



Original Article

A Qualitative Exploratory Study on Absenteeism among Nursing Students in a Private Nursing College

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ABSTRACT

Nurses play an important role in the provision of frontline patient care. Absenteeism among nurses is common, and has an impact on patient care output. Nursing students' academic success and professional growth depend on their ability to attend class. Attendance is an essential for the effective training of nurses. **Objective:** To explore the perception of nursing students regarding factors of absenteeism and its possible solution in a private nursing institute. **Methods:** A qualitative exploratory study design was conducted among 16 participants who recruited purposively. Semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from the enrolled fourth year BS Nursing students. Transcription, coding, categorization of data help in the formulation of sub-themes and themes about absenteeism. **Results:** The analysis of qualitative data revealed four major themes. First themes as individual factors of absenteeism (sickness, family commitments, transport problems etc.) accompanied by institutional and clinical factors. The last theme pertaining to possible solutions of absenteeism proposed by nursing students in the form of semester break, provision of sick leave and leave for family responsibilities. **Conclusions:** The study found three factors, i.e., individual, institutional and clinical related factors that lead to nursing student's absenteeism from classroom lectures. Besides, it was found that student absenteeism was solved by allowing the students to go on holidays after every semester examination and student facilitation in case of any illness/family issues as suggested by students in interviews.

INTRODUCTION

Nurses play an important role in the provision of frontline patient care. Absenteeism among nurses is common, and has an impact on patient care output. It significantly affects both staffing instability and the standard of patient treatment. Nursing students' academic success and professional growth depend on their ability to attend class [1]. Attendance is an essential requirement for the training and affects learning outcomes. It is considered as a key to student success in class and it also reflects engagement of the students with their subject matter [2]. Worldwide,

absenteeism is an issue for which there is no simple solution. Pakistan Nursing Council mandates that during their training, students must attend a specific percentage of hours for theory and practice. Apart from attending lectures for academic education, students are assigned to different clinical areas on a regular basis to bridge a gap between theory and practice [3]. Attendance is typically seen to represent students' degree of involvement with their course and to be crucial to students' success. There is growing interest among educators, academics, and person

at clinical setting in the topic of student absenteeism in [4]. Furthermore, nurses are the person who provide care to the patients and have the nature to serve. Nurses become absent at the clinical side because of poor staffing and leadership skills [5]. Unofficial absences of students from universities and nursing education institutes are becoming a bigger issue. The active teaching and learning environment are disrupted by absenteeism, which also has an impact on other students' general wellbeing [6]. Additionally, there is a correlation between absenteeism and poor educational performance, unprofessional behavior, and lack of socialization. Data from previous studies on absenteeism indicate that absenteeism increased significantly faster in recent years [4]. Absenteeism is the term for often skipping classes without any valid excuse, and it is considered to be the greatest problem in health profession education around the globe, particularly in nursing schools [5]. Additionally, Absenteeism in the context of nursing is defined as skipping planned lessons and learning experiences, regardless of the cause, which not only leads to poor academic achievement but also incompetent skill application. Baccalaureate nursing students frequently encounter significant levels of stress throughout their clinical rotations, which may cause psychological or emotional damage in later life and eventually decrease the quality of patient care they deliver [6]. Despite different policies at nursing colleges intended to discourage such behavior, Pakistan's school of nursing is facing high absenteeism rates among nursing and midwifery students in both clinical settings and classrooms. In order for learning to take place effectively, students need to interact with relevant materials (clinical skills, lectures, practical sessions), which are difficult for absentee students to access [7]. Nursing student absenteeism from clinical settings and lectures is a serious issue that, if not addressed, will have a negative impact on the standard of nursing care [6]. In the majority of the provinces, including Punjab, Sindh, and KPK, student absenteeism is still a major problem. Absenteeism is a persistent issue not just in Pakistan, but it is a phenomenon that is growing in institutions all over the world [7]. This is true even there are clearly written policies for regulating the necessary attendance of lectures and clinical practice sessions. Due to its detrimental effects on both individuals and society as a whole, absenteeism is becoming an issue that affects every member of society [8]. Nursing students often withdraw from lectures as they consider to be of low quality, uninteresting, and unworthy of their time. Their academic performance suffers as a result of their absence. Students who miss clinical practice sessions lose out on important knowledge about clinical competencies

