Research Article

Life Beyond White Coat: A Study on Hobby Engagement and Well-Being of Medical Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT:

Background: The medical undergraduate students are obliged to face academic, social and physical stress which affects their mental health, academic growth and self-confidence. Practicing hobbies helps them to reconnect with themselves and create a balance between their personal and professional interests. This study analyses how practicing hobbies affect mental, social, physical and overall well-being of medical undergraduate students through a survey based quantitative approach. **Methods**: A cross-sectional study was conducted among second- and third-year medical undergraduate students studying in a private medical college under a tertiary healthcare hospital in India. Data was collected from a total of 300 students and then systematically entered and analysed using Microsoft Excel (2508) and the IBM SPSS software version v.28. The findings were represented in the form of well-structured tables and graphical presentations. **Results:** This study analysed the effect of hobby over various factors of wellbeing of medical undergraduate students. The results indicated that out of 300 students, 259 (86.3%) students were pursuing hobby, among which 131 (43.7%) of them were males and 169 (56.3%) were females. Most of them, 270 (90%) students were hosteller and only 10% students were day scholar. With respect to the types of hobbies, sports being the most pursued hobby by 75 (28.95%) students, the findings also indicated that (93.3%) of students felt that hobbies are essential along with academics. Majority of 277 (92.3%) students felt that hobbies help in maintaining emotional balance, 282 (94.0%) students believed that it helps to relax after a stressful day, and 235 (78.3%) students believed that it helps you to prevent burnout. Whereas 134 (44.7%) students felt guilty after spending time on hobbies due to academic pressure. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study emphasize that hobbies play a crucial role in maintaining the mental, social, and physical well-being of medical undergraduate students. They help in maintaining the emotional and mental life balance and help to calm the stream of thoughts running through the mind. Encouragement to practice hobbies among students should be done by integrating them into the curriculum.

Keywords: medical undergraduate students, hobbies, mental health, social interactions, physical health, academic workload, overall wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

A hobby is a voluntary activity performed regularly during one's free time for enjoyment and personal satisfaction rather than for financial or professional benefit. Unlike casual leisure activities, hobbies generally involve continuous engagement and the gradual development of skills, knowledge, and creativity.[1]

Participation in hobbies contributes to personal well-being, self-expression, and opportunities for social interaction with individuals who share similar interests[2]. Engagement in hobbies has been shown to reduce the perceived need for perfectionism in every task, thereby helping individuals adopt a more balanced and flexible approach toward their activities.

Hobbies are a form of leisure activity that help create mental peace and relaxation. They increase social interaction, enhance creativity, and encourage innovation. Through hobbies, individuals develop a deeper understanding of the world around them and improve their power of observation.[3] They provide a sense of joy and fulfilment while helping people become more self-aware about their likes and dislikes. Hobbies also offer a break from studies, academics, or work life, giving a fresh perspective and helping individuals step out of their monotonous routine.[4] They refresh the mind, provide a motivational boost, reduce anxiety, and induce mental clarity. Being a part of daily life, hobbies enhance concentration and promote positive thinking throughout the day.[5] They can also help reduce depression by keeping the mind happy and engaged.

Additionally, hobbies teach time management and promote a structured lifestyle where work and emotions remain balanced. By providing peace and clarity, they help individuals gain better control over their desires and emotions.[6]

In contrast, the lifestyle of medical undergraduate students is often highly demanding and stressful. They must cope with a huge syllabus, massive textbooks, and continuous long hours of study. Their routine includes late-night shifts, clinical postings, and constant academic pressure from back-to-back tests and examinations. Many students also experience peer pressure and the fear of lagging behind in life due to the long duration of the medical course.[7]

Personal challenges such as unhealthy relationships, family stress, and being away from home can further add to their emotional burden. Additionally, the persistent fear of not having enough knowledge or preparation can create anxiety.[8] Because of these intense academic and persona demands, hobbies play an important role in helping medical students maintain mental well-being and balance in their lives.

Medical undergraduate often finds it difficult to pursue hobbies due to the demanding and busy lifestyle of medical education, coupled with intensive academic workload and vast syllabus, leaves limited time for recreational activities. Many students also struggle with effective time management or may procrastinate, further reducing the opportunity to engage in hobbies. In addition, the pressure to perform well in examinations and maintain high academic standards often compels students to prioritize studies over personal interests.

