

# Prior Experiences and Mentoring Needs Self-Assessment of First MBBS Students: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Mentorship is critical in shaping the professional and personal development of MBBS students. However, there is limited evidence about the prior mentoring experiences and specific mentoring needs among first-year MBBS students in India. The present study was initiated to assess the prior experiences and mentoring needs of first-year MBBS students using a cross-sectional mixed-method approach.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 203 first-year MBBS students at a private teaching institute of Telangana utilising a structured and pilot-tested questionnaire. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis.

**Results:** Nearly all students reported previous exposure to at least one formal 188 (93%) or informal 182 (90%) mentor, though 15(7%) and 21(10%) had never had a formal and informal mentor respectively. The majority expressed a need for guidance in exam preparation [171(84%)], career development [170 (84%)], and communication skills [158(78%)]. Students valued mentors who provided a safe space, constructive feedback, and support for both academic and personal development. Thematic analysis highlighted kindness, approachability, patience, and individualised guidance as key attributes of an ideal mentor.

**Conclusion:** First-year MBBS students have diverse mentoring needs extending beyond academic support to personal and career guidance. Institutions should develop mentorship programs that address these multifaceted needs.

**Keywords:** mentor-mentee program, coaching, needs assessment

## INTRODUCTION

A robust mentorship program is often considered the cornerstone of professional development, particularly within demanding fields like medicine, where the curriculum is vast and challenging. Mentoring is commonly defined as a professional

relationship in which a more experienced person (e.g., a teacher) helps another (e.g., a student) develop skills and knowledge that enhances the less experienced person's knowledge and professional growth.<sup>1</sup>

The mentorship program is mutually beneficial to both the mentors and the

mentees. Mentors experience the satisfaction of nurturing and aiding the professional growth of mentees and may even be recognised and rewarded for their successful mentorship. Mentees benefit by feeling supported during their professional development and when facing professional problems. Therefore, a well-planned mentorship program is essential for fostering an individual's purpose and identity, creating a supportive environment for their growth within the medical community.

The recent NMC guidelines state that a formal mentor-mentee program should be implemented judiciously in medical institutions, with a ratio of one mentor to three mentees. The institution assigns a mentor to its mentees during the foundation course itself, from Phase 1. They stay connected with him throughout their MBBS course, i.e., until he completes their internship.<sup>2</sup> This type of formal mentorship program can often lead to a forced fit between the mentor and the mentee, making the program less effective. Often, these relationships wither from neglect because they lack a foundation of shared experiences or common interests.<sup>3</sup>

Allison Rossett (1987), professor emeritus at San Diego State University, defines needs assessment as “The systematic study of a problem or innovation, incorporating data and opinions from varied sources, to make effective decisions or recommendations about what should happen next.”<sup>4</sup> Needs assessment is the starting point of good program evaluation. It allows us to determine the existing knowledge base, future needs and priority areas that should be addressed. In the current context, assessing the needs of the mentees and clarifying their expectations of the relationship will help us define a more meaningful purpose for the mentorship program and plan a more comprehensive and beneficial program within the institute. The current study was therefore initiated with the following objectives: to assess prior experiences of mentoring among the first

MBBS Students and to evaluate the mentoring needs assessment of first-year MBBS students.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

A cross-sectional survey was carried out among the 250 first MBBS students of the 2023 batch in a tertiary care teaching hospital. The study was scheduled for a 2-hour session in the month of October 2023. On the day of the study, five students were absent. The 245 students who were present in the class were invited to participate. Initially, an introductory session of 30 minutes was taken to ensure familiarity with key terms related to mentorship (e.g., 'mentor,' 'mentee,' 'formal mentorship,' 'informal mentorship'). Following the session, the study's purpose and procedure were explained, and written consent to participate was taken. Hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to all 245 consented participants, and a sufficient time of 45 minutes was given to complete the questionnaire. The study questionnaire contained a total of 18 questions divided into three sections: 4 questions collecting their demographic data (Section A), 8 questions assessing their prior mentoring experiences, including the formal (Section B1) and informal mentorship (Section B2), and the remaining 6 questions assessing their mentoring needs (Section C). The questions were either multiple-choice questions with single or multiple answer choices (Section A and B) or questions requiring short descriptive answers (Section C). Questionnaires from the available literature were adapted,<sup>5,6</sup> and modified to suit the current study purpose and study population. The study questionnaire was pre-validated through expert review by five members of the medical education department. The content validity index of the questionnaire was 0.83. Data from the completed questionnaires were entered into Excel sheets and analyzed using Jamovi software version 2.3.28. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages for categorical variables

