

5-2016

Truancy in the Eyes of the Stakeholders

Lindsay Hjermastad

St. Catherine University, hjer8339@stthomas.edu

Recommended Citation

Hjermastad, Lindsay, "Truancy in the Eyes of the Stakeholders" (2016). *Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers*. Paper 593.
http://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/593

This Clinical research paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact ejasch@stkate.edu.

Truancy in the Eyes of the Stakeholders

by

Lindsay Hjermsstad, B.S.W.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

Committee Members
David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, ACT
Shelley Theisen, MSW, LICSW
Jeff Walsh, MA

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation

Abstract

The intent of this qualitative study was to examine what relevant stakeholders believe serve as significant causes of truancy and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it. This study utilized a qualitative, exploratory research design to better understand what a sample of stakeholders believed would help reduce truancy rates in youth ages 13-17. The sample of this study was made up of five professionals who currently work or have worked with families and youth involved with truancy related issues. Two of the participants were high school counselors, two were community outreach workers, and one participant was a county outreach worker; each participant had a minimum of seven years working with youth. The question format used was semi-structured, with 12 prepared questions. All were designed with room for elaboration, asking the professionals to discuss their professional experiences with youth experiencing truancy. The interviews were first transcribed, then themes were discovered by using both inductive and deductive methods. The transcripts were explored in an inductive manner, allowing themes to develop on their own through coding. Once this was complete, the data were further explored in a deductive manner to better determine actual themes found supporting the inductive coding. Four main themes emerged: the definition of truancy based on the professional role, changes in truancy, things that impact truancy, and things that reduce truancy. The data from the participants were compared to previous research. The previous literature, along with this study discovered that truancy occurs because of many reasons and not one approach will work for all students. There are several factors that go into truancy and remembering to take them all into account will help youth succeed in attending school regularly. Implications for the field of social work and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Literature Review | 8 |
| Conceptual framework | 17 |
| Methods | 20 |
| Results | 25 |
| Discussion | 45 |
| References | 58 |
| Appendices | 62 |

List of Tables/Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Participant Demographics | 26 |
| Figure 1: Definition of Truancy | 27 |
| Figure 2: Changes in Truancy | 27 |
| Figure 3: Impacts Truancy | 28 |
| Figure 4: Reduces Truancy | 28 |
| Figure 5: Definition of Truancy from Outreach Participants | 30 |
| Figure 6: Definition of Truancy from School Counselors | 31 |

Introduction

The majority of youth in developed countries finish high school and receive a high school diploma, but there are some states in the U.S. where that is not the case. In the United States, more than a million youth drop out each year, around 7,000 a day, and the numbers are rising (Rumberger, 2011). Reducing truancy rates and chronic absenteeism is a common goal of schools across the country. Research has shown that a lack of school *attendance* is related to students dropping out of school before receiving a high school diploma (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Truancy can be defined as skipping a class (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010), having one unexcused absence from school (McNeal, 1999), being tardy to a class (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001), having multiple unexcused absences from school (Jeynes, 2007), or having a set number of excused or unexcused absences from school (Corville-Smith, J., Ryan, B. A., Adams, G. R., & Dalicandro, T. (1998). All of the definitions have the same underlying meaning, regardless if excused or unexcused. It is when a student is not in school or class when they are supposed to be.

Youth without a high school diploma is not only detrimental for the youth, but to the larger society and the economy. Dropouts as a group, never catch up with high school graduates, using a number of indicators (Rumberger, 2011). They are less likely to find work, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to commit crimes, suffer health problems, and are “two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates” (U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Justice, 1996, p.1). Longitudinal studies have also shown youth who drop out of high school tend to have a shorter life expectancy of seven years compared to those

who earn a diploma (Rumberger, 2011). A study in Minneapolis found that students who were in class 95 percent of the time were twice as likely to pass state language-art tests, compared to those students who were in class 85 percent of the time (Johnston, 2000). Truancy is not a new problem, but is a problem schools and school systems have been struggling with on a daily basis since the 1800s, which coincidentally is when the schooling system began (Dougherty, 1999).

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice issued the *Manual to Combat Truancy* in July 1999. In this issue it states that truancy is both the first sign of trouble and also a gateway to crime. Vandalism during school hours has been linked to truancy, which can be a possible gateway to more serious crimes. High school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated compared to the youth with a diploma (Invest in kids, 2008). As reported in *The Silent Epidemic*, “For almost all young people, dropping out of high school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement” (Bridgeland, 2006, p. 7-8). Truancy starts long before high school; there are signs that can be seen in elementary school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Jeynes, 2007).

There are several studies that look at the causes of truancy, and most studies focus on what schools can do, but there are not very many studies examining what relevant stakeholders believe would help reduce truancy, sampling across the stakeholders. This study explored what a group of professional stakeholders believe are particularly important causes of truancy and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it. There are many different factors to consider when looking at youth truancy and what can potentially help youth succeed in school. This study explored

how to better define truancy, what a school can do, the role of a parent(s), the importance of community, and the partnership between the school, the parent, and the community in reducing it. This study used a qualitative method to ask these questions broadly to a number of people in “stakeholder roles,” including counselors and community outreach employees.

Literature Review

Attendance and truancy rates are highly monitored today. Students who attend school regularly are more likely to be successful academically (School Attendance: Issues to Consider, 2008) and schools that have higher attendance rates are more likely to have higher standardized test ratings (Sheldon, 2007) and thus is a more desirable school for families to send their children too. Based on this, it would make sense that schools do everything possible to improve attendance rates and decrease truancy. However schools can only do so much; it is vital to get help from all relevant stakeholders: the community, the schools, counselors, teachers, parents, and even the youth themselves. They all play a role in reducing truancy and helping the youth succeed in school and therefore later in life.

Defining Truancy

Defining truant and truancy is difficult because there is no consistent definition (Reid, 2005). This is one of the more difficult problems faced by schools, researchers, and others trying to reduce or prevent truancy. Even states define truancy differently, along with schools even in the same district. Truancy can be defined as skipping a class (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010), having one unexcused absence from school (McNeal, 1999), being tardy to a class (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001), having multiple unexcused absences from school (Jeynes, 2007), or having a set number of excused or unexcused absences from school (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Although all the definitions have the same underling meaning, truancy is when a student is absent from school.

Absenteeism and truancy are similar to each other, but have different definitions. Truancy is defined as an unexcused absence from school, while absenteeism is defined as not being physically in schools, with or without an excuse (Teasley, 2004). The main difference between truancy and absenteeism is truant youth tend to skip school to spend time away from the school without parental knowledge, where absenteeism is when the student is physically not in school, but generally with parental knowledge (Teasley, 2004). Reid (2005) defines truancy as youth being absent from school without parent consent or knowledge; for the sake of this paper, this is the definition that will be used.

Community

There is a traditional African saying that, it takes a village to raise a child. Literature does not dispute this common wisdom. Community makes a big difference in a youth's life. There are many factors that influence how a student does in school; one of these factors is socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Lower socioeconomic status is not a risk in of itself, but when shared with other risk factors, such as low self-esteem, or learned helplessness, the chances of truancy increase (Lehr et al., 2004). Children who come from lower socioeconomic statuses often have lower self-esteem and tend to believe they are not capable academically (Lehr et al., 2004). In addition families who have fewer financial resources, may have their children work to help out with extra income. This work

usually occurs after school hours, but this leaves the child exhausted and unable to fully focus on school, or may leave the child too exhausted to physically make it to school. The student does this with parental knowledge and consent but without the permission of the school system (Teasley, 2004).

Higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods tend to be more “resource rich” neighborhoods, which provide more youth programs, more support for families, better relationships with neighbors, and more communication with schools (Teasley, 2004). The opposite tends to happen in lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods. In these settings, youth are more likely to experience acts of violence, and experience maltreatment. There is often less communication and relationships with the schools, fewer programs are offered to the youth and the neighborhoods have a higher degree of transient activity, which often leads to low home ownership and less resident investment (Teasley, 2004). These factors all influence truancy and school attendance.

Related to this, the University of Minnesota created a program “Shoulder to Shoulder” that was aimed to help parents raise teenagers. Their main focus is when raising a teenager, doing it together (parent, child, child’s friends, parents of child’s friends, community, and school) is vital. They created a handbook that is a “quick snapshot” with key information for parents. The handout provides parents with ideas and strategies to help raise a teen, from parents who have raised a teen, along with the understanding that every teenager is unique and parents ultimately know their teen best.

Schools

There are many underlying causes of why a student is absent from school. There are various reasons or motives behind a student's school avoidance and these reasons need to be kept in mind (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). When looking at increasing a student's attendance to school, exploring the reasons behind the absence is important. There are both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies linking students who drop out of high school having more absences than other students, beginning as early as first grade (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Jeynes, 2007). School characteristics play a role in the reasons why students are truant. Larger schools tend to have more problems with truancy compared to smaller ones (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Class size does make a difference, but other factors include: whether students believe the classroom environment is chaotic, if the students doesn't feel heard or noticed by the teacher, if the class is boring to them, or if they don't believe there are consequences to skipping school (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Schools have a number of practices they can use to increase a student's attendance.

Reid (1999) states that some issues that cause truancy could consist of: teacher-student relationships, student-peer relationships, attendance policies, or even bullying. When it is the school environment, and not necessarily the home that is contributing to the truant behavior of the student, the professional, the parents and/or the student should reflect on how the teacher's teaching techniques or the classroom management styles can be altered to help at students. If necessary, parents may look into finding a school that may be a better fit for that student.

Schools offer counselors to help students with both academic and personal concerns. They are one of the resources a school uses help with truancy. When a counselor is involved in a student's school life, they can help overcome some of the obstacles or reasons behind why they are missing class. Schools also work with the county when the student is chronically absent (Teasley, 2004). But usually getting outside help is not beneficial for the student and can be more damaging (Corville-Smith et al., 1998), by involving the student in the legal system and thus missing more class time. This can lead the student to fall more behind (Mallett, 2016). Historically, schools did not always involve parents until the problem was severe enough that the student was on the verge of failing out (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Parents are now being recognized as an important factor in a students' attendance, and as a resource in reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism (Corville-Smith et al., 1998).

