

Profile of Self-Sabotage Among First-Year Undergraduate Nursing Students

Indah Lutfiah Nur Solehah¹, Reni Nuryani¹, Heri Ridwan¹

¹University of Educatin, Sumedang Campus, Indonesia

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Corresponding Author :

Indah Lutfiah Nur Solehah

E-mail :

indahlutfiah12@upi.edu

ABSTRACT

Background & Objective: Undergraduate nursing students in their early years often face complex academic demands, such as adjusting to independent learning, understanding theoretical material, and mastering practical skills. These conditions have the potential to cause psychological stress that can develop into self-sabotage – that is, maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors that hinder academic progress. This study aims to describe self-sabotage among first-year undergraduate nursing students. **Method:** This study employed a quantitative descriptive design with the population consisting of all undergraduate nursing students in the class of 2025. Total sampling was used, yielding a sample size of 159 students. Data were collected using a self-sabotage questionnaire distributed online. Data were presented in the form of frequency distributions and percentages, while data analysis utilized univariate statistics. **Result:** The analysis revealed that the majority of first-year students fell into the moderate category of self-sabotage, accounting for 34.59 percent. These findings indicate that self-sabotage behaviors are already evident among first-year students, although they have not yet reached a severe level. **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that first-year undergraduate nursing students generally exhibit moderate levels of self-sabotage; therefore, early academic attention and guidance are necessary to support their adjustment process and the development of their academic potential.

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Introduction

Nursing students face high academic demands because they must understand various complex and interrelated health science concepts (Labrague et al., 2017). The

dense nursing curriculum, numerous foundational courses, and the demands of developing professional attitudes and empathy from the beginning of their studies make the learning process more challenging (Turner & McCarthy, 2017). These conditions require high levels of time management, discipline, and mental resilience to ensure that competencies can be developed optimally (Cao et al., 2025). This complexity can lead to psychological distress in the form of stress, exhaustion, and decreased learning motivation (Andargeery et al., 2024).

First-year students are the group most vulnerable to such pressures because they are at the initial stage of adapting to a learning system that is more independent and competitive than that of their previous educational level (Chernomas et al., 2023). The results of a study by Rosyidah (2020) showed that the level of severe stress among nursing students reached 90% in the first year, then decreased to 89% in the second year and 73% in the third year. These findings indicate that the early period of university education is a crucial phase in the academic adaptation process of nursing students, in which the inability to adapt can affect both learning performance and mental health (Tahulending et al., 2023).

During the early semesters, nursing students face complex adaptation challenges when entering the university environment (Rahmawati et al., 2025). They must not only adjust to a more independent learning system but also to the distinctive learning patterns of nursing, which require an understanding of theoretical concepts as a foundation for practical-based learning activities and as preparation for facing learning demands in subsequent semesters (Chernomas et al., 2023). Unpreparedness in adapting to the learning pace, more rigorous evaluation methods, and high academic demands can lead to internal pressures such as anxiety, a lack of self-confidence, and doubts about their abilities as prospective healthcare professionals (Dogham et al., 2024).

If these pressures are not managed properly, students may experience obstacles in the learning process due to the development of negative thought patterns regarding their abilities. In the psychological domain, this condition is associated with the emergence of the phenomenon of self-sabotage, which occurs when individuals consciously or unconsciously hinder or undermine their own efforts to achieve success (Nurhaliza & Sahputra, 2024). This phenomenon arises when there is an internal conflict between the desire to succeed and the fear of failure, causing individuals to unconsciously engage in actions that move them away from the goals they wish to achieve (Jakubik, 2024). High academic pressure, including a heavy practical workload and the demands of mastering theory and skills simultaneously, can place students at risk of experiencing obstacles in achieving competence and academic goals. If this pattern is not promptly addressed, its effects may develop into decreased academic performance in subsequent semesters (F. Zhang, 2022).

