

Stress Treatment for Medical Students: Essential or Dispensable?

A 2014 basic survey of psychosomatic symptoms in medical students at the University of Freiburg, Germany

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Summary

A high amount of medical students report diverse stress-related psychosomatic symptoms. In line with former research, our data analysis reveals a high prevalence of psychosomatic symptoms due to stress induced by studying and anxiety facing exams. As a consequence, we are currently developing an online platform to tackle these problems.

Theoretical Background

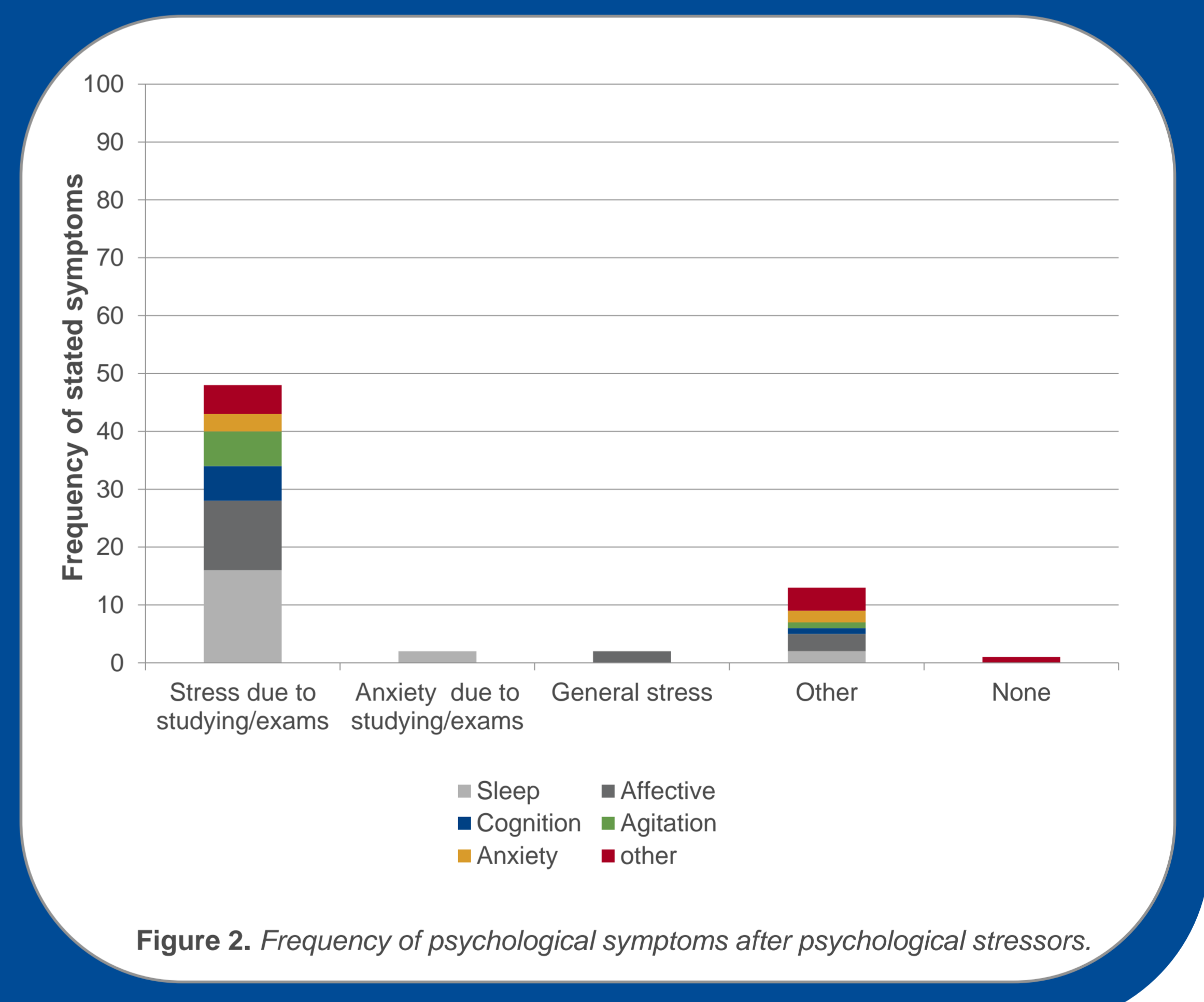
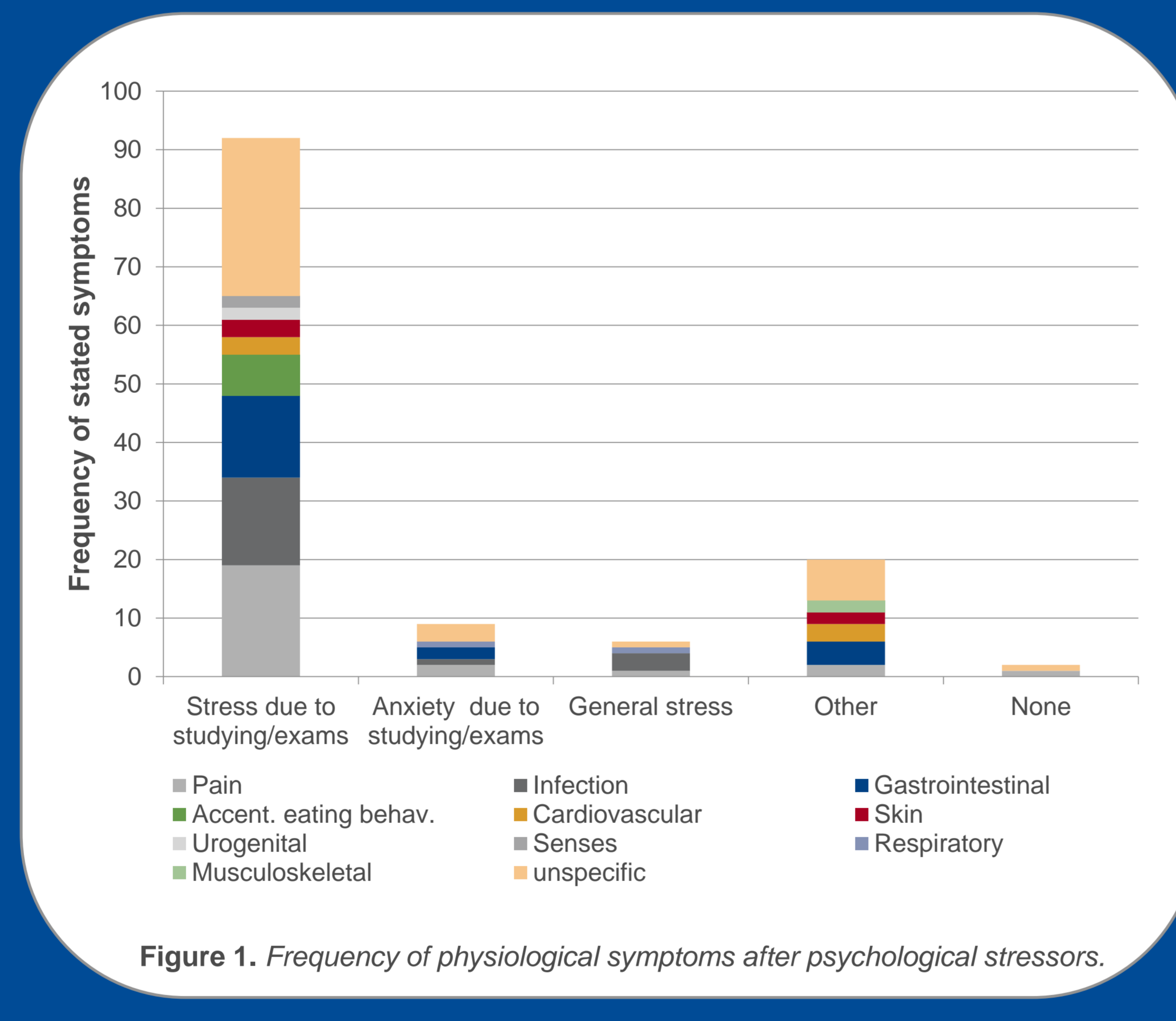
Psychological and physical stress during medical studies is well researched and documented. During preparation for exams, stress levels tend to rise in many students [4]. A large amount of research shows, amongst others, that psychosomatic symptoms are common in medical students [2,3]; they are reluctant to seek help [5,8]. In the long run, many students' identification with their professional identity decreases as they become more emotionally distanced in the course of their studies [8].

Method

To be admitted to the course, psychosomatics medical students in the first clinical year had to submit a pre-course assignment wherein they report their experiences with psychosomatic symptoms. In a qualitative research we analyzed these reports looking for students' self-reported symptoms and their origins.

