

# Assessing Mental Health Literacy Among Nursing Students at University of Tabuk: A Cross-Sectional Study

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess mental health literacy (MHL) levels among nursing students at the University of Tabuk and evaluate the effectiveness of existing mental health support structures. Using a cross-sectional design, the research surveyed 78 nursing students via online instrument, employing stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across academic levels. The nursing students generally demonstrate strengths in mental health literacy. There were no significant differences in understanding mood disorders and anxiety based on gender, age, academic level, and GPA. However, significant differences were observed in confidence in seeking mental health information, with higher scores among third- and fourth-year students than first and second-year students. Students with a GPA below 3.0 had lower confidence scores. Additionally, attitudes toward mental illness were significantly influenced by age and GPA, with older students and those with a GPA of 3.0 to 3.4 showing more positive attitudes. No significant differences were found regarding willingness to engage with mental health issues. This study concludes that nursing students generally demonstrate positive MHL. Improvements could be made through mental health programs by the Faculty of Nursing to equip future nurses in addressing mental health challenges in clinical practice and improve patient care.

*Keywords: Mental health literacy, nursing students, mental health education, mental health training, healthcare professionals*

## INTRODUCTION

In schools and universities mental health problems quietly harm students' ability to stay in school and do well in their studies. If students are dealing with mental health issues, they have a higher chance of quitting their studies without finishing their degrees. They also struggle in doing well in their studies because of emotional challenges. This doesn't just affect the students, it also impacts society's investments in these students who play an important role in shaping the future of our community<sup>1</sup>.

While intervention trials have spotlighted prevention and treatment effectiveness in younger adolescents, the college landscape remains relatively uncharted territory. A void in infrastructure for mental health prevention and early intervention exists, with limited research on college-specific interventions despite the distinct maturity of this demographic<sup>2</sup>. Herein lies the fountain for our exploration- a commitment to understanding and addressing Mental Health Literacy (MHL) among college students, with specific lens on the unique challenges faced by nursing students.

Mental health literacy, a compass in this exploration, encapsulates awareness, attitudes, and the willingness to seek help<sup>3</sup>. This study aimed to understand the level of MHL among nursing students at University of Tabuk. The motivation behind this research goes beyond mere investigation; it is a response to the lack of tailored interventions for mental health within the context of nursing education. As we delve into the realms of MHL, we explore not only knowledge but also attitudes

and the ability to seek help. The goal is not solely academic-it's a quest to create a supportive environment for proactive mental health management, nurturing the well-being of nursing students throughout their academic journey and into their future professional careers. In the maze of college life, this study seeks to illuminate pathways for enhanced MHL a guiding light for the holistic growth of nursing students amidst the challenges of their educational Journey.

Mental Health Literacy in Educational Settings, A study conducted a comprehensive review addressing the escalating rates of mental health problems among adolescents, particularly in educational settings<sup>4</sup>. The study focused on barriers, facilitators, and interventions associated with help-seeking behaviors for common mental health issues in adolescents aged 10-19 years. The identified barriers, such as stigma and negative beliefs toward mental health services, resonated with the theme of understanding obstacles to mental health help-seeking, reflecting a concern not only in educational realms but also in broader contexts. In alignment with this focus, delved into the examination of progress in generating evidence to support national policies aimed at enhancing health literacy among community populations<sup>5</sup>. Although the scope of this review was constrained by a limited number of studies meeting inclusion criteria, the findings revealed a broader influence of the health literacy concept on interventions. The use of educational strategies to enhance functional health literacy, as identified in the interventions, aligns with the overarching theme of improving health literacy. Both reviews highlight the importance of addressing barriers and enhancing literacy to promote better mental

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health outcomes, emphasizing the interconnectedness of WIL and broader health literacy.

The two studies collectively underscore the need for a holistic approach to understanding and addressing health issues among adolescents. One study emphasized the significance of extending efforts beyond educational realms to reach adolescents outside formal systems, recognizing the need for enhanced accessibility to mental health support for all adolescents<sup>4</sup>. One study highlighted the slow emergence of evidence to support national policies and programs, emphasizing the urgency for increased research efforts<sup>5</sup>. Together, these reviews contribute to the discourse on promoting comprehensive health and mental health outcomes, emphasizing the importance of systematic testing, valid measurement tools, and priority focus in research funding. The interconnectedness of these studies reinforces the call for concerted efforts to address barriers, enhance literacy, and develop effective interventions to ensure timely access to vital mental health treatments and support for adolescents.

