

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL ASPECTS OF TRUANCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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### Abstract

*The main thrust of this paper is to determine the psychosocial aspects of truancy among secondary school students in Lagos State. The predisposing factors to truancy mentioned herein are: the home, school, community, peer, the student and physical & emotional sickness of the student. This paper also made attempt to examine each factor with a view to understanding how they cause truancy. The effects and remedies were also discussed. Moreover, the implications for counselling hinges on creation of awareness in schools by the counsellors on the damaging effect of truancy to the student and the society at large.*

**Keywords:** Truancy, Family, School, Peer, Community

### Introduction

The philosophy of Nigerian education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen that will maximize the creative potential and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment (National Policy on Education, 2004). Based on this, it becomes the primary obligation of the education sector to ensure that learners attend school regularly and punctually. Truancy which is the habit of staying away from school without permission is one act of indiscipline that defeats the philosophy of Nigerian education. Collins (2010) asserts that students who absent themselves from school are exhibiting truancy. Truancy has been reported as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of educational programmes and has caused lots of setbacks in the educational pursuits of adolescents in secondary schools (Gesinde, 2004; Adeyemi,

2009; Animashaun, 2009). In the view of Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry and Cothorn (2000) truancy leads to potential delinquent activities, school phobia, social isolation, failure via suspension, expulsion or dropping out of school.

Okwakpam and Okwakpam (2012) described truancy as any intentional unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory school. According to them, it may also refer to students who attend school but do not go to classes. Moreover, Stoll (2002) opines that students may skip school for a full day or miss a single lesson because they may want to attend a special event or simply take a “mental health day”. In the view of Animashaun (2009) truancy is a non-school attendance behavior, an irregular attendance of school, a delinquent and antisocial behavior.

The statistics released by the office of youth and social development, an arm of the Lagos State Ministry of Youth, Sports and Social development showed that 2,095 students in Lagos State Public Secondary Schools were engaged in truancy. Furthermore, the number of school age children seen hawking, roaming the street or in entertainment centers during school hours is an indication of the prevalence of truancy in Lagos State, Nigeria. Previous studies have shown that truancy is prevalent in Lagos State, Nigeria. Makinde, Daodu and Topohozin (2015) found that truancy is prevalent among secondary school students in Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria with parenting style and peer influence as strong predictors. Also, Onoyase (2017) concludes that truancy is manifested by secondary school students in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria across gender, socio-economic status and school location. This points to the fact that truancy is prevalent in Lagos State, Nigeria. Therefore, the need for reduction or

curbing this social menace called truancy cannot be overemphasized.

### **Purpose of this Paper**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the factors that are responsible for truancy among secondary students in Lagos State, Nigeria, as well as investigate the effects and proffer remedies on how to curb truancy.

### **Scope of the Paper**

This paper focuses on the truant behavior of all categories secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

### **Causes of Truancy**

Researchers (Gesinde, 2004; Animashaun, 2009; Okwakpam & Okwakpam, 2012; Oliha, 2014; Ehindero, 2015; Makinde, 2015 and Onoyase, 2017) have identified the following factors that could determine truant behavior among secondary school students. Such factors include the students' family background (home), the school, the community, peer influence, poor health and bullying. All these are factors that could increase or eliminate truancy in students in varying dimensions.

### **Family Background**

Obe (1996) mentioned that truancy and absenteeism could be traced to the circumstances at home, some of these circumstances include: poor parent-child relationship characterized by hostility, lack of affection and under involvement of parents in the child's welfare, overly harsh and authoritarian methods of discipline. Osarenren (1996) stated that the presence of the above conditions in any given home predisposes a student who is already having identity crises to easily drift into indiscipline. Osarenren further stated that students from wealthy homes engage in truancy as a form of protest and attention seeking from their parents who in their insatiable quest for money have relegated their parental duties to stewards and house helps. Siziya et al (2007) in their study concluded that parental involvement and the support of the students was associated with less truant behavior.

