

PERADENIYA MEDICAL FRESHERS' VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY LIFE AND RAGGING

R. Morel

Department of Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya

Introduction

Ragging, hazing, fagging, bullying, pledging, horse-playing etc. are different terms used in different parts of the world but each signifying the same old practice of welcoming the fresher in a barbaric manner. This phenomenon can be traced back to as early as 7th or 8th century A.D. In Greek culture, new entrants to the sport community were subjected to all kinds of humiliations and teasing to inculcate a team spirit in them. (Agarwal *et al.*, 2007). Students from widely differing backgrounds enter the Peradeniya medical faculty. They also face many stresses at the start of university life. Perhaps the most serious cause of stress for freshers is ragging. This has been a big problem in the medical faculty in the past few years. Several ragging related incidents in 2009 even led to the suspension of some medical students. This study explores some of the medical freshers' opinions regarding ragging and how best they can make use of their university experience.

Materials and Methods

A cross sectional descriptive study was carried out by distributing a self administered questionnaire to the entire batch of medical freshers. This was during the intensive English course while ragging was still going on.

Results

The day the questionnaire was distributed was after a long weekend and only 138 out of a batch of 215 (64.19%) were present. Of them, 78.3% said that one purpose of university education is to learn to live in unity with others who are different to me by living in a multi racial/multi religious /multi cultural environment while 98.5% said university education was to get a degree & get a job. Only 33.3 % said it was to learn to think for themselves and become leaders in society.

Among the 64% of the batch who answered the questionnaire, 86.2% (n=129) said they had not gone for ragging. Of those who said they got ragged; most said the reason was because they have to go to the canteen to buy food, stay in university residence halls or were afraid they will be left out of the batch.

The majority (97.4%) agreed that there are ways other than ragging to get to know their batch mates and seniors. Ways suggested included talking, friendly discussions, sports, freshers meets, big matches, drama, music, cultural activities, variety entertainments, shramadana and blood donation campaigns. Seniors could brief juniors on what campus life is like in a friendly manner.

Regarding religious views concerning ragging 88.4% said their religion is against physical or severe mental ragging & they agreed with what their religion said. These same students said they will NOT rag their juniors while only 3 students said they will rag & 9.4% (n=13) did not answer this question.

Regarding relationships with university staff, 85.8% disagreed that staff don't care about students while the majority (73%) thought that staff can help students and so they would be willing to talk to staff about their problems. However there was mixed opinion as to whether staff care but don't understand how to help students with 23.7% saying 'yes – they don't understand' and 35.6% saying 'no – they do understand' while 40.7% said they don't know.

Discussion

The Supreme Court of India defined 'ragging' in a 2001 judgement as:

“Any disorderly conduct whether by words spoken or written or by an act which the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness any other student, indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which causes or is likely to cause annoyance, hardship or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior student or asking the students to do any act or perform something which such student will not do in the ordinary course and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the physique or psyche of a fresher or a junior student.” (Coalition to Uproot

Ragging from Education, CURE 2001).

Therefore ragging can be thought of in terms of verbal, physical and sexual aggression. Ragging is not only responsible for physical injury but it is also a major cause of stress related illness among undergraduates. It is encouraging to note that 88.4% said that they are against ragging and will not rag their juniors.

A significant body of research shows that academic achievement and students' behaviours are greatly influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship. The research suggests that 'the emotional aspect of the teacher-student relationship is much more important than the traditional advice on methods and techniques of lecturing would suggest' (Ramsden, 1992). Ramsden's (1992) research in Australia showed that interest in undergraduate students' individual needs, help with difficulties in understanding and learning and creating a climate of trust between teachers and students are fairly important in quality teaching and learning.

In this context it is encouraging that students perceive staff as being willing to help even though there was divided opinion as to whether the staff can understand student's problems. We need to build on our relationships with students in order create a better teaching learning environment.

References

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