

# Perception of Professional Values and Academic Stress among Nursing Students

Mrs. Natasha Mahajan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Vaishali Jadhav<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Arunima Sreeletha<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Sunil Kulkarni<sup>4</sup>, Mrs. Priyanka Mathew<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor. Email: [natasha.mahajan@bharativedyapeeth.edu](mailto:natasha.mahajan@bharativedyapeeth.edu)

<sup>2</sup>Professor. Email: [Vaishali.Jadhav@bharativedyapeeth.edu](mailto:Vaishali.Jadhav@bharativedyapeeth.edu)

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor. Email: [ARUNIMA.SREELETHA@bharativedyapeeth.edu](mailto:ARUNIMA.SREELETHA@bharativedyapeeth.edu)

<sup>4</sup>Professor. Email: [sunil.kulkarni@bharativedyapeeth.edu](mailto:sunil.kulkarni@bharativedyapeeth.edu)

<sup>5</sup>Clinical Instructor. Email: [priyanka.mathew@bharativedyapeeth.edu](mailto:priyanka.mathew@bharativedyapeeth.edu)

College of Nursing, Bharati Vidyapeeth, Deemed to be University, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

## Abstract

Professional values constitute the ethical foundation of nursing practice and guide nurses' clinical decision-making, behaviour, and professional conduct. During undergraduate education, nursing students develop these values alongside academic and clinical competencies. However, the demanding nature of nursing education often exposes students to considerable academic stress, which may influence their perception and internalization of professional values. This quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional study aimed to assess the level of academic stress and perception of professional values among nursing students and to determine the relationship between these variables and selected socio-demographic factors. The study was conducted among 120 first- and second-year B.Sc. Nursing students from a selected nursing colleges using a non-probability convenient sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire including socio-demographic variables, a Likert scale measuring perception of professional values, and a Likert scale assessing academic stress. Content validity was ensured through expert review, and reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha ( $r = 0.7$ ). Results revealed that 70% of students had a good perception of professional values, while 30% showed poor perception. Severe academic stress was reported by 63.34% of students and very severe stress by 18.33%. A weak positive correlation ( $r = +0.10$ ) was found between academic stress and perception of professional values.

**Keywords:** Academic stress, Professional values, Nursing students, Nursing education, Perception.

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## INTRODUCTION

Professional nursing practice is firmly grounded in professional values, which serve as the ethical and moral framework guiding nurses' behaviour, decision-making, and interactions with patients, families, and members of the healthcare team. These values are not innate; rather, they are learned, internalized, and continuously reshaped through personal experiences, formal education, and clinical exposure. During their academic journey, nursing students gradually acquire and refine professional values through classroom learning, clinical practice, and professional socialization within the nursing discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Professional values are also strongly influenced by observation of role models, particularly nursing

educators and clinical supervisors who demonstrate high professional standards and ethical conduct. Through mentorship and guided clinical experiences, students learn to integrate professional principles into their daily practice. However, despite the recognized importance of professional values in nursing education, limited understanding exists regarding how nursing students progressively internalize these values during their years of training. This lack of clarity may hinder educators' ability to systematically inculcate professional values early in the curriculum and reinforce them effectively throughout the educational programme.<sup>2</sup>

Clinical training, although essential for developing competence and professional identity, often places considerable psychological and academic demands on

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nursing students. Exposure to real-life patient care situations, extensive academic workload, frequent examinations, prolonged study hours, limited leisure time, and delayed feedback are some of the factors that contribute to academic stress among nursing students. Furthermore, students are expected to develop critical thinking skills, leadership abilities, and professional accountability, which can further intensify stress levels during their educational preparation.<sup>3</sup>

Nursing students acquire professional values through multiple sources, including ethical codes, theoretical instruction, clinical experiences, interactions with educators, and peer learning. Professional values serve as guiding standards for ethical decision-making and professional conduct. The process of value clarification involves cognitive and emotional components such as thinking, choosing, valuing, and acting, which support personal and professional development. Awareness of one's beliefs, cultural values, and biases is essential for effective communication and ethical practice, particularly in complex and stressful clinical environments.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence from the literature indicates a noticeable gap between nursing students' knowledge of ethical codes and their practical application in clinical practice. This discrepancy may have significant implications for patient safety, professional accountability, and public trust in the nursing profession. Studies conducted in different countries have reported variations in nursing students' perceptions of professional values based on factors such as gender, academic level, and professional roles. For instance, research conducted in Iran demonstrated significant differences in the perception of professional values among nursing students, practicing nurses, and nursing educators. Additionally, studies from the United States have reported a moderate positive relationship between professional values and academic stress, suggesting that inadequate professional value orientation may influence students' ability to cope with academic challenges effectively.<sup>5</sup>

Academic stress among nursing students often arises from the need to integrate theoretical knowledge with clinical practice while working within demanding healthcare environments. High levels of stress may negatively affect students' psychological well-being, academic performance, attendance, job satisfaction, and long-term professional commitment. A cross-sectional

study conducted among undergraduate nursing students in North India reported moderate to high levels of perceived stress, with higher stress levels observed among female students and those in their second academic year.<sup>6</sup>

Considering the evolving demands of nursing education and professional practice, it is essential to assess both academic stress and perceptions of professional values among nursing students. Understanding these aspects during the training period provides opportunities to identify gaps, strengthen value-based education, and implement supportive strategies aimed at reducing stress and promoting professional development. Therefore, the present study aims to assess the level of academic stress and perception of professional values among Nursing students and to determine the relationship between these variables in order to enhance professional competence and psychological well-being during their academic journey.

