

# DOES EXCESSIVE ABSENCE FROM CLASS LEAD TO LOWER LEVELS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT?

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## Abstract

There is a general agreement among researchers that being chronically absent places students at risk for negative academic consequences. However, some studies have failed to find a significant correlation between attendance and academic performance. Studies examining this relationship are lacking at the field of Nursing. The purpose of this study was to check the effect of absenteeism rate on the academic achievement of graduate and undergraduate nursing students at a private university in Amman, Jordan. A cross-sectional correlational design was used with a sample of 130 BSN and 40 Master students. Results showed that students who have higher absenteeism rates have lower Grand Point Average (GPA) regardless to academic level. Moreover, Male students have higher absenteeism rates and lower GPAs than females. In conclusion, the present study has reported a negative correlation between absenteeism and academic achievement. Application of attendance polices might help in improving students' attendance and their academic achievement.

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**Keywords:** Absenteeism, academic achievement, Nursing, and Jordan

## Introduction

Regular class attendance is related to a student's commitment to pursuing education. Professional courses such as Nursing require high attendance. The aim of education is to produce graduates with adequate knowledge, skills and a healthy attitude towards patients and their families (Abdulaziz *et al.*, 2006). Even though there have generally been many changes in the ways of teaching, traditional lecture format of teaching is still followed (Abdulaziz *et al.*, 2006). Lectures and classroom discussion still represent the primary means of teaching for undergraduates and some of graduate topics at colleges of nursing in Jordan universities.

The link between attendance and academic achievement has been studied in a wide variety of courses such as Culture (Gump, 2005), Pharmacy

(Hidayat, Vansal, Kim, Sullivan, & Salbu, 2012), Psychology (Van Blerkom, 1990), Business (Ehsan, 2013) Obstetrics/Gynecology (Deane & Murphy, 2013), Medicine (Chilwant, 2013; LB, 2012; Millis, Dyson, & Cannon, 2009; Subramaniam, Hande, & Komattil, 2013) and other (S. van, 2010). However, such studies are lacking in the field of nursing especially at the graduate levels. Researchers have identified chronic absenteeism as a persistent problem related to poor academic performance and potential behavioral and developmental issues.

There is a general agreement among researchers that being chronically absent places students at risk of negative academic consequences (Chilwant, 2013; LB, 2012; Millis, Dyson & Cannon, 2009; Moonie, Figs & Castro, 2008). Moreover, researchers found that when the material covered in classes was not available in the course textbook, students who attend classes benefited from interactions with the teacher and classmates and did better in the examinations. Students who attend classes also were able to take class notes, and such note taking has been shown to have positive learning benefits (Ehsan, 2013). In a study done by (S. van, 2010), the three major points why the students attend their classes were: *The lectures helped me to better understand the work* (Comprehension) (92,4%); *Useful tips about tests and the exam were given in class* (Test tips) (88%), and *I learn a lot by listening in class* (Learn in class) (86,7%).

The majority of the studies which have been done previously found a negative relationship between the absence and the academic achievement (Chilwant, 2013; LB, 2012; Millis, Dyson & Cannon, 2009; Moonie, 2008). Moreover, some studies found that attendance was improved when it was tied to grades (Friedman, Rodriguez, McComb, 2001; Launius, 1997). However, some studies failed to find a significant correlation between attendance and academic performance (Gal, Busturia, & Garrido, 2011; Golding, 2011; Ricardo, 2011; YU, 2011). Interestingly, some studies found that when attendance policy was implemented students had lower exam scores than when there was no attendance policy (Golding, 2011). Studies checking the difference between males and females regarding the absenteeism showed that males were absent more than the females (Chilwant, 2013; Ronald, Julie & Stephen, 2011). Furthermore, absenteeism negatively affected the examination grades in both genders (Chilwant, 2013; Ümit Özkanal, 2011). Studies including nursing students found that the effects of absenteeism were minor (Hammen, 1994).

