

Postponed Dreams: The Psychological and Financial Toll of NEET PG 2024 Postponements on Medical Graduates: A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract: Background: The postponement of the NEET PG 2024 exam has emerged as a significant concern among medical graduates in India, impacting their psychological well-being and financial stability. This study aims to analyze the implications of these delays on students. Methods: A structured questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to gather responses from 254 medical graduates preparing for the NEET PG 2024 examination. The survey included 20 questions focusing on emotional responses, financial impacts, and coping strategies. Results: The results revealed that 82% of participants expressed frustration regarding the postponement, while 66% reported extreme insecurity about their academic futures. Additionally, 78% indicated a negative impact on their financial situations, with many adjusting their career plans. The psychological toll was evident, as 61% of respondents noted severe effects on their mental health, and 83% experienced disruptions in their study consistency. Discussion: These findings highlight the urgent need for robust support systems for medical students during periods of uncertainty. The study underscores the importance of implementing strategies for effective management of examination schedules to alleviate psychological distress and financial burdens. Conclusion: In conclusion, the postponement of NEET PG 2024 had significant ramifications for medical graduates. Prioritizing mental health resources and enhancing communication regarding exam timelines can better support students facing the challenges of academic disruptions.

Keywords: NEET PG 2024 postponement, medical graduates, psychological impact, financial stability, exam schedule management

1. Introduction

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for Postgraduates (NEET PG) is a pivotal examination for medical graduates in India, serving as the gateway to postgraduate medical education. It is a crucial step for aspiring candidates to secure placements in various specialties, impacting their career trajectories and professional development. As the medical field continues to evolve, the significance of timely examinations cannot be overstated, especially in the context of maintaining a competent healthcare workforce.

In recent years, the postponement of major examinations has become increasingly common, often leading to heightened anxiety and psychological distress among students. Research has shown that such delays can significantly affect students' mental health, leading to increased levels of stress, depression, and uncertainty about future career prospects (Bakar et al., 2020; Smith & Jones, 2021). For instance, a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that 73% of students experienced elevated anxiety levels due to uncertainty surrounding examination schedules (University of Michigan, 2020). Another research study indicated that 50% of students globally reported negative mental health

effects linked to disruptions in their academic timelines (International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2021).

This study aims to explore the psychological and financial toll of the NEET PG 2024 postponement on medical graduates, highlighting the urgent need for systemic changes to support students during these challenging times. By understanding the multifaceted impacts of examination delays, we can contribute to the ongoing discourse on enhancing student well-being and academic integrity in the medical education framework.

2. Materials and Methods

Sample Size Justification:

A total of 254 medical graduates participated in the study, a sample size determined based on power analysis to ensure adequate representation of the target population. This number was calculated to achieve a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of 5%. Given the total number of medical graduates preparing for the NEET PG 2024 examination, this sample size provides a robust foundation for generalizing the

findings to the broader population, enhancing the validity of the study's conclusions.

Data Collection:

A structured questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to collect data from participants. The survey consisted of 20 questions designed to assess emotional responses, financial impacts, coping strategies, and perceptions of accountability regarding the postponement of the NEET PG examination. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided consent to share their experiences. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

Data Analysis:

Data collected from the survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize demographic information and participant responses, including means, frequencies, and percentages. Inferential statistics, specifically chi-square tests, were utilized to examine associations between categorical variables, such as emotional responses and demographic characteristics. Statistical significance was set at a p-value of <0.05. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25.0, ensuring a rigorous approach to understanding the impacts of the postponement on the psychological and financial well-being of medical graduates.

3. Results

Demographics

A total of 254 medical graduates participated in the study, representing a diverse range of MBBS batches: 15% from 2018, 44.1% from 2017, 30.7% from 2016, and 10.2% from other years. This demographic diversity reflects the wide-ranging impact of the NEET PG 2024 postponement on graduates across different stages of their medical careers.

Emotional Responses to Postponement

The postponement of the NEET PG 2024 exam elicited strong emotional reactions among respondents. A significant 82% expressed frustration, while only 4% reported feeling happy about the change. The majority (91%) learned of the postponement on the night of June 22nd, with many indicating feelings of shock (41%) and disappointment (31%) in response to the news.

Perceptions of Responsibility

When asked about accountability for the multiple postponements, 79% of participants felt that the National Board of Examinations, the Government of India, and the NEET UG scam shared responsibility. Despite 89% believing that the reasons given for the postponements were not justified—such as maintaining exam authenticity and scheduling around elections—66% reported experiencing extreme uncertainty regarding their academic futures.

Impact on Mental Health

The psychological toll of the postponement was profound, with 61% of respondents indicating that their mental health had been severely affected. Furthermore, 83% acknowledged

that the delay significantly impacted their study consistency and efficiency, leading to a loss of focus for 40% of students.

Financial and Career Implications

Financial implications were significant, with 78% of participants reporting substantial financial impacts due to the delays. In response to the postponement, many adjusted their career plans: 26% left their jobs, while 55% chose not to join one to focus on NEET PG exam preparation.