performed in clinical area on that particular day. Extensive research on student absenteeism supports the idea that students who attend lectures and skill labs. performance regularly do better on their exams [9]. There are several reasons why nursing students miss school. A number of factors have been mentioned in the literature to explain absenteeism, including low interest in the subject matter, ineffective teaching methods, unfavorable learning environments, excessive student socialization, part-time employment, bad health, insomnia, and strained relationships with lecturers [10]. Additional reasons that have been recognized include private concerns like health conditions, obligations to family members like a loss in the family, and transportation obstacles to placement places [6]. On academia side nursing teachers are impacted by student absences since it is hard to move on to a new topic when students are unprepared due to absence in previous lecture. Moreover, good students who are punctual in class get irritated with the practice of having to redo work, and lecturers see this approach as time-consuming and ineffective [11]. As a consequence of peer-lecturer interaction, the students miss out on important information and the usage of precise examples to clarify particular ideas. Nurse educators' morale suffers as a result of student absences, and lecturers become angered by it. Therefore, those who miss class are inevitably missing out on these rich educational materials, and this loss might have an adverse effect on their academic performance and length of study [12]. Nonetheless, a prevalent issue is student nurse absence from clinical placements, sufficient exposure to clinical practice is necessary for competent professional nurses to acquire the necessary knowledge and abilities [3]. Research indicates that nurse educators may not always be able to provide students with the necessary assistance during their clinical rotations. Even in a clinical context with sufficient learning opportunities, inadequate assistance and supervision can demotivate students and cause absenteeism. Therefore, more student support is required to help students make wise decisions about their education [13]. Attendance of nursing students in the class and at clinical setting is crucial for academic achievements and to provide effective care to the patients. Therefore, it is crucial for institutions to have efficient systems in place to track the attendance of unpunctual students in order to constructively interact with them [11]. Absenteeism affects the learning process of learner which ultimately impacts their professional growth [13]. It should be acknowledged that every student has different personalities and features. As a result, teaching institution employ teaching, learning, and assessment systems that heavily account for these variations [9]. One fundamental

tenet of the learning process holds that participation by an individual student in a learning environment is a requirement for that student to benefit from the academic environment [14]. Student absences produce a dull, tedious, and unpleasant learning atmosphere in the classroom that makes those who regular students uncomfortable and the lecturer get agitated [15]. Additionally, it disrupts the dynamic of the teaching-learning environment and negatively impacts how smoothly courses run as a whole. The authors claim that absenteeism is a quality-related waste of time, money, and human potential in the educational system [16]. Many students see attending to class as difficult and stressful in comparison to unwinding at home and taking part in other activities that are more appealing and pleasurable, such going to the movies and partying [17]. Non-attendance is distressing and concerning for educationalist to achieve the academic goals. In Pakistan, the undergraduate nursing students undergo training for four years, with scheduled theoretical face to face lectures and clinical learning. As per Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) Rule, a minimum of 75% lecture attendance in every course is required for students to gain access to the examination. Students are orientated to these policies at the beginning of the year and each semester. Thus, if the student did not meet the 75% class attendance, he/she will not be permitted entry into the examination. The study aimed to explore the factors of absenteeism from the viewpoints of the nursing students and possible solutions of absenteeism for sufficient learning and professional development.

