

The Cost of Compassion: Investigating Psychological Distress and Academic Burnout as Predictors on the Life Satisfaction of Nursing Students in Rural Academia

Abstract:

Aim: This study investigates the impact of psychological distress and academic burnout on life satisfaction among students, aiming to understand how emotional and academic challenges affect overall well-being.

Instruments and Methods: Employing a quantitative research design, the study utilized a survey method to collect data from university students selected through a simple random sampling technique. Validated instruments were used to measure psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction, ensuring reliability and accuracy in assessing these constructs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to determine the significance of relationships and the extent of influence among variables.

Findings: Results indicate that both psychological distress and academic burnout are significantly associated with lower life satisfaction, highlighting the interplay between mental health and academic stressors. Moreover, regression analysis confirms that these factors collectively contribute to students' overall well-being, suggesting that increased emotional and academic strain negatively affects their perceived quality of life. The findings suggest that maintaining emotional stability and effectively managing academic stress are crucial in promoting a positive student experience.

Conclusion: The study concludes that psychological and academic challenges do not operate in isolation but rather influence life satisfaction in a multidimensional manner. Understanding these relationships provides valuable insights into the broader implications of mental health and academic engagement on students' overall well-being, emphasizing the need for a holistic perspective in addressing educational and psychological concerns.

Keywords: Academic Burnout; Life Satisfaction; Psychological Distress; Student Well-being; University Students

Introduction:

Life satisfaction refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their quality of life-based on personal experiences, achievements, and expectations [1]. It encompasses a subjective sense of well-being influenced by various factors such as physical health, social relationships, academic performance, and future aspirations. In the educational context, life satisfaction plays a significant role in promoting students' mental health, fostering academic engagement, and enhancing their ability to cope with stress and challenges [2]. Among nursing students, maintaining a high level of life satisfaction is crucial as it directly impacts their motivation, resilience, and capacity to provide compassionate care despite academic pressure and demanding clinical exposure [3].

Psychological distress refers to a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and a perceived inability to cope with stressors in life [4]. It commonly arises in response to overwhelming situations, such as academic pressures, social challenges, or personal difficulties, which disrupt an individual's emotional and psychological well-being [5]. Among students, particularly those in high-demand programs like nursing, psychological distress often manifests through persistent feelings of worry, sadness, and helplessness, ultimately affecting their academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall functioning. Prolonged exposure to psychological distress can lead to burnout, mental fatigue, and decreased life satisfaction, making it essential to understand and address the root causes of distress to promote better mental health and academic outcomes for students [6].

Academic burnout refers to a psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged academic stress, characterized by feelings of exhaustion, reduced academic efficacy, and a sense of detachment from academic tasks [7]. It typically emerges when students face excessive academic demands, limited rest,

and a lack of control over their educational workload, leading to mental and physical fatigue. Among nursing students, academic burnout is particularly prevalent due to the rigorous nature of their coursework, clinical rotations, and caregiving responsibilities, often resulting in diminished motivation, decreased academic performance, and impaired mental well-being. If not addressed, academic burnout can significantly impact students' life satisfaction, psychological health, and overall academic engagement, emphasizing the need for interventions that promote resilience and academic support systems [8].

Students in higher education, particularly those in demanding academic programs, often face pressing challenges that negatively impact their life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and academic performance. Low life satisfaction among students is frequently associated with academic pressure, financial constraints, social isolation, and lack of institutional support, which collectively undermine their overall well-being and quality of life [9]. Concurrently, students experience heightened levels of psychological distress due to excessive academic demands, personal problems, and uncertainty about their future, resulting in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion that impede their functioning [10]. Moreover, persistent exposure to academic pressure and stress increases the likelihood of academic burnout, characterized by mental exhaustion, detachment from academic tasks, and decreased academic self-efficacy, which can further compromise students' academic performance and psychological health [11].

