



Physical and Mental Health Issues Faced by Interns in Hospital

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Abstract

Medical internships are an important time in the training of future healthcare professionals. They provide essential clinical exposure and help develop skills. However, this phase often comes with major physical and mental health challenges. Interns usually deal with long hours, irregular sleep, poor nutrition, and demanding tasks, which can lead to fatigue, sleep problems, and overall physical exhaustion. At the same time, the high-pressure environment, emotional demands of patient care, fear of making mistakes, and lack of support can cause psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. Even though interns play a vital role in healthcare delivery, they often have little access to mental health resources and face stigma when trying to seek help. These health issues, if not addressed, can affect their well-being and job performance. They may also impact the quality of patient care. This paper will look into the physical and mental health issues that hospital interns commonly face, explore their causes, and suggest ways to improve support systems and working conditions to create healthier training environments.

Keywords: Interns, hospital, problem faced by interns, stress, over workload.

1. Introduction

Internship is an important stage in the medical profession. It connects academic learning with real-world clinical practice. While it offers valuable hands-on experience, it also subjects interns to physical and emotional challenges. Long working hours, high patient loads, sleep deprivation, and tough situations can take a toll on their well-being. Interns often juggle clinical responsibilities while feeling the pressure to learn and perform quickly. This often comes at the expense of their health. The demanding environment can cause physical issues like fatigue, sleep disorders, and weakened immunity. It can also lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, burnout, and depression. Even though they are part of the healthcare system, interns frequently lack proper support or time for self-care. This makes them vulnerable to both short-term and long-term health issues.

2. Review of Literature

Medical internships represent a critical phase for medical graduates. They are often seen as one of the toughest times in their careers. Several studies show that interns face various physical and mental health issues due to long hours, heavy workloads, lack of sleep, and constant exposure to stress in hospital settings. Research indicates that depression, anxiety, and burnout are common among medical interns. A meta-analysis by Mata *et al.* (2015) found that nearly one-third of

medical residents and interns show signs of depression. Other studies emphasize that stress levels peak during the internship year because of the sudden rise in clinical responsibilities and emotional tension. Sleep deprivation is another key factor that harms mental health, often leading to fatigue, irritability, and trouble concentrating. This can negatively impact patient care and raise the risk of errors. Interns also deal with various physical health challenges. Long hours on their feet, irregular meal times, and night shifts can lead to musculoskeletal pain, digestive issues, and overall exhaustion. A study by Alnaami *et al.* (2019) reported that musculoskeletal disorders, particularly back and neck pain, are frequent among healthcare workers due to long hours and poor ergonomics. Additionally, interns face high risks of occupational hazards, such as needle-stick injuries and exposure to infectious diseases, largely due to inexperience and fatigue. Research indicates that chronic stress and insufficient rest can increase the chances of developing hypertension, headaches, and sleep problems among interns. The reasons behind these issues are complex. Organizational factors include inadequate staffing, long duty hours, insufficient rest breaks, and a lack of psychological support systems in hospitals. Cultural barriers and the stigma around seeking help for mental health make the situation worse. Many interns fear being judged or facing career setbacks if they reveal their mental struggles. Studies show that supportive mentorship, reforms in duty hours, and

structured wellness programs can help address some of these problems. Institutions that offer mental health counselling, stress management workshops, and ergonomic training for interns have reported better overall wellbeing and job satisfaction. Despite increasing awareness of these challenges, research gaps still exist, particularly in developing countries where systemic and cultural differences may impact outcomes. Most of the current studies are cross-sectional and focus mainly on high-income countries. This highlights the need for long-term research that monitors interns' health over time. In summary, the literature makes it clear that physical and mental health issues among medical interns are serious and widespread. There is an urgent need for institutional policies that balance clinical training with wellbeing. By prioritizing work-life balance, offering access to counselling, and enforcing safety protocols, we can significantly enhance the health and effectiveness of interns, ultimately benefiting both healthcare providers and patients.

3. Research Design:

- a) **Research Methodology:** This study will take a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative part will measure how common and severe physical and mental health issues are among hospital interns. The qualitative part will provide deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions.
- b) **Sample Size:** The study will focus on medical interns, also known as house surgeons or junior doctors, who are currently completing their required rotational internship in government and private hospitals.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Interns who have finished at least 3 months of clinical rotations.
- Those who agree to take part in the study.