Self-sabotage can also be associated with physiological responses among students. Chronic stress resulting from demanding study requirements can increase cortisol levels, disrupt sleep, cause fatigue, headaches, digestive problems, and weaken the immune system. If these physiological responses are not managed appropriately, students' mental conditions may deteriorate, increasing feelings of anxiety, frustration, and emotional exhaustion. The accumulation of physical and mental pressure often encourages students to unconsciously engage in protective measures, such as postponing assignments, avoiding studying, or withdrawing from academic interactions, in which these actions represent forms of self-sabotage

(Maroño, 2023). Meanwhile, the effects of self-sabotage can be observed in several aspects, including academically, where postponing assignments, avoiding studying, or withdrawing from learning activities can reduce understanding of the material, hinder the mastery of clinical skills, and increase the risk of failing assessments, resulting in inconsistent academic performance and difficulty achieving basic competencies (Li et al., 2023). Psychologically, these habits reinforce negative thought patterns, reduce self-confidence, increase performance anxiety, and potentially lead to burnout from the early stages of university education (Prakash et al., 2023).

Several previous studies provide an important foundation for understanding self-sabotage among university students. The study by Nurhaliza & Sahputra (2024) highlighted that students demonstrate tendencies to engage in self-sabotage through procrastination, perfectionism, negative self-talk, and fear of failure, which directly have the potential to hinder personal achievement. Furthermore, the study by Zhang (2022) emphasized that this behavior is closely related to psychological aspects such as self-esteem and learning motivation, in which low self-esteem can strengthen students' tendency to engage in self-sabotage, negatively affecting their academic engagement. In addition, a study by Al-aida & Islam (2024) showed that young individuals raised in environments with parents who are emotionally immature (emotionally immature parents) tend to exhibit higher levels of self-sabotage. This study emphasizes that self-sabotage does not only arise from internal factors but is also influenced by the environment that shapes individuals' coping patterns, in which internal coping styles tend to suppress self-sabotage, whereas external coping styles increase the tendency toward such behavior.

Based on previous studies, most research has focused on students' internal factors, such as procrastination, perfectionism, and coping styles, as well as the influence of the family environment. However, these studies are generally broad in scope and have not specifically examined undergraduate nursing students, particularly those in the early stages of their education who are undergoing a critical transition and require adjustment to high academic demands (Rahmawati et al., 2025). This transitional phase requires the ability to adapt and manage pressure so that students can participate in the nursing learning process optimally (Tahulending et al., 2023).

To strengthen the identification of the problem, the researcher conducted a preliminary study through semi-structured interviews with 7 early-stage nursing students. The interview results showed that all respondents reported experiencing difficulties in adapting to the demanding learning pace, particularly when the volume of assignments increased. Meanwhile, 5 out of 7 students also revealed that when facing academic pressure, they tended to demonstrate responses that could potentially hinder their personal development, such as distancing themselves from difficult material, postponing learning assessments, or shifting their focus to activities considered easier. In addition, 2 other students reported academic difficulties in the form of delaying assignments and fear of failure, but they were still able to overcome them. Based on these conditions, the researcher is interested in further investigating "The Description of Self-Sabotage among Early-Stage Undergraduate Nursing Students."

Objective

The objective of this study is to determine the description of self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students.

Method

This study is a quantitative study with a descriptive design aimed at describing the level of self-sabotage among early-stage nursing students. The study population consisted of all 159 early-stage nursing students from the 2025 cohort in the Nursing Study Program. The sampling technique used was total sampling, in which the entire population was included as the research sample. The research instrument was a self-sabotage questionnaire adapted from Nurhaliza & Sahputra (2024), consisting of 37 statements to measure the tendency toward self-sabotage. Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms during a single data collection period. The data were presented in the form of frequency distributions and percentages, then analyzed using univariate analysis to describe the categories of students' self-sabotage levels. Data processing was carried out with the assistance of statistical software. This study was conducted during the odd semester of the current academic year in the Nursing Study Program.