Factors Influencing Mental Health Literacy, conducted a study in Malaysia to explore factors influencing mental help seeking attitudes among students from low-income backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. Their findings emphasized the significance of self-stigma as a predictor for mental help-seeking attitudes, with efforts recommended to address self-stigma as a potential barrier. The study resonates with the broader theme of understanding and overcoming barriers to mental health help-seeking, particularly in populations with lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

In alignment with this theme, a systematic review by Radez et al. delved into the underutilization of professional help for mental health problems among children and adolescents<sup>7</sup>. The review highlighted four overarching themes of barriers and facilitators, including individual factors, social factors, perceptions of the therapeutic relationship, and systemic and structural factors. Notably, the emphasis on individual factors, such as limited mental health knowledge and perceptions of help-seeking, aligns with the findings of Ibrahim et al.<sup>6</sup>. The interconnectedness of these studies underscores the multifaceted nature of barriers to mental health help-seeking across diverse populations.

Duffy et al.<sup>8</sup> contributed to the understanding of mental health problems in university students, emphasizing the prevalence and persistence of symptoms and their negative impact on academic performance. This longitudinal study complements the theme of understanding mental health challenges among students, highlighting the need for a comprehensive mental health strategy. The findings align with the call for targeted early-intervention measures, resonating with the overarching goal of addressing mental health issues in educational settings.

Expanding the exploration to a global context, the World Health Organization's World Mental Health International College Student (WMH-ICS) initiative, as described by Cuijpers et al.<sup>9</sup>, focused on enhancing prevention and early interventions for mental health problems among college students. This initiative aligns with the broader theme of addressing mental health challenges in educational settings and emphasizes the importance of evidence-based interventions. The interconnectedness of these studies underscores the global relevance of understanding and addressing mental health issues among students. Collectively, these studies form a cohesive narrative, emphasizing the interconnected themes of understanding barriers to mental health help-seeking, addressing

challenges in educational settings, and advocating for evidence-based interventions. The studies contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on MHL and underscore the need for collaborative efforts to enhance mental health outcomes across diverse populations.

Correlates of Mental Health Literacy, the collective body of research reflects a comprehensive exploration of MHL and associated challenges across various contexts. A study delved into the literacy of depression and suicide among medical students, shedding light on disparities between pre-medical and clinical levels<sup>10</sup>. Their findings emphasized the urgent need for targeted educational programs, aligning with the overarching theme of enhancing awareness and literacy in mental health. The study by Ebert et al., part of the WMH-ICS initiative, expanded the focus to a diverse cross-national sample, underlining the barriers to future help-seeking among first-year students<sup>11</sup>. The identified factors influencing help-seeking intentions, such as preferences for handling issues independently, resonated with the imperative to address stigma and awareness, echoing the sentiments expressed by Maalouf et al.<sup>12</sup> in their call for action to empower Arab mental health researchers.

The literature further extends to the global disparity in mental health research output, with Maalouf et al.<sup>12</sup> pinpointing the challenges faced by Arab researchers. The proposed action plan, encapsulating strategies to reduce stigma, foster collaboration, and translate research into impactful actions, aligns with the overarching goal of enhancing MHL on a societal level. This theme of societal impact reverberates in one study<sup>13</sup>, focusing on the high prevalence of psychological distress among college students in Jordan. The findings underscored the need for strategies to promote awareness and encourage access, with a potential role for nurses in bridging the gap between mental health issues and available resources.

Transitioning to the context of Saudi Arabia, Alshehri et al.<sup>14</sup> and Almanasef<sup>15</sup> contributed to the exploration of MHL among university students. One study addressed the scarcity of research in Saudi Arabia, validating an Arabic version of the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS)<sup>14</sup>. Their findings, including the varied indicators of mental health literacy, set the stage for understanding the factors influencing literacy levels. Another study, specifically focusing on pharmacy students, emphasized the importance of targeted interventions to enhance mental health literacy, connecting with the broader theme of improving help-seeking behaviors<sup>15</sup>.

Expanding the exploration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, Elyamani et al.<sup>16</sup> conducted a systematic review on MHL among adults. The review revealed limited MHL, high stigma, and negative attitudes, aligning with the need for large-scale campaigns to improve MHL in the GCC region. The study by Selim et al.<sup>17</sup> incorporated a digital educational intervention among undergraduate health profession students in Saudi Arabia. Their findings highlighted the effectiveness of such interventions, connecting back to the overarching theme of educational initiatives to enhance mental health literacy.

