

## Psychological Distress in Medical Students: Cross Sectional Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Medical students, especially those of higher classes, are more likely to be severely distressed due to their clinical rotations. Moreover, exposure to critical patients, lack of social life and selection of speciality etc are few of the stresses in the lives of senior medical students.

**Aim:** To assess the degree of mental stress in medical students.

**Study Design:** Cross-sectional study.

**Methodology:** The M.B.B.S students of higher classes, i.e., third, fourth and fifth year students, were included in the current study. The Kessler psychological distress scale was used to assess the degree of mental stress in medical students. Each questionnaire, having 10 questions, was distributed among the 230 students at Farooq Hospital Westwood, Lahore. Out of 230, 189 students filled the questionnaires. Data was evaluated by using SPSS version 20.

**Results:** Majority of the students 36% had severe psychological distress. About 19% and 16% students had been found to have mild and moderate level of psychological distress respectively. Only 29 % students were doing well. **Conclusion:** It was concluded that Majority of medical students were found suffering from severe psychological distress.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Medical Students, Mental Health and Mental Distress.

### INTRODUCTION

Medical education is a stressful period in a medical student's life<sup>1</sup>. Various factors have been found to be responsible for this increased stress. Medical students face a great deal of academic stress in order to become competent health care workers<sup>2</sup>. Test anxiety is one of the reasons of stress in them<sup>3</sup>. Sleep deprivation, financial issues and speciality selection also contribute to mental distress. Medical students have been found to suffer from higher rate of mental distress<sup>4,6</sup>. Psychological distress is manifested through various ways among medical students. This is increased sometimes to such an extent that it leads to the dropout of the students from the medical education<sup>7</sup>. Some students are indulged into the habit of substance abuse<sup>8</sup>. Many students have been found to suffer from severe anxiety and depression. These symptoms sometimes lead to the suicidal thoughts among them<sup>9</sup>. The research has indicated that distress among medical students increases, as they advance towards higher classes, when their ward rotations are started<sup>10</sup>.

So, the current study has been conducted on third, fourth and final year medical students, as the clinical rotations of those students had been started and they were likely to be more suffering from mental distress as compared to first and second year medical students.

The objective of the study was to assess the degree of mental stress in medical students.

### METHODOLOGY

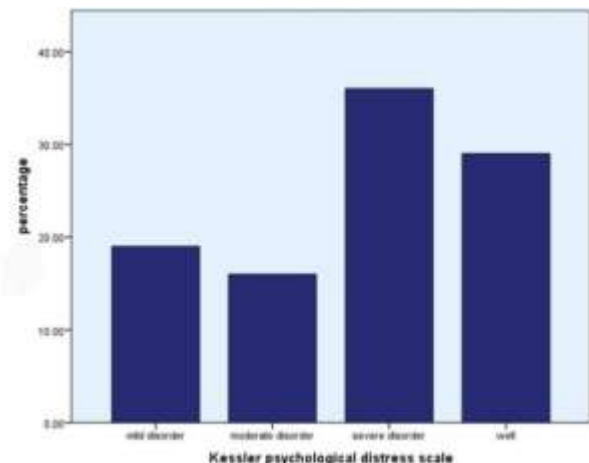
The current study was conducted at Farooq Hospital Westwood, Lahore. The study was conducted on third, fourth and fifth year MBBS students after permission from Ethical Review Committee. Both males and females were included in the study. The age range of the students was between 17 and 25 years. Students of other speciality, such as those of nursing, physiotherapy and BDS were excluded from the study. 230 questionnaires were distributed among the students, under the supervision of facilitators. The Kessler psychological distress scale was used to assess the degree of mental stress in medical students.

**Statistical analysis:** The data collected was analysed by SPSS version 20. The scores that were obtained from Kessler psychological distress scale were compared among students.

### RESULTS

The data analysis revealed that the 29 % of the students had Kessler psychological distress score between 1-19, which showed that they were doing well. About 19% of the students had the score between 20-24, which revealed that they were having mild psychological disorder. The students who had score between 25-29, which indicated that they were having moderate amount of psychological distress were 16%. But 36% of the students had the score between 30 and 50. So, the majority of the students were having severe psychological distress (Figure 1).

Figure-1: Distribution of psychological distress score among students



### DISCUSSION

The results of current study revealed that most of the students are suffering from severe psychological distress. The results are consistent with the study conducted by Bore M, et al<sup>11</sup>. According to their study, the majority of medical students had more than 30 score on Kessler psychological distress scale. So, most of them were suffering from severe mental distress. Their study also revealed that medical students were found to be more distressed than non – medical students of the same age.

Similar results were obtained in the study conducted on medical students in Saudi Arabia. Assessment of distress by

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Kessler psychological distress scale revealed higher prevalence of stress among medical students. It was found that poor sleep quality due to high level of stress, led to poor cognition and concentration in those medical students<sup>12</sup>.

A study conducted on medical students, in Canada, revealed that more anxiety and depression was present in medical students of higher classes than those of first and second year medical students. The reason was that the preclinical training of those higher class students had been started<sup>13</sup>.

A study conducted in Pakistan revealed various reasons of higher stress in senior medical students.<sup>14</sup> The fear of exams in a highly competent environment, higher expectations from teachers, family and self, fear of practical life ahead and difficulty in choosing the desired speciality, were found to be the major stressors among them.

Third, fourth and fifth year medical students, in most of the medical colleges of Pakistan, start their clinical rotations. During the clinical rotations, they interact with patients. They observe critically ill patients and face patient's deaths. A study conducted on senior medical students in Canada, exposed certain causes of higher stress level in senior medical students than in first and second year medical students<sup>15</sup>. It was found that, due to breaking the bad news to patients, exposure to serious cases like those of child abuse and patients deaths, many students were found suffering from anxiety and depression. They also found that medical students of higher classes also had less time for social life. All these factors were found to be the causes of stress in senior medical students.

The current study has also been aimed on senior medical students. Severe distress among majority of these students have probably been found due to exposure to critical patient cases, less social life and career choosing difficulties. So, more work needs to be done to rule out the causes of severe distress in medical students so that an effective measure can be taken to prevent them.

**Limitations:** Long term follow up could not be completed. Students unwilling to participate due to Covid-19 Pandemic. Limited financial resources.

## CONCLUSION

It was concluded that Majority of medical students were found suffering from severe psychological distress.

**Author's contribution:** **SK:** Conceptualized the study, analyzed the data, and formulated the initial draft, **UAH & ZM:** Contributed to the proof reading, **SM & SA:** Collected and analyzed data.

**Conflict of interest:** None

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