

Anxiety and Answer Changing Behavior in Nursing Students

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Abstract

Background/Introduction

The prevalence of anxiety in college-age students has increased significantly over the last several years. Nursing students who struggle with test anxiety and low examination scores often reach out to faculty for guidance with test taking strategies. The literature has identified answer changing behaviors as a benefit for more than 50% of students in some situations. The challenge remains on how to identify which students benefit from answer changing.

Purpose

To investigate if a relationship existed between student anxiety and answer changing behaviors.

Methods or Processes/Procedures

One hundred thirty-one nursing students from a large Midwestern Baccalaureate Nursing Program were enrolled in a quasi-experimental prospective research study. Data included demographics, analysis of student movement through the examination to identify changed answers via ExamSoft, and completion of the PROMIS® Short Form v1.0-Emotional Distress-Anxiety 8a tool.

Results

Participants changed answers from incorrect to correct a median of 50 % of the time, correct to incorrect a median of 25% of the time, and incorrect to incorrect a median of 21.5% of the time. PROMIS anxiety scores did not covary significantly with the rate of answer changing ($r_{sp} = -0.15$, $t[129] = -1.77$, $p = 0.08$) or rate of negative changes ($r_{sp} = -0.05$, $t[126] = -0.57$, $p = 0.57$).

Limitations

Participants were enrolled from two different courses and were at different levels in the program which may result in skill variation among the participants. Examinations were written by two different faculty and data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic possibly altering anxiety levels and testing behaviors.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice

Anxiety was unrelated to changes (positive or negative) in examination scores. This study did not identify a relationship between answer-changing behavior and anxiety. Findings may aid faculty in considering factors other than anxiety as possible reasons for answer-changing behaviors and future studies should evaluate these factors.

Biography

Ashley Schmuke PhD, RNC-OB is an Associate Professor of Nursing at the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing at Saint Louis University. She teaches Human Growth and Development and Maternal/Neonatal Nursing, with a clinical background in perinatal nursing. Her research interests include cancer during pregnancy and nursing education.

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