

Managing Mental Health and Academic Demands: A Husserlian Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of Nursing Scholars of Lorma College

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of present-day nursing student scholars at Lorma Colleges in managing their mental health amid heavy academic responsibilities using a Husserlian phenomenological approach. The study aimed to understand how academic pressures influence their psychological well-being, coping strategies, and sense of meaning in their academic journey. Eleven (11) nursing student scholars participated in in-depth interviews, and the gathered data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's method for phenomenological data analysis, which involved extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering themes. The findings revealed three major themes: Lived Tensions and Expectations of Academic Strain, Negotiating Stress Through Maladaptive and Adaptive Responses, and The Meaning of Fulfillment in the Midst of Academic Strain. These themes show that nursing student scholars experience intense academic pressure and emotional strain while simultaneously navigating both healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms in response to stress. Despite these challenges, participants continue to find fulfillment and meaning in their academic journey through achievements, recognition of efforts, and financial support as scholars. Overall, the study highlights that although nursing students face significant mental health and academic challenges, they demonstrate resilience and strong motivation to complete their nursing education. The study emphasizes the importance of providing adequate mental health support systems, balanced academic workloads, and accessible stress management interventions to promote well-being among nursing student scholars in higher education settings.

Keywords: *nursing student scholars, mental health, academic stress, coping strategies, phenomenology*

1. Introduction

Mental health is an essential component of an individual's overall well-being because it influences emotional regulation, coping abilities, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. According to the World Health Organization, mental health refers to a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, manage normal life stressors, work productively, and contribute to their communities. However, academic environments with excessive demands may negatively affect mental health, particularly among students enrolled in rigorous professional programs such as nursing. Nursing education is widely recognized as academically and emotionally demanding because students are expected to balance theoretical knowledge, laboratory activities, clinical exposure, and performance-based requirements simultaneously. Unlike other academic programs, nursing students are continuously exposed to situations that require emotional resilience, critical thinking, physical endurance, and professional competence. These expectations become even more difficult for nursing scholars whose academic performance directly determines the continuation of their scholarship privileges.

Studies suggest that nursing students commonly experience stress, anxiety, burnout, and emotional exhaustion due to the heavy academic workload and clinical demands associated with nursing education. According to Labrague et al. (2020), nursing students frequently encounter psychological distress caused by examinations, clinical duties, fear of failure, and academic expectations. Similarly, a study by Savitsky et al. (2020) revealed that prolonged exposure to academic stress contributes to emotional exhaustion, poor sleep quality, and decreased psychological well-being among nursing students.

Globally, mental health concerns among college students have significantly increased over the years. In a study conducted by Son et al. (2020), university students reported increased levels of anxiety, stress, and emotional fatigue associated with academic pressures and uncertainty regarding future responsibilities. These findings emphasize how academic environments can negatively affect students' emotional and psychological well-being when stressors become persistent and overwhelming.

Within nursing education, scholars experience additional pressure because maintaining academic excellence becomes directly connected to financial stability and scholarship retention. A study by Alkhawaldeh et al. (2022) found that scholarship students often experience heightened anxiety due to fears of losing educational privileges and disappointing their families. The burden of sustaining academic performance may contribute to emotional distress, self-imposed pressure, and unhealthy coping behaviors.

In the Philippine setting, nursing students also experience substantial mental and emotional strain due to overlapping academic requirements, financial concerns, and institutional expectations. According to Aruta et al. (2021), Filipino college students demonstrated elevated levels of stress and anxiety associated with academic pressure and uncertainty in achieving future career goals. Additionally, the study emphasized that emotional exhaustion and academic overload may negatively influence students' motivation, concentration, and psychological well-being.

Similarly, a local study conducted by Quintana et al. (2023) emphasized that students undergoing academically demanding programs often struggle to maintain emotional balance due to continuous workloads, expectations, and responsibilities. The findings highlighted that prolonged academic strain may result in physical exhaustion,

sleep deprivation, emotional withdrawal, and decreased self-confidence. However, the study also revealed that support systems, spirituality, and adaptive coping mechanisms contribute significantly to students' resilience and perseverance.

