



Frontiers in Medical & Health Sciences Education Conference  
**Forum on Learner Wellbeing in Asia: Experiences and Issues**  
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# What does medical student stress look like?

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# Background

## Stress in medical students:

- Medical students are psychologically **less healthy than the general population** in terms of mental health, stress and burnout<sup>1</sup>

## Situation in Hong Kong:

- Medical students experienced a **higher level of psychological distress** than other university students<sup>2</sup>
- 1/3 interns exhibits **abnormal levels of depression, anxiety and stress**<sup>3</sup>

1. Dyrbye LN, Thomas MR, Shanafelt TD. Systematic Review of Depression, Anxiety, and Other Indicators of Psychological Distress Among U.S. and Canadian Medical Students. *Academic Medicine*. 2006
2. Wong JGWS, Patil NG, Beh SL, Cheung EPT, Wong V, Chan LC, et al. Cultivating psychological well-being in Hong Kong's future doctors. *Medical Teacher*. 2005
3. Lam TP, Wong JGWS, IP MSM, Lam KF, Pang SL. Psychological well-being of interns in Hong Kong: What causes them stress and what helps them. *Medical Teacher*. 2010

# MBBS Curriculum



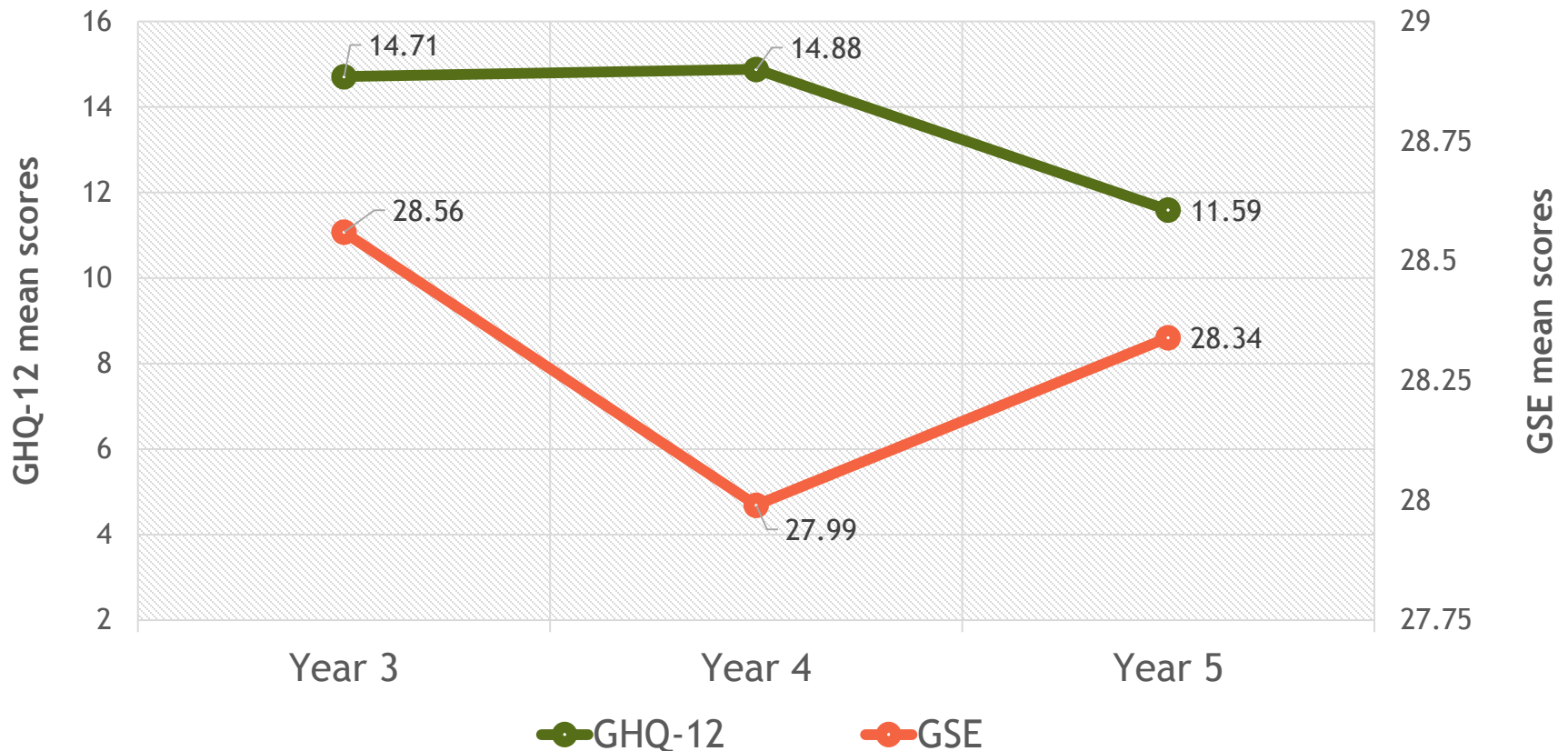
# Who are we looking at?



