

# Ragging: Awareness and perception among undergraduate medical students: A cross-sectional study

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## ABSTRACT


**Background:** Ragging has become a menace, cause of fear, and shock not only for a fresher but to his/her parents too who are sending the loved ones for pursuing higher education by investing a lot of hard-earned money. **Objective:** The objective of this study was to know the ragging experiences, perceptions of the medical students regarding ragging, and to make them aware of the laws for their protection. **Materials and Methods:** This study was an institution-based, cross-sectional, qualitative study conducted on the third semester MBBS students of Kurnool Medical College, Kurnool, between January and February, 2016. Out of 201 students, 150 students gave informed consent and participated in the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for pre- and post-tests. Educational intervention to create awareness on ill-effects and laws against ragging in sessions was conducted. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS 20 statistical software; Excel and appropriate statistics were used. **Results:** Majority of the students (54%) were been ragged. Nearly 99% of the students encouraged positive interaction and 92% felt that ragging is done to communicate and familiarize, and majority (65.3%) of the students said that ragging has helped them to face hurdles in their life. Almost 92% of the students changed their view about ragging after our educational intervention. A significant improvement in the knowledge was seen regarding ragging, its effects, acts of ragging, and ragging as a punishable offence after educational intervention. Almost 86.67% said that actively functioning anti-ragging committee or squad or patrol can reduce the burden of ragging in the campus. **Conclusion:** Overall awareness about ragging is poor. Provision of prior support for students may help reduce anxiety among newcomers. There is a need to develop awareness among these students about the various aspects of ragging and legal action against it. Only prior education and sensitization of students of hazards of ragging can curb this menace of ragging.

**KEY WORDS:** Ragging; Perceptions; Awareness; Undergraduate; Medical; Students

## INTRODUCTION

Ragging had become a major concern of society today. As per Andhra Pradesh Prohibition of Ragging in All Educational Institutions Rules, 2002, "Ragging" means doing an act

which causes or is likely to cause insult or annoyance of fear or apprehension or threat or intimidation or outrage of modesty or injury to a student. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India perhaps has given a more comprehensive meaning of ragging as follows: "Ragging" means any disorderly conduct whether by words spoken or written or by an act which has 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 in the ordinary course and which has the effect of causing

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or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the physique or psyche of a fresher or a junior student. The Medical Council of India (MCI, 2009) has identified as an objective the elimination of ragging in all forms from medical colleges/institutions in the country by prohibiting it by law, preventing its occurrence by following certain regulations, and punishing those who indulge in ragging. Ragging is a cognizable, criminal, and punishable offence.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ragging is an age-old practice in most professional institutions, where incoming junior students are subjected to a certain amount of “good natured” teasing by seniors.<sup>[2]</sup> Ragging is practiced all over the world, with different nomenclature such as hazing, fagging, and bullying; *baptême* in French; *doop* in Dutch; and *Mopokaste* in Finnish. The word *hazing* was later appropriated in the West for the ridicule and rough jokes forced on newcomers. As far as the history of ragging is concerned, the first case of ragging was recorded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC during the Olympics in Greece. The practice spread fast and menacingly first to the armed forces and then to the educational institutions.<sup>[3]</sup> Ragging is intended to break the ice and also allows juniors to get to know seniors. However, there is always a possibility of conflict arising from the inherent diversity of individual student’s nature both among seniors and juniors. This deviation leads to unexpected and disastrous outcomes.<sup>[2]</sup> Freshers under severe stress may leave the system or may suffer from serious psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders. Occasionally, there may be physical injury and some may even commit suicide. Promising careers are nipped in the bud.<sup>[4]</sup> This practice has come under strict public scrutiny and strong pleas have been made to do away with ragging.<sup>[2]</sup>

The ill effects of ragging include all the dimensions - right from the physical injury through beating, hitting by objects, or by forcing to perform dangerous tasks to sexual abuse by forced stripping, forced masturbation, forced unnatural sex, etc. The psychological effects of ragging include constant fear, loss of concentration, inferiority complex and guilt because of decline in academic performance, and feeling of insecurity arising out of financial exploitation, ultimately leading to suicide risks.<sup>[5]</sup>

