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Original Research Article

A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY TO ASSESS THE MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY, HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR, RESILIENCE IN HEALTHCARE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Mental health literacy, help-seeking behaviour, and resilience are important determinants of psychological well-being among healthcare students. Adequate mental health literacy promotes early recognition of mental health problems and appropriate help-seeking, while resilience enables students to cope effectively with academic and emotional challenges.

Aim: To assess mental health literacy, attitudes toward professional help-seeking behaviour, and resilience among healthcare students and to evaluate their interrelationship.

Materials and Methods: This institution-based cross-sectional observational study was conducted among 716 undergraduate healthcare students at Akash Group of Institutions, Bengaluru, Karnataka, from December 2025 to May 2026. Data were collected using validated questionnaires assessing Mental Health Literacy (MHLQ), attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and resilience using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 27.0 and GraphPad Prism version 5. Associations were analyzed using the Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test, while Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to assess correlations. A p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results: Of the 716 participants, 66.9% were females and 33.1% were males. Overall, 99.4% demonstrated above-average mental health literacy, 62.6% had positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and 70.1% exhibited normal resilience as assessed by the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Significant associations were observed between gender and selected MHLQ domains, help-seeking attitudes, and resilience. Professional course was significantly associated with selected MHLQ domains and help-seeking attitudes. Resilience was also significantly associated with gender, professional course, overall mental health literacy, and selected MHLQ domains ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion: Healthcare students demonstrated high mental health literacy, generally positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, and predominantly normal resilience. Resilience showed significant associations with gender, professional course, and mental health literacy, highlighting its important role in students' psychological well-being. Integrating structured mental health literacy programs and resilience-building interventions into healthcare education may strengthen adaptive coping, promote timely help-seeking, and enhance the psychological preparedness of future healthcare professionals.

Keywords: Mental health literacy; Healthcare students; Help-seeking behaviour; Resilience; Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ); Brief Resilience Scale (BRS); Psychological well-being; Cross-sectional study.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being and plays a crucial role in academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and professional development among healthcare students. Healthcare education is inherently demanding, involving rigorous academic schedules, clinical responsibilities, emotional stress, and high expectations, all of which place students at increased risk of psychological distress.[1] Medical, nursing, and allied health students often experience anxiety, depression, burnout, and emotional exhaustion during their training period. Despite growing awareness regarding mental health issues, many students fail to recognize early symptoms of mental illness or hesitate to seek appropriate professional help because of stigma, fear of discrimination, lack of awareness, and concerns regarding confidentiality.[2]

Mental health literacy refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in their recognition, management, and prevention.[3] It includes the ability to identify specific mental health conditions, understand available treatment options, recognize risk factors, and seek appropriate support services when necessary. Adequate mental health literacy among healthcare students is particularly important because they are future healthcare providers who will be expected to identify and manage mental health concerns not only in themselves but also in their patients.[4] Poor mental health literacy may contribute to delayed diagnosis, inappropriate coping mechanisms, and negative attitudes toward individuals suffering from psychiatric illnesses.

Help-seeking behavior is another important aspect influencing mental well-being. It refers to the willingness and actions taken by individuals to obtain assistance for psychological or emotional problems from formal or informal sources.[5] Although healthcare students possess basic medical knowledge, studies have shown that they are often reluctant to seek psychological support due to social stigma, self-reliance, fear of academic consequences, and lack of trust in mental health services.[6] Delayed help-seeking behavior may worsen psychological problems and adversely affect academic achievement, clinical performance, and quality of life. Understanding the factors associated with help-seeking behavior among healthcare students is therefore essential for developing effective institutional support systems and mental health interventions.

