



Original Article

Assessment of Stress among Undergraduate Medical Student in Eastern Medical College, Cumilla, Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Stress is the feeling which is created when a person react to the particular events that makes him/ her feel threatened or upset. Stress is a combination of psychological, physiological and behavioral reactions that people have in response to event that challenge them. During the studies in medical college, medical students often face many difficulties that were the cause of their stress. Current study was a cross sectional type of study that was conducted in Eastern Medical College (EMC), Cumilla, Bangladesh. A questionnaire on stress assessment was prepared through extensive review of literatures. Developed questionnaire was then pretested and validated. A total of 150 questionnaires were given to the undergraduate medical students of EMC. Study subjects were selected randomly. Our study found that 124 (82.67%) out of total 150 students having stress related problem. Major cause of stress was academic overload due to vast curriculum. Major approach to cope with the stress was prayer in this medical college. To cope up with stress in medical student life is one of the most important quality of a medical student. Therefore different stress management techniques should be taught to the medical students to improve their ability to cope with this demanding professional course of medicine. Availability of recreational facilities as well as quick solution of hostel related issues will also help much to improve the state of stress of the medical students.

Key words: Stress, Undergraduate Medical Students, Bangladesh

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Introduction:

The unpleasant state of emotional arousal and reaction that occurs in people when experiencing threatening or upset situations to a particular events is explained as stress¹. Stressors are the environmental and personal factors that cause stress¹. Excessive stress can lead to mental and physical health problems².

Several studies revealed that life of medical colleges in many countries is quite stressful. Undergraduate medical students experience high levels of stress and decreased life satisfaction compared with other professional students³⁻⁸. University life is much different especially in medical colleges than secondary and higher secondary life in school. There students need to live alone in less supported condition and to cope up with the high pressure of

study demands of the program which is often tough for young folks⁹.

Medical students are predominantly sufferers from stress during their undergraduate course as because of academic pressure and tough nature of medical practice which requires involvement with human suffering, death, sexuality and fear¹⁰⁻¹². Prevalence of stress was reported at 65% among medical students in the United Arab Emirates University; 30.9% among Egyptian medical students; 61.4% among medical students in Thai Medical Schools; 41.9% among medical students in Malaysian Medical Schools; more than half among Indian medical students and 31.2% among medical students in three British universities¹³⁻¹⁸. This could be justified because medical students are more exposed to work overload in a competitive manner with constant pressure of examinations and regular

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assessment. The environment around medical student also encourages competition rather than cooperation, which brings stress¹⁹. This, in turn, usually makes medical students to stop themselves from socializing and enjoying extracurricular activities²⁰.

Stress lead to poor physical health, mental distress, sleep disturbance, reduce self-esteem, have a negative effect on cognitive functioning and learning as well as poor academic performance and even substance abuse among the students in the medical colleges at many occasion²¹⁻²³. Multiple researches reported that stress damages mental health. Therefore causes anxiety and depression in medical students not only in advance countries but also developing countries²⁴⁻²⁵. Medical students are exposed to diverse varieties of stress. It is reported during undergraduate medical education stress is related to academic, financial and social. Sometime stress arises from compulsion to succeed and also in difficulties of integrating education system²⁶.

The stress during the undergraduate medical study may continue during the internship and into the physician practical life and may reach burnout levels²⁷. Studies have shown that a higher prevalence of depression and suicide among physicians compared with other professions may be a reflection of untreated depression during the undergraduate period²⁸⁻³⁰.

Researcher identified stress of medical students are mainly due to curricular overload but not due to personal difficulties^{31,32}. It is because of demanding, intense environment of medical education has created excessive pressure on medical students³³. There are number of reports available indicates that medical school's environment is not congenial and friendly to enhance psychological and physical health of students³⁴⁻³⁶. It is less than 3% in any population suffers from psychiatric diseases. Similar figure also observed with medical students before taking admission in medical school³⁷. However, psychological morbidity in medical students rises sharply to 21% to 56%³⁸. There are reports that at the end of first year it is doubled which is very alarming³⁹.

Currently there are lot of discussions regarding stress of medical students because mental health ensures total health (WHO, 2003). Research reported three main areas of stress; academic pressures, social issues and financial problems⁴⁰. A number studies emphasis on the quality of life of medical students which will ensure quality of medical education and henceforth better prescriber on basis of rational use of medicine for this earth⁴¹⁻⁴³. Information on regarding stress of medical students is imperative. Therefore authority controls

medical education can take necessary preventive measures for vulnerable future of medical doctors. This study was conducted to evaluate the prevalence of stress among undergraduate medical students and how each student copes with their stress in Eastern Medical College (EMC), Cumilla, Bangladesh.

Materials & Methods:

This cross-sectional study was carried out among the undergraduate medical (MBBS) students (first year to fifth year) in the Eastern Medical College (EMC), Cumilla, Bangladesh during the academic year of 2017-2018. Total study population was 150. Thirty students from each of first to fifth year were selected randomly. An instrument on stress assessment was developed through extensive review of literatures. Then the questionnaire was pretested and validated. This study was conducted by distributing the questionnaire to the participants. The questionnaires were divided into three sections: section A was for demography, section B was for the Stress Test, section C was for the questionnaires on stress level, causes of stress and strategies to cope stress. The data was then compiled and analyzed using SPSS. The study was approved by the ethical review committee of EMC.

