

Emotional Intelligence among First Year Nursing Students and Novice Nurses: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: *Emotional intelligence is important in nursing because it supports interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and effective professional practice. This study compared emotional intelligence between first-year nursing students and novice nurses. A descriptive cross-sectional design was used with 60 participants, comprising 30 first-year nursing students and 30 novice nurses selected by simple random sampling from the study setting. Data were collected using a socio-personal data sheet and the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. First-year nursing students had a mean emotional intelligence score of 117.87 with a standard deviation of 12.30, while novice nurses had a mean score of 135.53 with a standard deviation of 14.59. The difference between the groups was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).*

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Nursing Students, Novice Nurses.

1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and positively influence one's own emotions and those of others.¹ In nursing, where human interaction is central, EI enables leaders to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, foster resilience, and drive transformative outcomes.² Emotions are essential in the development of professional relationships and can affect clinical decision-making, and impact healthcare workers on a personal level.³

Emotionally intelligent leaders influence employee retention, quality of patient care and patient outcome.⁴ Significant barriers around time, pressure and staffing levels impeded their potential to use EI to become more effective leaders.⁵ Emotional intelligence is essential for nurses as it allows them to manage their own emotions and those of their patients.⁶ Research comparing emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses can provide valuable insights into leadership development.

2. Literature Survey

Emotional intelligence is a social skill that controls stress and affects one's ability to cope with the demands and environmental pressures; it can therefore improve professional competence in health care providers such as nursing students.⁷

A descriptive study by Sharma and Sharma (2022) reported that 81% of undergraduate nursing students had average EI, with only 19.4% showing high EI, suggesting considerable scope for development⁸. Another study in Nepal found that EI significantly correlated with academic performance, critical thinking, and stress management.⁹

In a comparative study between Saudi and Indian nursing students, EI was positively associated with self-esteem, impacting academic engagement and interpersonal skills.¹⁰

Novice nurses face the realities of clinical work, where EI becomes essential for managing patient care, communicating with colleagues, and navigating stressors. Zhao et al. (2022) found that EI significantly influences the clinical ability of nursing interns, particularly components like emotion management and thought facilitation.¹¹

Comparative literature suggests that emotional intelligence evolves over time with clinical exposure and real-world nursing experiences. Adams et al. (2011) observed that senior nursing students and novice nurses typically demonstrate higher EI and better emotional reasoning than first-year students.¹²

A longitudinal study was conducted on emotional intelligence among nursing students in 2016 and 2019. A total of 111 undergraduate nursing students participated in the study in the first year of their study, and 101 in the third year. Data were collected using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form (TEIQue-SF) and Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). The study showed that students' emotional intelligence changes over time with years of education and age, suggesting that emotional intelligence skills can be improved.¹³

The reviewed studies consistently show that EI improves as nursing students transition into novice nurses.

3. Problem Definition

Emotion is fundamental to nursing practice and emotional intelligence is considered an important characteristic of nurses that can affect the quality of their work including clinical decision-making, critical thinking, evidence and knowledge use in practice. The present study aims to compare the emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses.

4. Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was utilized for this study. The sample comprised 60 participants selected through a simple random sampling technique, divided equally into two cohorts: 30 first-year Bachelor of Science (BSc) Nursing students and 30 novice nurses. For the purpose of this study, novice nurses were operationally defined as individuals who had recently completed and passed out of the BSc Nursing program. The inclusion criteria encompassed nursing students who expressed willingness to participate in the study, whereas nursing students with a history or presence of chronic illness were excluded.

Data were gathered using two primary research instruments. Tool 1 consisted of a socio-personal data sheet designed to record participant background variables, including age, gender, number of siblings, birth order, family structure, and

primary caretaker during childhood. Tool 2 was the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), which was administered to assess the participants' emotional intelligence levels.

Ethical clearance for the study protocol was formally obtained from both the Scientific Review Committee (SRC) and the Institutional Human Ethics Committee (IHEC). Prior to data collection, written informed consent was secured from each participant after explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality assurances. Data were analyzed using statistical software; descriptive statistics were compiled for demographic attributes, and an independent t-test was conducted to evaluate significant mean differences in emotional intelligence scores between the first-year nursing students and novice nurses.

