

Medical Students' Perspectives Towards Absenteeism in Class

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Abstract

Objective: To examine the reasons why medical students miss their classes.

Material and Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in a private medical college of Faisalabad, for 7 months. Ethical approval was taken beforehand. Participants from all MBBS classes and those who gave consent were included. Total sample size was 300. Stratified sampling technique was used. A pretested and structured questionnaire was used to get the response. Frequencies and percentages were calculated. One-sample t-test was applied. P-value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

Results: Mostly students joined medical field as per their choice (89%) and majority also liked their field of study (95%). Most common reasons for absenteeism were preparation for tests, hectic schedule and self-directed learning. One-sample t-test showed significant contribution of all variables towards absenteeism among medical students.

Conclusion: There were several reasons why students missed classes, most commonly mentioned by students were “To prepare your tests or tutorials; Hectic schedule and want to spend the same time in self-studies/self-directed studies.” Teachers must be approachable and helpful in order for pupils to get over their fears and shortcomings. The curriculum should include mentorship programs and constructive feedback.

Keywords: Absenteeism, class, medical, perspectives, students

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Introduction

Medical education is a rigorous and demanding field, requiring a significant amount of time and effort on the part of students in order to succeed. In this context, attendance in class is often seen as a critical factor in achieving success.¹ However, medical students' perspectives towards absenteeism in class can vary widely depending on a number of factors, including their personal motivations, academic goals, and individual circumstances.²

Medical education is highly structured and organized,

with a large amount of material to cover in a short period of time. One perspective that is commonly held among medical students is that attendance in class is essential for success in medical school. Missing classes can make it difficult for students to keep up with the material and stay on track with their peers.³ Additionally, many medical schools have attendance policies in place that require students to attend a certain percentage of classes in order to pass the course or graduate. In this view, absenteeism is seen as a major barrier to success.⁴ There are several reasons why medical students view attendance in class as so important. First, medical education is highly competitive, and students must work hard to distinguish themselves from their peers. In this context, attendance in class can be seen as a way of demonstrating commitment and dedication to the field. Additionally, medical students are often highly motivated and driven, and they recognize the importance of staying on top in order to succeed. In this view, missing classes is simply not an option for students who are serious about their education and their future careers.⁵ Another reason why medical students may view attendance in class as so important

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is that medical education is highly structured and organized. Courses are often taught in a linear fashion, with new material building on previously learned concepts.⁶ Missing classes can disrupt this linear progression and make it difficult for students to understand new material. In this context, absenteeism is seen as a significant risk factor, with the potential to derail a student's academic progress.⁷ However, not all medical students view absenteeism in such a negative light. Some students may view absenteeism as a necessary trade-off in order to achieve their academic and personal goals. Medical school is demanding, and students may need to prioritize their time and resources in order to meet their obligations. For example, students may need to miss classes in order to attend clinical rotations or complete research projects. Additionally, many medical students have personal obligations or health concerns that make attendance in class difficult or impossible. In this view, absenteeism is seen as a necessary compromise for some students, with the potential to enhance rather than inhibit academic success.⁸ Another perspective that some medical students hold is that absenteeism is a symptom of larger issues within the medical education system. For example, some students may feel that classes are not engaging or that lectures are not effective methods of learning.⁹ Others may feel that medical education is overly focused on memorization and testing, and that attendance in class is not necessarily correlated with learning outcomes. In this view, absenteeism is seen as a symptom of a larger problem that needs to be addressed. Also, students feel that they are under a great deal of pressure to perform well. In this context, attendance in class may be seen as a way of demonstrating commitment and dedication to the field, rather than as an effective method of learning.¹⁰

The causes differ from nation to nation, but the bulk of them stem from issues with the institution itself. However, it is important to consider the social and personal factors that influence student absenteeism. Poor teaching techniques, strained relationships with instructors, an uncomfortable learning environment, a lack of enthusiasm in the topic, illness, and social media addiction are among the main causes indicated by numerous research. As an industrial and 3rd largest city of Pakistan, medical students of Faisalabad may have different reasons for absenteeism. Despite the fact that the issue is known to exist, no published study has evaluated and examined the scope and determinants of absenteeism in this particular city. In order to understand the reasons of absenteeism among undergraduate medi-

cal students in Faisalabad, this study was carried out.

Material and Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in a private medical college of Faisalabad, from September 2022 to March 2023. Ethical approval was taken beforehand from institutional ethical review committee with Ref.No: IEC/182-22. Participants from all MBBS classes and those who gave consent were included. Participants were included in the study through stratified sampling by taking 1st 60 students from each MBBS class by considering equal proportion of males and females students. To ascertain absenteeism behaviour and contributing variables, a self-reported questionnaire was employed. A pretested and structured questionnaire, adopted from studies titled "Absenteeism among Saudi Medical Students and Analysing the Attitude of Medical Students toward Class Absenteeism" was used after taking permission from author.¹¹ It has 2 parts. In 1st part, student demographics and did they join medical field as per choice and also whether like their field of study were asked. In 2nd part, attitude of students towards absenteeism reasons was assessed comprising 26 items on 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It was made as google form and circulated through email and WhatsApp and responses were recorded and then imported in excel sheet and finally in SPSS work sheet. Frequencies and percentages were calculated. One-sample t test was applied. P-value less than .05 was considered as statistically significant.

