

EVALUATION OF FACTORS CAUSING ABSENTEEISM FROM CLASSES IN MEDICAL COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the factors causing absenteeism among undergraduate medical students from classes in medical studies.

Methodology: This cross sectional study was conducted at Aziz Fatimah Medical & Dental College, Faisalabad during July to August 2017. The participants were the medical students of the three batches (Third year, Fourth Year and Final year) of the college. They were 308 students, having attendance more than 50% and attending clinical classes as well. They were asked to fill the questionnaire which was adapted from Hafeez et al. (2014).¹This study was done to find out the factors which influence the students not to attend the classes in medical college. The questionnaire was distributed among the students in Aziz Fatimah Hospital.

Results: Out of 308 medical students in three batches, a total of 267 completed the questionnaire; the response rate was 86.6%. Mean age was 21.14 ± 3.4 years. There were 105 (39.3%) male and 162 (60.6%) female students. The two most common reasons for not attending the lectures were preference of self-studying over attending lectures (n=123, 46%) and poor teaching style by lectures (n=128, 47.9%).⁵ Training in new teaching methodologies is required to improve the quality of lectures; will ultimately help to increase the percentage of presence in lectures.

Key words: Absenteeism, Medical Students, Lectures

INTRODUCTION

Student absenteeism is one of the most basic indicator of poor individual performance and low level of motivation. The regular attendance in studies is important for the students' educational achievements, professional and social change. Students who attend classes regularly can be successful in their future professional lives through completing work-related skills such as determination, problem-solving, and the ability to work with others to achieve an objective.² Regular students have better job opportunities.^{3,4} As compared to their class-mates, students who don't attend classes regularly have lower academic performance, limited future employment opportunities and will experience social and emotional complications.⁵ Absenteeism not only affects the academic advancement of the student, but also influences the in-class planning of teachers and at the same time the enthusiasms of the other students in the class.⁶ Chronic absenteeism has a significant relationship with assured dangerous behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, physical injury and eventual dropout.^{7,8}

Absenteeism is not only a pointer of low academic achievement but also a strong pointer of moderated life success and future.⁹ Absenteeism marks it difficult to create a solid base in terms of discipline and sense of responsibility. Therefore, it leads to difficulties in work and discipline behaviors in future work life.¹⁰ This leads to low income and inability to work at a regular job.¹¹ Moreover, as absenteeism increases, students are inclined to experience psychological problems such as depression or behavioral disorders such as becoming involved in violence inside and outside of the college, quitting college and acquiring harmful habits.¹² If no measures are taken, absenteeism may be the beginning of a process ranging from academic failure to dropping out of education.

Low attendance in lectures is not a new problem. It has also been identified previously and number of causal factors has been suggested including illness, transport problems, inconvenient lecture times, poor content of lectures and poor teaching techniques. Lectures remain one of the essential methods of teaching in many medical colleges regardless of adaptation of new curriculum. It is informal to deliver knowledge through lecture to a large number of students and logistically saving resources. With the increase use of the electronic equipment there is variety of different software to assist in making the lectures more presentable, interesting and interactive, making the traditional teaching more effective. In spite of this advancement low attendance at lectures is still an issue. Absenteeism at higher education level affects the learning process of the students as well as the final result at the end of academic session. There has been a raising concern that it affects the professional socialization also. Lecture and tutorials provide a platform where students interact with the teachers, observe them and distinguish them as examples. Low attendance therefore may disturb this process and deter their professional growth. On the other side the role of teachers in improving student's attendance in lectures cannot be denied. Good attendance is probably the most important and direct reflection of the student's perception of the effectiveness and usefulness of the lectures delivered. Teachers with well training skills deliver lectures which are structured and scheduled having good communication skills leads to more students' attraction and higher attendance rates.

METHODOLOGY

² In general, the objective of this study is to explore the occurrence of truancy among medical college students; however, specifically the objective is to recognize the factors that cause students to be absent from lectures according to the insights of their college mates who are their friends. This cross sectional study was conducted at Aziz Fatimah Medical & Dental College, Faisalabad during July to August 2017. The participants were the medical students of the three batches (Third year, Fourth Year and Final year) of the college. They were 308 students, having attendance more than 50% and attending clinical classes as well. They were approached at the end of lecture and asked to fill the questionnaire which was adapted from Hafeez et al. (2014). The questionnaire was distributed among the students in Aziz Fatimah Hospital. Time was allocated to fill the questionnaire after taking consent from them.

Study Design

² Data was collected through a questionnaire distributed by one of the researchers. The elements developed in the questionnaire refer to some associated previous studies. The questionnaire comprises two parts, Part A deals with demographic questions and attendance in last semester and Part B contains different survey questions related to factors that cause students to be absent from class. A three-point scale¹³ is used to identify student respondents' level of agreement on a statement given. The scale is as follows:

3: Agree; 2: Neutral; 1: Disagree

² The quantitative data was analyzed using Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to get descriptive statistics indices and percentages were calculated for each question.

