

THE CLINICAL ENVIRONMENT AS A SOURCE OF STRESS AMONG BACHELORS OF MEDICAL SPECIALTIES

Monika Obreykova¹

Abstract:

Purpose: The fundamental goal of medical education is to train knowledgeable and capable medical professionals. However, the heavy workload during the learning process and clinical practice can sometimes negatively impact students' mental health. This research paper aims to draw attention to the stress-causing factors and strategies for coping with stress during the clinical practice of nurses, midwives, and medical assistants. An online survey was conducted to study the opinion of 100 students of medical specialties from the Department of Health Care, University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov", Burgas, during their clinical practice in four private and public hospitals in the city of Burgas. The research was conducted in November-December 2021. The results of the study reveal that stress factors significantly predict the mental health of undergraduate students in medical specialties and can cause health problems and adverse situations. The study outlined the main challenge in medical education as the establishment of methods that ignore the students' insecurities and suggests strategies for dealing with stress. Furthermore, the fears that cause stress among students about the activities performed during clinical practice were illustrated. Finally, the study found that many dynamic experiences influence the well-being of undergraduate students in medicine during their clinical practice. The findings of the study will allow the cultivation of professional endurance in patient care.

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Introduction

The term stress was first used in 1930 by the Canadian endocrinologist Hans Selye. In his work "Stress without Distress (1982)", he considered stress as an endocrine physiological phenomenon that plays a vital role in maintaining the body's reactivity. This concept defines the "general syndrome of adaptation" - a universal mechanism for adapting the person to the stress that arises under specific body requirements. Stress is a response to an irritant (nervous tension, physical damage, infection, cold, temperature, changes in lifestyle and its requirements, crises, failures, conflicts, disappointments), resulting in a non-specific reaction of adaptation. Richard Lazarus (1984), an American psychologist who brings out the Transactional Stress Model, discusses the psychological aspects of stress. According to him, "stress is a condition provoked by the situation, the requirements of the social environment, which are assessed and experienced by individuals in different ways. Scientific literature defines the state of stress as increased psycho-physical activity in response to some danger or threat and is usually associated with unpleasant emotions (Rudow 1986); as the manifestation of an individual's adaptation to changes in the external environment (Smewing, Cox 1996); or a reaction to physiological and /or mental arousal, initially arising out of a demanding external environment, impacting the physical and psychological well-being of an individual adversely (BMA book 1992). Students Bachelors in medical specialties are the key future human resource in the health system, which is significant nationally and globally. Demanding situations beyond a student's ability to adapt are prevalent in the learning process and in their practical training. Students are young and insecure while coping with a stressful clinical environment that could affect their mental health. Medical professionals face many challenges that require a timely and adequate response (Gencheva et al., 2021). The medical profession is saturated with emotional coloring. Dealing with patients' pain, suffering, and problems is at the heart of this profession, and that too against the background of lack of funds. For future medical professionals dealing with human suffering daily, it is natural to feel some disappointment with their choice of profession. At the completion of their training, however they discover the other side of their profession i.e.the patient's gratitude for their care, the healing process, and satisfaction with a job done well (Dragusheva et al., 2017).

Many medical professionals are unprepared for reality. Clinical practice is an essential stage of the academic training of medical students to assist them in developing and improving professional competencies. It prepares them to render quality health care services. During clinical practice, students must be provided with a favorable environment to gain professional experience and develop habits and adaptability to the stressful profession. Regardless of the stressors in the clinical setting, students

¹ University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov", Department of Health Care, Burgas, Bulgaria, monika_obreykova@abv.bg

prefer practical training over theoretical methods of education related to their future professional realization, where practical activity predominates (Mladenova, 2018). This in turn, requires teachers to provide an effective set of methods to empower students to deal with the stress during their learning process and in their future careers. Placing students in a clinical setting aims to prepare them for professional situations and to facilitate the socialisation required in their professional careers (Cant R et al., 2021). Building humane relationships in the system teacher-student as a condition and factor for establishing the behavioral model of humane treatment of the patients by these future medical professionals: in providing medical help and care; in the implementation of the preventive, promotional, pedagogical, and social functions and activities of the medical specialist (Terzieva, 2009). Medical specialists must acquire psychological knowledge and competencies, and master the skills of empathy. Empathic professional behavior improves the understanding of the patient's disease and is a prerequisite for achieving an effective therapeutic outcome and quality health care (Dragusheva et al., 2020).

