

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ABSENTEEISM AMONG STUDENTS OF GOMAL MEDICAL COLLEGE

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Background: Absenteeism in educational settings is a significant barrier to academic success and skill development. This study investigates the socio-demographic factors contributing to absenteeism among students at Gomal Medical College MTI, Dera Ismail Khan, KPK, highlighting the importance of class attendance for fostering essential job-related skills and overall student development. **Methods:** Utilizing a cross-sectional study design, this research was conducted from April to September 2023 within the Community Medicine Department of Gomal Medical College. The study population included students from 1st to final year, using a non-probability convenience sampling method. According to Raosoft Sample size calculator for population of 566 total students with confidence interval of 95%, margin error 5% and response rate 50%, the sample size was determined to be 230. **Results:** Among the participants, 42.4% were female and 57.6% were male, with 76.4% residing in hostels. Key factors leading to absenteeism included the perception of being able to pass exams without attending lectures, disrupted sleep patterns, and the need to prepare for other exams. College-related factors such as non-interactive classes and a communication gap with teachers were also significant. **Conclusion:** Absenteeism is influenced by both student-centric and institutional factors, with a prevalent belief among students that physical attendance is not essential for academic achievement.

Keywords: Student absenteeism; Academic performance; Educational engagement; Socio-demographic factors; Medical students

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INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism, defined as the habitual non-attendance of scheduled classes without valid justification, is a key indicator of diminished student engagement and motivation.¹ This lack of participation is not merely a reflection of personal disinterest but signifies deeper issues affecting students' academic achievements, professional growth, and broader societal contributions. Regular class attendance is crucial, fostering essential skills such as resilience, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving, all of which are fundamental for success in future professional endeavors.¹ The importance of addressing student absenteeism is particularly pronounced in higher education settings, where its association with poor academic outcomes has been extensively documented.² Within the context of Khyber Medical University, like many other esteemed medical institutions across Pakistan, absenteeism poses a significant challenge. These institutions uphold strict attendance policies across lectures, laboratory sessions, and practicals, underscoring the universal concern over absenteeism in global academic environments.^{3–5} Mandated attendance not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the curriculum but also nurtures professional qualities such as ethical conduct, effective communication, and a commitment to lifelong learning—attributes essential for medical

professionals.^{6–8} The persistent issue of disinterest in attending physical lectures at medical colleges has prompted numerous studies, identifying various contributing factors, including ineffective teaching strategies, suboptimal learning environments, lifestyle pressures, and gaps in student-teacher communication.^{9–11} Faculty across health professions, encompassing medicine, dentistry, nursing, and pharmacy, share concerns over this trend, emphasizing the critical role of professional networking and direct engagement in the educational process.¹² This comprehensive understanding of absenteeism, rooted in a diverse array of influences, calls for a multifaceted approach to foster meaningful student participation and engagement.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The cross-sectional study was conducted within the Community Medicine Department of Gomal Medical College in Dera Ismail Khan. The study targeted the entire student body of the college, ranging from first-year to final-year students, encompassing a diverse demographic of future medical professionals. The total population from which the sample was drawn consisted of 566 students, representing a comprehensive cross-section of the college's academic community. Employing the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator, and setting a confidence interval at 95%, a margin of error at 5%, and

anticipating a 50% response rate, it was established that a minimum sample size of 230 was necessary to achieve statistically significant results. To ensure robustness in our findings, we expanded our sample size to 250 students. This study was conducted over a period of six months from April to September 2023. The chosen study design facilitated an efficient collection of data at a single point in time, allowing for a snapshot analysis of absenteeism patterns among the students.

Data were collected through a meticulously designed self-administered questionnaire. Prior to distribution, students were briefed about the purpose of the study and the significance of each section of the questionnaire to ensure clarity and encourage thoughtful responses. The questionnaire comprised 13 open-ended questions, structured around a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" [1] to "strongly agree" [5]). This scale was employed to quantitatively assess the participants' attitudes and perceptions regarding various factors associated with absenteeism. Mean scores were calculated for each item, as well as collectively for student-related factors, institutional factors, and external factors influencing absenteeism.

