

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**WORKPLACE BASED CHALLENGES FOR POSTGRADUATE TRAINEE DOCTORS WORKING IN A PUBLIC SECTOR HOSPITAL****Sadia Zaheer, Waqas Khalid, Usman Shahid Butt\*, Sanober Rana\*\*, Anwar Khan\*\*\***

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**Background:** Workplace-based challenges are experiences that are seen as inappropriate by the person experiencing or observing the challenge. These challenges may arise every day in different situations or may be a one off incident that is disturbing and affects one's productivity. The study aims to identify and analyse the major hurdles that healthcare professionals encounter in their daily practice. **Methods:** A qualitative approach was employed to collect data from a diverse group of doctors at a public sector hospital in Sialkot. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in groups from different departments of the hospital in 2023. The consenting participants were interviewed regarding the challenges they face day to day working in government setup. Themes were extracted and data was tabulated to draw results. **Results:** We interviewed 21 consenting doctors from different departments mainly, Medicine, Surgery, Paediatrics and Gynaecology and identified six main themes which were high workload, security threats, financial Issues, resource constraints, time constraints, and inadequate work-life and personal-life balance. Amongst the 21 doctors, (47.62%) were females and (52.38%) were males. the challenges of high workload was stated by all (100%) of the participants, followed by security threats (91.5%), resource constraints (85.7%), financial issues (76.1%), time constraints (71%) and work and personal life imbalance (71.4%). **Conclusion:** Doctors reported significant levels of work-related stress, poor work-life balance, inadequate work capacity, and about one-third of them burned out, a sign of unfavourable working conditions.

**Keywords:** work based challenges, post graduate trainees, public sector hospital

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**INTRODUCTION**

The healthcare system of Pakistan witnessed a significant development in recent years but it continues to face numerous challenges. Among the key stakeholders in the healthcare system, doctors play a pivotal role in delivering quality medical care to patients.<sup>1</sup> The country's emphasis on producing more doctors has resulted in significant gains in the doctor-to-population ratio; nonetheless, issues of quality and capacity, as well as the effective and equitable deployment of health-related human resources, remain significant.<sup>1</sup> However, the workplace environment for doctors in hospitals across Pakistan presents various obstacles that may impact their performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being.<sup>2</sup> During their medical training, trainee doctors in Pakistan, like in many other developed and under developed countries, experience a variety of workplace-based problems. Trainee doctors are frequently required to work long and arduous hours, often surpassing the accepted limits for safe and successful medical practice. This can result in weariness, burnout, and a decrease in learning ability.<sup>3</sup> The patient load at hospitals and medical institutions can be burdensome, particularly in public hospitals with a high patient-to-doctor ratio.<sup>4</sup> Trainees may have difficulty balancing patient care, learning, and personal well-being. In Pakistan, trainee doctors

may have restricted access to current medical resources, textbooks, and research materials. This can make it difficult for them to keep up with medical advances.<sup>5</sup> Some medical institutions may lack enough infrastructure, equipment, and technology, which can impede good patient care and training.<sup>5</sup> Due to the high expense of education and training, trainee doctors sometimes suffer financial difficulties. Low stipends or incomes during training may not be sufficient to cover their costs.<sup>6</sup> Medical training can be rigorous, making it difficult for trainees to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This can lead to burnout and have a negative impact on their general well-being. Dealing with patients, especially in urgent or difficult situations, can be emotionally draining for trainee doctors. They may not have enough psychological assistance to deal with the stress and emotions involved. Some trainee doctors may not be exposed to a wide range of medical situations and procedures, limiting their exposure to various medical problems and treatments.<sup>7</sup> This study aims to identify and analyze the challenges that healthcare professionals encounter in their daily practice in our locality.