Results

Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire distribution, the characteristics of respondents are presented based on gender:

TABLE 1. Respondents' Characteristics

<i>Self-Sabotage Category</i>	<i>Frequency (n)</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	21	13.00
Female	138	87.00
<i>Total</i>	159	100.00

Based on Table 1, the characteristics of respondents show that out of 159 early-stage undergraduate nursing students who participated in the study, the majority of respondents were female, totaling 138 students or 87%. Meanwhile, male respondents numbered 21 students, accounting for 13% of the total sample. This composition illustrates that the respondent population in this study was dominated by female students. This condition is understood as a general representation of gender distribution in nursing education, which empirically often shows higher female participation than male participation. Nevertheless, the presence of male respondents remains an important part of the research data because it provides diversity in participant characteristics.

TABLE 2. Distribution of Self-Sabotage Behavior among Early-Stage Students

<i>Self-Sabotage Category</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Very Low	7	4.40
Low	36	22.64
Moderate	55	34.59
High	44	27.67
Very High	17	10.69
<i>Total</i>	159	100.00

Based on Table 2, the distribution of self-sabotage among 159 respondents shows that the moderate category represented the largest proportion, consisting of 55 students (34.6%). The findings indicate that some early-stage undergraduate nursing students have experienced tendencies toward self-sabotage at a moderate level, such as procrastination, doubts about their abilities, or avoidance of academic demands, but have not reached the most severe level.

Discussion

Respondents' Characteristics

Based on the results of the study, the characteristics of respondents based on gender were dominated by female students. Of the 159 early-stage undergraduate nursing students who participated as respondents, 138 were female (86.8%) and 21 were male (13%). This proportion confirms that female participation in this study was considerably higher than male participation. This condition is understood as a demographic representation of the respondents, reflecting the composition of the subjects at the time the study was conducted. In the present study, the presentation of respondents' characteristics serves to provide initial context regarding the participants' backgrounds. However, the gender distribution is not intended to draw conclusions regarding differences in self-sabotage behavior between female and male students, as the current study focuses on the general mapping of self-sabotage among early-stage nursing students.

The dominance of female respondents in this study is related to the characteristics of nursing education and the nursing profession, which are socially often associated with caring, empathy, patience, attentiveness, and the ability to provide humane services to those in need. Within certain social constructions, these values are still frequently associated with women's roles, resulting in women's interest in the nursing field tending to be higher than that of men. Nevertheless, this perspective needs to be understood proportionately, as nursing is a scientific profession that is open to all genders. Therefore, the composition of respondents dominated by women in this study is more appropriately interpreted as a demographic representation of the population of early-stage nursing students, rather than as a basis for stating the existence of a particular tendency toward vulnerability or resilience to self-sabotage behavior.

The findings of the present study are related to the results of a previous study conducted by Opoku et al. (2025), which emphasized that more than 90% of students in nursing and midwifery education in Ghana were female. This similarity indicates that the dominance of women in nursing education does not occur only in the local context; women's participation in nursing also represents a broader tendency in the field of healthcare education. Furthermore, a study conducted by Jadid et al. (2025) emphasized that nursing is still perceived as a field more closely associated with women's roles, resulting in male students frequently facing social barriers due to gender stereotypes that develop within society.

Description of Self-Sabotage

Based on the results of the research data distribution presented in Table 4.2, the description of self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students shows that the moderate category had the highest proportion, consisting of 55 respondents (34.6%). This finding indicates that self-sabotage among students has not

reached a high level, but has emerged in various academic activities they undertake. According to Azwar (2015), the moderate category indicates that an individual's score falls within the average range of the distribution, meaning that the measured characteristic is at a moderate level. A moderate level indicates that the tendency toward self-sabotage is neither low nor high, but has emerged and is apparent in certain academic situations, although it has not yet become a dominant or consistently occurring pattern in students' academic lives.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that the tendency to engage in self-sabotage has become apparent among some students, although it has not yet become fully dominant. This condition also indicates a vulnerability that needs to be considered because if academic pressure, achievement demands, and difficulties in self-adjustment are not managed properly, self-sabotage may increase and hinder students' academic achievement (Barutc, 2019).

