

## ASSESSMENT OF SELF-CARE HABITS AMONG NURSE INTERNEES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR HOSPITAL IN KP, PESHAWAR, A DESCRIPTIVE CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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### Abstract

**Background:** Nursing students frequently neglect the significance of self-care for their mental, emotional, and physical well-being, particularly in light of the demands of clinical, intellectual, and emotional training. Nursing students sometimes ignore their own health despite their vital position as patient caretakers due to the long hours, lack of institutional support, and pressures associated with

the sector. Poor dietary habits, high levels of stress, and emotional exhaustion are common issues within this group, eventually leading to burnout syndrome and declining job satisfaction. **Objective:** The primary objective of this study was to assess the knowledge level of self-care habits among nursing internees in selected public and private hospitals of Peshawar. **Methods:** It utilized a non-probability convenient

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sampling technique with a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional study design encompassing 384 nursing internes. Data were collected from 6 hospitals in Peshawar, namely RMI, Northwest, HMC, KTH, NTH, and Kuwait Teaching Hospital. A structured, pre-validated questionnaire were used for data collection. **Results:** Out of 385 participants, 384 gave valid responses. Most of them were male (69.5%) and aged between 20-25 years (60.7%). Majority were single (65.6%) and had positive registration under internship training. The findings also showed divergence in self-care knowledge and habits. Stress and dietary pattern, however, emerged as key issues largely reported under emotional exhaustion, inconsistent eating habits, and poor work-life balance, highlighting clear gaps in self-care awareness and its implementation. **Conclusion:** Moderate knowledge and practices in self-care were reported among nursing internes. There should be institution policies and training programs that would hence promote self-care for nurses, either physically, emotionally, or psychologically. These gaps, when fulfilled by structured support systems, can improve not only the personal health of the nurse internee but also the quality of care that the patients receive.

**Keywords:** Self-care, Nursing intern, Stress, Dietary habits, Emotional well-being, Burnout, Cross-sectional study, Peshawar.

### Introduction

Self-care refers to intentional actions that enhance physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, including healthy eating, regular physical activity, and adequate sleep. It plays a key role in reducing stress, maintaining life balance, and preventing burnout, particularly in demanding professions. Prioritizing self-care improves resilience and overall functioning in both personal and professional life (Mohanlal et al., 2024). It is also considered a component of lifestyle behavior that reflects individual choices regarding diet, physical activity, and health maintenance, ultimately empowering individuals to take control of their well-being and develop sustainable healthy routines that support mental clarity, emotional stability, and physical resilience. These practices not only prevent illness but also improve daily performance, especially in high-stress professions such as nursing (Javed et al., 2019). However, evidence shows that many students adopt poor dietary habits; for example, a study in South Africa reported that 83.2% did not consume adequate grains, 97.5% did not eat sufficient vegetables, 92.6%

lacked adequate fruit and dairy intake, and around 59% skipped regular meals, contributing to overweight, obesity, and poor academic and health outcomes (Van Den Berg et al., 2012).

Self-care in nursing internees is particularly important because it influences both professional performance and personal well-being. Factors such as sleep quality, interpersonal relationships, and psychological health significantly determine self-care capacity. A positive psychology approach emphasizes strengthening well-being rather than only addressing negative outcomes such as fatigue or burnout. Supporting self-care in nursing interns is both a professional and ethical responsibility, as it improves teamwork, patient safety, and overall healthcare outcomes (Kong et al., 2024). However, demanding work conditions, including rotating shifts and long working hours, often lead to unhealthy lifestyle behaviors such as poor diet, irregular eating patterns, smoking, and increased substance use due to lack of time and energy for healthy practices (Logan et al., 2023). Emotional self-care, including boundary setting and development of supportive relationships, is essential for protecting against stress and emotional exhaustion, while strong social support systems reduce isolation and improve coping in clinical environments (Tay et al., 2013). Despite this, stress among nursing interns is frequently associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and disengagement from work, which negatively affects job satisfaction and quality of patient care, increasing the risk of errors and compromised patient safety (Munangatire et al., 2022).