The collected data were digitized and analyzed using SPSS-23 trial version software. Descriptive statistical methods were applied to delineate demographic characteristics in terms of frequency and percentage. Additionally, the mean scores for each question and categorized groups of factors were evaluated to derive insights into the predominant reasons for absenteeism. Inferential statistical analysis was also conducted to estimate the 95% confidence interval for the population proportions, further substantiating the study's findings on the determinants of student absenteeism at Gomal Medical College.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the study participants. Out of the total 250 student from 1st year to final year, 144 (57.6%) were male and majority of them 191 (76.4%) were residing at hostel.

The score which is allotted according to Likert scale shows that if mean of any factor came out more than three it means that the participant agrees, if it falls above 4 it means participant strongly agrees. If it falls below 3 it means participant is neutral and when fall below 2 it means participant is disagreed. Mean value of all the student factors have been assessed and it was observed that out of all factors, the top three student factors contributing to the absenteeism were passing exam without attending lecture (4.1), disrupted sleep (3.8), preparing for other exams (3.4). (Figure 1)

The top four college factors contributing to the absenteeism were non interactive classes (4.2), not contributing to learning (3.7), no impact on achieving

good grade (3.6), and communication gap with teachers (3.4). (Figure 2)

The top two external factors contributing to the absenteeism were another source like internet (3.4) and poor hostel condition (mess problem, electricity, water etc. (3.6), (Figure 3).

Students perceived that out of 5 students' related factors for absenteeism, on average students were influenced by 17.8606 ± 3.81896 factors. Out of 6 college related factors students were influenced by 20.9522 ± 3.89226 factors. Mean influence 2 external factors found to be 7.099 ± 1.93547 (Table-2). As our target population is all 566 students of GOMAL MEDICAL COLLEGE. We are 95% confident that for whole college population the student factors will fall between (17.38–18.3) college factors will fall between (20.42–21.37) and external factors will fall between (6.86–7.33).

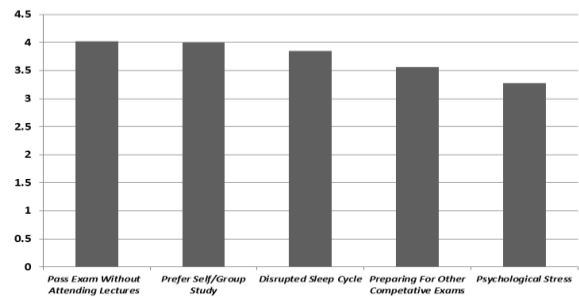


Figure-1: Student factors as a reason for absenteeism among students.

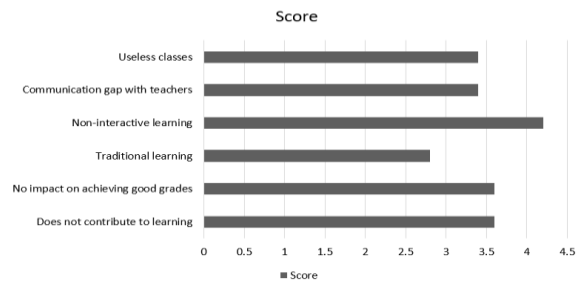


Figure-2: College factors as a reason for absenteeism among students

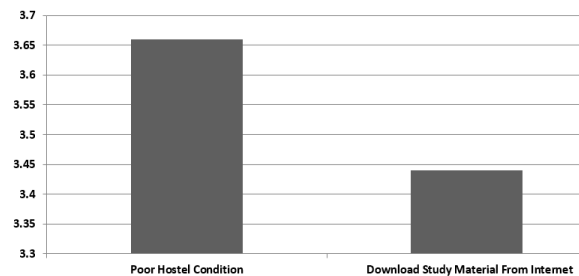


Figure-3: External factors as a reason for absenteeism among student

Table-1: Study participant’s profile

Characteristics		n	%
Gender	Male	144	57.6
	Female	106	42.4
Place of residence	Hostel	191	76.4
	Home	59	23.6

Table-2: Description of Mean scores of different factors effecting absenteeism

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	95% CI	
Student factors (5)	8.00	25.00	17.8606	.81896	Lower 17.38	Upper 18.3
College factors (6)	8.00	30.00	20.9522	3.89226	20.42	21.37
External factors (2)	2.00	10.00	7.099	1.93547	6.86	7.33
Total marks (13)	18.00	65.00	45.9118	9.64669	44.71	47.10

