



## Parental Expectations and Mental Health Issues: A Cross-Sectional Study of Medical Students

Anila Iram<sup>1</sup>, Rabia Mukhtar<sup>2</sup>, Arooj Sikandar<sup>3</sup>, Insha Tarar<sup>4</sup>

1. Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.  
(Corresponding Author), Email: [anila.iram@uog.edu.pk](mailto:anila.iram@uog.edu.pk)
2. M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat.  
Email: [rabiamukhtar979@gmail.com](mailto:rabiamukhtar979@gmail.com)
3. Department of Sociology, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.  
Email: [aroorj.sikandar@uog.edu.pk](mailto:aroorj.sikandar@uog.edu.pk)
4. M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-e-Azam University, Pakistan.  
Email: [Inshaatarar979@gmail.com](mailto:Inshaatarar979@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

The impact of parental expectations on medical students' academic and career paths is becoming more widely acknowledged in the educational system. The medical field is considered to be costly but more fruitful for a developing country like Pakistan. Due to the economic situation, parents wanted their children to select careers with high income for better living and the future. This study filled a significant gap in the literature that measures parental expectations of medical students. This study aims to examine the relationship between parental expectations and mental health issues. A pilot study was carried out with a small group of medical students, also content and face validity were measured to evaluate the items' relevance and intelligibility. The study consisted of a quantitative research design. The data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire by distributing questionnaires to medical students. Nawaz Sharif Medical College was selected for data collection. A proportionate random sampling procedure was employed to select a total sample of 110 respondents. Data analysis, Pearson's Correlation, and Simple Linear Regression were conducted using SPSS software. In addition, this research will also improve our understanding of how parental expectations affect students' academic experiences. This research will help researchers, educators, and policymakers create a plan that helps medical students grow both personally and professionally, which will ultimately lead to better medical education results.

**Keywords:** Parental Expectations, Medical Students, Mental Health Issues, Parental Aspirations and Cross-Sectional

### Introduction

The first social institution that children receive is their parents. They teach them how to live in society and teach them about language, behavior, norms, customs, and traditions (Assari, Boyce, Caldwell, & Bazargan, 2020). They also have an impact on their way of thinking and their mental health. Parents anticipate that their children will select a career based on their own preferences when they begin their schooling (Carales, 2020). Parents have high expectations for their children's education; they want the best students and success in all areas of study. Parents' preferences and expectations influence the educational paths their students pursue (Froiland, 2021).

Parental expectations have a big impact on medical students' academic and personal paths. These expectations are frequently a result of familial, social, and cultural norms that place emphasis on academic and professional achievement, especially in high-stakes professions like medicine. The development and validation of a scale to gauge parental expectations can yield important information about the relationships between medical students and their families, improving comprehension of the demands placed on students and the wider effects on their well-being and academic achievement. The demanding intellectual requirements, lengthy training durations, and emotional stakes that define medical school make it particularly difficult (Elbadawi et al., 2024). In this situation, parental expectations are especially strong because of the reputation of the medical field. Social and cultural norms are quite important in forming these expectations, which frequently result in a big discrepancy between what parents want and what students want (Akmal, Hood, Duffy, & Creed, 2025). Education is the most important component that is crucial to the development of human capital. This promotes a community that is educated and productive. Additionally, it provides opportunities for underprivileged social and economic segments of society. According to educational theory, teaching, training, research, and growth are the main sources of the learning process that transmit knowledge, skills, and experiences from one generation to the next. These sources are considered to be the ultimate replication of the nation's socioeconomic development. Parents, on the other hand, are thought to have a significant influence in influencing children's development. Additionally, family socialization is fostered via parenting activities, which help parents achieve their goals and develop values in their children. Since parents are a person's closest surroundings, they have an impact on their schooling. Both good and bad effects are possible. Parental encouragement, support, and assistance can help a person improve their academic performance. It is consistent with the findings that demonstrate how parents' engagement has a good relationship with their children's education (Wilder, 2023). Parents hope that their children have better lives in the future. According to (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010), parents' desire emerges from their desire for their children to have a prosperous future rather than their own. Parental expectations influence the development of a person's aptitude and capacity to meet their life's academic goals (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2001). However, parental expectations and hopes are negatively impacted, particularly if parents have unreasonable expectations and fail to consider the children's skills. It is due to parents' wish to have their children relive their lives, make up for their mistakes, or fulfill their unfulfilled dreams (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

