



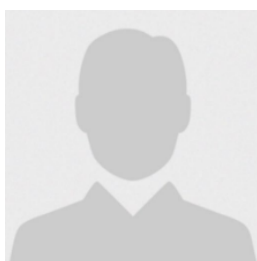
## Coping Strategies for Nurse Managers Exposed to Workplace Stressors



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### Keywords

*coping strategies;  
nurse manager;  
workplace stressors;  
stress in nursing;*

### Abstract

**Background:** The healthcare environment is complex and often known to expose healthcare workers to various workplace stressors. Nurse managers are part of the healthcare workforce that interacts with this complex environment and, hence, are also exposed to the stressors in the healthcare environment. It is necessary for nurse managers to develop coping strategies that enable them to withstand the workplace stressors and hence cultivate an environment that facilitates the provision of quality nursing care. **Objective:** To explore the coping strategies used by nurse managers exposed to workplace stressors. **Methodology:** This paper is derived from the main study, which followed a mixed-method approach entitled "Strategies to enhance the resilience of nurse managers in Botswana hospitals." The paper reports data generated through a qualitative exploratory inquiry exploring coping strategies used by nurse managers exposed to workplace stressors. Data was collected through written narratives, and thematic analysis was used to identify themes. **Results:** The results depicted various coping strategies that nurse managers utilised to cope with workplace stress. Four themes emerged from the analysis of data, which were: Engagement with management, peers, and supervisees; Social support and Teamwork; Development of leadership skills; and Resource mobilization. The coping strategies were found to protect nurse managers from the negative impact of stress and created a positive demeanour that facilitates the provision of quality services. **Conclusions:** The study revealed that nurse managers are capable of developing coping strategies that enable them to withstand workplace stressors. It was evident that the application of coping strategies minimised the impact of workplace stressors and cultivated an environment that enabled the provision of quality nursing care.

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## 1 Introduction

Nurses and nurse managers are at the core of the provision of care to patients in public hospitals. Nurse managers play a pivotal role in health care organisations, as their performance is linked to the achievement of optimal patient and organisational outcomes ([Chen et al., 2024](#)). According to [Membrive-Jimenez et al. \(2022\)](#), nurse managers aim to facilitate the provision of high-quality care effectively and efficiently. The nature of the healthcare environment is complex and therefore exposes healthcare professionals, including nurses and nurse managers, to various workplace stressors. According to literature, nurse managers are exposed to a substantial amount of workplace stressors ([Ofei et al., 2020](#); [Membrive-Jimenez et al., 2022](#)). Additionally, nursing has been seen as a highly demanding and stress-prone profession that is physically and emotionally taxing ([Vallone et al., 2024](#); [Goudarzian et al., 2024](#)). [Vallone et al. \(2024\)](#) further assert that nurses are on the frontline within the wards and are therefore at a high risk of perceiving notable levels of stress.

Patients are often admitted with various conditions, some of which can be demanding both physically and emotionally for nurses and nurse managers ([Goudarzian et al., 2024](#); [Vallone et al., 2024](#)). Moreover, the inadequacy of resources, both human and material, may add to the challenges that place a lot of stress on nurse managers in their quest to facilitate the provision of quality care. [Milku et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Ofei et al. \(2020\)](#) have identified the inadequacy of human resources and scarcity of material resources as sources of stress. The physical and emotional demands of healthcare and the inadequacies of resources described above often expose nurse managers to workplace stress. The exposure to stress might negatively affect the provision and quality of care. For the nurse managers to give direction in the provision of quality nursing services, achievement of organisational goals, and promotion of the provision of quality patient care, they need to develop coping strategies that will enable them to withstand workplace stressors. Hence, it is necessary to identify coping strategies that are seen to cushion nurse managers against the effects of workplace stressors.

Coping strategies have been defined as “specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events” ([Jordan et al., 2016](#)). Therefore, coping strategies can be seen as behaviours and actions that are employed to regulate the demands brought about by stressful situations.

It can be concluded that coping strategies enable one to absorb stress and therefore not develop any negative effects related to exposure to stressful situations. Therefore, it is necessary to identify coping strategies that nurse managers in the study utilised when dealing with workplace stressors.