At Lorma Colleges, nursing scholars are expected to maintain high academic standards while simultaneously fulfilling clinical responsibilities and scholarship requirements. The pressure to sustain grades, satisfy expectations, and avoid scholarship termination often becomes a source of emotional burden for nursing scholars. Beyond academic achievement, these students continuously navigate exhaustion, self-doubt, fear of failure, and emotional strain while striving to achieve their personal and professional aspirations.

Despite the growing body of literature regarding academic stress and student mental health, limited qualitative studies specifically explore the lived experiences of nursing scholars in balancing mental health and academic demands. Most studies focus primarily on stress prevalence and coping mechanisms rather than the deeper meanings attached to these experiences. There remains a need to understand how nursing scholars personally perceive, interpret, and navigate the emotional realities associated with academic strain and scholarship retention.

Using Husserlian phenomenology, this study explored the lived experiences of nursing scholars in managing mental health amidst academic demands. Husserlian phenomenology focuses on describing experiences as consciously perceived by individuals while setting aside researcher assumptions and biases. Through this approach, the researchers sought to understand the essence of being a nursing scholar who continuously negotiates academic pressure, emotional exhaustion, resilience, and fulfillment.

The findings of this study may contribute to the improvement of institutional mental health programs, student support services, and nursing education strategies that promote holistic well-being among nursing scholars. Furthermore, the study may provide educators, administrators, and future researchers with a deeper understanding of the realities experienced by nursing scholars within demanding academic environments.

2. Objectives

To explore and describe the lived experiences of nursing student scholars in managing mental health amidst academic demands

3. Materials and Methods

This study utilized a qualitative Husserlian phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of nursing scholars in managing mental health amidst academic demands. Husserlian phenomenology focuses on describing human experiences as consciously perceived by individuals while bracketing researcher assumptions and preconceived ideas.

The study was conducted at Lorma Colleges. The participants of the study were eleven nursing student scholars enrolled during the School Year 2025–2026. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria established by the researchers. Participants were required to be nursing scholars currently enrolled in the institution and actively experiencing academic responsibilities related to scholarship retention and nursing education.

The researchers utilized a validated in-depth interview guide as the primary data-gathering instrument. The interview guide underwent face and content validation by experts from the nursing department and guidance office to ensure appropriateness, clarity, and relevance to the objectives of the study.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee of Lorma Colleges. Participants were oriented regarding the objectives, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature of participation. Written informed consent was obtained before the conduct of interviews. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable environment to encourage openness and honest sharing of experiences. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 15–30 minutes. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary to deepen understanding and clarify participant responses. Data gathering continued until saturation was achieved.

All gathered data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method of phenomenological analysis. Significant statements were extracted from the transcripts, meanings were formulated, and thematic clusters were developed to identify patterns and the essence of participants' lived experiences.

Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Member checking, audit trails, reflexive journaling, and peer review were employed to strengthen the rigor and authenticity of the findings. Ethical principles including confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and non-maleficence were strictly observed throughout the research process.

4. Results

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the lived experiences of nursing scholars in managing mental health amidst academic demands. From the data gathered, three major themes emerged: (1) **Lived Tensions and Expectations of Academic Strain**, (2) **Negotiating Stress Through Maladaptive and Adaptive Responses**, and (3) **The Meaning of Fulfillment in the Midst of Academic Strain**. These themes collectively reflect the emotional, psychological, and personal realities experienced by nursing scholars as they navigate the demands of nursing education while maintaining scholarship expectations.

