



## STUDY OF ABSENTEEISM AMONG UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

### Community Medicine

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Professional course like undergraduate Medical education needs good theory and clinical class attendance, the reason being these students will be a future Doctors and deal with health and diseases. Students are likely to skip some lectures those that are not of their interest. If Medical student is unable to attend by any means, it is loss not only for him or her but also for the whole society in long term. So the present cross-sectional study was conducted to evaluate the attendance of medical students in the theory and practical and to identify different factors responsible for low attendance.

**Methodology:** A cross sectional study was conducted from March 2019 to April 2019 among all the four batches of M.B.B.S. students currently present at Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur. A pre-designed, pre-tested online questionnaire through Google form was given to the students after explaining about various contents.

Statistical Analysis: Chi-square test was used to find out the association between absenteeism and different socio-demographic factors.

**Results:** Out of the total 600 students of all the four M.B.B.S. batches, 300 students participated in the study. Preference to self/group study was the main factor for absenteeism. Among the college factors lengthy classes and inaudibility while teaching are the main contributing reasons. Lack of clarity among the teacher and uninteresting way of teaching were found to be common factors related to teaching staff for absenteeism.

**Conclusion:** Teachers need to adopt creative teaching techniques to improve the attendance of the students for theory and practical.

### KEYWORDS

Absenteeism, Undergraduate Student, Magnitude and reasons of absenteeism

### INTRODUCTION

Graduate medical curriculum is oriented towards training students to undertake the responsibilities of a physician of first contact who is capable of looking after the preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative aspect of medicine.<sup>1</sup>

Absenteeism is a situation in which people are not at the mandatory attendance during lectures & practical sessions, absenteeism is a growing concern.<sup>2</sup> Number of reasons has been quoted for absenteeism. Absence can be viewed as a very personal decision based on both the ability to attend and the motivation to attend. The individual decision to come to lectures will be influenced by many factors.<sup>3</sup>

The major reasons for missing lectures were preparing for another examination, inconvenient class schedule, lack of interest in the subject matter, dislike of teaching style and the ease of understanding the subject matter without guidance.<sup>4</sup> A high number of students remain absent in the pre-examination period.<sup>5</sup> Absence in the pre-examination period and at the end of the year is may be due to lack of preparedness, so the students prefer to spend time on study rather than attending lectures.<sup>6</sup> Some students wait till exam dates are announced and quickly rush through the books and guides thereafter. The student then tries to cover much material in few hours.<sup>7</sup>

Another common reason for absenteeism is sickness. Students are forced to miss classes in illness or illness of a family member.<sup>8</sup> Getting to bed late in the night and feeling tired in class are other common reasons for absenteeism.<sup>3</sup> Even though medical students opt for the course by choice, they may find the course work more rigorous and demanding than anticipated. Absenteeism can be one convenient way to escape the curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

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. The qualities of teachers, their practices and the relationship they have with their students appears to play a role in non-attendance to lectures.<sup>3</sup> Poor teaching skills of lecturers leads to boring lectures.<sup>9,10</sup> Dislike for teaching style and the ease of understanding the subject without guidance is also a contributing factor for absenteeism.<sup>4</sup> Lack of clarity about the topic among teachers while teaching is a contributing reason for absenteeism.<sup>11</sup> Accessibility of lecture content in the form of online slides, videos and audios have their own contribution to absenteeism.<sup>8</sup> Medical education system has inherited the traditional pattern: lecture-

based, teacher-centred, discipline-based, examination driven, and hospital-oriented.<sup>12</sup> Reorientation of medical education is needed along with policy settings to attract students. Thus, this cross sectional study was conducted to determine the magnitude and reasons for absenteeism among undergraduate students of Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted at Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur from March 2019 to April 2019. Undergraduate students who were pursuing first, second, third Part I and Part II of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery course at Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur, and gave consent to participate, were included in the study. Students were briefed about the importance, background and objectives of the study at the end of a lecture, and a pre-designed, pre-tested online questionnaires were made available to them after informed consent. Students who were not present at that time were encouraged to fill out the questionnaire. Those students, who have not given consent and not willing and refuse to participate, were excluded from the study. Students were assured about their anonymity.

