Stanford Prison Experiment: Lessons on Medical Student Abuse

http://www.prisonexp.org/conclusion
Abstract

• Lessons from the Stanford Prison experiment in 1971 can be applied to the abuse and mistreatment of medical students across the country. The lessons of authoritarianism, individualism giving way to groups, social interaction from this mock prison can parallel the establishment and maintenance of medical student abuse.

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Introduction

• 1971 Dr. Philip Zimbardo explored how people can be persuaded into antisocial acts through the power of rules, roles, and group identity

• Study the psychology of imprisonment where guards hold dominating influence over prisoners

• 9 guards and 9 prisoners recruited from college-aged, middle-class, “normal” men

• Experiment stopped after only 6 days because of over-the-top abuse

• 1990 46.4% of med students reported mistreatment

• 2012 AAMC reported 47.1% of med students were mistreated

• 2013 AAMC reported 42.1% of med students were mistreated

Not much has changed
**Literature Review- Stanford Prison Experiment**

**Day 1:** Prisoners “arrested” like in real life, procedures to humiliated and emasculate. Guards free to make any rule to maintain order and respect.

**Day 2:** First prison rebellion stopped by intense force. Guards decide to use psychological tactics to break solidarity. Guards aggressive now.

**Day 3:** First Prisoner broke down with crying, rage, and disorganized thought. Was released.

**Day 4:** Parents and friends come to visit. They all take scenario seriously. Rumor of escape plan breaks down fourth wall and researchers begin to play a role. Rumor is fake and guards bring retribution.

**Day 5:** Prison chaplain visits, Prisoners introduce themselves with number identity. Parents call requesting lawyer for release.

**Day 6:** Night videotapes show sadism and degrading abuse from guards. New researcher shocked by treatment of subjects and demands a stop.
According to 2012 AAMC graduate questionnaire, of 12,195 students, 47.1% reported abuse from physicians, nurses, residents, interns, and staff. Of those who only report one major incident, the breakdown of those incidents is shown to the left.
### Discussion - Common themes between Stanford Prison and Student Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanford Prison Experiment</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Medical Student Abuse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taken from their old homes, volunteers were given new identities, uniforms, and peers</td>
<td>Good People Induced into irrational behavior by total immersion into new situations</td>
<td>Hospital environment with new language, etiquette, rules, and peers</td>
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<td>Several outsiders and even researchers witnessed but did not intervene</td>
<td>Inherent motivation to bend to authority</td>
<td>Students fear retribution so rarely confront the abuser or report it</td>
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<td>In less than a week, guards acted unlike their old selves and inflicted the abuse</td>
<td>Groups provide new shared identities and guide actions</td>
<td>Attendings, former students themselves, often underemphasize abuse</td>
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<td>Guards were given free range to form rules within a context and reacted strong to rebellion</td>
<td>Authoritarian born from calamity to bring order and define society</td>
<td>Supposed early days of medical education needed a way to bring order to large crowds</td>
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<td>Subjects willingly participated to prison study ad</td>
<td>Group made of individuals more likely to embrace order</td>
<td>Medical students like order and know to please hierarchy</td>
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Conclusion - Future Directions to Curb Abuse

- Top down replacement with role models of professionalism
- Focused training to students, residents, faculty, and staff
- Ombudman system for confidential assistance and advice
- Guarantee confidentiality
- Include supervisory nurses in instruction
- Documented respect for students and faculty as a part of promotion
- Hiring of future academicians must have formal training in clinical experience as well as a trial period
- Students need to work on insensitive behaviors

https://blogpsychology.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/prisoner-and-guard-in-zimbardos-experiment.jpg


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