

# The Relationship Between Absenteeism Rates and Family Involvement

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## ABSTRACT

Truancy is typically defined as unauthorized absences from school and truancy is specifically defined by Hamilton County Department of Education as having six or more unexcused absences throughout a school year. Truancy has always been a main concern for America's educational system. The effects of a child not regularly attending school prove to be negative academically, emotionally, and socially. The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between absenteeism and family involvement, more specifically whether the child lives in a one or two guardian household, and how that affects the child's attendance. The effects of absenteeism while in elementary school can still be seen once a child enters into high school. Studies have shown that children who are habitually absent from school have a higher chance of being found delinquent in juvenile court and dropping out of school (McCluskey, Bynum, Patchin, 2004). To explore this phenomenon, data was collected from Hamilton County Department of Education for the 2006-2007 academic year. The data was analyzed to compare students who live in a one-guardian household versus a two-guardian household and the number of absences each group accumulates. In addition, this study analyzed the relationship between a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students it serves. To explore this question, data was retrieved from the state level report card for Tennessee/Hamilton County schools. The data was analyzed to determine whether or not the population the school serves in terms of economic advantage or disadvantage affects a school's performance.

## PURPOSE/RATIONALE

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between a child's home life, more specifically whether the child lives in a one or two guardian household, and how that affects the child's attendance. In addition, this study examined state level data to determine whether or not there is a negative relationship between a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students it serves.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the relationship between absenteeism rates and family involvement, more specifically whether the child lives in a one-guardian household or a two-guardian household? Is there a negative relationship between a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students the school serves?

## STUDY PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS STEPS

Data was collected through Hamilton County Department of Education. The data was in the form of an excel spreadsheet. The data was "cleaned" to remove any identifying information about the student's and their families. The variables that were looked at were age, race, gender, family make-up, grade level, school attended, number of absences. In addition, state level data was obtained from the state report card in order to analyze a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students the school serves.

This research project is quantitative, non-experimental

Question #1: Quantitative, Non-experimental

1. Data was given in the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.
2. Data was entered into SPSS.
3. Descriptive statistics were run to check for normal distribution and skewness as a post-test only.
4. An independent sample t-test was run to test for differences between the groups.
5. A correlation test was run to determine if there is a relationship between a child's home life, one-guardian household or two-guardian household, and a child's number of absences.

Question #2: Quantitative, Non-experimental

1. Data was given in the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet
2. Data was entered into SPSS.
3. Descriptive statistics were run to check for normal distribution and skewness as a post-test only.
4. An independent sample t-test was run to test for differences between the groups.
5. A correlation test was run to determine if there is a relationship between a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students it serves.

## FIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- 1) Promote comprehensive cultural competence within the school system
- 2) Advocate for community involvement
- 3) Smaller student to school social worker ratio
- 4) Research and implement new truancy protocol
- 5) Advocate for change in No Child Left Behind Act



## DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLING FRAME/ DESCRIPTION OF METHODS TO SELECT STUDY SAMPLE

The secondary data was screened for including but not limited to male and female students, different ethnic backgrounds, different socioeconomic statuses, etc so the sample will be representative of students in the Hamilton County school system for the 2006-2007 academic year. The data was obtained from Hamilton County central office. For this project a sample of 4,033 students from ten Hamilton County Elementary Schools. The sample consists of students who have five or less absences and students who have six or more absences. The rationale is to compare the students who live in a one-guardian household versus a two-guardian household and how this affects absenteeism rates. Data was also collected from the state of Tennessee's education website to determine if there is a negative relationship between a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students the school serves.

## RESULTS

The study sample consisted of 4,033 Hamilton County elementary school students. According to the overall sample (N=4,033), 2,155 (53%) were male and 1,875 (47%) were female. The ethnic make-up of the sample is as follows: 2,178 (54%) are Caucasian, 1,513 (38%) are African-American, 243 (6%) are Hispanic, 86 (2%) are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 11 (.3%) are Indian. The average mean age of the students is 8.96 years ( $SD=1.91$ ). To answer research question number one a Pearson coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between absenteeism rates and family involvement. The overall sample (N=4,033) was divided into subgroups according to racial identity. A Pearson coefficient was calculated for the relationship between absenteeism rates and family involvement of Caucasian students. A weak correlation was found ( $r(2,176) = -.148, p < .01$ ), indicating a slightly significant linear relationship between the two variables. A Pearson coefficient was calculated for the relationship between absenteeism rates and family involvement of African American students. A moderate correlation was found ( $r(1,511) = .057, p < .01$ ), indicating a moderately significant linear relationship between the two variables. After review of the data and multiple correlation tests, it was evident a strong correlation existed between a student's absenteeism rates and the school the student attends. For example, a Pearson coefficient was calculated for the relationship between absenteeism rates and the school attended for African American students which found a moderate correlation ( $r(1,511) = .133, p > .001$ ), indicating a strong linear relationship between the two variables. To answer research question number two a Pearson coefficient was calculated and a correlation was found between a school's performance (testing scores) and the number of economically disadvantaged students the school serves. A moderate correlation was found ( $r(8) = .643, p > .05$ ), indicating a moderately significant linear relationship between the two variables. This indicated that the higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students a school serves, the lower they performed on state-wide tests.

## DISCUSSION

The literature that was available regarding absenteeism and family involvement was plentiful and supported the hypothesis formed for this project. As stated before there was a significant relationship between absenteeism and family involvement, but upon further review of the data the most significant relationship was between absenteeism and the school a student attended. The students who had a higher number of absences attended a school that was located in a more urban area and had lower test scores on the state report cards. Which begs the question, are those schools receiving the services they need? Are the services properly funded? Is diversity being considered when determining what services/interventions will be utilized?