The questionnaire used for this study consists of various aspects pertaining to the medical students, teachers and college and they were asked to fill the questionnaire on their own without revealing their answer to other students or without discussing amongst themselves. First part of the questionnaire contained general information regarding their demographics and attendance in last semester. Students were considered as having missed the classes if they remain absent in the class at least twice in last semester. Second part consisted of various questions assessing the different reasons why medical students tend to remain absent from lectures, their views regarding content and quality of lectures. The students were briefed about maintaining the honesty while filling the details in given questionnaire.

Information was gathered on student's related 37 factors like class schedule inconvenience, preference to self/group study over lectures, Lack of interest in the subject, laziness, their involvement in sports and cultural activities, lack of interest, preparing for other exams, fear of examinations etc.

Information was gathered on teaching staff related 7 factors like teaching style, uninteresting way of teaching, more topics covered in short time, topics covered rapidly, topic not understood etc.

Data was collected about the views on 4 college related factors like class environment, non audible lectures, uncomfortable sitting arrangement in class, overcrowding in the classroom.

Suggestions about remedies on improving the attendance were also obtained from the students to make subject more interesting.

**Statistical Analysis**

The data from the questionnaire has been entered and analyzed by using SPSS-21 trial version software. Analysis was carried out for different types of variables. Mean and percentages were used for descriptive variables. Chi-square test was used to observe the

association between absenteeism and different socio demographic factors.

**RESULTS**

A total of 300 students participated in the study. Table 1 shows the characteristics of study subjects. The mean age of study subjects was 22.3 ± 1.4 years. Maximum students 83 (27.7%) were at 21 years of age. Male students were 182 (60.7%). Majority of the students were Hindu by religion 245 (81.3%). Majority of the students had grown up in urban area 195 (65.0%). Majority of the students were currently residing at hostel 238 (79.3%). 267 (89.0%) students had joined the course by their choice. 259 (86.3%) were feeling interested in studying the course.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics & absenteeism among students**

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency		Missed a Class at least twice in last semester (n=284)		p value
		No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)	
Age (in years)	17	4	1.3	4	1.4	0.983161
	18	26	8.7	22	7.7	
	19	56	18.7	55	19.4	
	20	68	22.7	64	22.5	
	21	83	27.7	79	27.8	
	22	44	14.7	43	15.1	
	23	14	4.7	13	4.6	
Gender	Male	182	60.7	170	59.9	0.22774
	Female	118	39.3	114	40.1	
Religion	Hindu	245	81.3	233	82.0	0.271644
	Bouddha	31	10.3	29	10.2	
	Muslim	14	4.7	13	4.6	
	Others	11	3.6	9	3.2	
Where they grew up	Urban area	195	65.0	186	65.5	0.450737
	Rural area	105	35.0	98	34.5	
Year of Study	First MBBS	78	26.0	73	25.7	0.617778
	Second MBBS	63	21.0	59	20.8	
	Third MBBS part I	121	40.3	117	41.2	
	Third MBBS Part II	38	12.6	35	12.3	
Current Residence	Hostel	238	79.3	224	78.9	0.407009
	Day Scholar	57	19.0	55	19.4	
	Room outside	5	1.7	5	1.8	
Joined MBBS as per choice	Yes	267	89.0	253	89.1	0.843758
	No	33	11.0	31	10.9	
Feel interested in studying MBBS	Yes	259	86.3	244	85.9	0.37472
	No	23	7.7	22	7.7	
	No Comment	18	6.0	18	6.3	

Out of 300 students, only 16 (5.3%) students responded that they had never missed a class, large number of students 284 (94.7%) admitted that they had missed at least two classes in last semester. No statistically significant difference, for missing a class, was observed among different age groups, gender, place where they grew, current residence, year of study, joining the course by choice & interest in the course.

