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Child, Family and School Factors as Correlates of Truancy among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

The alarming rate at which students skipped schools constitute grave consequences for national development. In its attempt to explain the occurrence of this menace in schools, this paper investigated the influence of child, family and school factors on the existence of school truancy. A total of five hundred and forty sampled chronic absentees purposively selected from secondary schools in Oyo State responded to Predictor of Non-School Attendance Questionnaire (PNAQ). The stepwise multiple regression analysis used to test the two research questions posed indicated that the three variables made a joint contribution of about 56% to the prediction of school truancy while each of the variables made significant contribution at .05 level of significance. It was, therefore, recommended that counsellors should endeavour to identify other variables causing school truancy with a view to develop appropriate intervention.

Introduction

Students' failure to attend school has been given diverse label or appellations. These include absenteeism, truancy, non-school attendance behaviour. An x-ray of the way and manner by which scholars and non-scholars alike employ these terms revealed that in some instances there are separate and distinct definitions for the three terms while in some other cases the three terms or two of the terms are synonymously used.

Truancy, which is the focus of this paper, has been subjected to diverse definitions. The failure of the absentee to obtain permission to be absent from the school is regarded to be truancy in the definitions proposed by Osarenren (1996) and Medahunsi (2001). Winconsin (2000), on the other hand, posited that a case of truancy could only be established if the parents failed to provide valid reasons for a student's absence. The submission of Fitzgibbon (1996), however, is that absence in school is truancy, if it is persistent, habitual and unexplained.

The contradictions in the definition of truancy notwithstanding, it is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, which cut across race, sex, and rank and file of all institutions. The alarming rate at which the number of students who engaged in this maladaptive behaviour continues to increase on daily basis calls for concerted efforts against the illicit acts.

In a recent Western Australia Child Health Survey of Schools by Zubrick, *et al.*, (1997) cited in Oerlemans and Jenkins (1998) it was discovered that in three per cent of their schooling, eleven per cent missed at least half a day per week. Of the total number of absences over fourteen per cent were unexplained, that is without a medical certificate or note.

Similarly, in a cross-sectional survey conducted to estimate the magnitude of school absenteeism and determine its causes in a village in Tamilnadi, South India by Anathakrishnan and Nalini (2002), a total of two hundred and seventy eight (278) children (117 girls and 61 boys) were found to be absent during the survey.

It is common phenomenon to see some Nigerian students roaming streets, playing snooker or table tennis, hawking and watching films during school hours. As rightly pointed out by Stoll (1993) the consensus is that the child between the ages of five and sixteen should be in school receiving full-time education, they are not, he strongly contended that the matter needs to be investigated and remedies sought.

The adverse impacts of truancy are quite enormous. Apart from the fact that the absentees cannot benefit from educational programmes of the nation, their non-attendant behaviour, in the submission of Gabb (1997); Garry (2001) is a precursor to other maladaptive behaviour like juvenile delinquency. In a significant dimension too it contributes to the waste of public and private resources. This is because certain amount of money is expended by government and non-government organisations to sustain the educational sector of the nation. If students, therefore, refused to attend school, it amounts to waste of resources. It would even be impossible to place an accurate figure on the cost of poor attendance of students

in cash terms (Galloway, 1985).

The devastating effects of illegal non-appearance of students in school might have led scholars to ponder over aetiological factors responsible for its occurrence. As a result of this, quite a number of scholars have pinned down the root causes of truancy to factors stemming from the child, family/home from where the child attends school and the school which the child attends. Scholars who belong to this school and the school of thought include (Galloway, 1985; Adana 1987; Ioannakis, 1997; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams and Delicandro, 1998). In the same vein, Lansdown (1990) identified family-centred, child-centred and school base theories as theories that have explanations on school attendance behaviour of students. He stated further that while the family-centred theorists argue that children are victims of parental neglect, the child-centred theorists on the other hand, see non-attendance as a healthy response from children who have been made painfully aware of their academic frailty. The school based theories fall into two broad areas. One, there is something aversive in school, which may be a feared teacher or a bullying classmate. Two, the fact that formal education especially at the secondary level is simply irrelevant to a proportion of children and their parents.