## 2 Materials and Methods

### *Methodology*

This paper is an extract from the main mixed-method research entitled: “Strategies to enhance the resilience of nurse managers in Botswana hospitals.” The paper focuses on the qualitative exploratory design that explored coping strategies for nurse managers exposed to workplace stressors. The study involved all nurse managers working in the general wards of all district hospitals who agreed to participate. Participants were 49 nurse managers working in medical and surgical wards in public hospitals in Botswana, and who were recruited through purposive sampling. Written narratives were used as the method of data collection. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify emerging themes.

### *Population and sampling*

Nurse managers were recruited from all public hospitals in Botswana through purposive sampling. The sample included all nurse managers working in the general wards of district and referral hospitals.

### *Participants*

The study was carried out in eleven public hospitals – 9 government and 2 government-aided mission hospitals. Forty-nine nurse managers – 43 females and 6 males – working in the general wards of all public hospitals participated in the study. Nurse managers working in specialised wards were excluded.

### *Data collection*

Written narratives were used to collect data. Participants responded to an interview guide on how they managed workplace stress. The interview guide was developed by the researcher, based on the objectives of the study, and validated by two experts who were supervisors of the researcher. The interview guide was also pilot tested to ensure accuracy and validate the tool. A consent form containing detailed information about the research was discussed with participants, and they signed the consent form individually before data collection.

### *Data analysis*

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Raw data was created through written narratives that acted as transcripts. Transcripts were read several times to understand the text, determine meaning, develop categories, and identify emerging themes. The process continued until no new themes emerged. The themes were reviewed, refined, and finalised. This resulted in the presentation of results according to themes. A co-coder was engaged to validate the themes.

### *Ethical considerations*

Ethical clearance was sought and granted by the University Research Ethics, the Regulatory Committee of the Ministry of Health in Botswana, and the participating hospitals for the main study. Participants were given detailed information about the study, including possible risks and benefits. They were further informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequence. All participants individually signed a consent form. Each interview participant was assigned a code to protect their identity and ensure anonymity.

### *Findings*

The study established that nurse managers experiencing workplace stress utilised various coping strategies to avoid compromising their performance.

Thematic analysis was used to identify coping strategies that nurse managers used when dealing with workplace stress. The following themes were identified:

Theme 1: Engagement with management, peers, and supervisees

Theme 2: Social support and Teamwork

Theme 3: Development of leadership skills

Theme 4: Resource mobilisation.

## **3 Results and Discussions**

### *Discussion of findings*

#### *Theme 1: Engagement with management, peers, and supervisees*

A healthy working relationship between the nurse manager and senior management, peers, and employees is vital, both for the provision of quality patient care and for managing stress. [Ofei et al. \(2020\)](#), have identified effective communication as one of the major mechanisms for coping with stress. When management provided

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guidance, advice, coaching, and mentoring, nurse managers felt that they were being cushioned against the effects of workplace stressors. Managers' supportive leadership has been identified as an important factor for employees' work engagement (Kim et al., 2024). Additionally, engagement with peers allowed nurse managers to share experiences and learn how their peers handled similar stressors. It was evident that when they shared their experiences and engaged with each other, they were able to learn from each other and dissipate the pressure from the stressors. This is corroborated by Qasem et al. (2024), who assert that sharing experiences with colleagues reduces stress. Moreover, a healthy relationship with employees created a conducive environment for the provision of care.

Open and transparent communication and collaboration with employees has also been seen to improve morale and reduce the risk of burnout (Turato et al., 2022). Roche et al. (2015) affirm that when nurse managers engage nursing staff and provide support and motivation, nurses will perceive it as positive leadership. A harmonious working relationship between the nurse manager and employees maintains a healthy work environment (Adriaenssens et al., 2017). According to Yilmaz (2017), improving workplace relationships enhances one's ability to withstand workplace stress. It can be concluded that engagement with management, peers, and supervisees allowed nurse managers to identify work stressors that impeded quality care and facilitated amicable resolution of those issues.

