THE PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT OF NURSING STUDENTS – PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract
The evaluation and the control on students in the process of learning enable lecturers and authorities in high school to get information about the achievement of the training goals at a particular stage to assess their own work and improve it. Objective: To investigate the role of various factors in the emotional and mental state of the student nurses during the test session. The study was conducted during a regular examination session with 202 students specialty "nurse" in the Faculty of Public Health, Medical University - Sofia. Results and debate: The analysis of the results has proved that monitoring and evaluation are a stressful event for students. The main factors that predispose to stress during exams are the large volume of material for learning, short deadlines between exams and the large number of exams in one exam session.

Key words: assessment of knowledge, student nurses, psychology, stress

1. INTRODUCTION
Assessment and control in the process of students’ education enables lecturers and heads in the higher institutions gain information about the achievement of the educational goals at the particular phase of studies, evaluate their own work and improve it.

The important role of control and assessment both for lecturers and students has always been of interest and has been subject to study by pedagogues, psychologists and nowadays by managers too!

Examination and assessment provides stimuli to students and makes studying a result-oriented activity. The examination score enables the students to compare their achievement with the educational requirements and criteria in order to determine their correct approach to further studying, memorizing and reproducing their knowledge at the exams.

The examination period is a period of the students' life, which puts to the test not only memory but also many other mental processes.

The purpose of examinations is to verify the knowledge acquired by the students and to assess the efficiency of the process of training. Examination scores enable lecturers and heads in the higher institutions gain information about the achievement of the educational goals at the particular phase of studies, evaluate their own work and improve it. (Balkanska P. 2005 p 45), (Pedagogy,2005 edited by T. Popov)

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The important role of control and assessment both for lecturers and students has always been of interest and has been subject to study by pedagogues, psychologists and nowadays by managers too! This calls for the establishment of the scientific area "docimology" - the science of testing. Upon testing and assessment the following principles shall be observed: objectivity, consistency, comprehensiveness, individuality and differentiation.
A key point upon assessment of the students' knowledge is to determine the minimum required level of competence (MRLC), of which the students must be informed in advance, as well as the educational goals, which they are expected to meet.

Every higher institution has its own approved system of control and assessment of the knowledge and skills of students, which is also a determining factor for its reputation. (Vodenicharov Thz., M. Mitova, S. Mladenova, 2008 p 83)

Even if they are very well aware of the goals, requirements, methods of training and personality of the examiner, sitting for examination is an exciting event for the students. It is accompanied by excitement, anxiety, fear and other psycho-emotional states. Results from others studies in this area establish that during examination 99.7% of students experience stress. (Mladenova S., 2012)

Psychologists consider that this stress passes through several phases: perception of the situation, assessment of the situation and assessment of their own abilities to handle the situation. (Balkanska P. 2009)

We made a pilot study to establish to what extent the nursing students assess the regular examination sitting as a stress event and the influence of different factors on the mental status of students.

2. PURPOSE

To study the role of different factors for the emotional and mental status of nursing students during the regular examination period.

Hypothesis: During the regular examination period, students experience higher stress level to which contribute a number of factors such as age, income, social and living conditions, organization of the examinations, examination and assessment methods.

Tasks: To study the opinion of the nursing students for the process of academic assessment; To establish the factors, which are of material significance for the examination scores of students; To establish the influence of the process of testing and assessment on the students' mentality.

3. METHODS

The study was conducted during the regular examinations in January 2014 among 202 nursing students, including 90 first year students, 60 second-year students and 52 third-year students studying for Bachelor’s degree at the Faculty of Public Health, Medical University - Sofia. For that purpose sociological survey was conducted with questionnaire specially developed for that purpose. The survey was anonymous. Other used methods were also the documentary method, interview, observation and statistical methods. Results were processed by SPSS 17.0

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the obtained results established that 96.0% of the students consider the examination and assessment process a stress event and only 1.0% of the respondents state that they do not experience stress during the examination period. Despite of this unequivocal result, the students consider that the academic examination is a traditional form for knowledge assessment and they accept it as fair and inevitable.

Respondents are mainly female - 98.0% because the share of men in the nursing profession is negligible and the profession is strongly feminized. The distribution of the respondents by age is given in:
The widely spread opinions for low income and social status made the nursing profession unattractive for the young people who finish high schools. In the recent years, this profession is pursued by women in active age, some of them have another profession and others have raised their children as housewives and such profession, being connected with care and help, is their natural daily round. The high unemployment rates in a number of areas of the economy made attractive the nursing profession for people who pursue a normal work to reach retirement age. The pay for this work, although insufficient, is more secure in the state sector than in the private sector, according to the respondents. The high demand of specialists providing professional care, caused by the demographic processes and the increased share of patients with chronic diseases in Bulgaria and in the European countries, makes the choice of this profession very reasonable and provides opportunities for work both in Bulgaria and EU.

