



Balancing Academic and Personal Life: Challenges for Medical Students

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Abstract

Medical students are found to experience stress with a considerable impact because of the academic studies they are undertaking. High demands compared to non-medical students can interfere with other life domains, such as personal life. This interference can manifest in several ways, such as diminished time for social interactions and leisure activities. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the potential impact on the relationship between academic life and personal life. The research was conducted with a sample of 7 medical student participants from Universitas Padjadjaran. Participants completed a questionnaire with 5 open-ended questions designed to capture their experiences and perspectives in detail. The findings revealed that a significant number of participants struggle with time management, feeling that their academic commitments leave them with minimal time for free activities and social engagements. This imbalance contributes to a sense of inadequacy in maintaining a fulfilling personal life. The study highlighted that a well-rounded personal life is crucial for sustaining optimal academic performance. A good personal life can provide good academic conditions, but the lack of free time for personal life makes participants do other alternatives such as postponing, procrastinating, and causing stress. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that not only alleviates academic burdens but also promotes a healthy balance between professional and personal domains. It's essential for ensuring the well-being and success of medical students in both their academic pursuits and personal life.

Keywords: medical students, perceived stress, academic challenges, personal life, well-being

Abstrak

Mahasiswa kedokteran ditemukan mengalami stres dengan dampak yang cukup besar karena studi akademik yang mereka jalani. Tuntutan yang tinggi dibandingkan dengan mahasiswa non-kedokteran dapat mengganggu aspek kehidupan lain, misalnya kehidupan pribadinya. Gangguan ini dapat terjadi dalam beberapa bentuk, seperti berkurangnya waktu untuk interaksi sosial dan kegiatan luang. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi dan memahami dampak potensial terhadap hubungan antara kehidupan akademis dan kehidupan pribadi. Penelitian dilakukan dengan sampel sebanyak 7 partisipan mahasiswa kedokteran Universitas Padjadjaran. Peserta menyelesaikan kuesioner dengan 5 pertanyaan terbuka yang dirancang untuk mengumpulkan pengalaman dan perspektif mereka secara rinci. Penelitian menemukan bahwa sejumlah besar peserta penelitian mengalami kesulitan, khususnya dalam mengatur waktu karena mereka merasa bahwa komitmen terhadap akademik membuat mereka memiliki sedikit waktu untuk melakukan aktivitas di waktu luang maupun kegiatan sosial. Ketidakseimbangan ini juga berkontribusi pada rasa ketidakmampuan mereka untuk memenuhi kebutuhan kehidupan pribadinya. Studi ini juga menyoroti bahwa kehidupan pribadi yang baik menjadi penting untuk mempertahankan kinerja akademik yang optimal. Kehidupan pribadi yang baik juga dapat memberikan kondisi akademik yang baik, namun kurangnya waktu luang untuk kehidupan pribadi membuat partisipan melakukan alternatif lain seperti menunda dan melakukan prokrastinasi yang dapat menyebabkan stres. Dalam mengatasi permasalahan ini, perlunya pendekatan holistik yang tidak hanya meringankan beban akademis namun juga mendorong keseimbangan yang sehat antara kegiatan akademik dan kehidupan pribadi. Hal ini penting untuk memastikan kesejahteraan dan kesuksesan mahasiswa kedokteran baik dalam bidang akademik maupun kehidupan pribadi.

Keywords: Mahasiswa kedokteran, pengalaman stress, tantangan akademik, kehidupan pribadi, kesejahteraan diri

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1. Introduction

Medical students exhibit a notably elevated occurrence, research found the incidence of depression ranged from 1.4% to 73.5%, and the anxiety ranged from 7.7% to 65.5% among medical students [1]. In Indonesia, founded very high levels of burnout and

mild psychiatric illness among medical students [2] and found also globally amongst medical students [3]. This heightened prevalence can be attributed, in part, to challenging circumstances faced by medical students. These include the lengthy and demanding educational commitments required to complete their practical training, which often span several years and

involve coursework. Additionally, the academic pressures inherent in medical education, such as the need to maintain high grades, pass challenging exams, and stay in parallel of a body of medical knowledge, significantly contribute to the stress experienced by these students [4].

