The Prevalence of Anxiety and Depression Among Medical Students Comparing 10 Countries: Systematic Review

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Abstract

The prevalence and severity of anxiety and depression among medical students are increasing progressively due to the unhealthy and pressured environment students are surrounded with. Multiple risk factors differ from country to country, which play an important role in their mental health. A systematic review of depression and anxiety was searched in PubMed/MEDLINE, PubMed Central (PMC), and ScienceDirect papers from 2007 and after. Systematic reviews, cross-sectional studies, meta-analyses, and observational studies were included.

According to the search strategy, 131 papers were included, and after filtering, 51 papers remained, they were then screened by the title and abstract screening applied, and we ended up with 12; finally, the AMSTAR checklist was applied, and 11 papers were included in the study. Depression and anxiety are major issues that medical students suffer from in different parts of the world. There are a lot of factors that were shared between countries that affect the mental health of students; the most important are academic load and financial burdens.

The present review provides a clear picture of the psychological wellbeing of medical students in 10 countries and a comparison with each one, which is important to define which country has the more prevalence of anxiety and depression, and it's crucial to formulate a health policy for preventative measures and therapeutic purpose.

Introduction

The environment of the medical school overall is considered very stressful to deal with [1], and medical education leads to physical and emotionally damaging in the long term. Medical students can be exposed to numerous risk factors during their academic life, thought to be typical in the medical school environment.

They are exposed to psychological stressors, work overload, academic pressure, sleep deprivation, peer competition, fear of failure, financial issues, etc. In addition, they face personal life events like illness, marriage, and the death of relatives and family members [2]. Other factors include the high expectations from family members, teachers, and even ourselves to take responsibility for curing patients, which increases stress and depression [1]. Because of all these reasons, the students will suffer from impaired academic performance, cynicism, academic dishonesty, substance abuse, and suicide, and when we compare the medical students to the general population of the same age, they were found to have higher levels of depression and anxiety [3].

Statistics show about a third of medical students worldwide suffer from depression (about 3.9 - 6.6%). A higher level of depression is reported in first-year students. The studies also show the difference between anxiety and depression levels among public and private school students. A higher level of depression is reported in first-year students [2]. Medical students are at a high risk of developing depression due to academic load and financial burden, which can be severe enough to establish consequences such as emotional liability, mental health, and physical well-being, which can lead to serious consequences in the end, and also affect their grades and their future performance as future doctors in the healthcare field. So this study aims to estimate the prevalence and severity and associated risk factors of depression among medical students and how depression in this age group affects their grades.

Methods

Search Strategy

This systematic review was conducted according to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines [4]. We searched PubMed/MEDLINE, PubMed Central (PMC), and ScienceDirect to identify full-text and most relevant papers. They were thoroughly searched using the appropriate keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms. The MeSH strategy employed in PubMed was:

(anxiety)OR("Anxiety/epidemiology"[Mesh]OR"Anxiety/psychology"[Mesh]OR"Anxiety/statistics andnumericaldata"[Mesh])AND(Depression)OR("Depression/epidemiology"[Mesh]OR"Depression/psychology"[Mesh]OR"Depression/psychology"[Mesh]OR"Depression/statistics and numerical data"[Mesh])AND

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(medical	students)	OR	("Students,
Medical/psych	ology"[Mesh]	OR	"Students,
Medical/statis	tics and numeric	al data"[Me	esh])

For other databases, keywords used include anxiety, depression, and medical students.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

We include articles published in 2007 and after, the ones published in English, and full-text papers. Depression among medical students was the focus topic of the research, and there were no specifications for any country, so all the countries were included. Systematic reviews, cross-sectional studies, meta-analyses, and observational studies were included. Articles focusing on adults or geriatrics, unpublished or gray literature, and full-text articles were unavailable, and animal research was excluded.

Quality Assessment

After applying inclusion/exclusion criteria, the remaining articles were checked for quality using the New Castle Ottawa checklist for observational studies [5], and the Assessing the Methodological Quality of Systematic Reviews (AMSTAR) checklist for systematic reviews and meta-analysis studies [6]. Only articles with more than 70% satisfied of the checklist quality parameters were included in the review.

Results

Search Results

We conducted a thorough search using databases, including Pubmed, Medline, PMC, and ScienceDirect, and one hundred thirty-one articles were identified. The excluded papers were 80, and the remaining were 51; then, title screening was done, and we excluded 16 papers due to irrelevant titles. After that, we did the full-text screening, and we excluded 23 papers due to the absence of the full text or inability to reach it, so we ended up with 12 papers. Finally, a quality check was done using (AMSTAR) checklist, and 11 papers were included.



Figure 1: Identification of studies via databases.