To encourage class attendance, we have always spent part of the first class meeting telling our students that it is important to attend class. Also, they will learn more if they attend class, and generally earn higher grades for the course and vice versa. Therefore, after reviewing the literature, we began to question our assumptions about attendance and academic performance.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between academic achievement, as measured by GPA, and absenteeism for nursing students (graduate and undergraduate) at one of the private universities in Amman, Jordan.

### **Research Hypothesis**

- 1) Students who have higher records of absenteeism will have lower GPA.
- 2) There will be a correlation between absenteeism and GPA.

### **Methods**

#### **Design, Sample, and Setting**

A cross-sectional correlational design was used to meet the objectives of this study. We used the convenience sampling method for this research. All the students enrolled in the undergraduate and graduate programs-college of Nursing at one of the private universities, Amman, Jordan were included in the study. The sample consisted of 130 BSN students and 40 MSN students.

#### **Measurement of variables**

The undergraduate classes are usually 3 credits hour courses. The students sit for the class three-one hour sessions per week for 16 weeks resulting in 48 hours per semester. To meet the needs of the Master students, the courses are structured differently. The student will sit one three –hour session per week for 16 weeks resulting in 48 hours per semester. In order to avoid the discrepancy in the measurement of absenteeism rate, the total hours of absenteeism rate was divided by 48 then it was multiplied by 100% to get a percentages. We got the GPA, the number of absenteeism and the gender of the students from the electronic system of the university where the course coordinators upload this information systemically. This information is usually confirmed by the department head and the dean of the college on regular basis each semester which enhance the validity of the data. For the analysis purposes, the absenteeism percentage for the BSN students was divided into three categories as the following: 0-5%, 5.1-10%, more than 10%. For the master students, the percentage was divided into two categories only (not absent and absent) because the sample size was small.

#### **Ethical Consideration**

The Principle Investigator got the IRB approval to conduct the study from the research and ethical committee/ college of nursing at the specified university before data collection.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Windows 21.0 (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, Illinois). An alpha of  $< 0.05$  was used to determine the statistical significance of analyses. To test the effect of the absenteeism on the GPA, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for the undergraduate students. For the same purpose for the master students, independent sample t-test was used. A bivariate correlation between absenteeism and the GPA was done to check hypothesis number 2.

## Results

The sample included 170 participants, (i.e. 130 undergraduate students and 40 graduate students). Female participants were more than male participants (i.e. 102 female and 68 male). Undergraduate students with high absenteeism rates have lower GPA ( $F(2,128) = 109.3, p < 0.001$ ). The post hoc analysis showed that group one (i.e. 0-5% absenteeism rate) has higher GPA than group two, (i.e. 5.1-10% absenteeism rate), which has higher GPA than group three (i.e. more than 10% absenteeism rate). The means  $\pm$  SD were  $71.4 \pm 8.5, 60.7 \pm 8.1, 41.6 \pm 9.0$ , respectively. There was a strong significant negative relationship between absenteeism rates and GPA,  $r = -0.810, p < 0.001$ . Female students have higher GPAs (means  $\pm$  SD,  $70.8 \pm 8.7$  vs.  $53.9 \pm 15.2$ ) and lower absenteeism rates ( $1.5 \pm 1.8$  vs.  $9.4 \pm 5.2$ ) compared to male students.

Approximately the same results were found for the graduate students. Master students who were absent have lower GPA than those who were not absent (means  $\pm$  SD,  $82.5 \pm$  vs.  $89.3 \pm, P < 0.001$ ). A negative moderate significant relationship was found between absenteeism rates and GPA,  $r = -0.571, p < 0.001$ . Female students have higher GPAs (means  $\pm$  SD,  $87.3 \pm 3.2$  vs.  $81.4 \pm 4.3$ ) and lower absenteeism rates ( $4.2 \pm 3.7$  vs.  $96.8 \pm 3.3$ ) compared to male students.

