

Perceptions of Mental Health and Work-Life Balance Among Medical and Health Professionals: An Evaluation of Stress, Burnout, and Coping Mechanisms- A Cross-Sectional Study

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KEYWORDS

Mental health, work-life balance, stress, burnout, medical professionals, coping mechanisms, healthcare workforce.

ABSTRACT

Background: Medical and health professionals are often exposed to high levels of occupational stress, leading to burnout and challenges in maintaining work-life balance. These factors not only impact their mental health but also affect the quality of care provided to patients. This study aims to evaluate the perceptions of mental health, prevalence of stress and burnout, and coping mechanisms among medical and health professionals.

Objectives: To assess the prevalence of stress and burnout among medical and health professionals, evaluate their perceptions of work-life balance, and identify the coping strategies employed to manage these challenges.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among medical and health professionals across various specialties and healthcare settings. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on stress levels, burnout symptoms, work-life balance perceptions, and coping mechanisms. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis were performed to analyze the data.

Results: The study revealed a high prevalence of stress (66%) and burnout (61%) among participants, with notable gender differences in experiences of work-life balance. Factors contributing to stress included long working hours, high workload, and inadequate support systems. Common coping mechanisms identified were peer support (31%), mindfulness practices (27%), and physical activity (42%). Participants highlighted the need for institutional interventions, such as flexible work schedules and mental health programs, to address these issues effectively.

Conclusions: Medical and health professionals face significant challenges in maintaining mental health and achieving work-life balance. Effective coping strategies and organizational support are essential to mitigate stress and burnout. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions can enhance the well-being of professionals and improve the quality of healthcare delivery.

1. Introduction

The medical and healthcare professions are often considered noble yet demanding career paths, with professionals experiencing intense physical, emotional, and psychological pressures^{1,2}. These challenges are further amplified by long working hours, high patient loads, critical decision-making, and the constant expectation of delivering exceptional care. Over time, such demands may contribute to significant mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and burnout^{3,4,5}. Burnout, in particular, is a growing concern, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Medical and health professionals play a pivotal role in safeguarding public health, often working under immense pressure and demanding schedules^{6,7}. The nature of their work involves high levels of responsibility, frequent exposure to stressful situations, and the need to manage critical patient outcomes. These factors, coupled with long and irregular working hours, can significantly affect their ability to maintain a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal lives^{8,9}. Work-life balance has become a central issue in discussions about the well-being of healthcare professionals. An imbalance between work and personal life may lead to physical and mental exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and strained relationships outside of work. This, in turn, can negatively impact their overall quality of life and the quality of care they provide to patients¹⁰. The increasing awareness of the challenges faced by healthcare workers highlights the importance of fostering a supportive work environment that promotes work-life balance. Strategies such as flexible work arrangements, mental health support programs, and workload management are vital for addressing these challenges¹¹.

In recent years, work-life balance has emerged as a critical aspect of professional well-being in healthcare. Striking a balance between professional obligations and personal life is essential for maintaining mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life. However, achieving this equilibrium remains challenging for many medical and health professionals due to unpredictable work schedules, emergencies, and high-stakes responsibilities^{12,13}. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, placing unprecedented strain on healthcare systems and professionals, underscoring the urgent need to address their mental health and well-being^{14,15}. Understanding how healthcare professionals perceive mental health and manage work-life balance is crucial for implementing strategies that foster resilience, reduce burnout, and improve their overall quality of life^{16,17}. This study aims to evaluate the prevalence of stress, burnout, and coping mechanisms among medical and health professionals, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing their mental health and strategies to enhance their professional and personal well-being.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to evaluate the perceptions of mental health, work-life balance, stress, burnout, and coping mechanisms among medical professionals. The study targeted both clinical practitioners and academic faculty members in medical and health institutions to provide a comprehensive understanding of these challenges across different professional environments. Ethical clearance approval was obtained from Committee of Health Research Ethics, Deanship of Scientific Research, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The study population included licensed medical and health professionals actively engaged in clinical practice and/or academic roles. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation from various specializations from different academic institutions. The sample size was calculated based on a desired confidence level of 95% and an acceptable margin of error of 5%, with the final sample consisting of approximately 500 participants. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire that included both quantitative and qualitative items. The questionnaire was developed based on validated instruments used in previous research on mental health, burnout, and work-life balance among healthcare professionals. It consisted of four main sections: demographic information, stress and burnout levels, work-life balance, and coping mechanisms. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions to capture personal experiences and suggestions for improving mental health and work-life balance in the profession. Participants were given the option to complete the survey electronically through an online platform or via paper forms distributed at medical and academic institutions at Qassim region. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS Version 26). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the demographic information and responses to the questionnaire. Inferential statistical tests such as chi-square tests were used to determine significant differences in stress, burnout, and work-life balance perceptions across demographic subgroups (e.g., gender, years of experience, and practice setting). The study received ethical approval from Committee of Health Research Ethics, Deanship of Scientific Research, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent before participation. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were maintained throughout the study, and all data were stored securely in accordance with institutional guidelines. This study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional design does not allow for the establishment of causal relationships. However, the findings provide valuable insights into the mental health challenges and coping mechanisms of medical and health professionals, offering a foundation for future longitudinal studies.

