

A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Young Adults with K-12 Truancy Behavior:

Bronfenbrenner's Model

Submitted by

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PREVIEW

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Bronfenbrenner's Model

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Successfully Defended and Approved by All Dissertation Committee Members

December 7, 2022

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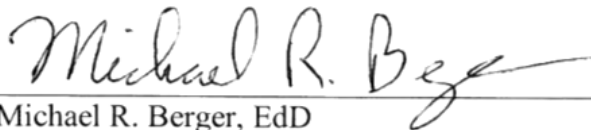
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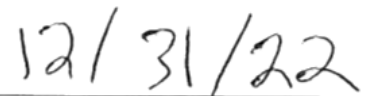
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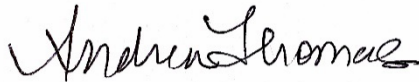
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Abstract

The effects of student truancy behavior are felt not only by the truant student, but also by their family and by the community in which they live. Current research on the factors that lead to truancy behavior has shown student's that are truant have several identified risk factors present during their K-12 education. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to understand how young adults in southern Minnesota described and ascribed meaning to the events and/or circumstances contributing to their K-12 truancy behavior through social and cultural values. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Process, Person, Context, Time) of human development provided the theoretical framework for this study. Two research questions were developed, field tested, and reviewed by an expert panel before this research study began. The first research question was how do young adults describe the social and cultural values that contributed to their K-12 truancy behavior? And the second question addressed was how do young adults describe the events that contributed to their K-12 truancy behavior, and what meaning do they ascribe to these events? The target population for this study were individuals at least 18 years old and had experienced K-12 truancy behavior. The data were collected through two primary sources, individual interviews, and focus groups. Findings in this study, which align with current research, suggest students with a history of trauma; mental illness; substance use; limited support from peers, school, and the community, are at a higher risk for truancy behavior.

Keywords: Truancy, student, mental illness, substance use, peers, school, family, community

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Every child in Minnesota aged 7 to 17 is required to receive compulsory instruction unless the child has graduated from high school (Minnesota Statutes, 2020). Minnesota requires parents or guardians to ensure their children attend formal education. Children who fail to attend school consistently become truant from school (Minnesota Statutes, 2020). Student truancy behavior began in the United States when formal education became an option for children (McIntire, 1918). According to McIntire (1918), the earliest truancy laws were created to boost the U.S. economy and reduce harmful child labor. Truancy behavior is difficult to define because of the complex nature of the factors that contribute to it and the lack of specific criteria provided by the Department of Education (van der Woude et al., 2017).

Today, student truancy behavior continues to rise in the face of government efforts to reduce occurrences (Maynard et al., 2017). Reducing truancy in students at any stage of their academic career will increase graduation rates (Henry & Yelkperli, 2017). The effects of truancy can be significant if a student does not complete high school (Reyes, 2020). Scientific research continues to inform the development of prevention and early intervention programming, but the results show how interventions have not significantly decreased student truancy behavior (Maynard et al., 2017). Student truancy negatively impacts families, schools, and communities. Prevention and early intervention programming will need to address the interconnection of all systems in a student's life to increase protective factors, reduce risk factors, and improve student outcomes (Hysing et al., 2017; Rosenthal et al., 2020; Tobias, 2019).

Tobias (2019) stated that further investigation into understanding risk factors would inform the creation of effective prevention and early intervention programming. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to understand how young adults in southern Minnesota described and ascribed meaning to the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their K–12 truancy behavior through social and cultural values. The results from this study contribute to scientific literature supporting the creation and implementation of effective truancy behavior reduction efforts.

Background to the Study

Research on student truancy behavior has provided insufficient qualitative data to understand the individual student's human development concerning their entire bioecological system. Quantitative researchers have conducted several studies focused on specific aspects of student development and K–12 truancy behavior. Quantitative research has omitted the richness of data collected through qualitative descriptive measures by allowing the students to share their lived experiences (Gase et al., 2016; Keppens & Spruyt, 2017). The qualitative data collected in this study were gathered through an in-depth semi-structured interview and a semi-structured focus group with open-ended questions. The interview and focus group questions centered on the phenomenon of this study, which is based on young adults' description of the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their truancy behavior understood through Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory of human development. The data analyzed may contribute to the existing research by providing a deeper understanding of K–12 student truancy behavior and giving meaning to the experience.

