Factors Contributing to Truancy in Secondary Schools in Meru South District, Kenya

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Abstract- Truancy is deliberate absence from school on the part of learners without the knowledge and consent of parents. The aim of this study was to establish the factors that contribute to student's absenteeism and their effects in secondary schools in Meru South District, Kenya. Pilot study was done in three schools from the neighboring Maara district. The study collected views from principals, class teachers, counseling teachers and form two students, purposive and stratified random sampling method was used to select a sample size 298 students 8 Principal 8 counseling teachers and 8 class teachers. Questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analyzed quantitatively using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 11.5 for windows and presented using frequency distribution table, bar charts and percentages. The study found that unsupportive school culture; family, social economic and psychological factors significantly contributed to truancy. The effects of truancy were identified as poor academic performance for the truants, their class and school the school, wastage of learning time, dropping out of school, poverty to the individual and family in future, involvement with delinquent behavior, family instability, social maladjustment and insecurity in the family. The study recommended that education managers hold regular meetings with principals and teachers to sensitize them on truancy and discuss ways of dealing with truancy in their schools.

Index Terms- truancy. Factors contributing and effects

I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the factor that contributes to Truancy among Secondary School Learners. It also investigated the effects of truancy. According to Kee (2001) Truancy is deliberate absence from school on the part of learners without the knowledge and consent of parents or absence of learners from school without a reasonable or acceptable excuse. According to Maynard (2006) a truant is a student who might be absent from school altogether or from a particular lesson with or without parents knowledge. Truancy is therefore absence from school, class or lesson without the knowledge of the teacher or parent. It can be due to dislike for the school environment, the teachers or fellow students. It can also be as a result of inability to cope with academic pressure from teachers, parents and fellow students.

Reid (2000) provides a summary of research findings dealing with the home background factors which are related to truancy and proposes that truants are most likely to come from broken homes in which divorce, separation cohabiting and mixed siblings are often the norm, families where the fatter or father figure is always away from home for long periods; Families with above average number of children, families living with overcrowded conditions, Families where parents are unable to cope with a single or variety of social, Pathologies that threaten their life styles and lead to abnormal conditions within the homes; These factors includes alcoholism, physical illness, violence, abuse, family conflicts and associated stress factors; families where parents are un cooperative and or hostile to authority in general and are frequently hostile to external professional support, including educators, principals and educational social work interventions; Families where the parents are not interested with their children's progress at school; families where the parents are passive victims of a very poor environment and unsure of their constitutional rights; families that do not insist on their off spring prompt attendance at school, as manifested by their children over sleeping, being late and failing to turn up for school bus.

According to Reid (2000) Truants are likely to emanate from: Families at the lower end of the social scale where the father and or the mother are un employed or perform unskilled or semi skilled work, Families on low income, families where paternal un employment or irregular employment is the norm, families with severe financial and or financial management difficulties, homes caught in a poverty trap in which the culture of social exclusion in the norm, homes where children are poorly clothed and eat cheap, low quality food and families with transport difficulties especially in rural areas. Maynard (2006) suggests that it is difficult for educators who have been raised with middle class social values, to appreciate the full extent and meaning of deprivation of some of the learners they teach. The daily lifestyle for many truants is one in which they receive little or no parental support, guidance and encouragement a home, since their parents in many instances tend to display anti- education values. As many truants live in families in which the father or mother or both were truants themselves, it is not surprising. Maynard (2006) further asserts that after visiting homes of truants it became clear that they have limited resources with which to do their school work, have little space to do their home work and frequently live in an atmosphere where reading literature is unusual. In most cases they also form part of social environment dominated by television, alcohol and drug abuse. Gitonga (1997) investigated the effect of truancy on academic achievements among marginalized urban children in and found that the high rates of absenteeism and truancy, in Kenya could be caused by early drive for money, Students Parental Poverty, and Lack of school levies or low educational motivation by parents. Rohrman (1993) cited the home life of truants as often characterized by overclouded living conditions, frequent relocations and weak parent – child relationship. Older children may be asked to remain at home to care for younger siblings or

work to supplement family income. This study sought to establish whether family factor contribute to student's truancy in secondary schools in Meru South district.

