

ASSESSMENT OF DIFFERENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE REGULARITY OF UNDERGRADUATE DENTAL STUDENTS OF SHARIF COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY, LAHORE

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to find the relationship between different contributing factors affecting student's regularity in class.

Materials & Methods: A study was conducted at Sharif College of Dentistry, SMDC, Lahore on the undergraduate dental students inclusive of all years, age and gender. Students who had migrated from other institutes or not had been a part of college since last six months were excluded from the study. In this cross sectional study, specially designed questionnaires were distributed among the 195 undergraduate dental students of all four years. The questionnaire consisted of questions on various personal, familial, emotional, social and motivational problems that have an impact on student regularity in college. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23. Chi-square test was used for determining the association between regularity and the factors affecting it, a p-value less than or equal to 0.05 is considered statically significant.

Results: A study was conducted on 195 students of Sharif College of Dentistry, SMDC, Lahore with a male to female ratio of 1:2.5, mean age of 21+S.D 1.398. Fear of being debarred from the final examination was the main driving factor for regularity (93.8%). The irregularity was mainly due to stress and anxiety 39 % and frequent illness 27%. A significant relationship was found between the attendance and familial problems with $p < 0.001$ No significant relationship was seen between the regularity of students, motivational and social problems.

Conclusion: Frequent illness (27%), stress and anxiety (38%) are the main factors affecting the regularity of the students within the class, whereas the fear of being debarred (93%) from the final exam is the main driving force for being regular in class.

Key Words: Regularity, undergraduate dental education, motivating factors, demotivating factors, familial problems, social problems and personal problems.

Introduction

Absenteeism is defined as the intentional truancy of students from the class¹.

Over the years, dental education along with broadening the sphere of embarking new avenues of advancement is becoming progressively complicated². The primary objective of undergraduate dental education is to give oral health care professionals

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a basic knowledge of oral diseases and train them to help improve the oral health of the people³. It is immensely important for students of medical and dental schools to develop new and enhance existing skills alongside developing a better understanding of health and disease subject. Another important aspect of undergraduate dental education is to teach the students to develop an empathetic and kind approach towards their patients and their attendants⁴.

Since a very long time, teaching in a classroom type setting where students are present in a large number has been the most common and widely

employed method and holds great importance in the medical and dental education system^{5,6}.

It is practically impossible to disregard the importance of a regular teacher-student interaction via the mode of lectures. It benefits the students by enriching and enhancing their subject knowledge that leads to the development of better concepts. Additionally, it enables the students to identify all the good attributes of their teachers and adopt them^{7,8}.

The importance of attending classes by students and its positive impact on their academic results is a well-established fact. It helps them to improve their theoretical and practical understanding of the subject along with their academic results⁹⁻¹⁴. Maintaining regular attendance in lectures is a very integral part of the process of acquisition of knowledge and failure to do so can have negative implications on the process of learning¹⁵.

The reasons compelling dental students to maintain adequate attendance is a topic that has been debated upon in the past¹⁶. The issue of inadequate attendance in lectures goes back a long way. Riggs and Blanco suggested that higher the percentage of attendance the better is the academic performance of the students¹⁴.

Major reasons reported for absenteeism are the teacher's methodology of teaching, attitude towards the students and preparation for an upcoming exam¹⁷. Some of the other reasons reported are ill health, being preoccupied at a part-time job, monotonous lectures and other many factors again related to the teaching methodologies¹⁸. Another study suggested that inability of students to understand lectures demotivates them to attend classes and leads to their low attendance¹⁹.

A study was conducted in Sharif Medical and Dental College to find out the main contributing factors affecting the regularity of dental undergraduate students.

Aims and Objectives

To determine the effect of multiple affiliated factors on the student's regularity in class.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted on all four years of the undergraduate dental students of Sharif College of Dentistry, SMDC, La-

hore. Demographics like name, age, gender and year of study were collected, and the students were asked regarding the various motivating and demotivating factors that impacted their regularity in college. The key features of the questionnaire are given in table 1.

Questionnaires were distributed among the 195 undergraduate dental students of Sharif College of Dentistry, Sharif Medical and Dental College, (SMDC), Lahore after obtaining permission from Sharif medical research centre (SMRC). Multiple quantitative and qualitative variables were used. A self-administered questionnaire was designed and implemented on these students after taking their informed consent.

The inclusion criterion was undergraduate dental students of all years irrespective of age and gender. Students who had migrated from other institutes or not had been a part of college since last six months were excluded from the study.

The students were categorized into four groups on the basis of the percentage of their attendance as shown in Table 2. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 23. Numerical data were presented as mean and standard deviation whereas nominal data were presented as frequencies and percentages. Chi-square test was used for determining the association between regularity and different factors affecting $p < 0.05$ taken as significant.

