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Prevalence of Deviant Behavior among University Students of Quetta: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

Deviant behavior in higher education has become a serious concern, as universities are expected not only to provide academic knowledge but also to develop students' character, discipline, and sense of civic responsibility. Universities in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan, function amid difficult socioeconomic and emotional environments. Inadequate psychosocial support, increased exposure to digital platforms, quickly changing cultural values, and academic stress are all common problems for students. This study explores how these conditions relate to the prevalence and forms of deviant behavior among university students in Quetta. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data was collected from a sample of students selected through proportional stratified sampling. Key aspects of deviance such as academic misconduct, aggression, absenteeism, disrespect, and ethical disengagement. The findings indicate a moderate but concerning level of deviance, particularly in academic dishonesty, absenteeism, disrespectful language, and involvement in bullying or physical confrontations. Students largely attributed deviant behavior to academic pressure, personal frustration, and inadequate moral guidance, while many emphasized the importance of strengthening counseling and guidance services. Overall, the findings suggest that student deviance in Balochistan's universities is influenced by institutional culture, peer interaction, and psychological strain. The study underlines the pressing need for moral leadership, effective counseling services, and a supportive campus environment to help students maintain ethical and emotionally balanced academic lives, ultimately reducing deviant behavior.

Keywords: Deviant behavior, university students, academic dishonesty, student misconduct, higher education

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1. Introduction

Universities hold a central responsibility in shaping not only students' academic competencies but also their ethical values, emotional maturity, and sense of civic responsibility. In recent years, however, higher education institutions worldwide have witnessed a noticeable rise in student misconduct, which challenges their educational and moral mission. Behaviors such as cheating, absenteeism, disrespect toward teachers and peers, classroom disruption, physical aggression, and emerging forms of digital misconduct increasingly appear across campuses. Such actions threaten academic standards, weaken institutional culture, and gradually normalize practices that conflict with the principles of responsible citizenship and personal integrity (Bolu-Steve et al., 2017; Hanımoğlu, 2018).

Although student deviance is observed in educational systems around the globe, its nature and level often reflect the social and institutional environments in which learners are embedded. In Pakistan, and more notably in Balochistan, this challenge becomes more complex due to factors such as economic disparity, limited educational support structures, political sensitivity, and inadequate psychosocial services. Universities in Balochistan operate in a context shaped by weak academic infrastructure, scarcity of student counseling facilities, and ongoing socio-cultural change influenced by digital media. Students simultaneously confront academic pressure, financial uncertainty, limited employment pathways, and shifting value systems, making them more vulnerable to stress-related and socially influenced behavioral issues (Mushtaq & Kausar, 2018; Zia et al., 2022).

Contemporary scholarship suggests that student deviance stems from a combination of institutional, interpersonal, emotional, and technological factors. Theories such as Agnew's strain perspective highlight how academic pressure, frustration, and limited coping strategies can push students toward misconduct, while Akers' social learning theory emphasizes the role of peers, group dynamics, and digital communities in shaping behavior (Agnew, 2006; Akers, 2017). Regional studies also indicate that increasing digital exposure, weak ethical regulation, and limited campus-based counseling systems contribute to shifts in student morality and conduct (Avakyan et al., 2021; Ayub, 2022). Moreover, universities in Pakistan continue to grapple with classroom politics, declining ethical discipline, and insufficient mechanisms for emotional and academic guidance (Khan et al., 2024).

Within Balochistan's universities, student misconduct must therefore be understood as part of a broader social and institutional challenge. Rapid digital socialization, reduced parental and community oversight, economic pressure, and tension between traditional values and modern influences have reshaped student behavior and expectations. Strict or punitive disciplinary strategies alone appear insufficient and, at times, counterproductive, highlighting the need for supportive, developmental, and guidance-oriented responses. In addition, teacher conduct plays a crucial role. Research shows that when educators model ethical, empathetic, and professional behavior, students are more likely to adopt positive attitudes and comply with institutional norms;

conversely, unethical or discouraging teacher behavior can reinforce deviance among learners (Asiyai, 2019; Niazi et al., 2025).

