ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

DOI: 10.26727/NJRCM.2019.8.4.316-321

Year: 2019 Vol: 8 Issue: 4. Oct.-Dec. Page: 316-321

A Cross Sectional Study On Reasons for Poor Attendance Among Medical Undergraduates at Private Medical College of Central Gujarat, India

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Date of Submission : 17.11.2019

Date of online Publication : 27-12-2019

Date of Acceptance : 27.12.2019

Date of Print Publication : 31-12-2019

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ABSTRACT

Background: Absenteeism is defined as a habit of staying away from the regular classes without providing a genuine or any reason for not attending classes. If Medical student is unable to attend the classes, it is not only loss for him or her family but also to the whole society. **Materials and Methods:** It was a Cross sectional study conducted among medical undergraduates at Private Medical College of central Gujarat during April to September 2018. Total 238 students having attendance less than 75% were approached from all batches. Number of responses was taken as a denominator to calculate the percentages. **Results:** 73% of students joined MBBS by self-motivation followed by Parents' wish (21%). The main reasons for less attendance were Classroom related (non-functioning Air conditioner (57%), audiovisual aids (15%), ventilation & hygiene (17%), Colleague related (peer pressure (12%), Faculty related (non-interactive lectures (27%), subject related (boring subject (23%), subject hard to understand (16%). Students spent time on leisure activities (29.2%), sleeping (17.3%) and going home (7.2%) while not attending lectures. 35% students studied the missed topic by self, 41% preferred books and internet and 13% asked classmates. 62% suggested improving the quality of teaching with interactive sessions. **Conclusion:** Absenteeism was highly prevalent among medical undergraduates. More student friendly infrastructure of classrooms and more interactive teaching with quality presentation might promote students to attend the lectures. Early communication of Attendance to the students as well as parents can be one of the remedial measures.

Key word: Absenteeism, Medical undergraduate students, Poor Attendance.

INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism is defined as a habit of staying away from the regular classes without providing a genuine or any reason for not attending classes ^[1] and it is a truant behavior that affects adversely the prospects of a student. Frequent absence from the classes may lead to improper learning and poor performance in the examinations.^[2] The Professional courses like undergraduate Medical education needs good theory and practical class attendance, as these students will be the future Doctors and will deal with health profile of the public. Without attaining proper knowledge and technical skills, it will be very difficult to satisfy the expectations of the patients attending to a doctor. The final examination marks may significantly be affected by absenteeism among Medical graduates.^[3]

Lectures afford the opportunity to introduce a difficult subject, to describe different points of view on a given topic, or to sum up individual clinical or laboratory experiences. They encourage reflection on a subject, aid understanding, and develop scientific and clinical thought about it.^[4] The main purpose of lectures is to present the knowledge in a structured and efficient way. Lectures

involved teaching a lot of students in a single large class room and test the ability of a teacher how efficiently he conveys the knowledge and keeps the students attentive.^[5]

Organized lectures and tutorial classes are part and parcel of modern day academic activities. Regular attendance in classes help a student to get clear idea about the subjects of discussion as per course curriculum, which is essential for performing better result in examinations.^[6]

This study has been planned to evaluate the attendance of medical undergraduates in lectures and practical who are studying at Private Medical College of Central Gujarat, India and to explore the various reasons like student, college and external factors for the absenteeism among them and also to find out the various remedies, suggestions and ideas expressed by the students.

MATERIAL & METHODS

It was a descriptive Cross sectional study carried out between the time periods of April to September 2018 at Smt.B.K.Shah Medical Institute & Research Centre, Sumandeep Vidyapeeth University situated at Piparia

village in the outskirts of Vadodara city of Gujarat state of India. Medical undergraduate students of all the years (I, II, III M.B.B.S) were targeted for the study.

