

SOCIOEMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NURSING: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND THE PATH TO INTEGRAL CARE

DESENVOLVIMENTO SOCIOEMOCIONAL NA ENFERMAGEM: POTENCIALIDADES, FRAGILIDADES E O CAMINHO PARA O CUIDADO INTEGRAL

DESARROLLO SOCIOEMOCIONAL EN ENFERMERÍA: FORTALEZAS, DEBILIDADES Y EL CAMINO HACIA EL CUIDADO INTEGRAL



<https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2026.009-045>

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ABSTRACT

Nursing education, crucial for societal health and well-being, extends beyond technical and scientific mastery, demanding a robust development of socio-emotional competencies. These are essential for future professionals to face the complex and multifaceted demands of the academic environment, professional challenges, and personal vicissitudes inherent in such a demanding career. This book chapter, based on a cross-sectional quantitative study, aimed to outline the socio-emotional competency profile of undergraduate nursing students at a private higher education institution in the Northwest region of São Paulo State. The methodology involved administering a sociodemographic questionnaire and the Socio-Emotional Competencies Scale for University Students (ECSEU) to 98 academics. The results revealed a general profile of socio-emotional competencies at a moderate level (mean of 3.83), with responsible decision-making (M=4.62) and emotional self-awareness (M=4.10) standing out as strengths. However, emotional self-management presented the lowest mean (M=2.70), indicating an area of significant fragility. Additionally, a high proportion of students reported feeling frequently stressed (82.7%) and overwhelmed (81.6%) by the demands of their undergraduate program. It is concluded that, although students present good skills in relational and decision-making aspects, there is a notable deficit in managing

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their own emotions. This scenario underscores the urgency of integrating innovative pedagogical and institutional strategies into the nursing curriculum, aiming to strengthen socio-emotional development and promote mental health, thereby preparing future nurses for humanized care and resilient, effective professional practice.

Keywords: Socio-Emotional Competencies. Nursing Students. Mental Health. Emotional Self-Management. Nursing Education.

RESUMO

A formação em enfermagem, fundamental para a saúde e o bem-estar da sociedade, vai além do domínio técnico e científico, exigindo um sólido desenvolvimento de competências socioemocionais; estas são essenciais para que futuros profissionais enfrentem as complexas e multifacetadas demandas do ambiente acadêmico, os desafios profissionais e as vicissitudes pessoais inerentes a uma carreira tão exigente; este capítulo de livro, baseado em um estudo quantitativo transversal, teve como objetivo delinear o perfil de competências socioemocionais de estudantes de graduação em enfermagem de uma instituição privada de ensino superior da região Noroeste do estado de São Paulo; a metodologia envolveu a aplicação de um questionário sociodemográfico e da Escala de Competências Socioemocionais para Universitários (ECSEU) a 98 acadêmicos; os resultados revelaram um perfil geral de competências socioemocionais em nível moderado (média de 3,83), destacando-se a tomada de decisão responsável (M=4,62) e a autoconsciência emocional (M=4,10) como potencialidades; entretanto, o autogerenciamento emocional apresentou a menor média (M=2,70), indicando uma área de significativa fragilidade; além disso, elevada proporção dos estudantes relatou sentir-se frequentemente estressada (82,7%) e sobrecarregada (81,6%) pelas demandas da graduação; conclui-se que, embora os estudantes apresentem boas habilidades nos aspectos relacionais e decisórios, há déficit relevante no manejo das próprias emoções; esse cenário evidencia a urgência de integrar estratégias pedagógicas e institucionais inovadoras ao currículo de enfermagem, com o objetivo de fortalecer o desenvolvimento socioemocional e promover a saúde mental, preparando futuros enfermeiros para um cuidado humanizado e uma prática profissional resiliente e eficaz.