Resilience, defined as the ability to adapt positively and recover from stress or adversity, is considered a protective factor against mental health problems.[7] Students with higher resilience are better able to cope with academic pressure, emotional challenges, and professional stressors. Resilience helps in maintaining emotional stability, enhancing self-confidence, and improving overall psychological well-being.[8] Several studies have suggested that resilience training and supportive educational environments can significantly reduce stress and improve mental health outcomes among healthcare students.[9]

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward mental health issues among healthcare students worldwide. However, there remains limited comprehensive data evaluating the combined relationship between mental health literacy, help-seeking behavior, and resilience, particularly in developing countries and resource-limited settings.[10] Assessing these factors together may provide valuable insights into the psychological preparedness of healthcare students and help identify gaps requiring targeted interventions. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to assess mental health literacy, help-seeking behavior, and resilience among healthcare students and to explore their interrelationship in order to promote better mental health support strategies within healthcare education systems.

The present study was undertaken with the objective of assessing Mental Health Literacy (MHL) among students belonging to various healthcare professions and evaluating their understanding and awareness regarding mental health problems, recognition of symptoms, and available treatment options. The study also aimed to assess the attitudes of healthcare students toward help-seeking behaviour and to examine its correlation with Mental Health Literacy, as appropriate awareness and positive attitudes are essential for timely psychological support and intervention. In addition, the study intended to evaluate the association between resilience and Mental Health Literacy among healthcare professional students, considering resilience as an important protective factor that influences an individual's ability to cope with stress, emotional challenges, and academic pressures. By exploring these interrelated domains, the study seeks to provide a better understanding of the psychological preparedness and mental well-being of future healthcare professionals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design: Hospital/institution-based cross-sectional observational study.

Study Population: Undergraduate students from various healthcare professional courses including medical, nursing, and allied health sciences students studying in the selected institution.

Sample Size: The calculated final sample size for the study was 716 participants.

Study Duration: The study was conducted over a six-month period from December 2025 to 31 May 2026.

Study Place: The study was conducted at Akash Group of Institutions, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Students enrolled in healthcare professional courses.
- Students willing to participate in the study.
- Students who provided informed written consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Students who were absent during the period of data collection.
- Students unwilling to participate in the study.
- Incompletely filled questionnaires/forms were excluded from final analysis.

Statistical Analysis: Data were entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 27.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) and GraphPad Prism version 5. Continuous variables were expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD), while categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. The unpaired t-test was used for comparison of continuous variables between independent groups, whereas the paired t-test was applied for comparisons within the same group. Categorical variables were analyzed using the Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate. Correlation analysis was performed to assess the association between Mental Health Literacy, help-seeking behaviour, and resilience scores. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the study participants

Variable		Frequency (n=716)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	479	66.9
	Male	237	33.1
	Total	**716**	**100**
Professional Course	1st Year MBBS	106	14.8
	2nd Year MBBS	91	12.7
	3rd Year MBBS	142	19.8
	4th Year MBBS	76	10.6
	Interns	93	13
	Allied Sciences	208	29.1
	Total	**716**	**100**
Attitude toward Seeking Professional Help	Less positive attitude	268	37.4
	More positive attitude	448	62.6
	Total	**716**	**100**

Table 2. Distribution of MHLQ, attitudes, and Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Variables	Response	Frequency (n=716)	Percentage (%)
MHLQ	Below average literacy	4	0.6
	Above average literacy	712	99.4
Factor 1	≤18 score	35	4.9
	≥19 score	681	95.1
Factor 2	≤9 score	155	21.6
	≥10 score	561	78.4
Factor 3	≤19 score	42	5.9
	≥20 score	674	94.1
Factor 4	≤12 score	6	0.8
	≥13 score	710	99.2
Attitude toward Seeking Professional Help	Less positive attitude	268	37.4
	More positive attitude	448	62.6
Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)	Low Resilience	199	27.8
	Normal Resilience	502	70.1
	High Resilience	15	2.1
Total		**716**	**100**

Table 3. Association of gender with MHLQ, attitudes, and Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Variable	Category	Female (n=479)	Male (n=237)	Total (n=716)	P-value
MHLQ	Below average literacy	2	2	4	0.851
	Above average literacy	477	235	712	
Factor 1	≤18 score	20	15	35	0.208
	≥19 score	459	222	681	
Factor 2	≤9 score	88	67	155	0.002
	≥10 score	391	170	561	

