Original Article

A Comparative Study of General Health among Medical and Nonmedical Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

India offers several courses in the field of health-science. The increasing population of the country demands more trained individuals in this field. These courses include MBBS, BDS, BAMS, BPT, BSc Nursing etc. The current study aims to asess the general health of undergraduate students from various courses, across the state of Andhra Pradesh in South India. The assessment used the Standardized General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), which consists of 12 items with 4 response options each. It measures general well-being and mental health, evaluating factors such as the individual's ability to concentrate and sleep quality. The questionnaire is designed to assess overall mental health status. The GHQ-12 was used to interview 156 UG Students across the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, 78 of whom were medical students and 78 were nonmedical students. Post-graduate students were excluded for the study. Upon data collection and analysis, it was observed that 71.79% medical students in their UG tend to have poor general health as compared to 70.89% nonmedical students. Thus, higher number of medical students tended to have poorer general health as compared to nonmedical students. This might have been due to their hectic schedule and extensive syllabus, demading both physical and mental hardwork and exhaustion. 73.27% males showed scores above 3 in contrast to 67.86% of female subjects, indicating lower general well-being in females. The study was concentrated in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, leaving scope for similar research on a different population and a different sample size.

Keywords: Undergraduates, General Health, Mental Health, Medical students, MBBS

Introduction

As per the 2021-22 survey, around 4.33 crore individuals were present in India at an undergraduate level for pursuing higher education. The high population of India, demands a large number of trained individuals in the medical and health-care field. Every year around 70,000 to 80,000 doctors graduate in the country. Alongside, there are numerous other courses in the health-care field including BDS, BPT, BAMS etc. These aspirants go through rigorous training in their undergraduate period to be able to provide maximum service to their field after graduation. For this to take place smoothly, it requires a cautious monitoring of the mental and physical well-being of these individuals, to enable them to reach their full potential.

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The psychological well-being of undergraduate students in medical and non-medical fields has been studied since years. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) is often used to assess mental health in these populations. Several studies have highlighted the intensifying stress levels amongst medical students compared to their non-medico colleagues. Substantial stress in medical education negatively impacts mental health of the students (Firth-Cozens[4], 1989), leading to increased anxiety, stress, and other mental health issues (Aktekin et al.[1], 2001). The prevalence of stress and depression among medical students is attributed to affect their overall well-being (Mosley et al.[13],1994; Dahlin et al.[2], 2005). The ennui and psychological distress experienced by the medicos are more than any general degree aspirants (Dyrbye et al.[3], 2006). Similar remarks by earlier researchers (Guthrie et al[6], 1998; Henning et al.[7], 1998) indicate that since ages, medical students have been more prone to stress and depression than their non-medical peers. More medicos suffer from anxiety and depression than students in any other discipline (Jadoon et al.[9], 2010; Ibrahim et al[8], 2013). According to Lloyd et al[11]. (1994) and Wolf et al.[17] (1994) medicos are always under more academic and psychological pressure than the non-medics. The rigorous nature of medical education leads to increased anxiety and exhaustion (Stewart et al.[16], 1999). Intense academic pressure often builds up overwhelming stress in medical aspirants (Moffat et al.[12], 2004) that may contribute to mental health issues (Kumar et al.[10], 2016). Sreeramareddy et al.[15] (2007) established that undergraduate medical students experience greater psychological strain compared to any other degree or diploma doers.

In the present study, authors included student populations pursuing their undergraduate courses in different disciplines and compared their responses against various psychological parameters to obtain a fair idea on the mental health status of Indian students in the second decade of the twenty first century.

Materials and Methods

Sample Size: 156 UG students of 18 to 24 years were surveyed, of which 77 were female and 79 male.

Hypotheses: To find out if the tough curriculum of MBBS has an adverse effect over the health of the pursuing students.

Inclusion criterion: Undergraduate students enrolled for higher education across various medical and nonmedical courses.

