

***Medical consultant's Job-Related Stress:
a Cross Sectional Study, Egypt***

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Abstract

Background and Purpose: Medical consultants face significant job-related stress due to various factors such as intense workloads and long working hours. This study aimed to assess the job-related stress among medical consultants in Egypt and explore the underlying factors.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted, and data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms. The sample consisted of 106 medical consultants residing and working in Egypt. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were employed for data analysis.

Results: The findings revealed that medical consultant's job-related stress varies from high to low level with 25.5% of the studied sample experienced high job-related stress. The stress underlying factors were mainly attributed to low income being the highest stress factor, followed by bureaucratic procedures and managerial responsibilities. Surgical specialties, long working hours, and absence of daily leisure time were positive predictors for high stress levels ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The study highlighted the medical consultants' sufferings from job related stress in Egypt which necessitates the importance of developing tailored interventions to alleviate stress and promote the well-being of medical consultants. Furthermore, addressing these specific stressors can contribute to enhancing the overall Egyptian healthcare system, benefiting both medical consultants and the patients they serve.

Keywords: Stress; Medical; Consultants; Egypt

Introduction

The field of medicine is renowned for its demanding and high-stress nature, with healthcare professionals often facing numerous challenges that may have negative consequences on their well-being (Yates, 2020). Among these professionals, medical consultants play a critical role by delivering specialized care and leveraging their expertise in specific domains. Nevertheless, the intense workload, long working hours, bureaucratic procedures, and external pressures collectively contribute to high levels of Job-related stress among medical consultants, ultimately impacting their overall health and quality of care (Abd-Elrahman et al., 2022; Herraiz-Recuenco et al., 2022; Anjum et al., 2019; Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015).

Several studies have explored the prevalence and determinants of Job-related stress among healthcare providers globally (Girma et al., 2021). However, there is limited research focusing on the unique experiences and stressors encountered by medical consultants in Egypt (Abd-Elrahman et al.,

2022; Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015). The Egyptian healthcare system presents its own challenges, and when combined with the demanding expectations placed upon medical consultants, it becomes crucial to investigate the specific stressors they face in this particular context (Kamel, 2020). This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining the Job-related stress experienced by medical consultants in Egypt and identifying the factors that contribute to their stress levels. By understanding the specific stressors faced by medical consultants in this setting, healthcare organizations and policymakers can develop customized interventions to alleviate stress and foster their well-being. Additionally, exploring the unique stressors in this context can inform the development of strategies to enhance the Egyptian healthcare system as a whole, ultimately benefiting both medical consultants and the patients under their care.

Participants and Methods

Methods

Study Design, Setting, and Participants

This study adopted a cross-sectional design and targets medical consultants residing and working in Egypt. The data collection was conducted through an online-based approach using an electronic questionnaire distributed via social media platforms.

Sample size and technique

Convenience sample: Sample size calculation was based on evidence from previous similar study and by considering the total job stress score among physicians in Banha Major Hospitals as a primary outcome (Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015). Epi-calc 2000 was used to calculate the sample size of this cross-sectional study. Assuming 80% power, 0.05 level of significance and estimated proportion of 26.2%, Sample size would be = 95 participants. Considering drop-outs rate of 10%, therefore the final sample size was **106 participants**.

Data Collection Tool

An electronic questionnaire was utilized for data collection, which takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. The questionnaire consisted of five sections: socio-demographic data, lifestyle and habits, occupational data, Job-related stress assessment, and the current challenges facing the medical consultants. The questionnaire incorporates validated and reliable tools, including a modified version of the Hospital Consultant's Job Stress and Satisfaction Questionnaire (HCJSSQ) developed by the Cancer Research UK London Psychosocial Group (Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015; Teasdale et al., 2008).

Procedures and Ethical considerations

Pilot testing was conducted on a group of 20 subjects to ensure questionnaire clarity, and the data collected during this phase are not included in the final data set. Written consents were obtained electronically from participants who voluntarily chose to fill in the questionnaire. Participants were recruited using an online Google form, following approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University (N-311-2023) and amended form approval (A-26-2024). The research poses no potential risks, and confidentiality of data is maintained by ensuring participant anonymity and utilizing electronic data collection methods without acquiring personal identifiers.

