

UNVEILING THE RISK FACTORS OF ABSENTEEISM AND DROPOUT: A CASE STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DISTRICT SKARDU TEHSIL ROUNDU, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines school absenteeism and dropout challenges in developing regions, where they hinder educational progress and limit future opportunities for young learners. Focusing on female secondary school students in Tehsil Roundu, District Skardu, the research identifies underlying risk factors contributing to absenteeism and dropout. Using a quantitative and descriptive design, data were collected from 156 students across 10 government schools through a validated questionnaire. Analysis with SPSS revealed that absenteeism stems not from a single cause but from interconnected social, economic, and institutional barriers. Key factors include family responsibilities, financial hardship, recurring health issues, discouraging teacher attitudes, negative peer influence, and environmental challenges such as distance and inadequate facilities. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive interventions involving parental awareness, improved teacher-student relationships, supportive learning environments, and government policies addressing educational inequalities. Tackling these factors collectively is essential to reduce dropout rates and ensure equitable access to quality education for marginalized female students in remote areas.

Keywords: Dropout, Risk Factors, Education Inequality, District Skardu Tehsil Roundu, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

School absenteeism and dropout remain persistent challenges in developing countries, significantly undermining educational progress and social development. Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of human capital formation, economic growth, and gender equity (UNESCO, 2021).

However, despite global commitments to universal education, female students in remote and marginalized regions continue to face systemic barriers to sustained schooling (Kingdon & Aslam, 2020). In Pakistan, particularly in peripheral areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan, female secondary school students

are disproportionately affected by social and economic constraints that impede educational continuity (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2021). Factors contributing to absenteeism and dropout include household responsibilities, poverty, health-related concerns, lack of adequate infrastructure, and negative school environments (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, gender norms and parental attitudes often exacerbate educational inequalities, leading to early withdrawal of girls from formal schooling (Saeed & Zubair, 2020). Education is globally recognized as a fundamental right and a catalyst for social and economic transformation. Yet, across developing countries, absenteeism and dropout continue to undermine educational progress and limit human capital development. In Pakistan, where rural and mountainous regions face additional geographical and socioeconomic challenges, school attendance remains a critical concern. Tehsil Roundu in District Skardu reflects this challenge, with students frequently absent or leaving school altogether due to a variety of risk factors. This study explores these barriers to provide insights into how schools, families, and policymakers can address the structural and social conditions that hinder educational continuity. Addressing absenteeism and dropout requires a multidimensional approach that combines parental engagement, institutional reforms, and targeted policy interventions (World Bank, 2020). Understanding the risk factors in specific socio-cultural contexts is therefore critical for formulating effective strategies. This study contributes to this discourse by investigating the determinants of absenteeism and dropout among female secondary school students in Tehsil Roundu, District Skardu.

Literature Review

A substantial body of research has examined the complex phenomenon of school absenteeism, recognizing it as a multidimensional issue that extends beyond the simple absence of students from classrooms. Scholars generally categorize absenteeism into various forms, including

authorized absences arising from health-related concerns or family obligations, unauthorized absences due to negligence or lack of parental monitoring, and truancy, which reflects deliberate avoidance of school without valid reasons. Within these categories, researchers have identified a web of interrelated determinants that contribute to absenteeism. These include parental neglect, domestic conflicts, household poverty, and in certain cultural contexts, early marriages that disrupt girls' education. School-related factors such as teacher attitudes, lack of supportive learning environments, and inadequate facilities further exacerbate the problem, while peer influence and environmental barriers—such as distance to school, unsafe travel, or extreme weather conditions—add additional layers of complexity (Marburger, 2001; Reid, 2005). Empirical studies consistently highlight that persistent absenteeism is not merely a short-term issue but often serves as a precursor to complete school dropout, which carries profound consequences for students' long-term prospects. Dropout is closely linked to limited future employment opportunities, restricted social mobility, and the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and marginalization (Cabus & Witte, 2015). While global and national studies have provided valuable insights into the general causes and effects of absenteeism, there is still a noticeable gap in localized research, particularly in geographically remote and socioeconomically disadvantaged regions such as Skardu. Given the unique cultural, economic, and environmental characteristics of these areas, context-specific investigations are crucial. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by exploring the particular risk factors influencing absenteeism and dropout among female students in Tehsil Roundu, thereby contributing timely and contextually significant evidence to both academic discourse and policy development.

