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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON ABSENTEEISM AMONG DAY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KEIYO SUB COUNTY, KENYA

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Socio-economic status of parents,  
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#### Abbreviations:

EU - European Union  
NCES - National Centre for Education  
Statistics  
KDHS - Kenya Demographic and Health  
survey  
MOEST - Ministry of Education Science  
and Technology  
SES - Socio-economic Status  
SFP - School Feeding programme

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the influence of parents' socio-economic status on absenteeism in public day secondary schools in Keiyo North Sub County of Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya. The specific objectives of this study were; to investigate the relationship between parent's level of education, occupational status and level of income on absenteeism among secondary schools students in public day schools. The study was guided by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The study adopted ex post facto research design. The study employed stratified random sampling to select 294 students. The instrument for data generation was questionnaires and document analysis of student's class attendance. Test-retest was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics involved the use of frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics (Chi-square) was used to determine associations between variables. The level of significance for testing the null hypotheses was 0.05. The study results indicated that indicated that the parent's level of income was significantly associated with student absenteeism ( $\chi^2 = 13.237$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.010$ ). On the other hand, the mother's occupation was significantly associated with the mother's absenteeism ( $\chi^2 = 17.989$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). In conclusion, Most students whose fathers and mothers attained secondary and primary education miss school compared to those whose fathers/mothers attained college or university education. The study recommends mitigation through school feeding programme (SFP) need to be formulated. The study will be useful to parents, school and the community at large, to find ways of supporting the school in order for learners to achieve a better life in future.

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## INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, parents have a duty of ensuring that their children attend school without fail. Even though parents make sure their children attend school, their children on the other hand may absent themselves from school with or without permission. Students who have absenteeism problems generally suffer academically and socially. According to Baker and Jansen (2000), studies indicate that students who are absent have lower achievement and may be penalized on test scores. Research has also indicated student absenteeism leads to more serious problems including violence substance abuse poor academic performance risk sexual behavior and teenage pregnancy (Dube and Orpinas, 2009). A high level of student absenteeism places students at risk for permanent drop out from school, which can lead to more significant problems later in adulthood for example economic deprivation and marital difficulties (Wilkins, 2008).

Research from the 1993 western Australian child Health study showed that 14% of students were absent for 20 days per year and would be considered to be at risk for lowered academic achievement (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carton and Lawrence 1997). Additionally, research from the United States has shown that the effect of school attendance is stronger for students from low-socio economic status backgrounds than high socio-economic status background (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012). It is therefore likely that the minimum level of school attendance required for satisfactory educational achievement may be different for students from different backgrounds and for schools with different student population. In Ireland a report from the National Educational welfare Board shows that absenteeism during the year 2010/2011 reveal that almost 110,000 children miss over a month of school every year. Absenteeism for compulsory schools in Japan rose in fiscal 2013 for the first time in six years, according to the report from the education ministry. Nationwide 119, 617 students in elementary and junior high schools were absent for 30 days or more for reasons other than

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health or economic. While that number was still down from the record 138, 733 absent students in 2001, it is up 7000 from the previous year. In Africa, research shows that majority of children miss school because of poverty. It is estimated that there is about 80 million child workers in Africa, and the number could rise to 100 million by 2015. Since the problem is with family incomes and educating children, most African countries are making primary education compulsory and parents are constantly reminded on their responsibility (National Centre for Education Statistics, NCES, 2003). According to Kenya Demographic and Health survey (KDHS) (2008), there are twice as many youth attending secondary school in urban areas as compared to rural areas. In urban areas, 45% of children of secondary school age attend school compared to 23% in rural areas, much more effort needs to be placed on increasing secondary education, especially in rural areas and gender disparity is higher in urban areas. Despite the fact that the government of Kenya has been funding secondary schools, there is still poor attendance among the students. The situation is made worse by a number of non-fee costs which some find difficult to pay, the cost include school uniform, building funds, equipment levy and activity fees. In Keiyo sub county there are students who still miss to attend school despite the good learning facilities in their schools making them to score low grades. Excessive school absenteeism may result into poor grades, loss of interest and may result in students withdrawing from school. This issue of absenteeism if not addressed will become a chronic issue which will lead to social issues later in adulthood. There are many factors that cause school absenteeism and this paper investigates specifically whether parents' socio-economic status and indicated by level of education, occupation and income influence student's absenteeism in public day schools in Keiyo Sub County. Consequently the study tested three hypothesis that:

- HO<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between parents level of education and absenteeism among secondary school students in public day schools.
- HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between parents occupational status and absenteeism among secondary schools students in public day schools and
- HO<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between parents level of income and absenteeism among secondary school students in public day schools.

