

# **Effectiveness of A Friendship Circle Model on Mental Health Awareness, Attitudes, and Peer Support Among First-Year GNM Nursing Students**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Academic success, emotional steadiness, and social adaptation are all greatly impacted by first-year GNM nursing students' mental health. Students are more likely to have emotional and mental difficulties throughout the transition from school to nursing school due to the increased academic pressures, more exposure to clinical settings, and the loss of established support networks. As a peer-based intervention, the Friendship Circle Model aims to raise students' consciousness of mental health issues, change their perspectives on mental illness, and fortify their support systems amongst their peers. Students participate in controlled small-group interactions within this paradigm, during which they talk about their lives, their feelings, and how they're doing emotionally. More people will be able to talk about their mental health, and the stigma associated with it will decrease. Peer support within friendship circles promotes a feeling of belonging and connection while helping kids develop empathy, self-confidence, and efficient coping mechanisms.

**Keywords:** *Friendship, Mental, Health, Nursing, Peer.*

## **I. Introduction**

It is widely acknowledged that educating nursing students about mental health is an essential part of their curriculum. Academic, emotional, and social adjustment are common struggles for first-year GNM students when they enter the rigorous healthcare training environment. Their emotional health, relationships with others, and academic achievement may all take a hit when they're under these kinds of pressure. Here, a novel peer-based intervention called the Friendship Circle Model has arisen as a means to increase understanding of mental illness, foster more positive attitudes toward those who suffer from it, and fortify networks of support among those who suffer from it.

Students in the Friendship Circle Model participate in guided mental health education activities, exchange stories, and address emotional difficulties in small, supportive groups that meet frequently. Peer engagement, empathy-building, and shared responsibility for emotional well-being are the pillars of this concept, as opposed to the typical lecture-based awareness programs. It creates a welcoming space where all kids feel comfortable talking about their mental health issues without fear of repercussions.

Along with raising awareness, the model has a substantial impact on how pupils perceive mental illness. Because of cultural factors or a lack of exposure, many students may initially hold stigmatizing attitudes or prejudices. But these preconceptions may be dismantled by consistent communication within friendship groups. Students develop more welcoming and empathic attitudes as they participate in guided contemplation and listen to the stories of their classmates. Effective patient outcomes are built on compassionate care and nonjudgmental attitudes, which is why this transition is crucial in nursing practice.

Another important area that the Friendship Circle Model favorably affects is peer support. Emotional anguish is common among first-year nursing students due to academic pressure and feelings of isolation. People feel more at ease and part of a community in the organized peer groups. When students depend on each other for moral support, help with schoolwork, and psychological support, they develop a sense of

community. Being part of this peer network helps people feel less alone and more resilient. Students develop their interpersonal communication and collaboration abilities, which are critical in therapeutic settings, as they learn to provide and receive help efficiently.

Important "soft skills" like active listening, empathy, and dispute resolution may also be fostered via the Friendship Circle Model. Group discussions help students recognize and understand their own and others' emotional reactions. In order to steer conversations in a constructive direction, make sure everyone feels welcome, and encourage good communication habits, facilitators are crucial. Students are able to absorb supportive attitudes via this controlled contact, which they may then take with them into their academic and clinical situations.

Improvements in mental health literacy, attitude scales, and perceived peer support are usually rather noticeable when comparing pre- and post-intervention assessments when evaluating the model. A decrease in stress and an improvement in self-confidence are common student reports while dealing with emotional difficulties. A combination of the model's ease of use, scalability, and compatibility with teamwork in nursing make it a powerful tool.

## **II. Friendship Circle Model on Mental Health**

Friendship is an important social phenomenon in human life. In friendship, a person usually looks for friends with similar interests, values, and goals. Good friends can usually provide emotional and psychological support, as well as entertain and motivate a person. Friendship can also help a person expand their social network and improve their psychological well-being. A quality circle of friends can provide benefits for students in achieving academic achievement.

