A study on the source of stress and their correlation with coping strategies among Medical students in a Malaysian private Medical School

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Introduction: Academic performance among medical students demands overall well being. They need to adapt to various psychological changes besides coping up with the academic and social demands while preparing for their professional career. Increasing pressure and high expectations can lead to psychological disturbance among students. These psychological disturbances can affect their academic performance and also lead to deterioration in relationships, marital problems and also affect their future employment.

The current study aims at assessing the sources of stress among medical students and also analyse the correlation between stressors and coping strategies. The results of this study would be helpful in developing interventional measures for a better student health care, in helping students in facing the challenges of student life.

Methodology: This is a cross sectional study conducted among 364, year 1 to year 3 medical students. Demographic, MSQQ and brief coping strategy Questionnaires were used. The socio demographic questionnaire was used to obtain data regarding the age, gender, and ethnicity. The MSQQ Questionnaire is a validated instrument specially designed for medical students and used to identify sources of stress. The items in MSSQ represent 40 possible sources of stress grouped into six main domains; Academic Related Stressor (ARS), Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Related Stressor (IRS), Teaching and Learning Related Stressor (TLRS), Social Related Stressor (SRS), Drive and Desire Related Stressor (DRS), and Group Activities Related Stressor (GARS). The scoring method assigns marks from 0 (causing no stress at all) to 4 (causing severe stress) to each of the responses respectively. The brief cope is taken from the full cope where it consists 28 items with 14 scales with 2 items for each scale. The responses were scored on a four point likert scale. The scoring was done in terms of mean score for each scale. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics and ANOVA.

Results: The mean age of the students was 20.8±2.2 years. The students had high academic related stressors (2.1±0.7). All the other stressors were moderate in intensity. Among the year 1 and year 2 students’ academic stressors were high (2.3±0.6 and 2.2±0.7 respectively) and all the other stressors were moderate . However among year 3 students all the stressors were moderate except for drive and desire related stressors which was mild(0.9±0.8). When we
compared the year of study with each domain we found statistically significant results. The stressors among the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others were moderate in all the domains except for mild desire related stress among others. The stressors among different genders and area of upbringing were also moderate. When we compared the stressors between gender, race and the area of upbringing we did not find statistically significant results. The stressors were found to be positively correlated with most of the coping strategies.

Conclusion: We conclude that academic related stress was high in most of the students. Most of the stress was positively correlated to most of the coping strategies.

Take home message:

Screening of all students at regular intervals and identifying the source of stress in vulnerable students can prevent mental illness among medical students.