In comparison with Asian parental expectations to white parents, Asian parents hold themselves to a higher academic standard, value education, and believe that their children's academic achievement is the primary objective in exposing their expectations (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015). Likewise, every child reacts and perceives their parental expectations slightly differently. Subjectivity and individual variations are the causes of this disparity in perception. Parental expectations for their children's future achievement, including their academic performance and likelihood of entering college, are known as academic expectations (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). However, other researchers explain it by predicting the children's skill as well as expectations for their present academic achievement (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Parental expectations for their children's future achievement are referred to as parental expectations (Langenkamp, 2019). Additionally, he points out that it differs from parental aspirations. Therefore, rather than reflecting the parents' hopes for the child's possible future achievement, parental expectations represent their own aspirations for the degree of future success. The socioeconomic status (Stull, 2013) educational attainment (Cesarini & Visscher, 2017) the child's gender (Jacobs, Davis-Kean, Bleeker, Eccles, & Malanchuk, 2005) the parents' ethnicity (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010), and the child's prior achievements (Wan, Laueremann, Bailey, & Eccles, 2021) all can have impact on parental

expectations. Fan and Chen (2001) reported that the parenting factor that had the most influence on academic success was parental expectation. Furthermore, research indicates that children with more demanding parents tend to do better academically than children in the other group. Additionally, they are more likely to seek higher education and do better on standardized examinations Rutchick, Smyth, Lopoo, and Dusek (2009). Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, and Colvin (2011) demonstrated that strong parental expectations also have a favorable impact on children's desire to succeed in school, social skills, and readiness to attend college. The impact of parental expectations on academic achievement is explained in the literature in connection with parental involvement and their communication with the children about schooling. As a result, parental expectations affect how parents anticipate in school-based and home-based activities, including helping with homework, supporting classroom and school-related activities, being willing and able to create a home environment and conditions that facilitate schoolwork, and communicating with their children about their future goals and expectations (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mistry, White, Benner, & Huynh, 2009). Kirk et al. (2011) found that by facilitating conversation and sharing, parental involvement helps both the parents and the children develop more reasonable expectations for the child's future. Children who share their goals and expectations are more motivated to learn and study, and their career plans are positively impacted. However, Eamon (2005) suggests that the most crucial element is the balance between the expectations of parents and children. The student's academic performance serves as the foundation for a realistic understanding that both parents and the youngster share. They show how actions like providing financial aid to promote further education, setting an example of success, encouraging the student's own objective, and thanking the student for their hard work have a good impact on the balance between the student's and parents' expectations. The parent-child bond and parental engagement will both benefit from the parental involvement that occurs via these children of exchanges Eccles and Harold (2013). As was previously noted, a connection built on effective sharing will boost the possibility of harmony between parents and children as well as their expectations for the children's future academic career Seginer (2006). It is evident from the following that parental expectations have been found to have an impact on student results both directly via interactions with their children and indirectly through parental views and perceived effectiveness in supporting their academic progress. Although characteristics including parents' educational and socioeconomic level, parenting methods, and parental participation have been used to evaluate the impact of parents on academic success, very few studies have looked at the elements that reflect parental expectations from medical students. Nevertheless, no research on the topic was found in Pakistani literature before.

