

## **ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN IN REHRI GOTH, LANDHI TOWN, KARACHI**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Back Ground and Aims:* School absenteeism is becoming a common problem in different countries of the world. It is known to be the indicator of school drop outs and ensuing problem in later life. The causes however, are variable in different populations of the world. The aim of this study was to assess causes of absenteeism in school children in local population of Karachi. *Objective:* To find out absenteeism in school going children in Rehri Goth, Karachi. *Method:* This cross sectional study was conducted in Landhi town. Systemic random sampling was adopted and males were interviewed for data. *Results:* It was found that only half of the school age children were going to school. *Conclusion:* The major reason found to be responsible for absenteeism from school was Poverty.

*Key words:* School absenteeism, poverty.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Absenteeism is becoming very common in school going children, especially in a third world country like Pakistan. In a study<sup>1</sup> in Karachi it was found that the most common causes of absenteeism between ages 2½ to 5 years were yelling and crying; the absenteeism being 10.49% absentees / day. In age group among 6 – 10 years the most common causes being fever, cough and Coryza; the average absenteeism in this age group is 5.93% absentees / day. Finally in ages 11 – 15 years the absenteeism came out to be 5.35% absenteeism / day and the commonest causes being headache and fever.

Among other causes in absenteeism in school going children in general were lack of personal interest, lack of school interest, lack of confidence, excess of home work, inferiority complex within students, more than desired facilities provided by the parents such as car, mobile, excess money.<sup>2</sup>

In a western study it was observed that elementary school absenteeism due to infection was markedly reduced when an alcohol gel hand sanitiser was used in class room as part of hygiene program in school going children.<sup>3</sup> A strong association has also been found between absenteeism and poverty. Primary school students are more likely to be affected by an excess economic and employment deprivation than their counterparts at secondary school.<sup>4</sup> In a study<sup>5</sup> conducted in Northwest Frontier province and Punjab in Pakistan (6 districts; 3 from each province) school dropouts and poverty was found. Girls being an unwanted birth were not enrolled in government primary schools, which was the main cause for dropouts. Loss of remittances came out to be the main reason for dropouts in boys.

The United Nations ranks Pakistan 105 among 134 in its Human Development Gender Index 2006.<sup>6</sup> Regarding lack of access to education it came out to be the biggest hurdle for female education in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> According to UNESCO, in Pakistan only 70% of students who begin primary school actually complete it.<sup>8</sup> The main reasons for non attendance in Pakistan for both sexes are high school fees, distant schools and uncooperative learning environment<sup>8</sup>. Financial problems, here in Pakistan, come out to be the main reason for dropouts. They include high tuition fees, costly text books and uniforms and the children have to go out for work.<sup>8</sup>

Government of Pakistan estimates that it will cost \$ 7 billion to achieve education for all (EFA) by 2015, of which \$ 4.3 billion will be petitioned from international donors.<sup>9</sup>

A survey was carried out regarding absenteeism in school going children in Rehri Goth, Landhi town on 21.10.09 as project of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The survey included variables like number of school going children in the area, how many are actually going to school and the reason for not going to school.

Rehri village is a coastal area in Karachi, with a population of approximately 50,000. Ethnically it comprises Sindhi and Baloch. Their main occupation is fishery. The village comprises Khalifa jat Para, Malkai mohalla, Mosani mohalla, Pan para, Amin jat mohalla, Bhola colony and Sachal dino para.

There are 25 clinics in the area with only 1 qualified (MBBS) doctor. Here, in the area, there is only one government out Patient Health Center and no Maternity Home. The lady health workers serv-

ing the area belong to Agha Khan Health Services. There are 8 – 10 Madarsas in the area. The whole area has 4 government and 2 private schools.

Regarding morbidity major diseases are Diabetes mellitus, skin disorders and hepatitis.

Basic demography of Rehri village is:

Total Population - 50,000.

0 – 11 months – 1800.

0 – 5 years – 8000.