Study Analysis

Table 1: represents the author's last name and the abbreviated name of the assessment tools utilized in the 11 articles. In these 11 papers, they utilized four assessment tools for depression, which include Zung self-rating depression scale SDS, Beck's Depression Inventory BDI, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-9, and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Regarding anxiety, they used two different assessment scales, including The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and the generalized anxiety disorder assessment GAD-7. Three of the papers measured both, and they used scales that combined anxiety and depression, which include the AKUADS scale, The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21), and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). The remaining papers utilized assessments conducted among Chinese medical students, including the APGAR Family Index, the Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS), and The Chinese Trait Coping Style Questionnaire (TCSQ). Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) and Medical Students' Stressor Questionnaire (MSSQ) were used to assess Nepalese medical students' burnout and stress rates. Two papers used SCL PID-5BF to assess psychological problems and maladaptive personality traits.

The studies are cross-sectional and observational, containing 36,924 individual participants in 10 countries, including Saudi Arabia, China, the UK, Switzerland, Nepal, Brazil, Italy, Egypt, Pakistan, and Palestine. All 11 articles were conducted in medical colleges or universities, one study focused on the premedical years, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years in Qassim University in Saudi Arabia, and one article analyzed the 4th, 5th, and 6th academic years of Alexandria medical school, two articles were focusing on the final year medical students from private and public colleges in UK and Pakistan, one study was evaluated medical students and residents in Nepal, one article considered the medical and pharmaceutical colleges, the rest of the articles were focusing on undergraduate medical students in general.

Six papers discussed and analyzed the prevalence of depression and anxiety [7,8,9,11,13,15]. Three articles discussed and analyzed the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress [14,16,17], one article analyzed the prevalence of depression only [12], and only one article analyzed the prevalence of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and eating disorder [10]. Multiple determinants cause anxiety and depression among medical students, which are included in 3 categories: personal and demographic, academic, and social problems.

The demographic causes include gender, like being female, which is the most causative factor of anxiety and depression, especially in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Palestine, and Egypt. Other factors like the presence of mental problems or chronic illness or history of mental illness in the family, married students,

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and students who live with their relatives revealed low to moderate depression, while severe to moderate depression among students who live in residence and students with high crowding index.

Students who attempt suicide show a high risk for depression, poor sleep quality, bad appetite, emotional stress, depersonalization, alcohol, cigarette, substance abuse, and marijuana. Academic causes include academic load and exam stress, or the fear that may not live up to the academic expectation, suspicion of the future, the surrounding environment not being suitable for studying, final examination, students with low GPAs and final years, or who failed in classes previously, students who live alone or had a bad relationship with their colleagues and students who didn't attend lectures had higher anxiety than who attends.

Social causes include: don't have a friend to talk to when under pressure, low socioeconomic status, married students showing low to moderate depression than students who live with their relatives, students using public transportation, not having a hobby or participating in sports, financial burden, students live in rural areas, parent's poor education, introvert's and have no friends, not satisfied with the career and violence against doctors in the field.

