INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays an important role in helping students develop a sense of civic and social responsibility and learn ways to contribute to common good, thereby playing a pivotal role in developing a civil society; however students are willing to cheat in order to advance academically. Many explanations for academic incivility have been recommended including exposure to hostility, poor secondary school preparation, changing student’s demographics, and inadequate parenting.1Reports of unprofessional behaviors by students in classroom have a reflective impact on students, teachers, and environment of teaching and learning.2 For those students who attempt to increase performance by cutting corners, cheating begins early in their career and grows with educational demands.3

Morrissette also defined classroom incivility as “intentional behavior of students to disrupt the teaching/learning process of others”.4 Feldman defined classroom incivility as “any action that interferes with a harmonious and co-operative learning atmosphere in the classroom” and classified uncivil classroom behavior into four categories: annoyance (answering cell phones in class, arriving late in class), classroom terrorism, intimidation, and threats of violence.5

Classroom incivility has also been documented in many professional courses.6-14 In a study among nursing students and faculty it was reported that the level of student and faculty incivility has increased in nursing education to become a noteworthy problem.16 Additionally, Clark CM et al reported that faculty and students described classroom incivility as a reciprocal process with stress as a major factor influencing uncivil behavior, along with poor communication, lack of mutual respect, and poor teaching methods.17

Dental schools are also vulnerable to problems associated with academic incivility. A study by Andrew et al revealed that cheating was a critical problem in dental schools of United States and Canada.3 Furthermore, Al-Dwairi and Al-Waheidi identified 13 categories of cheating behaviors among dental students in a study completed at Faculty of Dentistry in Jordan university.18 Rowland and Srisukho found considerable disparities in perception of uncivil classroom behavior among students and faculty members.2 The most obvious practical outcome of uncivil classroom behavior is unprofessional and under skilled students passing out of dental schools.

Literature review revealed that no research has been conducted on perception of uncivil classroom behavior in field of dental education in India. Hence the present study aimed at assessing the mean perception of uncivil classroom behavior among students and faculty in a private dental institute in Hyderabad city, India.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Institutional Review Board (PMVIDS/PHD/0018). Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents was maintained and participation was voluntary.

A self administered questionnaire by Rowland and Srisukho2 comprising of 2-sections was employed in the study. The first section gathered the demographic details of both students and faculty members. Second section comprised of eighteen questions about uncivil classroom behavior. In the last question (19), students were asked to indicate their involvement in classroom incivility and faculty members were asked to mention any other uncivil classroom behavior which was not included in questionnaire. Students and faculty member’s opinion about uncivil classroom behavior was noted on five point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree).

Statistical analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (12.0 Version). Comparison among groups was done using Analysis of variance (ANOVA). Mann-Whitney U test was used for comparison among items of the questionnaire. p< 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

RESULTS

The questionnaire was distributed to 600 dental students (both Under Graduate and Postgraduate) and 70 faculty members of Panineeya Mahavidyalaya Institute of Dental Sciences and Research Centre, out of which 510 students and 55 faculty members completed the survey (Response Rate: Students- 85.5% faculty members- 78.5%)

Table 1represents the demographic distribution of the study population, of the 510 students who completed the questionnaire, 400(78.43%) were females and 110(21.57%) were males with mean age of 20.7+ 2.24 years. Among the faculty members, majority had a Master’s degree 67.3% with 27.27% of them working as Senior Lecturers, 25.45% as Readers, 14.5% as Professors. Mean age of the faculty members was 31.6+ 5.75 years.

Mean perception of uncivil behaviour among staff and students based on gender is demonstrated in Table 2.When gender comparison was done for perception of uncivil classroom behaviour among students, statistically significant difference was noted for: Item3- demanding special treatment (p=0.04), Item7- missing deadlines (p=0.04), Item10- sleeping in class (p=0.00), Item12- arriving late in class (p=0.00**),** Item17- cheating in class (p=0.01), and Item18- challenging the instructors credibility ( p=0.00),with males having a high mean values for all items. Among faculty members, overall there was no statistical significant difference between males and females (p=0.23). Nevertheless, significant difference was observed with male faculty considering Item2- challenging authority (p=0.01), and Item8- prolonged chattering in class (p=0.01) as more uncivil than females.When comparison was made between students and faculty members statistically significant difference was noticed for all the items (p=0.0002) except for, Item5- leaving class early (p= 0.10**)**,Item11- talking out of turn (p= 0.53), Item14- reluctance to answer questions (p=0.34), and Item18- challenging the instructors credibility (p=0.24). (Table 2)

Among 353 undergraduate students (I – IV years), significant difference was noted for all the items of the questionnaire (p= 0.000). The mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour was highest in 4th year students (mean=72.28) and least in 3rd year students (mean= 58.69).

Among all the dental students (UG, Interns and PG), statistical significant difference was noted for mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour (p=0.01). The mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour was significantly high among the under graduates (mean=68.17) and least in post graduates (mean= 62.27). Item wise comparison revealed significant difference for, Item-5- leaving class early (p=0.01), Item6- making offensive remarks (p=0.01), Item8- prolonged chattering in class (p=0.03), Item9- reading magazines during class (p=0.006), Item10- sleeping in class (p=0.01), Item-11 talking out of turn (p=0.02), Item15- using computer to surf the net (p=0.002) among the students**.** (Table 3)

Based on faculty designation, no statistically significant differences was observed (p= 0.20) for mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour. Items such as, Item1- using cell phones in class (p=0.04), Item2- challenging authority in class (p= 0.001), Item3- demanding special treatments in class (p= 0.01), Item9- reading magazines during class (p= 0.008), Item11- talking out of turn in class (p=0.002), Item13- not paying attention in class (p=0.02) revealed significant differences. Mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour was more among professors (mean= 82.63), followed by senior lecturers (mean= 75.7), readers (mean= 75.5), and tutors (mean= 73.72). (Table 4)

Among students, 88.6% agreed that they were involved in uncivil classroom behaviour. In addition faculty members felt that abusing faculty members, giving proxy attendance, not following dress code, doing forging staff signatures) were other uncivil classroom behaviours.