This study is significant because it focuses on self-care practices among nursing internees, a critical yet often neglected aspect of nursing education and practice. Due to heavy workloads, shift duties, and limited institutional support, interns often neglect their own well-being, which can lead to stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, ultimately affecting patient care quality. However, literature on self-care practices among nursing internees remains limited. Therefore, it is important to explore how they develop and maintain physical and psychological self-care practices during their training, including their daily routines, coping strategies, and challenges faced in managing health and well-being. This study aims to assess the knowledge level of self-care habits among nursing internees, with the objective of identifying gaps in awareness and

support systems that influence their well-being and professional performance. Nursing internees are defined as students who have completed academic coursework and are undergoing clinical training but have not yet obtained their PNC license. Self-care habits refer to intentional actions taken to maintain physical, emotional, and professional well-being, categorized as poor (<40%), average (40–50%), and good (>50%). Stress and coping refer to how effectively interns manage stress, categorized as poor (<35%), average (35–50%), and good (>50%). Dietary habits refer to nutritional practices for maintaining health, categorized as poor (<50%), average (50–60%), and good (>60%) (Javed, 2016).

### Methodology

A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the level of self-care habits among nursing internees. The study was carried out in both public and private hospitals of Peshawar, including RMI, Northwest, HMC, KTH, NTH, and Kuwait Teaching Hospital. The duration of the study was six months.

The sample size was calculated using the OpenEpi calculator with a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and an estimated population of 1,000,000, which yielded a sample size of 384 participants. A non-probability convenient sampling technique was used. A total of 384 nursing internees were selected purposively from the mentioned hospitals. Nursing internees included those who had completed their academic coursework but had not yet obtained their PNC license and were currently undergoing clinical training in the selected public and private hospitals of Peshawar. Only those internees who were willing to participate were included in the study.

Participants who were already registered nurses with a PNC license, those working outside the selected hospitals, and those who were not willing to participate were excluded from the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adopted from Anita Javed (2016), which assessed self-care habits among nursing internees. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection after explaining the purpose of the study, ensuring voluntary participation, and informing them of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study.

The collected data were entered and analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize demographic variables and self-care-related responses. The results were presented in the form of tables and graphs to illustrate distributions and trends among participants, including variables such as age, gender, hospital placement, stress levels, and anxiety.

**Results**

The below Table #1, 2, 3, Showing demographic data of that Participants

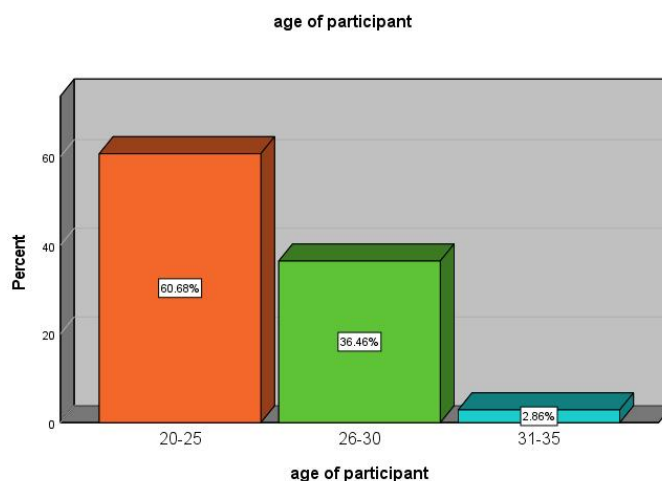
The majority of participants were male, comprising 69.5% (n=267) of the total sample. In contrast, females made up 30.5% (n=117).

**Marital Status of Participants**

A higher proportion of participants were unmarried, accounting for 65.6% (n=252), while married individuals constituted 34.4% (n=132).