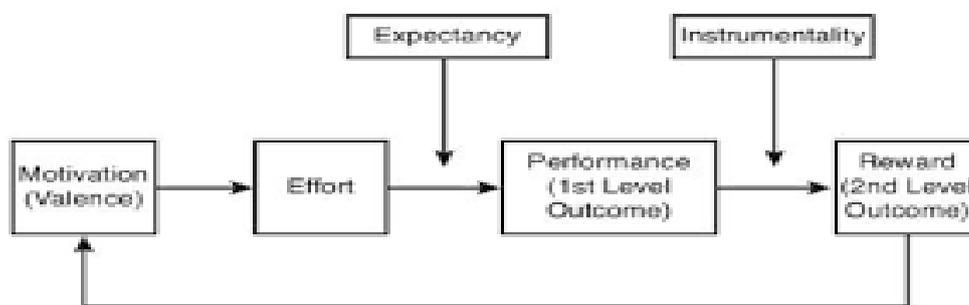
## **Objectives**

- To examine the socio-economic characteristics of medical students of Nawaz Sharif Medical College.
- To analyze the parental expectations of medical students of Nawaz Sharif Medical College.
- To measure the mental health issues of medical students of Nawaz Sharif Medical College.
- To find out the relationship between parental expectations and students' mental health issues of medical students of Nawaz Sharif Medical College.

## **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

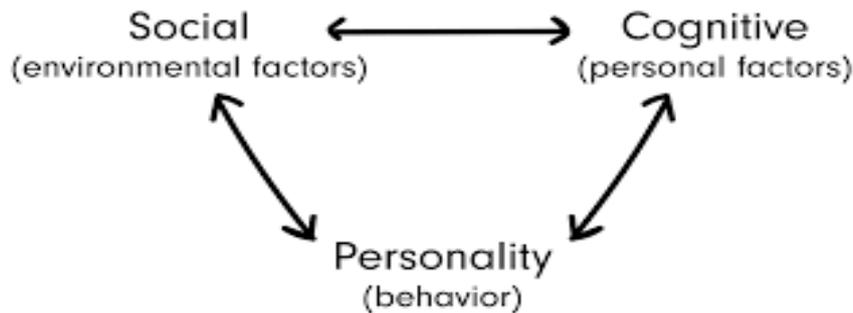
The theoretical framework for this research explores the relationship between parental expectations and mental health issues of medical students. The present study framework is based on two theoretical models: Expectancy Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Bandura, 2001). These two theoretical models explain the relevance to parental expectations and mental health issues.

**Expectancy Theory:** Jacquelynne Eccles and her associates have created the expectancy theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). According to the idea, people’s aspirations for success and their subjective tasks’ worth in certain areas work together to inspire achievement-related decisions. According to the expectancy theory, the outcomes of any behavior depend on our initial expectations of it. Sometimes, all it takes for a result to happen is the expectation of it. Due to the possibility of a placebo effect, the outcome may or may not match these expectations. The application of expectancy theory is all about the mental process. It explains the expectancy and mental health, and decisions that are made on the basis of expectations from an individual. Expectancy theory is sometimes a motivational theory. Expectations affect the workings and behaviour of an individual. High expectations mean high mental issues as well. Expectancy theory explains that individuals can be negatively affected by the expectations of their parents. Theory defines that there is a correlation between expectations and the mental health and performance of the individual. Expectancy theory defines that expectations motivate efforts and performance, but it is not important that individuals are satisfied with their efforts and performance.