The construct of truancy in the United States is segmented by each level of government (local, state, and national entities). Overall, the United States and local governments have struggled to provide effective K–12 student truancy programming to keep students in school dating back to the turn of the twentieth century (Maynard et al., 2017). In the early 1900s, the struggle to keep students in school was centered around agricultural communities and establishing appropriate child labor laws (McIntire, 1918). Statistics from the Minnesota Department of Education (2019) reported that 20% of high school students were chronically absent in the 2015–2016 academic year. Students today may face different struggles that keep them away from school, but student truancy continues to harm students, their families, and their communities.

In a review of the literature, Dannow et al. (2020) called for further research to study the field of student truancy behavior. Baskerville (2020) posited the need for further research to include student voice on truancy policy to affect change within school systems. Lastly, Kepens and Spruyt (2017) suggested further research to fill the gap of insufficient qualitative data to gain insight into personal experiences regarding the onset and persistency of truancy behavior. This qualitative descriptive study addressed these gaps from Dannow et al. (2020), Baskerville (2020), and Keppen and Spruyt (2017) by exploring how young adults described and ascribed meaning to the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their K–12 student truancy behavior through social and cultural values.

Definition of Terms

Bioecological Systems Theory and PPCT Model. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory combines human development theory and environmental influence into a broader understanding by identifying the importance of the interconnection between the two and allows for development over time through interactions and experiences (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The PPCT model encompasses Bronfenbrenner's original work and expands to include the concepts of how human development changes over time and through different contextual interactions (Crawford et al., 2020). Specifically, the theoretical model provides for the process of the person's development in their respective context over time across micro-, meso-, exo-, and chrono-ecological systems.

Early Intervention and Prevention Programs. Prevention and early intervention programming will reduce K–12 truancy behavior by addressing the interconnection of the bioecological systems in a student's life (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Rosenthal et al., 2020; Tobias, 2019). Establishing effective programming to reduce truancy behavior relies on current research that helps identify the key factors to address within the program outcomes. Partners working on behalf of students, families, school support services, and communities to reduce truancy behavior will benefit from actively engaging in research and observation within their respective programs (Rosenthal et al., 2020).

Excused Absences. A student is absent from school when the student does not attend class in person or in a virtual setting. According to a Southern Minnesota School District's attendance policies, an excused absence occurs when the student's

parent/guardian can provide a sufficient reason (according to district policies) for the absence or can provide a medical note stating the reasoning the student cannot be in school ([on file with GCU] Public Schools, 2016). When a student has accumulated numerous excused absences, the school district follows up with the student's parents to address any needs the family might have to get the student back to the classroom.

Truancy Behavior. Truancy is a school absence by a student that was not approved by the parent and/or the school district ([on file with GCU] Public Schools, 2016). Truancy behavior occurs when a student is repeatedly truant over a specific amount of time as defined by local independent school districts. When a pattern of truancy behavior is established, a school administrator or other support staff member will reach out to the student's parents/guardians to address any family needs to get the student back to the classroom.

Unexcused Absences. A student is absent from school when the student does not attend class in person or in a virtual setting. An unexcused absence occurs when a student is not approved by a parent/guardian or the school district to be absent from school, a student does not comply with district absence reporting guidelines, or a student is working at home or in a business ([on file with GCU] Public Schools, 2016). Students can accumulate unexcused absences while physically in the school building and choose to skip certain classes. These types of unexcused absences can also lead to truancy.

Anticipated Limitations

Limitations of Data Sources

This study utilized two data sources. These sources, identified as an in-depth semi-structured participant interview and a semi-structured focus group, gathered

information from the participants through self-reporting. The information provided by the participants could not be verified by another data source; therefore, there was the potential for participant bias when describing experiences relating to the participant's K–12 truancy behavior. In addition, participants were asked to recall experiences from the past, and it is possible they had difficulty recalling details during the interview and/or focus group.

Limitations of Transferability and Application

The results from the data gathered in this study are specific to the geographical location and the demographics of the community in which the participant sample lived. Therefore, the transferability of the study results may be limited. The application of the study results may benefit truancy programs that fit the description of both the geographical location and other specified demographics from the participant sample.

Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to understand how young adults in southern Minnesota described and ascribed meaning to the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their K–12 truancy behavior through social and cultural values. The purpose of gathering data was to answer the two research questions posed in this study: How do young adults describe the social and cultural values that contributed to their K–12 truancy behavior? What meaning do young adults ascribe to the events that contributed to their K–12 truancy behavior?

Study participants were asked to spend no more than 3 hours on study-related tasks. Participants were given an incentive to participate in the study. The feasibility of

this study is high because of the limited engagement of the participant, the incentive provided, access to the target population, and the sample size needed for data saturation.

