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Effect of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Medical Students Across Africa: A Cross-Sectional Survey of 33 Countries

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Introduction:

Covid-19 disrupted medical education across the globe. Medical students experience depression and anxiety at higher rates than the general population. Our study aims to evaluate how the mental health of medical students in Africa was affected by COVID-19 related changes to their education.

Methods:

A 39-item survey composed of Likert scale (LS), dichotomous, and free-response items was used to examine the impact of COVID-19 on medical education. The survey assessed domains of class structure changes and timing, patient interactions, exam administration, learning environment satisfaction, mental health impacts, and volunteer opportunities/engagement. This anonymous electronic survey was sent to medical schools across thirty-three African countries. Medical students were reached via an established social media network under the International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA). Participants were from all years of medical school. Quantitative analysis was completed using R and Excel.

Results:

694 medical students across 33 African countries completed our survey. 94.1% responded to :“How was your mental health affected by the pandemic-related medical education changes”. 9.45% were extremely negatively impacted, 35.03% were negatively impacted, 32.99% were neither positively nor negatively impacted, 17.59% were positively impacted, 4.94% were extremely positively impacted. The average score

was 3 with an increase toward negative as disruption time lengthened. Resuming classes within 60 days (n: 140) had a score of 3.1; 60-180 days (n:177) score of 3.3. Not yet resumed (n:217) score of 3.4.

Discussion and conclusion:

Covid-19 and related mitigation measures have caused unprecedented disruptions to medical education. The mental health challenges of this disruption for medical students have important implications for future public health.