

Title: Burnout Among First-Year Medical Students During COVID-19 Pandemic in Mexico: A Cross-sectional
Study.

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Authors Contribution Statement:

Contributor Role	Role Definition	Au 1	thors	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Conceptualizat ion	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	Χ		Χ			(
Data Curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later reuse.	Х	Х	Х			7) \			
Formal Analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data.	Χ			Y						
Funding Acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.	X	X	X	X	X	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	X
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.	X		X	<u></u>		Χ				
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models	X		X							
Project Administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.			X				Χ		Χ	Χ
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.		Χ	Χ	Χ		Χ	Χ	Χ		X
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.	Χ									
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.		Χ	Χ	Х	Χ	Х	Х	Х	Х	X
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.		Χ		Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.	Χ	X	X	X	Χ	Χ	Х	X	X	X
Writing – Original Draft Preparation	Creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	Х		Χ							
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Discussion Points:

- 1. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the psychological health of medical students.
- 2. Burnout was identified in 14.9% of first-year medical students.
- 3. High emotional exhaustion was evident in 53.9%, and more occurred more often likely in men.
- 4. Schools should consider making available and promoting mental health programs and making available for their students.



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ABSTRACT.

Background: The coronavirus pandemic is an international public health emergency without precedence in modern history. It represents a challenge to the academic and psychological stability of students due to the changes it can cause in daily life. This study aimed to evaluate the prevalence and level of burnout in medical students caused by the academic and psychological instability that the pandemic represents.

Methods: A cross-sectional prospective study was designed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS). This evaluated the emotional exhaustion due to study demands, cynicism, and negative self-academic efficacy. This study was based in the school of medicine of the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon (UANL), in Monterrey, Mexico during the Spring semester 2020.

Results: A total of 154 (93 women and 61 men) first-year medical students participated (response rate 36.4%). Burnout was identified in 14.9% (n=23), and high emotional exhaustion in 53.9% (n=83). Burnout was almost 4 times more likely to develop in men than in women (aOR = 4.8; 95% Confidence Interval=1.7-13.3) when considering age as a covariable in the multivariable model.

Conclusion: Further epidemiological studies of burnout syndrome in medical students are needed, and schools should consider promoting mental health and making programs available for their students to help overcome the emotional and social challenges during the pandemic.

Key Words: Psychological burnout, COVID-19, Pandemic, Medical students.





INTRODUCTION.

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Burnout is a psychological syndrome produced by professional exhaustion and chronic stress based on three main domains: excess emotional exhaustion, excessive depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement.¹ In the academic context, the three main domains that evaluate the presence of burnout syndrome are emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and self-academic efficacy. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Cynicism is a cynical detached response to other people and themselves. Negative self-academic efficacy evaluates a reduction in personal accomplishment and feeling less competent in their academic performance.²-³ The Maslach Burnout Inventory has been the most used instrument in the scientific community to evaluate burnout syndrome in the general population and the General Survey version (MBI-GS) was designed as an instrument to assess burnout in work contexts.⁴-⁵ Based on the assumption that students experience an equivalent form of exhaustion, the MBI-GS was adapted to survey university students, creating the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS).⁶ The application of the MBI-SS shows students can experience high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and negative self-academic efficacy. Each domain assesses different symptoms and conducts.

During the last years, burnout has increased its incidence as a common phenomenon among medical students, residents, and doctors with less than 5 years of experience in comparison to the general population.⁷ Recent observations suggest the appearance of burnout during the first years of medicine has increased,⁸ and that at least half of the students will suffer burnout at some point in their medical studies.^{3,9} These high statistics suggest that the evaluation of burnout syndrome is important in medical students. Addressing the problem at the right time can improve their academic performance and reduce the risk of developing further emotional instability, fatigue, and drug use.¹⁰⁻¹¹

The SARS-COV-2 pandemic, also known as COVID-19, has changed completely the way the population lives around the world. From the mandatory self-isolation time and use of face masks, to a forced transition from face-to-face education to online platforms, changing the environment in which educators and students interact. These sudden outbreaks can precipitate new psychiatric symptoms and aggravate pre-existing mental illnesses. During today's pandemic, the general population has reported an increase in feelings of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, insomnia, and suicide. Apart from the psychiatric consequences to the general population it has been proved that social isolation has increased substantially the suicide risk in older people during the pandemic. Understanding the severity of the problem leads to finding common solutions, such as suicide prevention, dissemination of scientific information, promoting self-help, positive coping, reducing isolation through technology, and developing telehealth.

The medical community has suffered an important increase in the amount of work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several studies have evaluated burnout in physicians during the pandemic, reporting that on average, 76% of medical residents had reported burnout in these times.¹⁵⁻¹⁶ In contrast to medical residents and specialists, few have addressed the psychological burden and pressures on students due to the closure of facilities and schools around the world.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

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We hypothesized the students would present high levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout levels because, during the pandemic, the risk of developing COVID-19 and the change in learning methods will accentuate their previous stress. The objective of this study was to evaluate the prevalence and level of burnout in first year medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic.