Palavras-chave: Competências Socioemocionais. Estudantes de Enfermagem. Saúde Mental. Autogerenciamento Emocional. Educação em Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

La formación en enfermería, crucial para la salud y el bienestar sociales, trasciende el dominio técnico y científico y exige un sólido desarrollo de competencias socioemocionales. Estas resultan esenciales para que los futuros profesionales afronten las demandas complejas y multifacéticas del entorno académico, los desafíos profesionales y las vicisitudes personales inherentes a una carrera de tan alta exigencia. Este capítulo de libro, basado en un estudio cuantitativo de corte transversal, tuvo por objetivo delinear el perfil de competencias socioemocionales del estudiantado de pregrado en enfermería de una institución de educación superior privada en la región Noroeste del estado de São Paulo. La metodología consistió en la aplicación de un cuestionario sociodemográfico y de la Escala de Competencias Socioemocionales para Estudiantes Universitarios (ECSEU) a 98 estudiantes. Los resultados revelaron un perfil general de competencias socioemocionales de nivel moderado (media = 3,83), destacándose como fortalezas la toma de decisiones responsable (M = 4,62) y la autoconciencia emocional (M = 4,10). No obstante, la autogestión emocional presentó la media más baja (M = 2,70), lo que indica un área de significativa fragilidad. Además, una elevada proporción de estudiantes refirió sentirse frecuentemente estresada (82,7 %) y sobrecargada (81,6 %) por las exigencias del curso de pregrado. Se concluye que, aunque el estudiantado presenta buenas habilidades en los



ámbitos relacional y de toma de decisiones, existe un déficit notable en la gestión de las propias emociones. Este panorama subraya la urgencia de integrar estrategias pedagógicas e institucionales innovadoras en el currículo de enfermería, con el propósito de fortalecer el desarrollo socioemocional y promover la salud mental, preparando así a las futuras enfermeras y a los futuros enfermeros para un cuidado humanizado y para una práctica profesional resiliente y eficaz.

Palabras clave: Competencias Socioemocionales. Estudiantes de Enfermería. Salud Mental. Autogestión Emocional. Educación en Enfermería.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nursing, as a fundamental pillar of global healthcare systems, demands from its professionals a framework of competencies that extends far beyond technical-scientific mastery. The complexity of patient care, constant interaction with multidisciplinary teams, experience with situations of human vulnerability, and the inherent pressure of the healthcare environment require a profound capacity to manage emotions—both one's own and those of others—in a balanced and effective manner. In this context, socioemotional competencies emerge as indispensable attributes in the education and practice of the contemporary nurse (Souza, 2022). The relevance of these competencies has been progressively recognized in educational and professional spheres. Holistic education, encompassing not only intellectual but also emotional and social development, is viewed as a crucial differentiator for success in the job market and for promoting individual well-being. This perspective was further accentuated by recent global transformations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the fragility of healthcare systems and the urgent need for resilient, empathetic professionals capable of managing stress in crisis scenarios (Castro and Silva, 2024; França; Kanaane, 2022). The global health crisis intensified existing challenges in the academic journey, such as remote learning and the need for rapid adaptation, demonstrating that resilience and adaptability are as crucial as technical knowledge. Historically, nursing has been a profession that demands direct and humanized contact with suffering and pain, making the development of skills such as empathy, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and emotional self-management an ethical and professional imperative (Cordeiro et al., 2024; Barbosa, 2017; F et al., 2021). The daily realities of the field impose challenges that, without adequate socioemotional preparation, can lead to professional burnout, compromised quality of care, and consequently, a negative impact on nurses' mental health. Recent studies, such as Teixeira et al. (2024), even point to a lack of awareness among faculty and students regarding the topic of socioemotional competencies, despite their recognition as a protective factor against professional insecurity and mental distress. Given technological evolution and the complex demands of the post-pandemic job market, the value of soft skills, i.e., socioemotional competencies, has become even more pronounced (Estudos, 2022). Employers seek professionals who, in addition to technical knowledge, possess problem-solving abilities, effective communication, empathetic listening, and a refined sense of interpretation. The capacity to deal with people and situations in a balanced way is fundamental for building healthy relationships, teamwork, and conflict resolution, characteristics that are the essence of nursing practice. It is within this landscape that the present research is situated, aiming to understand the socioemotional profile of

undergraduate nursing students. Identifying these competencies is not merely a descriptive exercise but a crucial step for higher education institutions to proactively contribute to the formation of more complete, resilient nurses who are better prepared for the challenges of such a noble profession. The development of socioemotional competencies, as highlighted by Silva (2023), can serve as an effective strategy in preventing mental distress, mitigating social relationship problems, and reducing academic dropout rates, thereby significantly contributing to the academic, personal, and professional success of future nurses. Thus, this chapter aims to identify the socioemotional competency profile of undergraduate nursing students at a private Higher Education Institution (HEI), located in the Northwest region of São Paulo State, in order to provide insights for improving pedagogical strategies and student support.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nursing education, traditionally focused on technical-scientific mastery, has undergone a paradigm shift that recognizes emotional intelligence and socioemotional competencies as integral and indispensable components of a professional's profile. This section explores the conceptual foundations of these competencies and their intersection with nursing practice and education.