Irregular schedules and long clinical duties also disrupt routine leisure time. Furthermore, a lack of institutional encouragement for hobbies and limited peer participation may discourage students from developing hobbies.

These combined factors often make it challenging for medical undergraduates to allocate time for leisure activities despite their potential benefits for overall well-being. Hobbies act as an important source of cognitive relaxation, creativity, and personal expression; however, when medical students are unable to engage in such activities, they may experience reduced creative stimulation and limited opportunities for social interaction. This may gradually lead to social withdrawal and feelings of isolation. The continuous academic pressure with lack of recreational outlets such as singing and music clubs, drama and theatre, photography and baking clubs can make it difficult for students to manage the constant flow of emerging thoughts related to studies and responsibilities, thereby increasing mental fatigue.[9] Over time, the absence of hobbies may impair emotional regulation and reduce the sense of personal fulfilment and life satisfaction.

The lack of engagement in hobbies can ultimately lead to decreased motivation, reduced concentration, and diminished psychological resilience among medical undergraduates, highlighting its negative impact on their overall well-being and academic functioning. Therefore, we conducted a study over medical undergraduate students to overcome such negative side effects.

Aims and Objectives

1. To determine the proportion of students who are actively participating in hobbies.
2. To assess student perception regarding the role of hobbies in their overall well-being.
3. To identify factors influencing student participation in a variety of hobbies.
4. To suggest recommendations based on the study findings.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

MATERIALS

Study Design - Cross-sectional study.

Study Duration - The study was conducted over a period of 2 months (March - April) 2026.

Study Area - The study was conducted in a private medical college of a tertiary healthcare hospital in India.

Study Subjects – 2nd and 3rd year medical undergraduate students.

Sampling Technique - Participants were selected using convenient sampling. A total of 300 students who fulfilled the inclusion criteria of being present at the time of data collection and consented to participate were included in the study.

Sample Size – 300 medical undergraduate students of and 2nd and 3rd year MBBS course.

Data Collection Tool - Data were collected using a self-structured and validated questionnaire.

Data entry and Analysis - The data was stored in Microsoft Excel (2508) and calculation of frequency and percentage was analysed using IBM SPSS software version (v.28)

METHODOLOGY

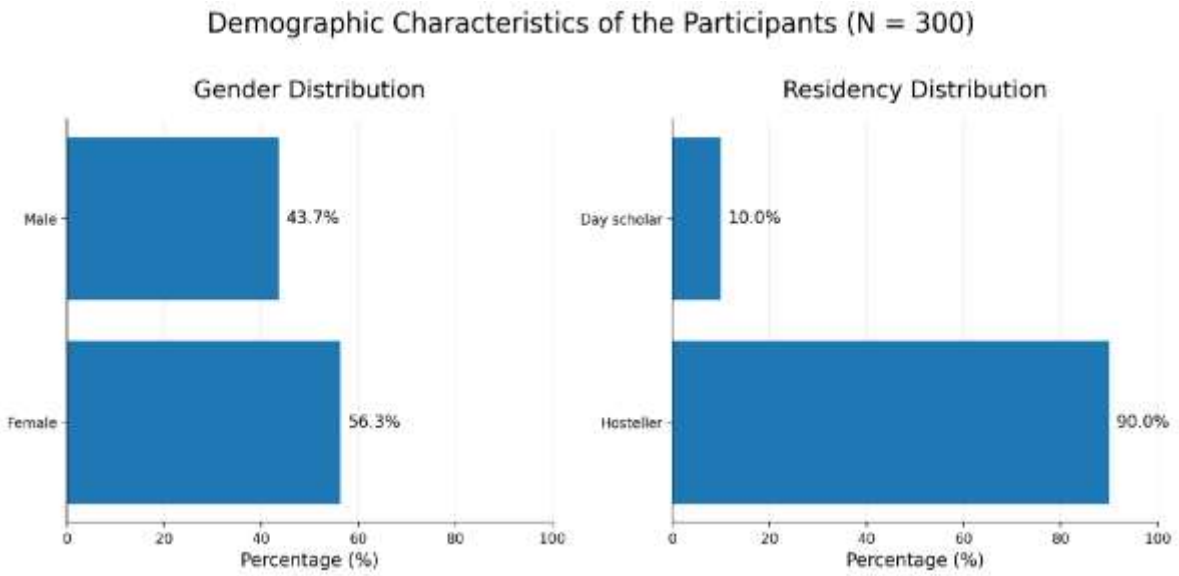
A cross-sectional study was conducted over a period of 2 months among 2nd and 3rd year medical undergraduate students studying in a private medical college of a tertiary healthcare hospital in India. Participants were selected using convenient sampling. A total of 300 students who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and provided informed consent were included in the study. Data was collected using a self-structured validated questionnaire. Data

