

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Child Abuse & Neglect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg

Evidence for a relationship between child maltreatment and absenteeism among high-school students in Sweden

Johan Melander Hagborg*, Kristina Berglund, Claudia Fahlke

Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Box 500, 40530 Gothenburg, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Academic functioning
Adolescence
Child abuse
Child maltreatment
Mental health
School-absenteeism

ABSTRACT

School absenteeism is a potent predictor of academic failure. Maltreated adolescents have been found to be more absent from school compared to their peers. However, it is scarcely studied in what degree a general population of students with high levels of school absenteeism has been exposed to child maltreatment. Furthermore, it is not known if maltreated school-absentees have specific characteristics compared to not-maltreated absentees. In this article, the first objective was to present and compare the prevalence of six types of child maltreatment in a general population of high school students reporting no, moderate or excessive absenteeism. The second objective was to compare maltreated and not-maltreated students who report absenteeism in respect to mental health, perceived school environment and peer victimization in school. Data from 667 girls and 649 boys (mean age 14.3) was used from the longitudinal multidisciplinary research program LoRDIA (Longitudinal Research on Development In Adolescence). Data was collected via self-report questionnaires in classroom settings. All six types of child maltreatment were overrepresented among absentees. Roughly 25% of absentees reported one subtype of maltreatment (16% in the total population) and a mean of 22% of absentees reported two or more types of maltreatment (11% in the total population). Maltreated absentees reported more mental health problems, personal harassment and worse relationship with their teachers than not-maltreated absentees. There might be specific correlates of school absenteeism among maltreated adolescents and professionals involved in preventing school-absenteeism should be made aware of the relationship between maltreatment and absenteeism.

1. Introduction

Academic achievement has been shown to be a potent protective factor against the development of mental health problems for children exposed to maltreatment and trauma (e.g. Zingraff et al., 1994). However, maltreated children normally runs heightened risk of a myriad of stressors that might hinder them from succeeding in all the developmental tasks necessary to sustain a good enough schooling (Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris, 1993; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001; Veltman & Browne, 2001). Hence, there is abundant evidence of the negative influence of child maltreatment on educational outcomes (Romano, Babchishin, Marquis, & Fréchet, 2015; Slade & Wissow, 2007).

One of the most potent predictors of academic failure and permanent school dropout is poor school attendance. Poor school attendance has been labelled with many terms such as unexcused absenteeism, truancy or prolonged absenteeism (Kogan, Luo, Brody, & Murry, 2005). In Sweden, different definitions and operationalisations of problematic absence from school are used. Legally, any unexcused absence from school is considered truancy and Swedish schools are obliged to contact caregivers at every occasion of

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: johan.hagborg@psy.gu.se (J.M. Hagborg), kristina.berglund@psy.gu.se (K. Berglund), claudia.fahlke@psy.gu.se (C. Fahlke).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.08.027>

Received 18 January 2017; Received in revised form 27 August 2017; Accepted 28 August 2017

0145-2134/© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

unexcused absence. Furthermore, unexcused absenteeism is a growing problem in Sweden (Skolverket, 2010). A report from the Swedish School Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, 2016) found that 43, 4 per 1000 students in grades 7–9 reported repeated unexcused absence, an almost 50% increase compared to 2009. Sporadic but recurring unexcused absence was defined as skipping at least five percent of class over a period of at least two months. In a study of poor school attendance in Swedish secondary schools, the Swedish national board of education (2010) found that 10% of students are unexcused absent at least once per month. This was also an increase of almost 50% compared to 2008.

Another way to utilize how the Swedish school system operationalizes problematic absenteeism is to examine how the study allowance is connected to school-attendance. In Sweden, all students attending upper secondary school has the right to study allowance from the Swedish Government authority in charge of financial aid for studies (CSN). Up until 2011, unexcused absence from class for 20% caused the CSN to withdraw the students study allowance. Earlier studies on problematic absenteeism in Sweden have therefore used 20% of unexcused absence as a cut-off level for when absenteeism is considered problematic (Strand, 2013). However, in the Education Act, that governs school activities in Sweden, from 2010 students school attendance was emphasized more strongly than before (SFS, 2010). Therefore, in 2011, the CSN changed their definition of problematic absenteeism so that four hours of recurring absenteeism during one month are cause for withdrawal of study allowance. Being absent four hours in 15 days is considered excessive absenteeism. According to the time-plan for the Swedish curriculum, this means that approximately 5% of unexcused absence over one month could be considered moderate absenteeism and 10% is considered excessive absenteeism. It is however important to note that both moderate and excessive absenteeism, as defined above, are considered problematic and both are cause for intervention from schools. In the school-year of 2015/16, 7, 8% of Swedish students in upper secondary school got their study allowance withdrawn (CSN, 2016).