(Stanton, Cole, Galbraith, Pendelton, Cottrel, Marshal & Kalijee, 2004; Henry, 2007) opined that Parental involvement is an important determinant of truancy among secondary school students and that a large amount of unsupervised time available to the students was associated with truancy. Kerjsers ,Branje, Vanda-valk, and Meeus, (2010) found that the more leisure time a student spends with parents, the less likely the student is to deviate. These point to the fact that parental supervision is paramount in the fight to eliminate truant behavior among secondary school students. Moreover, financial difficulty in the family is a contributing factor to adolescent truant behavior. Many students from poor households go hungry, lack school materials like uniform, books etc. Therefore, they try to fend for themselves by doing menial jobs, hawking or even begging to earn some money in order to provide for themselves. While doing this, they tend to have poor school attendance rates or may become truants out rightly. Stemming from the home is also marital instability which has also been identified as a direct or indirect cause of truancy followed by broken homes, lack of affection, disability of parents, and parent's educational background as other causes of truancy. Other causal factors related to the home include single parenthood and parents discord. Owodunni (2008) reported that a hostile home environment would make children to prefer to spend most of their time around peers where they would be free, happy and relaxed. Sokan and Akinade (1994), cited in Uhuegbu (2008) stated that parental styles of child rearing such as authoritarian and permissive methods of child upbringing bred children who lack discipline. Autocratic parents who set absolute standards and make inviolable rules will produce children who are timid and incompetent. The permissive parents who set inconsistent standards produce children who lack self-confidence and prone to delinquency. Such parents engage in over protection and over permissiveness. They further stated that these children are prone to breaking school rules because of lack of self-

control, lack of home support, absence of safety and security, unfulfilled emotional and economic needs, lack of supervision and intellectual inspiration. In permissive homes, discipline is not a way of life for them. Therefore, they find it difficult to obey school rules and regulations.

### **The School**

The school is where students spend most of their time learning, reading and participating in other curricular and co-curricular activities. The school as a citadel of learning is supposed to be the ground for the molding of the character of youths. Makinde (2001) opined that an effective educational structure is one which a child will be educated with a view of developing the ability to think effectively, communicate and make relevant judgment. However, some possible causes of truancy has been traced to the school.

Behaviors and attitudes of students may be shaped by the teaching styles prevalent in the school. Bernstein (2014) posited that permissive-neglectful teachers make no serious effort to establish or maintain discipline in their class, so when there is any misbehavior in the class room, they are likely to ignore it. Permissive –indulgent teachers are deeply involved in teaching and they fear taking any action or step that might create stress for students or hurt their self-esteem. Authoritative teachers employ a blend of high involvement and firm but fair discipline, they reward outcome not effort. Buskist and Benassi (2012) suggest that an authoritative style is one most likely to promote learning and least likely to promote student misbehavior. Therefore, a school that encourages the use of authoritative teaching style is less likely to have students who are truants because the teachers are responsive and always ready to help students.

The school environment according to Reid (1999) cited in Oliha (2014) is a factor that will encourage school attendance. He opined that a clean school building that is well maintained rather than an unattractive school environment which is characterized by poor

toilet facilities, and dilapidated buildings is likely to make learners feel welcome. (Gabb, 1997; Adana, 1987 & Igborgbor, 1984) cited in Ehindero (2015) reported that poor learning environment make truancy prevalent among students. Omoegun (1995) is of the view that the main function of the school is the provision of care and guidance, to him this includes the provision of conducive learning environment, adequate learning facilities and other conveniences. Teaching methods used in the classroom are meant to capture the attention of students and arouse their interest, however, poor teaching method and inadequate instructional materials could make students loose interest in subjects. Heilbrunn and Seeley (2000) reported that students who were not interested in methods of teaching of their teachers may not concentrate in class. In a study by Nielson and Gerber (1979) cited in Uhuegbu (2008) 70% of the respondents indicated that the school was the major cause of truancy. Osarenren (1996), corroborates this by stating that inadequacy of instructional materials will make students to loiter around the school compound looking for an opportunity to leave school during school hours. Furthermore, an inappropriate curriculum often leads to restlessness, inattentiveness by students or classroom disorderliness. Obe (1996) mentioned that this is so especially when the topic taught is either obsolete or irrelevant to the students' needs, too difficult and relatively meaningless, too theoretical and unrelated to their immediate practical experience. Because of this, the students may respond by withdrawal, sleeping off during lesson or exhibiting aggressive and truant behaviors. Moreover, the policies that affect the principles and practices of education in Nigeria lack consistency and this in turn affects the curriculum.