We calculated number of students having attendance less than 75% and approached all these students. Total 238 students were approached from all batches (Major as well as minor batches). They were informed about the study purpose and written consent was taken prior to filling the Pre designed and Pre tested Oral Questionnaires. Adequate time was allocated to fill the desired questionnaire. All participants were briefed about background and objectives of the study and importance of the study was explained. Confidentiality anonymity was maintained throughout the study period. The participating students were asked not to disclose their names in order to avoid identity crisis.

First part of the questionnaire contained general information regarding their demographics and attendance in last semester. Second part consisted of various survey questions assessing the different reasons why medical students tend to remain absent in lectures, their views regarding quality of lectures and their suggestions for remedial measures.

Inclusion Criteria: Students having <75% attendance in last semester (August 2017 to January 2018)

Exclusion Criteria: Students having >75% attendance in last semester; Participants who didn't give written informed consent.

Data was entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed using Epi Info software. It was presented in the form of frequency tables. The Study was initiated after getting approval from the Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Institutional Ethics Committee (SVIEC).

RESULTS:

Table 1: Sample size for the study

Semester	No. of students with Attendance <75% (total students.)	No. of students approached	Students enrolled in this study
1st	79 (out of 150)	64	81%
3rd	107 (out of 151)	65	61%
5th	18 (out of 18)	8	44%
6th	36 (out of 36)	36	100%
8th	65 (out of 76)	65	86%
Total	305 (out of 431)	238	78%

There were total 431 students in different semesters during the study period, from which 305 (70.77%) were having less than 75 percent attendance in their last semester. We approached all these 305 students. We were able to interview 238 students (Table 1). Reasons for less achievement in third and fifth term were non willingness of the students to participate and non availability of the students respectively. Some students did not respond in few questions and some had given multiple answers for some questions.

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile of the Medical students

Sr No.	Variable	No. of responses (N=238)	Percent
1	Gender		
	Male	139	58.4
	Female	99	41.6
2	Reason for joining MBBS		
	Self Motivation	173	72.69
	Parents wish	49	20.59
	Peer Pressure	7	2.94
	Social status	5	2.1
	Other	4	1.68
3	Father's education		
	Illiterate	3	1.26
	Up to secondary level	5	2.1
	Higher secondary	31	13.03
	Graduate	104	43.7
	Postgraduate	95	39.92
4	Mother's education		
	Illiterate	5	2.1
	Up to secondary level	4	1.68
	Higher secondary	52	21.85
	Graduate	132	55.46
	Postgraduate	45	18.91
5	Father's occupation		
	Professional	76	31.93
	Nonprofessional	11	4.62
	Business	129	54.2
	Agricultural	14	5.88
	Others	8	3.36
6	Current place of residence		
	College Hostel	168	70.59
	Own House	50	21.01
	Private Hostel	11	4.62
	Room or Flat shared with friends	9	3.78
7	Mode of transportation		
	No need for transportation	136	57.14
	Own car	47	19.75
	Bike	26	10.92
	College Bus	15	6.3
	Van	7	2.94
	Car Pooling	7	2.94

Among the interviewed, 58% were male. The main reason for joining in MBBS study was Self motivation (73%) followed by Parents' wish (21%). Majority of the fathers of the students were graduates (44%) & postgraduates (40%) and mothers were also educated up to graduate

Figure: 1-Reasons by students for not attending the Classes

*N denotes number of responses for the particular question. Multiple responses are possible.

(55%) & post-graduation (19%) level. Regarding father's occupation, majority were involved in business (54%) followed by Professionals (32%). Majority of the students were staying at college hostel (71%), while 21% were localite and only 8% stay in private hostel, room. Majority of the students were staying outside the campus and were using car (20%) or bike (11%) followed by Van, college bus or car pooling for transportation. (Table 2)

Figure 1 shows the various reasons for not attending lectures by the enrolled students in the study. In class related issues, out of 211 responses, majority of the students complained non functioning Air conditioner in the classroom (57%), while 17% & 15% students had problem due to ventilation & hygiene and Audiovisual aids respectively. 27% of them had no class related problem.