Several studies have examined life satisfaction among students, highlighting its crucial role in fostering overall well-being, academic achievement, and positive mental health. Research has shown that higher life satisfaction is associated with better academic performance, increased social support, and improved psychological resilience, allowing students to cope effectively with academic and personal challenges [12]. In the context of nursing students, life satisfaction has been linked to their capacity to manage academic stress, maintain emotional balance, and sustain their motivation in pursuing their professional goals [13]. Studies also indicate that life satisfaction significantly contributes to reducing psychological distress and preventing academic burnout, highlighting the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes students' well-being. Moreover, findings suggest that promoting life satisfaction among students may lead to enhanced academic engagement, reduced dropout rates, and improved overall quality of life [14].

Further, few studies have extensively examined psychological distress among students, revealing its significant impact on their mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. Research suggests that high levels of psychological distress often manifested through anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion, are commonly experienced by students due to academic pressure, financial difficulties, and social challenges [15]. Among nursing students, psychological distress is notably prevalent due to the demanding nature of their educational and clinical training, which often leads to emotional fatigue, decreased motivation, and impaired academic functioning [16]. Studies also indicate that prolonged exposure to psychological distress negatively affects students' cognitive functioning, decision-making abilities, and physical health, ultimately diminishing their quality of life. Furthermore, research highlights the need for universities to implement mental health support services and coping strategies to help reduce the psychological burden experienced by students [17]. Several studies have investigated academic burnout among students, emphasizing its detrimental effects on their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. Academic burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced academic efficacy, often arises from excessive academic demands, prolonged study hours, and a lack of rest, particularly among students in high-demand programs such as nursing [18]. Research has shown that students experiencing burnout tend to exhibit low academic motivation, increased absenteeism, poor academic performance, and heightened psychological distress, ultimately compromising their life satisfaction [19]. Moreover, studies suggest that academic burnout is strongly associated with feelings of helplessness, frustration, and detachment from academic tasks, making it difficult for students to sustain their academic and professional aspirations [20].

Despite numerous studies on life satisfaction, psychological distress, and academic burnout among students, there remains insufficient data on the predictive relationship between psychological distress and academic burnout on the life satisfaction of nursing students, particularly in rural academic settings. Existing literature primarily focuses on these variables individually, but limited attention has been given to understanding how psychological distress and academic burnout collectively influence students' overall life satisfaction. This gap in knowledge limits the development of comprehensive interventions that could holistically address the well-being of nursing students

who are exposed to intense academic pressure and caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by answering the general research question: To what extent do psychological distress and academic burnout predict life satisfaction among nursing students in rural academia? Correspondingly, the primary objective of this study is to examine the predictive relationship between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction, providing empirical evidence that can inform policies, intervention programs, and institutional support services aimed at promoting the overall well-being of nursing students. This research holds significant importance as it provides valuable insights into the well-being of nursing students, particularly in understanding how psychological distress and academic burnout impact their life satisfaction. For the respondents, the findings may contribute to the development of targeted support systems that promote mental health, reduce burnout, and enhance overall quality of life. In the body of knowledge, this study expands the literature by establishing the predictive relationship between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction, addressing a gap that has received limited attention in previous research. The novelty of this research lies in its focused exploration of the predictors of life satisfaction among nursing students in rural academia, offering empirical evidence that may drive future interventions and academic reforms.

Methods:

Research Design:

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive correlational approach, to investigate the predictive relationship between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction among nursing students. Quantitative research is a systematic investigation that collects and analyzes numerical data to understand, explain, and predict phenomena, allowing researchers to measure variables objectively [21]. Descriptive correlational research, on the other hand, seeks to determine the extent to which two or more variables are related without manipulating any of them, providing a clear understanding of their association [22]. The use of a quantitative descriptive correlational design is deemed most appropriate for this study as it allows for the identification and measurement of the relationship between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction among nursing students. This design enables the researchers to gather data objectively, analyze statistical relationships, and generate empirical evidence to understand how psychological distress and academic burnout predict life satisfaction. Furthermore, it supports the study's aim of providing evidence-based insights that may contribute to enhancing the well-being of nursing students, particularly in rural academic settings.