entry was performed using Microsoft Excel (2508) and analysis of frequency and percentage was done using the IBM SPSS software version v.28.

RESULTS

TABLE 1: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS

VARIABLE		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
GENDER	MALE	131	43.7
	FEMALE	169	56.3
RESIDENCY	HOSTELLER	270	90.0
	DAY SCHOLAR	30	10.0



Out of 300 students, 131 (43.7%) of them were males and 169 (56.3%) were females. Most of the, 270 (90%) students were hosteller and only 10% students were day scholar.

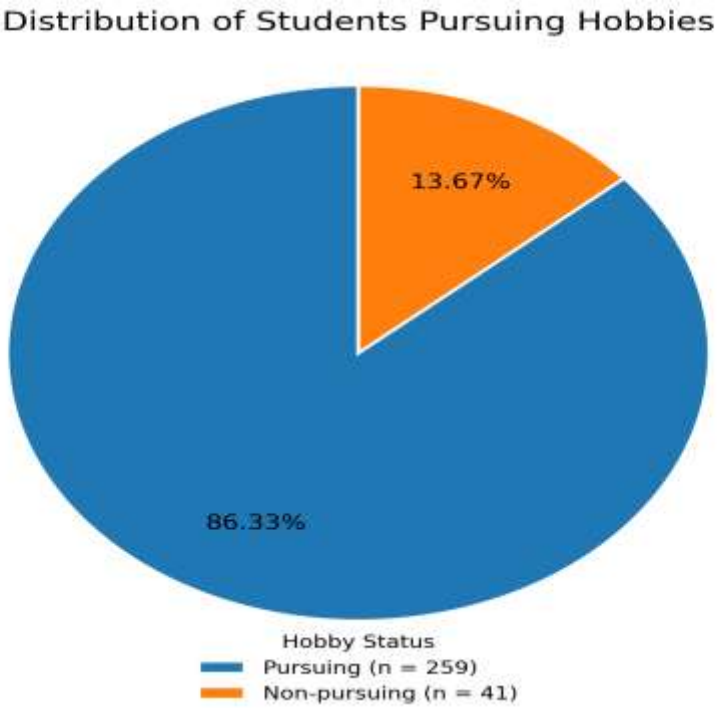
TABLE 2.1

HOBBY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
PURSUING	259	86.30
NON-PURSUING	41	13.7
TOTAL	300	100

TABLE 2.2

TYPES OF HOBBY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
SPORTS	75	28.95
YOGA/MEDITATION	15	5.79
MUSIC	54	20.84
READING/WRITING	18	6.94
ART (DRAWING/PAINTING)	37	14.28
DIGITAL (CODING/TECH/GAMING)	15	5.79
COOKING/BAKING	31	11.96
OTHERS	14	5.40
TOTAL	300	100

TABLE 2.3



Out of 300 students, 259 (86.3%) students are pursuing hobby, indicates that hobby participation is highly prevalent in students. With respect to the types of hobbies, sports is the most commonly pursued hobby 75 (28.95%), followed by music 54 (20.84%), art 37 (14.28%) and cooking/baking 31 (11.96%). Comparatively fewer students engaged in reading/writing 18 (6.94%), yoga/meditation 15 (5.79%), digital activities 15 (5.79%) and other hobbies 14 (5.40%). Half of the students 131 (50.57%) engage in hobbies daily for 1-2 hours, while 85 (32.81%) engage once a week and 42 (16.21%) engage once a month in hobbies.