The narrative concludes providing insights into MHL and attitudes among undergraduate students at Jazan University in Saudi Arabia. Their findings, emphasizing the need for health educational programs, resonate with the broader theme of addressing attitudes and understanding mental health issues.

Collectively, these studies form a cohesive narrative, emphasizing the urgency of targeted educational programs, raising awareness,

**Table 1.** MHLS assesses four main domains

Domain	Items	Response Scale	Score Range	Interpretation
Understanding Mood Disorders & Anxiety	9	1–4 (Likert)	9–36	Higher = better knowledge
Confidence in Seeking Information	4	1–5 (Likert)	4–20	Higher = more confidence
Attitudes Toward Mental Illness	8	1–5 (Likert; one item reverse coded)	8–40	Higher = more positive attitudes
Willingness to Engage	7	1–5 (Likert)	7–35	Higher = more willingness

(Detailed scoring instructions and reliability testing results are provided in Appendix A.)

and reducing stigma to enhance MHL across diverse populations and contexts. The interconnectedness of these themes underscores the global relevance and importance of addressing MHL as a multifaceted challenge requiring collaborative efforts and strategic interventions. Thus, this study aims to assess the current level of MHL among nursing students at the University of Tabuk.

## MATERIALS and METHODS

**Study Design and Setting:** A cross-sectional design was employed to assess mental health literacy (MHL) among nursing students at the University of Tabuk. Data were collected at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of MHL levels in the target population.

**Participants and Sampling:** The study population consisted of undergraduate nursing students enrolled at the University of Tabuk during the 2023-2024 academic year. Stratified random sampling was used, with strata defined by academic year (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year). The sampling frame was obtained from the official student registry, and participants were randomly selected within each stratum using a computer-generated list to ensure proportional representation.

**Inclusion criteria:** (1) current enrolled nursing students, and (2) willingness to participate.

**Exclusion criteria:** (1) students on leave during data collection, and (2) refusal to provide informed consent.

**Sample Size and Justification:** Sample size was calculated using G\*Power (version X.X), with parameters set at medium effect size ( $f=0.25$ ),  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and power = 0.80, for comparisons across four academic levels. The minimum required sample was 76 students. To account for possible non-response, 90 students were invited, of which 75 provided valid responses.

**Instrument:** Data were collected using the validated Arabic version of the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS, originally developed by O'Connor and Casey and validated in Arabic by Alshehri et al.<sup>14</sup>. The MHLS assesses four main domains (Table 1):

**Data Collection:** The structured questionnaire was distributed electronically. Prior to participation, students received study information and provided informed consent electronically.

**Data Analysis:** Data was analyzed using RStudio (version 4.3.1). Internal consistency was evaluated with Chronbach's alpha, rhoC, and rhoA. A bootstrapped partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach with 1,000 resamples was used to validate construct reliability. Normality was assessed with the Shapiro-Wilk test. Since MHLS score were non-normality distributed ( $p=0.002$ ), non-parametric tests were applied.

**Ethical Considerations:** The study adhered to ethical guidelines for human research. Informed consent was obtained electronically, and confidentiality was maintained. Participants could withdraw at any

time. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Tabuk (Approval No. UT-379-211-2024).

## RESULTS

Responses of a total 78 students were received on the online system. However, we excluded three records of students who disagreed to participate. Therefore, we analyzed the records of 75 nursing students. The majority of participants were male (77.3%), aged between 21 to 23 years (50.7%), and all of them were of Saudi nationality (100.0%). The largest proportion of students were in their fourth year of study (45.3%) and reported a current GPA/grade average of 4.0 or more (56.0%, Table 2).

The four-factor structure of the 28 items was confirmed with mean bootstrap factor loadings above the accepted threshold of 0.50 for each individual item under the respective construct. .

Additionally, rhoA and rhoC values were all above 0.70, with AVE values ranging between 0.501 and 0.752 (above 0.50).

In the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) scores, the overall median score was 84.0 (IQR: 77.0 - 93.0), with understanding mood disorders and anxiety having a median score of 27.0 (IQR: 24.5 - 31.0), confidence in seeking mental health information with a median score of 15.0 (IQR: 11.0 - 17.5), attitudes towards mental illness with a median score of 22.0 (IQR: 18.0 - 27.0), and willingness to engage with mental health with a median score of 21.0 (IQR: 17.0 - 24.0). More details about the scores are provided in Table 3.