Family

Parent involvement practices are important in a child's school success but not all practices have been related to truancy. Positive parental involvement takes the form of things like checking homework, and reading. Both are associated with improved grades and achievement scores (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010; McNeal, 1999) Similarly, parental monitoring, parent-child discussions, parent participation in the school and PTA membership are linked to a youth's higher school attendance rate (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). If a school would like to increase daily school attendance, studies have shown that they are more likely to succeed when they reach out and work with parents in specific ways to address the problem (Epstein & Sheldon,

2002). Another way to reduce truancy is when both the school and parent partner together (Dannerbeck, 2005; Jeynes, 2007).

When a school and parent partner together the probability of succeeding in reducing truancy doubles (McNeal, 1999). School and parent partnerships are beneficial, but other techniques and relationships help too. Parent-child relationships have been shown to be unparalleled to another relationship when it comes to absenteeism rates (Dannerbeck, 2005). When parents spend more time with their kids they impart values and aspirations, promote positive behaviors, encourage academic achievement, and foster positive communication. These parent-child traits positively influence how well a youth does in school (Teasley, 2004).

When there is not a successful or healthy parent-child relationship, and that child lives in a stressful household, they are at a higher risk of dropping out of school. A stressful household can include environments with parents with drug or alcohol abuse problems (Hammond et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2007). Parents with chemical dependency issues tend to not monitor their children's everyday activities, and thus giving the child a greater risk of dropping out of school (Lehr et al., 2007).

Prevention and Intervention Strategies

There are as many prevention and intervention strategies for truancy as there are causes of truancy. Unfortunately, there is no magic policy or intervention that will end truancy and truant behavior. Reasons behind truancy are very hard to assess; each student's circumstances and reasons behind the behavior vary. There have been many procedures and policies used to help reduce truancy.

There have been attendance incentive programs, which have shown to be very effective if used correctly (Dougherty, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Attendance incentive programs are usually successful as long as they are implemented with fidelity. The main focus of the effective programs is that the student is rewarded when they have perfect attendance during a predetermined amount of time. This amount of time must be obtainable for students. This could be a quarter, a six, or nine-week period. One important factor in this type of program is the reward must be desirable to the student. Oftentimes the school will get the community involved by having restaurants donate gift certificates or theatres donate movie tickets, etc. If the reward is undesired by the students the program was shown to be ineffective. The schools can involve the youth to create rewards that will be motivating.

Early intervention has been shown to also reduce truancy. Implementing interventions to reduce truancy during elementary years, when truant behaviors are first noticed is vital. If truancy is prevented in early schooling years it has shown to dramatically impact future truant behaviors in the middle school years (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Jeynes, 2007). At-risk students for truancy can be identified as early as third grade. Some significant risk factors to look for in elementary aged children include: behavioral difficulty, irregular attendance, and meager academic performance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ford & Sutphen, 1996).

Parental involvement has been linked to reducing truancy rates. In the *Manual to Combat Truancy* (1996) parents were identified as the most significant individuals in getting their child to have good attendance in school. With parents

being so vital it is important for schools to develop relationships with parents that are based on respect and trust (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Every student's attendance must be monitored, and although this task is not easy and can seem overwhelming, the Epstein & Sheldon study (2002) found that when schools communicated with parents, regardless if the communication occurred by phone, in person, or by mail, attendance rates improved.

All in all the literature found that to reduce truancy rates is essential is that schools have well-developed policies regarding student attendance (Doughety, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). It is vitally important that all stakeholders: administrators, teachers, parents, and students understand and enforce the policies consistently (Teasley, 2004). When attendance rates change, the policies need to be reflected on and reviewed and if necessary rewritten. In order to adequately rewrite a policy, so it is more effective the school/district must first determine the main causes behind the truancy.

Summary

There are many risk factors for truancy and the high rate of absenteeism in many high schools around the United States. Although many of those were discussed in the literature review, it is impossible to list all of the reasons. However, it is clear that truancy occurs because of several reasons and not one approach will work for all students. Studies have demonstrated that to effectively reduce truancy community, schools, and parents all need to work together and create a common goal (Gullatt, 1997; Jeynes, 2007; Teasley, 2004). In this literature it was clear to see that all three forces need to work together, but there were not many studies on what

each stakeholder believed would help reduce truancy. This study sought to better understand what some relevant stakeholders believed serve as significant causes of truancy and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it: seeking perspectives from the community, a sample youth themselves and hearing from those in and outside of school settings.

Conceptual Framework

Youth truancy is multi-faceted. Many factors go into truancy: why the student is truant, the school climate, the family dynamics, and what, if any community influences there are. Truancy affects not only the youth, but also society. A book, written by Christopher Mallett, Ph.D., JD, MSW, *School-to-Prison Pipeline* (2016) illustrates how schools and court systems, although they were not designed to collaborate together, often do today to the detriment of many vulnerable youth. This phenomenon is often referred to as the “school to prison pipeline” (Mallett, 2016). The pipeline is better understood as a set of policies set in place by the schools that make it more likely the student will experience criminal involvement with juvenile courts than to obtain a quality education (Mallett, 2016).

A zero-tolerance policy is an example of this. First introduced in 1983 by the Navy for submarine crewmembers who were suspected of drug use, (Gage, 2013) was even recently a common practice in American schools for offenses related to drugs, weapons, tobacco and school disruption including absenteeism. Zero tolerance policies mandate a “predetermined consequence(s), most severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (Gage, 2013 as cited by American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 852). When this concept is applied to truancy in the schools, the consequence tends to be suspension. The increased uses of zero tolerance policies have exponentially increased arrests and referrals to the juvenile court (Mallett, 2016). Even though there has not been evidence that zero tolerance policies increase attendance or

school performance (Gage, 2013), they are still in practice today. Such policies and the differential risks of things like suspension operate in the context of race. This has been discussed not only by Mallett, but also on a local level by attorneys and faculty such as Nekima Levy-Pounds. Nekima was elected in 2015 to be the president of the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP and serves on and has founded a variety of organizations that focus on issues of racial equality and disparity. She also has been recognized for her legal work, including being named 2015 Attorney of the Year by *Minnesota Lawyer*.

High school dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated compared to the youth with a diploma (Invest in kids, 2008). Truancy in youth tends to be a first sign of trouble that can lead the youth to the juvenile court systems and eventually prison. The pipeline concept is a complicated problem. Mallett explains that truant youth end up progressing through the pipeline, which places the children and adolescents at risk for school failure. Strict school truancy policies can serve as significant risks of, if not direct referrals, to juvenile court involvement (Mallett, 2016). Schools that use zero-tolerance policies discipline students who often are first-time offenders for nonviolent incidents and are usually typical adolescent behavior. A study conducted found that one suspension in the 9th grade was found to double the risk of failing subsequent academic courses in high school, also increasing the risk of dropping out of high school (Mallett, 2016). In addition, dropout rates double if a student is arrested either on or off school grounds, and is four times more likely to be formally involved with the juvenile courts (Mallett, 2016).

Many of these students who are being routed into the school-to-prison pipeline, often are already facing difficulties or obstacles within their families, schools, and communities (Mallett, 2016). A multi-faceted approach is needed to reduce truancy rates: partnerships between school, family, community and student. Best practices suggest that to reduce truancy there needs to be this partnership (Gullatt, 1997; Jeynes, 2007; Teasley, 2004). This study sought to better understand what a sample of relevant stakeholders believe serve as significant causes of truancy and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it: initially seeking perspectives from the community, school employees, parents, and to the youth themselves.

Method

Research Design

This study sought to better understand what relevant stakeholders believe serve as significant causes of truancy and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it: by seeking perspectives from the community, and if possible, from youth who were once truant and their parent or parents. The literature discussed the importance of a partnership between community, schools, parents, and youth to successfully tackle youth truancy. However more research is necessary to determine what each relevant stakeholder believe serve as significant causes of truancy. This study utilized a qualitative, exploratory research design to better understand what a sample of stakeholders believes will help reduce truancy rates in youth ages 13-17.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of youth and families experiencing or who have previously experienced truancy, as well as professionals who currently work or have worked with families and youth involved with truancy related issues. For the sample of this study the researcher was interested in focusing on truant youth and professionals who work with those youth. The final sample of this study consisted of only professionals. The researcher tried to personally interview 8-10 relevant stakeholders, including two county workers in the juvenile justice area, two school employees (Deans, Social Workers, or Teachers), two parents, and two youths. This would have allowed the researcher to explore perspectives from a variety of professionals and families who could offer informed perspectives on this

complex phenomenon with the insights and perspective of “first hand” experiences. This method is something referred to as “theoretical sampling” or sampling to describe a phenomenon from a number of related perspectives.

Data Collection:

This research was conducted using a qualitative design in order to obtain data from participants through one-to-one interviews. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 35-65 minutes and included 12 questions with associated sub-questions and prompts (see appendices D & E), which was pre-approved by the research committee and Institutional Review Board. The questions were designed to build on the current literature on reducing truancy and absenteeism rates, while respecting each person’s level of education and understanding. The questions were designed to attempt to elicit open and honest feedback from the interviewees, and avoid interviewer bias, through the use of open-ended questions.

Initially the researcher developed two separate interview questionnaires: one for professionals working with the youth and one for parents of truant youth and the youth themselves. However only the professional questionnaire was used.