Factor 3	≤19 score	18	24	42	0.001
	≥20 score	461	213	674	
Factor 4	≤12 score	3	3	6	0.654
	≥13 score	476	234	710	
Attitude toward Seeking Professional Help	Less positive attitude	162	106	268	0.005
	More positive attitude	317	131	448	
Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)	Low Resilience	150	49	199	0.001
	Normal Resilience	325	177	502	
	High Resilience	4	11	15	

Table 4. Association of professional course with MHLQ scores

Variable	Course	Low Score	High Score	Total (n=716)	P-value
Overall MHLQ	1st Year MBBS	0	106 (100.0%)	106	**0.544**
	2nd Year MBBS	0	91 (100.0%)	91	
	3rd Year MBBS	2 (1.4%)	140 (98.6%)	142	
	4th Year MBBS	0	76 (100.0%)	76	
	Allied Sciences	1 (0.5%)	207 (99.5%)	208	
	Interns	1 (1.1%)	92 (98.9%)	93	
Factor 1*(≤18 vs ≥19)*	1st Year MBBS	6 (5.7%)	100 (94.3%)	106	**0.032**
	2nd Year MBBS	8 (8.8%)	83 (91.2%)	91	
	3rd Year MBBS	4 (2.8%)	138 (97.2%)	142	
	4th Year MBBS	0	76 (100.0%)	76	
	Allied Sciences	15 (7.2%)	193 (92.8%)	208	
	Interns	2 (2.2%)	91 (97.8%)	93	
Factor 2*(≤9 vs ≥10)*	1st Year MBBS	21 (19.8%)	85 (80.2%)	106	**0.024**
	2nd Year MBBS	10 (11.0%)	81 (89.0%)	91	
	3rd Year MBBS	25 (17.6%)	117 (82.4%)	142	
	4th Year MBBS	21 (27.6%)	55 (72.4%)	76	
	Allied Sciences	56 (26.9%)	152 (73.1%)	208	
	Interns	22 (23.7%)	71 (76.3%)	93	
Factor 3*(≤19 vs ≥20)*	1st Year MBBS	6 (5.7%)	100 (94.3%)	106	**0.568**
	2nd Year MBBS	8 (8.8%)	83 (91.2%)	91	
	3rd Year MBBS	9 (6.3%)	133 (93.7%)	142	
	4th Year MBBS	4 (5.3%)	72 (94.7%)	76	
	Allied Sciences	13 (6.3%)	195 (93.8%)	208	
	Interns	2 (2.2%)	91 (97.8%)	93	
Factor 4*(≤12 vs ≥13)*	1st Year MBBS	1 (0.9%)	105 (99.1%)	106	**0.96**
	2nd Year MBBS	0	91 (100.0%)	91	
	3rd Year MBBS	2 (1.4%)	140 (98.6%)	142	
	4th Year MBBS	0	76 (100.0%)	76	
	Allied Sciences	2 (1.0%)	206 (99.0%)	208	
	Interns	1 (1.1%)	92 (98.9%)	93	

Table 5. Association of professional course with attitudes toward seeking professional help

Courses	Attitude towards seeking professional help		Total (n=716)	P-value
	Less positive attitude	More positive attitude		
1st yr MBBS	39(36.79%)	67(63.20%)	106	**0.002**
2nd yr MBBS	44(48.35%)	47(51.64%)	91	
3rd yr MBBS	52(36.6%)	90(63.3%)	142	
4th yr MBBS	24(31.57%)	52(68.42%)	76	
Allied sciences	89(42.78%)	119(57.21%)	208	
Interns	20(21.5%)	73(78.5%)	93	
Total	268	448	716	

Table 6. Correlation among MHLQ, attitudes, and MHLQ domains

Variables Compared	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient (ρ)	P-value
MHLQ vs. Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help	0.019	0.603
Factor 2 vs. Factor 3	0.114	0.002
Factor 1 vs. Factor 3	0.191	<0.001

