

# Academic Honesty among Students of Selected Dental Colleges of Bangladesh

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** The purpose of this research is to explore some of the issues related to academic honesty among students in Dental colleges, the challenges faced by them to do well academically in an honest manner.

**Methods:** This cross sectional study was conducted at ten public and private dental colleges of Bangladesh. The students were asked to fill up a self-administered, semi structured questionnaire containing about their Academic honesty and behavior. Data was collected using convenience sampling method. Sample size was 739.

**Results:** The study revealed 30% marked proxy for their friends and 28.9% asked their friends to mark proxy for them. 10.8% cheated in examination using notes. Also 38.7% copied answers from another student during an examination.

**Conclusion:** The study revealed that a large number of dental students admitted to cheating and involvement in other forms of academic dishonesty.

**Key words:** Academic Honesty, Dental Students, Dental Colleges

## Introduction

Impeccable moral and ethical values are desired attributes of a medical practitioner. Attitudes of dental students have an impact on the quality of health care provided to their patients. The basic personality of a person is strongly influenced by his or her attitudes and behavior (Asokan S, John B, Janani D, Jessy P, Kavya S & Sharma K, 2013). Acts of academic dishonesty are common among university students. Academic institutions around the world have addressed this problem in many ways, generally by adopting rules, guidelines, and procedures to deal with it. Influences on a student's decision to commit improprieties in education may include pressure to succeed or pass a test, get better grades, or obtain specific benefits now or in the future. This behavior may originate in the family environment or culture.

The desired competencies and moral practices of medical professionals are outcomes of academic training. Honesty and integrity are fundamental virtues expected from medical student. However, deviation of academic honesty, which includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism and falsifying documentation, is not uncommon in medical colleges across the world. There is general agreement that there should be zero tolerance of cheating in a profession

based on trust and one on which human lives depend (Tanawattanacharoen S & Nimnuan C, 2009).

## Methodology

It was a descriptive type of cross sectional study. A total of 6 public and 4 private dental colleges were included in the study. They were Dhaka Dental College (DDC), Dental Unit of Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC), Dental Unit of Shaheed Suhrawardi Medical College (ShSMC), Dental Unit of Mymensingh Medical College (MMC), Bangladesh Dental College, Sapporo Dental College, Dental Unit of MH Samorita Medical College, Safena Women's Dental College, Update Dental College and Rangpur Dental College.

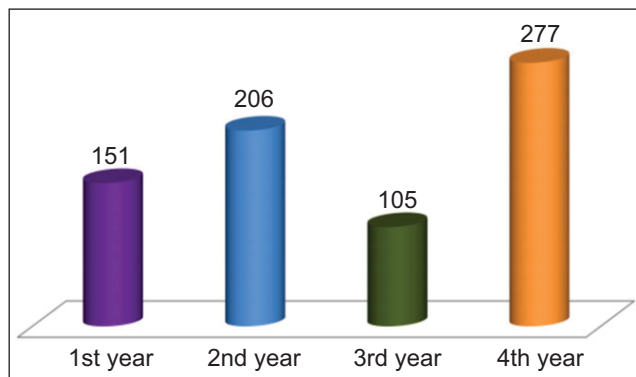
The study period was from July 2016 to June 2017 (one year). The study population was the students of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year of selected 10 Dental Colleges. Total respondents were 739 students. Each of the 739 students were the sampling unit of this study. Convenience sampling technique was used. A self-administered semi structured questionnaire was used as research instrument. The students responded to all questions that requested an opinion by using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly agree. All the collected data had been checked manually. Data editing, entry, processing and analysis were done using version 19 of SPSS. Interpretation of the qualitative data was presented by tables to compare the findings. There was a qualitative part of the questionnaire, to which none of the respondents responded. So it was left out of the data analysis.