Results

Total 300 participants were included in the study. There were equal percentage of males and females from every class i.e. 30 males and 30 females, total 60 students (20%) each from 1st year to final year MBBS. Majority of study participants were from age group above 21 years of age i.e. 194 (64.7%) and were day scholars i.e. 184 (61.3%). Mostly joined medical field as per their choice and majority also liked their field of study as shown in fig. 1 and 2 respectively. There were multiple reasons regarding absenteeism in class. They have been arranged as per their mean and rank order in descending order as shown in Table 1. To evaluate the degree of significance for the variables, a one-sample t-test was performed for additional analysis as shown in Table 2. The results of Table 2 show that each variable considerably increases absenteeism among the participants.

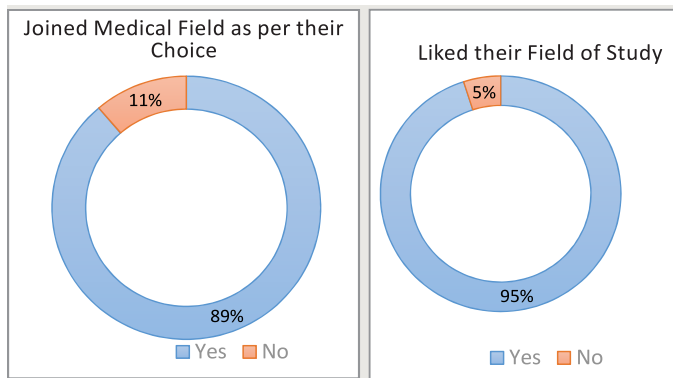


Fig. 1: *Joined medical field as own choice* Fig. 2: *Liked their field or not*

Discussion

This study investigated the possible reasons of absenteeism in class by medical students. As the curriculum of MBBS is shifting from traditional towards integrated,

now there is more need to improve medical students' attendance because of multiple subjects' involvement in curriculum starting from 1st year and if there is lack of attendance, it will create more problems for them rather than traditional curriculum where only specified subjects had been taught. The most important 10 reasons quoted by medical students contributing towards absenteeism are following: To prepare your tests or tutorials; Hectic schedule; You want to spend the same time in self-studies/self-directed studies; You easily find lectures online in the form of videos/slides/ppts; Due to burnout; Inflexible time tables that hamper quality learning; You cannot concentrate during lectures; Due to any health issue; You were awake late at night and You do not like the teaching style of the teacher. A study done by Jeannette Weber et al showed that exam-related issues, including scheduling, perceived unjust grading, and personal traits like self-expectations and failure dread,

Table 1: *Statistical analysis of Likert based questions, regarding the attitude of the study participants toward the reasons for absenteeism*

You skip lectures/tutorials because of:	Frequency	Percentage	Variance
To prepare your tests or tutorials	3.46	1.347	1.814
Hectic schedule	3.31	1.396	1.948
You want to spend the same time in self-studies/self-directed studies	3.03	1.323	1.751
You easily find lectures online in the form of videos/slides/ppts	2.99	1.390	1.933
Due to burnout	2.92	1.372	1.883
Inflexible time tables that hamper quality learning	2.89	1.346	1.811
You cannot concentrate during lectures	2.88	1.307	1.709
Due to any health issue	2.83	1.343	1.803
You were awake late at night	2.80	1.346	1.813
You do not like the teaching style of the teacher	2.77	1.269	1.611
You do not find yourself connected to the subject	2.71	1.224	1.499
For having meals when you skip your breakfast	2.62	1.364	1.861
Aggressive attitude of your teacher	2.62	1.317	1.735
Poor teaching skills of a teacher	2.57	1.232	1.517
You think the lectures are not enough informative	2.54	1.194	1.426
You think you can easily understand without guidance	2.53	1.175	1.381
Any bad memory associated to that particular teacher	2.48	1.228	1.508
Unfavourable learning environment like an excessive distraction, noise, no proper seating in classrooms, overcrowding, poor ventilation	2.45	1.222	1.492
Socialization like in cafeteria or social media	2.44	1.248	1.558
No interest in that subject	2.41	1.149	1.320
To attend the unannounced visits from your family	2.32	1.184	1.402
Because of some family issue	2.27	1.118	1.249
You have already received lecture slides from other sources like seniors	2.26	1.078	1.163
Resident of a far-flung area	2.19	1.217	1.481
Transport issues	2.16	1.129	1.274
Traffic jam on roads	2.14	1.227	1.505

Table 2: One-sample t-test showing significance level of the established variables