CBA (child bearing ladies) -11,000.

Main profession – fishery.

Major diseases – Diabetes Mellitus, skin disorders, hepatitis.

## METHODOLOGY

*Study design:* Cross – sectional.

*Sampling Technique:* systemic random sample.

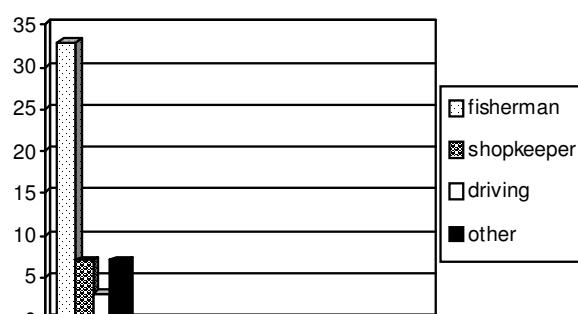
*Sample Size:* Fifty houses. Their heads were approached and were asked the relevant questions (in the form of a questionnaire).

*Inclusion Criteria:* Five – Fifteen year's children permanent resident of the area.

*Exclusion Criteria:* Guests and outsiders between 5 – 15 years.

*Analysis:* SPSS version 13.

Frequencies were calculated for variables like profession of parents, school age children, school going children and the reason for not going to school.



**Fig. 1:** Main profession.

**Table 1:** Main Profession.

Profession	Frequency	Percentage
Fisherman	33	66
Shopkeeper	7	14
Drivers	3	6
Other	7	14
Total	50	100

## RESULTS

As can be depicted from table 1 main profession is fishing. According to table 2 most of the families have two school going children. Table 3 shows only 50% of the school age children go to school. Poverty is the main reason for that.

**Table 2:** School age children.

Child (x)	Families (f)	Total Child (fx)	Cumulative Frequencies
1.	13	13	13
2.	17	34	47
3.	15	45	92
4.	5	20	112
Total	50	112	

**Table 3:** Children going to school.

Child (x)	Families (f)	Total (fx)	Cumulative Frequencies
0.	16	0	0
1.	16	16	16
2.	13	32	48
3.	4	12	60
4.	1	4	64
Total	50	64	

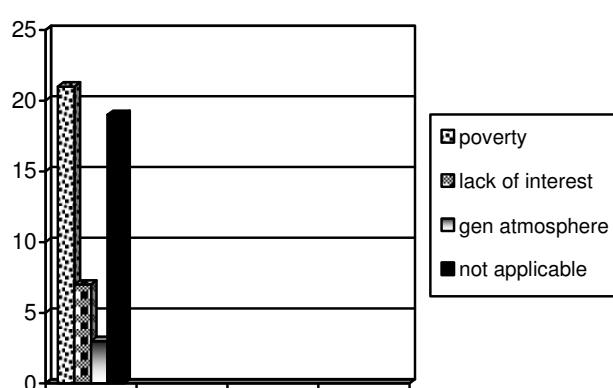
**Table 4:** Reason children not going to school.

Reason	Families Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	21	42
Lack of interest	7	14
General atmosphere	3	6
Not applicable	19	38
Total	50	100

## DISCUSSION

It is evident from the results that only 50% of the school age children were going to school. Poverty is the main reason for this; lack of interest comes next. Fishery is the main profession of the area.

The researcher came to know that only decade back parents used to worry about education. They used to have regular meetings with the teachers. Now the scenario has changed completely. Every



**Fig. 2:** Reason children not going to school.

man is trying to involve his children in his profession in an attempt to make both ends meet. In this connection it is worth mentioning that big dealers buy fish from these poor fishermen at the rate that was 9 years back. This explains the main reason for their poverty.

Regarding morbidity, amazingly, current prevalence of Diabetes mellitus is very high as compared to the past. This was an accidental finding. No proper medical facilities are available in the area.

In conclusion only 50% of the school age children go to school. Poverty being the main reason.

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