3. Results

Table 1 shows, that majority of participants in this study were aged between 20 and 30 years, representing 40% of the sample, followed by equal representation in the 31–40, 41–50, and above 50

age groups (20% each). A significant portion of the participants were female (75.4%), with male participants constituting 24.6%. Regarding educational and professional status, undergraduate students formed the largest group (40%), followed by equal representation from postgraduate students, medical professional and academicians (20% each). Among professionals, most had 4–6 years of experience (36%), while fewer had more than six years (22%). The table 2 highlights differences in working hours and perceived workload across professional groups. Undergraduate students predominantly worked less than 20 hours per week (70%), while postgraduate students worked slightly more, with 67% falling in the 20–30 hours category. Academicians and medical professional often worked more than 40 hours per week (62% and 20%, respectively). Regarding workload manageability, 75% of undergraduates reported their workload was manageable, but only 20% of medical professional agreed. Stress levels varied, with undergraduates reporting the highest regular stress levels (70%) compared to 32% among medical practitioners. Tables 3 shows the mental health awareness and burnout. A notable proportion of postgraduate students strongly agreed on the importance of mental health in the medical profession (60%), while only 20% of academicians and dental surgeons held the same view. Burnout symptoms were reported by a majority of undergraduates (60%) and half of the postgraduate students (50%). Table 4 shows the support for mental health appeared insufficient, with a significant percentage of participants across all groups unsure about the availability of mental health resources. Physical exercise was the most reported coping mechanism among postgraduate students (50%), while undergraduates leaned toward hobbies such as reading or music (50%). Meditation and mindfulness practices were adopted by 23% of undergraduates and 15% of academicians. Participation in mental health workshops was moderate across groups, with 60% of undergraduates reporting involvement, compared to 50% among postgraduate students.

Table 1: Assessment of Demographic Details

QUESTIONNAIRE	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Age distribution	20-30	200	40
	31-40	100	20
	41-50	100	20
	Above 50	100	20
Gender distribution	Male	123	24.6
	Female	377	75.4
What is your current level of education/professional status?	Undergraduate Student	200	40
	Postgraduate Student	100	20
	Medical professional	100	20
	Academician	100	20
How many years of experience do you have in the profession? (Applicable for medical practitioner and academician)	Less than 1 year	16	8
	1-3 years	68	34
	4-6 years	72	36
	More than 6 years	44	22