Aim of the study

To study, analyze and draw attention to the stressors and strategies for coping with stress during the clinical practice of nurses, midwives, and medical assistants. The objective of the study was to understand the factors causing stress during the clinical practice of the graduates of medical specialties and the role of their teachers. The relevant literature on the problem has been extensively reviewed. The present study is based on sociological and documentary research.

Results and analysis

An online questionnaire was used to identify the main stressors during the clinical practice and the coping strategies. The data has been analysed using SPSS by IBM. The sample size for the study is 100 students from medical specialisation. Age-wise distribution of the respondents shows that 63% of the respondents are above the age of 35 years, 20% are within the age group of 30-35 years, 10% of the respondents are in the age group of 25-30 years and 7% students are in the age group of 20-25 years. Specialisation wise distribution of students is presented in figure 1:

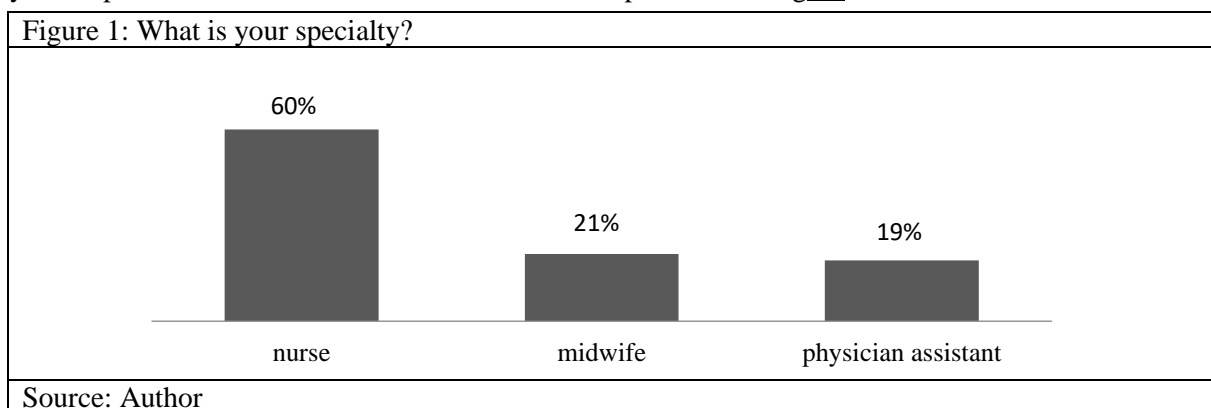
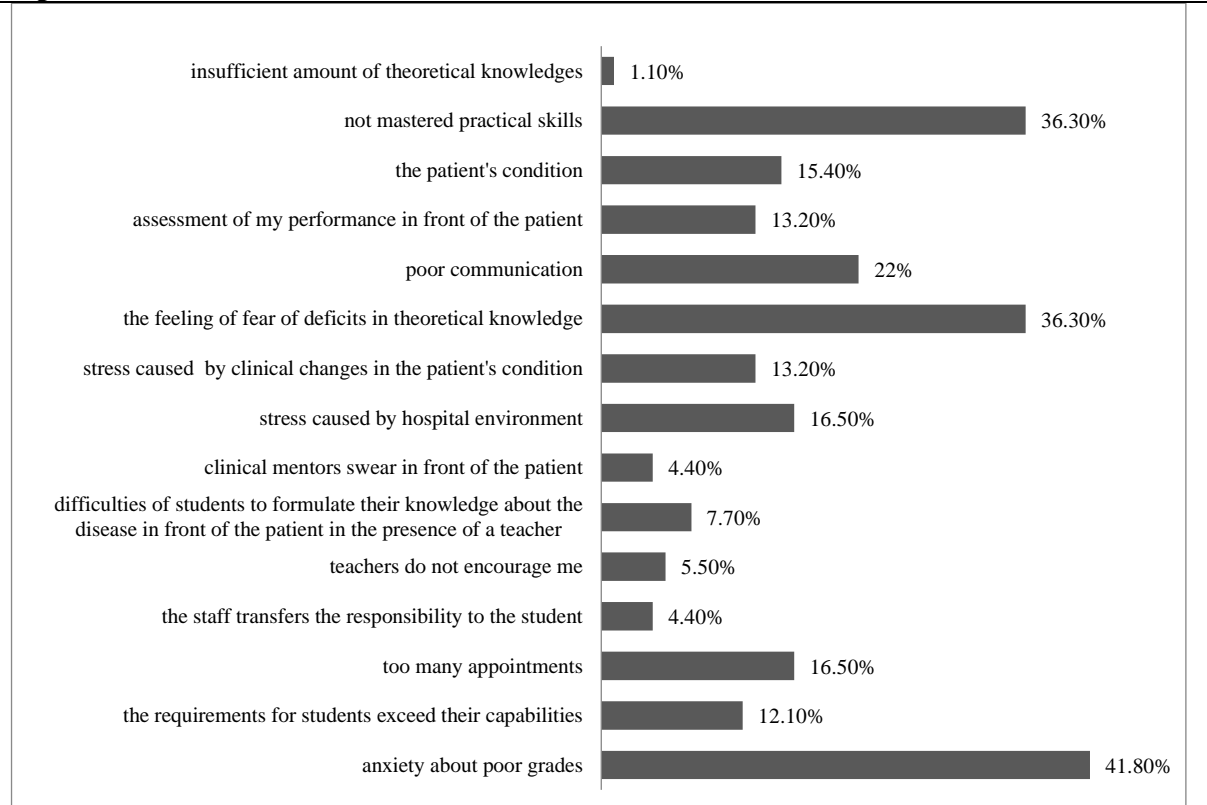