The professional questionnaire began by asking demographic information and about their experiences with truancy. The interview went on to ask about any changes in the field related to truancy, and to what extent parental-involvement impacted truancy. The questions continued based on their answers to more in-depth questions. The interview questions continued by asking open-ended questions about other policies or procedures they have used, and their experiences with zero-tolerance policies. The questions asked about the extent to which they

agree or disagree with emerging findings in the literature: for instance, asking respondents' opinions about the idea that in order to reduce truancy there needs to be a collaborative effort between potential stakeholders. The interview then concluded by asking the professionals if there was anything they would like to add or if there was something they felt as an important part in truancy reduction or prevention that the researcher didn't think to ask.

The parental and youth questionnaire began by asking demographic information and started to build rapport with either the parent or youth. The interview would have continued by asking about their experience with truancy. It had questions about what policies, people, or things that were helpful or could have been more helpful. It included by asking who in particular helped the most, and then if parental-involvement made a difference. This questionnaire asked about zero-tolerance policies and if they or someone they knew was affected by it. The interview then would have concluded by asking if they would like to add something that the researcher didn't think to ask.

To gather this sample the researcher used "snowball sampling". County workers were contacted first, and then the researcher was referred to two community outreach workers, then two high school counselors. The researcher had the hope of being referred to families and youth but was unsuccessful. This was mainly due to the fact that the professionals were still working with those families/youth or were no longer in contact with previous families/youth. (The invitation script for county and school workers is attached in Appendix C) The researcher chose to focus on success stories from the families and youth because it

may have been easier to reach families who are not currently experiencing truancy, but instead the families who have overcome this. The researcher would have asked them about their personal experiences of what helped, what did not help, and what could have helped.

Since the researcher was unable to reach any families or youth directly, another county program was contacted. Here the researcher found another professional to interview. This study was able to reach a total of five professional participants: two high school counselors, two community outreach workers and one county outreach employee.

Protection of Human Participants:

In order to ensure protection of human participants, an informed consent form was developed. The consent was given ahead of the interview for participants to read and look over. Youth (those under 18 years of age) would have been given a verbally assent to the interview as well as have a parent or parents give parental permission. Before the start of the interview the researcher began by explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and the measure that would be used to ensure confidentiality (consent form is attached in Appendix A). The informed consent was developed by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) for expedited-level review and it was adaptation for this study. It was approved by the research committee, comprised of David Roseborough, Shelley Theisen, Jeff Walsh, and the IRB prior to administering it to participants. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions after the form was reviewed and before they agreed to the information in the informed consent. The

researcher required a signed consent form before interview could start. All of the participants were given a copy of the informed consent for their records. They were given up to two weeks after the interview to make this request.

Data Analysis:

The book by Christopher Mallett (2016), *The School-to-Prison Pipeline*, offered a perspective to inform the data analysis in this research. The theory states that youth who are subjected to zero-tolerance policies are more likely to face criminal involvement with the juvenile courts. The researcher first collected data by conducting one-to-one interviews. Then each interview was transcribed. This gave the researcher a chance to re-familiarize herself with the interview and allow for coding. Inductive coding was used first to find recurring themes from the data by labeling the themes, color-coding the transcribed text. Deductive coding was then used to determine sub-themes. Emerging themes were then grouped together into main themes and sub-themes. The transcripts were then reviewed once more for accuracy.

Strengths/Limitations:

A strength of this study is that it sought to hear from a number of people and perspectives. A limitation of this study is that it is a pilot study, and only a small number of participants were interviewed from one geographic location that may or may not represent this phenomenon more broadly.

Results

The current study focused on how to better understand what relevant stakeholders believe serve as significant factors for truancy in youth ages 13-17 and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it. Twelve interview questions were developed by the researcher to help guide this study. The questions started off with demographics, including professional role and length of time working with truant youth, and then about the definition of truancy based on that professional role. By using open-ended questions, the hope was to achieve a more thorough look at how different roles viewed youth truancy.

The method used for recruiting the professionals was a “snowball sample”. The researcher reached out to several county programs that focused on youth. With referrals, the researcher was then forwarded to several school employees. The researcher had hopes of reaching families or youth with personal experience with truancy, but since many of the professionals are still working with those families or are not in contact with previous families, it was unsuccessful. The researcher did anticipate this population being hard to reach, and so more county outreach workers were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted using a qualitative design in order to obtain data from participants through one-to-one interviews. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 35-65 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed by the researcher.

The sample included five professional participants (N=5). One professional that works in a county run program; two professionals that work in community

outreach; and two professionals that work as high school counselors. Each professional had a minimum of 7 years experience working with youth, more specifically a minimum of at least 6 months working in his or her current position with youth who have struggled with truancy. Demographics of each participant are represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

| Participant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Role | High School Counselor | High School Counselor | Community Outreach | Community Outreach | County Outreach |
| Total years experience | 30 | 25 | 7 | 15 | 10 |
| Time in current position | 20 | 20 | 6 months | 5 | 3.5 |

Themes were discovered by using both inductive and deductive methods. The transcripts were first explored in an inductive manner, allowing themes to develop on their own through coding. Once this was complete, the data were further explored in a deductive manner to better determine actual themes found supporting the inductive coding and four main themes emerged.

When explored inductively the emerging themes related to the categories of: The definition of truancy based on the professional role, changes in truancy, things that impact truancy, and things that reduce truancy. Within the theme, definition of truancy, two sub-themes emerged: no specific definition used by program and the use of the county definition (displayed in Figure 1). Within the theme, changes of truancy three sub-themes emerged: use of technology, use of schools, and economic contexts (displayed in Figure 2). Within the theme of, what impacts truancy four

sub-themes emerged: mental health concerns, zero-tolerance policies, homelessness, and culture (displayed in Figure 3). Within the final theme, what reduces truancy, four sub-themes emerged: parental involvement, collaborative efforts, incentives, and connections (displayed in Figure 4).

Figure 1: Definition of Truancy

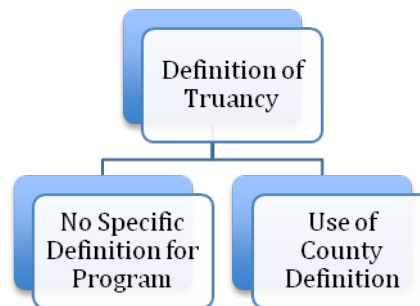


Figure 2: Changes in Truancy

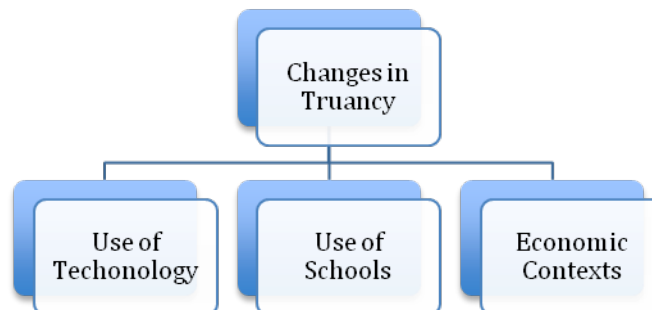
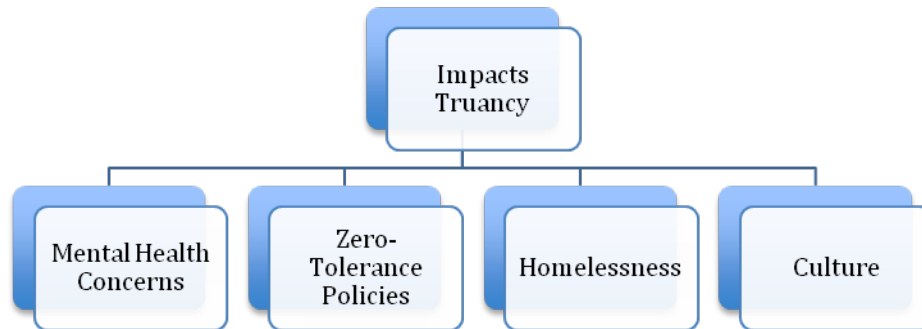
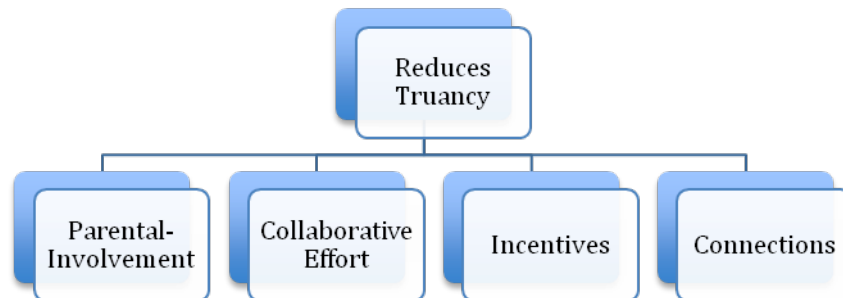


Figure 3: Impacts Truancy**Figure 4: Reduces Truancy**

Themes of truancy in the eyes of the stakeholders

Theme #1: Definition of Truancy

Participants were asked what the definition of truancy was they used in their individual professional role. Each professional role: county/community outreach worker and school counselor had a different definition, mainly because each professional had his or her own role with the youth. The two school counselors worked with the youth on a variety of different needs, not solely truancy. One of the three county outreach workers said her day-to-day contact with the youth is regarding truancy but there were always underlying concerns the youth and her discussed. The other two community workers said the youth are referred for truant

behavior, but their interaction with the youth is not solely truancy, but other concerns as well.

