

Abstract

Objective

Objective of the study was to determine the factors associated with stress, coping strategies adopted by them to overcome stress and the prevalence of psychological distress among postgraduate trainees.

Design

Descriptive cross sectional study.

Method

All post graduate (PG) trainees undergoing training in Medicine, Paediatrics, Surgery, Gynaecology and Obstetrics and Anaesthesiology were included as study subjects. Study instrument a self administered questionnaire which had four main components, those being questionnaire on socio-demographic, work and training related variables, Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), 30 item GHQ (General Health Questionnaire) and the questionnaire on coping strategies.

Results.

Out of the total population of 364, only 311 subjects responded giving a response rate of 85.4%. The mean age of the PG trainees was 33.5 years with a male preponderance (68%). Of the total, 250 (80.4%) were married and among the spouses 147 (67%) were in the medical profession. The total stress score (SAQ score) ranged between a minimum score of 35 to a maximum score of 125 while the mean score was 78. Factors significantly associated with high stress were female sex (OR = 2.1, 95% CI = 1.1 - 4.1), number of on call days per week (>3) (OR = 1.98, 95%CI = 1.1 - 3.5) and boredom at work (OR = 3.5, 95%CI = 1.6 - 7.5). Satisfaction with income level (OR = 0.44, 95%CI = 0.25 - 0.78) and at work (OR = 0.12, 95% CI = 0.03 - 0.44) and being rewarded for the work (OR = 0.46, 95% CI = 0.22 - 0.93) were significant protective factors for stress. Marginally significant association with stress level were found to exist in the factors namely conflicts with family members (OR =1.87, 95% CI = 0.97 - 3.6) and adequacy of training by the consultant (OR = 0.54, 95% CI = 0.28 -1.04). Out of the total study

sample 39.9% were psychologically distressed as measured by the 30 item GHQ (a score of ≥ 6). GHQ scores were significantly associated with stress (OR = 4.44, 95%CI = 2.1 - 9.7).

All the above variables which were significantly and marginally associated with stress and recent major illness or death of a close relative /friend in addition were significantly associated with ≥ 6 scores in GHQ. Higher proportions of postgraduate trainees had adopted problem focused coping methods. A higher proportion of trainees preferred to adopt harmless coping strategies such as discussing with the spouse, listen to music, watch television, exercise, meditation rather than practicing harmful coping methods such as smoking, alcohol, taking drugs such as anxiolytics, venting anger on family members.

Conclusions

Postgraduate trainees are having stress ranging from a minimum of 35 to a maximum of 125 with a mean of 78.6 and a median of 78 score. Female PG trainees were significantly more stressed than the male PG trainees. Other factors significantly associated with high stress were having ≥ 3 days of on calls per week, boredom at work and dissatisfaction regarding the income. Conflicts with family members and adequacy in training by the consultant were marginally associated with high and low stress respectively. Factors significantly associated with low stress were satisfaction at work and being rewarded for the good work by the consultant. Prevalence of psychological distress among study sample was 39.9%. A GHQ score of ≥ 6 was significantly associated with female sex and having ≥ 3 days of on calls per week, inadequate training by the consultant, boredom at work, conflicts with family members, inadequate income and recent illness or death of a close relative or friend. Satisfaction at work and being rewarded for the good work by the consultant were significantly associated with low psychological distress.