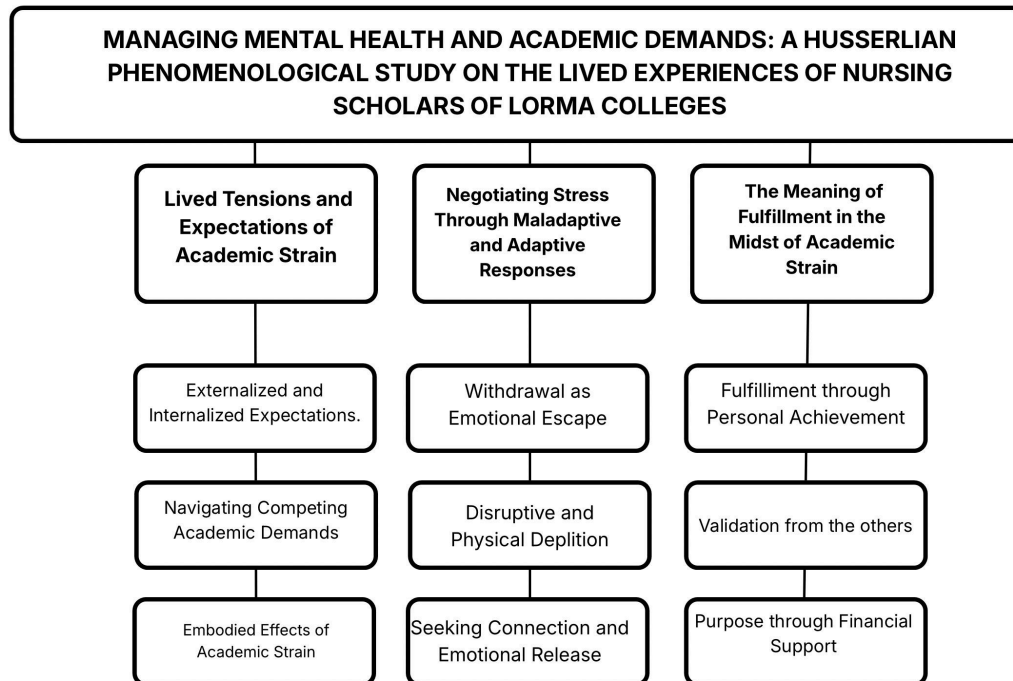


Figure 1 Conceptual Map of the Lived Experiences of Nursing Scholars in Managing Mental Health Amidst Academic Demands. The conceptual map illustrates the interconnected experiences of nursing scholars in managing academic pressure, coping responses, and fulfillment. The first major theme, *Lived Tensions and Expectations of Academic Strain*, reflects the pressure and exhaustion experienced by participants. The second major theme, *Negotiating Stress Through Maladaptive and Adaptive Responses*, highlights the coping strategies used in dealing with academic stress. Lastly, *The Meaning of Fulfillment in the Midst of Academic Strain* reflects how participants find purpose, resilience, and growth despite academic challenges. Together, these themes reveal the lived experiences of nursing scholars balancing mental health and academic responsibilities.

5. Discussion

Under The major theme **Lived Tensions and Expectations of Academic Strain** captures the lived experience of nursing scholars who continuously carry the tension between meeting expectations and enduring the demands of nursing education. Beyond academic responsibilities, the participants described a constant feeling of pressure shaped by the expectations of others and by the standards they set for themselves. Their experiences reflect how academic strain becomes part of their everyday lives, influencing not only their performance in school but also their emotional and physical condition. Despite exhaustion and pressure, nursing scholars persist in fulfilling their roles,

revealing the silent burden carried through their academic journey.

The **Externalized and Internalized Expectations** subtheme reflects how expectations become a central source of tension in the lived experiences of nursing scholars. Participants described carrying pressures not only from parents, instructors, peers, and family members, but also from the standards they set for themselves. Family expectations, scholarship responsibilities, academic recognition, and personal goals gradually become internalized, creating a persistent inner pressure to succeed and avoid failure. The findings imply that continuously internalizing expectations may increase vulnerability to anxiety, self-pressure, and emotional exhaustion among nursing scholars. These findings are supported by Labrague et al. (2021), who explained that expectations related to academic achievement significantly contribute to stress and emotional exhaustion among nursing students. Similarly, Alkhateeb et al. (2023) found that students who internalize high expectations are more likely to experience anxiety and emotional strain when attempting to maintain academic excellence.