Statistical analysis

The completed electronic forms were exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for data analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 23. Descriptive analysis included counts and percentages for categorical variables and means and standard deviations for continuous measures. The total stress score (35 items) was categorized into three levels based on percentiles; scores below the 50th percentile were considered low, scores between the 50th and 75th percentile considered moderate, and scores equal to or above the 75th percentile considered high. Regression analysis was employed to predict factors influencing the total job-related stress score among the studied population. Statistical significance was set at a P-value of <0.05.

Results

Table 1 presents the background characteristics of the studied population. A total sample of 106 medical consultants (including 45.3% males and 54.7% females) took part in this study. The median age of them was 45 years ranging from 35 to 64 years. The majority of respondents were married (76.4%), about (92.5%) reported living with their families and (73.7%) were responsible for the financial expenses of their children. Non-surgical consultants constituted the largest proportion (57.5%), followed by academic consultants (18.9%) and surgical consultants (23.6%). The largest proportion of respondents (43.4%) worked in both public and private sectors, indicating a diverse work environment, while (32.1%) of the respondents worked in private facilities and (24.5%) worked in public facilities only. The median years of experience since graduation was 21 spans from 11 to 37 years and the range of total working hours per week was quite broad, ranging from 6 to 110 hours, indicating potential variations in work schedules and the median number of night shifts worked per week was one shift. Regarding smoking and physical activity 28.3% of the sample were smokers and 66% did not engage in in physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day during the last 7 days. Regarding the favorite daily leisure time activities, the most popular choice was social media (63.2%).

Table 1:
Characteristics of the studied population

		N (106)	% (100)
Gender	Male	48	45.3%
	Female	58	54.7%
Age	Median (range)	45 (35-64)	
Marital status	Single	17	16.0%
	Married	81	76.4%
	Divorced or separated	4	3.8%
	Widowed	4	3.8%
Living with family	Yes	98	92.5%
	No	8	7.5%
Responsibility for the financial expenses of any of the following on a monthly basis:			
Father		14	14.7%
Mother		26	27.4%
Wife/Husband		32	33.7%
Children		70	73.7%
Another family member		8	8.4%
Specialty	Academic	20	18.9%
	Non-surgical	61	57.5%
	Surgical (including ENT, Ophthalmology, Obstetrics and Gynecology and, Anesthesia)	25	23.6%
Current workplace(s)	Public facilities only including universities	26	24.5%
	Private facilities only including universities	34	32.1%
	Both public and private	46	43.4%
Years of experience since graduation	Median (range)	21 (11-37)	
Total working hours per week	Median (range)	34 (6-110)	
Night shifts work per week	Median (range)	1 (0-6)	
Current smoking status	Smoker	30	28.3%
	Nonsmoker	76	71.7%
Engagement in physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day during the last 7 days	Yes	36	34.0%
	No	70	66.0%
Favorite daily entertainment	Social media	67	63.2%
	TV	17	16.0%
	Radio	8	7.5%
	Podcasts	2	1.9%
	Reading	4	3.8%
	None	8	7.5%
Number of hours watching TV per day	Median (range)	1 (0-6)	
Number of hours spent on social media per day	Median (range)	3 (1-10)	

Figure 1 and Table 2 display the Job-related stress scores among the studied population. Approximately (25.5%) of physicians experienced a high Job-related stress score, while (43.4%) had a low score based on the levels of total stress. The mean total stress score was 53 ± 7 and mean percent score 75.84 ± 10.64 ($n = 106$). Feeling poorly paid for their jobs (4.27 ± 0.98), was the higher mean stress factors' scores followed by Bureaucratic and regulatory procedures that interfered with their work schedule (4.07 ± 0.73) then those reporting to have managerial responsibilities (4.03 ± 0.75).

Stress categories

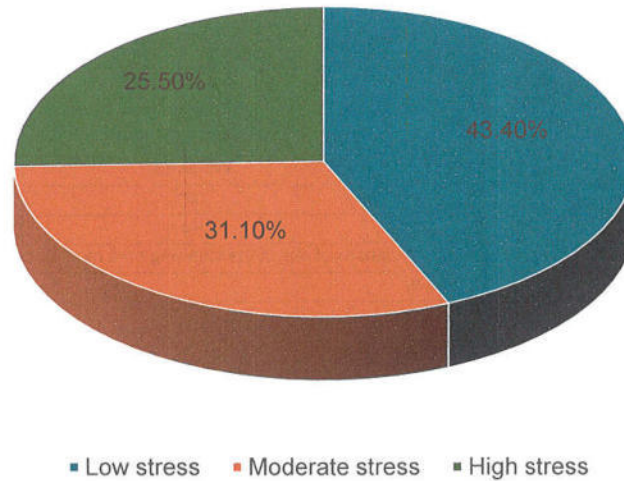


Figure 1:
Percent distribution of Job-related stress scores among the studied population

