



Timeline of Burnout in Phase 1 Medical Students at UWSMPH

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Abstract

Physician burnout has received significant media attention since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, physician burnout often stems from roots of burnout in medical students that can begin during their first year of medical education. This study focuses on determining the pressure or “burnout” points for 1st year medical students during Phase 1 of the ForWard curriculum at UWSMPH. These pressure points are driven by specific factors and understanding them guides future interventions that optimize the learning and wellbeing of medical students early in medical school. This quality improvement project focuses on better understanding the unique aspects of the first year of the UWSMPH Phase 1 curriculum. Factors evaluated include the learning environment, support services, MS1 orientation, among others that may impact burnout and wellbeing.

Objective

To understand unique aspects of the UWSMPH Phase 1 curriculum, learning environment, support services and other aspects that may impact burnout through literature reviews and focus groups of rising M2 UWSMPH students. Themes from the focus groups and online surveys identifying the factors and timing of burnout will be analyzed and disseminated to key UWSMPH student, faculty, and staff stakeholders.

Methods

- Medical students from UWSMPH’s class of 2025 were recruited through a class-wide email to assist with this quality improvement project
- 21 students voluntarily signed up for one of three focus groups
- A literature review was conducted to create a facilitator guide that outlines broad questions regarding personal, social, and academic factors driving the incidence of burnout during UWSMPH’s Phase 1 curriculum.
- Three, one hour-long focus groups were conducted, and responses were recorded over Zoom for later analysis
- Student responses to the guide's questions were analyzed through hierarchical inductive coding to create a codebook that was analyzed by two different coders
- A broader electronic survey was created through Qualtrics based on focus group responses and sent in a class wide email to be completed by the 2025 cohort.
- 62 students completed the Qualtrics survey.

