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## Causes of truancy with special reference to school factors

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**Abstract**

Truancy is any intentional, unjustified, unauthorized, or illegal absence from compulsory education. It is absence caused by own free will of the students, and usually does not refer to proper excused absences. This study attempts to describe the socio-demographic variables and the influence of school variables on truancy. This study was conducted in a government higher secondary school, Karur District. The truant children from sixth standard to twelfth standard constituted the universe of this study. They were identified with the help of the head master and the school teachers. Census method was adopted and complete enumeration of all the 70 students were the sample of this study. The researcher used structured interview schedule as tool to collect the required data from the respondents. The detailed findings of this study is discussed in the full paper.

**Keywords:** Truancy, school variables, attitude, truant behavior

**Introduction**

Truancy is any intentional, unjustified, unauthorized, or illegal absence from compulsory education. It is absence caused by own free will of the students, and usually does not refer to proper excused absences. Another term for truancy is playing hooky; attending school but not going to class is known as skipping class.

There are several factors in a child's home or personal life can lead to truancy. Problems such as alcoholism, divorce, physical or verbal abuse and frequent shifting from place to place also cause prolonged absenteeism. Children from poor economic background are more vulnerable to truancy when compared to children from rich families and parents who are not showing involvement in their child's school life.

A hostile school environment may also cause truancy. Students who do not have friends or are being bullied by classmates are likely to become truants. In addition, some children may face peer pressure also cause absenteeism. The students who lack confidence in their mental abilities or have learning disabilities may also become truants. Truancy is high in schools that have antagonistic relationships between teacher and students and a poor attendance policy.

Absenteeism leads to poor academic performance. Chronic absenteeism results in loss of interest in school and creates negative attitude towards the overall learning environment. Without continuous supervision, truant teens are more likely to get involved in criminal activities, such as vandalism or shoplifting. Truancy is also sometimes resulted in delinquency if students begin associating with gangs. Truancy is also a risk factor for substance abuse.

**Review of literature**

Reid (2006) [3] identifies attendance as the single important factor in measuring students' achievement levels; so it is important that corrective action be taken against chronic absenteeism immediately. The possible causes for the behavior must be identified. The short-term and long-term effects of chronic absenteeism must be informed to the truants. Due significance must be given to solutions towards decreasing, preventing, and/or eliminating the behavior.

According to Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, and Wilson (2007) [8], discussed about the causes which can be positioned within four major categories. These categories include family

factors, school factors, economic influences, and student personality variables. Family factors include parents' education, parental supervision, and household income.

Henry (2007) illustrates that the lower the father's education, the more likely the child is to become truant. The chance is high if the mother was a high school dropout. Additionally, Henry's work proves that the longer a child is uncontrolled and unsupervised after school, the more likely that child is to become a truant. In a recent study on truant offenders in the juvenile justice system, Zhang, *et al.* (2007)<sup>[8]</sup> linked truancy to household income.

School factors that may cause truant behavior include, but are not limited to school environment, class atmosphere, teachers' attitudes and ability to meet each student's diverse needs, and the school's attendance and discipline policy regarding truancy. According to Wilkins (2008)<sup>[7]</sup>, students who attend large schools may feel isolated in their regular school setting, to escape these feelings they skip classes. These students do not feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, or Henry (2007) solicits that 23% of truants choose to absent school because they feel insecure in their school atmosphere. Moreover, if a student does not feel comfortable, secure, or safe, and logically decides to not to go to school.

Tobin (2009)<sup>[4]</sup> suggests that serious punishments worsened truant behavior; thus proving punishment to be counterproductive in the fight against chronic absenteeism. Economic conditions also influence truant behavior include, because of limited living situation and student employment. Henry (2007) indicates that truancy will result in extensive negative implications for multiple levels of society. Truancy can predict maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, and teen-age pregnancy. In the long-term, evidence reveals truancy as a predictor of poor adult outcomes, including violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and Truancy.

## **Materials and methods**

### **Aim of the study**

The study on causes of truancy with special reference to school factors aimed to study the school factors responsible for truant behavior.

### **Research design**

The design of the study is descriptive in nature. It attempts to describe the socio-demographic variables and the influence of school variables responsible for truancy.

### **Universe and sampling**

The study was conducted in a government higher secondary school, Karur District. The truant children from sixth standard to twelfth standard constituted the universe of this study. They were identified with the help of the head master and the school teachers. They were 70 students who are found as having truant behavior are the universe of this study and census method was adopted and complete enumeration of 70 students were the sample of this study. The respondents were chronic absentees having very poor attendance according to the school records.

### **Pilot study and pretest**

In order to know the feasibility of conducting the study, the researcher visited the school and got permission from the Head master and explained about the research objectives. Then with the help of the teachers the researcher identified the universe.

