Perception Medical Faculty Regarding Students' Classroom Incivilities and Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To explore perception of medical faculty regarding students' classroom incivilities and coping strategies.
Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Place and study duration: Khawaja Muhammad Safdar Medical College, Sialkot, Pakistan from January to April 2020.

Methodology: A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect responses from the faculty. The study was carried out on 125 participants. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0.

Results: Of 125 faculties 67(53.6%) were males. Junior faculty members were 80(64.0%). Irritating remarks (89.0%), cellphone use and cheating in the exam (87.0%) were the most common incivilities and reluctance to answer questions (40.0%) was the least common. Being friendly/respectful to students, passionate, establishing clear rules, starting class on time, using eye contact and variable students' engaging activities, encouraging students to self-evaluate their behaviour and welcoming their suggestions were supported by >90% of the faculty. However, humiliating remarks to correct the students' incivility was unanimously rejected. In comparison, the use of cell phones, irritating remarks, whispering, talking out of turn, arriving late in class, cheating in exams and leaving the cell phone bell "on" equally bother most junior and senior faculty. Overall, the female junior teachers from basic subjects with experience <10 years were significantly (*p* <0.05) more sensitive to incivilities.

Conclusion: The most common incivilities were irritating remarks/gestures, cell phone use and cheating in examination. Teaching with passion/enthusiasm was the most favourite coping strategy. However, humiliating remarks to correct the incivility was strongly rejected. Junior, female, less experienced demonstrators from basic disciplines were more vulnerable to rude behaviour.

Keywords: Classroom management, Coping strategy, Disruptive behaviour, Gender difference incivility, Medical faculty, Medical student.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom incivilities of students interrupt the educational process and cause stress for both teachers and students. These behaviours are on the rise, not only in the classroom but also in society at large. Such behaviours are a major challenge for educators in academic settings and, if left unaddressed, may progress into threatening situations.[1,2,3] They result in less motivated/burnt-out faculty because even the most experienced educationists are not fully versed in managing such behaviour effectively. Such behaviours fall into one of three categories: behaviour by the student individually (e.g. playing games or reading irrelevant stuff), behaviour interacting with other students (e.g. chatting) and behaviour interacting with the instructor (asking irrelevant questions, confronting, arguing etc.).[4]

Regarding solutions to this issue, there is no "one plan fits all" for faculty. In formulating a discipline plan, teachers must establish classroom rules from the beginning, course, define limits, set expectations, clarify responsibilities and develop a suitable practical and meaningful curriculum.[5] Assessing the perception of the faculty regarding incivilities would help to create favoured strategies to curtail the issue.[6] To cope with incivilities, problem-solving strategies, the social health approach, role-playing, active learning strategy, getting help from educational services, holding conferences between students and educators, creativity and collaboration in a classroom setting are recommended.[7,8]

Developed countries have ample research on the subject, but we have an abstract picture, and the gravity of this issue is still being underestimated locally. In the medical profession, not enough studies are available on the behaviour of the students in the classroom. This scenario warrants the need for locally conducted studies to realize the problem in detail and formulate possible strategies to minimize the issue in our setup.

The objective of this work was to explore the perception of medical faculty regarding classroom incivilities of the students and strategies to manage

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them. In addition, this study may guide the students, teachers, and policymakers to devise and implement strategies to minimize the incivilities which disrupt the learning environment.

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study was conducted at Khawaja Muhammad Safdar Medical College, Sialkot, from January to April 2020. The ethical approval of the study was taken from the Research and Ethics Committee of the Institution (92/REC/KMSMC dated 19-05-2020). A list of all faculty of the college was prepared. 125 faculty members were selected by using a random number table, and consent was sought from them to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, anonymous and non-compensatory. WHO sample size calculator was used, with reference statistics based on the study by Lemeshow *et al*. was used.[9] With the formula, the calculated sample size was 108, and we took 15% more data for missing data/dropouts.

Inclusion Criteria: Faculty members having teaching experience of at least one year and performing teaching responsibilities were included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria: Faculty members with teaching experience of more than one year, performing non-teaching responsibilities, and not wishing to continue participation were excluded from the study.