MATERIALS OR PATIENTS AND METHODS.

Across-sectional study was designed to establish the burnout prevalence in first-year medical students; enrolled in the 2020 spring semester of the Human Anatomy course. The ages ranged between 18 and 24 years and the mean age was 18.9 ± 0.9. The study was based in the school of medicine of the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon (UANL), in Monterrey, Mexico, which has a 6-year program, and a 19-week anatomy course during the first year.²⁰

The eligibility criteria were to be enrolled in the human anatomy course during the pandemic COVID-19 and to be at least 18 years old. The students enrolled in the Gross Gross Human Anatomy course were second-semester medical studens and they previously had presential courses last semester. We determined as an estimated sample size that the enrollment of 139 first-year medical students would provide a power of 97.5% to detect the prevalence of burnout at least 10%, using a two-sided test with a type I error of 0.05.

An online survey was advertised on the official website of the human anatomy department during the last week of the spring semester (June 22 to June 26 of 2020). The survey contained an online informant consent where the students had the opportunity to deny their participation in the study or answered voluntarily. The age and sex of the students were collected, then the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI- SS)²¹⁻²² was applied, which consisted of 15 questions corresponding to the evaluation of emotional exhaustion (five items), cynicism (four items), and academic efficacy (six items) (Supplement 1). The scores described the frequency with which the student felt identified with each expression, from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Results from the three domains were classified as follows: emotional exhaustion: low (0-9), moderate (10-14), or high (>14); cynicism: low (0-1), moderate (2-6), or high (>6); and academic effectiveness: low (<22), moderate (23-27), or high (>28). ²¹⁻²²

Due to the anonymity of the survey, all participants were provided with the information for psychological support through the student mental healthcare programs provided by the University through the Department of Psychiatry of the University Hospital.

Responses from all questionnaires were registered in a database using 2020 Microsoft Excel for Mac, version 16.43 (Microsoft Corp., Redmond, WA). These were then analyzed using SPSS statistical package, version 25.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Quantitative variables were summarized in measures of central tendency and dispersion, and qualitative variables in frequencies and percentages. A student's t-test was used to compare quantitative variables. A Pearson's Chi-Squared test was run and odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were calculated to determine associations in qualitative variables. Adjusted OR (aOR) were calculated after including age as a covariate in a multivariable regression model. Variables with a p-value of <0.05 in the univariate analysis were included in the multivariate. A statistical threshold of <0.05 was used throughout. The study was approved by the University's ethics and research committees with the registration number AH20-0003. No external funding was used. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



RESULTS.

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A total of 154 first-year medical students were included on the study, 60.3%(n =93) were female and 39.6% (n=61) were male (response rate 36.4%). Based on the MBI-SS definition, 14.9% (n=23) of the study participants were found to have burnout syndrome, 53.9% (n=83) scored high on emotional exhaustion, 16.9% (n=26) scored high cynicism, and 34.4% (n=53) scored low on academic effectiveness (*Table 1*, *Figure 1*): Men had a statistical tendency towards lower academic effectiveness (p=0.037) and increased cynicism (p=0.003) than women, as well as a higher incidence of burnout (26.6% vs 7.5%, p=0.001).

Men were 3 times more likely to develop burnout than women (aOR: 4.3; 95% CI [1.6-11.3]) in the bivariable analysis and almost 4 times more likely (aOR: 4.8 95% Confidence Interval=1.7-13.3) after adjustment by age (*Table 2*)



DISCUSSION.

The coronavirus pandemic caused the need to establish quarantine around the world. Students were forced to transition from face-to-face learning to fully online learning, restrained to their homes, experiencing a constant fear of being infected. Facing these daily-life changes can impact the mental health of the students as well as their academic performance due to the increased amount of stress exposure.

In this cross-sectional study, the burnout prevalence was 14.9% among first-year medical students enrolled in the human anatomy course. There was a high (53.9%) prevalence of emotional exhaustion. Men were more likely to experience lower academic effectiveness, increased cynicism, and burnout levels. Previously studies had addressed burnout syndrome, however, their focus was towards student involvement in clinical scenarios, rather than prevalence. Aebischer et al. (2020) surveyed medical students and residents involved in COVID-19 scenarios and their non-involved peers, to determine levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Both medical students and residents reported lower levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout, compared with their non-involved peers. Asencio-Lopez et al. (2016) evaluated the prevalence of burnout among medical students in a Mexican University before the COVID-19 pandemic. They used the MBI questionnaire reporting a lower prevalence of 5.2% for moderate burnout syndrome (vs 14.9% in the present study). Although the study included first to sixth-year students rather than only first-year students, it can be hypothesized that the pandemic is an influencing factor for increased burnout prevalence. Other associated factors involved such as attending university for the first time, living away from home, drug use, among others, should also be considered.