Subtheme #1: No specific definition

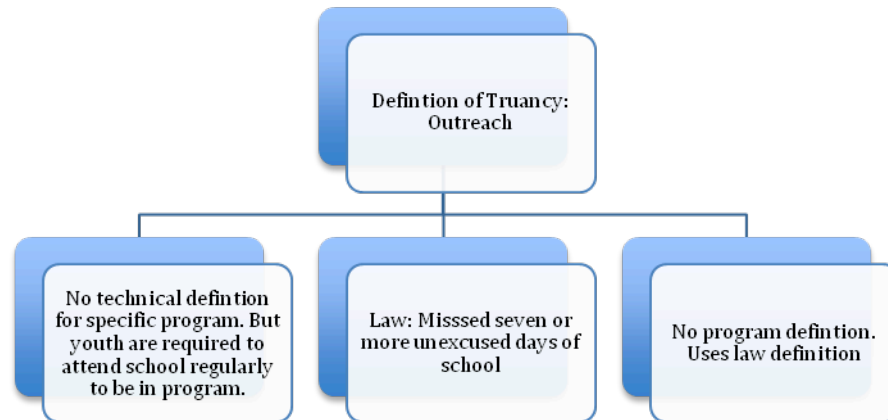
Each role the professional had shaped the definition of truancy used. Each of the three-county/community workers did not have a specific definition for their individual role but their program used the county definition. One community outreach worker stated,

Well, I don't know what the technical definition is. Since we work with the kids more in the evening, it's not something I think about. We do transport the kids to our program from school. And if they are not where they're supposed to be then we are more concerned. But to be referred to our program they have to be found as truant and are court ordered to attend not only our program but school regularly. If they do not, then they get kicked out of our program and are sent to the JDC.

Another county outreach worker stated that,

We don't necessarily have a definition of what truancy is. So we use the law. It states that if you have missed seven or more unexcused days of school, you are considered truant.

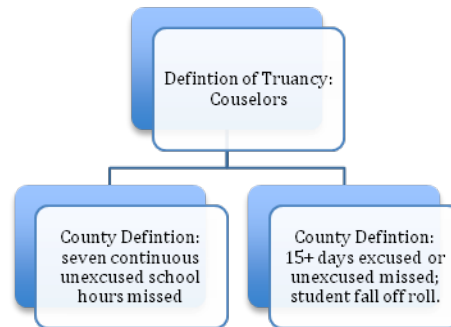
Overall, participants who work at the county or community level do not have their own specific definition of truancy, but use either the state law or county law to guide their practice. Figure 5 below shows the definitions used by each outreach participant.

Figure 5: Definition of Truancy from Outreach Participants*Subtheme #2: County Definition*

Each school counselor had a different idea about his or her definition of truancy. One school counselor stated, “In this setting, I believe it’s the {name withheld} county’s definition: seven unexcused absences. And they have to be consecutive absences in one class.” In the school setting, focusing on the role of the counselor they both seemed to use the county’s definition and did not have one specific to their school. The other counselor went into a little bit more detail and stated,

We use the county’s definition, which is 15+ days missed; unexcused or excused and they fall off roll. Excused absences can be tricky because sometimes we find the some families will over excuse to hide the fact that their child is truant for this reason or that. We do look into the child absences way before that; we are looking at seven to ten class periods missed. And the school comes and tries to figure out why they’re not coming to school.

Overall school counselors used the county definition from where their school was located. Figure 6 below shows the definitions used by each participant as a school counselor.

Figure 6: Definition of Truancy from School Counselors

Theme #2: Changes in Truancy

Each participant was asked how truancy has changed over his or her time while working with truant youth. The answers varied depending on each role the professionals had with the youth. Three sub-themes emerged: Use of technology, the use of schools, and economic contexts.

Subtheme #1: Use of technology

Use of technology was reported as a major factor with the work professionals do with the youth experiencing truancy. Technology has come a long way in 20 years and it has become a vital part of American life and not always for the positive.

One professional stated that:

Technology has negatively changed how youth view the school. Why do youth need to come to school when they can YouTube or Google anything they might need to know? When there is an instant access to information. And so you are seeing a change in how we learn instantly versus in the olden days when you had to find someone to teach you and take the time to learn it. There is now instant access and that has shortened our attention spans. So you have kids who say I can do all of this at home, why do I have to come here and do this?

Another professional saw a positive use of technology. She uses technology with the youth on a daily basis. She expressed that communicating with the youth regularly

helps build connection and rapport that has shown to improve attendance. She said it helped by “communicating the way they do.” She also expressed that technology is also used with parents and her. When she calls a parent and tells them they are not in school and the parent thought they were, she asked them to GPS “ping” their child’s phone. This can be used to show the parent that their child is not at school like they say, but instead at home or at a movie theatre.

Subtheme #2: Use of schools today

Schools in the past had access to community support and resources to best help youth succeed in life, while also being a place for them to learn their ABCs and 123s. As time progressed community support and resources have begun to stagger and participants reported that schools have had to become more than what they were intended to. Schools today still try and teach the youth their ABCs and 123s, but now access to those resources and support from the community are less.

Schools are now according to one professional,

A clearing housing that fills a lot of voids. It gives the youth a chance to have health care access, access to food, a free clinic, plus education on top of all of that. That is what I struggle with; what is the definition of school now a days.

Another professional expressed the same concern,

In school, we have to use a wrap-around method with other professionals here at the school to help each individual. We partner with the therapist we have on campus and that helps gives more access to services to the kids some would not have the chance to have.

With schools expanding their roles, it was expressed by both school counselors that it is harder and harder to help the youth with their school attendance without addressing the many other concerns they may have. Although

they both said it was beneficial for the schools to offer those services to the youth, it made it more difficult to focus solely on education.

Subtheme #3: Economic Contexts

Some professionals expressed how economics do and do not play a role on youth truancy. Most professionals stated that socio-economic status does not necessarily play a role in youth truancy, but more on how each family deals with their economic conditions. Many professionals stated that socio-economic status does not impact youth truancy, but that truancy does carry a stigma that the youth that are truant are mostly living under the poverty line, which is not the case. One professional stated,

Economic factors like low income tend to be at higher risk for truancy related activities, but not because they are lower income. But because there is less supervision. Lower income families tend to focus their energy on getting their family through day-to-day life; putting the roof over their heads, making sure there's food on the table and making sure daily needs are met. Income does not necessarily matter, but it's how the family's day-to-day life is managed.

Another professional discussed her belief about single and two parent families and their effect on truancy,

There are many factors that go into whether or not a student comes to school. Single-parent or dual-parent do not necessarily make a difference. It is not a variable. But what does make a difference is parenting skills that are incorporated while in the situation definitely makes a difference. There is a stereotype that if you are low income or struggling or using economic assistance or any of those things that you're at risk for truancy. But that is definitely not the case.

Socio-economic status sometimes carries a stigma as stated above in that truant youth are assumed to be those living in poverty, but what was expressed by the professionals suggests that this is not necessarily the case.

Theme #3: What impacts youth truancy

Throughout each interview each professional had both very similar and very different views on what impacts youth truancy. The four most common impacts were mental health concerns, zero-tolerance policies, homelessness, and the culture of the youth and family. Many of the professionals overlapped their thoughts on each subtheme. Each is described in detail below.

Subtheme #1: Mental Health

Mental health was one of the main impacts on youth truancy the professionals expressed impacting their daily work.

I would say most of the kids I work with have a mental health concern or at least it is a contributing factor of their truancy. A little but of it is chemical dependency and an even smaller amount is related to what people normally think of truancy; that the kids just doesn't want to go to school. There is always an underlying cause and more often than not it's anxiety.

Acknowledgment of mental health is slowly becoming more mainstream and more people are beginning to understand that it is a thing that affects more people than originally thought. One area that is still lacking some "buy-in" according to some in the sample, is in the school systems. One professional expressed this,

It is hard to get the parents on board with mental health. Because it's not like a broken leg, which is something you can see. It's hard to get a parent's buy-in. But when the symptoms are described, the parents begin to understand that their child would benefit from some sort of therapy to help them cope.

Many professionals expressed the view that truancy is not related to the common misconception that the youth just doesn't want to go to school. There is usually to always an underlying cause. Mental health is one of those causes. One professional

went into detail on what mental health can look like in his or her role,

Students who do not know how to handle stress or trauma have a tendency to shut down. The anxiety they feel can cripple them to the point where they are school phobic and they do not want to go to school because they have too many high expectations or have people who have expectations of them and they get anxious about it. When the youth miss school, they get farther and farther behind, which makes them more anxious and they are even more crippled. This snowball effect happens over and over again. And until that student is taught how to handle the stresses of life they are too anxious to start to move forward.

Sometimes the students with mental health issues self medicate to cope with life.

One professional spoke to this phenomenon.

There have been kids who were unable to cope with the stresses and demands of everyday life, so they lead to substance abuse. Once a youth goes toward self-medicating it can be even harder to get them back on track.

Mental health was a main theme found, but was not the only one. One interview question asked about policies currently or in the past that were used and what impact it had on truancy. The zero-tolerance policies that began to become common practice after a school shooting were mentioned by most of the professionals.

Subtheme #2: Zero-Tolerance

The purpose of the zero-tolerance policy was originally geared toward offenses related to drugs, weapons, tobacco and school disruptions. Over time the policy has been expanded to many uses. One professional expressed how zero tolerance policies are being used today but not as they were originally intended,

Kids are getting kicked out at a significantly higher rate for swearing at a teacher or for what was known as "normal" teenage behavior in the past than even before. And then these kids are being charged criminally for these acts. Now kids are being tried and labeled younger and younger; it's a really huge systematic problem.

Another professional expressed the same idea of how zero tolerance policies are now being used for reasons other than their original concept and what should be used instead,

Zero-tolerance policies are important when it come to the safety of everyone in the school. If there is a student (who) is presenting a threat to the safety of themselves or others in the building regardless if its increased their truancy need to leave the building. However if students are only missing school and are not a threat, a zero-tolerance policy is not adequate. Their consequence should not be suspension but some kind on in-school suspension where they are monitored while they get help on homework.

The next subtheme is homelessness and how truancy is impacted.

Subtheme #3: Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex issue that affects a person's entire being. Maslow's hierarchy of needs specifies that some needs cannot be met before basic needs are met first, meaning if a person is hungry, worried about stable housing or clothing they cannot focus on other aspects of their life that also might need attention. Many professionals spoke to this during the interviews. Here is one professional's words,

If the youth and family do not have stable housing it goes back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Education is not high on the priority list when their basic needs are not met.