The dominance of the moderate category in this study is consistent with the concept of self-sabotage as a negative form of behavior that can occur consciously or unconsciously and has the potential to hinder the achievement of an individual's goals. Zhang (2022) emphasized that self-sabotage can emerge through procrastination, justification-seeking, repeated complaints, avoidance of responsibility, and actions that have an impact on declining academic performance and psychological well-being. Based on this statement, students in the moderate category cannot immediately be categorized as experiencing severe problems. However, the moderate category can be understood as an early symptom that requires attention. If this pattern is not recognized and managed from an early stage, the tendency experienced by students may develop into more serious obstacles.

The moderate category is an important finding to consider because it indicates that self-sabotage among students has not reached a very severe condition, but has begun to emerge consistently in daily academic activities. This condition indicates that students are still able to fulfill academic demands, while at the same time beginning to use less adaptive coping patterns when facing academic pressure. Self-sabotage behaviors, such as postponing assignments, doubting one's abilities, or avoiding certain academic situations, may develop gradually and often without students being aware of them. If these behaviors continue, they have the potential to increase academic stress, psychological exhaustion, and even academic burnout among early-stage nursing students (Widjaya, 2018).

The moderate category in this study indicates that self-sabotage among early-stage nursing students may be influenced by various factors that encourage the emergence of self-inhibiting behaviors. During nursing education, students face academic demands in the form of assignments, examinations, practical sessions, and adjustment to a new learning environment (Donovan et al., 2026). Students' inability to manage academic demands, organize study time, and balance academic pressure may increase the tendency for self-sabotage to emerge. In addition, an unsupportive social environment, limited emotional support, and pressure to achieve good academic results may also reinforce the emergence of academic avoidance among students (Nurhaliza & Sahputra, 2024). This condition is consistent with the studies conducted by Nurhaliza & Sahputra (2024) and Al-aida & Islam (2024) regarding factors associated with self-sabotage, which state that academic pressure, psychological conditions, less adaptive coping patterns, and the social environment may influence the emergence of self-sabotaging behaviors among students.

Self-sabotage among early-stage nursing students is not only related to individual factors but is also influenced by the process of adapting to the nursing education environment, which has relatively high academic and clinical practice demands. Early-stage students are in a transitional phase from the school environment to professional healthcare education, which requires critical thinking skills, discipline, academic responsibility, and readiness in practical skills (Nugraheni et al., 2020). These changes may generate psychological pressure, particularly when students feel that they are not yet able to meet the expected standards (Gause et al., 2024). Under such conditions, some students tend to develop negative thought patterns, such as fear of failure, fear of making mistakes, or feeling that they are not sufficiently competent compared with other students.

The findings of this study are supported by research conducted by Nurhaliza and Sahputra (2024), which stated that self-sabotage among students is influenced by the inability to manage academic pressure, low self-confidence, and a tendency to use ineffective coping strategies. In addition, Zhang (2022) explained that self-sabotage may emerge through procrastination, avoidance of responsibility, justification-seeking, and other actions that have an impact on declining academic performance and students' psychological well-being. In the context of nursing students, these conditions may be observed through habits of delaying assignment completion, inadequate preparation for practical sessions, and a tendency to avoid academic situations perceived as creating pressure or a risk of failure.

When associated with the characteristics of self-sabotage according to Zhang (2022), Jakubik (2024), and Nurhaliza & Sahputra (2024), the results of the study indicate that students are beginning to demonstrate forms of self-inhibition, such as procrastination, fear of failure, negative self-talk, and maladaptive perfectionism. These characteristics emerge when students feel afraid of being unable to meet academic demands, worry about making mistakes, or hold negative evaluations of their own abilities. According to the Cognitive Theory proposed by Beck (1979), negative thought patterns can influence an individual's emotional responses and behavior. Thoughts such as "I am not capable," "I will fail," or "My results will not be perfect" may generate anxiety, stress, and doubts about one's abilities, which subsequently encourage students to engage in self-sabotage as a form of avoidance of academic pressure.

