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Married to Nursing School: How Stress Affects Marital Satisfaction of Nursing Students

Krysta AF Laabs

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Married to Nursing School: How Stress Affects Marital Satisfaction of Nursing Students

by

Krysta Laabs

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Abstract

In this paper, the lived experience of married nursing students and their stress during nursing school was explored. This project aimed to answer the questions: 1) what is the lived experience of married nursing student during one semester of their nursing program and 2) what is the students' combined experience of nursing school stress and marital stress or satisfaction? The research design was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The participants of the study consisted of 7 volunteer, married nursing students attending the BSN program at the University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Park campus during the fall 2015 semester. The participants were asked to write journal accounts about their experiences with nursing school stress combined with marital stress and/or marital satisfaction. Data were analyzed for themes separately by both the researcher and thesis chair. Inter-coder reliability was achieved for all themes identified with only slight variations in wording. Duplication of themes were reduced to four by the researcher. The four themes identified are: 1) Familial social role changes, 2) Imbalances between school and family, 3) Emotional stress, and 4) Spousal support. The recurring themes identified indicate that the additional stressors from nursing school negatively impact the marital stress of married nursing students.

Keywords: married nursing students, nursing school stress, marital stress

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my encouraging husband, Josh, and three amazing children:

my beautiful Haylee, cheerful Elijah, and thoughtful Cade.

Your love and support gives me the strength and motivation to accomplish my goals.

Acknowledgments

I want to take this time to formally express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Karen Rich. Thank you so much for your constant mentoring and advice throughout this entire experience. You exemplify what it means to be a caring, intelligent and successful nursing instructor. Thank you for helping me navigate through this nursing school journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The number of nontraditional students enrolled in college is increasing. The typical college student is being replaced by students who are older than 25 and married (Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, 2011). Dill and Henley (1998) described the nontraditional student as having multiple social roles as well as experiencing at least one year between high school and college. McLeod (2008) defined social roles as the parts people play as members of a social group. Traditional students typically perform the social roles of student, friend, and child while nontraditional students play these social roles in addition to the roles of parent, employee, and spouse. These additional roles carry extra problems along with them. One of the most influential of these additional problems is stress (Dill & Henley, 1998). With this changing demographic of college students, the multiple social roles and stressors of married college students becomes more important to discuss. The increasing population of nontraditional students requires different approaches to preparing a successful learning environment.

Married college students are faced with not only the common academic stressors such as examinations, assignment deadlines, long study hours, and a fear of failing, but also with familial and spousal obligations (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2014). As a result of additional social roles, a student may be faced with social role conflict in which one social role must be given more priority over another. The increased demands of college attendance and married home life result in additional stress on not only the student, but on the marital relationship as well.

Marital distress is included in the types of stress that nursing students can face in

the intense education process of nursing school. This point is justified in a study by Lo (2002) where family sources of stress accounted for 48.5% of the sources of stress in nursing students. While these family sources of stress could encompass single parents as well as married students, Lo attributed some of this stress to the fact that approximately 40% of the student subjects were faced with the problem of balancing studies, work, and family (Lo, 2002). The added stress of balancing home life with school life can negatively affect students' academic performance. The purpose of this senior honors thesis is to explore the lived experience of married nursing students and their stress during nursing school.

Research Questions

The research design for this senior honors thesis was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The research questions were: 1) what is the lived experience of married nursing students during one semester of their nursing program and 2) what is the students' combined experience of school stress and marital stress or satisfaction?

Significance of the Project

Although the academic stressors of nursing students have been examined, few studies have focused specifically on marital distress. A study by Meehan and Negy (2003) focused on marital status and satisfaction among married undergraduate students, but this broadly-focused study targeted undergraduate students in various academic fields. Focusing on the marital satisfaction and stress affecting nursing students can aid in understanding the emotional needs of this population who is exposed to higher levels of stress and experience more physical and psychological symptoms in comparison to students in other health related disciplines (Jimenez, Navia-Osoria, & Diaz, 2010, p.

442).