Another professional had similar thoughts,

Kids who are homeless are not really worried about school. They are worried about where they are going to sleep that night or when they are going to eat next. We do have supports to help those students but we can only help if they tell us they need help.

This concept was common from not only the school counselors but from community outreach professionals as well. Here is one professional's idea as to how

homelessness impacts truancy,

Homelessness is a huge thing we run into. Families who don't know where they're sleeping tonight or don't know where their next meal is coming from, school is not on their radar.

The same concept was expressed by another professional,

There is a law that the school has to bus a transient family to and from school, but the family has to tell the school. Many families do not want to admit or inform the school of that situation.

Homelessness is something more and more people are experiencing. And something that the professionals expressed is an important factor when working with truant youth. According to them, many families find it challenging to admit or ask for help with their housing.

Subtheme #4: Culture

Culture was a theme that came up in all interviews. Culture instead of race was said to be an important factor. Many of the professionals expressed how their work was impacted by different cultures. One professional expressed how “culture” (or his or her exposure to it) has changed over time and how that impacts truancy and the importance of school,

When I first started there was an unwritten rule that all kids were going to either college or getting a blue-collar job. But now that has shifted. We have had a lot more diversity move-in, which brings in completely different cultures. For some, college is still expected and others college is less important but on the other hand a high school diploma is not even important. In that culture there is a lot of pressure not to succeed.

Another professional expressed the same idea but went a little more in-depth and expressed that it is not only the culture but each subcultures within a culture that

makes a difference,

When working with different cultures, it important to remember that there are so many little subcultures in each culture. Each subculture each has their own perspective on things. It would be nice to be able to break it down by black, white, yellow, purple, green, or blue but that's just not the case. It's less race and more culture that makes the difference.

To round off the importance of culture and the work professionals do with the youth this professional expressed how vital it is to always be a learner and to never stop trying to understand and to educate ourselves about each different cultures, so when it comes to helping the youth succeed in school, they can have a better understanding on how each student views school from their cultural lens,

Each culture is very different and the more education that we can have to learn about the different cultures the better. This is help [to] better understand what their "normal" is and what is expected from the youth.

Theme #4: What reduces youth truancy

This final theme corresponded to one of the interview questions that was asked. When asked what best helps reduce truancy, there were many answers provided. The main responses go into detail below in each subtheme: parental-involvement, collaborative effort, incentives, and connections.

Subtheme #1: Parental-Involvement

Parental involvement was an over-arching theme. All of the professionals expressed that when there is parental involvement a youth has a better chance of succeeding in overcoming their truancy. This is not to say that if a child does not have parental-involvement they cannot succeed, but the youth have better odds at

succeeding. Three professional spoke to this directly.

We of course want parental involvement. With it, the youth will be more successful. We do not necessarily need it, but when they are involved the child sees that their parents believe in them and tend to believe in themselves.

Parental involvement is definitely a factor, but it is not “the” factor. A parent could be involved but not actively involved.

It would take a really special kid to do it without a parent. There are some, don’t get me wrong. There are some kids who have figured it out and have overcome so many obstacles and succeed without parental help or influence. But it usually doesn’t happen without the help of parents.

The professionals also expressed that all parents ultimately want their children to succeed. Even if it doesn’t necessarily look or seem like they do. Several professionals expressed this. Here are two professionals’ thoughts:

Every parent of course wants to best for their kid. That’s something people tend to forget. It’s important to remember that every parent is doing the best they can. Even though they might be doing seems opposite of what they are “supposed” to be doing its often because that was how they were raised and they don’t know any better.

Ultimately every parent wants his or her child to succeed. But not every parent has the time to put into help their child because they are working toward getting their family just to survive daily life.

Parental involvement is key when helping youth become less truant. When asking more sub-questions, each professional went more in depth on what parental-involvement looks like in truancy. Many professionals expressed that a parent has to be an active parent, which in their terms means knowing where their child is at all times.

Parental-Involvement is key. You have to know where your kid is at. And if they’re not where they say or are supposed to be, what are the ramifications at home for that student. If there is no ramifications are home, it can be really hard to enforce anything at school.

Knowing where your child is pretty much all the time, but not being a helicopter parent. Being an engaged parent not an enabling parent is what helps most. That kind of parent supports and loves their children but does have clear consequences of unacceptable behavior. That way the child learns.

Finally professionals in the school expressed how they alone could not succeed without the parents.

If the parent isn't involved you do not have a chance of success. We have the kids for seven hours a day here but on the outside world that's on the parents. If there is not buy-in from the parents there is no chance that we will succeed.

Another professional went more into detail on how to get parental involvement.

She suggested that there be mandatory parenting class right away in elementary school. Doing that would instill the importance of school and begin the habit of regular attendance throughout each students' school years.

Parenting classes; mandatory parenting classes at the elementary level. It's vital for each parent to understand the importance of going to school every day. And the importance of installing the habit early that going to school every day is vitally important.

Since parental-involvement was something each professional from each level brought up and said was important. It was stated clearly that parental-involvement is a vital factor in helping reduce truancy.

Subtheme #2: Collaborative Effort

During the interviews the second most common theme that helped reduce truancy was getting a collaborative effort between the stakeholders. Many of the professionals expressed that the youth themselves are important stakeholders and although not usually in the meetings, would benefit from inclusion.

A collaborative effort is always the best. We don't always work with the youth as much as I think we should. Youth are usually not in the meetings. But because the youth do have issues and concerns themselves, I feel like the youth would be more engaged and would be a valuable asset in those meetings. It

would show the youth that they do have people in their corner and people really do want them to succeed. It has a lot to do about strengths and if a child is presented with their strengths, they are likely to want to succeed or believe that they are able to succeed.

As the child gets older: 16/17 years old their participation is vital. They are mentally capable to understand in the future and begin to have their own opinions and thoughts about their future. They need to be invited to participate in the meeting, but they ultimately have the choice of they want to be there or not.

Another professional expressed the idea that a collaborative effort is vital, and without one key element, families, the work would not help the youth succeed in the long run,

It takes a village. I think the strongest components are the parents and the schools. The county is also a strong component, but they are often viewed as a negative. The wrap-around services which include school, counties, and whatever services you can wrap-around the family is crucial. But if you do not have families actively participating it will fall apart.

A final quote is being used here to show that all professional expressed the belief that a collaborative effort is ideal, but in reality it is really hard to accomplish,

In a perfect world all systems would work together and support each other, but usually that does not happen.

Subtheme #3: Incentives

Several professionals brought up incentives, although the use of them was not unified. Some professionals expressed how useful they are and how much of a difference they make,

Incentives are definitely used and have been found to be useful. A lot of youth don't get recognized for their achievements; big or small. And here we try to acknowledge all accomplishments. We use both little and big incentive throughout our program that I really believe help get the kids to stay on track, stay focused and motivated.

While others expressed how hard it is to find an incentive that motivates kids to come to school, while not disenfranchising any of those youth. It was also hard to reach those students and ask what they would like as an incentive, because they are not in school they cannot be easily asked, whereas the youth who are regularly coming are easier to reach, but do not have the same desires as those who are struggling with school attendance. The quotes below express this.

Incentives usually do not work with youth truancy. The programs we've tried work with the kids who are already attending regularly, but when a kid doesn't like school or it isn't important to them, it's usually because they have been unsuccessful and an incentive for them to come doesn't work.

It's really hard to motivate kids with incentives. School officials have to be very creative at what the incentives are and to ensure that some kids are not disenfranchised.

One school professional expressed one incentive he has seen that works really well, but has nothing to do with his work: the school lunch program. It was expressed that many students come to school primarily for breakfast and lunch every day, where if that were not an option they would not eat and come to school every day, which sometimes can be half the battle.

The best ways that we have found is the lunch program. Both free and reduced. We have kids who will come here for breakfast and lunch every day. And that's huge. For some students that's the only reason that they come here.

Overall the consensus from the professionals was the incentives work for some but not all. The main reason youth do not come to school is, from their perspective, some kind of disengagement. And even with the perfect incentive, if that youth is still disengaged they will still not want to come to school.

For some kids yes and some kids no. It's all about the engagement. They may like the incentive and will work to get it, but once they get it and they are still

not engaged then the incentive didn't work. If whatever the reason they did not like school didn't change then they are still not going to want to go.

Subtheme #4: Connections

The above spoke about disengagement, and this idea was a very prominent theme throughout all interviews. One way to get a student engaged in school, one professional expressed, is extra curricular activities,

The most effective way to reduce truancy is to get the kids engaged in school activities. The kids that are involved in activities and when they are actively engaged in that activity their attendance rate is higher.

Another professional believed that when a student is not engaged in an activity whether in school or outside of school, it is a main reason why they struggle and get engaged in less than ideal activities,

Students who do not get engaged in school, for whatever reason struggle the most. They are the kids that are usually involved in activities you do not want them involved in.

When it comes to getting youth engaged in their school several professional expressed that when a student has made a connection with an adult, either in the school or even outside of the school who encourages regular attendance that, the student has a much higher rate of success. Here are several professionals'; thoughts about how connections make the world of difference:

Kids usually succeed better if there is an adult in the building they have a connection with, it could be a teacher, hall monitor, really anyone in the building that the kid sees everyday; that helps immensely.

Sometimes just finding that connection is the ticket. It could be that the youth was at the wrong school, wrong location, the school was too big, or it didn't meet their learning style. But once that connection is made, that student is more likely to succeed.

That connection does not have to be someone in the school. It can be someone outside of the school. Sometimes that connection is an aunt or uncle. It can be whoever that youth latches on to.

The reasons kids don't go to school widely varies. Usually it is because they do not feel connected to their school, or to any teachers so they do not want to go.

The bigger idea is some kind of connection with someone at the school to get them feeling that their presence is important.