- Longitudinal study of the level of psychological distress and coping ability of M14 cohort
- 152 participants
- 63% male
- Response rate
  - Year 3 (62%)
  - Year 4 (84%)
  - Final (51%)

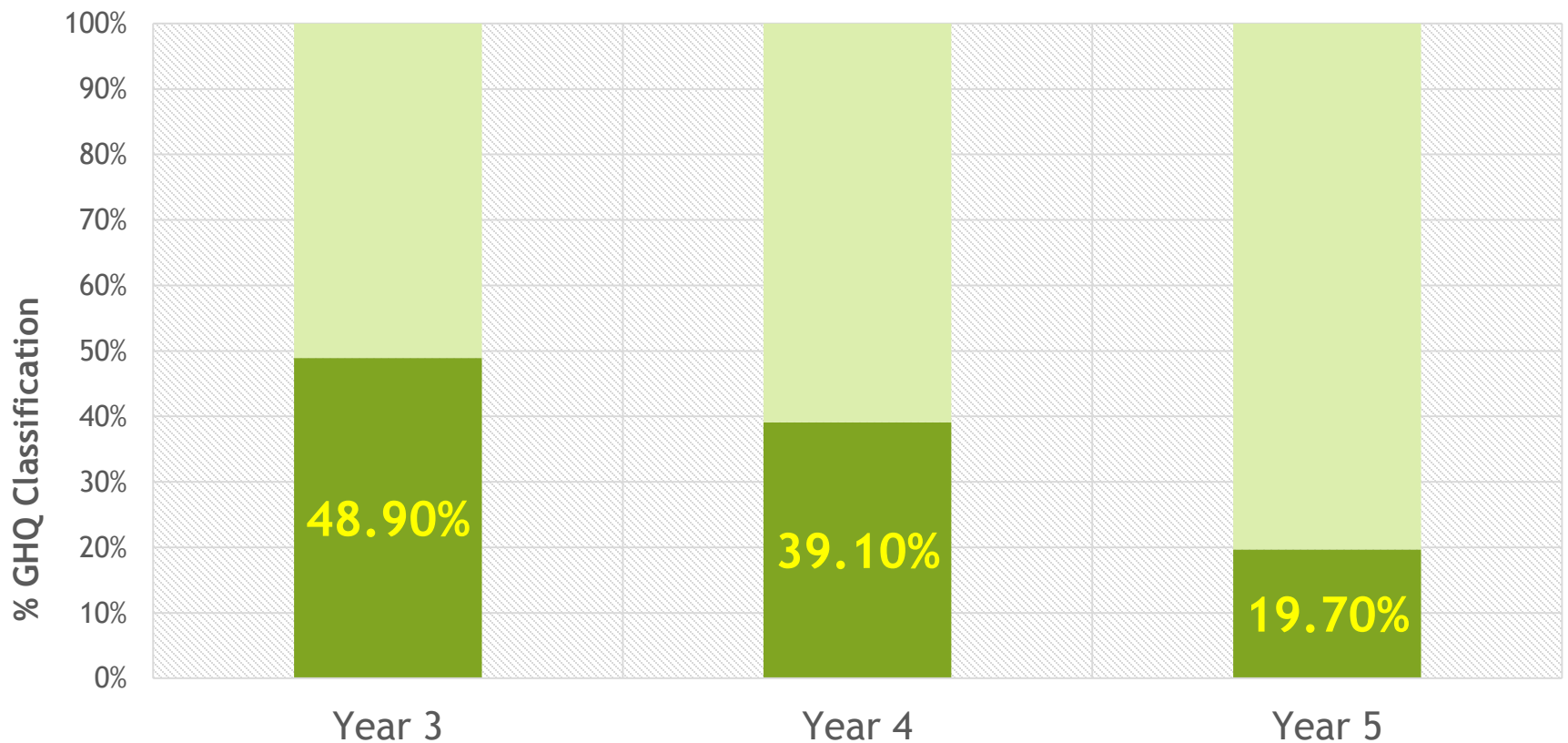
# Trend of psychological distress and coping

## GHQ-12 and GSE mean scores of M14 at Year 3, 4 and 5



# Prevalence of psychological distress

Proportion of students who screened GHQ-positive



Dark: GHQ positive (high psychological distress); Light: GHQ negative (low psychological distress)  
Classification using a bi-modal coding system and a cut-off of 4 for the total mean score.

# Sources of stress

Source of stress	Frequency
Study and workload	15
Examination	14
Interpersonal relationship	10
Frustrations	8
Health issues/ death of a family member	8
Lack of rest	5
Personal issues	5
Family conflicts	4
Own health issues	4
*domestic violence, break up with partner, financial hardship*	

# Visual expressions of distress

“A person who I can only see her back sitting on a chair, without crying, in a dark room, in an absolutely quiet dark room. However, on the other hand, the surrounding world was shouting, laughing and filled up with crowds and colours. The only thing that was left behind in that person’s mind was emptiness.”





# Visual expressions of coping

“...very often I feel that what’s in me originally (blue elements) are displaced by new stuffs (black elements). This may at times bring in frustration and fear. **However, I’ll try to think about it... the other way round.** I’ll try my best to influence what’s and who’s new with the impact me so that things turn out better (black to blue).”



# Conclusion

**Medical student distress is prevalent, the source of which may be unexpected and revealed in unconventional ways.**

**Educators need to be vigilant and sensitive in order to recognize and provide appropriate support.**



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**Thank you!**

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