

ABSENTEEISM AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS

by

KARTHIGESAN SHUNMUGAM NAIDOO

Submitted in part fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the

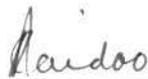
**Faculty of Education
University of Durban-Westville**

Supervisor : Professor A Ramphal

December 1995

D E C L A R A T I O N

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work, and has not been submitted previously for a degree at any other university.



K. S. Naidoo

Durban

1995

A new nation is born. A new era dawns upon us.

As professional educators, it is critical that we recognise the short-lived nature of symptom alleviation and prepare to do substantive battle in the realm of problem resolution.

T.F.Brown(1984)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My appreciation to all those who assisted and encouraged me to complete this dissertation more especially to the following:

1. Professor A. Ramphal, my supervisor, for his invaluable suggestions and the time spent reading and marking the drafts of the entire manuscript. It was his expertise and thoroughness that influenced and helped me complete this dissertation.
2. The staff and pupils of the various schools who assisted me in this project.
3. The parents and pupils without whose co-operation this project would not have been possible.
4. Department of Education and Culture for allowing me permission to conduct this study in schools under their control.
5. Miss I. Naidoo of Computer Services, University of Durban-Westville, who willingly assisted with the data analysis.
6. Cookie Pillay, Keshnee Govender and Pat Naicken for typing parts of the dissertation.
7. Ronnie Naidu and Perry Moodley for their assistance and support.
8. To Dayaneethie, my wife, who encouraged and assisted me throughout this project.
9. My children Kitrishia and Denushka for their patience and tolerance.
10. My parents, for their encouragement and especially, to my father, Mr. M.S.Naidoo, who suggested this project.

To my wife

Dayaneethie

ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this study was to ascertain the nature of the differences that exist, in selected aspects, between two groups of pupils, viz. regular attenders and persistent absentees. More specifically, the research was designed to furnish information on the following issues :

- a) The incidence of absenteeism and truancy in Tongaat.
- b) The home and familial circumstances of regular attenders and persistent absentees.
- c) An examination of the differences, if any, between poor and good attenders with regard to maladaptive behaviour.
- d) The role of the school and school-related factors as contributors to absenteeism and truancy.
- e) The different conceptions that regular attenders and persistent absentees may have of the future.
- f) The reasons offered by teachers for pupil absenteeism.

The sample (N = 153 pupils) was randomly selected from a list of five secondary schools in the Tongaat area. Pupils responded to a four-part Pupil's Perception Questionnaire (PPQ) designed to gather data relating to the home and familial circumstances, maladaptive forms of behaviour, the school and school-related matters and the pupils' perceptions of their future. In-depth interviews were also held with parents of the children in the sample. Teachers (N=116) were asked to offer what they saw as the more important reasons for the absence or regular attendance of the pupils.

The major findings of the study were as follows:

1. The majority of absentees fall into the age category 15-16 years. Girls were often absent with the full knowledge and encouragement of their parents while the opposite was generally true for boys.
2. Absentee rates are not consistent throughout the year. Higher figures were recorded on a Monday and a Friday (days which coincided with the week-end) and on test days.
3. Poverty, parental ill-health, parental unemployment, single parent problems and alcohol abuse featured prominently in the lives of poor attenders.
4. Positive attitudes towards education on the part of parents generated similar attitudes in their children. In general, the converse was also true.
5. Poor parent-child relationships and a lack of communication with parents often resulted in ill-disciplined children who were frequently absent from school. On the other hand, children whose parents took a keen interest in their progress and welfare attended school more regularly.
6. Poor attenders showed greater alienation from the school and the values it represented than did good attenders.
7. Poor attenders highlighted characteristics of teachers' personalities that influenced them to be absent from school while good attenders highlighted those characteristics that encouraged them to attend school.
8. Persistent absentees tended to have poorer relationships with teachers compared to good attenders.

9. Troublesomeness in class was a reliable indicator of absenteeism and truancy amongst pupils.
10. Career aspirations of persistent absentees tended to be lower than that of regular attenders.
11. The curriculum, perceived by some children as irrelevant to their needs, was blamed for generating boredom and frustration. These, in turn, contributed to their absence from school or even dropping out.

Evidence from various sources show that early detection and the proper treatment of absentees can produce positive results and thereby save the individual and society much unhappiness and wastage. It is against this background that several recommendations are made. Schools, teachers and parents (individually and collectively) can do a great deal to curb absenteeism amongst pupils. It is vital for all interested parties to create a warm, accepting and congenial climate both in the home and school situation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	Page
DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
DEDICATION	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE, AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

1.1.	SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM: A MATTER OF CONCERN TO THE EDUCATOR.....	1
1.1.1.	THE CONSTRAINTS OF TEACHER-BASED ACTION ON ABSENTEES.....	3
1.1.2	THE CONSEQUENCES OF ABSENTEEISM.....	4
1.1.3.	THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD ATTENDANCE.....	6
1.2.	SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM : THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM.....	7
1.2.1.	THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION.....	7
1.2.2.	NON-ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL : A GENERAL REVIEW.....	9
1.2.2.1.	SCHOOL PHOBIA.....	11
1.2.2.2.	TRUANCY.....	14
1.2.2.3.	A MODEL OF PERSISTENT SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM.....	15
1.2.2.4.	THE TRUANCY-DELINQUENCY LINK.....	22
1.2.2.5.	NON-ATTENDANCE AND SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT.....	23
1.2.2.6.	PROBLEM PUPILS AND THE SCHOOL.....	25

1.2.2.7.	NON-ATTENDANCE AND THE LAW.....	26
1.3.	DESIGN OF THE STUDY.....	28
1.4.	MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY.....	29
1.5.	AIMS OF THE STUDY.....	33
1.6.	ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT.....	34

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1.	INTRODUCTION.....	36
2.2.	EARLY PERSPECTIVES ON ABSENTEEISM.....	40
2.2.1.	THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE HOME.....	41
2.2.2.	INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS.....	42
2.2.3.	SCHOOL PHOBIA.....	43
2.3.	INCIDENCE OF ABSENTEEISM.....	45
2.4.	FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM.....	48
2.4.1.	PERSONALITY.....	49
2.4.2.	FAMILY BACKGROUND AND ECOLOGICAL FACTORS.....	50
2.4.3.	INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS.....	51
2.5.	THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY.....	55
2.5.1.	THE MALADJUSTED TRUANT.....	55
2.5.2.	FAMILIES THAT PRODUCE TRUANTS.....	56
2.5.3.	INFLUENCE OF THE COMMUNITY.....	59
2.5.4.	CONTRIBUTION MADE BY THE SCHOOL.....	60
2.6.	THE MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF SCHOOL ABSENTEES.....	63
2.7.	SUMMARY.....	67
2.8.	CONCLUSION.....	69

Shelby

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1.	NATURE OF THE PRESENT STUDY.....	71
3.2.	PRELIMINARY ISSUES: AN OVERVIEW.....	73
3.2.1.	LOCATION OF THE STUDY.....	73
3.2.2.	SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY.....	77
3.2.3.	THE SAMPLE.....	78
3.2.4.	DATA COLLECTION.....	78
3.2.5.	THE PILOT STUDY.....	78
3.2.6.	ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS.....	79
3.2.7.	UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE CHOICE OF SAMPLE.....	80
3.3.	DATA COLLATION.....	84
3.3.1.	INSTRUMENTS USED.....	85
3.3.1.1.	THE PUPIL'S PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE.....	86
3.3.1.2.	THE INTERVIEW.....	87
3.3.2.	FIELDWORK	89
3.3.2.1.	HOME INTERVIEWS.....	90
3.3.2.2.	GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.....	92
3.3.2.3.	ADMINISTRATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	93
3.4.	CONCLUSION.....	95

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

HOME AND FAMILIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

4.1.	INCIDENCE OF ABSENTEEISM.....	101
4.2.	HOME AND FAMILIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.....	104
4.2.1.	SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD.....	104
4.2.2.	PARENTS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION.....	107
4.2.3.	TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD.....	110
4.2.4.	SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES.....	114
4.2.5.	PARENTS' STATE OF HEALTH.....	116
4.2.6.	ATTITUDES OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.....	118
4.2.7.	PARENTAL ATTITUDE TO EDUCATION.....	120
4.2.8.	PARENTAL ATTITUDE TO ABSENCE.....	122
4.2.9.	PUPIL PERCEPTIONS OF FATHER'S/MOTHER'S JOB.....	123
4.2.10.	PUPILS' READINESS TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS WITH PARENTS.....	126
4.2.11.	PARENTAL UNDERSTANDING.....	128
4.2.12.	PARENTAL AUTHORITY.....	129
4.2.13.	PARENTAL WISHES.....	130
4.2.14.	PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD'S FRIENDS.....	130
4.2.15.	PARENTAL APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL OF CHILD'S FRIENDS.....	132
4.3.	MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS.....	133
4.4.	CONCLUSION.....	136

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY (CONT.)

SCHOOL AND SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS

5.1.	THE SCHOOL.....	139
5.1.1.	TENSION AND ANXIETY AT SCHOOL.....	139
5.1.2.	FREQUENCY OF TRUANCY.....	141
5.1.3.	PUPIL ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL.....	143
5.1.4.	THE SCHOOL AND ALIENATION.....	145
5.1.5.	RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS.....	148
5.1.5.1.	TEACHING TEMPO.....	149
5.1.5.2.	VICTIMISATION IN THE CLASSROOM.....	151
5.1.5.3.	CREDIT FOR EFFORT IN THE CLASSROOM.....	152
5.1.5.4.	TEACHER EXPECTATIONS.....	153
5.1.5.5.	NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TO TEACHERS.....	154
5.1.5.6.	PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN CLASS.....	156
5.1.5.7.	CONCERN FOR TEACHERS' OPINIONS.....	158
5.1.5.8.	CARING TEACHERS.....	158
5.1.5.9.	THE TEACHER AS A CONFIDANT/COUNSELLOR.....	159
5.1.6.	RULES AND PUNISHMENT.....	160
5.1.6.1.	MISBEHAVIOUR REQUIRING PRINCIPAL'S ATTENTION.....	161
5.1.6.2.	REASONABLENESS OF SCHOOL RULES.....	162
5.1.7.	INFLUENCE OF PEER GROUP	164
5.1.7.1.	RELATIONSHIP WITH CLASSMATES.....	164
5.1.7.2.	FRIENDS WHO HAVE QUIT SCHOOL.....	166
5.1.8.	HOMEWORK.....	167
5.1.9.	RELEVANCE OF COURSES IN CURRICULUM.....	168

5.2.	PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE.....	170
5.2.1.	CAREER ASPIRATIONS.....	170
5.2.1.1.	CHOICE OF JOB IN ADULTHOOD.....	171
5.2.1.2.	LIKELIHOOD OF ACHIEVING DESIRED JOB.....	171
5.2.2.	EDUCATIONAL DESIRES.....	172
5.2.3.	SELF-ESTEEM.....	173
5.3.	TEACHERS' VIEWS ON REGULAR AND POOR ATTENDANCE.....	175

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1.	INTRODUCTION	179
6.2.	DISCUSSION	180
6.3.	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	188
6.3.1.	PROCEDURES TO PROMOTE BETTER ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOLS.....	188
6.3.2.	THE KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN COMBATING ABSENTEEISM.....	189
6.3.2.1.	THE TEACHER.....	189
6.3.2.2.	THE PUPIL.....	191
6.3.2.3.	THE PRINCIPAL.....	192
6.3.2.4.	OTHER PERSONNEL.....	193
6.3.2.5.	THE PARENTS.....	195
6.3.2.6.	THE SCHOOL.....	197
6.4.	SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	198
6.5.	SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	204
6.6.	CONCLUSION.....	205
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	207

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES

3.1.	AGE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION.....	83
4.1.	COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY GENDER.....	101
4.2.	COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERSBY AGE.....	103
4.3.	GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD.....	105
4.4.	GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY PARENT'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION.....	109
4.5.	GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD.....	111
4.6.	GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY NUMBER OF PARENTS IN THE FAMILY.....	114
4.7.	GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY PARENTS' STATE OF HEALTH.....	117
4.8.	ATTITUDES OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.....	119
4.9.	FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PUPILS DISCUSS PROBLEMS WITH PARENTS.....	127
4.10.	ITEM 16: "MY PARENTS NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD ME": GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	128
4.11.	DEFIANCE OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY: GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	129
4.12.	PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD'S FRIENDS.....	131
4.13.	RESPONSES OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS TO MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR VARIABLES.....	134
5.1.	COMPARISON OF ANXIETY LEVELS OF POOR AND GOOD ATTENDERS.....	140

5.2.	ITEM 27: "I PLAYED TRUANT QUITE OFTEN": GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	141
5.3.	PUPIL ATTITUDES TO SCHOOL: GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	144
5.4.	COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS ON SIX VARIABLES RELATED TO ALIENATION FROM SCHOOL.....	146
5.5.	RESPONSES OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS TO THE PACE AT WHICH A TEACHER TEACHES.....	150
5.6.	ITEM 38: "TEACHERS WHO PICK ON PUPILS": GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	151
5.7.	ITEM 39: "TEACHERS WHO GIVE PUPILS CREDIT FOR EFFORT":GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	152
5.8.	ITEM 40: "THE KIND OF WORK TEACHERS EXPECT OF PUPILS": GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	154
5.9.	ITEM 42: "PUPILS WHO DISLIKE TEACHERS AT SCHOOL": GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	155
5.10.	COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS: TROUBLESOMENESS IN CLASS.....	156
5.11.	FREQUENCY OF VISITS TO PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE FOR MISBEHAVIOUR: GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	161
5.12.	ATTITUDE OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS TOWARD SCHOOL RULES.....	163
5.13.	NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS: GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	165
5.14.	TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK: GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS.....	167

5.15. REASONS GIVEN BY TEACHERS FOR PUPIL ABSENCE.....176

5.16. REASONS GIVEN BY TEACHERS FOR PUPILS' REGULAR
ATTENDANCE.....177

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

1.1. NON-ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL.....10

1.2. SCHOOL REFUSAL: THE OVER-VALUED CHILD.....18

1.3. TRUANCY: THE REJECTED CHILD.....20

3.1. MAP OF TONGAAT.....75

3.2. POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN TONGAAT.....76

3.3. GENDER DISTRIBUTION.....83

3.4. COMPOSITION OF THE FINAL SAMPLE.....89

4.1. PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN.....121

4.2. DEGREE OF SATISFACTION OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS
WITH PRESENT STATE OF FAMILY LIFE125

APPENDIX A.....

APPENDIX B.....

APPENDIX C.....

CHAPTER ONE

1.1. SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM: A MATTER OF CONCERN TO THE EDUCATOR

The classroom is a critical location for pupils' interpersonal and educational development (Withall, 1949, 1951). Educators and policymakers, therefore, express concern about the problem of school absenteeism and its consequences, which include, inter alia, serious economic and social disadvantages for those who fail to complete high school. In a wider sense, the civic and economic welfare of a nation is jeopardized since these depend heavily upon high levels of educational attainment. Thus for the benefit of both the individual and society, educators urge that youth should remain in school for as long as possible.

In South Africa, the Minister of Education has expressed his concern for the situation by pointing out that "one out of every seven children in South Africa (ie. a total of 1,8 million) is not at school" (Daily News, 26 August, 1994). His proposal that these children be phased into the school system over a ten-year period has, however, been rejected in favour of some speedier process.

Traditional research relating to absenteeism and truancy has tended to identify characteristics least amenable to change.

More recent research has, however, begun to focus on understanding the institutional character of schools and its potential for contributing to absenteeism and truancy.

The focus is on those policies and practices that relate to the institution's holding power. This holding power of schools in a democratic society takes cognizance of all pupils, not just the academically competent. According to Reid (1985), there are five categories for viewing absenteeism and truancy as a problem. These relate to legal, educational, psychological, sociological, and institutional factors.

1. Legally, it is a problem because of the consequences for parents who break a statutory requirement by failing to ensure that their children receive a suitable education.
2. Educationally, it is a source of concern because non-attenders generally tend to fall behind in their school work.
3. Psychologically, it is symptomatic of deeper trouble within an individual and may foreshadow more serious problems.
4. Sociologically, it is known to be linked with adverse home conditions and deprivation.
5. Institutionally, it suggests disaffection from school.

Considered against this background, it dawns upon one that the social and home backgrounds of absentees are relatively minor pieces of a complex jigsaw puzzle. Before any remedial programme is implemented in the case of a particular absentee, it is important to have a clear understanding of his or her unique set of circumstances.

1.1.1. **THE CONSTRAINTS OF TEACHER-BASED ACTION ON ABSENTEES**

Teachers are busy people. Their heavy workloads and the organisation of schools leave them with very little time to get to know individual pupils intimately. There are even fewer opportunities for them to become familiar with, and understand, the problems of pupils who attend school irregularly. Their impatience with these pupils is evident from the remarks that teachers often make. These include the following:

" We have no time for their problems...What about us...? We, too, have families and problems...".

" It is the parent's duty to look after his children. If he fails he should refer them to the social worker."

Teachers are primarily concerned with the task of imparting knowledge. To do this effectively, they favour good attendance and small classes of well-motivated pupils. This is evident in statements such as :

" I am not going to force him to attend... I can only talk to him...that's all ."

" The fewer pupils in my class, the better... I'll have less marking and fewer problems."