You skip lectures/tutorials because of:	t	DF	Significant (2-Tailed)	95% CI of the difference (lower-upper)
Traffic jam on roads	30.210	299	0.000	2.00 – 2.28
A resident of a far-flung area	31.218	299	0.000	2.06 – 2.33
No interest in that subject	36.337	299	0.000	2.28 – 2.54
Poor teaching skills of a teacher	36.143	299	0.000	2.43 – 2.71
Unfavourable learning environment like an excessive distraction, noise, no proper seating in classrooms, overcrowding, poor ventilation	34.735	299	0.000	2.31 – 2.59
Socialization like in cafeteria or social media	33.856	299	0.000	2.30 – 2.58
Due to burnout	36.818	299	0.000	2.76 – 3.07
Any bad memory associated to that teacher	34.934	299	0.000	2.34 – 2.62
Do not find yourself connected to the subject	38.291	299	0.000	2.57 – 2.85
Easily find lectures online	37.290	299	0.000	2.84 – 3.15
Do not like the teaching style of teacher	37.755	299	0.000	2.62 – 2.91
You think you can easily understand without guidance	37.246	299	0.000	2.39 – 2.66
You think the lectures are not enough informative	36.887	299	0.000	2.41 – 2.68
You want to spend the same time in self-studies/self-directed studies	39.700	299	0.000	2.88 – 3.18
You cannot concentrate during lectures	38.205	299	0.000	2.73 – 3.03
Because of some family issue	35.226	299	0.000	2.15 – 2.40
Transport issues	33.194	299	0.000	2.04 – 2.29
You have already received lecture slides from other sources like seniors	36.299	299	0.000	2.14 – 2.38
You were awake late at night	36.021	299	0.000	2.65 – 2.95
Hectic schedule	41.115	299	0.000	3.15 – 3.47
Tests/assessments	42.950	299	0.000	3.22 – 3.53
To prepare your tests or tutorials	44.451	299	0.000	3.30 – 3.61
For having meals when you skip your breakfast	33.307	299	0.000	2.47 – 2.78
Due to any health issue	36.465	299	0.000	2.67 – 2.98
To attend the unannounced visits from your family	33.934	299	0.000	2.19 – 2.45
Inflexible time tables that hamper quality learning	37.200	299	0.000	2.74 – 3.04
Aggressive attitude of your teacher	34.455	299	0.000	2.47 – 2.77

as well as organizational factors and time and performance pressure, identified as the main causes of stress among medical students.¹² This stress can lead towards absenteeism as well which is similar to results of our study where most common reason cited towards absenteeism is preparation of tests and tutorials. A study done by Takami Maeno et al showed that the alteration of the academic calendar and busy/hectic timetable was the most frequently recognized primary obstacle to the implementation of professional education¹³ which is similar to the results of our study where hectic schedule is one of the commonest reasons towards absenteeism. A study done by Neil P. Morris et al showed that attendance for unrecorded lectures was much higher as compared to recorded ones which students can assess any-time later on.¹⁴ This is similar to our study where avail-

ability of lectures is one of the reason for not attending class.

A study done by Antonios Nteveros et al depicted that the consequences of burnout among medical students are numerous since it is linked to absenteeism, low morale, and unhappiness¹⁵ which is similar to the results of our study. Similarly, a study done by Moeed Iqbal Qureshi et al found that rigid timetables were among the top causes of absenteeism among medical students, which hindered quality learning¹⁶, similar to the results of our study. A study done by Ahmed Alsoufi et al showed that one of the factors contributing to student absenteeism is students' disinterest in lectures and their reliance on the availability of learning materials online which impede their concentration during lectures and tutorials.¹⁷ a study done by Bothaina Ahmed Attal showed that due

to late-night internet usage and a lack of sleep hygiene awareness, medical students often experience insufficient sleep duration and poor sleep quality, which is linked to concentration problems, poor academic performance, and absenteeism.¹⁸ These results are similar to our study.

A study done by Azim Mirzazadeh showed that the scientific knowledge, topic mastery, and oral communication skills of faculty members were seen by both faculty members and students as having the greatest impact on student attendance. The opinions of students and faculty members on how attending class affects academic success were statistically significant. Students were less likely to agree with the faculty members who stated that professionalism in students was measured by their attendance in class.¹⁹ According to the results of study done by Kiran Nawaz et al, instructional factors, evaluation factors as well as social variables, were the main contributing factors influencing absenteeism among nursing students.²⁰ Our study was limited by the fact that it was a single centre study. The generalisability of absenteeism reasons among medical students could not be determined due to the study's nonprobability sampling approach and also due to variability of factors variations in different institutes. Compared to qualitative procedures used in face-to-face situations, the depth of information that may otherwise be acquired is typically overlooked by online data collecting.

Conclusion

There are several reasons why students miss class, most commonly mentioned by students were “To prepare your tests or tutorials; Hectic schedule and want to spend the same time in self-studies/self-directed studies.” Teachers must be approachable and helpful in order for pupils to get over their fears and shortcomings. The curriculum should include mentorship programs and constructive feedback.

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Authors Contribution

MUD, SA: Conceptualization of Project

NF, MM, UN, KAT: Data Collection

NF, MM, UN, KAT: Literature Search

MUD: Statistical Analysis

MUD, NF, UN, KAT: Drafting, Revision

MUD, SA, MM: Writing of Manuscript