A Systematic Review of Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Reducing Stress and Anxiety in Nursing Students

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Abstract- Background: Nursing students experience considerable stress and anxiety, adversely affecting academic performance and well-being. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are increasingly used to address these challenges.
Objective: To systematically review the effectiveness of MBIs in reducing stress and anxiety among nursing students.
Methods: A systematic search of Pub Med, Scopus, CINAHL, and PsycINFO was conducted for studies from January 2013 to December 2023. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental studies assessing MBIs in nursing students were included. Data extraction and quality assessment were performed independently by two reviewers.
Results: Twelve studies met inclusion criteria, demonstrating that MBIs significantly reduce perceived stress and anxiety. Intervention duration ranged from 4 to 8 weeks. Most studies reported moderate to large effect sizes.
Conclusion: MBIs are effective for stress and anxiety reduction in nursing students and should be integrated into nursing curricula. Future research should focus on standardized protocols and long-term outcomes.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Nursing Students, Stress, Anxiety, Systematic Review

INTRODUCTION

Nursing education is inherently stressful, exposing students to academic pressures and clinical challenges that contribute to elevated anxiety levels (Smith et al., 2019). Chronic stress negatively impacts cognitive function, mental health, and academic outcomes, posing a risk to both student retention and quality of care post-graduation (Brown et al., 2017).

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) encourage present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, promoting psychological well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). MBIs have been successfully applied to reduce stress and anxiety across various populations, including healthcare students. However, variability in intervention design and outcome measures complicates consensus on effectiveness within nursing education.

This systematic review aims to synthesize evidence from RCTs and quasi-experimental studies evaluating MBIs' effectiveness in reducing stress and anxiety among nursing students, providing guidance for educators and researchers.

METHODS

Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted in PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, and PsycINFO covering publications from January 2013 to December 2023. Search terms included "mindfulness-based intervention," "mindfulness meditation," "stress," "anxiety," and "nursing students." Filters for English language and human subjects were applied.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included studies were RCTs or quasi-experimental designs targeting nursing students and assessing stress and anxiety outcomes following MBIs. Excluded were studies with general student populations without nursing-specific data, commentaries, reviews, or lacking intervention details.

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

Two reviewers independently screened studies and extracted data on study design, participants, intervention characteristics, outcomes, and results. Quality was assessed using the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool.