Table: 7. Association of resilience with study variables

Variables	Categories	Low n=199	Normal n=502	High n=15	Total (n=716)	P-value
Professional Course	1st Year MBBS	36	68	2	106	0.03
	2nd Year MBBS	30	59	2	91	
	3rd Year MBBS	28	112	2	142	
	4th Year MBBS	21	51	4	76	
	Allied Sciences	50	156	2	208	
	Interns	34	56	3	93	

Gender	Female	150	325	4	479	0.001
	Male	49	177	11	237	
Mental Health Literacy (MHLQ)	Below average literacy	1	3	1	5	0.019
	Above average literacy	198	499	14	711	
Factor 1	≤18 score	6	27	2	35	0.131
	≥19 score	193	475	13	681	
Factor 2	≤9 score	23	128	4	155	0.002
	≥10 score	176	374	11	561	
Factor 3	≤19 score	8	32	2	42	0.001
	≥20 score	191	470	13	674	
Factor 4	≤12 score	2	3	1	6	0.03
	≥13 score	197	499	14	710	

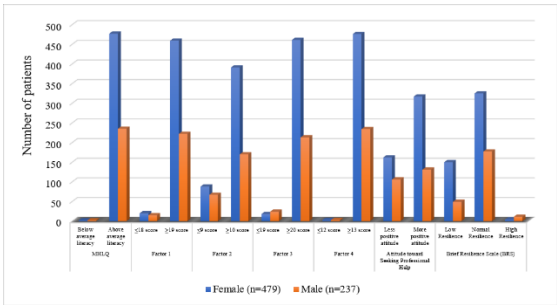

Figure: 1: Association of gender with MHLQ, attitudes, and Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

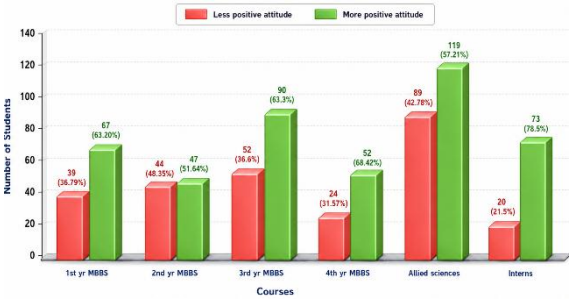

Figure: 2 Association of professional course with attitudes toward seeking professional help

A total of 716 undergraduate healthcare students participated in the study. Among them, 479 (66.9%) were females and 237 (33.1%) were males. Regarding professional course distribution, the largest proportion of participants belonged to Allied Sciences (208; 29.1%), followed by 3rd Year MBBS (142; 19.8%), 1st Year MBBS (106; 14.8%), Interns (93; 13.0%), 2nd Year MBBS (91; 12.7%), and 4th Year MBBS (76; 10.6%). Assessment of attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help revealed that 448 students (62.6%) demonstrated a more positive attitude, whereas 268 (37.4%) had a less positive attitude (Table 1).

The overall Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ) showed that 712 participants (99.4%) demonstrated above-average mental health literacy, while only 4 participants (0.6%) had below-average literacy. For the individual MHLQ domains, 681 students (95.1%) achieved scores of ≥19 in Factor 1, whereas 35 (4.9%) scored ≤18. In Factor 2, 561 participants (78.4%) scored ≥10, while 155 (21.6%) scored ≤9. Similarly, 674 students (94.1%) obtained scores of ≥20 in Factor 3, compared to 42 (5.9%) scoring ≤19. In Factor 4, 710 participants (99.2%) achieved scores of ≥13, whereas only 6 (0.8%) scored ≤12.

Regarding help-seeking behaviour, 448 students (62.6%) exhibited a more positive attitude toward seeking professional psychological help, while 268 (37.4%) demonstrated a less positive attitude. Assessment using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) indicated that 502 participants (70.1%) had normal resilience, 199 (27.8%) had low resilience, and only 15 (2.1%) exhibited high resilience (Table 2).