and means and standard deviations for continuous variables, were used to analyse the quantitative data, while an inductive thematic analysis, following the principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006),<sup>7</sup> was conducted manually for the qualitative data to identify recurring themes and patterns. The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the institute (Certificate No. RC.No. IEC/RVMIM&RC/2023/12/02).

## RESULT

Out of 245 students who participated in the study, questionnaires of 32 were incomplete. Excluding them, data from 203 students who completed the questionnaire were analysed. The results are presented below in four sections: A. Demographic data of the participants, B1. Prior formal mentoring experiences of the participants, B2. Prior informal mentoring experiences of the participants, and C. Mentee Needs Self-Assessment.

### A. Demographic data of the study participants

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the study participants.

**Table 1. Demographic data of study participants (N = 203) in n (%)**

AGE IN YEARS	
17	31(15.3)
18	68(33.5)
19	68(33.5)
20	29(14.3)
21	6(3)
22	1(0.5)
SEX	
Female	117(57.6)
Male	86(42.4)
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED BY EITHER OF PARENTS	
Less than 10th class	13(6.4)
Intermediate	24(11.8)
Bachelor's degree	67(33)
Master's degree	63(31)
Doctor/professional degree	36(18)
ALL INDIA NEET-UG RANK	
< 50000	3 (1.4)
50000-100000	9 (4.4)
1lakh to 1.5 lakhs	62 (30.5)
1.5 to 2	25 (12.3)
2 to 2.5	33 (16.2)
2.5 to 3	9(4.4)
3 to 3.5	20(9.8)
3.5 to 4	29(14.2)
above 4 lakhs	13(6.4)

The minimum all-India NEET rank of the study participants was 14624, while the maximum was 983046.

#### ***B1. Prior formal mentoring experiences of the students***

53(26%) of the participants had one formal mentor, while 48(23%) had two mentors.

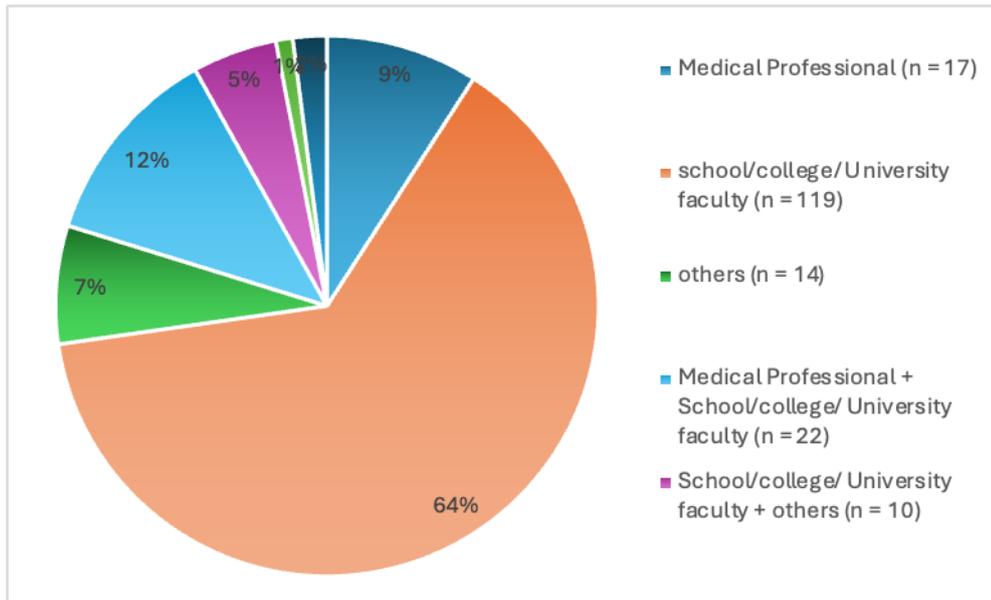
7% (n=15) of the participants had no formal mentors at all. The remaining students reported having more than two formal mentors