Absenteeism

Regular school attendance is fundamental to students' academic achievement, socialization, and personal development. Consistent

attendance not only facilitates linguistic and cognitive growth but also fosters essential workplace-related skills such as persistence, collaboration, and problem-solving (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Conversely, absenteeism and eventual school dropout are critical challenges in both developed and developing countries, with severe personal, social, and economic consequences. A student who drops out of school is typically unable to complete the level of education in which they are enrolled, often due to a complex interplay of structural, institutional, and individual factors (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001). Research consistently demonstrates that school absenteeism and dropout are linked to long-term disadvantages. Dropouts are at a higher risk of unemployment, low-paying jobs, criminal involvement, and adverse health outcomes (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). Studies also suggest that individuals who fail to complete secondary education are more likely to experience reduced life expectancy—up to a decade shorter compared to those with higher educational attainment (Rumberger, 2011). Furthermore, absenteeism disrupts the learning process, weakens peer relationships, and diminishes motivation, often creating a self-perpetuating cycle of disengagement (Kearney, 2008). On a broader scale, high absenteeism rates undermine national development goals by perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting human capital formation (UNESCO, 2021). Policymakers across the globe have therefore prioritized strategies aimed at reducing absenteeism and dropout, including parental engagement, supportive school environments, and targeted interventions for at-risk students (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). Addressing

absenteeism requires a holistic approach that recognizes its multidimensional roots in social, economic, and educational inequalities.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design. The target population included 520 female students enrolled in 10 government secondary schools in Tehsil Roundu. A 30% sample (n=156) was selected using convenience sampling. A self-constructed, Likert-scale questionnaire validated by three research experts served as the primary data collection instrument. The reliability of the tool was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.93. Data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage, and frequency distributions.

Results

Findings reveal that absenteeism and dropout are influenced by interrelated factors: Family factors; Lack of parental involvement, domestic quarrels, and responsibilities at home disrupted attendance. Socioeconomic challenges; Poverty, financial instability, and child labor reduced the ability to attend regularly. Health issues; Illness, stress, and lack of medical support were frequently cited. School and teacher-related factors: Harsh disciplinary practices, lack of interactive teaching, and insufficient resources discouraged students. Environmental barriers; harsh weather and long distances to schools in mountainous terrain significantly hindered attendance. Peer-related influences; bullying and peer pressure were linked to disengagement and absences.

Family related factor

Table 1. My parents don't show any interest in my studies.

Respondent	SA	A	N	DA	SD	MEAN
Frequency	156	51	36	10	21	38 = 3.26
Percentage	100%	32.2 %	23.0%	6.4%	13.4%	24.4 %

Table1. Show that 24.4% respondents were strongly disagree, 13.4% respondents were Disagree, 6.4% respondents were neutral, 23.0% respondents were agreeing, and 32.2% respondents were strongly agreeing with the statement. The mean of the statement was 3.26. This implied that respondents generally thought their parents showed a moderate level of involvement in their academic pursuits.

Thematic Analysis of Family Related Factor

The major family-based factor that contributes to school dropout and absenteeism is thought to be the absence of care for the child. Parental work conditions may lead to a decrease in the amount of time they spend with and authority over their children, as well as a rise in absenteeism and school dropout rates. It has been noted that children from households where there is poor communication, extreme oppression, lack of authority, and acceptance of their children's failures have significantly higher absenteeism and school dropout rates. According to research findings, many families think that the education of girls is not important, girls are forced to get married at an early age and kept at home to provide help with housework. There are a number of reasons why families would rather not send their kids to school, including shopping, attending weddings or funerals, leaving the town or neighborhood, or hosting visitors at home. It is believed that this case amply illustrates the value that families place on education and, thus, on absence. Family issues include divorce, domestic abuse, and parent death have a detrimental impact on a student's ability to attend school. In these situations,