According to Smith (1996) school system itself may be an important influence in generating truancy and that there may be identifiable factors within school that are closely associated with development of truancy behavior amongst school children. Okeefe (1994) found that there is a body of theoretical and empirical literature which looks at school itself as a cause of truancy. Bosworth (1994) reported that school personnel usually attribute truancy to individual, family and community factors outside their control, which lead to hopelessness and lack of effort to change variables. This was particularly unfortunate because Bosworth's research showed school factors to be the major cause of truancy. Maynard (2006) found that learners who are truants said that attending school was one of their lowest priorities for their time. To Maynard it is important for all learners to feel they fit with their peer group. However, truants tend to see themselves as outcasts and rejected at school. Most of the learners, who participated in Maynard (2006) focus discussions, said they often felt confused and did not know where to turn to for help. To Maynard truants consider social factors to be one of the main reasons why they do not attend school. Bell (1994) observed that students and family factors may contribute to truancy, but found that the primary cause was the school. This lead to a conclusion that several contributing factors of truants behaviour are within the schools control including areas like policies, rules, curriculum and educators characteristic. According to Brown (1983) truants feel that educators are authoritarian, unfair and excessively concerned within minor rules, and that administrators are punitive and in effective in their handling of truancy. O Keefe (1994) found that educational unpleasantness and antipathy towards certain learners played significant role in their demonstration of truants behaviour. He found that fear of education may be contributory factors for learners deliberate absence from school. According to Epstein and Sheldon (2002) truancy is more prevalent in schools that have inconsistent enforcement of truancy policy, poor interaction between parents and school personnel, unsupportive educators, unchallenging class home work assignment and low sensitivity to diversity of issues. Truancy has also been linked to differences in teaching and learning styles, educator's absenteeism, and poor learner educator relation, low educator expectations and inconsistency in discipline (Maynard, 2006). This study assessed the school factors that contribute to student truancy in Meru South district.

Psychological factors that contribute to Truancy include the self concept of academic ability, introversion, isolation and phobia. Campbell and Agra (1959) expressed the view that truants are often found to have excessive anxiety and fears which are expressed as fears of being devoured by bullies of sexual menacing children of opposite sex or arousal of sexual longings. Benson (1980) found that most of the person truant shows withdraw irritability and aggressive behaviour. Thus fear, anxiety paranoid systems, compulsive obsessions can be linked to truancy. Brown (1987) postulates that self esteem may be described as the way individuals perceive and value them selves as human beings. It emanates form life experience and is grounded to a large degree on perceptions that we may have of

how others in our life – the world deal with us. From this it is clear that particularly the school experience may impact on how learners, especially at early adolescent development, findings about themselves may be shaped. Low self esteem will make students doubt their academic ability, feel disliked by others and hence absent themselves from school (Reid, 1982). In 1932 Broadwin (in Hyne & rolling, 2002) indentified a form of truancy characterized by neuroticism. The main features included worrying about safety of Mum at home, fear of education, nervousness and running back home from school. Svendson (1941) noted that there is type of emotional disturbances in children, associated with great anxiety that leads to serious absence from school.

Poor performance in school may lead to anxiety and stress and hence affects one altitudes to school Raju (1973) found that poor performance discourages children to an extent of withdrawing from school. Truancy is the first symptom of one intending to withdraw from school. More often children play truants in order to draw attention to parents and teachers of their wish to withdraw from school. Eshiwani (1984) in a study of differences in perception of persistent absentees and truants towards teacher and parents related cases in Kajiando, Kenya concluded that children with lower intellectual abilitymay be more persistently absent than those with higher intellectual ability. Jardine (1984) found that most truants expressed the opinion that they were not capable of doing well in their final examinations. This study sough to establish the psychological factor that contribute to students truancy in secondary schools in Meru South district.