In many colleges, ragging has been strictly banned. However, this ban has not been very effective as seen by the number of ragging cases still reported by the media, ragging involves gross violations of basic human rights. The seniors are known to torture juniors and by this those seniors get some kind of sadistic pleasures. There is, however, a lack of information from Kurnool about this prevalent but unspoken and hidden menace. This survey was carried out to explore the view of the direct stakeholders of the ragging, i.e., the students themselves. The objective of this research paper is to understand the problem and perspective of ragging among medical students and legal approaches for its prevention.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was an institution-based, cross-sectional, qualitative study conducted on the third semester MBBS students of Kurnool Medical College, Kurnool, between January and February, 2016. Out of 201 students, 150 students gave informed consent and participated in the study. Confidentiality of the participants has been maintained throughout the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared to assess the different aspects of ragging. The questionnaire mainly focused on the view about ragging: Positive and negative sides of ragging, they are in favor or against ragging and some local issues regarding ragging such as their personal experience, common modes of ragging in the institute, knowledge on legal issues of ragging, and their suggestions to stop ragging in the campus. First pre-test, followed by educational intervention to create awareness on ill-effects, laws against ragging in sessions, and later post-test was conducted. At the end of the session, they were asked for suggestions to maintain a ragging-free campus. They were further asked about measures to curb the menace of ragging. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS 20 statistical software, Excel and appropriate statistics were used.

## RESULTS

Out of the 201 students, 150 third semester MBBS students participated in the study with 75% response rate. Nearly 54% of the students ( $N = 81$ ) had reported of being ragged in the institute as a fresher. Table 1 shows that majority of the students were ragged in their hostels (56%), both during day (56.7%) and night (50.7%), when they were along with batch mates (73.4%), for a day (40%) of <15 min (51.3%) per session, and mostly verbal abuse (78.7%). Most of the students (92%) expressed their view that, to communicate and familiarize with the freshers, ragging is been practiced in institutes. Almost 90% of the students do not feel the punch of ragging incident now. When asked about their perception of ragging, majority of the students said that ragging has helped them to face hurdles in their life (65.3%) and 44.7% expressed that they felt bad and worried if any of their near and dear ones get ragged (Table 2). Nearly 92% of the students expressed that their view changed about ragging after our educational intervention. Almost all the students after educational intervention said that they now know the difference between ragging and interaction (97.3%) and encourage (99.3%) positive interaction.

Table 3 shows the comparison of pre-test data with that of post-test after educational intervention regarding knowledge on ragging issues. Significant improvement in the knowledge was seen regarding ragging, its effects, acts of ragging, and ragging as a punishable offence after educational intervention. Students were made aware of the rules and regulations of acts of ragging prevalent for safety of students in Andhra Pradesh

**Table 1:** Distribution of participants according to their ragging experiences

Variable	N (%)*
Place of ragging	
Classroom	17 (11.3)
Institute premises	39 (26)
Hostel	84 (56)
Canteen	10 (6.7)
Common room	10 (6.7)
Time of ragging	
Day	85 (56.7)
Night	76 (50.7)
While being ragged you were	
Alone	16 (10.7)
Along with batch mates	110 (73.4)
Along with roommates	32 (21.4)
Duration of ragging per session	
<15 min	77 (51.3)
15 min to 1 h	47 (31.3)
>1 h	16 (10.7)
Number of days been ragged	
1 day	60 (40)
2-7 days	50 (33)
>7 days	27 (18)
Type of ragging faced	
Verbal	118 (78.7)
Physical	5 (3.3)
Both	8 (5.3)

\*Total, percentages are not equal to 100 as missing, multiple answers are present

**Table 2:** Perception of ragging

Variable	N (%)
Helped to face hurdles in our life	98 (65.3)
Forced us to change our aspirations/career path	2 (1.3)
Ragging is an inseparable part of career development	53 (35.3)
Do not support ragging in campus	62 (41.3)
Feel bad and worried if any near and dear ones get ragged	67 (44.6)
Aware of the difference between ragging and interaction	146 (97.3)
Positive interaction necessary between juniors and seniors	149 (99.3)

such as Andhra Pradesh Prohibition of Ragging Act, 1997, and Andhra Pradesh Prohibition of Ragging in All Educational Institutions Rules, 2002. Knowledge regarding punishments given at institutional level for ragging juniors according to MCI (Prevention and Prohibition of Ragging in Medical Colleges/Institutions) Regulations, 2009, was significantly improved after our educational intervention, which was even statistically proven (Table 4). Table 5 depicts the statistically significant improvement in the knowledge of students regarding measures to curb the menace of ragging from the institutions. Before intervention, 73.34% of the students