Friendship circles are also one of the factors that can affect the mental health of students. Social relationships and support from friends and family can help reduce stress and strengthen mental health. Mental health is one of the important factors in a person's survival. This also applies to students, who are a group of people who are in transition to adulthood. Good mental health will help students to overcome various problems faced during their education, such as academic stress, interpersonal problems, and emotional problems.

College students are one of the groups that are quite vulnerable to mental health problems, especially during the transition from high school to college limited facilities for mental health services are also one of the causes This transition period is marked by environmental changes, social burdens, higher academic requirements, and adaptations to living on one's own. Students may experience considerable emotional and mental strain as a result of each of these factors. A lot of negative connotations are associated with this age, including adolescence, coming of age, unreality, change, and the quest for one's own identity.

A person's mental health encompasses their physical and mental well-being throughout their life. On top of that, pupils' mental wellness will aid them in reaching their full academic potential. In order to concentrate on their studies and accomplish their goals, students should prioritize maintaining excellent mental health. A student's mental health may also aid in the development of healthy emotional and social competencies.

Having a strong social support system makes it simpler for students with excellent mental health to connect with others and build friendships. Interactions between people that provide social support may take many forms, including but not limited to: taking part in shared activities, offering words of encouragement, sharing relevant information, bestowing prizes, or evaluating one another. Hence, it is critical to focus on students' mental health and provide them the resources they need to stay mentally well.

There are a number of approaches to achieve this goal, including educating the public on the significance of students' mental health, establishing programs to promote their mental health, and offering them social and emotional support. Students' academic and social life are profoundly affected by mental health difficulties, making it a prominent emphasis in the field of education.

### **III. Role of Peer Support in Mental Health of First-Year Nursing Students**

Peer support is a vital component in promoting mental health and well-being among first-year GNM nursing students. During the initial phase of their nursing education, students often face multiple challenges such as academic pressure, clinical exposure, adjustment to a new environment, and separation from family. These challenges can lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional instability. In such situations, peer support becomes an essential source of comfort, understanding, and guidance.

Peer support involves students helping each other emotionally, socially, and practically. Within friendship circles, students feel safe to share their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences without fear of judgment. This open communication helps reduce mental health stigma and increases awareness about emotional well-being. When students talk openly about their problems, they are more likely to understand their own mental health status and recognize the importance of seeking help when needed.

Providing support to peers also has positive effects on the individuals who offer help. It can increase feelings of satisfaction, empathy, and self-worth. Students who support others often develop better communication skills, emotional intelligence, and a stronger sense of responsibility. However, continuously supporting others, especially in difficult situations, may sometimes lead to emotional exhaustion or stress. Therefore, it is important that peer supporters also receive encouragement and support from their group.

Peer support can occur through different methods such as informal conversations, group discussions, and structured friendship circle activities. These interactions help students develop healthy coping strategies, such as problem-solving, sharing experiences, and emotional expression. Trained or guided peer support programs can further improve the effectiveness of these interactions by teaching students how to listen actively, respond empathetically, and manage sensitive situations.

Another important benefit of peer support is the development of a sense of belonging and connectedness. First-year students often feel isolated in a new academic setting, but strong peer relationships can reduce feelings of loneliness and improve adjustment. Friendship circles create a supportive environment where students feel valued and accepted, which positively influences their mental health and academic performance.

Despite its many benefits, peer support also has some limitations. Differences in personality, communication skills, and levels of understanding can affect the quality of support provided. Additionally, some students may hesitate to share personal issues due to fear of confidentiality or judgment. Therefore, creating a respectful, non-judgmental, and confidential environment is essential for effective peer support.