**Age of Participants**

The dominant age group was 20–25 years, representing 60.7% (n=233) of participants. This was followed by 26–30 years at 36.5% (n=140), and a small minority aged 31–35 years at 2.9% (n=11).



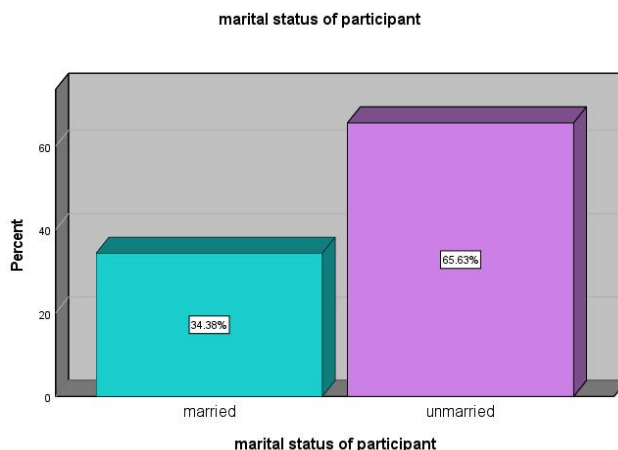


Table 1: *Eighth Question Which Is Related To Stress And Coping*

I cope well with stress	NEVER	(3%)
	RARELY	(65%)
	SOMETIME	(243%)
	OFTEN	(71%)
	ALWAYS	(2%)
	Total	(384%)
I feel overwhelmed with my current unit work	NEVER	(38%)
	RARELY	(84%)
	SOMETIMES	(122%)
	OFTEN	(63%)
	ALWAYS	(77%)
	Total	(384%)
I become anxious very easily	NEVER	(107%)
	RARELY	(73%)
	SOMETIMES	(97%)
	OFTEN	(60%)
	ALWAYS	(47%)
	Total	(384%)
My university workload is manageable	NEVER	(76%)

	RARELY	(49%)
	SOMETIMES	(82%)
	OFTEN	(112%)
	ALWAYS	(65%)
	Total	(384%)
I have a hard time coping with all the stress in my life	NEVER	(104%)
	RARELY	(51%)
	SOMETIMES	(102%)
	OFTEN	(68%)
	ALWAYS	(59%)
	Total	(384%)
I make time for myself daily	NEVER	(25%)
	RARELY	(64%)
	SOMETIMES	(114%)
	OFTEN	(74%)
	ALWAYS	(107%)
	Total	(384%)
I participate in social events or outings without interfering with my university work	NEVER	(26%)
	RARELY	(68%)
	SOMETIMES	(164%)
	OFTEN	(81%)
	ALWAYS	(45%)
	Total	(384%)
I spent time alone each day	NEVER	(34%)
	RARELY	(85%)
	SOMETIMES	(101%)
	OFTEN	(113%)
	ALWAYS	(51%)
	Total	(384%)

The above table showing that a majority of participants sometimes cope well with stress (63.3%), suggesting inconsistent coping abilities among the group. When it comes to

workload, 31.8% reported sometimes feeling overwhelmed with their current unit work, while a significant portion also reported always (20.1%) or rarely (21.9%) experiencing this, pointing to a mixed experience of stress related to academic demands. Interestingly, 27.9% stated they never become anxious easily, yet others responded with sometimes (25.3%) or rarely (19.0%), indicating diverse anxiety patterns. Regarding workload manageability, the highest percentage of participants (29.2%) reported that their university workload is often manageable, though nearly one-fifth (19.8%) felt it was never manageable. Similarly, when asked if they have a hard time coping with stress in general, 27.1% reported never experiencing this, but over one-third of the sample still reported difficulties to varying degrees (sometimes, often, or always). On the topic of self-care, 29.7% said they sometimes make time for themselves daily, with a notable 27.9% always doing so, which reflects a moderate level of daily personal time. Social engagement appeared balanced, as 42.7% sometimes participate in social events without it interfering with their studies, though only a small group (11.7%) reported always achieving this balance. Lastly, 29.4% stated they often spend time alone each day, indicating that solitude is a common strategy used by many students for emotional regulation or personal reflection.