**Table 3:** Effect of educational intervention on knowledge of ragging

Variable	Pre-test	Post-test	Chi-square	P value
Effects of ragging			168.8	<0.0000001
Physiological	1	14	10.11	0.0007392
Psychological	10	111	138.5	<0.0000001
Cognitive changes	2	9	3.397	0.03265
Behavioral changes	3	11	3.671	0.02768
Not sure	135	31	143.1	<0.0000001
Ragging punishable under the court of law	119	137	7.697	0.002766
Aware of acts of ragging	16	140	202	<0.0000001
Ragging, a cognizable offence	119	137	7.697	0.002766
Aware of acts of ragging	16	140	202	<0.0000001

\*significant

were ignorant of any protective measure intended for them, while in post-test, 86.67% said that actively functioning anti-ragging committee or squad or patrol can reduce the burden of ragging in the campus.

## DISCUSSION

Out of the 201 students, 150 third semester MBBS students participated in the study with 75% response rate. Almost 54% of the students (N = 81) had reported of being ragged in the institute as a fresher. Majority of the students were ragged in their hostels (56%), both during day (56.7%) and night (50.7%), when they were along with batch mates (73.4%), for a day (40%) of <15 min (51.3%) per session, and mostly verbal abuse (78.7%). Most of the students (92%) expressed their view that, to communicate and familiarize with the freshers, ragging is been practiced in institutes. Nearly 16% of our students expressed that ragging caused them mental stress. When asked about their perception of ragging, majority (65.3%) of the students said that ragging has helped them to face hurdles in their life. Nearly 92% of the students expressed that their view changed about ragging after our educational intervention. Almost all the students after educational intervention said that they now know the difference between ragging and interaction (97.3%) and encourage (99.3%) positive interaction. Significant improvement in the knowledge was seen regarding ragging, its effects, acts of ragging, and ragging as a punishable offence after educational intervention. Before intervention, 73.34% were ignorant of any protective measure intended for them, while in post-test, 86.67% said that actively functioning anti-ragging committee or squad or patrol can reduce the burden of ragging in the campus. Only 10.7% were aware of legal action against ragging which improved to 93.3% after educational intervention.

**Table 4:** Punishments for ragging

Characteristic	Pre-test	Post-test	Chi-square	P value
Cancellation of admission	3	20	12.05	<0.01*
Suspension from attending classes, expulsion from hostel	39	125	97.18	<0.01*
Debarring from test and withholding/withdrawing scholarship and result	5	9	0.6743	0.20
Rustication from the institution for period ranging from 1 to 4 semesters	1	85	112.3	<0.01*
Expulsion from the institution and debarring from admission to any other institution	2	99	137.6	<0.01*
Fine up to Rs. 25,000	36	106	63.66	<0.01*
Imprisonment	39	27	2.35	0.06
Do not know	87	1	116.2	<0.01*

Chi-square: 299.1, df: 7, \*P<0.01. Total, percentages are not equal to 150 and 100 as multiple answers are present

**Table 5:** Measures suggested to prevent ragging

Characteristic	Pre-test	Post-test
Proctorial board	1	3
ARC/squads (ARS)/patrols	15	130
Control room	0	22
Booklet containing important telephone numbers of security/admin, etc.	0	13
Instructions for freshers for whom to contact	0	42
Others	34	30
Do not know	110	7

Chi-square: 299.1, df: 7, \*P<0.01. ARC: Anti-ragging committee, ARS: Anti-ragging squads

In a study done in Nepal, among the respondents, contrary to our study, majority (81.7%) had personally experienced of being the victim of ragging in the institute. Contrary to ours, 30% reported of facing verbal abuse, physical (5.0%), both verbal and physical (38.3%), and others, for example, sexual harassment (11.7%). Even here like ours, many students (70%) felt that it might facilitate socialization/introduction process, while contrary to ours, 68% of the respondents found ragging to be stressful.<sup>[7]</sup>

Similar to our study, being ragged as a junior improves abilities of interaction in life according to 68% of medical students in a study done in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. Likewise, 99% of the students felt that a little bit of ragging is necessary to build a relationship between seniors and juniors. “An introduction/interaction is a must with seniors. It helps juniors to develop personally/educationally. At the same time, the interaction/ragging should not cross the limits of humanity.”<sup>[2]</sup>

There are certain myths associated with ragging which have glorified and justified ragging. For example, a popular myth is that ragging makes a student bold and prepares him/her for the difficult circumstances in life. The fact is that it is a weak acceptance of fate by the victim. It encourages exploitation and encourages non-resistant acceptance. It is also believed that ragging helps in breaking the ice between the seniors and freshers. It helps in their interaction and developing friendship between them. However, there can be more effective, enjoyable, and healthy ways of interacting.<sup>[4]</sup>

Ragging needs to be perceived as our failure to inculcate human values from the schooling stage.