**Table 2.** Demographic and Academic Characteristics

Characteristics	(N %)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	58 (77.3%)
Female	17 (22.7%)
<b>Age</b>	
18 to 20	26 (34.7%)
21 to 23	38 (50.7%)
> 23	11 (14.7%)
<b>Nationality</b>	
Saudi	75 (100.0%)
<b>Current Academic Level</b>	
First year	18 (24.0%)
Second year	13 (17.3%)
Third year	10 (13.3%)
Fourth year	34 (45.3%)
<b>Current GPA/ Grade average</b>	
4.0 or more	42 (56.0%)
3.5 to 3.9	15 (20.2%)
3.0 to 3.4	14 (18.7%)
Below 3.0	4 (5.3%)

**Table 3.** Description of MHLS scores of the overall MHLS domain and subdomains

Characteristic	Median (IQR)	Mean±SD	Min- Max
MHLS overall score	84.0 (77.0 - 93.0)	84.3 ± 6.7	32.0- 127.0
Understanding Mood Disorders and Anxiety	27.0 (24.5 - 31.0)	27.0 ± 5.6	9.0 - 36.0
Confidence in Seeking Mental Health Information	15.0(11.0 - 17.5)	14.1 ±4.2	4.0 -20.0
Attitudes Towards Mental Illness	22.0 (18.0 - 27.0)	22.8 ± 6.3	12.0 - 36.0
Willingness to Engage with Mental Health	21.0 (17.0 - 24.0)	20.4 ± 6.2	7.0 - 35.0

IQR: interquartile range; SD: standard deviation

**Table 4.** Statistical differences in the MHLS score across different demographic and academic characteristics

Variable	Median (IQR)	p-value
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	85.5 (76.3, 94.8)	0.466
Female	84.0 (79.0, 86.0)	
<b>Age</b>		
18 to20	80.0 (72.3, 88.0)	0.17
21 to23	85.5 (81.3, 93.0)	
>23	85.0 (80.0, 101.5)	
<b>Current academic level</b>		
First year	79.0 (69.8, 88.0)	0.095
Second year	82.0 (75.0, 92.0)	
Third year	86.0 (84.0, 97.0)	
Fourth year	85.5 (81.0, 94.0)	
<b>Current GPA/Grade average</b>		
4.0 or more	84.0 (77.5, 88.8)	0.051
3.5 to 3.9	92.0 (81.0, 95.5)	
3.0 to 3.4	86.0 (79.5, 107.5)	
Below 3.0	66.5 (57.8, 73.3)	

IQR: interquartile range

Wilcoxon rank sum test; Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test

**Statistical differences in the MHLS score across different demographic and academic characteristics**

Among the demographic and academic characteristics examined, a borderline significant difference in Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) scores was observed based on current GPA/Grade average (p = 0.051). Specifically, individuals with a GPA/Grade average of 3.5 to 3.9 demonstrated a relatively higher median score (median = 92.0, IQR = 81.0 to 95.5) compared to those with other GPA/Grade averages. However, other demographic and academic characteristics were not significantly associated with the overall MHLS score (Table 4).

Furthermore, among the demographic and academic characteristics examined, no significant differences in understanding mood disorders and anxiety scores were observed across gender (p = 0.563), age (p = 0.082), current academic level (p = 0.160), or current GPA/Grade average (p = 0.436). However, significant differences in confidence in seeking mental health information scores were observed across current academic levels (p = 0.012) and current GPA/Grade average (p = 0.033). Specifically, participants in their third (median = 16.0, IQR = 14.5 to 17.8) and fourth (median= 16.0, IQR = 13.3 to 18.0) years of study demonstrated higher median scores compared to those in their first (median = 11.5, IQR = 10.0 to 15.0) and second (median= 12.0, IQR = 10.0 to 16.0) years. Furthermore, individuals with a GPA/Grade average below 3.0 exhibited significantly lower median scores (median= 8.5, IQR = 6.3 to 10.0) compared to other GPA/Grade categories (p = 0.033). No significant differences were found across gender (p = 0.063) or age groups (p = 0.148, Table 5).

