

Factors Influencing Academic Cheating in an Undergraduate Setting of Central Park Medical College, Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To study the different factors influencing academic cheating among the students during exams or during their academic life.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted using a 10 items structured questionnaire on different aspects of cheating in MBBS 5 year students of the Central Park Medical College, Lahore. There were 334 students in total who volunteered to participate in this study. A 10 items questionnaire was given to the participants after taking informed consent. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 23.

Results: The mean age of the students was 23.48 ± 1.71 years. More female students 196 (58.7%) participated as compared to the male students 138 (41.3%). Two hundred and eighty five (85%) participants had witnessed anyone else involved in cheating and 15% of participants denied witnessing others doing cheating. Out of 334 students, 72.7% of students ignored the situation when they saw anyone involved in this act and 8% of students wanted to do the same. Most of the students (38.6%) were busy doing their own work when they witnessed someone involved in cheating. Lack of preparation was the major reason given by 30.5% of students followed by fear of not sending admission in 23% of students. The most common method of cheating was to ask from a friend and taking helping material with them by 60.18% and 12.28% students respectively. According to 35.3% of students, strict invigilation can stop students from cheating. However, 23.6% of students said that nothing could be done to stop this.

Conclusion: Present study concludes that three fourth of the students mostly females are involved in cheating. Factors for cheating include lack of exam preparation, admission issues and lenient invigilation. Strict invigilation and counseling can be adopted in order to minimize cheating.

Keywords: Academic cheating, Undergraduate, Cheating factors.

INTRODUCTION

Examinations are the most important tool for measuring learner's ability and effectiveness in delivering the content at different levels of education all over the world. Cheating in examinations is a worldwide problem.¹ Academic cheating is described as copying things from materials which are brought in the examination center. Students are not allowed to copy anything whether it's oral, written or by any other means.² Cheating is one of the main predictors that can lead to the wrong assessment and hence impose a false message on the detailed evaluation of students.³ In spite of the fact, academic cheating in medical and health sectors should be strictly monitored because it has devastating consequences on human lives, socially as well as economically.¹

There is enough evidence to suggest that academic dishonesty is an area of interest for academic as well as professional bodies.⁴ A number of studies have shown an alarming increase in academic misconduct in educational institutions. It has also been reported that students become desensitized to this attitude as they progress further and accept cheating as a normal phenomenon. It is suggested that students who are

involved in cheating and misconduct may likely violate workplace ethics and are involved in dishonest practices with patients and organizations later in their lives.⁵⁻⁷

Academic cheating among students breaks the link between hard work and knowledge, resulting in the allocation of student's talent toward unnecessary and illegal practices. Moreover, cheating is not restricted to only college campuses; but also this misconduct is transferred to the workplace as the ethical issue of future professionals.⁸ Students living in countries with massive corruption levels might be more prone to academic cheating whereas people who are habitual to cheating and evading the rule of law since their childhood are more likely to engage in such activities when they become adults. This situation provides strong reasons to carry out research on cheating as well as its causes and consequences.⁹

Cheating behavior in institutions not only affects the negative attitude on students but also it downregulates the institutions. This study is carried out to understand the factors influencing academic cheating among students.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was conducted in the Central Park Medical College, Lahore after taking approval from the ethical committee. A total of 334 MBBS students of all the classes were included in this study. The purpose of the study was explained and informed consent was taken from all the participants. A 10 items questionnaire was given to the participants which

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included information regarding cheating practices, causes, methods of cheating and measures taken to control the cheating.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Categorical variables were presented as numbers and percentages. For quantitative variables mean and the standard deviation was calculated.

RESULTS

The mean age was 23.48±1.71 years. One hundred and thirty eight (41.3%) male and 196(58.7%) female students participated in this study. The number of students of first year to final year MBBS participated in this study is shown in figure 1.

In response to the questionnaire, 256(76.6%) students involved in the cheating included 90(35.15%) male and 166(64.85%) female students. Seventy eight (23.3%) students were never involved in cheating. Main reasons

for the cheating were lack of preparation (30.50%), admission issues (25%), confirmation of the answers (12.80%) and that everybody does the same (7.40%).

Two hundred and eighty five (85%) students had witnessed other students being involved in cheating during the examination, 243(72.7%) ignored the situation, 15(4.4%) students told the invigilator and 27(8%) wished to do the same. Main reasons of ignoring the situation were that they were busy in their own exam (38.6%), that students involved in cheating were their friends (17.5%), that they had no concern (27.5%) and that teachers were involved in cheating (1.2%). Different methods used for cheating by the respondents are tabulated in table 1.

Regarding cheating, 172(51.4%) students said it is done only in the exam, 64(19.1%) thought it involved copying the assignments from other students, 52(15.5%) students thought it marking proxy attendance for other students and 46(13.7%) had no idea about cheating. Table 2 shows various methods proposed by the students to prevent cheating.

