

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

ACADEMIC PROCRASTINATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF A MEDICAL INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Academic procrastination is a universal phenomenon. It affects various aspects of student's personal and academic life and also has been associated with numerous undesirable and irreversible consequences. The objective of the study was to assess the level of academic procrastination among the undergraduate students.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 454 undergraduate students of a medical institute using convenience sampling technique. Students were requested to complete a self-administered questionnaire which comprised their socio-demographic characteristics and Academic Procrastination scale. Descriptive studies i.e. mean, percentage, frequency, standard deviation and inferential statistics i.e. Chi-square was used to analyse the data.

Results: High level of academic procrastination was seen among 40.1% of the undergraduate students. Academic procrastination was also found to be significantly associated with age, sex and academic year of the undergraduate students.

Conclusions: The finding of this study reveal that a considerable number of undergraduate students have high level of academic procrastination.

INTRODUCTION

Academic procrastination refers to a deliberate delay in an intended course of study-related action in spite of the expected deterioration.¹ It is a universal phenomenon. Studies have reported that 80 to 95% of students procrastinate,² with about 50% doing so persistently and problematically.³ The causative factors responsible for academic procrastination are still a matter of controversy. Piers Steel carried out extensive studies on procrastination and found that strong and consistent predictors of procrastination were task aversiveness, task delay, self-efficacy, impulsiveness as well as conscientiousness and its facets of self-control, distractibility, organization and achievement motivation.⁴

There are numerous effects of academic procrastination as shown by studies done in this field. Procrastination can weaken self-confidence,⁴ cause low achievement in students,⁵ higher stress, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, plagiarism, higher use of alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine and decrease ability to maintain healthy self-care habits like exercise and eating.⁶

The objectives of the study were to assess the level of academic procrastination among the undergraduate students of a medical institution and its associated factors.

METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted from July 2019 to March 2021 among undergraduate students of a medical college in Eastern Nepal. Data could not be collected from March 2020 to December 2020 because of covid-19 pandemic. The study was approved by Institutional Review Committee of the college (Reference number: 481/075/076-IRC). Students willing to participate were included in the study. Written informed consent was taken from each participant and confidentiality was maintained.

Sample size was calculated using the formula;

$$n = Z^2 \times p \times q / I^2 = (1.96)^2 \times 0.471 \times (1 - 0.471) / (0.0471)^2 = 433$$

Where,

n = required sample size

p = prevalence of procrastination (taken as 47.12 based on the

study done by Ali Shah SI et al. among medical undergraduates in Pakistan)⁷

q = 1-p

l = 10% of p

Z = 1.96 at 95 % CI

Adding the 10% non-response rate, the sample size that was taken is 476.

A total of 476 students (MBBS, BDS and B.Sc. Nursing) were selected by using convenience sampling method and 22 were excluded from the study due to the incompletely filled questionnaire.

Students were requested to complete a self-administered questionnaire that consisted of self-developed questionnaire to collect information on socio-demographic characteristics and Academic Procrastination scale. Academic Procrastination scale developed by McCloskey & Scielzo⁸ which consists of 25 items was used. It is grouped under six domains i.e., psychological beliefs (5 items); distractions (4 items); social factors (3 items); time management (4 items); personal initiative (5 items) and laziness (4 items). Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree and score 80 and higher indicates a higher level of procrastination.

The Cronbach alpha value of the academic procrastination scale is 0.94.⁸ Pretesting of tools were done by administering the tool to 10% of the total sample.

Data entry was done in Microsoft Office Excel 2007 and analyzed in SPSS version 16. Descriptive (frequency, percentage, median, interquartile range, mean and Standard Deviation) and inferential statistics (Chi-square) was applied to determine the association of selected demographic variables with academic procrastination.

RESULTS

In this study, majority of the participants 283 (62.3%) were in the age group 21-23 years with mean age of 22.09 ± 1.5 years. Majority of them belong to the nuclear family i.e. 376 (82.8%). Of the total students; 235 (51.8%) were female. The median income was Rs.50000 [IQR (96,250-300000)] (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic variables of the undergraduate students (n=454)

Characteristics	Category	n(%)
Age	18-20	84 (18.5)
	21-23	283 (62.3)
	24-26	87 (19.2)
	Mean±SD = 22.09±1.579	
Education of mother	Illiterate	67 (14.8)
	Primary	78 (17.2)
	Secondary	146 (32.2)
	Bachelor and above	163 (35.9)

Education of father	Illiterate	18 (4.0)
	Primary	27 (5.9)
	Secondary	130 (28.6)
	Bachelor and above	279 (61.5)
Family income status	≤ 30,000	128 (28.2)
	31000-50000	154 (33.9)
	51000-80000	55 (12.1)
	80000-100000	50 (11.0)
	>100000	67 (14.8)
	Median: 50,000 IQR (96,250-30,0000)	
Stream	B.sc Nursing	62 (13.7)
	MBBS	257 (56.6)
	BDS	135 (29.7)
Academic year	1 st year	87 (19.2)
	2 nd year	92 (20.3)
	3 rd year	81 (17.8)
	4 th year	97 (21.4)
	5 th year	97 (21.4)

High level of academic procrastination was found among 182 (40.1%) of the undergraduate students (Table 2).

