

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF PSYCHIATRIC PLACEMENT AND ABSENTEEISM

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## A Qualitative Study

### 01. Introduction

Psychiatry placements are central to preparing future doctors for mental health care, yet student absenteeism and disengagement remain a concern. Understanding students' lived experiences may identify modifiable factors to improve placement quality and engagement.



### 04. Methodology

#### Design:

Qualitative study using semi-structured focus groups with medical students undertaking psychiatry placements.

#### Data Collection:

Seven focus groups were moderated by a Teaching Fellow. Discussions explored placement experiences, perceptions of psychiatry, and reasons for attendance or absenteeism. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, yielding six usable transcripts.



#### Analysis:

Data were analysed using thematic analysis and managed using Taguette software.

#### Reflexivity and Bracketing:

The facilitator recognised a positive bias towards students' perspectives. Bracketing was used by explicitly acknowledging this positionality and consciously setting aside assumptions during data collection and analysis.

### 06. Conclusion

Engagement and absenteeism during psychiatry placements are influenced by stigma, teaching quality, and placement structure. Addressing these factors may improve attendance, student experience, and preparedness for future clinical practice.



### 05. Results and Analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Analysis
Stigma and Misconceptions	1- Fear of Association with Psychiatry 2- Negative Societal Attitudes	Students described persistent stigma towards psychiatry, including perceptions that the specialty is less scientific, less prestigious, or emotionally challenging. Limited prior exposure contributed to misconceptions about the role of psychiatrists, which negatively influenced motivation to attend placements and engage fully with learning opportunities.
Teaching and Learning Environment	1- Lack of Structure 2- Passive Learning	The quality of the teaching environment was a major determinant of engagement. Students valued supportive, approachable supervisors, clear learning objectives, and opportunities for active participation. Enthusiastic educators who contextualised psychiatry within broader medical practice were perceived as particularly influential in shaping positive placement experiences.
Absenteeism Drivers	1- Perceived Low Stakes 2- Lack of Accountability	Absenteeism was commonly attributed to a perceived lack of relevance to future career plans, inconsistent teaching experiences, and competing academic pressures. Students reported that unstructured days, limited clinical involvement, and passive observation reduced the perceived value of attending placement sessions.
Engagement Factors	1- Enthusiastic Staff 2- Interactive Sessions	Engagement was enhanced by structured placements, meaningful clinical exposure, and clear expectations. Opportunities to interact with patients, receive feedback, and understand the practical application of psychiatric knowledge increased attendance, enjoyment, and confidence. Positive role modelling by clinicians was highlighted as a key motivator.

### 02. Aims

To explore medical students' perceptions of psychiatry placements, focusing on engagement and absenteeism.

### 03. Hypothesis

Stigma, teaching environment, and placement structure significantly influence attendance, enjoyment, and engagement.

- Ethical approval obtained (Newcastle University, Application: 2524/30425).
- Research Management Group, run by the medical school, approval has been granted.

### Declaration of Interest:

The author has not conflict of interest to declare.

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None.