2.1 THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIOEMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES IN NURSING

Nursing is, by its very nature, a profession that demands human interaction at its highest degree of complexity. Direct patient care, communication with family members, interprofessional collaboration, and crisis management require more than clinical knowledge; they necessitate a profound ability to understand, express, and regulate emotions. Goleman (2015), in his seminal work on emotional intelligence, defines it as the capacity to identify one's own emotions and those of others, and to manage them. This skill is a cornerstone for high performance in any context, but it acquires a critical dimension in healthcare, where decisions and interactions directly impact people's lives. Socioemotional competencies encompass a set of skills that enable individuals to constructively address challenges, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions (Cordeiro et al., 2024). In the context of nursing, key competencies include:

- **Emotional Self-Awareness:** The ability to recognize one's own emotions, values, strengths, and limitations. For nurses, this means understanding how their emotions affect their practice, clinical judgment, and interaction with patients and colleagues

(Soeima, 2021). The absence of this skill can lead to impulsive reactions, emotional exhaustion, and compromised professional objectivity.

- **Emotional Self-Management:** Refers to the ability to control impulses, manage stress, adapt to new situations, and maintain motivation. In a high-pressure environment such as a hospital, a nurse's capacity to remain calm and mentally clear is vital for patient safety and the effectiveness of care (Lacerda et al., 2023).
- **Social Awareness (Empathy):** The ability to understand the emotions, needs, and concerns of others. Empathy is the cornerstone of humanized care, enabling nurses to connect with patients on a deeper level, offering support that transcends technical aspects (Comaru et al., 2020). It is the internal compass that guides professionals through ethical dilemmas in care, strengthening their ethical commitment (Kalantari et al., 2024).
- **Relationship Skills:** These include effective communication, the ability to build and maintain healthy relationships, work in teams, inspire and influence, and manage conflicts. Collaboration is intrinsic to nursing practice, and proficiency in these skills ensures a harmonious work environment and coordinated care (Dias et al., 2020).
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** The capacity to make ethical and constructive decisions about personal behavior and social interactions, considering the consequences of one's actions. In nursing, this competency involves clinical judgment, analysis of complex situations, and accountability for care, directly impacting patient safety and well-being (Marques, 2021; Leal et al., 2022).
- **Perseverance:** Persistence in long-term goals, overcoming obstacles and setbacks. In a demanding course like nursing and a career with constant challenges, perseverance is fundamental for academic and professional retention (Hernandez-Vargas and Garcia-Castro, 2020; Calo et al., 2022).

The recognition of these competencies reflects a paradigm shift in education, which now acknowledges the importance of forming complete individuals capable of navigating the complexities of the 21st century. Souza (2022) emphasizes that modern quality education must focus on preparing future professionals to face the complexity of their roles, integrating knowledge, practices, and values.

2.2 CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS ON NURSE TRAINING

The academic journey in nursing is notoriously challenging. Intense workloads, early exposure to human suffering in clinical internships, and pressure for high academic performance contribute to high levels of stress and overload (Quina et al., 2020; Lourenson

et al., 2024). Lourenson et al. (2024) observe that the incidence of stress among health science students is frequent, and understanding its stressors is crucial for developing minimization strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of these challenges. Remote learning and uncertainty created an unprecedented environment of stress and anxiety, where resilience and adaptability became more critical than ever (França; Kanaane, 2022). In this scenario, limitations in emotional self-management, as evidenced in studies with nursing students, can have serious consequences for mental health and academic and professional performance (Lacerda et al., 2023; Ferreira et al., 2022). The ability to identify and manage one's own emotions not only preserves the nurse's mental health but also strengthens interpersonal relationships with patients and colleagues, fostering a more empathetic and effective care environment. Therefore, integrating pedagogical strategies aimed at socioemotional development from the early years of undergraduate education is not only beneficial but essential (Ribeiro et al., 2025). Interventions using dramatizations, relaxation exercises, and reflections on feelings, for example, have demonstrated significant improvement in emotional self-awareness and reduction of anxiety in nursing students. In summary, the theoretical framework corroborates the premise that socioemotional competencies are a pillar of nursing education, as important as technical skills. Investment in their development is an investment in the quality of care, the mental health of professionals, and the resilience of the healthcare system.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to investigate the socioemotional competency profile in undergraduate nursing students, adopting a rigorous and ethical methodological approach. The procedures and instruments employed in the research are detailed below.