Attitudes such as these need to be closely examined with a view to replacing them with more positive ones and enlisting teachers' support in the campaign against needless absence from school.

1.1.2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ABSENTEEISM

Regular school attendance is important for both the individual and society. When pupils persistently absent themselves a variety of problems arise. Some of these are as follows:

1. Absenteeism draws heavily on the various resources set aside for education, particularly those linked with time, money and personnel (Brodbelt, 1985).
2. Absent children lose the opportunity of benefitting from the school's educational programme. Mei and associates (1981), found a strong relationship between school attendance and the number of courses passed. Findings by Rozelle (1968), Hersov (1960), and Rohrman (1993), confirm the association between regular attendance and good scholastic progress.

Pupils are generally expected to spend about 12 000 hours in school. The typical high school absentee, however, is not there for 20% or more of the time. The loss of 3000 school hours results in lessened benefits from homework, corrected tests, and pupil-teacher interactions (Brodbelt, 1985).

3. Persistent absenteeism and the backlog that builds up can cause a pupil to become discouraged and withdraw socially (Moos and Moos, 1978). This may retard his/her growth and development in other directions as well. Rohrman (1993), found that in adulthood poor attenders frequently had to cope with illiteracy, social alienation, poverty and political powerlessness.
4. Persistent absenteeism has been linked to delinquency (Senna, Rathus, and Siegel, 1974). Englander (1968), in his study of prison inmates, found that 89% had a history of truancy. Rohrman (1993), notes that truancy is positively linked to daytime burglary rates, auto-theft rates, and vandalism.
5. High rates of absenteeism may adversely affect the progress of other pupils and the atmosphere of the school as a whole (Elton Report, 1988).
6. High absenteeism may prevent some students from obtaining the credentials which are necessary for future occupational success. A high school certificate is often required by employers even though it may not guarantee that its bearer possesses the skills and knowledge which are necessary for satisfactory job performance (Berg, 1971).

In some systems regular school attendance on its own ensures that a pupil will pass his coursework. A recent study in San Francisco, for instance, found that pupils who attended classes regularly, passed their subjects (Dornbusch, 1974).

7. Frequent absence from school increases the workload of the administrators who must monitor and enforce attendance laws (Whitehead and Marshall, 1980).

Most school principals, teachers and educational authorities in this study expressed concern about high absenteeism rates and were keen that decisive steps should be taken to improve the situation.

1.1.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD ATTENDANCE

Compulsory attendance laws are the outcome of public consensus about the value of, and need for, education. Education is therefore viewed as an important element in promoting a child's growth and development.

It is also considered to be a key to effective and informed citizenship, an access route to better jobs and upward mobility, and a need that is crucial to a healthy economy (Encyclopedia of Education, 1971)

Some of the more positive outcomes of good attendance, distilled from the literature, include the following:

1. It helps reduce the dropout rate.
2. It enables the child to compete in the employment world.
3. It relieves the community and society of economic and civic burdens.
4. It fills successful pupils with feelings of self-worth.
5. It reduces the incidence of delinquency and crime.
6. It helps to reduce the alienation of the pupil from his school.

In Denmark, where absenteeism and truancy are rare, there is a tight but "flexible and friendly" surveillance system in which teachers stay with the same class of pupils throughout their years at the school. This fosters a close relationship between teacher, pupil and parent (Times Education Supplement, 9-3-1990). Problems are tackled timeously by the close, co-operative network of teachers, parents, social workers and educational officials. Failure to attend school is seen as a failure on the part of the educational system rather than on the part of the child.

1.2. SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM: THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM.

1.2.1. THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

It is difficult to define "truancy" without simplifying the concept. Reid (1985), presents a simplistic definition of truancy as "persistent absence without adequate reason" or "being away from school illegally with or without parental consent" (p.6).

Both these definitions imply, incorrectly, that truancy is a generic term which is used to cover any illegitimate form of absence from school.

Tyerman (1968), defines a truant as "a child who is absent on his own initiative without his parents' permission " (p.9). Like most writers, he distinguishes between truancy and other forms of absence, such as parental-condoned absence and school phobia. The Pack Committee (1977), which investigated truancy and disruptive behaviour in Scotland saw truancy as the "unauthorized absence from school, for any period, as a result of premeditated or spontaneous action on the part of the pupil, parent or both" (Reid, 1985:6).

Some writers avoid using the term "truancy". Eaton and Houghton (1974), Galloway (1976), and Carroll (1977), for instance, prefer to use the term "absenteeism" because it does not carry with it the negative emotive connotations commonly associated with the term "truancy".

For Carroll, absenteeism includes both truancy as well as certain superficially less serious forms of poor attendance at school. Carroll argues that the problem of absenteeism is just not about non-attenders. It is also related to the wider context of the home, the school, the neighbourhood, and society.

Reynolds and Murgatroyd (1977), use the term truancy in a broad sense so as to include all absentees, irrespective of the reasons underlying their absence.

May (1975), is more cautious and less sweeping in his definition. He distinguishes between poor attenders who are truants from those who are not, on the basis of teachers' statements. Teachers have close contact with their pupils and their circumstances and are presumably in a strategic position to make accurate judgements.

In the context of the present study, absenteeism is seen as a pupil's absence from school without his/her parents' knowledge or approval. Absence due to physical illness and to the occasional periods when a family goes on holiday are not included in this definition.

1.2.2. NON-ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL : A GENERAL REVIEW

Non-attendance at school may arise in quite different ways. The child may be kept at home by his parents to care for a younger sibling, or he may be playing truant, or there may be school refusal as part of some general emotional disorder. If it is school refusal, this, too, may be due to a number of reasons. These, according to Rutter (1975), may be distinguished from one another. A procedure for doing this is illustrated in Figure 1.1

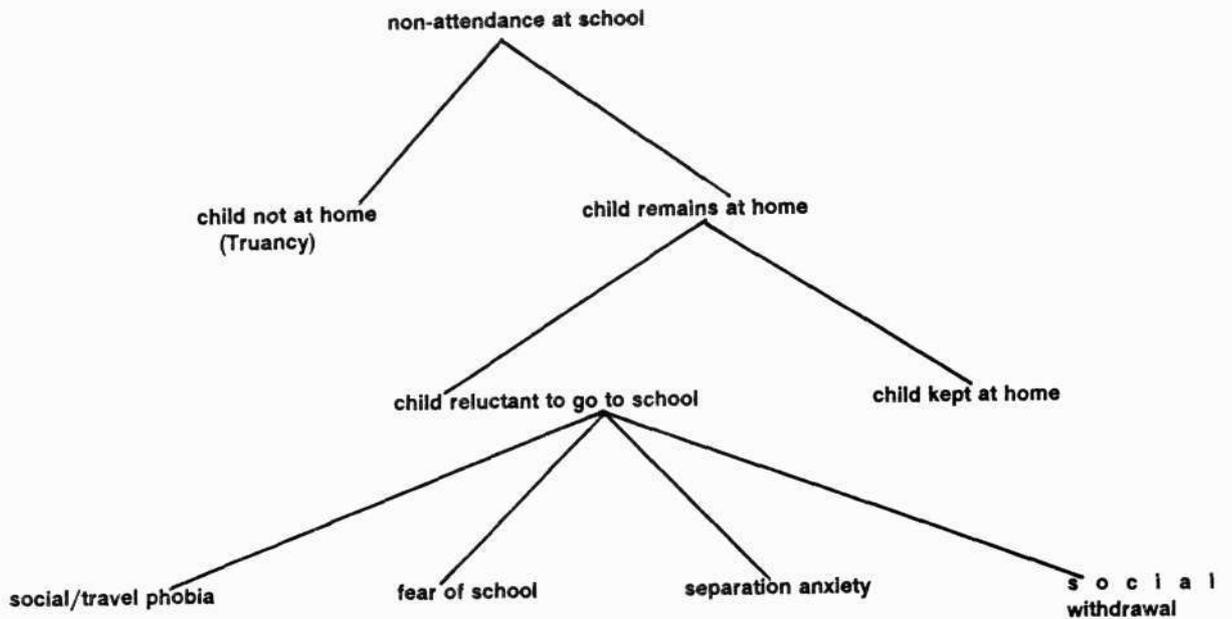


FIG.1.1 NON-ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL

Source: Rutter, M., 1975. *Helping Troubled Children*, pp.40- 42.

The first question to settle is whether the child is at home or not when he is not at school. If he is not at home, then it is likely to be a problem of truancy.

The parents, in such a case may not be aware of the truancy. However, if the child remains at home with the parents' knowledge then he is either being kept at home by his parents or he is refusing to go to school.

The second question relates to whether the school refusal varies with the curriculum. The aim here is to find out whether some anxiety at school, for example, fear of physical education, prevents attendance.

The third question relates to what is happening at home. For example, is the non-attendance related to the parents' illness or some other anxiety within the family ?

Once this preliminary sorting out is complete, the next step is to ask why? and how? This calls for a careful examination of factors within the child, the school and the home.

1.2.2.1. SCHOOL PHOBIA

School phobia or school refusal is another form of absenteeism, which needs to be examined so as to distinguish it from other kinds of absence.

Definitions of school phobia often include the following points:

1. Severe difficulty in attending school, often resulting in prolonged absence.

2. Severe emotional upset manifested by such symptoms as excessive fearfulness, excessive displays of temper, misery or complaints about feeling ill when faced with the prospect of going to school.
3. Staying at home during school hours with the knowledge of parents.
4. Absence of significant antisocial disorder, such as stealing, lying, wandering or sexual misbehaviour.

In contrast to school phobia, truancy is characterised by behaviours that are the opposite of the last two behaviours. Estimates of school phobia range from 3,2 to 17 per 1000 school children (Kennedy, 1965; Yule 1979).

The causes of school phobia have been examined from different perspectives, viz. psychoanalytic, psychodynamic and social learning theories. The psychoanalytic focus frames school phobia within a mutually dependent and hostile parent-child relationship. It is believed that the unconscious conflict resulting from this relationship leads the child to want to protect the mother, and hence, not leave her. Some psychoanalysts postulate that the conflict surrounding the hostile-dependent relationship is displaced onto the school situation, which becomes the manifest phobic object. However, both agree that separation anxiety plays a key role in school phobia (Atkinson, et al., 1985; Kelly, 1973).

An alternative theory was postulated by Leventhal and Sills (1964). They state that "these children commonly overvalue themselves and their achievements and try to hold onto their unrealistic self-image. When this is threatened in the school situation, they suffer anxiety and retreat to another situation where they can maintain their narcissistic self- image. This retreat may very well be a return to a close contact with mother" (p.686).

Behavioral theories account for school phobia in terms of both classical and operant conditioning. The former model explains school phobia as a conditioned anxiety response elicited by the school situation. An often cited case is that of a boy whose mother repeatedly told him, as he was leaving for school, that she might die while he was gone. Eventually, the thought of going to school led to fear of his mother's death (Garvey and Hegrenes, 1966). This model assumes that internal or environmental cues trigger and maintain the school phobic behaviour.

Atkinson et al.,(1985), argue that all three perspectives differ more in focus than in substance because all account for school phobia as a fear of either separation, or the school situation, or of failure in school.

1.2.2.2. TRUANCY

School absenteeism is probably a symptom of low morale at school (Behr, et al., 1987: 148). Some children are absent with the full knowledge of their parents, some are needed to help at home, and others are supported by parents in their view that school is of little relevance.

The stereotyped image of a truant is that of a happy-go-lucky child with more interesting things to do than attend school. Truancy studies, however, suggest a different picture, ie. the majority fail to cope with life.

They are unhappy at home and unpopular at school. Many are lonely children. Recent literature shows them to be poor employees because of their erratic work habits and the low level of work they aspire to. Also, many of them fall into delinquent habits during their absence from school.

Truancy may also be a response of the child to an unsupportive home background where school is not valued by the parents. Poor attenders usually come from the lowest social classes and from large families (Davie et al., 1972). Once a child has missed a great deal of schooling, it may be difficult for him/her to bridge the gap.

Many truants claim that they absent themselves because of a conflict with a teacher at school.

Truants, generally, find school unrewarding and meaningless. Attendance becomes a legal requirement rather than a way of achieving personal goals.

Although most investigators have concentrated on the home, school factors may well be important. Attendance tends to fall sharply at the beginning of secondary school, when pupils come into contact with a much larger and impersonal organisation. Hence, the role of the school and the teacher must be emphasized in helping pupils return to school.

The early identification of the truant is essential and demands friendly vigilance on the part of teachers so as not to generate further anxiety.

1.2.2.3. A MODEL OF PERSISTENT SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM

Most research has either concentrated upon school refusal or truancy. Truancy has been described in terms of the disaffected youth. Truants differ from school refusers in their anti-social behaviour. In addition, their pattern of non-attendance, family structure and parental management differs significantly in form and quality. School refusal has been based frequently upon a faulty mother-child relationship. A variety of models have been used to explain the disorders. This variety problematises attempts to understand the problem of non-attendance.

For this reason attempts are being made to find a model that unifies the various explanations and bases the problems of truancy and school refusal within the framework of a single concept (Cooper, 1986:15).

Cooper's unifying model based on the concept of the non-satellized child appears to be a useful one and deserves closer scrutiny. According to this model the child, in the course of his/her development, passes through various phases of dependency before attaining independence. Early infancy is a period of helplessness and dependency. The child can perceive the differences between the parents' caring attitude and the competitive attitudes of siblings.

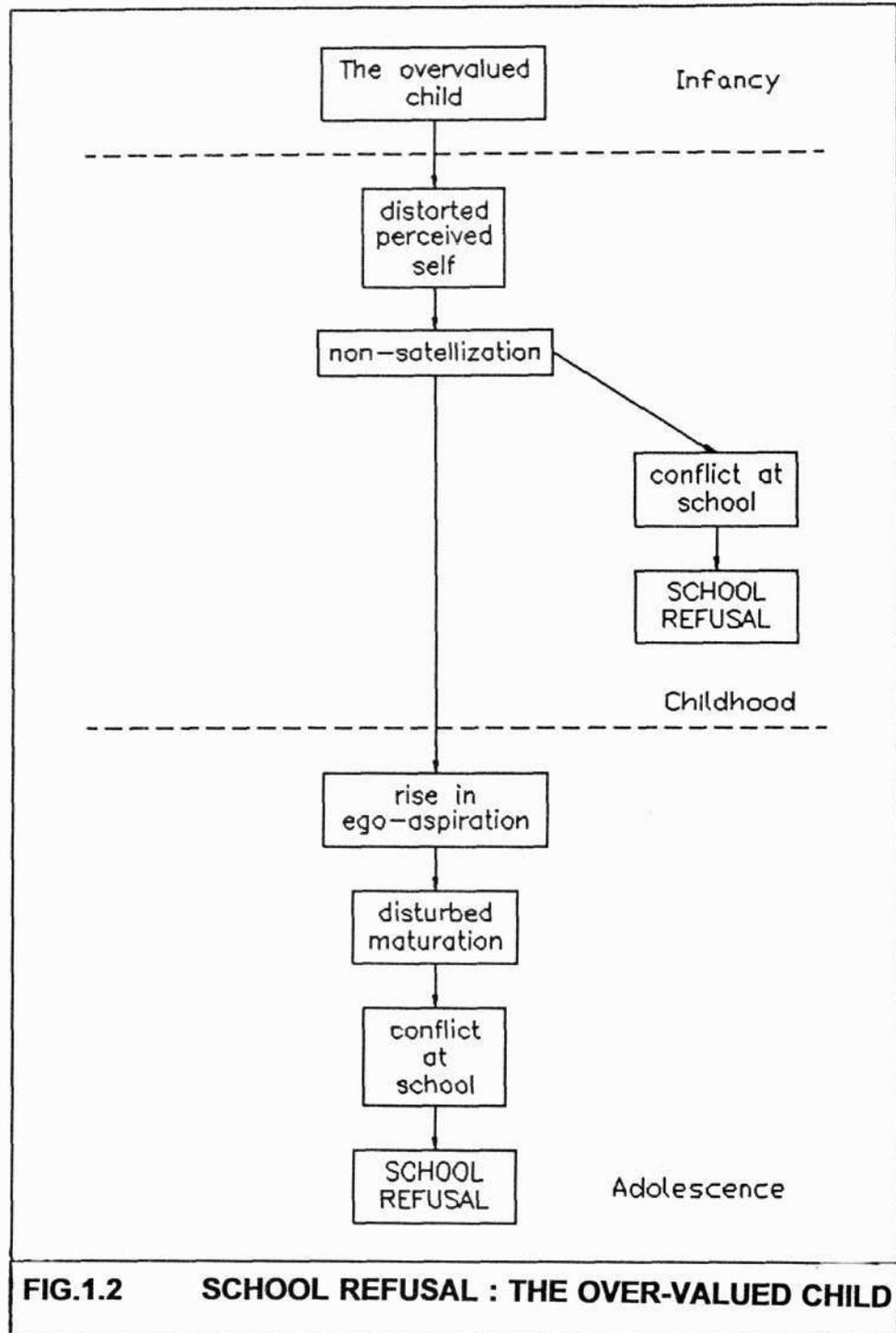
Being too young to understand the motivation of his/her parents' attitudes, a misperception arises that the parents are obliged to defer to the child's needs, thereby exaggerating the child's powers of independence and self-value. As the child gets older, parents begin to make demands upon him/her, and the child perceives that he/she is under no compulsion to submit to them. Thus there is a crisis in ego-development. As a result a complete re-organisation of the ego-structure is required on a greatly devalued basis.

