

A study on Nursing Students' Learned Helplessness in South Korea

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1. Background

Learned helplessness refers to learning that one's actions taken to avoid unpleasant outcomes or painful stimuli have no influence over the situations, and assuming that a new adverse event has uncontrollability and the same limitations as previous ones.

Learned helplessness lowers failure tolerance and expectation to succeed in future performances, and results in deterioration in academic achievement and accumulation of learning deficits by hampering the selection of appropriate strategies arriving at successful outcomes. Individuals with learned helplessness suffer from underestimation of self-assessment, anxiety, frustration and depression, inefficiently respond to stress, experience suicidal impulse, and express negative emotions such as severe anger and hostility against other people.

The purpose of this study is to provide reference base for developing intervention program to alleviate learned helplessness by examining the degree of learned helplessness in nursing students.

2. Aims

2.1. To identify the differences in learned helplessness according to the general characteristics of nursing students

2.2. To identify the degree of learned helplessness in nursing students.

3. Methods

1) Setting and Sample

Nursing students attending H University in J city and J University in G city were fully informed about the purpose, and consented participation in this research. Data were collected from October 1 to 20, 2013. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, 18 questionnaires with insincere answers were omitted, and the remaining 332 questionnaires were used for data analysis. The appropriate number of sample size was 305 individuals using G*Power 3.1.9 program at a 0.25 effect size, a 0.05 significance level, and a power 0.95. Therefore, 332 questionnaires were sufficient for data analysis.

2) Measurements

The scale developed by Gi Myung Shin (1990) consists of 45 items measuring the degree of learned helplessness in college students. The assessment scale comprises a total of 7 sub-categories including lack of self-confidence (17 questions), depression-negative cognition (10 questions), passivity (6 questions), lack of self-control (4 questions), lack of persistence (3 questions), lack of ostentation (3 questions) and lack of responsibility (2 questions). The questionnaire items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely). A higher mean score indicates a greater level of learned helplessness. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.96.

3) Data analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using PASW 21.0 version for Windows, and the two-tailed p-value < 0.05 were considered statistically significant. The general characteristics of subjects and continuous variables were presented as real number, percentage, and mean \pm standard deviation. Moreover, learned helplessness levels according to general characteristics and the difference in subcategories were analyzed using t-test and one-way ANOVA.

4. Results

Differences in learned helplessness according to general characteristics and the degree of learned helplessness are shown in <Table 1> and <Table 2>.

[Table 1] Differences in learned helplessness according to general characteristics (N=332)

Characteristics	Categories	N(%)	Learned Helplessness		
			M±SD	t/F	p
Gender	Male	28(8.4)	2.52±0.64	0.36	.807
	Female	304(91.6)	2.49±0.60		
Grade	Freshman	111(33.3)	2.48±0.60	2.69	.045
	Sophomore	85(25.3)	2.49±0.64		
	Junior	61(18.4)	2.43±0.52		
	Senior	769(22.9)	2.59±0.64		
Perceived economic status	Good	52(15.7)	2.45±0.64	0.20	.111
	Fair	197(59.3)	2.48±0.58		
	Poor	68(20.5)	2.51±0.64		
	Bad	15(4.5)	2.87±0.58		
Current residence	Dormitory	197(59.3)	2.48±0.60	0.20	.896
	Parent's house	75(22.6)	2.51±0.62		
	Relative house	2(0.6)	2.59±0.49		
	Studio or flat	58(17.5)	2.54±0.49		
Degree of peer relationship	Good ^a	406(50.2)	2.53±0.47	7.53	.001 a<c*
	Moderate ^b	370 (45.7)	2.63±0.46		
	Difficult ^c	33 (4.1)	2.78±0.56		
Accumulated last semester grade	< 2.0	5(1.5)	2.62±0.36	3.67	0.13
	2.01 ~ 3.0	40(12.0)	2.77±0.64		
	3.01 ~ 4.0	247(74.4)	2.47±0.58		
	>4.01	40(12.0)	2.37±0.66		
Prejudice of regional college	Not at all feel ^a	32(9.6)	2.31±0.58	4.78	0.01 a,b,c<e*
	Slightly feel ^b	85(25.6)	2.37±0.57		
	Somewhat feel ^c	132(39.8)	2.51±0.60		
	Very feel ^d	71(21.4)	2.63±0.58		
	Extremely feel ^e	12(3.6)	3.00±0.77		

Note. *= Post hoc test (Scheffe's test)

[Table 2] Degree of learned helplessness (N=332)

Variables	M±SD
Learned Helplessness	2.46±0.60
Lack of self-confidence	2.46±0.60
Depression-negative cognition	2.46±0.60
Passivity	2.46±0.60
Lack of self-control	2.46±0.60
Lack of persistence	2.46±0.60
Lack of ostentation	2.46±0.60
Lack of responsibility	2.46±0.60

5. Conclusions

Learned helplessness in nursing students showed significant differences in peer relationship, academic performance, and social prejudice against the provincial universities. The mean score of learned helplessness were higher than that of previous studies.

The scores for the subcategories of depression-negative cognition, lack of self-control, and lack of persistence were higher than the mean score. Based on the findings, the study proposes the development of intervention program to improve learned helplessness in nursing students.

6. References

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