Stress at work raises the risk of health problems among doctors: *A UK cross-sectional study*

Dr Asta Medisauskaite
Research Fellow
@astamedis
Today:

- Introduction;
- Methods;
- Results:
  - Prevalence;
  - Raising risk.
- Conclusions.
Introduction

Panic, chronic anxiety and burnout: doctors at breaking point

As the system piles on the pressure, who is looking after the medics?

- Scroll down for an extract from psychologist Caroline Elton’s book about her work with NHS doctors
Introduction: Aims

1) the prevalence of health problems;
2) if occupational distress increases a risk of maladaptive health-related behaviours and health issues among UK doctors.
Methods

417 UK doctors (protocol #NCT02838290)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic characteristics</th>
<th>% (n) or M(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Male)</td>
<td>48% (199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior doctor</td>
<td>20% (82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General practitioner</td>
<td>18% (75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>49% (203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14% (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General practice</td>
<td>17% (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public health</td>
<td>12% (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaesthetics and intensive care</td>
<td>9% (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paediatrics</td>
<td>7% (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency medicine</td>
<td>6% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry</td>
<td>6% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>44% (184)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods

- Insomnia (Insomnia Severity Index);
- Sleep disturbances (items from the Effort-Reward scale and Insomnia Severity Index):
  - Difficulty falling asleep;
  - Difficulty staying asleep;
  - Sleep problems interfere with daily functioning;
  - Think about work when they go to bed.
Methods

- Alcohol dependence (Patient Health Questionnaire);
- Alcohol use habits (Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test):
  - Frequency;
  - Quantity;
  - Drink 6 or more drinks on one occasion.
- Substance use to cope with stress (Brief COPE);
- 22 illicit and legal drugs list (Commonly Abused Drugs Charts; the UK drug misuse declaration).
Methods

• 12 physical health symptoms (Physical Symptom Inventory), e.g. upset stomach, headaches, diarrhoea.

• Binge-eating disorder (Eating Disorder Diagnostic Scale as a scale and separate items): e.g. eat until feeling uncomfortably full.
Methods

- Psychological distress;
- Burnout (emotional exhaustion);
  - Job efforts (e.g. time pressure, interruption);
  - Work-life imbalance;
- Maladaptive coping with stress strategies (self-blame & using substances);
- Work experience (year);
- Workplace (hospital vs other).
Results:

BMJ Open  Does occupational distress raise the risk of alcohol use, binge-eating, ill health and sleep problems among medical doctors? A UK cross-sectional study

Asta Medisauskaite, Caroline Kamau

https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/9/5/e027362.full.pdf
Results: Prevalence

• 11% insomnia;
• 22-61% have various sleep disturbances:
  • 61% think about work when they go to bed;
  • 35% sleep problems interfere with daily functioning.
Results: Raising risk

• **Significant factors:**
  • Emotional exhaustion & psychiatric morbidity (OR 1.344 to 3.826, p≤0.036);
  • Work-life imbalance (OR 1.577, p<0.001);
  • Coping strategies (OR 1.414 to 1.854, p≤0.023);
  • Work-place (hospital; OR 1.953 to 2.172, p≤0.030).

• Predictors significantly explained 23.4-39.1% of variance.
Results: Prevalence

- 5% alcohol dependence;
- 22-34% use substances to cope with stress;
- 53% drink 2-3 times a week or more often;
- 44% use some type of drugs, but mostly over-the-counter medications (35%).
Results: Raising risk

- **Significant factors:**
  - Psychiatric morbidity (R: frequency OR=0.478, p=0.019);
  - Coping strategies (OR 1.374 to 18.836, p≤0.039);
  - Work experience (more often: OR=1.036, p=0.002; less hazardously: OR=0.970, p=0.007);
  - Work-place (hospital; OR 1.672 to 1.812, p≤0.044).

- Predictors significantly explained 6-28% of variance (non-significant for drug use; use substances to feel better);
Results: Prevalence

- 4-69% experienced physical symptoms (weekly/daily):
  - 69% fatigue;
  - 33% backaches;
  - 8% dizziness.
Results: Raising risk

• **Significant factors:**
  - Emotional exhaustion & psychiatric morbidity (OR 1.804 to 3.544, p≤0.017);
  - Job efforts (OR=1.905, p=0.030);
  - Work-life imbalance (OR=1.717, p=0.005);
  - Work experience (R; fatigue, upset stomach, headaches: OR 0.963 to 0.972, p≤0.024; ringing in ears: OR=1.050, p=0.002).

• Predictors significantly explained 8-35.2% of variance (non-significant for backache);
Results: Prevalence

- 8% binge-eat;
- 24-35% reported binge-eating features:
  - 35% eating large amounts of food when not physically hungry;
  - 24% eating alone because they feel embarrassed.
Results: Raising risk

- **Significant factors:**
  - Emotional exhaustion (OR=1.378 to 1.841, p≤0.038);
  - Coping strategies (self-blame; OR 1.400 to 1.507, p≤0.040);
  - Work-life imbalance (OR=1.311, p=0.038);
  - Work experience (R; OR=0.966, p=0.009);
  - Work-place (community; OR=0.453, p=0.008).

- Predictors significantly explained 8.1-17.1% of variance.
Results: Doctors responses

VictoriousRaptor  MD PGY1  47 points  ·  2 days ago
I always wonder how much better our profession would be if our forbearers didn’t have this "well I suffered through this, so you should to" combined with healthcare administrators who prefer to shave dollars to save pennies.

... I know I survived on caffeine, shitty food, injuring my wrists god knows how many times on the punching bag out of frustration, and paying my therapist way too fucking much to have a handle on what life has been like.

Evangeline1313  17 points  ·  1 day ago
Agreed. This attitude of "you're a horrible doctor if you don't constantly overwork yourself" is a horrible attitude to have. No wonder doctors have so many mental and physical health issues-there's very little support apart from telling people to toughen up.
Results: Doctors responses

I'm a doctor working in the UK and I will add a bit of a counterpoint to this. I think a lot of doctors are actually perfectly happy and content. We are definitely hideously overworked but many of us are satisfied with our job. I mean sometimes the work really really sucks, but I know what I signed up for and ultimately the positives beat the negatives.
Conclusions:

- High prevalence;
- Occupational stress raises the risk of health problems;
- Need to acknowledge the importance of stress;
- Change the culture & increase support.
Thank you!

Dr Asta Medisauskaite
Research Fellow
@astamedis