author	y cur of publication	country	purpase of	mental problem	53815	Assessment tool	number of patients	conducto a from	types of studies
Borri han et al[7]	207	Saudi Arabia	to measure fire anxiety and depression ann ong 142 cut and 3rd year students using questionnuire.	Derresion and and and	formic, ist year, formic, ist year, consistent of events, consistent and constraints areas and constraints, they also stress, drug alsos.	SUADS	288 maleci OS female	the providence of arealogy in formule is highter in Lit year.	Cross sectional study.
Shao et al[8]	3030	Chim	to measure the previouse of depression and arcivary and estimate to ornefation with family function, social suppert, and coping ayole in chim.	depression and arrelary	francial butlet, big study- linkasi diren and too king study- tudasi direna and too king o equitori too king of too king of too king of too king of too king of too king out do king of discontasy of fictorik.	SDS. Furtily APGAR Index. Social Supper Buing Scale and Trat Coping Style Questormaire.	2057 medical student	the providence increase in older students with fituration that but relationship with fit of the verse and distrip, bass sheep quality and who fire alone.	Cross sectional study.
Tabalips et al[9]	2015	Brack	to estimate the risk factors that lead to inconcentricity and depression in moderal students.	Abiyan par pagada	femalegrade, high family pressue, neuron in advacts obsergements are more provident and the provident of the structure in source and and applied pressues are an advantage and and addacts, core or advantagement and other and and and and applied and a source of the first a	(1/1/13)*(1/03)	202	the previouse of mattery was higher in writes, statistic burker particular and writes, statistic burker and and publically the protect within depression increases the protection and who advery is concern about their datases.	Cos sectoral su by.
Zang et al[10]	6102	Chim	to provide a close insidituation, prevision that experiences by chance methical students, and ordinares base to size.	depression, arcterer, suicidal idention, and enting disorders	here y calattic freature or involta a landa, freature or involta a parta bealtaren everen (di parta realizaren everen al parta realizaren everen al parta everen compter and uncatinger and regionality frare correct	BB, SDS, CISD/PIQ-9.3 CL- 90.	30.817 Chinese medical students	the studies show that depression is higher than an order, contrary date date or statistical infeation between titlenes models students, and there is no significant offf remove however genders or ages.	meta em úlyeis
Bettani at el[11]	2020	haly	v sustent the analytic of ground and depression and depression and tailing the constraint observation of the second se	derression and anxiety	and our with high and load to the start and and the future that here of ourpetifyreness.	(HADS), PID-5-B.F.	667	ontrined areacy- depressive or ymptorns wer o repeated.	Cross sectional study.
Elsawy et al(12]	00.00	all Big	to estimate the previource rate of 40, 50 and 60 modeul sources in Alexandia.	Depression	family, processes of aread- professional being second and the op- profession of the procession of the procession consolidition of the the second second pro- teed of the second second second second procession of the second	II- 1018	016	moderate to severe elegension were reported due to many risk factors face vorten gouds, nat brilling servers en adit ou under pressure, arrestal life conditions, sociosconterio status and not statuade erreformention	Cross sectional study.
Shawahaa et al(13)	2020	Palestine	to investgrae the sociodemorgraphic factors and its relation to depressive and an viety symptome.	derression and an sitety	derression and ansistery higher in: family motives behind family motives behind in basis staged (2.3). Sovie GPA or had familed in class with had familed in class attemptionale, had attemptionale, had attemptionale, had attemptionale, had attemptionale, had attemptionale, had	BDHLBA	425	more than have of invited students had minimal depression, and quarter of the sample had mild to moder ale arcciep.	cros-sectional observation al design



Discussion

This study conducted a systematic review to analyze 11 studies for the determinants, gender-based depression, country-based depression, and risk factors of depression and anxiety among medical students in Saudi Arabia, China, Egypt, Palestine, the UK, Switzerland, Nepal, Pakistan, Italy, and Brazil. The studies discuss multiple determinants and risk factors associated with increased depression among demographic, academic, and social medical students.

Regarding demographic factors, first, The prevalence rates of depression and anxiety among medical students vary according to gender. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia showed it was significant in females 99% and males 68.7% [7]. Research in Brazil showed that anxiety increased among females by 42.2%, while in males, it was 27%. Depression was also higher in females by 40.1% and males by 23.5% [9]. Another study proposed in Italy clarified the prevalence of anxiety only, depression only, and anxiety & depression. Anxiety is higher in males at 22% while in females at 20%. In comparison, depression was equal between males and females at 7%, and the combination between anxiety and depression showed a higher percentage in women at 57%, while males at 38% [11]. A study in Palestine showed the prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms among Palestinian medical students was higher in women, 60.8%, while in males, 39.2% [13]. While in Uk a study conducted showed that 61.7% of females have depressive symptoms, while males were 28.3% [15].

Secondly, studies [7,13,1,15,2,14,8] showed that the most grade had depression and anxiety in was first, second, and third stages. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has more depression among first-year medical students, while in China, it was more severe among third-year medical students. In Palestine, it was more extensive among basic years in medical school (first, second, third) years. In Pakistan, final-year medical students were the most anxious; another study in Switzerland showed that first-year medical students expressed more depression, while the intern was the least. In Nepal, it was common among third-year

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medical students; in the UK, students become more depressed when final exams are closer,

Risk factors and determinants in Different Countries Hinder Medical Students' abilities and make them more prone to depression and anxiety.

A study conducted in Saudi Arabia showed six determinants play a major role in depression among students. For example, being a female in Arabic society, being in premeds like the first, second, and third year, depression increases, especially in first-year medical students. Other factors are academic, like the inability to cope with curricular demands, continuous academic assessments and examinations, stress exams, and not functioning in class performance and clinical practice [7].

Another study conducted in Palestine showed there were eight risk factors, including family members behind the decision to enter medical school, depression higher in students who have lower GPAs or had failed in class previously, higher in students who attempt suicide and who have low socioeconomic status, low mental health, ad low religion commitment. At the same time, depression is lesser in basic-year medical students, like the first, second, and third years [13].

In Pakistan, there were seven risk factors: stress and pressure from exams, pressure to meet family expectations, feelings about a medical career in the future, missing family far from home, having no idea about school choices specialty, and dissatisfaction with the administration of their medical school. Anxiety and depression are more common among students from private colleges [1]. In Brazil, six determinants were major in anxiety and depression among medical students, including being female, family pressure, depression more In students whose families are not physicians, cause they are pushed by their parents more, more In the south campus students, more in students whose concern about their future career, and more in the second semester than first [9].

