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# Effect of pre-exam absenteeism on academic performance among first year BDS students

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## Abstract

Being away from college without a valid reason is called absenteeism. Absenteeism refers to a student's intentional or habitual absence from work. Pre-exam absenteeism is being absent just before the examinations. Most of the students bunk classes a day prior to the examinations to cover the portion at the last minute. The present study was undertaken to observe the impact of pre-exam absenteeism on academic performance among first year BDS students. Hundred and one first-year BDS students were recruited in the present study. The students who were absent a day prior to the examination were grouped as absentees. Their internal marks in all the subjects were collected and compared. Marks obtained by the presenters were significantly higher in Anatomy ( $P < 0.01$ ), Physiology ( $P < 0.05$ ) and Biochemistry ( $P < 0.01$ ). The results of the study indicate that pre-exam absenteeism has negative impact on academic performance. The study also suggests further detailed and multi-centered studies in this area.

**Key words:** Academic performance, education, students

## Introduction

Absenteeism is a major concern in medical education. Though majority of the universities made mandatory attendance of 80 percentages for lecture and practical, still the absenteeism is a worldwide issue in professional education (Wadesango et al., 2011; Kottasz et al., 2005). The factors associated with the absenteeism include lack of motivation, lack of interest, unfavorable teaching and learning environment, health problems, poor sleep quality, personal issues and fear of exams (Obeng-Denteh et al., 2011; Moore R, 2006; Bati AH et al., 2013). Absenteeism is associated with decrease in the academic performance of the students. In professional courses, learning and understanding the subject is highly essential as the students need to apply the knowledge

that is acquired (Friedman et al., 2001). Absenteeism adversely effects especially when they are involved with the group activities and team works. Research in medical education is emerging to convert teaching student-friendly and to promote positive learning space which together improves the academic performance of the students. A negative association was reported between the poor attendance and academic performance of the students. Most of the students bunk classes a day prior to the examinations to cover the portion at the last minute (Schieffler et al., 2012). Though it is known that absenteeism has an adverse effect on academic performance, the studies on pre-exam absenteeism are sparse. Hence, the present study was undertaken to observe the impact of pre-exam absenteeism on

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academic performance and to minimize the pre-exam absenteeism by increasing the awareness in first BDS students.

**Objective**

To assess the impact of pre-exam absenteeism on academic performance among first BDS students.

**Materials and methods**

*Study design:* Observational study

*Study population:* A total of 101 first-year Dental students including both males and females were included in the study. Participants were recruited after obtaining the written informed consent. Willing participants were included in the study. After recruiting the participants, they were grouped into two groups based on absent one day prior to the examination. Those who were present were grouped in presenters group. Those who were absent were grouped as absentees. Their academic performance was obtained from each subject's internal examination marks. These marks were compared between the two groups.

*Sampling technique:* Convenience sampling technique was used for recruiting the participants.

*Study setting:* This study was conducted at the Department of Physiology, Vishnu Dental College, Bhimavaram.

*Outcome measures*

*Students' attendance:* Details of student attendance was obtained from the online software used in the college to upload daily attendance and other academic-related details. List of the students who were absent for one day before the internal examination in the respective subjects was included.

*Academic performance:* Marks obtained in the internal theory examinations were considered as academic performance of the students in the corresponding subject. All the exams were conducted for 35 marks. Approximately, 17.5 marks out of 35 were considered as a pass mark. Students were declared as first if the marks were between  $\geq 65$  to  $\leq 75$  range. Students with above 75 percentages were considered as distinction.

The study protocol was approved by the institutional research committee.

Data was analyzed using SPSS 20.0 version. The student's t-test was applied to observe the significance of difference between the groups. Probability value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

**Results:** Results are presented in Table 1. Marks obtained by the presenters were significantly higher in anatomy ( $P < 0.01$ ), physiology ( $P < 0.05$ ) and biochemistry ( $P < 0.01$ ). In Dental Anatomy and Dental Histology (DADH), also marks obtained by presenters were higher when compared to absentees. However, the difference is not statistically significant. Pass percentage was higher in presenters when compared with absentees in all the subjects. Percentage of distinctions was higher in presenters when compared to absentees in all the subjects. Percentage of first class was higher in presenters when compared with absentees in physiology and DADH. However, in anatomy, percentage of first class was higher in absentees when compared with the presenters. Percentage of first class was almost same in presenters and absentees in Biochemistry. In all the subjects, percentage of failures was higher in absentees when compared to presenters.