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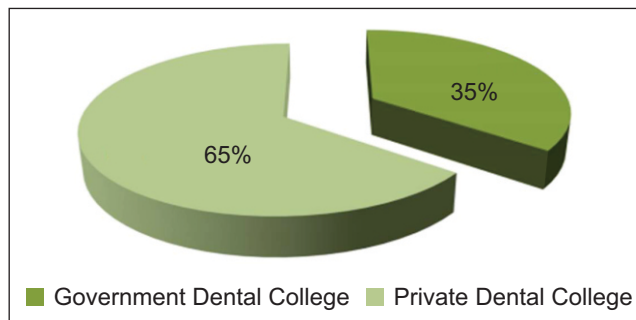
## Result



n=737

**Figure 1:** Distribution of the students by year

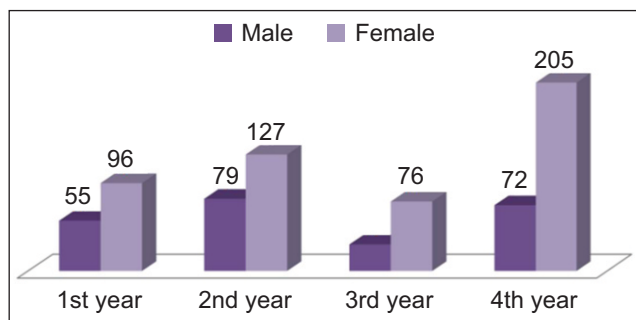
Figure 1 shows the distribution of the students by year. The total number of respondents was 739. There were 151 respondents (20.4 %) in the 1st year students. There were 206 respondents (27.9 %) in the 2nd year students. There were 105 respondents (14.2 %) in the 3rd year students. There were 277 respondents (37.5 %) in the 4th year students.



n=739

**Figure 2:** Distribution of students from the different types of Dental Colleges

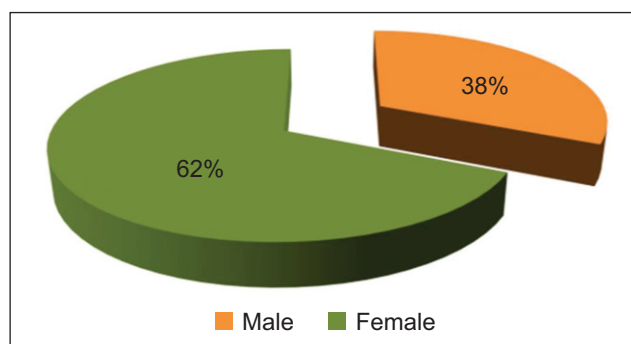
Figure 2 shows the distribution of students from the different types of Dental Colleges. There were 261 respondents (35.3%) from Public Dental Colleges and 478 respondents (64.7%) from Private Dental Colleges.



n=739

**Figure 3:** Distribution of respondents by gender and year of student

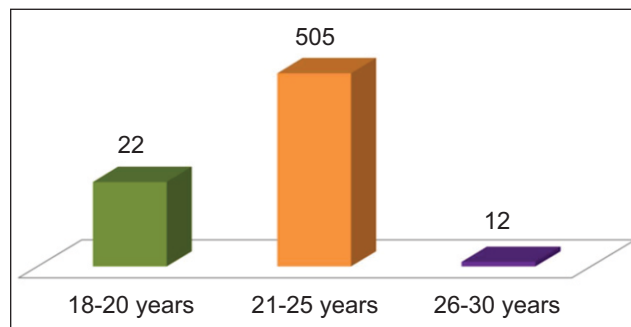
Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents by Gender and Year of student. There were 235 (31.8%) respondents who were male. From this there were 55 respondents who were from 1st year, 79 respondents who were from 2nd year, 29 respondents who were from 3rd year and 72 respondents who were from 4th year. There were 504(68.2%) respondents who were female. From this there were 96 respondents who were from 1st year, 127 respondents who were from 2nd year, 76 respondents who were from 3rd year and 205 respondents who were from 4th year.