## Discussion

There is broad unanimity among researchers that attendance is a major factor affecting performance of the students. Studies involving nursing students showed that the attendance affected the academic achievement but the effect was minimal (Hammen, 1994). In this study we found that attendance has a strong positive relationship with the academic achievement for the undergraduate students and a moderate strength for graduates.

Some of the previous studies showed a dose-response relationship between the absenteeism rates and the academic achievement (Ricardo, 2011). This means as absenteeism rates increases the academic achievement decreases. The same results were found in this study. This is an alert to the

management of the universities and the ministry of higher education because this will affect the quality of the nursing graduates.

There are different factors that might affect students' attendance to classes. Some of these factors are related to the students (i.e. age, gender, employment status, marital status, attitude, study major and level of the specialty (i.e. graduate or undergraduate), student perception of teacher's quality, and health condition). Other factors are related to the instructors (i.e. nature of the instructor, qualifications, and method of teaching (traditional vs. non-traditional)). In this study we focused on two important aspects of these; gender, the specialty (Nursing) and its level (graduate and undergraduate).

The result of the study showed that class attendance is positively impacts grade of the students. This is in line with the results from similar studies (Chilwant, 2013; LB, 2012; Millis, Dyson & Cannon, 2009; Moonie , 2008) . Female students have a higher GPAs and lower absenteeism rates regardless to the academic level. Male students have higher absenteeism rates than female students in both levels, even when the classes for the master students were structured differently. In Jordan, as one of the Arabic countries, males are usually dominants even they are students. In most of the cases, males have to work to support their families. This might explain why the male students have higher absenteeism rate compared to females.

Moreover, the sample of the current study consisted of graduate and undergraduate students. All male graduate students and approximately half of the male undergraduate students were working between 8 and 12 hours shift. This probably conflicted with the class times causing a significant increase in their absenteeism rates. This was clearly presented in the study as there was a moderate to strong relationship between absenteeism and GPA, the mean GPA for male students' was lower than the females in both graduate and undergraduate levels.

In Jordan, the traditional method of teaching is still followed even for the graduate students. Someone may argue that if the instructors used a non-traditional method of teaching might help even if the students did not attend the class. In a previous study checking the effect between absenteeism and academic achievement between traditional (control group) or non-traditional methods (experimental group) in Physiology teaching, higher absenteeism rates were associated with lower academic achievement in both groups (Gal, Busturia & Garrido, 2011). Therefore, the authors concluded that class attendance is critical when nontraditional active-learning methods are in use.

Some studies found that attendance was higher if it was tied to grades. This study found that higher attendance was associated with higher GPAs. Therefore, to encourage class attendance, instructors might provide incentives to students such as assigning a certain percentage of grades for

class attendance. Furthermore, this study showed that the graduate students have the same results, indicating that the graduate students should attend classes as well. On one hand, research clearly indicates that having an attendance policy will get students to present to their class. In addition, the implementation of such a policy didn't appear to cause harm to an instructor's course evaluation scores (Golding, 2011).

### **Conclusion and Implication to practice**

In Jordan, this is the first study to be done on this sample of students (Nursing) including graduate level. The present study has reported a moderate to strong negative correlation between absenteeism and academic achievement. Therefore, class attendance is very critical for learning and important in improving the knowledge and academic achievement. Faculty members are highly encouraged to apply education activities during the classes to attract students to attend. To encourage class attendance, instructors might provide incentives to students such as assigning a certain percentage of grades for class attendance. Furthermore, application of attendance polices might help in improving students' attendance and their academic achievement.

### **Limitation and recommendation for future research**

This study was done in only one private university in Amman. A larger sample including governmental and private universities might enhance the results. We used a cross-section design and thus could not control for unobserved individual-specific heterogeneity. A future study examining other factors that might affect class attendance and academic achievement is necessary. The effects of different factors including gender differences on absenteeism rates require further examination in future studies.

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