Table 3: Students Knowledge of hobbies

QUESIONS	YES/NO	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Are you aware that leisure activities/hobbies are included in college curriculum?			
	YES	97	32.3
	NO	203	67.7
Are you aware that hobbies increase a sense of self-esteem?			
	YES	265	88.3
	NO	35	11.7

More than half 203 (67.7%) students are not aware that leisure activities/hobbies are included in college curriculum. But 265 (88.3%) are aware that hobbies increase a sense of self-esteem.

Table 4: Students Attitude towards hobbies

Questions	Frequency (%)
Do you think that practicing hobbies enhances sleep quality?	
Yes	256 (85.3%)
No	44 (14.7%)
Do you feel that hobbies are essential along with academics?	
Yes	280 (93.3%)

No	20 (6.7%)
Do you feel that hobbies help in maintaining emotional balance?	
Yes	277 (92.3%)
No	23 (7.7%)
Do you feel that hobbies help you relax after a stressful day?	
Yes	282 (94.0%)
No	18 (6.0%)
Do you feel guilty spending time on hobbies due to academic pressure?	
Yes	134 (44.7%)
No	166 (55.3%)
Do you feel as a student hobbies help you to prevent physical burnout?	
Yes	235 (78.3%)
No	65 (21.7%)
Have you ever discontinued a hobby due to academic workload?	
Yes	247 (82.3%)
No	53 (17.7%)
Do you engage in group-based hobby activity?	
Yes	148 (49.3%)
No	152 (50.7%)
Do you feel that lack of resources affects your participation in hobbies?	
Yes	213 (71.0%)
No	87 (29.0%)
Will you now make an effort to practice your hobby?	
Yes	253 (84.3%)
No	47 (15.7%)

256 (85%) of students agreed that practicing hobbies enhances sleep quality and 280 (93.3%) of students feel that hobbies are essential along with academics. Majority students feel hobbies helps maintaining emotional balance 277 (92.3%), helps to relax after stressful day 282 (94.0%) and help you to prevent physical burnout 235 (78.3%). 247 (82.3%) students discontinued a hobby due to academic workload, and 134 (44.7%) students feel guilty spending time on hobbies due to academic pressure. 148 (49.3%) students engage in group-based hobbies and 213 (71.0%) students agreed that lack of resources affects their participation in hobbies. But 253 (84.3%) students showed willingness to make effort to practice hobby.

Table 5: Students Perception towards hobbies.

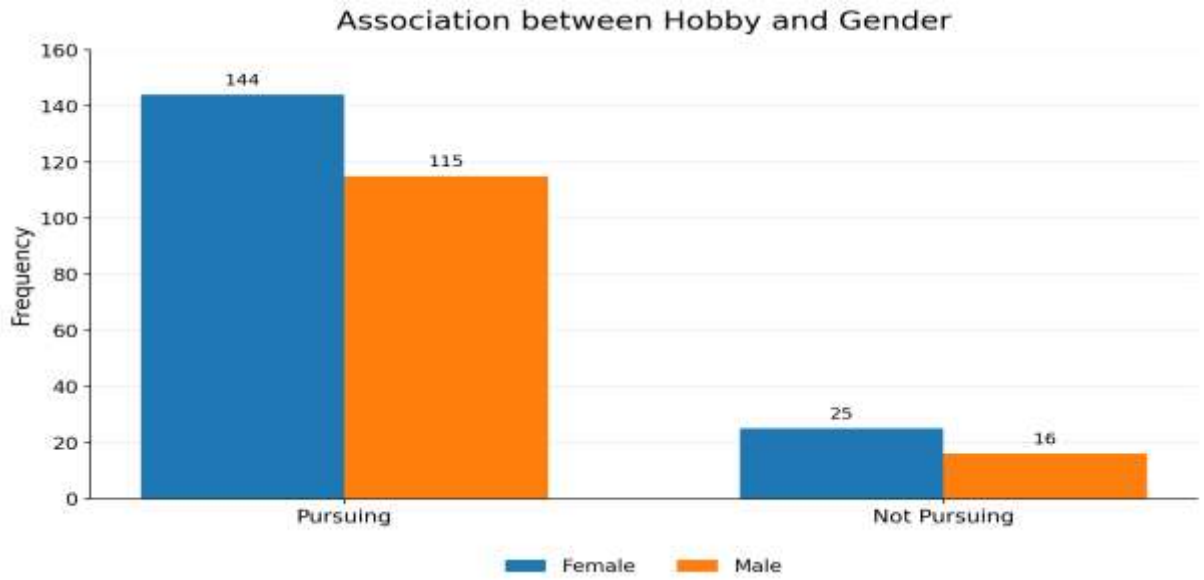
Questions	Frequency (%)
Do you think that hobbies help to overcome any of addiction?	
Yes	261 (87.0%)
No	39 (13.0%)
Do you think hobbies enhance your social interactions?	
Yes	246 (82.0%)
No	54 (18.0%)
Do you think having social cultural clubs in college would encourage students to pursue hobbies?	
Yes	255 (85.0%)
No	45 (15.0%)

