

PSYCHOSOMATIC WELLBEING OF MEDICAL STUDENTS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Introduction

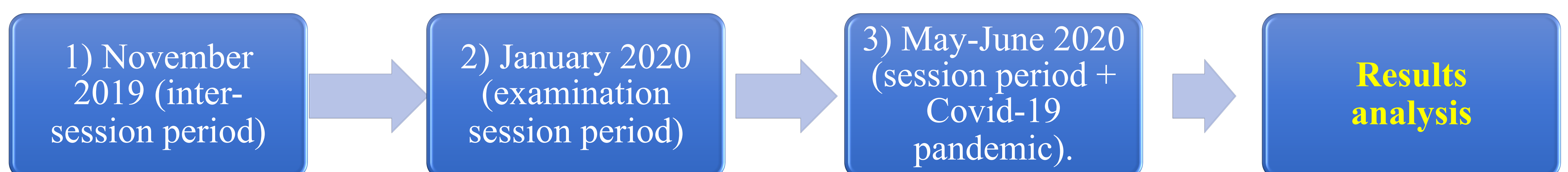
The recent COVID-19 pandemic bears a major challenge for medical students. Studying online, isolation, constant changes of the restrictions, disrupted traveling schedule and fear of disease may become serious stressors and influence psychological well-being of medical students.

Objective

To explore psychosomatic wellbeing of medical students during the initial period of Covid-19 pandemic.

Methods:

64 university students were actively recruited for participation in the research of influence role of examination stressor on psychosomatic functions in October 2019. After the start of Covid-19 pandemic, 53 students agreed to participate in the present research. Participants filled in online questionnaires in 3 phases: 1) November 2019 (inter-session period); 2) January 2020 (examination session period); 3) May-June 2020 (session period + Covid-19 pandemic). Holmes and Rahe stress scale for non-adults was used for assessment of the chronic stress in phase 1, other questionnaires were used 3 times: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) for assessment of acute stress, Kellner's Symptom Questionnaire for assessing symptomatology and emotional well-being, Brief COPE to assess cognitive and behavioral coping strategies. Medical Student Stressor Questionnaire (MSSQ) was used for assessment of specific stress and stressors in medical study.

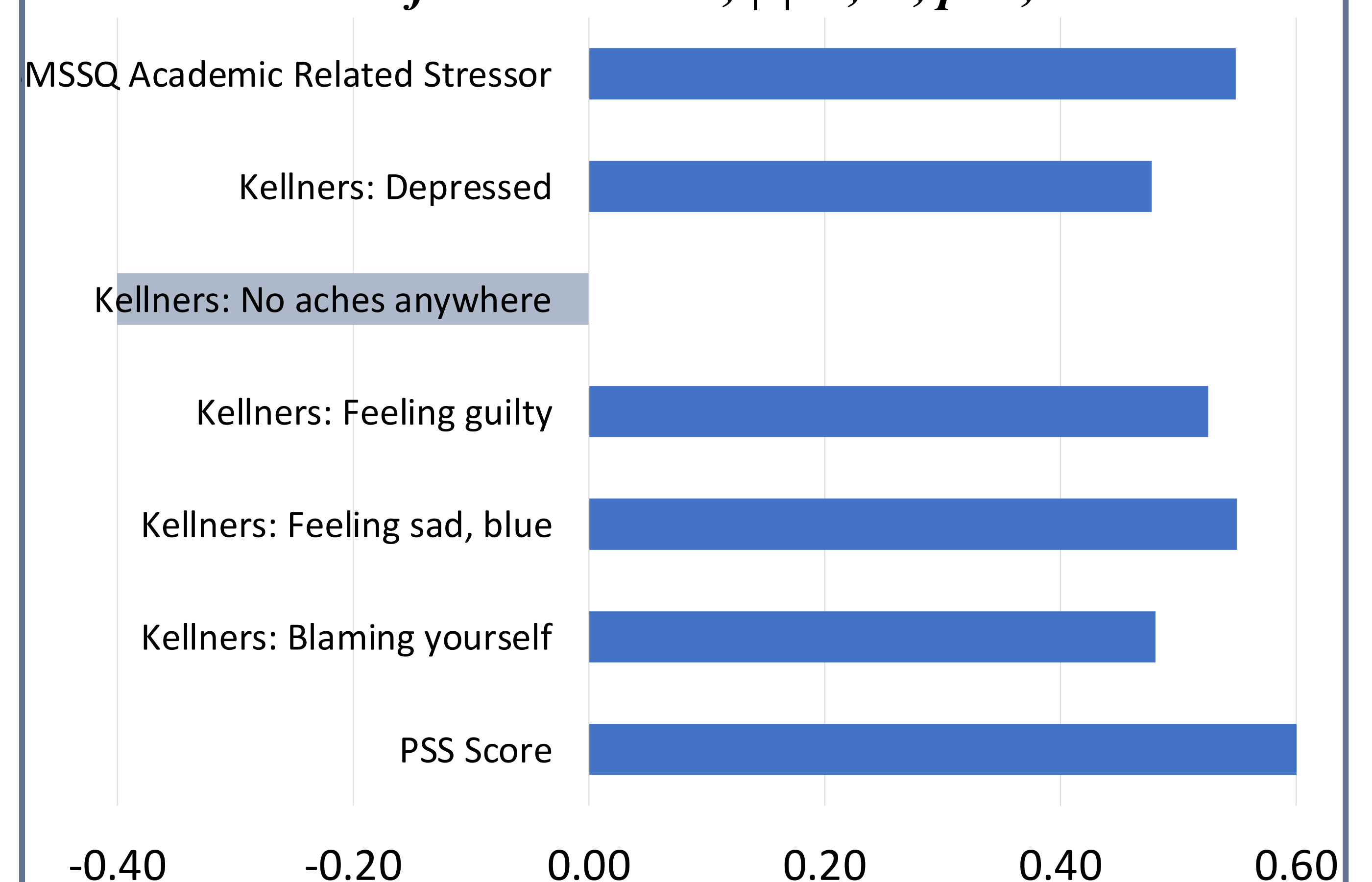


Scheme 1: Flow diagram of the research questionnaire sending

Results

We found that the examination period before COVID-19 pandemic and after the start of pandemic (session 2 vs 3) were characterized by different changes in medical students' psychological state and well-being. During examination period (phase 2) medical students have felt more frightened (0.39 ± 0.06 vs 0.23 ± 0.05 , $p < 0.01$), more panicky (0.33 ± 0.05 vs 0.17 ± 0.05 , $p < 0.01$), more anxious (6.25 ± 0.05 vs 5.21 ± 0.5 , $p < 0.01$) in comparison to phase 1. During the initial period of Covid-19 (phase 3) in comparison with phase 1, students felt unable to control the important things in their life (3.07 ± 0.16 vs 2.48 ± 0.16 , $p < 0.001$), similar changes were on other scales of PSS; the main coping mechanism used among the students during phase 3 was getting emotional support and advice from family (2.21 ± 0.14 vs 2.69 ± 0.14 , $p < 0.01$). Most of other parameters of psychosomatic wellbeing in phase 3 did not differ from phase 1.

Graph 1: Correlation of standard scales with stress from Covid-19, $|r| > 0.40$, $p < 0.02$



Conclusion

At the initial period of Covid-19 medical students did not demonstrate deterioration of major psychosomatic parameters. Students used emotional support from the families more extensively during initial period of Covid-19 pandemic in comparison with intersession period, which might help them to maintain their psychosomatic wellbeing. Subjective perception of stress from Covid-19 positively correlated with feeling sad, blue, guilty, depressed, Perceived Stress Scale score and academic stress.