Results:

Out of 150 respondents, 30 (20%) students were from each of first year to fifth year. Among them 60 (40%) were male and 90 (60%) were female. Again among our respondents majority [117 (78%)] were Muslim but EMC have other religion like Hindu [18 (12%)], Buddhist [11 (7%)] and Christian [4 (3%)] students also.

The prevalence of the stress among the medical students and its level were evaluated by using the stress test. Stress test was based on the scoring of the behavior and symptoms of stress. The students that experienced more than 3 symptoms with scores of 2 or 3 were labeled as suffering from stress related problem. Study found that 124 students experienced stress related problem which is 82.67% in total and majority of them experienced moderate level of stress (Table-I).

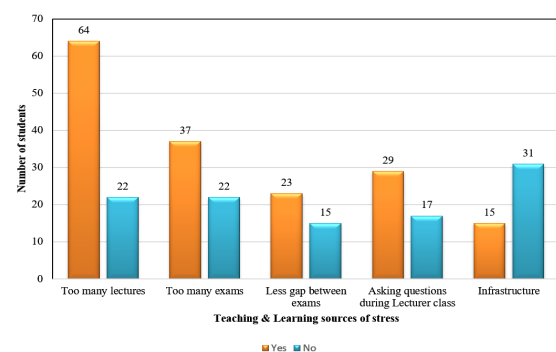


Figure-1: Teaching and Learning related sources of Stress.

Majority of the respondents 64 (55%) were having teaching and learning related source of stress due to too many lectures to attend every day (Table-II). Other stressor that had been identified was too much exams [37 (48.0%)], less gap between exams [23 (39.2%)], asking question during lecture class [29 (43.6%)] and infrastructures [15 (25.4%)] (Figure-1 & Table-II).

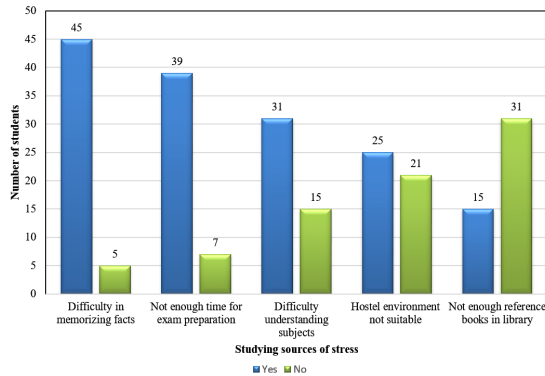


Figure-2: Studying related sources of Stress.

Memorizing subjects was the most stressful problem regarding the studying related sources of stress [45 (75.3%)] (Figure-2 & Table-II). Not enough time for exam preparation, difficulty in understanding the subjects, hostel environment not suitable for studying and not enough reference books in library had also been identified as an important stressor with the percentage of 65.1%, 51.7%, 40.2% and 25.1% respectively (Table-II).

Table-I: Stress level of Respondents' (n=150).

Stress level	No. of respondents n (%)
1	0
2	3 (2.4)
3	7 (5.6)
4	13 (10.5)
5	34 (27.4)
6	25 (20.2)
7	18 (14.5)
8	13 (10.5)
9	6 (4.8)
10	5 (4.1)
Total	124 (82.67%)

1-2=Mild stress; 3-8=Moderate Stress; 9-10=Most stress

Personal problem had also been identified as a cause of stress among undergraduate medical students. The significant stressor that had been identified under this group was homesickness [(32 (49.7%))], difficulty in getting food [(26 (43.1%)) and high price for the food [23 (38.3%)] (Figure-3 & Table-II). There were some other sources of stress, such as

financial problem [(22 (35.8%)) and transport problem [13 (21.3%)]. Relationship with family [9 (16.1%)] and boyfriend or girlfriend [8 (15.2%)] was appeared as a source of stress to the students.

Table-II: Factors related to the Stress

Factors	Yes	No
Teaching and learning, n (percentage)		
Too many lectures	64 (55.0)	22 (20.0)
Too many exams	37 (48.0)	22 (33.3)
Less gap between exams	23 (39.2)	15 (32.5)
Asking questions during lecture class	29 (43.6)	17 (25.2)
Infrastructure	15 (25.4)	31 (47.1)
Studying, n (%)		
Difficulty in memorizing facts	45 (75.3)	5 (8.7)
Not enough time for exam preparation	39 (65.1)	7 (11.7)
Difficulty understanding subjects	31 (51.7)	15 (25.3)
Hostel environment not suitable	25 (40.2)	21 (35.8)
Not enough reference books in library	15 (25.1)	31 (51.7)
Personal, n (percentage)		
Homesickness	32 (49.7)	17 (28.2)
Difficulty in getting food	26 (43.1)	21 (33.7)
High food price	23 (38.3)	14 (22.6)
Financial problem	22 (35.8)	18 (23.3)
Transport problem	13 (21.3)	31 (52.3)
Family problems	9 (16.1)	33 (59.3)
Girl/boyfriend problems	8 (15.2)	35 (62.4)
Hostel, n (percentage)		
Uncomfortable Hostel environment	80 (53.3)	70 (46.7)
Recreational activities, n (percentage)		
Lack of facilities	85 (56.6)	65 (43.4)

