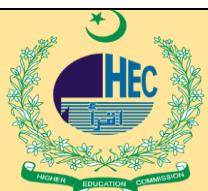




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Psychological Determinants of Student Absenteeism in Higher Education Institution of

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Student absenteeism is a persistent challenge in higher education globally and is strongly associated with academic disconnection, poor performance, and increased failure risk. While current research has largely underlined socioeconomic and institutional factors, comparatively little empirical attention has been given to psychological factor of absenteeism, particularly in the situation of public universities in Pakistan. The aim of this study is to investigate the association between the psychological factors and student's absenteeism in the university level at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. Using a quantitative research design, Data were collected from Bacha Khan University Charsadda and Government Post Graduate Collage Charsadda students through a well a well-structured questionnaire. The chi-square tests were run to test the relationship between the psychological factor and student's absenteeism. The findings indicate that absenteeism of the student is largely associated to psychological factors. Strong association was observed between low academic self-efficacy, fear of being criticized by peers, inability to concentrate because of personal issues, and previous academic failure and student absenteeism. Moderate associations were observed with anxiety and stress, low self-confidence and with absence of peer support and weak yet significant correlations with sleep-related fatigue, isolation, and depressive feelings. Challenges in acclimatizing to the university environment however were not significantly linked. The study concludes that absenteeism as a key predictor of psychological distress and social disengagements rather than not just non-compliance. The findings recommended that the universities should adopt student based and psychologically supportive engagements such as counseling services, peer mentoring and mechanisms to enhance academic self-efficacy and social sense of belonging. Addressing student's psychological well-being is vital for improving attendance, engagement, and overall academic success.

Keywords: Student absenteeism; psychological factors; academic self-efficacy; anxiety and stress; higher education; Pakistan

Introduction

Student absenteeism has arisen as a global educational challenge due to its strong association with poor academic performance, disconnection, and increased failure risk. Contemporary research is focusing more on psychological causes as key factors in erratic attendance in addition to socioeconomic and structural reasons. Psychological factors are widely acknowledged as significant predictors of absenteeism in affluent nations such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and European countries.

According to studies, student's who are academically anxious, have low self-esteem, and are afraid of being judged negatively are more likely to avoid classrooms as a coping mechanism (Kearney, 2016; Psychogiou et al., 2024). Further, stress, sadness, and sleep problems impair cognitive function and emotional regulation, which leads to avoidance behaviors such as absenteeism (Beiter et al., 2015; Hershner & Chervin, 2014).

Furthermore, a lack of peer support and social belonging has been linked to a decrease in institutional attachment, which raises the risk of disengagement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Wilcox et al., 2005). Increasingly, absenteeism is seen as an early psychological sign of disengagement in these conditions rather than just a case of non-compliance.

In developing countries, psychological factors behind absenteeism often interact with greater academic pressures and limited mental health support system. Absenteeism is highly correlated with anxiety, emotional misery, and poor academic self-concept, irrespective of the economic context (Trani & Hart, 2023).

According to these results, psychological susceptibility is a common factor influencing attendance behavior, but contextual stressors might make its impact worse. Epically in Pakistan suggests similar psychological patterns. According to studies, student's absenteeism, particularly at the university level, is significantly influenced by factors such as poor academic self-efficacy, test anxiety, stress, depression, fear of peer judgment, and personal issues (Manzoor et al., 2025; Khaskheli, et al., 2024). The emotional distress and lack of engagement are likely to be thoughtful by the high academic pressure, lack of counseling services, and the stigma of dealing with mental health that Pakistani student's have to suffer. Local studies also shows that the student's would miss classes more often because they have a lesser sense of belonging caused by isolation and the lack of peer support (Leonard & Khurshid, 2025). Despite the growing awareness that absenteeism is a major education issue in Pakistan, empirical studies have mostly focused on socioeconomic and institutional factors, but less attention has been done on psychological factors particularly at the university level. This gap limits the development of effective, student-centered involvements meant at improving attendance and academic engagements.