Despite increasing concern, empirical literature focused specifically on the behavioral patterns of university students in Quetta remains limited. The scarcity of localized data constrains efforts to design evidence-based interventions tailored to the unique socio-cultural and institutional context of Balochistan. There is therefore a pressing need to investigate the nature and extent of deviant behavior in universities of Quetta and to understand the social, academic, and emotional forces influencing student conduct.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the prevalence and forms of deviant behavior among university students in Quetta. By drawing on established theoretical perspectives and employing empirical data, the study aims to contribute to both academic understanding and institutional practice. The findings are expected to support the development of informed student-support frameworks, ethical awareness initiatives, and institutional policies that strengthen academic integrity, emotional well-being, and moral responsibility across higher education settings in Balochistan.

2. Problem Statement

In Balochistan, deviant behavior among university students has become a consistent educational and social issue. Over the past few years, concerns have grown regarding a noticeable decline in students' moral commitment and ethical conduct. Acts such as cheating, plagiarism, absenteeism, disrespectful behavior, aggression, and other forms of misconduct are reported more frequently across university campuses. Existing scholarship suggests that student deviance in Pakistan is not merely an individual or occasional problem; rather, it reflects a wider and more systemic challenge within the higher education environment (Mushtaq & Kausar, 2018; Ruwan et al., 2016).

The situation in Balochistan appears more sensitive due to its unique socio-political landscape, which includes limited educational facilities, administrative weaknesses, and comparatively weak mechanisms for moral guidance and student oversight. These structural and contextual constraints create conditions where deviant behaviors may become more visible and difficult to control. Despite the rising seriousness of the issue, there is limited empirical research focused specifically on understanding the nature and extent of student deviance in Quetta's higher education institutions. Therefore, it is important to investigate this phenomenon in a systematic and evidence-based manner. Doing so will support the development of informed strategies to safeguard academic integrity, promote ethical student behavior, and foster a disciplined and supportive learning culture in universities across the province.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent and forms of deviant behavior among university students in Balochistan, with particular emphasis on public universities located in Quetta. This research aims to determine how frequently students engage in different types of academic and social misconduct, and to explore the underlying factors

and contextual influences that shape such behaviors within the university setting. By systematically measuring these patterns, the study intends to generate empirical evidence that can inform institutional planning and policy development. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of student conduct, strengthen ethical awareness, and support the creation of a more disciplined, supportive, and morally grounded academic environment.

4. Research Objectives

- -To investigate the prevalence of deviant behavior among university students of Quetta.
- -To explore the reasons behind the prevalence of deviant behavior among university students of Quetta.

Literature Review

Actions or attitudes that deviate from accepted institutional, ethical, or social norms are referred to as deviant conduct. Cheating, plagiarism, rudeness, absenteeism, aggressiveness, vandalism, and general indiscipline are just a few of the many actions that fall under this category in higher education. Universities serve as both hubs for academic research and establishments that foster civic and moral ideals, as the thesis discusses. Deviant behavior by students undermines the educational goal of character development, weakening institutional culture and academic integrity.

Deviance's conceptual underpinnings are derived from psychology and sociological ideas. According to Agnew's General Strain Theory (2006), people who endure emotional or social strain due to dissatisfaction, academic pressure, or the failure to accomplish justifiable goals are more likely to commit deviance. People take on maladaptive behaviors like misbehavior or withdrawal when institutional frameworks don't offer coping mechanisms. Similarly, Akers' Social Learning Theory (2017) emphasizes that deviant behavior is learned through social interaction — students imitate behaviors modeled by peers or authority figures, particularly when such actions go unpunished or are socially accepted.