In colleague related reasons, out of 233 responses, bunking the class due to peer pressure was the main reason (12%) while 7% were not attending due to unfriendly, uncooperative behavior of colleagues. 75% had no issue due to colleagues. In faculty related problems, out of 234 responses, 27% of students did not like method of teaching by teacher, while 15% did not like even particular teachers also but 50% students had no issue related to teacher.

In subject related issues, out of 199 responses, 23% students felt subject boring while 16% felt the subject hard to learn while 60% had no issue. Regarding lecture content, out of 230 responses, 34% students did not like quality of lecture while 66% had no problem.

In hostel related problems, out of 244 responses, most of the problems (almost half) were due to water supply, air conditioner, lift or electricity, while fewer (3%) had

problem due to frequent shifting of rooms in hostel and 39% had no issues. Regarding language problem, out of 194 responses, 91% had no language barrier.

Table:3 - General Information regarding Poor Attendance:

Sr No.	Particulars	No. of responses	Percent
1	Awareness of attendance in the subject (n=238)	186	-78.15
2	Acceptance of poor attendance (n=238)	147	-61.76
3	How to learn the topic if not attending classes (n=96)		
	Self study	34	(35.4)
	From Books	21	(21.87)
	Internet	20	(20.8)
	Ask Classmate for missed class	12	(12.5)
	Tution	9	(9.37)
4	Plan to improve attendance (n=233)		
	Will Attend classes more regularly in future	175	(75.1)
	no plans made yet	29	(16.57)
	Arrange extra classes	17	(7.29)
	Give extension	4	(1.7)
	will maintain health not to get illness	3	(1.28)
	Don't care	3	(1.28)
	Give assignment	2	(0.85)
5	Suggestion to subject expert to improve attendance (n=207)		
	Give quality teaching with better presentations, interactive teaching	128	(61.83)
	None	63	(30.43)
	Extra lectures	9	(4.34)
	attendance should be optional	5	(2.4)
	Take Viva	2	(0.96)
6	Attendance to be communicated to students early (n=238)	187	-78.57
7	Attendance to be communicated to parents (n=238)	174	-73.11
8	Believe that examination can be passed without adequate attendance (n=238)	123	-51.68

According to Table 3, out of 238 responses, 78% students had idea of their status of attendance in their concerned subjects and 62% students accepted that they had poor attendance (<75%). Majority of the students spent time on leisure activities (29.2%), sleeping (17.3%) and going home (7.2%) while not attending lectures. Only 22.2% replied they did self study during that time.

Figure: 2 activities done by students while absent in lectures (N=202)

Table: 4 Barriers for attending class (N=197)

BARRIERS FOR ATTENDING CLASS (N=197)	No. of responses	Percent
None	79	40.1
Boring lectures	28	14.2
Sleep	20	10.1
Poor comfort in classroom	12	6.09
Ill health	11	5.6
Online Games	10	5.07
lectures not arranged on schedule	9	4.6
Co Curricular activities and sports	8	4.06
lectures are not enough useful	6	3.04
I like it	6	3.04
Peer pressure	3	1.5
Home sickness	3	1.5
Staying out side of college campus	2	1.01

Regarding barriers in attending classes, out of 197 responses, 40% reported no barriers while others were involved in leisure activities, sleeping, felt lecture boring or not useful or due to peer pressure (Table 4). Regarding learning topics if not attending classes, out of 96 responses, 35% students studied by self, 41% preferred books and internet to learn and 13% asked classmates. To improve attendance in lectures, out of 233 responses, 75% replied that they would attend the classes regularly in future, while 10% asked for extra classes, assignments & extension, but 17% students still had not thought to improve attendance. 207 suggestion responses were obtained to improve attendance in lectures. 62% suggested improving the quality of teaching with interactive sessions. 2% said that attendance should be optional.