A questionnaire comprising three sections was used to collect data. The first section consisted of the demographic characteristics of the faculty. The second section had 20 items regarding students' incivilities adopted from Rowland *et al*.[10] The third section consisted of 24 combating strategies of incivilities adopted from Fowler *et al*.[11]

Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral opinion, 4=agree, and 5= strongly agree. The Cronbach alpha for the scale of uncivil behaviour was 0.92, and for the strategies, the scale was 0.73. For analytic convenience, strongly disagree and disagree, as well as agree and strongly agree, were merged.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25:00 was used for the data analysis. Faculty were grouped into basic and clinical disciplines at the analysis stage. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize demographics and faculty perceptions of classroom incivilities and coping strategies. The independent samples t-test was used to determine differences among different demographic faculty groups. The level of statistical significance for all statistical analyses was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

Out of 125 participants, 67(53.6%) were males. 54(43.2%) participants were from basic disciples, and 71(56.8%) were clinicians. Similarly, 81(64.8%) were junior faculty members (Demonstrators, Senior Registrars and Assistant Professors), and the rest 44 (35.2%), were senior members (Associate Professors and Professors) teachers who had teaching experience >10 years (Table-I).

Table-I: Characteristics of Faculty Members (n=125)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	67(53.6)
	Female	58(46.4)
Age (Years)	<30 years	12(9.6)
	30-40 years	49(39.2)
	40-50 years	28(22.4)
	>50 years	36(28.8)
Qualification (Highest Degree)	MBBS	33(26.4)
	M Phil	15(12)
	Ph D	1(.8)
	FCPS	68(54.4)
	MD/MS	7(5.6)
	MRCP/MRCS	1 (0.8)
Disciplines	Basic disciplines	54 (43.2)
	Clinical disciplines	71(56.8)
Designation	Junior faculty (Demonstrator, Senior Registrar & Assistant Professor)	80(64.0)
	Senior faculty (Associate Professor & Professor)	45(36.0)
Teaching experience (years)	< 5 years	43(34.4)
	5-10 years	38(30.4)
	<10 (Junior Faculty)	81(64.8)
	>10 (Senior Faculty)	44(35.2)

Irritating remarks (88.8%), whispering/prolonged talking (88.0%), cell phone use and cheating in examination/class (87.2%) were considered to be the rudest behaviour. The least rude behaviours were reluctance to answer direct questions (40.8%) and questioning the teacher's knowledge (52.8%) (Table-II). Almost all faculty rejected using embarrassment/ consolidating remarks (88.0%) to correct students (Table-III). In comparison, females from basic disciplines were found to be significantly more sensitive to this behaviour (p <0.05) (Table-IV).

Demonstrators (mostly juniors) with teaching experience <10 years considered these behaviours significantly ruder (p<0.001) as compared to professors

Table-II: Response of Faculty on Classroom Incivilities (n=125)

Response of Faculty	Disagree n(%)	Neutral Opinion n(%)	Agree n(%)
Cell phone use	13(10.4)	3(2.4)	109(87.2)
Challenging faculty's authority	20(16.0)	6 (4.8)	99(79.2)
Demand special privilege	21(16.8)	14(11.2)	90(72.0)
"I paid for it" mindset	19(15.2)	10(8.0)	96(76.8)
Leave class early	27(21.6)	9(7.2)	89(71.2)
Irritating remarks/gesture	9(7.2)	5(4.0)	111(88.8)
Missing homework dead line	25(20.0)	10(8.0)	90(72.0)
Whispering/prolong talking	12(9.6)	3(2.4)	110(88.0)
Reading nonrelated matter	24(19.2)	7(5.6)	94(75.2)
Sleeping	27(21.6)	9(7.2)	89(71.2)
Talk out of turn	35(28.0)	16(12.8)	74(59.2)
Arriving late in class	23(18.4)	9(7.2)	93(74.4)
Inattentive	26(20.8)	14(11.2)	85(68.0)
Acting bored	26(20.8)	20(16.0)	79(63.2)
Reluctant to answer	47(37.6)	27(21.6)	51(40.8)
Irrelevant computer use	29(23.2)	9(7.2)	87(69.6)
Questioning teacher's knowledge	41(32.8)	18(14.4)	66(52.8)
Cheating in examination/class	14(11.2)	2(1.6)	109(87.2)
Challenging teacher's credibility	16(12.8)	11(8.8)	98(78.4)
Leaving cell phone bell "on"	21(16.8)	6(4.8)	98(78.4)

