

Self-Efficacy and Psychological Well-Being among First Year Nursing Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The transition to higher education increases first-year nursing students' risk of psychological vulnerability. Self-efficacy has been identified as a potential protective factor; however, evidence focusing on early-stage nursing students remains limited. This study aimed to examine the association and predictive role of general self-efficacy on psychological well-being among first-year nursing students.

Research Methodology: An analytical cross-sectional study was conducted among 119 first-year nursing students at a public university in Indonesia using convenience sampling. Data were collected through an online survey using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) and the WHO-5 Well-Being Index. Descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, Pearson correlation, and linear regression analyses were performed using SPSS with $\alpha = 0.05$.

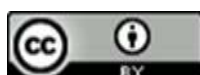
Results: Self-efficacy demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with psychological well-being ($r = 0.42$; 95% CI: 0.26–0.56; $p < 0.001$). Linear regression analysis showed that self-efficacy significantly predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.42$; $p < 0.001$), explaining 18% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.18$). No significant gender differences were identified.

Conclusion: Self-efficacy is a significant psychological determinant of well-being among first-year nursing students. Early educational interventions aimed at strengthening self-efficacy may enhance students' mental well-being and academic adjustment.

Keywords: Nursing Students; Psychological Well-Being; Self-Efficacy.



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INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being among university students has emerged as a growing global concern, particularly during the transition into higher education (Alharbi et al., 2026). International reports consistently indicate rising levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress among first-year students, reflecting the psychological burden associated with academic adjustment, social reorientation, and increased autonomy (Azza et al., 2025). Within health professional education, these concerns are amplified. Nursing students, in particular, must simultaneously adapt to demanding theoretical coursework, professional value formation, and expectations of future clinical responsibility. This layered transition creates a high-risk period for compromised psychological well-being at the very beginning of nursing education (Bahari et al., 2025).

At the national level, similar patterns have been observed in higher education institutions, where academic pressure, competitive learning environments, and limited structured mental health support may exacerbate students' vulnerability (Barrington-Moss et al., 2026). In many developing educational contexts, including Indonesia, rapid expansion of higher education has not always been accompanied by proportional strengthening of student psychological support systems (Bayageldi & Kaloğlu Binici, 2024). Locally, nursing programs often emphasize academic rigor and professional discipline from the first semester, potentially intensifying stress during the early adaptation phase (Ben Natan et al., 2025). These contextual realities underscore the urgency of identifying protective psychological resources that may buffer first-year nursing students against reduced well-being (Berdida et al., 2026).

Existing literature highlights self-efficacy as a central psychological resource associated with adaptive functioning in educational settings (Bong et al., 2026). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to manage challenges and execute necessary actions to achieve desired outcomes. Empirical studies across diverse student populations demonstrate that higher self-efficacy is linked to better emotional regulation, stronger academic engagement, and lower psychological distress (Collins et al., 2025). Within nursing education, self-efficacy has been associated with clinical competence, academic persistence, and stress management. However, much of this research has focused on general university samples or students in advanced clinical phases rather than those in the earliest stage of professional formation (Culha, 2025).

Furthermore, while several studies report positive associations between self-efficacy and psychological well-being, the strength and explanatory power of this relationship vary across contexts (Elhadidy et al., 2025). Some findings suggest that self-efficacy accounts for only a modest proportion of variance in well-being, indicating the involvement of additional psychosocial factors (El-Sayed et al., 2025). Other studies emphasize structural variables such as social support, resilience, or academic environment without clearly isolating the predictive contribution of self-efficacy (Erbay Dalli & Pehlivan, 2025). Evidence regarding gender differences is also inconsistent, with some studies reporting disparities and others identifying no significant variation. These inconsistencies signal the need for context-specific and population-specific investigation (Galan-Lominchar et al., 2024).