Another factor stemming from the school is bullying. Bullying occurs when a person willfully and repeatedly exercise power over another with hostile or malicious intent. A wide range of physical or verbal behaviors of an aggressive or antisocial nature which

includes: insulting, teasing, threatening, humiliating, harassing and mobbing. Kim, Leventhal, Koh, Hubbard, and Boyce (2006) reported that students who have been victims of bullying were more likely to be truants. Bullying is a prime component in the making of an unsafe school environment, bullying occurs for many reasons and goes beyond the one isolated instance of harassment either because of teacher's inability to control or problems arising from child's own personality or learning abilities. It is possible that students who have been bullied may stay away from school in order to escape further victimization (Muula, Rudatsikira, Babaniyi, Songolo & Siziya, 2012).

A school is meant to be a place of safety and security for the students but in reality a significant number of students are the target of bullying. Unfortunately, school personnel often minimize or underestimate the extent of bullying and the resultant effect. However, a bully-free school may reduce the prevalence of truancy (Vreeman & Carrol, 2007; Kim et al, 2006).

### **Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure plays a strong role in shaping students' behavior. Students usually cherish the feeling of belonging to a group with own identity. Peer group is a collection of like-minded individuals who share several things in common e.g. age, class, school, neighborhood and members give their peers moral, social, and emotional support. Akinade (2005) stated that peer influence is very strong during adolescence. If well-articulated, is very useful for the social maturation and complete social metamorphosis of the adolescent. Ehindero (2015) reported that peer-related factors are strong enough to predispose students to truancy. Students often adhere to the advice of their peers especially students whose parents lack value for education or students from hostile environment would prefer to spend most of his/her time with his/her peers (Reids, 1999; Omoegun, 1995; Osarenren, 1996 & Owodunni, 2008). However, Reid

(2000) is of the view that truants who lack social skills to maintain friendships and risk being isolated from peer groups.

Moreover, peer acceptance is particularly crucial and the influence is very powerful and all encompassing. It plays a strong role in shaping children's behavior. Peer groups provide opportunities for practicing new behaviors and developing necessary social skills for future interaction. Students who have supportive peers that exhibit the same truant behavior may tend to be more comfortable in their truant behavior since they are more likely to get all the help and kind gestures they need from such peers. A positive peer influence will serve as a protective strategy against antisocial behavior like truancy; also it will help to develop self-esteem and high behavioral standards among the group members.

### **Community Factors**

The behavior of students usually reflects the society in which they were brought up and leave in since they are products of the society, they mostly exhibit and share in its values and beliefs. The community contributes to the truant behavior of students in diverse ways. Lack of support for the school by the community, gang activities in the community, communal crisis, kidnapping, high rate of delinquency, drug use and abuse, bunkering, rape and general insecurity in the community.(Okwakpam et al, 2012; Osarenren, 1996) agreed that the general indiscipline of the society causes truancy.

Oni (2004) cited in Uhuegbu(2008) concluded that a friendly society with adequate facilities and recreational activities will help equip students socially and emotionally in the positive direction thereby making antisocial behavior less attractive to them.