Table 2 shows the gender distribution of formal mentors to whom 188 participants were exposed:

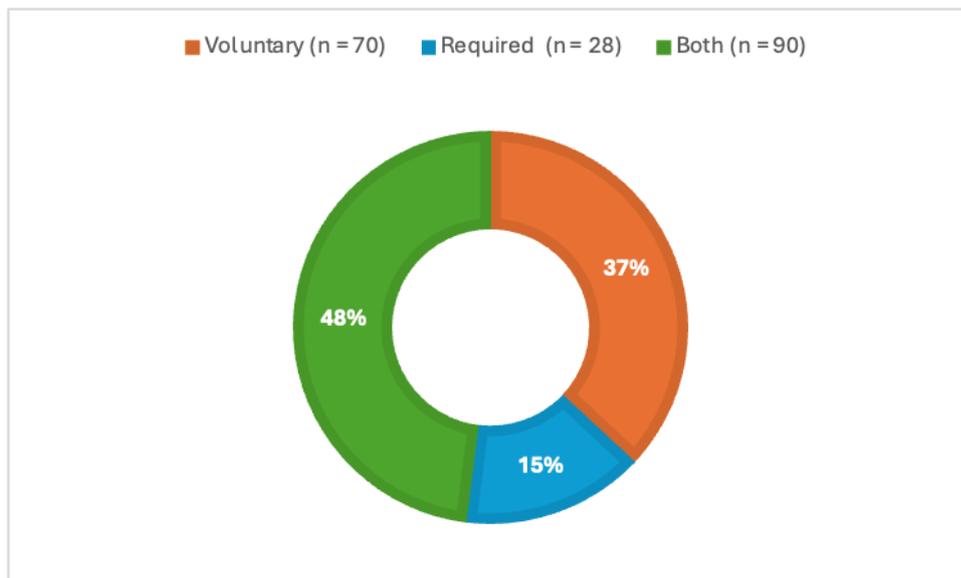
**Table 2. Gender distribution of formal mentors of the 188 participants**

Gender	n (%)
Males only	70 (37)
Females only	28(15)
Both Males and Females	88 (47)
Prefer not to answer	2 (1)

Figure 1 presents the Profession of formal mentors that 188 participants were exposed to, and Figure 2 presents whether the formal mentorship of 188 participants was voluntary or required, or both.



**Figure 1. Profession of the formal mentors of the 188 study participants (in percentages)**



**Figure 2. Formal mentorship experience of 188 students was voluntary or required (In percentages)**  
**B2. Prior informal mentoring experiences of the students**

