

Short Communication

Effect of anti-ragging program

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Received: 25 February 2025

Revised: 18 April 2025

Accepted: 19 April 2025

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ABSTRACT

Ragging, a form of student misconduct defined by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India, poses significant threats to mental and physical well-being, with severe consequences including death. In response, UGC established measures including toll-free helplines and anti-ragging programs. This study assesses the effectiveness of an anti-ragging lecture through a questionnaire survey of students. Results indicate a moderate improvement in awareness post-lecture. Statistical analysis using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) reveals significance ($p \leq 0.05$) in understanding ragging implications. Despite limitations in response rate, findings suggest the lecture's potential to enhance students' perception and response to ragging, emphasizing the importance of continued educational efforts to combat this pervasive issue.

Keywords: Ragging, Anti-ragging programs, University Grants Commission (UGC), Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Ragging means intimidating/teasing/abusing/hurting any individual, verbally/physically, by action/gesture in a way to cause mental agony/fear/anxiety/ depression or physical injury/threat to life/ incapacitating/debilitating damage in the recipient. It is defined by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India as a disorderly conduct of students. Most often, it is done in educational institutions by senior students on the incumbent freshers entering the institution or any junior students, mainly to know about them. However, few students cross the acceptable limits and end up harassing the newcomers/juniors in personal/ social/ communal/ linguistic/ regional/ economical/ sexual/ racial aspects. Some students also indulge in physical tortures/ manhandling/violence which may culminate in death/suicide by the victim. The sensational death of a medical student in 2009 due to ragging influenced many researchers to declare it as a public health problem.¹

In 2009, UGC India, established a toll-free helpline to curb the ragging menace and imposed strict regulations for the Universities governed by it. According to this, all educational institutions should conduct anti-ragging programs targeting the senior students to create awareness and sensitize the freshers on the avenues for lodging complaints when facing any form of ragging. In a knowledge and awareness survey by Sabu et al.⁽²⁾ it was reported that 69% of the respondents had good knowledge about the hazards of ragging. The professional regulatory bodies like the Dental Council of India, mandates the institution to record the entire program, send the report, constitute anti-ragging support committee and anti-ragging squad to monitor/ surveil against ragging every year. The contact number of the committee members and the toll-free helpline should be prominently displayed in strategic locations of the institution like lecture halls, common room, laboratories, library, hostel mess, hostel audio visual room, gymnasium etc. Where senior-junior interactions can happen. In this context, to understand the impact of such anti-ragging programs on students, a questionnaire survey was conducted following an anti-ragging lecture.

METHODS

This short communication study was conducted at Madha Dental College and Hospital, Chennai, over a duration of six months, from August 2023 to February 2024. The study involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to undergraduate dental students, aimed at evaluating their knowledge, awareness, and attitudes towards ragging, both before and after an anti-ragging awareness lecture.

The questionnaire comprised ten questions, with seven items assessing baseline awareness and understanding of ragging and its consequences prior to the lecture, and three items evaluating their perception and behavioral intentions post-lecture. Two additional questions were included to distinguish students' experiences with bullying versus ragging, considering that both phenomena may overlap within peer interactions. Furthermore, two questions assessed students' awareness of the role of faculty intervention in addressing ragging, specifically whether such behavior had resulted in complaints being lodged with the student or their parent. The questionnaire also included an item to evaluate the usefulness of the anti-ragging session, as perceived by the students. Finally, two questions assessed the likelihood of the participants continuing ragging behavior or their intention to raise awareness among peers regarding its consequences.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Madha Dental College and Hospital. Ethical clearance reference number is MDCH/IEC/2023/25.

Statistical analysis

The results were statistically analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for their levels of significance at a confidence interval of 95% and value of significance $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

Totally 78 students responded to the questionnaire survey after attending the lecture. Of this only 24 students answered all the 10 questions. The percentage response to each question is tabulated in Table 1.

Approximately 60% of the respondents were anonymous. 54% revealed whether they were juniors or seniors. The question on parental knowledge of their wards' ragging behavior, was the most frequently unanswered one. Only 31 respondents answered this. The question that was most frequently answered to be the usefulness of the lecture. Only 3 students of the 77 respondents, found the lecture to be not useful. To the question on whether they would continue to rag after the program, 4 respondents responded in affirmative and 2 did not respond of the 76 respondents. To the question on whether they were ragged as a junior, more than 2/3 (52) of the 66 respondents, did so in affirmative. Of the 53 positive respondents to ragging, parental awareness was there only for 13 respondents. 18 out of 31 respondents to the question answered in the negative.