METHODS

A qualitative exploratory study design was used for this study. Qualitative approach was helpful to gain an in-depth understanding of different contributing factors of absenteeism and its possible solution among student nurses in a nursing college. This qualitative research design is the suitable approach to explore the personal beliefs, perceptions, subjective experiences and provides in-depth understanding of processes and contexts in different settings [18]. This qualitative research patterns were chosen in the study since it is more convenient to see what meanings the participants have attributed to their experiences and how they reflect these experiences [19]. Participants were given the option to respond to open-ended, semi-structured interview grid in their own terms and to express their own ideas. The unstructured interview produced thorough and honest data that helped to clarify the issue under study. The participant setting was the Department of Nursing at Jinnah institute of Health Sciences, Faisalabad. The duration of the study was six

month (December, 2022 to May, 2023). The sample was consisted of 16 participants who recruited purposively. This sample size is adequate because in exploratory study, 10-20 participants are usually an acceptable sample size. Data were collected from the enrolled fourth year BS nursing students. Participated students attended the lectures of different subjects on different venues in the college. Interview guide was used to collect data from study participants. Semi-structured interview guide was developed with the help from different qualitative studies. The interviews were conducted at study site to explore the perception of student nurses regarding contributing factors of absenteeism and its solution. An interview guide was maintained and participants were interviewed as per their convenience of time and place for interview. The interview duration was between 45 to 50 minutes. Interviews were recorded in a tape-recorder and medium of communication was Urdu. In-depth information was gathered using open-ended, unstructured questions, and field notes were utilized to record the participants' experiences and opinions. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to offer more information, including sentiments and opinions, and to respond freely and unrestrainedly. All information was kept secure. The qualitative data from audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into verbatim. As transcribed verbatim is a skill of changing spoken word into text in such a way that message is captured correctly the way it has been spoken. Next data were analyzed through memo writing, comparison analysis, open and focal coding. In this step, the data were split into sub unit, which will extract from the main paragraph or statement and label them with term names (codes). After this open coding step in which the codes were compare on base of similarities and differences and make categories. Each subcategory having a similarity will be the part of main category. Lastly, content analysis was utilized to create themes and sub-themes and organized data according to emerging themes. The interview data were exploring the participant's perception about workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior. In addition, analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions are explored by committee checks. All steps within the research method are documented by means of the researchers to ensure the verifiability and reliability of the data. The Jinnah Institute of Health Sciences, Research Ethics Committee gave its approval for the study's ethical conduct. Additionally, the Principal of the Department of Nursing gave her approval for the study to be carried out. The students were advised that participation was entirely optional and that they might leave the research at any point without incurring any fees or needing an explanation. Before the interviews, the

students provided written, informed consent. Instead of utilizing actual names, pseudonyms were used to protect both confidentiality and anonymity.

RESULTS

Eighteen nursing students voluntarily continue to be part of the study. Two of these were unable to continue due to health and some other domestic circumstances. This resulted in total of sixteen participants being interviewed. Result section provides the detailed description of interview data in qualitative context about different factors causing absenteeism and perception of student nurses about possible solutions to the issue of absenteeism. The thematic framework constructed inductively from the interview data consisted of four themes. These four themes were generated from underlying sub-themes as depicted in Table-1.

Table 1: The thematic analysis of factors causing student nurses absenteeism

Themes	Sub-themes
Individual factors of absenteeism	Physical illness
	Family responsibilities
	Transport problems
	Accommodation
Institutional factors of absenteeism	Institution rules and policies
	Learning environment
	Lack of motivation
	Teaching methods of teachers
Clinical related factors of absenteeism	Student role and experiences at clinical
	Shift work
	Staff attitude at clinical
Students proposed solution to absenteeism	Sick leave
	Leave for Family responsibilities
	Semester break after every semester examination

The analysis of qualitative data revealed four major themes of absenteeism among student nurses, (1) Individual factors of absenteeism, (2) Institutional factors of absenteeism and (3) clinical related factors of absenteeism and (3) Possible solutions to absenteeism proposed by nursing students.

Theme 1: Individual factors of absenteeism

Students indicated that individual factors of absenteeism from lectures were as follows:

The participants said that the reasons they don't attend class are of physical illness, family responsibilities,

transport problems and accommodation.