It is critical to understand the dynamic between marital satisfaction and the stress levels of nursing students in order to better support students throughout their intense academic program. Identifying the experience of stressors affecting nursing students, including marital distress, can result in a better understanding of the difficulties nursing students face when completing their nursing education. Reeve, Shumaker, Yearwood, Crowell, and Riley (2012) rationalized that understanding the emotional needs of students will add to an educational environment that is more conducive to learning. According to Lo (2002), family stress in the form of marital distress is a significant source of stress among married nursing students and should be studied in order to maintain a social environment beneficial to learning. This knowledge can be used to develop resources and strategies to help married nursing students cope with the stress of nursing school and, in turn, improve the nursing school experience.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Stress Defined

Selye (1974) used a broad definition of stress as the body's response to any demand to specific stress producing factors named stressors. This definition of stress has evolved to encompass any form of psychological distress (Gibbons, 2010). Most literature on the stress experienced by nursing students uses the theoretical framework and transactional model of stress developed by Lazarus and Folkman. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (p.19). This transactional model of stress defines a stressor as anything that an individual perceives as stressful when the person appraises the situation (Sheu, Lin, & Hwang, 2002). After the initial perception about the stressor, the individual judges it to be positive, negative, or benign. These broad classifications of stress are named eustress, distress, and benign, respectively (Gibbons, 2010).

The stressors accompanying nursing school have been further categorized by source. Based on their research study, Jimenez et al. (2010) categorized the stressors of nursing students into three categories: academic, clinical, and external. Academic stressors include "assignments and workload, exams, pressure of grades or fear of failing and relations with academic staff" (p. 443). The researchers categorized clinical stressors as those that specifically encompass the clinical setting and patients while using the broad category of external stressors for those that involve daily life and finances (Jimenez et al., 2010). Marital distress falls into this last category.

Stress can affect an individual both physically and psychologically. Symptoms of stress can manifest physically by increasing heart rate and blood pressure in addition to causing headaches and ulcers; psychologically, stress symptoms can manifest as anxiety and anger (Sheu, Lin, & Hwang, 2002). Another common manifestation of stress is exhaustion (Timmons & Kaliszer, 2002).

Nursing Students and Stress

Studies involving nursing students and stress have shown that students with high or excessive levels of stress experience impaired physical health and psychological distress, such as anxiety and depression (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2014; Jimenez et al., 2010). The physical and psychological effects of stress affect the academic progress and adaptation of nursing students (Zyga, 2013). This has a profound effect on students; however, the harmful effects of stress have long-lasting implications that are not just limited to the academic domain but, rather, carry over into a student's life external to school.

The effects that stress can have on a student are not conducive to a beneficial learning environment. Jimenez et al. (2010) illustrated this point by saying, "stress is a particularly important issue in education because it has the potential to impede learning and performance" (p. 442). Stress is recognized as a particular issue of concern among nursing students because of its effects on health and wellbeing (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2014). High levels of stress may influence nursing students to discontinue their education, which will eventually contribute to the ongoing nursing shortage issue (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2014). The stress levels of nursing students can carry over into patient care and "adversely affect the quality of nursing care" (Lo, 2002, p. 119). The high levels of stress incurred by nursing students affect the health of the nursing profession as a whole but also affect the

individual health of the student. Timmins and Kaliszer (2002) pointed out that nursing has been established as a stressful profession making the issue of stress important in the education of future nurses. Understanding and identifying stress in nursing students can improve education regarding effective coping skills used in the professional environment as well.

Reeve et al. (2012) pointed out that nursing students in particular have been found to “experience higher levels of stress than other college students. Nursing students believe that they have little free time due to the demands of studying with assignments for didactic and clinical work” (p. 420). Nursing students in comparison to students in other academic fields experience longer hours of study in addition to the added pressure of clinical work, which exposes these students to additional stressors (Gibbons, 2010).