- c) **Research Gap:** Despite increased awareness of physician burnout and stress, medical interns are still not well studied regarding their specific physical and mental health challenges during clinical training. A review of existing literature highlights several important gaps:

i). Limited Focus on Physical Health beyond Sleep Deprivation

Most studies mainly focus on mental health issues like stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout, primarily related to sleep deprivation. However, there is a lack of thorough data on other physical health problems faced by interns, such as:

- Musculoskeletal issues from long hours of standing
- Poor nutrition and hydration habits
- A weak immune system or frequent sickness
- Fatigue-related accidents

ii). Insufficient Research in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs)

Most of the available research is centred in high-income countries. In contrast, in LMICs like India, Bangladesh, or Nigeria, limited resources, heavy patient loads, and weaker support systems may worsen interns' health outcomes. These contexts are underrepresented in global research, even though they face different systemic challenges.

iii). Lack of Longitudinal Studies

Most studies are cross-sectional, providing only a snapshot of

interns' health at a single time. There is a need for longitudinal research that tracks interns throughout their clinical rotations to:

- Observe changes in health over time
- Understand how interns cope under ongoing stress
- Identify key points for intervention

d) Objectives of the Study

General Objective:

To assess the physical and mental health challenges faced by medical interns during their clinical internship in hospital settings.

Specific Objectives:

- i). To identify common physical health issues, like fatigue, sleep disturbances, physical strain, and nutrition-related problems, that hospital interns encounter.
- ii). To assess the prevalence and severity of mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout among interns.
- iii). To evaluate how work-related factors, including working hours, night shifts, departmental workload, and role clarity, impact interns' physical and mental well-being.
- iv). To examine the coping strategies and support systems, whether formal or informal, that interns use to handle their physical and psychological stress.
- v). To explore how demographic factors, such as age, gender, hospital type, and department, relate to the health outcomes for interns.
- vi). To identify institutional or systemic gaps that contribute to the decline in intern well-being and suggest recommendations for better health support for interns in hospital settings.

e) Research type:

- i). **Mixed Method Research:** This study will use a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the physical and mental health challenges faced by medical interns in hospital settings.

Rationale: Quantitative data provides measurable patterns while qualitative insights offer context, perceptions, and experiences behind the numbers.

- ii). **Analytical Research:** Analytic research focuses on identifying and evaluating relationships and causes among variables to explain phenomena more thoroughly. Unlike descriptive research, which simply outlines "what" is happening, analytic research seeks to understand "why" and "how" it occurs.
- iii). **Field Research:** Field research entails collecting data directly from participants in their real-life environments. For this study, the hospital serves as the natural setting where interns work, offering genuine insights into their physical and mental health challenges.

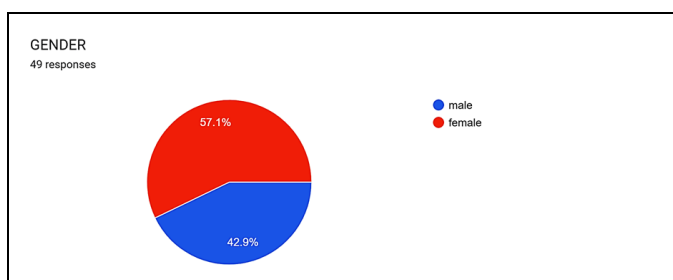
f) Research Limitations:

- i). **Self-Reported Data Bias:** As much of the data will come from interns' self-reports through surveys and interviews, there is a risk of bias. Participants might downplay mental health symptoms due to stigma or fear of repercussions at work or might exaggerate symptoms to seek help or support.
- ii). **Cross-Sectional Design:** If the study adopts a cross-sectional approach, it will capture data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to infer causation or observe changes in interns' health as they progress through their

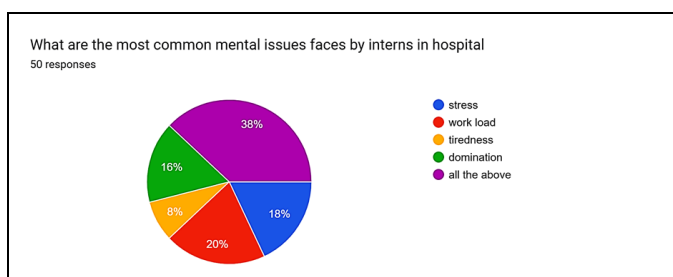
internships.

