Author's response to reviews

Title: Perceived stress and gastrointestinal symptoms in nursing students in Korea: A cross-sectional survey

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Philippa Harris,

We are submitting a revised manuscript entitled “Perceived stress and gastrointestinal symptoms in nursing students in Korea: A cross-sectional survey.” for your reconsideration as an article in the BMC Nursing.

We have addressed all of the concerns expressed by the reviewers and we believe that this revision has greatly improved the manuscript. We hope that with these modifications our manuscript is now acceptable for publication. A point-by-point response to the reviewers’ comments is attached.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely yours,

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Author Response to Editor and Reviewers

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Sincerely, thank you for very careful and kind comments. Replies for your comments and suggestions are as follows:

Author response to Reviewer

[ Editorial Office ]

Comment 1:
Please clarify if you sought ethical approval for your study from an ethics committee and, if so, include this information in your revised manuscript.
Please include your table in your manuscript rather than in the additional files.
Please remove additional file 2.

Response: This study was approved by the Research Review Committee of College and informed consent to participate survey was obtained (page 5, line 102-106). Tables were included in manuscript (page 17~).
Comment 1:

As in my previous review of the manuscript I have concerns relating to the study design and the conclusions. Again, these concerns mainly relate to the way the study aim is formulated and the timing of the data collection. In their response, the Authors clarify that the data collection took place immediately after the final exams and that collecting data at this point in time was convenient for the students. However, it can be discussed whether collecting data during (or immediately after) an exam period adequately reflects the actual prevalence of perceived stress and GI in students. To clarify, if the exam period is considered more stressful than other periods of the academic year then the exam period is no longer representative for the remaining study year. From this follows that stress-levels and perhaps GI problems are higher during the exam period than during the remaining academic year. Of course this is unless there are other exam periods apart from these final exams, are there other such exam periods?

If these final exams are considered as and (scientifically) reported as more strenuous than other parts of the education, then this means that the figures reported in the paper actually refer to an extreme situation (e.g., this type of stress is not experienced throughout the school-year but only during this specific period). Is this so?

In view of the study design and timing of the data collection, the aim and title of the paper should be more specific and refer to the fact that the study focuses on a specific period of time, e.g., during (final) exams. However, narrowing down the focus to reflect what was actually measured has, perhaps, implications for the generalizability of findings: How many publications report on health problems during (or immediately following) an exam period? To solve this and to increase clarity, these issues should be clarified and addressed in the manuscript.

If the stress levels and GI problems are related to the exam period then suggesting tailored intervention programs is perhaps not the solution? Perhaps it would be more adequate to suggest additional efforts focusing on how nursing students can cope with preparing for and sitting through exams?

Response: Thank you for your precise review and insightful comments! The curriculums of nursing program in Korea include midterm exams, final exams, and irregular pop quizzes. It also includes academic work as well as clinical practices. Therefore final exam is a part of nursing curriculums. We would like to obtain data from students had completed at least one semester in the nursing program. Thus we collected data at the end of the final exams, which was convenient to take survey. We added this information in the method (page 5, line 106-108).
We don’t think that final exam is more strenuous than other parts of the education. Also, results from this study, prevalence of GI symptoms and association between perceived stress and GI symptoms, are in line with several other reports (Suarez et al, 2010, Stock et al, 2003, Han et al, 2005). However, we cannot exclude the possibility that the stress level and GI symptoms might be related to the exam period. Thus we added this issue in the limitations in the discussion (page 12, line 276-278).

**Comment 2:**

There are still a number of spelling and grammatical errors that have to be corrected. For instance, "data was" should be replaced by "data were" and "Engle" should be "Engel".

Response: We carefully reviewed the manuscript and then corrected spelling and grammatical errors.