Most (55%) people are aware of the distinct nature of ragging and bullying. About 21% of respondents have been ragged as a junior. Only 3% of respondents have ever received a complaint from the faculty regarding their ragging. Almost all respondents (96%) found the lecture on the consequences of ragging to be useful. About 5% of respondents said they are likely to rag after this lecture.

About 54% of respondents said they are likely to sensitize their peers and juniors about the negative effects of ragging. Only 2 out of 64 respondents, found being ragged as acceptable. Of the 53 people who answered the question, "why do you rag", 32 did for fun, 18 due to peer pressure and only 2 for personal gratification. There was a striking similarity in the number of responses to those who ragged others (53), and those who were ragged as junior (52).

Table 1: Percentage of responses for the research questions.

Questions	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Total responses
	32	55.17	26	44.83	58
Have you been ragged as a junior?	14	21.21	52	78.79	66
Did you like being ragged?	2	3.13	62	96.88	64
Have you ever got a complaint from the faculty regarding your ragging?	3	5.26	54	94.74	57
If the answer to the above question is yes, are your parents aware of your ragging?	13	41.94	18	58.06	31
Was this lecture useful in understanding the consequences of ragging?	74	96.10	3	3.90	77
How likely are you to rag after this lecture?	4	5.26	72	94.74	76
How likely are you to sensitize your peers and juniors about the negative effects of ragging?	32	54.24	27	45.76	59

Table 2: Gender differences in ragging experience.

ANOVA		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Do you think there is a difference between the terms ragging and bullying?	Between groups	0.536	1	0.536	0.646	0.431
	Within groups	15.750	19	0.829		
	Total	16.286	20			
Have you been ragged as a junior?	Between groups	0.875	1	0.875	3.884	0.041
	Within groups	4.958	22	0.225		
	Total	5.833	23			
Did you like being ragged?	Between groups	0.467	1	0.467	2.778	0.018
	Within groups	4.200	25	0.168		
	Total	4.667	26			
Have you ever got a complaint from the faculty regarding your ragging?	Between groups	0.050	1	0.050	0.751	0.394
	Within groups	1.812	27	0.067		
	Total	1.862	28			
If the answer to the above question is yes, are your parents aware of your ragging?	Between groups	0.013	1	0.013	0.307	0.585
	Within groups	0.947	23	0.041		
	Total	0.960	24			

Table 3: Relationship between years of study and awareness of ragging before lecture.

ANOVA		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Why do you rag?	Between groups	0.683	1	0.683	1.179	0.285
	Within groups	20.289	35	0.580		
	Total	20.973	36			
Do you think there is a difference between the terms ragging and bullying?	Between groups	0.923	1	0.923	0.998	0.327
	Within groups	24.041	26	0.925		
	Total	24.964	27			
Have you been ragged as a junior?	Between groups	0.225	1	0.225	0.874	0.358
	Within groups	6.948	27	0.257		
	Total	7.172	28			
Did you like being ragged?	Between groups	0.500	1	0.500	3.429	0.014
	Within groups	4.375	30	0.146		
	Total	4.875	31			
Have you ever got a complaint from the faculty regarding your ragging?	Between groups	0.000	1	0.000	0.007	0.934
	Within groups	1.882	32	0.059		
	Total	1.882	33			
If the answer to the above question is yes, are your parents aware of your ragging?	Between groups	0.048	1	0.048	0.509	0.481
	Within groups	2.652	28	0.095		
	Total	2.700	29			

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	Total	1.882	33			
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	Within groups	2.652	28	0.095		
	Total	2.700	29			

Table 4: Relationship between status of students (anonymous versus authenticated) and awareness of ragging before lecture.

ANOVA		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Why do you rag?	Between groups	0.111	1	0.111	0.173	0.680
	Within groups	21.889	34	0.644		
	Total	22.000	35			
Do you think there is a difference between the terms ragging and bullying?	Between groups	7.350	1	7.350	12.543	0.002
	Within groups	14.650	25	0.586		
	Total	22.000	26			
Have you been ragged as a junior?	Between groups	0.222	1	0.222	0.860	0.363
	Within groups	6.445	25	0.258		
	Total	6.667	26			
Did you like being ragged?	Between groups	0.260	1	0.260	1.919	0.177
	Within groups	3.933	29	0.136		
	Total	4.194	30			
Have you ever got a complaint from the faculty regarding your ragging?	Between groups	0.028	1	0.028	0.879	0.356
	Within groups	0.941	30	0.031		
	Total	0.969	31			
If the answer to the above question is yes, are your parents aware of your ragging?	Between groups	0.039	1	0.039	1.223	0.278
	Within groups	0.929	29	0.032		
	Total	0.968	30			

Gender differences in the ragging experience revealed that significantly more females were ragged ($p=0.04$) than males and most of them did not like being ragged ($p=0.02$) than men (Table 2).