The extra pressures of balancing a family and completing a nursing education produce additional stress for married nursing students. The additional time required for study, the intensity of the material, and the various clinical hours involved in nursing education can interfere and disrupt the family dynamic of married nursing students. For example, in a study conducted by Bosch and Gess-Newsome (2014), the nursing students described “facing intense class, clinical, and study schedules that often interrupted family life” (p. 37). In addition to this grueling process, the studying involved with nursing school does not stop when students arrive at home (Bosch & Gess-Newsome, 2014). Nursing school encompasses not only the school day but bleeds into the home life of students as well. Married nursing students are faced with more time constraints and role conflicts than non-married or traditional students (Dill & Henley, 1998). Married nursing students experience more role conflict as they attempt to balance multiple social roles, which leads

to added stress. According to Hoffnung and Williams (2012), “stress and strain result from multiple roles...” (p. 322). In addition to the elevated levels of stress from being in nursing school, married students carry the additional effects of stress from the extra role strain involved with marriage and family.

Nursing Students and Social Roles

Married nursing students must contend with the excessive stress involved with nursing school in addition to the stress of marriage and family life. Gibbons (2010) referenced married nursing students when saying, “for some, the demands of the course might put a strain on existing relationships outside of the course” (p. 1306). The strain experienced by married nursing students can be based on the lack of time available for family life. The intense curriculum, clinical work, and long study hours leave little time left for family and spousal interaction. In a study of stress in undergraduate nursing students by Lo (2002), almost 40% of the participants reported problems of trying to “strike a balance between studies, work, and family” (p. 124). Married nursing students are forced to reconcile multiple social roles such as student, spouse, parent, and employee. Trying to balance multiple roles results in added levels of stress.

Based on Goode’s theoretical framework, traditional role theorists conjecture that psychological and emotional resources have fixed limits (Hoffnung & Williams, 2012). Each social role has its own set of role expectations and demands the same emotional resources. The resulting strain and burden of role demands that face married women lead to role overload, interrole conflict, and stress (Hoffnung & Williams, 2012). For married nursing students in particular, the stress caused by multiple social roles in addition to the stress of nursing school can negatively impact marital satisfaction and happiness.

Marital satisfaction is affected by many factors including the stress and changing social roles of students in general. In a study comparing full time and part time college enrollment status, Sutor (1987) found that “marital happiness declined substantially among husbands of full time students” (p. 322) and female “full-time students themselves also became less happy with their marriages...” (p. 324). Attending college full time, as most nursing students are required to do, can negatively impact marital happiness.

Marital satisfaction also has been studied in the process of adapting to college. Meehan and Negy (2003) found “a causal connection between relationship satisfaction and adjustment to college” (p. 687). Married students had poorer adjustment to college when compared to unmarried students, and the quality of married students’ relationships with their spouse correlated positively with their adaptation to college. The reciprocal nature of marital satisfaction and college adaptation can be applied to the stress involved with nursing school and marital satisfaction.

According to a study by Sutor (1987), emotional support was the prominent theme of marital dissatisfaction among returning women students, while the dissatisfaction of the spouses focused on the decrease in time that the students spent with their family. The struggle of students to balance academic life with family life causes stress, especially with nursing students. Due to the number of demands on married nursing students, emotional support becomes critical to marital satisfaction. A nursing student participant in a study by Bosch and Gess-Newsome (2014) demonstrated frustration about the lack of emotional support felt by some married nursing students with this quote, “for anyone who has a relationship-either husband or boyfriend-[this] program is either going to make you or break you” (p. 38). While a lack of emotional support from one’s spouse can lead to

marital dissatisfaction and stress in nursing students, an abundance of emotional and social support can actually help buffer the stress encountered in the nursing school experience.

Lo (2002) reported that social support from family, a spouse, or a partner could reduce, or buffer the adverse effects of stress. Social support refers to actions performed for a distressed individual by persons within that individual's social circle (Lo, 2002). Nursing student stress levels are reduced with higher levels of social support. This relationship is evidenced by the study by Meehan and Negy (2003): "As predicted, married students reporting relatively high levels of social support did manifest better adjustment to college than married students reporting relatively low levels of social support" (p. 686). Social and emotional support from a spouse was directly related to adaptation to college. The same relationship can apply to nursing students and stress levels.