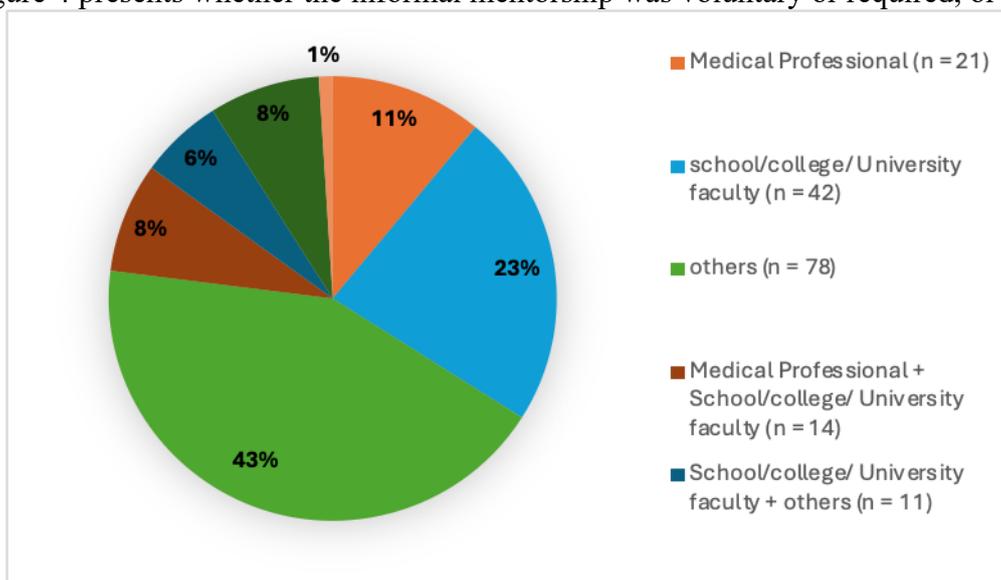
The majority of the participants – 79 (39%)- had two informal mentors, while 34 (17%) had one informal mentor. 21(10.3%) of the participants had no informal mentors at all. The remaining students reported having more than two informal mentors.

Table 3 presents the gender distribution of informal mentors to whom 182 participants were exposed.

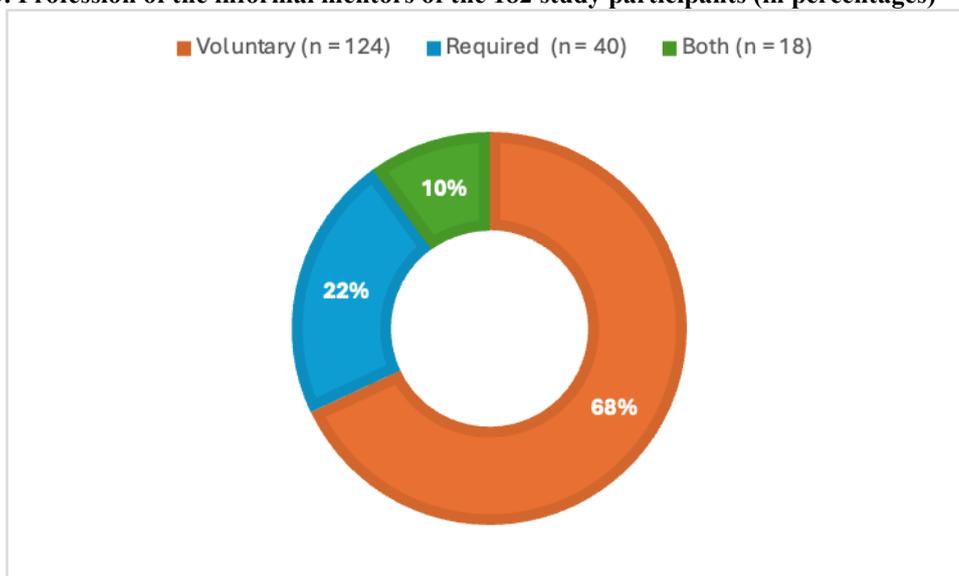
**Table 3. Gender distribution of informal mentors of 182 students**

Gender	n (%)
Males only	41 (23)
Females only	25(14)
Both Male and Females	116 (63)

Figure 3 presents the Profession of informal mentors that 182 participants were exposed to, and Figure 4 presents whether the informal mentorship was voluntary or required, or both.



**Figure 3. Profession of the informal mentors of the 182 study participants (in percentages)**



**Figure 4. Informal mentorship experience of 182 students (N=203) as voluntary or required (In percentages)**

Different Mentoring configurations experienced by the students in the last five years are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Different mentoring configurations experienced by the students in the last five years. Please note: Percentages do not add to 100% as participants could choose multiple answer choices**

Mentoring configuration	n (%)
A. Pairing of one mentor and one mentee	42 (21)
B. Two or more mentees with a mentor	45(22)
C. Two or more mentors with one mentee	14(7)
D. Two mentors and three mentees	4 (2)
E. One mentee with one formal and one informal mentors	32 (16)
F. Others	3 (1)
G. Two of the above configurations	50 (25)
H. Three of the above configurations	9 (4)
I. Four or more of the above configurations	4(2)

## **B. Mentee need self-assessment**

### **i. What are you looking for in a mentor?**

Most students expressed that their mentors should guide them in the right way and help them to find the right path in their careers.