The subtheme **Navigating Competing Academic Demands** reflects the lived tension of nursing scholars as they continuously balance overlapping academic demands that compete for their time, attention, and energy. Participants described academic life as a constant piling of deadlines, quizzes, assignments, and clinical responsibilities that happen simultaneously, leaving them in a state of continuous adjustment. Rather than experiencing academic tasks separately, participants experienced them as competing responsibilities that create confusion, pressure, and emotional exhaustion. The findings suggest that prolonged exposure to overlapping academic demands may contribute to cognitive overload, decreased concentration, and emotional fatigue among nursing scholars. These findings are supported by Alshammari et al. (2022), who identified heavy academic workload and overlapping requirements as major contributors to stress among nursing students. Likewise, Suliman et al. (2021) emphasized that continuous academic demands and time pressure may negatively affect students' psychological well-being.

The **Embodied Effects of Academic Strain** subtheme reflects how academic strain is not only mentally experienced but also physically and emotionally carried by nursing scholars. Participants described how continuous pressure gradually manifested through anxiety, exhaustion, disrupted sleep, restlessness, and emotional fatigue. Their experiences revealed that academic strain extends beyond school responsibilities and becomes embodied through physical depletion and emotional instability. The body itself becomes the space where academic pressure is endured and expressed. The findings imply that prolonged academic strain may negatively affect both the psychological and physical well-being of nursing scholars, increasing vulnerability to burnout and emotional exhaustion. These findings are supported by Rudman and Gustavsson (2012), who explained that prolonged academic stress may result in psychological distress and physical exhaustion among nursing students. Similarly, Labrague et al. (2021) emphasized that poor sleep quality and continuous academic stress are strongly associated with burnout and reduced well-being in nursing education.

The major theme **Negotiating Stress Through Maladaptive and Adaptive Responses** reflects how nursing students respond to sustained academic pressure through both maladaptive and adaptive coping strategies. Participants revealed that coping responses vary depending on the intensity of stress, emotional resilience, and the support systems available to them. Some participants demonstrated unhealthy coping mechanisms

such as withdrawal and sleep disruption, while others utilized emotional support, social connection, and self-regulation to manage stress. This major theme is represented through three interconnected subthemes: (1) Withdrawal as Emotional Escape, (2) Disruptive Rest and Physical Depletion, and (3) Seeking Connection and Emotional Release.

The **Withdrawal as Emotional Escape** subtheme emerged as a maladaptive coping response among nursing scholars experiencing overwhelming academic stress. Participants described withdrawing from social interactions, isolating themselves from others, and disengaging from responsibilities whenever pressure became emotionally exhausting. Emotional withdrawal became a temporary escape from overwhelming academic demands and internal tension. However, despite offering temporary relief, participants recognized that isolation eventually intensified loneliness, helplessness, and emotional burden. The findings imply that self-isolation and emotional withdrawal may negatively affect both academic functioning and psychological well-being among nursing scholars. These findings are supported by Esperanza and Bulusan (2020), who identified withdrawal and disengagement as dysfunctional coping responses commonly used by students experiencing academic stress.

The **Disruptive Rest and Physical Depletion** subtheme reflects how academic stress disrupts the physical well-being and restorative functioning of nursing scholars. Participants described irregular sleeping patterns, insufficient rest, exhaustion, and physical fatigue caused by overwhelming academic responsibilities. Several participants shared sacrificing sleep to complete requirements and manage deadlines, while others described emotional “crashing” due to excessive pressure. These experiences reveal how academic stress gradually weakens physical endurance and emotional stability among nursing scholars. The findings suggest that chronic sleep disruption and physical exhaustion may negatively affect concentration, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. These findings are supported by Alhasan et al. (2025), who reported that psychosocial stressors are strongly associated with sleep disruption and insufficient rest among students.

