

# Perceptions of MBChB students of factors impacting on their success in the final examinations



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## Introduction

The Faculty of Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University, offers a 6 year undergraduate medical programme. The demographic profile of the students represents a diverse school, socio-economic and cultural background. In 2008 14% of the students were unsuccessful in their final qualifying examinations. Faculty needed to develop and implement an urgent intervention.

## Objective

The purpose of this study was to identify remediable factors that contributed to students being unsuccessful.

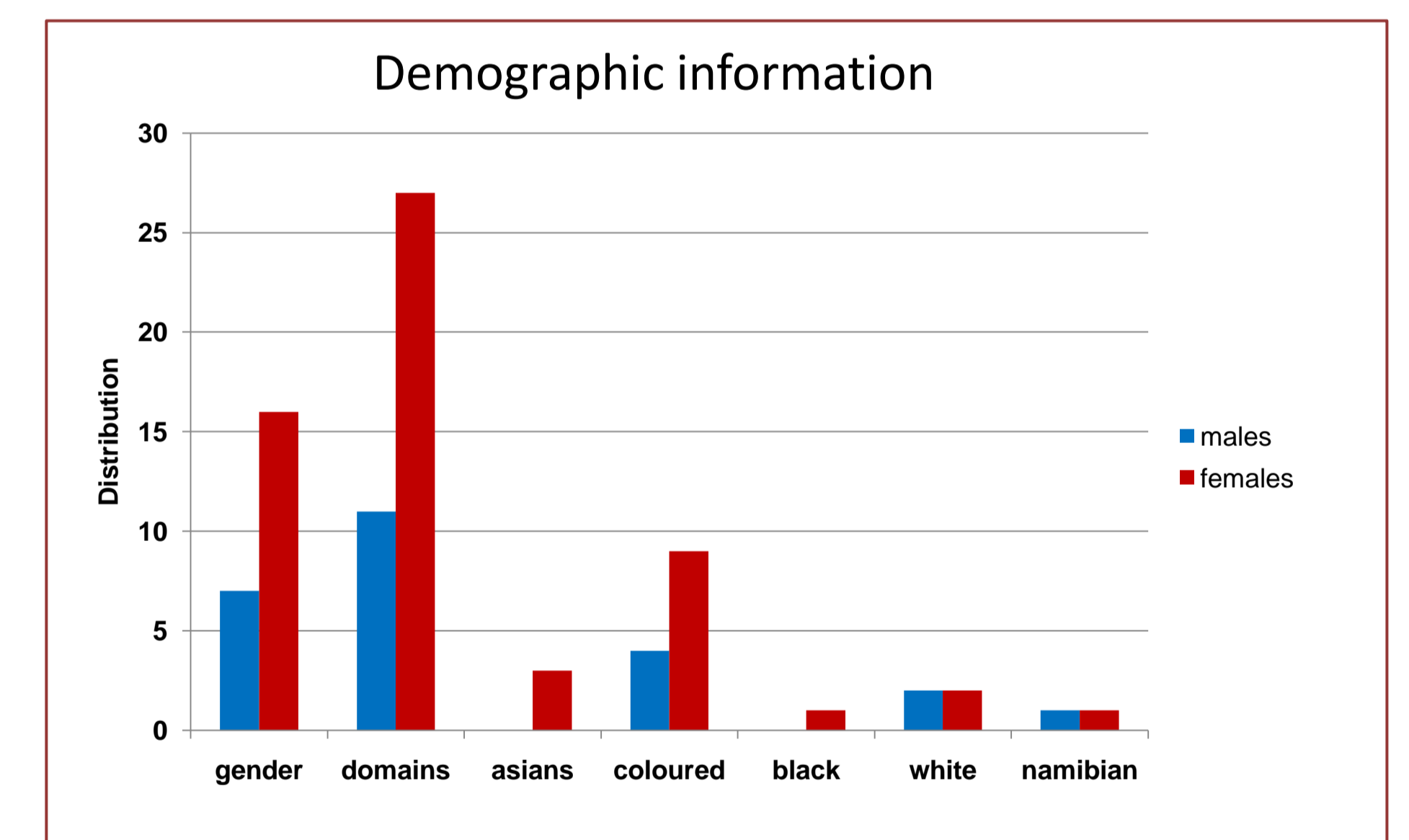
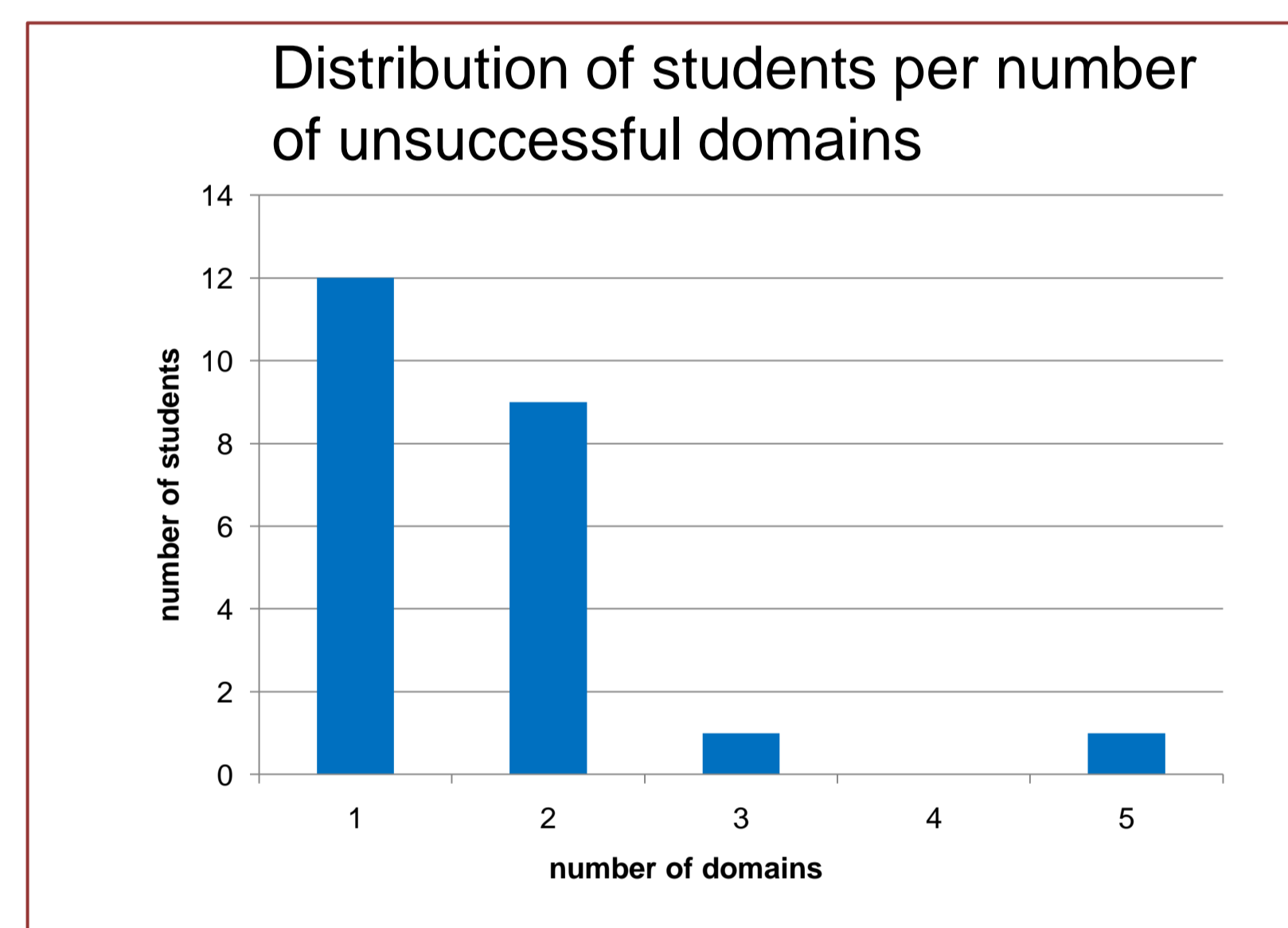
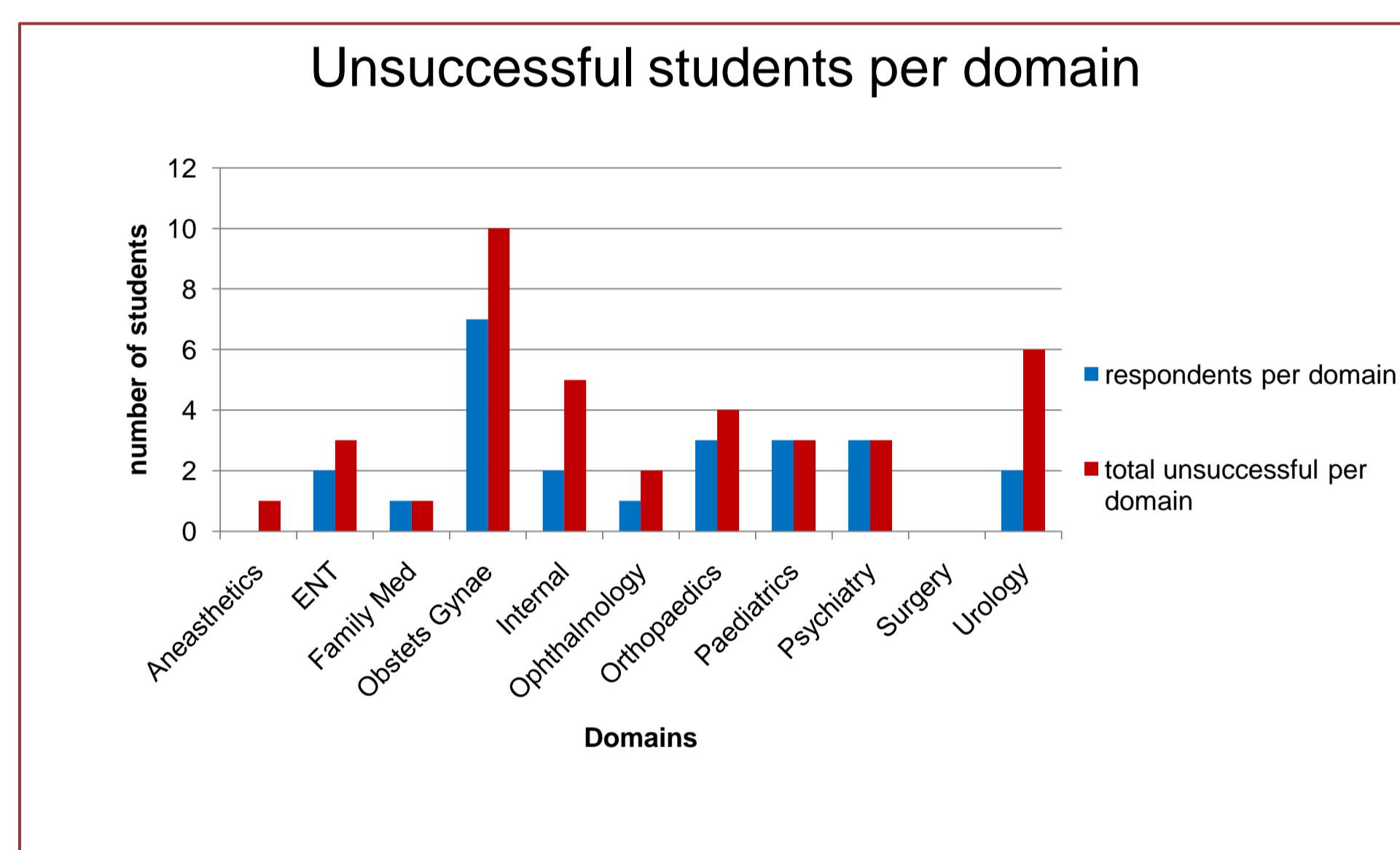
## Methodology