Respondents and Sampling:

This study involved a total of 649 nursing students from leading state university in Southern Philippines from June 2024 – March 2025 selected through simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is a probability sampling technique where every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, ensuring that the sample is representative and free from selection bias [23]. This sampling technique is considered the most appropriate for this study as it provides equal opportunity for all nursing students to participate, allowing for diverse and unbiased responses. Additionally, it enhances the generalizability of the findings, ensuring that the results accurately reflect the experiences of nursing students in rural academia regarding their psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction.

Further, rural educational settings possess unique characteristics that significantly shape student experiences. Geographical isolation often limits access to educational resources, extracurricular activities, and specialized academic support, which can influence students' academic engagement and overall satisfaction. Additionally, schools in rural areas may face challenges such as underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to mental health services. Cultural aspects, including strong community ties and traditional values, can both support and constrain students, impacting their coping mechanisms, motivation, and perceptions of well-being.

The number of respondents is presented below:

Table 1. Respondents of the Study

Characteristics	Frequency (n=649)	Percentage
Gender		

Male	89	14.0
Female	521	80.0
LGBTQA+	39	6.0
Year Level		
1 st Year	281	43.0
2 nd Year	134	21.0
3 rd Year	82	13.0
4 th Year	152	23.0

This research followed a systematic procedure beginning with the preparation and validation of the research instruments. To ensure efficient and wide-reaching data collection, the researchers utilized online survey forms distributed through official student channels and social media platforms. Participants were provided with clear instructions and informed consent prior to answering the questionnaires. The use of online forms allowed for faster data gathering, ensured participant anonymity, and facilitated convenient access for respondents across various rural academic settings.

Research Instrument:

This study employed the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS), developed by Huebner (1994), to measure the life satisfaction of nursing students, with a reported reliability index of 0.82. To assess psychological distress, the study employed the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), developed by [24], which demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93. Additionally, this study employed the Student Version of the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT), developed by Schaufeli et al. (2020), to measure academic burnout, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88. The use of these standardized instruments ensured the validity and reliability of the data gathered, allowing for accurate measurement of the variables under investigation.

Statistical Analysis:

This study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts, mean, and composite mean, were used to describe the levels of psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction among nursing students. To determine the relationship between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was used to predict the extent to which psychological distress and academic burnout influence the life satisfaction of nursing students. The use of these statistical tools is deemed most appropriate as it allows for a clear understanding of the variables' characteristics, establishes the strength and direction of their relationship, and identifies the predictive power of psychological distress and academic burnout on life satisfaction. This ensures that the study provides valid and evidence-based results that may inform future interventions and support systems.

Results:

Table 2 presented the levels of psychological distress among the respondents. The results showed the distribution of nursing students across four levels: likely to be well, possible to have a mild disorder, likely to have a moderate disorder, and likely to have a severe disorder. This data provided an overview of the respondents' mental health status, reflecting the varying degrees of distress they experience.

Table 2. Psychological Distress among the Respondents

Distress Level	Frequency (n=649)	Percentage
Likely to be well	113	17.0
Likely to have a mild disorder	133	20.0
Likely to have a moderate disorder	174	23.0
Likely to have a severe disorder	256	39.0

Table 3 presented the levels of academic burnout among the respondents. This provided insight into the extent of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from academic demands.