### Methodology & Materials

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach with a descriptive cross-sectional research design to assess academic stress and perception of professional values among nursing students in a selected Colleges of Nursing. The target population comprised undergraduate B.Sc. Nursing students, and a sample of 120 first- and second-year students who met the inclusion criteria was selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. Data were collected in 2023 after obtaining ethical clearance and formal permission from the concerned authorities, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. A structured, validated, and reliable self-administered questionnaire was used, consisting of socio-demographic variables, a Likert scale to assess perception regarding professional values, and a Likert scale to assess academic stress. Content validity of the tool was established through expert review, and reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha ( $r = 0.7$  for both scales), indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were collected through Google Forms, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) to determine levels of academic stress and perception of professional values, Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess the relationship between academic stress and professional

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values, and chi-square tests to identify associations between study variables and selected socio-demographic characteristics. A pilot study conducted on 20 students confirmed the feasibility of the study.

### 3. RESULTS

Table 1: The demographic profile of the nursing students shows that the majority of participants were aged 18–20 years (84.17%). Female students (77.5%) constituted a higher proportion compared to male students (22.5%). Most respondents belonged to the Hindu religion (70.83%), followed by Christians (19.17%). Regarding the academic year, the sample had equal representation, with 50% from first-year B.Sc. Nursing and 50% from second-year B.Sc. Nursing. Overall, the participants were mainly young female nursing students in the early years of their undergraduate education.

#### Demographic profile analysis

Table 1: Distribution of samples as a demographic profile n=120

Demographic Variables	Category	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
Age Group In Years	18-20	101	84.17
	21-23	11	9.17
	24-26	7	5.83
	27 And Above	1	0.83
Gender	Male	27	22.5
	Female	93	77.5
Religion	Hindu	85	70.83
	Muslim	10	8.33
	Christian	23	19.17
	Others	2	1.67
Year of study in Nursing	First year BSc Nursing	60	50
	Second year BSc Nursing	60	50

Figure 1: - Level of perception on professional values among nursing students

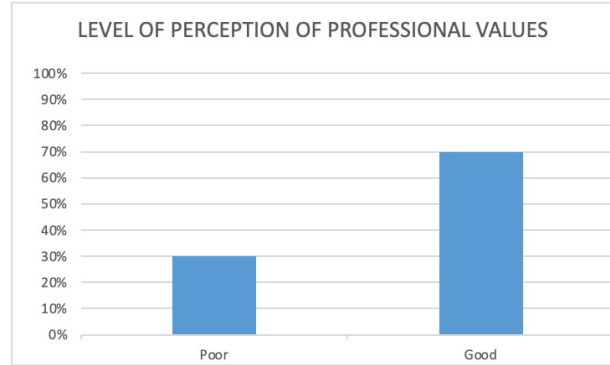


Figure 1 depicts the distribution of perception levels regarding professional values among the study participants. Out of the total sample of 120 nursing students, 36 participants demonstrated a poor level of perception, while the majority, 84 participants, showed a good level of perception toward professional values.

Figure 2: Level of academic stress among nursing students

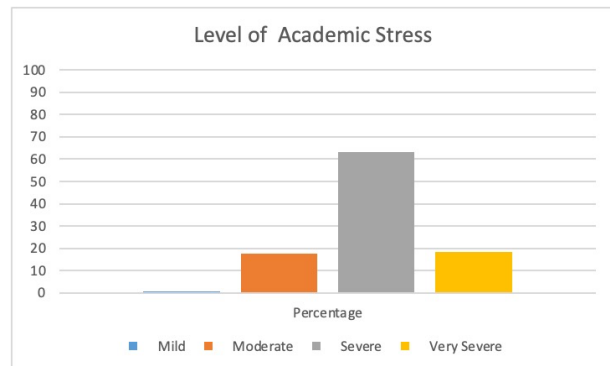


Figure 2 represents the level of academic stress among the study participants. Out of the total sample of 120 nursing students, 1 (0.83%) reported mild stress, 21 (17.5%) reported moderate stress, 76 (63.33%) reported severe stress, and 22 (18.33%) reported very severe levels of academic stress.

#### Correlation between academic stress and perception on professional values among nursing students.

Based on the substitution of the obtained values into Karl Pearson’s correlation formula, the calculated correlation coefficient was  $r = 0.78$ . This value indicates a strong positive correlation between academic stress and perception of professional values among nursing students. The finding suggests that as the level of academic stress increases, the perception of professional values among nursing students also tends to increase.