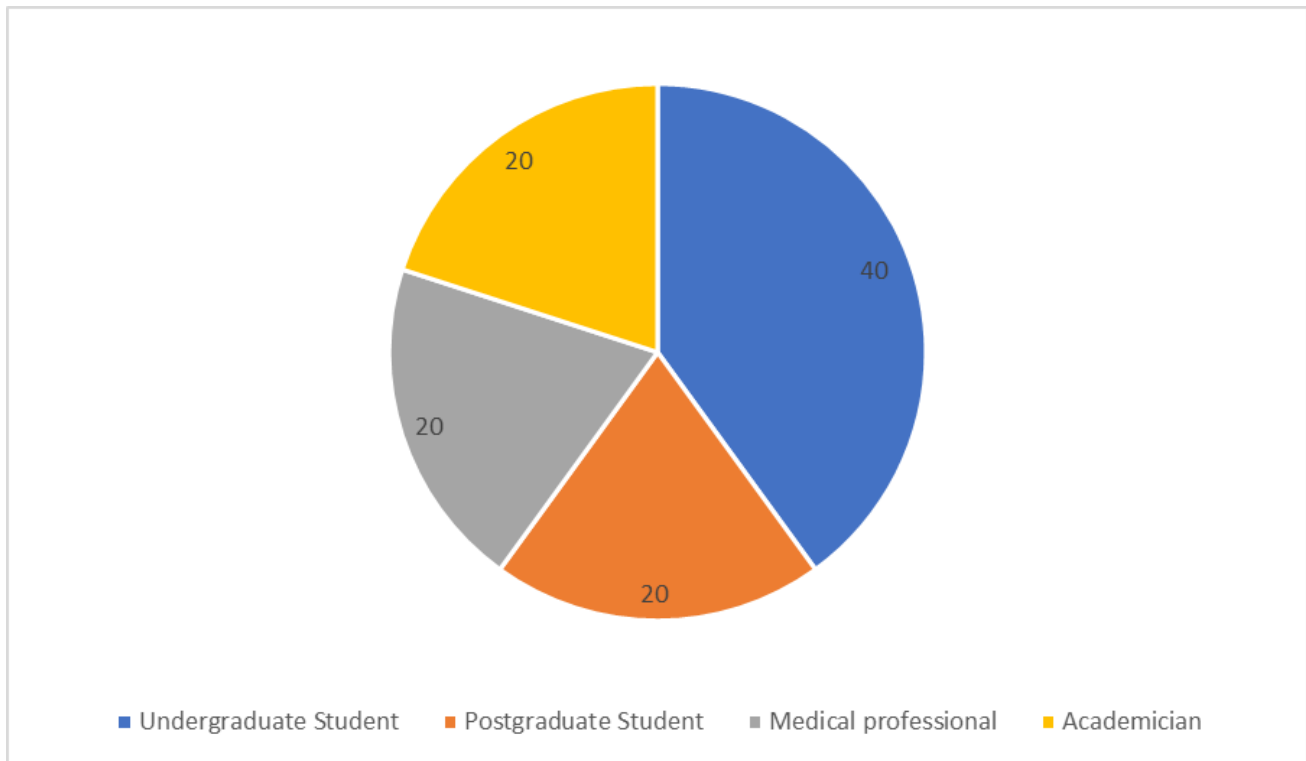


Figure 1: Current Level of Education / Professional Status

Table 2: Distribution of Work Environment Related Questionnaire

Questionnaire	Options	Undergraduate students		Post graduate students		Academician		Medical professional		P-value
		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
How many hours do you work on average per week	Less than 20 hours	140	70	67	67	0	0	32	32	0.014*
	20–30 hours	45	22.5	14	14	19	19	16	16	
	31–40 hours	15	7.5	10	10	4	4	32	32	
	More than 40 hours	0	0	9	9	62	62	20	20	
Do you feel that your current workload is manageable?	Yes	150	75	69	69	52	52	20	20	0.67
	No	45	22.5	12	12	19	19	16	16	
	Sometimes	5	2.5	14	14	15	15	31	31	
	Not at all	0	0	5	5	14	14	33	33	
Do you experience work-related stress on a regular basis	Yes	140	70	67	67	62	62	32	32	0.32
	No	45	22.5	14	14	19	19	16	16	
	Sometimes	15	7.5	11	11	15	15	32	32	
	Not at all	0	0	8	8	4	4	20	20	

Questionnaire	Options	Undergraduate students		Post graduate students		Academician		Medical professional		P-value
		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
What do you believe is the primary cause of stress in your work?	Long working hours	72	36	39	39	62	62	54	54	0.032*
	Difficult patients	84	42	48	48	31	31	41	41	
	Administrative work	44	22	13	13	7	7	5	5	
	Financial pressure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Lack of work-life balance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Table 3: Distribution of Mental Health Awareness

