

# Stress Among Undergraduate Dental Students During Course – Dental Detox?

Manjeet Singh Sidhu<sup>1</sup>, Surendran Mahendran<sup>2</sup>, Mathew Jacob<sup>3</sup>, Saramma Mathew Fenn<sup>4\*</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Intern, Vinayaka Mission's Sankarachariyar Dental College, NH-47, Sankari main road, Ariyanoor, Salem – 636308, Tamil Nadu, India; principal.vmsdc@vmu.edu.in

<sup>3</sup>Reader, Department of Oral Pathology, Vinayaka Mission's Sankarachariyar Dental College, NH-47, Sankari main road, Ariyanoor, Salem – 636308, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>4</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Oral Medicine and Radiology, Vinayaka Mission's Sankarachariyar Dental College, NH-47, Sankari main road, Ariyanoor, Salem – 636308, Tamil Nadu, India; docere\_mathew@yahoo.co.in

Date of Receiving: July 2017

Date of Submission: Oct 2017

Date of Acceptance: Nov 2017

## Abstract

Dentistry is considered a challenging profession and does hold nobility in the realm of professional hierarchy and inspires parents and students to opt the path of dentistry as a vocation in the current generation. But as with any professional course, the journey to attain the degree does entail its struggles experienced as students during their undergraduate days. This article attempts to analyse the various stress points faced by undergraduate students during the course of dentistry.

**Keywords:** Stress, Undergraduate Dental Students, Counsellor

## 1. Introduction

Dentistry is a professional degree opted by students as a career after their schooling. As with any professional course, the journey to its completion is not easy and not for the feeble hearted. Students usually have to live in college accommodations away from their parents, sharing rooms or rented houses, adjust to a new environment and making friends along with the stress of the academics such as formative and summative exams for the next four years.<sup>1,2</sup> This article attempts to analyse the stress factors experienced by students and the reasons for it during the course.

## 2. Aim

- To identify the stress factors experienced by undergraduate dental students during the course.
- The ways by which undergraduate students overcome stress experienced by them during the course.
- The role of a counsellor in relieving stress experienced by undergraduate students.

## 3. Methodology

A total of fifty undergraduate dental students were included in the study with students from the first year to internship. Each group comprised of ten students with an equal ratio of male and female students, except in the first year which comprised of three males and seven females. Five sets questionnaires (for day scholars and college accommodation) were prepared for each year of the course with questions pertaining to academics, student accommodation and role of a counsellor. A sample of the questionnaire for students of the first year is shown in figure 1. All participants were given twenty minutes to answer the questionnaire provided to them. The study was double blinded to obtain an unbiased opinion from the students.

## 4. Inference

The factors of stress range from the daily commute to college to finance required to become a dentist. The stress factors common to all years are tabulated in table 1.

**VINAYAKA MISSION'S SANKARACHARIYAR DENTAL COLLEGE, SALEM**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE - 1 BDS (DAY SCHOLAR)**

<p>1. How do you travel daily to college?                  Private / Government Bus                  College bus                  Parent's car/ motorcycle                  Own car/ motorcycle</p> <p>2. What is the frequency of you being late to college?                  Never                  2 times a week                  3-4 times a week                  Always</p> <p>3. Do you think you wake up early enough to be in college at time, or earlier, but unfortunately, you are still late to college?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>4. Do you think it is necessary to be given 'absent', if you are late to college ?                  Yes                  No                  If no, why?</p> <p>5. Are you worried of regularly being absent due to coming late to college will affect your final attendance percentage?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>6. Do you think being late to college &amp; given absent as punishment should be consider?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>7. Do you feel the theory – practical exposure is balance in relevance to academic?                  Yes                  No                  If no, why?</p> <p>8. What kind of technique is commonly used for teaching?                  Blackboard–chalk                  Powerpoint presentation                  Others                  Which is most satisfactory? Why?</p> <p>9. Do you have trouble understanding what your teacher is teaching you?                  Yes                  No                  If yes, why?</p>	<p>10. Do you have lack of interest in Dentistry?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>11. If no, why                  Forced into the course (eg. by parents)                  Can't understand what have been thought                  Others</p> <p>12. How many friends do you have?                  Less than 10                  More than 10                  Everyone is my friend                  Prefer to be alone</p> <p>13. Do you find it difficult making new friends?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>14. Do you fell stress as a 1st year student?                  Never                  Sometimes                  All the time</p> <p>15. If yes, how do you cope with it?                  Talking to someone                  Physical activities                  Smoking, drinking alcohol                  Others</p> <p>16. Do you feel co- curricular activities helps in handling stress?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>17. Are you happy with the infrastructures &amp; coaching facilities?                  Yes                  No                  If no, what aspect do you feel needs improvement</p> <p>18. Should there be a need of a counsellor?                  Yes                  No                  If yes, how would a counsellor help you?</p> <p>19. Are you aware of a counsellor present in college?                  Yes                  No</p> <p>20. Do you have any other stress related problems which was not mentioned in the above questions?                  Yes                  No                  If yes, please state</p>
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Figure 1. Questionnaire (Sample).

