



TRUANCY BEHAVIOUR: IMPLICATIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS AMONG OUT-OF- SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

Truancy is the deliberate avoidance of school without a valid justification. It is a prevalent issue among secondary school students in Nigeria. It is a major challenge facing the educational system, affecting students' academic performance, school discipline, and overall national development. The truancy problem has manifested in different forms. Some students deliberately refuse to attend the full days of school, some students may attend school but run away after break, while some students arrive at school after break. Likewise, some students attend school and stay in class for lessons that they have an interest in, but internationally refuse to stay in class for lessons that they do not have an interest in due to the teacher's hostile attitude or hatred of the subject. Also, some students attend school but do not go to their classes at all. Therefore, this paper explains the concept of truancy, causes, types, implications and psychological interventions for students with truancy. Lastly, the conclusion and recommendations were provided.

Keywords: Truancy Behaviour, Implications, Psychological Interventions, secondary school students

Introduction

Truancy is fast becoming a serious problem that can result in sociological and psychological maladjustment. It is a complex problem resulting from environmental influences, personality development and educational opportunities. Truancy is accompanied by a wide range of other mischievous behaviours that can result in adult criminality; most cases of adult criminality have a previous history of involvement in truancy behaviour (Akorede et al., 2022; Ronke & Kamil, 2024). Truancy is a delinquent and antisocial behaviour; truancy is an act of staying off school, which is one of the several kinds of antisocial behaviours (Gungon & Kocturk, 2023). Truancy is one of the social maladjustment challenges facing secondary school adolescents. This is fast becoming a critical issue to all stakeholders in educational sectors, such as counsellors, psychologists, teachers, parents, school administrators and social health workers. If this is left unchecked, it can undermine the educational objectives of any country. According to Hasan et.al (2023), behaviour disorders are divided into two broad categories, which include: internalising behaviour problems and externalising behaviour problems. The internalising behaviour problems are those behaviour disorders that are typically manifested inwardly by the students, which include anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, withdrawal tendency, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and so on. Meanwhile, the externalising behaviour problems are those behaviour disorders that have been manifested outwardly by the students, which include aggressive disorder, defiant disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct disorder, truancy, stealing tendency, among others. Although students with externalising behaviour problems are those whom teachers are more likely to refer for appropriate supervision and special treatment. While students with internalising behaviour problems are often just as much at risk for school failure if care is not properly taken. Truancy is one of the externalised behaviour disorders, a problem which seriously and negatively affects students' schooling in particular and their life progress in general (Bulama & Bosede, 2016).

Concept of Truancy

Truancy has been conceptualised as unjustified intentional absence from school; truancy is any absence from school without an acceptable reason (Baker et al., 2001). Sheldon (2002) is of the view that a truant student leaves home but does not get to school or escapes from school or class to engage in any other activities that

capture his imagination. Indeed, it is a type of deviant behaviour exhibited by some students in schools without formal permission from the school administration or the authority governing the institution. Truancy is any intentional, unjustified, unauthorised, or illegal absence from compulsory education. It is a deliberate absence by a student's own free will (though sometimes adults or parents will allow and/or ignore it) and usually does not refer to legitimate excused absences, such as ones related to medical conditions (Byer & Kuhn, 2007).