adolescents lack parental guidance, affection, and concern and are more likely to exhibit aimless behaviors like absenteeism and school dropout. One significant factor in absenteeism and school dropout rates appears to be parents' lack of education and, consequently, their dis-grade for education. Research indicates that many families believe that girls' education is unnecessary, that young marriages are pushed upon them, and that females should be kept at home to help with chores. Furthermore, it is seen that certain families remove their kids from public schools so they can receive religious instruction. A family's financial circumstances have a big impact on student absence and dropout rates. Children who are obliged to work as seasonal workers or whose families employ seasonal workers are kept away from school for extended periods of time, which has a detrimental impact on the children's school lives. Thornton, Darmody & McCoy (2013) state that participation in parent teacher meetings families who cannot have a good communication with their children, who are highly oppressive or who have no authority on their children and have accepted the failure of their children show considerably high cases of absenteeism and school dropout. (Adiguzel2013) states that, reaching puberty and early marriage of girls are stated as an important causes of school dropouts among girls.

Administrative and Teacher Behavior Factors

Students miss school and eventually drop out as a result of the highly harsh attitudes and

negative behaviors of administrators against them. Additionally, it has been noted that children would much rather skip school on days when they are terrified of the strict and unforgiving attitudes of the administrators. Additionally, the harsh and repressive attitudes that teachers have toward their students are revealed to be a significant contributing element in the pupils' presence at class. According to a study Bayhan and Dalgic (2012), weak communication of students with the administrators within the period they attend school is a factor that has a negative effect on the students' success and their decision to drop out of school. Under the heading of "teacher behavior in the classroom," the most significant contributing factor was discovered as homework stress. When students are terrified of their peers' or teacher's reactions, they avoid doing their assigned homework for a variety of reasons, making them not want to attend class that day. The teacher negative behavior in class decreases and even destroy the student's interest and attention to classroom life. This leads to absenteeism and to school dropout in long term. Negligent control of absences of students, failing to contact the parents in case of absence and not investigating the cause of

absence show that the necessary importance is not given to absenteeism, which leads to the increase of absences and ultimately the occurrence of dropout. According to the Nova Scotia Department of Education, every member of the school staff—including the principals—is accountable for the absence of students. They need to find out why a student misses so many days of class. The parents of students must be kept informed by school personnel. Parents must meet with the parents once a month to go over all of their child's records. It will assist educators and parents in determining the primary reason behind a student's absence from class. School principals bear the obligation of determining the reasons behind students' absences from class and devising strategies to curb it, as it not only affects the students' future but also damages the school's reputation. Better attendance is essential for students to succeed, according to Muir, J. (2009), who also noted that regular students do well on tests and have no difficulties in their studies. When teachers act irresponsibly toward their students, it is often the case that students do not value attendance either. As a result, kids often drop out of school.

Social Factors

Table 2. I Feel Socially Isolated Or Excluded At School, Which Leads To My Absenteeism.

Respondent	SA	A	N	DA	SD	MEAN
Frequency	156	20	42	36	43	15 = 3.057
Percentage	100%	12.8 %	26.9%	23.1%	27.6%	9.6 %

Table2. show that 9.6% respondents were strongly disagree,27.6% respondents were disagreed, 23.1% were neutral,26.9% were agree and 12.8% respondents were strongly agreeing with the statement. The mean score of 3.057 suggests a moderate level of social isolation or exclusion experienced by respondents.

Thematic Analysis of Social Factors

Factors under these categories include that, a student didn't like school in general or a particular, he/ she was failing, getting poor grades, or couldn't keep up with schoolwork, didn't get along with teachers and/or students, had disciplinary problems, was suspended or expelled, didn't fit in and didn't

feel safe. Schools that operate on a shift system are found to produce a larger dropout rate than schools that offer full day classes. It has been observed that shift-based schools have higher dropout rates than full-day schools. Both rural and urban places have this. This might result from classes being held for shorter periods of time so that two shifts can be completed each day. Several factors contribute to student dropout from schools, and these issues are often complex and multifaceted. One significant factor is socioeconomic status, as students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may face challenges such as a lack of access to resources, inadequate support systems, and the need to contribute to family income. Financial pressures can force students to prioritize work over education, leading to dropout. Additionally, academic difficulties and a lack of engagement in the learning process can be crucial factors. Students who struggle with coursework or feel disconnected from the educational environment may lose interest and motivation to stay in school. Insufficient support for students with learning disabilities or those who require additional academic assistance can exacerbate these challenges.