RESULTS

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING LECTURES	Agree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Disagree n(%)
I don't attend lectures as I can download them from the websites.	90 (33.7)	58 (21.7)	119 (44.5)
You feel health related issues have a huge effect on your attendance.	104 (38.9)	62 (23.2)	101 (37.8)
You prefer self/group studying over attending lectures.	123 (46.0)	36 (13.4)	108 (40.4)
You feel that you can pass exams without attending the lectures.	100 (37.4)	32 (11.9)	135 (50.5)
Lack of subject interest	90 (33.7)	46 (17.2)	131 (49.0)
Poor teaching strategies by lecturers	128 (47.9)	39 (14.6)	100 (37.4)
A desire of different parties and activities with peers	99 (37.0)	41 (15.3)	127 (47.5)
Negative self-image and low self-esteem	33 (12.3)	67 (25)	167 (62.5)
The mental capacity does not match with the medical studies	57 (21.3)	31 (11.6)	179 (67)
Feeling home sick	101 (37.8)	71 (26.5)	95 (35.5)
Attendance at lectures does not affect the achievement of good grades	105 (39.3)	44 (16.4)	118 (44.1)
Even if I don't attend, the lecture notes from peers are enough.	100 (37.4)	34 (12.7)	133 (49.8)

Table 1: Reasons why students do not attend lectures

Out of 308 medical students in three batches, a total of 267 completed the questionnaire; the response rate was 86.6%. Mean age was 21.14±3.4 years. There were 105 (39.3%) male and 162 (60.6%) female students. The 99 respondents were resident of college hostel and 168 were day

scholars. The two most common reasons for not attending the lectures were preference of self-studying over attending lectures (n=123, 46%) and poor teaching style by lectures (n=128, 47.9%). ⁵ Training in new teaching methodologies is required to improve the quality of lectures; will ultimately help to increase the percentage of presence in lectures.

44.5% of the respondents considered that they don't attend lectures as they can download from websites. 38.9% of the students feel health related issues have a huge effect on attendance. 46% prefer self/group study over attending lectures. Majority of the students (50.5%) disagree that they can pass exams without attending the lectures. 49% of the students disagree on lack of subject interest and on the other hand 33.7% of the students agree that there is lack of subject interest and that is the reason for not attending the lectures. Some students (47.9%) consider the poor teaching strategies by lecturers. 47.5% of the respondents reported disagree on having desire of different parties and activities with peers. 62.5% students disagree on negative self-image and low self-esteem. Majority of the respondents (67%) disagree that mental capacity does not match with the medical studies. Some students (37%) claimed that they feel home sick so they don't attend the lectures, 44.1% of the respondents disagree that the attendance of lectures does not affect the achievement of good grades and 39.3% of the respondents agree with this. Few students (37.4%) agree ⁷ even if they don't attend the lectures, the lecture notes are enough. Table 1 indicates the top reasons why students do not attend lectures and remain absent from lectures.

DISCUSSION

Our study reported many causes for not attending lectures. The two most common reasons for not attending the lectures were preference of self-studying over attending lectures (46%) and poor teaching style by lectures (47.9%). Lectures are one of the important ways of teaching in most of the universities in traditional system as well as modular system. It is the ability of the teacher to create interest of all students in a single classroom so that they should not lose their concentration and interest. Poor lectures can leave students uninterested and frustrated, good lectures can encourage. The lecturer can communicate the lecture content to their students' former knowledge and relate it to real life examples, thus making the information more evocative. Teachers should improve lecture presentation strategy to improve the attendance of class. It should include illustrative presentation, adding videos, and question answer sessions to enhance the interest of students in attending lectures. On the other hand, 40.4% students considered lectures as a best source of learning and understanding the difficult topic. According to them, some more hard subjects should be taught completely in the lecture, as the concepts are too difficult for most of the students to understand on their own. Sometimes lecturers made topic so easy, interesting, well organized and understandable within a short period of time, which could have taken hours to understand on their own or in group study. Robert¹⁴ recommends that teachers should effort to transform ⁶ their methods of teaching to give students with differing learning styles an opportunity to learn in an environment more advantageous.

In addition to this there are number of other reasons which affect students' attendance. In our study, 33.7% students agree that they can download uploaded lectures of their teachers from their university website at any time as well as get information from other resources also. But according to 44.5% students, they agreed that the role of teachers cannot be denied to solve all

queries about subject. Nowadays almost all students are equipped with new technology devices such as laptops and smart phones. Digital technologies have heightened the process of learning through the use of digital audio and video recordings that can be circulated across the Internet directly to students' desktops¹⁵.

Health problems are identified as a major contributor to student absenteeism. In our study, 38.9% students reported cause of their absenteeism the health related issues. Stress related health issues also contribute in their absence. Vision problem, obesity, tension diarrhea, fever, headache, sore throat, insomnia are some of the health problems. The student who is well nourished, physically active, and well rested is likely to have advantages regarding intellect compared with the adolescent with deficits in any of these areas¹⁶ and will attend classes more regularly as compared to sick student. But 44.5% students think that these problems are not the main cause of absenteeism.