- iii). **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The study may only include interns from a few hospitals or specific areas, affecting how well the findings can be applied to all hospital interns, especially in varied healthcare settings or countries with different systems.
- iv). **Time Constraints of Participants:** Interns often have demanding schedules and long hours, which may limit their availability and willingness to fully participate in the study. This could affect response rates and the depth of qualitative data collected.
- v). **Observer Effect (Hawthorne Effect):** During direct observation, interns may change their behaviour consciously or unconsciously because they know they are being watched. This can impact the authenticity of the observed data

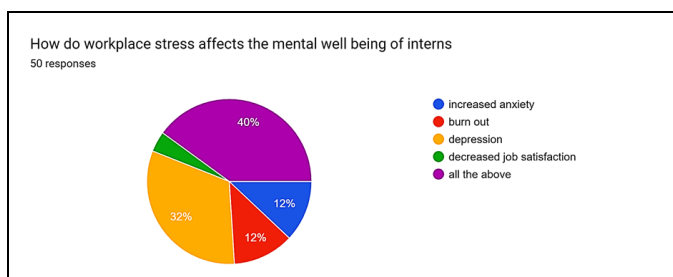
4. Data Analysis



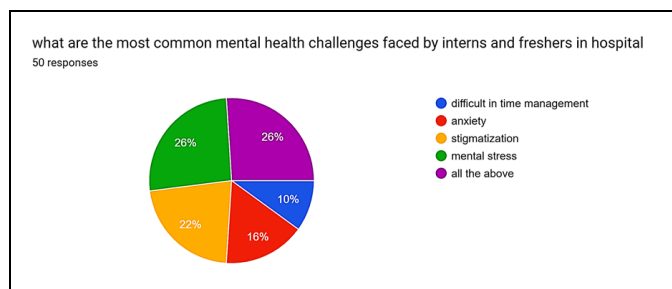
In the above pie chart shows the gender of the respond for the topic of physical and mental health issues faced by interns in hospitals. Here the male response are about 42.9%, the female response are about 57.1%. For following data 49 response.



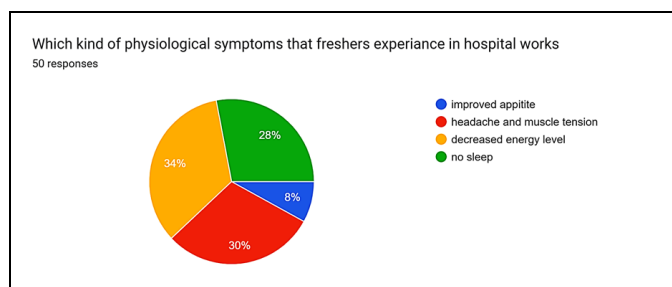
The above pie chart shows the mental issues faced by interns in hospital. Here the stress factors are stated as 18%, the workloads are stated as 20%, tiredness are stated as 8%, domination factors are stated as 16%, and all the other criteria are being represented by 38%.



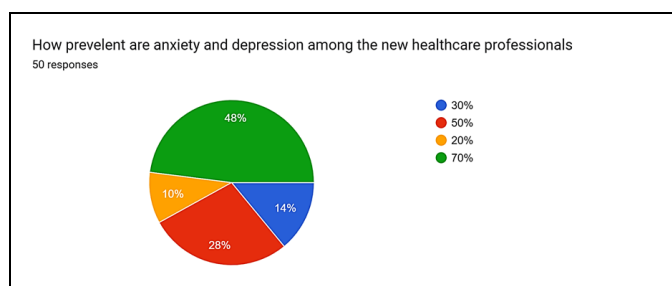
The above pie chart represents the stress effect and the well-being of the interns. The nominal situation are expressed in certain listed percentile, increased anxiety is expressed as 12%, burn out as 12%, depression as 32%, all the above are expressed as 40%.



