

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS FOR UNDERGRADUATE DENTAL STUDENTS IN SEEKING PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING

A. U. Hassan¹, S. A. Khan², R. Zaheer³, H. Saqib⁴, S. M. H. Shah⁵, I. U. Rehman⁶ and A. Tariq⁷

¹ Department of Community and Preventive dentistry, University College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, ² Department of Operative dentistry, University College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, ³ House officer, University College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, ⁴ House officer, University College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, ⁵ Department of Community and Preventive dentistry, University College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, ⁶ Department of Oral and Maxillofacial surgery, University College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, ⁷ Research cell, University college of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Lahore, Lahore.

ABSTRACT: The goal of this study was to evaluate the Perception of dental undergraduates regarding need of psychological and psychosocial support throughout their undergraduate life. A total sample of 300 dental students participated from 3 private dental colleges of Lahore. A cross sectional study was done to evaluate their needs for psychological counseling. A questionnaire was made comprising of 15 questions regarding various aspects and perceptions of counseling to evaluate its need and outcomes. The data showed 62.2% of undergraduate dental students need counseling sessions and 84.4% believes that mentoring has high impact on dentist health and practice. Data showed 71.2% will attend if confidentiality is provided and 80.1% believes these sessions will be productive. Confidentiality in counseling sessions is the most important part as there is a reluctance seen for counseling because of lack of confidentiality.

Keywords: Psychological counselling, confidentiality, dental students, psychosocial factors.

(Received 03.09.2020

Accepted 14.12.2020)

INTRODUCTION

Dental undergraduates undergo a high level of stress due to academic pressure, going through anxiety resulting in increased health concerns. An increased stress level and anxiety results in depression. Depression mediates the students to substance abuse rather than going for professional help students find a way to relax them through alcohol, marijuana, nicotine intake and get them stuck deeper into their state of mind (Hyman, and Sinha, 2009; Ecker, and Buckner, 2017; Buckner, and Zvolensky, 2014).

A depressed mind may result in negative thoughts resulting in students taking severe steps. To reduce the incidence of such cases school-based interventions need to be done, in educational institutions, services of psychological assistance are needed in Pakistan which should be in easy access of students with guaranteed confidentiality as well as devoid of having any fear of negative effect on academic evaluations. As recommended by WHO strategies need to be initiated which include; crisis management, self-esteem enhancement, development of social skills, and healthy decision making (Osama *et al.*, 2014; Naqshbandi, Bashir, Qadri and Khan, 2019). The single greatest risk factor predisposing to suicidal ideation was substance abuse. This was followed jointly by parental neglect and peer pressure for success. Campaigns against substance

abuse and counseling of vulnerable students will help (Stebleton, Soria and Huesman, 2014; Alzahem, van der Molen, Alaujjan and de Boer, 2014). A study conducted in Karachi explored the effect of career counseling on the postgraduate course choice preferences of dental professionals. This study concluded a significant difference of career counseling on the course selection of dental students before and after the counseling session which was found very much operational for the students (Azad and Rahim, 2015).

All these factors raise the need of a full time or a part time counsellor on campus where students can seek help regarding their problems which may be related to their education or any problem they are going through in their life; this can happen only if their confidentiality is maintained. The aim of this study was to assess how students feel about professional counseling as a way to reduce stress among dental undergraduate dental students of Lahore.

METHODOLOGY

It was a cross-sectional study design where the target population was the undergraduate dental students. A sample size of 300 students was calculated using Cochran's formula.⁶ Dental institutes were chosen by random lottery method. Data was collected from 3 private dental colleges of Lahore. Ethical approval was taken

from the Ethical review board. A questionnaire was developed and validated by experts of the field and a pilot study was conducted from 20 participants consisting of 14 questions regarding the need of professional counselor and barriers of perceived in the using their services. Likert scale was used to record the answers ranging from 0 to 2 (where 1= Yes, 0=No, 2=May Be). The questionnaire was filled after obtaining informed consent from the participants. Data was analyzed in percentages to explore the difference between responses.

RESULTS

A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed by the researchers out of which 310 questionnaires were filled, 10 questionnaires were rejected as they were not filled completely.⁴ Respondents from 3 different medical colleges were chosen those who responded actively. Hence, the response rate was calculated to be 96.7%. 135(45%) of which were males while 165(55%) were females. Summary of the overall results is shown in fig.1.

The results showed 62.2% reported a need for counseling session. 74.8% believed that mentoring has high impact on Dentist’s professional development. 71.8% reported that they will attend counseling sessions, if confidentiality is provided. 82.2% believe these sessions will be productive.

As shown in table.1. Some of the questions which had an alarming response by the respondents, when asked if they are psychologically disturbed after they have made a mistake 85.1% responded positively as they are affected by the mistake during the procedure this could be covered up if they are well counseled. Moreover, when they were asked if they would like to attend the counseling sessions above than 71.8% of the people responded in agreement in case the confidentiality is maintained, According to this study, Confidentiality is the most important factor of concern in counseling sessions.83.2% people believed that if counseling sessions were held that would be beneficial for their future practice.