These quotes express how different the connection can be, but overall with some kind of connection youth tend to have better success in attending school regularly. It can be a connection with a person in the school, a connection with an extra curricular activity, or an overall sense of connection with the school. Basically overall the student needs to feel like their presence is important and if they are not there they will be missed. Most importantly one professional expressed that,

It's the connection that is important. You cannot force it and cannot fake it. The kid has to bind to it.

Summary:

Youth truancy is multi-faceted and complex. The professionals expressed how each youth is an individual and is unique from other youth struggling with truancy. No one factor is the cause of truancy and it was clear in the interviews how complex the phenomenon is. Each professional had their individual role with the youth and although working toward the same goal, had sometimes very different views on the causes of it.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand what relevant stakeholders believe serve as significant factors related to truancy for youth ages 13-17 and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it. This is a complex phenomenon, and the results of this study reflect this in many ways. The data revealed information that was both consistent with research that was discovered and expressed in the literature review, and it also revealed new, valuable information to consider when trying to understand youth truancy. Overall, the professional participants were very forthcoming in sharing their experiences regarding their work done with the youth and the families experiencing truancy. Each professional was able to express the elements that they believe serve as significant causes of truancy and what they believe would help reduce it. Each professional was also able to identify various barriers that prevented their work to successfully eliminate youth truancy.

Interpretation of Findings

The literature reflects the complexity of understanding the reasons behind truancy; each student's circumstances and reasons behind the behavior vary. This held true throughout this study. Each professional had their own thoughts on what causes truancy and the best way to reduce or eliminate it. Below are the themes found throughout the interviews and how they correlated throughout the literature review.

Definition of Truancy

In the literature it was difficult to find a universal definition of truancy. Throughout this study, this stayed consistent. This study did not provide a universal definition; every professional had his or her own definition used by either the program or school they worked for. One professional shared the same belief as Epstein & Sheldon, 2010; skipping a class, while the majority expressed the same definition as Smith et al, 1998, having a set number of excused or unexcused absences from school.

Changes in truancy

Although truancy has been a challenge of the school system since its inception, there have been some changes, technology being one of the main ones. It now has become a vital part of American life and although it can be used in a positive way in schools, it also can be used negatively.

One professional spoke to this directly and said it can be used to communicate more effectively with the youth. She stated that it is a way to communicate to the youth in the “same way they do.” She also suggested it to be used by parents to GPS “ping” their child’s phone to see where they really are.

Another way technology was viewed both as a positive and a negative was in relation to online schooling. Several outreach workers reported that online school is a benefit for some students because of their transient lifestyle, or for students who are anxious about attending the school itself. The opposite held true with school counselors. They reported that although the original intent of online school is beneficial to some, the majority of youth who move toward online school have a

more difficult time. It is interesting that county employees in this sample agreed that online school is beneficial, while school employees reported that it is not.

One school counselor reported that technology has made attention spans of youth even shorter than they have been in the past. When everything is available instantaneously online, it is harder to get buy-in from the youth when they are told they have to be in school. When youth can easily access information through *YouTube* or *Google* the idea that a student has to be taught by someone is becoming more and more difficult. Youth and society in general are used to instant information, and learning the “old fashion way” was perceived by some in the sample as less and less realistic.

It was also interesting to hear how technology has changed the socialization of youth today. One committee member, a school social worker, noted how schools historically have served as a primary venue where youth would communicate and see their friends regularly. Technology has enabled even truant youth, when not physically in school, to still be in communication and in touch with their friends, and no longer feel like they are “missing” out by being at home.

Another interesting thing that was not brought up in any of the interviews was how bullying has changed. While the typical scenario is that the bullies would push kids into lockers, or tease them in the hallways, technology has created a whole new way to bully, with anonymity. Cyber bullying has become a serious issue and I was surprised that it was not discussed in the interviews as impacting truancy.

Impacts on truancy

The literature distinguishes that lower socioeconomic status is not a risk in of itself, but when shared with other risk factors, such as low self-esteem, or learned helplessness, the chances of truancy increase (Lehr et al., 2004). This held true throughout the research. The professionals reported that although there is a stigma that the youth who are truant are from lower socio-economic status, which is not at all what they found to be true. When families are not financially successful, the parents often have their children work during the day to help out with extra income (Teasley, 2004). This statement came up in the interviews and the professionals agreed that when a family does have lower income there is often less supervision and the youth do spend more time helping the family with needed income, but this was not identified as a main impact on attendance.

Literature also pointed out that students who live in a household that is stressful are at a higher risk of dropping out of school. A stressful household can include environments with parents with drug or alcohol abuse problems (Hammond et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2007). Parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, may be unable to adequately care or support their children, and get them to school because they are under the influence and oversleep themselves (Hammond et al., 2007; Lehr et al., 2004). Students in that situation are more likely to miss school because they have to care for themselves, their siblings and maybe even at times their parents. Parents with chemical dependency issues tend to not monitor their children's everyday activities, and thus giving the child a greater risk of dropping out of school (Lehr et al., 2007). This is important to point out again because several

professionals spoke to the importance of parental monitoring. It was said that parents need to know where their children are at all time to help reduce truancy. This will be discussed in depth below. But as an impact on truancy chemical dependency and lack of parental monitoring can be a contributing factor to the youth's truant behavior.

Another impact on truancy that was found in the literature is that larger schools tend to have more problems with truancy compared to smaller ones (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). This research pointed to some potential reasons for this. It is not necessarily the size of the school but how youth feel in that school setting. Many professionals spoke about finding out the "why" behind the truancy. This is important because each youth is different and each has their own reasons behind their truancy. It may not be the size of the school but various other reasons. The student may not have a connection in the school, they may find the subjects too easy, they may have anxiety of the physical size of the building or they are anxious because of many other reasons. It is important to point out that larger schools by definition have more students, and so chances are they will have more truancy issues because of sheer number of students versus smaller schools with fewer students.

Mental health was a major theme that the literature did not necessarily emphasize as a contributing factor to truancy. It did however become a main theme in this study. Mental health awareness is beginning to become mainstream in American culture. When it comes to truancy the professionals expressed that mental health more often than not is a cause of the youth's truant behavior. For the

most part they identified the cause as anxiety. Youth who struggle with anxiety are more and more likely to miss school, even if the reason for the anxiety was not school related. This study revealed how complex mental health is, how intertwined in truancy and how hard it is to help the student overcome it. Even though mental health is now becoming more common to discuss, it does not always make it any easier for parents to understand. One factor that was discovered as a potential difficulty when working with youth, was the parents. Mental health is not something one can physically see and getting parental “buy-in” is an aspect that the majority of the professionals spoke about. When a parent is told their child is or may be suffering from anxiety the parents cannot necessarily see anything physically wrong with their child and may go through their own process in accepting that their child may need therapy or help to cope with whatever they are anxious about.

Ways to reduce truancy

Gaining a better understanding of the causes of truancy and what can be done to reduce or eliminate it was the main focus of this study. In the *Manual to Combat Truancy* (1996) parents were identified as the most significant individuals in getting their child to have good attendance in school. With parents so crucial it is vitally important for schools to develop relationships with parents that are based on respect and trust (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This held true throughout this research. Every professional interviewed stated that parental involvement is key to helping reduce truancy. Although it was said that if a youth does not have parental involvement they are not doomed to failure, they are seen as having a much harder

time. Parental involvement can look different in each family but the literature reported that parental involvement that included checking homework and reading is associated with improved grades and achievement scores (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010; McNeal, 1999) but parental monitoring, parent-child discussions, parent participation in the school and PTA membership are linked to a youth's school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). This held true in this study. Several professionals expressed specifically that parental monitoring and knowing where their child is at all times was crucial and one professional in particular firmly believed that parent participation in the schools was linked to higher attendance rates.

Early intervention has been shown to also reduce truancy in the literature. Implementing interventions to reduce truancy during elementary years, when truant behaviors are first noticed is crucial. If truancy is prevented in early schooling years it has been shown to dramatically impact future truant behaviors in the middle school years (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Jeynes, 2007). One professional expressed this same idea in detail. She recommended parenting classes at the elementary level to instill the importance of regular school attendance early.

The literature stated there have also been attendance incentive programs, which have shown to be very effective if used correctly (Dougherty, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Attendance incentive programs are usually successful as long as they are implemented with fidelity. One important factor in this type of program is the reward must be desirable to the student. If the reward is undesired by the

students the program was shown to be ineffective. In this study incentive programs were found to be both useful and not useful. Such programs were perceived as not useful mainly because of the reasons the literature found: that the reward is undesired. The professionals spoke to this a great deal because of how hard it is to find an incentive that does not disenfranchise any of the youth. This population is hard to reach and to ask what is desirable because they are not there to ask. When a student is truant, it was reported that finding out the “why” was more important and successful than giving any kind of incentive. If a student is not coming to school for a reason but they do to receive their incentive, if the reason behind their truancy was not addressed or changed then the student will continue to not go to school after.

One incentive program that was said to work was the free and reduced cost lunch program. This is not something any of the professionals do personally but it was reported that this helps get students in the school, which was said to be half the battle sometimes. Another incentive that was reported that worked was to acknowledge the students’ successes. This does not include a prize but just verbal acknowledgment. Students often do not get any kind of recognition big or small for their positive behavior and when they receive an acknowledgement for their success they are more likely to continue that positive behavior.

Conceptual Framework

The lens the research viewed the literature and data from was based on the book *School-to-Prison Pipeline*, by Christopher Mallett (2016). This book focused on how youth today are more likely to experience the legal system in the context of

problems at school. Many students who are being brought into the “school-to-prison pipeline,” often are already facing difficulties or obstacles within their families, schools, and communities (Mallett, 2016). A multi-faceted approach is needed to reduce truancy rates: partnerships between school, family, community and student. Best practices have been reported to be effective in reducing truancy suggest there needs to be a partnership (Gullatt, 1997; Jeynes, 2007; Teasley, 2004). The respondents spoke little to this interface between the legal system and truancy.