- A retrospective, qualitative and quantitative study was done.
- Unsuccessful students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews
- Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University
- Informed consent for voluntary participation was obtained from the students.
- Transcribed data was thematically analysed
- Recurrent themes of student perceptions were identified.

## Results

58% (14/23) unsuccessful students responded to the invitation to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Themes of student perceptions contributing to their lack of success were identified from the qualitative data as student, domain related or institutional factors.

### Quantitative data



### Qualitative data

#### Student factors

- Psychiatric morbidity
  - Acute, chronic and intra-exam Stress
  - Emotional/relationship factors
  - Bereavement
  - Other causes of psychiatric morbidity
- Exam preparation
- Study environment off campus
- Understanding explicit questions during assessments
- Missing important clinical data during assessments

#### Domain related factors

- Standardisation of
  - outcomes for domains
  - assessments
  - assessors
- Clinical teaching during rotation
- Identification of high risk students during rotation

#### Institutional factors

- Structure of the late phase – 15 months
- Structure of the exam timetable
- Transparency
- Re-evaluations

## Discussion

Low resilience to stress was the most commonly identified factor in this study. The limitation of the study was the small sample size (n=23). Nevertheless student perceptions correlated with factors impacting on student performance in high stakes exams as identified in the literature.

## Take home message

It is the responsibility of Faculty to identify and implement remedial strategies early in the curriculum to facilitate the outcome of at risk exit candidates.