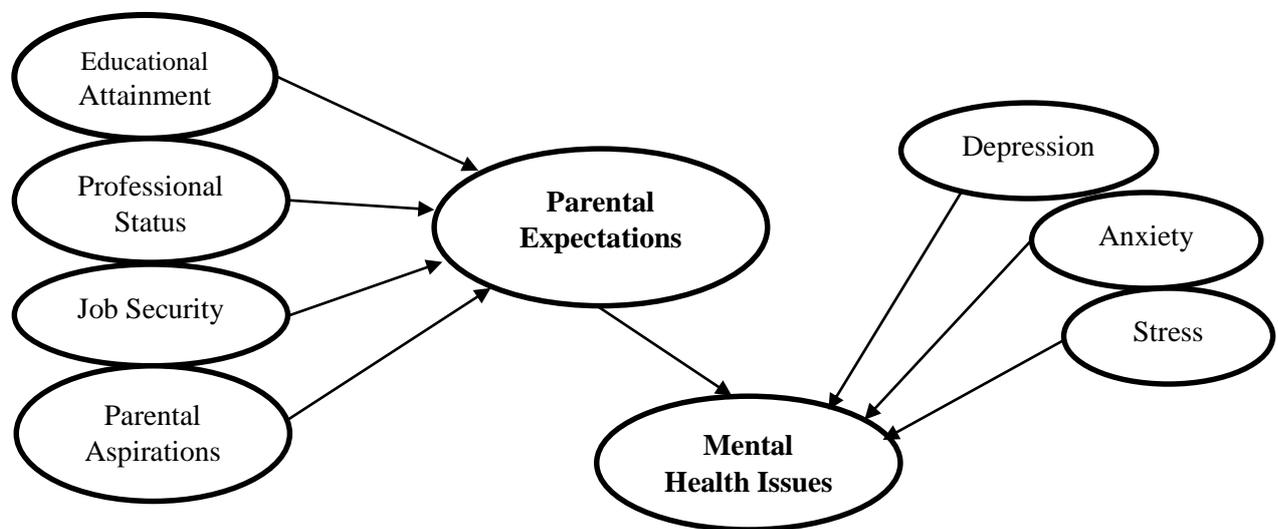
**Figure 1: Model of Expectancy Theory**

**Social Cognitive Career Theory:** Social cognitive career theory seeks to explain three interconnected aspects of career development: (1) how fundamental academic and professional interests develop; (2) how educational and professional choices are made; and (3) how academic and professional success is attained. It’s Bandura’s social cognitive career theory (Bandura, 2001) . He insisted that it’s crucial to distinguish between an action result and the action itself, pointing out that people make decisions based on their expectations for the future. Bandura argued that people’s perceptions of outcomes are positively correlated with their appraisals of their capacities to perform in various contexts. This theory explains the other factors like individuals’ interests, abilities, norms, values, traditions, and as well as environmental factors which affect the mental health of individuals. The application of Social Cognitive Career Theory is used to analyze the parental expectations and mental health among students. Parental expectations directly affect the mental health of students during their career development. This social cognitive career theory may be best understood and implemented in the context of the current study, since mental health problems are getting worse every day as a result of parental expectations of their students. For students, their career development is the biggest challenge in their lives, as their parental expectations are so high that students have to evaluate outcomes and challenges. In this stage, students are involved in evaluating the mental health issues according to Bandura’s model.



*Figure 2: Model of Social Cognitive Career Theory*

**Analytical Framework of Independent and Dependent Variables of the Study**



**Hypothesis**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between parental expectations and mental health issues of medical students.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no positive relationship between parental expectations and mental health issues of medical students.

**Research Methodology**

The research focuses on the enrolled MBBS (4 Years) students at Nawaz Sharif Medical College, Hafiz Hayat Campus, Gujrat, which represents the entire universe of the study. The sampling frame includes a comprehensive list of students from the medical department, encompassing all four years of the MBBS program. For selecting the sample, a proportionate random sampling technique was utilized to ensure that the sample accurately reflects the broader student population. The sample size was 110 medical students, determined using the Taro Yamane formula (1969), which is expressed as  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ , where 'N' is the total population and 'e' represents the margin of error. This methodology has been employed to validate the representativeness of the findings related to the student body at Nawaz Sharif Medical College. To collect the responses of medical students, researchers utilized a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews. A four-point Likert scale was employed to assess parental expectations alongside mental health issues. The quantitative data

derived from this process emphasized the importance of pre-testing in verifying the questionnaire's efficacy and validity. A small sample of 25 medical students was pre-tested; they carefully read and completed the questionnaires, allowing the researcher to assess the accuracy of the data collection method. Emphasizing research ethics, the researcher ensured respondents' confidentiality and informed them about the research purpose. Data accuracy was achieved through modifications, and SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) was utilized for data entry and analysis. Kendall's Correlation and Simple Linear Regression were employed to assess the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