Results

Data was collected from 195 undergraduate dental students of Sharif College of Dentistry, SMDC, Lahore 28.7% of which were males and 71.3% were females. The mean age was calculated to be 21+S.D 1.398 years. The number of respondents from the first, second, third and final year were 48, 47, 51 and 49 respectively. The students were categorized into four groups by the percentage of their attendance.

It was observed that there was no significant relationship between the regularity of students and motivational problems although extended lecture length was the biggest demotivating factor as shown in chart 1.

Among the social problem faced by students the most commonly reported factor was being bullied at the college. However, no significant relationship was seen between the student regularity and social problems ($p=0.324$). The students also reported that

the biggest emotional problem they faced while attending college was stress and anxiety, but again the results were seen to be insignificant.

There was no significant relationship between personal problems and regularity. However, group 1 reported a high frequency for frequent illness as the main personal problem that affected their regularity followed by transport problems and a distant residence (23, 10 and 6% respectively) as shown in chart 2.

It was further observed that even though the fear of being debarred had an insignificant relationship with student's regularity, the students from all three groups widely responded that it was the main driving factor for them to attend college regularly.

A significant relationship was observed between familial problems and regularity of students on one way ANOVA with $p < 0.001$. Students attributed marital problems, entertaining guests, teaching siblings at home and excessive household work the main reason for their poor attendance as shown in chart 3.

Table 1: Factors affecting the regularity of students in college

Q No	Demotivating Factors for Students	Response
1	Irregularity due to personal problems	Frequent ill health/ Transport problems/residence located far away/ Fail to wake up on time
2	Irregularity due to problems in motivation and concentration	Extended lecture length/Consecutive lectures/Preference for individual study / /Fail to maintain attention span/None of the above
3	Irregularity due to personal problems	You have siblings at home to teach/ you get exhausted due to Excessive household work (cooking, cleaning and washing etc.)/ Entertaining guests/Marital problems/ Fail to wake up on time
4	Irregularity due to emotional problems	The feeling of stress/feeling of anxiety/No emotional problems
5	Irregularity due to social problems	Subjected to social isolation/ Bullied at college /No social problems

Table 2: Categorization of students based on the percentage of their attendance

Group	Percentage	Number of students
GROUP 1	85% and above	140
GROUP 2	75 to 84%	48
GROUP 3	65 to 74%	6
GROUP 4	50 to 64%	1

Fig: 1 Bar Chart showing motivational problems affecting student regularity

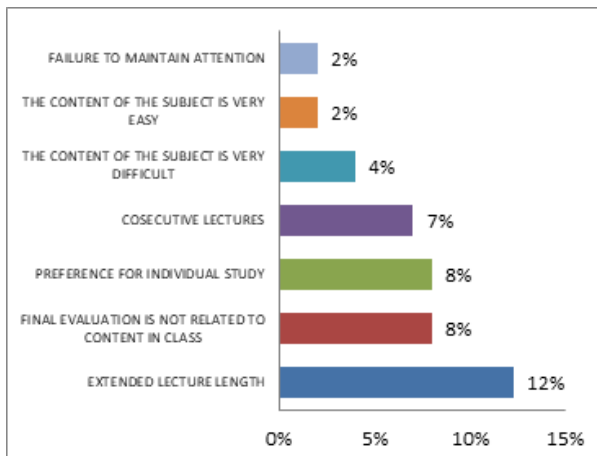
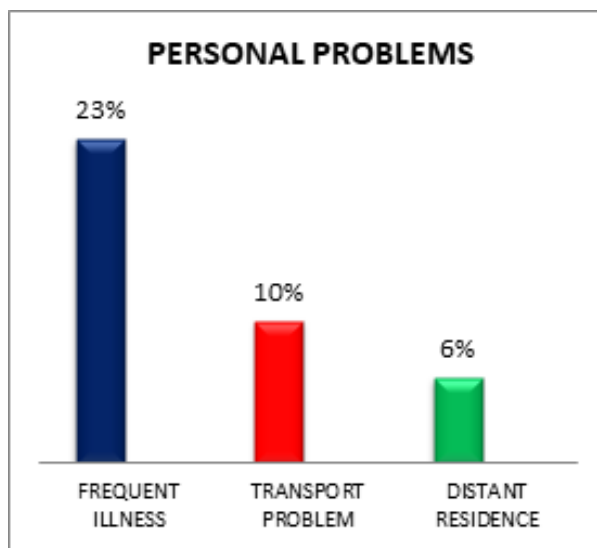