Literature review

It is now more widely accepted that student absenteeism is not just a behavioral problem but rather a psychological reaction to emotional, cognitive, and social stresses. In developed countries, researchers have discovered a strong correlation between psychological suffering, notably anxiety, depression, fear of failure, and low self-efficacy, and chronic absenteeism. In line with self-determination theory, which states that unmet psychological needs reduce motivation and participation, Filippello et al. (2019) revealed that student's who see academic activities as frightening or have doubts about their academic ability are more inclined to skip classes. Similarly, McLeod, Horwood & Fergusson, (2019) discovered those teenagers who have high degrees of emotional discomfort and a weak sense of belonging in school are more likely to have non-attendance patterns. Student's avoid classroom settings because of social anxiety and fear of being negatively evaluated, especially when active participation is necessary (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). According to cross-national studies conducted in 69 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), anxiety predicts unauthorized school absence in a variety of contexts, suggesting that psychological distress is not just a factor in absenteeism in wealthy nations (Parizad et al., 2025). Emotional issues, loneliness, and worry are major predictors of school absenteeism in nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In developing nation study reveals that regardless of socioeconomic background, avoidant actions rooted in worry and low self-esteem of academic talent are among the strongest predictors of school refusal (Klassen, 2021; Haq et al., 2025). Despite the fact that empirical research on psychological causes of absenteeism is still developing in Pakistan, available studies mirror global patterns. University student's absenteeism is largely caused by stress, anxiety, and a lack of self-assurance (Kainaat, 2024). Likewise, research from Pakistani medical schools

highlights psychological obstacles to consistent attendance, such as sleep problems, academic stress, fear of failure, and disengagement (Hussain et al., 2023).

National studies also reveal a link between elevated levels of depressive symptoms and stress in undergraduates and lower-class participation and higher absenteeism rates (Ahmed & Tariq, 2021). These studies mutually show that psychological factors, such as low self-efficacy, anxiety, stress, fear of judgment, social isolation, and personal difficulties, are key to understanding absenteeism in a variety of global contexts. Hence, in order to improve academic engagement and class attendance, it is vital to address these psychological aspects with helpful involvements.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1993), which is the most proper framework for clarifying the psychological causes of student's absenteeism. According to Tinto's theory, student's attendance and resolution are depending upon their successful academic and social integration into the university when student's feel anxiety, stress, social isolation, or a lack of peer support, their sense of belonging weakens, leading to greater disconnection behaviors like absenteeism. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which stresses that student's attitudes about their academic skills have a significant impact on their motivation and conduct, is complementary to this. Student's are less confident in their ability to manage academic challenges and, as a result, avoid taking part in class because of low academic self-efficacy, fear of failure, and previous academic failures. Together, this theory offers a solid basis for viewing absenteeism as a psychological reaction to perceived academic incompetence and a lack of social and emotional integration, rather than just a problem with attendance.

Methodology

This study adopted quantitative research design to measure the association between independent variable (psychological causes) and dependent variable (student's absenteeism) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, Area of District Charsadda. The population of the study is 5171 from Bacha Khan University Charsadda and Government Post Graduate Collage Charsadda. The area was selected because the people of District Charsadda mostly belongs to rural areas and socioeconomic instable, they face many challenges. Sample size of 374 respondents was selected for this study is using Slovi's formula (Solvin, 1960). Stratified random sampling technique was employed to confirm representation across various sub-groups within the population. A well-structured Likert scale questionnaire was used for the data collection in this study. The questionnaires were used Participants because the participants were highly educated. Data were collected through the questionnaire distributed to in person to certify the respondent's perception. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software Version 26 to understand the findings and draw meaningful conclusions about the psychological causes of absenteeism in District Charsadda Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

Data analysis

The study utilized Chi-square test to measure the association between both dependent variable (Student absenteeism) and independent variable (psychological factors).

Results

Relationship between Psychological factors and Student's' Absenteeism

Psychological factors play significant role in determining student's' academic behavior, and regular attendance. A student's capability to contribute in academic activities regularly is greatly impacted by their emotional well-being, confidence, stress levels, social relationships, and mental health. Absenteeism is frequently a coping mechanism for student's who are

experiencing psychological distress or who have negative self-perceptions, rather than a conscious choice. The findings show that the majority of psychological variables have a significant correlation with student's absenteeism, demonstrating that mental and emotional health issues are major contributors to irregular class attendance. The insights of respondents regarding psychological causes and student's absenteeism are presented in Table and discussed below.

The finding displays significance and strong positive association between student's absenteeism and inability to pass certain subjects ($\chi^2 = 25.34$, $p = 0.003$, $Tc = 0.43$). The finding stated that low academic self-efficacy increases student's chance of absenteeism. When student's notice themselves as psychologically unable, their motivation failures, leading to student absenteeism.

