

Factors Associated with Absenteeism in Secondary School Students of Namobuddha Municipality

Krishan Dhakal^{1*}, Sudha Ghimire², Krishna Payara Shrestha², Gyanu Maharjan³

1. Assistance Professor, Tribhuvan University

2. Lecturer, Tribhuvan University

3. Lecturer, Purbanchal University

Abstract

Absenteeism is a significant issue faced by educational institutions worldwide, including those in Nepal. High rates of absenteeism can negatively impact students' academic performance, potentially leading to poor grades and increased likelihood of dropping out. This study aims to investigate the frequency of absenteeism and its association with various factors in Namobuddha Municipality, Kavrepalanchok district among 288 secondary students. A cross-sectional survey was conducted for the study, and a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. The results showed that 56.3% of students reported being absent for one day, 15.6% for one week, and 2.1% for 15 days in current academic year they were studying. Personal factors were the most significant contributing factors to absenteeism, with bullying (36.5%), lack of interest in study (69.8%), and stress (39.6%) being the top reasons. The school environment was also a significant contributing factor, the relationship between students and teachers (50%), going to work with parents (41.7%), inability to buy essential stationeries (22.9%) also contributed for absenteeism among students. The chi-square test revealed a significant association between absenteeism and personal factors ($p=0.002$), school environment ($p=0.001$), and socio-cultural factors ($p=0.001$). Absenteeism is a significant problem faced by educational institutions in Nepal, with personal factors, school environment, and socio-cultural factors being significant contributing factors. Interventions aimed at addressing these factors can reduce absenteeism and improve the academic progress of students.

Keywords: Absenteeism, secondary students, Nepal, personal factors, socio-cultural factors

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*Corresponding author; K. Dhakal (kdhakal024@gmail.com), S. Ghimire (sudha.ghimire42@gmail.com)

1. Introduction

School absenteeism is a significant issue associated with various factors in many countries, including Nepal. High absenteeism rates can harm student's academic performance, leading to poor grades and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school (Klein, 2022). Moreover, absenteeism can negatively impact students' social and emotional well-being and ultimately limit their opportunities (Antaramian, 2015). School absenteeism can both be referred to the intentional or unintentional non-attendance of students from school without a legitimate reason (Kearney, 2008).

In Nepal, school absenteeism is a significant issue, particularly in rural areas with limited access to education (Hussein, 2019). According to the Ministry of Education, absenteeism is more prevalent among girls than boys, and the main reasons for absenteeism include household chores, child marriage, and lack of interest in education (Government of Nepal, 2018). Moreover, a study conducted by the World Bank in 2015 found that absenteeism rates in Nepal are higher among poor households, indicating that socio-economic factors play a significant role in absenteeism (World Bank, 2015). Similarly, the percentage of students completing basic education in Nepal is 71 percent while for grade twelve it is 22 percent (MoF, 2019). Student dropout imposes a huge waste of resources spent on education and a burden on the hard-earned money of the taxpayers and frequent absenteeism is one of the key indicators for drop-out. A recent study utilizing data from the 2019 Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reveals that marriage is the most common reason in Nepal for children quitting school specially for girls. Girls also can more dropout because of absenteeism due to child labour or household work since it is found in the literature that girls do more household work than boys does. Furthermore, a study by Adhikari and Pokharel (2016) found that students from lower-income families were likelier to be absent from school than students from higher-income families. Financial difficulties and lack of access to resources, such as transportation and educational materials, were the main reasons for absenteeism among low-income families.

Manandhar (2012) states that the overall primary school dropout rate was 4.26 percent in Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts. The dropout rate for girls (4.04%) was less than for boys (4.50%). More boys (52.6%) dropped out than girls (47.6%). Dalit caste comprised around 30.5 per cent of dropout children. The maximum (42.2%) of the actual dropout was due to illiteracy and parents' negligence in their children's education (Roy, 2019).

Moreover, child-related variables like grade, age and work at home were found to be significant. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors associated with school absenteeism to develop effective prevention strategies. It is, therefore, important to identify the factors associated with school absenteeism to develop effective interventions. Considering the above state problem, this study aims to discuss the factors associated with school absenteeism in secondary students of Namobuddha Municipality, Nepal. The study begins by providing an overview of school absenteeism, followed by a discussion of the prevalence of absenteeism in Nepal. The study further concludes by discussing the implications of these findings and recommendations for addressing school absenteeism.

2. Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional research design and quantitative data collection methods to investigate academic absenteeism among secondary school students in Namobuddha Municipality of Kavre district. A self-administered structured questionnaire was utilized to collect data from a sample of students. The study population comprised 1254 students from grades 8 to 10 in Namobuddha Municipality's 50 community and institutional schools (CHERD, 2021). The data were collected between 1st to 25th February 2023, and specifically focused on academic absenteeism within the current academic year. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were used to determine the prevalence of absenteeism and identify its associated factors. The study ensured that all participants provided informed written consent, and their anonymity was protected by assigning codes to each respondent. The participants in the study were voluntary and had the right to withdraw at any time.

The Purposive sample was calculated, by using the following formula.

$$n = (z^2 * p * q * N) / ((z^2 * p * q) + ((N - 1) * e^2))$$

Where:

P = Population size = 1254

e = Margin of error = 0.05

CI = Confidence interval = 95%

z = Z-score for the given confidence interval (from standard normal distribution table) = 1.96

p = Probability of success (assumed 0.5 for 50% response distribution)

q = Probability of failure (1 - p) = 0.5

Substituting the values, we get:

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5 * 1254) / ((1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5) + ((1254 - 1) * 0.05^2))$$

$$n = (3.8416 * 0.25 * 1254) / (3.8416 * 0.25 + 62.605)$$

$$n = 287.3077$$

Therefore, the required sample size is approximately 288.

3. Result

The following section explains the finding of the study

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Variable	Frequency (288)	Percentages
Age		
Below 15	237	82.3
Above 15	51	17.7
Grade		
8	96	33.3
9	105	36.5
10	87	30.2
Sex		
Male	168	58.3
Female	120	41.7
Religion		
Hindu	240	83.3
Buddhists	48	16.7
Ethnicity		
Brahmin	36	12.5
Chhetri	129	44.8
Janajati	123	42.7
Education of father		
Illiterate	3	1.0
Literate	285	13.5
Education of mother		
Illiterate	18	6.3
Literate	270	12.5

Variable	Frequency (288)	Percentages
Occupation of father		
Agriculture	66	22.9
Non-agriculture	222	78
Occupation of mother		
Agriculture	156	54
Non-agriculture	132	46

Table 1 presents data on various demographic variables information on various demographic and socio-economic variables, including age, grade, sex, religion, ethnicity, education and occupation of parents. The table shows that the majority of individuals in the sample are below 15 years of age (82.3%) and in grade 9 (36.5%). Most individuals are Hindu (83.3%) and belong to the Chhetri ethnic group (44.8%). In terms of gender, there are more males than females (58.3% vs 41.7%). Most fathers are employed in the non-agriculture sector (78%) and are literate (13.5%), while most mothers are employed in agriculture (54%) and are also literate (12.5%).

Table 2: Factors associated with absenteeism

Frequency of absenteeism* (current academic year)	Frequency	Percentages
One day	162	56.3
One week	45	15.6
15days	6	2.1
None	75	26.0
Personal factor		
Bullying	105	36.5
Lack of interest in study	201	69.8
Stress	114	39.6
Peer pressure	63	21.9
Family conflicts	93	32.3
School environmental factors*	0	-
Relationship between students and teachers	144	50
Sexually harassed at school	30	10.4
Lack of transportation	105	36.5
School is too far from home	126	43.8

Frequency of absenteeism* (current academic year)	Frequency	Percentages
School is located at difficult landscape	36	12.5
Gender		
Menstruation	213	74
Have to help mother's in household work	117	40.6
Because mother get her period	45	15.6
Look upto younger siblings	51	17.7
Socio cultural factor		
Go to work with parents	120	41.7
Cannot buy essential stationeries	66	22.9

*Multiple response

Table 2 provides information on the frequency and reasons for absenteeism among students, as well as the socio-cultural factors that contribute to absenteeism. In terms of frequency, the majority of students have been absent for one day (56.3%), followed by none (26.0%), one week (15.6%), and 15 days (2.1%). The personal factors that contribute to absenteeism include lack of interest in study (69.8%), stress (39.6%), bullying (36.5%), family conflicts (32.3%), and peer pressure (21.9%). Regarding school environmental factors, the most common reason for absenteeism was a poor relationship between students and teachers (50%), followed by the school being located too far from home (43.8%), and lack of transportation (36.5%). No students reported absenteeism due to the school environment itself. Similarly, gender-related factors such as menstruation (74%), having to help with household work (40.6%), looking after younger siblings (17.7%), and mother's menstruation (15.6%) were also reasons for absenteeism. Finally, socio-cultural factors contributing to absenteeism include going to work with parents (41.7%), and not being able to afford essential stationery (22.9%).