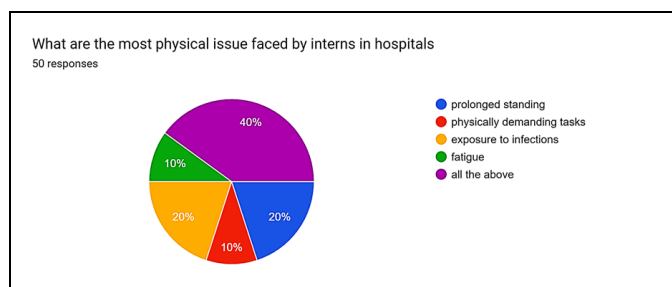
The above pie chart depicts the mental health challenges faced by interns and fresher's in hospital. The difficulties in time management are quoted as 10%, the anxiety as 16%, stigmatization as 22%, mental stress as 26%, all the above as 26%.



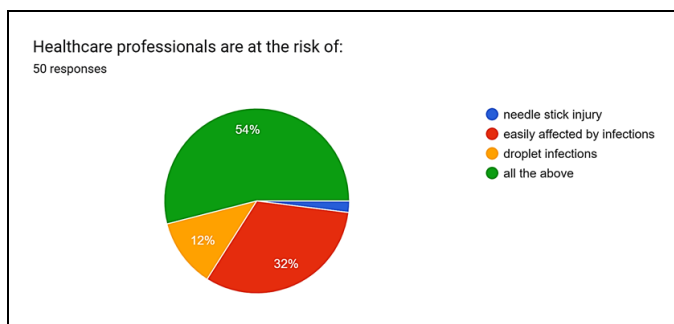
The above pie chart depicts the kind of physiological symptoms that fresher's experience in hospital works. The various situation has been encircled by the following percentile, the improved apatite-8%, headache and muscle tension-30%, decreased energy level -34%, no sleep -28%.



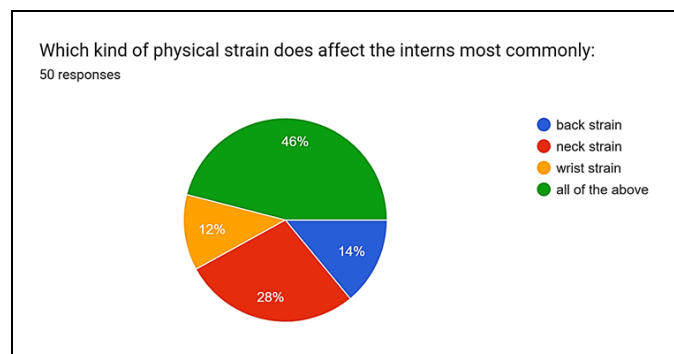
The above pie chart shows the prevalent are anxiety and depression among the new healthcare professionals. The level of anxiety and depression are listed with 30%,50%,20%,70%, the responses corresponding to the levels are 14, 28, 10, 48 respectively.



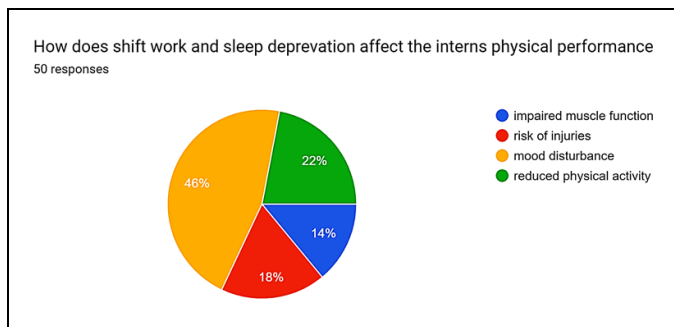
The above pie chart depict the physical issues faced by interns in hospitals. The prolonged standings are about 20%, physical demanding task are about 10%, exposure to infection are about 20%, fatigue are about 10% and all the above are about 40%.



