

“I’m Training to Save Lives, but Debt is Consuming Mine.”

The Perceived Impact of Financial Constraints on Academic Performance Among Medical Students

Ms Lucy Bulmer, Dr Rebecca Holdsworth, Dr Alison Graham
Student number: 200854467 | Degree programme: MBBS | l.bulmer1@newcastle.ac.uk | Newcastle University



1. Background

In 2024, the British Medical Association (BMA) surveyed over 3,500 medical students in England and found that 43% had considered leaving their course due to financial pressures. ^[1]

By their final year, medical students are £3,674 worse off compared to their previous years. ^[2]

Few studies, however, have examined how those who remain in medicine manage the academic demands alongside such financial hardship.

2. Aims

- Assess if financial constraints affect academic performance among medical students in the clinical years at Newcastle University.
- Recommend support and policy changes to promote equity.

3. Methodology

Who participated:

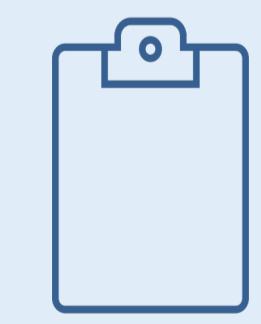
Newcastle University medical students in Years 3–5 (including intercalating students).

Years 1–2 were excluded. Nationally, 28.5% of clinical students get no travel reimbursement despite high placement costs. ^[3]

What was done:

An online questionnaire piloted with peers and distributed via email, social media, and Newcastle University student societies.

What was asked:



Multiple-choice questions: demographics, finances, working hours, and study habits.



Open questions on personal experiences.



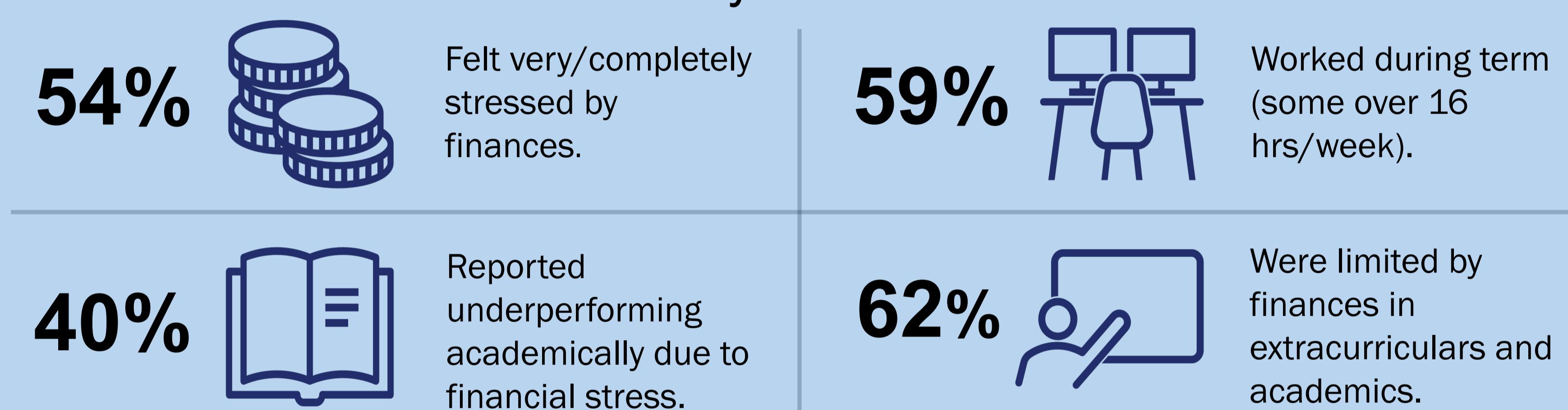
Rating scales (adapted from the IFDFW Financial Stress Scale.) ^[4]