The **Seeking Connection and Emotional Release** subtheme reflects how nursing scholars cope with academic stress through emotional expression, supportive relationships, and social connection. Participants described seeking comfort through conversations with friends, spending time with loved ones, listening to music, praying, and engaging in activities that allowed emotional release. Emotional expression and companionship helped participants feel understood, emotionally validated, and less burdened by academic pressure. Through connection with others, stress gradually became more manageable and emotionally bearable. The findings indicate that emotional support systems significantly contribute to resilience and psychological well-being among nursing scholars. These findings are consistent with Berdida et al. (2023), who reported that social support significantly improves resilience and psychological well-being among nursing students. Likewise, Loureiro et al. (2024) found that emotional connectedness enhances coping effectiveness amidst academic and clinical stressors.

The major theme **The Meaning of Fulfillment in the Midst of Academic Strain** captures how nursing scholars continue to find meaning, satisfaction, and motivation despite experiencing emotional exhaustion and academic pressure. Participants described fulfillment as something shaped not only by achievement, but also by recognition from others and the practical benefits associated with scholarship privileges. Their experiences

reveal that fulfillment emerges through perseverance, emotional validation, and the realization that their sacrifices contribute to both personal and familial well-being. This major theme is represented through three interconnected subthemes: (1) Fulfillment through Personal Achievement, (2) Validation from Others, and (3) Purpose through Financial Support.

The **Fulfillment through Personal Achievement** subtheme reflects how nursing scholars derive fulfillment from achieving academic success and attaining scholarship status. Participants described becoming scholars as a reward for their hard work, perseverance, and sacrifices amidst overwhelming academic demands. Scholarship attainment became a symbol of accomplishment, competence, and personal growth. Participants viewed their achievements as evidence that their struggles and sacrifices were worthwhile. The findings suggest that academic achievement serves as a strong intrinsic motivator that strengthens students' confidence, resilience, and commitment toward their goals. These findings are supported by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that competence and achievement contribute significantly to intrinsic motivation and psychological fulfillment.

The **Validation from Others** subtheme reflects how fulfillment among nursing scholars is strengthened through acknowledgment, appreciation, and emotional affirmation from family members and significant others. Participants described feeling fulfilled whenever their achievements made their families proud or when they saw their names included in scholarship lists. Recognition from others gave deeper emotional meaning to their academic success and strengthened their motivation to continue despite academic strain. The findings suggest that emotional validation positively influences students' resilience, confidence, and psychological well-being amidst academic pressure. These findings are supported by Berdida et al. (2023), who emphasized that emotional support and social affirmation contribute significantly to resilience among nursing students.

The **Purpose through Financial Support** subtheme reflects how scholarship privileges provide nursing scholars with a deeper sense of purpose through financial assistance and reduced educational burden. Participants expressed that scholarship benefits helped lessen tuition expenses and reduced financial stress experienced by their families. Scholarship support became emotionally meaningful because it allowed participants to contribute positively to their household while continuing their education. The findings imply that financial assistance programs significantly strengthen students' motivation, persistence, and emotional well-being amidst academic challenges. These findings are supported by Alkhaldeh et al. (2022), who emphasized that scholarship support positively influences students' motivation and perseverance despite academic difficulties.

6. Conclusion

The lived experiences of nursing scholars in managing mental health amidst academic demands are multifaceted, encompassing both fulfilling and distressing experiences throughout their academic journey. The study provided an in-depth understanding of the tensions, coping responses, and meanings attached to the experiences of nursing scholars as they continuously navigate academic pressure, scholarship retention, and personal expectations.

Nursing scholars experienced persistent pressure brought by external and internalized expectations, overlapping academic responsibilities, and the embodied effects of prolonged academic strain. Participants recognized that maintaining academic performance and scholarship status required continuous sacrifice, adjustment, and endurance. They experienced emotional exhaustion, anxiety, disrupted sleep, and physical fatigue as they attempted to balance academic responsibilities, clinical duties, and personal well-being.