DISCUSSION

The implications of medical students skipping classes extend beyond their personal development to potentially impact the socioeconomic fabric of a nation.¹³ Regular attendance plays a crucial role in students' academic performance, with absenteeism negatively affecting examination scores and the overall learning-teaching ecosystem. The presumption among students that passing exams is achievable without attending lectures encourages engagement in extracurricular activities at the expense of academic pursuits. This misallocation of time not only hampers study but also induces fatigue, undermining their ability to concentrate during lectures.⁴ This phenomenon parallels findings in educational studies, such as those by Jyoti D.F *et al.*,¹⁴ which identified nutritional deficiencies as a contributing factor to school absenteeism, and by BinSeed *et al.*, 2009,¹⁵ who noted a trend among students to intensify study sessions close to final exams, potentially at the cost of regular class attendance.

A lack of interest in medical subjects, with a mean score observed at 0.29 in our study, echoes concerns raised by Devadoss and Folt, 1996, and Moorea *et al.*, 2008,¹⁶ highlighting disengagements as a significant deterrent to consistent attendance. Additionally, unforeseen life events, such as personal or family illnesses, further disrupt students' ability to maintain regular class attendance, as highlighted in the study by Bin Saeed *et al.*,¹⁷ emphasizing the critical need for consistent participation in the context of medical education, where decision-making often involves life-and-death considerations.

Our research identified several factors contributing to absenteeism, including non-interactive classes and a lack of effective communication between students and teachers. Similar observations were made in an Indian study,¹⁸ where prolonged lectures and instructional ambiguity were noted as key barriers to attendance. Echoing these findings, a study from Aziz Fatima Medical & Dental College, Pakistan,¹⁹ pinpointed unsatisfactory lectures and a preference for self-study as primary reasons for absenteeism. Further,

our study brought to light environmental and lifestyle challenges such as poor hostel conditions and sleep disturbances, underscoring the influence of external factors on student engagement and performance. Comparative analysis with a cross-sectional study from KAU-FD, Saudi Arabia,²⁰ revealed that younger students are more prone to missing classes, suggesting that maturity and acclimatization to the academic environment enhance attendance motivation.

The literature, including insights from Hunter and Tetley,²¹ supports the notion that engaging and relevant lectures can significantly reduce absenteeism. Students have expressed a desire for more captivating and applicable content within their curriculum, indicating that innovative teaching methods and proactive incorporation of student feedback could revitalize the educational experience. Establishing a supportive college culture and fostering an environment conducive to active learning are essential for enhancing student engagement and academic commitment.

Our study at Gomal Medical College reveals that absenteeism transcends gender and residential backgrounds, implicating all the research variables examined. A striking consensus among students highlights a perceived lack of utility in attending classes, which they believe neither enhances their learning nor influences their grades. This sentiment is underpinned by the confidence that exams can be passed with the aid of online study materials, bypassing the need for physical attendance in lectures. Further, the preparation for competitive exams during their academic years emerges as a significant distraction, detracting from their engagement with regular classroom activities. This indicates a broader trend of disengagement from traditional learning methods, with students expressing a desire for more interactive and engaging educational experiences. They also report a communication gap between themselves and their instructors, underscoring a disconnect that hampers the learning process. Additionally, external factors such as disrupted sleep patterns and substandard hostel conditions have been

identified as contributing factors to the absenteeism observed among students. These findings underscore the necessity for educational reforms at Gomal Medical College, advocating for the integration of more interactive learning methods and improved living conditions to enhance student attendance and overall academic engagement.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that absenteeism at Gomal Medical College transcends gender and residency status, with students feeling disengaged from their academic environment. The prevalent belief that physical attendance is unnecessary for academic success, coupled with the accessibility of online resources, suggests a critical need for educational reforms. Enhancing classroom interactivity, improving teacher-student communication, and aligning academic assessments with class engagements may serve as effective strategies to reduce absenteeism and improve educational outcomes.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

AD, IUH: Conceptualization. NN: Methodology. SB: Formal analysis. SI, DZ: Writing, review and editing.

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