

# Psychological Stress in the Workplace: A Comparative Study of Doctors and Non-Medical Professionals in India

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## ABSTRACT

The mental health of professionals is a growing concern in India, with doctors often being at the forefront due to their critical roles in healthcare delivery. This research article explores the impact of professional pressure on the mental health of doctors in India, comparing it with other professional employees, such as IT workers, engineers, and teachers. By examining the unique stressors faced by doctors, such as long working hours, high patient loads, and life-or-death decisions, this study aims to highlight the differences and similarities in mental health outcomes between these professions. The findings suggest that doctors experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout compared to their counterparts in other professions, primarily due to the nature of their work environment and responsibilities. Recommendations for improving mental health support for doctors and other professionals are discussed.

**Keywords:** Mental-health, Psychological stress, Healthcare workers, Anxiety

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## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being, and occupational stress significantly impacts it. In India, professionals across various sectors face different levels and types of job stress. Among these, doctors are believed to be one of the most affected due to the unique pressures of their profession. Studies suggest that professional pressure, characterized by long working hours, high expectations, and life-or-death decision-making, disproportionately affects doctors compared to other professionals like engineers, IT employees, and teachers. This article aims to examine the impact of professional pressure on the mental health of doctors in India compared to other professional employees.

## Literature Review

Several studies have focused on the mental health of doctors, highlighting that they are at a higher risk of developing anxiety, depression, and burnout [1-4]. For instance, a Survey conducted by the Indian Médical Association (IMA) found that nearly 82% of doctors suffer from stress-related disorders, with 55% of them showing signs of burnout [2]. In comparison, a study on IT professionals indicated a lower prevalence of mental health issues, with around 40% experiencing mild to moderate stress [5-7].

While other professional groups, such as engineers and teachers, also experience job-related stress, the nature and intensity of the stressors differ significantly. For example, IT professionals face stress due to project deadlines and client demands, whereas teachers often deal with classroom management and administrative tasks. However, these stressors do not typically involve the high-stakes decision-making or the constant risk of litigation and violence that doctors face [3].

This paper utilizes a comparative analysis of existing literature and data from various studies conducted on the mental health of doctors and other professional employees in India. Secondary data from surveys, such as those conducted by the Indian Medical Association (IMA), National Institute of Mental Health and

Neurosciences (NIMHANS), and other peer-reviewed journals, were used to assess the mental health outcomes among these groups. The study focuses on parameters such as stress levels, burnout rates, anxiety, and depression to understand the differences between these professions.

## Analysis

### Stress Levels and Burnout

Doctors in India experience significantly higher levels of stress and burnout than other professional employees. According to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) survey (2021), approximately 70% of doctors reported moderate to severe burnout symptoms, such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment [5]. This is particularly prevalent among resident doctors and those working in emergency and intensive care units. In contrast, burnout rates among IT professionals were reported at 35%, while for engineers, it was around 40%. The disparity in burnout levels can be attributed to the intense and unpredictable nature of medical work, which often involves prolonged hours, night shifts, and emotionally taxing situations, such as patient deaths and critical care decisions [6].

### Anxiety and Depression

The incidence of anxiety and depression among doctors is notably higher than in other professions. A study by Mammen et al. (2021) indicated that around 40% of doctors exhibited symptoms of anxiety, and 30% showed signs of clinical depression [4]. Female doctors showed a higher prevalence of anxiety and depression, potentially due to the dual burden of professional responsibilities and societal expectations related to caregiving roles at home. In contrast, only 25% of IT professionals and 20% of engineers reported anxiety symptoms, with even lower percentages (15% and 10%, respectively) experiencing depression. The continuous exposure to stressful and life-threatening situations, along with limited opportunities for adequate rest and relaxation, places doctors at a higher risk for these mental health disorders [1].