Table 3. Academic Burnout among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description
Exhaustion			
2. Everything I do at school requires a great deal of effort.	3.13	.83	Agree
8. At the end of my school day, I feel mentally exhausted and drained.	2.99	.82	Agree
4. At school, I feel physically exhausted.	2.83	.91	Agree
1. At school, I feel mentally exhausted.	2.78	.89	Agree
6. I want to be active at school, but I somehow struggle to manage it.	2.75	.96	Agree
3. After a day at school, I find it hard to recover my energy.	2.68	.94	Agree
5. When I get up in the morning, I lack the energy to start a new day at school.	2.66	.89	Agree
7. When I exert myself at school, I quickly get tired.	2.63	.90	Agree
9. I struggle to find any enthusiasm for school.	2.28	.89	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.75	.88	High Burnout
Mental distance			
10. At school, I don't think much about who I am.	2.42	.85	Disagree
11. I feel a strong aversion towards my school.	2.22	.83	Disagree
13. I'm cynical about what my school means to others.	2.19	.83	Disagree
12. I feel indifferent about my school.	2.07	.87	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.23	.92	Moderate Burnout
Emotional Impairment			
23. At school, I may overreact unintentionally.	2.20	.95	Disagree
21. During school time, I become irritable when things don't go my way.	2.15	.90	Disagree
22. I get upset or sad at school without knowing why.	2.01	.88	Disagree
20. I do not recognize myself in the way I react emotionally at school.	1.89	.92	Disagree
19. At school, I feel unable to control my emotions.	1.81	.91	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.01	.91	Moderate Burnout
Cognitive impairment			
14. At school, I struggle to stay focused.	2.52	.92	Agree
15. At school, I struggle to think clearly.	2.39	.98	Disagree
17. When I'm at school, I have trouble concentrating.	2.38	.97	Disagree
16. I'm forgetful and distracted at school.	2.35	.99	Disagree
18. I make mistakes at school because I have my mind on other things.	2.28	.92	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.38	.83	Moderate Burnout
Psychological distress			
25. I tend to worry.	2.92	.91	Agree
28. Noise and crowds disturb me.	2.79	.89	Agree
26. I feel tense and stressed.	2.72	.96	Agree

24. I have trouble falling or staying asleep.	2.61	.94	Agree
27. I feel anxious and/or suffer from panic attacks.	2.07	.89	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.38	.90	Moderate Burnout
Psychosomatic complaints			
32. I experience muscle pain, for example, in my neck, shoulder, or back.	2.87	.88	Agree
31. I suffer from headaches.	2.58	.83	Agree
33. I often get sick.	2.06	.85	Disagree
30. I suffer from stomach and/or intestinal complaints.	1.94	.83	Disagree
29. I suffer from palpitations or chest pain.	1.93	.83	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.28	.87	Moderate Burnout
Grand Mean	2.39	.92	Moderate Burnout
Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation	
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Severe Burnout	
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Burnout	
2.49-1.50	Disagree	Moderate Burnout	
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Low Burnout	

Table 4 presented the overall life satisfaction levels of the respondents across five domains: family, friends, school, living environment, and self. The results indicated that most nursing students reported high to very high levels of life satisfaction, particularly in their relationships with friends and family.

Table 4. Life Satisfaction among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description
Family			
1. I enjoy being at home with my family.	3.44	.88	Agree
3. I like spending time with my parents.	3.43	.92	Agree
7. My parents treat me fairly.	3.41	.98	Agree
5. My family is better than most.	3.35	.97	Agree
2. My family gets along well together.	3.24	.99	Agree
4. My parents and I are doing fun things together.	3.05	.92	Agree
6. Members of my family talk nicely to one another.	2.98	.83	Agree
Composite Mean	3.27	.82	High Life Satisfaction
Friends			
8. I have enough friends.	3.59	.89	Strongly Agree
3. I am happy with my friends.	3.58	.96	Strongly Agree
5. My friends are great.	3.55	.94	Strongly Agree
6. I have a good time with my friends.	3.55	.89	Strongly Agree
4. My friends are kind and supportive.	3.53	.90	Strongly Agree
7. I have a lot of fun with my friends.	3.53	.89	Strongly Agree
2. My friends are lovely to me.	3.49	.88	Agree
9. My friends will help me if I need it.	3.48	.83	Agree
1. My friends treat me well.	3.43	.85	Agree
Composite Mean	3.53	.83	Very High Life Satisfaction