A common hypothesis in higher education is that absenteeism considerably contributed to low academic achievement. The class attendance is a key for improving grade rather than obtaining just pass marks. In our study, 37.4% students feel that they can pass exams without attending the lectures but most of the students (50.5%) think that to pass exams, its essential to hear all lectures very carefully, as most of the examination paper comes from the lecture content. 44.1% students think that its compulsory to attend all lectures to attain good grades but 39.3% students disagree and reported that they can achieve good grades without attending lectures. Dhaliwal¹⁷ reported in his study that absenteeism is associated with poorer marks. Early corrective actions should be taken to prevent failure in examinations. Underachievers should be motivated to improve their performance, relatively than passing them at their third or fourth attempt in a subject. In many studies it is shown that good attendance exposed good results and

those with poor attendance are at risk of poor performance throughout exams in basic medical sciences¹⁸.

Our study reported that 33.7% students don't like the subjects of medicine, so they don't attend lectures but 49% students said that this is not the cause of their absenteeism. There is widespread work ¹ on the relation between absenteeism and lack of subject material interest, poor teaching policies, critical learning environment, and extreme socialization among students, part-time jobs, disease, insomnia, and poor relations with lecturers¹⁹.

According to our study, 37% students are interested in different types of extra-curricular activities and celebrations of different occasion in college as well as parties with their friends so they remain absent from college and attend those activities. Students who are over-scheduled in too many activities are more tired and irritable and give more attention towards participation of extra-curricular activities instead of attending lectures. But 47.5% students disagree with their point of view and reported that this cannot be the major cause of absenteeism. Those who participate in out-of-school activities often have higher grades, a decrease in absenteeism, and an increased interest to the academics. When balanced with academic learning, extracurricular activities may help students raise self-esteem, feel relaxed and pay more attention toward studies. It has been proved by many researches that there are many advantages of participating in extracurricular activities including having better grades, higher educational achievement and decreasing absenteeism²⁰.

Our study reported that very small number of students (12.3%) remain absent from college because of low self-worth and negative self-image. 62.5% students think that they are with high self-confidence and highly motivated to learn medicine. According to Karim (2012)²¹ medical students seemed to have poor self-confidence in performing clinical procedures. A

support group of family, peers, faculty and a psychologist could be designed to develop their self-esteem and confidence.

Evaluation of medical students' motivation showed that the most important reasons for choosing field of medicine by the students were doctor's earnings, prestige, transferable skills, giving back to society, international elective and career and course variety. According to our study, 21.3% students think that after joining the college they felt that medical subjects are much difficult to understand and their mental capacity does not match with the medical studies. Actually they have joined medical college to fulfill the great desire of their parents to become a doctor. They have only come by the pressure imposed upon them by their families; otherwise they wanted to join some other specialty. But 67% students like medicine. The medical students who enter this profession are highly motivated, but later develop the attitude of "just learn what is necessary to pass the exam" as they progress through the curriculum. For medical students to become a lifelong learner having an inspiration to make an effort towards educational aim is a must.²²

37.4% students reported that they don't find any need to attend the lectures as they take written notes from their friends and class mates which they have made while attending lectures and these notes are not only beneficial but enough to pass the exam. But 49.8% students disagree that these notes are enough to achieve high grades in examination. According to them the ability to take in information from lectures and make their own notes by processing it, restructuring it, adding information from references books and then presenting them in an examination and getting higher grades is one of the basic skills and it could be impossible without increasing attendance in lectures. Contrary to these students there is a literature by Grabe (2005), in which he stated that the notes given by teachers can be additional if a student does not attend a lecture or if a student is not accomplished in this task, as note taking is a difficult task that involves

concurrently the skills of listening, organizing, and writing.²³ By getting these notes, students cannot decrease percentages of absenteeism but improves their grades.

37.8% students who were living in college hostel felt home sick and this home sickness disturbs their mental comfort and they remain absent from lectures. Homesickness, aloneness, stress, and nervousness are all common feelings among first-year college students. Victims classically ⁸ report a combination of depressive and anxious symptoms, withdrawn behavior, and difficulty focusing on topics unrelated to home.²⁴

¹ There is broad literature on the relation between absenteeism and lack of subject matter interest, poor teaching strategies, unfavorable learning environment, and unnecessary socialization among students, part-time jobs, ill health, insomnia, and poor relations with lecturers. In addition, availability of lecture content in the form of online slides, videos, audios has their own influence to prolonged absenteeism.

CONCLUSION

This study proven that the problem of absenteeism is increasing nowadays in medical students. There is no single factor of absenteeism. There are multiple factors of absenteeism. With the passage of time absenteeism percentage is increasing due to these factors alarming to fulfill minimum credit hours of teaching compulsory to sit in university examination. The following are recommendation:

1. All stakeholders including teachers, students, administration and parents must focus to minimize absenteeism.
2. The students must be motivated for this noble profession as their competency and professionalism has vital role in saving life of patients.
3. Sharing knowledge, skill, experience and updates is only possible via such interactions of teaching module and true understanding of subject becomes easy.

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ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance was attained from Ethical review board of Aziz Fatimah Medical and Dental College (AFMDC). We have taken written consent from each study participant, and maintained confidentiality by analyzing the data in collection.

REFERENCES

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