The most acceptable alternative is for the child to adopt the role of satellite to his/her parents and thereby enjoy derived status. In this way feelings of security and adequacy are effected.

However, schooling imposes new conditions upon the child. Here the child is valued for what he/she can do and, therefore, begins to perceive him/herself in a less dependent light.

During adolescence a process of desatellisation takes place. There is now upward revision of self-esteem and ego-aspiration. The process of desatellisation is easily achieved through resatellisation. Parents are now gradually replaced by peers as essential socializing agents. Throughout this process, the role of the parents is vital in determining the success or otherwise of the child gaining independence. The concept of satellisation provides an explanation of how self-esteem can be maintained when status is threatened. Desatellisation during the pre-adolescent and adolescent stages can result in successful maturation.

Cooper (1986), accordingly, places emphasis on the importance of parent-child relationships in his explanation of school refusal and truancy. However, there are instances where satellisation does not occur. This happens when parent-child relationships are poor, for example, in the case of the over-valued child (Fig.1.2) or the rejected child (Fig.1.3). It is the concept of the non-satellised child which is of special interest in understanding school refusal and truancy.



Source: Cooper, M., 1986. A Model of Persistent School Absenteeism. Educational Research, 28, 18-19.

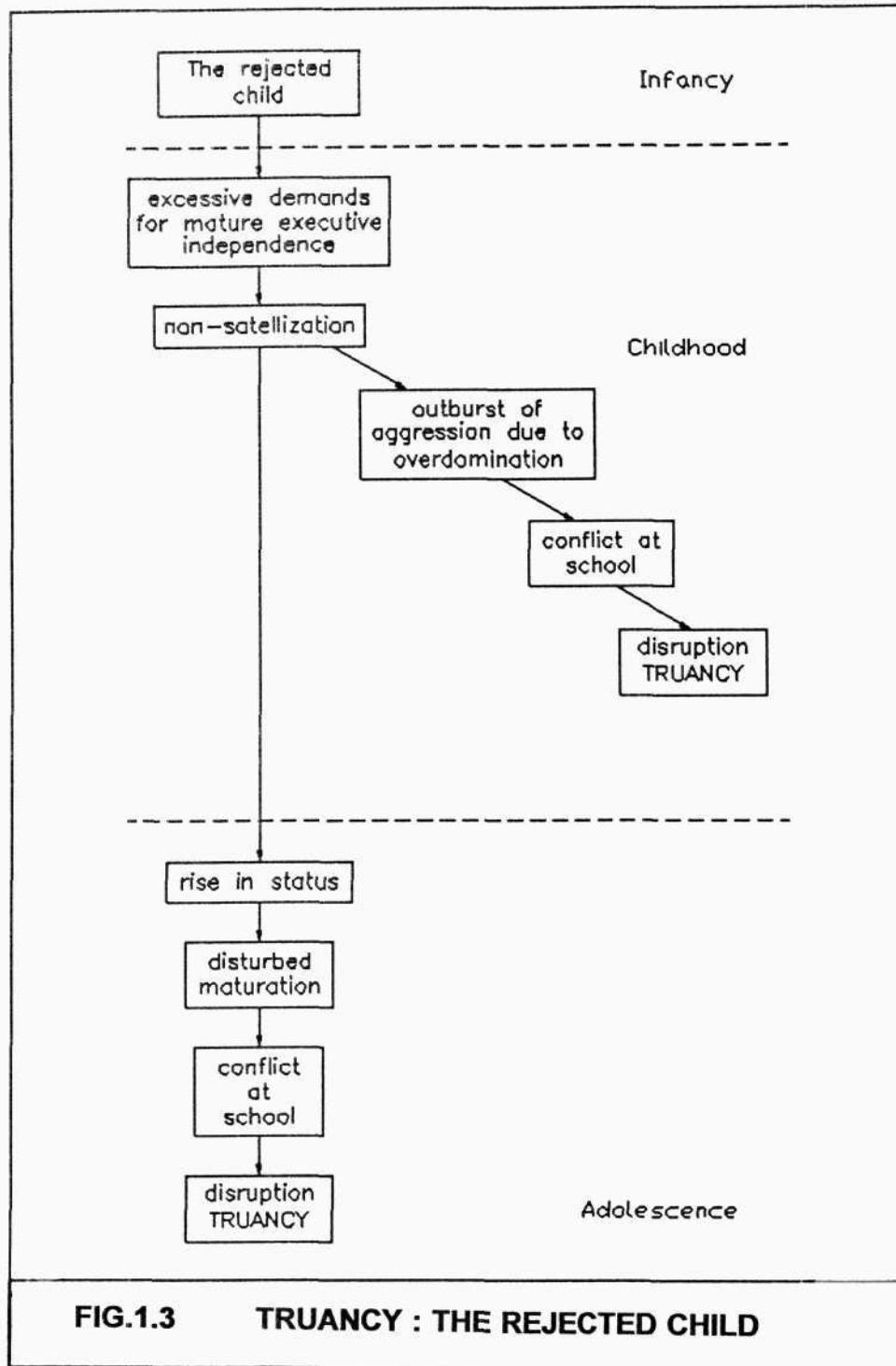
As has been illustrated, school refusal may be the result of an over-valued child.

Such a child is over-protected and the parents do not make any demands on him/her.

There is thus no need for the child to achieve derived status via satellisation. He/she may also fail to undergo ego-devaluation.

However, schooling may question his/her over-valued status. Separation from the mother may also cause worry and anxiety. Fear of school with its unaccustomed demands may generate school refusal during childhood.

During adolescence there is reactivation of issues of independence. Maturation is more difficult in over-valued children, hence the adolescent refuser is often immature and may have a tendency to over-estimate his/her status, abilities and performance and set for him/herself unrealistic goals. Another instance where satellisation may not occur is in the rejected child (Fig. 1.3).



Source: Cooper, M., 1986. A Model of Persistent Absenteeism. Educational Research, 28, 18-19.

The rejected child is often over-dominated and obliged to adhere to stringent standards. The child is expected to develop mature behaviour when quite young. He/she is not valued and accepted for his/her own sake by the parents.

Consequently the child fails to satellise and does not enjoy derived status. The truant may be likened to the rejected child. As in the case of the school refuser, satellisation does not take place, but in truants the reasons for non-satellisation are different. Rejection by parents causes a loss of security and adequacy. Self-esteem suffers. The truant may react with bitter and violent outbursts and inter-personal relationships are consequently poor.

The concept of the non-satellized child encompasses many of the current models of school refusal and truancy and places them within the context of accepted psychological theory. The importance of the parent-child relationship is stressed. The effects of non-satellization, (Figs. 1.2 and 1.3), whilst common to both disorders, result in different behaviour patterns which are readily observable in truants and school refusers. Management will be different, but with a better understanding of the processes underlying the two conditions, a successful outcome is more likely.

1.2.2.4. THE TRUANCY-DELINQUENCY LINK

Grimshaw and Pratt (1984), note that much research on truancy has had an institutional setting. This has contributed to the establishment of a relationship between truancy and delinquency. Although this relationship may not be causal, these writers point out that both truancy and delinquency may be functions of the same external factors, for example, socio-economic background.

Many of the results quoted in relation to truancy mirror results previously published in relation to delinquency.

Background features such as a large family, a low income, other delinquents in the family, unsatisfactory upbringing, disharmony between parents and early troublesomeness, are similar. As young adults both the truants and the delinquents show a similar tendency to antisociality.

Like truants, delinquents often come from an unfavourable home background, characterised by multiple adversities, and tend to have deviant lifestyles after leaving school. Farrington (1980), suggests that adverse backgrounds produce anti-social people, and that truancy and delinquency are just two symptoms of this.

Hargreaves (1980), indicates the undesirable organizational features that characterize schools with high delinquency rates.

These include, inter alia, dubious rules concerning dress and smoking, allocation of less committed teachers to difficult classes, and attitudes of open distrust. Phillipson (1971), notes that frequent staff changes and the lack of correlation between curriculum and labour market promotes a belief among the less academically inclined that the school programme is irrelevant.

Concern about delinquents is closely related to concern about truants. Teachers also vary in their willingness to interest themselves in their pupils' backgrounds and personal problems, or to make contact with parents; yet this is essential when dealing with delinquent-prone individuals. If teachers are to play a greater role in the management of potential and actual delinquents, it is important for them to have access to outside agencies, such as social services and school psychologists, and not to regard these agencies as meddling rivals.

1.2.2.5. NON - ATTENDANCE AND SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT

The relationship between non-attendance and achievement is difficult to assess because achievement is not something which is simply present or absent; it is a matter of degree (Reid, 1985:62). Generally speaking, educators view absentees as under-achievers because they are less likely to participate fully in the continuous developmental programme of experiences and instruction in school that will meet their present and later needs in life.

Rates of achievement vary, depending on the type of school and family background from which the pupil comes. The kind of teacher, the teaching methods, and the textbooks used have important effects on academic achievement. Often, the disadvantaged child is adversely affected in these respects and consequently comes to have feelings of inadequacy and a poor self-concept.

The pupil who cannot keep up academically or who finds school life puzzling and irrelevant is likely to find the school experience frustrating. Such children find it easier to stay away from school to avoid being embarrassed.

Often such pupils drop out of school and eventually join the ranks of delinquents, criminals, drug-addicts, the welfare dependent, and the irresponsible parents of tomorrow. In this way social problems are perpetuated.

According to Mussen et al., (1969 : 734), the typical drop-out is likely to come from an emotionally troubled, socially isolated, lower class home. He is likely to have friends whom his parents do not approve of, who share his aversion to school and who have already dropped out themselves. At school the potential drop-out feels academically and socially frustrated. Psychologically, he is troubled by feelings of inadequacy, by resentment of authority and by the lack of ego identity.

It is essential for our schools to recognise these features and to so organise themselves that they are able to counter them. In this way, national losses, through the loss of valuable human potential, can be reduced.

1.2.2.6. PROBLEM PUPILS AND THE SCHOOL

Although most educators express genuine concern about absenteeism, it is ironically seen by some as a partial solution to classroom problems.

During the fieldwork interviews, individual teachers cynically pointed out that absenteeism helped to solve the problem of overcrowding in schools. It also reduced the incidence of behaviour problems since many of the pupils who did not attend school were branded as troublemakers, as those who frequently presented disciplinary problems.

Seen in this context, the practice of suspension from school, often imposed by high school administrators on troublesome pupils, seems somehow contrived since the punishment seeks to alleviate the problems faced by the teacher or administrators at school rather than being aimed at benefitting or reforming the errant pupil. Absence from school is reinforced when suspensions and expulsions are used as disciplinary measures for truancy and instead of attempting to solve the problem, it merely validates the pupils' further absence. Educators need to pause and consider these anomalies and seek out more positive and constructive ways of dealing with absentees.

Many schools, by their very nature and mode of functioning, are inadvertently responsible for "creating problem pupils". Pupils often rebel against schools that are "narrowly custodial in orientation and have high levels of control, harsh and strict rule enforcement, and a gulf between teachers, pupils and parents" (Reynolds, 1976,1977). Schools that are characterized by a rigid structure, hostile ethos, lack of understanding and lack of trust are breeding grounds for conflict with their pupils.

Such an atmosphere frustrates the natural development of a child, who can only react by avoiding the source of his/her frustration. Such pupils may show a willingness to resort to violence when they feel isolated, powerless and dissatisfied. Often, they react by missing school regularly, or even by retaliating against teachers.

In order to combat this situation, calls are often made for smaller schools, lower institutional control, less rigorous enforcement of certain key rules on pupil behaviour, higher co-option of pupils in decision-making, and close parent-school relationships.

1.2.2.7. NON-ATTENDANCE AND THE LAW

Compulsory attendance laws make educators agents of the legal system. Laws give school personnel responsibility and authority to intervene when children are absent.

This has led, in many countries, to an expanded school bureaucracy to monitor attendance, investigate absences, and generate programmes to reduce absenteeism (Tyack, 1976).

Laws usually specify that truants and their parents are subject to prosecution and could be subjected to fines or enforced probation by the courts. In South Africa, the Compulsory Education Act was promulgated to enforce regular school attendance. It is compulsory for all children to remain at school until the age of fifteen.

The South African judicial system provides for the prosecution of offenders by imposing fines or imprisonment or both. However, the extent to which this has been enforced in South Africa has been severely limited by lack of funds and other resources, especially in black communities.

Positive steps are now being taken at national level to rectify this situation. From the beginning of 1995 school attendance became compulsory for all children who turn six years of age before June of the same year. Further, all children would have to remain at school up to the age of fifteen. It is the personal view of the researcher that these requirements would be difficult to enforce because of the state of flux in which education presently finds itself.

1.3. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In this study a combined qualitative and quantitative design was used to gather and analyze data. The researcher interacted freely with respondents, using participant observation methods, structured interview schedules and field notes. Information was obtained from parents, pupils, teachers, principals, social workers, and education authorities. The selection of the research groups was a carefully planned process and was finalised in consultation with senior staff and education authorities. Each poor attender was matched for age and sex with one good attender.

Good attenders comprised pupils with an exemplary attendance history for a particular academic year whilst poor attenders were those who had absented themselves for 20% or more over the same period. Questionnaires were completed by both pupils and teachers. Teachers reported on reasons for poor and/or good attendance of particular pupils.

Pupils' questionnaires (PPQ) sought information relating to the parents, the school situation, teachers, and perceptions of themselves.

Interviews were conducted with parents at their homes, and with teachers, principals and social workers at their institutions. Some interviews were straightforward, others were more complex and demanded a considerable amount of skill, time, and patience.

On the basis of the findings a set of recommendations was formulated which would promote regular school attendance and indicate to teachers, principals, social workers and other interested parties what they could do to improve the "status quo".

1.4. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

This study is primarily concerned with Indian pupils belonging to the former House of Delegates schools. It is essential, therefore, to give some background about the community from which they come. The Indian family differs in many ways from the typical Western family.

It is usually larger in size and more closely-knit. Often, married sons, together with their wives and children, share the parental home. At the present time the typically Indian family style is giving way to a Western one.

The close filial bonds holding the different members of the family together are not as inviolable as they once were. Piety and a strong sense of duty to the other members of the family are giving way to individualism. The attitudes of the younger generation have changed and this is reflected in the diminished values placed on education by some youth of today. This manifests itself in the rising rates of absenteeism.

Research shows that certain behaviour patterns noticeable in the early years of schooling often serve as indicators of absenteeism and truancy in later years (Encyclopedia of Education:1971). When these warning signs are not recognized early or are completely ignored, the problem may be exacerbated to the point of becoming a precursor of antisocial acts. Previously, adults talked glibly about children playing truant. This misdemeanour was seen as a relatively minor and forgivable offence. However, truancy has now become a social, psychological and educational crisis that has grown in size in recent years. The National Child Development Study data point to the overwhelming proportion of absenteeism among working class children in the United Kingdom (Reid,1985:61). Statistics from this study also show a strong relationship between poor scholastic performance and absenteeism. Experienced educators and social workers report similar patterns in South Africa.

An added concern was expressed by school principals whose schools do not have counsellors. They point out that this missing member of staff handicaps them in their fight against absenteeism. It is expected that under the new education system in South Africa this omission will be rectified. School counsellors, together with teachers and researchers, will, hopefully, seek answers to questions that will lead to the designing of remedial programmes. To ensure a competitive workforce, South Africa needs to upgrade the quality and quantity of high school education for all our youth. For this good attendance is vital.

Truancy and dropping out of school are costly not only to the individual but to society. Because they suffer from reduced employment opportunities, drop-outs require more welfare, health care, and employment subsidies. They are more likely to be involved in criminal activities, thus incurring costs for the judicial and penal services as well. The media has correctly pointed out that if our youth are going to remain undereducated and continue to underperform, society as a whole would become less economically competitive. The nation would have to contribute even more towards public services for poverty, crime prevention and rehabilitation.

Economists and other forecasters agree that as the disadvantaged become a majority of the government school population, their educational problems with its concomitant consequences would become the concern of the more privileged as well.

Helping a greater proportion of potential drop-outs to complete their education, on the other hand, can reduce such costs substantially. These savings would far out-weigh the costs of helping these pupils to complete school. Educators and the various sectors of society would have to work together to explore ways of encouraging pupils to attend school regularly.

The climate for developing solutions to the problem of school absenteeism is conducive. Heightened public attention to what is now recognized as a crisis in education has triggered widespread concern.

While the nature and scope of new policies and programmes have not yet been finalized, the most common approach thus far has been either to introduce new programme funding generally or to direct funds specifically to disadvantaged pupils. This provides a useful starting point for developing effective programmes.

To help understand and deal with the problem of absenteeism among pupils, the first essential would be a well-designed, locally-oriented study which takes into account the multiplicity of factors unique to the area under consideration. Whatever small scale studies have been carried out to date, have been done on an ad hoc basis. An objective study covering several dimensions of absenteeism would help provide an accurate assessment of the problem, its nature, its causes, and the kind of remedial steps that need to be taken. This study is directed towards these ends.

The researcher is in an especially favourable position to carry out this project for the following reasons:

1. He is an experienced teacher who has taught at the secondary school level in Tongaat for several years. He knows the area well.
2. He resides in Tongaat and his high community profile facilitates communication with local schools, pupils and parents.

3. He is a senior teacher who has been assigned the specific duty of handling persistent absentees at his school.
4. He holds a post-graduate degree in School Guidance and Counselling.