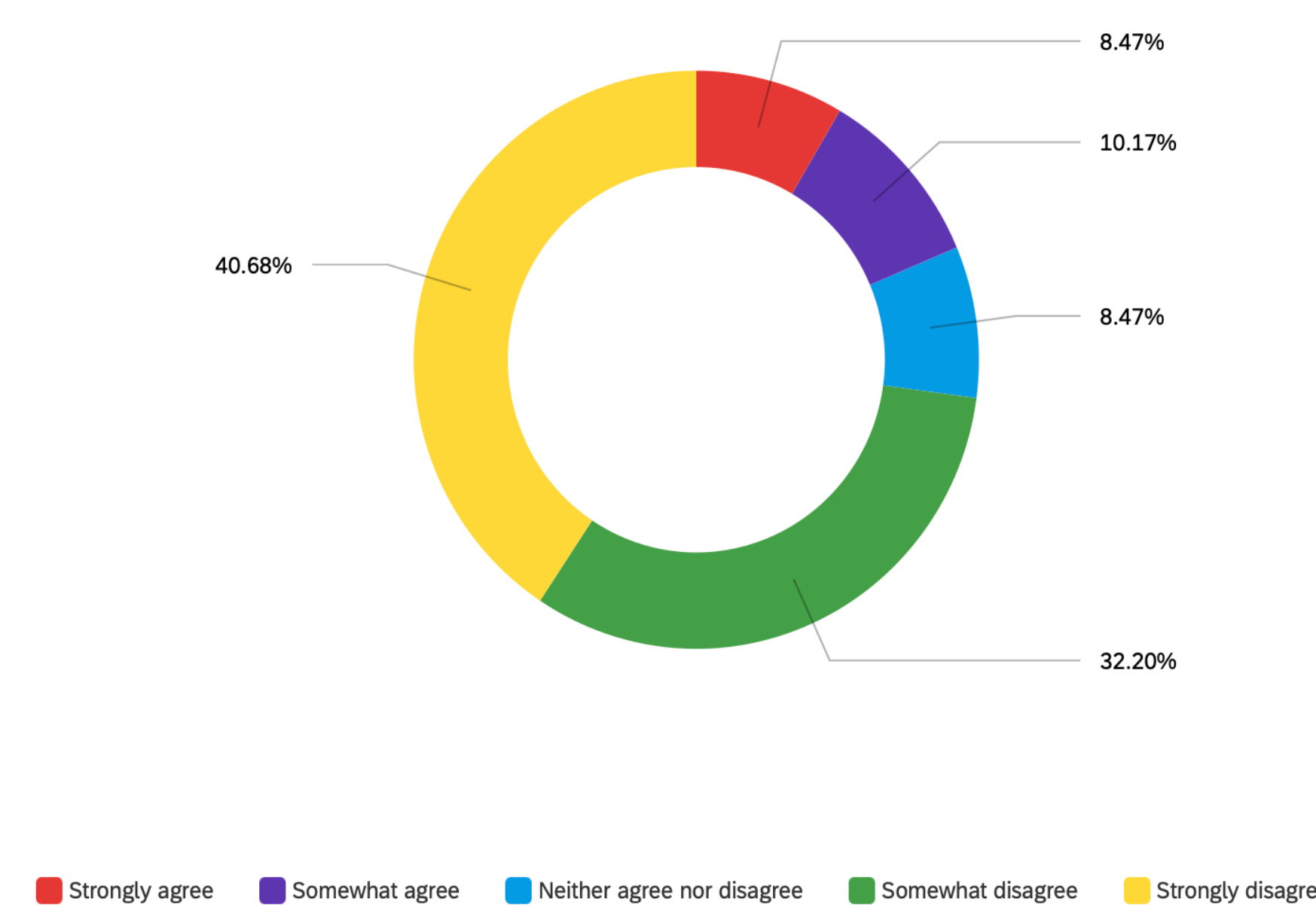
Results

Focus Groups Results

Codebook analysis with the secondary coder is still under analyzation, however common themes arose throughout the 3 focus groups. A majority of students claimed that their burnout waxed and waned throughout the year, with winter, spring, and summer break offering a time of respite. Student response to how mentorship affected their burnout varied. While some students stated they found mentorship, especially in their LTC and the learning specialists, others explained how they did not have a mentor and wanted more opportunities to talk with potential mentors. In terms of coursework, students stated that they wanted an earlier indication of how much content would be presented in the beginning to prepare themselves for the weeks ahead. They explained how being front-loaded without warning contributed to their burnout. In terms of resources provided to combat burnout, a majority of students advocated for more mental health counselors and earlier appointments. Many also advocated for increased presence of mentors. An example given was that students wanted their ACAP mentors to reach out more frequently. When asked about which block students felt more burnt out, answers varied per student with no clear consensus on which block caused the most burn out due varying factors such as family, marriage, finances, and other personal and social factors.

Figure 2: Student responses to the question “I felt burnt out at the start of medical school.”

Figure 1: 72.88% of students strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that they entered medical school burnt out, while 18.64% strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they entered medical school burnt out.



Survey Results

Student responses towards which block(s) caused the most burnout varied, however the majority of students indicated that they strongly disagreed that they experienced burnout throughout PPP and during winter, spring, and summer break.

47 students stated that they strongly disagreed that they experienced burnout at the beginning of PPP. This number decreased to 36 when asked about burnout at the beginning of BiB. At the beginning of FFF, 21 students stated that they strongly disagreed that they were burnt out. This number further decreased to 12 when asked about the beginning of HFT.

Students were given the opportunity to relay their level of burnout in regard to the QI and advocacy projects to account for non-academic factors of burnout. The following graph shows that a majority of students found the timing of these projects to negatively impact their burnout.

Figure 1: “How did the placement/timing of the following projects affect your burnout?”

