

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Academic stress in dental students: suggestions for care in university institutions.

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Purpose of the letter

Stress is a challenging situation that is generated by the arrival of an unexpected or novel situation that is difficult to solve. Dental students are subjected to high stress loads. The purpose of this paper is to briefly review the most recent literature on this topic and to make suggestions on how to approach it according to this and the authors' experience.

Dear Editor

Stress is the physiological reaction of an organism that arises when faced with a novel and difficult-to-solve situation.^{1,2} The triggering agent of the threatening situation or stimulus is called the stressor. When the individual possesses the resources to overcome the stressful situation, it is called adaptation; otherwise, if the individual is overcome by the situation or cannot find a solution, he/she becomes exhausted.²

The successful process of coping with a stressor generates a beneficial effect called eustress (harmony, gratification, pleasure, learning, improvement of skills); if it ends in burnout, it is called distress, which is a state of psychic tension that causes discomfort, displeasure, exhaustion or sadness and can compromise the physical and mental health of the individual.^{2,3}

Since stress usually depends on the individual-environment relationship,⁴ there are different types of stress, among which academic stress stands out, that which derives from the demands of the training process.² Several studies indicate that the practice of dentistry and the study of dentistry are one of the activities that generate the most stress and anxiety.^{2,5}

Tirado et al.,⁶ in a descriptive study of 158 dental students in Cartagena (Colombia), concluded that the main stressors were belonging to semesters of basic areas (generally the first), family dysfunction and being a woman; they suggested university wellness interventions as support in the prevention of unfavorable health conditions and academic performance.

Misrachi et al.,⁷ when analyzing a sample of 302 Chilean dental students, observed that the main causes of stress were grades, exams, fear of losing a subject or the year, and little leisure time. They also noted that students from eighth semester onwards considered dealing with their supervisors as an important stressor. In addition, those with less workload showed better academic performance. They suggest better curriculum planning and management to decrease students' stress levels.

De Nasetta et al.,⁸ found that the main stressors in Argentine dental students are examinations, work overload, lack of rest, patient welfare, patient noncompliance, and compliance with academic requirements. Scores were particularly high in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low in personal fulfillment. They suggest providing tools for coping with stress during their academic training, involving the work of different bodies such as university welfare.

Given the evidence, we consider it highly relevant that the university welfare department, faculties or programs lead strategies associated with the well-being of students where they learn to make good use of time (including hobbies with friends and family), develop efficient study techniques, relaxation techniques, identify their emotions in stressful situations and recognize the physical, behavioral and cognitive reactions they require to act better. We propose holding workshops and personalized support for students to identify the different coping strategies they can assume in the face of the daily activities of their training process, as well as accompanying them in the most complex moments of the semester through collective strategies that lead to the expression of emotions and carrying out actions associated with art where students can feel heard and identified.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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