When comparing junior vs. senior students' perception and experience of ragging, more juniors were apprehensive of ragging ($p=0.01$) than seniors (Table 3).

While comparing the anonymous respondents versus authenticated it was found that the former understood the difference between bullying and ragging significantly more often ($p=0.002$) than the latter (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

While academics (70%) take a greater toll of stress on medical students, social and environmental factors (25%) also seem to play a significant role.³ The average stress score among new medical students has been found to be quite high at 19.6.⁴ Ragging has been found to be a potential stressor for college students. Surprisingly, most students were unaware of the legal recourse available for ragging menace.⁵ Besides, the awareness of the existence of anti-ragging committee is abysmally low among students.⁶ In the present survey also, the percentage of students reprimanded by staff for their behavior is very

less. This suggests that ragging is often not reported to the authorities. Wickramasinghe et al reported that since faculty members and students adjusted and accepted ragging as a norm or integral part of university life, measures to curb the same is not yielding the desired results.⁷ Desai reported that there is glorification of the perpetrators and justification of the act of ragging which enables its continued thriving in campuses. Nallapu et al reported that 99% of the participants felt that ragging is necessary in college to build a relationship between seniors and juniors. In the present survey, for the question on reason for ragging 34% of the respondents thought it is normal to rag in college life; whereas 60% said they ragged for fun.⁵ This survey found that at least one fourth of the respondents were ragged by their seniors. This is a significant number, and it suggests that ragging is still a problem in many educational institutions.

A previous study reported that most students indulged in ragging, apparently, "to follow traditional practice of ragging in college".⁸ But in the present survey, more students did it for fun than succumb to peer pressure. In the present survey more juniors were unaware of the avenues for reporting ragging similar to the reporting by Suryavanshi et al.⁸ This was evident by the fact that though a total of 68% people among the respondents indulged in ragging, only 5% among them got reprimanded by staff

and only 42% of the parents were aware of their wards' behavior. More females are being subjected to ragging and bullying than males according to Qamar et al, conforming to the results of the present survey.⁹ Digital advancements have been utilized to curb the ragging menace in campus and an app has been developed by Gomathy et al to enable easy reporting and monitoring of ragging issues. The present survey confirms the regulations of UGC, DCI in enforcing anti-ragging programs, as most participants found it to be useful. This is a positive finding, as it suggests that the lecture was effective in raising awareness of the issue.

Few participants said they would continue to rag even after the lecture. This is a small number, but it is still concerning. It is important to continue to educate students about the negative effects of ragging so that they do not engage in this harmful behavior. More than half of the participants responded that they would sensitize others about the consequences of indulging in ragging. This is a positive finding, as it suggests that many students are willing to take action to prevent ragging and that there is still a need to raise awareness of the issue and to educate students about the negative effects of ragging. The striking similarity in the number between those who got ragged as a junior and those who ragged others as a senior suggests that a student's campus experience molds his character.

The uniqueness of the present survey is that it revealed that gender differences are there in the perception of ragging and the frequency of ragging with females getting ragged more often and feeling more hurt than their male counterparts. For all other questions there was no significant difference based on gender.

In any questionnaire survey, the main limitation is the genuineness of the response. That is, people may give a false response for the fear of repercussions. Hence, we included one parameter, anonymity of the respondent and its influence on response. Only 42% of the respondents revealed their identity. There was a significant difference between the anonymous and identifiable respondents for the negative response to questions 3-7, 9 and 10 with more anonymous respondents answering so. This could be because of their fear for action rather than actual response. On the contrary questions assessing the value of the program (question 8) evoked significantly more positive response from anonymous respondents. Similarly, significantly more anonymous respondents were likely to sensitize others on the consequences of ragging than the identifiable group. In a questionnaire survey on ragging, it was concluded that counselling, seminars, and workshops would curb the menace of campus ragging.

CONCLUSION

The survey was intended to find the usefulness of anti-ragging program and the awareness of the menace among participants. It may be concluded that though the proportion of students having been ragged as juniors was

quite less, it is continuing in educational institutions. Students are finding such programs to be useful, and hence more feedback based anti-ragging programs should be conducted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors would like to express their gratitude to the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India for their support in conducting this study and for their continuous efforts in combating ragging and promoting a safe educational environment. Additionally, they would like to thank all the participants who willingly took part in the questionnaire survey, contributing valuable insights to this research.

Funding: No funding sources

Conflict of interest: None declared

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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Cite this article as: Anand S, Ebiraj JA. Effect of anti-ragging program. *Int J Community Med Public Health* 2025;12:2340-4.