### **Student Factors**

Adolescent students themselves are responsible for their truant behavior. Some students are not academically sound; their

poor performances leave them shy, depressed, alienated from their teachers and mates and have low self-esteem. (Gray & Jesson 1990 cited in Okwakpam et al 2012; Reids 2002 & Ehindero, 2015) reported that academic failure, learning disability and learning style can make students susceptible to truancy. The implication is that as the students feels alienated, he/she loses freedom and cordial relationship with other students and with time slowly withdraws from school. Self (intrinsic) motivation is a strong factor that enhances desirable behaviors. Intrinsic motivation gives the student inner encouragement and push to stick to good behavior for personal satisfaction and self-fulfillment. Extrinsic motivation could also help a student to drop truant behavior if he is motivated by the use of desirable tokens anytime he attends school. Adeyemi (2009) added that school attendance behavior and motivation are significantly positively correlated. Student's poor learning style and study habits can also predispose them to have truant behavior as these can lead to their poor academic performance. However, students should be creative in solving their own problem rather than think that every circumstance around them poses a challenge to his regular school attendance, creativity is a factor that will spur students into developing rational thinking and new ways of behavior with a view of dispelling negative thoughts that could lead to unprofitable decisions and actions like truancy and other antisocial behaviors. Animashaun (2002) and Owodunni (2002) advocated that having creativity techniques for effective thinking leads to sound decision-making, productive actions and positive behavior towards positive life skills. Animashaun (2009) opined that creativity enhances school attendance behavior and that a creative person can never be idle, he would be busy doing something good all the time. Lack of vision of education in the students as a means to achieve life goals can also lead to truant behaviors.

### **Physical and Emotional Sickness**

Students' physical and emotional sickness can be a great hindrance to their regular school attendance and by extension predispose them to truant behavior. Hence, students need a healthy mind in a healthy body. Obe (1996) cited in Uhuegbu (2008) opined that physically disabled individuals are more frequently maladjusted than normal ones and tend to experience frustration when confronted with tasks which they feel inadequate, shy, timid, withdrawn or even develop inferiority complex caused by their own self- concept. Such students will either suppress or sort out their emotions, adopting different behaviors either positively or negatively.

Maitra (2005) stated that physical and emotional sickness in students result in mental and development disorder which includes depression, anxiety, aggressiveness, antisocial behavior, suicidal attempts, alcohol and drug abuse. He further stated that these behavioral disorders may lead to poor school performance, low self-esteem and eventually causes truant behavior.

Moreover, poor health care, mental imbalance, psychiatric disturbances and the feeling of lack of control over life can cause a student to become a truant (Gesinde, 2004; Okwakpam, 2012).

Students' feeling of self-worth can be enhanced by following the three principles of Carl Roger's client centered therapy.

- Demonstrating unconditional positive regard for students.
- Acknowledging students' feelings.
- Showing students that you empathize with them.

The above-mentioned methods according to Carl (1997) cited in Erinsho, Arikewuyo and Ogunkoya (2005) will help students to do away with negative feelings that often lead to lack of self-esteem, poor self-concept and also remove other emotional disturbances that can lead to truant behavior. Low self-esteem can restrict a student's

activity and cause humiliation, leading to maladaptive behaviors in student. Students who can manage their emotions irrespective of their physical state will be able to build their hope and aspirations and not allow irrational thought to take over their thinking thereby seeing themselves as never do well.

### **Effects of Truancy**

Truancy as an anti-social behavior is a national problem therefore the effects will cut across virtually every aspect of the society.

A student who has repeatedly being absent is likely to have a long-term effect of dropping out of school. Drop outs may constitute more nuisance to the home and community as they may get involved in risky behaviors like drug abuse, armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, gang raping, political thuggery, prostitution and other criminal activities which not only endanger the lives of truants but also that of others. Geo-opah (2003); Helibrunn et al (2007); Boga (2013); and Ngutor, Moses and Solomon (2015) are all of the view that truancy has negative consequences on students' dropping out of school. Hence dropping out of school is a long term effect of truancy.