In specific terms, Kinder, Harland, Wilkin and Wakefield (1995) studies enumerated factors resident in the child to include lack of self-esteem/social skills, confidence; poor peer relations, lack of concentration/self-management skill. Osarenren (1996) listed poor physical home condition; poor parent-child relationship characterised by hostility; lack of affection and under involvement in the child's welfare; overtly harsh and authoritarian methods of discipline; a high degree of family conflict and disorganisation as factors stemming from the family. In the submission of Project-Stay-In (1991) school curriculum; poor-teacher relationship; insufficient counselling and guidance staff; lack of parent-school communication; too weak or too rigid administration policies among others.

It is however, expedient to note that most advanced explanation for the occurrence of truancy behaviour are invalidated. This is in addition to the fact that there is inadequate empirical information on the predictive values of these three underlying factors of truancy.

Aim of the Study

On the premise of the above background information the present study, therefore, is an attempt to establish the combine and separate contributions of child, family and school factors to the occurrence of school truancy. It is hoped that the findings

of this study would facilitate the development of workable intervention programmes as well as reinforce the need for further research.

Research Question

1. What is the joint contribution of child, family and school factors to the occurrence of school truancy?
2. To what extent did each of the three variables above contribute to school truancy?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted *ex-post facto* research design mainly because the three independent variables have already occurred and were therefore not manipulable.

Subjects

The participants in the study consist of five hundred and forty (540) chronic absentee students [248 males (45.93%) and 292 females (54.07%)] purposively selected from thirty (30) participating secondary school from the three senatorial districts of Oyo State. The table of random numbers was used to select ten (10) participating secondary school from each of the district. The ages of the subjects ranged from 12-21 with a mean age of 15.99 and standard deviation of 2.12. There are one hundred and forty-nine (149) students in the junior secondary school and three hundred and ninety-one (391) in the secondary school.

Instrumentation

The Predictor of Non-School Attendance Questionnaire (PNAQ) developed by Gesinde (2004) was used to elicit information from the subjects about factors influencing school truancy. The questionnaire has two major parts. The first part (Section A) sought personal information from the respondents, such as name, sex, age, class, religion etc. The second part (Section B) is subdivided into five subscale. Each of these sub-scale containing fifteen (15) positively worded items on five aetiological predictors of non-school attendance behaviour namely: child, family, school, society and government. The fifteen (15) items for each sub-scale was designed in such a way that subjects responses ranged from very much like me (5) to very much unlike me (1). The PNAQ has reliability co-efficient of 0.78 based on split-half method of a pilot sample of 100. For the purpose of this study, however, subscale A – C namely child, family and school were used.

Procedure for Data Collection

The PNAQ were administered to the five hundred and forty (540) participants in their various schools. Before the administration, the participants were found to have satisfied the necessary condition for participation i.e. they have missed more than one third of the total expected attendance in the first and second terms of 2001/2002 session. The administration of questionnaire was carried out with assistance from thirty (30) specially trained research assistants. The questionnaires were collected on the spot after administration. Only those correctly filled were used for data analysis.

Analysis of Data and Results

The data collected from the respondents were subjected to stepwise multiple regression analysis in an attempt to provide answer to the two research questions posed by the study. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables I and II below:

Table I: Summary of Regression Analysis on Correlates of Truancy

Regression Analysis	Analysis of Variance					
	Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
R .74556	Regression	3	284000.908	94666.970	223.605	.0000
R ² .55586	Residual	536	226924.685	423.367		
S.E .57560						

*Significant at .05

The display on Table I indicated that the combination of child, family and school variables when taken together against the criterion variable gave a coefficient of multiple regression of R .74556 and unadjusted R square (R^2) of .55586. The standard error (SE) was 0.576 and F-value of 223.605 which was significant at an alpha level of .05. Therefore, when the R^2 value (.55586) is translated into 55.6%, it could be said that about 55.6% of the total variability in students' truant behaviour is accounted for by child, family and school factors.