### *Theme 2: Social support and Teamwork*

Social support from management and colleagues was identified as a strategy for coping with stress. Inadequate support from management has been identified as a source of stress for nurse managers (Ofei et al., 2020). Nurse managers require support from senior managers to navigate their management role effectively. Turato et al. (2022) reiterate the need for senior management support. They further emphasise that mentoring by senior managers translates to support. Roche et al. (2015) suggest that nurse managers require support from senior managers, particularly in providing clarity on and defining the authority and functions of their roles. Peer support has also been identified as a strategy for coping with stress, and this is affirmed by Qasem et al. (2024), who also assert that peers offer emotional support. Ofei et al. (2020) indicate that poor relationships among colleagues can be a source of stress. When managers and peers were seen as being concerned and taking an interest in the nurse manager's work, this reduced the impact of workplace stressors and relieved stress. Therefore, nurse managers need to garner support from their peers. A supportive working environment has been found to improve morale (Turato et al., 2022). It has been identified that health care workers working in a supportive environment experienced lower mental health problems (Ho et al., 2024). Cope et al. (2016) and Udod et al. (2017) identified social support as a strategy used to cope with workplace stress.

Working as effective teams was also seen as a way of reducing workplace stress. Teamwork involved working collaboratively with nurses, other nurse managers, and other health care workers. Working as teams ensured interdependence and reduced the burden of stress, as workload and stressors were shared. Therefore, nurse managers saw teamwork as a strategy to cope with workplace stress, and this is substantiated by Adriaenssens et al. (2017).

### *Theme 3: Development of Leadership Skills*

Nurse managers who felt that they lacked leadership skills experienced more stress than those who had been developed in leadership or supervisory skills. Nurse managers are often appointed to their roles based on their clinical performance and seniority rather than their leadership, managerial, and supervisory skills or qualifications. Roche et al. (2015) affirm that nurse managers are often selected based on their clinical skills and seniority, regardless of their formal qualifications in management. However, Turato et al. (2022) state that clinical skills and seniority were not the most appropriate criteria for the nurse manager role. Moreover, Ofei et al. (2020) stated that nurses needed adequate preparation before they are appointed to administration positions. Nurse managers who took responsibility on their own to acquire leadership skills, either through formal training, seminars, or workshops, and developed their skills in leadership, experienced less stress than their counterparts. Therefore, the development of leadership skills was seen as a coping strategy in handling workplace stress. Nurse managers who understand their responsibilities were found to cope better with the

demands of their positions (Brennan, 2017; Korth, 2016). In cases where there was discourtesy amongst employees, Turato et al. (2022), assert that the development of leadership skills enhances nurse managers' ability to handle poor behaviour. They further state that leadership development improves the level of performance, patient care, and management skills. Adriaenssens et al. (2017) assert that the level of performance of a leader influences the quality of care.

#### *Theme 4: Resource mobilization*

Inadequate resources can be a source of stress, as they may negatively impact the provision of care and services. The ability of the nurse manager to mobilize and access required resources was also seen as a coping strategy for dealing with workplace stress. According to Cope et al. (2016), the availability of resources assists a person in withstanding stressors. Additionally, Milku et al. (2024) assert that health workers often find ways of mobilising resources to ensure appropriate care. The availability of appropriate and adequate resources creates a good environment for the provision of quality patient care. Hence, the ability to mobilise and access resources places the nurse manager in a better position to plan for and provide appropriate and quality care, ultimately reducing the impact of workplace stressors.

## **4 Conclusion**

Nursing is practiced in a complex healthcare environment, which can be demanding both physically and emotionally. Nurse managers are exposed to various workplace stressors, such as handling patients with various conditions, inadequate resources, high workloads, a lack of leadership skills, and various other challenges. Exposure to workplace stressors stimulated nurse managers to develop and deploy various coping strategies in order to protect themselves from their negative effects. The coping strategies included engagement with management, peers, and supervisees; social support and teamwork; development of leadership skills; and resource mobilisation. It may prove to be beneficial to include the identified coping strategies in the orientation of new nurse managers as an intervention for coping with the effects of exposure to workplace stressors.

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