1.5. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The basic aim of the present investigation is to gather objective and scientific information about the phenomena of absenteeism and truancy among secondary school pupils in the Tongaat area.

Previous studies have shown that school absenteeism is a complex, multidimensional problem. Teachers need to understand the issues involved and adopt enlightened, non-punitive attitudes if they hope to reintegrate non-attenders fully into the school system.

Overall, this research aims to shed light on the following issues:

1. The incidence of absenteeism and truancy in Tongaat.
2. The home and familial circumstances of regular attenders and persistent absentees.
3. An examination of the differences, if any, between poor and good attenders with regard to maladaptive behaviour.
4. The role of the school and school-related factors as contributors to absenteeism and truancy.

5. The different conceptions that regular attenders and persistent absentees may have of their future.
6. The reasons offered by teachers for pupil absenteeism.

Answers to questions such as these are required before an effective programme for combatting persistent absenteeism can be designed and implemented. In this regard, Glueck and Glueck (1957), write, "if we know what aspects of a child's rearing contribute to the formation of traits which are in general more significantly characteristic of problem children than non-problem children, there arises some hope that specific targets in family life and school can be found, and dealt with preventitively, both on an individual basis and in a broad prophylactic public health program" (p.98).

1.6. ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

This report is divided into six chapters:

1. Chapters One, Two and Three are concerned with the background and framework of the research. They relate to the reasons for undertaking the study, its design and scope, its social setting, and its relationship to some of the well-known research projects already completed in the area of absenteeism and truancy.
2. Chapters Four and Five focus on the findings of this study. These findings are linked, where appropriate, to relevant viewpoints from the findings of other studies presented in the earlier chapters.

3. The implications of the findings and the recommendations which flow from them, form the subject matter of Chapter Six. Special consideration is given to the role which various constituencies like the school, parents and education authorities can play in reducing the incidence of absenteeism and truancy in schools. It also includes suggestions concerning programme design, common service strategies, and the importance of discovering what works under what circumstances.

A survey of the literature relevant to this study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This review will be divided into the following sections, each dealing with a separate aspect. They are as follows:

1. Early perspectives on absenteeism
2. Incidence of absenteeism
3. Review of the factors associated with absenteeism
4. Theoretical approaches to absenteeism and truancy
5. Management and treatment of absenteeism

A review of the literature on the subject of absenteeism and truancy is crucial to the researcher's aim of investigating this problem among secondary school pupils in Tongaat. This review will provide the conceptual framework within which the problem will be studied. It will also enable the researcher to compare his data with those of others who have conducted research in this field. It is important to note that relatively few studies on absenteeism have been carried out in South Africa.

Recent research highlights the family and home circumstances of absentees and truants. They show that homes of persistent absentees are characterised by:

1. conditions of multiple deprivation (Carroll,1977) and
2. low social class (Davie et al.,1972; Fogelman and Richardson,1974).

The adverse home and social conditions include, among others, large families and overcrowding (May,1975; Tibbenham,1977); inconsistent home discipline and father absence (Hersov,1960), one-parent families (Ferri,1976) and unemployment and illegitimacy (May,1975).

Recent research has suggested that the home and social backgrounds of absentees and truants need to be investigated in conjunction with their psychological and institutional aspects. For example, reasons for absenteeism given by pupils indicate the importance of interaction between family and social factors on school experiences (Buist,1980). It is becoming increasingly apparent that persistent absentees tend to blame their schools rather than themselves or their home backgrounds for their non-attendance (Reid,1983a).

There has, to date, been a great deal of research into the relationship between disruptive behaviour and absenteeism (Bird et al.,1980; Tattum,1982). Davie (1980), was able to obtain a sizeable grant from the Welsh Office to organize a unique course and research project in South Wales for senior staff of secondary schools hoping that these teachers would lead the fight against disruptive conduct and absenteeism in their institutions.

Until the mid-1970's published research into absenteeism and truancy appeared sporadically and apart from a few researchers, truancy was almost exclusively the professional concern of teachers, welfare officers, attendance officers and some child psychologists who were more interested in school phobia. For most other people, truancy was a fairly harmless misdemeanour indulged in by a minority of the school population. This attitude, however, soon changed.

There are two important reasons why truancy was no longer treated with the amusement one might have felt for the comic-strip rascals who hid their schoolbags under a bush to go fishing, unencumbered. Firstly, there was a growing feeling among educational professionals that truancy was on the increase. Secondly, there was a fear that an upsurge in the truancy rate would contribute to the growing crime rate.

Thus Burt's view that truancy was "the first step on the downward slide to crime" was resurrected by Boyson (1974), who stated that " boys who truant continuously and defy the law successfully for a number of years are unlikely to become reliable workmen and they could be a source of a large new criminal class which could threaten further the fabric of our society" (p.55).

The relationship between truancy and delinquency has been established for well over half a century during which time, numerous articles have been written on this subject. More recently, studies have aimed to assess the outcomes of truancy both in terms of its association with delinquency and criminal convictions, as well as its long-term consequences upon the employment and life-style of truants after leaving school.

A significant relationship was found between secondary school truancy and juvenile delinquency, violence, and aggressive attitudes (Farrington,1980). He also found that delinquent truants were more extreme in truancy than non-delinquent truants although they were more likely to come from backgrounds with more severe problems. It was also found that by age eighteen, secondary school truants were in lower status jobs with unstable job histories, heavier gamblers, smokers and drinkers and more sexually active. Farrington offers no explanation why truants should become so drastically degenerate in their adult life.

It may be that truancy causes these conditions, or more plausibly, that the factors contributing to truancy also contribute to other anti-social lifestyles. Nevertheless, his studies are consistent with earlier findings that truancy is one of the major factors which can lead to less well-adjusted adult lives. Gray et al.,(1980), found that unemployment was a greater problem for early leavers and was more common among poor attenders.

It is suggested that attendance affects employment through its association with early leaving. Poor attenders were found to have a lower success rate in examinations. In the South African context, the future of truants regarding employment prospects appears to be rather bleak, considering today's economic climate.

2.2. EARLY PERSPECTIVES ON ABSENTEEISM

The earliest investigations, notably that of Kline in 1897, attempted to explain truancy by linking it with a migratory impulse, "a rebellion against suppressed activity and denial of free outdoor life" (Cooper, 1966:115). Such a simple diagnosis, according to Cooper, could not account for the inexplicable urges of non-conformity which characterised the behaviour.

In 1915, Healy produced evidence to link truancy with anti-social and unlawful conduct. In his investigation of 1000 juvenile court cases he found that truancy had as its determinants, poor parental control, broken homes and mental conflict. Evidence now existed to link the "impulse to wander" with unlawful conduct. The importance of early detection and treatment by dealing with the basic and environmental causes was stressed, lest truancy become a precursor of crime.

2.2.1. The Role Played by the Home

Kline (1897), found that homes were often supporting non-attendance at schools. Many parents had not yet come to appreciate the advantages of free education and kept their children at home to serve their own ends and for their own convenience. Girls, who had reached a stage of helpfulness at home stayed away from school in any domestic crisis. Other cases of this kind were concealed under the guise of illness. Fretful children who preferred the warmth and comfort of home were supported by indulgent and over-anxious parents, and wilful children often beguiled parents into accepting continued absence from school.

Burt, in "the Young Delinquent" (1925), questioned the "inborn impulse to wander" by pointing out that all healthy children, by nature, are curious and want to explore their surroundings. His work suggested that the paramount conditions for truancy associated with delinquency were mental dullness, temperamental instabilities, defective family life in vicious homes, and undesirable friendships with other delinquents. He found that 17.1% of boys and 4.1% of girls in his investigation group had truanted. Thus truancy began to be more firmly associated with delinquency.

Cooper (1966:117) reported on the research works of Lowry (1936), Levy (1943), Bowlby (1944) and Friedlander (1947), by showing that children made insecure in their relationships within the home, were not equipped to meet the consistent pattern of school, with its discipline and demands.

New experiences of a substitute mother figure, of sharing equipment, of the necessity to wait on another's pleasure, and of the turbulence of peer relationships could exacerbate feelings of non-conformity. The urge to seek some means of personal success, if expressed in a manner unacceptable to others, led either to complete rejection of school (by running away or staying away), or to anti-social behaviour within the classroom, the inevitable punishment of which, frequently strengthened feelings of resentment and unhappiness.

2.2.2. Institutional Factors

According to Dayton (1928), dislike of the teacher, feelings of inferiority, lack of recreational facilities after school hours, physical defects, lack of home discipline together with a bad parental example and being kept at home by parents, were more important factors in truancy than low intelligence.

Educational retardation continued to be an important theme of the investigation, and in 1931 McElwee, in a study of 110 New York truants found that the median in terms of school retardation per truant amounted to two terms. The study revealed that the children in question were playing truant from school as a means of escape from discouragement and feelings of inferiority, caused by faculty grade placement.

In 1935 Kirkpatrick and Lodge reported a study of 752 cases of truancy. The age range of the children was from 6 to 17 years with a peak at 16 years: the girls tended to be older than boys.

Two years later, O'Connor (1937), undertook a comparative study involving 119 truants. Intelligence and personality traits were investigated but no substantial conclusions were offered as to the relationship between the two.

Further studies that placed more emphasis on sociological factors, notably the one conducted by Young (1947), highlighted emotional retardation and vicious home life as important factors in the etiology of truancy. Tyerman, too, cited factors such as unsatisfactory home conditions, inferior intelligence and social failure at school together with its concomitant implications of unhappiness, inferiority, and frustration-evidence that was by then already well-documented. Home conditions thus emerged as the major cause of deviant behaviour.

2.2.3. School Phobia

In his research, Tyerman (1956), referred to an associated problem of truancy, namely, school phobia. He described this problem as "a deep-seated, psycho-neurotic disorder, characterized by the terror of the child when at school".

Research into this aspect was pioneered by Broadwin in America in 1932. It was found that such children were absent from school for varying periods from several months to a year. School phobia is characterised by absence that is consistent. Furthermore, the parent is always informed as to the whereabouts of the child.

The reason for the absence is however, incomprehensible to both the parent and the school. The child's reasons for absence may vary. He/she may say that he/she is afraid to go to school, afraid of the teachers, or that he/she does not know why he/she does not wish to go to school. When at home the child is happy and apparently carefree. When compelled to go to school he/she becomes miserable and fearful. At the first opportunity the child runs back home despite the certainty of corporal punishment, because escape from the school situation brings reassurance and relief from anxiety. Such children indicate a strong infantile love-attachment to the mother (Broadwin, 1932).

This diagnosis served as a guide for future investigators. With the passage of time investigators began to distinguish between truancy and school phobia. The works of Nursten and Kahn (1958), Hersov (1959), and Chazan (1962) supported this distinction. Kahn and Nursten (1964), published a complete review of the problem of school refusal in their book "Unwillingly to School". They pleaded for the consideration of problems pertaining to mental ill-health of which school phobia is seen as only one aspect.

Truancy and school phobia are usually considered to be distinct from one another in that truancy is seen as part of a conduct disorder while school refusal is generally thought of as a neurotic disorder. This distinction has, however, been challenged by Tyerman, who believes the two groups lie on a continuum.

More recently, then, the term "absenteeism" has been preferred to such labels as truancy and school phobia because it encompasses both these aspects as well as the superficially less serious forms of poor attendance at school. Furthermore, the term "absenteeism" as used in the school context, does not carry the negative emotive connotations commonly associated with such labels as truancy and school phobia.

2.3. INCIDENCE OF ABSENTEEISM

Researchers agree that valid and reliable measures of attendance are very difficult to obtain and therefore interpret. Absence figures which are based on school registers are notoriously unreliable. Moreover, attendance records can obscure true patterns. A 90% attendance figure could mean that 90% of the pupils attend all the time and 10% never, or that all pupils attend 90% of the time (Reid, 1983).

Both national and local surveys on absenteeism have been known to report vastly different rates of pupil attendance. This could be attributed to either subjectivity or differing standpoints of the different researchers. National surveys can also be misleading because attendance rates vary and can be affected by the type and area of schools examined.

In a one-day national survey of all secondary and middle schools in England and Wales, it was reported that 9.9% of the pupils were absent on that day (Reid and Kendall, 1982:296).

Of these, 22.7% had no legitimate reason for absence. In another survey in Scotland, which involved a six-week study of secondary school children, Reid and Kendall (1982) report that 15% of the children had been found to be absent, without legitimate reason, on at least one occasion. More boys than girls were found to be absent (p.296).

A review of the research revealed that absenteeism increases from about 10% in primary school to about 20% in the last years of secondary school (Gray et al.,1980). Galloway's (1980), findings of the Sheffield Education Department surveys of 1973 and 1974 reveal that an increase in absenteeism was evident at age twelve, with a peak in the final year of schooling. In a study of twelve London secondary schools it was found that the proportion of poor attendance per school ranged from 5.7% to 25.9% (Rutter et al.,1979) .

An interesting study reported by Galloway (1976), revealed that nearly 1000 children in the Sheffield area had missed at least 50% of schooling each year (studies were carried out in the course of the Spring and Summer terms of 1975). The proportion of absentees ranged around 4% of the total on roll in the final year of compulsory education (Galloway,1976).

Information from education officers showed that less than 6% of primary school absentees were regarded as phobic or suffering from psychosomatic illnesses.

Truancy, defined as absence from school without parental knowledge or consent, accounted for less than three percent of primary school absentees when investigated as the principal reason for absenteeism. In the secondary age group, a similarly small proportion of pupils were placed in the category of school phobia or psychosomatic illnesses, while truancy accounted for 11% of all absences. It was found that parents played an instrumental role in their child's absence.

Common problems encountered by authorities were that of pupils absenting themselves with the knowledge, consent and approval of their parents or of parents unwillingness to act when informed of their child's absence. These results are consistent with other findings which suggest that truancy and school refusal account for but a small proportion of unauthorized absentees. Research also shows that although psychologists and psychiatrists have devoted a great deal of attention to truancy and phobics, there is still a surprising lack of systematic information about the silent majority of absentees who are never referred for specialist advice (Tyerman; Hersov, 1960a, 1960b.,1977; Cooper 1966a,1966b).

It is doubtful whether information obtained in this way accurately represents the situation in the severely disadvantaged areas where unauthorized absence is known to be most prevalent (Galloway,1980). The following interesting trends were revealed by Galloway's study of persistent absentees and their families:

1. Absentees are significantly more likely than regular attenders to live in families where neither parent is employed. Such families also experienced financial hardship.
2. Separation from one or both parents is evident in the absentee group.
3. Fear of a particular teacher and dislike of a particular subject is more frequently reported in the absentee group.

Although the figures present a somewhat confused picture, certain facts are reinforced by widely found evidence; persistent absenteeism does appear to increase substantially in the latter years of schooling. Variations in attendance rates between schools and geographical areas suggest that psychological, social and institutional factors are clearly associated with truancy. The contribution of these factors will now be examined.

2.4. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM

Determining the causes of absenteeism is of considerable importance if remedial or preventive measures are to be attempted. Researchers have long investigated the characteristics of absentees and their social backgrounds. However, attention is now switched to the institutional factors involved in absenteeism since it has become apparent that school absenteeism is a multi-disciplinary and multi-causal problem.

2.4.1. Personality

Farrington (1980), reports the findings of the Cambridge Study in Delinquency Development using a sample of 411 boys. Data were obtained from tests taken at ages 8, 10 and 14, and included interviews with teachers, parents and the pupils themselves up to age 21. Teachers considered the boys labelled as truants to be lazy, difficult to discipline and lacking in concentration while being indifferent to their parents' feelings. Neurotic symptoms were also more commonly ascribed to teacher-rated truants. The most significant predictor of truancy was found to be the degree of troublesomeness.

Many researchers have linked truancy to low intelligence and attainment. The Cambridge Study, for example, found a tendency among truants to score badly in vocabulary tests, to have poor primary school results and to leave school at the minimum age.

Further, the results of Reid's study (1982), showed that persistent absentees had significantly lower academic self-concepts and general levels of self-esteem than his control group. In addition, the absentees were more badly behaved, neurotic, antisocial and alienated from their school than the good attenders. These findings are consistent with those of Farrington's (1980) study of teacher-rated truants.

2.4.2. Family Background and Ecological Factors

Family background, socio-economic status and parental attitudes have all been investigated by past researchers and have proved to be significant predictors of school absenteeism. The research of Tyerman (1968), stressed the crucial importance of the home background in research on school absenteeism, but his thesis ignored the inverse relationship between social class and school absenteeism.

Reid's study of persistent absentees (1982), indicated that absentees differed from good attenders in their social backgrounds. Absentees were found to have more disruption in their home lives. Moreover, they tended to come from families of lower socio-economic status, and to have a lower birth order position in the family. More absentees than good attenders lived in council homes and had committed delinquent acts.

The Cambridge Study found a high proportion of boys from lower class families in the groups of truants studied. The truants tended to come from families of larger size and low income, dilapidated or slum housing and to have fathers with erratic job records. Their parents were often criminal and their siblings, delinquents. The parents showed poor child rearing behaviour and a lack of interest in the child's education.

Marital disharmony was found to be very common. With such a background of multiple adversities, anti-social and deviant behaviour would seem to be a likely outcome. Carroll's summary (1977), suggested that chronic non-attenders were likely to have the following factors in their background:

1. one-parent families
2. above average number of children in the family
3. one or both parents ill
4. poor housing
5. parents unemployed or of low socio- economic status
6. negative attitude to school and a clash of values with school.