Tyerman (1968) observes that poor attendance makes poor progress which leads to difficulties in forming friendly links with other students. So the truant is unhappy at home, unpopular at school and unsuccessful in the class work. According to Marklud (1973) students who play truant are generally difficult, anxious and highly sensitive. They try to escape from reality, are low status in class and have difficulties dealing with other people. Clyne (1966) found that absence from school can lead to lack of such educational benefits as the children intelligence might have entitles them to. Poor school attendance can make the difference between passing and qualifying in exams. Clyne further observes that many truants who do not obtain jobs due to their poor performance in school become delinquents. Tyerman (1968) observes that truancy has been a major problem in our schools for it worries both parents and teachers. Tyreman further argues that to keep worm truants go to cinemas and shops where they may steal the admissions fee or be tempted by goods on display. Unable to have a meal at home or in school may make them steal money for food. Glenn (2004) observes that non school attending students are place at a disadvantage both socially and academically, missing critical stages of interaction and development with peers whilst simultaneously minimizing the likelihood of academic progress and success. In short term this would compound the uses of low self esteem, social isolation and dissatisfaction that may have triggered non attendance in the first place. Wheatly and Spillane (2001) observes that absence can lead to cumulative disadvantage in subjects that have hierarchical or developmental sequence. If students are absent when a key concept or prerequisite is taught they are likely to have increasing difficulty as the course progresses in turn. This

may lead to further absence as these students decides to absent from classes where they feel they cannot cope or where their peers and teachers perceive them to be having difficulty. Bucci (2002) argues that non attending students tend to leave school earlier and as a result, truancy is associated with unemployment, low status occupation and less career stability. It is also true that those with decreased skills levels and decreased opportunities for labour market participation are statistically more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, ill health, drugs and alcohol abuse and family break down. Bucci (2002) further found that those who leave school early run the strong risk of exclusion from reciprocal relationship in the community, incomplete or damaged rites to adult hood and personal vulnerability which can trigger substance abuse and criminal acts. Glenn 2204) explains that in this manner non attendance can jeopardize independence and well being in the medium and long term. Truancy therefore cost communities dearly both economically and in terms of social cohesion. Manson and Edie (1998) found that students who continued to be truants had a combination of additional deviant behaviors' including substance abuse detention, arrests and leaving the family earlier than age 18 years while in secondary school truancy was associated with juvenile delinquency. According to Patchin (2004) chronic school absenteeism is a precursor to undesirable out comes in adolescence including academic failure school dropout and juvenile delinquency. This study sought to establish the effects truancy in Meru South district secondary school.

METHODOLOGY

The study sought to establish the factors that contribute to students' truancy in secondary schools in Meru South District, Kenya. The study was conducted in public secondary schools. Meru South district has 30 schools with a population of 1,650 form two students 30 principals, 30 class teachers and 30 counseling teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 298 form 2 students, 8 Principals 8 Counseling teachers and 8 form 2 class teachers using a fomular suggested by Kathuri and Pals (1993). Questionnaires were used as the sole instruments of data collection. Piloting was done in the neighbouring Maara district in order to assess the clarity and determine the reliability of the instruments. The items of the questionnaire that were found to be inadequate were modified thus improving quality of the research instruments. This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The independent variables are the factors contributing to truancy, the dependent variable is truancy while the intervening variables are Guidance and Counseling and government policy on truancy. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5 computer programme and is presented quantitatively using descriptive statistics like percentages, frequency count and bar charts.

