

## Perceived Sources of Stress Among Students of Al Azhar Dental College, Thodupuzha, Kerala- A Descriptive Study

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Accepted 2018-03-05, Published 2018-03-10

### Abstract:

**Introduction:** Stress is one of the contributing factors to most of the health ailments. In this competitive world, job is one of the major factor causing Stress and Dentistry is no exception to that.

**Am and objectives:** To identify various sources of Stress as perceived by the undergraduate students of Al Azhar dental college, Thodupuzha, Idukki

**Materials and methods:** Hundred students (third and fourth year students of the college) were assessed for various sources of Stress using a validated questionnaire. Responses were tabulated and summarized using descriptive statistics

**Results:** Quota completion system (>80%) and fear of failing exams were most Stressful conditions of students and dependence to alcohol/drug was the least Stressor.

**Conclusion:** There are conditions which create Stress in students need to be addressed by teachers and college authorities to have a productive and quality dental education.

**Key Words:** Dentistry, Dental students, Stress.

### Introduction:

The term Stress describes external demands on an individual's physical and psychological wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> Stress has been manifested as fatigue, tension, dizziness, sleeplessness, tachycardia, GI symptoms, irritability, anxiety and cynicism, which can eventually lead to depression, absenteeism and diminished work efficiency.<sup>2-5</sup> In addition to this, a negative association has been reported between Stress and academic performances of studies. Contemporary curricula require Dental students to attain diverse proficiencies including acquisition of theoretical knowledge, clinical competencies and interpersonal skills. Hence dental profession has been widely acknowledged as being associated with high levels of Stress.<sup>6,7</sup> In chronic or extreme circumstances occupational Stress can precipitate as state of burnout in susceptible practitioner.<sup>8</sup> Maslach et al<sup>9</sup> described burnout as a unique response to frequent and intense clinician-patient contacts consisting of three components: emotional exhaustion (mental fatigue), depersonalization

(psychological distancing from others) and reduced personal accomplishment. Dentists who experience burnout are unable to continue working, find the interaction with patients unbearable and withdraw from contact with staff and colleagues<sup>10-12</sup>. In recent decades Stress among Dental students has appeared to be a major concern for dental educators globally and various surveys and studies have been made across different countries, different universities and curricula. In India the duration of the BDS is four years with examination at end of each year followed by 1-year rotatory internship in dental colleges and is governed by DCI through various universities.<sup>13</sup> Although no cumulative nationwide studies on the topic has been reported in India various universities and colleges have conducted several studies and shown significant amount of Stress among Dental students of India in relation to different variables. Since the perception of Stress is frequently influenced by sociocultural factors, the result of studies in one region, cannot necessarily be generalized to the other. Hence it is important for individual dental colleges to identify sources of

Stress among its students and plan a curriculum that is more student friendly.

**Methodology:**

A questionnaire survey was conducted to identify various sources of Stress as perceived by the undergraduate students of Al-Azhar dental college. Questionnaire contained closed questions following Likert scale to elicit facts and opinion regarding the subject. The collected data was changed from its qualitative form to quantitative form by characterizing the result. The sample group consisted of 50 students from final year and 50 students from

third year out of which 21 were male students and 79 were female students. The sample was selected from Al Azhar Dental College, Thodupuzha.

**Result:**

A 100% response rate was obtained with the questionnaire. This study was carried out at the beginning of the academic year among third and fourth year students, and it discussed experiences of the preceding academic years. Among the participants, 21% were males and 79% were females. The age of the sample ranged from 20 to 22 years, the overall mean age being 21 years.

**Table 1** shows the percentage scores for each of the 14 Stressors of third year

Domain	Not Stressful %	Mildly Stressful%	Moderately Stressful%	Severely Stressful%
Lack of home atmosphere	6	40	32	22
Following rules and regulations	16	44	26	14
Financial feasibility	0	8	44	48
Dependences(smoking/alcohol)	100	0	0	0
Behaviour of teaching staff& atmosphere created by clinical supervisors	8	24	38	30
Quota completion system	0	2	34	64
Mandatory attendance	16	22	42	20
Difficulty in learning clinical procedures	8	64	18	10
Language barrier	64	22	12	2
Competition for grades and quota completion among batchmates	30	16	30	24
Fear of failing in exams and lagging behind	0	14	16	70
Fear of not having possibility to pursue a PG programme	46	14	20	20
Lack of time for relaxation	6	30	28	38
Uncertainty about dental career	12	34	44	10