Conclusion

Research has shown that nursing students experience high levels of stress that impacts their physiological and psychological health. The stress that accompanies the nursing curriculum can carry over into a student's marriage and cause marital distress. Married nursing students are faced with the conflict of managing the multiple social roles involved in academic life and married life. This conflict can result in added stress and reduced marital satisfaction. The central theme of marital distress in female students is a perceived lack of emotional support from a spouse; however, the stress accompanying nursing school can be buffered by social support from a spouse. The reciprocal experience of the stress of nursing school and marital satisfaction was explored in this project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this senior honors thesis was to explore the lived experience of married nursing students and their stress during nursing school. Research has shown that family and marital distress is a significant stressor reported by nursing students (Lo, 2002; Bosch & Gess-Newsome, 2014). In addition, spousal emotional support correlates to the marital satisfaction of students (Suitor, 1987). In this phenomenological study, the dynamic of spousal emotional support among married nursing students was explored. Study participants were asked to journal once to twice per week about their experiences of nursing school stress combined with marital stress and/or marital satisfaction.

Participants

The participants in this research project consisted of volunteer, married nursing students attending the BSN program at the University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Park campus during the fall 2015 semester. Students' informed consent was obtained prior to their participation in the survey, but students' participation also implied consent. Students were informed that they were free to leave the study at any point without negative repercussions. The participants were married for longer than one year and had completed three semesters of the nursing program. The total number of participants was 7 nursing students: six females and one male. The median age of the participants was 29 years old while the median age of the spouses was 31 years old. The median age difference between the participant and their spouse was 2 years. The median length of marriage of the participants was 4 years. One participant had no children, while the other 6 participants had between 1 and 3 children, with the median number of children being 2. The ages of the

children ranged from less than one year up to 11 years old. Other demographic data of the participants including mean and mode can be found in Table 1 of the Appendix. Including the participants and their spouses, 57% were Caucasian, 21% were multiracial, 14% were Asian, and 7% were Hispanic. This data is visualized in Chart 1 of the Appendix.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB), seven students were recruited for the study during a nursing class early in the fall 2015 semester. The study was fully explained to the volunteer participants, and informed consent was obtained. Students were asked to complete journal notes about their experiences in nursing school and marital stress and/or satisfaction. The journal entries contained both current and past experiences. The study began in the fall 2015 semester as soon as IRB approval was obtained, and the journals were emailed to the researcher periodically until the semester was complete. Each participant completed at least two entries with a maximum of up to five total journal entries by one participant. The study data was not anonymous, but strict confidentiality was maintained by the researcher and thesis advisor. The data was analyzed and reported anonymously according to accepted procedures for interpretive phenomenological studies.

The data was interpreted from the journal entries received during the fall 2015 semester. Journal entries by each participant were analyzed for themes. The individual themes were then compared to the other entries for common and repeated themes. The thesis advisor contributed to the analysis of journal entries, providing feedback and validation of interpreted themes of journal entries. The thesis advisor was blinded to the identity of the participants during her analysis and discussion of data with the researcher.

The participants verified that the individually interpreted themes corresponded with the participants' experiences and intentions in writing each journal entry.

Assumptions

It was assumed that the participants were honest in sharing their experiences of nursing school related stress and marital stress or satisfaction during nursing school.

Limitations

The proposed study was limited by the researcher's inexperience with conducting research. Another limitation was that this study must be conducted within a timeframe that is shorter than one that should be used for a typical phenomenological study. However, it is the researcher's goal to use this study as a good introduction to learning how to conduct quality research studies in the future.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this thesis was to gain an understanding of the relationship between marital stress and the nursing school experience through the lived experience of currently married nursing students attending nursing school. These experiences were expressed through personal journal entries that were then analyzed and interpreted for prominent themes related to marital stress. A total of 4 themes were identified as common among the participants: 1) Familial social role changes and 2) Imbalances between school and family, 3) Emotional stress and 4) Spousal support.

