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ABSTRACT

Effect of Online Learning Due to COVID-19 on Mental Health among Medical Students in Gaza City

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Background: The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), originated in Wuhan city of China, has spread rapidly worldwide, sending millions of people into lockdown. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. In light of the rising concern about the current COVID-19 pandemic, almost all universities worldwide have switched to online learning. \

Moreover, the study of medicine, in which the development of practical skills is a significant proportion of the course, has not previously been envisaged through online learning. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the medical education system to temporarily switch to online learning

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the effect of online learning on the mental health of medical students.

Methods: A questionnaire-based cross-sectional study was conducted among medical students ranging from 1st-year to 6th-year from the Islamic University of Gaza and Alazhar University of Gaza. The study was conducted during the online learning period (March 2021). Burnout syndrome, depression, anxiety, and how students dealt



with the new system were all analyzed among students.

Results: The findings revealed that 70.76% of participants complained of moderate to high Burnout syndrome. Furthermore, 87.7% of participants had some degree of depression ranging from mild, moderate, moderate-severe to severe (36.25%, 29.82, 14.03, 7.06), respectively. Analysis of the anxiety level using General Anxiety Disorder-7 Tool (GAD_7) showed that 79.52% of students had anxiety; 38.1% had a low anxiety level, 27.48% had a moderate anxiety level, and 14.03% had a high anxiety level.

74.26% of all responders had a high degree of fear from technical issues related to online exams. Additionally, 69.01% expressed fear when they think of their career given the lack of interaction with patients and gaining the clinical skills they are supposed to learn. Finally, 58.48% expressed feeling a bit alarmed because of all these discussions of online learning.

Discussion: Due to the long-lasting pandemic situation and onerous measures such as lockdown and stay-at-home orders, the COVID-19 pandemic brings negative impacts on medical education. The findings of our study highlight the urgent need to develop interventions and preventive strategies to address the mental health of medical students.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online learning, Medical students, Mental health