The stress also associated with clinical practice adds another layer of complexity to their experience. The responsibility of making critical decisions, often under the supervision of experienced practitioners, and the need to navigate the complexities of patient interactions can be overwhelming [1]. Furthermore, academic stress has been identified as a substantial predictor of diminished mental well-being and a key factor contributing to reduced empathy within the medical student population [4].

Numerous studies about diverse educational systems conducted in both developed and developing countries also indicate that medical students experience a higher degree of psychological distress compared to their non-medical peers. This can be attributed to various factors, including the relentless pursuit of exceptional performance and top-notch grades, particularly among medical students attending public universities where the competitive environment necessitates rigorous efforts. Furthermore, the transition from high school to university brings about lifestyle changes that further compound the challenges faced by these students [5]. Additionally, the elevated prevalence of symptoms related to anxiety, stress, and depression is closely associated with the accumulation of both academic and non-academic stressors, such as academic workload, limited leisure time, strained peer relationships, geographical separation from family, and a lack of social support [6].

Past research categorized the main sources of stress in academic life were time pressure, heavy workload, fear of failure, and examination frequency. One-third of students also indicated that they also experienced of psychosocial and non-academic stress [7]. Academic stress also contains challenges of limited free time, extended class hours, peer competition, and anxieties regarding the academic performance. Furthermore, also there is stressors related to the psychosocial involving the feeling of homesickness, financial difficulties, distance from home, and concerns about the future success of medical careers [8].

College life holds significant importance in shaping the experiences and future careers of medical students. This period is marked by intense academic demands and thorough training, which are crucial for their professional development. However, they also juggle other life domains, including maintaining relationship with family and friends, and engaging in leisure activities which can serve as valuable stress reducers and ensuring overall well-being. Despite their importance, conflicts frequently arise as the demanding

nature of medical studies often clashes with personal commitments. For instance, students may find themselves too fatigued from their studies or academic workload so they are unable to actively engage in family activities, social gatherings, or leisure pursuits [9]. Research indicates that coping strategies play a crucial role in managing stress, especially accompanied by social support from family [10]. On the other hand, the research revealed a decline in socializing intensity with peers, leading to reduced resources for social support and, consequently, feelings of loneliness, lack of supplies, and poor communication, which can contribute to medical students' stress levels [11].

While personal life may help students to decrease academic stress, it can also become the reason of new additional tension, if the students' social need is not satisfied [10]. Overcoming depression has been shown to correlate with reduced burnout levels, increased satisfaction in social activities, and improved perceptions of learning challenges by focused in mindfulness-based interventions ultimately effective to enabling the cultivation of a healthier balance between academic commitments and other life facets [12]. Additionally, research highlights the positive adaptive abilities and resilience of medical students and when coping with stress and increasing their emotional intelligence [13].

This research has been precisely designed to search into the intricate connections between the academic and non-academic facets of medical students' lives. The overarching goal is to bridge an existing knowledge gap, thereby facilitating a more profound understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play. This comprehensive exploration is motivated by a profound aspiration: to explain the nuances of the challenges faced by medical students as they navigate the complex part of their academic and personal lives.

Central to the research's purpose is the desire to collect insights that can inform the development of targeted interventions. These interventions are envisioned as potential tools to mitigate the conflicts that often arise between the critical domains of medical students' lives. By illuminating these interrelationships, we aspire to contribute to the enhancement of mental health within this particular population. Ultimately, the aim is to foster an environment in which medical students can flourish academically while also nurturing their overall well-being.

2. Research Method

This research entailed a qualitative investigation that employed a content analysis approach, with the primary objective of examining the connections between the demands of medical studies and other aspects of life that may have pose competing demands or offered coping resources. The aim was to investigate into how these competing demands and resources

interplay, affecting the overall well-being and academic performance of medical students.

The study's participants were selected from the Faculty of Medicine at Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia, specifically targeting students on their 2nd and 3rd year to ensure a broader range of perspectives. These particular years were chosen because they represent critical periods in medical education where students typically face increasing academic pressures while still adjusting to the demanding environment of medical school.

A convenience sampling technique was employed to enhance the diversity of the participant pool. This method allowed for the inclusion of a wide variety of students with different backgrounds, experiences, and coping mechanisms. By doing so, the research aimed to capture a holistic view of the challenges and strategies that medical students employ to balance their academic responsibilities with other life domains.

