

Study reveals potential reasons for school absenteeism

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A questionnaire of Swiss schoolchildren has revealed the extent of truancy and school fear. The research, published in BioMed Central's open access journal *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, links truancy and school fear to life events, parental behaviour and school environment.

Over 800 children completed the questionnaire, once at thirteen years old and then again at sixteen years old. They were asked to rate themselves on whether they are scared of school, and whether they ever play truant. Hans-Christoph Steinhausen led the research team from the University of Zurich.

He explained, "Our study not only allows the assessment of the frequency of fear and truancy but also allows a clinically meaningful differentiation of these two forms of absenteeism by behavioural and psychosocial characteristics".

'School fear' is defined as difficulty attending school associated with emotional distress, especially anxiety and depression. This new study reveals that 6.9% of the pupils experienced school fear at thirteen years old while 3.6% reported it three years later. It was significantly more common in girls than boys.

Unlike 'school fear', rates of truancy significantly increased as pupils got older. When they were thirteen, only 4.9% admitted to skipping school. When questioned again at 16, 18.5% reported that they had played

truant.

According to Steinhausen, there are many differences between pupils with school fear and truants, "At age sixteen, kids with school fear showed less self esteem and perceived more competition amongst students than the truants. At age thirteen the students with school fear felt less accepted by their peers than the children who played truant".

Source: BioMed Central

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