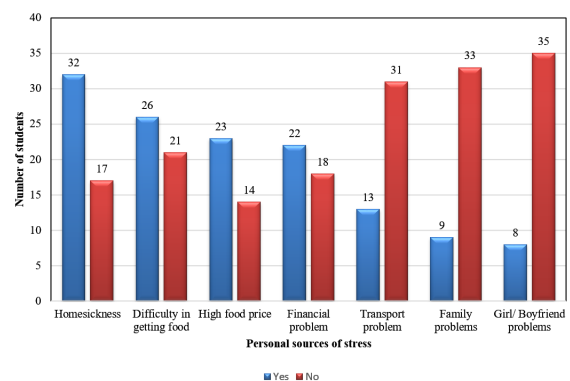


Figure-3: Personal related sources of Stress

In this study (80, 53.3%) of students also developed stress due to uncomfortable hostel environment (Table-II). Present study detected that lack of

recreational facilities (85, 56.6%) also contributed for the development of stress among undergraduate medical students (Table-II). A few other factors that had contributed to stress among medical students had been identified. These include social problems, poor networking at the hostels and campus as well as lack of facilities. Some students also felt that they had failed in managing their time thus lead to stress problem.

This study had been identified a few ways to overcome the stress. One of the examples was religious activities. Beside religious practice students overcome their stress by eating, singing, dancing, listening to music, playing games and going outside of the campus. Lastly, a few students relieved their stress by crying also.

Discussion:

‘Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community’ as defined by World Health Organization (WHO, 2005)⁴⁴. The term stress has been deep-seated as like part of life in almost all language and community⁴⁵. In the early 1930s, first the term stress was started to use⁴⁶. Researcher mean with stress ‘is a biopsychological model that refers to the consequence of failure of an organism to respond adequately to mental, emotional or physical demands, whether actual or imagined’⁴⁷. People even in absence of major psychiatric disorders also suffer from socio-culturally and lead to poor physical health and education status⁴⁸. Good mental health status is imperative to progress and maintain a quality life for each individual^{42,46}. Most common psychiatric health disorders related to stress are depression and anxiety^{40,45}. There is alarming report that at least 50% of world population is some kind of poor mental health^{36,38}.

This study found that 124 (83%) undergraduate medical students suffers from stress and most common sources of stress faced by them were study related. Similar study conducted in Saudi Arabia reported 63.8% suffers from all form of stress but 25.2% is severe stress^{13,14}. Therefore current study finding is almost similar with Arabian study. Academic stress is much higher than other thing causing stress and this finding was supported in multiple studies³¹⁻³². The stressor of current study includes teaching and learning, studying and personal problems. Based on teaching and learning source of stress, too many lectures become the main problem that caused their stress. The entire problems that are classified in teaching and learning session had occurred due to problem in managing their time properly. Most of the students can’t arrange their daily schedule properly.

Some problems like difficulty in understanding and memorizing subjects, not enough time and references for revision and uncomfortable environments become the source of stress among the students during the study session. These problems may be occurred due to lack of preparation that has been done by the students before starting the study session. To avoid these entire problems students must give the full of interest in their study.

Among the medical students, personal matters sometimes may also became the sources of stress. Some of the personal problems that always been faced by the students were relationship problems either with family or friends, homesickness, difficulty in getting food, expensive food, financial and transportation matters⁴⁹⁻⁵¹. This study also revealed similar personal problems as the cause of stress. Medical students should have to control their emotional status properly to overcome these problems.

Despite of having stress, coping stress was closely related to the religious activity, which was also a finding of our study. Majority of our respondents were Muslim and prefer to say prayer and recite Holy Quran in order to have calmness while experiencing stress. For others religion to relieve stress, they prefer to eat, recreation and sports activity. All the students had a similar way to get relief from stress and that was by sleep. Medical students in our study were found to reduce their stress by taking different measures also and a few solutions (like singing, dancing even crying) were listed by the respondents. These finding are similar with other studies also⁴⁹⁻⁵⁵.

Based on the stress level of the students, it showed that most of the undergraduate medical students were able to manage their tension properly even though they were having some stress related problems. The ability in controlling stress and emotion is the most important skill that must be having by each of medical students.

Conclusion:

The present study unfolds that stress is a major problem in medical students which have substantial risk of developing grave psychological, emotional, and physical complications. But coping stress in medical student life is one of most important quality also. The students should be taught different stress management techniques to improve their ability to cope with this demanding professional course. The hostel related issues and recreational facilities should be resolved as far as possible within limited resources. Therefore authors hope and believe that, medical students will do much better in their academic and personal life. Well-designed prospective study is suggested for this unnoticed and

undiscussed issue of medical students to ensure more community oriented rational medical doctor for Bangladesh and rest of the world.

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Conflict of interest:

This study obtained no funding and authors do not have any conflict of interest.

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