To conduct the interviews, the researcher had employed a predefined topic guide encompassing the structured inquiries aimed at eliciting detailed and nuanced responses from the participants. The topic guide was designed to cover several key areas:

1) a concise overview of participants' academic and personal life circumstances. Participants were asked to provide a brief summary of their current academic status and personal life situation, including information about their academic workload, social activities, and any other relevant personal commitments. This overview helped set the context for understanding each participant's unique situation.

2) Perceptions of the impact of academic studies on personal lives and associated challenges. Participant were prompted to reflect on how their academic studies had influenced their personal lives. They were also encouraged to discuss specific challenges they faced, such as time constraints, reduced social interactions, and any changes in their personal relationships or lifestyle. This overview aimed to uncover the direct and indirect effects of academic demands on their personal well-being.

3) Perceptions of personal lives affecting academic studies and related challenges by how they had perceived their personal lives affecting their academic studies and related challenges. Participants were asked to consider how their personal lives and circumstances had impacted their academic performances. Included the discussions on how personal responsibilities, social activities, and durability influenced their ability to focus and excel in their studies. Participants were encouraged to share any coping strategies they employed to manage these challenges.

Data collection was facilitated through participant responses recorded via Google Form software,

utilizing open-ended questions. This method allowed participants to provide in-depth, qualitative data that could capture the complexity of their experiences. The open-ended format was chosen to encourage detailed responses and enable participants to express their thoughts and feelings without the limitations of predefined response options.

The subsequent content analysis had involved two main coding approaches. Firstly, deductive coding had been applied to systematically identify and categorize key issues in accordance with the predefined topic guide. The deductive coding process focused on the primary themes that were established before data collection, based on the research objectives. By applying deductive coding, the researcher was able to systematically map the collected data onto these predefined themes, ensuring that all relevant aspects of the research questions were thoroughly addressed. This had entailed coding for themes related to the impact of academic studies on personal life and the reciprocal impact of personal life on academic studies.

Secondly, inductive coding was employed to identify and categorize additional sub-themes that had emerged from the collected data. Inductive coding allows new insights to surface directly from the data. This approach facilitated the discovery of sub-themes that were not initially anticipated but proved to be significant in understanding the full scope of the participants' experiences.

To provide a clear context of the analysis, the table below present a comprehensive overview of the participant demographic (table 1). This detailed demographic information is crucial for appreciating the variability within our sample and understanding how different demographic factors may interact with academic and personal life experiences.

Table 1. Participant Demographic

Participant Gender	<i>n</i>	Generation	<i>n</i>	Age	<i>n</i>
Male	0	2020	4	19	3
Female	7	2021	3	20	2

This study enlisted the participation of a carefully selected cohort, comprising a total of seven medical students, thoughtfully stratified across two distinct class cohorts. Specifically, four participants hailed from the Class of 2020, while the remaining three represented the Class of 2021. This deliberate composition was aimed at capturing a diverse range of experiences and perspectives within the medical student population (Table 1). The research was conducted with precision and rigor, taking place in May 2023, employing the Google Form platform as the medium for data collection. This methodological choice was made to ensure the efficient and systematic gathering of responses from participants, bolstering the credibility and reliability of the study's findings.

3. Result and Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate into how these competing demands and resources interplay, affecting the overall well-being and academic performance of medical students. Specifically, the research aimed to understand the balance students must maintain between their academic responsibilities and other aspects of their personal lives. To provide a comprehensive analysis, there are three topics related to the exploration of the relevance of the demands of medical studies with other life domains.

These table provides a comprehensive overview of the themes and sub-themes explored in this study, highlighting the complex interplay between competing demands and resources that affect the overall well-being and academic performance of medical students.

For a more complete explanation, the main themes and sub-themes are presented from the data are presented in the table below.

3.1 Overview of Student Academic Conditions and Personal Life

In order to comprehensively understand the dynamic interplay between academic demands and personal life among medical students, it is crucial to examine the multifaceted aspects of their experiences. The subsequent table presents a detailed overview of the primary themes and sub-themes derived from our analysis (Table 2), providing a nuanced perspective on how academic conditions intersect with personal life medical students.