Table 2: Academic Procrastination among the undergraduate students (n=454)

Characteristics	Category	n (%)
Academic Procrastination	High level (≥ 80)	182 (40.1)
	Low level (< 80)	272 (59.9)

Academic procrastination was significantly associated with age, sex and academic year of the undergraduate students (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

In the present study, high level of academic procrastination was seen among 40.1% of the undergraduate students. This finding is comparable with studies done among undergraduate students of medical college in Pakistan and Indonesia where high level of academic procrastination was seen among 52.1% and 55.1% students respectively.^{9,10}

High level of academic procrastination was found to be 32.1% among dental students in India.¹¹ Studies done in medical institutes of Iran have found that 16.5%, 28.85% and 29.25% of the students had high level of academic procrastination.¹²⁻¹⁴ High level of academic procrastination was seen among 28.5% of undergraduate dental students in Malaysia.¹⁵ The findings of these studies are low in comparison to this study.

The finding from different parts of the world implies that academic procrastination is a relatively common phenomenon among undergraduate students of medical institutes.

Academic procrastination is associated with undesirable and irreversible consequences by preventing the students from the achievement of the goals. It is furthermore associated with poor physical and mental health along with substance abuse.⁴⁻⁶

Table 3: Association between academic procrastination and selected demographic variables among the undergraduate students (n=454)

Characteristics	Category	Procrastination		p-value
		Low n (%)	High n (%)	
Age	≤22	158 (34.8%)	88 (19.4%)	0.041*
	>22	114 (25.1%)	94 (20.7%)	
Sex	Male	120 (26.4%)	99 (21.8%)	0.032*
	Female	152 (33.5)	83 (18.3%)	
Stream	MBBS	150 (33.0%)	107 (23.6%)	0.443
	Others	122 (26.9%)	75 (16.5%)	
Academic Year	1 st and 2 nd year	126 (27.8%)	53 (11.7%)	<0.001*
	Others	146 (32.2%)	129 (28.4%)	
Father's education	Graduate& above	170 (37.4%)	109 (24.0%)	0.143
	Others	102 (22.5%)	73 (16.1%)	
Mother's education	Graduate& above	105 (23.1%)	58 (12.8%)	0.576
	Others	167 (36.8%)	124 (27.3%)	

Moreover, the procrastinating behavior can not only directly influence the future career of the students but also affect patient care and outcome. Hence, it is clear that academic procrastination is indeed a serious problem for the students and should be a matter of concern for the stakeholders in education.

In this study, age was associated with academic procrastination. Age more than 22 years had higher level of academic procrastination. Research studies have reported that as people get older, procrastination behavior tends to decrease.⁴ The age group of this study ranges from 18-26 year which fall under young adult group and this might be the reason for the inconsistent finding.

The study result revealed that males tend to procrastinate more as compared to females which is consistent with previous investigations suggesting a relationship between them.^{4, 13,14} It might be possibly related to lower level of self-control among men which is a key determining factor of procrastination. Due to this reason, males may tend to procrastinate more due to absence of goal-directed processing ability and failure to suppress appealing stimuli.¹⁶ Furthermore, it has been found that women are more intrinsically motivated for academic tasks than men, hence are predicted to procrastinate less.¹⁷ However, this finding is inconsistent with various studies where procrastination score did not differ according to gender.^{7, 15,18}

Academic year was associated with academic procrastination with higher procrastination found among 3rd, 4th year and 5th year students as compared to other year. This finding is similar with other previous studies.^{14,15} Some studies have reported that with an increase in the years of education, the student's motivation decreases.¹⁹ Motivation is negatively related to procrastination; therefore, less the student's motivation, the more the procrastination behaviors.^{17,20,21}

Moreover, in the later years, apart from regular academic work, the students get more involved in clinical activities. It has been found that too much tasks at the same time is one of the main factors that influences procrastination.²² Hence this might be a reason why students tend to procrastinate more in 3rd, 4th and 5th year.

Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, researcher could not collect the data at that particular time as the students were inaccessible. Therefore, data was collected after the student joined the institute and the onsite classes were started and this may have affected the procrastination score of the students and may have limited the findings of the study.

CONCLUSION

The finding of this study reveal that a considerable number of undergraduate students have high level of academic procrastination. Students in medical institutes tend to have heavy work load. Hence, trainings and workshops that focuses on approaches for self-assessment, effective time management, assertiveness training, regulation of emotion and ability at problem solving should be arranged so that the tendency to procrastinate will be reduced. Moreover, various interventions need to be planned that will enhance the motivation of the students which will assist them to internalize academic behavior as personally important.

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