Table-III: Response of Faculty on Coping Strategies for Classroom Incivilities (n=125)

Strategies	Disagree n(%)	Neutral opinion n(%)	Agree n(%)
Allow students to freely express their opinions.	7(5.6)	10(8.0)	108(86.4)
Use of embarrassing/scolding remarks to correct students.	110(88.0)	7(5.6)	8(6.4)
Friendly and respectful to students.	2(1.6)	4(3.2)	119(95.2)
Show enthusiasm (passion) for the subject.	3(2.4)	0	122(97.6)
Establish clear rules from the beginning of the course.	2(1.6)	2(1.6)	121(96.8)
Display a strict attitude towards classroom control.	25(20.0)	9(7.2)	91(72.8)
Arrive on time for class.	8(6.4)	3(2.4)	114(91.2)
Start class on time.	2(1.6)	2(1.6)	121(96.8)
End class early.	58(46.4)	22(17.6)	45(36.0)
Spend time taking attendance.	74(59.2)	17(13.6)	34(27.2)
Use group work in the classroom.	13(10.4)	13(10.4)	99(79.2)
Allow students to eat or drink in class.	81(64.8)	12(9.6)	32(25.6)
Strictly enforce attendance policies.	23(18.4)	13(10.4)	89(71.2)
Remove students who are causing problems in classroom.	52(41.6)	11(8.8)	62(49.6)
Use eye contact as a classroom management method.	7(5.6)	4(3.2)	114(91.2)
Use L1 (first language (Urdu) in the classroom.	38(30.4)	30(24.0)	57(45.6)
Allow students to enter class late.	57(45.6)	24(19.2)	44(35.2)
Allow students to leave class to answer a phone call.	65(52.0)	17(13.6)	43(34.4)
Monitor students class work by walking around their seats.	17(13.6)	9(7.2)	99(79.2)
Vary (different) activities in your practical lessons.	4(3.2)	8(6.4)	113(90.4)
Have to stop lessons to address student's misbehavior.	38(30.4)	16(12.8)	71(56.8)
Allow students to work on the assigned in-or out-of class task.	57(45.6)	16(12.8)	52(41.6)
Encourage students to self-evaluate their behavior.	4(3.2)	7(5.6)	114(91.2)
Welcome student's suggestions for managing classroom.	4(3.2)	9(7.2)	112(89.6)

(mostly seniors) with teaching experience >10 years (Table-V).

DISCUSSION

Incivility in education is an emergent problem. Therefore, preventing and managing uncivil classroom behaviour is challenging for the faculty.

In this study, highest grades of incivilities were given to irritating remarks/gestures, whispering/ prolonged talking, cell phone use and cheating in examination/class. This is quite in line with Krecar *et al*. work in 2016 in a Croatian university depicts similar incivilities as cheating in the exam, rude communication, answering a cell phone during class and

chatting.[12] Corroborating our findings cheating in exams, irritating remarks/rude gestures, sleeping in class, whispering, doing other subject classwork, and using media devices, were more frequently considered rude behaviour in Hasanvand *et al*.[13] Leaving class early, expressing disinterest/boredom with course content, using a media device, and cheating in examinations were common uncivil behaviours in this study which have similarities with reports by Clark and Rauf.[14,15] However, Kale *et al*., Ballard *et al*. and

Table-IV: Comparison of Gender and Disciplines on Classroom Incivilities (n=125)