## Results

**Table 1:** *Percentage Distribution of the Socio-demographic characteristics of the Respondents*

<b>Year of the Students</b>	<b>Frequency(f)</b>	<b>Percentage(%)</b>
1. First Year	56	50.5
2. Second Year	11	09.9
3. Third Year	44	39.6
<b>Age of the Students</b>		
1. 17-19	37	33.3
2. 20-22	67	60.4
3. 23-25	07	06.3
<b>Gender of the Students</b>		
1. Male	38	34.2
2. Female	73	65.8
<b>Education Level of the Mother of the Students</b>		
1. Primary	06	05.4
2. Secondary	15	13.5
3. Intermediate	25	22.5
4. Graduation	28	25.2
5. Masters	25	22.5
6. Uneducated	12	10.8
<b>Education Level of the Father of Students</b>		
1. Primary	01	0.9
2. Secondary	14	12.6
3. Intermediate	18	16.2
4. Graduation	22	19.8
5. Masters	51	45.9
6. Uneducated	05	04.5
<b>Residential Area for the Students</b>		
1. Rural	33	29.7
2. Urban	78	70.3

**Table 2:** *Correlation Product-Moment of Parental Expectations and Mental Health Issues*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Parental Expectations</b>	<b>Mental Health Issues</b>
Parental Expectations	1.000	
Mental Health Issues	.223**	1.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To investigate the connection between mental health problems and parental expectations, a Kendall's Tau-b correlation was calculated. The findings showed that the two variables had a strong positive association ( $\tau = .223$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This result suggests that participants' reported mental health problems were positively correlated with increased parental expectations. In light of the above correlation, it is clear that our hypothesis is valid. On top of the fact that there is a strong and favourable link between parental expectations and mental health problems. If parental expectations are high, mental health issues will also be high.

**Table 3: Kendall's Correlation Statistical Test between the Variables**

Var.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Educational Attainment	1.000	.360**	.337**	.316**	.117	.140*	.171*
Professional Status		1.000	.373**	.361**	.106	.029	.183**
Job Security			1.000	.406**	.251**	.212**	.164*
Parental Aspiration				1.000	.281**	.118	.167*
Depression					1.000	.564**	.361**
Anxiety						1.000	.433**
Stress							1.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.0level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings show several noteworthy positive correlations between mental health issues and the aspects of parental expectations. In particular, there was a positive correlation between Educational Attainment and Professional Status ( $\tau = .360$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Job Security ( $\tau = .337$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Parental Aspiration ( $\tau = .316$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that improved scores in one area of parental expectation were often linked to improved scores in other expectation-related measures. Moreover, there were noteworthy positive associations between Educational Attainment and Anxiety ( $\tau = .140$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Stress ( $\tau = .171$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that higher parental expectations were somewhat associated with stress and anxiety. Professional Status and Stress also had a significant relationship ( $\tau = .183$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while Job Security correlated with depression ( $\tau = .251$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Anxiety ( $\tau = .212$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Stress ( $\tau = .164$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Lastly, Pparental Aspiration had a positive correlation with both Stress ( $\tau = .167$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and depression ( $\tau = .281$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Different forms of mental health difficulties tended to co-occur, as seen by the positive and substantial correlations between the mental health variables depression, anxiety, and stress ( $\tau$  values ranging from .361 to .564, all  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 4: Coefficients Results when Mental Health Issues are Dependent and Parental Expectations Independent**

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients ( $\beta$ )	t	P-Value	95% CI for B
Constant	15.243	4.623	-	3.298	.001**	[6.079-24.407]
Parental Expectations	.742	.060	.768	12.744	.000**	[0.624-0.860]

Dependent Variable: Mental Health Issues

**Table 5: Model Summary**

<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
.768	.590	.586	154.826	.000	8.423

The findings in Table 4 showed that the simple linear regression was performed to predict the mental health issues, which were significantly and positively predicted by parental expectations ( $B = .742$ ,  $t = 12.744$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The regression model significantly predicted the achievement behavior with 59% of variance ( $R^2 = .590$ ,  $F (154.826, P > 0.001)$ ). The constant term has a coefficient of 15.243, which is statistically significant ( $p = 0.001^{**}$ ), indicating the baseline level of mental health issues when the independent variable is zero.