*“Good guidance for career, should have good knowledge about the subject.”*

In addition to career guidance, they expect their mentors to help them develop communication, Lifestyle skills and exam preparation.

*“Good and great advice so that I can top in my studies and so that I can even participate in few things”*

*“A practical based mentoring which gives a lot of experience and some ethical and legal and lifestyle related tips and friendly nature”*

They want the mentor to understand the mentee individually in a kind and patient manner. They should provide support, encouragement and help as required.

*“ The mentor should clarify all our doubts. They should be skilled in their profession; advise me in any difficult situation that arises.”*

*“Understand me and share with me how I am perceived- to understand beyond us.”*

*“They should encourage us and give us confidence to move forward.”*

*“An ideal mentor should be patient and knowledgeable; a mentor should be kind and helpful, empathetic and understand the mentee and help them get a solution and be happy”*

*“I would like my mentors to be patient and helpful.”*

*“ I want my mentor to guide me but not humiliate me for my ideologies or doubts.”*

*“ Should be very comfortable with the students”*

The themes that emerged on analysis of the students’ responses to what they are looking for in a mentor are presented in Figure 5

### **i. What qualities would you like your mentor to possess?**

The students described the qualities their mentor should possess as -

*“Honesty and patience are the most important qualities for a mentor.”*

*Qualities my mentor should possess are to be friendly, to be successful in life, help others, be kind and educate in the good direction, and be experienced.”*

*“Mentors should always guide the students whether they are doing right or wrong. They should correct them while they are doing and educate more about how to think in hard situations and make decisions.”*

*“A mentor needs to have qualities like leadership experience, proper communicative skills.”*

*“Good teaching skills and the ability to simplify concepts are crucial.”*

*“Help me in all aspects of life, especially career guidance.”*

The summary of the qualities the mentor should possess, obtained by thematic analysis, is given in Figure 6.

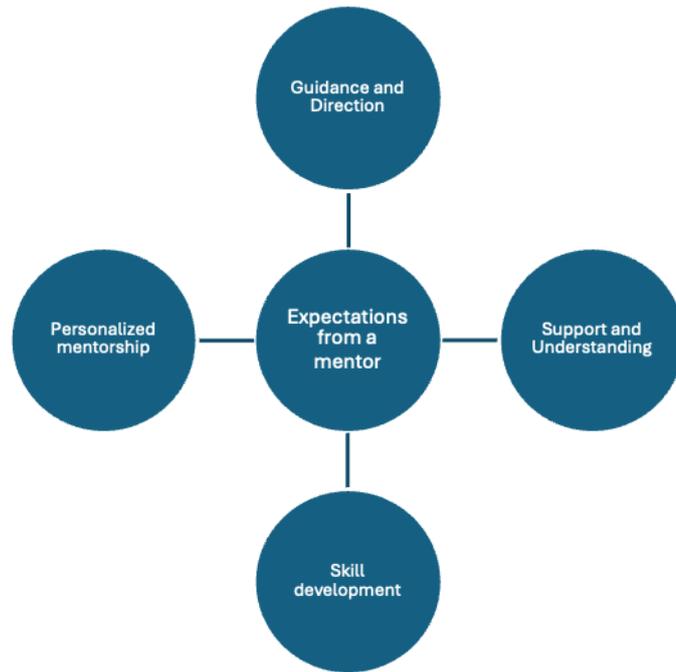


Figure 5. Themes identified for “students’ expectations from a mentor” by thematic analysis



Figure 6. Themes identified “qualities of a mentor expected by the students” by thematic analysis

***ii. Areas looking for mentorship***

The most common areas where the students feel that they require mentoring are in the subject-specific guidance to pass the examination and for career development. Table 5 shows the students’ choices of areas for mentorship.