### Conceptual Framework

Parent's income, occupational status and educational level are interrelated, each factor may influence students to make decisions to either go to school regularly or absent themselves frequently. Parcel and Dufur (2001) maintain that students who come from lower socio-economic class than the majority of their classmates are generally subjected to verbal taunts, which besides undermining their self esteem and affecting their academic performance, influence them towards deliberate absence.

### Absenteeism

Bond (2004) defines absenteeism as persistent, habitual and unexplained absences from school. Absenteeism according to Kearney (2008) refers to legitimate or illegitimate absence from class or school. Most absence, perhaps around 80% are

legitimate and may stem from illness, medical doctors appointments, family emergencies, religious holidays, poor weather, homelessness and other several family conditions that prevent school attendance or enrolment. Illegitimate absence means the child does not fully attend school and no reasonable or justifiable circumstances for the absenteeism are present. It may be parent- child motivated absenteeism where a parent deliberately withholds a child from school for economic purposes such as baby sitting or working to support the family. School absenteeism is a complex problem with a variety of causes and adverse consequences school absenteeism is also a main predictor for school drop-out, which in turn is a predictor for social, economic and health related problems in adulthood (Kearney, 2008). Almost all children and adolescents are absent a few days from school during a school year. School absenteeism can either be excusable/unproblematic if due to medical illness or other accepted causes, or inexcusable/problematic if due to environmental, social, psychiatric or other reasons. In Keiyo sub county, school absenteeism may be either excusable or inexcusable and the researcher intends to investigate how parents socio economic status influence student absenteeism.

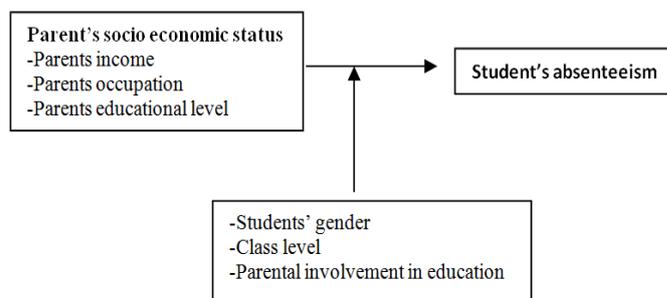


Figure 1. Diagrammatic presentation of conceptual framework

### Parents' Socio-Economic Status and Student Absenteeism

Family socio-economic status (SES) has been observed globally as an essential predictor associated with student learning achievement in both developed and developing countries (Hungu and Thuku 2010). It refers to family socio-economic status as an individual relative position in the society and this is often measured through parental income, educational and occupation. Studies have repeatedly revealed that the parent's annual income is correlated with student's achievement (Eamon 2005). Children whose parents have college education hold so-called white collar jobs and earn above average income and are considered to come from a higher socio-economic status background than students whose parents have not completed secondary school hold blue collar jobs and earn below average wages (Cruikshank, Jenkins and Metcalf, 2009). This study will focus on the three socio-economic status of parents that is, parental income, parents educational level and parents occupation.

### Parents income and student absenteeism

Students in Kenyan secondary schools come from different economic groups which may be high, moderate or low reflected by the size of the family income. Parents income level can affect access to reliable transportation, nutritious food, health care, educational resources in the home and clean and suitable clothing. Less access to these goods and services may negatively affect school enrolment and attendance

(Chugh, 2011, Teshome, 2012, Romero and Lee, 2007). Students from low socio economic status are more likely to experience serious health problems (Rothstein, 2004). As a result they are three times more likely to be chronically absent from school due to illness or injury (Bloom, Dey and Freeman, 2005). This link between family income and children's school attendance is the product of complex and interconnected relationships. Students born to teenage unmarried mothers, a demographic group strongly associated with childhood poverty are more likely to be chronically absent from early elementary school (Romero and Lee, 2008). Adult composition of the home is also strongly related to both the economic resources and children cognitive development (Ellwood and Jenks, 2004) which are in turn associated with student mobility: Disadvantaged children are considerably more likely to change schools during the school year (Rumberger, 2003). This is important, as student mobility is linked to both children's cognitive development and school attendance. For example, homeless children and those with unstable housing situations are far more likely to be absent from school because they change schools two to three times each academic year. Thus the students home status significantly predicts whether the student will attend school regularly (Rafferty 1995). Truancy as a problem behaviour can be influenced by the family background the child comes from. It has been observed that children from low income families are more prone to truant behaviour than those from high income families. According to Durojaiye (1976), low income parents cannot provide learning materials at home to support what the children learn at school and this facilitates truancy. Although education in public day schools in Kenya is free, parents have to incur the cost of uniform and other educational expenses like project funds, payment for lunch and purchase of text books (Fall and Roberts, 2012).