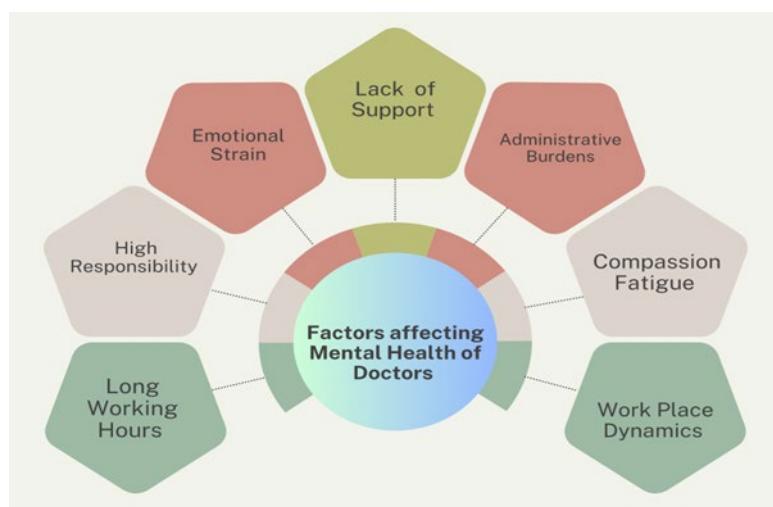


Figure 1: Various factors affecting the Mental-Health of Doctors

### Unique Stressors for Doctors

Doctors face a range of unique stressors not typically experienced by other professional groups. One of the most significant factors is the life-or-death nature of their work. Doctors are required to make rapid, high-stakes decisions that can directly affect patient outcomes. This constant pressure to perform flawlessly under tight deadlines can contribute to anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, doctors often experience "compassion fatigue" due to continuous exposure to suffering and loss, leading to emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction<sup>6</sup>. Another notable stressor is the increasing incidence of workplace violence.

A survey by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in 2020 reported that over 75% of doctors had faced some form of violence or aggression in the workplace, further contributing to their mental distress [2].

### **Comparative Professional Pressures**

While other professionals, such as IT employees and engineers, also face job-related stress, the type and intensity differ markedly. IT professionals, for example, report stress primarily due to project deadlines, rapid technological changes, and client expectations. Similarly, engineers face stress from workload, project management, and competitive workplace environments [7]. Teachers experience stress related to managing student behavior, meeting curriculum standards, and administrative duties [3]. However, these stressors generally do not involve the immediate, life-and-death decision-making required in medical practice, nor do they involve the direct threat of violence, making the nature of stress in these professions less acute.

### **Work-Life Balance and Social Expectations**

The demanding nature of the medical profession often leads to poor work-life balance for doctors. Many reports have difficulty finding time for family, leisure activities, or self-care due to long hours and unpredictable schedules. This imbalance exacerbates stress, anxiety, and burnout. In contrast, other professional groups such as IT professionals and engineers generally have more predictable working hours and greater flexibility, enabling better work-life integration [7]. Additionally, societal expectations and professional culture contribute to the mental health burden of doctors, as they are often perceived as invulnerable caregivers, which discourages them from seeking help with their own mental health needs.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings reveal a pronounced disparity in the impact of professional pressure on the mental health of doctors compared to other professionals in India. Several factors contribute to this difference, including the high-risk nature of medical work, unique stressors, and societal expectations.

### **High-Risk Nature of Medical Work**

Doctors are exposed to constant high-pressure situations, where their decisions can mean the difference between life and death. This level of responsibility creates a pervasive sense of urgency and stress that is uncommon in other professions. Unlike IT professionals or engineers, whose mistakes are generally correctable or limited to project timelines, errors made by doctors can have irreversible consequences. This reality creates a constant state of vigilance and anxiety, leading to chronic stress and burnout [1].

### **Unique Stressors**

Doctors also face stressors unique to the medical profession, such as compassion fatigue, exposure to trauma, and frequent encounters with suffering and death. These experiences can lead to emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout, which is exacerbated by a lack of adequate mental health resources and support within the healthcare system. The increasing incidents of violence against doctors in India further aggravate their mental health challenges, creating an environment of fear and insecurity [2].