Familial Social Role Changes

Most of the journal entries centered on the marital stressors that occur during nursing school. The theme of familial social role changes permeated all of the journal entries across all participants. The theme of familial social role changes encompasses the shifting of established social roles and division of household responsibilities within the family unit. Participant 1 expressed the stresses of this new dynamic, “Now some of that responsibility is shared with my husband. It has been a bigger change for him than for me, and it took him a while to get used to it.” The participant elaborated in another entry that her husband “is not used to taking on that much responsibility alone.” Participant 3 expressed frustration about the division of household responsibilities since beginning nursing school, “I also do not feel like the house is just my responsibility... I believe he knew what we were getting into when I was accepted as we discussed it many times.” This clearly demonstrates the tension that arises from the altered familial social roles that are required of nursing school student spouses.

Another component of the theme of familial social role changes includes the topic of financial burdens of the family with the participants feeling like they were unequally contributing to the household income. Most of the participants were full time students without employment. Participant 7 emphasized this predicament in a journal entry, “Since I’ve started nursing school, I’ve felt guilty for putting all of our finances off on my husband...Now I feel like my husband is constantly stressing over what we spend and it makes me feel horrible.” Due to nursing school, the financial burden of the family is commonly placed onto the shoulders of one spouse creating additional stress upon the marriage and producing feelings of guilt upon the non-working student. Participant 5 also expressed this concern in addition to the complexities of traditional gender role changes within the marriage:

The other big stressor for nursing school that applies to men specifically is the fact that it basically requires us to conflict with the traditional gender roles of the family. Usually, the guy is the breadwinner; he works his 40 and brings home the money while the wife takes care of the kids. In my situation though, my wife makes twice and much as I do, as she has already graduated with her Bachelor’s degree. Obviously, any reasonable person sees that me finishing school while she works will be best for us all in the long run, it still puts great pressure on me, and even embarrassment to an extent, in the meantime.

According to one participant, this financial stress is due to a lack of time to work which places “tremendous” stress on the family. This stress can contribute to conflicts between spouses. For example, participant 4 expressed anger about finances in a journal entry in relation to her spouse spending money on automotive window tinting, “...he is

disconnected from our money situation. It is not a bad situation, but things still have to be budgeted.” It is evident that the nursing school experience contributes to the additional marital stressors of changes in household responsibilities and financial burdens.

Imbalances Between School and Family

The common theme of imbalances between school and family include divided attention between family and school with limited quality time spent with the family. Some of the participants described this division of attention between family and school in different ways. Participant 1 stated, “Sometimes I feel like I’m stretching myself too thin.” Participant 3 depicted this division of attention as “a disjointed feeling when it comes to my family.” This imbalance applies to the responsibilities of school as well. After spending time with her family and doing housework, participant 3 explained her anxiety about not doing schoolwork, “As I look around it is spotless, but I feel a bit guilty for the lack of studying and there is a test in the morning.” The participants discussed this constant friction between spending time on school related activities and spending time with family. Participant 2 voiced similar concerns in a journal entry:

I am so busy trying to make sure I study enough for the next test without waiting until the last minute, helping other classmates study so they pass, and trying to balance everything, that sometimes I forget about things that seem less important...I feel like a crappy mom when I forget about their things. At the same time, I feel like I don’t focus enough on my school work and spend more time focused on their stuff.

The struggles of balancing a home life are already difficult and the additional work of nursing school further challenges this delicate balance. Participant 2 talked about heeding

parental advice, “If there is anything I have learned at all through this whole school experience, it’s that I should have listened to my mom and finished school before I had a family. Juggling both is very difficult!”

The imbalance between school and family is most related to a lack of quality time spent together. All participants complained of limited time spent with family. Participant 1 said, “...we didn’t spend much alone time together because I was trying to juggle everything.” Participant 2 discussed this topic in relation to her feelings of exhaustion at the end of the day, “I’m sure my husband hates that too because I feel there is no time for us to be intimate.” Similarly, participant 6 opened her first journal entry with, “This week, I think I’ve seen my husband (awake) for maybe a total of 8 hours.” In another journal entry, this same participant recalled an argument with her spouse,

I was still upset, so it made me cry again to talk to him about it, but I told him how it’s really not fair for him to tell me he wants me to be successful in school and to work a certain amount of hours per month, then use the “you’re never here line.”