**Table 1.** Responses from questionnaires (I BDS – Interns)

YEAR	COMMUTE	ACADEMICS AND TEACHING METHODOLOGY	STUDENT ACCOMMODATIONS	SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE	EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	COUNSELLOR
First year	Students who use government transportation found it difficult to reach on time and feared being late might lead to being marked absent.	Preferred combination of PowerPoint presentations and black board.	Students preferred staying in student accommodations did not have or face any issues with sharing rooms with batch mates	Communicate with batch mates friends about problems.  Others resort to reading, music and movies.	Found sports to be one of ways to relieve stress.	Majority preferred a counsellor to relay problems
Second year	Students were adjusted to the timings and resorted to travel by transportation that reach early to college.					
Third year	Did not find commute to college to be an issue.					
Final year						
Internship		Did feel that need for practical exposure on more advanced techniques for preparation for a clinical practice.		Stress regarding the future rather than academics were cited. Apart from the above mentioned means, students used to travel during short holidays.		

## 5. Discussion

During the course of dentistry, most students have to stay separated from their families and live in college accommodations usually located in the outskirts or for private accommodations within the city. This is one of stress factors a first year undergraduate student experiences. Acclimatization to new environment and independence from parents demands responsibility on the shoulders of students to fashion a timetable for daily chores and scheduling for study. However, for the participants in our study, college accommodation and its concept of sharing with a batch mate did not seem to associate with

any reason of stress for all the years. On the other hand, as expected, food provided by the accommodation was found to be unanimously unfavourable among all the students, especially the first years. On having enjoyed home food preparations, students disliked the all-inclusive preparations of meals provided by the hostels catering to all diversities of students. Students have to restrict their diet to the schedule of timing and dishes. As students advanced to the subsequent years, food although did continue to remain an issue but were overshadowed by stress of academics as will be explained in the next paragraphs.<sup>3</sup>

Commute to college, the race to reach on time to the morning lecture hours, due to fear of being marked

absent, particularly first year students traveling from the city by government bus was an ordeal. The questionnaire did provide provision to justify themselves on the whether the action taken by staff on being late were necessary. Majority of the students did accept that action taken was justified and under certain circumstances with genuine reasons the student could be exempted. It was interesting that none of the students, given an option in the questionnaire, deemed the action to be an extreme step and unwarranted thereby acknowledging that it lies in their hands to be on time for class. The subsequent years, from second year to interns, students did not find commute to college to be any form of stress.<sup>3,4</sup>

Another factor that was found to be stressful was the curriculum which emphasized more on theoretical aspects than practical training. Students were trained with focus on theoretical aspects of the subjects than providing a holistic approach to make the lines of theory and practical classes meet. The students appreciated the efforts made by the staff in their teaching methodology employing PowerPoint presentations and demonstrations (most students preferred blackboard). However, the excitement on viewing them as patients diminishes to mere cases as a requirements for completion of quota. Students entering to their clinical postings from third year find the abrupt change with quota completions of dental speciality subjects along with medical subjects such as general surgery and medicine to be overwhelming.

Students of the third year and final year found it stressful studying diseases affecting the whole body in the general medicine and general surgery. The medical aspects of the systemic diseases and the management of such patients in a dental office were covered in final year speciality subject of Oral Medicine. Moreover, in practice, a dentist is required to manage the oral symptoms of patients with underlying systemic diseases who report to their clinic while referring these patients to a general physician for treatment.

Another reason for stress by students were the number of subjects in final year. The preparation for theory exams and completion of quotas within the restricted practical postings was found to be strenuous in every aspect. Although, given two years, third year and final year, the concept and theory behind the treatment is dealt in the final year.<sup>2,4</sup>

Students usually dealt with stress by talking to batch mates, friends and close relatives probably because they feel that their friends may be relate or empathize with their situation. It was interesting that none of students mentioned having talked to a staff or their parents probably due to fear. Other students resort to music and travel to cope with the stress.

The role of counsellor cannot be undermined in any academic institution. Students felt the need of external qualified personnel to vent and also seek guidance in issues that cannot be discussed with their parents. Students in this study acknowledged the significant role a counsellor could play in handling issues faced and discussing personal problems.<sup>1,2,5</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The fact remains that students of the current generation do face a lot of pressure during the undergraduate course, and feel alone and insecure to face the pressure and tackle the obstacles that hinder them to perform to best of their potential during their course. The need of hour is a change of the curriculum that tailors according to the “new age students” and prepare students with a holistic approach to the practice of dentistry.

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