

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## The Prevalence of Truancy on Gender Basis among Primary School Pupils in Hamisi Sub-County, Vihiga County, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*The purpose of this study was to find out the prevalence of truancy on gender basis among primary school pupils in Hamisi Sub-County, Kenya. The study population consisted of 4561 Class Seven pupils from 108 primary schools, 108 head teachers, 108 school counselors and 1 Sub-County Quality Assurance Standards Officer (SQASO). Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. Stratified sampling was used to put schools into stratus (boarding public, day public and private). Cluster sampling was used to select 32 primary schools, 32 school counselors, 32 head teachers and 295 pupils. Focus Group Discussion was used to gather information from respondents. Test-retest method was used to establish the reliability of research instruments. A correlation co-efficient of 0.792 was deemed adequate. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Chi-square was used to determine the influence of truancy on gender basis. Findings revealed that the males truant more than the females. It was recommended that parents/guardians to work together with the teachers, and the local administration to look for better ways to eradicate truancy. All stakeholders are also advised to look at the problems facing the boy child and address them urgently to enable him attend school regularly.*

**Keywords:** Prevalence, truancy, gender

### **1. Introduction**

Indiscipline among students is a perennial problem. One common discipline problem found globally is truancy. Truancy can be defined as unexcused and unlawful absence from school; typically, without parental knowledge or consent (Lee and Miltenberger, 1996). Students that are truant typically spend the time they are out of school away from their home and tend to conceal the absences from their parents. Truancy then, is a form of absenteeism that is unexcused and without guardian consent. Davies and Lee (2006) found out that school children in the United Kingdom (UK) are inclined not to attend certain classes during school hours.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization Country Programming Documents (UNESCO) of 2011-2015 indicates that The Net Completion Rate in primary education in Tanzania stood at only 53 per cent in 2010, while the percentage of pupils enrolled in the first grade of primary education who reached the final grade of that level (Survival Rate) in 2010 was around 70 per cent. In 2010 alone, a total of 68,538 girls and boys, or 2.6 per cent, dropped out of primary school; the reported reasons were truancy in 80 per cent of cases, as well as death, inability to meet basic needs, illness, pregnancy and taking care of sick people.

Most primary school pupils in a sample from a study in England had at some time wished they did not have to go to school. Eighteen per cent of boys and 10% of girls had actually walked out of school when they knew they ought to be there and almost a third of boys and 18% of girls admitted to skipping school (Kinder et al, 1996).

Truancy is more prevalent among teenage girls than boys in Scotland as stated by McAra (2008). Although 1 in 5 truants at primary school is a girl, this increased to 3 in 5 by the middle of secondary school, overtaking the boys. He further explains that some subjects like swimming and Physical Education are avoided by girls especially at puberty stages making them bunk off these lessons. He concludes that although the findings show girls were more likely to truant, boys were more to be excluded from school.

The results of the 2006 attendance and absence survey by the MOE (2006) of New Zealand shows that both overall absence and truancy rates continue to rise. Nationally, truancy rates had increased from 3.4 to 4.1% and absence rates had increased from 10.9 to 11.5 between 2004 and 2006. There was only a slight difference between the overall absence rate and truancy rates by gender. The overall absence rates (including justified and unjustified absence) is 11.2% for males and 11.5% for females, while the truancy rate (including unjustified and justified truancy) is 4.1 % for males and 4.2% for females (MOE, 2006).

A study done in Swaziland using Global School Based Health Survey data (GSHS) conducted in 2003 showed the prevalence of truancy was 27.4% (60.5) and 17.9% (723) in males and females respectively. The research revealed that males were more likely to truant than females which might be a manifestation of cultural expectations (Siziya et al., 2007).

The study in Zambia by Shooba (2013) in the period under review, 2006-2010, shows the number of pupils absent was 842. That is, 414 were boys and 428 were girls. It was observed that, on average, 82 boys and 85 girls were absent each year. These findings demonstrate that in Zambia truancy affects both genders almost equally.

In a study carried by Tanja (2006) at Luguru in Tanzania revealed that truancy was a serious problem between boys and girls. In the study, 43.8% of the teachers who were interviewed said that girls were likely to truant more than boys and 12.5% said boys were more likely to truant. This shows that there is a high rate of boys who missed class in the surveyed schools compared to girls. However, the reviewed literature does not give reasons to this, hence the rationale for the current study.