It is apparent that the lack of time spent together has adverse effects on the marriages of nursing students. This is further evidenced with participant 4’s frustration with her spouse in regards to lack of time spent together, “He continues to give me issues about study time. He hates that I ever have to study on nights when he is home...” In addition, participant 7 stated, “I feel as though nursing school has taken away a large portion of my time spent with my husband during our first year of marriage.” Clearly, the additional time needed for nursing school related coursework has a negative impact on the relationships of students.

The lack of quality time is not limited to spouses but includes missing valuable time with children as well. This participant detailed the grief felt from missing time with his

daughter, “I painstakingly had to deny her “daddy time,” telling her that I have to do homework. It broke my heart...I HATE that nursing school is having an effect on the time I get to spend with my kids.” Unfortunately, the time that is missed during nursing school is irreplaceable. Participant 3 best described this tragedy, “...but the problem is, you cannot catch up on family time. You miss things and there will never be a memory of that event.” The time that is missed during nursing school is time lost and that sacrifice is an additional stressor placed on married nursing students.

Emotional Stress

Many participants reported that nursing school adds to their stress levels. Participant 2 stated, “Honestly, school creates a lot of stress for me,” adding that “Life in nursing school with a family is hard.” Participant 5 mirrored this complaint, “Unfortunately for me, people who have never been in nursing school simply do not know what a massive burden, stressor, undertaking (the list goes on) that nursing school is!” This participant later correlated the nursing school experience with marriage, “Perhaps my least favorite “symptom” of nursing school is the stress it puts on my marriage.” Participant 7 emphasized this theme of emotional stress with her entry:

I know this adventure will all be worth it in the end, but reaching the end has been such a challenge. Not only am I stressing over tests and assignments, I’m stressing over what I spend and what I ask my husband for.

The stressors of nursing school contribute to the increased stress levels of the participants in addition to emotional stressors such as feelings of guilt.

Some participants expressed feelings of guilt within their marriage. Participant 2 explained, “I only felt guilty once [this week] so, for me anyway, it’s been pretty good.”

This implies that the participant had recurring episodes of guilt during the week. In addition, this participant stated, “I feel like a very self-absorbed person because of nursing school.” Again, this implies that this is not typical of her personality type indicating that the experience of nursing school changes the personality and behavior of students. Participant 5 related the feelings of guilt in regard to nursing school:

You are never truly relaxed due to the constant reminder of the fact that you SHOULD be studying. I never really have fun without feeling guilty that I may not be putting in the effort that is expected of me.

Participant 7 conferred similar feelings of guilt but in relation to financial burdens, “My husband would never complain to me about taking on the burden of supporting us, because that’s not the type of man he is, but I still feel guilty. I have been feeling extremely guilty this week in particular.” Once more the opposing demands of nursing school and marriage put additional stress on nursing students, this time in the form of emotional stress as feelings of guilt.

Spousal Support

The theme of spousal support includes both negative and positive aspects. Some participants expressed feelings of positivity towards the perceived support of their spouses. For instance, participant 2 articulated gratitude:

Sitting here thinking about all this has made me realize that I may not show my appreciation for my husband as much as I should. He has always been my rock, supporting me through school and encouraging me to believe in myself.

Participant 1 discussed the importance of spousal support, “He told me that for the first time he can see how hard it must be for me with juggling being a wife, mother, and student. This was really important for me to hear, because it is very hard.” The spouse of one participant moved her to a city closer to nursing school in order to lessen the driving burden placed to get to and from both school and clinical locations even though that meant that the spouse would have to live on a military base during the work week that was over an hour and a half drive from their shared home. This participant commented, “I am extremely grateful for the sacrifice my husband has made to make school easier for me.”