3.1 STUDY TYPE AND SETTING

This work is characterized as a quantitative, observational, descriptive, and cross-sectional study. Its quantitative nature is justified by the use of numerical data and statistical techniques for analysis. The observational characteristic reflects the researcher's role as a spectator, without direct intervention on the participants or the phenomenon under study. It is descriptive because its main objective is to detail the characteristics of socioemotional competencies in the selected sample. Finally, the cross-sectional classification indicates that data collection was performed at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of socioemotional competencies during that period (Fontelles et al., 2009). The research was conducted at a large private Higher Education Institution (HEI) located in the Northwest

region of São Paulo State. This institution offers 14 different undergraduate courses, including nursing, distributed across three campuses operating during day and night periods. The HEI is recognized for its activities in teaching, research, and extension, and offers pedagogical, psychological, and financial support programs, serving a significant portion of students from various municipalities, both within and outside São Paulo state.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

The target population of this study comprised all students regularly enrolled in the HEI's undergraduate nursing program, totaling 141 students. Participants were identified from a list provided by the course coordination.

The following inclusion criteria were established for the sample:

- Regular enrollment in any term of the undergraduate nursing program.
- Age 18 years or older.
- Complete response to all data collection instruments.

Students who met the following conditions were excluded from the research:

- On health or maternity leave during the data collection period.
- Absent on scheduled data collection dates.
- Under 18 years of age.

After the questionnaires were administered, 102 students were contacted in the classroom, of whom 4 were excluded for being under 18 years old. Thus, the final sample consisted of 98 nursing students, representing 69.50% of the course's total population.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Two main instruments were used to obtain data:

- Participant Sociodemographic Characterization Questionnaire: This questionnaire, adapted from Alves et al. (2024), was designed to collect relevant information about the students' profile. Variables included sex, age, skin color, marital status, origin, living arrangements, use of alcohol and drugs (licit and illicit), assessment of interpersonal relationships (academic and family), physical exercise habits, perception of stress, history of suicidal behavior, and self-harm.
- Socioemotional Competencies Scale for University Students (ECSEU): This self-report instrument was used to measure students' socioemotional competencies, focusing on academic development. Developed in Brazil by Souza et al. (2021), the ECSEU consists of 31 items, rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 -

Strongly disagree" to "5 - Strongly agree." The scale explores six distinct socioemotional factors or competencies:

- Factor 1: Perseverance (items 1*, 2*, 8, 13*, 15*, 21, 27)
- Factor 2: Emotional Self-Awareness (items 3, 4, 10, 11)
- Factor 3: Relationship Skills (items 18, 26, 28, 29, 31)
- Factor 4: Social Awareness (items 5, 12, 19, 23, 30)
- Factor 5: Emotional Self-Management (items 6*, 7*, 9*, 14*, 22*)
- Factor 6: Responsible Decision-Making (items 16, 17, 20, 24, 25)

It is important to note that for the final score of each factor, items marked with an asterisk (*) had their scores inverted (1=5; 2=4; 3=3; 4=2; 5=1) before summation, according to the instrument's instructions.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Data collection was carried out on February 24, 2024, after prior contact and authorization from the course coordination and faculty. Researchers visited classrooms at an agreed-upon time, presenting the study's objectives and relevance, clarifying doubts, and explaining the process of signing the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF). Participants who agreed to participate were directed to a link for accessing the survey, created on the Google Forms platform. This link contained both instruments: the sociodemographic questionnaire and the Socioemotional Competencies Scale for University Students (ECSEU). A period of 15 minutes was allotted for students to respond to the questionnaires during the visit, aiming to optimize participation rates. Participant anonymity was guaranteed, and all information was treated with confidentiality, used exclusively for scientific purposes.