Gitonga (1997) study revealed that more boys than girls were absent because of truancy, and engaging in paid employments and slum community influence. More girls than boys were absent because of helping with household chores, parental withdrawal and maturation problems. Certain school based factors like teacher-pupil conflicts, poor methods of teaching, excessive punishments and excessive homework contributed to pupils' absenteeism. It therefore follows that more boys than girls are more likely to be truants due to school based factors, and in relation to home based factors and peer pressure, the boy child exhibits a higher tendency of indulging in truant behaviors.

## 2. Research Methodology

The research adopted descriptive research design due to its suitability in collecting data and describing the social setting of a situation as it is (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2008). This method enables the researcher to collect information from the respondents by interviewing them or administering questionnaire (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Orodho, (2005) says that descriptive design allows a researcher to collect information, summarize and interpret it for the purpose of clarification. It can be used when collecting people's attitudes, opinions habits or any of the variety of education or social issues (Orodho and Kombo, 2005). The design was suitable in the current study for its effectiveness in collecting data and describing the current existence of truants in their situation. The researcher is therefore in a position to assess the prevalence of truancy on gender basis. Stratified random sampling technique is a process of selecting a sample by dividing a population into sub groups called strata (Mugenda and Mugenda 2008).

Stratified sampling was used for the selection of study sample population by dividing the target population of schools into different strata (Mugenda and Mugenda 2008). This technique was used to get a good representation of primary schools that are in stratus (public day, public boarding and private) primary schools with the desired characteristics suitable for meeting the objectives of this study. This enabled the researcher to compare prerequisite characteristics in these different categories of schools.

Purposive sampling technique was then used to pick on pupils in Standard Seven in all the schools covered by the study. This technique was used to pick Class Seven pupils for the study as the records from the Sub County Education Office (SEO) showed that it was the class with the highest number of pupil absenteeism/truancy and school dropout probably because they are in adolescence stage. Besides, the class was also established to be mature, enough to give required responses for the study.

After purposively selecting Standard Seven pupils in 108 schools, simple random sampling procedure was used to give each unit in the selected categories in the targeted schools an equal opportunity to be included in the study (Kathuri and Pals, 1993). Kerlinger (2004) says an ideal sample should consist of 10% to 30% of the target population depending on the purpose of the data to be gathered. 30% of 92 public day schools were selected for the study thus 18 schools were used for the study. This was done in recognition of Kerlinger (1973) assertion that 10%-30% of a population is fairly representative to be used as a sample population.

Due to the low numbers of public boarding and private schools, they were all selected and included in the sample population and these were 4 and 12 schools respectively.

Therefore, the first 18 public day schools that were picked using simple random sampling constituted the sample population. This involved randomly picking every 5<sup>th</sup> school until the count of 18 public day schools was achieved. The research was thus done in 32 schools of which 18 were public day 4 were public boarding and 12 were private school.

Thereafter, the researcher sampled respondents to be used in the study basing on each stratum. The selection of public day school pupils was done by selecting 10% of the total number of 1510 pupils which is in line with Kerlinger (1973) proposal. Due to the low number of public boarding and private schools, 30% of the pupils in the targeted schools were selected. Therefore 30% of 312 pupils from public boarding and 166 pupils from private school were used in the study. This resulted to a sample of 151, 94 and 50 pupils from public day, public boarding, and private school respectively.

## 3. Results and Discussion of Findings

An analysis of truancy trends with regard to gender was undertaken using descriptive statistics and findings presented in table 1.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Male	205	1.3396	.31993	.041833
Female	74	1.0645	.37027	.08541

Table 1: Gender and Truancy

With regard to gender, findings show that there were more male cases of truancy (1.34%) among primary school pupils in Hamisi Sub-County than female cases (1.06%). This shows that Gender was statistically significant as a factor influencing truancy among

primary school pupils in Hamisi Sub-County. This finding collaborates the findings of Willensen et al., (2005) and Siziya et al., (2007) amongst other studies that show gender is an important factor in truancy. In relation to Siziya et al. (2007) and Willensen et al. (2005) who conducted a research and found out that boys had a higher propensity to engage in truant behaviors, the study established that boys in Hamisi Sub County have a higher chance of engaging in truancy than their girl peers in schools. This fits into the general picture of boys being more of risk takers than girls and hence has a higher chance of risking indulgence into truant behaviors. This is summarized in the following table 2 and 3;

<b>Tiriki East</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	114	40.86
Female	40	14.34
<b>Tiriki West</b>		
Male	91	32.62
Female	34	12.19
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2: Gender Trends in Truancy

Findings in table 2 reveal that more male pupils were truant than their female counterparts in both divisions. The study revealed that 73.48% of the respondents were male while 26.52% were female. Further discussion is found in table 3. It also came out that there were more truancy cases in Tiriki East Division than there were in Tiriki West Division. This is probably due to child labour like mining of gold in Tiriki East together drug and substance abuse which majorly affects boys as compared to girls as cited by SQASO of Hamisi Sub-County during the interview schedule with the researcher, who stated that;

- “Truancy cases are more rampant in Tiriki East Division than Tiriki West, and the suspected causes for this trend are due to gold mining, drug and alcohol abuse and the illicit trade in illegal alcoholic brews are more rampant in Tiriki East. May be this is also the basis as to why there are more girls in schools than boys in Tiriki East Division, because the boys work in the mines and act as couriers for alcohol and drugs”.

