Prevalence of mistreatment and justice of grading system in five health related faculties in Jordan University of Science and Technology

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Prevalence of mistreatment and justice of grading system in five health related faculties in Jordan University of Science and Technology

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Abstract

Background: Many Jordanian university students complain of the behavior of some teaching staff. Also, they complain of the grading systems in universities.

Aim: This study concerns the occurrence of different forms of student mistreatment and student mistrust of the grading system in the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) as an example of universities in Jordan.

Method: A total of 500 students in five health related faculties in JUST responded to a questionnaire.

Results: Our results were as follow: (i) 61% of the students had experienced at least one form of mistreatment; (ii) perceived mistreatment most often (52%) had taken the form of psychological mistreatment (shouting and humiliation); (iii) other forms of mistreatment such as physical harm (32%), mistreatment related to religion (36%), mistreatment related to external appearance (35%), sexual harassment (33%) and mistreatment related to specialty (29%) were also common; (iv) with the exception of mistreatment related to specialty which was high among the nursing students, perceived mistreatment did not vary significantly between the different faculties; (v) the male students (66%) complain more than female students (56%); (vi) perceived mistreatment was exceptionally high among the Israeli Arabs, 83% compared to 59% for the Jordanians and 65% for other non-Jordanian Arabs; (vii) fellow students (44%), professors (37%) and laboratory technicians (19%) were cited as major sources of mistreatment. Many students (66%) believe that grading system in JUST is unfair. Ninety seven percent of the Israeli Arabs did not trust the grading system compared to 64% of the Jordanians and 66% of the non-Jordanian Arabs.

Conclusions: This study suggests that, feelings of mistreatment among university students is strong while their trust of the university grading system is low. Perceived mistreatment and an unfair grading system may be a major source of stress among our students and may affect the process of teaching and learning in our country. This should alert the university administration to face these issues and try to solve them.

Introduction

University education in Jordan, especially during the last few years, is expanding quickly. The number of students in Jordanian universities keeps growing, with many non-Jordanian students starting to join these universities. In light of these changes, there is a need to examine the experience of these students during their university life, critically. Mistreatment is a problem at a personal level and at the university teaching level. In some cases, mistreatment may form a major source of stress for students or may affect their psychological health (Silver 1982; Rosenberg & Silver 1984; Richman et al. 1992; Lebenthal et al. 1996). Also, mistreatment and discrimination based on a student’s sex or nationality may change the attitude of the students towards their teaching staff and universities (Silver 1982; Rosenberg & Silver 1984; Wolf et al. 1991).

Various forms of mistreatment have been reported in universities in different countries (Sheehan et al. 1990; Silver & Glicken 1990; Wolf et al. 1991; Baldwin et al. 1991; Richman et al. 1992; Uhari et al. 1994; Magnus et al. 1998; Association of American Medical Colleges 1996; Recupero et al. 2004). A big difference in the percentages of student mistreatment were reported in these studies. Most of these
studies (Sheehan et al. 1990; Silver & Glicken 1990; Wolf et al. 1991; Baldwin et al. 1991; Richman et al. 1992; Uhari et al. 1994; Association of American Medical Colleges 1996; Magnus et al. 1998) reported the prevalence of student mistreatment to be greater than 70% while two studies (Magnus et al. 1998; Recupero et al. 2004) reported the prevalence of student mistreatment to be less than 50%.

Studies that measure students' trust in the grading system are scarce. A survey in 10 United States faculties (Baldwin et al. 1991) found that 34.8% of the students complain of unfair grades. An unfair grading system and discrimination among students concerning their marks and grades will have a great impact on teaching, learning and attitude. Therefore, it was decided to examine how our students view our grading system. The main objectives of this study were; (1) to evaluate the scale and forms of mistreatment; and (2) to evaluate how much our students trust the grading system in five health related faculties.

Subjects and methods

Questionnaires were distributed during the 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 academic years. The questionnaires were distributed to about 800 students. Five hundred and forty five responded. Forty five were excluded from the study for different reasons such as filling the questionnaire with clear carelessness or leaving most of the questions without answers. Five hundred (100 of medical faculty, 100 of dental faculty, 100 of pharmacy faculty, 100 of medical allied sciences faculty and 100 of nursing faculty) were included in the study. In order to have exactly 100 good questionnaires from each faculty, we use more questionnaires where needed. The students were in the second year (350 students) and the third year (150 students) of their university life. 280 of these students were male and 220 were female. 430 were Jordanians, 30 were Israeli Arabs and 40 were other non-Jordanian Arabs. The last 40 students were from Arabic Gulf States, Syria, West Bank and Iraq.

The questionnaire was as follows:

**Part I (personal data):**
- Age
- Sex
- Year of study
- Faculty
- Nationality
- Religion.

**Part II (forms and sources of mistreatment):**
- Psychological mistreatment (shouting and humiliating)
- Physical harm
- Mistreatment related to religion
- Mistreatment related to external appearance
- Sexual harassment
- Mistreatment related to specialty
- Source of each form of mistreatment.