Table 2:
Job-related stress scores among the studied population

Stress factors	Mean \pm SD
Work interferes with family activity that is stressful to me	3.64 \pm 1.03
Managing my schedule is stressful	3.75 \pm 0.95
To deal with blame and anger from patients and proxy is stressful	3.81 \pm 0.97
To deal with change in clinical practice is stressful	3.68 \pm 0.86
Difficulties in relationships with staff/colleagues is stressful	3.65 \pm 0.82
To deal with patients' suffering is stressful	3.79 \pm 0.88
Managerial responsibilities is stressful	4.03 \pm 0.75
Feeling that you are poorly paid for your job is stressful	4.27 \pm 0.98
Being responsible for the quality of the work of other staff is stressful	3.72 \pm 0.84
Facing an unrealistic or unattainable performance targets is stressful	3.61 \pm 0.95
Bureaucratic and regulatory procedures is stressful	4.07 \pm 0.73
Feeling stressed for not having time to prepare for your performance appraisal	3.71 \pm 0.85
Providing services outside your working hours i.e phone calls, WhatsApp messages is stressful	3.80 \pm 1.08
Disruption of your home life as a result of being on-call after working hours is stressful	3.56 \pm 1.17
Total Stress Score	53 \pm 7
Average percent score	75.84\pm10.64

Table 3 illustrates the percent distribution of participants' responses regarding different challenging issue. The majority of physicians (97.2%) agreed that current economic challenges were a significant source of stress. Similarly, a significant percentage (94.3%) agreed that newly introduced taxations contributed to their stress levels. When it came to licensing and licensing inspections of their healthcare facilities, a

significant majority (76.4%) agreed that it was a stressful process. Additionally, a high percentage of physicians (92.5%) agreed that the lack of legal coverage in case of medical errors was a source of stress for them. Promotion rules and prerequisites in their work also contributed to stress for a significant proportion of them. Furthermore, a considerable number of respondents (89.6%) agreed that social media insults incidents, directed towards themselves or their colleagues, were a source of stress.

Table 3:
Percent distribution of participants' responses regarding different emerging stress factors

		N (106)	% (100)
Current economic challenges are stressful	Disagree	3	2.8%
	Agree	103	97.2%
The newly introduced taxations are stressful	Unsure	6	5.7%
	Agree	100	94.3%
Licensing/licensing inspection of your health care facility is stressful	Disagree	5	4.7%
	Unsure	20	18.9%
	Agree	81	76.4%
Lack of legal coverage in case of medical errors is stressful	Disagree	3	2.8%
	Unsure	5	4.7%
	Agree	98	92.5%
Promotion rules prerequisites in your work is stressful	Disagree	4	3.8%
	Unsure	18	17.0%
	Agree	84	79.2%
Social media insults incidents for you or your colleagues is stressful	Disagree	6	5.7%
	Unsure	5	4.7%
	Agree	95	89.6%

A multiple linear regression was run to predict high Stress score from certain independent variables presented in the model (Table 4). Only surgical specialties, high total working hours /week and absence of favorite daily entertainment were statistically significantly predicted high stress, $F(14, 106) = 1.984$, $p < 0.028$, $R^2 = 0.234$. All these 3 variables added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < 0.05$.

Table 4:
Multiple linear regressions of factors affecting the total stress score among the studied sample

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	P value	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	45.559	8.275		.000	29.122	61.996
Gender	1.554	1.851	.104	.403	-2.122	5.231
Marital status	.844	1.461	.067	.565	-2.058	3.746
Living with family	-2.951	2.704	-.105	.278	-8.322	2.421
Specialty	2.897	1.491	.254	.055*	-.064	5.859
Current workplace(s)	.415	.971	.045	.670	-1.514	2.344
Years of experience since graduation	-.031	.124	-.028	.806	-.278	.217
Total working hours per week	.101	.048	.241	.038*	.006	.197
Night shifts work per week	-.110	.696	-.019	.875	-1.492	1.272
Current smoking status	-.373	2.014	-.023	.854	-4.373	3.628
Engagement in physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day during the last 7 days	1.902	1.709	.121	.269	-1.493	5.297
Favorite daily entertainment	-1.215	.492	-.250	.015*	-2.192	-.239
Number of hours watching TV per day	-.820	.609	-.143	.182	-2.030	.390
Number of hours spent on social media per day	.088	.493	.020	.859	-.892	1.068

Discussion

The findings of the current study provide a comprehensive overview of the Job-related stress among medical consultants in Egypt, which is essential for developing targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate stress and promote well-being in this crucial workforce.