The literature reported that schools that use zero-tolerance policies often discipline students who are first-time offenders for nonviolent incidents and are usually typical adolescent behavior. This held true from some professionals’ experience but not the majority. It was not argued that the original intent of the zero-tolerance policy in the schools was not important but how far it has been expanded was. When it comes to weapons and the safety of the students and staff the policy was universally said to be a positive policy. But when it came to students being punished for what was in the past considered “normal teenage” behavior is not okay.

Implications of the study

Teaching/Training

Truancy is a very complex phenomenon. When working with youth it is important to be flexible and treat every student individually as the reasons behind their truancy is never identical to another. It is vital that a professional take that into consideration when working with truant youth. Once the why is determined the youth will have a much better chance of beginning to attend school regularly. Also it

is important to work collaboratively with the youth, parent and the professional to have the best possible outcome.

Future Research

This study had the intent of reaching some families and youth who have struggled with truancy in order to obtain their perspectives on what helped or hindered most for them personally. For future studies, it would be important to try to get their perspective and this study was unable to reach that population. Every person's experience is different just as not two reasons behind truancy are the same. Without the perspectives on those who have personally experienced truancy and have overcome it, there is a lack of important information that can help future students.

I would recommend a doctoral student or another master's level student to focus their research on reaching families and youth solely. Their voices are not often heard and their individual experiences would help understand the complexity of truancy. One suggestion I would give them is to open up participation requirements. Instead of solely looking for families and youth who are no longer struggling with truancy, I would recommend talking to families and youth who are currently experiencing this phenomenon. This would allow a picture of experiences and beliefs in "real time" as to what ultimately affects truancy.

Practice/Policy

This study showed the importance of recognizing each student struggling with attendance individually. No two students are truant for the same reason, and being mindful of those differences will make or break the work done with those

youth. When a youth successfully graduates from high school and gets a diploma they are more likely to find work, more likely to live above the poverty line, and are two and a half times less likely to be on welfare compared to those without a diploma. They also have a longer life expectancy, on average, of seven years. Earning a high school diploma is not only about having that piece of paper, but helps the student become a productive member of society.

Strengths and Limitations

There were many strengths in this study. First it utilized more than one professional role to help understand the different perspectives among those who work with truant youth. The professionals were passionate about their work and wanted to only help the students and youth they serve to overcome barriers to live successful lives. Another strength this study had is that it sampled among a very experienced group. The study was conducted using professionals who worked in the field for a minimum of 7 years. They all had considerable professional experience and thus expertise that allowed them to speak to a variety of different practices they found to be successful.

This study first explored this topic using an inductive manner to allow themes to develop on their own, and then explored again in a deductive manner, refining the emerging themes. This allowed the researcher to reach more insight into the professionals' experiences and allowed the researcher to further broaden what was discovered in the literature review.

A limitation of this study was the nature of the participants. The intended population was for a broader sample of stakeholders: community, school, parents

and youth to gain a variety of perspectives on this complex phenomenon. However there was difficulty reaching families or youth who have personal experience, mainly because the professionals are currently working with those families, or are no longer in contact with past families. So this study was only able to get the perspectives from community outreach professionals and school counselors.

Suggestions for future studies

As this study had the intent of reaching families and youth but was unsuccessful, a suggestion for future studies is to try and reach that population. Their first-hand knowledge and experience would provide a vital missing piece of knowledge in truly understanding what help reduce or eliminate truancy, as well as some causes. To reach this population, I would recommend opening up the requirements of participants. This study only reached out to families and youth who did struggle with truancy and are now attending school regularly. But for others, I would suggest reaching out to families and youth who may or may not be attending school regularly, to make participant recruitment easier.

Summary

This study made it clear that truancy occurs because of many reasons and not one approach will work for all students. There are several factors that go into truancy and remembering to take them all into account will help youth succeed in attending school regularly. The definitions of truancy although differing depending on location and professional role, all have the same underlying meaning: a student is not in school. The actual definition may vary but it is important to not dwell on the specific definition but to help the youth attend school regularly to achieve the best

education possible. There are numerous causes of truancy and no one way to solve them. Mental health was identified as one of those main causes. Anxiety affects one in four adults and is the most common mental illness, which is perhaps why the professionals expressed this as being one of the more common reasons behind truancy. It was also demonstrated that to effectively reduce truancy community, schools, and parents all need to work together and create a common goal. This held true throughout this entire study, with the exception of one aspect that was not included in the literature: the importance of including the youth in that partnership. Their buy in and belief that their opinion and feelings matter is just as important as getting the partnership between school and parents. Truancy is a very complex phenomenon and being mindful that every student is as unique as is their reason behind their truancy; helping every student attend school regularly will not only help that student later in life but society as well.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2015). Socioeconomic Status. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/>
- Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N., & Nugent, M. E. (2001, September). *Truancy Reduction: Keeping students in school*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/188947.pdf>
- Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., & Morison, K. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Corville-Smith, J., Ryan, B. A., Adams, G. R., & Dalicandro, T. (1998). Distinguishing absentee students from regular attenders: The combined influence of personal, family, and school factors. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 27(5), 629-640.
- Dannerbeck, A. M. (2005). Differences in parenting attributes, experiences, and behaviors of delinquent youth with and without a parental history of incarceration. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 3(3), 199-213.
- Dougherty, J. W. (1999). *Fastback: Attending to attendance*. Bloomington, ID: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308-318.
- Ford, J., & Sutphen, R. (1996). Early intervention to improve attendance in elementary school at-risk children: A pilot program. *Social Work Education*, 19, 95-102.

- Gage, N. A., Sugai, G., Lunde, K., & DeLoreto, L. (2013). Truancy and zero tolerance in high school: Does policy align with practice? *Education and Treatment of Children*, 36(2), 117-138. doi:10.1353/etc.2013.0011
- Gullatt, D. E., & Lemoine, D. A. (1997). Truancy. What's a principal to do? *American Secondary Education*, 26(1), 7-12.
- Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report*. Clemson, S.C.: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and Communities in Schools, Inc.
- Invest in Kids. (2008). 2008-2009 Invest in the future invest in kids annual review. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.iik.org/UserFiles/File/IIK%20ANNUAL%20REVIEW%20FINAL\(1\).pdf](http://www.iik.org/UserFiles/File/IIK%20ANNUAL%20REVIEW%20FINAL(1).pdf)
- Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement a meta-analysis. *Urban education*, 42(1), 82-110.
- Johnston, R. C. (2000). As studies stress link to scores, districts get tough on attendance. *Education Week*, 20(3), 1-2.
- Lehr, C. A., Sinclair, M. F., & Christenson S. K. (2004). Addressing students' engagement and truancy prevention during the elementary school years: A Replication study of the check and connect model. *Journal of Education for Students Places at Risk*. 9(3), 279-301.
- Mallett, C. (2016). *The school-to-prison pipeline a comprehensive assessment*. New York, New York: Springer Publishing Company, LLC.

- McNeal, R. B. (1999). Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out. *Social forces*, 78(1), 117-144.
- Pullen, S. M. (2014). *Teacher perception of truancy in high school* (Order No. 3662036). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1643445781). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.stthomas.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1643445781?accountid=14756>
- Reid, K. (1999). *Truancy and schools*. London: Outledge.
- Reid, K. (2005). The causes, views, traits of school absenteeism and truancy: An analytical review. *Research in Education*, 74. 59-82.
- Rumberger, R. (2011). *Dropping out: Why students quit school and what can be done about it*. Harvard University Press.
- School attendance: Issues to consider. (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.greatschools.net>
- Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with family and community involvement. *Education and urban society*, 35(1), 4-26.
- Sheldon, S.B. (2007, May/June). Improving student's attendance with school, family and community partnerships. *The Journal of Education Research*, 100. 267-275.
- Teasley, M. L. (2004). Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for school social workers. *Children & Schools*, 26(2), 117-128.

U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Justice. (1996). *Manual to combat truancy*. Government Publication.

Appendix A



UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS
MINNESOTA

Professional Consent Form**Truancy in the eyes of the stakeholders**

You are invited to participate in a research study understanding, preventing, & intervening youth truancy. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you currently work with or have worked with students experiencing truancy. You are eligible to participate in this study because of your professional knowledge and experience regarding youth truancy. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Lindsay Hjermsstad a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Dr. David Roseborough. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the causes of youth truancy, to find ways current professionals are using to prevent or reduce truancy, and gain knowledge of a potentially effective approaches to preventing and to intervening in time to decrease school dropout rates, with the goal of improving high school graduation rates.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Meet with me one-to-one in a private location for 30-60 minutes in length and discuss your professional experiences on youth truancy. Before the interview will start a consent form will need to be reviewed and signed, as a requirement of the Institutional Review Board. A copy of the consent form will be provided to you before meeting and again at the start of the interview. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. This research study plans to interview 8-10 people personally involved in youth truancy.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has little to no risks. At any time you do not feel comfortable or would no longer like to continue the interview, we will end it. You are also free to choose not to answer particular questions and can review the questions in advance of the interview if you would like to. I will be asking about your professional understanding of truancy, but will not ask you to reflect on specific cases or to speak officially for your setting. I will not identify you by name or by your setting, but only by your professional role.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Compensation

After your participation and completion of the 30-60 minute interview, a \$5 coffee gift card will be provided to you as appreciation for your time.

Privacy

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. I will not include any personal identification information on the transcripts. The recordings will be in a password-protected file on my computer, that no one will have access too except myself. The interview will be in a private location to ensure privacy.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records (audio and written) will be kept in a locked file on my computer, which will be password protected. I will also keep the electronic copy of the transcript in a password-protected file on my computer. I will be the only person that would have access to both the recorded interview and the transcription of the interview. I will delete any identifying information from the transcript. The recording and transcript will be destroyed by June 1, 2016. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the School of Social Work, or the University of St. Thomas or with your employer. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will only be used with permission. You can withdraw within two weeks of the interview or any time during the interview by calling myself, Lindsay Hjermsstad at 952-212-1525, or email at hjer8339@stthomas.edu.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Lindsay Hjermsstad. You may ask any questions you have now and any time during the or after the research procedure. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 952-212-1525 or hjer8339@stthoma.edu or Dr. David Roseborough at 651-962-5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns.