**Part III (grading mistrust):**
- Threat of unfair grades
- Getting unfair low grades
- Giving unfair high grades for certain students.

The data were statistically analysed using Chi-square values of less than 0.05 were considered significant. Percentage analyses were presented in tables.

Results

The perceived mistreatment among the students at JUST was common as indicated by the finding that 61% of the responded students reported at least one form of mistreatment. Also, 66% of students reported their mistrust in the grading system. The followings are the main findings of this study.

Mistreatment in relation to years of study

This study clearly indicates that students' mistreatment increases with the number of years of study (Table 1). Table 1 shows that the percentage of students mistreatment jumped from 56% in the second year to 77% in the third year.

Mistreatment in different faculties

With the exception of mistreatment related to specialty, which was high (44%) among the nursing students and low (7%) among medical students, perceived mistreatment did not differ significantly between the different faculties (Tables 2 and 3). Careful analysis of the data in Table 3 shows that although the dental students reported slightly more mistreatment in general (at least one form of mistreatment) compared to the medical students, for five of the six forms of mistreatments (all forms of mistreatments except the specialty) the medical students reported more.

Different forms of mistreatment

Results show that perceived mistreatment most often (52%) took the form of psychological mistreatment (shouting and humiliating). Other forms of mistreatment such as physical harm, mistreatment related to religion, mistreatment related to external appearance, sexual harassment and mistreatment related to specialty were also common (Table 3).

| Table 1. The percentage (frequency) of mistreatment and grading mistrust according to the year of study. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year of study | Mistreatment | Grading mistrust |
| Second (350) | 56% | 59% |
| Third (150) | 77% | 87% |
| Total (500) | 61% | 66% |
Mistreatment in relation to sex (males and females)
The students who responded to the questionnaire were 280 males and 220 females. The male students complain more (60%) than female students (56%) (Table 4).

Mistreatment according to the students’ nationality
The students who responded to the questionnaire were 430 Jordanians, 30 Israeli Arabs and 40 non-Jordanian Arabs (Arabic Gulf States, Syria, Iraq and West Bank). Table 5 show that perceived mistreatment was much higher among the Israeli Arabs students (83%) than both the Jordanian students (59%) and the non-Jordanian Arabs (65%).

Mistreatment according to its source
A total of 454 students reported the source of their mistreatment. Fellow students (44%), professors (37%) and laboratory technicians (19%) were cited as major sources of mistreatment (Table 6). These results indicate that more than half of the mistreatment (56%) came from the teaching team (either professors or laboratory technicians).

Table 6 also shows the percentage distribution of the source of each form of mistreatment. For example, 135 students reported the source of their psychological mistreatment as follows: 63 students (47%) by professors, 35 students (26%) by laboratory technicians; and 37 students (27%) by fellow students. This means that most of the psychological mistreatment (73%) came from teaching staff (professors or laboratory technicians).

Trust of the grading system
Sixty six percent of the 500 students who responded to the questionnaire did not trust the grading system in JUST (Table 1). This result was unexpected and unfortunate especially when we note that the percentage of grading mistrust jumped from 59% in the second year to 87% in the third year (Table 1). A even more unexpected and unfortunate result of this study was the finding that 29 out of the 30 Israeli Arabs (97%) who were included in this study did not trust the grading system (Table 5). Table 7 shows that, 275 out of the 430 Jordanians, 29 out of the 30 Israeli Arabs and 26 out of the 40 non-Jordanian Arabs did not trust the grading system in JUST. Table 7 also shows that 23 Israeli Arabs students out of the 29 students who did not trust the grading system reported being threatened with an unfair grade, 29 Israeli Arabs students out of the 29 students believe they get unfair low grades and 27 Israeli Arabs students out of the 29 students complained that some professors gave unfair high grades for certain students.

Discussion
Many studies have been conducted to assess the prevalence of university student mistreatment (Sheehan et al. 1990; Silver & Glicken 1990; Wolf et al. 1991; Baldwin et al. 1991; Richman et al. 1992; Uhari et al. 1994; Association of American Medical Colleges 1996; Magnus et al. 1998; Recupero et al. 2004). Unfortunately, no similar studies were published in Jordan.

The main task of universities in the developing countries like Jordan is teaching and learning. The university atmosphere must be based on justice and respect between the students and their teaching staff and between the students themselves. This is important not only for teaching and learning, but also for building up positive attitudes by the students towards their teaching staff and their fellow students. Attitudes, positive or negative, adopted during university studies will have great effect on the behavior of students in their future working life.