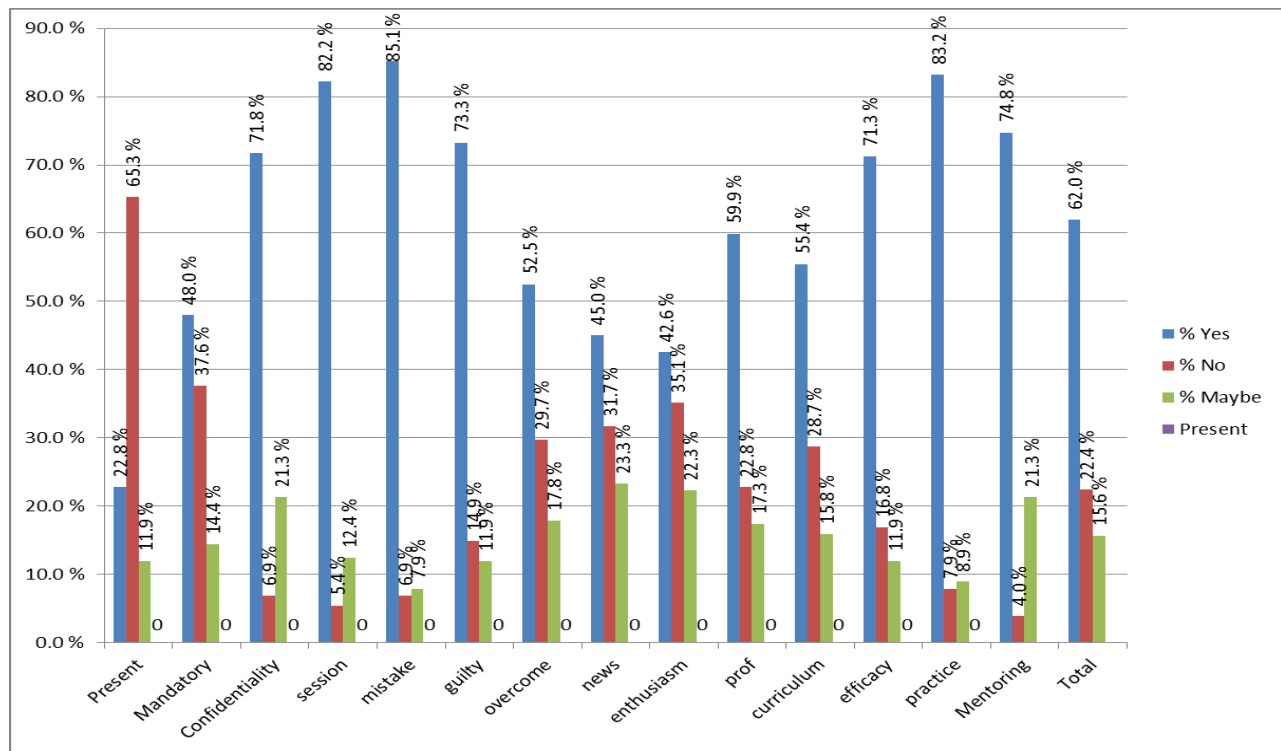


Fig 1: Overall results of the questionnaire

Table 1: Percentages of responses about Mistake, confidentiality and practice.

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)	Maybe (%)
During procedure, are you psychologically disturbed if you make a mistake?	85.1	7	7.9
Would you attend counseling sessions if Confidentiality is provided?	71.8	6.9	21.3
Do you think counseling will be beneficial for your future practice?	83.2	7.9	8.9

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to assess counseling requirements and results suggested that students have reported a need of counseling and acknowledged its importance. It also focuses on promotion of mental health and well-being of junior dentists during their undergraduate and training phases (Finkelstein-Fox, Park, and Riley, 2018). Previous research studies show dental undergraduate undergoing a higher level of stress, going through anxiety resulting in increased health concerns. A number of studies have been done among the dental students of various countries of the world i.e. UK, USA and Canada, the results raised a variety of factors in which dental students find it stressful i.e. time management, faculty- student relationship, work load, quotas, annoying patients, shorter holiday breaks, less family time and competition at educational level in terms of grades among peers (Lehr, Lehr, and Sumarah, 2007).

A recent study in Turkey showed that dental undergraduates had a higher level of stress level as compared to any other professional showing an inverse relationship between anxiety and academic performances (Wolf, 1994). In comparison of western over eastern culture different factors play a role in stress levels. These factors may include, depression, interpersonal sensitivity, psychological distress, anxiety, and tendencies of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Due to high level of stress among students instead of getting help from professionals, students find their way in the form of nicotine, alcohol, marijuana to relax themselves. This is an alarming situation for our society. According to a study conducted in UK, majority of students of dentistry face multiple types of abuses during their study as well as in their professional life whereas alcohol abuse was found the most prevalent type of abuse among students of dentistry as compared to medical students (Uraz, Tocak, Yozgatlıgil, Cetiner and Bal, 2013; Elliott, and Daley, 2012).