**Table 5. The students' choices of areas for mentorship (in percentages).**

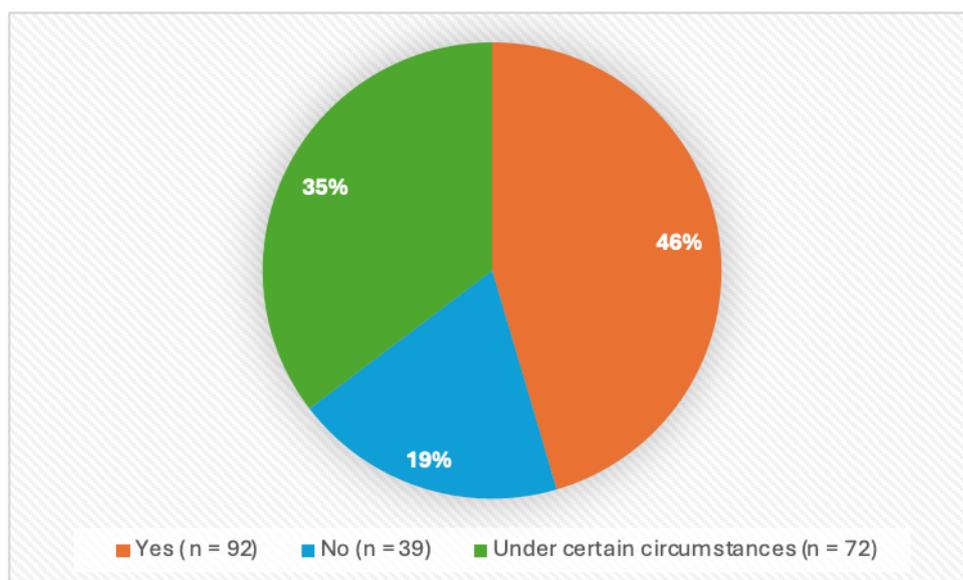
(Note: Percentages do not add to 100% as participants could choose multiple answer choices)

CHOICE OF AREA	n (%)
a. Subject specific guidance to pass the examinations	171 (84)
b. Career development eg, career skills	170 (84)
c. Career guidance eg. Selecting right track	155 (76)
d. Balancing professional and personal life	131 (64)
e. Guidance for research work	84 (41)
f. Budgets and money management	68(33)
g. Teaching skills	72(35)
h. Communication skills	158 (78)
i. Leadership skills	126 (62)
j. Conflict management	68 (33)
k. Any others- please mention	7 (3)

The other areas where 3% of the students mentioned that they require help are in the areas of ethics and societal behaviour, time management, stress management, organisation, personality development and tackling anxiety issues.

**iii. Would you consider multiple mentors?**

Figure 7 represents the percentage responses of students on whether they would consider multiple mentors for mentorship.



**Figure 7. Students' consideration of multiple mentors (N=203)**

**iv. What would I like my mentor to be?**

**Table 6. Students' responses to what they would like their mentor to be.(Note: Percentages do not add to 100% as participants could choose multiple answer choices)**

Mentor's Character	Roles expected	n (%)
A Confidant who will	Advise me on work-life balance, wellness, and resilience	123 (61)
	Offer me a safe place where I can ask questions and share difficulties	153 (75)
	Share with me how I am perceived	80 (39)
	Offer honest evaluation	134 (66)
A High-Level Advisor	Advise me on career dilemmas	123 (61)
	Strategize with me about career and organizational dynamics	117 (58)
	Pose challenging questions	83(41)
	Identify opportunities for my professional development	121 (60)
	Offer feedback on long and short-term career goals	87 (43)
	Impart negotiation skills	62 (32)
A Skill Developer who will	Teach me scientific skills	111 (55)
	Evaluate my teaching and presentation skills	101 (50)
	Edit my grant proposals	30 (15)
	Support my research enterprise infrastructure	50 (25)
	Identify specific behaviours that are helping or hindering my career	165 (81)
	Prescribe recommended actions	97 (48)
	Help me navigate organizational politics	71 (35)
A Sponsor who will	Operate as my information broker	35 (17)
	Solicit invitations for me to speak	61 (30)
	Find potential research collaborators for me	101 (50)
	Nominate me for award	36 (18)
	Increase my visibility	125 (62)
	Fosters networking opportunities for me	85 (42)