The high category occupied the second position in the distribution of self-sabotage, consisting of 44 respondents (27.7%), while the very high category was found among 17 respondents (10.7%). When the two categories are combined, there are 61 students (38.4%) who demonstrate a tendency toward self-sabotage at a level requiring serious attention. This proportion indicates that more than one-third of respondents may experience stronger academic and psychological obstacles. At the high and very high levels, self-sabotage is no longer limited to postponing assignments, but may be associated with fear of failure, maladaptive perfectionism, low self-confidence, and a tendency to avoid challenging academic situations. This finding is consistent with Jakubik (2024), who views self-sabotage as a form of maladaptive self-defense in which individuals hinder their own development due to doubt, fear of failure, or pressure from certain standards.

Referring to the Cognitive Theory proposed by Beck (1979), the description of self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students may be interpreted as a consequence of negative thought patterns that influence emotional states and

behavioral choices. Thought patterns such as negative self-talk, maladaptive perfectionism, and fear of failure may lead to anxiety, stress, psychological exhaustion, and decreased learning motivation. These conditions have the potential to encourage the emergence of self-inhibiting behaviors, such as the tendency to postpone assignment completion, withdraw from academic interactions, and fail to make optimal use of learning opportunities. In nursing education, thoughts such as "I am not capable," "I will fail," or "My results will not be perfect" may cause students to hesitate to try, delay practical preparation, and avoid discussions and clinical activities.

The results of the study regarding self-sabotage clarify that self-sabotaging behavior among early-stage undergraduate nursing students is influenced by the relationship between academic pressure, psychological conditions, the social environment, coping patterns, and family background. Academic factors may encourage students to procrastinate, reduce motivation, or avoid learning responsibilities. Psychological factors may reinforce doubts about one's abilities, while limited social support may make students more vulnerable to choosing avoidance as a response to pressure. According to Cognitive Theory, these various factors may form cognitive distortions, such as negative self-talk, fear of failure, and negative self-evaluation, which subsequently generate negative emotions in the form of anxiety, stress, exhaustion, and low motivation (Beck, 1979). These conditions affect students' psychological, academic, social, and physical aspects, such as decreased self-esteem, weakened motivation, and disruption of students' mental and physical health balance, which may ultimately worsen academic achievement if not promptly recognized and addressed.

The low category, which included 36 respondents (22.6%), and the very low category, which included 7 respondents (4.4%), indicate that some students have relatively better abilities to control their tendency toward self-sabotage and respond to academic pressure. This condition is associated with protective factors, such as effective coping strategies, positive social support, self-confidence, and a supportive academic environment. According to Nurhaliza and Sahputra (2024), less effective coping styles may increase avoidance and procrastination behaviors, whereas adaptive coping helps students face academic demands more constructively. In addition, Zhang (2022) emphasized that self-sabotage may emerge through the avoidance of responsibility. Therefore, the low proportion in these categories indicates that some students possess the ability to manage priorities, maintain motivation, and prevent self-inhibiting behaviors from developing into more serious problems.

When examined based on the classification of the seven self-sabotage indicators, the most dominant form among respondents was maladaptive perfectionism, with a percentage of 71.95%. This finding indicates that some early-stage undergraduate nursing students tend to set high achievement standards for themselves, have difficulty accepting shortcomings, and feel pressured when the results they obtain do not meet their expectations. In nursing education, high academic and clinical skills demands may encourage students to establish excessively high standards of success, thereby generating fear of making mistakes and doubts about their abilities. This condition is consistent with the study by Widjaya (2018), which found that first-year nursing students had moderate to high levels of perfectionism and that perfectionism was positively associated with academic stress. The study explained that nursing students tend to set high standards, conduct overly critical self-evaluations, and feel anxious when making mistakes or failing to achieve the expected results.