Truancy refers to unauthorised absence from school during the compulsory school-going years. Several students skip school for their own reasons and lose a lot in the education system. Different schools have various definitions for truancy, but the number of truants is on the increase. Truancy has been linked with delinquent behaviour in students and negative behaviour later in adulthood. The students who engage in truancy in school are more likely to exhibit destructive behaviour and poverty in adulthood. The problem with truancy is widespread. The trend of truancy seems very fashionable to the extent that truants share their ideas on how to skip classes on the internet. The truants waste their time because they miss an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge for use in life and future careers. Moreover, the students who cut classes waste their parents' money. The problem of truancy often is a symptom of underlying problems that cause students to skip classes (Baker & Jansen, 2000). Truancy has been conceptualised from different perspectives by different scholars. Truancy means staying away from school without the permission of parents and the school authority by students. According to Nwafor (2024), truancy is defined as a deliberate absence from school without parental knowledge. In the same vein, Yankyerah (2023) said that truancy is when a student stays away without permission. A student who absents himself/herself from school without permission from school and home is a truant. Tanko and Ajaji (2023) observed that irregular school attendance is interchangeably used with truancy, which occurs when students fail to attend school without permission from the school. Similarly, Agu et al. (2023) stated that truancy among students is abnormal and results in absenteeism. Truants lack the skills to maintain friendships, hence they are isolated by peers. Truancy may refer to students who attend school but do not go to classes. According to Alhassan et al. (2021), truancy refers to any unauthorised and undocumented absence or abstention from school, disregarding the school's norms and regulations. Truancy can manifest in many ways, such as consistently arriving late or being absent for part or all of a school day. Truancy is a multifaceted problem that can arise from several factors, including the person's family and school structures. Individual conditions can increase the rate of truancy, such as learning disability, exposure to bullying, and mental health problems. With regard to family structure's contribution to truancy behaviour, this is very common among low-income families and single-parent households. Truancy behaviour is also prevalent among those living in more disadvantaged areas, such as slums. Truancy is more prevalent among students who have inadequate parental assistance with their schoolwork (Esther et al., 2023).

Types of truancy

There are different types of truant behaviours, which include occasional truancy, casual truancy and habitual truancy.

1. **Habitual Truancy** is the type of truancy that occurs when a student (truant) is constantly and continually absent from school without the due knowledge or consent of his parents and school authorities. Habitual truants are mainly those students who miss numerous full days of school academic activities. Their frequent absenteeism has become a regular behaviour or habit. It is important to note that students who are habitual truants have high chances of falling behind in their school work, a decline in their academic performance and even lose their attachment or positive attitude towards school.
2. **Casual Truancy** is a type of truancy that occurs when a student's absence from school is by chance. This type of truancy or unexcused absence from school is not regular and constant but happens by chance. For instance, students who remained lurking within the sound of the school bell so that they could attend those lessons which interested them.
3. **Occasional Truancy** is a type of truancy that occurs when a student is not constantly and continually absent from school. In this type of truancy, students' attendance is irregular or not regular. For instance, a student whose mother refuses to go to school and was kept at home to help care for

siblings, and the child taken out of school for an out-of-season family holiday, are all instances of occasional truancy (Igbokwe, 2023).

Other types of truancy include:

Chronic Truancy: Chronic truancy occurs when a student repeatedly and regularly skips school without a valid reason. This type of truancy is characterised by a pattern of extended absences over a period of time.

Intermittent Truancy: Intermittent truancy refers to sporadic absences from school. Unlike chronic truancy, intermittent truants may not have a consistent pattern of skipping school but still have several unexplained or unauthorised absences.

Parent-Enabled Truancy: In some cases, parents or guardians may knowingly or unknowingly enable their children's truancy. This could happen when parents allow or encourage their children to stay home without a legitimate reason.

School-Avoidance Truancy: School-avoidance truancy occurs when a student intentionally skips school to avoid specific challenges or stressors at school, such as bullying, academic difficulties, or social anxiety.

Medical Truancy: Medical truancy happens when a student is absent from school due to health-related reasons but fails to provide proper documentation or follow the necessary procedures to be excused from school.

Class-Cutting: Class-cutting refers to skipping individual classes within the school day. Students may attend some classes but deliberately avoid others.

Skipping School Events: This type of truancy occurs when students skip important school events, such as assemblies, exams, or presentations, without a valid excuse.

Truancy Due to Family Circumstances: In certain situations, students may be absent from school due to family emergencies, financial issues, or other unavoidable circumstances. While these reasons may be genuine, they can still contribute to truancy if not properly communicated to the school.

Causes of Truancy

According to Omenebele and Jude (2023), the causes of truancy behaviour among secondary school students are classified under six main categories, which are as follows:

1. Family: It is obvious that the family as an institution has various functions to perform. By discharging their duties, parents indirectly fulfil the needs of their children. There are certain significant causes: social, economic and psychological, which contribute immensely to truancy behaviour in children.