79% students suggested that attendance should be communicated early to them so that they can cope up while 73% suggested sending it early to parents also. It was strange to hear that 52% students believed they can pass the examinations without adequate attendance.

DISCUSSION

In study by Rao BT et al most of the students (95%) joined the M.B.B.S course by their own interest, a very less number of students joined it with their parent's pressure (5%). Majority of these students (95%) were residing at hostel and a very few (5%) were coming to college as a day scholars. [7] These findings were quite similar with present study.

The top five college factors contributing to the absenteeism were lengthy classes, lack of clarity about the topic among teachers, past experience with lecturer, monotonous lectures, poor infra structure in the class rooms and lack of proper canteen and food related problems in a study by Rao BT. [7]

The top five suggestions by the students for improving the attendance was taking feedback from students, interaction with teachers, creative teaching methods, supportive college culture, friendly teacher/ student relationship in a study by Rao BT. [7]

It was observed in study by Rao BT et al that maximum students express their willingness about laziness and taking part in extracurricular activities like cultural activities and sports were the two main student factors for absenteeism among Medical students. Many students were thinking that they can easily clear their exams so they can spend time in other activities. [7]

Quarter of the students in present study found lectures boring either due to lecture content or unfriendly teacher. A study conducted in Medical colleges of Tripura state also noted that poor teaching skills of teachers were one of the main reasons for absence of the students from the classes. [8]

Few students (24.1%) considered transport facility as a causative factor in non-attending the lectures. Majority of the students (58.9%) thought that the content of the lectures is poor in a study by Hafeez K. [5] Most of the students (63.8%) thought that timing of the lectures is not adjusted according to their schedule. A large number of students (63.1%) reported health related issues as a cause of absenteeism. [5]

A Study by Daud S on fourth year medical graduates concluded a statistically significant association between attendance and test scores ($p < 0.001$). There was a positive correlation between attendance and test scores ($r = 0.05$). [9]

All students said attendance is a requirement for qualification to sit for professional MBBS examination in study by Ahmed M et al. and 17(3.58%) thought they could pass subject without attending the classes [10] which is contrary to finding in this study where 52% students believed they can pass the examinations without adequate attendance.

In study by Ahmed M et al. some students were absent in the class due to sickness, leave, feeling the class boring or thinking of getting notes from friends etc. [10] Illness was found as a reason for not attending lecture in 5% of the students in present study.

In a study on medical, Pharmacy, Dentistry and Nursing students fewer than one fifth of students believe that the lectures were easy and that they could learn without attending, while 40% affirmed that lecturers had a positive influence on their learning about that subject. The proportion of students finding the lecture halls physically inadequate was 45%. Amongst the reasons for non-attendance at lectures, the most frequently cited were lack of sleep, illness, studying for examinations in other subjects, having other commitments at the same time and poor weather conditions. [4] 28.7% medical students perceived that attendance at lectures does not affect academic achievement in that study [4] while half of the students in present study believed that they can pass the examinations without adequate attendance.

Conclusion:

Absenteeism was highly prevalent among medical undergraduate students of all semesters at SBKS MIRC. More student friendly infrastructure of classrooms might promote students to attend the lectures like functional air-conditioned classrooms, good functional audiovisual system, less noisy atmosphere etc. Some students were also facing language barrier and other problems. Students needed more interactive teaching with quality presentation in lecture hall. Majority were aware about their poor attendance and didn't do productive study related activities while not attending the classes. They also wanted to communicate the attendance early to them and their parents for early remedial measures.

Limitation:

Response bias as it was a questionnaire based study. Some students may have not responded.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank to Smt. B. K. Shah Medical Institute & Research Centre, Sumandeep Vidhyapeeth University, Piparia, Vadodara, Gujarat, India for providing opportunity to conduct this study through EviGenCHIP – Evidence Generating Community Health Project. We also thank the medical undergraduates who participated in the study.

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