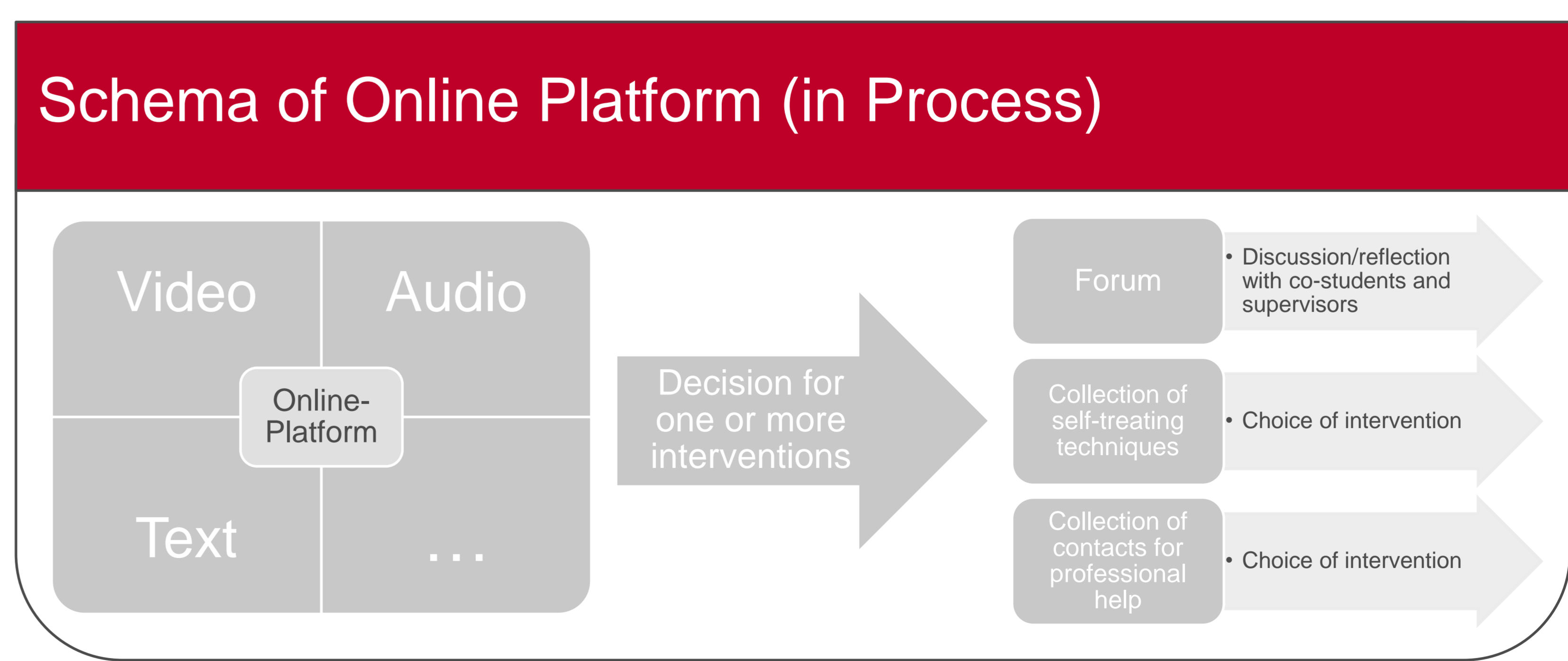
Results

Out of $N = 280$ ($f = 175$, $m = 105$) medical students, 269 (96%) cited psychological stressors as a reason for psychosomatic symptoms. 76 (27% of the original N) referred to themselves. Of these, 60 (79%) stated bio-psycho-social interrelations based on their own medical studies.



Conclusion and Perspective

We conclude that there is a high demand for psychological-based interventions such as stress-coping strategies for medical students. Many German medical universities implement mentoring programs to help students develop professionalism and provide counseling for individual problems [6]. Because of high competition in classes, students fear a potential damage of reputation when becoming associated with mental problems [2] and are more likely to seek advice informally from friends and/or family [1]. When anonymity was guaranteed, medical students showed a high acceptance of an online forum to discuss mental problems [7]. With our online platform we intend to provide anonymous opportunities for shared reflection and self-care/coping strategies to reduce student distress and prevent resignation and burn-out tendencies.



References

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