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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DENTISTRY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: With the COVID-19 pandemic, all Mozambican school institutions were closed, resulting in student stress and anxiety, especially in for those in their final years of university. This paper reports the experience of a last year dental student. The abrupt pause of classes led to the dental school to introduce contingency plans for distance learning, but teachers and students were not prepared for this new modality. They did not have any previous training of the platforms, therefore leading to a consequent increase in anxiety and stress among students. Regarding the pandemic, most dental students felt sad (57%; 73/128), followed by fear (52%; 66/128), impotence (28% 36/128) and anxiety (27%; 35/128). Regarding the academic year and the feeling, the 4th year had more sadness (63.3%; 19/30), fear (43.3%; 13/30). The last year of the course who saw his graduation late, felt more sadness (68.1%; 15/22) fear (59.1%; 13/22) and impotence (50%; 11/22).

Keywords: COVID-19; Dentistry student; Impact.





O IMPACTO DO COVID-19 NOS ESTUDANTES DE MEDICINA DENTÁRIA

RESUMO: Com a pandemia do COVID-19, todas as instituições moçambicanas de ensino foram encerradas, resultando em stress e ansiedade dos alunos, especialmente para os que estavam no último ano da universidade. Este artigo relata a experiência de um estudante de medicina dentária do último ano. A pausa abrupta das aulas levou a Faculdade de Medicina Dentária a introduzir planos de contingência para o ensino a distância, mas os professores e os alunos não estavam preparados para esta nova modalidade. Eles não tiveram nenhum treinamento prévio das plataformas, levando a um conseqüente aumento de ansiedade e estresse entre os alunos. Em relação à pandemia, a maioria dos estudantes de medicina dentária sentiram-se triste (57%; 73/128), seguido de medo (52%; 66/128), impotência (28% 36/128) e ansiedade (27%; 35/128). Em relação ao ano lectivo e ao sentimento, o 4º ano teve mais tristeza (63,3%; 19/30) e medo (43,3%; 13/30). No último ano do curso que viu sua formatura atrasada, senti mais tristeza (68,1 %; 15/22) medo (59,1%; 13/22) e impotência (50%; 11/22).

Palavras-chave: COVID-19; Estudantes de Medicina Dentária; Impacto.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID 19 pandemic has greatly affected education in the world and in Mozambique in particular. After the presidential decree that ordered the closure of schools and universities, educational institutions saw the contingency of adapting to the new reality and entering the world of distance learning, using various platforms such as Microsoft teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, Telegram, Google Classroom, etc. Dental students, like other students, were forced overnight, to adapt to the new teaching approach. The pre-clinical and clinical practical classes were suspended and eventually replaced by online seminars. In some subjects, such as Medical Chemistry, English, etc., practical classes were carried out by solving exercises, however, the practices of the core disciplines of the course and the internship were totally interrupted leading to great concern and uncertainty in the students.

The assessment was cancelled and replaced by a written exam and two face-to-face





recurrences, when the confinement measures were relaxed. In the report, held on the 16th of July 2020, the President of the Republic postponed the opening of schools until all institutions were prepared to receive students without the risk of contamination.

Dentistry courses have a fundamental and mandatory practical component with models and patients and distance learning cannot fill this strand. The uncertainty that hangs over students who anxiously await the speeches of the head of state to know when they are going to open schools, especially finalist students who are already late to graduate.

DISCUSSION

The sudden interruption of classes led the dental school to introduce contingency plans for distance learning, but teachers and students were not prepared for this new modality. They did not have any previous training on the platforms, with a consequent increase in anxiety and stress among students. The institution, in an emergency measure, published manuals on the use of the teams platform and provided a support team. For example, regarding the pandemic, most dental students felt sad (57%; 73/128), followed by fear (52%; 66/128), impotence (28% 36/128) and anxiety (27%; 35/128). Regarding the academic year and the feeling, the 4th year had more sadness (63.3%; 19/30), fear (43.3%; 13/30). The last year of the course who saw his graduation late, felt more sadness (68.1%; 15/22) fear (59.1%; 13/22) and impotence (50%; 11/22) (Dadá et al., 2022).

Mozambique is a developing country where not all students have access to means of communication (laptop and smartphone) and the cost of internet is high. With the end of classes, many students traveled to their respective provinces, and in some of them the Internet connection is weak. The Mozambican government, in partnership with mobile internet operators, has created some exclusive internet promotions for students and teachers from schools and universities, however, many students were unable to benefit from this offer because their area has no internet connection.

Most of them do not have access to books in physical format because they are very





expensive and not all have devices to view e-books. The confinement brought serious economic problems to the families, because some heads of household were fired from their jobs and others lost their source of livelihood and consequently, their children faced many difficulties in order to join these platforms, eventually leading to some of them dropping out of the course.

To make up for the absence of practical classes, seminars were held with clinical cases, discussion session by students including and interpretation of radiological images and control text, sometimes by solving exercises and clinical problems but, the training of the dentist depends exclusively on practical training with patients. Practical classes in the dental medicine course are an important tool to prepare the student for the daily life of the profession, familiarization with the equipment and instruments used.

The European Dental Education Association (ADEE) in 2020, conducted an online questionnaire in 153 dental schools on the impact of the pandemic on teaching and found that in 69 schools the clinical internship was closed for undergraduate students and almost all the work was done by senior lectures and with some help from postgraduate doctors. In online classes, 90% of schools used a teaching software, 72% used live or recorded videos, 48% used links to other online materials, and 65% used virtual meetings(Quinn et al., 2020), but technical software is expensive and most students and teachers do not have the financial capacity to purchase it.

As in European dental schools, our dental medical school are led by confinement led to postpone formative and summative assessments or organize online exams (Quinn et al., 2020). Due to the difficulty of students accessing the internet, online assessments were not scheduled.

PERSPECTIVES

Since COVID-19 has no signs of slowing down and looks set to continue in the coming years, dental schools in low-income countries, where there is unequal access to the internet and technologies (laptop and android phones) should create some conditions to minimize this problem, namely to plan strategies to keep students motivated and create biosafety conditions in clinics to receive students in the post-slowdown period of confinement (Macedo et al., 2020),





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promote condition to use e-learning system, acquisition of training software for use of students, negotiate more affordable prices with publishers of study materials for students, namely atlases and textbooks, negotiate promotional packages with operators, mobile phone and computer resellers for more attractive packages with payment facilities and think about starting the evaluations online or in person, in small groups, keeping the social distance.

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