n=739

**Figure 4:** Distribution of the students by their gender

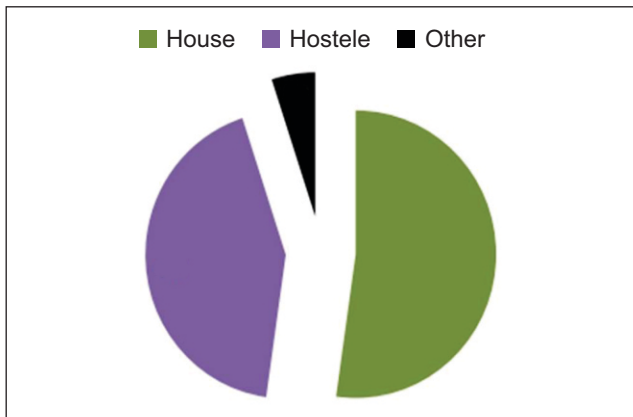
Figure 4 shows the distribution of respondents by Gender and Year of student. There were 235 (31.8%) respondents who were male. There were 504(68.2%) respondents who were female.



n=739

**Figure 5:** Distribution of the students by their Age

Figure 5 shows the distribution of the students by age in the 739 respondents. There were 222 respondents who were from 18-20 years, there were 505 respondents who were from 21-25 years and there were 12 respondents who were from 26-30 years old



**Figure 6:** Distribution of the student by their residence

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the students by their residence in the 739 respondents. There were 386 (52 %) respondents who were living in houses, there were 316 (42.8) respondents who were living in hostel and there were 37 (5.0%) respondents who were living in other type of accommodation.

**Key to Tables:** Level of agreement:

1. **SA (Strongly Agree):** When respondent largely agrees with the statement
2. **A (Agree):** When respondent has some agreement with the statement
3. **NAND (Neither Agree Nor Disagree):** When respondent cannot agree or disagree with the statement
4. **D (Disagree):** When respondent has some disagreement with the statement
5. **SD (Strongly Disagree):** When respondent largely disagrees with the statement

**Table 1:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding attendance

Statement	n=739					Total
	5 SA f(%)	4 A f(%)	3 NAND f(%)	2 D f(%)	1 SD f(%)	
I stay in the dental college during academic hours	335 (45.6%)	269 (36.6%)	33 (4.5%)	32 (4.4%)	65 (8.9%)	734
I have left before class finished without permission	26 (3.5%)	97 (13.2%)	38 (5.2%)	256 (34.7%)	320 (43.4%)	737

Table 1 shows practising academic honesty regarding attendance. The highest percentage responding is 39.6% strongly disagreed (SD) for asking signing a friend to sign

proxy attendance and 35.2% strongly disagreed (SD) for signing proxy attendance at for a friend who did not attend the class. The percentage of those who strongly agreed (SA) was 7.6%, and agreed (A) was 21.3% to asking a friend to sign proxy attendance. Similarly percentage of those who strongly agreed (SA) was 8.1%, and agreed (A) was 21.9% to have signed proxy for a friend.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding justifying their absence from class

Statement	n=739					Total
	5 SA f(%)	4 A f(%)	3 NAND f(%)	2 D f(%)	1 SD f(%)	
I have faked illness to justify my absence	25 (3.4%)	99 (13.5%)	51 (6.9%)	194 (26.4%)	365 (49.7%)	734
I sometimes remain absent for classes without any genuine cause	54 (7.4%)	196 (26.7%)	57 (7.8%)	210 (28.6%)	217 (29.6%)	739
I have submitted fake medical certificate to justify illness	3 (3.1%)	54 (7.3%)	27 (3.7%)	175 (23.7%)	458 (62.1%)	737

Table 2 shows practising academic honesty regarding justifying their absence from class. The highest percentage of academic honesty is 62.1% strongly disagreed (SD) for submitting fake medical certificate to justify illness. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 3.4% and agreeing (A) was 13.5% to faking illness. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 7.4% and agreeing (A) was 26.7% to remain absent without genuine cause. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 3.1% and agreeing (A) was 7.3% to submitting fake medical certificate to justify illness.