The background characteristics of the studied population, provide important contextual information for understanding the demographic and professional factors that may influence the experiences of stress among medical consultants. The sample consisted of 106 consultants, with a slightly higher representation of females. The majority of respondents were married and reported living with their families, indicating potential sources of support and familial responsibilities that may impact their stress levels (*Jerg-Bretzke et al., 2020*). The distribution of special areas revealed that non-surgical consultants comprised the largest proportion, followed by academic and surgical consultants. This distribution aligns with a previous study conducted by *Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud in Egypt (2015)* that have reported a similar professional composition among medical consultants.

The work environment of the participants was diverse, with a significant proportion working in both public and private facilities. Additionally, the wide range of total working hours per week observed in this study is consistent with previous literature, which has documented variations in work schedules among medical consultants (*Liu et al., 2021*). The median number of night shifts worked per week was one shift, a finding that is in line with other studies that have reported the prevalence of night shifts in the work schedules of medical consultants (*Lahlouh and Mustafa, 2020*). The prevalence of non-smokers among the participants is consistent with previous research that has highlighted a higher percentage of non-smokers among medical professionals in comparison to the general population (*Xia et al., 2020*). However, the lower engagement in physical activity among participants raises concerns, as physical activity has been shown to have numerous benefits for stress reduction and overall well-being (*Marquez et al., 2020*). The popularity of social media as the favorite daily entertainment activity among medical consultants aligns with the increasing integration of social media platforms in people's daily lives, including healthcare professionals (*Farsi, 2021*).

The results of the current study revealed that approximately 25.5% of physicians experienced high job related stress, while 43.4% had low stress scores, additionally the mean total stress score was 53 ± 7 . This aligns with the findings from the previously published work in Banha major hospitals in Egypt, which reported a similar percentage (26.2%) of physicians facing high total job stress scores and a mean total stress score of 47.2 (*Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015*). This similarity suggests that physicians in both studies face a considerable level of stress in their work environments.

The present study highlighted the role of financial compensation and available resources in influencing job stress and satisfaction. Specifically, feeling poorly paid for their jobs was identified as the highest mean stress factor score (4.27 ± 0.98). This finding is consistent with the findings of several previous studies, that highlighted underpayment as a major stress factor among medical professionals (*El-Mazahy et al., 2021; Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015*). Similarly, *Indriyani and Fakhrudin (2023)* emphasized the significance of financial compensation in influencing employee work related stress.

Furthermore, this study reported bureaucratic and regulatory procedures that interfered with work schedules and the presence of managerial responsibilities as significant stress factors. These findings align with the literature related to stressors among healthcare workers to underscore the universal nature of stress factors in healthcare professions across different regions (*Abd-Elrahman et al., 2022; Herraiz-Recuenco et al., 2022; Anjum et al., 2019; Hassan and Abd-Elmaksoud, 2015*). The current study provides valuable insights into the challenging issues faced by physicians and their association with job related stress. The majority of participants (97.2%) agreed that current economic challenges were a significant source of stress. This aligns with the existing literature, which highlights the impact of economic factors on physicians' well-being. The financial pressures and uncertainties in the healthcare system can contribute to increased stress levels among physicians (*Last et al., 2022; Jaggar and Navlakhi, 2021*).

Similarly, a noteworthy percentage (94.3%) of participants agreed that newly introduced taxations added to their stress levels. This finding underscores the influence of external factors, such as changes in tax policies, on the Job-related stress experienced by physicians. The financial implications of taxation can further exacerbate the stress levels of physicians, who already face significant professional demands (*Panagopoulos et al., 2014; Antoniou et al., 2003*).

Licensing and licensing inspections of healthcare facilities were identified as a stressful process by a substantial majority (76.4%) of participants in the current study. This highlights the bureaucratic challenges and regulatory burdens that physicians encounter in their practice. The complex and time-consuming procedures associated with licensing can contribute to increased stress levels and potentially impact the overall well-being of physicians (*Mechanic, 2003*). Moreover, a high percentage (92.5%) of participants agreed that the lack of legal coverage in case of medical errors was a source of stress. This finding reflects the concerns and anxieties that physicians face regarding potential legal consequences of medical errors. The absence of adequate legal protection and support can significantly contribute to the stress levels experienced by physicians (*Vizcaino-Rakosnik et al., 2022*).