However, Mitchell and Shepherd (1980), in their Buckinghamshire study, and Eaton (1979), found family background to have little effect on children's liking for school although truancy itself was not investigated. Though there is some disagreement in the evidence, the findings seem to favour the influence of social factors and family background as being prime causal factors in both absenteeism and truancy.

2.4.3. Institutional Factors

Reynolds et al., (1980), have criticised past research for failing to examine the contribution of institutional factors in school absenteeism. Farrington (1980), however, argues that the major factor accounting for variation between schools, when considering the problems posed by truancy, is the differences in the nature of schools themselves.

Recent research focusing on the influence of the school on truancy, supports this idea. It reveals great variations between schools in rates of delinquency, deviant behaviour, and child guidance referrals. The implication must be, therefore, that the educational system and schools in particular, can be important causal factors of absenteeism.

Reynolds et al., (1980), undertook research into the influence of individual schools in the South Wales valley, upon absenteeism. They found that high attendance schools were characterised by small size, lower institutional control, less rigorous rule enforcement, higher involvement of pupils in management and closer parent-school relationships. High truancy schools were found to be custodially oriented, to have imposed high level of control and to be using inflexible organizational systems which, to some extent, kept the pupils and parents from close involvement in the running of the school. Similarly, Rutter et al., (1980), in a study of London secondary schools, found a strong relationship between attendance rates and the types of schools attended.

Children were found to make better progress and to obtain higher levels of attendance in those schools which had a well-planned curriculum and realistic expectations of their pupils.

High-attendance school pupils said they were able to discuss their personal problems with a member of the staff.

Reid (1983), using a social anthropological approach, found his persistent absentees to be generally unenthusiastic about most aspects of their school curriculum, in which they could see little purpose. The majority of the absentees stated that they would not discuss their school or home problems with any member of staff while most said that punishment would be ineffectual in getting them back to school. These results illustrate the disillusionment of the absentees with their schools.

Eaton (1979), found that relationships with teachers were significantly worse for secondary school absentees than for good attenders. His study showed that parental relationship was a significant factor in truancy. Jones (1980), argues that the school has adopted so many roles, including social and welfare aspects, that the functions of the school have become too ill-defined. Hence, realistic aims and objectives are not implemented.

Jones also criticizes teachers for often failing by underestimating the mature qualities of pupils and for attempting to control and organize them too closely. She suggests that irrelevant or unstimulating subject matter, the lack of challenging school work and separate pastoral care systems are all contributors of truancy in schools.

She considers that schools need to reaffirm their beliefs in their own values and purposes. This has diminished for many reasons in recent years.

Schools must make education a more valuable experience for all. Jones cites her own school, Vauxhall Manor, in South London, as an example of good practice. The school consciously eases the integration of new entrants, and ensures that subject teachers remain with the same pupils from year to year in order to increase continuity and minimise readjustment. School clubs and outings foster identification with the school and there is a great deal of parental involvement. Particular provisions at the school include a counsellor and a social worker.

Jones claims that such arrangements have been overwhelmingly successful and has increased attendance figures by ten percent in a three-year period. Given the diverse findings that the various research projects have yielded, the picture of the school that emerges is that of a very influential factor in contributing towards, or discouraging all types of absenteeism. The overall ethos of the school and attitudes of the school appear to be of great importance although, by virtue of its very abstract nature, it may be difficult not only to change but also to measure. However, the findings indicate that there is much that a school can do, to promote good attendance through its own initiatives.

2.5. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ABSENTEEISM AND TRUANCY

As absenteeism and truancy have now been promoted from minor misdemeanours to the realm of major social problems, researchers have been striving to produce findings that will uncover their causes. Emerging from the rapidly growing number of studies are four distinct theoretical approaches. This section will examine the models used by researchers in order to explain absenteeism. The first of these sees absenteeism and truancy as maladies affecting individuals that are themselves maladjusted.

2.5.1. The Maladjusted Truant

" Many instances of truancy, especially persistent cases, can only be understood as a result of or as a form of emotional disturbance or maladjustment" (Tyerman,1968:75). This conclusion is based on Tyerman's findings which claim, like Stott (1966), that truants are more maladjusted than non-truants.

What brings about this maladjustment? It is interesting to note that some researchers deny that it has anything to do with school, and therefore attribute much blame to parents (Stott, 1966:103; Tyerman, 1968:73). Truancy is seen as one part of a set of behavioral disorders, brought about by the child's rebellion against adverse home circumstances (Hersov, (1960-1961a:130).

In this context researchers were interested in the emotional provision found in the home. According to Stott, the most maladjusted truants were those who had parents who were so busy following a hedonistic way of life that they were totally indifferent to their children.

One of the problems of this model is that many of the studies use children who had been "processed" to varying degrees by the authorities. Tyerman used children who were totally persistent; Galloway and Hersov used children who were labelled truants and disturbed. Thus truants selected in this way are not truly representative of truants in general. By using wider populations of children, two studies, namely those of Carroll (1977b) and Galloway (1980), seem to indicate that not all truants are maladjusted. Carroll found that poor attenders were more maladjusted than good attenders but that the difference between them was not significant.

2.5.2. Families That Produce Truants

A second model of truancy is derived from the large number of studies which have indicated that truants are most likely to come from the lower end of the social scale. Research has revealed the following about absentees:

1. Truants come from homes of low incomes (Blythman, 1975; Farrington, 1980; Galloway, 1980; Tyerman, 1968)

2. Family members of absentees are involved either in skilled or unskilled work (May, 1975; Mitchell,1972) or are unemployed or at best irregularly employed (Blythman, 1975; Farrington,1980; Hersov 1960-61a; May,1976). If the families of truants are poor then inevitably truancy is associated with poor material conditions at home (Farrington, 1970; Hodge,1968; Tibbenham, 1977) and over-crowding (Fogelman et al.,1980; Tyerman,1968; Hersov,1960).

While this model sees the parents of truants as predominantly passive victims of a dreadful environment, another version sees the parents in a less deterministic light. From this perspective, parents are presented as actively colluding in their child's absenteeism because of their hostility to, or lack of interest in education. Tyerman (1968), supported a claim that many parents had justifiably bad memories of old and depressing schools that were inadequately equipped and badly staffed. Most parents thus failed to show interest in the education of their children and failed to enforce attendance at school. Galloway (1976b), came to a similar conclusion after he found that a quarter of his truants had parents who knew and approved of their child's absence, while another quarter had parents who were either unwilling or unable to insist, on their child's return to school.

As far as parental attitudes towards education are concerned Jones (1980), reports that she has never seen parents who do not want their children to leave school equipped with some or other skill (p.173).

Her argument obtains support from Mitchell and Shepherd (1980:20), who indicate that parents of truants are interested in the education of their children and that they do not collude in their absenteeism. This suggestion made by Mitchell and Shepherd that the parents of poor attenders are not anti-school, is reiterated explicitly by Bird, Chessum, Furlong and Johnson (1980). They note that parents of truants seemed to see school in a positive light and would have liked their children to do well, but were paradoxically not overly concerned if they did not. Surprisingly, few studies actually asked parents' views on the subject. Instead, indirect methods such as judging a parent's interest in his/her child's education by the number of parental visits made to school, were used as yardsticks to determine parental involvement and its effects on truancy and absenteeism (Blythman, 1975; Fogelman et al., 1980).

A controversial factor in studies that claim that the parents of truants are not interested in the education of their children is their use of unreliable and highly subjective measuring instruments such as visits to schools (as mentioned earlier and the opinion of teachers; instruments that do not accurately reflect the complexity of the parent's view.

The consequence of this is that the results are inaccurate and/or unreliable because of the largely simplistic nature of the studies themselves.

Personal contact with parents is an integral part of the research process in truancy and should be accorded its proper status. It is obvious, then, that future researchers must have contact with the parents to discover the substance, source and consistency of their views.

2.5.3. The Influence of the Community

A third model that attempts to explain truancy is based on the argument that the truant's anti-school values, fostered by his/her parents, are reinforced by similar values found in the wider working class community. There is support for this view, particularly in "older" studies such as that of Jackson and Marsden (1962), who reported that, for working class people "school had always seemed irrelevant to the central business of living" (p.60). Studies of truancy have made similar claims.

Galloway (1976), found that schools with the highest rate of absenteeism were those in deprived areas, while Tyerman (1974), claimed that 90% of his truants lived in areas where education was considered a burden. This attitude could result in the development of a tradition of truancy as part of the ethos of the area.

It is possible that this "ethos of the area" could have grown from a working class fatalism which is borne out by research, showing that truants tended not to have very high expectations of future job levels (Jones, 1974; Mitchell, 1972).

Another study showed that such children seemed to believe that fate played a large part in school success (Hamblin, 1977).

2.5.4. Contribution Made By The School

In this model the school itself falls under scrutiny. Galloway, (1974); Reynolds, (1976) and Fogelman, Tibbenham and Lambert, (1980), concerned themselves with what might be called "objective" factors, such as the size of the school, the adequacy of its buildings, the turnover of the staff and the efficiency of the attendance administration. In recent years, however there has been a tendency to look beyond these "objective" factors and to consider the social processes and educational ethos of the school.

There are two opposing schools of thought at work in this model. Boyson (1974), is the advocate of one school and he sees truancy as the result of changing and deteriorating educational methods and standards.

The other viewpoint which represents a contradiction to the previously mentioned school, suggests that aspects of traditional teaching with its emphasis on the maintenance of certain rules, and its use of corporal punishment, can lead to conflict between teachers and pupils, with the result that the school suffers from "vandalism within it, truanting from it and delinquency outside it" (Reynolds, 1976:288).

Boyson (1974:57), sees two dangerous trends in modern schooling. Firstly, he is of the opinion that schools are concentrating on subjects that are irrelevant to the needs of the children. His second fear is that schools are staffed with trendy teachers who are concerned with social egalitarianism if not with revolution, and who, because of their "little contact with the outside world drive pupils to truancy" (p.57).

Whereas Boyson's thesis is supported mainly by his own opinion, Reynolds and associates provide considerable research to support their view that truancy arises from conflicts inherent in traditional teaching values. Comparing schools in the same area, they found that the schools were characterised by harsh and unsympathetic regimes. He also noted that such schools insisted on the use of corporal punishment and the maintenance of rules, in relation to, for example, smoking, chewing gum and behaviour outside school.

The result was high rates of absenteeism. This was in contrast to schools which had arrived at a "truce" situation regarding interaction between staff and pupils (p.225). The research of Reynolds concurs with the findings of other studies which investigated what absentees thought about school. Galloway (1982), found that parents of truants in secondary schools thought that their children played truant because of the fear of a teacher(s).

Mitchell and Shepherd (1980), found that children who were reputed to dislike school were absent more often than those whose attitudes were more favourable. Reid (1981), also discussed the feeling many truants had that school did not have a lot to offer them. Reid found that persistent absentees manifested a greater sense of alienation from school than did good attenders.

Cope and Gray (1978), assert that "we can infer that for non - certificate pupils, the perceived irrelevance of much of their school work, their sense of being treated as relatively unimportant... must at very least legitimise their truancy in their own eyes, may have indeed triggered it off, and certainly could not have countered other factors to induce them to absent themselves from schools" (p.25).

This explanation tends to make the point that the anti-school attitude of absentees may not stem exclusively from their parents or their communities, but are shaped in part at least, by the truants perceptions of their relationships with their teachers. Associated with this is the point that anti-school attitudes of truants may not be as much related to what the school has to offer them in terms of curriculum as they are to a sense of rejection felt by the truants.

Recent trends in education have indicated that we need to know a lot more about what goes on inside schools and the study of absenteeism should not be an exception to this.

The implications for the study of absenteeism and truancy are therefore, obvious. The views absentees have of their circumstances in the present and future, cannot be disregarded as they have been in the past for they can offer insights into the decisions that lie behind their actions.

2.6. THE MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF SCHOOL ABSENTEES

This section deals with a wide and complex field - the management and treatment of absentees. It is an area where there has been little research to date but about which we need to know a great deal more.

In South Africa, each of the former separate education departments, responded more or less similarly in the management and treatment of absentees. The procedures governing Indian schools under the former House of Delegates were as follows:

1. The House of Delegates stipulates a regulation as far as absenteeism is concerned. If a pupil is absent for a period of forty or more consecutive days without valid reason, he is automatically excluded from the class register. Such pupils become the responsibility of the local social welfare department.
2. In the event of the child being away from school for three or more consecutive days the parent has to submit a note stating good reason for the absence.

If the parent fails to do so, the Principal has the option to notify the Director of Education. Persistent non-compliance by parents could result in fines of fifty rands or imprisonment or both.

3. At schools daily attendance is recorded in a summary register. If a pupil is absent, a note which is filed for record purposes must be produced. Cases of persistent absenteeism are reported to the principal who refers the matter to the school counsellor for investigation. In cases where the appropriate action was taken without producing the desired effect, the matter is then referred to the chief psychologist who decides what further action must be taken in the matter.

Determining the causes of persistent absenteeism is of considerable importance if preventative and remedial measures are to be attempted. Since 1958, researchers have investigated the individual characteristics of absentees and their social backgrounds. However, within the last decade, attention has switched from these earlier works to pioneer studies which have attempted to uncover some of the factors involved in absenteeism since it has become apparent that school absenteeism is a multi-disciplinary and multi-causal problem.

Research evidence of Reid (1985), suggests that "about three-quarters of absentees who are given psychological treatment improve" (p.109).

Most psychologists agree that there is no standardised treatment or punishment for this type of behaviour, so that every persistent absentee is regarded as unique. The official policy followed by psychologists appears to be one of understanding the problem rather than coercion.

Galloway feels that while school phobia has received much attention, the treatment for truancy, which is more widespread, has been neglected. Galloway argues that more time needs to be allocated to an advisory service for teachers. Within ordinary classes a number of treatments have been tried, especially those using behaviour modification approaches. For example, Brooks (1974), found contingency contracts to be effective in improving attendance. Such contracts can be tailor made to deal with specific problems, and good attendance can be reinforced by previously agreed rewards.

There is no ready made panacea to help schools to overcome their absenteeism problem. Hard work and a willingness to persist over a period of time, are the two commodities most needed if schools are to succeed in this objective.

Development of special units to deal with truancy is on the increase. However, teachers' feelings towards this are divided. Some teachers favour therapeutic treatment, others deterrence. Some feel that these units decrease the commitment of class and subject teachers to tackle the problem themselves.

Schloss et al., (1981), evaluated factors relating to adverse aspects of attending school and pleasant aspects of staying home. An intervention programme individually developed, assisted the pupil in increasing the amount of satisfaction received from going to school while decreasing the amount of satisfaction derived from staying home, and also actively taught skills that enhanced the pupils' ability to benefit from going to school. Not only did school attendance improve, but test scores also increased.

Greenlees (1992), observed that an increasing number of Japanese school children stayed away from school for more than 50 days of the academic year. Educationists studying the problem say the education system itself is to blame. The rigid regimentation and strict discipline of the Japanese education system has created a stifling regime.

A growing number of students find it difficult to conform to the barrage of rules and regulations enforced by many schools. A demanding curriculum has been blamed for the non-attendance of slow learners who find it difficult to keep up with their classmates.

Many pupils also stay away to avoid being bullied and some 30% absent themselves because of some family or domestic problem. When a school gets its policies right a lot can be done to prevent, forestall and combat absenteeism. Early detection must be a feature and emphasis of any scheme.

Once detected, the problem should be followed up as soon as possible in the best interests of all concerned, not least being the pupil. In the long-run, a major drive to prevent and overcome initial non-attendance can make everyone's life easier.

2.7. SUMMARY

In the early 1960's most of the effective school inquiries were typical input-output studies. The input variables primarily consisted of the background characteristics of pupils (parental socio-economic class and pupil intelligence) and statistical school features such as school size and the amount of materials supplied. At the end of the 1970's, attention was no longer directed solely at the cognitive domain of pupil performance but at the non-cognitive domain as well.

Pupil satisfaction and pupil behavioral variables, like truancy and drop-out were also researched. Bos et al., (1990), found that a mutual comparison and interpretation of truancy figures was hindered by the diversity of definitions for truancy that different researchers used and also by the various methods of data collection.

As a result they felt that reliable measures of truancy are in short supply, since most methods are not based on the perceptions of participants. Schools do differ from one another in a variety of ways.

Each school is a miniature society in itself and is thus unique. The structure of a school has, therefore, an enormous influence upon both children's behaviour and scholastic progress.

Today, outside family factors - the specific environment of the community, the school and the wider school milieu- are also being seen as important in understanding the problem that absenteeism presents. Empirical studies show that children who absent themselves frequently from school often:

1. Have conflicts at school caused by personality problems (Galloway,1980)
2. Have serious family health and economic problems that make education a low priority (Galloway,1980)
3. Express non-conformist behaviour by being absent (Birman and Natriello,1978)
4. Do not do well at school (Galloway,1980)

Although absenteeism in schools has attracted a considerable amount of attention from writers in many countries, especially Britain and the United States, the review of literature shows a certain amount of uncertainty and discrepancies regarding the descriptions, diagnosis and aetiology of the condition.

One reason for this is perhaps the fact that it has been studied from too many perspectives.

The review of the literature on school absenteeism emphasizes not only the extent of the problem, but stresses that it is on the increase. Whilst it is still imperative to explore the extent to which personality, family background and other ecological factors contribute to absenteeism, it has now become crucial to discover how far institutional factors are to blame for high rates of absenteeism.