"I just do not go to class because of my sickness (No 11)".

One of the participants added that, "fever is the main cause of absenteeism among our class fellows (No 06)".

Furthermore, majority respondents declared that institution is not providing accommodation and many students stay outside the college which resulted in higher absenteeism rate.

"My accommodation is far away from my college and there is no proper transport available which lead to greater absenteeism as compare to other classmates who are living closer to the institute (No 13)".

"I am absent from my graded activity in the class because of my brother marriage ceremony (No 07)".

Personal factors in the form of sickness, family commitments, far away accommodation and lack of proper access or transportation result in absenteeism from the class. Importantly, most of the ten respondents exposed to transportation problem emphasized that they would not be able to attend the class activities. Most students were unable to reach the class timely because of heavy traffic and high fare rate in the morning.

Theme 2: Institutional factors of student absenteeism

The study subjects the point of view about the institutional inability to provide conducive class environment, inflexible institutional rules/policies, and lack of motivation and dedication of faculty members in the classes.

"There were extreme heat waves in summer but class AC was not working properly and class capacity is not according to student's strength. (No 13)".

"Time is wasted as most of the lectures were started late because of multimedia issue (No 9)".

"For an hour or so we wonder where the lecture theater is, and that is wastage of student time (No 2)".

"Faculty members are not interested and motivated to take lectures as most of the lectures started late and ended earlier (No 4)".

Most of the participant stated that poor teaching learning strategies and congested class rooms with proper ventilation discourage the student nurses to attend classes. Furthermore, strict attendance policy and disciplinary action against late fee led to absenteeism among students. Participants voiced their displeasure with the instructors' lack of dedication. They claimed that it is a waste of their time when either the lecturers are absent, courses begin late, or lessons terminate earlier than expected.

Theme-3: Clinical Factors of student absenteeism

Participants noted the factors in the clinical area that might lead to student absenteeism are nursing student role and experiences at clinical setting, shift work and attitude

of clinical staff towards students. Student nurses are ill-treated by senior staff nurses despite they cover the staff shortage and manage the heavy workload of the ward. Majority student nurses are allocated to those wards where there is a heavy workload.

"We as a student provide complete care to the patient with no ward staff involvement (No 06)"

"I don't get credit for my clinical work as a student, but if a permanent staff does the same thing, he/she gets credit for it (No 10)".

"I don't want to change my unit where I am learning a lot but most of the time my unit and shift was changed by the head of ward (No 1)".

The participants claimed that bad attitude of ward staff and unsupportive ward environment, frequent shift change are the factors promoting student absence at classroom. However, in order to strengthen learning and to increase student enthusiasm, the students suggested that the positive attitude and good mentoring are important at clinical. Furthermore, student's attendance tends to be more positive in wards where they feel welcomed and supported, thus leading to better attendance.

Theme-4: Students proposed solutions of absenteeism

Majority student nurses responded that there should be holidays after every semester examination as students are stressed out because of exhausted examination routine in every institution. Moreover, there should be proper policies for student facilitation in case of any illness or family issues to discourage unallowable absenteeism at the college level. If institutions did not develop policies to give leave without having pay back of missed hour to the students in case of sickness or to attend the marriage, funeral as well as sickness of immediate family member, then student absenteeism in the classroom cannot be minimized.

DISCUSSION

The aim of present study was to explore the perception of nursing students regarding factors of absenteeism and its possible solution in a selected nursing institution. The results showed that nursing students had a high absence rate. The individual factors of absenteeism from class were physical illness, family responsibilities, transport problems and accommodation, and the students' inability to handle the assignment. Student absenteeism from the class has been linked to the family commitments, sickness and trouble in getting transport to the college [20]. Institutions have a significant responsibility when it comes to student absence. When an institution does not make flexible institution rules and policies, nor provide conducive learning environment and lecturer criticizes a student under certain circumstances, it might lead to a student who refuses to attend college and stays at home [21]. Literature