### **Societal Expectations and Stigma**

The societal expectation that doctors should always be available and capable of handling any medical situation creates an additional layer of stress. Many doctors feel pressured to hide their vulnerabilities, leading to reluctance in seeking mental health support. There is also a significant stigma surrounding mental health issues within the medical community, which discourages doctors from acknowledging their own mental health struggles [4].

### **Comparative Analysis of Other Professions**

In contrast, other professionals, while experiencing job-related stress, do not typically encounter the same life-or-death stakes or direct violence. For instance, IT professionals face stress due to project demands and technological change but have more predictable schedules and less direct contact with clients in crisis

**Figure 2: Various aspects of Mental Health Awareness and support for Healthcare Professionals**

situations. Teachers, while facing classroom management and administrative pressures, do not usually deal with the immediate threat of harm or the emotional toll associated with patient care [3].

### Need for Targeted Interventions

The stark differences in stressors and their impact suggest a need for tailored mental health interventions that address the specific challenges faced by doctors. Current mental health programs and policies often do not adequately consider the unique aspects of medical work, leading to inadequate support and resources for doctors [6]. Moreover, the lack of institutional support and the normalization of excessive workload in the medical profession perpetuate the cycle of stress and burnout.

### Recommendations

#### Implementation of Mental Health Support Programs

Hospitals and healthcare institutions should implement comprehensive mental health support programs tailored specifically for doctors. These programs could include access to confidential counseling services, mental health workshops, stress management training, and peer support groups. Such initiatives could help doctors manage stress, anxiety, and burnout more effectively [4]. In addition, healthcare organizations should consider integrating mental health services into regular professional training and development programs to normalize their use.

#### Reforming Workplace Policies

Workplace policies in the healthcare sector need to be reformed to prioritize doctors' mental health. This includes implementing reasonable working hours, reducing on-call duties, and providing adequate rest periods to prevent fatigue. Policies should also address the physical and psychological safety of doctors by establishing zero-tolerance policies against workplace violence and harassment [2]. Furthermore, creating a supportive work environment where doctors feel valued and respected can help reduce feelings of burnout and enhance job satisfaction.

#### Promoting Work-Life Balance

Healthcare institutions should promote a culture that encourages work-life balance. This could involve offering flexible working arrangements, job-sharing opportunities, and sabbaticals to allow doctors time to recover from burnout. Providing spaces within healthcare facilities for relaxation, mindfulness, and exercise could also help doctors manage stress [1]. Additionally, institutions could encourage regular vacations and time off to help doctors recharge physically and mentally.

### **Increasing Awareness and Reducing Stigma**

It is crucial to increase awareness about mental health issues among healthcare professionals and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. Awareness campaigns should emphasize that mental health challenges are common and treatable, and that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Senior doctors and medical leaders should be encouraged to speak openly about mental health, thereby fostering a more supportive environment for all healthcare workers [6].

### **Regular Monitoring and Research**

Continuous monitoring of the mental health status of doctors and other professionals is essential to identify emerging trends and issues. This can be achieved through regular surveys, mental health check-ups, and feedback mechanisms that enable healthcare organizations to assess the effectiveness of their mental health initiatives. Further research is also needed to understand the specific factors contributing to mental health issues among doctors and to develop evidence-based interventions tailored to their unique needs [4].

### **Collaboration with Mental Health Experts**

Collaboration between healthcare institutions and mental health experts, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, can help develop specialized support systems for doctors. These collaborations can also facilitate the integration of mental health services into routine medical practice, ensuring that doctors receive timely and appropriate care when needed [7].

### **Enhancing Community and Family Support**

Encouraging doctors to build robust support systems outside their professional lives, such as strong family bonds, friendships, and community engagement, can help mitigate the effects of professional pressure. Healthcare institutions can also involve families in wellness programs to provide a more holistic approach to mental health care for doctors [1].

## **CONCLUSION**

The study underscores the severe impact of professional pressure on the mental health of doctors in India compared to other professionals. Given the critical role doctors play in society, addressing their mental health needs should be a priority. Creating a supportive work environment and implementing mental health support measures can help mitigate the adverse effects of professional pressure on doctors.

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