

## ROLE OF COUNSELLORS IN MANAGING MENTAL STRESS AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*Mental stress among medical students has emerged as a significant concern due to the demanding nature of medical education, competitive academic environments, and emotionally challenging clinical exposure. In the Indian context, pressure related to postgraduate entrance examinations, family expectations, and workload during internship further intensifies psychological distress. Persistent psychological stress adversely affects academic performance, emotional well-being, and professional development. Counsellors play a vital role in managing these challenges by providing preventive, supportive, and therapeutic psychological services. The present paper explores the nature and sources of mental stress among medical students and examines the role of counsellors in managing psychological stress within Indian medical institutions. Emphasis is placed on counselling interventions such as individual and group counselling, stress management training, cognitive-behavioural techniques, and mindfulness-based strategies. Strengthening institutional counselling services is essential for enhancing the psychological resilience and overall well-being of future healthcare professionals.*

### **Keywords**

*Medical students; mental stress; counselling; psychological well-being; India; stress management*

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## **1. Introduction**

Medical education is widely recognized as academically intensive and psychologically demanding. Medical students are required to cope with extensive syllabi, frequent examinations, long hours of study, and emotionally taxing clinical responsibilities. In India, these challenges are further aggravated by intense competition for postgraduate entrance examinations such as NEET-PG and NEXT, along with high parental and societal expectations.

Sustained exposure to mental stress can lead to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, burnout, and impaired academic performance. If left unaddressed, such psychological strain may adversely influence professional behaviour and future patient care. Hence, mental health support within medical institutions has become increasingly important. Counsellors play a central role in identifying stress-related difficulties and assisting students in developing effective coping mechanisms.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

A growing body of research highlights that medical students experience higher levels of stress compared to students from other academic disciplines. Indian studies consistently report high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among undergraduate and postgraduate medical students. Academic overload, examination pressure, fear of failure, clinical workload, and uncertainty regarding career prospects are frequently cited stressors.

Evidence indicates that counselling interventions effectively reduce psychological distress among medical students. Cognitive-behavioural therapy, stress management programs, and mindfulness-based techniques have shown positive outcomes in improving emotional regulation and coping skills. Availability of counselling services within institutions also encourages early help-seeking and reduces stigma associated with mental health issues.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To understand the level and nature of mental stress among medical students in India
2. To identify the major sources contributing to psychological stress
3. To examine the role of counsellors in managing mental stress among medical students

## **4. Methodology**

The present study adopts a descriptive and conceptual research design based on secondary sources. Data were collected from published research articles, academic

journals, books, and institutional reports related to mental stress, counselling psychology, and medical education in India. The reviewed literature was analysed and synthesized to identify common stressors and effective counselling strategies. The numerical data presented in the tables reflect review-based estimates drawn from existing Indian literature.

### 5. Prevalence of Mental Stress among Medical Students in India

Several studies conducted in India indicate that a large proportion of medical students experience moderate to severe levels of psychological stress during different stages of their training.

**Table 1: Reported Levels of Mental Stress among Indian Medical Students (Review-Based Estimates)**

Level of stress	Approx percentage	Description
Mild stress	25-30	Temporary academic or adjustment-related stress
Moderate stress	40-45	Persistent academic and examination anxiety
Severe stress	15-20	Severe emotional exhaustion, anxiety, depression related symptoms
No stress	10-15	Effective coping strategies

### 6. Sources of Mental Stress among Indian Medical Students

Mental stress among medical students results from a combination of academic, psychological, social, and environmental factors.

#### Common Sources of Mental Stress among Indian Medical Students

- **Academic** -Vast MBBS syllabus Heavy curriculum with limited preparation time
- **Academic** -NEET-PG / NEXT competition, Fear of ranking and future career uncertainty
- **Psychological.** -Fear of failure, High personal, family, and societal expectations
- **Social.** - Parental pressure, pressure to meet family aspirations
- **Clinical** - Internship duties include long duty hours, night shifts, and emotional exposure
- **Lifestyle.** - Sleep deprivation, Imbalance between academic, clinical, and personal life

## **7. Role of Counsellors in Managing Mental Stress**

Counsellors play an essential role in promoting mental health among medical students by addressing preventive, developmental, and therapeutic needs.

### **7.1 Identification and Assessment**

Counsellors help in the early identification of psychological stress through screening programs, self-referrals, and referrals by faculty members. Early identification allows timely intervention and prevents worsening of mental health problems.

### **7.2 Individual and Group Counselling**

Individual counselling provides a confidential space for emotional expression, while group counselling promotes peer support and normalization of stress experiences.

#### **Counselling Interventions and Expected Outcomes**

**Counselling Intervention - Purpose Expected Outcome**

**Individual Counselling - Emotional support and guidance reduced anxiety**

**Group Counselling - Peer interaction and sharing reduced isolation**

**Stress Management Workshops Skill Development - improved coping abilities**

**Psycho-Education Sessions Awareness and Prevention - Early help-seeking**

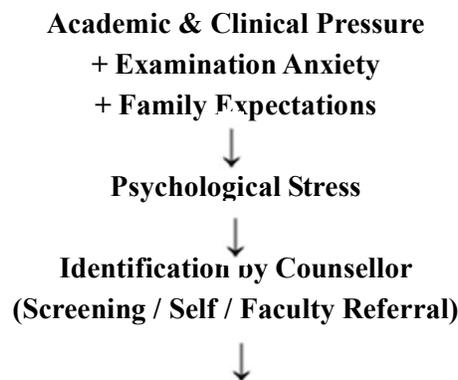
**Crisis Intervention Immediate Psychological Support - Emotional stabilization**

## **8. Utilization of Counselling Services in Indian Medical Colleges**

Despite the availability of counselling services, their utilization by medical students remains limited due to stigma, lack of awareness, and fear of being judged.

## **9. Counselling Process for Stress Management**

**Figure 1: Counselling-Based Stress Management Model for Indian Medical Students**





## 10. Challenges in Counselling Services

Counselling services in medical institutions often face challenges such as stigma related to mental health, limited availability of trained professionals, lack of awareness among students, and time constraints due to heavy academic workload. Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, policy initiatives, and mental health awareness programs.

## 11. Recommendations

- Establish well-equipped counselling centers in all medical colleges.
- Conduct regular mental health screening programs.
- Integrate stress management training into the medical curriculum.
- Promote awareness campaigns to reduce stigma related to mental illness.

## 12. Conclusion

Mental stress is a significant issue among medical students in India and poses serious implications for academic performance and psychological well-being. Academic pressure, competitive examinations, and clinical responsibilities contribute substantially to psychological distress. Counsellors play a crucial role in early identification, stress management, and mental health promotion among medical students. Strengthening counselling services within medical institutions is essential for developing emotionally resilient and competent future healthcare professionals.

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