The research project obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) under Opinion No. 7.294.508 and CAAE: 85398624.9.0000.5428, in strict compliance with the ethical principles established by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS), which regulates research involving human beings. Data collected from Google Forms were exported to an Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft Office Mondo 2016) and subsequently analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 25.0 for Windows. Exploratory analysis included descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum, and maximum values for numerical variables, and number (n) and proportion (%) for categorical variables, allowing for the characterization of the sample and the socioemotional competency profile.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this research provide a detailed overview of the sociodemographic, academic, and socioemotional competency profiles of undergraduate nursing students. The analysis of these data not only characterizes the sample but also discusses the implications of the findings for the training and well-being of future healthcare professionals.

4.1 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND ACADEMIC CHARACTERIZATION OF STUDENTS

A total of 98 nursing students participated in the study. The average age of participants was 23.44 years (SD = ± 6.77 years), with a median of 21 years and a range from 18 to 48 years. This age profile corroborates findings from other research involving nursing students, which also indicate a predominance of a young population (Santos et al., 2024). The sample revealed a significant predominance of female students (85 participants, 86.7%), a finding that reiterates the historical presence and representation of women in nursing, a predominantly female profession, as pointed out by Kusol and Kaewpawong (2024) and Bodys-Cupak et al. (2021). In contrast, Albaqawi's (2025) study in Saudi Arabia showed a majority of male students. Regarding self-declared skin color, most students (68 participants, 69.4%) identified as white, which reflects the current scenario of access to higher education in Brazil (Brasil, 2021), but also prompts reflection on the need for greater representation of mixed-race and black populations in universities. This data is consistent with the study by Ferreira et al. (2021), where 76.9% of participants identified as white. Most participants were enrolled in their fifth year of undergraduate study (28 participants, 28.6%), possessed sufficient financial resources for their university sustenance (66 participants, 67.3%), engaged in paid work (61 participants, 62.2%), and considered their family relationships harmonious (81 participants, 82.7%). These data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages of sociodemographic characterization variables of nursing students

Variables	n	%
Gender		
Female	85	86.7
Male	13	13.3
Marital status		
Single/Without partner	50	51.0

Variables	n	%
Married/With partner	48	49.0
Skin color		
White	68	69.4
Brown	25	25.5
Black	4	4.1
Indigenous	1	1.0
Year of graduation		
1st Year	16	16.3
2nd Year	18	18.4
3rd Year	11	11.2
4th Year	25	25.5
5th Year	28	28.6
Sufficient financial resources for university sustenance		
Yes	66	67.3
No	32	32.7
Who do you live with		
Family	77	78.6
Alone	15	15.3
Friends	6	6.1
Do you perform paid work (excluding scholarships or institutional aid)		
Yes	61	62.2
No	37	37.8
Do you consider your relationship with your family		
Harmonious	81	82.7
Conflicting	17	17.3

Source: Research data, 2025.

Although a large proportion of students reported satisfaction with the course (91 participants, 92.9%), concerning data emerged when analyzing aspects related to university life. The majority of students declared feeling overwhelmed by undergraduate activities (80

participants, 81.6%) and frequently stressed (81 participants, 82.7%). These findings corroborate the literature addressing the mental health of university students, especially in the health field, where academic workload and professional demands can lead to physical and mental exhaustion (Quina et al., 2020; Lourenson et al., 2024). Table 2 presents the percentages of these variables.

Table 2

Percentages of variables related to university life aspects of nursing students

Variables	n	%
Satisfaction with the course		
Yes	91	92.9
No	07	7.1
Do you feel overwhelmed by undergraduate activities		
Yes	80	81.6
No	18	18.4
Do you feel stressed frequently		
Yes	81	82.7
No	17	17.3

Source: Research data, 2025.

Regarding lifestyle habits, the majority of students (53 participants, 54.1%) reported not regularly engaging in physical activity. In contrast, a significant portion (62 participants, 63.3%) engaged in leisure activities weekly. Concerning substance use, most did not frequently consume alcoholic beverages (78 participants, 79.6%) and did not use drugs (97 participants, 99%). These results, particularly the low substance use, are positive and may indicate that the use of psychoactive substances is a less common coping strategy for adversity, as observed by Bodys-Cupak et al. (2021). Table 3 details these habits.