RESULTS
Factors that Contribute to Truancy

This section established the factors that contribute to truancy and its effect in order to meet the first objective the respondents were given a questionnaire with a listing of possible factors contributing to truancy.   Open ended questions were also provided to enable them list other factors. The responses for factors contributing to truancy are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Factors that contribute to Truancy

	Responses on factors contributing to truancy		Student %	Class Teachers	GSC Teachers	Principals
1	Inability to finish assignments	263	88.2	37.5	50	50
2	Poor student-teacher relationship	248	83.2	25	50	25
3	Hatred to teacher and negative attitude to subjects	208	69.8	50	64.67	75
4	Lack of interest in school work	198	66.4	100	87.5	87.5
5	Peer influence	187	62.7	75	100	50
6	Attraction to opposite sex	184	61.7	50	62.5	37.5
7	Inability to cope with academic performance	174	58.2	37.5	50	100
8	Threat and bullying by others	168	56.4	7.5	37.5	37.5
9	Drugs & substance abuse	161	54.1	37.5	50	37.5
10	Family problems	150	50.3	50	75	100
11	Strict demanding school environment	144	48.3	12.5	37.5	25
12	Poverty lack of basic necessities	132	44.2	50	75	25
13	Attraction to films, movies and discos	122	40.9	37.5	37.5	87.5
14	School adjustment problems	108	36.2	25	37.5	37.5
15	Delinquency	98	32.8	37.5	50	75
16	Attraction to games remarked	41	13.8	11	37.5	37.5

From Table 1 88.2% student respondents suggested that inability to finish assignment was a factor that contributed to truancy while the responses of class teachers was 37.6%, counseling teachers 50% and principals 50%. On poor relationship between teachers and students as a factor 83.2% of students suggested it, 25% class teacher, counseling teacher 50%

and principals 25%. Hatred and negative attitude to some subjects had 69.8 students, 50% class teachers, 66.7% counseling teacher and 75% principals' responses. Responses for lack of interest in school work were as follows students 66.4, class teachers 100%, counseling teachers 87.5 and principals 87.5%. Peer influence 62.7 from students, 75% class teachers, counseling teachers 100% and principal 50%. Attraction to opposite sex was supported by 62.7% students, 50% class teachers, 62.5% counseling teacher and 37.5% principals. Inability to cope with academic performance had 58.3 students, 37.5 class teacher 50% counseling teachers and 100% principals' responses. 56.4% students, 37.5%, class teachers, 37.5 counselors and 37.5 principals responded to threats and bulling as a factor contributing to truancy. Drug and substance abuse was selected by 54.1 students, 37.5% principals. Family problems as a factor was selected by 50.3 students 50% class teachers' 75% counseling teacher and 100% principals.

Responses on poverty were as follows students 44.2% class teacher 50% counseling teachers 75% and principals 25%.

Attraction to films scored 40.9% from students 37.5% from class teacher, counseling teacher, counseling teachers and principals. Responses to school adjustment problems were; students 36.2, class teachers 25% and counselors and principals 37.5%. Delinquency as a factor was selected by 32.8% students, 37.5% class teachers, 50% counseling teachers and 75% principal. Responses on attraction to games in market place were 13.8%, students, 25% class teachers, 37.5% counseling teachers and principals.

Effects of Truancy

The second objective of the study was to establish the effects of truancy. Respondents were given a questionnaire with suggestions of the possible effects as well as open ended question to enable them list other effects outside the suggested ones. The responses they gave on the effects of truancy are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: <u>Effects of truancy</u>

	Effects of truancy		Student %	Class Teachers	GSC Teachers	Principals
1	Poor academic performance	258	86.6	100	100	100
2	Wastage of learning time	251	84.2	87.5	87.5	100
3	Poor class & school performance	248	83.2	75	37.5	100
4	Poor relationship with teachers	245	82.2	87.5	75	100
5	Parents eventually dropping out of school	234	78.5	75	87.5	100
6	Poor health	183	61.4	62.5	87.5	75
7	Poverty to ……. & family in future	174	58.4	50	37.5	62.5
8	Involvement in delinquent behavior	168	56.4	50	87.5	87.5
9	Family instability in future	156	52.3	62.5	37.5.5	67.5
10	Social maladjustment	138	46.3	50	75	50
11	Stealing % robbery in later life	129	43.3	62.5	37.5	37.5
12	Insecurity in the society	118	39.6	50	37.5	37.5