However, some participants expressed a frustration with a perceived lack of support from spouses. One participant opened a journal entry with, “Nursing school is going to kill my marriage.” This participant proclaimed that nursing school led to trust issues with his spouse crediting this jealousy as “the consequence of being a guy in a predominately female profession.” On the other hand, participant 5 expresses anger at her husband’s lack of support and assistance, “He gets needy like this when I am not around as much or in school. HE stops doing things around the house and becomes one with the couch. It’s infuriating.” This perceived lack of spousal support adds to the stressors already experienced by married nursing students.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The intent of this project was to explore the lived experience of married nursing students and their stress during nursing school. The participants discussed the stress of shifting familial social roles and the additional stress this created as the spouses were forced to take on additional familial social roles as well. This correlates to the role scarcity perspective that asserts that both sets of role expectations use the same number of a finite number of resources, resulting in decreased well-being and increased stress (Hoffnung & Williams, 2012).

In addition to the changing social roles within the family, the participants discussed the stress of financial burdens due to nursing school. This compares to the study by Lo (2002) in which finances were the second major source of stress for nursing students. Some of the participants continued to work at least part time while in nursing school while others sacrificed their income to focus on school full time. Many participants expressed feelings of guilt in regard to not “bringing in my equal part into the household.” These feelings of guilt pervaded the struggles of trying to balance the demands of both school and family. Many participants felt a constant opposition between the two priorities in their life. When time was dedicated to family, the student felt guilty for not completing schoolwork, yet the participant would feel guilty if time was spent focused on school at the expense of family time. This competition between school and family created additional stress for the participants and negatively impacted the marital relationship.

The negative impacts on the marital stress of the participants related to the lack of time spent together. The study by Bosch and Gess-Newsome (2014) found similar issues in their study of interpersonal support in a Spanish-English nursing program. One of the

students in their study also remarked on missing time spent with children (Bosch & Gess-Newsome, 2014). The participants in my study continuously described marital conflicts that arose from a limited amount of quality time directly related to the additional burdens of nursing school.

The participants also commented on the additional stressors of nursing school coupled with the pressures of marriage. Many students commented about how stressful the nursing school experience was on them. Common keywords used included, “burden” and “challenging.” The intense pressure of nursing school put additional burdens on the marriages of the participants.

Finally, the participants had both positive and negative references to spousal support. Some participants felt gratitude toward their spouse for sacrificing and supporting the student through the nursing school process. However, some participants felt a lack of support from their spouse, causing additional conflict within the marriage. Spousal support can greatly impact the stress level of student nurses. According to Lo (2002), social support (functions performed for a distressed individual by spouses or other significant persons) reduce the adverse psychological impacts of stress.

Conclusion

Familial social role changes, an imbalance between school and family, additional emotional stress, and both negative and positive spousal support were described by the sample of nursing students in this study. Nursing school and the additional stress that accompanies it contributed to the marital distress of all participants involved. Many participants complained about the constant struggle between balancing the demands of school and the demands of family suggesting that the student must choose one or the other.

The additional stress of having to choose between important areas of a student's life puts unnecessary stress upon the student. High levels of stress can lead to burnout and high levels of turnover (Lo, 2002). More research should be done on how to expand the balancing of both nursing school and family to reduce levels of stress. Reeve et al. (2012) asserts that "the academic community has a responsibility to promote coping and well-being in nursing students" (p. 423). This obligation applies to all nursing students, especially married nursing students who have to shoulder the burdens of nursing school in addition to the stresses of marriage and family.