**Table 3:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding presence in class and in college during academic hours

Statement	n=739					Total
	5 SA f(%)	4 A f(%)	3 NAND f(%)	2 D f(%)	1 SD f(%)	
I stay in the dental college during academic hours	335 (45.6%)	269 (36.6%)	33 (4.5%)	32 (4.4%)	65 (8.9%)	734
I have left before class finished without permission	26 (3.5%)	97 (13.2%)	38 (5.2%)	256 (34.7%)	320 (43.4%)	737

**Table 3:** Shows practising academic honesty regarding presence in class and in college during academic hours. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 45.6% and agreeing (A) was 36.6% to staying in the dental college during academic hours. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 3.5% and agreeing (A) was 13.2% to leaving before class finished without permission.

**Table 4:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding Assignments

n=739

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Total
	SA f(%)	A f(%)	NAND f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	
For an assignment, I have copied verbatim (word-for-word) from the internet, textbooks, journals, papers and not listed them as references	52 (7.1%)	313 (43%)	110 (15.1%)	138 (19%)	115 (15.8%)	728
I have copied answers from another student's work for an assignment	31 (4.2%)	246 (33.4%)	87 (11.8%)	183 (24.9%)	189 (25.7%)	736
For an assignment I have copied from assignments submitted earlier by senior peers	45 (6.1%)	234 (31.9%)	101 (13.8%)	199 (27.1%)	155 (21.1%)	734

**Table 4** shows deviation from practising academic honesty regarding assignments. The percentage of deviation from academic honesty is 7.1% strongly agreeing (SA) and 43% agreeing (A) to practising plagiarism. 4.2% strongly agreeing (SA) and 33.4% agreeing (A) to have copied answers from another student's work for an assignment. 6.1% have strongly agreed (SA) and 31.9% have agreed (A) to have copied from assignments submitted earlier by senior peers.

**Table 5:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding Written Work

n=739

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Total
	SA f(%)	A f(%)	NAND f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	
I have modified another student's work and submitted it	32 (4.3%)	198 (26.9%)	89 (12.1%)	201 (27.3%)	217 (29.4%)	737
I have helped a friend by writing an assignment for him/her	142 (19.3%)	333 (45.3%)	89 (12.1%)	80 (10.9%)	91 (12.4%)	735

Table 5 shows deviation from practising academic honesty regarding assignments. The highest percentage of deviation from academic honesty is 26.9% (Agreeing) to have modified another student's work and submitted it and 29.4% (Strongly Disagreeing) to have copied answers from another student's work for an assignment and 31.9% have copied from assignments submitted earlier by senior peers.

**Table 6:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding Laboratory tests

n=739

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Total
	SA f(%)	A f(%)	NAND f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	
I have reported a laboratory test or oral dental examination as normal, when it was not done	43 (5.9%)	142 (19.5%)	83 (11.4%)	244 (33.4%)	218 (29.9%)	730
I have falsified (changed) laboratory or experimental data	16 (2.2%)	90 (12.3%)	56 (7.6%)	256 (34.9%)	315 (43%)	733

Table 6 shows deviation from practising academic honesty regarding laboratory tests. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 5.9% and agreeing (A) was 19.5% to reporting a laboratory test or oral dental examination as normal, when it was not done. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 2.2% and agreeing (A) was 12.3% to have falsified laboratory or experimental data. The highest percentage of deviation from academic honesty is 43%

strongly disagreeing (SD) to the statement. Respondents disagreeing (33.4%) have reported a laboratory test or oral dental examination as normal, when it was not done.

**Table 7:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding forging teacher's signature and grades

n=739

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Total
	SA f(%)	A f(%)	NAND f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	
I have forged teacher's signature on a piece of work	26 (3.6%)	51 (7.1%)	52 (7.2%)	186 (25.8%)	406 (56.3%)	721
I have changed grades in the record book	17 (2.3%)	40 (5.5%)	29 (4%)	182 (24.8%)	465 (63.4%)	733

**Table 7** shows that a high percentage (56.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed (SD) to having forged a teacher's signature on a piece of work. Similarly 63.4% respondents strongly disagreed (SD) to have changed grades in the record book. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 3.6% and agreeing (A) was 7.1% to have forged teacher's signature on a piece of work. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 2.3% and agreeing (A) was 5.5% to have changed grades in the record book.