DISCUSSION

There has been much debate on issues concerning professionalism in dental education with most of the attention focused on academic integrity, dishonesty, and misconduct.2 Preventing and managing uncivil classroom behavior is a tough job for faculty and students as academic incivility seriously disrupts the faculty- student relationship. Research studies by Schab indicated that percentage of cheating behaviors have doubled from 34% in 1969 to 68% in 1989 at the University of Georgia.3 Till date there has been no reported studies conducted on perception of uncivil classroom behavior in field of dental education in India. Hence, the present study aimed at comparing perception of classroom incivilities among students and faculty members and also determined how many students readily engage in uncivil classroom behavior in a private dental institution in India.

The survey instrument used in current study was based on prior investigation by Rowland and Srisukho.2 It was previously pretested for face and content validation by Paik C.11 In addition, this instrument has been approved by Ohio Northern university (ONU’s) internal review board. This is the only available questionnaire on uncivil classroom behavior which was previously used for assessing uncivil classroom behavior among dental fraternity.2

In this study, significant difference was noted among Undergraduate students for all the items of the questionnaire. Mean perception of uncivil classroom behavior was highest among final years followed by second, first and third year students. Final year students considered most of the items in the questionnaire as uncivil. This might be because final year students were more worried to complete their clinical work and the pressure of giving exam for eight subjects prevailed among students. Moreover, this can be because students in final year were in the wake of becoming dental professionals so it is expected for them to display professional behavior and be role model for other junior batches in the dental school. Year wise comparison of classroom incivilities among dental students was taken up for the first time in our study.

There was notable difference among all dental students (UG, interns, and PG) for mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour. Mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour was highest among under graduate students and lowest in post graduate students. Post graduates had the least mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour among all the students as they were closely monitored by the faculty members. There was no statistical significant difference found between males and females for 12 out of 18 items in the questionnaire. Majority of the male students felt that “sleeping in class” was uncivil classroom behaviour than females. This result was in parallel with a study conducted by Rowland ML and Srisukho K among dental students in which less than half of females (48%) felt that sleeping in class was uncivil behavior.2

Among faculty members, no prominent difference was observed for mean perception of uncivil classroom behaviour (p=0.20). Faculty with experience (professors) had the maximum mean perception of uncivil class room behaviour. Professors believed that using cell phones in class and challenging authority in class as most commonly viewed disruptive behaviours. This disparity is because of the fact that younger faculty who have recently passed may not have experienced classroom incivility. Other investigators who have studied classroom incivility found that women, faculty based on color, younger faculty members were more prone to experience acts of student’s incivility.2

There was notable difference in perception of uncivil classroom between students and faculty members. Age difference between students and faculty members may have affected the perception of uncivil classroom behaviour among students and faculty members because, the students may have grown up in a time of accelerated change in the civilization which has brought variation in basic morals and ethics. Moreover, students have been exposed to cell phones and internet although their lives. This awareness may have affected their interpretations of what is considered appropriate use in classroom. Faculty members in turn may have experienced conflict between what has traditionally been considered appropriate classroom behaviour and changing attitudes and values.16

Students and faculty members displayed no statistical significant difference for only 5 items (27.7%) in the 18 item questionnaire (item numbers- 5, 11, 14, 16, 18). This result was not in correlation with a study conducted by Rowland ML and Srisukho K in which 7 items (39%) showed no notable difference. Behaviours such as “missing deadlines” and “arriving late to class” were considered least uncivil classroom behaviour by students whereas, faculty considered “talking out of turn” and “challenging the instructor’s knowledge” as least uncivil classroom behaviour. Faculty members may have perceived some behaviours as disorderly where as students may consider same behaviours acceptable because of generation gap and life experiences.

The faculty members (14.5%) also considered the following as uncivil classroom behaviours (abusing faculty members, giving proxy attendance, not following dress code, doing forgery of staff signatures). These findings agreed with a study done by Al-Dwairi in which forgery of staff signatures was considered as very serious cheating behaviour.18

Percentage of students who agreed that they were involved in uncivil classroom behaviour was 88.6% reflects the seriousness of the issue. Most of the students believed that competitive pressures and stress instigates them to behave unethically and felt that there is a need for dental educators to seriously consider approaches to reduce stress and support student’s accademically.14

The literature on this topic suggests that classroom incivilities will carry on and it’s vital for dental educators to be prepared to handle such incidents when they transpire. Administrators can assist younger faculty members by providing workshops and symposiums concerning issues of incivilities in classroom. Moreover, it is important for vastly experienced faculty members to share their experiences with younger faculty members regarding the issue of classroom incivility. It is essential for faculty members to support and communicate with students in order to reduce the culture of classroom incivility.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the issue of uncivil classroom behaviour remains a major concern because 88.6% of students agreed that they were involved in uncivil classroom behaviour previously. Most of the students believed that competitive pressures and stress instigates them to behave unethically and felt that there is a need for dental educators to seriously consider approaches to reduce stress and support student’s academically. Most of the students and faculty members also believed that classroom incivility was reciprocal processes, suggesting positive faculty- student’s relationships which in turn may promote empowering learning atmosphere.

Significant changes occurred in dental student’s perception of uncivil classroom over the course of their educational career. Students growing both personally and efficiently as they progress through the dental curriculum could likely influence these changes. This study may possibly help dental educators understand and prevent classroom incivilities.

The limitations of our study were small sample size and it was a single institution study.

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