Despite these challenges, nursing scholars continuously negotiated stress through both maladaptive and adaptive coping responses. Some participants coped through emotional withdrawal, self-isolation, and disrupted rest whenever academic pressure became overwhelming. However, participants also relied on emotional support, social connection, emotional expression, spirituality, and self-regulation practices that helped them manage stress and continue despite emotional difficulties. These coping responses demonstrate that nursing scholars persist through resilience, emotional support systems, and personal determination.

Moreover, the participants attached deeper meanings to their experiences as nursing scholars. Fulfillment was experienced through personal achievement, recognition from significant others, and the financial support provided by scholarship privileges. Participants viewed scholarship attainment not only as academic success but also as a source of pride, gratitude, motivation, and purpose. Their experiences revealed that fulfillment emerged through perseverance, emotional validation, and the realization that their sacrifices positively contributed to their personal aspirations and family well-being. The findings imply that nursing scholars require continuous emotional, psychological, and institutional support to help them effectively manage academic strain and maintain mental well-being. Supportive academic environments, accessible mental health services, balanced academic expectations, and strong support systems are essential in promoting resilience and psychological wellness among nursing scholars.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that nursing educators and academic institutions strengthen mental health programs, counseling services, and student support systems specifically designed for nursing scholars experiencing academic stress and emotional exhaustion. Faculty members may promote balanced workloads, emotionally supportive learning environments, and healthy coping strategies that encourage resilience and well-being among students.

Furthermore, nursing scholars may be encouraged to strengthen adaptive coping mechanisms such as emotional expression, time management, seeking social support, and engaging in self-care practices to better manage stress amidst academic demands. Families and peers may also continue providing emotional reassurance, encouragement, and understanding to nursing scholars as they navigate the challenges associated with nursing education and scholarship retention.

Additional studies are recommended to further explore the lived experiences of nursing scholars from different academic institutions and healthcare programs. Future researchers may also examine the effectiveness of mental health interventions and support systems in improving the psychological well-being, resilience, and academic experiences of nursing students.

7. Acknowledgements

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9. Appendices

APPENDIX A Approval Sheet from the Research Ethics Committee

 LC-REC Form #524
APPROVAL LETTER
REC Reference #: 2026-006

February 20, 2026

To: LAYC L. MONTES, SIMON BERNARD Z. PALALAY, ANGEL C. ALICO, NATASHA ASHLEY V. SANCHEZ and RYZIEL G. UNABIA
LORMA Colleges, College of Nursing

Subject: Approval of the Research Study – “MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH AND ACADEMIC DEMANDS: A HUSSERLIAN PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NURSING SCHOLARS OF LORMA COLLEGES” – by the Research Ethics Committee (REC).

Dear Researcher/s,


The Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed your application to conduct the above-mentioned research study in Lorma Colleges, Carlatan, City of San Fernando, La Union with you as the Principal Investigators within a duration of February 20, 2026 to February 20, 2027.

The Following documents have been reviewed and approved:

1. Endorsement of the Research Coordinator
2. Title and Statement of the Problem/Objective
3. Literature Review
4. Methods and Procedures
5. Population and Locale
6. Exclusion/Inclusion Criteria
7. Data Analysis
8. Ethical Considerations

The Institutional REC expects to be informed about the progress of the study, any revision in the protocol before implementation and participants'/respondents' information/informed consent. Likewise, you are required to provide the Board a copy of the final report.

Yours Sincerely,


JEROME P. VERA, LPT
Chairman, LC-REC

10. Author(s) Biodata

Ms. Layc L. Montes, a third-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing student from Lorma Colleges, together with her group members, Simon Bernard Z. Palalay, Angel C. Alico, Natasha Ashley V. Sanchez, and Ryzlei G. Unabia, conducted this study under the guidance of their research adviser, Mrs. Araceli F. Surat, an expert in qualitative studies. Their research reflects their dedication and commitment to exploring meaningful lived experiences and contributing valuable insights in the field of nursing research.