Statement of Consent

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date



UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS
MINNESOTA

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Truancy in the eyes of the stakeholders

You are invited to participate in a research study understanding, preventing, & intervening youth truancy. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you have had experience with truancy with your son or daughter. You are eligible to participate in this study because of your personal knowledge and experience regarding youth truancy. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Lindsay Hjermsstad a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Dr. David Roseborough. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the causes of youth truancy, to find ways that currently being used to prevent or reduce truancy, and gain knowledge of a potentially effective approaches to preventing and to intervening in time to decrease school dropout rates, with the goal of improving high school graduation rates.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Meet with me one-to-one in a private location for 30-60 minutes in length and discuss your l experiences with youth truancy. Before the interview will start a consent form will need to be reviewed and signed, as a requirement of the Institutional Review Board. A copy of the consent form will be provided to you before meeting and again at the start of the interview. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. This research study plans to interview 8-10 people personally involved in youth truancy.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has little to no risks. At any time you do not feel comfortable or would no longer like to continue the interview, we will end it. You are also free to choose not to answer particular questions and can review the questions in advance of the interview if you would like to. I will not identify you by name, but only by your parental role.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Compensation

After your participation and completion of the 30-60 minute interview, a \$5 coffee gift card will be provided to you as appreciation for your time.

Privacy

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. I will not include any personal identification information on the transcripts. The recordings will be in a password-protected file on my computer, that no one will have access too except myself. The interview will be in a private location to ensure privacy.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records (audio and written) will be kept in a locked file on my computer, which will be password protected. I will also keep the electronic copy of the transcript in a password-protected file on my computer. I will be the only person that would have access to both the recorded interview and the transcription of the interview. I will delete any identifying information from the transcript. The recording and transcript will be destroyed by June 1, 2016. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision

whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the School of Social Work, or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will only be used with permission. You can withdraw within two weeks of the interview or any time during the interview by calling myself, Lindsay Hjermstad at 952-212-1525, or email at hjer8339@stthomas.edu.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Lindsay Hjermstad. You may ask any questions you have now and any time during the or after the research procedure. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 952-212-1525 or hjer8339@stthoma.edu or Dr. David Roseborough at 651-962-5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns.

Statement of Consent

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date



UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS
MINNESOTA

Parental Consent Form for Children Participation in Research

Truancy in the eyes of the stakeholders

Your child is invited to participate in a research study understanding, preventing, & intervening youth truancy. I invite them to participate in this research. They were selected as a possible participant because they have experienced truancy. They are eligible to participate in this study because they have successfully returned and continue to attend school regularly. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like them to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Lindsay Hjermsstad a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Dr. David Roseborough. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the causes of youth truancy, to find ways youth find it helpful to prevent or reduce truancy, and gain knowledge of a potentially effective approaches to preventing and to intervening in time to decrease school dropout rates, with the goal of improving high school graduation rates.

Procedures

If you agree for your child to be in this study, I will ask them to do the following things: Meet with me one-to-one in a private location for 30 minutes in length and discuss their experiences on youth truancy. Before the interview will start will ask them to verbally assent to agree to be in the study, as a requirement of the Institutional Review Board. A copy of the assent form will be provided to you and to your child at the start of the interview. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. This research study plans to interview 8-10 people personally involved in youth truancy, including two youths.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has little to no risks. At any time they do not feel comfortable or would no longer like to continue the interview, we will end it. They are also free to choose not

to answer particular questions and can review the questions in advance of the interview if they would like to. I will be asking about their understanding of truancy, and what helped them get back to attending school regularly. I will not identify them by name, but only as a youth who experienced truancy in the past.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Compensation

For their participation in the 30-minute interview, a \$5 coffee gift card will be provided to them as an appreciation for their time.

Privacy

Their privacy will be protected while they participate in this study. I will not include any personal identification information on the transcripts. The recordings will be in a password-protected file on my computer, that no one will have access too except myself. The interview will be in a private location to ensure privacy.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify them. Research records (audio and written) will be kept in a locked file on my computer, which will be password protected. I will also keep the electronic copy of the transcript in a password-protected file on my computer. I will be the only person that would have access to both the recorded interview and the transcription of the interview. I will delete any identifying information from the transcript. The recording and transcript will be destroyed by June 1, 2016. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Their participation in this study is entirely voluntary. They may skip any questions they do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Their decision whether or not to participate will not affect their future relations with St. Catherine University, the School of Social Work, or the University of St. Thomas or with their school. There are no penalties or consequences if they choose not to participate. If they decide to participate, they are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. Should they decide to withdraw, data collected about them will only be used with permission. They can withdraw within two weeks of the interview or any time during the interview by

calling myself, Lindsay Hjermstad at 952-212-1525, or email at hjer8339@stthomas.edu.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Lindsay Hjermstad. You may ask any questions you have now or after the research procedure. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 952-212-1525 or hjer8339@stthoma.edu or Dr. David Roseborough at 651-962-5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns.

Statement of Consent

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent for my child to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission for my child to be audio recorded during this study.

In addition to my permission, I understand that my child must agree to participate in the study. If they do not want to participate they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If my child initially agrees to be in the study they can change their mind later without any penalty.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Printed Name of Child

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix B

Youth Assent:

I am doing a research study about truancy, which means when a student is not in school with or without parental knowledge. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, I would ask you about your experience and thoughts about truancy: what helped, what did not help, and how you feel about the people who helped get you back into school. We would talk for 30 minutes.

There are some things about this study you should know. I will ask you about your personal experiences with truancy. But you do not have to answer any question you don't want to.

There is not direct benefit for you. But I will give you a \$5 coffee gift card as a thank you for your time.

If you do not want to be in this research study, it's no problem. All you have to say is no or that you changed your mind and we will end the interview.

When we are talking during the interview I will need to audio record our conversation and when we are all done, I will type out our conversation on my computer. Your name and any personal information will not be included. I will then look at yours and other people's thoughts on truancy and write a report about what I learned. I might share a quote in this paper, but would not share your name.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Your parents know about the study. They already said it was okay for me to ask you to join.

Would you like to continue this interview and talk a little about your experiences and thoughts on truancy?

Appendix C

Script for County/School Workers for Families:

Dear _____,

I am writing today to ask you if you would be interested in talking with a graduate student about your truancy experiences. I thought you would be a great resource for her because of your successful story. She is trying to learn more about understanding, preventing, & intervening youth truancy. She is looking to talk with families who were involved with programs that helped them with their truancy experience and get their perspectives on what helped or did not help. I have not told her who I am contacting and your decision whether or not to get more information about the study will be completely your decision. I will not know if you contact her or not and your decision will not effect your relationship with me, or the county/school.

If you would like more information about the project, please contact Lindsay Hjerstad at 952-212-1525 or hjer8339@stthomas.edu.

Thank you

Appendix D

Truancy in the eyes of the stakeholdersInterview Questions For Professionals:

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your role here, including:
 - *Length of experience working with community/with youth*
 - *Length of experience working in the schools*
2. Definitions tend to vary. How in your setting do you define truancy?
3. What have been your experiences in regards to truancy in this setting?
 - *That is, how common is it?*
 - *How much is it a part of your work?*
4. Truancy has been described in the literature as a “gradual process of disengagement.” To what extent does this fit or not fit with your experience?
 - *What have you observed?*
 - *What seem to be some of the most important variables here?*
 - *Do you see suspensions as effective or ineffective?*
5. Based on your personal experience, what helps most in reducing truancy?
 - *Can you go more in depth on _____*
 - *What about policies like “zero-tolerance” or incentive programs for attendance?*
6. During ___ years of working with youth have you noticed any changes in truancy in regards to school?
 - *Most specifically, what changes ___*
 - *What would you say the cause for that change is?*
7. Working with youth who are experiencing truancy, how important is it to work with parents/guardians?
 - *How much does this happen?*
8. How would you describe the parental-involvement with the youth you have worked with, that have had trouble with truancy?

Based on that answer

 - *Would you say, the youth would or would not have had those troubles if their parent’s were more/less involved?*
 - *Are there any models of parent-school partnership you’ve seen or might imagine/recommend?*
9. Are there practices in place to assist you in helping youth be less truant?
 - *Of those practices what have you noticed help youth be less truant?*
 - *Within ___ practice specifically, have you noticed would have made a bigger difference?*
10. Do you have any experience with zero-tolerance policies?
 - *What have you seen worked?*
 - *Would of helped more?*

11. The literature seems to say that, to best help youth be less truant, it takes a collaborative effort, meaning the help from county workers, school officials, teachers, and parents. Based on your experienced, what are your thoughts on the literature findings?
12. Is there anything you would like to add about truancy reduction or prevention that I didn't think to ask?

Thank You

Appendix E

Truancy in the eyes of the stakeholdersInterview Questions For Parents/Youth:

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself including:
 - *Current age of children*
 - *Current grade level*
2. Asking about the weather, how they got here, how their day is going, etc.
Small talk to start to build rapport.
After rapport is beginning to be built the interview will continue
3. What have been your experiences in regards to truancy? I'm thinking of things like:
 - How did it start?*
 - What was good/bad about it?*
 - How did people react to it? At home/school*
4. Who and/or what helped you return to school so successfully?
 - Were there important people/important events that helped?*
5. You said ____ experience. Can you explain that a little more?
 - Paraphrase-*
6. What that helpful when ____?
7. What could have ____ done to be more helpful?
8. Who helped you the most?
 - The Least*
9. Were your parent/guardians involved with your school?
 - Homework?*
 - Attendance?*
10. Do you know what a "zero-tolerance policy" is?
11. Were you or anyone you know affected by that policy?
12. Are there some things you think might help people your age to return to school?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to say that I didn't think of asking?

Thank You