**Table 2:** *Seven Question Which Are Related To Food Habit*

I have healthy eating habits	NEVER	32%
	Rarely	62%
	SOMTEIMES	96%
	OFTEN	107%
	ALWAYS	87%
	Total	(384%)
I eat three balanced meals a day	NEVER	39%
	RARELY	62%
	SOMETIME	141%
	OFTEN	64%
	ALWAYS	78%
	Total	(384%)
I eat five to seven servings of fruits	orNEVER	51%

vegetables a day	RARELY	80%
	SOMETIME	132%
	OFTEN	80%
	ALWAYS	40%
	Total	(384%)
I drink coffee and tea to stay awake	NEVER	51%
	RARELY	79%
	SOMETIME	147%
	OFTEN	63%
	ALWAYS	43%
Total	(384%)	
I drink enough water every day (at least 1500 ml)	NEVER	29%
	RARELY	63%
	SOMETIME	105%
	OFTEN	105%
	ALWAYS	81%
Total	(384%)	
I eat foods that help regulate my bowel habits	NEVER	36%
	RARELY	80%
	SOMETIME	117%
	OFTEN	85%
	ALWAYS	66%
Total	(384%)	
I follow the instructions of healthcare providers regarding eating healthy food	NEVER	20%
	RARELY	70%
	SOMETIME	169%
	OFTEN	60%
	ALWAYS	65%
Total	(384%)	

The above table showing that the data reveals that students' food habits are moderately healthy but inconsistent. For general healthy eating habits, the most common response was "often" (107 participants, 27.9%), followed closely by "always" (22.7%), indicating a positive trend, though a notable portion (24.2%) still responded with "rarely" or "never." When asked if they eat three balanced meals a day, 36.7% responded "sometimes," reflecting an irregular pattern, with only 20.3% consistently doing so. Regarding fruit and vegetable intake, 34.4% reported "sometimes" eating five to seven servings per day, while a combined 34.2% (never or rarely) admitted to inadequate intake, suggesting a need for improved nutritional balance. The use of coffee or tea to stay awake was reported as "sometimes" by the largest group (38.3%), implying a moderate dependency on stimulants among students. Water consumption habits were more encouraging, with both "often" and "sometimes" equally marked by 105 participants each (27.3%), and an additional 21.1% stating they always drink enough water, showing that most students are hydrated adequately. When asked about eating foods that help regulate bowel habits, 30.5% chose "sometimes," and 22.1% selected "often," which points to occasional attention to digestive health. Lastly, following healthcare provider advice on healthy eating was reported "sometimes" by 44% of respondents, though a significant number (18.2%) reported "rarely" doing so, suggesting that while guidance is acknowledged, it's not consistently followed.

**Table 3:** *Five Questions Related To Rest And Sleep*

Exercising daily is a priority for me	NEVER	(29%)
	RARELY	(75%)
	SOMETIMES	(159%)
	OFTEN	(50%)
	ALWAYS	(71%)
	Total	384%
I make an effort to get enough sleep so that	NEVER	(26%)
I am rested	RARELY	(108%)
	SOMETIME	(122%)
	OFTEN	(74%)
	ALWAYS	(54%)

	Total	384%
I sacrifice sleep to get the unit work done	NEVER	(32%)
	RARELY	(64%)
	SOMETIMES	(118%)
	OFTEN	(122%)
	ALWAYS	(46%)
	Total	382%
I complete my daily sleep time of 6-8 hours	NEVER	(21%)
	RARELY	(51%)
	SOMETIMES	(99%)
	OFTEN	(86%)
	ALWAYS	(126%)
	Total	383%
I feel restored on completion of my sleep	NEVER	(21%)
	RARELY	(50%)
	SOMETIMES	(138%)
	OFTEN	(67%)
	ALWAYS	(108%)
	Total	384%

