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Identifying potential stressors among dental undergraduate students: Study from Jammu region

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Abstract

Background: Dental students are subjected to different kinds of experiences which makes them vulnerable to undergo a lot of stress. Source of stress among dental students is multifactorial, arising from the academic expectations.

Aim: To determine the potential sources of stress in undergraduate dental students.

Methods: This study was conducted at two dental hospitals and teaching hospitals of Jammu region in the month of July 2016 using self administered questionnaire. Responses of 220 students were included in the study.

Results: Out of a total 400 dental students, 220 returned the questionnaires giving an overall response rate of 55%. Subjects cited frequency of examination and performance in examination as most commonly cited sources of stress. Non availability of adequate learning material and competition with peers were the stressors cited as almost or never by the study subjects. Becoming a doctor was rated as most severe stressor. Quality of food in mess was the most commonly reported health related stressors. Again quality of food in mess and class attendance were rated as most severe.

Conclusion: Findings of present study suggest that interventions are needed to tackle stress and improve dental students' physical and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Stressors, dental students, rural, stress

Introduction

Dental students are subjected to different kinds of experiences which makes them vulnerable to undergo a lot of stress. Source of stress among dental students is multifactorial, arising from the academic expectations [1]. Infact Dental Education is regarded as a complex, demanding and often stressful exposure. It involves acquisition of required academic, clinical and interpersonal skills during the course of learning adding to the stress perceived by the students [2, 3]. Students are subjected to different kinds of stressors, such as the pressure of academics with an obligation to succeed, an uncertain future and difficulties of integrating into the system [4]. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that stress-related disorders will be one of the leading causes of disability by the Year 2020 [5].

Stress may affect students' social, physical, and mental health. Deterioration in the health of students may affect learning ability and academic performance as well as goal achievement. Data indicate that academics, examination, fear of failing, clinical training, financial resources, fear of facing parents after failure, and fear of unemployment cause major stress in students [5]. All these consequences have a potential to end up in professional burnout and in extreme conditions even suicide [6, 7]. Therefore, it is essential to identify potential stressors in every academic environment, to understand the way students perceive, react and respond to dental stress and plan effective strategies to alleviate them.

The ability to cope well with stress is important because stress can result in health-damaging behaviors and psychological morbidity. Recent research indicates that psychological morbidity, pathological anxiety, and emotional exhaustion in dental students are not uncommon. Hence, this study was aimed to determine the potential sources of stress in undergraduate dental students.

Methods

This study was conducted at two dental hospitals and teaching hospitals of Jammu region in the month of July 2016 using self administered questionnaire.

The study population consisted of students who were currently studying in the dental colleges. At the time of study there were 4 batches of dental students each with 100 students. All these students formed the study population. Those students who could not be contacted after three attempts were excluded from the study. Students were explained about the nature and purpose of study and requested to fill the questionnaires which were distributed by authors in the classrooms just after the completion of classes. The time allocated for the completion of the questionnaire was 15 minutes. Out of a total 400 students, 220 completed and returned the questionnaires.

A detailed questionnaire was framed for the purpose of recording socio-demographic information of the study participants, the potential stressors experienced by the students and other relevant data. There were a total of 33 stressors which were grouped into academic, psychosocial and health related stressors. Academic stressors included stressors such as academic curriculum, performance in examinations etc. Psychosocial stressors in the study included high parental expectations etc. Sleeping difficulties and exercise were some of the stressors in the health related stressors segment of the questionnaire. For each potential stressor the frequency of occurrence was classified as never, rarely, sometimes, often and always and scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 respectively. The severity of each stressor was rated using a Likert scale (1-10) ranging from not severe to very severe. Information about personal characteristics of the subjects including age, sex, and year in which studying, hosteller or day boarder etc was also collected.

The collected data was entered in Microsoft Excel. Coding of the variables was done. SPSS version 11.5 was used for analysis. Interpretation of the collected data were done by using appropriate statistical methods like percentage, mean, median and inter quartile range. Informed consent was taken and complete confidentiality was ensured to the students.

Results

Out of a total 400 dental students, 220 returned the questionnaires giving an overall response rate of 55%.

Academic Stressors

Subjects cited frequency of examination and performance in examination as most commonly cited sources of stress. Non availability of adequate learning material and competition with peers were the stressors cited as almost or never by the study subjects. Becoming a doctor was rated as most severe stressor. (Table 1)

Psychosocial Stressors

Subjects cited Quality of food in the mess and lack of entertainment as the most commonly cited psychosocial stressors. Lack of personal interest and difficulty in reading text books, adjustment with roommates and financial strain were the least common stressors reported by the students. Quality of food in mess was rated as most severe. (Table 1)

Health Related Stressors

Quality of food in mess was the most commonly reported health related stressors. Again quality of food in mess and class attendance were rated as most severe. (Table 1)

Table 1: Response pattern of various sources of stress and perceived severity (rated in a Likert scale of 1-10) as reported by the study subjects.