A student counselor relationship has an ethical and legal obligation to keep information contained within that relationship (Reilly, 2018). There is a need to have psychological sessions with students on campus, collaboration with Government, non- government institutions, professional from mental health department as well as public health department to cope up with this challenging situation. It is, in most cases, found difficult for a person to visit a counselor. The major reasons for this difficulty is level of comfort, social stigma etc. It has become a dilemma of our society that a person receiving counseling is considered as a mentally unstable person whereas in reality, it is very helpful to have counseling while addressing a specific situation as looking for a professional assistance is a symbol of maturity, and awareness and care about self.

Limitations: This was a self-reported questionnaire which is often the cause of bias. The study has its own limitation as it involves a moderate sample due to limited time span and lack of resources. In addition the findings were completely subjective. There is a need to include more students and institutes in this research at a national level for a better outcome.

Conclusion: In order to produce better academic results and confident professionals, counseling should be mandatory for undergraduate Dental students. Moreover, to develop a trust among students there is a need of putting strong emphasis on maintaining the confidentiality among student during and after the counseling sessions. A systemic review published in 2011 suggested that prior studies have not come up with any solution towards stress related to dental undergraduates concluding:

'There is a need of full time professional counselor or a psychologist for students on campus' (Elani, Allison, Kumar, Mancini, Lambrou, and Bedos, 2014).

Recommendations: A higher workload and increased peer pressure in the clinical and academic environment simultaneously creates a challenging and inspiring workplace but it may also produce adverse stress, fatigue and potential for burnout, in order to avoid these situations steps are to be taken to make counseling mandatory for every undergraduate dental students out there and for this steps are to be taken. Counseling services should be free and mandatory for every student to attend his/her session with counselor. Students should be self-referred or referred by faculty. The doors of counselor should be open for all students including house surgeons and post graduate students. Confidentiality should be practiced by counselor and counseling department. Individual files should be made in order to assess improvement.

REFERENCES

- Azad, A.A. and Rahim, S. (2015). Effect Of Career Counselling On Postgraduate Education Preferences Of Dental Students. *Pak Armed Forces Med J.*, 2015; 65(5): 701-05
- Hyman, S.M. and Sinha, R. (2009). Stress-related factors in cannabis use and misuse: implications for prevention and treatment. *Journal of substance abuse treatment*, 36(4): p. 400-413.
- Ecker, A., and Buckner, J., (2017). Cannabis-Related Problems and Social Anxiety: The Mediation Role of Post-Event Processing. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 53(1):36-41.
- Buckner J., and Zvolensky, M. (2014). Cannabis and related impairment: The unique roles of cannabis use to cope with social anxiety and

- social avoidance. *The American Journal on Addictions*, 23(6):598-603.
- Alzahem, A., van der Molen, Alaujan, and de Boer. (2014). Stress management in dental students: a systematic review. *Advances In Medical Education And Practice*, 167. doi: 10.2147/amep.s46211
- Naqshbandi, I., Bashir, N., Qadri, S., and Khan, S. (2019). Prevalence of Stress, Anxiety and Depression among Medical Undergraduate Students of Kashmir - A Cross-Sectional Study. *International Journal Of Contemporary Medical Research [IJCMR]*, 6(5). doi: 10.21276/ijcmr.2019.6.5.40
- Osama, M., Islam, M., Hussain, S., Masroor, S., Burney, M., and Masood, M. *et al.* (2014). Suicidal ideation among medical students of Pakistan: A cross-sectional study. *Journal Of Forensic And Legal Medicine*, 27, 65-68. doi: 10.1016/j.jflm.2014.08.006
- Stebbleton, M., Soria, K., and Huesman, R. (2014). First-Generation Students' Sense of Belonging, Mental Health, and Use of Counseling Services at Public Research Universities. *Journal Of College Counseling*, 17(1), 6-20. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2014.00044.x
- Elani, H., Allison, P., Kumar, R., Mancini, L., Lambrou, A., and Bedos, C. (2014). A Systematic Review of Stress in Dental Students. *Journal of Dental Education*, 78(2):226-242.
- Uraz, A., Tocak, Y., Yozgathgil, C., Cetiner, S., and Bal, B. (2013). Psychological Well-Being, Health, and Stress Sources in Turkish Dental Students. *Journal Of Dental Education*, 77(10), 1345-1355. doi: 10.1002/j.0022-0337.2013.77.10.tb05609.x
- Elliott, K., and Daley, D. (2012). Stress, coping, and psychological well-being among forensic health care professionals. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 18(2):187-204.
- Wolf, T.M. (1994). Stress, coping and health: enhancing well-being during medical school. *Medical education*, 28(1): p. 8-17.
- Finkelstein-Fox, L., Park, C., and Riley, K., (2018). Mindfulness and emotion regulation: promoting well-being during the transition to college. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 31(6):639-653.
- Lehr, R., Lehr, A., and Sumarah, J., (2007). Confidentiality and Informed Consent: School Counsellors' Perceptions of Ethical Practices. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 41(1): 16-30.
- Reilly, K., (2018). *Record Numbers of College Students Are Seeking Treatment for Depression and Anxiety — But Schools Can't Keep Up*, in *TIME*. March 19, 2018, TIME USA, LLC: USA.