2.8. CONCLUSION

Much of the evidence suggests that schools could take the initiative in planning and carrying through some of this pioneer work for themselves. It is advisable that a great deal of preventative work should be concentrated on the primary schools in order to prevent absenteeism from reaching the persistent stage. Once pupils become persistent absentees, the chances of success of remedial measures will be greatly minimised. However, given the multiplicity of factors involved, there are limitations to any measures taken to improve attendance.

Some educationists blame the increase in non-attendance on a breakdown in family discipline and a rise in delinquency. Researchers over the last twenty years have identified social characteristics of truants but there seems to have been insufficient recognition of the close links between these characteristics.

A number of researchers agree that:

1. A disproportionate number of truants come from the families of manual workers (Tyerman, 1968; Cooper, 1968; May, 1975; Carroll and Cavenagh, 1977).
2. Truancy is linked with family size (Brooks, 1962; Mitchell, 1972).
3. Truancy is linked with delinquency (Tennant, 1971; Terry, 1975).
4. Truants have been found to be less able than non-truants on basic tests of attainment and in tests of intelligence (Tyerman, 1968; May, 1975).
5. Poor intelligence and unsuitable placing in school have also been seen to be associated with truancy (Mullen, 1950; Hall, 1951).
6. Truancy is linked with organisation and management practices (Reynolds and Murgatroyd, 1977).
7. Variations in delinquency rates exist between schools (Powers 1972; Reynolds and Murgatroyd, 1974).

As institutions, schools are able to alter conditions, and/or improve ethos, as a means of encouraging attendance, particularly if they are given guidelines as to what aspects of school life are associated with good attendance.

Much of the literature suggests that schools could take the initiative in planning and carrying through some of the pioneer work for themselves. The design of this study and data collection will be discussed in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE
THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1. THE NATURE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

According to Nieswiadomy (1987:125) research design can be classified into two broad categories, experimental and non-experimental. The present project is primarily a descriptive study and is, therefore, classified as non-experimental.

Behr (1973) and Borg (1967), point out that descriptive research precedes other types of research because before progress can be made in solving certain problems, one needs to know more about conditions that exist. It is important to note that this does not make descriptive research inferior in any way. It is simply a different kind of research and it goes beyond the mere gathering and tabulation of data. It involves interpreting the data and extracting the meaning and significance of what is described.

Descriptive research can, in turn, be classified into the following three subtypes:

1. Surveys
2. Developmental studies; and
3. Case studies.

The descriptive survey, including case studies, of which the present study is an example, typically gathers data at a particular point in time with the intention of:

1. describing the nature of the existing conditions;
2. identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared;
3. determining the relationships that exist between specific variables (Cohen et al.,1980).

More specifically, this is a causal-comparative study relating to the school and the familial circumstances of two groups of secondary school pupils residing in Tongaat. The first group of pupils, according to register statistics were absent for twenty days or more of a given year and will be referred to as the " poor attenders". The second group of pupils were absent for less than twenty days per year and will be designated the "good attenders". This cut-off point is similar to the one adopted by several other researchers. Rankin (1961), for instance, after reviewing school records extensively concluded that an attendance figure of ninety percent per annum is reasonable and acceptable.

The present study has been structured around the following steps:

1. the transformation of the problem into specific variables that can be measured;
2. the use of tests and questionnaires to measure these variables;
3. the collation and organisation of the data for analysis;
4. the processing and interpretation of the data.

As mentioned earlier, the definition of "absenteeism" includes for the purpose of this study, those pupils who stay away from school without valid reason and without their parents' knowledge or approval for twenty days or more per year. Conditions such as illness and the occasional family holiday have been regarded as acceptable reasons for absence. Essentially, the study aims to identify those factors that militate against good attendance at school.

In order to systematize and quantify the mass of information obtained from the questionnaires, the comparisons between good and poor attenders will be made by grouping various related items under sub-headings of a more global nature.

3.2. PRELIMINARY ISSUES: AN OVERVIEW

In the section that follows certain information relating to the planning stage of the study is presented so as to give the reader an overall view of what was required. Where appropriate, details will be furnished in subsequent sections.

3.2.1. The Location of the Study

Up to the present time no significant investigation concerning absenteeism and truancy has been undertaken in the Tongaat area. Mini studies were conducted in the early 1970's in the neighbouring suburbs of Verulam and Phoenix. However, these studies were confined to individual schools and the lack of random samples and inadequate research designs prevented the generalization of those findings on a wider scale.

The only major study on absenteeism relating to Indian schools was undertaken by Naidoo (1957). This was, however, confined to the greater Durban area of Clairwood. Although some of the findings of this study are still relevant, conditions and circumstances have changed to such an extent that an up-to-date study is required.

Ideally, such a study should include a cross-section of all secondary schools in the Kwa Zulu-Natal area. However, practical considerations such as the extensive area to be covered, the limited time available and the lack of manpower required to undertake such a project, made it necessary to scale down the study to more manageable proportions. A preliminary study had already revealed that, on average, it would take at least two hours to locate and interview each pupil's family. In addition, time would have to be set aside to visit the relevant school to complete the questionnaires. It was, therefore, decided to limit the sample size to ensure that the study could be completed within a reasonable time. However, care was taken, at the same time, not to make the sample so small that the accuracy of the findings would become questionable. There was a need to steer a course between these two extremes. As can be seen from Figure 3.1. Tongaat is an extensive area. It is also densely populated and includes families from various social classes. It is, therefore, likely to yield a representative sample of pupils.

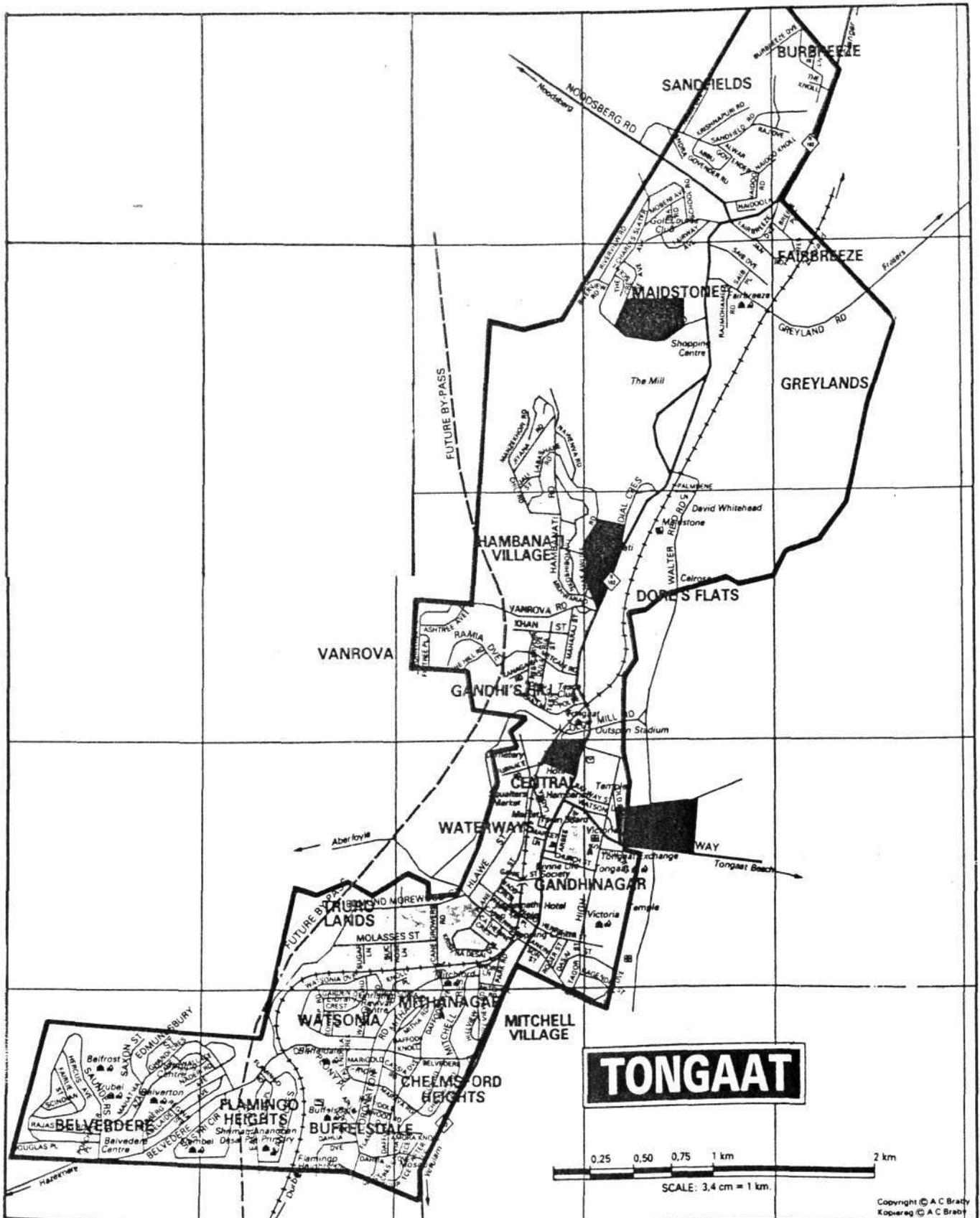


FIG.3.1 MAP OF TONGAAT

These factors, together with the following, motivated the researcher to locate his study in this area:

1. It was within reasonable travelling distance of the researcher's home and place of work.
2. It contained a reasonable cross-section of various types of social environment.
3. It had, located within it, six secondary schools with a total of about 6000 pupils representing the different socio-economic groupings.

Tongaat, originally, was largely rural in nature. Today large tracts of agricultural land have been taken up by small industries and densely populated residential areas. The town's 60 000 people form a racial mix and are distributed as follows.

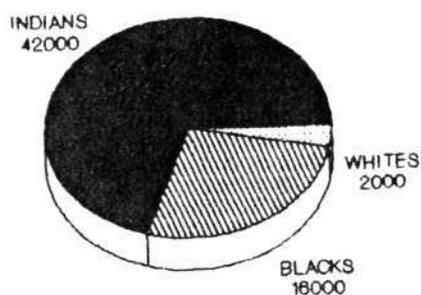


FIG 3.2 POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN TONGAAT

Through its period of transformation from an agrarian community to one that has now become industrialized, noticeable social changes have taken place. One of the less desirable changes relates to an increase in the rate of absenteeism and truancy at schools. Local social workers and school principals have expressed alarm in this regard and bemoan the fact that the constraints of time and a lack of qualified personnel make it difficult to control the problem. This is adversely affecting the scholastic progress of a growing number of pupils in the area. An objective, well-designed study is essential so that senior education management authorities can be furnished with a scientific report showing the magnitude of the problem and suggestions about what could be done to improve the situation. If the problem of absenteeism is to be solved, fundamental changes would have to be made in the socio-economic structures of our society. This is why it is imperative that the government's reconstruction and development plan should succeed. On a more practical level, an investigation is needed to identify the factors within the school and the family situations that lead to children staying away from school. Such a study will also provide leads as to what could be done to combat the problem.

3.2.2. The Schools Included in this Study

Five of the six secondary schools located in the area were selected for this study.

Only one school was omitted and this was done because it did not provide education beyond the standard seven level. The five selected schools were similar in terms of organisation, discipline, subject courses offered, and the competency of teaching staff. All schools fell under the jurisdiction of the former House of Delegates (Education and Culture).

3.2.3. The Sample

The pupils who participated in the study were selected randomly from a list compiled by the researcher with the assistance of the form-teachers and guidance counsellors at each school.

3.2.4. DATA COLLECTION

Data was gathered by both quantitative and qualitative methods, the one supplementing the other. The choice of a particular approach was governed by the following:

- (a) the duration of the research
- (b) the subjects to be interviewed
- (c) the setting
- (d) the constraints of time, money and personnel placed on the research.

3.2.5. The Pilot Study

The present research is an expanded and improved version of several pilot studies undertaken. Significant methodological changes were made prior to the main study so as to improve the reliability and validity of the findings.

Borg (1967) lists the value of pilot studies as follows:

1. to test the hypothesis of the study;
2. to provide the researcher with ideas, approaches and insights not noticed earlier;
3. to check on the effectiveness of the proposed statistical and analytical procedures;
4. to reduce the number of treatment errors because unforeseen problems revealed in the pilot study may be overcome by redesigning the study;
5. to save the researcher time and money on a project that may yield less than expected;
6. to provide useful feedback (from research subjects and other persons) that may be used to improve the study;
7. to give the researcher the opportunity of trying out a number of alternative measures and procedures and then selecting those that are likely to yield the best results.

The pilot studies in this investigation enabled the researcher to pretest his questionnaire and interview schedule, to decide on effective ways of opening the interviews and recording the data, and to work out ways and means of gaining the co-operation of "difficult" subjects and parents.

3.2.6. Administrative Matters

The permission of the various authorities and participants had to be obtained prior to the commencement of the study. These included the following:

- (a) The House of Delegates under whose control the participating schools fell ;
- (b) Principals of the selected schools. The preliminary visit entailed meeting with the Principal or, in some cases, the Deputy Principal to discuss issues such as the aim and purpose of the research, the research sequence and times. Times and dates were arranged in advance so as not to interfere with the normal activities of the school and staff. Discussions with members of staff took place mostly during lunch breaks and after school hours.
- (c) the parents of the participating pupils to set up times for an interview with them (Appendix C);
- (d) the pupils so that they could inform the researcher whether or not they were prepared to participate in the study. They had the option of refusing if they so desired;
- (e) the teachers for their co-operation (Appendix A);
- (f) the local Child Welfare Society for access to relevant information in their possession.

3.2.7. Underlying Principles Governing Choice of Sample

Sampling is defined by Smith (1975) as a "procedure by which we infer the characteristics of some groups of objects (a population) through experience with less than all possible elements of that group of objects (a sample)".

Sampling is concerned with selecting a portion of the total population, in such a way that inferences and generalizations from the portion or sample can be used for the entire population. In order to obtain a random sample of any population, it is necessary to have a complete list of the population concerned. This list is known as a sampling frame. The sampling frame used for this study was the school registration list of all pupils attending the school.

The researcher kept in mind the working definition of absenteeism and truancy when considering the population from which his sample was to be selected.

Since the population of good attenders was going to be too large to work with, the researcher decided to increase the cut-off point for good attenders to ten days. This yielded a population of convenient size. To avoid the problem of timing the researcher considered all pupils enrolled for the academic year 1992. The total number of days for the academic year 1992 was 200. With these points in mind and upon receiving approval for the research to be undertaken, the researcher visited each school by appointment.

At each school:

1. School records were inspected. These included class attendance registers, summary attendance register and staff minutes. The purpose of this inspection was to find out the rate of absenteeism, identify truants, determine how the problem was being perceived and how staff and principals hoped to manage it.

2. Form-teachers were then asked to assist in identifying both poor and good attenders in their classes. Each form-teacher submitted a list of ten poor attenders and ten good attenders. The teachers were requested to:
 - 2.1. exclude pupils who were absent, in their opinion, for legitimate reasons;
 - 2.2. exclude pupils whose absence coincided with the period after examinations;
 - 2.3. include all pupils from standard six to standard nine;
 - 2.4. exclude standard ten pupils because they would be difficult to trace and interview the following year;
 - 2.5. state in detail reasons for the poor or good attendance of the child.
3. A week later the researcher returned to the schools to collect the completed forms and other information from the form-teachers.
4. A total of 448 returns were collected. Figure 3.3 provides gender details.

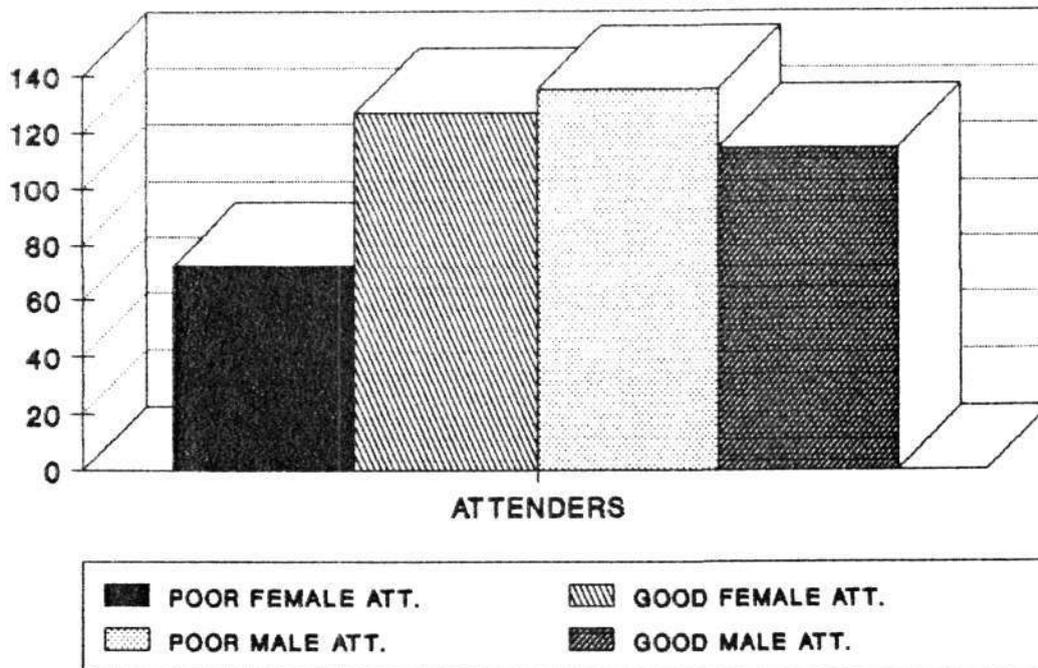


FIG 3.3 GENDER DISTRIBUTION

5. The ages of the pupils ranged from 13 years to nineteen years. Table 3.1 provides age details.

**TABLE 3.1
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION**

AGE IN YEARS	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
GOOD ATTENDERS (M)	5	24	24	5	24	3	1
GOOD ATTENDERS (F)	12	24	31	42	16	-	-
POOR ATTENDERS (M)	4	14	24	42	37	11	3
POOR ATTENDERS (F)	2	14	14	27	12	3	-
TOTALS	23	76	93	116	89	17	4

Pupils were then arranged according to age and sex. Firstly, the population was divided into males and females.