No statistically significant association was observed between gender and overall Mental Health Literacy (MHLQ) ($p = 0.851$). Among females, 477 (99.6%) demonstrated above-average mental health literacy compared with 235 (99.2%) males. Likewise, no significant gender differences were observed for Factor 1 ($p = 0.208$) or Factor 4 ($p = 0.654$).

However, Factor 2 showed a statistically significant association with gender ($p = 0.002$), with a higher proportion of males (67; 28.3%) scoring ≤9 compared to females (88; 18.4%). Similarly, Factor 3 demonstrated a significant association ($p = 0.001$), as 24 males (10.1%) scored ≤19, compared with 18 females (3.8%).

Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help also differed significantly according to gender ($p = 0.005$). A greater proportion of females (317; 66.2%) demonstrated a positive help-seeking attitude compared with males (131; 55.3%).

Resilience categories measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) were significantly associated with gender ($p = 0.001$). Low resilience was more common among females (150; 31.3%) than males (49; 20.7%), whereas high resilience was relatively more frequent among males (11; 4.6%) than females (4; 0.8%) (Table 3).

Overall Mental Health Literacy did not differ significantly across professional courses ($p = 0.544$). Nearly all students across every discipline demonstrated above-average mental health literacy, ranging from 98.6% to 100%.

A statistically significant association was observed between professional course and Factor 1 scores ($p = 0.032$). The highest proportion of low Factor 1 scores was observed among 2nd Year MBBS students (8.8%), followed by Allied Sciences students (7.2%), whereas no low scores were reported among 4th Year MBBS students.

Professional course was also significantly associated with Factor 2 scores ($p = 0.024$). The highest proportion of participants scoring ≤9 was observed

among 4th Year MBBS students (27.6%), followed by Allied Sciences (26.9%) and Interns (23.7%).

No statistically significant association was identified between professional course and Factor 3 ($p = 0.568$) or Factor 4 ($p = 0.960$) scores (Table 4).

Professional course demonstrated a statistically significant association with attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help ($p = 0.002$). The highest proportion of students with a positive help-seeking attitude was observed among Interns (78.5%), followed by 4th Year MBBS students (68.4%), 1st Year MBBS students (63.2%), 3rd Year MBBS students (63.3%), Allied Sciences students (57.2%), and 2nd Year MBBS students (51.6%). Conversely, less positive attitudes toward seeking professional help were most commonly observed among 2nd Year MBBS students (48.4%) (Table 5).

Spearman's rank correlation analysis demonstrated no significant correlation between overall Mental Health Literacy and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help ($\rho = 0.019$, $p = 0.603$). However, a weak but statistically significant positive correlation was observed between Factor 2 and Factor 3 ($\rho = 0.114$, $p = 0.002$). Likewise, Factor 1 and Factor 3 showed a weak positive correlation ($\rho = 0.191$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting a modest relationship among specific domains of mental health literacy (Table 6).

Resilience categories assessed using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) demonstrated significant associations with several study variables. Professional course was significantly associated with resilience ($p = 0.030$). Normal resilience was most frequently observed among 3rd Year MBBS students (112 of 142) and Allied Sciences students (156 of 208), whereas low resilience was comparatively more common among Allied Sciences students (50 participants).

Gender also showed a significant association with resilience ($p = 0.001$). Low resilience was more prevalent among females (150 of 479; 31.3%) than males (49 of 237; 20.7%), while high resilience was relatively more common among males (11 of 237; 4.6%) than females (4 of 479; 0.8%).

Overall Mental Health Literacy was significantly associated with resilience ($p = 0.019$), although the majority of participants demonstrated above-average mental health literacy regardless of resilience category. Among the individual MHLQ domains, Factor 2 ($p = 0.002$), Factor 3 ($p = 0.001$), and Factor 4 ($p = 0.030$) showed significant associations with resilience. Students with normal or high resilience generally demonstrated better performance across these domains than those with low resilience. In contrast, Factor 1 did not show a statistically significant association with resilience ($p = 0.131$) (Table 7).