The students who are not able to pay for the charges are normally on and off during the school days. Yara and Otieno (2010) noted that poverty in some parts of the country (Kenya) leads to non payment of fees which leads to absenteeism and exodus of students leaving big fee balances as they migrate from one school to another. Poverty has also made it very hard for Kenyan parents to provide food, shelter and health. Jonker (2006) says that students whose parents cannot afford cost of some of the educational expenses tend to go to school irregularly and in the long run drop out of school. According to Eze (2006) children from parents with high socio-economic status and from urban families can be better encourage to take their education more seriously. If children have parents who adopt a carefree attitude to their education, such children lack the motivation to take their studies seriously, such parents are either unwilling or unable to provide the basic materials of the child in school. The family background of a child is very important in the child's education as it makes the child develop positive attitude to school. Drummond and Stipek (2004) while discussing the "low-income parents" beliefs about their role in children's academic learning, mentioned that a few of these parents indicated that their responsibilities were limited to meeting children's basic and social and emotional needs, such as providing clothing, emotional support and socializing manners. Teasley (2004) noted that students who live in low-income neighborhoods and communities are more likely to be truant, as they are often exposed to violence and drugs, students from low income neighborhoods are more likely to attend schools that are poorly funded. Poorly funded schools often have overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources,

making it more challenging for students to have a successful school experience.

### **Parents Educational level and student absenteeism**

Parents educational level may limit involvement of parents in knowing their children full activities. Parents who do not understand how school operates tend to have a more difficult time helping their children at school. For example parents may not be familiar with programs or services available for their child or with the rules and process to access those services, thereby limiting the ability as advocates. Parents who have low levels of education themselves or are unsure of their parenting skills may feel unable to help their children with school work. Students may misunderstand their parents lack of engagement in school as indicating that schooling is unimportant, leading to their own disengagement from school (Cardoso and Verner, 2007, Chang and Romero, 2008, McCray, 2006). A study done by the Ministry of Education (MOEST, 2007) revealed that parents with professional qualifications ensure that their children remain in school while parents with low level of education have negative attitude towards education because they do not see its immediate benefits. In addition educated parents have improved financial status and improved quality of life and therefore they act as role models to their children and encourage them to remain in school (Polesel, Nizi and Kurantowicz, 2011). Parents level of education influences the continuation of students in school Chugh (2011) observes that parental education is associated with increased access to education, higher attendance rates and lower dropout rates. Parents who have certain educational level might want their children to achieve the same level or even higher (Mutinda, 2013). This study therefore intends to find out whether parents level of education has any effect on student absenteeism.

### **Parents occupation and students absenteeism**

Parents who are not employed may lack resources (time and money) to meet their children basic needs making them to shift their focus to priorities other than school. This negatively affect children's academic achievement and increase the risk of absenteeism or leaving school all together (Teshome, 2012). Families in which the head of the household is involved in subsistence activities like fishing, agriculture or non salary employment may be more affected than low income families with non subsistence jobs. Subsistence activities such as agriculture and fishing tend to be in season while school is in session. Students from this families may stay home to help with household responsibilities or assist with the harvest to help the family financially (Education Policy and Data Center, 2010). In emergent nations older children and non biological children tend to be removed from school more often to help the family meet basic survival needs (Lloyd, Mete and Grant, 2009).