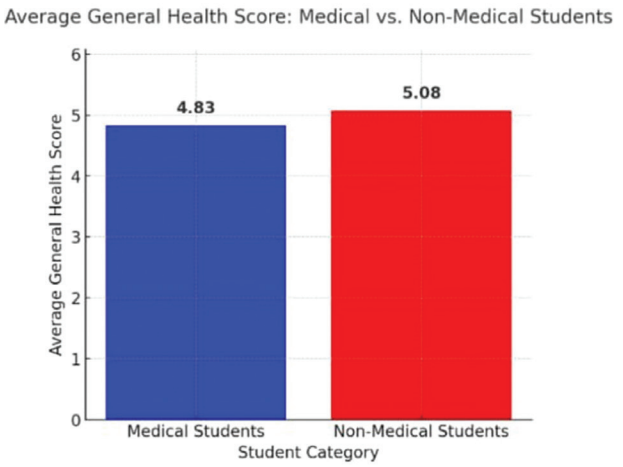
Exclusion Criteria: Postgraduate students, students who have not taken admission to any higher education courses yet.

Tool used: General Health Questionnaire (12) is a 12 item Questionnaire, which indicates how overall healthy mentally the subject is. It consists of questions like: "Been able to face up to your problems?", "Lost much sleep over worry?" and "Felt constantly under strain?". An acquired score of 3 or more was considered as a risk for acquiring psychological disturbances (Goldberg et al[5], 1988).

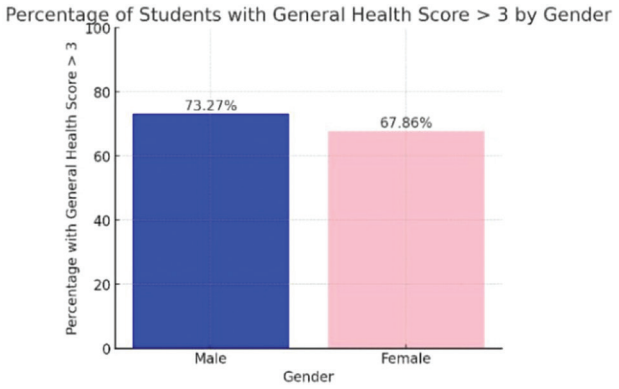
Method: The GHQ-12 was spread among Undergraduate students across the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana. Responses were recorded from 78 medical and 78 nonmedical students. Information about their current course was collected. Acquired data were analysed through MS Excel.

Table 1

Students	Percentage with score above 3
Medical	71.79%
Non-Medical	70.89%



Graph 1



Graph 2

Among medical students, 65.52% of MBBS students have a general health score above 3; whilst, 90.0% of non-MBBS medical students have a general health score above 3.

Gender Comparison:

Table 2

Gender	Percentage of students with score above 3
Male	73.27%
Female	67.86%

Results

71.34% UG students had a score above 3.

Discussion

The present study is in consistency with the existing literatures like that of Firth-Cozens[4] (1989) and Aktekin et al. (2001) where the percentage of medical students with a general health score above 3 was slightly higher than other nonmedical undergraduate students. This might be because of the excessively stressful life they lead, from early hours of classes, clinical postings, practical classes at laboratories etc. The syllabus at times gets too huge to complete. Moreover, many hospitals and colleges do not provide adequate comfort to medical trainees. However, the nonmedical undergraduate students also showed a pretty high percentage of individuals with poor general health, which was slightly less than the percentage of medical students. Moorthy et al[14]. (2024) surveyed the various aspects of medical education and collected data on what would be the ideal mode of learning according to medical students.

Conclusion

Medical students reported slightly greater percentage of individuals with GHQ score more than equal to 3, suggesting a greater chance of psychological disorders. The current study might have lack of generalisation as it was conducted only on students of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana State. Similar studies can be conducted in other parts of the country to check whether the inference being drawn is in contrast or simulation with the current study. There is scope of research in ways the training courses can be made more comfortable for the undergraduate students.

Consent: Inform consent was taken from all participants

Source of funding: Nil

Conflict of interest : Nil

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