Furthermore, truancy is an educational waste; it is one inappropriate behavior that defeats the philosophy of Nigeria education thereby rendering the student incapable of becoming a sound and effective citizen with the creative potential and skills for self-fulfillment and general development of the society. Truancy will also deprive the student the knowledge, skills and competence to contribute to national goals which enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy.

Moreover, truancy affects teachers and other students. This is because teachers have to spend more time making up for the lesson truants have missed hence the teacher spends less time with the none truants. Animashaun (2008) stressed the importance of school attendance as a determinant of attitude to

work later in life. This implies that a student truant will also grow into an adult truant who will have negative attitude to work in later life, never at his duty post, always late to work, and never having the zeal and skill to complete assigned duty at the set time.

In addition, they will always have misplaced priority and are never organized, having an underdeveloped sense of responsibility, lack goal setting skills and have no respect for authority.

### **Remedies**

According to Bolarin and Badejo (1998) truancy as an aspect of indiscipline cannot be left unchecked because of the likely effect on the future of the truants.

There are various effective remedies for the reduction of truancy such as:

- Good record keeping by the school especially daily marking of the attendance register to detect students who are prone to truancy.
- Parents should be informed early when the signs of truancy are noticed in the student so that parents can be involved in curbing it.
- Formulation of compulsory education law by the state.
- Collaboration among community and stakeholders such as law enforcement agents, mental health workers, educators and social service providers.
- Schools should have personalized attention programs for students.
- Meaningful incentives should be made available for improved school attendance and consequences for poor attendance.
- Building professional capacity of trained school counsellors and provision of well-equipped counselling centers within the school.

Several intervention techniques have been used by psychologists and counselling psychologists to address the problem of truant behavior among secondary school adolescents. Some of the interventions include: self-control, cognitive restructuring, behavior rehearsal, contingency

management, reality therapy, token economy, and value clarification techniques. These intervention techniques focus on further skills development, including self-esteem building and rewarding appropriate classroom behavior. Skill development of the students includes self-confidence, problem-solving, and positive decision making. However, the fight against truancy should be the joint efforts of the school, community, parents, law enforcement agents, law makers, therapists and the truants themselves.

### **Implications for Counselling**

The causes and effects of truancy call for the intervention of guidance counsellors to help in curbing the menace. The school counsellors should be at the fore front in rendering counselling services regularly to the students. Group and individual counselling should be used to help students participate and derive maximum benefits from educational and vocational experiences.

Counsellors should have a well-planned out activity to help students discover and develop themselves, acquire relevant knowledge, skills, attitude, values and interest that will prepare them to become useful citizens. Parents should also be informed on observing early signs of truancy among their wards. Moreover, counsellors should work hand in hand with class teachers to get names of potential truants. This will enable the counsellor to map out programmes of interactive sessions and re-orientation for them with a view of nipping truancy in the bud. Counsellors can also create awareness by giving enlightenment talks to all students on the damaging effect of truancy on the perpetrators. Furthermore, the National policy on education (2004) mandated states/ FCT, local government and proprietors of private schools to establish, equip counselling clinics and provide adequate number of guidance counselling for their institutions. To this effect, state government should provide funds, facilities, materials and qualified counsellors for effective counselling services. This will prevent guidance and counselling from being

relegated to the background. When youths are well guided, they will achieve competence, maturity and self-actualization. Counselling programmes should also be put in place in career and vocational aspects of students' life to help them maximize their potentials, thereby making meaningful and wise lifelong decisions. Counsellors should also embark on self-training to upgrade and equip themselves with current counselling techniques and services available in the profession.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has presented the predisposing psycho-social factors to truancy. It highlighted how these factors can have both short and long-term effects on truants and by extension the larger society. The need for cooperation among the stake holders (parents, school and community) to come together and work out strategies to curb truancy cannot be overemphasized. The school should keep a register of the daily attendance of all students so that students who absent themselves from school without permission can be easily detected. There is need to inform parents early as soon as the early signs of truancy is observed in the students. Also, effective counseling services should be put in place to strengthen the counselor / students' relationship.

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