From above findings, we can say that there is strong positive perception of hobbies among the students. A majority of students 261 (87%) reported that hobbies can help in overcoming addiction and 246 (82%) students think hobbies enhances social interactions. 255 (85%) of students agreed that having social cultural clubs in college would encourage students to pursue hobbies.

Table 6: Association between Hobby and Gender

Hobby	Gender		Total	P value
	Female	Male		

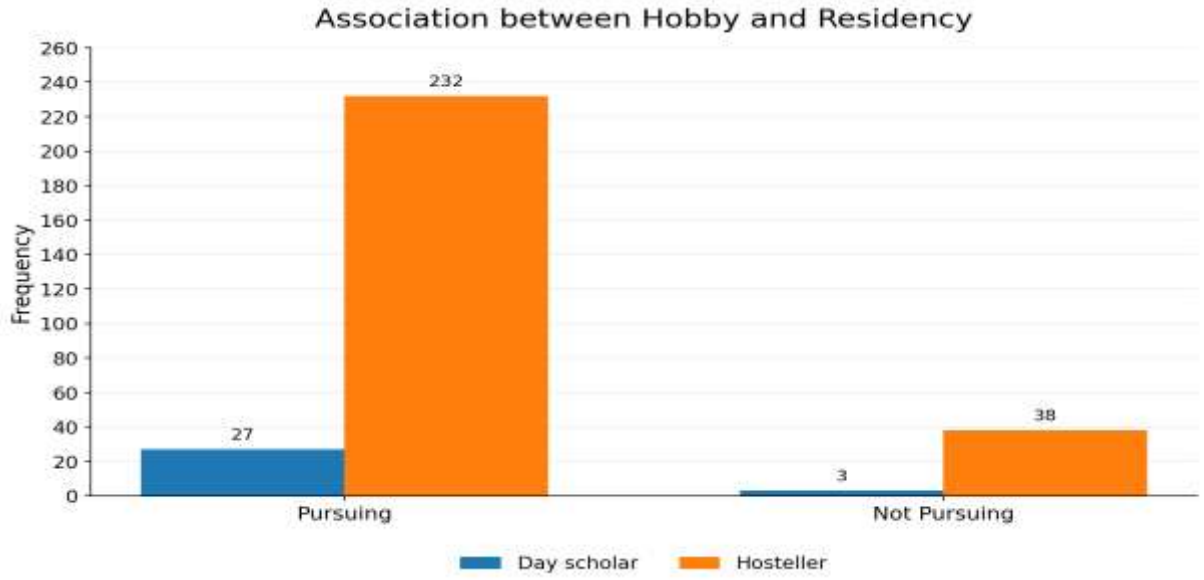
Pursuing	144 (55.6%)	115 (44.4%)	259 (100%)	0.519
Not Pursuing	25 (61.0%)	16 (39.0%)	41 (100%)	
Total	169 (56.3%)	131 (43.7%)	300 (100%)	



Among students who are pursuing hobby, 144 (55.6%) out of 259 students were females and 155 (44.4%) were males. Among students who are not pursuing any hobby, 25 (61.0%) out of 41 students were females and 16 (39.0%) were males. Overall, females slightly outnumber males. The association between hobby and gender was not statistically significant (p=0.519).