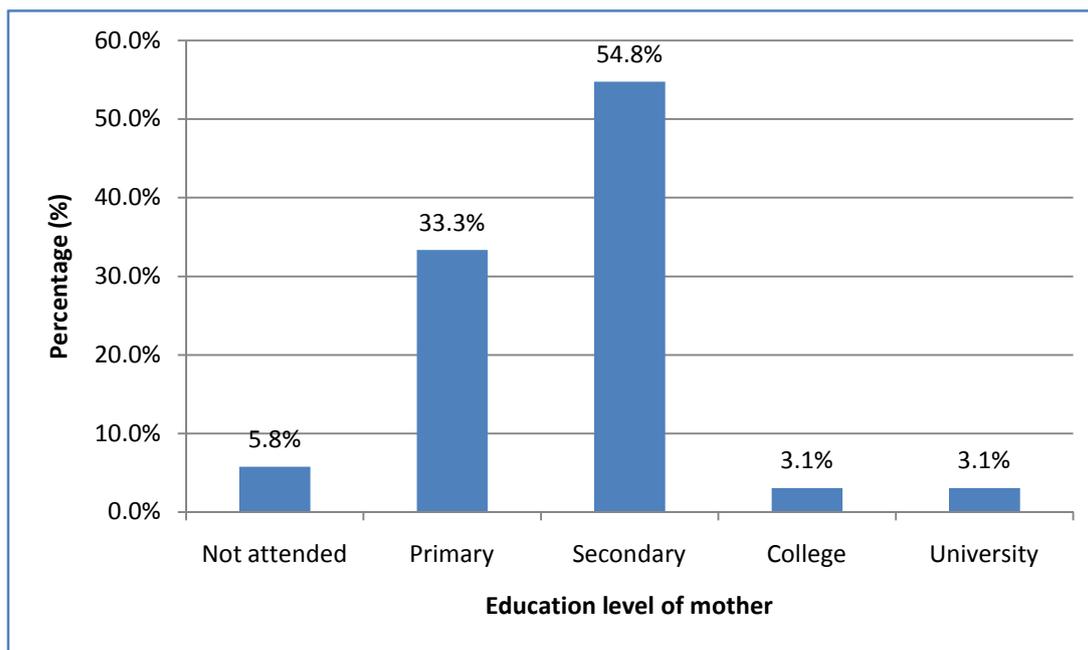
## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Keiyo sub county in Elgeyo-Marakwet County in Kenya lies between 0.8000'N and longitude 35.5667'E with approximate area of 557.40 square kilometers. The study adopted using ex post factor Questionnaires were used to collecting data. The target population comprised of 1711 students in public day secondary schools in the study area. The sample was 294 students drawn from form 2, form 3 and form 4.

**Table 1. Education level of father and absenteeism**

Education level of father		Absenteeism and education level of father			Total
		Rarely absent	Moderately absent	Frequently absent	
Not attended School	Count	10	4	5	19
	% within Education level of father	52.6%	21.1%	26.3%	100.0%
Primary	Count	13	11	9	33
	% within Education level of father	39.4%	33.3%	27.3%	100.0%
Secondary	Count	12	52	61	125
	% within Education level of father	9.6%	41.6%	48.8%	100.0%
College	Count	7	34	66	107
	% within Education level of father	6.5%	31.8%	61.7%	100.0%
University	Count	1	1	8	10
	% within Education level of father	10.0%	10.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	43	102	149	294
	% within Education level of father	14.6%	34.7%	50.7%	100.0%

Source: Research Findings, 2017



Source: Research Findings, 2017

**Figure 2. Mothers' education level and absenteeism**

The study employed stratified and random sampling techniques to select the respondents. Questionnaires were used to collect primary data while analysis of attendance registers were used to obtain data on the student absenteeism. Piloting was carried out and used to establish the reliability and Validity of the Instruments, where a Cronbach's alpha of at least 0.7 was tolerated (Serem, Boit and Wanyama, 2013). The questionnaires were administered to the participants who were assured of their confidentiality. The parents level of education, occupational status and level of income was scored on a three point scale. Data was analyzed using frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics used was Chi-square for independent samples to test the null hypotheses. The level of significance for testing the null hypotheses will be 0.05.

**RESULTS**

**Father's Academic Qualification and Absenteeism**

The study revealed that overall, there was absenteeism for students whose parents attained secondary level of education. The lowest cases of absenteeism were realized for students whose parents had not attended school (3.4%) or had attained university education (6.5%). However there were more cases of frequent absenteeism (80.0%) for students whose parents had attained university education (Table 1).

The study hypothesized states that "there was no significant relationship between parents level of education and absenteeism among secondary school students in public day schools" (C= 0.4859, p= 0.000).

**Mother's Academic Qualification and Absenteeism**

The study findings revealed that overall the highest proportion of absenteeism cases were realized in students whose parents had attained primary (33.3%) and secondary (54.8%) level of education (Figure 2). In all cases, frequent absenteeism was all time high except for primary (50.0%) and university (44.4%) whose highest proportions comprised moderate absenteeism. The Chi-square results showed that mothers' level of education and student absenteeism were significantly associated ( $\chi^2 = 33.314$ , df=8, p=0.000).

**Parent's Income and Absenteeism**

There was high proportion of frequent absenteeism for students whose parents are with low (57.5%) and moderate (43.9%) incomes. Overall, frequent absenteeism (51.4%) was recorded with disregard to the category of the income levels. There was equal proportion (25.0%) of moderate and frequent absenteeism in students from high income parents. High rates (57.5%) of frequent absenteeism were depicted for students whose parents had low income and moderate income (Table 2).

