

Anxiety and depression among orthodox Jewish medical students: a cross sectional study

Background: Previous studies have demonstrated increased rates of anxiety and depression in medical students compared to the standard population. This can negatively impact both patient care and academic performance. However, there are many mediating factors of anxiety and depression such as religion and marital status. Therefore, a cross sectional study was conducted to study Orthodox Jewish medical students.

Objective: To assess the prevalence of anxiety and depression in Orthodox Jewish medical students in both married and unmarried students using an anonymous survey.

Methods: An online survey was distributed to a group of Medical students who self-identify as Orthodox on WhatsApp. As part of the survey, participants were asked about both feelings of anxiety (using the GAD-7), and feelings of depression (using a PHQ-2) to screen for Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder respectively, along with additional questions regarding marital status and perceived sources of support.

Results: 69 of the 137 members of the group responded filled out the anonymous survey yielding a response rate of 50.3%. 8.3% of participants screened positive for Generalized Anxiety Disorder and 11% screened positive for Major Depressive Disorder.

When stratified by marital status, 20% of the non-married cohort screened positive for Generalized anxiety whereas only 4% of the married cohort screened positive. This indicates a 5 fold decrease associated with being married amongst Jewish Orthodox medical students. A fishers exact test was conducted and yielded p value of 0.045 with no difference in Major Depression between married and unmarried participants.

Conclusions: The stresses of medical education have been documented increase the risk of anxiety and depression which can result in a decreased quality of patient care and academic performance. This study has demonstrated the protective effects of marriage on anxiety in a cohort of Orthodox Jewish medical students.