

# Assessing the Mental Health of Doctors in Private Hospitals Using the General Health Questionnaire: A Survey Study in a Tier-1 City

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**Abstract:** Doctors working in private hospitals often face significant occupational stress due to demanding work environments, long working hours, and job insecurity. The high levels of stress can lead to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, and social dysfunction. This study aimed to assess the mental health status of doctors working in private hospitals in a Tier-1 city using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28). The GHQ-28 is a well-established tool that screens for psychological distress across four domains: somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. The study surveyed 54 doctors from various specialties and found that 68% of participants experienced psychological distress. Anxiety and insomnia were the most affected domains, with 82% of doctors reporting high stress levels. Job insecurity, which affected 61% of the participants, was identified as a major contributor to stress. The findings underscore the urgent need for regular mental health screenings, the implementation of supportive workplace policies, and the introduction of stress management interventions to improve the well-being and resilience of healthcare professionals in private hospitals.

**Keywords:** Mental health, Doctors, Private hospitals, GHQ-28, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Job insecurity, Occupational health, Tier-1 city

## **Introduction**

Healthcare professionals, particularly doctors, face considerable mental health challenges due to the nature of their work.<sup>1</sup>

Private hospital settings, where doctors often work under intense pressure, can exacerbate these challenges.<sup>2</sup> High patient volumes, long working hours, job insecurity, and the emotional toll of patient care contribute to elevated levels of stress among healthcare workers. This stress can manifest in various forms, including anxiety, insomnia, depression, and social dysfunction. Given the high stakes involved in healthcare delivery, addressing the mental health of doctors is crucial not only for their own well-being but also for the quality of care provided to patients.

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) is a widely used tool to assess or emotional distress and psychiatric morbidity, for assessing the mental health of individuals in various occupational settings, including healthcare.<sup>3</sup> It evaluates psychological distress in four domains: somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. This study aims to assess the mental health of doctors working in private hospitals in a Tier-1 city using the GHQ-28, providing valuable insights into the prevalence of mental health issues and the contributing factors that affect doctors mental well-being.

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess the mental health status of doctors working in private hospitals in a Tier-1 city using the GHQ-28.
2. To evaluate the prevalence of psychological distress, focusing on somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression.
3. To examine the factors contributing to mental health issues among doctors, including job insecurity, work stress, and workload.
4. To provide recommendations for addressing mental health issues and promoting the well-being of healthcare professionals.

## **Review of Literature**

Studies have consistently shown that doctors are more susceptible to mental health issues than the general population. The demanding nature of their work, long working hours, and emotional stress are key factors contributing to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Burnout, marked by emotional exhaustion, detachment, and a diminished sense of achievement, is widely common among physicians, especially those working in high-stress environments such as private hospitals.<sup>4</sup> Burnout a significant risk factor for psychological distress, leading to poor mental health outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

Doctors working in urban settings, particularly in private hospitals, were more likely to experience stress and burnout due to the high demands placed on them.<sup>6</sup> Job insecurity and long working hours are significant contributors to mental health issues among doctors. Additionally, doctors working in private hospitals in Tier 1 city experience higher levels of stress, which often led to anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.<sup>7</sup>

The GHQ-28 is an effective tool used in various studies to assess mental health issues in healthcare professionals. Studies have demonstrated its validity in screening for common mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia. It has been used to assess the mental health of doctors in public and private hospitals and has consistently shown high levels of psychological distress among healthcare professionals.<sup>8</sup>

## **Methodology**

### **Study Design and Setting**

This study is a cross-sectional survey conducted in private hospitals in a Tier-1 city. The sample consisted of 54 doctors from different specialties, including general practitioners, surgeons, and specialists, working in various private healthcare institutions. The survey aimed to assess the mental health of these doctors using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28).

### **Inclusion Criteria**

1. Doctors working in private hospitals in a Tier-1 city.
2. Doctors from various specialties, including general medicine, surgery, paediatrics, and obstetrics.
3. Doctors with at least one year of experience in clinical practice and were ready to fill the questionnaire.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

1. Doctors who had a history of diagnosed psychiatric disorders or were under psychiatric treatment.
2. Doctors not currently practicing in private hospitals.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using the GHQ-28, a validated self-report questionnaire that assesses psychological distress across four domains: somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. The GHQ-28 consists of 28 items, each rated on a four-point scale. A higher score on the GHQ-28 indicates greater psychological distress. The questionnaire was distributed to the participating doctors, and responses were collected over a period of two months.

The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages. The prevalence of psychological distress in each domain of the GHQ-28 was calculated. Factors such as job insecurity, stress levels, and workload were also analysed to determine their correlation with mental health distress.

### **Results**

A total of 54 doctors participated in the study, with an average age of 35 years. The sample consisted of 32 male doctors (59%) and 22 female doctors (41%). The majority of participants (62%) had been practicing for more than five years, with 38% having less than five years of experience.

The overall prevalence of psychological distress among the doctors surveyed was 68%. The GHQ-28 domains showed varying levels of distress among the participants:

1. **Somatic Symptoms:** 58% of doctors reported experiencing somatic symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, and fatigue.
2. **Anxiety and Insomnia:** Anxiety and insomnia were the most significantly affected domains, with 82% of doctors reporting moderate to severe anxiety and sleep disturbances.
3. **Social Dysfunction:** 45% of doctors indicated social dysfunction, including difficulties in maintaining personal relationships and social interactions.
4. **Severe Depression:** 35% of doctors showed signs of severe depression, including feelings of hopelessness and a lack of interest in activities they once enjoyed.

The study identified several factors contributing to mental health distress among doctors:

1. **Job Insecurity:** 61% of doctors reported feeling insecure about their jobs, which contributed significantly to their stress levels.
2. **Work Stress:** 82% of doctors reported high stress levels due to long working hours, high patient volumes, and administrative responsibilities.
3. **Workload:** Doctors working in specialties with higher patient loads, such as surgery and emergency medicine, reported higher levels of anxiety and stress.
4. **Personal Factors:** Family-related issues and personal health concerns were also cited as contributing factors to mental health distress.

## Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant mental health challenges faced by doctors working in private hospitals. The high

prevalence of psychological distress, particularly in the domains of anxiety and insomnia, underscores the need for mental health screenings and interventions in private healthcare settings.<sup>9</sup> Job insecurity, long working hours, and high patient loads were identified as key contributors to stress, which in turn affects the mental well-being of doctors.

The results align with previous studies that have shown high levels of stress and burnout among healthcare professionals, particularly those working in private hospitals.<sup>10</sup> The study also reinforces the importance of addressing job insecurity and creating a supportive work environment for doctors. Implementing workplace policies that promote work-life balance, reduce administrative burdens, and provide mental health support services could help mitigate the mental health issues faced by doctors.

## **Conclusion**

This study underscores the urgent need for regular mental health assessments and screenings for doctors working in private hospitals. The high prevalence of psychological distress among doctors, particularly in the domains of anxiety, insomnia, and depression, calls for immediate action. Healthcare organizations should prioritize the mental well-being of their staff by implementing supportive policies, offering stress management programs, and providing access to mental health services. Promoting a healthy work environment and supporting doctors in managing work-related stress are essential steps in improving their overall well-being and ensuring high-quality patient care.

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## **Declaration**

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### **Conflicts of interest**

There are no conflicts of interest.