DISCUSSION

The predominance of female participants in the present study reflects the current enrollment pattern observed in many healthcare institutions, where female students constitute a larger proportion of the student population. A generally positive attitude toward professional help-seeking observed in the majority of participants suggests increasing awareness and acceptance of mental health services among healthcare students. Similar demographic characteristics and help-seeking patterns have been reported by Lu et al. and Lumaksono et al., who found that female students represented the majority of participants and that attitudes toward seeking psychological support were generally favorable among healthcare students. [11,12]

The present study demonstrated a high level of mental health literacy, with nearly all participants achieving above-average MHLQ scores. Furthermore, most students exhibited positive help-seeking attitudes and normal resilience as assessed by the Brief Resilience Scale. These findings suggest that healthcare students possess adequate awareness of mental health issues together with satisfactory adaptive coping abilities. Similar observations have been reported among healthcare and university students in previous studies, where higher mental health literacy was associated with healthier attitudes toward psychological well-being and greater resilience. [12,13,17]

Although overall mental health literacy did not differ significantly between genders, significant differences were observed in selected literacy domains, help-seeking attitudes, and resilience. Female students were more likely to report positive help-seeking behaviour, whereas male students demonstrated relatively higher resilience. These findings may reflect gender-related differences in emotional expression, coping strategies, and willingness to seek professional psychological support. Comparable gender differences have also been reported among university and nursing students in previous investigations. [13,17]

Mental health literacy was consistently high across all healthcare disciplines, although selected MHLQ domains differed significantly according to professional course. These variations may be explained by differences in academic exposure, curriculum content, and clinical experience among students at different stages of training. Similar findings have been reported by Lu et al., who demonstrated that while overall mental health literacy remained high, individual literacy domains varied across healthcare disciplines. [14]

The significant association between professional course and help-seeking behaviour suggests that educational progression influences students' attitudes toward seeking psychological support. Interns demonstrated the most positive attitudes, possibly because greater clinical exposure improves

awareness of mental health problems and reduces stigma related to professional consultation. Similar trends have been described in university-based studies evaluating mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour among healthcare students. [15]

No significant correlation was observed between overall mental health literacy and help-seeking attitudes, indicating that better knowledge alone may not necessarily translate into greater willingness to seek professional psychological support. However, weak positive correlations among selected MHLQ domains suggest internal consistency within different aspects of mental health literacy. Comparable findings have been reported by Özer and Şahin Altun, who observed that psychological constructs such as literacy and resilience may be related but remain largely independent. [17]

Resilience demonstrated significant associations with professional course, gender, overall mental health literacy, and selected MHLQ domains. Students with better mental health literacy generally exhibited more favorable resilience levels, supporting the concept that mental health knowledge contributes to adaptive coping. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing positive relationships between mental health literacy, resilience, and psychological well-being among healthcare students. Furthermore, evidence suggests that strengthening mental health literacy through educational interventions may enhance resilience and reduce psychological distress. [17-20]

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrated that healthcare students possessed a high level of mental health literacy, with the vast majority exhibiting above-average literacy and positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. Most participants also demonstrated normal resilience as assessed using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). While overall mental health literacy remained consistently high across gender and professional courses, significant differences were observed in selected literacy domains, help-seeking behaviour, and resilience. Resilience was significantly associated with gender, professional course, overall mental health literacy, and selected MHLQ domains, highlighting the close relationship between psychological adaptability and mental health awareness. These findings emphasize that promoting mental health literacy alone may not be sufficient; equal attention should be given to strengthening resilience and encouraging timely help-seeking behaviour. Integrating structured mental health education, resilience-building interventions, and accessible psychological support services into healthcare curricula may improve students' emotional well-being, adaptive coping skills, and preparedness to meet the academic and professional challenges of future healthcare practice.

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