Friends related factors Peer groups are one of the most significant factors influencing student absenteeism, according to Reid (2005). A student may be influenced by their friends' negative attitudes toward education and decide not to go to school as a result. He might even attempt to get fellow students to engage in extracurricular activities (Özbaş, 2010; Reid, 2005). Furthermore, due to group dynamics, students may miss class in order to join a group, stay up with the group, or participate in the group (Arkonaç, 2001; Güney, 2000; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1998).

Socio-economic factors

Poverty

Poverty stands as a key factor contributing to dropout rates on the demand side of education. When families enroll their children in school, the escalating economic

burdens associated with education—particularly those not alleviated by scholarships or meal programs—force households to deplete their savings or curtail current expenditures. Within impoverished households, the duration of a child's education is influenced by parental perceptions of its long-term value as an investment, the opportunity costs tied to potential child labor either within the household or for income generation, and the mounting economic expenses such as fees, uniforms, and materials, which tend to increase as the child progresses through school. These factors collectively determine both the duration of a child's stay in school and the pace at which dropout may occur. For many families struggling with financial difficulties, going to school becomes an expensive luxury. Students who are impoverished frequently have to put their short-term financial necessities ahead of their long-term academic objectives. Students become disengaged from the classroom when they cannot afford basic educational essentials like textbooks, clothing, and transportation due to a lack of finances. The popularity of child labor or part-time job to support family income significantly reduces the amount of time and energy students may devote to their education. The relationship between poverty and student dropout in this difficult cycle is made clear, highlighting the pressing need for all-encompassing interventions that address socioeconomic inequalities in order to guarantee that every kid has the chance to pursue and complete their education.

Numerous studies have linked child labor to poverty, pointing to it as a major contributing cause to school-age children's absence from school. Poor homes adopt coping mechanisms that show up as a high demand for child labor (from both girls and boys) to help with domestic chores and to make money. This causes the children to miss school, have little time for study, or leave out completely. The most common forms of child labor seem to be household and domestic work (for females). These jobs are typically unpaid, little

acknowledged, and require a significant amount of time. This kind of labor does not always prevent access to education, as children sometimes combine schooling with household/agricultural responsibilities. Research shows that there is strain on children's time when they engage in child labor. Children who balance job and school for instance, have irregular attendance, frequent absences, or a higher frequency of tardiness, depending on the type and volume of work. In many parts of the world and skardu student dropout rates are significantly influenced by child labor. Children who are forced to labor long hours are frequently forced to put their financial survival ahead of their schooling. These young people's time and energy that could be spent attending school and studying are diverted as they are forced to work long hours in order to support their family. This distraction puts students at a higher risk of quitting school completely in addition to impeding their success in school.

Discussion

The findings highlight that absenteeism is a multifaceted issue shaped by structural, social, and personal dimensions. Consistent with global research, factors such as poverty, inadequate school environments, and lack of family support emerge as key predictors of dropout. In the specific context of Skardu, environmental hardships—particularly harsh weather and geographical isolation—further intensify the challenge. Therefore, tackling absenteeism demands a holistic strategy that engages families, schools, and policymakers to safeguard children's right to education.

CONCLUSION

In Tehsil Roundu, District Skardu, the issues of absenteeism and school dropout arise from a combination of family-related difficulties, economic constraints, health problems, and school-level challenges. If such barriers remain unresolved, they may reinforce cycles of poverty and social marginalization, hindering both individual growth and community development. Promoting regular attendance and reducing dropout rates should therefore

be understood as more than an educational concern; it is also a critical social responsibility. Overcoming these challenges calls for a comprehensive approach, including targeted improvements in educational infrastructure, the creation of supportive and inclusive school environments, and meaningful engagement with families and local communities. Coordinated efforts from educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders are essential to ensure equal access to education and to empower children to achieve their potential while contributing to the long-term progress of the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduce targeted scholarship schemes and financial assistance programs to support economically disadvantaged students. Foster stronger parent-teacher collaboration to identify, monitor, and provide timely support for students at risk of absenteeism or dropout. Upgrade transportation services and ensure safe, reliable access to schools, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach areas. Strengthen teacher professional development with a focus on interactive, inclusive, and student-centered teaching practices. Establish school-based counseling units and health services to address students' emotional, psychological, and medical needs. Conduct awareness campaigns aimed at reducing the stigma associated with absenteeism while emphasizing the value of consistent school attendance.

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