Table 3

Percentages of variables related to nursing students' lifestyle habits

Variables	n	%
Engage in physical exercise		
No	53	54.1

Variables	n	%
Yes, 1 to 2 times a week	16	16.3
Yes, 3 to 4 times a week	18	18.4
Yes, 5 to 7 times a week	11	11.2
Engage in leisure activities weekly		
Yes	62	63.3
No	36	36.7
Frequently consume alcoholic beverages twice or more per week		
Yes	20	20.4
No	78	79.6
Frequently use any type of drug		
Yes	1	1.0
No	97	99.0

Source: Research data, 2025.

Regarding mental well-being, most students (95 participants, 96.9%) reported not having purposely hurt or cut themselves to relieve suffering, and an even larger proportion (88 participants, 89.8%) had not recently contemplated suicide. Although these data are predominantly positive, the presence of a small percentage reporting such issues indicates the need for continuous attention to the mental health of these students. Table 4 summarizes these findings.

Table 4

Percentages of variables related to nursing students' mental well-being

Variables	n	%
Have you purposely hurt/cut yourself to relieve suffering		
Yes	3	3.1
No	95	96.9
Have you recently thought about suicide		
Yes	10	10.2
No	88	89.8

Source: Research data, 2025.

The profile derived from the sociodemographic data and lifestyle habits of nursing students at the institution reveals a young, predominantly female population that is satisfied with their course but, at the same time, experiences high levels of stress and overload. Although positive aspects exist, such as the low incidence of drug use and the majority having harmonious family relationships, the frequency of stress and overload signals a demand for support and strategies that promote well-being and the development of coping skills.

4.2 SOCIOEMOTIONAL COMPETENCY PROFILE

Analysis of the Socioemotional Competencies Scale for University Students (ECSEU) revealed that nursing students exhibited a moderate overall level of socioemotional competencies, with an average of 3.83 points (SD = ± 0.46). The minimum recorded value was 2.48 and the maximum was 4.77. This result suggests that, although students possess a good baseline of socioemotional skills, there is still room for improvement and strengthening of these capacities. Table 5 summarizes these data.

Table 5

Descriptive statistical analysis of the Socioemotional Competencies scale among nursing students

Socioemotional Competencies	Mean	SD	Min	Max	25th Percentile	50th Percentile	75th Percentile
Overall	3.84	0.46	2.48	4.77	3.54	3.80	4.16

Source: Research data, 2025.

Socioemotional competencies are increasingly recognized as crucial skills that must be enhanced in nursing education. They have the potential not only to improve the quality of care provided but also to shape professionals better equipped to face the challenges of practice with competence and empathy (Leal et al., 2022). The undergraduate period, especially in health-related courses, is often associated with high rates of mental health imbalances. In this context, socioemotional development emerges as a valuable tool for promoting the well-being of academics (Amestoy, 2020).

A detailed analysis of the ECSEU factors revealed significant disparities, indicating areas of strength and fragility. Table 6 presents the average results for each of the six factors.

Table 6

Descriptive statistical analysis of Socioemotional Competencies by factors among nursing students

Socioemotional Competency Factors	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Factor 1: Perseverance	3.85	0.79	1.43	5.00
Factor 2: Emotional Self-Awareness	4.10	0.65	2.25	5.00
Factor 3: Relationship Skills	4.00	0.68	1.80	5.00
Factor 4: Social Awareness	3.83	0.76	1.60	5.00
Factor 5: Emotional Self-Management	2.70	1.00	1.00	5.00
Factor 6: Responsible Decision-Making	4.62	0.46	3.00	5.00

Source: Research data, 2025.

The highest means were observed for Responsible Decision-Making (M=4.62) and Emotional Self-Awareness (M=4.10), indicating that students demonstrate good development in these areas. In contrast, the lowest means were recorded for Emotional Self-Management (M=2.70) and Social Awareness (M=3.83), with emotional self-management being the most vulnerable competency.