A separate list was made for the good attenders and another list for the poor attenders.

Thereafter, the pupils were categorised according to their age. Each name was assigned a code to avoid bias in the sample selection. Using each of the compiled lists separately, codes that had already been matched for age, sex and as far as possible, educational level, were randomly selected. Thereafter, each code was unravelled to enable the researcher to identify the pupil, his school and home address.

3.3. DATA COLLATION

Multiple operationalism was employed as a research strategy for this study. This implies that wherever possible, at least two research methods are used with respect to a particular research problem. Denzin (1970:298), makes the point that research methods are not "atheoretical tools" and that they usually represent different ways of acting on the environment.

These methods, when used together, serve as mutual checks upon one another, such that a second or third method may produce findings not revealed by the first, thereby adding a richer texture to the findings. Webb et al., (1966) argue that "every data gathering class-interviews, questionnaires, observation, performance and records is potentially biased and has specific to it certain validity threats...No single measurement class is perfect, neither is any specifically useless...When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the constricted framework of a single method...Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent processes, the uncertainty of the interpretation is greatly reduced"(p.3).

With this as the motivation a set of research procedures was chosen which complemented one another. The questionnaire served largely as the quantitative procedure and the interview, the qualitative equivalent. The questionnaire, which made possible the collection of data relating to groups was designed to indicate general trends among different sets of pupils, while the interview, which was less structured, elicited in-depth data for each individual. Confirmation of previously given responses and contradictions served to verify the information given by the respondent. Where contradictions were discovered further discreet questioning led to reliable responses.

The questionnaire and interview methods had the further advantage of enabling the replication of other researchers' questions, where appropriate, and comparing responses. Also, once data was collected, it was possible to analyze them in different ways in order to test various hypotheses and unanticipated trends emerging from the research. This flexibility would not have been possible had the research been bound by an unvarying research design.

3.3.1. Instruments Used

Data for this study was obtained through the use of the questionnaire, the interview as well as discussions with educational authorities. This section provides more specific information relating to the questionnaire and the interview as they pertain to this study.

3.3.1.1. The Pupil's Perception Questionnaire(PPQ)

The questionnaire (Appendix B), contained a series of close-ended questions. It was specifically designed to ascertain how the pupil perceives:

- a. his home;
- b. his parents;
- c. his teachers and other institutional factors;
- d. his peers;
- e. himself, in terms of his present, and his future desires and aspirations.

Close-ended questions were used because they are quicker and easier to answer. This makes it possible to ask more questions within a given period of time. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of details relating to demographic variables as well as the home and family circumstances. Besides gaining important information, the aim here was to get the respondent to feel at ease in his interaction with the researcher. The relatively more anxiety - provoking questions came later after a degree of rapport had been established.

The sequence of items in the questionnaire used in this study was as follows:

- a. Introductory questions;
- b. Questions of a demographic nature;
- c. Direct questions of a more specific nature.

The second part of the questionnaire examined possible differences between good and poor attenders.

This was measured by using six maladaptive behavioural variables.

Part Three questioned, at length, variables of the school and school-related factors which could lead to absenteeism. Differences in terms of future perceptions, of both good attenders and poor attenders, were tested in the fourth part which comprised eight questions.

3.3.1.2. The Interview

Denzin (1970), distinguishes two basic types of interviewing techniques, based on the amount of structuring in each of them. The first type is the "standardized schedule interview", in which the same schedule is administered to each and every respondent in the sample. This makes for a highly structured interview since identical questions are asked of each one.

The second type is "the non-standardized schedule interview ". Here certain types of information are derived from all respondents, but the particular phrasing of the questions, and their order, is redefined to fit the characteristics of each respondent. This affords each person the opportunity of reporting in his/her unique way depending on how he/she defines his/her world.

Denzin correctly points out that to meaningfully understand the world of a particular respondent the researcher should study it from the subject's perspective.

For the purpose of this study, it was deemed appropriate to employ an interviewing technique which combined both the "standardized schedule interview" and the "non-standardized schedule interview" for the following reasons:

1. It was considered necessary to maintain a level of consistency, at least, with respect to certain variables;
2. It also enabled a measure of comparability across the qualitative and quantitative spectrum.

In this study, interviews were conducted with parents, principals and social workers. These interviews were flexible and enabled an examination of the different constructs and meanings which respondents assigned to the same issue. Furthermore, a greater amount of probing was possible and this yielded in-depth responses. Sensitive issues such as private and family matters were dealt with on a more personal basis, thereby allowing both parents and pupils to recount unpleasant and controversial issues with a greater degree of ease and comfort.

The use of the questionnaire in this study had disadvantages. The questionnaire had to be short since it is a well known fact that lengthy questions lead to a low response rate and selective answering of questions. Secondly, analyzing and quantifying data obtained from open ended questions can become problematic. Nevertheless, it was the most effective method of investigating the variables of this study.

3.3.2. Fieldwork

The period from 31 July 1993 to January 1994 was set as a target period during which time it was hoped to complete interviewing the teachers and the parents in addition to completing the administration of the questionnaire. Some adjustments had to be made to the original sampling plan because it was discovered that some of the pupils selected had left school, some were transferred to other areas, and one had died. New matchings were made and the final sample distribution is shown in Figure 3.4.

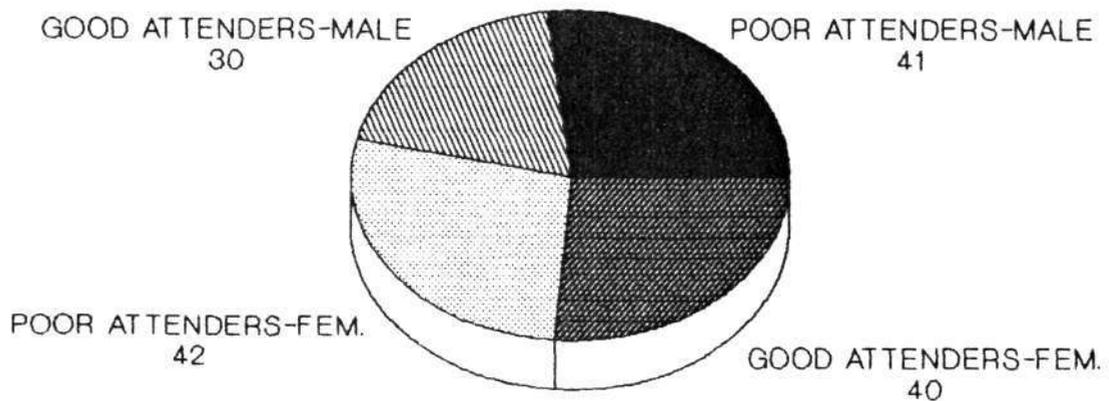


FIG 3.4 **COMPOSITION OF THE FINAL SAMPLE**

3.3.2.1. Home Interviews

The interviews proved to be more difficult and time consuming than was originally expected. Most of them had to be completed after school hours, in the evenings, at week ends, and during the school vacation. Appointments with parents were made telephonically, and, where no telephones existed, by letter. Home visits were made in the evenings or at week ends depending on when it was convenient for the family. As far as possible the presence of both parents was desired as this facilitated the airing of both points of view.

Home visits were categorised into two types. The first type of homes described belong to the lower socio-economic sector. In these homes interviews normally took place in the lounge or diningroom of the homes visited. At times it became necessary to ask for a quieter room, for example, the kitchen, in order to avoid television intrusion. In many homes where families were intently viewing their favourite "soap operas" on television, the times for the home visits had to be rearranged.

Those who belonged to the lower socio-economic group generally lived in council homes, semi-detached cottages, high-rise flats, out-houses or garages. Most of these homes were generally neat. It was observed that although many of the homes were inadequately furnished in other ways, every one of them possessed a television set.

These families tended to spend many hours viewing television programmes.

The researcher was generally well-received by most families and the atmosphere was warm and cordial. The researcher reciprocated by making the respondents feel comfortable and relaxed. Indeed, this was essential if he was to gain their cooperation. It was necessary to explain the purpose of the visit and the aims and intention of the research project. Many parents showed genuine interest in the study.

This became evident from the number and nature, of the questions posed. A common question was why school principals showed such little interest in their children's education. It is possible that a socio-economic bias does exist in the school ethos. Overt or not, it seems to be a point of concern amongst many parents of the lower social economic class.

At first, some parents felt that they were being "singled out" for study and that the information they gave might be used against them or their children. The researcher had to reassure such parents of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Further, they were assured that the recording sheet contained no names or addresses.

The second type of home, characteristically different, generally belonged to those from the middle and upper socio-economic levels. These homes were generally built, or bought, by the owners, and were large, comfortable and richly styled and furnished. Such homes had their own television rooms.

This made it possible for the interviews to be conducted in the comfort of the lounge. The reception in these homes was also warm and cordial. The parents talked freely about their interests and the value of education today. In many cases the researcher had to await the arrival of the father, who in many instances, was a businessman. The same approach was adopted, as had been with parents of the lower socio-economic group. The interview began unobtrusively with the parents being encouraged to talk about themselves, their hopes and their desires.

The general approach was "semi-structured". The same information was requested of each family, but the order and way in which the questions were asked, depended on the circumstances and the responses being received. Issues which appeared to have special significance for the parent or the child were discussed in greater detail.

3.3.2.2. General Observations

1. There were many occasions when the researcher had to explain the intent of a question or re-phrase it to make it clearer to the respondent. The nature and extent of the adaptations depended on the educational level of the respondent.
2. Interviews were occasionally interrupted by telephone calls, arrival of family members or unexpected visitors. On one occasion there was a disturbance from a shebeen which operated next door to the house in which the interview was taking place.

3. Use and abuse of alcohol was common in many of the homes visited. It appeared that this is a "way of life" especially in the lower socio-economic groups.
4. In the course of the interviews the researcher learned a great deal that was new to him.

Towards the end of the fieldwork he came to understand the Tongaat community better - their lives, their homes, their values, their hopes and their desires. Often he was called upon "to play counsellor" not only when school related problems arose but also when family and personal problems surfaced. At the conclusion of each session respondents were once again reassured of their anonymity and confidentiality with which their responses would be treated.

The recording of data was completed immediately after the interview at the home of the researcher. Although it was preferred not to record information whilst the interview was in progress, it was done when some unusual or helpful point was made by the respondent.

3.3.2.3. Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to a total of 153 pupils. These included both good attenders and poor attenders of both genders.

Appointments were made with the principals of the selected schools. In each of the five schools, the pupils who had been randomly selected to complete the questionnaire were informed a day before, that they would be required to participate in the research project.

In cases where a pupil was absent on the day the questionnaire was given, the principal was requested to inform the researcher when the pupil returned.

Return visits were made to schools to enable the pupil to complete the questionnaire. The schools co-operated so well that a 100 percent response rate was recorded.

The questionnaires were administered in groups, at a single session usually lasting approximately 45 minutes. After the usual preliminary remarks, the aim and nature of the research project was explained to the pupils.

In order to obtain maximum co-operation and ensure confidentiality, pupils were told not to write their names on their questionnaires. They were assured that the school staff was not associated with the questionnaire in any way. This protected the anonymity of the respondents thereby enabling them to respond openly and honestly to the questions. Pupils were encouraged to ask for assistance if they experienced difficulties with the questions. After the completed questionnaires were collected, a number was assigned to each one.

A label indicating the name of the school, the gender and the code PA (poor attender) or GA (good attender) was affixed to the questionnaire. This information was essential for statistical purposes.

The administration and scoring of the questionnaire was relatively simple and straightforward. The questionnaire thus provided a quick and convenient means of obtaining information about absenteeism and truancy. It enabled the researcher to gauge, in a cost-effective way, the opinions and attitudes of a large number of poor and good attenders.

3.4. CONCLUSION

The researcher ensured throughout the fieldwork process that due attention was given to the following aspects:

1. an explanation of the research to all participants;
2. the need for honest responses;
3. the confidential nature of the research;
4. the manner in which different types of questions should be answered.

Considered in overall terms, the fieldwork was very informative and yielded many observations that are difficult to express in words. The subtle clues by way of non-verbal interaction among the respondents and certain nuances provided valuable insights of a clinical and qualitative kind - all of which added richness to the mass of data that was collected.

The results of the study will be presented in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

HOME AND FAMILIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

It will be recalled from Chapter One that the overall aim of this research is to gather objective and scientific information relating to the factors involved in persistent school absenteeism. More specifically, the aim is to determine whether, and in what respects, regular school attenders differ from persistent absentees. In order to systematise and facilitate the handling of the mass of information obtained through the use of the questionnaire and the interview schedule, it will be essential to organise the data around the following aims:

1. To examine if, and in what ways, the home and familial circumstances of regular school attenders and persistent absentees differ.
2. To determine whether significant differences exist between regular school attenders and persistent absentees in respect of certain delinquency-related forms of behaviour.
3. To determine whether significant differences exist in the responses given by regular school attenders and persistent absentees to specific school-related issues.

4. To determine if, and to what extent, the perceptions of the future held by regular school attenders and persistent absentees differ.

The data gathered in the course of investigating these four basic issues should provide answers to a whole host of other related questions, many of which appear in the Pupils' Perceptions Questionnaire (PPQ) - Appendix B).

Identification of high-risk factors should provide valuable pointers about what needs to be done to minimise the problem of absenteeism. Ideally, all the factors which contribute to this problem should be identified and studied in depth. However, this is hardly possible because of the unlikelihood of these factors operating in isolation. Rather, it is the pupil's total personality, interacting with the environment, that is involved in behaviour and not independent, dissociated fragments and traits as is commonly believed.

Without losing sight of the inter-relationships among the different aspects of a pupil's make-up and functioning, it is helpful to disentangle some of the major strands from this unified matrix of influences and study them separately. A similar approach has been used by Glueck and Glueck (1951) in their famous study relating to delinquency.

It is against this background that the researcher has ventured to itemise a limited number of issues in the questionnaire - issues which, taken together, provide a reasonable, accurate description of the phenomenon of persistent absenteeism from school.

Chapter Four will provide an overview of the findings relating to the entire sample used in this study and will include information on the incidence and distribution patterns of absenteeism amongst secondary school pupils in the Tongaat area.

As far as possible, the general organisation of the questionnaire and its sub-divisions correspond closely with the order in which the aims of the study are stated. In this way the link between a particular research question, its data source in the questionnaire, and the relevant findings will become easier to follow.

Part One of the questionnaire will focus on the incidence of absenteeism amongst secondary school pupils in the Tongaat area. This section will show the distribution of pupils according to age and sex. More specifically, in Part One variables linked to the home are examined.

These include, inter alia, the type of household in which the respondents live, the size of the family, family health, parents' educational level, parents' attitude to the child at home and employment of parents. Information on these aspects was obtained through the use of the questionnaire (PPQ), as well as the interview. The questions intend to discover whether differences, if any, exist between the homes of poor attenders and good attenders.

In Part Two the questions were intended to determine whether any differences exist between the good attenders and poor attenders in respect of certain delinquency-related or maladaptive forms of behaviour.

Part Three of the questionnaire investigated the relationship, if any, between the good attenders and poor attenders in respect of school based factors. Items such as the teacher, the curriculum, rules, punishment, homework and the ethos of the school itself and their concomitant effect on pupils' attendance were some of the factors focused on.

In Part Four the questions examined what perceptions pupils had of their future. The aim was to determine if differences existed between the perceptions of regular attenders and persistent absentees.

Finally, the Teacher Response Table will list the reasons for poor attendance in rank order as listed by form teachers. Thereafter it will also tabulate in rank order, reasons why pupils attend school regularly. The purpose of this section is to allow the investigator to examine those factors, which, in the opinion of teachers, are responsible for the poor and good attendance of pupils at schools.

Regarding the data, both qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with parents and discussions held with teachers, social workers and principals, as well as quantitative data were collected and used, each supplementing and supporting the other.

This gave a more complete description of particular situations and offered a unique opportunity of viewing the situation through the respondent's eye. To enhance understanding, case studies would also be used, where appropriate. The findings, based on a comparative analysis of the responses of regular school attenders and persistent absentees, will be presented under the following broad headings:

CHAPTER FOUR

- 4.1. Incidence of absenteeism
- 4.2. Home and Familial Circumstances
- 4.3. Maladaptive Behavioural Patterns

CHAPTER FIVE

- 5.1. School and School-Related Issues
- 5.2. Perceptions of the Future
- 5.3. Teachers' views on regular and poor attendance

In those instances where two or more items are closely related, they have been combined so as to preserve their unity in the discussion and avoid repetition.

The discussion in Chapter Six is based on the combined findings of Chapters Four and Five. This structure will enable the researcher to link related ideas in the understanding of absenteeism and thereafter, suggest methods and programmes to manage this problem.