**Table 2: Reasons of absenteeism due to student related factors**

Reasons for absenteeism	Frequency	
	No.	%
Preferred self/group study over lectures	134	44.7
Lectures perceived as boring	124	41.3
Mass bunk	124	41.3
Class schedule inconvenience (timings of the lectures were not adjusted according to schedule)	112	37.3
Lengthy classes	102	34.0
Getting to bed late at night	90	30.0
College gatherings, cultural events	89	29.7
Feeling tired in class	87	29.0
Feels lazy	83	27.7
Accessibility of lecture content in the form of online slides, videos, audios	73	24.3
Not studied enough for exams	68	22.7
Ill health - own/ family member	67	22.3
Sleeplessness	66	22.0
Boring subject	65	21.7
Too much classes	65	21.7
Exhaustive clinical postings in morning hours	65	21.7

Fear of getting failed	64	21.3
Feel stressed	64	21.3
Lack of interest in the subject	57	19.0
Mimicked the seniors	55	18.3
Private tuitions	52	17.3
Fear of being scolded	48	16.0
College Camps	47	15.7
Preparing for another examination	44	14.7
Long gap between clinical posting and lecture	44	14.7
Lack of personal interest	44	14.7
Rigorous and demanding course-work	38	12.7
Family problems	38	12.7
Classes of appearing subjects	33	11.0
Peer pressure	27	9.0
Not useful	26	8.7
The subject does not need teachers guidance	24	8.0
Couldn't cope-up	23	7.7
Home sickness	21	7.0
Do not care to attend	20	6.7
Do not understand the medical subject	18	6.0
Engaged in research project	12	4.0

Table 2 shows the reasons for absenteeism related to student. Maximum students 134 (44.7) preferred self/group study than to attend the lectures, followed by 124 (41.3%) stated that they perceived lectures as boring, equal number of students remained absent due to mass bunk. 112 (37.3%) students stated inconvenient lecture schedule as a reason for absenteeism.

**Table 3: Teaching staff related reasons for absenteeism**

Reasons of absenteeism	Frequency	
	No	%
More topics covered in short time, topics covered rapidly, topic not understood	130	43.3
Uninteresting way of teaching	125	41.7
Do not like teachers teaching style	92	30.7
Change in lecture schedule on time	57	19.0
Do not have information about lecture	47	15.7
Teachers are non-co-operative	45	15.0
Lectures are taken without prior intimation	27	9.0

Table 3 shows teaching staff related factors for absenteeism as narrated by the students. More topics covered in short time or topics covered rapidly and topic not understood by them, were reasons stated by 130 (43.3%) students. 125 (41.7%) students perceived teachers way of teaching as uninteresting and 92 (30.7%) students did not like teachers teaching style.

**Table 4: Factors related to college for absenteeism**

Reasons for absenteeism	Frequency	
	No	%
Lectures not audible	68	22.7
Uncomfortable sitting arrangement in class	37	12.3
Overcrowding in the classroom	14	4.7
Transport problem	13	4.3

Table 4 shows college related factors for absenteeism. 68 (22.7%) students reasoned that lectures were inaudible, followed by 37 (12.3%) as uncomfortable sitting arrangement in class.

## DISCUSSION

The M.B.B.S. course aims to produce a physician with adequate knowledge of health and disease, reasonable medical skills and healthy attitudes to patients and their families.<sup>13</sup> The problem of students' absenteeism from lectures is becoming the concern, because of its grievous consequences on the individual in particular and the society in general. This study investigated the student-centred, teaching staff related and college related causes of absenteeism among M.B.B.S. students. That only half of the students participated in the study on the reasons for absenteeism, indicates a reluctance by the students to confront the issue as also observed by Dhaliwal U.<sup>14</sup> In the present study, large number of students 284 (94.7%) admitted that they had missed at least two classes in last semester. Students tend to remain absent irrespective to age, gender, religion, place where they grew up, year of study and current residence. The prevalence of absenteeism and associated risk factors at Hawassa University College of Medicine and Health Sciences were consistent with the finding from three South African universities<sup>15</sup> where 100% students missed the classes several times during the semester in which the study was conducted. Studies indicate that absenteeism from lectures and tutorials is a growing trend worldwide.<sup>16,17</sup>

