

A REVIEW ON: MEDICAL STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

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ABSTRACT:

Mental health is one of the most critical aspects of medical students' life. Unfortunately, many studies found that the prevalence of serious mental health problems among medical students is high. This high prevalence is due to many factors such as environmental factors, perfectionism, and insomnia, and obesity. Furthermore, severe mental health problems may have negative impacts on medical students. For example, mental health issues may cause physical illness, or it may affect their social life. Luckily, there are solutions to mental health issues. Visiting counseling centers and creating appropriate studying schedules are possible solutions.

Keywords: Medical students, Depression, Perfectionism, Mental Health, Counseling center.

INTRODUCTION:

Mental health is an essential part of medical students' life. It affects their studying progress. For instance, medical students who are creative and successful in their field usually have a healthy mentality and well-being. Alas, medical students' tasks and studies are heavy and require high effort, so students need a good mentality to cope with such arduous tasks. Moreover, having poor mental health will lead to experiencing more difficulty than usual. Nowadays, numerous medical field students come across complex and new courses that demand responsibility and commitment, but in some cases even if they are responsible, they still undergo mental issues such as anxiety and stress that impede their studying journey. The objective of this article is to shed light on the most common mental health issues that numerous medical students encounter during their college years. As well as showing the prevalence of these mental health issues among medical students and the factors contributing to those mental

health issues then proposing some of the possible solutions.

THE PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS:

The prevalence of stress:

Medical school is well known for its stressful life. Also, medical students have a high incidence of stress. The prevalence of stress is proved by the cross-sectional study "Prevalence of stress among medical students in Jizan University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," by Sani M et al. (2012) [1]. In the study, 385 male and female students from the college of medicine were included. Table 1 shows the details. Figure 1 shows the prevalence of stress. The prevalence among males was 64%. For females, it was 77%. It has been found that the whole prevalence among medical students is 71.9%. Furthermore, this percentage clearly shows that stress is highly spread among medical students [1]

Table 1. Student profile			
Variables	Groups	Number	%
Gender	Male	181	47.0
	Female	204	53.0
Year of study	First	58	15.1
	Second	110	28.6
	Third	70	18.2
	Fourth	98	25.5
	Fifth	49	12.7

The prevalence of depression:

The prevalence of depression is a significant concern in medical schools. Unfortunately, many universities suffer from a high rate of occurrence of depression. For example, in Taibah University, Madinah, Saudi Arabia, a cross-sectional study revealed that from 555 medical students, around 28.3% of them suffer from depression [2].

A similar conducted study in Umm Al-Qura University found that the prevalence was 30.9% among 136 students [3].

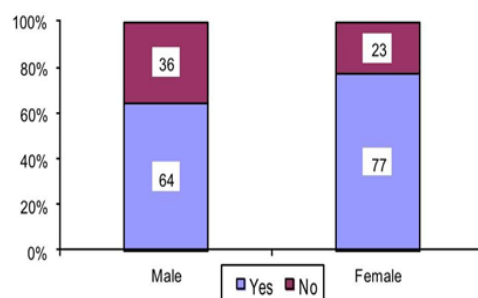


Figure 1. Stress vs. gender

FACTORS FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES:

Environmental Factors:

Many environmental factors affect the students' mental health. First, students might feel homesick. Numerous new medical students, who live on campus, miss their homes and yearn for the support of their family and friends. In addition, students have to endure the immense pressure of having to keep up a good grade, so they can make their parents proud of them. Third, bullying is a universal stress factor among students. Even in college, students have to face many hostilities and bullying, which lower their self-esteem. Furthermore, some courses make the students experience new events. To elaborate,

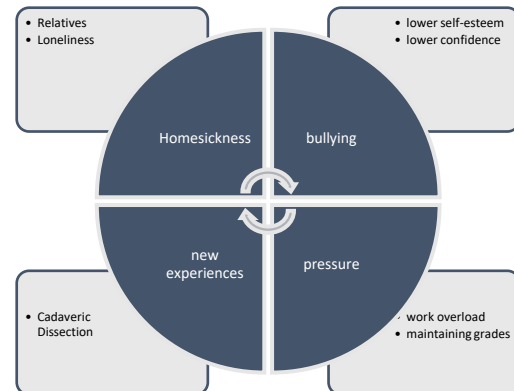


Figure 2. Environmental factors

Cadaveric Dissection is essential to visualize theoretical data. However, some students might fear such an experience because they have never seen it in their life before [4].