The current study highlighted that promotion rules and prerequisites were identified as stressors by a significant proportion of participants. This suggests that the criteria and processes for career advancement within the medical profession can create additional stress for physicians. The competitive nature of promotions and the expectations associated with professional advancement can add to the overall burden experienced by physicians (*Zhang et al., 2020*).

Additionally, a considerable number of respondents (89.6%) agreed that incidents of social media insults, directed towards themselves or their colleagues, were a source of stress. This highlights the impact of negative online interactions and cyberbullying on the emotional well-being of physicians. The increasing use of social media platforms can expose physicians to public scrutiny and criticism, which can contribute to heightened stress levels (*Chishty and Hashmi, 2024*).

The present study identified three factors as significant predictors of high stress scores among the participants. Firstly, the speciality of surgical disciplines was found to be a statistically significant predictor. This implies that the demanding nature of surgical practice, which involves complex procedures, long hours, and high stakes, may contribute to the observed association between surgical specialities and elevated stress levels (*Makara-Studzińska et al., 2020; Rosta et al., 2020*).

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Secondly, high total working hours per week were identified as a statistically significant predictor of high stress scores. This aligns with the study conducted by **Said and El-Shafei (2021)** that revealed that the stressful workload and potential for burnout associated with extensive working hours may contribute to heightened stress levels among healthcare workers. Lastly, the absence of favorite daily entertainment emerged as a statistically significant predictor of high stress scores. This finding suggests that physicians who do not engage in activities that provide relaxation and enjoyment in their daily lives are more prone to experiencing higher levels of stress.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the Job-related stress experienced by medical consultants in Egypt, highlighting factors such as financial compensation, bureaucratic procedures, and external influences like taxation and licensing. The study also identifies specialty, working hours, and engagement in daily leisure time activities as significant predictors of high stress levels. To address these stressors, healthcare organizations should focus on fair compensation, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and providing legal coverage for physicians. Work-life balance and promoting activities for relaxation and enjoyment should also be prioritized. Policymakers should consider these recommendations to create a supportive environment and improve the well-being of medical consultants.

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التوتر النفسى المرتبط بعمل الاستشاريين بالمجال الطبى: دراسة مقطعية، مصر

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الملخص العربى

الخلفية والهدف: يواجه الاستشاريون فى المجال الطبى ضغوطاً مهنية كبيرة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التوتر النفسى المرتبط بعملهم واهم اسبابه. الطرق: دراسة مقطعية تم جمع البيانات باستخدام استبيان عبر الإنترنت تم توزيعه عبر منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعى. تكونت العينة من ١٠٦ استشاري طبي يقيمون ويعملون في مصر. تم استخدام الإحصاءات الوصفية وتحليل الانحدار لتحليل البيانات.

النتائج : كشفت الدراسة ان الاستشاريين فى المجال الطبى يواجهون درجات من التوتر النفسى المرتبط بالعمل تتفاوت بين درجة التوتر النفسى المنخفضة و العالية الدرجة ، فقد بلغت درجة التوتر النفسى عالية الدرجة لدى اكثر من ربع العينة ٢٥.٥% و أرجعت النتائج ذلك لعوامل متعددة ، أكثرها هو الشعور بالدخل غير المناسب ، يله الإجراءات البيروقراطية تليه المسؤوليات الإدارية. أظهرت الدراسة ان التخصصات الجراحية وساعات العمل الطويلة مع عدم وجود اوقاتا للترفيه ما بين ساعات العمل اليومي متنبات إيجابية لمستويات التوتر العالية. ($p < 0.05$)

الاستنتاج : اوضحت الدراسة ما يعانىه الاستشاريون فى المجال الطبى من التوتر النفسى المرتبط بالعمل مما يؤكد على حتميه وجود اجراءات متخصصة للتخفيف من معاناتهم و محاولة تذليل عوامل التوتر النفسى تعزيز جودة الظروف العمل مما يحقق لهم العمل فى ظروف بعيدة عن التوتر النفسى لتعزيز النظام الصحى المصرى بشكل عام مما يعود بالفائدة على المنظومة الصحية و الاستشاريين و المرضى .

الكلمات الرئيسية: التوتر النفسى، الاستشاريون فى المجال الطبى، مصر