The dominance of maladaptive perfectionism in this study also indicates that some nursing students tend to view academic achievement as the primary benchmark of their success. According to the study by Flett et al. (2015), students with maladaptive perfectionism generally set extremely high standards, have difficulty accepting mistakes, and tend to engage in excessive self-evaluation. These conditions may make students more vulnerable to experiencing academic anxiety because they feel that they must always achieve perfect results. When the expectations they establish are not met, students may experience disappointment in themselves, lose motivation, and eventually choose to avoid academic assignments or challenges as a form of self-protection against the possibility of failure. Thus, maladaptive perfectionism can become a form of self-sabotage that hinders students' academic development.

However, these findings need to be understood by distinguishing between high achievement standards and maladaptive perfectionism. High standards and the motivation to achieve the best results are not always associated with negative effects. Research by Park et al. (2020) showed that perfectionistic strivings, namely the drive to achieve high standards, may be positively associated with academic achievement through the ability to conduct accurate self-evaluation. In the context of nursing students, this indicates that the motivation to achieve good results may support the learning process when accompanied by realistic self-evaluation. Conversely, when high standards are accompanied by unrealistic demands, concerns about mistakes, and excessive self-evaluation, the condition is more indicative of maladaptive perfectionism, as identified as the dominant indicator in this study.

Perfectionism among early-stage nursing students may emerge as a result of the process of adapting to a university environment that differs from the school environment. Early-stage students are required to follow intensive learning activities, understand complex material, maintain academic grades, and adapt to the demands of nursing practical skills. These conditions encourage students to strive for their best performance in order to meet the expectations of themselves, lecturers, and parents. In addition, a competitive academic environment may encourage students to continually compare their achievements with those of other students, leading to the desire to appear perfect at all times. Widjaya (2018) explained that perfectionism may be influenced by high academic demands, achievement pressure, criticism from the environment, and competition among students, which cause individuals to fear failure and feel dissatisfied with the results they achieve.

If self-sabotage is not recognized and managed from an early stage, it may affect various aspects of students' lives, both academically and psychologically. Zhang (2022) explained that self-sabotage may lead to decreased learning motivation, increased academic stress, low self-confidence, and reduced academic performance among students. In addition, according to Zarshenas et al. (2019), self-sabotage that occurs continuously may also affect students' psychological well-being, such as the emergence of anxiety, mental exhaustion, and difficulties in adapting to the demands of nursing education. Therefore, the high proportion of the moderate category and the dominance of maladaptive perfectionism indicate that self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students is related to the process of adapting to academic demands, psychological pressure, and a competitive nursing education environment. Early detection and support are needed to prevent self-sabotage from

developing into more severe academic and psychological obstacles among nursing students.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the profile of self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Sumedang Campus, cohort 2025, shows varying levels of self-sabotage. Of the 159 respondents, the moderate category had the largest proportion, consisting of 55 students (34.6%), followed by the high category with 44 students (27.7%), the low category with 36 students (22.6%), the very high category with 17 students (10.7%), and the very low category with 7 students (4.4%). These results indicate that self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students was most commonly found in the moderate category. This finding may illustrate that, during the early stages of nursing education, students face academic demands and an adjustment process to the college environment, as reflected in the predominance of moderate levels of self-sabotage.

In addition to the overall description of self-sabotage levels, based on the classification of the seven self-sabotage indicators, the most dominant indicator among the respondents was maladaptive perfectionism, with a percentage of 71.95%. This finding indicates that maladaptive perfectionism was the most prominent indicator in the self-sabotage profile of early-stage undergraduate nursing students compared to the other indicators.

Overall, this study shows that self-sabotage among early-stage undergraduate nursing students occurs at varying levels, with the moderate category being the most frequently identified. The findings of this study provide an overview of the condition of self-sabotage among students in the early stages of nursing education and may serve as a basis for providing attention and support to students from the beginning of their college education.

In general, this study emphasizes that self-sabotaging behavior has emerged since the early stages of college among nursing students, with varying levels. These variations reflect differences in students' ability to adapt and manage themselves in responding to academic pressure. Therefore, attention to psychological aspects is needed as part of efforts to support the academic success of nursing students.

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