(a) Social Causes: the social problem of one generation is the psychological problem of the next generation. Children coming from homes that have been broken due to death, divorce, desertion, separation, ., are often maladjusted in their behaviours. Drunkard parents, strained marital relationships of spouses, quarrels and fights between spouses are also responsible for developing frustration in children. Such children can become truants.

(b) Economic Causes: The occupational status of parents, problems of unemployment, poverty and low economic status breed truancy among children. Under such circumstances, parents are unable to satisfy the needs of their children, which eventually leads to frustration, aggression and hostile behaviours in growing children.

(c) Psychological causes: Psychological instability of parents is directly responsible for the truancy behaviour of their offspring. If parents are over-possessive, highly authoritative, unrealistic in their expectations, incompatible, abusive and prejudiced, this will have a deleterious effect on their children

When the psychological needs are not met, children get frustrated and develop problems like nail biting, daydreaming, fear of the dark, lack of self-confidence, and flickering of eyes. Those parents who threaten, nag, punish and humiliate their children before others are directly responsible for their children's isolated and rejected behaviours.

2. Personal causes: It is observed that individuals who are physically, mentally and visually handicapped react abnormally to the situation. Even children with partial deficiencies, such as defective eyesight, poor hearing and impaired speech, may find it difficult to adjust under normal situations. When they cannot score well academically compared to their peers, they develop an inferiority complex. Finally, they isolate themselves from others and indulge in truancy behaviours.

3. School-related causes: Children spend roughly seven hours a day in school. When growing children do not find ways and means to channel their energy purposefully in school, they exhibit truancy behaviour. The school authorities, including teachers, should organize various curricular and cocurricular activities to suit the needs of growing children and also If for whatever reason students feel as though they've fallen behind at school because of consistent truanting, long term illness or other reasons it can cause additional absences whereby students avoid school as they feel as though they have fallen too far behind, this is a vicious cycle

4. Teacher-related causes: An imbalanced personality in teachers has an impact on the behaviours of children. If the teacher is unfair, biased or not involved with the students, and also the reason for skipping school can be as simple as not enjoying a certain aspect of school, either classmates, the teacher or the subject. And also, it certainly affects the mental health of the children in the school, which can make them dislike school.

5. Peer-group-related causes: Another important factor that disturbs the psycho-equilibrium of students is an unhealthy relationship with their peer group. Normally, students ask earnestly for recognition from their peer group during later childhood and adolescence. However, popularity among the peer group depends on various factors, such as good looks, athletic abilities, social class, academic performance, and special talents. If the student lacks these qualities, they may fail to get status among his/her peer group and get frustrated and maladjusted.

6. Community causes

The community plays a major role in the success of a school. Communities that do not support schools often experience the problem of truancy. Negative influences in the community, such as substance abuse and gang activity, can lead to truancy. Another factor in the community that can cause truancy is a lack of adequate transportation, especially if the schools are far from students' homes. Upheavals in the community also cause truancy (Jay & Mary, 2012).

Implications of Truancy

Bill (2010) indicates that truancy's consequences are extensive, resulting in negative implications for multiple levels of society. In the short-term, truancy can predict maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency and teenage pregnancy. In the long term, evidence reveals truancy as a predictor of poor adult outcomes, including violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and incarceration. Moreover, truancy exerts a negative effect on the community because it correlates with delinquency, crime, and other negative adult outcomes. Student dropout from school is the most obvious result of chronic absenteeism. These forms of delinquency include substance abuse, gang activity, and later involvement in adult criminal activity such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism, thus leading to incarceration. (Ivy, 2022). Truancy has been linked with delinquent behaviour in students and negative behaviour later in adulthood. The students who engage in truancy in school are more likely to exhibit destructive behaviour and poverty in adulthood. The problem with truancy is widespread. The trend of truancy seems very fashionable to the extent that truants share their ideas on how to skip classes on the internet. The truants waste their time because they miss an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge for use in life and future careers. Moreover, the students who cut classes waste their parents' money. The problem of truancy often is a symptom of underlying problems that cause students to skip classes.