Fig: 2 Factors among the personal problem that affects student's regularity

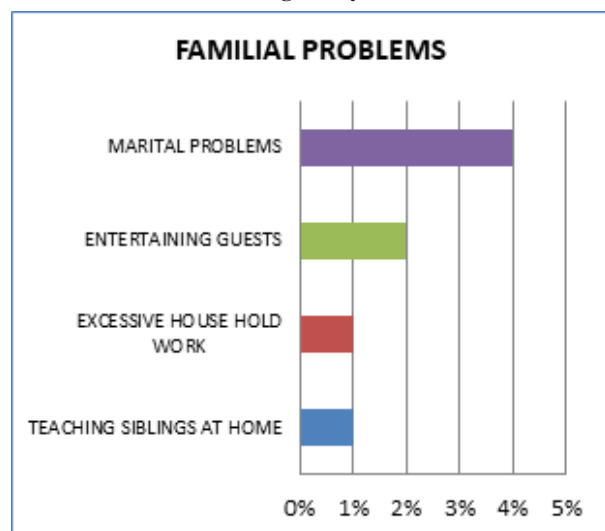


Discussion

The phenomenon of student irregularity in class is on the rise in the universities and colleges worldwide irrespective of the stern rules and regulations²⁰⁻²².

Among the personal problems, frequent health

Fig: 3 Bar chart showing personal problems that affect regularity



problems have been identified as a cause of absenteeism according to some studies 63.1%²³ and 36.9%²⁴ whereas in our study only 27% of the students reported it as a problem which is quite low in comparison to the studies mentioned above. The difference can be attributed to the place of study as our study was done in Lahore city which has good facilitations in terms of food, medicine and other basic life necessities leading to fewer health problems.

Transport problems have also been reported to have a negative impact on student regularity. The problem in commuting to college is another major reason for irregularity¹⁹. According to one study, 24% of students agreed that transport problems are an important factor for their irregularity in class. A large percentage of students (45%) also reported that they were unable to attend classes on time because the hospital and college were distant from each other²³. In our study transport problems were reported as a reason for irregularity by 13% students and 6% identified a distantly located residence as the main reason for reaching college on time. This is again way less than the studies mentioned above and can be attributed to good transportation facilities and new roads formation in Lahore.

Another study reported that a demotivating factor for students is that the contents of the subject are not complicated and can be understood without the guidance of the teacher (17.6%)²⁴ which is very high in comparison to our study (2%). It has also been reported that the students are irregular in

lectures because they believe that they can clear the final examination without attending lectures as the final evaluation is not related to the subject contents taught in class (47%)²³ whereas only 8% students in our study were of this view.

Inconvenient schedule of lectures (22%)²⁴ and unsuitable lecture timings (64%)²³ have been identified by students as demotivators impacting their regularity whereas in our study students who reported extended lecture length and consecutive lectures as factors of their irregularity were 12% and 7% only. This is way less than the studies mentioned above and can be attributed to well-formatted lecture timings and scheduling by the administration of SMDC.

The work of Timmis and Kaliszer²⁵ relate social, personal and emotional problems as reasons for absenteeism. A study reported reliance on students on self-study rather than attending lectures mainly due to easy subject contents²⁶. Another study reported students prefer individual and self-study over taking lectures (70%)²³ which are extremely high in comparison to our study (8%). This shows that students are relying more on their teachers may be due to the good teaching methodology they are using or due to a good amount of knowledge they are gaining out of them. Also, it proves that our teachers are successful in gaining students attention, gaining the trust of their students and giving them a good quality education.

It has been reported in a study that 42.9% of the students agreed upon believing social causes as the main reason for their absence from college²⁴ whereas, in our study 98% students reported that social problems were not a reason for their absenteeism. This can be attributed to the strict rules and discipline in SMDC which prevents students from being bullied or subjected to social isolation leading to minimal social problems.

Familial problems sometimes play a role in demotivating the student to attend college¹⁹ which according to our study only 4% had marital problems, and 2% had problems related to entertaining guests at home.

Literature, shows only 18.2% students, having reported stress as the main reason for their absenteeism²⁷. Our study reports way higher value (38%) which identifies stress as among the leading cause of student's irregularity. It can be postulated to

excessive studies burden in the medical and dental education and is main demotivators for the dental students.

According to our study, one of the major reasons for students to attend college was the fear of being debarred in the final examination (93%) while another study reported only 48.6%. This again identifies the strict discipline and rules followed by proper implication in SMDC all for the benefits of the students.

Conclusion

Frequent illness (27%), stress and anxiety (38%) are the main factors affecting the regularity of the students within the class, whereas, the fear of being debarred (93%) from the final exam is the main driving force for the students to be regular in class.

Recommendations

There are innumerable factors affecting the student absenteeism in undergraduate dental schools. These need to be addressed and adequate measures should be taken to cater to the needs of the students to help them resolve their problems. This will help improve their attendance and hence their academic performance.

Limitations

One limitation that the research faces is that the data collected was from one dental college and therefore the results of this research cannot represent the perspective of undergraduate dental students as a whole. Another limitation that exists is that the outcomes of this research do not represent the undergraduate medical students as it was carried out on undergraduate dental students only.

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