**v. Describe your ideal mentor**

Students expressed that their mentor should be very knowledgeable, non-judgmental, and have good communicative skills. As expressed in their own words,

*“I need a mentor, be like my good teacher, communicator and guide me to be best on my way. The mentor should check my skills, my ability, how much i can give my best, he should teach me the best and help me.”*

*“My mentor should be kind, interactive, and patient. They help me to understand where I lack.”*

*“He should be responsible.”*

*“My ideal mentor is someone who encourages me, pushes me forward to do anything. He/she also must be there when I'm done, and i should feel free to behave myself and ask my queries.”*

The key themes that appeared in the thematic analysis of students' descriptions

of their ideal mentor are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Key themes and students' descriptions of an ideal mentor (by thematic analysis)**

S. No	Theme	Summary of students' descriptions of ideal mentor
1	Knowledge and Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors should possess expertise in their field, whether academic or professional.</li> <li>• They should have experience and practical knowledge to guide their mentees effectively.</li> </ul>
2	Communication and Interaction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good communication skills are essential for mentors to convey advice and guidance effectively.</li> <li>• Mentors should maintain an open and friendly relationship with their mentees, encouraging dialogue and trust</li> </ul>
3	Support and Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors should be supportive, encouraging, and understanding, particularly during difficult times.</li> <li>• They should guide their mentees in making career decisions and navigating challenges.</li> <li>• Providing feedback and constructive criticism to help mentees improve is crucial.</li> </ul>
4	Personal Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patience, empathy, and honesty are valued traits in mentors.</li> <li>• Mentors should respect their mentees' individuality and maintain confidentiality.</li> <li>• Being non-judgmental and accepting of the mentee's strengths and weaknesses is important.</li> </ul>
5	Role Modelling and Inspiration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors often serve as role models, inspiring their mentees through their actions and achievements.</li> <li>• They should motivate mentees to strive for success and provide guidance on personal development.</li> </ul>
6	Accessibility and Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors should be approachable and accessible, providing support whenever needed.</li> <li>• Availability for guidance and advice, as well as responsiveness to mentees' inquiries, is crucial for effective mentorship</li> </ul>
7	Advisory Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors should offer career advice, help in decision-making, and provide insights into various career paths.</li> <li>• They may also assist in skill development and offer guidance on personal and professional growth.</li> </ul>
8	Personal Connection and Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong personal connection between mentor and mentee, built on trust and understanding, enhances the effectiveness of mentorship.</li> <li>• Mentees often value mentors who genuinely care about their well-being and success.</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION

The current study was initiated to assess prior experiences and identify specific needs for mentoring of first-year MBBS students. Our findings will help us understand what the students are expecting, identify the areas that require attention and plan an effective mentorship program in the institute.

A significant majority of our participants reported prior experience with both formal (97%) and informal (91%) mentors. This high prevalence suggests that these students already possess a foundational understanding of mentorship. Either formal or informal, mentorship offers benefits to both the mentors and the mentees.

As expected, informal mentorship was mostly voluntary (68%), reflecting the self-initiation characteristic typical of informal mentorship. Conversely, Formal mentorship was both voluntary and required (47%), showing that the students are exposed to diverse formats of mentorship programs, where they were allowed to choose their mentors or were allotted. Further supporting this, the majority of students experienced a combination of mentoring configurations, demonstrating their adaptability to various mentorship structures.

They got exposed to both male and female mentors previously. Gender of the mentors may affect the mentee's approachability for mentorship. While our study did not explore the impact of mentor-mentee gender concordance, Wekam et al<sup>5</sup> reported that there was a significant association between the gender identity of the mentee and the gender identity of their first formal mentor ( $\chi^2 [2, N = 66] = 10.00, P = 0.007$ ) and their first informal mentor ( $\chi^2 [2, N = 70] = 10.75, P = 0.005$ ). This suggests that in future, mentoring program designs need to consider the potential role of gender in mentor-mentee matching and approachability.