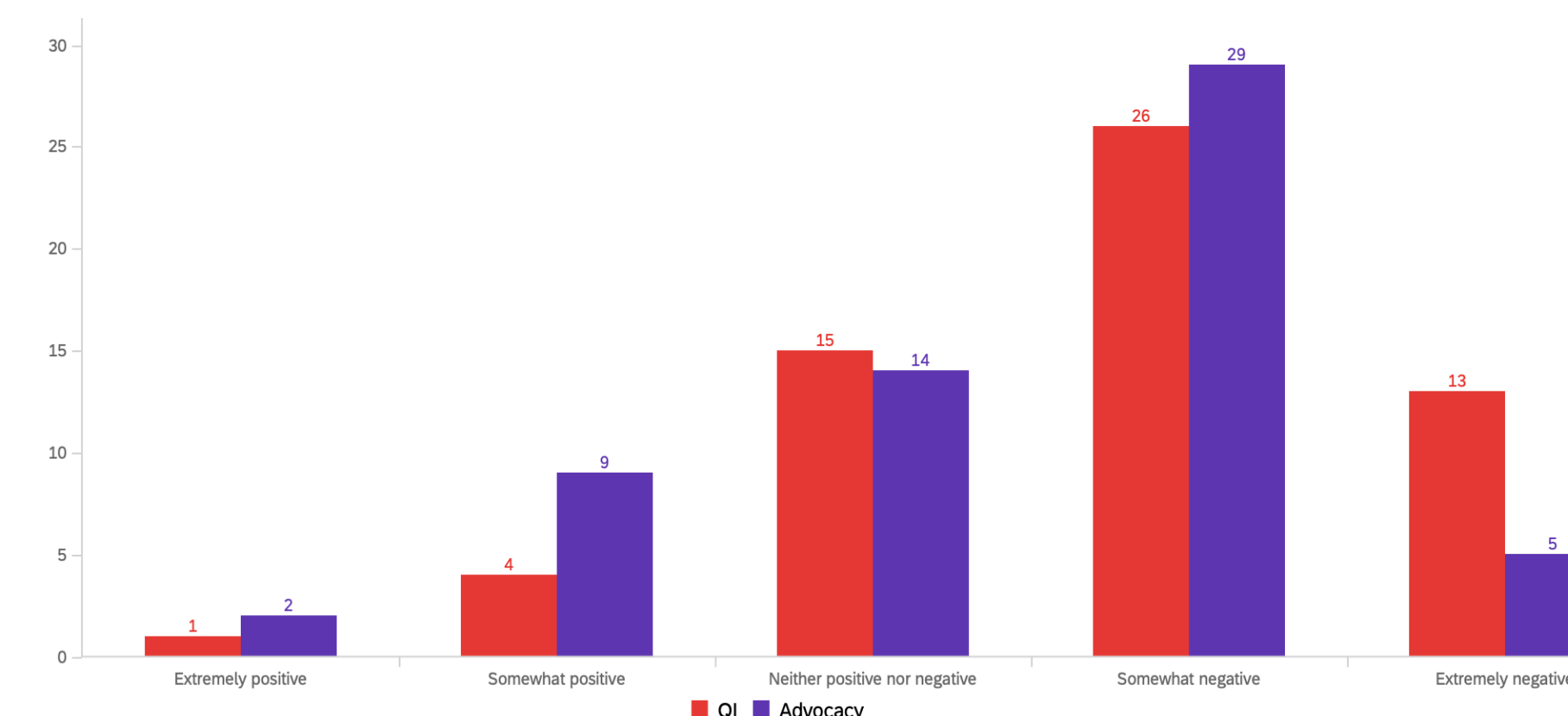


Table 1: Effect of UWSMPH Mentors on Student Onset of Burnout

Table 1: UW students encounter mentors of different capacities throughout Phase 1. The table above portrays the spectrum of satisfaction students experienced with their mentors in terms of how their mentors impacted the incidence and onset of burnout. Of the students who completed this question, only 2 indicated that they did not find a mentor for the first 2 semesters of Phase 1.

Field	Extremely positive	Slightly positive	Neither positive nor negative	Slightly negative	Extremely negative	N/A	Select if Yes to the last question
LTC	57.45% 27	28.17% 20	17.46% 11	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.66% 1	0.00% 0
ACAP House Mentor	2.13% 1	7.04% 5	38.10% 24	50.00% 4	0.00% 0	16.45% 25	0.00% 0
BEAM Mentorship	6.38% 3	5.63% 4	11.11% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	28.29% 43	0.00% 0
Big/Little Sib Program	14.89% 7	19.72% 14	19.05% 12	25.00% 2	100.00% 1	14.47% 22	0.00% 0
Other Upperclassmen	19.15% 9	38.03% 27	11.11% 7	25.00% 2	0.00% 0	9.21% 14	0.00% 0
I do not have a mentor at UWSMPH	0.00% 0	1.41% 1	3.17% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30.92% 47	100.00% 2
	47	71	63	8	1	152	2

Table 2: Student responses when asked “What ONE resource would better address burnout in Phase 1?”

Student Responses	
More mental health counselors and increased availability of mental health resources	Fall break
An additional SMA day and more access to absences	More support in the beginning of the year in learning how to study. I would have liked more support in learning how to use outside resources (amboss, anki, etc).
More chances for positive reinforcement from faculty, sometimes it	A better schedule of projects- printed out for us so we knows what to expect when

Conclusions

For the first year of the Phase 1 curriculum, student burnout per block varied depending on interest in unit material, preexisting burnout, and social, personal, and financial factors. Students found that their LTCs and other upperclassmen positively contributed to their burnout. However, additional mental health resources were desired to delay its onset. With the majority of students entering medical school not burnt out, anticipating their needs with resources and additional mentorship opportunities may also delay onset. The onset of burnout may have been prompted by the scheduling of public health projects and the front-loading of lecture content at the beginning of different units. During academic breaks, burnout appeared to be alleviated. This study will continue into December 2022 when further data regarding burnout and its associated factors are evaluated for the remaining semester of Phase 1.

Recommendations

- Move the advocacy project to a time that has less of an impact on exam preparation and scheduling
- Promoting mentors (i.e. ACAP) to students
- Assess burnout levels in incoming M1 class
- Improve access to mental health