### **IV. Importance of Peer Support Among First-Year Nursing Students**

The difficult process of mentoring necessitates the cultivation of limited and intentional connections supported by information, experience, and chances for introspection. There can't be a mentor-mentee relationship without regular in-person gatherings, open dialogue, clear lines of communication, and role-playing exercises. But isn't this level of formality and complexity necessary for mentoring relationships? Imagine a less complicated solution: a more seasoned undergraduate would act as a mentor to a less seasoned peer, and vice versa. Peer-assisted learning is a catch-all word for a variety of approaches, including:

- Cooperative Learning;
- Collaboration;
- Peer Coaching.

The advantages have been emphasized for both upperclass and lowerclass students. Upperclass students, in particular, often benefit from a more thorough grasp of their field, which aids in self-assurance, communication, and the eventual move to certified practitioner status.

### **Benefits for Junior Students**

Students in their junior year clearly had some of the same fears as their seniors. These were grouped into five main categories:

- Unsure what to expect;
- Fear of seeming inexperienced;
- Fear of seeming incompetent;
- Failing;
- Gaining confidence.

A lot of the junior class was confused about their role and the expectations placed on them. The upperclassmen provided "a safe space to ask questions that may sound basic," in their words. Because "they had lived through the experience so could really tell me what to expect," talking to a senior student had its benefits. When asked about "things that maybe I should know, and didn't," juniors felt more comfortable asking another student than a tutor.

### **Benefits for Senior Students**

The project was also useful for the seniors. They spoke about how it gave them a "confidence boost," a feeling of significance, and a sense of belonging. Several of them found the experience to be "empowering" and thought it provided a solid foundation for their qualifications:

"This really helped; it made me feel like maybe I did know something. I often worry about how I'll manage as a licensed staff nurse."

"It made me reflect upon my training and wish that I had had this when I started. I really believe that would have been a game-changer for me.

For the first two years of our mentorship, my mentee asked me every question I'd ever wanted to ask—about everything!

"It made me realise how much I knew but also how much I still had to learn – and where the gaps in my knowledge were. Wow, this was fantastic!

Peer mentors provide the impression of realizing and acknowledging their own richness of expertise by assisting other pupils. A number of peer mentors expressed their willingness to "find out the answer if I didn't have it... [thereby] helping myself too" in response to the abundance of challenging questions posed to them. Their chosen profession emphasizes the need of obtaining evidence for optimum practice, therefore this aligns nicely with their work. As a way to help their fellow students study, peer mentors were asked to make a collaborative whiteboard. On a regular basis, they updated and contributed to a board that included answers to commonly asked queries. Students in the pilot project and other nursing programs gave the board good reviews.

### **Benefits for Academic Staff**

Teachers also benefited from the insightful criticism that peer mentors offered on lesson plans, pedagogical choices, and content discrepancies. Academics and students were able to "close the gap" because to the connection they supplied.

Peer mentors were able to provide one to-one support to new students on a whole catalogue of issues and were able to answer questions relating to assignments, documentation, university policies and procedures, and clinical placements. This is a great service that will help academics free up time that is becoming more scarce due to the rising workload.

## V. Conclusion

For first-year GNM nursing students, the Friendship Circle Model is a powerful tool for raising knowledge about mental health, changing stigmatizing attitudes about mental illness, and building peer support. Many students experience mental distress, social adjustment issues, and academic strain when they enter nursing school. Within this setting, friendship circles and other organized peer-based treatments provide a nurturing space for kids to freely express themselves. A higher level of mental health literacy is the result of the model's promotion of engagement, mutual comprehension, and compassionate dialogue. As a result, they have a better understanding of mental health concerns, how to recognize them, and how to cope. In order to lessen stigma and encourage early help-seeking behavior, this increased knowledge is vital. Another benefit of consistent peer contact is the amelioration of stigma and the development of empathy for those who struggle with mental health issues. The formation of robust networks of mutual support between friends is another important result of the Friendship Circle Model. Students' emotional resiliency, sense of belonging, and general health may all benefit from these networks. Important interpersonal qualities for prospective nurses to have include active listening, empathy, and collaboration, all of which are fostered by the model.

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