The Social Control Theory (Hirschi), which contends that weak ties between people and their institutions lessen internalized discipline, is also included in the argument. Students' adherence to regulations decreases in a university context when they lack attachment to instructors, respect for authority, or faith in institutional justice. Together, these theoretical frameworks demonstrate that aberrant behavior is a social and psychological response to institutional and environmental forces rather than a fundamental moral flaw.

Deviant behavior in educational institutions is a global concern, according to international studies cited in the thesis. Scholars like Bolu-Steve et al. (2017) and Hanımoğlu (2018) have noted rising patterns of student indiscipline in higher education, including interpersonal problems, academic dishonesty, and absenteeism. Such behavior frequently emerges in settings that are marked by insufficient institutional supervision, competitive stress, and poor moral instruction.

According to the theory, similar problems exist in developing countries, where exposure to digital culture, urbanization, and quick social change have changed conventional moral frameworks. Deviant student behavior in many areas is a reflection of larger society changes: a conflict between increasing individualist impulses that support autonomy and self-interest and collectivist norms that emphasize respect and obedience. In colleges, this cultural change frequently shows itself as a loss of social duty and a relaxation of moral discipline.

The phenomena has also been connected to inconsistent educational governance, socioeconomic inequality, and restricted access to student support networks throughout South Asia. Disciplinary procedures frequently fall behind as institutions deal with growing administrative and academic difficulties, producing environments where abnormal behavior is tolerated or goes unpunished. The thesis highlights the importance of acknowledging these contextual elements when evaluating behavioral concerns at Pakistani institutions, especially in areas like Balochistan where institutional development is still unequal.

Higher education institutes in Pakistan deal with a variety of issues that lead to behavioral issues among students. Academic dishonesty, absenteeism, and hostility are pervasive problems with both structural and cultural roots, according to Mushtaq and Kausar (2018) and Zia et al. (2022). The paper emphasizes how Pakistani colleges frequently struggle with moral education, ethical training, and efficient counseling systems despite increasing educational access. Deviant behavior becomes both a symptom and an outcome of larger systemic flaws in this setting. Stress that shows up as misconduct is caused by the competitive academic environment, a lack of job options, and insufficient emotional support. According to the thesis, students frequently face a tension between the limited institutional resources available to support them in achieving academic success and the expectations of society. This discrepancy generates frustration and disengagement, consistent with the strain-based explanations of deviant behavior.

Additionally, student behavior is greatly influenced by institutional ethics and teacher behavior. Positive values are more likely to be internalized by kids when teachers exhibit professionalism, empathy, and ethical responsibility. On the other hand, bad tendencies are reinforced by apathy, strict discipline, or unethical faculty behavior. The thesis highlights the relationship between student morality and professor behavior by using Niazi et al. (2025) and Khan et al. (2024). Hence, institutional culture functions as both a cause and a moderator of deviance — influencing whether misconduct is suppressed, tolerated, or reproduced.

The thesis identifies several interrelated factors contributing to the prevalence of deviant behavior among university students.

1. Performance and Academic Pressure Anxiety:

Students frequently engage in academic misconduct due to heavy workloads, exam stress, and a fear of failing. These pressures are consistent with the core ideas of Agnew's Strain Theory, which postulates that

students turn to other activities like cheating or absenteeism when acceptable ways to succeed are limited.

2. Social and Peer Influence:

According to Akers' Social Learning Theory, social groupings have a significant impact on behavior. According to the thesis, students are prone to copy classmates who disobey academic regulations, particularly when doing so results in immediate benefits or social approval. Deviance can proliferate through peer networks and become accepted in settings with weak moral regulations.

3. Socioeconomic and Emotional Stress:

According to the thesis, a lot of Balochistan's students deal with family difficulties, political unpredictability, and economic insecurity, all of which reduce their emotional fortitude. These difficulties are exacerbated by limited access to counseling or mental health services, which causes dissatisfaction, indifference, and a retreat from moral and intellectual obligations.