Table 7: Association between Hobby and Residency.

Hobby	Residency		Total	P value
	Day scholar	Hosteller		
Pursuing	27 (10.4%)	232 (89.6%)	259 (100%)	0.538
Not Pursuing	3 (7.3%)	38 (92.7%%)	41 (100%)	
Total	30 (10.0%)	270 (90.0%)	300 (100%)	



Among students who are pursuing hobby, 27 (10.4%) out of 259 students were day scholar and 232 (89.6%) were hosteller. Among students who are not pursuing any hobby, 3 (7.3%) out of 41 students were day scholar and 38 (92.7%) were males. The association between hobby and residency was not statistically significant (p=0.538).

DISCUSSION

Our study encompassed a total of 300 students comprising 131 males and 169 females, indicating a higher representation of female students in the study population. The most frequently observed age among the participants was 22 years. These students were further categorised based on their residential status, with 270 (90%) of them were hostellers and only 30(10%) students were day scholars. An equal proportion of second year and third-year undergraduate medical students participated in the study.

Based on the data collected through the questionnaire, out of 300 students 259(86.3%) students were pursuing hobbies. This indicates that hobby participation is highly prevalent in medical students because they are aware about the positive impacts of hobbies on mental and physical health. Moreover, they practice hobbies to get a break from their stressful lifestyle. Similar findings were seen in. [10]

Among the type of hobbies pursued, sports was observed to be practiced by a majority of 75(28.9%) out of 259 students. This was observed because sports is present as the most commonly available resource in college campuses.[11] Also, as the higher proportion of students belonged to 22-year age group, it has been observed that the age group is more aware of the importance of physical health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, which explains their increased involvement in sports. Moreover, the academic curriculum of medical students explains the importance of practicing physical activities and its impact on the overall health of an individual. Amongst the data, 60 were males and 31 were females, indicating there was more male participation in sports. This was because biologically men have higher level of testosterone which is associated with greater strength, competitiveness and aggressive behaviour. [12] Moreover, they don't have physiological constraints like menstrual cycle, which makes it easier for them to pursue sports as a hobby as compared to females.[13]

Encouragingly, almost half of the students 131 (50.57%) engaged in hobbies daily for 1-2 hours. This was observed as medical students generally tend to follow a rigorous routine wherein when they practice hobbies it makes them feel lively and joyful.[14]

Also, on a contradictory note, it was observed that many students could not practice hobby daily. It may be attributed to the extensive curriculum of the medical course, due to which spending a large amount of time on recreational activities may lead to academic imbalance. Additionally, some individuals may experience feelings of regret after engaging in hobbies. Similar findings were seen in.[15]

Alarmingly, more than 203(67.7%) students believed that there were not enough resources available in their medical colleges which refrains them from practicing their desired hobbies. Recent initiatives have been taken by the National Medical Commission (NMC), with the aim of promoting the overall well-being, stress management, and development of medical students. Similar findings of expansion of college curriculum were seen in.[16]

Positively, 265(88.3%) students believed that hobbies increase a sense of self-esteem. As hobby is seen as an activity that an individual is personally interested in, engaging in such activities can enhance self-esteem and contribute positively to one's emotional well-being. Participation in hobbies also promote a sense of satisfaction and improve one's perception of self-worth. Similar findings were seen in.[17]

A positive finding of this study was that 256 (85.3%) students agreed that practicing hobbies enhances sleep quality. A majority of 277 (92.3%) students believed that hobbies help in maintaining emotional balance and 282 (94.0%) students believed that it helps them relax after a stressful day. Also, 235(78.3%) students believed that it helps them to prevent physical burnout. Similar findings were seen in.[18]

Participation in hobbies foster positive emotions and an improved sense of happiness and well-being in our mind. Previous studies. [19]. Have suggested that individuals who experience satisfaction and enjoyment in what they do in their daily lives tend to have better sleep quality. Moreover, people who practice hobbies that requires physical engagement tend to feel tired which ensures a proper sleep at night.[20]