In Chapter 2, a review of literature is presented, providing an in-depth look into the history of truancy behavior, key themes identified in relation to truancy behavior, and an exploration of literature to set up the purpose of this study. The study method, design, and data collection steps for this investigation will be discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will provide details describing the data analysis procedures and the results of the analysis in both written and graphical form. The last chapter, Chapter 5, will interpret the results in a discussion form, indicating the implications of the research and how the results relate to the research questions posed in the study. See Table 1 for how this research study aligns with the core components within this qualitative descriptive study.

Table 1*Alignment Table*

Alignment Item	Alignment Item Description
Problem Space Need:	In a review of literature, Dannow et al. (2020) called for further research to study the field of student truancy behavior. Baskerville (2020) posited the need for further research to include student voice on truancy policies to affect change within school systems. Lastly, Kepens and Spruyt (2017) suggested further research to fill the gap of insufficient qualitative data to gain insight into personal experiences regarding the onset and persistency of truancy behavior. This proposed qualitative descriptive study will address these gaps from Dannow et al. (2020), Baskerville (2020), and Keppen and Spruyt (2017) by exploring how young adults describe the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their K-12 student truancy behavior through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory.
Problem Statement:	It is not known how young adults describe and ascribe meaning to the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their K-12 student truancy behavior through social and cultural values.
Purpose of the Study:	The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study is to understand how young adults in southern Minnesota describe and ascribe meaning to the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their K-12 truancy behavior through social and cultural values.
Phenomenon:	The phenomenon is young adults' description of the events and/or circumstances that contributed to their truancy behavior.
Research Questions:	RQ1: How do young adults describe the social and cultural values that contribute to their truancy behavior? RQ2: How do young adults describe the events that contributed to their K-12 truancy behavior, and what meaning do they ascribe to these events?
Methodology/Research Design:	Qualitative Descriptive Study

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Chapter

Maynard et al. (2017) concluded that truancy remains a chronic problem despite local, state, and federal agencies' efforts to reduce student truancy. Therefore, gathering data through scientific research needs to continue until behavior reduction occurs through informed programming (Tobias, 2019). In this literature review, K–12 truancy behavior will be defined and discussed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory will be defined and supported through literature as the theoretical foundation for this study. This chapter will also address why understanding truancy behavior is important and explore factors found in the current research to influence this behavior. Finally, a discussion on truancy behavior prevention measures and early intervention programming will be offered.

In preparation for a thorough literature review, several databases were utilized to identify current research on K–12 student truancy and the supporting topics addressed in this chapter. Over 130 databases were accessed through the GCU Library and Google Scholar covering research journals in the following areas: social sciences, sociology and social work, education, and counseling and psychology. Search terms utilized included *truancy, K–12 truancy, school absenteeism, adolescent truancy, student truancy, student absenteeism, school refusal, school tardiness, factors of truancy, mental health and truancy, environment and truancy, qualitative studies and truancy, bioecological systems theory, and qualitative descriptive research*. When journal articles were identified, they were surveyed for appropriateness to the topics discussed in this study.

This chapter presents a detailed literature review. The sections and subsections addressed in the literature review will be as follows: definition of truancy, why truancy matters, risk factors for truancy behavior; with subsections identified as home environmental factors, school environmental factors, internal factors, and cultural factors, PPCT model, and prevention and early intervention programming, concluding with a summary of topics. Before these topics are addressed in the literature review, this chapter reviews the background to the problem and describes the theoretical foundation used in this study.

Background to the Problem

The United States Department of Education conducted the first national data collection in 2016 regarding chronic absences. It declared K–12 student truancy behavior a national crisis affecting more than 6.5 million students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). After this research was presented, student truancy was identified as a national crisis, and the intense work to create effective programming to reduce K–12 student truancy behavior in the United States began. While this formal declaration by the U.S. government in 2016 was an important step in addressing truancy, this determination did not constitute the beginning of our nation’s student truancy problem. Throughout history, students have struggled with truancy behavior in the United States (Gleich-Bope, 2014).

Concerns regarding child labor and the need for children to receive a formal education to boost the economy were among the reasons for creating truancy laws (McIntire, 1918). Individual states governed the first K–12 student truancy laws in the mid-1800s. By 1918, every state had established truancy laws to monitor K–12 truancy behavior (Trujilloal, 2006). McIntire (1918) postulated in the early twentieth century that