**Table 8:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding written examinations

n=739

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Total
	SA f(%)	A f(%)	NAND f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	
I have cheated in examinations using notes taken into the examination	15 (2%)	65 (8.8%)	45 (6.1%)	190 (25.9%)	420 (57.1%)	735
I have copied answers from another student during an examination	57 (7.7%)	229 (31%)	105 (14.2%)	152 (20.6%)	196 (26.5%)	739
I have used cheat sheets during examinations	28 (3.8%)	63 (8.6%)	42 (5.7%)	159 (21.7%)	441 (60.2%)	733

**Table 8** shows the deviation from practising academic honesty regarding written examinations. 57.1% respondents said that they strongly disagreed (SD) having cheated in examinations using notes taken into the examination, while only 2% strongly agreed (SA) to have used notes taken into

the examination. Using cheat sheets has a similar finding with 60% strongly disagreeing (SD) to the statement. Copying answers from another student has a lower percentage (26.5%) strongly disagreeing (SD). Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 2% and agreeing (A) was 8.8% to have cheated in examinations using notes taken into the examination. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 7.7% and agreeing (A) was 31% to have copied answers from another student during an examination. Those responding by strongly agreeing (SA) was 3.8% and agreeing (A) was 8.6% to have used cheat sheets during examinations.

**Table 9:** Distribution of the respondents' opinions about deviation from practising academic honesty regarding practical examinations

n=739

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Total
	SA f(%)	A f(%)	NAND f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	
I have changed labels and slides in an OSPE/OSCE examination	11 (1.5%)	65 (8.9%)	45 (6.1%)	178 (24.3%)	435 (59.3%)	734
I have talked to another student about an OSCE	63 (9.6%)	328 (44.9%)	84 (11.1%)	122 (16.7%)	133 (18.2%)	730
I have used electronic devices, such as smart phones and tablets, without permission	55 (7.5%)	218 (29.6%)	61 (8.3%)	140 (19%)	263 (35.7%)	337

**Table 9** shows the deviation from practising academic honesty regarding practical examinations. Respondents said that they strongly disagreed (59.3%) having cheated in OSPE/OSCE examinations, OSPE/OSCE. while only 1.5% strongly agreed to have changed labels and slides. Talking to another student during practical examinations has a similar finding with 44.9% agreeing of the statement. Using electronic devices without permission has a lower percentage (7.5%) strongly agreeing.

## Discussion

Copying at class tests and university examinations, copying/cooking up records and case sheets, forging teachers' signatures in records, altering marks entered in papers, giving proxy for attendance at teaching sessions, all seem to be common practice for undergraduate students in Indian medical colleges (Gitanjali B, 2004). Use of cell phones without permission has been reported in a study by Rowland ML & Srisukho K (2009) and by Ward C & Yates D (2014). Hafeez K, Khan M, Jawaid M & Haroon S (2013) stated that in their study they found that 55.1% cheated at least once in their medical college.



Asking a friend to sign proxy attendance for oneself seems to be a very common phenomenon among students in dental colleges. Most of the students (61.7%) said they disagreed (SD and D) to asking a friend to sign proxy attendance for them. Only 28.9% (SA and A) said they signed proxy attendance. Also the highest percentage (62%) claimed to disagree (SD and D) to signing proxy attendance at for a friend who did not attend the class. Tanawattananacharoen S & Nimnuan C (2009) have reported 41.3% and 49% students not attending class but asking a friend to sign proxy attendance and signing a proxy attendance for a friend respectively.

Students tend to remain absent from classes for various reasons. A high percentage of respondents claimed that they did not fake illness to justify their absence (49.7%). Similarly a high percentage of respondents claimed that they did not remain absent for class without any genuine cause (29.6%). The highest percentage (62.1%) of respondents claimed that they did not submit fake medical certificates to justify illness. Tanawattananacharoen S & Nimnuan C(2009) have reported students fake illness like food poisoning to remain absent from class.

Koletsis-Kounari H, Polychronopoulou A, Reppa C & Teplitsky PE (2011) stated that students reported to have missed lectures frequently. A high percentage of respondents claimed that they stayed in the dental college campus during academic hours (45.6%). A high number of respondents (43.4%) strongly disagreed to the fact that they left before class finished without permission.