From Table 2, 88.6% of students, 100% class teachers, counseling teachers and principals indicated that truancy affects academic performance. Responses on that truancy affects learning time were students 84.2, class teachers 87.5 counseling teachers 87.5 and principals 100%. On poor class and school performance responses were students 83.2% class teachers 75% counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 100%. The selection for poor relationship with teachers and parents was student 82.2, class teacher 87.5 counseling teacher 75% and principals 100%. Responses that truants eventually drop out of school were 78.5% from students, class teachers' 75% counseling teachers 87.5% and principals 100%. That truancy can eventually lead to poor health responses were 61.4 from students, 62.5 class teachers, 87.5 counseling teachers and 75% from principals.

Responses that truancy would lead to poverty to individual and family in later life were as follows students 58.4 class teachers 50%, Counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 62.5%. Involvement with delinquent behaviour was selected by 56.4%, students 50% class teachers, 87.5% counseling teachers and 87.5 principals.

Responses for family sustainability in future were students 52.3%, class teachers 62.5%, counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 75%. Social maladjustment responses were students 46.3%, class teachers 50%, counseling teacher 75% and principals 50%. 43.3% students, 62.5% class teachers, 37.5% counseling teachers and 37.5% principals selected stealing and robbery in later life. Lastly, responses to insecurity in the society were students 39.6, class teachers 50%, counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 37.5.

Discussion

In relation to summary of the findings the main factors contributing to a truancy were identified by the respondents as follows; Inability to finish assignment, poor student-teacher relationship, hatred to teacher and negative attitude to subjects, lack of interest in school work, peer influence, attraction to members of opposite sex, inability to cope with academic performance, threats and bullying by others, drug and substance abuse and family problems. All these factors got over 50% responses from the students and from counseling teachers.

The factors suggested above are in agreement with other researchers and they can be grouped into socio economic, psychological, unsupportive school culture, poor academic and family factors. Brown (1987) findings that school experiences may impart on how learners feel about themselves and if they develop low self esteem, they will doubt their academic ability. This further makes them feel disliked by others and hence absent themselves from school. The findings in this study are very similar because the key factors identified that is, inability to finish assignment, poor student teacher relationship, lack of interest in school work, inability to cope with academic work as well as threats and bullying are all school experiences and were very strongly identified by students as major factors causing truancy. It is also in agreement with O'Keeffe (1994) findings that the educators' unpleasantness and antipathy towards certain learners played a significant role in their demonstration of their truant behaviour and that fear of educators is a main contributory factor in learners' deliberate absence from school.

The findings also concur with those of Grazer (1959) psychological factors. Like excessive anxiety, fears of being devoured by bullies, sexual menacing children of opposite sex or arousal of sexual longing contribute to truancy. In this study factors like peer pressure, attraction to members of opposite sex as well as threats of bullying from other students hand over 50% responses. All these are psychological.

Finding from this study further concurs with Reid (2000) that family factors contribute to truancy. All the respondents suggested by over 50% responses that family problem was a contributory factor to truancy. According to Reid (2000) these family problems may include: broken homes in which divorce separation and cohabiting where mixed siblings is a norm.

Concerning effects of truancy, this study concurred with the findings of Glenn (2004) that truants are placed at a disadvantage both socially and academically because they miss a critical stage of interaction and development with peers whilst simultaneously minimizing the likelihood of academic progress and success. All the respondents in our study suggest that truancy not only affects the truants' academic performance but also their social life now and in future. The effects with high responses included poor academic performance, wastage of learning time, poor school and class performance, poor health, poverty to individual and family in future, involvement with delinquent behaviour, family instability, social maladjustment, stealing and robbery as well as insecurity in the society.

Conclusion

With regard to the findings of the study, truancy is still a challenge in secondary schools. Respondents were able to identify the factors contributing to truancy in secondary schools. The factors can be grouped into school factors, psychological, family and sociological factors.