Similarly, the result was significantly associated with student's absenteeism and feelings of insecure about oneself ($\chi^2 = 35.45$, $p = 0.034$, $Tc = 0.32$). These findings suggested moderate positive association which shows how low self-confidence declines student's confidence, making classroom participation psychologically painful and increasing absenteeism.

Further, a significance and moderate positive association was found between *anxiety and stress* with student's absenteeism ($\chi^2 = 30.23$, $p = 0.001$, $Tc = 0.20$). Stress and Anxiety negatively affect emotional stability, which often results in student's avoiding the academic environment to reduce psychological distress. feelings of isolation and loneliness in the classroom

Moreover, the finding revealed a significance but weak positive association between staying up late at night, feeling sleepy in class and student's absenteeism ($\chi^2 = 34.70$, $p = 0.004$, $Tc = 0.12$). The result recommends that poor sleep reduce student's physical willingness for learning, indirectly contributing to absenteeism.

Furthermore, a significance and weak association was created between feeling of isolation and loneliness in classroom with student's absenteeism ($\chi^2 = 8.23$, $p = 0.002$, $Tc = 0.10$). This result identified that lack of social belonging reduces student's attachment and increasing the chance of absenteeism.

Likewise, a significant and modest positive association were revealed between student's absenteeism and lack of friends to accompany them to the university ($\chi^2 = 40.67$, $p = 0.004$, $Tc = 0.21$). This result recommended that significance of relationships with friends helping regular attendance, as social support reduces anxiety and improves motivation as a result the rate of absenteeism become low.

Conversely, the association between student's absenteeism and feeling depressed about studying indicated a significant and very weak association ($\chi^2 = 35.44$, $p = 0.001$, $Tc = 0.01$). This finding stated that depressed feeling is statistically connected with absenteeism. Their direct influence may be mediated by other psychological or environmental factors.

Whereas, a non-significant association ($\chi^2 = 2.11$, $p = 0.23$, $Tc = 0.021$) was found between difficulty in adapting to the university environment and student's absenteeism. The result specified that distress in adaptation alone does not significantly expect absenteeism, possibly because students gradually adjust over time or receive informal support.

Further, a significance and strong positive association was shown between student's absenteeism and difficulty concentrating on studies due to personal issues ($\chi^2 = 60.44$, $p = 0.006$, $Tc = 0.41$). The finding highlights that unresolved personal issues significantly disturb cognitive attention and emotional stability, lead to absenteeism.

Similarly, a significance and strong positive association ($\chi^2 = 55.33$, $p = 0.02$, $Tc = 0.33$) was shown between fear of being criticized by peers with student's absenteeism. The finding

underscores the role of social anxiety and fear of negative assessment in discouraging absenteeism.

Finally, a highly significant association ($\chi^2 = 2.23$, $p = 0.000$, $T_c = 0.011$) was found between student's absenteeism and past academic failures. The result suggests that due to earlier failures the student's absent from classes because they feel embarrassed in front of peers or teachers.

Overall, the results show a strong association between psychologically factors and student's absenteeism which suggests that the main reason behind the irregular attendance is emotional, cognitive, and social problems rather than adjustment issues. Academic insecurity was found to be a significant predictor of absenteeism and the highest associations occurred with low academic self-efficacy (belief in inability to pass subjects), difficulty in concentration as a result of personal problems and fear of peer criticism or negative judgment. Moderate relations were eliminated between low self-confidence, worry, stress, the absence of peer camaraderie, whereas weaker but nevertheless significant associations were observed between historic academic disappointments, fatigue caused by sleeping, a sense of isolation, and depression. Conversely, absenteeism and difficulty in adapting to the university environment were not linked with each other. The findings, are aligning with Tinto Student Integration Theory (1993) suggest that the lack of social support and psychological distress weaken the academic and social integration of student's leading to absenteeism as a red flag of disengagement and potential withdrawal rather than just an attendance issue.

Association between psychological causes and student's absenteeism

STATEMENTS	Dependent variable	Statistic
I believe I am unable to pass certain subjects	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 25.34$ $P=0.003$ $T_c=0.43$
I often feel insecure about myself.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 35.45$ $P=0.034$ $T_c=0.32$
I experience anxiety or stress.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 30.23$ $P=0.001$ $T_c=0.20$
I stay up late at night and feel sleepy in class.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 34.70$ $P= 0.004$ $T_c=0.12$
I feel isolated or alone in the classroom.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 8.23$ $P=0.002$ $T_c=0.10$
I lack friends to accompany me to university.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 40.67$ $P=0.004$ $T_c=0.21$
I feel depressed about studying.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 35.44$ $P=0.001$ $T_c=0.01$
I do not feel adapted to the university environment.	Student's absenteeism	$\chi^2 = 2.11$ $P=0.23$ $T_c=0.021$
I have difficulty concentrating on my studies due	Student's	$\chi^2 = 60.44$

to personal problems.	absenteeism	P=0.006 T ^c =0.41
I avoid attending classes because I fear being criticized or judged by peers.	Student's absenteeism	χ^2 =55.33 P=0.02 T ^c =0.33
Past academic failures have lowered my motivation to attend regularly.	Student's absenteeism	χ^2 = 2.23 P=0.000 T ^c =0.011