Response of Faculty	Gender			Disciplines		
	Male Mean±SD	Female Mean±SD	*p*-value	Basic Mean±SD	Clinical Mean±SD	*p*-value
Cell phone use	4.2±1.1	4.2±0.9	0.87	4.3±1.0	4.1±1.2	0.38
Challenging faculty's authority	4.0±1.2	4.2±1.2	0.25	4.3±1.1	4.0±1.4	0.10
Demanding special privilege	3.6±1.2	3.9±1.0	0.07	4.0±1.0	3.5±1.1	0.03
"I paid for it" mindset	3.9±1.2	4.1±1.3	0.28	4.3±1.1	3.8±1.3	0.07
Leave class early	3.6±1.3	4.0±1.1	0.12	4.0±1.0	3.6±1.3	0.13
Irritating remarks/gesture	4.3±1.0	4.4±1.0	0.31	4.6±1.0	4.1±1.1	0.01
Missing homework dead line	3.5±1.2	3.9±1.0	0.04	4.0±1.1	3.3±1.1	<0.01
Whispering/prolonged talking	4.1±1.1	4.3±1.0	0.18	4.4±1.0	4.1±1.0	0.18
Reading non-related matter	3.7±1.2	4.1±1.1	0.24	4.2±1.0	3.5±1.2	<0.01
Sleeping	3.5±1.3	3.8±1.2	0.20	4.0±1.2	3.5±1.3	0.02
Talking out of turn	3.4±1.1	3.4±1.1	0.96	3.6±1.2	3.3±1.1	0.15
Arriving late in class	3.7±1.2	3.7±1.0	0.84	3.8±1.1	3.7±1.2	0.52
Inattentive	3.3±1.2	4.0±1.0	<0.01	4.1±1.0	3.3±1.2	<0.01
Acting bored/apathetic	3.3±1.1	3.7±1.0	0.02	3.9±1.0	3.3±1.1	0.01
Reluctant to answer direct question	2.8± .2	3.2±1.1	0.02	3.4±1.1	2.7±1.2	<0.01
Irrelevant computer use	3.5±1.3	4.0 ±1.1	0.02	4.0±1.2	3.5±1.4	0.06
Questioning teacher's knowledge	3.3(3.0)	3.7±1.2	0.36	3.8±1.1	3.4±3.2	0.47
Cheating in exam/class	4.2±1.1	4.2±1.0	0.88	4.3±1.0	4.2±1.1	0.43
Challenging teacher's credibility	4.0±1.2	4.2±1.1	0.26	4.5±1.0	3.7±1.3	<0.01
Leaving cell phone "on"	3.8±1.3	4.1±1.1	0.18	4.3±1.1	3.7±1.4	0.01
Total score	73.2±15.6	79.2±14.5	0.03	81.6±13.6	71.7±15.3	<0.01

Table-V: Comparison of Most JUNIOR and Most Senior Faculty and Teaching Experience on Classroom Incivilities (n=125)

Response of Faculty	Most junior and most senior faculty			Teaching experience		
	Demonstrator Mean±SD	Professor Mean±SD	*p*-value	<10 years Mean±SD	>10 years Mean±SD	*p*-value
Cell phone use	4.3±1.0	4.1±1.2	0.42	4.2±1.0	4.2±1.1	0.74
Challenging faculty's authority	4.5±1.0	3.8±1.4	<0.01	4.3±1.2	3.7±1.3	0.01
Demanding special privilege	4.1±1.0	3.3±1.2	<0.01	4.1±1.0	3.3±1.1	<0.01
"I paid for it" mindset	4.3±1.3	3.6±1.4	<0.02	4.3±1.1	3.6±1.4	<0.01
Leave class early	4.2±1.0	3.2±1.4	<0.01	4.0±1.0	3.3±1.3	<0.01
Irritating remarks/gesture	4.6±1.1	4.3±1.1	0.11	4.4±1.0	4.3±1.0	0.54
Missing homework dead line	4.2±1.0	3.4±1.2	<0.01	3.8±1.1	3.5±1.1	0.12
Whispering/prolonged talking	4.3±1.0	4.1±1.3	0.09	4.3±1.0	4.0± 1.2	0.19
Reading nonrelated matter	4.3±1.0	3.6±1.2	0.01	3.9±1.2	3.6±1.2	0.22
Sleeping	4.2±1.2	3.5±1.3	0.02	3.8±1.2	3.5±1.3	0.21
Talking out of turn	3.6±1.1	3.2±1.1	0.21	3.5±1.1	3.3±1.1	0.35
Arriving late in class	3.9±1.1	3.5±1.2	0.13	3.8±1.1	3.5±1.2	0.20
Inattentive	4.2±1.0	3.3±1.2	<0.01	3.7±1.1	3.5±1.1	0.16
Acting bored/apathetic	3.9±1.0	3.4±1.1	0.04	3.6±1.1	3.4±1.1	0.36
Reluctant to answer	3.6±1.1	2.8±1.1	<0.01	3.1±1.2	2.8±1.1	0.21
Irrelevant computer use	4.1±1.0	3.5±1.3	0.02	3.8±1.3	3.6±1.3	0.39
Questioning teacher's knowledge	4.1± 1.0	2.8±1.1	<0.01	3.8±2.7	2.8±1.1	0.02
Cheating in exam / class	4.3±1.0	4.1±1.3	0.32	4.2±1.0	4.1±1.2	0.53
Challenging credibility	4.6±1.0	3.5±1.3	<0.01	4.3±1.0	3.5±1.3	<0.01
Leaving cell phone "on"	4.3±1.0	3.7±1.5	0.06	4.1±1.1	3.8±1.5	0.20
Total score	83.7±11.8	70.6±16.8	<0.01	78.5±14.9	71.2±15.3	0.01

