

Original Article

Stress Levels among Indian Doctors – An Online Survey

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An Online survey was conducted by sending a ten-point questionnaire to about 200 Doctors in India, using the Survey Monkey App. A total of 146 responses were received, out of which 132 were complete. Majority of the Doctors had more than 20 years of experience in the Medical Profession and 80% of the respondents were males. Surprisingly, majority of the Doctors were happy with their income and though the prevalence of smoking and alcohol intakes was low, almost 60% had High Stress Levels. Professional Stress was almost twice that of Domestic Stress. The causes and solutions for these high levels of stress in the Indian Doctors needs to be explored further.

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Key words : WhatsApp survey, Survey Monkey App, Indian Doctors, Stress levels.

Stress is a normal physical reaction to an internal or external pressure that is placed on a Person's system. Stress becomes a problem when one feels overwhelmed by its challenges. Among various population subsets who are affected by such Emotional Stress and Disorders, Doctors comprise an important group because of their workplace uniqueness. Mental Health of a Doctor is a cause of great concern owing to the nature of the profession they serve. Long working hours, sleep deprivation and repeated exposure to emotionally charged situations play an important role in causing stress in them coupled with allied factors like job/income satisfaction, family and personal problems¹. Added to this existing condition, the unforeseen situation of COVID-19 pandemic has also led to Psychological problems among the Doctors, who have been relentlessly working in the forefront combating the crisis. Stress levels in doctors working in Critical Care and during COVID era has been studied previously. The present study was conducted to assess the stress levels in Indian Doctors working in routine Medical Care. Information was retrieved via WhatsApp by sending a ten-point questionnaire to about 200 Doctors all over India. The present study also tried to look for prevalence of other Allied factors like smoking, alcohol abuse, professional satisfaction and medico-

Editor's Comment :

- Despite a high level of satisfaction for the medical profession, the survey showed a very significant stress level (> 60%) in Indian doctors, more professionally related.
- Professional stress can be reduced by a strong peer support and a safe environment to work.

legal issues among the respondents.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A ten-point questionnaire using the Survey Monkey App was sent via WhatsApp to over 200 Doctors pan-India among known contacts. The questions consisted of several items like respondent's details (viz gender, smoking status, alcohol intake), total experience in medical practice, type of practice, stress levels, medico-legal issues, professional satisfaction, satisfaction from income, and whether they had ever committed an error of judgement. Responses were tabulated and descriptive data were analysed using statistical software like Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

A total of 146 responses were received back. Five persons skipped the questions on Stress Levels, professional & income satisfaction and whether they had committed an error of judgement. 79.3 % of the respondents had more than 20 years of professional experience. The type of practice was almost equal for Hospital based and Private clinics. 81.25% were males while rest Female Doctors. Only 6.25% were current smokers, while 75% had never smoked. Only 3.47% had history of regular alcohol intake while 45.83% were teetotallers and 41.87% were social drinkers. Only 20.98% had ever faced a Medico-legal problem. Surprisingly 61.43% were undergoing Emotional stress, out of which 40% had Professional stress and 20.43% had Domestic stress. 92.14% were satisfied with their profession and 75% with their income.

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Table 1 — Responses Received for 10-Item Questionnaire

Item	Response Rate	Response
Gender Distribution :		
Male	99.31%	118 (81.38%)
Female		27 (18.62%)
Smoking :		
Non-Smoker	99.31%	109 (75.17%)
Current Smoker		9 (6.21%)
Quitted Smoking		27 (18.62%)
Alcohol Use :		
Never	99.31%	67 (46.21%)
Social drinker		60 (41.38%)
Only on weekends		13 (8.97%)
Regular		5 (3.45%)
Experience in Medical Practice :		
< 5 years	100%	2 (1.37%)
5-10 years		6 (4.11%)
10-20 years		22 (15.07%)
>20 years		116 (79.45%)
Types of Practices :		
Hospital based	99.31%	36 (24.83%)
Private clinic		47 (32.41%)
Own nursing home		16 (11.03%)
Both		46 (31.72%)
Do you have any type of Stress :		
No	96.57%	55 (39.01%)
Yes		86 (60.00%)
Professional		56 (39.72%)
Domestic		30 (21.28%)
Are you happy with your profession?		
Yes	96.57%	130 (92.2%)
No		5 (3.55%)
Would be happier in other profession?		6(4.26%)
Income Satisfaction :		
Yes	96.57%	106 (75.18%)
No		16 (11.35%)
Want to earn more money		19 (13.48%)
Have you ever committed an error of judgement in your career?		
Yes	95.89%	103 (73.57%)
No		37 (26.43%)
Ever Faced a Medico Legal Problem?		
Yes	98.63%	30 (20.83%)
No		114 (79.17%)

73.38% admitted to having committed an error of judgement in their career (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

The Modern Medical Workplace is a complex environment, and Doctors respond differently to it, some finding it stimulating and exciting, while some being stressed and burnt-out from the excessive workload, thus inviting lower career satisfaction, greater propensity of choosing pre-mature retirement and greater risk of experiencing difficulties in personal relationships. As stress among Doctors is not taken into much consideration and often a neglected topic, so this study was planned with objectives of estimating the prevalence of stress among Doctors in our region and to find the associated Risk Factors for the same.

Rahul Amte *et al* measured stress levels of Critical Care Doctors in India and found a low prevalence of 40% despite higher workload, more responsibility and managing VIP Patients². Another study found a gender discrimination with Female Doctors having a high level of perceived stress³. Grover *et al*⁴, found a very high level of stress (67.2% had moderate stress whereas 13% had high levels of stress) amongst Residents and Faculty Members.

Though the present study did not use specific Stress questionnaires, this was a preliminary study to assess the overall prevalence of stress levels amongst Doctors in India involved in routine medical care. Surprisingly, 61.43% reported perceived stress levels despite the majority having professional and income satisfaction, with no pressing Medico-legal Issues. Moreover, the prevalence of smoking and alcohol abuse was very low.

The study has some obvious limitations. The results of this study are preliminary and depends largely on the veracity of the respondents. Overall, the causes of stress levels were not addressed and neither was the questionnaire designed to assess the Stress Levels through a quantitative outcome measure. The sample may not be a true representation of the entire Indian Medical Fraternity. The purpose was just to get an idea about the prevalence of stress in Indian Doctors. Whether the stress is related to various other factors like professional and income satisfaction or abuse of tobacco or alcohol, needs in-depth quantitative Assessment using Psychometric Measures.

CONCLUSION

The stress levels as perceived by the Doctors in India, was alarmingly high (61.43%) with two-thirds due to Professional and one-thirds due to Domestic Stress. Majority of the respondents had more than twenty years of professional experience and were satisfied professionally and with their income. Smoking and alcohol abuse was very low. The causes of stress need to be further evaluated and solutions found.

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