5. Results & Discussion

Table 1: Socio-personal variables, (n=60)

Socio-personal variables		First year nursing students (N=30)		Novice nurses (N=30)		χ^2	df	p
		f	%	f	%			
Gender	Male	3	60	2	40	0.22	1	0.64
	Female	27	49.1	28	50.9			
No. of siblings	Nil	6	20	9	30			
	1	22	73.3	16	53.3	2.83	2	0.24
	2	2	6.7	5	16.7			
Birth order	First child	18	60	17	56.7			
	Second child	10	33.3	10	33.3	0.23	2	0.9
	Third child	2	6.7	3	10			
Structure of family	Nuclear family	23	76.7	27	90			
	Extended family	3	10	2	6.7	2.32	2	0.31
	Joint family	4	13.3	1	3.3			
Primary caretaker during childhood	Mother	14	46.7	14	46.7			
	Father	5	16.7	8	26.7	1.92	3	0.6
	Parents	10	33.3	8	26.7			
	Grandparents	1	3.3	-	-			

Table 1 shows that 49.1% of first year nursing students and 50.9 % of novice nurses are females. It was found that 73.3% in first year nursing students and 53.3% novice nurses have only one sibling. Sixty percent of first year nursing students and 56.7% of novice nurses are first child. It was found that 76.7% of first year nursing students and 90% of novice nurses belong to nuclear family. Finding shows that 46.7% both first year nursing students and novice nurses had mothers as their primary caretaker.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of scores of emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses, (n=60)

Group	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
First year nursing students	117.87	12.3	90	143
Novice nurses	135.53	14.59	103	152

Table 2 shows that mean score and standard deviation of first year nursing students was 117.87 ± 12.3 whereas, in novice nurses it was 135.53 ± 14.59 .

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and t value showing scores of emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses, (n=60)

Group	Mean	Standard deviation	t value	p
First year nursing students	117.87	12.3	-5.07***	0.0001
Novice nurses	135.53	14.59		

***Significant at 0.001 level

Table 3 shows that mean score of emotional intelligence among first year nursing students was 117.87 and novice nurses were 135.53. The obtained t value was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. It can be interpreted that there is significant difference in emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses.

6. Discussion

The present study was intended to compare the emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses in Govt. College of Nursing, Alappuzha. It was evident from the literature review that the emotional

intelligence varies among nursing students and novice nurses.

In this study, mean age of the first year nursing students was 19.83 ± 1.42 and novice nurses were 22.53 ± 0.51 . A longitudinal study conducted in Slovenia, UK showed that students' average age was 19.27 ± 0.81 , with a minimum age of 18 and a maximum age of 23 years.¹³ This finding was similar to the present study finding.

In this study, mean score and standard deviation of emotional intelligence among first year nursing students was 117.87 ± 12.3 whereas, in novice nurses it was 135.53 ± 14.59 . The mean SSEIT scores for nursing students in the first study year were 93.26 (95%CI: 67.90-118.20) and for the nursing students in the third study year 95.34 (95%CI: 71.95-124.15).¹³ This finding was not consistent with present study.

The present study revealed that there is significant difference in emotional intelligence among first year nursing students and novice nurses ($p < 0.001$). A descriptive comparative research study on emotional intelligence and self-esteem among Saudi Arabian and Indian nursing students showed that there is significant difference in EI scores based on year of study ($p < 0.011$).¹⁴ It is congruent with the present study. Another study conducted in UK showed that no statistically significant difference in SSEIT scores between nursing students in the first study year and nursing students in the third study year ($t(76) = -1.523$; $p = 0.132$).¹³ This finding is incongruent with the present study.

7. Conclusion

The study found a statistically significant difference in emotional intelligence between first-year nursing students and novice nurses, with novice nurses demonstrating higher mean emotional intelligence scores. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence may differ across stages of nursing education and early professional experience. Further longitudinal and multicenter studies are needed to determine how education, clinical exposure, age, and other factors contribute to the development of emotional intelligence.

8. Future Scope

Future research can expand upon these findings by conducting similar studies across multiple settings or comparing mean scores of emotional intelligence among different colleges. Additionally, a comparison across different years of study could be conducted specifically among nursing students to track changes over time. Researchers might also focus on interventional studies to determine the precise effects of counselling packages on the emotional intelligence of nursing students. Finally, qualitative studies are recommended to deeply explore the underlying factors that contribute directly to emotional intelligence.

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