

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A HORTICULTURE THERAPY CLASS ON PERCEIVED EMOTIONS FOR COLLEGE NURSING STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Horticultural therapy (HT) is a dynamic, guided therapeutic process that involves healthcare providers teaching patients to work with plants and natural materials. Through engaging in horticultural activities, patients achieve specific goals such as improved physical strength, memory, cognitive abilities, task initiation, language skills, and socialization. The aim of the study was to evaluate the efficacy of a horticultural therapy (HT) class for college nursing students who perceive high levels of stress in their academic and clinical nursing studies.

**Method:** The study was conducted at a health science university in an urban city of northern Taiwan. After explaining the procedure to and receiving consent from participants, a total of 116 college, nursing students, aged 20-39 years, mean age 26.90 (4.72), all females were recruited into the study. One group pretest and posttest design and convenient sampling were adopted. Participants received a pretest one week prior to the three-week HT class. The three-week HT class was conducted once per week with two hours for each section. Learning was evaluated with a posttest one week after the end of the HT class. Personal characteristics and outcome data was collected by a constructed questionnaire including five parts: the demographic section, the attitude towards HT, the knowledge of HT, the perceived emotional status, and the Chinese State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (C-STAI).

**Results:** After the three-week HT class, student-perceived emotional management and status significantly improved. While students perceived greater HT knowledge, there was no significant difference in the HT knowledge pre and post-test scores. While a decrease in anxiety was found, it failed to reach a 0.05 level of significance. It showed relationships between pretest emotional status and previous experience with the decreased level of anxiety in the results of the multiple regression analysis.

**Conclusion:** Engaging students in experiencing HT during an academic class could improve college nursing students' emotional status. Further refinement of the HT class and research design are suggested, such as adding a control group and involving more therapeutic activities into the class.

**Keywords:** horticultural therapy, emotion management, anxiety, college nursing student