

ABSENTEEISM IN UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS: A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Absenteeism is an important factor for decreased motivation in learning the subject. In literature it was found that absenteeism indicates low motivation for learning, poor teaching strategies, unfavorable environment, socialization, ill health and poor relations with lecturers. If this behavior continues after school, it will reflect on their work life and therefore, may affect the quality of health service in the future. This study is aimed at understanding the prevalence and underlying reasons for absenteeism. **Methodology:** This is a descriptive cross sectional study among second to final year students. A structured, pre tested questionnaire was developed with questions in themes of pattern and reasons for absenteeism was administered to a convenient sample of 100 students. **Results:** In this study, 47 hostlers and 53 day scholars were included in the sample for this study. Out of the 100 students, 84% said lectures are affecting their attendance which is statistically significant. Only 32% think attendance matters. 27% said that they are absent to study for exams. **Conclusion:** Our study clearly shows the main reason for absenteeism is poor teaching practices. Socratic lectures replacing didactic ones should ensure mental attendance instead of just physical presence in class room.

Keywords: absenteeism, attendance, Lectures, motivation, semester.

INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism is an important indicator of decreased motivation for learning (1). Despite the strict rules insisting 75% attendance, absenteeism is so phenomenal that the first thing many teachers do at the beginning of class is take attendance. Previous studies have shown that academics workload on students implicating as a factor in affecting their attendance, Quality of teaching methods like lecture as felt by the students also found to be an important factor for very very low levels of attendance in students(1). In literature it was found that absenteeism indicates low motivation for learning, poor teaching strategies, unfavorable environment, socialization, ill health and poor relations with lecturers. If the absenteeism continues after the medical college, it will have an impact on their work life and finally, may affect the quality of health

services in the future over the society (1). Quality of teaching methods as felt by the student is also an important factor for very low attendance in students from various studies (2). Despite of many rules imposing on students to attend classes still absenteeism is a major concern in many colleges. Hence, this study is aimed at understanding the prevalence and underlying reasons for absenteeism.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive cross sectional study among second to final year students. A structured, pre tested questionnaire was developed with questions in themes of pattern and reasons for absenteeism was administered to a convenient sample of 100 students of 47 hostlers and 53 day scholars. Ethical clearance was obtained from institutional ethical clearance and

written consent was taken from each study participant, and maintained confidentiality. Results were analysed and presented as percentages.

RESULTS

In this study, 45 males and 55 female students were included. Out of the 100 students, 11% students miss less than 4 classes per semester, 68% students miss between 4 to 8 classes per semester and 20% students miss more than 8 classes per semester. In the reasons for absenteeism, 84% said lectures are affecting their attendance which is statistically significant. Only 32% think attendance matters. 27% said that they are absent to study for exams. 17% stated that non effective teaching is contributing to their absenteeism. The leading cause at 28% is that students find that classes are not engaging enough. Only 6% students agree that health issues are affecting their attendance.

Table: 1 Gender n=100

Gender	Number
Male	45
Female	55

Table: 2 Student type n=100

Student type	Number
Day scholars	53
Hostlers	47

Table: 3 Absenteeism n=100

Absent (no: of classes / semester)	Percentage %
never missed a class	0
1to 4	11
more than 4- 7	68
more than 8	20

Table: 4 Reasons for absenteeism

Reasons	Percentage %
hard to follow classes	5%
health issues	6%
non effective teaching	17%
They are boring	28%
to relax	9%
to study for monthly and internal exams	27%
Post graduates are taking classes	8%

DISCUSSION

In this study nearly 90% missed approximately 4 classes in one semester, 43.7% missed more than 3 lectures and 14.1% reported that they missed more than 8 lectures in each semester which goes similar to other studies (3,4,5). Our study states that 84% students felt lectures are affecting their attendance which goes in accordance with many studies stating that quality of lecture and teacher behavior as perceived by the student was also found to be a significant factor for very low levels of attendance among students(6,7,8). The teaching quality of the teachers, their methodology in approach towards subject and the interaction they have with the students appears to play an important role in non-attendance to lectures(9), disorganized and monotonous lecturers who cannot involve and engage the students are felt as boring and will see lower numbers of attendance(10). Among the study participants, 28% students felt lack of interest, boring in the subject as a reason for non-attendance, this could be because of vast subject or they may join the course by force from family. It is also observed that final year students i.e., seniors were found more likely to be absent than junior students this is because of the confidence and behavioral change in them due to influence by their peers. We also observed students who missed more than 8 classes per semester are having poor performance in their monthly tests, internal exams and even in final university exams also, a strong correlation between absenteeism and poor exam performance that has been demonstrated by a number of studies (11,12,13). In our study no one mentioned about infra-structure like ambience and lecture hall or laboratory facilities are the reasons for their non-attendance.

CONCLUSION

Our study clearly shows the main reason for absenteeism is poor teaching practices. Socratic lectures replacing didactic ones would ensure mental attendance instead of just physical presence in class. As many of the students felt teaching is affecting their attendance, more engaging methods like discussion groups, mentor - mentee programs can improve attendance and prevent unwanted consequences of absenteeism on academic performance. The causes for absenteeism in students may have a significant importance on teaching methodologies and student orientations at the level of Universities.

Since we asked students to self-report their absenteeism, there is scope for recall bias, as the questionnaire was distributed in class, the regular absentees were probably missed, and the situation of absenteeism may be worse and the entire data was not compiled in a day, there was chance of information contamination

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