Perfectionism:

Numerous students in medical college undergo disappointment over their grades because they were ranked at the top of their high school. Furthermore, these students have set high standards because of their expectations and have tried hard as they are challenging to achieve. However, they often have excessive stress as medical college is overloaded with studies and demanding courses. Thus, they start losing their self-confidence and feel inferior after experiencing such an incident [5].

Insomnia and obesity:

Medical students are potential patients for poor sleep disorders and insomnia because of their heavy academic workload. Additionally, it has been found that there is a correlation between sleep deprivation and obesity. To illustrate, many doctors and medical field students face sleep disorders, and their time for leisure and physical activities has decreased significantly [6]. Moreover, researchers have found that sleep-deprived patients' appetite has increased as their satiety-inducing hormone levels have decreased. Also, sleeping disorders and obesity are colossal factors for stress and mental health issues.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON MEDICAL STUDENTS:

Mental health is considered an essential factor as it plays a distinctive role in medical students' lives, so many students are influenced by mental health in different situations. First, it is challenging for medical students to deal with high stress and anxiety daily. As a result, many medical students feel disparate in some specific

phase in their learning journey, and they are no longer capable of coping with this kind of feeling that leads them to quit or give up on medical studying eventually.

Consequently, they will not have enough time like usual to spend it with family and friends. This situation is mainly linked with social isolation issues as they begin to lose their communication skills with the public because of the time spent on college. Finally, as mental health is strongly related to physical health, medical students who face extreme mental health disorders such as depression, burnout, anxiety, etc... are exposed to physical health issues.

SOLUTIONS FOR MEDICAL EDUCATORS TO REDUCE MENTAL PROBLEMS:

Usually, the counseling centers educate students on how they can cope and manage stress and its harmful effects. Some of the best techniques to cope with stress and other mental problems are: 1- exercising and any physical activities can improve concentration, self-confidence, alertness, and sleep quality. 2- In addition, practicing an appropriate sleeping habit can also reduce stress and other mental health problems. 3- sharing disorders with classmates and family can increase social engagement, lowering the prevalence and incidence of further problems. 4- balancing between studying and not studying can also help.

HEALTH SERVICES FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS:

One of the most effective ways to cope with mental health problems is using mental health services. However, the rate of using mental health services among medical students is relatively low. In 1994, a cross-sectional survey was conducted on first and second-year medical

Barriers to Use of Mental Health Services Reported by 46 Depressed First- and Second-year Medical Students, University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine, 1994	
Barrier	No. (%)
Lack of time	22 (48)
Lack of confidentiality	17 (37)
Concern that "No one will be able to understand my problems"	15 (33)
Stigma of mental health care	14 (30)
Feeling that "My problems are not important"	14 (30)
Cost	13 (28)
Fear of unwanted intervention	12 (26)
Feeling that "Using services will mean that I am weak"	12 (26)
Fear of documentation on academic record	11 (24)
Difficulty with access to care	10 (22)
Lack of availability of services	7 (15)
Concern about lack of sensitivity to cultural issues	3 (7)
Concern about lack of sensitivity to sexual identity issues	3 (3)

Table 2. Depressed medical students' use of mental health services and barriers to use [7].

students at the University of California to measure the use of mental health services among depressed medical students and to identify barriers to use. Two hundred eighty students participated in the survey, and (24%) of them had severe depressive symptoms. Furthermore, only (22%) of the depressed students had used mental health services [7]. The depressed students cited barriers to using mental health services, such as lack of time, absence of confidentiality, and the stigma of mental health care. [Table2]

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, mental health problems among medical students are very underrated despite the seriousness of this issue and its significant effect on medical students' performance and personal life. Furthermore, medical school faculty needs to pay more attention to this issue and apply more solutions.

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