

The state of mental well-being among medical students: A review

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ABSTRACT

Mental well-being constitutes a fundamental aspect of overall wellness, essential for sustaining life and achieving personal goals. In contemporary times, it has become a primary global concern, mainly affecting medical students by raising mental health issues, a problem often ignored by medical colleges and society. Students frequently refrain from discussing this issue due to stigma and professional considerations. This poses a significant challenge for medical colleges striving to develop skilled physicians. Several studies show a notable rise in mental health issues among medical students, negatively impacting their well-being. Key factors include academic stress, personal struggles, institutional problems, social media effects, and loneliness. Poor mental health in these students often results in stress, anxiety, and depression, which are critical mental health concerns. It is therefore recommended that academic workloads be reduced and various mindfulness programs be implemented to address this serious issue.

Keywords: Medical Student, Mental well-being, Review, Stress

INTRODUCTION

Mental well-being is a broad, multifaceted concept that encompasses both psychological and functional aspects. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health well-being is described as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community"[1]. Supporting this, Diener et al. described mental well-being as a personal assessment of one's life, marked by positive emotions, engagement, and a sense of life purpose. The definition of mental well-being remains a topic of debate within the research community[2]. Despite the significance of mental well-being, medical students face various challenges that affect their mental health, such as performance pressure, emotional stress from clinical training, and limited time for other activities and self-care. Multiple studies and research articles suggest that medical students are at a higher risk of mental health issues compared to the general population. These findings underscore a growing mental health crisis among upcoming doctors and stress the importance of institutional action and reform. This review will begin by detailing the scope of mental health issues encountered by medical students, then explore the contributing factors, and ultimately discuss existing and emerging strategies to support student mental well-being.

Prevalence and nature of Mental well-being issues

Mental well-being is essential for medical students to enhance their career development and academic performance, helping them become good physicians. However, a systematic meta-analysis revealed that 27.2% of medical students experience depression or related symptoms, with 11.1% reporting suicidal ideation students[3]. The incidence of common mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, stress,

and post-traumatic problems was 54% among medical students in the pre-clinical phase and 48% during the clinical phase[4]. In the national context, cross-sectional studies at KIST Medical College in Kathmandu reported a depression prevalence of 29.2% and suicidal ideation at 4.7% among medical students[5]. Based on various types of studies concerning mental well-being among medical students, there is a high prevalence of mental distress. This issue remains unaddressed due to stigma, fear of professional consequences, or lack of mental health resources.

Contributing factor

The high incidence of mental distress in medical students is due to several factors which are categorized as:

1. Academic factors (Heavy workload due to intense course work, long study hours and lack of sleep, assessment pressure as frequent valuable exams and competition for grades)[6]. Unrealistic self-expectations and fear of failure[7].
2. Personal factor(Demographic vulnerability, as female students from rural backgrounds report higher stress[8], Psychological property indicates low self-esteem and poorly adjusted coping mechanisms as well as financial problems due to high tuition burden and living expenses[9].
3. Institutional barriers, such as a lack of adequate counselling services, leave students without professional support[10]. Even when help is available, stigma and fears about confidentiality prevent students from seeking care due to concern about professional consequences[10]. Another leading factor is social media pressure[11]. Loneliness plays a significant role in hampering mental well-being[12].

Institutional and social influences

Tempski et al. conducted a qualitative study, revealing that students felt emotionally neglected and overwhelmed by academic pressure. They experienced poor relationships with faculty and lacked psychological safety, leading to feelings of disconnection and burnout[13]. In a study Students avoided consulting mental health professionals because they feared their conditions might be documented or seen as a sign of weakness. One student said, "I wouldn't want it on my CV or their records," showing how much professional concerns are linked to mental health issues and distress[14]. Found that a low level of social connectedness was strongly predictive of depression and anxiety.

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Intervention and Preventive Strategies

Acknowledging the seriousness of the problem, numerous institutions have started adopting mental wellness programs. These include peer support groups, academic counseling, flexible schedules, and stress management workshops as additional strategies implemented. Additionally, some schools have introduced a pass/fail grading system in preclinical years to reduce competition and psychological pressure[15]. Since such types of intervention and strategies help to cope with stress and anxiety and depression to restore mental well-being, for example, a mindful medics programme is done in UK by the university of Bristol by making format as 8 week mind fullness based stress reduction course (MBSR) by focus on stress management and emotional regulation and resilience find 23% reduction of burnout symptoms and long term benefits on mental wellbeing[16].

CONCLUSION

Mental well-being among medical students is becoming a significant concern worldwide, including in Nepal. Many research studies have shown that a large number of medical students are experiencing mental health problems like stress, anxiety, and depression because of a heavy academic workload, pressure to perform well, and a lack of emotional or institutional support from teachers or the system.

While personal solutions like practicing mindfulness, talking to counselors, or engaging in relaxation activities can provide some relief, they are not enough. To make real and lasting changes, the medical system needs to improve aspects such as reducing academic overload, conducting mindfulness programs and events, and fostering better relationships with students, as well as positively encouraging them. Institutions must create a healthier learning environment where students feel supported both academically and emotionally.

FUTURE SCOPE AND DIRECTION

Looking ahead, future research could explore how medical education influences students' mental health over time, especially in developing stress during various stages. It's important to have culturally sensitive mental health programs that encourage students to seek help without feeling judged. Colleges should work closely with mental health experts, educators, and policymakers to ensure students receive the support they need. Promoting student wellbeing is truly essential—not just for their own health, but also for training well-rounded, capable doctors for the future.

DECLARATION

Author Contributions

Raj Prajapati conceptualized, reviewed the literature, analysed references, drafted and revised the manuscript, and approved the final version.

Ethical Approval

NA (Review Article, based on published data)

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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