

Empowering self-care in nursing and midwifery: enhancing mental wellbeing to sustain perseverance and resilience

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Nursing and midwifery are widely recognized as high stress professions, shaped by the emotional, cognitive, and physical demands of care work. They are expected to remain clinically competent, emotionally present, and ethically grounded, often within unpredictable and high-pressure environments such as hospitals, birthing centres, and community care settings (Foster et al., 2020). The emotional impacts of witnessing suffering and bearing responsibility for others' wellbeing is further intensified by systemic constraints, including extended working hours and chronic staffing shortages (Ibrahim et al., 2020). To navigate these complex realities, preparation must begin early in the educational journey through the structured development of self-care practices. More than a personal wellness strategy, self-care supports sustained professional motivation, emotional availability, and the consistent delivery of compassionate care. The capacity to regulate emotions, think clearly under pressure, and maintain psychological balance is fundamental to long term professional wellbeing (Haji Matarsat et al., 2021).

For some, self-care is not instinctive, but for others it may be in-born. Yet, it is a professional capacity that required to be reinforced, taught, and practiced throughout the training process (Chiam et al., 2020). During their education, students begin to encounter the ethical, emotional, and interpersonal complexities of healthcare work. Through clinical experience, structured reflection, and meaningful mentorship, they gradually develop coping strategies to manage these evolving demands (Marshall et al., 2022). A comprehensive nursing and midwifery education must extend beyond clinical proficiency and theoretical knowledge. It should deliberately cultivate emotional insight, psychological flexibility, and the ability to navigate complex human

experiences with clarity and compassion (Hussien et al., 2020). These attributes do not emerge automatically and should not be left to chance.

Many students report psychological distress during their studies, commonly expressed as anxiety, fatigue, or emotional exhaustion. These responses often reflect a misalignment between professional expectations and the support structures provided. Students frequently begin their training with limited tools for managing stress and few opportunities to build emotional resilience. It is therefore a pedagogical and ethical responsibility for institutions to treat emotional development as a core element of professional preparation (Chandra, 2021). Self-care must not be framed as an option, but mandatory. While students do bear responsibility for their own wellbeing, they should not be expected to manage psychological burdens in isolation. Structured systems such as reflective practices, peer support networks, emotional coaching, and accessible wellbeing services must be intentionally embedded within the curriculum (Labrague, 2021). Like any clinical skill, self-care must be explicitly taught, modelled, and assessed. Neglecting to formalize these supports risks reinforcing inequality. Students from underrepresented or high-pressure backgrounds may face greater difficulty in accessing help or speaking openly about personal challenges. A structured and inclusive approach to self-care ensures that all students, regardless of background, are equipped to manage the emotional demands of both education and future professional roles (Suslovic & Lett, 2024).

Attention must also be paid to the hidden curriculum. Despite formal messaging around wellbeing, students often encounter unspoken norms that reward overwork, emotional suppression, and self-neglect, particularly

during clinical placements (Mbakaya et al., 2020). Educators and mentors must actively demonstrate that setting boundaries, taking rest, and engaging in reflection are not signs of weakness, but essential expressions of professional maturity. By positioning self-care as a central educational priority, nursing and midwifery programs can graduate professionals who are not only clinically competent, but also emotionally grounded and ethically attuned. This integrative approach not only sustains compassionate care but also protects the long-term wellbeing of those who provide it.

Keywords

Nursing, midwifery, education, wellbeing, self-care, mental health

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