The above table showing that the findings regarding rest and sleep habits reveal that most students prioritize sleep occasionally, but consistency is lacking. When asked whether daily exercise is a priority, the highest response was "sometimes" (41.4%), with only 18.5% choosing "always," suggesting that regular physical activity is not a strong priority for many. Regarding efforts to get enough sleep, 31.8% reported "sometimes," while a considerable 28.1% admitted to rarely trying, indicating that while some attempt to manage rest, many still struggle with regularity. Notably, 31.8% reported "often" sacrificing sleep for academic work, and another 30.7% "sometimes" do so, clearly showing that academic demands frequently interfere with sleep schedules. On a more positive note, 32.9% stated they always complete the recommended 6–8 hours of sleep, and 22.5% reported doing so often, reflecting a healthy pattern among over half the participants. Finally, in terms of feeling restored after sleep, 35.9% responded

“sometimes”, and 28.1% “always”, indicating that although many participants experience restful sleep, a substantial portion may not feel consistently refreshed.

**One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Stress Coping	384	3.07	.559	.029
Food Habit	384	3.1752	.61261	.03126
sleep Rest	384	3.3146	.68012	.03471

**One-Sample Test**

Test Value = 0

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	(2-Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Stress Coping	107.441	383	.000	3.067	3.01	3.12
Food Habit	101.567	383	.000	3.17522	3.1138	3.2367
sleep Rest	95.501	383	.000	3.31458	3.2463	3.3828

**One-Sample Effect Sizes**

	Standardizer	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Stress Coping	Cohen's d	.559	5.483	5.883
	Hedges' correction	.560	5.472	5.872
Food Habit	Cohen's d	.61261	5.183	5.563
	Hedges' correction	.61381	5.173	5.552
sleep Rest	Cohen's d	.68012	4.874	5.232
	Hedges' correction	.68146	4.864	5.222

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

**Correlations**

		Stress Coping	Food Habit	sleep Rest
Stress Coping	Pearson Correlation	1	.351**	.350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	384	384	384
Food Habit	Pearson Correlation	.351**	1	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	384	384	384
sleep Rest	Pearson Correlation	.350**	.431**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	384	384	384

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above all tables showing that the study analyzed responses from 384 participants on three key domains: stress coping, food habits, and sleep/rest practices. The mean score for stress coping was 3.07 (SD = 0.559), for food habits was 3.18 (SD = 0.613), and for sleep/rest was 3.31 (SD = 0.680). These means are significantly greater than zero as shown by one-sample t-tests:

Stress coping:  $t(383) = 107.44, p < .001$  Food habit:  $t(383) = 101.57, p < .001$

Sleep/rest:  $t(383) = 95.50, p < .001$

These highly significant results suggest that participants rated themselves moderately high across all three domains. The 95% confidence intervals confirm this with narrow bounds for each domain, indicating precision in the estimates (e.g., 3.01–3.12 for stress coping).

The effect sizes (Cohen’s d and Hedges’ g) for all three variables were notably large (above 4.8), reflecting strong practical significance and showing that the observed differences are not only statistically significant but also meaningful in magnitude.

**Correlation Analysis**

The Pearson correlation coefficients revealed moderate, statistically significant positive relationships between the three variables at the 0.01 level:

Stress coping and food habits:  $r = .351, p < .001$

Stress coping and sleep/rest:  $r = .350, p < .001$

Food habits and sleep/rest:  $r = .431, p < .001$

These findings suggest that students who report better food habits and adequate rest also tend to have better coping mechanisms for stress. The strongest relationship observed was between food habits and sleep/rest, indicating a potential interdependence between physical nourishment and sleep quality.