Pre test was conducted with 5 respondents to ensure the fitness of the tool of data. There were no changes taken place in the interview schedule and hence the pretested respondents were included in the sample.

### **Tools of data collection**

The researcher used structured interview schedule as tool to collect the required data from the respondents. The interview schedule included open and closed ended questions covering certain aspects like socio demographic variables and causes of truancy with special reference to school factors.

## **Findings and discussion**

### **Socio-demographic data**

When analyzing the age group of the respondents, more than one third of the respondents (34.2%) were up to 14 years and nearly one third of the respondents (32.9%) ranged between 15-16 years and 17 years respectively. Regarding the sex of the respondents a vast majority of the respondents (84.3%) were male, while remaining few of the respondents were female.

A sizeable proportion of the respondents (95.7%) were Hindus and a negligible proportion of the respondents were Muslims. Regarding the community of the respondents, less than half of the (41.4% and 40%) belonged to schedule caste and backward caste respectively. Remaining respondents were from most backward community. Analyzing the domicile of the respondents, a vast majority of the respondents (88.6%) hailed from rural areas and the remaining respondents were from urban areas.

The analysis on class of study of the respondents revealed the 38.6% of the respondents belonged to eleven and twelfth standard, 32.9% of them belonged to ninth and tenth standard and the remaining respondents are at the class of sixth to eighth standard.

Regarding the type of family of the respondents, a vast majority of the respondents were living in a nuclear family, while less than one fourth of the respondents (18.6%) were from joint family. The analysis on the size of the family of the respondents, 80% of the respondents having 4-6 members in their family, remaining 20% of the respondents have more than 4 members in their family.

### **Attitude towards school environment**

A vast majority of the respondents (85.7%) were of the opinion that they are not having sufficient spacious classrooms and 91.4% of the respondents felt that the physical surroundings such as ventilation and lighting is not at good level. More than 4/5th of the respondents felt that the facilities like playground, laboratory equipment, adequate books in the library, multimedia supported classroom and safe drinking water facilities need improvement.

**Table 1:** Distribution of the respondents' by their reason for truancy with reference to their school related variables

<b>Attitude towards school</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Like	8	11.4
Dislike	62	88.6
<b>Reason for truancy</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Physical punishment	17	27.4
Strict rules and regulations	7	11.3
No recreation	9	14.5
Workload burden	4	6.5
Bullying	8	12.9
Poor study involvement	8	12.9
Long distance between school and home	6	9.7
Lack of academic interest	2	3.2
Unpleasant school atmosphere	1	1.6

From the above table, it is revealed that among the respondents a vast majority of the respondents disliked their school and the remaining meager respondents liked their school. It was followed by the distribution of reasons for their dislike towards their school and it is found that 27.4 % of the respondents expressed that the physical punishment like beating, kneel down and other physical corporal punishments made them to have aversion towards school.

Strict rules and regulations of the schools regarding timing, test, special class and assignment are very heavy to 11.3% of the respondents which made their mind set not to go to school. 14.5% of the respondents opined that there is no space for enjoyment and recreation at school. 6.5% of the respondents felt that it is boredom to study all the subjects and clearing the respective papers.

12.9% of the respondents expressed that they are teased by their classmate which made them to felt very badly and the same percentage of the respondents felt that it is very hard to study with full involvement. 9.7% of the respondents felt that the distance between their house and the school is too long to travel everyday and there is no hostel facility which made them to be chronic absentees. 3.2% of the respondents have lack of academic interest and they wanted to work and earn money for their family. 1.6% of the respondents expressed that they have strong dislike towards their school surroundings, atmosphere and the availability of facilities, and due to that they did not want to attend school.

### Conclusion

Truancy can effectively dealt by family support intervention wherein the family members are informed about the conditions of truant children, they must be guided with what they have to do to deal with their children, efforts to be taken to correct their behavior. Effective parent teachers association is also of another strategy to pave a right way to the truant children. The collaborative support system by both the parents and family will be of greater use to address this issue. Teacher or mentor support intervention is also very useful because in such system the class teacher of the students will keep on monitoring the attendance of the students, their behavior in the classroom, their peculiar attitudes towards their classmates. The mentor's professional rapport with the parents of the affected children and continuous effort to help such students to come out of their problems will be one of the useful interventions.

Appointing professionally qualified social workers as student counselors and school social workers is essential to change the negative attitudes of the students towards study, teachers and school environment. Positive behavior enforcement intervention and continual assessment and

behavioral modification strategies will be successfully employed by the social work professionals. Positive Behavior Support is useful to enhance study involvement and improve the academic interest of the students. Such initiatives would definitely be resulted in reducing the truancy. This process generally involves self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and positive reinforcement. This process also teaches students to take responsibility for their social behavior and academic performance.

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