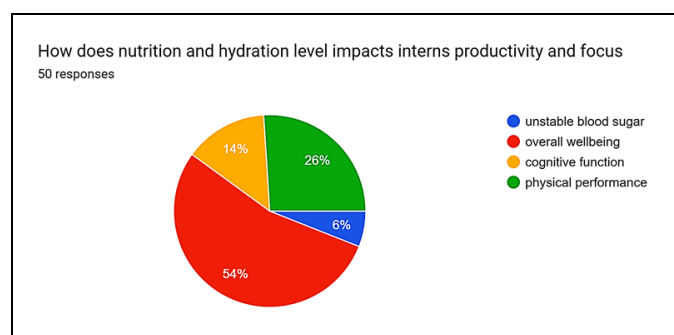
The above pie cart illustrates the risk faced by healthcare professionals. The needle stick injuries are very minimal. Meanwhile the infection rates are 32%, droplet infection rates about 12%, all the above is about 54%



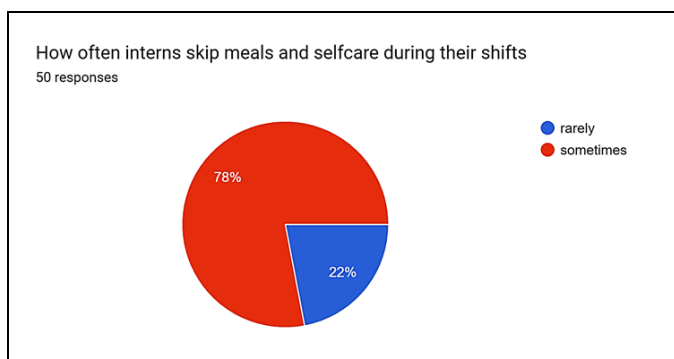
The above pie chart shows the physical strain which affects the interns most commonly. The back strain holds 14%, neck strain holds 28%, wrist strain holds 12% and all of the above holds 46%.



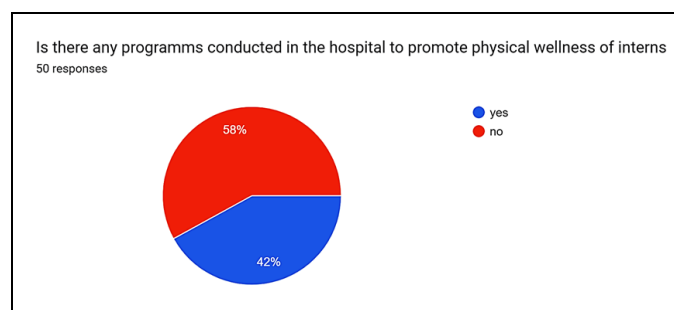
The above pie chart categorises the shift work and sleep deprivation that affect the interns physical performance. The impaired muscle function rates 14%, risk of injuries rates 18%, mood disturbance rates 46%, reduced physical activity rates 22%.



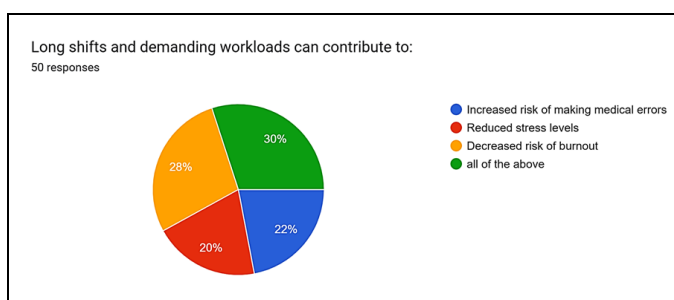
The above pie chart shows the nutrition and hydration levels which impacts the productivity and focus. The unstable blood sugar shows 6%, overall well-being 54%, cognitive function 14%, physical performance 26%.



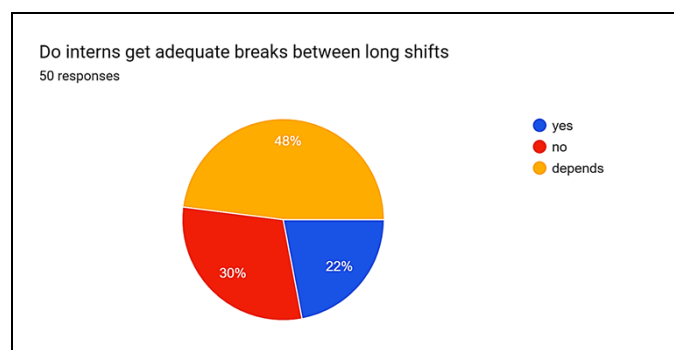
The above pie chart represents the how often the interns skip their meals during their shifts, rarely bears 22% while sometimes bears 78%.