Figure 2 presents the causes of stress among the respondents as: the clinical tasks, teachers and clinical mentors, the clinical environment, patient care, insufficient professional knowledge, and skills. The results of the study show that students perceive the stress manifested during clinical practice as a predictor of their mental health. According to 41.80% of the respondents, one of the major factors for stress is anxiety about securing poor grades. Among 36.30% of the respondents, anxiety is also caused by the fear of insufficient theoretical knowledge. Next, the respondents point out to the new practical skills as a reason for the uncertainty during clinical tasks. Poor communication is reported by 22% of students as a stress factor, while 15.40% of respondents reported patient's condition as a cause of high stress. Mastering the principles and rules of effective communication with patients is crucial for overcoming stress among students during clinical practice (Andonova, 2017). The stressful characteristics of the clinical environment also negatively affect the emotional state of the respondents, 16.50% of respondents indicated the hospital environment and too many daily appointments as stressful. Clinical changes in the patient's condition are indicated (13.20%) as a reason that negatively affects the performance of clinical tasks. In addition to lack of experience and patient's age another stress causing factor for students during clinical practice is the support of mentors and teachers; which

is crucial for students (Andonova et al., 2021). According to 12.10% of respondents, the professional requirements exceed their capabilities, matching these consumes a lot of time and create tension. 7.70% of the students indicated the difficulties in practically implementing their theoretical knowledge in clinical practice in the presence of a teacher and patient as a stress-causing factor. And for 4.40% of respondents it is the bad attitude of mentors that cause stress.

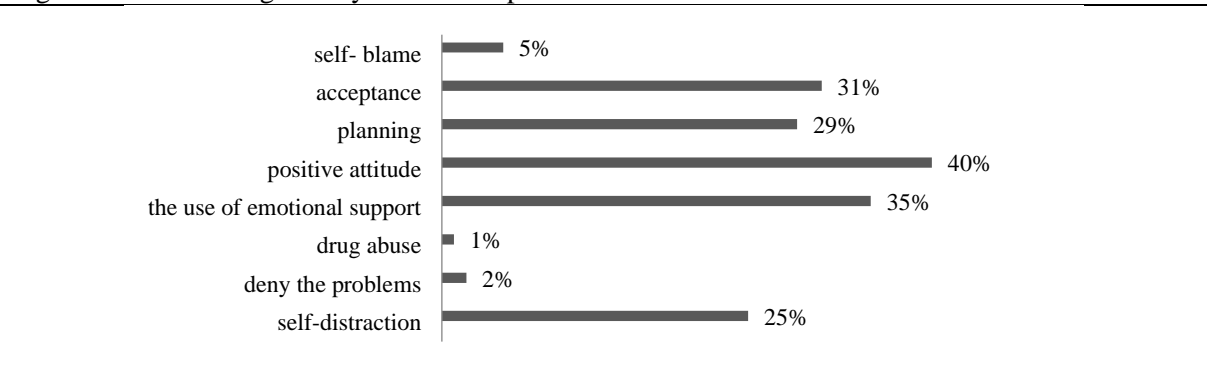
Figure 2: What is the cause of stress?