The reasons for unexcused absence from school are several. Researchers suggest both individual and contextual factors. Factors that have been found to contribute to heightened risk of unexcused absenteeism are: mental health problems, high-risk life situations, being bullied in school, learning disabilities, living in a single household, negative relationships with teachers and a school environment that does not meet the students' needs, (Havik, Bru, & Ertesvåg, 2015; Karlberg & Sundel, 2004; Strand & Granlund, 2014; Witkow & Fuligni, 2011).

Students with high levels of unexcused absenteeism is a group where the prevalence of psychopathology, delinquency and substance use are substantially higher than in the normal population (Berg et al., 1993; Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003; Henry & Thornberry, 2010; Hirschfeld & Gasper, 2011). Furthermore, bidirectional effects of absenteeism and mental health have been illustrated in earlier research. For example, Wood et al. (2012) found that greater absenteeism in the first year of middle-school predicted an increased risk of depression and conduct problems in year two of middle-school. The opposite direction of effects was found for both middle and high school students. Hence, from a mental health perspective, absenteeism should be seen as a risk factor for psychopathology and as an expression of underlying psychiatric syndromes. Furthermore, mental health problems associated with absenteeism which, in Sweden, increase in 7th to 9th grade (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2008), has also been shown to persist into adulthood (Flakierska-Praquin, Lindstrom, & Gillb erg, 1997; Robins & Robertson, 1996, chap. xvi).

1.1. Child maltreatment and school-absenteeism

Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) suggest that negative impact of child maltreatment, especially in earlier stages of development, will be exacerbated in school due to the heightened requirement of social competencies, academic engagement, and ego-resiliency and ego control. In high school and early adolescence, the influence of child maltreatment might be even more accentuated since the demands on autonomy concerning social and academic skills increase while professional and parental supervision decrease. Accordingly, most studies find that problematic absenteeism typically debuts in high-school (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2008). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that maltreated youths in early adolescence are prone to be more sensitive to risk-factors resulting in absenteeism as well as to the negative outcomes of absenteeism (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). Indeed, commonly found correlates of absenteeism, such as psychosomatic symptoms, drug use, depression, anxiety-disorders, low self-esteem, and antisocial problems, closely match those of maltreated and abused children (Egger et al., 2003; Ek & Eriksson, 2013; Thornton, Darmody, & McCoy, 2013).

Child maltreatment and absenteeism can be regarded as multidimensional outcomes as well as risk-factors carrying multiple interacting causes and outcomes. As an outcome, absenteeism could for example be placed within the realm of equifinality (multiple pathways may lead to the same outcome) and as a risk factor, both absenteeism and child maltreatment draws on multifinality (similar risk factors may result in different outcomes; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996). Accordingly, academic failure in adolescents exposed to child maltreatment have been associated with a wide variety of factors such as increased levels of behaviour problems, depression and anxiety, cognitive deficits, impaired social skills, low self-esteem and motivation. (Eckenrode et al., 1993; Perfect, Turley, Carlson, Yohanna, & Saint Gilles, 2016; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001).

Surprisingly few studies have, however, specifically focused on the relationship between child maltreatment and absenteeism. One exception is Slade and Wissow (2007) who found significant associations between maltreatment and absenteeism from school among adolescents. The results from Slade and Wissow (2007) indicate that maltreatment had impact on school performance mainly via emotional and/or behavioural problems of which school absenteeism was one sub-category.

In order to effectively tailor preventive interventions for absenteeism, there is a need to know more about adolescents who have been maltreated as a child and therefore are at higher risk of drop-out from school. There are for example, to our knowledge, no studies aimed to investigate the prevalence of child maltreatment among truants in a large general population of adolescents. Neither is there any studies analysing what (if anything) differentiates maltreated truants from non-maltreated truants.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6832125>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6832125>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)