In Italy, three determinants came in the form of students with high study load, uncertainty about the future, and a high level of competitiveness in medicine [11]. There were two major determinants in the UK: imminent exams and graduate course students [14]. In Switzerland, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were the most important factors that played a role in depression [15].

In Nepal, there were determinants, including work and study-related burnout, family history of mental problems, no satisfaction with job, career, or academic performance, Substance abuse, alcohol, cigarette, marijuana, disturbance in sleep hours, stressors, satisfaction with career choices, satisfaction with academic performance, previous history of mental health problems, family history of mental health problems. Third-year medical students, single students, Hindu, upper middle class, and first-year residents are more depressed [2].

In China, there were ten determinants: financial burden, big study-induced stress, large employment pressure, and Students who lived alone or had a bad relationship with their lovers, classmates, or friends. Students in the rural area report more anxiety than in urban areas; low parental education and parents caring indicate low anxiety and depression; introverted students report a high degree of anxiety and depression, heavy academic pressure on medical students, frequent violent attacks against healthcare workers, high-intensity internships, frequent WPV, complex multi personal relationships, and uncertainty regarding future careers [8].

Another study in China showed that Chinese medical students suffered from depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and eating disorders; their prevalence was 29%, 21%, 11%, and 2%, respectively [10]. In Egypt, they did not have someone to talk to when under pressure, had stressful life events, were not satisfied with their socioeconomic level, did not specify a grade to achieve, and had extreme dissatisfaction with the student's results, married students: had low to moderate depression. Students who lived with their relatives: had moderate and severe depression, while the lowest percentage of moderate and severe depression was noticed among students who had private residences.

Moderate to severe depression record a lower percentage among students with high crowding index. Moderate and severe depression were more common among students who were not using public transportation, not practicing sports and did not have a hobby. Students who smoked cigarettes had moderate and severe depression compared to those who did not. Moderate and severe depression was noticed among the students who reported substance abuse compared to those who did not. The connections between these factors and the level of depression were not statistically significant. Moderate and severe depression was higher among students who reported having chronic diseases, students who reported having a mental illness, and students who reported having a family history of mental illness.

Social life, academic environment:

Moderate and severe depressive symptoms were higher among students who had no close friends, did not have someone to talk to when under stress, experienced stressful life event(s) during the previous six months, and were not satisfied with their socioeconomic level. The relationship between the grades achieved during the previous academic year and the rate of depression was tested among males and females.

Among males, the rate of moderate to severe depression was 33% between those with an excellent score, 48.6% among those with a fair score, and 37.5%

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among those who failed. Among females, the prevalence of moderate and severe depression increased with the decrease in the score achieved (49.6% among those with excellent and very good scores, 53.8% among those with good or fair scores, and 66.7% among those who failed). A high level of prevalence was also noticed among students who did not have a specific grade to achieve for the current year (53.2%).

Students who attended lectures frequently and those who didn't attend frequently had a lower prevalence of moderate to severe depressive symptoms (about 39% each) compared to those who sometimes did (55.3%). The prevalence of moderate and severe depressive symptoms was higher among students who reported that their surrounding environment was unsuitable for studying. Students strongly disagreed that studying medicine allows them to balance their social and academic life. Students strongly disagreed that the gap between exams was sufficient[12].

Conclusion

This systematic review highlights the common problem of depression and anxiety among medical students of different countries and the risk factors in these countries that contribute to this depression and anxiety. Most of the depressed students were in their third year, suffering from financial burdens, future career concerns, stressful life, and inability to keep up with the academic loads. Some of the students shows high risk to depression and suicidial liability due to substnace abuse, alcohol and marijuana. In addition to that, females from middle east countries shows alot of pressure based on their gender, beside academic load, parents domination and examination which leads them develop more anxiety and depression in Arab countries. Measures should be taken, and academic support should be implemented in colleges and institutes; major steps should be taken to decrease the level of depressed students.

Abbreviation

PMC: PubMed Central. SDS: Zung self-rating depression scale. BDI: Beck's Depression Inventory. PHQ-9: Patient Health Questionnaire. CES-D: The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale. BAI: The Beck Anxiety Inventory. GAD-7: Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment. AKUADS: The Aga Khan University Anxiety and Depression Scale. DASS-21:Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale. HADS: Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale. SSRS: The Social Support Rating Scale. TCSO: The Chinese Trait Coping Style Questionnaire. CBI: Copenhagen Burnout Inventory. MSSQ: Medical Students' Stressor Questionnaire. PID-5 BF: Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Brief Form. GPA: Grade Point Average.

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