To complete assignments on time, as the workload is high in dental colleges, copying from others and plagiarism may occur. The highest percentage of deviation from academic honesty is 43% (Agreeing) practising plagiarism, 33.4% (Agreeing) to have copied answers form another student's work for an assignment and 31.9% have copied form assignments submitted earlier by senior peers. Tanawattananacharoen S & Nimnuan C(2009) have reported students have modified a friend's work and submitted it.

There is a trend to alter another student's written work and submit it. The highest percentage of deviation from academic honesty is 26.9% (Agreeing) to have modified another student's work and submitted it and 29.4% (Strongly Disagreeing) to have copied answers form another student's work for an assignment and 31.9% have copied form assignments submitted earlier by senior peers. Koletsis-Kounari H, Polychronopoulou A, Reppa C & Teplitsky PE (2011) stated that students reported to have an entire essay assignment. Tanawattananacharoen S & Nimnuan C have reported 15.25 students submitting work submitted by a senior student the previous year.

The highest percentage of deviation from academic honesty is 12.3% (Agreeing) to have falsified laboratory or experimental data and submitted it and 43% (Strongly Disagreeing) to the statement. Respondents disagreeing (33.4%) have reported a laboratory test or oral dental examination as normal, when it was not done . During clinical

rotations, students are observed to write fake histories and examinations which they have not asked or performed (Hafeez K, Khan M, Jawaaid M & Haroon S, 2013).

Due to various time limits and work overload there seems to be some students who resort to forging teacher's signature and changing grades in record keeping. A high percentage (56.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed to having forged a teacher's signature on a piece of work. Similarly 63.4% respondents strongly disagreed to have changed grades in the record book. Koletsis-Kounari H, Polychronopoulou A, Reppa C & Teplitsky PE (2011) have said that students have forged a faculty signature on a patient chart . Tanawattananacharoen S & Nimnuan Chave reported that a percentage of 5.3 % medical students have forged staff's signature on a piece of work. Andrews KG, Smith LA, Henzi D & Demps E (2007) reported an incresded incidence in forging a teacher's signature. Some of the students also accepted to have forged a teacher's signature (16.9%), according to Hafeez K, Khan M, Jawaaid M & Haroon S (2013).

This is an area of concern in all countries. Cheating in exams seems to be wide spread. Respondents claim to strongly disagree (57.1%) having cheated in examinations using notes taken into the examination, while only 2% strongly agree to have used notes taken into the examination. Using cheat sheets has a similar finding with 60% strongly disagreeing o the statement. Copying answers from another student has a lower percentage (26.5%) strongly disagreeing. Koletsis-Kounari H, Polychronopoulou A, Reppa C & Teplitsky PE (2011) have said that students have Cheated on a written exam using "crib notes". Tanawattananacharoen S & Nimnuan C have reported 33.2% students copying answers from a friend in an examination.

Respondents claim to strongly disagree (59.3%) having cheated in OSPE/OSCE examinations, OSPE/OSCE while only 1.5% strongly agreed to have changed labels and slides. Talking to another student during practical examinations has a similar finding with 44.9% disagreeing o the statement. Using electronic devices without permission has a lower percentage (7.5%) strongly disagreeing. According to Hafeez K, Khan M, Jawaaid M & Haroon S (2013), during OSCE most of the students share common stations and students may pass information to their colleagues. In their study, 83.6% of students accepted that they tell their friends about the questions which were asked in first shift.

## Conclusion

The causes of the students' deviation from practising academic honesty were that 66.1% of the students claimed that some assignments are burdensome to complete in terms of time, 61.7% said that they experienced burnout from work (content) overload, and 58.6% had pressure from parents to do well academically.

We need to improve our educational system, formally add professional sessions in the curriculum. The study recommended that Dental Colleges and Dental Educators

must be aware stay of these dimensions of academic honesty, and they must ensure that dental students, faculty members, and staff are ethical caretakers of this ethical practise. Dental colleges must either create or reinforce an ethical culture on campus that should include students, faculty members, and staff; increase or modify the teaching of ethics to all students.

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