### Discussion

The study was designed to assess self-care practices among nursing interns, focusing on stress coping, dietary habits, and sleep/rest patterns. The findings suggest that although nursing interns possess a basic awareness of self-care, its actual implementation remains inconsistent due to workload pressure, time limitations, and clinical training demands.

In terms of stress coping, most participants reported infrequent or inconsistent use of effective coping strategies. Statistical analysis indicated significant differences among groups, suggesting variability in stress management practices among interns. These findings reflect that nursing interns are frequently exposed to emotionally demanding clinical environments, which may contribute to emotional exhaustion and psychological strain. Although positive coping strategies such as social support, humor, and problem-solving were recognized, they were not consistently practiced. This gap highlights the need for structured stress management training within internship programs to strengthen psychological resilience and reduce the risk of burnout, which can ultimately affect quality of patient care.

Regarding dietary habits, the results indicated a moderate level of healthy eating practices among participants, with noticeable variation between individuals. While more than half of the interns reported occasional adherence to healthy dietary practices, a considerable proportion demonstrated irregular meal patterns and unhealthy food choices. This inconsistency is likely influenced by heavy clinical workloads, limited meal breaks, and lack of access to healthy food options during duty hours. Although interns are generally aware of the importance of nutrition, practical barriers prevent consistent implementation of healthy dietary behaviors. This emphasizes the need for institutional support to ensure availability of nutritious food and protected meal times during clinical shifts.

Sleep and rest patterns also showed considerable variability. Although some interns reported adequate sleep duration, many indicated that sleep was frequently compromised due to academic responsibilities and clinical duties. The demanding nature of nursing internship, which includes long shifts, emotional involvement, and academic requirements, significantly disrupts sleep patterns. This lack of adequate rest negatively affects cognitive functioning, decision-making ability, communication skills, and overall clinical performance. Despite awareness of the importance of sleep, interns often prioritize work demands over personal rest, leading to long-term health consequences and reduced efficiency in patient care.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a clear gap between knowledge and practice of self-care among nursing interns. While awareness exists, actual implementation is limited by environmental, organizational, and workload-related factors. This suggests the need for structured interventions, including stress management training, institutional wellness programs, and supportive clinical policies that promote healthy behaviors. Nursing education and healthcare institutions must create an environment that supports self-care as an essential component of professional development rather than an optional practice.

The implications of this study highlight the importance of integrating structured stress management programs into nursing internship training. Institutions should ensure adequate meal breaks and access to healthy food options during clinical duty hours. In addition, duty schedules should be designed in a way that allows sufficient rest and recovery time to prevent fatigue and burnout. Strengthening self-care practices among nursing interns not only improves their physical and mental well-being but also enhances patient safety, reduces clinical errors, and improves overall healthcare quality.

**Conclusion:** Nursing interns demonstrate an understanding of self-care practices; however, their application is significantly hindered by workload pressure, time constraints, and systemic challenges within clinical training environments. Stress coping strategies are used inconsistently, dietary habits remain moderate due to practical limitations, and sleep patterns are frequently disrupted. These findings indicate the urgent need for institutional reforms and structured support systems to promote

sustainable self-care behaviors. Strengthening self-care within nursing education will contribute to developing healthier, more resilient, and professionally competent future nurses capable of delivering safe and compassionate care.

**Recommendations** include integrating self-care education into the nursing curriculum with a focus on stress management, emotional resilience, and time management skills. Regular workshops on mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and coping strategies should be conducted to support interns in managing clinical stress effectively. Furthermore, hospital administrations should ensure the provision of nutritious food options and scheduled rest breaks within duty rosters to support both physical and psychological well-being.

**Limitations:** The study is limited by a relatively restricted and demographically imbalanced sample, which reduces generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias and limit causal interpretations. The absence of any interventional component also restricts the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of potential self-care improvement strategies.

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