Training of students, especially at the age over 40 in the medical profession is difficult because of the big volume of training material, which is to be assimilated, the impaired abilities of the students to memorize and the lost learning habits. Concurrently the personal experience contributes to understanding and memorizing through already gained experience of life. These students are responsible and shy and for that reason they perceive the process of testing and assessment very emotionally.

The number of students who are married also increases - about 50% of the first-year and second-year students and about 63.0% of the third-year students - and they are very responsible to their study. Some of them have children at school age and consider that they have to give personal example to them with excellent grades. Therefore the factor "marital status" has a positive role. Concurrently the housekeeping duties impede the students to prepare well for examinations for a plenty of reasons - looking after ill children and adult parents, a disabled person in the family, etc. Students prepare for examinations late in the evening, after a hard day, which has a negative effect on all mental processes.

The social and economic factors are also of material significance such as maintenance of the family, opportunities to purchase textbooks, etc. These factors create anxiety and psychic and emotional stress among students. The price of the textbooks for a married unemployed student is always too high. Their priority is buying clothes and textbooks for their children, and therefore such students need to attend the classes regularly in order to keep records enabling them to prepare for examinations. This factor is not significant for the young single students who receive money support from their parents, in case of full family.

More than half of the students, i.e. 63.0% state that at home they have no conditions to study as they have no their own room and opportunities for isolation and concentration.

The full-time course of study in the major Nursing prevents students, who are self-supporting, to work on a regular full-time basis. They work part-time, take only night shifts or 24-hour shifts, duties on holidays and shifts, which do not hinder the course of study but deprive them of rest and recovery time, makes them overtired and tense, which hampers their thinking, memory and creativity. Over 70% of the third-year students work, compared to only 33.6% of the first-year students.
Factors, which cause stress during the examination period for the students include also the big volume of material for learning, the short term for preparation between the examinations and the big number of exams within one examination period. Despite of the pursuit to organize the examinations in the most favourable manner for the students, they may not last more than one month. Within that month the nursing students have to sit for at least five exams. In the third year of study the summer examination period comprises eight - nine examinations, which means sitting for examination every third day. The preparation for these examinations is absolutely impossible if the student hasn't studied the material consistently for different reasons. These factors cause the occurrence of somatic complaints such as sleep disorders, headache, tachycardia, etc.

Many surveys of similar nature indicate that a stress factor for the students during examinations is the face-to-face meeting with the examiner and the possibility that they are unfairly assessed. Therefore the preferred method for testing and assessment is considered a factor for disturbing the mental stability of the student. Students who prefer the oral examination have mentioned that thus they may show their paces and their actual knowledge and skills. During the oral examination, they have the opportunity for visual and verbal contact with the lecturer and the latter may ask them questions having cues. The students state that knowledge exchanged with the lecturer during the examination, remains permanently in their mind. The analysis of the results shows that the oral examination is the preferred method for students at the age of 30 - 35, self-supporting and single. Many of them – 80.6% have excellent grades at the examinations and receive scholarships for excellent results. The oral form of examination is preferred by students who are extrovert and self-assess their self-confidence as good and excellent - 72.6%.

Written examination is preferred by introvert students who self-assess their self-confidence as "good". They consider that this form of examination brings them lower level of anxiety; they feel calm and certain and may be more convincing.

The examination by test is the preferred method of all students. Those who have prepared thoroughly do not worry about the objectivity of assessment and are confident in the successful completion of the examinations. Student who consider themselves "well prepared" and "fairly well prepared" are sure that if they are able to read the hint answer in the test, they will handle it. Students who consider themselves "insufficiently prepared" are very worried and believe that by the test they will not achieve the required minimum result to pass the examination. Although this examination is in writing and without face-to-face communication with the examiner, it poses serious mental stress on unprepared students.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The summary of results from the conducted survey among nursing students has proven the influence of a number of factors contributing to the anxiety and stress during examination period. The effect of the factors is determined by the age, marital status, temper and preparation of the students. The high internal motivation of these students makes them hard-working and ambitious despite of the lost learning habits, lack of appropriate conditions for preparation and low finances. The high sense of responsibility motivates the students during examinations and despite of the big number of examinations and the limited time for preparation, they handle them well. These personal efforts are connected with emotional stress and fatigue, which additionally impairs memory, thinking and creative solutions during examinations.

Since the examination and the assessment is a key element of the process of training and is unavoidable, the efforts of students shall be directed not only to assimilation of the educational material but also to studying and applying techniques for emotional intelligence and stress prophylaxis.

On their part, lecturers - examiners should use and combine different classic and innovative methods for evaluation of knowledge. Significant relief of stress from the examinations could be achieved if
Lecturers demonstrate creativity and inventiveness in the process of examination in order to make the examination interesting, effective and calm.

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