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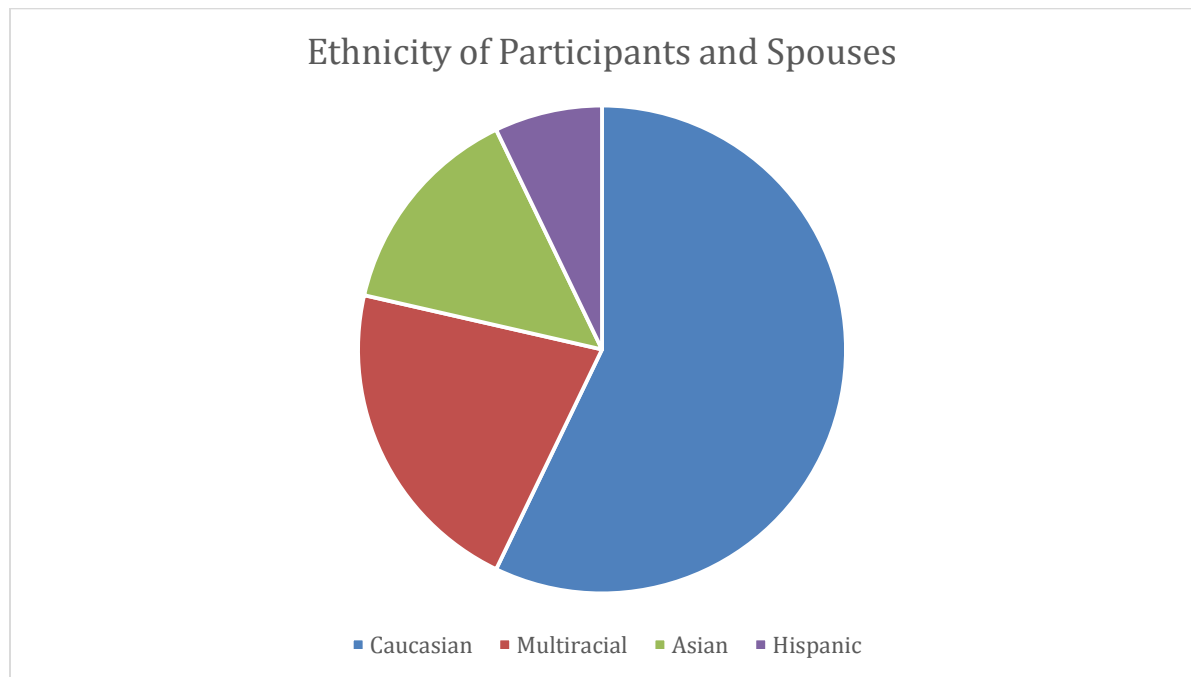
Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Data

Table 1
Demographic Data

Participant Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	Median	Mode
Participant Age	29	33	30	29	26	30	26	29	29	29
Spouse Age	31	31	33	31	25	28	27	29.4	31	31
Age Difference (years)	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1.9	2	2
Marriage Length (years)	4	11	3	4	6	3	1	4.6	4	4
Number Of Children	2	3	1	2	2	1	0	1.6	2	2

Chart 1: Ethnicity of Participants and Spouses



Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15082702

PROJECT TITLE: Married to Nursing School: The Experience of Stress and Marital Satisfaction Among Nursing Students

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): Krysta Laabs

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Nursing

DEPARTMENT: Collaborative Nursing Care

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 08/31/2015 to 08/30/2016

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
SHORT FORM CONSENT**

SHORT FORM CONSENT PROCEDURES
<p>This document must be completed and signed by each potential research participant before consent is obtained.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All potential research participants must be presented with the information detailed in the Oral Procedures before signing the short form consent. • The Project Information section should be completed by the Principal Investigator before submitting this form for IRB approval. • Copies of the signed short form consent should be provided to all participants. • The witness to consent must be someone other than the Principal Investigator or anyone else on the research team. <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Last Edited July 22nd, 2014</small></p>

Today's date: _____	
PROJECT INFORMATION	
Project Title: Married to Nursing School: How Stress Affects Marital Satisfaction of Nursing Students	
Principal Investigator: Krysta Laabs	Phone: 228-342-4999 Email: krystalaabs@gmail.com
College: USM Gulf Park College of Nursing	Department: Collaborative Nursing Care
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH	
Participant's Name: _____	
<p>Consent is hereby given to participate in this research project. All procedures and/or investigations to be followed and their purpose, including any experimental procedures, were explained. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected.</p> <p>The opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and procedures was given. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.</p> <p>Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-5997.</p>	
_____	_____
Research Participant	Witness to Consent
_____	_____
Date	Date