The majority of the previous formal mentors were school/college/university faculty (63%), while the informal mentors were tagged as others (42%). A possible explanation for this is that students seek

initial guidance to achieve their immediate goal of getting into a medical college, and their needs may broaden once that goal is achieved.

The thematic analysis gave an insight into the mentees' needs for mentorship. Students expressed that their mentor should be kind and patient, guiding them not only to cross the academic hurdles like passing the examinations but also to help them develop their career and the required career skills, including research, communication and life skills such as ethics, societal behavior, time management and stress management. Karuna Sree P *et al*<sup>8</sup> assessed the perception of students on a mentoring program and reported that the majority of the medical students in a private institute of Telangana (41.9%) stated that the goal of mentoring was to develop professionalism and support students in their personal growth. Some students had opted to help in career development (10.5%), and a few opined for support in the research (12.8%). These findings give insight that students are looking for mentorship as a long-term developmental program to shape them into a better medical professional, a better person, in fact.

The majority of them agreed that they would consider multiple mentors (46%) for their mentorship, suggesting different mentors might fulfil distinct needs – a concept supported by various mentorship models.

The majority of the students described their ideal mentor as a confidant who offers them a safe space to ask questions and share difficulties (75%), a high-level advisor to help them navigate career dilemmas (61%) and identify opportunities for professional development (60%). An ideal mentor should also be a skills developer and teach them scientific skills (55%) and be their sponsor and increase their visibility (62%). These desired roles highlight the multifaceted support that students expect, ranging from emotional safety to active career advancement, moving beyond purely academic guidance. Sparshadeep *et al*<sup>9</sup>,

explored the perception of 96 Indian medical students on the mentorship program carried out in their institute. Thematic analysis of their data revealed that the students felt that they needed mentoring for experienced guidance, for non-biased opinions, because they are in a new environment, for monitoring, and to help self-manage. They also expressed that the qualities a mentor should have are a friendly nature, compassion, accessibility, availability, approachability, positive, encouraging and genuinely concerned.

In a study reported by Shilpa et al<sup>10</sup>, medical students addressed the mentor to be a role model, a local guardian, a guide and a tutor. Most of the students feel an ideal mentor to be friendly, easily approachable, a good listener, understandable, soft spoken, and should guide the students with their valuable suggestions. The findings of the above studies resonate with the results of the current study, suggesting consistency among the medical students regarding the attributes of mentors.

Beyond the Indian context, our results are also consistent with those of Von der Borch et al<sup>11</sup> who reported that among the medical students studying in a university in Munich, they identified a profound desire for mentoring. Particularly, students are looking for a mentor who can help them in areas like research, final year electives and experiences abroad. Additionally, students hope to be provided by their mentors with ideas and contacts to support their professional development.

Even though this study is one of the first of its kind to assess the mentee's needs, it has certain limitations that can be explored in future. First of all, its cross-sectional design offers only current information. Changes in the mentees' needs with time, as they progress through the medical curriculum, are not captured. Furthermore, it was carried out in a single institute, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other medical colleges or regions in India or internationally. The study focused exclusively on the mentees' perspectives,

but in fact, there are multiple stakeholders involved in the mentorship program. Understanding the perspectives of other stakeholders – the mentors, administrators, management and even non-academic persons is important as there may be disparities in their views about the program. Lastly, studying the experiences of postgraduate students of various departments about mentorship would give us context-specific information and help us tailor the mentorship program.

## CONCLUSION

Mentoring is a long-term process concerned with identifying and nurturing the potential of an individual. Medical mentorship programs must extend beyond tracking academic performance. Based on mentee expectations, they should be designed to provide holistic guidance, encompassing career development, emotional support, life skills, and research mentorship. A structured, multi-mentor model with trained faculty may best fulfil these diverse needs.

### *Declaration by Authors*

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**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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