A critical gap remains in understanding how general self-efficacy predicts psychological well-being among first-year nursing students during the early transition period, particularly in developing educational settings. Few studies have simultaneously examined the association, predictive strength, and potential gender differences using standardized and validated instruments within a single analytical framework. Consequently, evidence guiding early preventive strategies

in nursing education remains limited. The present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the relationship between general self-efficacy and psychological well-being among first-year nursing students within a structured cross-sectional design. Unlike studies that merely describe levels of stress or well-being, this research analytically evaluates the predictive role of self-efficacy using validated measurement tools and inferential statistical modeling. By focusing specifically on the first academic year, this study provides new insights into the psychological dynamics at work during the most vulnerable stage of nursing education. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the association between general self-efficacy and psychological well-being among first-year nursing students. Additionally, the study explored potential gender differences and assessed the extent to which self-efficacy predicts psychological well-being. The findings are expected to provide evidence-driven implications for early mental health promotion strategies within nursing education programs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study employed an analytical cross-sectional design to examine the association and predictive relationship between general self-efficacy and psychological well-being among first-year nursing students. A cross-sectional approach was selected because it enables the assessment of relationships between variables at a single point in time and is appropriate for estimating the strength of association and testing predictive models in non-experimental settings.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at the Department of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia, during the early phase of the 2025 academic semester. The target population consisted of all first-year nursing students enrolled in the program during the study period. Inclusion criteria were: (1) registered as an active first-year nursing student, (2) aged 17 years or older, and (3) willing to participate by providing informed consent. Students who declined participation or submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final analysis. A convenience sampling technique was used because participants were readily accessible within a defined academic cohort. A total of 119 students completed the survey and were included in the analysis. For correlational and regression analyses, the sample size met the general rule of 10–15 observations per predictor variable in linear regression, ensuring adequate statistical power to detect moderate effect sizes.

Variables and Measurement

The independent variable was general self-efficacy, defined operationally as students' perceived belief in their ability to manage academic and personal challenges. The dependent variable was psychological well-being, defined as the subjective evaluation of positive emotional functioning during the previous two weeks. Self-efficacy was measured using the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (exactly true). Total scores range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater perceived self-efficacy. The Indonesian version of the GSES has demonstrated satisfactory construct validity in previous studies. Psychological well-being was assessed using the World Health Organization Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5), consisting of 5 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (0–5). Total raw scores range from 0 to 25, with higher scores reflecting better well-being. Both instruments were administered as primary data through self-reported questionnaires. Internal

consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients within the present sample.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through an online survey platform distributed to eligible students via institutional communication channels. Before questionnaire access, participants received detailed information about the study objectives, procedures, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurances. Electronic informed consent was obtained before survey completion. To ensure data quality, the survey platform was configured to prevent missing responses on mandatory items. Completed datasets were screened for completeness, duplicate entries, and response inconsistencies before statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize demographic characteristics and scale scores. Bivariate analysis was conducted using independent samples t-tests to examine gender differences in self-efficacy and psychological well-being. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to assess the strength and direction of the association between self-efficacy and psychological well-being. A multivariate analysis was conducted using simple linear regression to evaluate the predictive role of self-efficacy for psychological well-being. Regression assumptions, including linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity, were assessed before model interpretation. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed).

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the KEPK STIKes Buleleng (Approval Number: 1005/EC-KEPK-SB/IX/2025) prior to data collection. All participants provided electronic informed consent before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

RESULT

A total of 119 first-year nursing students participated in this study. Descriptive statistics of the main study variables are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (n = 119)

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
General Self-Efficacy	32.08	4.39	18	40
Psychological Well-Being (WHO-5)	13.65	5.58	2	25

The findings indicate that participants demonstrated moderate to high self-efficacy and moderate psychological well-being during the early phase of nursing education. Gender differences in self-efficacy and psychological well-being were examined using independent samples t-tests. Results are summarized in table 2.