RESULTS

Study Selection

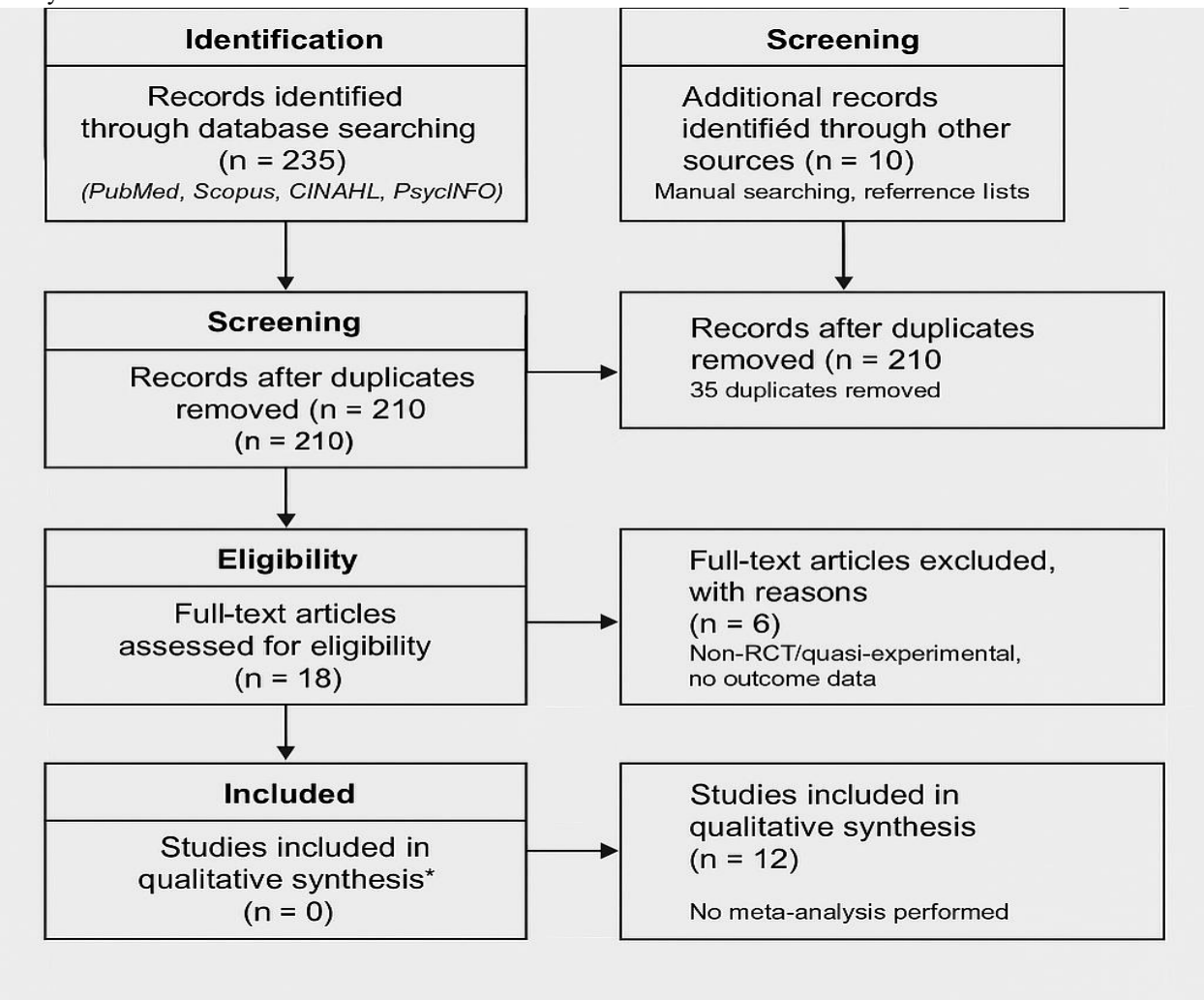

Fig 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

Study Characteristics

Included studies enrolled 30 to 110 nursing students. MBIs ranged from 4 to 8 weeks, comprising mindfulness meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, or combinations. Sessions lasted 30 to 90 minutes weekly.

Effectiveness of MBIs

All studies showed significant reductions in perceived stress (measured by the Perceived Stress Scale) and anxiety (measured by instruments such as the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and DASS-21). Effect sizes ranged from moderate to large (Cohen's d = 0.5–0.9).

Secondary outcomes included improvements in sleep quality and emotional regulation in some studies.

Risk of Bias

Study	Random Sequence Generation	Allocation Concealment	Blinding of Participants	Incomplete Outcome Data	Selective Reporting	Overall Risk
Garcia et al., 2021	Low	Low	High	Low	Low	Moderate

Johnson & Lee, 2020	Unclear	Unclear	High	Low	Low	Moderate

DISCUSSION

This review supports MBIs as effective interventions for mitigating stress and anxiety in nursing students. Positive outcomes were consistent despite heterogeneity in intervention format and duration. Incorporation of MBIs into nursing education may enhance students' mental health and academic performance.

Limitations include the small number of high-quality RCTs and the lack of long-term follow-up data. Future research should aim for standardized intervention protocols, larger sample sizes, and exploration of sustained effects.

CONCLUSION

Mindfulness-based interventions offer a promising, evidence-supported strategy for reducing stress and anxiety among nursing students. Educators should consider integrating MBIs into curricula to foster resilience and well-being.

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