School			
4. I appreciate the opportunity to go to school.	3.49	.87	Agree
7. I learn a lot at school.	3.28	.92	Agree
3. School is interesting.	2.96	.95	Agree
5. There are many things I like about school.	2.91	.95	Agree
1. I look forward to going to school.	2.89	.90	Agree
8. I feel good at school.	2.80	.88	Agree
2. I like being in school.	2.75	.92	Agree
6. I enjoy school activities.	2.73	.91	Agree
Composite Mean	2.98	.91	High Life Satisfaction
Self			
6. I enjoy trying new things.	3.42	.92	Agree
7. I like myself.	3.24	.98	Agree
3. I am a nice person.	3.23	.97	Agree
2. I'm a lot of fun to be around.	2.93	.99	Agree
5. I excel in many areas.	2.80	.92	Agree
1. I think I'm attractive.	2.65	.83	Agree
4. Most people like me.	2.63	.82	Agree
Composite Mean	2.99	.91	High Life Satisfaction
Grand Mean	3.18	.89	High Life Satisfaction
Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation	
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Very High Life Satisfaction	
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Life Satisfaction	
2.49-1.50	Disagree	Moderate Life Satisfaction	
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Low Life Satisfaction	

Table 5 presents the significance of the influence of psychological distress and academic burnout on the respondents' life satisfaction. The results determine the extent to which psychological distress and academic burnout predict the respondents' overall life satisfaction. This analysis offers valuable insights into how mental health challenges and academic pressures impact the quality of life among nursing students, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote their well-being and academic success.

Table 5. Significance of the Influence of Psychological Distress, Academic Burnout, on the Life Satisfaction of the Respondents

Singular Influence of the Predictors		Life Satisfaction of Nursing Students			Remarks
		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	
Psychological Distress		-.170	-3.00	.001	Significant
Academic Burnout		-.191	-3.37	.001	Significant
Combined Influence of the Predictors					
R	.339				
R ²	.115				
F	41.906				
p	.001				Significant

Discussion:

The results on the levels of **psychological distress among the respondents** showed that out of 649 nursing students, 113, or 17.0%, were found to be likely to be well, while 133 or 20.0% were likely to have a mild disorder. Additionally, 174 or 23.0% were likely to have a moderate disorder, and a considerable portion, 256 or 39.0%, were likely to have a severe disorder. The considerable number

of students experiencing severe psychological distress suggests a heightened exposure to academic pressure, emotional fatigue, and mental exhaustion. Nursing students often face overwhelming academic requirements, intense clinical duties, and constant exposure to patient care, which can significantly contribute to their psychological distress. This condition may negatively impact their cognitive functioning, decision-making, and academic performance, potentially compromising their overall well-being. Furthermore, persistent psychological distress may lead to burnout, lack of educational engagement, and poor mental health, affecting students' motivation and capacity to deliver quality patient care once they enter the healthcare profession.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which emphasizes the prevalence of psychological distress among nursing students. Studies have shown that academic demands, clinical exposures, and social expectations significantly contribute to heightened levels of distress, negatively affecting their mental well-being and overall quality of life [25]. Research also suggests that students experiencing higher levels of psychological distress are more likely to suffer from decreased academic performance, social withdrawal, and mental fatigue, ultimately affecting their educational journey [26]. Moreover, students in highly demanding academic programs, such as nursing, are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress, leading to negative implications for their mental health and academic success [27].

The **overall academic burnout** of the respondents yielded a grand mean of 2.39, which is interpreted as "Moderate Burnout." This means that most nursing students experience a moderate level of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from their academic workload and clinical responsibilities. This implies that while students may still demonstrate a certain degree of motivation and academic engagement, they also encounter considerable stress, fatigue, and a sense of detachment from their educational tasks. The presence of moderate burnout suggests that the demanding nature of nursing education, coupled with the pressure of clinical practice, may significantly impact their academic performance, mental well-being, and overall quality of life.

The findings of this study align with previous research highlighting the prevalence of academic burnout among nursing students. Students in health-related courses, particularly nursing, are highly susceptible to burnout due to the overwhelming academic demands and long clinical exposures [28]. Moderate to high levels of burnout significantly impact students' academic performance, motivation, and mental health, leading to reduced learning efficiency and engagement [29]. Nursing students often experience burnout due to the pressure of balancing academic tasks, practical training, and personal responsibilities, which may eventually impact their future professional roles. Academic burnout is also strongly associated with feelings of detachment and exhaustion, which limit students' academic productivity and diminish their overall well-being [30].