Sun *et al*. found using a cell phone and joining the class late, the most irritating behaviour. At the same time, one researcher mentioned talking out of turn so.[16,17,18] This difference in findings may be due to different environments and participants of their studies. In another study on nursing students, the authors portrayed that students creating tension by dominating the discussion, leaving class early, acting bored/apathetic, and not paying attention in class as the least rude behaviours.[6] In line with that study, our least uncivil behaviours were reluctance to answer direct questioning, challenging teachers' knowledge and acting bored/apathetic.

Supporting our findings, Sun *et al*. also reported disrespecting teachers, non-attentiveness/idleness, daydreaming, challenging teachers' authority, doing other subject homework, reading irrelevant material, using electronic devices, irritating remarks and sleeping adversely affect students' learning.[18]

Regarding coping strategies, >90% of our faculty supported the same strategies as proved by other researchers.[19,20] Suggested strategies were: being friendly/respectful to students, passionate about the subject, setting clear rules, starting class on time, using eye contact and variable activities to engage students well, interrupting class to address the student's disruptive behaviour, encouraging the student to self-evaluate his/her behaviour and welcome students' suggestions. Supporting our results, Rad *et al*. in Iran in 2016, as well as Latif *et al*. in Pakistan in 2019, reported that interactive teaching and friendly relationships enhance students' learning abilities.[7,19] Our results depict that now there is a change in faculty mindset as almost all faculty rejected the use of embarrassing/humiliating remarks to correct stu-dent's incivility endorsing the findings of Keser *et al*.[5]

According to our findings, allowing eating/drinking, spending time in attendance marking, allowing to enter class late, and permitting to do other class's work were comparatively useless strategies. Ayeni also corroborated our findings.[20] Similar to a report from Iran, our faculty was also indecisive about the usefulness of ending class early, the use of the first language (Urdu), and the strategy of removing the misbehaving student from class.[13]

It was noticed that basic discipline teachers were more sensitive to rude behaviours than clinicians. This difference may be due to extensive public/patient dealing and better social communication among clinicians.[20,21] Sometimes faculty has a prominent role in students' incivility, and the cause may be a lack of teachers' professional behaviour.[22,23]

Supporting our results, Krecar *et al*. reported that professors are less sensitive to most classroom incivilities than demonstrators because of their higher classroom management capability and more authority.[12] The other explanation could be that junior faculty might have more difficulty gaining authority/respect from the students and objectively face more uncivil behaviours.

One attention-grabbing finding is that the faculty strongly supported almost all coping strategies unanimously. Moreover, there was no significant difference in opinion among different groups of faculty.

LIMITATIONS

Single institution, small sample size and dominant female junior faculty in the basic disciplines may affect the internal reliability. Therefore, multi-institutional studies avoiding these limitations are recommended to have a clear view of the issue.

CONCLUSION

The most common incivilities were irritating remarks/gestures, cell phone use and cheating in examination. Teaching with passion and enthusiasm were the favourite strategies to cope with incivilities. However, humiliating remarks to correct the incivility was strongly rejected strategy unanimously. Female demonstrators from basic disciplines were more vulnerable to rude behaviour than experienced clinical faculty. Although this study revealed several strategies to deal with students' incivilities, depending on location, individual, and time, any single strategy may be ineffective, and a combined strategy approach may be needed to cope with the issue.

Conflict of Intrest: None**.**

Author's Contribution

Following author has made substantial contributions to the manuscript as under:

MR: Conception, study design, data acquisition, data analysis, data interpretation, drafting the manuscript, critical review, approval of the final version to be published.

Author agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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