This finding also concurs with the Sub-County Commissioner’s remarks who complained of drug and substance abuse in the Sub-County especially in Tiriki East Division. He also said that the population of girls in both primary and secondary schools had exceeded that of boys. He asked the local administration to play a pivotal role in ensuring that all children of school going age in their areas of jurisdiction are in school (GOK, 2015). Considering his statement,

- “Let local leaders, parents, churches and the local administration work to improve school attendance of children within their vicinity to develop our Sub-County especially with regard to improving the attendance of boys in schools.”

This statement reconciles with the findings of the study that noted boys are more truants than girls where reported cases in truancy was 40.86% and 14.34% respectively in relation to gender.

A Chi-Square test was performed to determine the influence of gender on truancy among primary school pupils in Hamisi Sub-County and findings presented in table 3.

	<b>Value</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Asympt. Sig. (2 -sided)</b>	<b>Exact Sig. (2 -sided)</b>	<b>Exact Sig. (1 -sided)</b>
<b>Chi-Square</b>	19.098 <sup>a</sup>	1	.004		
<b>Continuity Correlation<sup>b</sup></b>	6.399	1	.005		
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	19.101	1	.004		
<b>Fisher’s Exact Test</b>				.004	.004
<b>Linear by Linear Association</b>	19.095	1	.004		
<b>N of valid cases</b>	279				

Table 3: Chi-Square Results for the Influence of Gender on Truancy

0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 4. The minimum expected count is 49.59.

Findings in table 3 reveal a statistically significant influence of gender on truancy among primary school pupils in Hamisi Sub-County ( $\chi^2$  19.098; df=1; P>0.05). Study findings were compared with findings from empirical studies that sought to determine the relationship between gender and truancy in schools. Siziya et al., (2007) revealed that the prevalence of truancy in Swaziland was 27.4% (60.5) and 17.9 % (723) in males and females respectively. This research revealed that male truants were more than female truants. This concurs with Willensen et al., (2005) study which shows that 44% of adolescent boys and 35% of girls reported to skip school during lifetime in Netherlands. Also, Gitonga (1997) study in Kenya revealed that more boys than girls were absent because of truancy and engaging in paid employments and slum community influence. This also happens in Hamisi Sub-County as stated earlier due to child labour in form of mining. Also during circumcision period, the study established that older circumcised boys are usually involved in taking care of the younger boys who are to be circumcised. Secondly, they are taken into mandatory seclusions in forests long periods sometimes may last for even six weeks. They may be separated from the community before schools are closed which

simply increases truancy rates among boys during this period. Most boys do not attend school as some of them are usually the initiates and the remaining ones go to take care of the initiates as a cultural expectation.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

It is evident from the results and discussion that truancy is a big problem in Hamisi Sub-County especially in Tiriki East Division. According to the findings of the study, 51.7%, 47.3% and 64% of all the boys interviewed cited parental negligence, economic difficulties, and bullying were mentioned as some of the key causes of truancy in school respectively. For girls, parental negligence, economic difficulties and bullying were 45.7%, 46%, and 58.3% respectively were the causes of truancy. It was noted that truancy was higher among boys than in girls whereby most of them are involved in child labour in form of gold mining.

It was recommended that parents/guardians to work together with the teachers, and the local administration to look for better ways to eradicate truancy. All stakeholders are also advised to look at the problems facing the boy child and address them urgently to enable them attend school regularly.

The government to also enact tougher laws to punish parents plus other people who engage students to work for them during school hours.

With the cultural importance of the circumcision rites being cited as a major cause of truancy for boys, there is a need for community elders, education stakeholders and academicians to undertake research studies to explore ways of reconciling the circumcision festivals with the official government approved school session periods to reduce truancy levels among boys during the period.

Further research should be conducted to find out the reasons that make boys truant more than girls and the solution to this problem. This is due to the research findings that show boys truant more than girls in Hamisi Sub-County.

A study may also be carried out to find out the counseling strategies that work well in controlling truancy in primary schools. This is because different counseling strategies may work well for different ages and categories of schools.

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