

# ABSENTEEISM AMONG MEDICAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To assess the prevalence and causes of absenteeism among the undergraduate medical students of a Public Sector Medical College in Peshawar.

**Material and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted using a pretested self-administered semi-structured questionnaire from January 2015 to April 2015. The study was conducted on students of First Year MBBS to Fifth Year MBBS in Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, Pakistan. Quota sampling was done inclusion criteria was regular undergraduate students who were present on the day of interview, informed consent was taken and confidentiality was ensured. The primary outcome indicator was self-reported absenteeism from lectures from 12th January, 2015 to 12th February, 2015. The data analysed in SPSS version 20.

**Results:** Five hundred students consented and filled the questionnaire. Among these students, 12.8% had not missed a class, 37% had missed 1-5 lectures, 22.6% had missed 6-10 lectures, 10.2% had missed 6-10 lectures and 17.4% had missed more than fifteen lectures. Majority students (35.86%) missed classes due to academic reasons. The main reasons reported for missing lectures was lack of free time between classes, dislike of lecturers, teaching style, peer pressure and lack of sleep.

**Conclusion:** Poor teaching methods and social and personal factors are responsible for student's absenteeism. Changes in Students habits and teacher performance can play a role in reduction of absenteeism from lectures.

**Key Words:** Absenteeism, academic, prevalence, Medical College, undergraduate.

## INTRODUCTION

Student absenteeism is a worldwide problem for university education and the field of medicine is no exception. In spite of implementing strict policies regarding student attendance, the rate of absenteeism in medical colleges remains high and is a growing apprehension a phenomenon that is also on the rise in universities worldwide<sup>1</sup>.

In academics students success depends on attendance<sup>1,2</sup>. Studies have shown that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, but particularly for students with lower socio-economic status. Students who attend classes regularly score higher on tests than their peers who are frequently absent<sup>2</sup>. Absenteeism has been shown to be an indicator of low level of motivation for learning<sup>3</sup>.

As far as the cause of absenteeism is concerned, all the studies on the topic have established consciences for the gradual flux in nonattendance, though the level and magnitude of each reason may differ from country to country but majority of these reasons stem from problems within the institution itself. These problems include poor teaching strategies, unfavourable learning environment, poor relations with lecturers and lack of interest in the subject<sup>4</sup>. Having mentioned that, the social and personal factors that cause students to miss lectures cannot be overlooked. Issues such as heavy traffic, personal problems, sleeplessness, ill health and excessive socialization are only some of the reasons why students skip classes<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the observed nature of the problem, there is no published study that assessed the magnitude and predictors of absenteeism in any medical college in Peshawar. Thus, this study was conducted to determine the prevalence and causes of absenteeism among undergraduate medical students of a Public Sector Medical College in Peshawar.

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## MATERIAL AND METHODS

We conducted a descriptive, cross sectional study in a Public Sector Medical College Peshawar from January 2015 to April 2015 using a self-administered questionnaire. The participants were full time enrolled undergraduate medical students of Public Sector Medical College for at least one academic year. Those students who were unwilling to participate in the study were excluded from the study population. Total sample size was 500 i.e. 250 were male and 250 were female, with age ranging from 18-25 years old. Quota sampling technique was used and 100 students were selected from each academic year. The questionnaires were pretested before conducting the study. To ensure the confidentiality no identifying information was included. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20.

## RESULTS

Out of total 500 students, 87.4% of students reported missing at least one class in the stipulated period. We discovered that 37% of students had missed 1-5 lectures, 22.6% had missed 6-10 lectures, 10.2% has missed 11-15 lectures and 17.4% had missed more than 15 lectures. Breakup of class wise absenteeism was 80% in 1st year, 91% in 2nd year, 88% in 3rd year, 91% in 4th year and 86% in final year. Absenteeism rate was 72% among boarders while 64% among day scholars. The major academic reasons reported by the study participants for missing lectures were lack of free time between classes (12.72%) and dislike of teaching style (11.89%). The major social reasons reported by the study participants for missing lectures were peer pressure (23.03%) and traffic/transportation problems (20.69%). The major personal reason reported by the study participants for missing lectures was lack of sleep (23.59%) and illness/disability (20.26%).

## DISCUSSION

Good attendance is important for academic achievement. Therefore a university that promotes discipline and integrity will definitely reduce absenteeism. Our study revealed an alarming rate of absenteeism among the students of a Public Sector Medical College, Peshawar with majority of students reporting missing at least one class in the stipulated period that is consistent with a study conducted in Hawassa University College of Medicine and Health Sciences on the prevalence of absenteeism and associated risk factors revealed that nearly half of the students, 43.7% (95% CI=7.8-11.4) reported that they had missed three or more lectures

and 14.1% (95% CI=12.2-16.2) missed more than 8 lectures in the preceding semester<sup>6</sup>. Also studies indicate that absenteeism from lectures and tutorials is a growing trend worldwide<sup>7</sup>. We observed that the major cause of absenteeism was academic with 35.86% of students reporting missing lectures due to academic reasons, followed by personal reasons (33.05%) and social reasons (31.1%).

The other main academic reason which caused absenteeism is dislike of teaching style which is consistent with numerous studies all over the world<sup>5-8</sup>. Most of the teachers use PowerPoint presentations to deliver lectures and changing slides back and forth makes the lecture monotonous and less interactive and students lose interest. Other academic reasons we found were preference for self-study and class schedule inconvenience. According to another study preparing for an examination was the second most frequent cause of absenteeism among students<sup>9</sup>.

The major social reasons reported by the study participants for missing lectures were peer pressure and traffic/transportation problems. A study conducted in India revealed that socializing was their top reason behind absenteeism in their school and the same were the finding in Peshawar<sup>9</sup>. The other main social problem which contributed to the absenteeism of students in a heavily populated city like Peshawar is traffic. Students reach college late and thus miss classes. Additionally, students with low motivation are more likely to engage in social drug use. Low motivation to learn has been significantly associated with being absent in more lectures<sup>10</sup>.

Staying awake till late night either studying or socializing with friends, results in an increase in absenteeism, usually skipping the morning classes. As common saying is morning is for thinking, noon to act, evening for eating and night is for sleep. According to the study conducted in Jamaica<sup>1</sup> revealed that more than 50% students were absent due to financial constraint and family issues.

Our research findings raise various issues that call for further research to determine better understand the reasons for absenteeism and its consequences. This trend should be taken seriously as it will have long-term consequences for the health-delivery and health services in our country.

## CONCLUSION

Missing lectures was associated with lack of free time between classes, disliking the teaching style, peer pressure and lack of sleep.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Students as well the faculty need to be made aware of the problem and its short and long term consequences for the students and society at large. Also we need to improve quality of lecture materials and teaching techniques. Regular training for instructors to help them improve their teaching methodologies could be a useful intervention. In addition Peer assisted learning and problem based learning should be introduced in order to make it interactive.

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Following authors have made substantial contributions to the manuscript as under:

- Gul R:** Concept and design, acquisition of data, final approval.  
**Khan HM:** Drafting of manuscript.  
**Alam SR:** Data analysis.  
**Luqman F:** Data collection.  
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