Table 2. Gender Differences in Self-Efficacy and Psychological Well-Being

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	p-value
General Self-Efficacy	Male (n=28)	31.72	4.34	> 0.05
	Female (n=101)	32.14	4.42	
Psychological Well-Being (WHO-5)	Male (n=28)	13.72	5.69	> 0.05
	Female (n=101)	13.63	5.59	

There were no statistically significant gender differences in either self-efficacy or psychological well-being ($p > 0.05$), indicating comparable psychological profiles between male and female students during the first academic year. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive association between general self-efficacy and psychological well-being ($r = 0.42$, 95% CI: 0.26–0.56, $p < 0.001$). The magnitude of the correlation indicates a moderate effect size, suggesting that higher perceived self-efficacy is associated with better psychological well-being.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of self-efficacy for psychological well-being. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Well-Being

Predictor	β (Standardized)	95% CI	R ²	p-value
General Self-Efficacy	0.42	0.26–0.56	0.18	< 0.001

Regression analysis demonstrated that general self-efficacy significantly predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 18% of the variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = 0.18$), indicating a meaningful contribution of self-efficacy as a psychological determinant. The positive standardized coefficient confirms that higher self-efficacy is associated with greater psychological well-being. Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence that self-efficacy is a significant and moderately strong predictor of psychological well-being among first-year nursing students. At the same time, gender does not significantly differentiate psychological outcomes in this cohort.

The findings of this study highlight the central role of self-efficacy in shaping psychological well-being among first-year nursing students during the early transition into higher education. Participants generally demonstrated moderate to high perceived self-efficacy alongside moderate psychological well-being, suggesting that although students felt reasonably capable of managing academic demands, their overall emotional condition remained vulnerable to transitional stressors. Analysis revealed a clear positive association between self-efficacy and psychological well-being, indicating that students who perceived themselves as more capable of handling challenges reported better emotional functioning. Importantly, no meaningful gender differences were observed, suggesting that early academic and psychological adaptation processes operate similarly across male and female students within this cohort. Analysis further confirmed that self-efficacy functioned as a significant predictor of psychological well-being, explaining a meaningful proportion of its variation. These findings underscore self-efficacy as a key psychological resource rather than a peripheral attribute. Overall, the results suggest that strengthening students' confidence in their ability to manage academic and personal challenges may represent a strategic entry point for promoting mental well-being during the foundational phase of nursing education.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between general self-efficacy and psychological well-being among first-year nursing students during their transition into higher education. The findings demonstrate a moderate, positive association between self-efficacy and psychological well-being, indicating that students who perceive themselves as capable of managing academic and personal challenges tend to report better emotional well-being. In addition, self-efficacy emerged as a significant predictor of psychological well-being, explaining a meaningful proportion of its variance. Importantly, no statistically significant gender differences were observed in either self-efficacy or psychological well-being (Güvener, 2024). Together, these findings highlight self-efficacy as a central psychological resource during the early phase of nursing education and suggest that gender alone does not appear to be a determining factor in students' psychological adaptation within this cohort (Ho et al., 2026).

The observed association between self-efficacy and psychological well-being can be interpreted within the framework of social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy influences how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to environmental demands. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to appraise academic stressors as manageable challenges rather than as threats (Inuwa & Esmaeilzadeh, 2025). This cognitive appraisal process plays a crucial role in emotional regulation. When academic demands are interpreted as controllable, students experience lower perceived stress and greater psychological stability (Morsy et al., 2025). From a stress and coping perspective, self-efficacy functions as a protective cognitive resource that enhances adaptive coping strategies (Pierce et al., 2026). Students who believe in their capacity to perform effectively are more likely to engage in problem-focused coping, persist in the face of difficulty, and maintain motivation (Schulenberg et al., 2024). Conversely, students with lower self-efficacy may be more vulnerable to avoidance behaviors, rumination, and emotional distress. Thus, the predictive role of self-efficacy observed in this study underscores its conceptual relevance as both a motivational and regulatory mechanism during transitional periods (Shaygan et al., 2026).

Moreover, during the first year of nursing education, professional identity formation begins to take shape. Students are required to internalize expectations related to competence, responsibility, and ethical practice (Suprpto et al., 2024). In this context, self-efficacy may also function as a foundational element of emerging professional confidence. Students who believe they can master academic material and adapt to institutional expectations are likely to experience a stronger sense of coherence and purpose, which contributes to psychological well-being (Smith et al., 2025).