Engaging in hobbies provides individuals with a sense of satisfaction and personal fulfilment, as it allows them to devote time to activities they genuinely enjoy. Such practices promote relaxation and foster a stronger connection with one's inner self by encouraging individuals to acknowledge and value their personal interests and preferences. It is also noticed that practicing hobbies reduces the frequency of negative or self-doubting thoughts. Collectively, these factors contribute to emotional and psychological stability and provides overall mental relaxation. Hence, they maintain emotional balance and prevent physical burnout.[21]

Alarmingly,134 (44.7%) students reported feeling guilty about spending time on hobbies due to academic pressure whereas 280 (93.3%) students felt that hobbies are essential along with academics. As we know that,

medical students are subjected to a comprehensive curriculum which includes extensive academic workloads, continuous examinations, and the need to retain complex concepts and factual knowledge. Such academic demands can create considerable pressure. Leading to stress, mental exhaustion, burnout and a feeling of guilt among medical students. Similar findings were seen in studies.[22]

In such circumstances, engagement in recreational activities and hobbies can serve as an effective coping mechanism. Participation in hobbies allows individuals to temporarily disengage from academic stress, providing relaxation and mental refreshment. It was observed that students often return to their studies with improved concentration and enhanced memory retention after engaging in enjoyable activities.

Additionally, hobbies practiced in groups can strengthen social interactions and interpersonal relationships by allowing individuals to spend quality time with their peers and loved ones. It has been observed that such interactions expose students to diverse perspectives and shared experiences. This may help reduce feelings of isolation and contribute positively to psychological well-being and emotional resilience among medical students.

A majority of 261(87.0%) students believed that hobbies are helpful in overcoming addiction, while only 13.0% disagreed, suggesting a generally positive attitude towards the role of hobbies in addiction management. Similar findings were seen in[23]. Hobbies can serve as an effective source of positive distraction, as they involve activities that individuals already enjoy and feel emotionally connected to. Participation in hobbies can occupy an individual's attention span for extended periods, thereby reducing focus on addictive thoughts and cravings. Over time, consistent engagement in recreational and fulfilling activities may help lessen the psychological impact of addiction. Addiction often creates persistent urges and compulsive thought patterns that can negatively affect an individual's mental and emotional well-being. It was observed that engaging in such distracting and meaningful activities will help in reducing the intensity of such urges and gradually distancing the individual from addictive patterns. Similar findings were seen in[24].

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study emphasize the fact that medical students are more than just future doctors who are solely defined by textbooks, examinations, and clinical responsibilities. While medical education demands dedication and discipline, the results demonstrate that hobbies play a crucial role in preserving the mental, emotional, and social well-being of students. Furthermore, hobbies reflect their importance in helping students cope with stress, maintain emotional balance, prevent burnout, and foster a sense of self-worth and personal fulfilment. Even though students are aware of these benefits, they continue to face barriers such as academic pressure, lack of resources, and limited time, often leading them to discontinue their hobbies. Hence, promoting hobbies should not be perceived as a distraction from academic commitments but rather should be viewed as an important component of integrated student development.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend medical institutions to increase the participation of students in practicing hobbies by providing more resources and creating awareness among them by organising motivational sessions, competitions or workshops so that they manage time from their busy schedules to practice what they love as the white coat not only symbolizes knowledge and responsibility, but the person wearing it needs passion, balance, and well-being to truly thrive.

LIMITATIONS

The present study had a few limitations which are as follows: -

- A larger sample size could have improved the study findings and provided more reliable results.
- The study did not compare students across different medical colleges, which could have helped to identify the influence of different institutional cultures, extracurricular opportunities, and academic environments on hobby participation.
- Well-being was assessed primarily through student's perceptions and self-reported responses rather than through any standardised psychological assessment tool, which may have provided a more reliable evaluation.
- Being a cross-sectional study, data were collected at a single point of time; therefore, the relationships between hobby engagement and well-being could not be established. Longitudinal studies are more appropriate to assess the long-term effects of hobbies on students' well-being.
- The study did not provide the depth of engagement or their direct impact on academic performance of medical undergraduate students. Future research will be able to correlate academic outcome and mental health indicators.

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