Table 2. Income and Absenteeism

Income		Absenteeism Income			Total
		Rarely absent	Moderately absent	Frequently absent	
Low	Count	14	57	96	167
	% within Income	8.4%	34.1%	57.5%	100.0%
Moderate	Count	23	46	54	123
	% within Income	18.7%	37.4%	43.9%	100.0%
High	Count	2	1	1	4
	% within Income	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	39	104	151	294
	% within Income	13.3%	35.4%	51.4%	100.0%

Source: Research Findings, 2017

Table 3. Father's Occupation and Absenteeism

Father's Occupation		Absenteeism (Fathers occupation)			Total
		Rarely absent	Moderately absent	Frequently absent	
Unemployed	Count	5	30	51	86
	% within Father's Occupation	5.8%	34.9%	59.3%	100.0%
Informally employed	Count	11	54	67	132
	% within Father's Occupation	8.3%	40.9%	50.8%	100.0%
Formally employed	Count	19	20	3	42
	% within Father's Occupation	45.2%	47.6%	7.1%	100.0%
	Count	35	104	121	260
	% within Father's Occupation	13.5%	40.0%	46.5%	100.0%

Source: Research Findings, 2017

A Chi-square test indicated that the parent's level of income was significantly associated with student absenteeism ( $\chi^2 = 13.237$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.010$ ).

### Parental Occupation and Absenteeism

**Father's Occupation:** The results indicated that there was frequent absenteeism for pupils whose fathers were unemployed (42.1%) or informally employed (55.4%). on the other hand, there was rare (54.3%) or moderate (19.2%) absenteeism for pupils whose parents are formally employed (Table 3). The results further indicated that there was significant association between father's occupation and student absenteeism ( $\chi^2 = 56.541$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). On the other hand, the mother's occupation was significantly associated with the mother's absenteeism ( $\chi^2 = 17.989$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

**Parents Educational level and student absenteeism:** From the findings, most parents of absentee students had attained secondary and primary education. While students whose mothers and fathers received university or college education reported lower rate of school absenteeism. The findings of this study supports the link between school absenteeism and parent educational level founded by Henry(2007) who noted that students whose father or mother has college degree, had a lower chance of being absent from school. In other words, parent's educational level has an effect on students school attendance. Llyod and Blanc (1996) found out that the more educated the parents, the more likely the child will be attending school. This implies that the impact of education of the head of a household in which the child resides determines the students schooling.

**Parents Occupation and Absenteeism:** From the findings, most of the students whose parents are unemployed absent themselves from school. Parents from formal occupation had better position and assurance of helping students at home than those from informal occupation.

Parents who are formally employed had monthly salaries that are used to meet the educational needs of their children. On the other hand, parents with informal or unemployed occupation that are mainly self employed people, with an occupation that has no guarantee of turnover cannot afford to spend much on their children. Faisal (2014) revealed that parental occupation is the main predictive variable influencing student academic performance and attendance.

**Parents level of income and student absenteeism:** Most students who came from low income families miss school because parental job issues takes toll on their ability to attend school. Low income families faces hardships in meeting their children's basic needs. This implies that money for instrumental needs are not available while parents are out of the home trying to acquire an income, students are left at home to care for their other siblings (Zhang, 2003). Parents often leave for work much earlier than a student needs to be up, and the student is left to get to school on their own which often does not happen. Many students miss school because of school fees. It means that many students found themselves out of school for a day or more as they are sent home to bring school fees at the beginning of every term and just before exams begins, an obligation which should have been handled by their parents.

### Conclusion

Most students whose fathers and mothers attained secondary and primary education miss school compared to those whose fathers/mothers attained college or university education. Students whose fathers are unemployed miss school most compared to learners whose fathers are formally employed. Those whose mothers are unemployed miss school most compared to those whose mothers are formally employed. Most students from low and middle income families miss school frequently than those students from high income families. More male students miss school compared to the female students. It has therefore become apparent those parents with college or university education, formally employed and of

high income and highly involved in student education are the most important factors necessary to keep students from becoming absent from school.

### Recommendation

Further research should be conducted in the following areas related to student absenteeism;

1. To mitigate on student factors, such as absenteeism caused by hunger, programmes such as School feeding programme SFP need to be formulated or sustained for pupils to improve student performance (Agrisina, 2014)
2. To reduce school absenteeism, there is need to develop a policy such as that of the European Union (EU) where reducing the rate of early school leaving can be meted by offering free day secondary school fees (MEDE, 2014).

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