Source: Author

A stressful clinical environment limits the autonomy of trained medical professionals in terms of their decision-making and performance. Respondents are using various strategies to manage stress. 40% of the respondents indicated that they handle stress with a positive attitude. 35% of students stated using emotional support, and 31% of respondents accept the difficulties and thus decide to deal with the emotional stressors. 29% of the respondents systematically plan cope with the stress, while 25% consider self-distraction as a method for solving their problems. Only 2% of the respondents deny the problems, and 1% abuse drugs to relieve stress (Fig. 3):

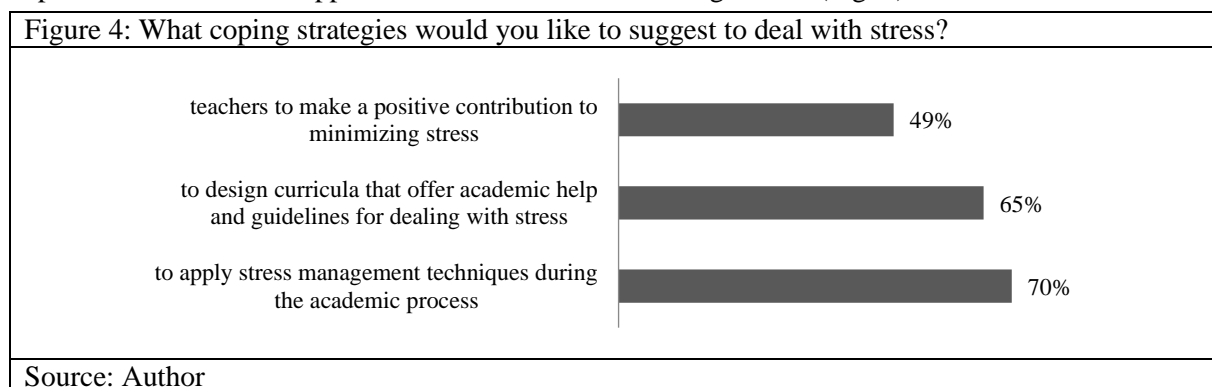
Figure 3: What strategies do you use to cope with the stress?



Source: Author

Intensive stress management among future medical professionals requires careful monitoring of risk factors in contemporary medical training programs. Stressors in the clinical environment are not isolated but are in close interaction with the socio-economic processes, the culture and traditions of a

country, social factors, family, and friendly environment. All of these have a significant influence on the efficiency of future medical professionals. In this study, 70% of students stated that they take responsibility for their psychological well-being and tend to apply personal stress management techniques during the academic course. Next, 65% of respondents suggested inclusion of formal academic help and guidelines for coping with stress in the curricula. According to WHO guidelines, there are no specific strategies for dealing with stress. However, 49% of future health professionals expect their teachers to support them with methods to manage stress (Fig. 4):



Conclusion

Training of students in medical specialties is exceptionally stressful and takes a toll on their mental well-being. Therefore, various stress management strategies should be used, especially during clinical practice, to help medical students perform efficiently in the challenging clinical environment. The findings of the study reveal that the main stressors stem from the set clinical tasks, behaviour of teachers and clinical mentors, clinical environment, patient care, and insufficient professional knowledge and skills. However, students understand the consequences of stress and use different stress management techniques like handling stress with their positive attitude, by using emotional support and acceptance. Finally, stress management strategies have been identified to support medical students during the course to minimize stress.

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