Mistreatment in JUST appeared to be very common, since about 61% of our students had experienced at least one form of mistreatment. This result is lower than the high percentages (70% or more) reported in most of these studies (Sheehan et al. 1990; Silver & Glicken 1990; Wolf et al. 1991; Baldwin et al. 1991; Richman et al. 1992; Uhari et al. 1994; Association of American Medical Colleges 1996) but higher than results reported by other two studies (Magnus et al. 1998; Recupero et al. 2004) who reported less than 50% of student mistreatment. The occurrence of mistreatment reported by the third year students was clearly higher than mistreatment reported by the second year students. This cumulative effect of being longer in the university is expected and came in agreement with similar results reported in several studies.
The extraordinary high number of negative comments reported as being made to nursing students concerning their choice of a career in nursing should be of concern to the university and the government officials. In fact this is not a problem at the university only but it is also a problem in our society too.

Table 4. The percentage (frequency) of mistreatments and grading mistrust among male and female students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Mistreatment</th>
<th>Grading mistrust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (280)</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (220)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (500)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. The percentage (frequency) of mistreatments and grading mistrust among students according to their nationality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Mistreatments</th>
<th>Grading mistrust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordanians (430)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Arabs (30)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-Jordanians (40)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. The percentage (frequency) of different types of mistreatments according to their source. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Psychological mistreatment</th>
<th>Physical harm</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>External appearance</th>
<th>Sexual harassment</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>At least one form of mistreatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>(63) 47%</td>
<td>(18) 37%</td>
<td>(26) 26%</td>
<td>(28) 36%</td>
<td>(20) 33%</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
<td>(167) 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab. technicians</td>
<td>(33) 26%</td>
<td>(9) 18%</td>
<td>(10) 12%</td>
<td>(12) 15%</td>
<td>(11) 18%</td>
<td>8 (16%)</td>
<td>(85) 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellow students</td>
<td>(37) 27%</td>
<td>(22) 45%</td>
<td>(46) 46%</td>
<td>(38) 49%</td>
<td>(29) 49%</td>
<td>30 (60%)</td>
<td>(202) 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(135) 100%</td>
<td>(49) 100%</td>
<td>(82) 100%</td>
<td>(78) 100%</td>
<td>(60) 100%</td>
<td>50 (100%)</td>
<td>(454) 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. The percentage (frequency) of different forms of grading mistrust among the students who had grading mistrust according to nationality of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality of students who mistrust the grading system</th>
<th>Threat with unfair grade</th>
<th>Getting low unfair grade</th>
<th>Giving unfair high grade for certain student(s)</th>
<th>Any form of grading mistrust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordanians (275)</td>
<td>188/275 (69%)</td>
<td>247/275 (89%)</td>
<td>256/275 (83%)</td>
<td>275/275 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli Arabs (29)</td>
<td>23/29 (80%)</td>
<td>29/29 (100%)</td>
<td>27/29 (93%)</td>
<td>29/29 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-Jordanians (26)</td>
<td>16/26 (62%)</td>
<td>20/26 (77%)</td>
<td>24/26 (94%)</td>
<td>26/26 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (330)</td>
<td>228/330 (69%)</td>
<td>296/330 (88%)</td>
<td>307/330 (93%)</td>
<td>330/330 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study indicated that, in our university, male students complain more than female students. This result differ from the result reported in previous American and Europe studies (Koromany et al. 1993; Magnus et al. 1998; Oancia et al. 2000; Larsson et al. 2003) which reported more complaints by female students compared to the male students. The fact that the females in our society are more conservative than males was the most probable reason for these differences between the results in this study and the American and Europe studies.

An interesting result in this study was the finding that the perceived mistreatment was strong especially among one group of students, namely the Israeli Arabs. Therefore, it may be important to organize regular special meetings with students, especially the Israeli Arabs, to hear and discuss their problems and ideas about the process of teaching, learning, grading and other aspects of university life in JUST.

Our finding of the high number of students mistrusting the grading system at JUST (66%) is about double the number of students that mistrust the grading system in the United States (34.8%) (Baldwin et al. 1991). This makes this problem a serious one that has to be addressed by the university officials at all levels of academia.

Despite any limitations such as the relatively small sample size (500 students from 5 faculties) and the low number of the Israeli Arabs (30 students), the perception of mistreatment among our students is high, their trust in our grading system is low. Indeed, one study (Guadagnoli & Cunningham 1989) has suggested that larger samples may not be required in similar studies when there is reason to think that respondents are not significantly different from nonrespondents.

Conclusion

The data presented suggest that mistreatment and mistrust of the grading system is a part of many students’ perceptions and experiences in JUST. For most people, the vision of universities is that they are places where they can read and learn in a just and peaceful atmosphere, but, as the present study indicates, many students do not share this vision and believe that they
are not treated equally. Our findings emphasize the need to develop and maintain a fair and supportive atmosphere for all students because as indicated by previous studies (Silver 1982; Rosenberg & Silver 1984; Wolf et al. 1991; Richman et al. 1992; Lebenthal et al. 1996; Heru et al. 2001), abusive experiences are known to have a negative effect on the attitudes, behaviors and learning capability of students and the continuation of this mistreatment and discrimination will prevent our university from achieving its goals.

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