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Thus, a positive relationship exists between the two variables, indicating that students experiencing higher academic stress demonstrate a relatively higher perception of professional values.

**Table 2: Association between perception on professional values scores and socio demographic variables.**

n=120

Demographic Variable	Level of perception score		Chi square value	P value	Significance
	Poor	Good			
Age	18-20				
	21-23	25	76	16.167	Significant
	24-26	9	2		
	27 and above	2	5		
		0	1		
Gender	Male	9	18	0.2928	Not Significant
	Female	27	66		
Religion	Hindu			1.9324	Not Significant
	Muslim	28	57		
	Christian	34	19		
	Others	1	1		
Year of studying in BSc Nursing	First year			2.5379	Not Significant
	BSc Nursing	14	46		
	Second year	22	38		

Table 2 analysis revealed that gender, religion, and year of study were not significantly associated with the perception of professional values, as their p-values were greater than 0.05. However, age showed a significant association with the level of perception ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that students' perception of professional values varied significantly across different age groups.

**Table 3: Association between level of academic stress scores and socio demographic variables.**

n=120

Demographic Variable	Level of academic stress				Chi square value	P value	Significance	
	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very Severe				
Age	18-20	0	15	67	18	NS	Not Significant	
	21-23	1	5	5	1			
	24-26	0	0	4	3			
	27 and above	0	1	0	0			
Gender	Male	0	8	17	2	6.1234	0.1057	Not Significant
	Female	1	13	59	20			
Religion	Hindu	1	15	54	15	9.0057	0.4367	Not Significant
	Muslim	0	4	12	7			
	Christian	0	0	2	0			
Year of studying in BSc Nursing	First year	0	18	31	11	13.7143	0.0033	Significant
	BSc Nursing	1	3	45	11			

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Table 3 shows the analysis of demographic variables revealed that age, gender, and religion were not significantly associated with the level of academic stress among nursing students, as their p-values were greater than 0.05. In contrast, the year of study showed a significant association with academic stress ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that stress levels varied across students in different academic years.

### DISCUSSION

A cross-sectional descriptive study conducted in China assessed the perception of professional values among undergraduate nursing students using a convenience sample of 1,219 participants aged 18 years and above. The findings revealed that dignity and justice were the most highly perceived professional values, highlighting the strong ethical orientation of nursing students toward patient-centered care and fairness. These results underscore the importance of integrating ethical principles into nursing education <sup>7</sup>.

In the present study, a descriptive research design was employed to assess the perception of professional values and academic stress among 120 nursing students from a selected colleges. The results indicated that a majority of students (70%) demonstrated a good level of perception regarding professional values, whereas 30% exhibited poor perception. A statistically significant association was observed between perception of professional values and age ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that maturity and progression in age may positively influence ethical awareness and professional value development. However, no significant association was found between perception of professional values and gender, religion, or year of study ( $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that these demographic factors may not substantially affect students' value perception.

A descriptive study conducted at Adesh University, Bathinda, assessed academic stress among B.Sc. nursing students using the Perceived Stress Scale. Among the 59 students studied, most experienced moderate academic

stress, particularly related to their academic year. These findings reflect the demanding academic and clinical expectations placed on nursing students <sup>8</sup>.

In contrast, the present study reported a higher prevalence of academic stress. Severe academic stress was reported by 63.34% of students, while 18.33% experienced very severe stress. Only a small proportion reported mild or moderate stress. A statistically significant association was observed between academic stress and year of study ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that academic progression may increase stress levels due to heightened clinical responsibilities and academic workload. No significant association was observed between academic stress and age, gender, or religion ( $p > 0.05$ ).

A study conducted in Texas examined the relationship between academic stress and perception of professional values among 255 nursing students using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The findings demonstrated a significant positive relationship between professional values and academic stress ( $p < 0.05$ ), with senior students experiencing higher stress levels while maintaining a positive perception of professional values. The study further suggested that stronger professional values were associated with improved stress management <sup>9</sup>.

Similarly, the present study revealed a weak positive correlation ( $r = +0.10$ ) between academic stress and perception of professional values. Although the relationship was weak, it suggests that nursing students with higher professional value perception may be better equipped to cope with academic stress. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating value-based education into nursing curricula to enhance ethical competence and psychological resilience<sup>10</sup>.

### Conclusion

The present study concludes that professional values and academic stress are important and interrelated aspects of nursing education. While most nursing students demonstrated a good perception of professional values, a considerable proportion experienced severe to very severe academic stress. A weak positive correlation between academic stress and perception of professional values suggests that students with stronger value orientation may cope better with academic challenges. Age significantly influenced perception of professional values, and year of study affected stress levels. These

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findings highlight the need for nursing educators to implement structured value-based education, establish mentoring and peer-support systems, and incorporate stress reduction strategies such as time management, relaxation techniques, and mindfulness into the curriculum. Addressing academic stress and reinforcing professional values can enhance students' psychological well-being, ethical competence, and readiness for professional nursing practice, and further longitudinal research is recommended to explore these relationships over time.

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