Stressor	Never	Sometimes	Fairly/ very often	Median	IQR
Academic Stressors					
Academic Curriculum	56 (25.45)	76 (34.55)	88 (40.00)	5	2-8
Frequency of Examinations	51 (23.18)	71 (32.27)	98 (44.55)	6	2-9
Performance in Examinations	43 (19.54)	81 (36.82)	96 (43.64)	5	2-6
Dissatisfaction with Class Lectures	79 (35.91)	54 (24.55)	87 (39.55)	4	2-5
Non-Availability of Adequate learning material	112 (50.91)	61 (27.73)	47 (21.36)	4	1-5
Becoming a Doctor	93 (42.27)	60 (27.27)	67 (30.46)	8	3-8
Lack of time for recreation	69 (31.36)	88 (40.00)	63 (28.64)	5	2-7
Competition with Peers	98 (44.55)	68 (30.91)	54 (24.55)	7	3-9
Performance in practicals	70 (31.82)	73 (33.18)	77 (35.00)	5	2-6
Lack of special guidance from faculty	73 (33.18)	79 (35.91)	68 (30.91)	4	1-6
Psychosocial Stressors					
High Parental Expectations	98 (44.55)	68 (30.91)	54 (24.55)	5	1-7
Loneliness	70 (31.82)	73 (33.18)	77 (35.00)	4	2-5
Family Problems	73 (33.18)	79 (35.91)	68 (30.91)	3	1-4
Accommodation away from home	43 (19.54)	81 (36.82)	96 (43.64)	5	1-6
Political situation in the country	79 (35.91)	54 (24.55)	87 (39.55)	4	1-5
Relations with the Opposite Sex	112 (50.91)	61 (27.73)	47 (21.36)	5	2-6
Difficulty reading text books	56 (25.45)	76 (34.55)	88 (40.00)	3	1-4
Lack of entertainment in the institution	51 (23.18)	71 (32.27)	98 (44.55)	4	2-5
Difficulty in the journey back home	70 (31.82)	73 (33.18)	77 (35.00)	4	2-6
Quality of food in mess	73 (33.18)	79 (35.91)	68 (30.91)	7	3-8
Financial strain	112 (50.91)	61 (27.73)	47 (21.36)	5	1-7
Inability to socialize with peers	93 (42.27)	60 (27.27)	67 (30.46)	3	2-5
Living conditions in the hostel	69 (31.36)	88 (40.00)	63 (28.64)	5	3-6
Member of fraternity	125(56.81)	40 (18.18)	55 (25.00)	2	1-3
Lack of personal interest in medicine	56 (25.45)	76 (34.55)	88 (40.00)	2	1-4
Adjustment with roommates	51 (23.18)	71 (32.27)	98 (44.55)	3	1-5
Health Related Stressors					
Sleeping difficulties	122 (55.45)	59 (26.81)	39 (17.73)	4	1-5
Class attendance	129 (58.64)	45 (20.45)	46 (20.91)	6	3-7

Nutrition	98 (44.55)	68 (30.91)	54 (24.55)	3	2-5
Exercise	112 (50.91)	61 (27.73)	47 (21.36)	2	1-4
Quality of food in mess	56 (25.45)	76 (34.55)	88 (40.00)	7	3-7
Physical disability	188 (85.45)	14 (06.36)	18 (08.18)	1	1-2
Alcohol/Drug abuse/smoking	183 (83.18)	17 (07.72)	20 (09.09)	1	1-3

Discussion

Dental education has shown to be very stressful for students as reported by large number of studies. Stress has been described as a double-edged sword that can either stimulate and motivate the students to peak performance or reduce the students to ineffectiveness^[9, 10]. Previous studies have reported that dental education induces considerable stress on students. The findings are consistent across different countries, universities, and curriculums. Findings of present study are consistent with others^[11-15].

In academic performance related domain, exams, grade stress along with the fear of failing was reported as one of the major stressors reported by both the year students. Most students had experienced either academic and/or psychosocial stressors. It was observed that among academic stressors, "Becoming a Doctor" was the most severely reported stress. The students know they have to sacrifice everything to achieve the goal and probably this puts them under a lot of stress. This may also be due to the fact that the dental curriculum requires lots of study and students feel overloaded by high academic demands. Large amount of information required to master in a short time makes them fearful of scoring well in the exams.

The current study revealed that the hostellers experienced more stress than day scholars as lack of recreational facilities, satisfaction regarding food quality, and living away from home were cited as stressful by a majority of subjects in the study. This may be related to the fact that students living away from parents encounter difficulties with adaptation to living alone in a new environment and being self-dependent. Therefore the quality of living and food in hostels should be improved, adequate facilities for recreation to be provided for relaxation, mentors and matrons should be appointed to make the students feel at home.

Conclusion

The factors identified are needed to be tackled by incorporating the stress-coping measures, to reduce the stress, as well as to bring out the best performance from students in a healthy and stress-free environment. It is necessary to include subjects such as stress management, practice management, and communication skills.

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