Other consequences of truancy are a less educated workforce, as youths who are the future leaders become uneducated as a result of truancy and dropping out of school. This will obviously have an adverse effect on the nation's workforce and hence low productivity. This will also increase unemployment and the illiteracy level of the nation. In a situation where educational institutions of different levels turn out graduates of different cadres annually and push them into the labour market, what chances do the truants/dropouts have? The above

situation will adversely affect the nation's development since employment and literacy levels are among the indices for determining national development.

Psychological Interventions for Students with Truancy

Manoranjan and Bisweswari (2022) originated several techniques in their theories that could help in resolving truancy, which include: assertiveness training, cognitive restructuring and modelling.

Assertiveness training: Assertive Training (AT) is a psychotherapeutic technique designed to help individuals develop assertiveness skills in various interpersonal situations. AT involves learning and practising communication techniques to express one's opinions, desires, and emotions directly and respectfully, thereby fostering self-confidence and reducing anxiety in social interactions. Assertiveness training equips individuals to communicate their needs and wants directly and confidently. This includes learning to say "no" without guilt or fear of rejection. Assertive communication allows individuals to prioritise their well-being without compromising relationships. The truant should try to be assertive, having it in his/her mind that he/she could do better, let him or she be repeat several times that "I will do better", "I will stop absenteeism" by saying these, he/she would work towards achieving it. This is called "record broken".

Cognitive Restructuring: Cognitive restructuring is a process by which an individual is made to avoid crooked and irrational thinking, guiding the individual to think straight and logically. Cognitive restructuring is a counselling technique used to assist an individual in reducing negative emotional reactions. The emphasis during this therapy session is to help a client modify his/her distorted perception of the world caused by a negative mindset. Cognitive restructuring aims at modifying distorted thinking patterns and negative self-talk that arise from internalised wrong beliefs. The technique restructures the already structured irrational thoughts, beliefs and philosophies, which an individual has already acquired by redressing and changing them at the mental level of the person concerned, to ensure his happiness and efficiency at school or workplace. Cognitive restructuring operationally is a behaviour modification technique that is based on teaching a client how to reduce negative emotional reactions by getting him or her to interpret situations with greater accuracy. Specifically, the problem is to get the individual or client to avoid crooked thinking and think straight (Ekwulundu et al., 2022). Here, the truant would erase the erroneous belief that someone is responsible for his truancy, such as poor home, parental ignoring, lack of funds, but should try to turn a new leaf, that he is the cause of the problem he/she is passing through by disputing the irrational thinking and erroneous beliefs.

Modelling: The truant should try to emulate and imitate those students who are punctual in school and copy them to be effective and perform well in their academics.

Other techniques include:

Reinforcement is a strong technique that will strengthen an organism's future behaviour whenever that behaviour is preceded by a specific antecedent stimulus. There are two types of reinforcement, namely positive and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement: a reward is offered for the expression of the wanted behaviour. Truancy is corrected when a child is encouraged to attend and is constantly present in school for a period of a week. The counsellor would assure him or her of the need to reward him/her so as to repeat the same behaviour. The moment is being rewarded, he/she will be repeating the expected behaviour (Obi, 2023). The positive reinforcers then provide a desirable stimulus. Negative reinforcement is characterised by taking away an undesirable stimulus. A perpetual truant may not allow or remove the pleasure he or she enjoys in absenting himself/herself from school.

Contingency contract; Contingency contract is an if-then agreement that states which actions under certain conditions will result in specific outcome This is an agreement between a truant and the counsellor, where both of them would sign agreement on the part that the truant would be rewarded if stood to the agreement of attending school regularly, he or she will be rewarded. This is not automatic or permanent; if they violate the contract, then they may break it (Schultz, 2015).

Token economy is a behaviour therapy, a program, sometimes conducted in an institutional setting like a hospital, classroom and churches. The desired behaviour is reinforced by offering tokens that can be exchanged for special foods, television time, passes, or other rewards. It is commonly used and has been

successfully modelled with pigeons in a laboratory setting. The counsellor may decide to reward the child if they attend school to serve as reinforcement to repeat the same behaviour (Obibuba 2020).