The findings align with a broad body of international research demonstrating a positive relationship between self-efficacy and mental health outcomes among university students. Across diverse educational contexts, self-efficacy has consistently been associated with lower psychological distress, improved emotional regulation, and stronger academic engagement (Turan & Cengiz, 2025). Within nursing education specifically, previous investigations have linked self-efficacy to academic persistence, clinical competence, and stress management. However, much of the existing literature has focused on general university populations or students in advanced stages of nursing training (Yue, Chen, et al., 2025). By concentrating on first-year students, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of psychological adaptation during the earliest and potentially most vulnerable phase of professional education. The absence of gender differences observed in this study aligns with research suggesting that shared academic

demands and institutional structures may exert a stronger influence on student well-being than gender alone (Yue, Lin, et al., 2025).

The convergence between the present findings and previous research strengthens the conceptual position of self-efficacy as a key determinant of psychological well-being. Although the association observed was moderate, it confirms that self-efficacy functions as a meaningful psychological resource rather than a peripheral factor. At the same time, the magnitude of the effect suggests that multiple interacting determinants, including contextual and institutional influences, shape well-being. Variations across studies regarding predictive strength and gender differences may reflect differences in educational culture, structural support systems, and socio-economic environments. In structured academic settings with standardized expectations and shared educational demands, gender disparities may be reduced, whereas in more unequal contexts, gender-related pressures may exert stronger psychological effects. Conceptually, the findings emphasize that self-efficacy should be understood as a developable capacity. Educational strategies such as mentoring, structured orientation, skills training, and formative feedback can strengthen students' confidence and adaptive coping. Systemically, institutions should adopt multidimensional mental health promotion frameworks that integrate academic support, peer engagement, and accessible counseling services. Embedding psychological resource-building within early nursing education may contribute to sustainable well-being and long-term professional resilience.

Strengths and Limitations

This study contributes to the literature by focusing on first-year nursing students, a psychologically vulnerable yet underexamined population during the transition into higher education. The use of standardized and validated instruments strengthens measurement reliability and enhances comparability with existing research. Moreover, the analytical emphasis on predictive modeling moves beyond descriptive reporting, clarifying the conceptual role of self-efficacy as a determinant of psychological well-being. However, several limitations warrant consideration. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the reliance on convenience sampling within a single institution limits generalizability. Self-reported measures may also introduce response bias. In addition, the model did not incorporate broader psychosocial variables such as social support, academic stress, personality characteristics, or institutional climate. Future longitudinal, multi-center research integrating multidimensional frameworks is necessary to understand better the dynamic mechanisms shaping psychological adaptation in nursing education.

CONCLUSION

This study directly addressed its objective by examining the relationship between general self-efficacy and psychological well-being among first-year nursing students. The findings demonstrate that self-efficacy is positively and significantly associated with psychological well-being and functions as a meaningful predictor during the early transition into nursing education. Students who perceive themselves as capable of managing academic and personal challenges tend to report better emotional functioning. No significant gender differences were observed, indicating that psychological adaptation during the first academic year operates similarly across male and female students.

These results highlight self-efficacy as a critical psychological resource in supporting students' mental well-being. Therefore, nursing education institutions should prioritize structured

interventions that strengthen students' confidence and adaptive coping capacities. Evidence-based strategies may include mentoring programs, early academic orientation, skills-based learning, formative feedback mechanisms, and accessible psychological support services. Integrating self-efficacy enhancement into first-year curricula may contribute to sustainable well-being, improved academic adjustment, and long-term professional resilience among nursing students.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. This study received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions

Wulida Litaqia conceptualized and designed the study, supervised data collection, performed data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Ainun Najib Febrya Rahman contributed to data collection, data management, and literature review. Fadma Aji Pramudita assisted in data analysis and manuscript preparation. Sri Yulian Hunowu contributed to the methodological review and critical revision of the manuscript. Ryan Nuari Pratama contributed to the interpretation of findings and final manuscript revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and the need to protect participants' confidentiality.

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