**Table 2** shows the percentage scores for each of the 14 Stressors of fourth year

Domain	Not Stressful	Mildly Stressful	Moderately Stressful	Severely Stressful
Lack of home atmosphere	16	16	28	40
Following rules and regulations	20	20	34	26
Financial feasibility	4	22	26	48
Dependences(smoking/alcohol)	88	6	6	0
Behaviour of teaching staff& atmosphere created by clinical supervisors	2	18	36	44
Quota completion system	2	8	10	80
Mandatory attendance	8	16	32	44
Difficulty in learning clinical procedures	8	46	26	20
Language barrier	58	26	2	14
Competition for grades and quota completion among batchmates	32	18	14	36
Fear of failing in exams and lagging behind	8	16	8	68
Fear of not having possibility to pursue a PG programme	28	20	20	32
Lack of time for relaxation	10	28	20	42
Uncertainty about dental career	6	28	18	48

In third years, the least Stressful factor (100%) is fear of dependence to smoking and alcohol. Academically, fear of failing in exams and lagging behind their batch mates was the highest Stressor, and it comprised of almost 70% of the students. Among the social domain, the language barrier was the least Stressful factor, i.e. 64%. Also, the quota completion system prevalent in the college is a highly Stressful factor among these students, almost 64%. In the clinics, students in the third year find learning the clinical procedures mildly Stressful, i.e. a majority of them (64%). 46% of the students also find following the rules and regulations of the college mildly Stressful. The financial feasibility of the course is a high Stress factor for the students, i.e. almost a combined 92% of these students. Among the fourth-year students too, the least Stressful factor (88%) is fear of dependence to smoking and alcohol. While 48% of the students are severely Stressed about financial feasibility of the course which is a common Stress factor in both years. With staffs, their behavior and the atmosphere created by clinical supervisors is a severely Stressful factor for the final year students, i.e. a 44%. The quota completion system that is prevalent is severely Stressful factor for the final year students (80%). 42% of the students find the lack of time for relaxation and other entertainment a severely Stressful factor. Language barrier is the least Stressor among the students,

almost a 58% of them. The fear of failing in exams and lagging behind their batch mates is severely Stressful factor for about 68% of the fourth-year students.

#### Discussion:

Dental education has shown to be very Stressful for the students as reported by a large number of studies in the literature. To become a responsible dental professional, students have to reach high levels of knowledge and professional skill as well as develop good attitudes toward patient care, all within a short period of time. Identification of potential problems is important in dental education programs, as it might give students, faculty and administrators an opportunity to take precautionary measures to prevent dental Stress. The present study is aimed to identify various sources of Stress as perceived by Dental students. When comparing both the years for Stress factors affecting them, we can see some significant differences. Like lack of a homely atmosphere affects more severely in fourth year students (40%) while the third-year students are only mildly Stressed about this (40%). In terms of the future of their careers, fourth year students are severely Stressed (32%) and fear that they would not have the possibility of pursuing a post graduate programme, while the third years are majorly not Stressed (46%) at all about the same factor. The final

years are also more severely Stressed (48%) about the uncertainties in dental career while the third years are less affected by this, only 10% being severely Stressed. Even academically, the competition for grades and quota completion among batch mates is a more Stressful factor in fourth year students (36%) compared to the third-year students (24%). Comparing these studies among the third-year students, academically, competition among batchmates is the least Stressor in the former study, but it is seen as a moderate Stressful factor in our study. While quota completion is severe Stress factor in our study which is only moderate in the former study conducted. Another dissimilarity seen among the studies is the language barrier, which is not Stressful in our study, while it is a high Stress factor in the former study. There are similarities too between the studies, the fear of failing in examinations is a severe Stress factor seen in both the studies. Comparing the fourth-year students in each study, here also we can see that competition among batch mates is the least Stress factor in the former study while it is a moderate one here. But in the former study, when comparing the quota completion systems, it ranks as one of the severe Stressors, which is similar to our study's results. There was always a flurry of activity to complete portions and quota toward the end of term, which was a major Stressor among students. Also, the fear of failing in examinations seems to top the toll in both studies. When comparing the language barrier Stressor, it is severe one in the former study while it is majorly not Stressful for the students. Gorter RC et al,<sup>12</sup> Murphy RJ et al.<sup>13</sup> and have reported that Stress associated with examinations was high across classes. Within the limitations of this study, the findings indicated that the undergraduate Dental students in India had high levels of perceived Stress. The results of the present study showed that the demands of the profession related to both quality and quantity of academic performance were potent sources of Stress. Hence, both academic and non-academic perceived sources of Stress should be considered in curriculum planning and the working environment for dental education.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion:**

The study reveals that the Stress faced by Dental students are mainly examinations and strict quota regulation system followed by the university. According to the study, both samples said that the quota completion is the most Stressful one, among other similar factors. Hence the university should do necessary preparations to bring the Stress down like

reducing the quota. The other Stress factors include worries about fees and worries about failing exams. There should be appropriate measures to overcome these worries, as they are reducing the quality of education. There is a need for student advisors and councilors combined with preparatory sessions for examination thus boosting student confidence levels. From the study conducted it is evident that the role of universities and management as Stress inducing sources is high. Hence a more lenient method should be taken from the side of management and university for improving the quality of education. There should be teacher student interactive sections along with other faculty empowerment programmes for further improvement.

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