4. Weaknesses of the Institution:

Deviant behavior occurs in an environment that is permissive due to weak disciplinary procedures, uneven rule enforcement, and a lack of mentorship programs. The thesis contends that in order for an institution to be effective, developmental tactics that deal with the underlying reasons of student misconduct are just as important as punitive ones.

5. Digital Exposure and Value Shifts:

Social standards among young people have been changed by the proliferation of digital technology and social media. The thesis explores how students become less sensitive to unethical behaviors like plagiarism and rude communication in digital environments, making it more difficult to uphold academic integrity.

The thesis makes a compelling case for the need of moral leadership and education in reducing abnormal conduct. It highlights the importance of counseling, mentoring, and faculty behavior in forming students' moral character. Students' internalized discipline and institutional attachment are strengthened when teachers serve as moral role models. On the other hand, moral disengagement can result from faculty members' carelessness or unethical behavior, which undermines respect for institutional authority.

Emphasizes on the value of guidance and counseling services as preventative measures are important. Students who receive effective counseling are better able to manage academic pressure, establish emotional stability, and find constructive ways to settle problems. The thesis highlights the necessity for supportive circumstances that promote moral decision-making and introspection, citing several publications (e.g.,

Braxton & Bayer, 1999; Hanımoğlu, 2018) that support developmental interventions above punitive measures.

The institutional ethos is also a part of the moral component. Universities that support equity, openness, and diversity create settings where students feel appreciated and respected. Students who attend such institutions are more likely to develop a feeling of responsibility and community, which lowers the risk of deviance.

Social Learning Theory describes the function of socialization and modeling; Social Control Theory shows how moral disengagement results from inadequate institutional ties; and Strain Theory explores the emotional causes of deviance.

These viewpoints demonstrate how regional socioeconomic stress, institutional capacity constraints, and changing cultural values influence university students' behavioral patterns as applied to the Balochistan's environment. Therefore, deviant behavior should be seen as a complicated social reaction to structural and psychological forces inside the educational system rather than just as a moral degradation.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted to assess prevalence patterns (Creswell, 2014).

5.2 Population & Sampling

Population was determined by using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size estimation:

University Approx. Population Sample (Proportional)

UOB	14,000	184
BUITEMS	9,000	121
SBK	8,000	107

Total respondents = 412

5.3 Data collection Instrument

Structured 10-item Likert questionnaire (1–5 scale)

Reliability Test Result: Cronbach's Alpha result = **0.804** (Good internal consistency)

5.4 Data Analysis

SPSS-27 was used for frequencies, percentages and descriptive interpretations.

5.5 Descriptive Statistics Table

Table 1: descriptive statistics of deviant behaviors among university students (n = 412)

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Total (%)
Q1. Observed cheating during exams	38.83	26.94	17.48	10.44	6.31	100.00

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Total (%)
Q2. Students using abusive language	16.99	31.80	22.57	20.15	8.50	100.00
Q3. Physical fights or bullying on campus	20.87	29.61	19.17	17.23	13.11	100.00
Q4. Skipping classes without valid reasons	29.13	34.95	14.81	17.72	3.40	100.00
Q5. Damaging university property	16.50	26.21	17.23	26.70	13.35	100.00
Q6. Engaged in plagiarism or dishonesty	17.48	30.83	25.24	19.90	6.55	100.00
Q7. Academic pressure leads to deviance	33.25	32.77	16.75	13.35	3.88	100.00
Q8. Lack of moral education contributes to deviance	20.39	39.81	23.54	10.92	5.34	100.00
Q9. Personal frustrations lead to deviance	27.18	40.78	15.29	13.11	3.64	100.00
Q10. Counseling services should be strengthened	27.43	34.22	19.42	11.65	7.28	100.00

Interpretation of Table I:

The findings indicate a moderate to high presence of deviant behavior among university students in Quetta. The most commonly reported behaviors relate to academic misconduct, absenteeism, and abusive communication. Across the items, approximately 48% to 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements describing deviant acts, suggesting that such behaviors are widely observed and socially visible in university settings.