**METHODOLOGY**

It was a qualitative descriptive study where Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted of volunteer post graduate trainee doctors in groups. The study was

carried out at a local government sector teaching hospital. Ethical approval was taken from to carry out the interviews. The consenting participants from the major disciplines, i.e., Medicine, Surgery, Obs/Gyn, and Paediatrics who were currently working at the hospital were invited for focused group interviews at a calm and comfortable setting. The participants were post graduate trainees and were included in the study based on their availability and willingness to contribute to the research. In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of doctors from each department to obtain qualitative insights into their experiences. We interviewed them with open ended questions regarding the challenges they face while at work. The interviews aimed to explore the reasons behind the challenges and how they impacted the doctors' professional and personal lives. Their responses were recorded in writing and weren't voice recorded to assure them safety and anonymity. After the interviews, themes were extracted from the data. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring themes and patterns related to workplace challenges.

## RESULTS

We interviewed a total of 21 doctors in departmental groups, out of which 10 (47.62%) were females and 11 (52.38%) were males.

**Table-1: Basic details of participants**

Items	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Females	10	47.62
Males	11	52.38
<b>Departments of postgraduate trainees</b>		
Gynaecology and obstetrics	6	28.57
General surgery	4	19.05
General medicine	6	28.57
Paediatrics	5	23.81
<b>Working Experience after graduation</b>		
2 yrs	3	14.29
2.5 yrs	2	9.52
3 yrs	5	23.81
4 yrs	5	23.81
5 yrs and above	6	28.57
<b>Year of Training</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> year	9	42.86
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	8	38.09
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	3	14.29
4 <sup>th</sup> year	1	4.76
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	12	57.14
Unmarried	9	42.86

The interview responses revealed the following major themes:

a) High Workload: All the participants (21) 100% reported that they faced an excessive workload when one individual has far too much work to handle on his own, leading to increased stress and fatigue. One of the participants said, 'Sometimes I have to take anti-depressants and painkillers to ease my stress and body aches after long duty hours'.

b) Security threats: The majority of the participants (19) 90.47% felt insecurity in their working environment in the form of violence by attendants of patients especially if a patient passes away, theft and harassment by media persons. 'I left my bag at the reception counter of the Emergency ward to see a patient when I returned my phone and cash were not in the bag', a trainee doctor from the participants said. One other participant said, 'Attendants of patients start shouting and even fighting if something goes wrong'.

c) Financial Issues: Most of the participants (16) 76.19% were not satisfied with their pay scale as due to inflation they could hardly meet their needs, especially as some of them had big families to take care of. A doctor said, 'My wife tells me that her family married her to a doctor as they thought doctors earn good, but her concept changed after two years of marriage with me as I can hardly meet our needs'.

d) Resource Constraints: Majority of doctors (18) 85.71% cited inadequate space, medical equipment and shortages of essential supplies as significant challenges affecting patient care. A Participant said, 'We have to see even two patients on same bed due to lesser number of beds in medical emergency'. Another participant said, 'We don't have proper rest rooms sometimes we have to use public rest rooms'.

e) Time Constraints: One of the participants from Surgery Department said, "I don't get time for studying books or doing research". Many of the respondents (15) 71.42% expressed dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities for career advancement and professional development in the healthcare system. They could not get time for self-study. One participant said, 'We have to teach juniors, see patients, do ward rounds and report to seniors, it's difficult to manage all in limited time'.

f) Work-Life and personal-life Imbalance: Many doctors (15) 71.42% struggled with maintaining a healthy work-life balance due to long working hours and demanding schedules. Due to this they must compromise in their personal life too. A trainee doctor said, 'I can't see my two-year-old son for long periods'. 36 hours of calls at hospitals and part time jobs make very hard situations for some to manage their personal lives.

The interviews with 21 doctors further emphasized the impact of these challenges on their morale and job satisfaction. (Table-2).