It was observed in this study that maximum students preferred self/group study than to attend lectures, they perceived lectures as uninteresting, also the mass bunk were important student factors for absenteeism among medical students. 19% students stated lack of interest in the subject as a reason for absenteeism as observed by Moorea S et al<sup>18</sup> and Devadoss S and Foltz J.<sup>19</sup> Lack of interest in the subject matter could be attributed to the likelihood that the health science students are assigned to the field probably against their choice and even though medical students elect to be on the medical track, they may find the course work more rigorous and demanding.<sup>4,11</sup> In this study 12.7% students found medical course as more rigorous and demanding.

Abdulaziz A<sup>5</sup> found that approximately half the students usual time of absence was for the morning lectures and sessions, showing that medical students do not prefer early sessions, possibly due to their tendency to study during the late hours, thereby over-sleeping in the morning.<sup>5</sup> In this study, inconvenient class schedule (37.3%), getting to bed late at night (30%), and preparing for another examination (14.7%) were the reasons quoted for absenteeism. 9% students stated peer pressure as a reason for absenteeism in this study as also observed by Dhaliwal U.<sup>14</sup> A study conducted by Haritha T<sup>20</sup> among final year medical students also observed lack of interest in the subject, mood disturbance, movies, peer pressure as student related factors for

absenteeism.

Bati et al<sup>8</sup> assessed 663 students from medical, dental, pharmacy and nursing to evaluate the reasons for lecture attendance. He reported individual causes for not attending the lectures including sleeplessness, ill health and inefficient lectures. In this study, 22.3% students reported illness as a cause of absenteeism. A study conducted by Dhaliwal U<sup>14</sup> observed number reasons for absenteeism including illness, family commitments, lecture topic and lecture time spent in clinical posting. Present study also showed similar causes for low attendance.

Among the factors related to teachers, topics covered rapidly and topic were not understood by the students making them to remain absent in the class. A study from Hawassa University Ethiopia<sup>4</sup> also revealed that unfavourable teaching strategies are major causes for absenteeism as reported by students, which is consistent with present study. A study conducted in Medical colleges of Tripura state<sup>9</sup> was also noted that poor teaching skills of teachers were one of the main reason for absence of the students from the classes. Poor understanding of the classes by students also found to be significant factor for low level of attendance for the classes. Poor lecture content or presentation skills make the students lose their concentration and this affects the attendance of the students in class rooms<sup>9</sup> Dislike for teaching methods and understanding problems in the subject without guidance was also a contributing factor for absenteeism which was observed by Desalegn et al.<sup>4</sup>

Poor infrastructure like inaudibility in lectures due to lack of audio-aids was also found to be one of the reason for absenteeism. A study conducted by Hafeez K<sup>21</sup> observed that 24.1% students consider transport facility as a causative factor in non-attending the lectures as most of the students (57%) were living >10km from their corresponding colleges. In the present study only 4.3% students stated transport related issues as a reason for absence as the majority of the students were residing currently at hostel.

There are certain limitations to this study like a cross sectional study, lesser number of students participation and the response bias as it was a self administered questionnaire. However the results of this study highlighted the important reasons for absenteeism, which should be treated as a matter of importance.

## CONCLUSION

Attendance was low in lectures and there were various reasons for absenteeism from lectures including preference for self/group study, lectures perceived as boring by students, inconvenient lecture timings and topics not understood by them. This raises concerns for the educators to rectify these factors in order to improve student's attendance in lectures. This will definitely have a positive effect in the professional growth of these medical undergraduates.

There is need to focus on the contents of the lectures and the lectures should be interactive so as to keep the students involved. Faculty should be well prepared for the classes with use of relevant audio-visual aids. Capacity building of faculty by various training programmes to change their orientation from the traditional lecture method to interactive and innovative lecture methods.

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