4.2.1 Responsible Decision-Making

The Responsible Decision-Making factor obtained the highest mean (M=4.62; SD=±0.46), which is a finding of great relevance for nursing education. Decision-making is an inherent and constant process in nursing practice, permeating everything from care planning to the execution of complex interventions, and directly impacting patient safety and the effectiveness of care (Lourenço et al., 2022; Marques, 2021). Students' good performance in this competency suggests that they are developing the ability to apply critical reasoning, articulate with the multiprofessional team, and assume responsibility for care, as highlighted by Leal et al. (2022). This competency, however, does not develop spontaneously; it requires continuous pedagogical investment that stimulates reflection, analysis of complex situations, and the exercise of ethical discernment from the initial years of undergraduate study. Chirelli and Sordi (2023) further state that training for decision-making should strengthen critical thinking, integrating not only technical aspects but also the recognition of emotions, active listening, and dialogue. Therefore, the positive result in this factor indicates that the institution may, in some way, be contributing to the development of these essential skills.

4.2.2 Emotional Self-Awareness

Emotional Self-Awareness also presented a high mean ($M=4.10$; $SD=\pm 0.65$), which is a strong point to be valued. In nursing students, emotional self-awareness is fundamental for developing healthy relationships in both academic and future professional environments. Studies, such as Amaral et al. (2023), show that a considerable portion of nursing academics perceive themselves as strong in this aspect. This ability allows nurses to identify and understand their own feelings, which is crucial for a more balanced, empathetic, and ethical practice. According to Soeima (2021), a self-aware professional is capable of recognizing their emotions without them negatively interfering with their professional demeanor, maintaining harmonious and rational behavior, even under pressure. The development of this competency from academic training is vital, and specific interventions, such as those described by Ribeiro et al. (2025) which included dramatizations and reflections on feelings, can promote significant gains in self-knowledge and reduction of anxiety.

4.2.3 Relationship Skills

With a mean of 4.00 ($SD=\pm 0.68$), the Relationship Skills factor also proved to be well-developed in the sample. This finding is particularly relevant for nursing, whose practice is essentially based on care and human interaction. The ability to communicate effectively, build trusting relationships, work in teams, and resolve conflicts is indispensable with both patients and colleagues (Comaru et al., 2020). Positive interpersonal relationships are crucial in the healthcare environment. Team conflicts can generate frustration, demotivation, and impact the quality of care. Elements such as individualism, lack of commitment, and disrespect are factors that contribute to these tensions, increasing workload and professional dissatisfaction (Dias et al., 2020). The good performance of students in this factor indicates that the academic dynamic, which involves interactions with colleagues and professors in practical settings, may be contributing to the enhancement of these skills (Silva, 2023). Although the variability of the data (SD) suggests that some students still need support to strengthen these competencies, the overall result is encouraging.

4.2.4 Perseverance

The Perseverance factor obtained a moderate mean ($M=3.85$; $SD=\pm 0.79$). Remaining steadfast in the face of challenges, fatigue, and difficulties is a crucial aspect in both nursing education and practice. Academic life is full of obstacles, and the ability to transform negative situations into opportunities for growth, through reflection and a sense of perseverance, is a

differentiator for academic retention and success in the course (Hernandez-Vargas and Garcia-Castro, 2020).

Perseverance contributes to resilience, which, in turn, is associated with increased motivation and student retention in the course, being a critical factor for academic and professional success (Calo et al., 2022). In a profession that demands commitment to human and ethical care, even in the face of adverse situations, the ability to persist and advocate for patients' rights is strengthened by this competency.

4.2.5 Social Awareness

Social Awareness presented a mean of 3.83 (SD= \pm 0.76), also at a moderate level. This competency manifests in nursing practice as an internal compass that guides professionals through ethical and moral dilemmas. It enables nurses to recognize what is socially and morally appropriate, guiding their decisions and strengthening their ethical commitment to the patient (Kalantari et al., 2024).

In an increasingly complex and multifaceted healthcare context, social awareness is vital to ensure sensitive, responsible care aligned with human and professional values. Although the moderate result is acceptable, enhancing this competency can lead to a greater positive impact on interactions with the diverse range of patients and situations that nurses will encounter.

