

Stress-Coping Strategies by Medical Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic [Letter]

This article was published in the following Dove Press journal:
Psychology Research and Behavior Management

Jie Man Low
Muhammad Zakwan Zakariya

School of Medical Sciences, University of
Manchester, Manchester, UK

Dear editor

We read with great interest, the study by Abdulghani et al¹ regarding the level of perceived stress and the coping strategies adopted by medical students at King Saud University, Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Being fourth year medical students, we can closely relate to the respondents in this study as online learning has become the norm. The authors successfully elucidated the academic and psychological struggles that medical students experience in the face of COVID-19. We appreciate the authors' timely efforts in shedding some light on this matter; however, we would like to address a few issues.

With a larger proportion of male participants, this study was exposed to gender bias, which might have impeded the generalization of the results. We think that a more equal gender distribution of participants would be essential to validate the conclusions drawn from the study, especially when higher stress levels in females were reported by the authors.

We applaud the authors' decision to include both acceptance and denial of COVID-19 as coping methods in the questionnaire. However, we found the items on the coping strategies questionnaire to be rather limiting. Whilst modern recreational activities such as playing games and watching movies were included, it would be better to cover a wider array of activities, eg, reading, crafting, playing music, etc., as suggested by Steiner-Hofbauer and Holzinger.² Moreover, we noted the lack of "unhealthy" coping strategies such as illicit drug use. The inclusion of tobacco use in the questionnaire would have also been informative because smoking was identified as one of the coping strategies adopted by a proportion of medical students in the same region, according to a study by Al-Haqwi et al.³

Additionally, we would like to suggest further clarification on some of the terminologies used in the questionnaire, including "mental pressure", "pleasure in study" and "anxiety" because these terms can be construed differently by different individuals. Furthermore, we echo the authors' acknowledgement that "anxiety" is commonly perceived in a negative light.⁴ As such, it would be helpful to substitute "anxiety" with a description of anxiety-related symptoms such as "a sense of unease or nervousness" to reduce ambiguity and to avoid response bias.

In summary, the authors have provided an astute insight on how the COVID-19 pandemic has induced stress among medical students and have laid out the foundation for further studies into alleviating these problems. In view of the physical and

Correspondence: Jie Man Low;
Muhammad Zakwan Zakariya
School of Medical Sciences, University of
Manchester, Manchester, UK
Email jiemman.low@student.manchester.ac.uk;
muhammad.zakariya-2@student.manchester.ac.uk

psychological impacts of COVID-19 on students, further research should explore the different avenues for interventions to better support and enhance their learning.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest for this communication.

References

1. Abdulghani HM, Sattar K, Ahmad T, Akram A. Association of COVID-19 pandemic with undergraduate medical students' perceived stress and coping. *Psychol Res Behav Manag.* 2020;13:871–881.
2. Steiner-Hofbauer V, Holzinger A. How to cope with the challenges of medical education? Stress, depression, and coping in undergraduate medical students. *Acad Psychiatry.* 2020;44(4):380–387.
3. Al-Haqwi AI, Tamim H, Asery A. Knowledge, attitude and practice of tobacco smoking by medical students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. *Ann Thorac Med.* 2010;5(3):145–148. doi:10.4103/1817-1737.65044
4. Pedersen ER, Paves AP. Comparing perceived public stigma and personal stigma of mental health treatment seeking in a young adult sample. *Psychiatry Res.* 2014;219(1):143–150. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2014.05.017

Dove Medical Press encourages responsible, free and frank academic debate. The content of the Psychology Research and Behavior Management 'letters to the editor' section does not necessarily represent the views of Dove Medical Press, its officers, agents, employees, related entities or the Psychology Research and Behavior Management editors. While all reasonable steps have been taken to confirm the content of each letter, Dove Medical Press accepts no liability in respect of the content of any letter, nor is it responsible for the content and accuracy of any letter to the editor.

Psychology Research and Behavior Management

Dovepress

Publish your work in this journal

Psychology Research and Behavior Management is an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal focusing on the science of psychology and its application in behavior management to develop improved outcomes in the clinical, educational, sports and business arenas. Specific topics covered in the journal include: Neuroscience, memory and decision making; Behavior modification and management; Clinical

applications; Business and sports performance management; Social and developmental studies; Animal studies. The manuscript management system is completely online and includes a very quick and fair peer-review system, which is all easy to use. Visit <http://www.dovepress.com/testimonials.php> to read real quotes from published authors.

Submit your manuscript here: <https://www.dovepress.com/psychology-research-and-behavior-management-journal>