Table 2. Overview of Student Academic Conditions and Personal Life

Theme	Subtheme
Academic Life	Tutorial class
	Lecturing
	Carry out tasks
	Skill lab
	Self-studying
Personal Life	Interact with others
	Self-care, me time
	Doing hobbies
	Exercises
	Fulfill daily needs (eat, sleep)

3.1.1 Academic Life

Participants in the medical education program said their lives were mostly focused on academics. From intensive tutorial classes to absorbing dense lectures, and meeting campus requirements like assignments, lab work, and independent study, their academic commitments demanded their utmost attention. *“My daily academic conditions are include tutorials, lectures, sometimes interspersed with skills, doing assignments by reading journals to find out a list of*

questions that are difficult to answer from text books, the hardest part is probably a thesis because it is difficult to balance both.”

3.1.2 Personal Life

On the other side, in the remaining pockets of time, most participants cherished moments spent connecting with family and friends. *“Life outside academics is sometimes gathering with friends to hangout or just chatting.”* They also recognized the fundamental human needs of sleep and sustenance. And if, by some miracle, there was still a slice of spare time left, some participants seized the opportunity to indulge in hobbies and exercise – a precious chance to savor life's pleasures *“If the target for the day has been achieved, I will do my hobby to clear my mind”*.

3.2 The perceived effect of academic studies on one's personal life and personal challenges

This investigation highlights the interplay between academic demands and personal experiences, emphasizing how academic schedules and pressures can affect various aspects of medical students' lives. The following table (Table 3) provides a structured overview of the key themes and sub-themes identified in our analysis, offering a detailed insight into the personal challenges medical students face as a result of their academic studies.

Table 3. The Perceived Effect of Academic Studies on One's Personal Life and Personal Challenges

Theme	Subtheme
Psychological Effect	Psychological distress
	Self-confidence
Challenges	Time management
	Set priorities
Leisure Time	Minimum time for personal life
	Personal life disturbed

3.2.1 Psychological Implications

A predominant theme among participants related to challenges in time management, with a notable consequence being the induction of depressive states in many. Interestingly, one participant reported heightened confidence as a result of the substantial time invested in academic endeavors, attributing this boost to an augmented depth of understanding. *“Sometimes academic situations are quite stressful and at times of crisis they can take up the whole day. However, this doesn't happen all the time.”*

3.2.2 Challenges Faced

Two participants highlighted the need to establish clear priorities and implement effective time management strategies to harmonize their essential requirements with the demands of their rigorous academic

curriculum. *“I feel I should be able to divide my time better between studying and also doing activities outside of studying”*. Additionally, one participant acknowledged ongoing struggles in allocating time proportionately, underscoring the persistent difficulty of this endeavor *“Due to my unclear academic schedule, it is difficult for me to maintain a work-life balance”*.

3.2.3 Leisure Constraints

The restricted allocation of personal time emerged as a stress-inducing factor for several participants. Given the substantial dominance of academic commitments in their lives, participants consistently prioritized these demands. Consequently, the limited availability of time for personal pursuits and relaxation engendered feelings of pressure and increased stress levels. *“If my academic schedule is busy, then I have less and less time to relax.”*

3.3 Perceived effect of one's personal life on academic studies and personal challenges

Understanding the perceived impact of personal life on academic studies, we aim to reveal the complex interactions between personal life and academic responsibilities (Table 4). The following table outlines a detailed overview of the themes and sub-themes derived from the analysis, offering a comprehensive view of how personal life factors impact the academic pursuits of medical students.

Table 4. Perceived Effect of One's Personal Life on Academic Studies and Personal Challenges

Theme	Subtheme
Psychological Effect	Enthusiastic
	Habit of procrastinating
Challenges	Access to get information
	Good life means Good in academic
	Limited free time
Leisure Time	Don't have a personal time

3.3.1 Psychological Effect

A recurring interaction outside the academic among research participants revolved around the stimulating influence of social interactions beyond the realm of academic, igniting motivation and enthusiasm to delve deeper into lecture content. *“Having a good personal relationship makes it easier to find out and consult about academic studies”*.

3.3.2 Academic Advantage

Participants articulated that the absence of familial obligations while being away from home afforded them greater flexibility to allocate additional time to academic and personal pursuits. Moreover, one participant attested that engaging in a hobby linked to medical education enhanced personal satisfaction and

enriched their classroom learning experience. *“because I live in a boarding house so I don't have any home works obligations that I have to do. It could say the impact is actually good for academics because I have more free time”*.