Table 3: Association between absenteeism with factors

Description value	Chi-square value	P
Personal factors	76.786	0.002
School environment	21.285	0.001
Gender issue	7.532	0.184
Socio-cultural factor	20.042	0.001

*P value <0.05

Table 3 shows the chi-square test results that assess the association between absenteeism and personal factors, school environment factors, gender issues, and socio-cultural factors. In the table, the p-value for personal factors, school environment factors, and socio-cultural factors are less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant association between absenteeism and these factors.

However, for gender issues, the p-value is greater than 0.05, suggesting no statistically significant association between absenteeism and gender issues. The chi-square value for gender issues is also relatively low compared to the other factors, indicating a weaker association between absenteeism and gender issues.

4. Discussion

Absenteeism among students is a prevalent issue in schools, and various factors contribute to it. This study identified personal factors like bullying, lack of interest in study, stress, peer pressure and family conflict. Similarly, school environment like relationship between students and teachers, Sexually harassed, Lack of transportation, school located at difficult landscape were some school environment that was considered. In regards to socio-cultural factors as significant contributing factors to absenteeism were going work with parents and unable to buy necessary stationary were considered. In this study personal factors, including bullying, lack of interest in the study, and stress, were the most significant contributors to student absenteeism. Previous studies identified bullying as a significant cause of absenteeism (Buijs et al., 2019; Craig & Pepler, 1997). Students who experience bullying are more likely to miss school due to fear, anxiety, and depression (Craig & Pepler, 1997). Lack of interest in the study is also a common cause of absenteeism (e.g., Odera & Okwara, 2019; Smith, 2011). Students who do not find their studies engaging or challenging are more likely to miss school. Academic and non-academic stress has been identified as a significant cause of absenteeism in various studies (Alwan & Abdullah, 2019; Tan, Chen, & Yang, 2021). Students who experience stress may miss school to avoid stressful situations or to cope with the stress (Roy, 2019).

Similarly, the school environment, including the relationship between students and teachers, was also a significant contributing factor to absenteeism. Previous studies have identified teacher-student relationships as a crucial factor affecting school attendance (Chen, 2015; Wang & Eccles, 2013). A positive teacher-student relationship can motivate students to attend school regularly, while a negative relationship can lead to absenteeism (Lee & Chung, 2019). School safety, including safety from violence and bullying, is also essential in promoting school attendance

(Furlong, Morrison & Dear, 2018; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). Similarly a study by Gubbels et. al (2019) shows that school absenteeism, 12 risk domains were found with large effects, including having a negative attitude towards school, substance abuse, externalizing and internalizing problems of the juvenile, and a low parent-school involvement. On the other hand, the study by Samuel and Burger (2020) reveals that negative life events, self-efficacy, and social support are risk and protective factors for school dropout intentions and dropout in school education.

Socio-cultural factors, such as working with parents, inability to buy essential stationeries, and menstruation, were also significant contributors to absenteeism. A study by Eamon, (2005) has identified poverty and socio-economic status as significant factors affecting school attendance (Eamon, 2005; Velez & Mahoney, 2006). The finding supported the finding of this study. Students from low-income families were found to miss school to work and support their families financially compared to middle- or high-income families (Malla, 2020). Moreover, lacking access to essential school supplies, such as stationery, can also lead to absenteeism. Menstruation is also a significant barrier to school attendance for girls in developing countries, including Bangladesh (Sommer et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2014). While study by Shah and Taj (2019) in Pakistan shows that socio-economic factors, physical factors, geographical factors, teacher related factors, family related factors, teaching learning material related factors, administrative related factors, child related factors, and facilities in schools related factors are major causes of Dropout Rate at Primary Level in Pakistan.

Interventions aimed at reducing absenteeism should target these contributing factors. For example, anti-bullying, mentoring, and teacher training programs can improve teacher-student relationships and promote school attendance (e.g., Al-Jabari, 2021; Li & Julien, 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Providing students with essential school supplies, offering scholarships, and addressing poverty can also improve school attendance (e.g., Eamon, 2005; UNESCO, 2014; Velez & Mahoney, 2006).

Limitations of this study include the use of self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias and the inclusion of only one school. Future studies should include multiple schools and use objective measures to improve the findings' generalizability.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study identified personal factors, school environment, and socio-cultural factors as significant contributing factors to student absenteeism.

Interventions addressing these factors can reduce absenteeism and improve students' academic progress.

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