In terms of **Exhaustion**, the composite mean yielded a value of 2.75, interpreted as high burnout. This means that a considerable number of nursing students experience persistent physical, emotional, and mental fatigue caused by their academic workload and clinical requirements. This implies that the accumulation of academic pressures, extended study hours, and demanding practical tasks contribute to their overall exhaustion, resulting in decreased energy and enthusiasm toward academic activities. The high level of burnout in this domain may also reflect the physical and mental toll of nursing education, impacting students' productivity and long-term engagement in their academic journey.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which emphasizes the high level of exhaustion experienced by nursing students. Students enrolled in demanding academic programs, particularly those in healthcare, often experience severe exhaustion due to the physical and cognitive demands of their coursework. Nursing students often experience high levels of burnout due to prolonged study hours, intensive clinical practice, and insufficient rest, which significantly impacts their academic performance and mental well-being [31]. Exhaustion in educational settings often leads to reduced motivation, decreased academic engagement, and compromised overall well-being. Persistent exhaustion in students may also increase the likelihood of educational failure, absenteeism, and long-term disengagement in their field of study [32].

With regard to **Mental Distance**, the composite mean yielded a value of 2.23, indicating moderate burnout. This means that a considerable number of nursing students experience a certain degree of mental disconnection from their academic responsibilities. This implies that despite maintaining functional engagement, students may occasionally feel emotionally detached or disinterested in their school-related tasks. The presence of moderate burnout in this domain may affect their motivation,

concentration, and overall academic performance, potentially influencing their overall educational experience.

The findings of this study are supported by previous research, which highlights the occurrence of mental distance among students experiencing burnout [33]. Mental distance is a common manifestation of burnout, wherein students emotionally withdraw from their academic roles, resulting in reduced interest and engagement [34]. Students experiencing burnout often develop negative attitudes toward their studies, which can lead to decreased academic motivation and enthusiasm.

As regards to the **Emotional Impairment**, the composite mean yielded a value of 2.01, interpreted as moderate burnout. This means that nursing students experience a moderate level of emotional exhaustion, which may occasionally affect their ability to regulate their emotions in school settings. This implies that while students generally manage their feelings, persistent academic pressure and overwhelming clinical duties may still lead to sporadic emotional distress. The presence of moderate burnout suggests that students are vulnerable to experiencing moments of emotional imbalance, which could influence their academic performance, social interactions, and overall mental well-being. The findings of this study align with research highlighting the emotional toll of academic burnout on students [35]. Burnout often leads to emotional imbalance, heightened stress, and difficulties in regulating emotions [36]. High academic demands contribute to emotional exhaustion, which in turn reduces productivity and increases psychological distress. Students struggling with emotional impairment due to burnout are more likely to lose motivation, negatively affecting their learning and well-being [37].

Concerning **Cognitive Impairment**, the composite mean yielded a value of 2.38, interpreted as moderate burnout. This means that the respondents experience a moderate level of cognitive exhaustion, which may occasionally interfere with their ability to focus, process information, and perform academic tasks efficiently. This implies that the cognitive load from academic responsibilities and clinical practices contributes to occasional lapses in focus, making it challenging for students to sustain optimal mental performance. However, their ability to maintain academic output despite moderate burnout reflects their resilience and adaptability in managing academic challenges.

The findings of this study support research linking academic burnout to cognitive impairment among students [38]. Burnout often leads to difficulties in concentration, reduced cognitive processing, and inefficient task performance. Cognitive fatigue limits students' ability to absorb and apply knowledge, reducing academic productivity. Prolonged academic stress further exacerbates cognitive burnout, negatively affecting engagement and learning outcomes [39].