Assessing the prevalence of burnout syndrome in medical students is important because early intervention can prevent the development of future psychiatric disorders. Suffering even from only one of the three domains that make up the syndrome can lead to the appearance of negative effects related to the learning process and physical symptoms such as drowsiness, fatigue, migraine, emotional instability, and even increased alcohol and drug use¹²⁻¹³. Son et al. (2020) reported 71% of college students had increased stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts due to COVID-19 associated with difficulty in concentrating, disruption in sleeping patterns, decreased social interactions, and increased concerns on academic performance.²⁴ These symptoms have a negative impact on the academic development of the student and their health, serving as a predictive factor for the increased risk of suicide and dropping out of medical studies.²⁵

The results of this study demonstrate that at least 14.9% of our medical students are at risk of developing the negative effects that come with burnout syndrome. Bearing in mind participants do not need to have been impacted in all domains of burnout to be at risk for negative impacts. To support these students at the end of the study we provide the information for psychological support through the student mental healthcare programs provided by the University through the Department of Psychiatry of the University Hospital.

The main limitation of this study was that it did not evaluate associated factors that may cause burnout symptoms such as drug or alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, economic or family status, stress, poor peer interactions and support, lower levels of physical activities, among others. There is a lack of a control



1 group (prior to the pandemic), therefore the high prevalence of burnout can only be hypothesized as due to

the pandemic but cannot be objectively shown. The survey was only answered by 154 students enrolled in the

human anatomy course of more than 500. The mean age (18.9 years) is younger than other medical schools,

4 and maturity may also influence the prevalence.

adapted to social distancing norms.

Although the University already has psychological support made available through the student mental healthcare programs, accessing these may present a challenge. The programs were designed for face-to-face interaction with trained psychologists, and when necessary, a psychiatrist. Due to the high levels of burnout and the several emotional challenges that the pandemic represented, the Department of Psychiatry started to receive free-of-charge all medical students who wanted counseling through a hybrid method. Students could decide between virtual or face-to-face. With the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, counseling needed to be adapted to an online format that benefits the students. It is important Universities encourage their alumni to exercise and obtain quality sleep, as both have been associated with prevention and reduced levels of

burnout.²⁵ In a university with over 7,000 students total, mental health programs need to be increased and

The results of this study demonstrated that the burnout prevalence during the pandemic is 14.9% among first-year medical students in a Mexican medical school. A high prevalence (53.9%) of emotional exhaustion was present and a significantly higher risk to present burnout in male students (*Figure 1*). These findings suggest that advocacy and interventions to improve mental health in medical students are important considering the impact this syndrome may cause on the quality of life. The academic performance may also be affected by the course-based changes implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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FIGURES AND TABLES.

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Table 1. Categorization by Domain and Severity of Burnout Syndrome.

Domain	Level	Total (n=154)	Female (n=93)	Male (n=61)	P-value	
Emotional	Low-moderate	71 (46.1)	48 (51.6)	23 (37.7)	0.090	
exhaustion	High	83 (53.9)	45 (48.4)	38 (62.3)		
Cynicism	Low-moderate	128 (83.1)	84 (90.3)	44 (72.1)	0.003*	
Cymcisin	High 26 (16.9)	9 (9.7)	17 (27.9)	0.003		
Acadomia officacy	Low-moderate	53 (34.4)	26 (28.0)	27 (44.3)	0.037*	
Academic efficacy	High	101 (65.6)	67 (72.0)	34 (55.7)	0.037	
Burnout	Yes	23 (14.9)	7 (7.5)	16 (26.2)	0.001*	
Dufficut	No	131 (85.1)	86 (92.5)	45 (73.8)	0.001	

All values are expressed are the number of participants and percentages between parenthesis (%). Female sex is the comparator. *Statistically significant with a p-value of <0.05. Burnout two-dimensional (Defined as high emotional exhaustion and cynicism).

8 Table 2. As

Table 2. Association between gender and burnout syndrome

Burnout	Univariable	Bivariable	p value	Multivariable	p value
Female	7 (7.5)	-	-	-	-
Male	16 (26.2)	4 3 (1 6-11 3)	.001*	4 8 (1 7-13 3)	0.002*

All values expressed in number of participants and percentages between parenthesis (%). Female gender is the comparator. *Statistically significant with a p-value of <0.05. Burnout two-dimensional (Defined as high emotional exhaustion and cynicism). Multivariable analysis after age adjustment.

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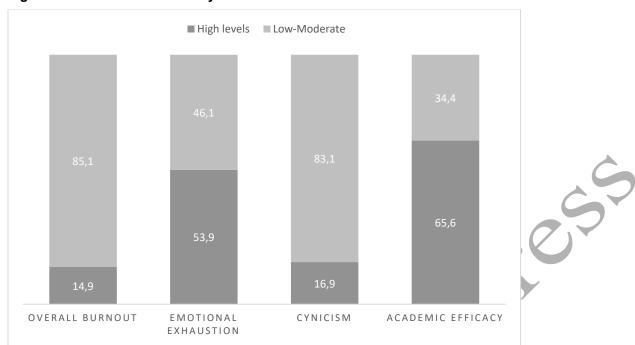
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1 Figure 1. Domains of Burnout Syndrome.



All values are expressed in percentages. Burnout two-dimensional (Defined as high emotional exhaustion and cynicism).