Significant differences in attitudes towards mental illness scores were observed across age groups (p = 0.011) and current GPA/Grade average (p = 0.015). Specifically, participants aged > 23 demonstrated a significantly higher median score (median= 29.0, IQR = 24.5 to 31.5) compared to those aged 18 to 20 (median= 20.0, IQR = 18.0 to 22.8) and 21 to 23 (median= 23.0, IQR = 18.0 to 27.0). Furthermore, individuals with a GPA/Grade average of 3.0 to 3.4 showed a significantly higher median score (median = 28.0, IQR = 22.5 to 30.0) compared to other GPA/Grade categories (p < 0.05). No significant differences were found across gender (p = 0.110) or current academic level (p = 0.499). Finally, no significant differences in willingness to engage with mental health scores were observed across gender (p = 0.196), age groups (p = 0.841), or current academic level (p = 0.849) and current GPA (p = 0.076, Table 5).

Understanding mental health literacy among nursing students is crucial for providing effective mental health care within healthcare settings. This discussion explores the mental health literacy of Saudi nursing students, focusing on their overall mental health literacy scores and subdomain analyses including understanding mood disorders and anxiety, confidence in seeking mental health information, attitudes towards mental illness, and willingness to engage with mental health issues.

**DISCUSSION**

The overall mental health literacy score among Saudi nursing students, as reflected by the median "MHLS score, underscores a promising trend in the level of mental health literacy within this demographic. Al-Mohaimed et al.<sup>18</sup> highlighted a generally positive level of mental health literacy among university students in Saudi Arabia, providing a foundational understanding of mental health knowledge and attitudes among the broader student population. The alignment of the nursing students' "MHLS scores with these findings suggests a consistent pattern of adequate mental health literacy extending to nursing students within the Saudi context.

This alignment is particularly noteworthy given the crucial role of nursing professionals in mental health care delivery, underscoring the importance of ensuring a strong foundation in mental health literacy among nursing students. Furthermore, the consistency of mental health literacy trends across different student populations in Saudi Arabia implies a systemic approach to mental health education and awareness within the academic sphere, potentially influenced by broader cultural and institutional factors. This suggests that efforts to enhance mental health literacy among nursing students can leverage existing initiatives and resources developed for the broader university student population, facilitating a more integrated and comprehensive approach to mental health education. Overall, the convergence of MHLS scores among nursing students with the broader trends in mental health literacy among university students in Saudi Arabia reflects a positive trajectory towards improving mental health awareness and understanding within the academic and healthcare contexts in the region.

**Table 5.** Statistical differences in the MHLS score across different demographic and academic characteristics.

Variable	Understanding Mood Disorders and Anxiety		Confidence in Seeking Mental Health Information		Willingness to Engage with Mental Health	
	Median (IQR)	p-value	Median (IQR)	p-value	Median (IQR)	p-value
Gender						
Male	27.0 (24.3, 30.0)	0.563	15.0 (10.3, 16.8)	0.063	21.0 (18.0, 25.0)	0.196
Female	29.0 (25.0, 32.0)		16.0 (14.0, 18.0)		19.0 (16.0, 21.0)	
Age						
18 to20	27.0 (24.0, 28.8)	0.082	15.0 (10.0, 15.8)	0.148	19.5 (17.3, 22.0)	0.841
21 to23	29.5 (26.0, 32.0)		16.0 (12.0, 18.0)		21.0 (16.3, 24.8)	
>23	27.0 (22.0, 27.0)		13.0 (11.0, 16.0)		21.0 (18.0, 26.5)	
Current academic level						
First year	26.0 (23.0, 27.8)	0.16	11.5 (10.0, 15.0)	0.012	19.5 (18.0, 22.0)	0.849
Second year	27.0 (26.0, 29.0)		12.0 (10.0, 16.0)		21.0 (16.0, 22.0)	
Third year	27.5 (26.3, 31.5)		16.0 (14.5, 17.8)		21.0 (18.5, 22.5)	
Fourth year	30.0 (25.0, 32.0)		16.0 (13.3, 18.0)		21.5 (16.3, 25.8)	
Current GPA/Grade average						
4.0 or more	27.5 (25.3, 31.0)	0.436	15.5 (12.0, 16.8)	0.033	20.0 (18.0, 22.0)	0.076
3.5to3.9	27.0 (24.5, 31.5)		15.0 (11.5, 19.5)		24.0 (19.0, 26.0)	
3.0 to 3.4	27.0 (24.5, 30.3)		13.5 (10.3, 16.8)		21.0 (17.5, 25.8)	
Below 3.0	23.0 (18.0, 26.3)		8.5 (6.3, 10.0)		15.0 (13.0, 17.3)	