As to the **Psychological Distress**, the composite mean yielded a value of 2.38, indicating moderate burnout. This means that most respondents experience a moderate level of psychological distress, characterized by occasional worry, stress, and mental exhaustion. This implies that the combination of academic pressure, clinical exposure, and personal responsibilities may contribute to students' psychological burdens, potentially affecting their well-being and scholarly engagement. However, despite experiencing moderate distress, their capacity to manage overwhelming emotions prevents it from escalating into severe psychological burnout.

The findings of this study align with research highlighting the prevalence of psychological distress among nursing students. Academic pressure and clinical demands contribute to emotional exhaustion and mental fatigue [40]. Psychological distress can hinder mental clarity, motivation, and scholarly productivity. Prolonged academic stress increases the risk of burnout, negatively impacting learning efficiency and overall well-being [41].

In terms of **Psychosomatic Complaints**, the composite mean was 2.28, interpreted as moderate burnout. This means that students reported experiencing a moderate level of physical discomfort, including muscle tension, fatigue, and body aches. This implies that the combination of mental strain, academic pressure, and physical inactivity may contribute to the manifestation of these bodily complaints. Although these symptoms appear manageable, they may still interfere with students' daily routines and academic performance if not addressed.

The results of this study align with research on psychosomatic symptoms among students facing academic stress. Prolonged academic pressure often leads to muscle tension, headaches, and physical discomfort [42]. Nursing students frequently report body pain due to demanding schedules and clinical duties. Mental stress commonly manifests as back pain, neck stiffness, and fatigue. Difficulty

in managing academic expectations contributes to physical discomfort, which in turn impacts overall well-being [43].

The **overall life satisfaction** of the respondents yielded a grand mean of 3.18, which is interpreted as “High Life Satisfaction.” This means that most students generally perceive their lives positively, experiencing fulfillment and contentment despite the academic challenges they face. This implies that, despite encountering stressors, they are still able to maintain a sense of well-being and optimism, likely due to personal coping mechanisms, social support, or a balanced perspective on both academic and personal life. A high level of life satisfaction suggests that students find meaning and value in their daily experiences, which may contribute to their overall motivation and engagement.

The findings support research highlighting the impact of positive well-being on students' academic and personal lives. High life satisfaction enhances emotional resilience and stress management [44]. Students with a positive outlook tend to perform better academically and build strong social connections. Personal achievements, supportive relationships, and a sense of purpose have a significant influence on life satisfaction [45]. Greater well-being reduces the risk of burnout and mental health issues, reinforcing its role in academic success.

With regard to the **family**, the composite mean yielded a value of 3.27, which is interpreted as “High Life Satisfaction.” This means that respondents generally experience contentment and fulfillment in their family relationships, viewing their home life as a significant contributor to their overall well-being. This implies that having a supportive family environment contributes to their emotional resilience, positively influencing their ability to navigate academic and personal challenges. Strong family connections often serve as a foundation for stability and psychological security.

The research highlights the crucial role of family in shaping one's well-being. Strong family relationships are associated with higher life satisfaction and emotional stability [46]. Maintaining close familial bonds can reduce stress and enhance psychological resilience. Family support helps students manage academic pressures, boosting motivation and self-efficacy. Positive family interactions foster long-term emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction [47].

Concerning **friends**, the composite mean yielded a value of 3.53, which is interpreted as “Very High Life Satisfaction.” This means that respondents generally experience strong fulfillment in their friendships and view them as a crucial aspect of their well-being. This implies that having meaningful friendships contributes to their emotional resilience, social connectedness, and overall happiness. The presence of supportive friends likely enhances their confidence, stress management, and ability to navigate daily life challenges.

Research highlights the importance of social relationships in promoting overall well-being. Strong friendships enhance life satisfaction and emotional stability [48]. Meaningful peer connections foster a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation. Supportive friendships reduce stress and improve mental health among students. The quality of friendships plays a crucial role in overall happiness and resilience [49].

As to the **school**, the composite mean was 2.98, which is interpreted as “High Life Satisfaction.” This means that, overall, students find fulfillment in their educational experiences despite some aspects being less enjoyable. This implies that their general satisfaction with school is driven more by their appreciation of learning rather than by specific activities. A high level of school satisfaction suggests that students perceive education as a crucial component of their personal and academic success.