4. Results

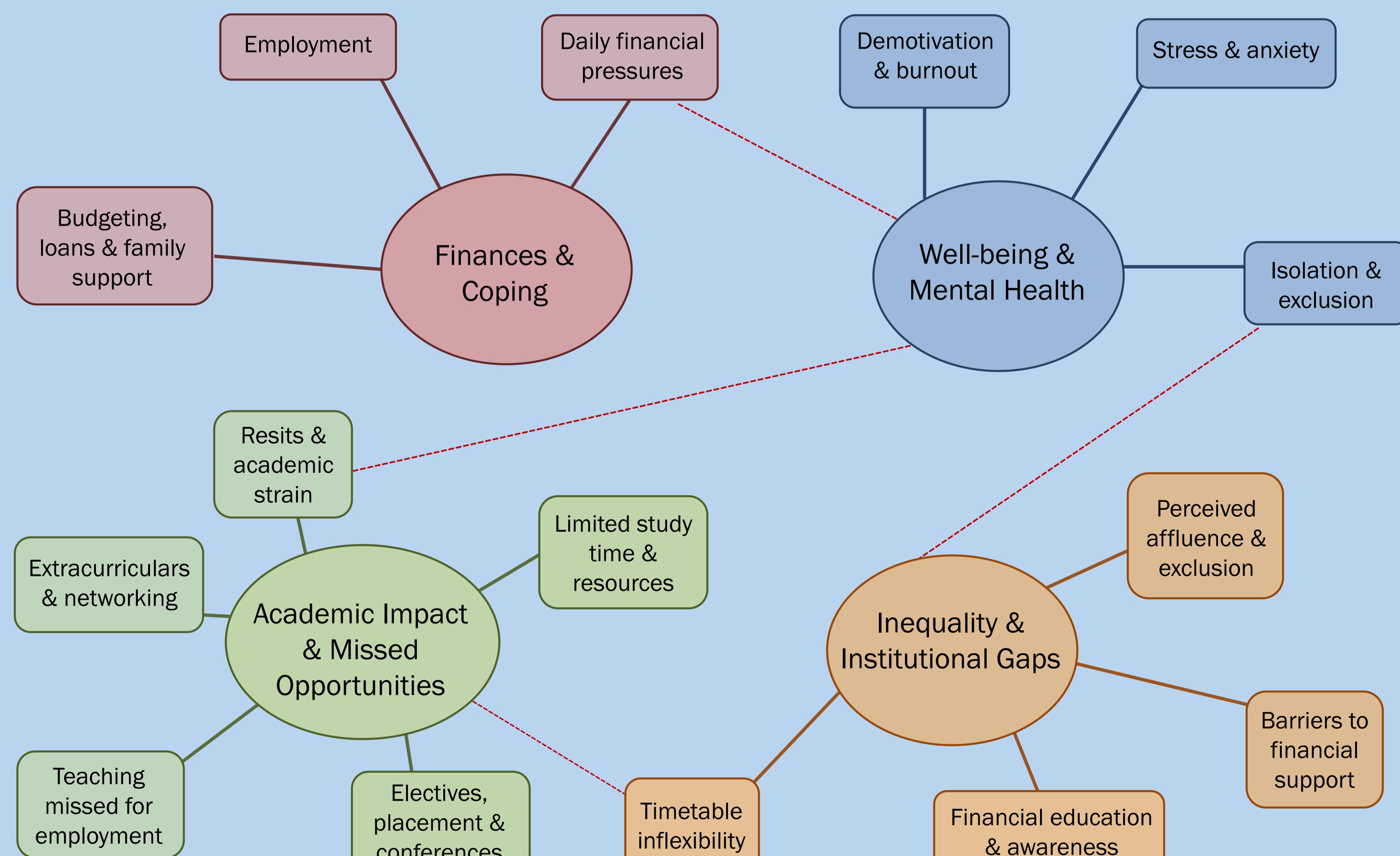
Participant Demographics

Variable	N (%)
Sample Size	N = 37
Widening Participation	32%
Parent in Higher Professional Role (at age 14)	46%
Year of Study	Year 3: 32% Year 4: 46% Year 5: 16% Intercalating: 5%
Ethnicity	White – British: 73% Black – African: 8% Asian – Any other Asian background: 5% Asian – Indian: 5% White – Other: 3% White – Irish: 3%

Key Results



Themes Identified



Financial stress has a significant impact on medical students' study time, well-being, and career opportunities.

5. Discussion

Financial stress affected all economic backgrounds – financial support, not socioeconomic status, predicted outcomes.

With support (family, bursaries, flexible work) → stability, study time, opportunities.
“I presented at a conference ... without family support, I’d have missed it.”

Without support → stress, long work hours, disrupted study.
“I sometimes went hungry ... I worked alongside uni and had to resit the year.”

Financial stress is an academic issue – support is key to equity.

6. Recommended Improvements

- Integrate financial well-being into the curriculum.
- Peer mentoring to share coping strategies and reduce isolation.
- Create flexible, accessible paid work opportunities – for example, HCA shifts or campus-based roles – that align with students' academic schedules.
- Encourage students and staff to support campaigns (e.g., BMA) that advocate for fairer funding and lessen financial pressures.

For More Information:



References

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- Hecht, K., McArthur, D., Savage, M., Friedman, S. (2021). *Elites in The UK: Pulling Away*. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Pulling-Away-1.pdf> (Accessed: 24/02/2025)
- Medical students across the UK are feeling the financial heat. (2022). Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/medical-students-across-the-uk-are-feeling-the-financial-heat> (Accessed: 24/02/2025)
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