suggested that lack of comfortable class environment and lack of motivation among teaching faculty account for almost three-quarters of all absences [20]. There is a connection between a lecturer and pupils who aren't in class. Lecturers ought to treat students with respect and in a comparable manner [22]. However, the aforementioned explanations allow underachievers a reason that their lessons are dull and boring. Lower accomplishment and poor academic performance are the effects of absenteeism. Students stay in school longer as a result, and parents experience financial stress. Increasing absenteeism will negatively impact nursing care quality and contribute to a rise in morbidity and death rates in society if the academic level is not properly achieved [23]. It is crucial that the teaching institutions remove the factors that have been found to be behind nursing students' absenteeism. The nursing students stated that the strict policies of colleges, uncomfortable class environment, lack of teachers' motivation and poor teaching learning strategies used by teachers lead to absenteeism in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers speak to the students in an unprofessional manner and show no respect for them. Around the world, absenteeism in educational institutions is a serious problem [11]. The organization may have serious concerns if nursing student absenteeism from lectures and clinical practice increases. Inadequate learning, particularly with regard to the calculation and administration of drugs, can potentially have an impact on public safety [17]. Nursing care's quality would suffer as a result of the rising issue of nursing students' absenteeism, which has to be addressed appropriately [24]. According to the previous research, there are several variables that might affect a student's absence, including ones that are personal, health-related, domestic, institutional and clinical factors that has been linked to absenteeism [25]. Even though the severity and importance of each cause varies from student to student, all of these variables have an impact on how often students are absent from class. Poor teaching techniques allegedly result in uninteresting lectures, an uncomfortable learning atmosphere, a lack of topic interest, and strained relationships with lecturers [23]. According to the study's respondents, clinical factors namely bad attitude of ward staff and unsupportive ward environment, frequent shift change are the factors promoting student absence at classroom. Poor senior staff and student relationship, and tedious ward management can both contribute to absenteeism [21]. According to the findings of a research done on medical students; some students may skip class because of bad or uninteresting ward environment [26]. Additionally, some of the excuses given by students for not attending class include the caliber and attitudes of the

lecturers [27]. Another element in absenteeism is poor teaching style and the simplicity of the subject without instruction [11]. The likelihood of satisfying the requirements of the students is increased when more cutting-edge teaching tactics and learning methods, including games and role playing, are incorporated into the lecture [12]. According to this study, institution and clinical placement are primarily to be blamed for students' absences from class. Students lose interest in going to class since they are aware that they won't learn anything there. According to the idea of planned behavior, students' awareness of absenteeism is influenced by variables including poor learning environment, family commitments, frequent shift change at clinical, lecturers' tardiness for course presentations and bad behavior ward staff, laziness at work [28]. The nursing students complained that there is too much work to do, which makes it hard for students to go to class while being required to participate in experiential learning on some days. According to study findings, majority of respondents confirmed that they had a lot of work to accomplish and that they could not handle at clinical side [25]. Findings that student nurses skipped class to study for tests and exams [29] provide additional support for the research's conclusions. In contrast, the study's findings revealed that students' personal issues, such as physical sickness, family commitments, and a lack of funds, affected their absence [4]. Furthermore, lecture absences were attributed to oversleeping, part-time employment, transportation, and other issues [30].

CONCLUSIONS

The present study marks the first attempt to conduct an in-depth qualitative investigation in a developing country to understand the factors of absenteeism and its possible solution as suggested by students. This study found three factors i.e., individual, institutional and clinical factors that lead to nursing student's absenteeism from classroom lectures. Besides, it was found that student absenteeism was controlled by allowing the students to go on holidays after every semester examination and student facilitation in case of any illness/family issues leads to solve absenteeism issue in the classroom.

Authors Contribution

Conceptualization: RS, SM¹, AS

Methodology: RS, ZZ

Formal analysis: ZZ

Writing-review and editing: ZM, RS, SM¹, SM², AS

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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