**Table-2: Identified themes from interviews of participants.**

Identified challenges	Number	Percentage
High Workload	21	100
Security Threats	19	90.47
Financial Issues	16	76.19
Resource Constraints	18	85.71
Time Constraints	15	71.42
Work-Life and personal-life imbalance	15	71.42

## DISCUSSION

The identified challenges include high workload, security threats, financial issues, resource constraints, time constraints, and inadequate work-life balance. These findings resonate with existing literature and highlight the urgent need for systemic improvements and policy changes to enhance the working conditions for doctors in the country. The challenge of high workload is a consistent issue faced by doctors in many healthcare systems worldwide. The study's findings align with the research conducted by Azam *et al* which highlights the excessive workload as a major factor contributing to burnout and decreased job satisfaction among doctors in Pakistan's hospitals.<sup>8</sup> This issue also resonates with global research, as studies from different countries have demonstrated the negative impact of heavy workloads on physician well-being and patient care.<sup>9</sup> Security threats are another significant concern identified in this study. The fear of violence, theft, and harassment faced by doctors is consistent with the research by Shiraz Shaikh, which documented the increasing incidents of violence against healthcare professionals in Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> Similar findings have been reported in studies from other countries, indicating a global problem that can compromise the safety and well-being of medical practitioners.<sup>11</sup> Financial challenges were reported by a substantial number of participants in the study. The dissatisfaction with pay scales and financial struggles experienced by doctors' echoes findings from studies conducted in other countries. For instance, research by Friedberg MW *et al*, in 2014,<sup>12</sup> has shown that inadequate compensation and financial concerns contribute to stress and dissatisfaction among doctors. This highlights the importance of addressing financial well-being as a crucial aspect of healthcare workforce satisfaction and retention. Inadequate resources, including space, medical equipment, and essential supplies, are reported challenges that affect patient care. Similar findings are documented in studies conducted in low-resource settings globally, including Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>13</sup> Resource shortages can compromise the quality of care delivered by healthcare professionals and hinder their ability to provide optimal treatment and services. Time constraints and limited opportunities for career advancement were prevalent challenges in our study. Research by Abdulghani *et al*<sup>14</sup>, in Saudi Arabia also emphasized the challenges related to time management and professional development for healthcare professionals. Limited time for continuing education, research, and personal development can hinder doctors' ability to stay updated with medical advancements and provide high-quality care. The struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance is a universal challenge in the medical field. The study's findings align with research

conducted by Shanafelt *et al*<sup>15</sup>, which identified a high prevalence of burnout among medical students, residents, and practicing physicians in the United States. This issue emphasizes the importance of addressing work-life balance to prevent burnout and support the overall well-being of doctors.

**Limitations:** While this study offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by trainee doctors in Pakistan's healthcare system, there are limitations that need to be acknowledged. The study's focus on a single teaching hospital and its qualitative nature might limit the generalizability of findings. Future research could expand the scope to include a wider range of healthcare institutions and explore potential solutions to these challenges in greater detail.

By addressing these challenges, Pakistan can foster a more conducive and supportive environment for its healthcare professionals, ultimately leading to enhanced patient outcomes and a stronger healthcare system.

## CONCLUSION

Doctors reported significant levels of work-related stress, poor work-life balance, inadequate work capacity, and about one-third of them burned out, a sign of unfavourable working conditions. Still, the majority were really motivated to practice. Hospitals should start measuring these indices to evaluate their quality, and studies should concentrate on how well various organizational and individual therapies for occupational stress and burnout work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts to mitigate these challenges could include:  
**Improving Work Conditions:** Addressing issues such as workload and resource constraints through proper staffing and investment in infrastructure.  
**Enhancing Compensation:** Providing competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain skilled medical professionals.  
**Safety Measures:** Implementing security measures to protect healthcare workers from violence and harassment.  
**Support Programs:** Offering psychological support and counselling services to address stress and burnout.  
**Career Development:** Creating opportunities for continuous medical education and professional growth. By addressing these challenges, Pakistan can foster a more conducive and supportive environment for its healthcare professionals, ultimately leading to enhanced patient outcomes and a stronger healthcare system.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

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**SR:** Data analysis

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