The research highlights the importance of school satisfaction in promoting students' overall well-being. Valuing education enhances life satisfaction and academic motivation [50]. School-related experiences have a significant impact on emotional and psychological well-being. Intrinsic motivation fosters a sense of fulfillment in the learning process. However, enjoyment of school activities varies based on engagement, peer relationships, and academic pressures [51].

In terms of **self**, the composite mean was 2.99, which is interpreted as “High Life Satisfaction.” This means that respondents generally have a positive outlook on themselves and their personal growth. This implies that their sense of self-worth and personal development contribute significantly to their overall life satisfaction. While confidence in social acceptance may vary, their engagement in new experiences enhances their well-being and sense of fulfillment.

The research underscores the link between self-perception and life satisfaction. High intrinsic motivation fosters personal fulfillment and happiness [54]. A strong sense of self enhances well-being, even without full social approval. Self-acceptance plays a key role in psychological health.

Actively pursuing personal growth leads to greater life satisfaction, regardless of external validation [55].

The multiple regression analysis reveals that psychological distress has a significant influence on life satisfaction, with a standardized coefficient of -0.170 ($p = 0.001$). This means that as psychological distress increases, life satisfaction decreases, though the effect size is moderate. This implies that emotional strain and mental health challenges negatively impact an individual's perception of their overall well-being. Similarly, academic burnout also significantly influences life satisfaction, with a standardized coefficient of -0.191 ($p = 0.001$), suggesting that academic exhaustion and disengagement contribute to lower life satisfaction. This implies that prolonged academic strain diminishes one's ability to maintain a fulfilling and balanced life.

The combined influence of psychological distress and academic burnout on life satisfaction was statistically significant ($p = 0.001$, $F = 41.906$), with an R^2 value of 0.115 . This means that these two factors collectively explain 11.5% of the variance in life satisfaction among respondents. This implies that while psychological distress and academic burnout play a significant role in shaping life satisfaction, other unexamined factors may also contribute to students' overall well-being.

The interconnections between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction are grounded in well-established psychological theories and empirical evidence. Psychological distress, often characterized by anxiety, depression, and emotional strain, can deplete an individual's cognitive and emotional resources, making them more vulnerable to academic burnout [57]. Academic burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, mental detachment, and a reduced sense of accomplishment, further exacerbates psychological strain and erodes motivation, ultimately diminishing overall life satisfaction [58]. Life satisfaction, a key indicator of subjective well-being, is closely tied to how individuals evaluate the quality of their life experiences, which can be negatively affected by ongoing distress and burnout [59]. These concepts are interlinked through a cyclical relationship, where distress leads to burnout, and burnout reduces life satisfaction, highlighting the importance of understanding their interplay in academic settings [60].

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccurate recall. The use of a cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between psychological distress, academic burnout, and life satisfaction. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single rural academic setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or contexts. Lastly, potential confounding variables such as socioeconomic status, family dynamics, or access to mental health support were not controlled, which could influence the observed relationships.

Given that the current model accounts for only 11.5% of the variance in life satisfaction, it is recommended to explore additional predictors that may significantly contribute to nursing students' well-being. Variables such as social support, resilience, and coping strategies can offer deeper insights into the protective and risk factors that influence life satisfaction. Including these elements in future models would enable a more comprehensive understanding of students' psychological and emotional well-being. This approach may also help identify more targeted areas for support and intervention in academic and clinical settings.

Conclusion:

Psychological distress and academic burnout significantly impact nursing students' emotional well-being, motivation, and academic engagement, often leading to exhaustion, detachment, and reduced ability to manage stress and maintain balance. Despite these challenges, students generally reported high life satisfaction in areas like family, friendships, and living environment, although satisfaction levels varied depending on personal resilience and academic pressures—highlighting the complex interaction between internal and external influences. The study confirmed that as psychological distress and burnout increase, life satisfaction declines, reinforcing the need for institutions to implement targeted strategies that support mental wellness, academic balance, and overall student well-being.