Table 1:  
*Marks obtained by presenters and absentees*

Subject	Marks obtained by presenters (n=78)	Marks obtained by absentees (n=23)	P Value
Physiology	21.74±7.04	17.13±8.15	0.0091**
Biochemistry	21.15±5.85	17.22±8.61	0.0131*
Anatomy	25.63±6.34	20.26±8.94	0.0017**
Dental Anatomy and Dental Histology (DADH)	21.13±5.19	18.52±7.17	0.0565

(\*\*P<0.001 is significant, \*P<0.05 is significant)

Table 2:  
*Pass percentage among presenters and absentees*

Subject	Pass percentage of presenters (n=78)	Pass percentage of absentees (n=23)
Physiology	80.76	52.17
Dental Anatomy and Dental Histology (DADH)	89.74	78.26
Anatomy	89.74	73.91
Biochemistry	80.76	52.17

Table 3:

*Percentage of distinctions among presenters and absentees*

Subject	Percentage of distinctions among presenters (n=78)	Percentage of distinctions among absentees (n=23)
Physiology	29.48	17.39
Dental Anatomy and Dental Histology (DADH)	12.82	8.69
Anatomy	50	21.73
Biochemistry	15.38	8.69

Table 4:

*Percentage of first class among presenters and absentees*

Subject	Percentage of first class among presenters (n=78)	Percentage of first class among absentees (n=23)
Physiology	16.67	4.35
Dental Anatomy and Dental Histology (DADH)	26.92	13.04
Anatomy	20.51	26.08
Biochemistry	21.79	21.74

Table 5:

*Percentage of failures among presenters and absentees*

Subject	Percentage of failures among presenters (n=78)	Percentage of failures among absentees (n=23)
Physiology	19.23	47.82
Dental Anatomy and Dental Histology (DADH)	10.25	21.74
Anatomy	10.25	26.08
Biochemistry	19.23	47.82

**Discussion** Absenteeism is the most common and unsolved problem in the education sector. In professional education it has a great impact as the students learn and practice the profession. They are supposed to attend all the theory and practical sessions without fail (Richards, 2013; Smith, 2012). The field of medical education is striving hard to make the medical education more interesting and student centered rather than teacher centered. This will help to promote the active learning and motivate the critical thinking skills of the students. The present study was undertaken

to observe the impact of pre-exam absenteeism on academic performance in first BDS students. Marks obtained by the presenters were significantly higher in anatomy ( $P < 0.01$ ), physiology ( $P < 0.05$ ) and biochemistry ( $P < 0.01$ ). In DADH, marks obtained by presenters were higher. However, the difference is not statistically significant. Pass percentage, number of distinctions and first classes were also higher in presenters. It was in accordance with earlier studies where positive association was reported between attendance and academic performance (Thompson JL, 1974; Sade RM, 1982). Some studies showed positive but weak correlation between the attendance and academic performance (Chan WP, 2009; Millis RM et al., 2009; Cortright RN et al., 2011; Hidayat L et al., 2012; Horton DM et al., 2012). Some of the studies where mandatory attendance policy was implemented, it was reported that the policy increased only the attendance, but not the academic performance (Cohall et al., 2012). The study results support the importance of attending the classes. Absent to the class one day prior to the examination was not helpful to alter the academic performance. Those who are present to the classes will be attentive from the beginning of the day and can do better in the examinations. Further, reading the subject at the last minute is no longer helpful. One should read it right from the beginning. The study helps to increase awareness in the student population that absent to the classes prior to examination is of no use and will not help to improve the performance.

**Limitations:** As the study was conducted at one centre, the study results may not be generalized. Hence, the study suggests multi centre studies in this area. Further, apart from attendance the ability of the students, motivation, cognitive functions also influence their academic performance. We do not have a specific control group to eradicate influence of those factors.

**Conclusion:** The results of the study indicate that pre-exam absenteeism has negative impact on academic performance. The study also suggests further detailed and multi centered studies in this area.

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