Discussion

Findings of this study approve that psychological factors are significantly related with student's' absenteeism, show that attendance behavior is extremely fixed in student's' academic perceptions, emotional well-being, and social experiences. Absenteeism and student's' belief that they are unable to succeed in specific subjects were the most strongly associated, underlining the significance of academic self-efficacy.

People who believe they are incompetent are more prone to avoid difficult situations, according to Bandura (1997). Low academic self-assurance is a predictor of disengagement and higher absenteeism as a defensive mechanism against anticipated failure (Chemers & Garcia, 2001; Klassen & Klassen, 2018). Additionally, absenteeism was found to be strongly linked to low self-confidence, indicating that students are psychologically terrified of participating in class due to their sense of insecurity.

Previous research suggests that low self-esteem leads to less academic involvement and greater avoidance of social and evaluative circumstances (Rosenberg, 1989; Murberg & Bru, 2009). Similarly, anxiety and stress were shown to have a moderate but statistically significant link with absenteeism, confirming studies that academic stress causes students to disengage from academic settings by impairing their motivation, emotional control, and concentration (Beiter et al., 2015; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). Sleep-related weariness, while less severe, was strongly linked to absenteeism, implying that a lack of sleep impairs cognitive preparedness and physical drive to attend (Hershner & Chervin, 2014). Social factors also contributed to absenteeism patterns, since students' who felt alone and lacked friends to accompany them to college were much more likely to miss classes. Student's who don't have peer support have lower institutional engagements and are less driven to attend classes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Haq et al., 2025; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005).

Although the relationship between depressive symptoms and absenteeism is extremely mild, it suggests that depression plays an indirect role in attendance issues, frequently mediated by stress, anxiety, and academic challenges (Eisenberg, Golberstein & Hunt, 2009). On the other hand, challenges adjusting to the university environment were not strongly associated with absenteeism, indicating that informal coping strategies may mitigate the transient nature of adaptation issues (Baker & Siryk, 1984). The study has pointed out the importance of emotional stress and social anxiety in causing avoidance behavior as it showed great connections between personal problems hindering attention and the fear of criticism or negative assessment (Leary, 2001). Finally, absenteeism was a strongly associated in the previous failures in academics, which support the learned helplessness theory of failure, which declares that repeating failure depresses motivation and results in withdrawing (Seligman, 1975). Overall, these findings give significant support to the Student Integration Theory proposed by Tinto (1993) that says absenteeism is an early indicator of disengagement and potential withdrawal instead of being

merely an attendance problem, because it is psychologically distressing and with respect to academic and social integration, the students are already disengaged.

Conclusion and recommendation

Student Absenteeism at the university level is a major academic issue particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan where there has been little empirical research on the psychological factors. The present study intended to occupy this gap with the help of the Student Integration Theory offered by Tinto, which would allow focusing on the role of psychological experiences of students in influencing absenteeism. The finding revealed that absenteeism is not only an attendance problem, but also a symptom of psychological and social problems. The study found out that, absenteeism is closely related to low academic self-efficacy, fear of peer criticism, inability to concentrate due to personal problems, and past academic failures. There were moderate associations between anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and a lack of peer support and less significant associations between sleep problems, loneliness and depressive feelings. On the other hand, issues with university adaptation had no visible impact, suggesting that internal psychological pain and poor social integration are more important than just adjustment issues.

Future implication of study

The result suggests that higher education institutions should replace disciplinary attendance strategies with psychologically informed, student-focused interventions, including counseling centers, peer assistance groups, and strategies of enhancing academic self-confidence.

Limitation of the study

The study is limited by the nature of cross-sectional design, self-reported data and regional coverage. Future studies need to utilize longitudinal and mixed research in different institutions. Overall, managing the psychological well-being is necessary for improving attendance, engagement, and long-term student's success.

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