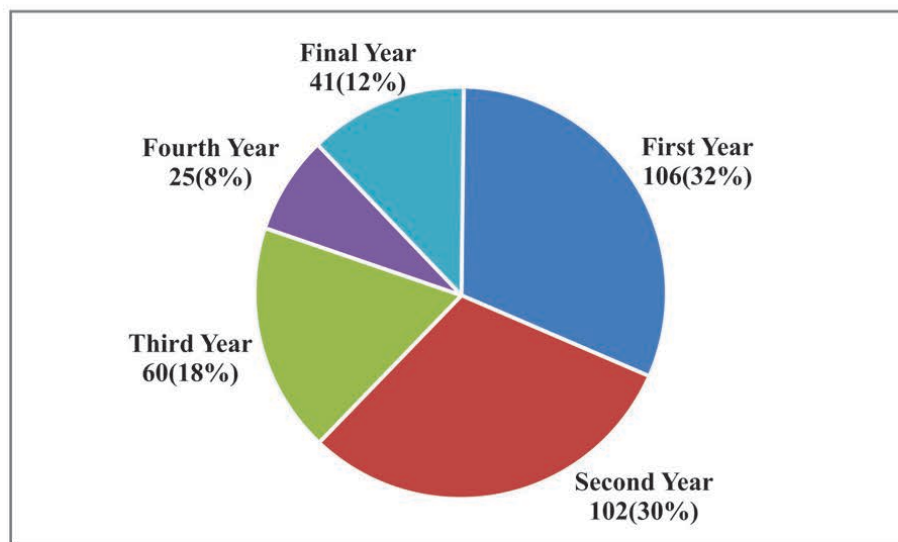


Figure 1: Distribution of Students According to the Class

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Different Methods Used in Cheating by the Respondents

Methods of Cheating	Never Caught	Caught		Total	Percentage
		Once	Multiple Times		
Asking from a friend	124	27	50	201	60.18%
Helping material in the exam hall	7	28	6	41	12.28%
Cell phones	2	7	2	11	3.3%
Helping material in the washroom	1	2	0	3	0.9%
Total	134	64	58	256	76.67%

Table 2: Various Methods Proposed by Students in Order to Stop the Cheating

Methods	Percentage
Strict invigilation	35.3%
Counseling	14.3%
Minimizing syllabus	10.1%
Conceptual teaching	6.5%
Punishment	4.4%
Proper sitting arrangement	2%
Sufficient preparation time	1.4%

DISCUSSION

Our study revealed that out of 76.64% students that cheat during the exams, 64.85% were female students. A study by Hafeez et al. held in different medical colleges of Karachi also states that most of the students have cheated during an examination at least once and more females were involved in cheating.¹⁰ Hrabek et al. reported that 94% of the students are involved in cheating.¹¹ Our results are also near to the one studied by Nyamwange et al. which state that more girls cheat during the exam than boys (52%).¹

In our study lack of preparation (30.50%) was among the main reason for cheating. Other studies also reported poor preparation among the main reason for cheating.^{11,12} A study conducted by Hammoudi revealed that the main factor which leads the students to cheat during an exam was that the students think examination method was just a test of memory rather than comprehension. Also the author stated that getting high grades has become the major focus of most of the students which lead them to use inappropriate resources in exams.¹³

According to our study, 12.8% of students cheat for confirmation of the answers. These results are similar to the study by Clariana et al. which states that student has a phobia during the examination and they lack the confidence.¹⁴ In our study, 52.9% of the students have an opinion that cheating depends on the invigilator. These results comply with studies by Li et al. and Karluki et al. which state lenient invigilation is among the major reasons for cheating during exams.^{15,16} Two hundred and forty (72%) students accepted that they help their friends in cheating during the examination. These results are similar to another study which state 83.9% of the students tend to copy answers of their classmates during exams.¹⁷

In our study, 85% of the students' witnessed that they have seen others cheating during the examination and 72.7% ignored the situation and never reported. Kruger reported that 88.4% of the students who witness cheating never reported the incident.¹⁸ Schwartz et al. also reported cheating incidents among students of

different school systems.¹⁹

Among the methods used to cheat, 60.18% were cheating by asking from a friend. A study conducted by Hafeez et al. reported that 83.6% of students are involved in cheating by this method.¹⁰ In our study, 12.28% of the students used helping material in the exam hall and 3.3% used a cell phone for cheating. Other studies also reported the use of helping material in the examination hall.^{1,21} Dogas et al. reported that 50% of the students are involved in cheating with the help of cell phones.¹⁷

In our study, 19.1% of the students are involved in copying the assignment of other students and 15.2% are involved in marking proxy attendance. Nyamwange et al. reported 10.25% of the students involved in forging the documents of other students.¹ Dogas et al. also discussed these factors of cheating in their studies and found that a large number of students are involved in this type of cheating.¹⁷

In order to stop or minimize cheating, a student proposed that strict invigilation (35.5%) and punishment (4.40%) can help. This complies with other studies which reported that punishment for example cancellation of paper and suspension of the student can help in minimizing cheating.^{9,20} Remodeling syllabus (10.10%) and improving teaching methodology (6.50%) can also help. Nyamwange et al. suggested that enhancing exam taking skills and counseling of students can help a lot.¹ Margaret et al. also found counseling an effective technique in order to curb cheating. Proper sitting arrangement (2%) can also help in curbing cheating.²¹ Similar results were found in a study by Ruto et al.²²

There are certain limitations in this study. The study focused on the questions that the students face in examination halls. Relationship of the students' previous grades and certain habits, moral and cultural values with cheating were not discussed. Role of teachers in the preparation of examination and its effect on the transparency of exams was not discussed. These limitations can be addressed in future researches.

CONCLUSION

It has been concluded that three fourth of the medical students mostly female students do cheating in their exams. Factors for cheating include lack of exam preparation, lenient invigilator and admission issues. Certain methods that can be adopted in order to minimize cheating including strict invigilation, counseling of the students, improving syllabus and teaching methodology.

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