THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF MEDICAL STUDENTS IN TRINIDAD

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Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a contagious disease caused by a newly discovered virus in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Infected persons experience respiratory illnesses. With the virus rapidly spreading, reaching over 118,000 cases in over 110 countries, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020. To reduce the spread of COVID-19, governments around the world implemented strategies including social distancing, self-isolation, border shutdowns and closure of all educational, religious and commercial institutions. Universities suspended face-to-face classes and transitioned to online schooling, resulting in many medical students exhibiting increased anxiety and depression due to social disconnection and uncertainty of their academic future.

Within the sample population of 176 medical students, 62.7% were males and 37.3% females with 87% falling within the 18-25 age range. 71% of students reported feeling powerless over their lives and 50% felt overwhelmed fairly often and very often with self confidence and likelihood of things going their way almost never and sometimes. 7.5% of respondents felt a lack of control over important things in their life fairly often and sometimes.

The most significant finding consisted of regression analysis between independent variable of feelings of inability to control important things in student’s life within last month with dependent variable of feelings of depression, hopelessness and sadness over the last two weeks with a P value of 0.000, standard error of 0.43 and 2.044. However, this is still falling within ranges of alpha value of 0.05 and T value greater than 1.96 hence it is still valid results.

Results revealed 87.9% of students were concerned with lack of clinical exposure 86.7% worried about their future being affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion

• This study found that the COVID-19 Pandemic has had an immense impact on the mental health of medical students at the UWI-STA. Some of these impacts included increased stress, anxiety and depression - all leading to reduced quality of life.
• The outcomes from the pandemic were predominantly negative for medical students, with factors such as increased workload, lack of social interaction and poor diet contributing to their negative emotions. Alternatively, the most notable positive outcome was the increased family time that students experienced.
• Majority of students answered that the COVID-19 Pandemic severely and negatively impacted their academic performance, mental health, physical health and social interaction. Students were also concerned about their lack of clinical exposure training due to public health restrictions made during the pandemic.
• Through linear regression analysis, it was determined that independent variables during the semester produced negative psychosocial emotions among students and the relationship was linear.
• Overall, mental health and general well-being were considered low with a staggering 97% of medical students finding their well-being diminished due to feelings of loneliness and lack of freedom.

Conclusion

The majority of medical students in Trinidad experienced anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased workload, lack of motivation, poor diet and exercise were the most common negative factors affecting their mental health. These issues require immediate attention and strategic solution implementation.

References


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