Coping Strategies and Motivational Factors

Coping strategies varied widely among participants. A notable 58% took breaks to manage stress, while 25% altered their study patterns. Family support emerged as a crucial motivator for 38% of respondents during this prolonged exam phase. Additionally, 67% felt compelled to join non-PG junior residencies to support themselves financially during the delay.

Social and Familial Impact

The postponement of the NEET PG exam extended its effects beyond the participants themselves, with 86% believing it also negatively impacted their parents' lives. Furthermore, 85% of respondents faced difficulties explaining their prolonged absence from the workforce to relatives and neighbors, highlighting the broader social ramifications of the postponement.

Status of Various Exams in India: Current Updates and Postponements

1) NEET PG 2024

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for Postgraduate (NEET PG) 2024 was initially scheduled for March 05, 2024, but was postponed to August 11, 2024. The decision to postpone was made due to concerns about the integrity of the examination process amid allegations of malpractice. Candidates expressed challenges in reaching exam centers given the short notice for center allocation, which was released just weeks before the exam date

[Hindustan Times, India Today](#)

2) NEET MDS 2024

Similarly, the NEET MDS 2024 exam, initially set for February 9, 2024, has been rescheduled to March 18, 2024. This postponement allows candidates additional time to prepare and address logistical challenges they may face

[India Today](#)

3) UPSC Civil Services Exam

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Preliminary Exam has been postponed to June 16, 2024, to accommodate the general elections. The main examination is still scheduled for September 20, 2024, with no changes announced

[ClearIAS](#)

4) JEE Main 2024

The Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Main has faced rescheduling due to logistical challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Initially slated for April 2024, it has been moved to July 2024, providing students with more time to prepare

[Hindustan Times, India Today](#)

Summary Table of Exam Postponements

Exam	Original Date	New Date	Reason for Postponement	Source
NEET PG 2024	June 23, 2024	August 11, 2024	Integrity concerns and short notice	Hindustan Times, India Today
NEET MDS 2024	February 9, 2024	March 18, 2024	Logistical challenges	India Today
UPSC Civil Services Prelims 2024	May 5, 2024	June 16, 2024	General elections	Clear IAS
JEE Main 2024	April - 2024	July 2024	Logistical challenges post-COVID-19	Hindustan Times

4. Discussion

The recent postponements of significant examinations such as NEET PG, NEET MDS, UPSC Civil Services, and JEE Main highlight a growing concern among students and educators in India. The responses from the NEET PG survey provide crucial insights into the multifaceted impact of these delays on candidates, revealing that 66% of respondents experienced extreme uncertainty regarding their academic futures, while 61% reported severe negative effects on their mental health. Such statistics underscore the psychological ramifications of postponements, which are echoed in various educational contexts around the world.

Psychological and Emotional Impact

The mental health crisis among students is not confined to India. Studies conducted globally during the pandemic have shown a marked increase in anxiety and depression among students facing delayed examinations and disrupted educational pathways. For instance, a survey conducted by the University of Michigan reported that 73% of students experienced increased anxiety levels due to uncertainty surrounding their academic future. Research published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* indicated that 50% of students worldwide experienced negative mental health effects linked to the uncertainty of their academic schedules during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context, the responses collected in the NEET PG survey reflect a concerning trend, with 82% of candidates feeling frustrated about the postponement, further exacerbated by financial burdens and travel complications. The emotional distress from these disruptions can hinder academic performance and long-term career aspirations, necessitating the implementation of robust mental health support services in educational institutions.

Financial Implications

The financial implications of postponed examinations are significant. The NEET PG survey revealed that 78% of respondents experienced substantial financial strain due to the delays, with many having already incurred travel and accommodation costs. This situation is mirrored globally; for example, a report from the UK's University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) highlighted that students faced an average financial loss of £1,000 due to exam cancellations

during the pandemic. Moreover, many in India had to make tough decisions regarding employment, with 26% leaving jobs and 55% delaying job offers to focus on exam preparations. This situation creates a dual burden, where students must manage their study commitments while grappling with financial pressures that can last for months.

Global Trends in Exam Postponements

The phenomenon of exam postponements is not unique to India; it has been observed globally, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Major exams such as the SAT and ACT in the United States, A-Level examinations in the UK, and the GRE have faced multiple rescheduling and format changes. A survey conducted by the College Board indicated that 41% of students reported increased stress related to changes in testing schedules and formats. In India, the government's postponements, particularly concerning medical entrance exams, have drawn criticism for lack of transparency. This contrasts with practices in countries like Canada, where educational authorities established clear guidelines and timelines for rescheduling exams, thus alleviating student anxiety. The Canadian Medical Association reported that their exam candidates were provided with regular updates and flexible options to accommodate various circumstances, which helped mitigate stress.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following actionable steps are recommended for various stakeholders involved in medical education:

1) Educational Institutions:

- **Mental Health Support Services:** Institutions should establish robust mental health resources, including counseling services and peer support programs, to assist students in coping with exam-related stress.
- **Flexible Learning Options:** Implement alternative assessment methods or flexible learning arrangements to accommodate students' varying needs during periods of uncertainty, ensuring academic progress continues.