4.2.6 Emotional Self-Management

The Emotional Self-Management factor presented the lowest mean among all competencies (M=2.70; SD= \pm 1.00), revealing a significant fragility in this dimension. This is an alarming finding, especially considering the high percentage of students who reported feeling frequently stressed (82.7%) and overwhelmed (81.6%) by the demands of their undergraduate program. The high variability (SD= \pm 1.00) also indicates that a considerable portion of students experience significant difficulty in this area. This limitation reflects the impact of intense academic demands, early contact with human suffering in practical internships, and the pressure to maintain high performance. The lack of ability to manage one's own emotions can severely compromise students' psychological well-being and, consequently, their formative trajectory and future professional practice. Goleman (2015) emphasizes that emotional intelligence, including self-management, is essential for effectively identifying and managing emotions, being crucial for high performance. Studies such as Lacerda et al. (2023) corroborate these findings, demonstrating significant difficulties among nursing students in aspects related to emotional intelligence, particularly concerning

the understanding and control of their own feelings. Such challenges were exacerbated during the pandemic, when emotional and academic overload became even more evident. The inability to recognize and manage emotions can harm not only the student's mental health but also the safety and effectiveness of interactions in care environments. Ferreira et al. (2021) reiterate that the development of emotional competencies is essential for nursing practice, as professionals are constantly exposed to complex and emotionally challenging situations. The ability to manage one's own emotions protects the nurse's mental health and strengthens interpersonal relationships with patients and colleagues, promoting more empathetic and effective care. The prevalence of stress and overload, combined with poor emotional self-management, points to the urgency of interventions. It is fundamental that higher education institutions for nursing integrate programs and strategies that promote the development of this competency, equipping future professionals with the necessary tools to cope with the emotional complexity of their careers.

In summary, the results of this research highlight a critical gap in the development of emotional self-management, despite strengths in other socioemotional competencies. This scenario demands profound reflection and the implementation of strategic actions by educational institutions to ensure a more balanced education that more comprehensively prepares nurses for the challenges of the job market and for promoting truly humanized care.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study offered an in-depth examination of the socioemotional competency profile among undergraduate nursing students at a private institution in the interior of São Paulo state. The results obtained paint a complex yet revealing picture of these future professionals' preparation for the inherent challenges of their careers. The overall analysis indicated that students exhibit a moderate level of socioemotional competencies, which, while positive, signals fertile ground for interventions and improvements. Both notable strengths and areas of concern clearly emerged. On one hand, students demonstrate a remarkable capacity for Responsible Decision-Making and Emotional Self-Awareness, in addition to strong Relationship Skills. These are invaluable qualities for the practice of nursing, which demands acute clinical reasoning, ethical discernment, empathy, and the ability to build bonds and work in teams. Such findings reinforce these academics' potential to provide humanized and high-quality care, grounded in ethical principles and an understanding of patient needs. Nursing education, it appears, is successfully cultivating crucial aspects of professional interaction and judgment. However, the research also illuminated a significant area of vulnerability: Emotional Self-Management. With the lowest

mean among all assessed competencies, this factor reveals a fragility concretely manifested in students' experiences, with the majority reporting high levels of stress and academic overload. This gap is concerning, as the inability to manage one's own emotions can lead to professional burnout, impact nurses' mental health, and ultimately compromise the quality of care. The nursing profession is intrinsically emotionally demanding, and the absence of robust emotional self-management can transform the work environment into an unsustainable burden. The evidence collected reinforces the urgency of a more integrated and proactive approach to nursing education. It is imperative that higher education institutions recognize the centrality of socioemotional competencies in the curriculum, moving beyond the mere transmission of technical knowledge. The development of pedagogical strategies specifically aimed at strengthening emotional self-management, resilience, and mental health promotion becomes not just a differentiator, but a fundamental necessity. This may include the incorporation of specific subjects, practical workshops, support groups, mentoring, and the creation of academic environments that validate and support the expression and management of emotions. Actions that reduce academic overload and offer accessible psychological support are also crucial. Additionally, the results underscore the importance of robust institutional policies that actively promote students' mental health. Academic well-being should not be viewed as a bonus but as a prerequisite for academic and professional success. Investments in psycho-pedagogical support programs, more welcoming academic environments, and training faculty to identify and intervene in cases of emotional distress are essential steps. In conclusion, the "radiography" of nursing students' socioemotional competencies reveals immense potential and, simultaneously, critical areas demanding attention. By addressing these fragilities strategically and compassionately, educational institutions will not only contribute to their students' well-being and academic success but, above all, will train nurses who are better prepared, more resilient, and capable of providing truly humanized care in an increasingly complex and demanding world. This study serves as a call to action, instigating new research and the implementation of innovative educational practices that will shape the next generation of nursing leaders and caregivers.

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