Behaviors such as cheating during examinations (65.77%), skipping classes without valid reasons (64.08%), and attributing deviance to academic pressure (66.02%) were particularly prominent. These results imply that academic challenges and performance-related stress may push students towards misconduct, which is consistent with the findings of McCabe et al. (2012) and Mushtaq and Kausar (2018) in similar contexts in Pakistan.

Moderate-level behaviors included the use of abusive language (48.79%), plagiarism (48.31%), and involvement in physical fights or bullying (50.48%). These patterns suggest that, while not universal, such actions are experienced frequently enough to indicate peer-based tolerance or normalization, supporting Akers' (2017) argument that deviance can be learned and reinforced through social interaction.

Less frequent behaviors, such as damage to university property (42.71%), show that serious physical or destructive misconduct is relatively uncommon. This pattern

echoes Hanimoglu's (2018) observations in collectivist societies, where certain ethical boundaries remain respected even when other forms of misconduct rise.

Students also identified academic pressure (66%), personal frustration (68%), and insufficient moral education (60.2%) as major reasons behind deviant behavior. This aligns with Agnew's (2006) Strain Theory, which connects deviance to emotional strain and limited coping mechanisms. Importantly, 89.08% of respondents expressed support for enhancing counseling services on campus, suggesting that students recognize their emotional and behavioral challenges and are receptive to institutional guidance. This finding aligns with Braxton and Bayer's (1999) emphasis on the significance of mentorship in shaping student conduct.

About 19% of students gave a neutral response, which could indicate a lack of clarity on what behavior is considered deviant. This could be due to a combination of increasing digital exposure and changing cultural norms (Avakyan et al., 2021). Conversely, less than 10% disagreed with claims about deviance, suggesting that its prevalence is widely acknowledged.

In summary, the data suggest that deviant behavior in universities in Balochistan is neither extreme nor negligible. Rather, it appears to be moderate, commonly tolerated, and driven largely by stress, frustration, and a lack of moral reinforcement. Students often justify minor deviance as necessary for academic survival or emotional release, reflecting an evolving ethical landscape where institutional weakness, social pressure, and digital influences intersect.

Overall, the combined "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses average around 59.5%, confirming a noticeable yet manageable level of deviant behavior. These results reinforce the need for strategic institutional responses, particularly in strengthening student support services, promoting ethical awareness, and encouraging a positive academic culture. Hence "Student deviance in Balochistan's universities is not rebellion but reflection — a mirror of systemic stress, academic fatigue, and moral confusion."

6. Results of the study

The overall results reveal a moderate yet notable prevalence of deviant behavior among university students in Quetta. The most prominent forms of misconduct were academic cheating and class absenteeism, indicating that many students struggle to maintain consistent academic discipline. The data further suggest that emotional stress and academic pressure are the major causes contributing to such behaviors, as students frequently face high expectations with little institutional and psychological support. Although serious forms of aggression were comparatively less common, they were still observed within some university environments. Crucially, a sizable percentage of students expressed a desire for moral guidance and psychological counseling, reflecting an awareness of their challenges and a willingness to seek institutional support for personal and behavioral improvement.

7. Discussion

The findings indicate a moderate to high prevalence of deviant behavior among university students, particularly in the areas of academic dishonesty and absenteeism. This

pattern is consistent with global studies highlighting similar behavioral tendencies among students facing academic pressure and stress. McCabe et al. (2012) observed that many students engage in cheating to cope with performance expectations, while Ang et al. (2010) linked emotional strain to an increase in rule-breaking behaviors. Akers (2017) also emphasized that deviance can become socially accepted through peer influence, and Damron-Bell (2011) associated weak institutional support systems with a higher likelihood of behavioral drift among students.