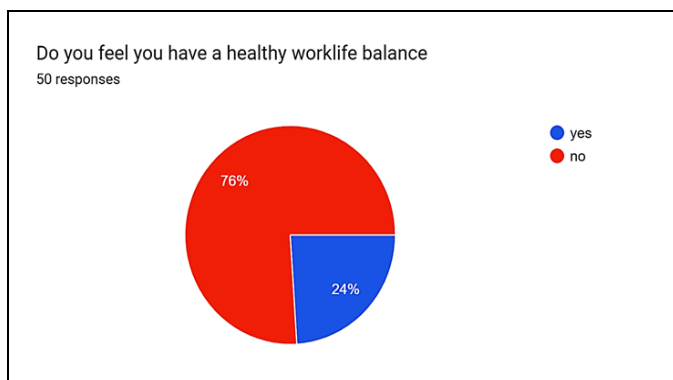
The above pie chart ensures that they are conducting programmes in hospitals to promote physical wellness with the assurance of 58% along with denial of 42%.



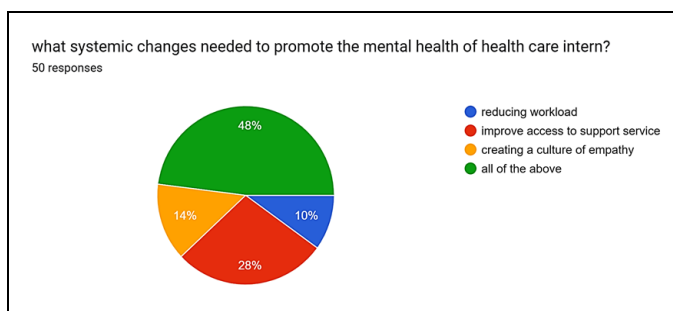
The above pie chart shows the long shifts and demanding workload issues. The increased risk of making medical error rates 22%, reduced stress level rates 20%, decreased risk of burn out 28% and all the above rates 30%.



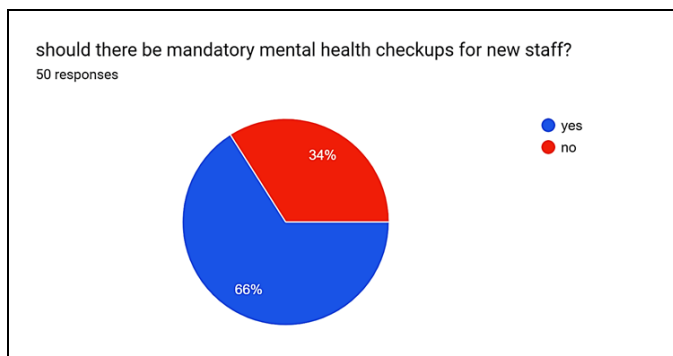
The above pie chart ensures that the interns are involved long shift without breaks with the evidence of about 22%, with the denial of about 30%, both conditions are 48%.



The above pie chart depict the healthy work life balance of respondents. The percentile of Yes is 24 and No is 76.



The above pie chart illustrates the systematic changes needed to promote the mental health care of intern. Reducing workload implies 10%, improved access to support service 28%, creating a culture of empathy implies 14% and all of the above implies 48%.



The above pie chart depicts the importance of mental health check-up's for new staff is approved by 66% and denied by 34%.

5. Findings of the Study

Based on the data collected and analysis done during the study, the following findings were observed:

- Long Working Hours:** Most interns work long hours, often exceeding 10 to 12 hours a day. Many also have night shifts. This results in tiredness, irregular sleep, and a lack of rest.
- Physical Health Problems:** Many interns reported body pain, back pain, headaches, and fatigue. These issues mainly arise from standing for long periods, skipping meals, and not getting enough sleep.
- Lack of Sleep and Poor Eating Habits:** Due to inconsistent duty schedules, interns often eat at strange hours or skip meals. Lack of sleep is common and affects their energy and concentration.