3.3.3 Leisure Activities

While cultivating a fulfilling personal life was associated with academic improvements, the practical realities faced by students revealed constraints on their free time, leading to less-than-ideal lifestyles characterized by insufficient rest and limited self-care. Some students, striving to meet their personal needs, made sacrifices in their academic commitments, opting to defer tasks until impending deadlines approached. *“Sometimes it's difficult to divide my time and sometimes I still like to postpone my hobby to watch films/series in between studying.”*

Psychological distress, as defined in the literature, manifests as an unpleasant emotional state experienced by individual in response to demands that cause mental disturbances and contribution to the increase of burnout [14]. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that psychological distress can also be regarded as a normative emotional response to stressors, a nuance that underscores the necessity of contextual and population-specific delineation [15].

Moreover, it is imperative to recognize that psychological distress is a highly dynamic and idiosyncratic phenomenon, despite being triggered by similar external stimuli. Therefore, the attempt to understand the connection between the academic and personal experience as complex becomes essential in the purpose of understanding the precisely developed emotions experienced by each student. This research was undertaken with the primary objective of providing a comprehensive overview and elucidating the challenges confronted by medical students, particularly those in their 2nd and 3rd year.

The findings of this study underscore the impact of rigorous academic commitments on certain students, notably the perceived scarcity of leisure time for social interactions and self-care activities, such as tending to daily needs. These findings align with those of previous qualitative investigation [9]. Revealed that students pursuing medical disciplines contend with an intensified struggle to balance the demands of academic rigor and personal life. Therefore, medical students must learn to balance the conflicting demands from different areas of their lives and prioritize their commitments to increase the allocation of personal time, but on the other hand facing such significant decisions of balancing the study life balance making it challenging for their mental well-being [16].

The issue of time management difficulties stands out prominently in the discourse of medical students. They contend with the serious challenge of allocating their

time wisely amidst demanding schedules, striving for a harmonious balance. Yet, the emergency of their academic pursuits often interfered upon their personal lives, necessitating a revisitation of prioritization and time allocation strategies. These observations resonate with previous scholarly investigations, particularly in the realm of medical education, which have highlighted the complex connection between the experience of time constraints and the academic endeavors undertaken by medical students [17].

Toward the results, students believe that an amicable personal life yields favorable academic conditions. It explains the significance of personal life elements such as social interactions and leisure pursuits as crucial resources in coping with the rigors of academic studies. Moreover, research highlight the salutary effects of social support and adaptive coping styles, revealing their association with buffer the pathogenic effects of psychological stress and an elevated quality of life within the medical student population [18].

The empirical findings from this investigation underscore the intricate interplay between academic and personal life dimensions, manifesting in multifaceted implications. This interplay is characterized by a dynamic balance where each dimension can significantly influence the other, leading to both challenges and opportunities.

Evident among these are adverse consequences, notably the obvious constraints on opportunities for social interaction and self-care, comprising the fundamental aspects of sustenance. The demands of medical studies often leave students with limited time and energy to engage in social activities or maintain routines that support their physical and mental health. This restriction affects fundamental aspects of sustenance, such as regular exercise, adequate sleep, and nutritious meals, which are essential for maintaining overall well-being.

However, it is noteworthy that personal life also emerges as a potentially influential asset, capable of improving the detrimental impact of academic stress. Participants in the study articulated that a flourishing personal life – encompassing supportive relationships, fulfilling hobbies, and effective stress management strategies – not only enhances their overall well-being but also positively influences their academic performance. Participants in this study articulated that a flourishing personal life not only enhances their overall well-being but also enhance their academic performance.

In the broader context of educational research, it is essential to underscore the significance of non-academic factors in shaping students' prospects for educational achievement. While academic pursuits are undoubtedly imperative, an inclusive perspective calls for due recognition of the manifold influences

radiating from personal life experiences that can either bolster or detain students' educational attainment.

4. Conclusion

The research highlights the dual nature of the relationship between academic demands and personal life. While academic pressures can impose significant constraints on personal well-being, a well-maintained personal life can act as a buffer against these stresses, enhancing both mental health and academic performance. These insights emphasize the importance of fostering an environment that supports medical students in achieving a healthy balance between their academic and personal lives, thereby promoting their overall success and well-being.

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