IQR: interquartile range

Wilcoxon rank sum test; Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test

The robust understanding of mood disorders and anxiety among Saudi nursing students reflects a significant aspect of their mental health literacy. This finding resonates with previous research, such as that conducted by Evans-Lacko et al.<sup>19</sup>, which demonstrated high levels of knowledge in these areas among healthcare students. A strong grasp of mood disorders and anxiety is particularly crucial for nursing students, as it equips them with the necessary knowledge to identify, assess, and intervene in mental health issues commonly encountered in clinical practice.

Furthermore, the association between higher academic performance and increased confidence in seeking mental health information highlights the role of education levels in shaping self-efficacy regarding mental health-related tasks among healthcare students. Studies by Al Ghamdi et al.<sup>20</sup> and O'Reilly et al.<sup>21</sup> support this association, indicating that as student's progress academically, they develop greater confidence in seeking and utilizing mental health information effectively. This finding underscores the importance of academic training and educational experiences in enhancing nursing students' abilities to navigate and access resources related to mental health, ultimately contributing to their overall mental health literacy.

The correlation between academic performance and confidence in seeking mental health information suggests that educational programs and curricula should prioritize mental health education and provide ample opportunities for students to engage with mental health-related content. By fostering an environment that encourages active learning and critical thinking in mental health, nursing students can develop the confidence and skills necessary to address mental health challenges in clinical practice effectively. Additionally, targeted interventions aimed at promoting mental health literacy among nursing students should consider incorporating strategies to enhance self-efficacy in seeking and utilizing mental health information, thereby empowering students to become competent and confident mental health advocates in their future roles as healthcare professionals.

Regarding attitudes towards mental illness, our findings align with studies indicating that older students and those with higher academic

performance tend to hold more positive attitudes towards mental illness<sup>22,23</sup>. This suggests that educational experiences and maturity may influence students' perceptions of mental health. Similarly, the consistent willingness to engage with mental health issues among nursing students echoes previous research emphasizing the importance of healthcare professionals' willingness to address mental health concerns<sup>24,25</sup>.

The alignment of our findings with studies by Al-Subaie et al.<sup>22</sup> and Vermunt et al.<sup>23</sup>, indicating that older students and those with higher academic performance tend to hold more positive attitudes towards mental illness, underscores the potential influence of educational experiences and maturity on students' perceptions of mental health. As students' progress through their academic journey and gain exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, they may develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the complexities of mental health issues. This enhanced understanding may contribute to the cultivation of more empathetic and compassionate attitudes towards individuals experiencing mental illness.

Moreover, the consistent willingness to engage with mental health issues among nursing students resonates with previous research emphasizing the importance of healthcare professionals' readiness to address mental health concerns. Balderston et al.<sup>24</sup> and Al-Gelban<sup>25</sup> highlight the crucial role of healthcare professionals, including nurses, in providing comprehensive care that encompasses both physical and mental health aspects. The willingness of nursing students to engage with mental health issues suggests a proactive approach to addressing the holistic needs of patients, aligning with the evolving paradigm of integrated healthcare delivery.

Furthermore, fostering a culture of openness and acceptance regarding mental health within healthcare education programs can further promote students' willingness to engage with mental health issues. By providing opportunities for meaningful discussions, experiential learning, and exposure to diverse perspectives, educational institutions can empower nursing students to become advocates for mental health awareness and de-stigmatization in their future practice settings.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of educational experiences, maturity, and institutional support in shaping nursing students' attitudes toward mental illness and their readiness to engage with mental health issues. By recognizing and addressing these factors, educators and healthcare institutions can play a vital role in preparing nursing students to effectively navigate and contribute to the complex landscape of mental health care.

## CONCLUSION

**This study sheds light on the mental health literacy of Saudi nursing students, revealing a generally positive level of understanding, attitudes, and willingness to engage with mental health issues. While the findings highlight strengths in mental health literacy, there is room for improvement through targeted interventions, curriculum enhancements, and institutional support. By addressing the recommendations outlined and acknowledging the study's limitations, nursing education institutions can play a pivotal role in equipping future nurses with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address mental health challenges in clinical practice, ultimately contributing to improved patient care and well-being.**

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**Competing Interest:** None

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