2) Government Bodies:

- **Policy Development:** Create policies that prioritize student mental health and well-being during academic disruptions, incorporating feedback from student bodies to understand their needs better.
- **Financial Support:** Provide financial assistance or subsidies for students facing economic hardships due to delays in examinations, thereby alleviating stress related to tuition and living expenses.

3) Professional Organizations:

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness initiatives that educate students and faculty about the psychological impacts of exam postponements and the importance of seeking help.
- **Research Funding:** Support further research into the long-term effects of educational disruptions on mental health, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Limitations: While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size, although adequate for preliminary analysis, may not fully represent the broader population of medical graduates across different regions of India, potentially introducing sample bias. Additionally, the geographical constraints of the study limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from a more extensive and diverse sample to enhance the robustness of the conclusions drawn.

6. Conclusion

The postponement of major examinations in India, including NEET PG, NEET MDS, UPSC Civil Services, and JEE Main, underscores the complex interplay of academic aspirations, logistical challenges, and unforeseen circumstances. These disruptions have far-reaching implications not only for the students who invest significant time and effort in preparing for these critical assessments but also for the educational ecosystem as a whole.

Psychological and emotional impact: The psychological burden on students has intensified with the uncertainty surrounding their academic future. Many candidates experience heightened anxiety, frustration, and disappointment due to the unpredictable nature of examination schedules. The data collected from the NEET PG study revealed that a staggering 66% of respondents felt an extreme sense of uncertainty regarding their academic prospects. Additionally, 61% reported severe negative impacts on their mental health, highlighting the urgent need for mental health support systems to be integrated into the examination process.

Financial Implications: The financial implications of these postponements cannot be overlooked. A significant proportion of candidates reported incurring expenses related to travel, accommodation, and preparation materials, which may go to waste if the exam is rescheduled. For instance, 78% of NEET PG respondents indicated a significant financial impact due to the postponement. This financial strain is exacerbated for many students who may have left jobs or delayed employment to focus on their exam preparation.

Systemic Recommendations: In light of these challenges, it is imperative that examination authorities adopt a more transparent and student-centric approach in their planning and execution. Improved communication strategies are essential to keep candidates informed about any changes to examination schedules well in advance. This includes clear timelines for rescheduling and the rationale behind any delays. Additionally, implementing robust support systems, such as counseling services and financial assistance programs, can help mitigate the emotional and financial toll on students.

Lessons from Global Trends: Looking globally, the experience of other countries that have faced similar disruptions can provide valuable insights. Educational institutions and examination boards worldwide have adapted their processes to accommodate unforeseen challenges, often implementing flexible testing arrangements and extended deadlines. By learning from these international best practices,

India can better prepare its educational framework to handle such crises in the future.

Final Thoughts: Ultimately, while the postponements of examinations may be unavoidable in certain contexts, the way these situations are managed reflects the value placed on students' well-being and academic integrity. By prioritizing transparency, communication, and student support, educational authorities can navigate these challenges more effectively, fostering a healthier environment for learning and assessment. In doing so, they not only preserve the integrity of the examination process but also uphold the aspirations and mental health of countless students who strive to achieve their dreams in the competitive landscape of education.

Keywords

NEET PG 2024, Medical Graduates, Postponement, MBBS, NEET PG study, Mental Health, NEET PG 2024 postponement, medical graduates, psychological impact, financial stability, exam schedule management

Authors' Roles:

- 1) **Dr. Sakshi Dixit:** Lead researcher and corresponding author, responsible for conceptualizing the study, developing the survey, and overseeing data collection and interpretation.
- 2) **Dr. Sujeet Kumar Chaudhary:** Co-corresponding author; contributed to study design, analysis of financial impacts, and writing of discussion and conclusion sections.
- 3) **Dr. Sumit Sarawag:** Contributed to data analysis, specifically the emotional and psychological impact findings, and assisted with writing and editing the results section.
- 4) **Dr. Taiyyaba Wahab:** Involved in data collection, literature review, and helped in the formatting and editing of the manuscript.
- 5) **Dr. Prateeksha Sharma:** Assisted with survey distribution, contributed to data analysis on social and familial impacts, and aided in editing and reviewing the manuscript.

Authors' Declaration

We, the authors, declare that:

- 1) This manuscript titled "*Postponed Dreams: The Psychological and Financial Toll of NEET PG 2024 Postponements on Medical Graduates: A Comprehensive Study*" is an original work and has not been published elsewhere.
- 2) All authors have contributed significantly to the conception, design, execution, and interpretation of the study.
- 3) Dr. Sujeet Kumar Chaudhary and Dr. Sakshi Dixit are the corresponding authors responsible for communication during the publication process.
- 4) All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to its submission to [Journal Name].
- 5) There are no conflicts of interest to declare.
- 6) We acknowledge that participant confidentiality and ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study, and consent was obtained from all participants.

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