In the case of Balochistan, these general patterns are intensified by local contextual factors. The region's universities often operate within environments characterized by limited access to counseling services, social and economic instability, and a cultural transition from traditional to digitally influenced social systems. Such conditions can heighten emotional and academic stress, making deviant behavior more likely as students attempt to adapt or cope with their surroundings.

These findings align with earlier research conducted in Pakistan (Mushtaq & Kausar, 2018; Zia et al., 2022), which points to weak ethical guidance and institutional neglect as key contributors to student misconduct. They also resonate with regional Islamic studies, such as those by Rishan et al. (2018), which associate moral disengagement with insufficient religious and ethical reinforcement. Similar trends have been reported in other contexts, including Nigeria and Turkey (Ruwan et al., 2016; Hanimoğlu, 2018), where deviance among students is interpreted not as moral collapse but as an adaptive response to external pressures. Encouragingly, the students in this study expressed a strong willingness to engage in counseling, moral education, and behavioral guidance, reflecting both awareness of their challenges and openness to positive personal and institutional change.

8. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that deviant behavior among university students in Quetta is present at a moderate yet noteworthy level, with academic dishonesty, absenteeism, and disrespectful conduct emerging as the most common forms. These behaviors appear to stem more from emotional strain, academic pressure, and coping challenges than from deliberate delinquency. Importantly, students demonstrated a genuine willingness to seek structured guidance, counseling, and ethical support, reflecting an awareness of their difficulties and a desire for personal improvement.

This situation presents an important opportunity for educational institutions. With effective support mechanisms such as counseling services, moral development programs, and positive academic mentorship, student deviance can be redirected toward constructive pathways. Strengthening such systems has the potential to enhance students' discipline, motivation, and moral identity, contributing to healthier campus environments and more responsible future graduates. Hence, Students do not misbehave because they lack values; often they lack support, direction, and emotional space to breathe. Give them guidance — not judgment.

9. Recommendations of the Study

The following recommendations are put out in light of the study's findings in order to combat deviant behavior and improve moral behavior among university students in Balochistan:

1. Established specialized counseling and mental health support centers at all institutions to help students deal with behavioral issues, emotional stress, and academic pressure.
2. To promote moral growth and responsible citizenship, incorporate ethics and character-building courses into university curricula.
3. Establish senior-junior guidance networks and peer-mentorship programs to foster positive social and educational environments.
4. Promote student-centered, interactive teaching strategies to improve academic engagement and lessen the burden of rote learning.
5. To assist students in overcoming contemporary social and academic obstacles, hold workshops on digital ethics, responsible technology use, and emotional intelligence.
6. Instead of using punishment alone, adopt non-punitive behavior-rehabilitation approaches that emphasize counseling, introspection, and behavior adjustment.
7. Establish campus peace committees and anti-bullying organizations to promote a polite, safe, and collaborative learning environment.
8. Provide training programs for faculty members on professional conduct and ethical leadership, acknowledging that educators play a crucial role in influencing the values and behavior of their students.

10. Limitations of the Study

It is important to take into account the limitations of this study when evaluating the results. First, only Quetta's public universities were included in the study, which would limit how broadly the findings can be applied to other parts of Pakistan or Balochistan. Secondly, while the 412 student sample yielded valuable insights, a bigger sample size might provide a more thorough knowledge of the problem. Lastly, there is need for more in-depth research in the future because the study did not look at differences in deviant conduct by gender or academic departments.

11. Future Research Gaps

By examining a number of linked dimensions, future research could expand on these findings. First, studies that compare several provinces may offer a more comprehensive view of student deviation and point out regional parallels or discrepancies. Furthermore, investigating the psychological elements and individual traits that affect student behavior would advance our knowledge of the root causes. The efficiency of counseling services and emotional intelligence training programs in lowering deviant behavior among university students could also be the subject of future studies. Lastly, future research could examine digital behavior patterns, online ethics, and cyber-related misconduct in higher education settings, considering the growing impact of technology on student life.

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