Clinical Placement Anxiety For Undergraduate Nursing Students: A Concept Analysis
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Introduction
Anxiety is a pervasive human phenomenon. Undergraduate nursing students experience high levels of anxiety during their clinical placements, resulting in negative outcomes related to their mental health and well-being, and academic performance.1,2
Despite an increased awareness and research in this area, there is still a lack of clarity of the concept of clinical placement anxiety in this population.

Purpose
The primary aim of this concept analysis is to establish a strong foundation for future research in this important area of nursing education.

Methods
Walker and Avant’s3 8-step approach to concept analyses in the nursing profession was utilized to guide the review of existing literature.
1. Select the concept
2. Determine the purpose of the analysis
3. Discover all uses of the concept
4. Determine the defining attributes
5. Identify a model case
6. Identify borderline, related, and contrary
7. Identify antecedents and consequences
8. Define empirical referents
Search terms: clinical placement, clinical experience, nursing students, undergraduate nursing students, anxiety.

Clinical placement anxiety is defined as a vague perceived threat to a student’s goals in clinical practice, due to the presence of stressors, including an unfamiliar environment or situation, resulting in psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses.

Results

Psychological-emotional response
Subjective: feelings experienced by the student. e.g., worry, uneasy, dread, uncertainty

Antecedents
Cognitive ability to perceive changes and the capacity to feel emotions.

Consequences
Negative: avoidance & escape
Positive: coping perceived as behavioral or adaptation, accompanied by a sense of worth/achievement/self-efficacy

Psychological-cognitive response
Cognitive processes influence the perceived reality and modify behaviour. e.g., distraction, avoidance, escape, confusion

Physiological response
Physical manifestations. e.g., restlessness, jaw clenching, insomnia, facial flushing

Unfamiliar environment or situation
New experiences related to the clinical. e.g., new clinical skills, site, encounters

Vague perceived threat
Perceived threat to goals. e.g., perceived potential or future danger, feelings of vulnerability

Empirical Referents
No specific tool to measure clinical placement anxiety. Tools* used by nurse researchers regarding clinical education:
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)
- Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS)
- State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)
- Clinical Experience Assessment form (CEAF)
- Nursing Anxiety and Self-Confidence with Clinical Decision Making (NASC-CDM)

*Tools need to be validated and/or adapted regarding clinical placement anxiety.

Model Case
Amanda is a first year nursing student who is starting her first clinical placement. She has not slept all night due to feelings of unease and apprehension and feels her heart racing and her chest feels heavy whenever she thinks about the upcoming clinical experience. On arrival to the clinical unit, Amanda meets her clinical instructor who is frowning and looks unfriendly. Amanda spends the morning avoiding the instructor and attempts to stand in the back of the group to avoid attracting attention to herself. Later in the day, Amanda is forced to seek guidance from the instructor regarding a new skill. Amanda feels unwell, she is perspiring and trembling. The instructor is patient and kind, which allays Amanda’s anxiety. After performing the skill well, Amanda feels more self-confident and realizes she has mis-judged her instructor.

Implication/Conclusion
Insights gleaned from this concept analysis will also enhance the ability of clinical nursing educators to effectively prevent and manage student anxiety in the clinical setting.
This concept analysis establishes the foundation for future research, as well as educational strategies in nursing education.

References

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