- Mental Health Issues:** A significant number of interns experience stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. The primary causes are work pressure, high patient loads, and fear of making mistakes.
- Workplace Pressure:** Interns feel pressure from senior doctors, nurses, and hospital management. Some believe they are not treated with respect or given sufficient support, which raises their stress levels.
- Lack of Emotional Support:** Many interns do not have someone to share their feelings with or seek help from when under stress. Counselling services or mental health programs are often lacking in hospitals.
- Impact on Performance:** Physical fatigue and mental stress affect interns' efficiency and ability to learn. Some struggle to focus during patient care or academic sessions.
- Gender Differences:** Female interns reported slightly higher stress and fatigue levels than their male counterparts, particularly due to balancing personal and professional responsibilities.
- Coping Mechanisms:** Some interns cope by talking to friends, listening to music, or taking short breaks, but most lack structured ways to manage stress.
- Need for Institutional Support:** Most interns agreed that hospitals should offer better facilities, such as restrooms, nutritious food options, regular health checkups, and counselling services.

6. Suggestions and Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions aim to help reduce the physical and mental health issues faced by hospital interns:

- Reduce Working Hours and Provide Proper Rest:** Interns should not work excessively long hours or be without adequate breaks. Hospitals can establish rotational schedules to ensure every intern gets sufficient rest and sleep. Adequate rest helps improve energy, focus, and performance.
- Encourage Healthy Eating and Hydration:** Hospitals should ensure interns have access to nutritious food and clean drinking water during their shifts. Regular meal breaks should be included in their schedules to avoid skipped meals or irregular eating times.
- Provide Mental Health Support:** Counselling services, stress management workshops, and support groups should be available for interns. Speaking with a counsellor or mental health expert can help them manage stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion more effectively.
- Create a Positive Work Environment:** Senior doctors and hospital staff should treat interns with respect and encouragement. A friendly and supportive environment helps reduce fear, pressure, and workplace stress. Supervisors should mentor interns, not just assign tasks.
- Conduct Regular Health Check-ups:** Hospitals should organize regular physical and mental health check-ups for interns. Early detection of health problems can prevent serious issues and ensure interns stay healthy throughout their training.
- Promote Work-Life Balance:** Interns should be encouraged to take short breaks, engage in relaxing activities like exercise and hobbies, and maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.
- Provide Rest Areas and Basic Facilities:** Hospitals should have proper restrooms, sleeping areas, and

recreation rooms for interns, especially for those on night shifts. Comfortable spaces help reduce fatigue and improve morale.

viii). Organize Training on Stress Management: Workshops or seminars on time management, emotional resilience, and coping with pressure can better equip interns to handle stressful situations. These programs should be part of the internship orientation.

ix). Improve Communication and Feedback: There should be open communication between interns, supervisors, and hospital administrators. Interns should feel free to discuss their difficulties without fear of punishment or judgment.

x). Policy Changes and Institutional Support: Medical colleges and hospital management should establish policies that protect interns' health, such as:

- Setting a limit on duty hours
- Ensuring weekly off-days
- Providing access to psychological counselling
- Encouraging regular feedback on working conditions

7. Conclusion

The internship period in hospitals is one of the most crucial times in a medical student's life. It allows interns to gain real experience, develop practical skills, and learn how to handle patients and emergencies. However, this study shows that the internship phase also brings a lot of physical and mental pressure. Most interns face physical health problems like tiredness, body pain, irregular sleep, and not eating well due to long hours and continuous duties. Many also struggle with mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and burnout because of heavy workloads, lack of rest, and emotional challenges while treating patients. These problems affect not only interns' health but also their ability to learn, perform their jobs, and stay motivated. When interns are tired or stressed, their concentration drops, which can lead to mistakes or a decline in care quality. The findings of this study emphasize that hospitals and medical institutions need to pay more attention to the well-being of interns. They should establish proper support systems, like counselling, mental health programs, regular breaks, flexible duty hours, and better communication between interns and supervisors. By improving working conditions and offering emotional support, hospitals can create a healthier and more positive environment for interns. In conclusion, this research shows that physical and mental health are closely linked. Taking care of interns' health is not only vital for them personally but also for ensuring safe and effective patient care. Supporting interns' health means supporting the future of healthcare itself.

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