Table II: Relative Contribution of Child, Family and School Variables to the Prediction of Truancy

Number of Variables	Variable Description	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig.
1.	Child	1.2092	.1060	.4012	11.406	.0000
2.	Family	.3507	.0930	.1166	3.603	.0003
3.	School	1.3671	.1191	.3889	11.480	.0000
	Constant	-6.0709	5.2369		-1.159	

***Significant at .05 level**

The results displayed on table II revealed that the standardised regression weights (B) ranged from 1.3671 to .3507 while the unstandardised regression weights (Beta) ranged from .1166 to .4012. It is also evident from the table that the three independent variables enter the regression equation at .05 level of significance. The t-observed value for each of the predictors showed 11.480 (school); 11.406 (child) and 3.603 (family) in that order.

Discussion

The result obtained from the statistical analysis of the research question indicated that child, family and school variables made a significant contribution of about 55.6% to the prediction of school truancy. This joint contribution could not have come by chance factor because the F-ratio value of 223.605 lends credence to the effectiveness of the three independent variables in predicting truancy among the subjects. On this premise, it could be conveniently concluded that about 55.6% of the variance in school truancy is accounted for by the combination of the three factors. The outcome of this research question in effect confirmed the submission of Galloway (1985), Adana (1987); Ioannakis (1997); Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams and Dalicandro (1998) who reported the effectiveness of the three independent variables in the explanation of the incidence of school truancy.

The findings from the research question two unlike the first delved into the separate contribution of the three independent variables. From the results, the three variables independently made significant contribution to the prediction of school truancy though at different degrees. The most potent predictor happened

to be school factor (t-ratio = 11.480) closely followed by child factor (t-ratio = 11.406) and family factor (t-ratio = 3.603).

This, therefore, implies that family variable made the least contribution to the prediction of school truancy when child, family and school variables are combined and tested at .05 level of significance. This discovery did not come as a surprise because it upheld Reid (1983) earlier findings that persistent absentees lay the blame of their absences on the school rather than themselves or their home background.

The outcome of these two research questions is not unexpected. This is because truancy is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. The outcome of this study, which confirm the combine, and separate contributions of three diverse factors only affirm its complexity and multi-dimensional nature. Besides this, many families are in disarray because of economic crunch/reforms of the present government in Nigeria. The aftermath effect of this is that children are forced to either fend for themselves or contribute to economic needs of the family at the expense of school attendance. The problem is also being compounded by the absence of standing legislation in the country, which aims at halting students' illegal absence or preventing the family from contributing to students' failure to attend school. Similarly, the present condition of facilities, teachers' appointment policy, teachers' commitment to work, nature of discipline in school and so on could not hinder school from making significant contribution to students' illegal absence from school.

Implications for Counselling Practice and Recommendations

The findings of this study have a number of implications for counselling practice. One, it has clearly demonstrated that a single factor cannot adequately explain the incidence of school truancy. Galloway (1985) stressed this when he succinctly stated that there are no shortages of ideas on the reasons for poor school attendance. The explanation frequently seems to reflect the discipline and/or the bias of the writer (p67). Similarly, the fact that the joint contribution of child, family and school variables could only be used to explain about 56% of the incidence of school truancy implies that there are other variables masterminding its occurrence apart from those identified by this study. On this premise, it is recommended that:

- counsellors, whose responsibility is to correct maladaptive behaviour of students, should engage in further studies that would expose all variables promoting the existence of school truancy; and

- counsellors are also enjoined to develop school truancy eradication packages for all institutions of learning since Kaeser (1985) has pointed out that causes of illegal absence exist in almost every school.

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