### **Discussion**

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between parental expectations and mental health issues of medical students. The findings of professional status indicators show that parents of medical students expect popularity, power, prestige, high status in the future, admiration, and respect in the family for them. Parents have some expectations regarding job security, like income support, high pay, parental future fears, insurance benefits, career development, and parents expect retirement benefits. Findings of parental aspirations indicators show that most of the medical students were also facing comparison with other doctors, parents expect a high position, parents aspired from other doctors, their social status, economic status, and the lifesaving journey of doctors. The results align with the study conducted by Davis-Kean (2005) shows that parental expectations as reasonable thoughts or viewpoints or rational judgments about achievement that may be gauged by an increase in grades, achieving the highest levels of education, and attending classes. Most of the time increases the stress among students. Froiland, Peterson, and Davison (2013) show that aspirations differ from parental expectations in that they take into account wants, ambitions, and hopes that parents have for their children's accomplishments rather than actual expectations.

The researcher may reasonably state that the medical students were facing mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress due to higher expectations from parents. The findings are supported by Khan, Mahmood, Badshah, Ali, and Jamal (2006) said that exams, pressure of high grades, high CGPA, stress about the future, personal choices, parental expectations, social status, and social environment. Social pressure leads to different mental health issues. Higher parental expectations have been badly affecting the mental health of medical students. Consequently, medical students were facing physical tiredness and psychological illness. Medical students are socially considered as in the most responsible and biggest professional field. They have to bear the social and familial pressure. Parental expectations are so high for medical students. As mentioned by Goldsmith (2009), parents expect that their students must have general knowledge, and they want their children to be their pride. They want to see their students extraordinary in every field of life. Their too many expectations from the students leads students towards bad mental health and also some physical illnesses.

The regression analysis indicates a significant relationship between the parental expectations and the mental health issues of medical students. Kendall's correlation was carried out to examine the relationship between parental expectations and mental health issues of medical students. The correlation results show that parental expectations strongly correlated with mental health issues. This showed that the medical students facing high expectations from parents have high mental health issues. Nihal Lindberg and Güven (2021) reported on parental expectations and their effect on students' success and failure. The above findings are related to the study conducted by Dobkin and Ferreira (2010) pointed out that parents expect cognitive skills from their students and to utilize these skills in the future. The more pressure and expectations regarding future security make a student more conscious about their careers and future, due to which they have to struggle more than their capacity to achieve a higher status in society. Students have to face more mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress. The results of the regression analysis show that participant variation in mental health disorders is substantially influenced by parental expectations. According to the positive coefficient, reported mental health issues increased in tandem with parental expectations. This implies that

teenagers may experience psychological pressure from high or unreasonable parental demands, which might increase stress, anxiety, or depressed symptoms. Van (2021) found that students' mental health concerns are influenced by a variety of subjective and objective factors, including age-related psychophysiological traits, elements from the family, and college-related factors. Parental expectations are one of the elements that might have an impact on students' mental health. Students' mental health is impacted by parental expectations. Medical students who are under more pressure tend to have more mental health problems.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the above results, parental expectations have a major impact on the mental health of medical students. Parental expectations significantly impact mental health, with high expectations leading to stress and emotional strain. Supportive and realistic expectations foster motivation and resilience. Balancing encouragement and pressure is crucial, as healthy communication within families can reduce psychological distress and promote better emotional well-being among young people. Maintaining a balance between encouragement and pressure is essential.

### **Recommendation of the Study**

The following recommendations are suggested for academic and practical work while keeping in mind the study's limitations and conclusions.

- Parents should understand the mental health issues of the medical students.
- They should understand that mental health issues are dangerous for both male and female students. It is important to provide awareness to parents about the mental health issues and symptoms of medical students.
- Parents should also consider the interests of the students in choosing their educational fields.
- It is recommended that parents should not expect more than capacity from their students.
- There must also be counselling centers for the students facing mental health issues. Parents should also communicate with their students and ask about their problems and issues.

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