School factors include; inability to finish assignment; poor student-teacher relationship, hatred to teachers and negative attitude to some subjects, lack of interest in schoolwork; inability to cope with academic performance, threats and bullying by other students, strict and demanding school environment, school adjustment problems. The school management needs to address its problem of truancy very closely. The education managers like the District Education Officers as well as County Director of Education should hold regular meetings with principals and teachers to sensitize them on the challenge and discuss on ways of dealing with truancy in their schools. Principals should make truancy an agenda in their staff meeting in order to discuss the causes of truancy and ways of reducing the challenges.

Class teachers should also be encouraged play their role effectively. Their responses showed that majority of them were not aware of some of the factors contributing to truancy. For example on poor teacher-student relationship while 83.2 students selected it as a cause of truancy only 50% of counseling teachers and 25% of class teachers and principals selected it. They should follow up truants and seek to know why the absent from school. Student counseling programs should be developed to address personal organization; study skills, time management skills as well as exam taking techniques to enable students finish their assignments, cope and improve on their academic performance. This way they will develop interest in schooling and stop absenting from school.

The principals should guide the teachers in creating a friendly school environment to attract the student attention as a way of curbing truancy. Teachers need to make the students comfortable by treating them as their own children. School programs should be student friendly and as much as possible students, especially; prefects should be involved in decision making. This will make them own the programs and policies of the school and hence be supportive to them.

Truancy caused by school factors can also be minimized by developing and strengthening peer counseling in secondary schools. Peer counselors understand their colleagues very well and if well trained, they can help them deal with the challenges that make them absent from school. Peers are able to prepare and refer the students they cannot counsel to either the class teacher or the counseling teacher.

The second category of factors contributing to truancy is psychological. Psychological factors include peer pressure, attraction of members of opposite sex, drug and substance abuse. All these are as a result of student's developmental stage that at this time they are in adolescence stage. At this stage they are going through rapid physical, psychological, cognitive and emotional changes which lead them to all the above attraction. Students should be helped by teachers and school management at large to understands themselves and what they are going through. Teachers should have session with students to help them understand their sexuality and how to deal with their uncontrolled sexual desire which makes them escape from school to satisfy it. Class teachers should also have regular meetings to discuss the effects of negative peer influence as well as help them embrace the positive peer pressure. They should also guide them on the effects of drug and substance abuse. It is hoped that this would minimize truancy as students would settle in school instead of escaping to look for drugs.

Family factors were also seen as major causes of truancy. The church and other social welfare groups should come out strongly to strengthen the family institution. Divorce, separation, remarriage and mixed siblings are on the increase and this is one of the major factors contributing to truancy. Most of the student from such home environment get stressed and sometimes loose meaning to life. This makes it difficult to concentrate in

academic work in school and so they find solace in keeping away from school or class.

Social economic is another category of factors contributing to truancy. Respondents indicated that poverty or lack of basic necessities, attraction to films movies; discos as well as games in the market place were causing truancy. This factor needs to be addressed by the government and the school. Partly the government has addressed the challenge by introducing free secondary education. It can go further to enforce compulsory education by taking legal action for parents and students flaunting the law. The school through the principal may also introduce guided social amenities like films, pool games and discos in school. This will encourage student to remain in school and attend lesson because after all they will get some entertainment in school.

On effects of truancy, respondents strongly supported that truancy has negative effects on not only the truant but also the society. The major effects that respondents identified were poor academic performance, wastage of learning time, poor class and school performance, dropping out of school, poverty to the individual and family in future, involvement with delinquent behaviour, family instability, social maladjustment and insecurity in the family. To alleviate these effects, Guidance and Counseling need to be strengthened by the school, at home and the community at large. School should involve the parents of the truants to jointly counsel these truants. The principal should also organize regular parents meetings to sensitize them on the effects of truancy as well as train them on some basic counseling skills to enable them handle their truant children.

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