Among the respondent medical students, majority had personally experienced of being victim of ragging in this institute. The victim respondents had experienced different types of ragging. About one-third of the respondents were in favor of some sort of ragging. Many felt that it may facilitate socialization process. However, a great majority found ragging to be stressful. They expressed that there was a definite need of some modification in the current pattern of

In a study done in Karnataka by Suryawanshi, it was proposed that “Ragging had become a major concern of society today. It had increased its level from college to society level. There are some basic human rights which provide an individual to live peacefully, healthy, and without any alien disturbance, and contrary to this, ragging, as a custom, violates all those rights from the very beginning and thereby, putting question on capabilities of law and also on the validity of human dignity.” Similar to our study, 89% response rate was seen.<sup>[6]</sup> Likewise, according to most of the students, hostel is the most common place of ragging by 76.79% males and 75.76% females in Karnataka study. Most of the male and female students responded that seniors rag mostly for fun (82.14% and 54.55%, respectively) followed by reasons such as “to follow traditional practice of ragging” (7.14% and 15.5%, respectively) and to communicate and familiarize (1.79% and 9.09%, respectively), which was contrary to our study. In contrast to popular beliefs against ragging, few respondents gave a positive response that ragging is helpful to improve communication between seniors and juniors (1.12%). When asked about students’ opinion about the most common impact of ragging on junior students, most of the male and female students responded that psychological disturbances are most likely to affect those who get ragged (50% and 48.48%, respectively). On inquiring students’ knowledge regarding provision of any legal action against ragging, similar to our study, majority of the male and female students were unaware of any legal action (75% and 91%, respectively).<sup>[6]</sup>

ragging in the institute. Many felt that some better form of interactive program was a great need.<sup>[8]</sup>

With the situation of ragging worsening yearly, a spontaneous anti-ragging movement is emerging in India. Several voluntary organizations have emerged who conduct drives for public awareness and arrange for support to victims. Online groups such as Coalition to Uproot Ragging from India, Stopragging, and No Ragging Foundation became the major anti-ragging groups on the Internet. Among them, the No Ragging Foundation has transformed into a complete non-governmental organization (NGO) and got registered at the Society against Violence in Education which is India's first registered anti-ragging NGO. These groups are working on issues related to ragging. Each of them is running anti-ragging websites and online groups. The Indian media have been playing a crucial role by exposing ragging incidents and the indifference of many concerned institutions toward curbing the act. The Supreme Court of India has directed in its interim judgment that action may be taken even against negligent institutions.<sup>[9]</sup>

We have chosen third semester students only as they are the pupil who faced the ragging and who anxiously indulges in it. We were unable to cover students of other semesters. Unless we sensitize all the students of medical college, we cannot dream of achieving a ragging-free campus in a medical college. We made our efforts successfully with one batch. It would have been better if we had done it just before fresh batch enters the college. We could have taken the 1<sup>st</sup> year students who have recently faced this reprehensible act and their perspective toward ragging.

## CONCLUSION

Even today, after the extreme aftermath of ragging, many students support harmless or healthy ragging or positive interaction; for some, it is painful torture, act of serious human indignity leading to loss of self-esteem and even innocents lives, but others consider it a personality development exercise. Significant improvement in the knowledge was seen regarding ragging, its effects, acts of ragging, ragging as a punishable offence after educational intervention, and measures to curb the menace of ragging from the institutions. Most of the students said that actively functioning anti-ragging committee or squad or patrol can reduce the burden of ragging in the campus. The malaise, if not cured, may grow into a chronic incurable disease. Ragging can be stopped by creating awareness among the students, teachers, and parents that ragging is a reprehensible act which does no good to anyone and by simultaneously generating an atmosphere of discipline by sending a clear message that no act of ragging shall be tolerated and any act of ragging shall not go unnoticed

and unpunished. A policy of zero tolerance on ragging is essential. We must understand that unless society condemns it, ragging cannot be eliminated. Parents must also take some responsibility and encourage their children to report any such incident immediately so that they can take up the issue with the management and prevent any tragic untoward outcome and also counsel their wards to refrain from ragging.

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