Abstract:
Media outlets have reported significant increases in maladaptive coping behaviors among physicians as a means of coping with pandemic-related stress. While the burden experienced by physicians during the pandemic is indisputable, the increase in maladaptive coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic may not be significantly elevated. We seek to demonstrate that the coping mechanisms used by physicians to alleviate stress during the pandemic may be comparable to those used prior to the pandemic, hypothesizing that, during times of stress, people generally lean heavily on their existing coping mechanisms (maladaptive or otherwise) as opposed to developing new ones. Though it is likely that some physicians developed new maladaptive coping mechanisms to manage the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, we theorize that this is not the case for the medical community at large and likely only applies to a small percentage of physicians.

Methods:

Results:

Conclusions:
Overall, stress-induced coping mechanisms amongst physicians were similar before and after the pandemic. After analyzing survey responses of ~28,000 physicians across 29 specialties, the notion that the pandemic prompted the use of maladaptive coping mechanisms is not well-represented in this analysis. "Use of prescription drugs" was increased however there is no data on what drugs were used. Its seen that anti-depressants were more frequently prescribed during the pandemic (potentially attributing to this--therefore this may not be a ‘maladaptive behavior’) however due to the lack of clarity for this question in the Medscape survey it is unknown.

We were not able to draw any conclusions about increase in pre-existing maladaptive behaviors (ex. increase in tobacco use among pre-pandemic smokers) from the data available. It is possible that those with maladaptive coping mechanisms did indulge in these behaviors more.