Questionnaire	Options	Undergraduate students		Post graduate students		Academician		Medical professional		P-value
		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
Do you believe mental health is an important issue within the health profession?	Strongly agree	15	7.5	60	60	20	20	20	20	0.039*
	Agree	40	20	10	10	15	15	14	14	
	Neutral	20	10	10	10	20	20	14	14	
	Disagree	25	12.5	10	10	20	20	15	15	
	Strongly disagree	100	50	10	10	25	25	37	37	
Have you experienced symptoms of burnout (e.g., emotional exhaustion, detachment, reduced performance)?	Yes	120	60	50	50	43	43	49	49	0.47*
	No	17	8.5	40	40	29	29	32	32	
	Not sure	63	36.5	10	10	28	28	29	29	
Have Do you think there is sufficient mental health support available to health professionals in your institution/clinic?	Yes	120	60	50	50	43	43	49	49	0.044*
	No	17	8.5	40	40	29	29	32	32	
	Not sure	63	36.5	10	10	28	28	29	29	

Table 4: Distribution of Coping Mechanisms and Support

Questionnaire	Options	Undergraduate students		Post graduate students		Academician		Medical professional		P-value
		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
Do you feel you have a good work-life balance?	Yes	120	60	50	50	43	43	49	49	0.039*
	No	17	8.5	40	40	29	29	32	32	
	Sometimes	63	36.5	10	10	28	28	29	29	
Which of the following activities do you use to cope with work-related stress?	Physical exercise	10	5	50	50	20	20	20	20	0.039*
	Meditation/mindfulness	46	23	10	10	15	15	14	14	
	Socializing with friends/family	10	5	20	20	10	10	15	15	
	Professional counselling	34	17	10	10	20	20	14	14	
Hobbies (reading, music, etc.)	100	50	10	10	35	35	37	37		
Have you participated in any mental health workshops or programs provided by your institution or professional body?	Yes	120	60	50	50	43	43	49	49	0.212
	No	17	8.5	40	40	29	29	32	32	
	Not aware	63	36.5	10	10	28	28	29	29	

4. Discussion

The findings of this cross-sectional study shed light on the perceptions of mental health and work-life balance among medical and health professionals, emphasizing the widespread impact of stress, burnout, and the coping mechanisms employed to navigate these challenges. The results highlight the multifaceted nature of professional well-being in healthcare and underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve the mental health of these essential workers^{18,19,20}. A significant observation from the study is the high prevalence of stress and burnout among medical and health professionals. This can be attributed to several factors, including long working hours, emotionally taxing patient interactions, and the constant pressure to meet clinical and administrative demands. The findings are consistent with existing literature that links prolonged occupational stress in healthcare to emotional exhaustion and reduced job performance. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have intensified these challenges, exacerbated workloads and created additional stressors such as fear of infection and limited personal time. Work-life balance remains a critical concern, with many respondents reporting difficulty in maintaining equilibrium between their professional duties and personal lives^{21,22}. The imbalance often leads to compromised mental well-being, strained interpersonal relationships, and diminished overall quality of life. Gender-based differences in work-

life balance were also notable, with female professionals often facing greater challenges due to societal and family responsibilities, which adds to their workload and stress levels^{23,24,25}.

Despite these challenges, the study also highlights the resilience of medical and health professionals, as many rely on coping mechanisms to manage stress and maintain productivity. Common coping strategies identified include seeking peer support, practicing mindfulness, and engaging in physical activities or hobbies^{26,27}. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies, and some professionals may resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as overworking or neglecting self-care, further perpetuating the cycle of stress and burnout. The results underscore the importance of institutional support in addressing mental health concerns and promoting work-life balance. Hospitals and healthcare organizations must prioritize creating a supportive work environment by implementing policies that mitigate stress, such as flexible scheduling, mental health programs, and workload redistribution. Additionally, fostering a culture that normalizes seeking help for mental health issues and emphasizes the importance of self-care can significantly enhance the well-being of healthcare professionals^{28,29,30}. This study contributes valuable insights into the perceptions of mental health and work-life balance among medical and health professionals. However, its cross-sectional nature limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Future research should explore longitudinal trends to better understand the evolving dynamics of stress, burnout, and coping strategies in this population³¹⁻³⁴. Moreover, interventions tailored to specific groups, such as early-career professionals or those in high-stress specialties, could yield more targeted and effective outcomes.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant challenges addressing the mental health and work-life balance of medical and health professionals is essential not only for their well-being but also for maintaining the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery. By implementing proactive strategies and fostering supportive workplace environments, healthcare organizations can ensure the sustainability and satisfaction of their workforce.

Conflict of Interest: Nil.

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