Ear Shooting: This is a behaviour modification technique used to increase and maintain a desirable behaviour of a student. It entails eulogising the good attitude or behaviour of a student in the presence of another person significant to the student in question, to the hearing of the student. For example, a teacher could promote a student with truant behaviour by talking about his recent frequency in school with the parents in the presence of the student. The teacher talks about that attitude with the parents of the pupils in their presence, so that the pupils will not only be happy but will also continue in that behaviour. This technique strengthens and increases the frequency of coming to school of a truant student.

Shaping: Shaping, as the name suggests, is a behaviour modification technique used to teach a new behaviour. The modifier or therapist does not wait until the client achieves the targeted desired behaviour before he/she is reinforced. But rather successive steps towards learning the desired behaviour are reinforced according to an increasingly rigorous criterion. What the teacher does first is to give a clear description of what the child has to learn to do, and then start by reinforcing something the child does that somehow resembles it. Progressively thereafter, behaviours that increasingly approximate the desired behaviour are reinforced until the child consistently elicits the target behaviour. Shaping involves breaking down tasks into small steps, a chaining process, and then reinforcing the client as he accomplishes each step (Obibuba, 2020).

Time out: This is a procedure that decreases the frequency of or eliminates an undesirable behaviour. Time out temporarily removes the opportunity to receive positive reinforcement. It is sometimes called removal punishment; a time-out is adopted, especially when a teacher believes that the attention of other students is a motivating tool to reinforce misbehaviour, so that the student is denied this reinforcement. A case of a girl who leaves her home with a school uniform every Friday, only to hide in the back corner of the school until storytelling period, simply because she hated mathematics. She walked into the class during a storytelling session and was assigned to a time-out as a consequence of her truant behaviour. Time out, among others, has generally been found to reduce truancy among students (Obibuba, 2020).

Conclusion

Truancy is a major problem in schools today; the symptoms of truancy ought to be tackled at the root to avoid the future problems that truants face. The stakeholders in a student's education must work hand in hand to combat the problem and end the blame game. Measures must be put in place to deal with truancy, and concerted effort must be employed. It is a well-known fact that truancy often leads to low academic achievement and, in other cases, dropouts. Students who drop out of school reduce their chances of meaningful employment, and many never get job opportunities, hence falling into a cycle of poverty. Truancy is a threat to the future of students and must be stamped out of the education system.

Suggestions

1. Psychologists and Counsellors should incorporate some psychological intervention into school guidance curriculum activities to ensure all students are sensitised to the dangers of truancy. Addressing truancy behaviour requires a collaborative effort involving the school counsellors, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. Therefore, there is a need to establish strong partnerships and open communication channels to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive approach to support students in addressing truancy issues.
2. Regular register attendance checks are conducted by the form master and followed up by the school head in order to minimise the prevalence rates of truancy among the students. And also, making students' attendance average visible to parents ensures they're aware of when their child is at school, and if there are any unexplained absences, they want to bring them up with the school.
3. The learning environment should be made more active, lively and interesting for the students in order to make them feel comfortable while in school. Also, teachers should be friendly and role models; by doing so, their negative attitudes towards students will be eliminated. Likewise, parents should supervise their children and equip them with the necessary educational materials to avoid unnecessary excuses from students.

4. Provide additional support: In more sensitive cases surrounding student absenteeism, it's important that the school provides additional support, both internally and by linking them with third parties, depending on the reasons for their absenteeism. Schools can take special measures like holding spare uniforms and stationery supplies, organising a pickup and drop off service, as well as hosting breakfast clubs to avoid students missing school because of these reasons. However, it's important that schools refer families to organisations that can help with at-home issues that are impacting their child's learning.
5. Communities and courts can provide a useful backup to families and schools by communicating expectations and enforcing sanctions on youth who fail to attend school. They are most effective in this role when they impose immediate and consistent sanctions, particularly ones that matter to youth. Because communities and courts may be most immediately concerned with the threat to citizen safety posed by truant students, their focus may be on keeping students off the streets during school hours. However, communities are also charged with guarding public safety long-term. One of the most effective means of accomplishing this is ensuring that a large proportion of a community's youth are prepared for responsible and productive lives through formal education.

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