4.1. INCIDENCE OF ABSENTEEISM

A knowledge of the incidence of absenteeism and truancy among secondary school pupils is fundamental for without it, the planning and implementation of measures to remedy the problem would be difficult. To date, no extensive or detailed scientific surveys on a regional or national level have been undertaken in South Africa. This is surprising, in view of the widespread beliefs about the harmful consequences of absenteeism and truancy.

Mitchell and Shepherd (1980), state that the rates of absenteeism and truancy vary according to gender and age. The distribution of the sample according to gender and age is presented in the following two tables. The first, a summary of the distribution of pupils according to gender is provided in Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1.

COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY GENDER

Gender	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Male	30 (19,6%)	41 (26,8%)
Female	40 (26,1%)	42 (27,5%)
Total	70 (45,8%)	83 (54,2%)

A review of the recent literature shows that while more girls are absent from school, a higher proportion of boys truanted.

This was supported by Tyerman (1968), who found that nine times more boys than girls truanted. Girls, generally remain at home with their parents' consent, either to care for the ill or to complete household chores. Furthermore, the female respondents tended to be more tolerant when faced with unpleasant situations at school or home. Boys, on the other hand, being more aggressive by nature, often retaliated against the source of their unhappiness by rejecting school.

An analysis of the data in Table 4.1. reveals that whilst there was almost a similar percentage of poor attenders for males and females, generally more females (27,5%) absented themselves from school. No statistically significant differences were found in this regard ($X^2 = 0,65; df = 1; p > 0,05$). The researcher learned during the interview that many of the girls stayed away from school with the consent of their parents. This is in line with Tyerman's (1968) findings. These girls often returned to school with a letter of excuse, which was accepted by the form teacher as a legitimate reason for absence. Many researchers are concerned that such condoned absences are often overlooked in absenteeism studies. The distribution of good and poor attenders according to age is presented in Table 4.2.

TABLE 4.2.
COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDER BY AGE

Age in years	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Poor Attenders	7	16	33	19	4	3	1	83
Good Attenders	0	11	17	23	16	3	0	70

It is interesting to note from the data that 62 % of poor attenders and 48 % of the good attenders fell within the 15-16 year old category. Statistically significant differences were found between good and poor attenders with regard to age distribution ($X^2 = 20,67$; $df = 6$; $p < 0,05$).

From the interviews with pupils, it became apparent that the 15-16 age category is an anxiety-ridden phase in the pupils' lives thereby making it a particularly critical period. During this phase the pupil may be either in the process of adapting to secondary school pressures or involved in the selection of subject courses for the senior secondary phase with the matriculation examination in mind. "Anxiety", "fear of failure" and "confusion" were some of the main concerns expressed by this age group.

Absenteeism and truancy increase with age and most of the truants and absentees are found at secondary school (Tyerman 1958:220; Mitchell, 1972; Galloway, 1985:53). The following are some of the possible reasons for increased absenteeism in the secondary school phase:

the value society places on success; family problems and pressures; the school and related factors; and peer influence which affects adolescents more than children.

The results of the investigation of home and familial factors of good and poor attenders will form the content of the next section.

4.2. HOME AND FAMILIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Healthy family background and family relationships can play an important role in helping the child cultivate a positive attitude towards school. If the home fails, then the children who feel neglected and miserable may resort to missing school. The responses to the nineteen items investigated are analyzed in the sub-sections that follow.

4.2.1. Size of Household (Item 1)

Large scale studies have confirmed that absentees frequently live in socially disadvantaged families. For example, Tibbenham (1977), showed that overcrowding was more common in families of absentees.

The data concerning the family size of good attenders and poor attenders are presented in Table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3.

GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD

Number of members in family	0-5	>5	Total
Poor Attenders	46 (55,4%)	37 (44,6%)	83
Good Attenders	49 (70%)	21 (30%)	70

There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in regard to this variable ($X^2 = 3,4$; $df = 1$; $p > 0,05$). The results indicated in Table 4.3. concur with May's (1975) study, that truants and absentees generally come from homes with large families.

The data indicated that 44,6% of poor attenders came from large families consisting of five members and more, while 30% of good attenders came from such families. Also 70% of the good attenders came from families consisting of less than five members as opposed to only 55,4% of poor attenders.

Berthoud (1976:114) lists the disadvantages of large families:

1. The greater the number in a family, the more stretched the family budget will be. The researcher discovered from parents and teachers that many pupils were forced to work part-time in order to supplement the home income.

Many, in fact, worked long hours and as a result were too tired to come to school the following day.

The following experience was related to the interviewer. Case study A worked as a waiter at a seaside restaurant in Tongaat. He worked long hours, often finishing work in the early hours of the morning. At first he worked only at week-ends, but soon his employers enticed him to work school evenings.

Since then the pupil has played truant or absented himself in order to work or to recover from a late night shift. His father is an alcoholic, his mother is a char woman and the family survives on a government grant. As a result this boy is forced to work in order to supplement his family's income as well as to cater for his own needs.

2. Communication between parents and children is restricted to essentials, discipline becomes more strictly necessary and inter-sibling rivalry more intense. One persistent absentee explained his experiences during the interview.

Case study B found consolation in his friends because his parents did not have the time to discuss the problems which he experienced at school. In addition to having a large family, the parents were working shifts. To avoid the problem at school, which remained unresolved, the pupil entertained himself with older boys who were not in school, thereby joining the culture of drugs and violence.

3. Long periods of child bearing have negative effects on the family's resources. A persistent female absentee explained her problem to the interviewer.

The long periods of absence, for Case study C, began with the birth of another child at home.

The mother constantly needed to be tended and pleaded to the father to allow her, the eldest daughter who was fifteen years old, to remain at home to assist for a short time. However, this soon became the pattern and the pupil was missing school regularly. It would seem that the size of family does influence absenteeism and truancy amongst certain children. Support for this is evident in many research works which found that the number of members in absentee families were significantly higher than in families of good attenders (Reid, 1980:66 ; Hersov, 1960a:135 ; Hodges, 1968:60).

According to Rip (1966:9-10) interaction and emotional involvement are more intense in smaller families. This results in more effective control and internalization of the cultural norms. Rutter (1975:185) expresses a similar view. It is possible that large families have less well organized discipline and frequent discord and disharmony.

4.2.2. Parents' Level of Education (Items 1,5)

The general educational atmosphere which prevails in the home is likely to affect the attitudes of parents and their children towards education. The educational level of the parents is a useful indication of the educational climate in which children are reared.

According to Goodacre (1970: 106- 107) parents with higher educational levels are more likely to inculcate positive attitudes in their children towards education. She goes on to say that parents with little or no formal education often fail to understand the school's role in promoting children's educational experiences.

In another study Fraser (1959:42) found a correlation between parent's educational rating and the child's progress in school. This means that in the case of two children of equal intelligence having parents of different educational levels, the child with the better-educated parents is likely to value school more and thereby enjoy better attendance. This may be due to the fact that the parents are better placed economically and realizing the importance of education motivate their child towards regular attendance and success.

The present study compared the educational levels of parents of poor attenders and good attenders. The levels of education for parents of good and poor attenders are presented in Table 4.4.

TABLE 4.4.

GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY PARENTS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level of education	No schooling to Std. 6	Std. 7 and above	Total
Good Attenders	21 (30,0%)	46 (65,7%)	67**
Poor Attenders	43 (51,8%)	33 (39,8%)	76*
*7 (8,4%)deceased ** 3(4,3%) - deceased = 10			

$X^2 = 9,17$

$df = 1$

$p < 0,05$

Table 4.4. indicates that 39,8% of the parents of poor attenders had secondary school education and above, compared to 65,7% of the parents of good attenders. Significant differences were found between the educational levels of parents of good and poor attenders ($X^2 = 9,17$; $df = 1$; $p < 0,05$).

Seen overall, it is evident that parents with higher levels of education provide their children with the kind of training, motivation and opportunities that equip them to meet the needs of the school situation than do parents with lower levels of education. Hence, children belonging to the former group exhibit higher levels of attendance than do children whose parents have lower educational levels.

This study also revealed that 78,3% of parents of poor attenders and 80% of parents of good attenders were "employed regularly" (Item 5). There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 1,17$; $df=2$; $p > 0,05$). This must be interpreted in conjunction with the observations of Parents' Level of Education which indicated that 51,8% of parents of poor attenders possessed an educational level below standard seven. This means that such parents invariably had less well- paid jobs. Where such a worker has a low standard of education, he/she must of necessity engage in work of an unskilled nature. As a result family income is almost always insufficient. Furthermore, such workers will be the first to be retrenched in times of recession.

4.2.3. Type of Household (Items 2,3,17)

In modern countries the two main types of dwelling are houses and flats. In poorer communities the range is extended to include garages and outbuildings. The type of household occupied by poor and good attenders is presented in Table 4.5.

TABLE 4.5.

GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Type of Household	Poor Attenders	Good Attenders
Complete House	40 (48,2%)	37 (52,9%)
Several rooms only	5 (6,0%)	7 (10,0%)
A flat	33 (39,8%)	25 (35,7%)
An outbuilding	5 (6,0%)	1 (1,4%)
A garage	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The data indicated that the type of home of the good attender did not differ much from that of the poor attender when one considers that 48,2 % compared to 52,9 % of poor and good attenders, respectively, live in complete homes.

However, the data revealed that 39,8 % of the families of poor attenders lived in rented flats which were small and inadequate for the large families occupying them. The researcher observed that these flats were often rowdy and that inter-family bickering and vulgarity were not uncommon. Further, children played in narrow confines such as corridors, which, coupled with the constant traffic of people served to exacerbate the lack of privacy in these dwellings; a factor that was already traumatised by the high number of inhabitants per household.

Another disturbing observation was that these "low-income" flats were often centres for drug - peddling and the sale of alcohol.

Sommer (1985:412) reported that both American and British studies had found that one common factor associated with absenteeism and truancy was sub-standard housing. Tibbenham (1977:501) also found a correlation between substandard housing and living conditions and absenteeism and truancy.

The type of household in which the child lives is significant because it can instil in him/her a sense of pride and self-esteem. Poor attenders (21,7 %) in this study believed that their homes were inferior to that of other pupils in their schools as opposed to only 5,7% of good attenders who also felt the same way (Item 3). There were significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 11,8$; $df = 4$; $p < 0,05$). It is important that the home exude an atmosphere of love, caring and warmth in order to make the child feel proud and wanted. A cosy and comfortable home will help in increasing the self- esteem of an individual.

The opposite type of home has many drawbacks for the pupil. Homes that lack private facilities, are unattractive or dirty, overcrowded, and generally lacking in material prosperity, are also frequently characterised by frequent quarrels and drunkenness and a corresponding lack of emotional support.

This often makes the child feel embarrassed and inadequate in the eyes of his/her peers. Such children are loathe to recognise their family homes which ought to be the centre of organisation and discipline.

This investigation revealed that 36,1 % of poor attenders felt like running away or leaving their homes as opposed to 21,4 % of the good attenders (Item 17). There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 3,76$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$).

An interesting statistic was the high number of poor attenders (18%), who responded "do not know" to this question. This indicates a high degree of uncertainty in the homes and lives of these children. Often, the result of this is anti-social behaviour which may manifest itself in the form of absenteeism especially if the school fails to provide for the unsatisfied needs of the child.

It would seem that in many instances the home of the poor attender fails to provide for the needs of the child, i.e. it does not provide a secure and comforting base from where he/she can make meaning of his world and try to find a niche for himself/herself.

4.2.4. Single Parent Families (Item 4)

Economic hardship is one of the most important burdens shouldered by single-parent families. In such cases members of the family are forced to survive on a single wage packet which is frequently insufficient to meet the needs of the family. The distribution of the responses of good and poor attenders on this item are presented in Table 4.6.

TABLE 4.6.

GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY NUMBER OF PARENTS IN THE FAMILY

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Two-Parent Family	58 (82,9%)	61 (73,5%)
One-Parent Family	9 (12,8%)	21 (25,3%)
No-Parent Family	3 (4,3%)	1 (1,2%)
Total	70	83

The data indicated that 25,3% of poor attenders belonged to single-parent families as opposed to 12,8% of children from the good attenders group. No significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders were found in this regard ($X^2 = 4,8$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$). This finding is consistent with that of Ferri (1976).

Interviews revealed that in the homes of poor attenders, discipline is often lax and the children of such homes are burdened with responsibilities such as cleaning the home and the preparation of meals.

Responses of persistent absentees from such homes were as follows:

" He (my father), thinks I'm a machine...I must study... I must cook... I must clean the house so that he and that girlfriend of his can sit and watch TV..."

Another absentee spoke of her experiences to the interviewer.

" I get up at four in the morning...I must complete all the chores...I'm too tired in the afternoon to study... I'll do the homework in the morning... But I am just too tired, so I just stay away..."

Responses from good attenders indicated that household chores were generally undertaken by maids, thereby allowing the child adequate time for study and leisure. Many good attenders assisted their parents with the chores on week-ends and evenings.

Single parents of poor attenders expressed their feelings to the interviewer:

" I've done enough for these children."

" You know, I'm killing myself working. And just to support these ungrateful children."

These responses indicated the emotional state of a single parent, in that he/she is hard-pressed to make provision, not only for him/herself but also for his/her dependants.

Finally, it is the child who suffers. Feeling over-burdened and neglected he/she resorts to other means to counter such feelings by attempting either to satisfy his/her emotional needs or to "punish" the offending parents.

This may manifest itself in some form of anti-social behaviour such as absenteeism and truancy.

The following is the experience of a persistent absentee. Case study D had to complete the chores in her home before going to school. She experienced fatigue, felt sleepy in class and was unable to present her homework at school. She was constantly scolded by the teacher and even sent to the Principal's office for punishment. To avoid such embarrassment and to overcome her fatigue she decided to remain at home after everyone had left.

4.2.5. Parents' State of Health (Item 6)

This section examined whether parents of poor attenders might more often be in poor health when compared to parents of good attenders. If so, this could have an impact on their children's attendance at school.

According to Herbert (1975:498), there is generally a relationship between the incidence of physical illness in parents and the presence of emotional problems in children. Pinkerton (1974:72), also draws attention to the far-reaching effects of parents' illnesses upon members of the family. This, he says, is especially true if there is a long standing incapacity such as tuberculosis, cardiac disease or if a prolonged stay in hospital is necessary. The chief danger, in Pinkerton's opinion, is the undermining of parental authority so that discipline and control becomes lax.

The children in the sample were asked to describe the state of their parents' health using a three-point scale of "good" , "average" , and "poor". The distribution of the parents' state of health of poor and good attenders is given in Table 4.7.

TABLE 4.7.

GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS BY PARENTS' STATE OF HEALTH

	Good	Average	Poor	Total
Poor Attenders	36 (43,3%)	43 (51,9%)	4 (4,8%)	83
Good Attenders	28 (40,0%)	36 (51,4%)	6 (8,6%)	70

$x^2 = 0,92$

$df = 2$

$p > 0,05$

As a large proportion of the parents for both groups were reported to be enjoying good to average health "parents state of health" did not appear to be an important factor in this study in determining absenteeism. No statistically significant difference was found ($X^2 = 0,92$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$). Galloway (1985:60), also found no significant difference between his samples on the issue of parents' health.

A single parent of a persistent absentee related his experience to the interviewer. The father of Case Study E, (fifteen years), said he could not understand why his daughter did not like going to school.

Paradoxically, he had spoken at length of his own health problems to her in the hope that she could be persuaded to like school while admitting that he had kept her away from school in the past because of his ill health. Within the past few years the girl had lost not only her grandfather but also her mother. Showing great sensitivity she had stayed away from school to look after her father who could, unfortunately, not appreciate the extent of his daughter's responsibility toward him.

4.2.6. Attitudes of Parents To their Children (Item 7)

Where there is conflict or a lack of understanding or a weak bond at home between parent and child, there is a danger, that the child may seek substitute anti-social satisfactions or pass through a grave stage of insecurity, frustration and resentment (Glueck and Glueck, 1951:135). This may manifest itself through forms of absenteeism or truancy. Sometimes, however, feelings of guilt drive the parent to over-compensate by over-solicitude. Such a parent may display excessive fear that the child may be hurt, that people may not like him or that he is growing up to be worthless.

On the other hand parental rejection may be manifested through indifference, neglect and failure to support the child. The rejecting parent is often over-correcting and over-critical. There is a demand for perfection and frequent scolding, nagging, shouting and punishing ensues.

The child may be blamed for various shortcomings and when he fails to measure up to impossible standards, he is exposed to belittling and ridicule. The anxieties and hostilities of the child may carry over from the home into the school, resulting in such behaviour as conflict with teacher, failure in schoolwork, stealing and truancy.

Item seven of this study asked pupils to evaluate whether their parents were satisfied with them as children. The question intended to find out if any tension existed in the parent-child relationship and to assess whether the child was viewed in a positive or negative light by his/her parents. Responses 1 and 2 were grouped as positive and responses 3 and 4 as negative. Response number 5 was ignored because it would have had no bearing on the results. Data pertaining to the attitudes of parents towards their children are presented in Table 4.8.

TABLE 4.8.

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN

	Positive	Negative	Total
Good Attenders	64 (92,8%)	5 (7,2%)	69*
Poor Attenders	74 (91,2%)	8 (9,8%)	82*

* 1 each ignored for analysis purposes

$$X^2 = 0,3$$

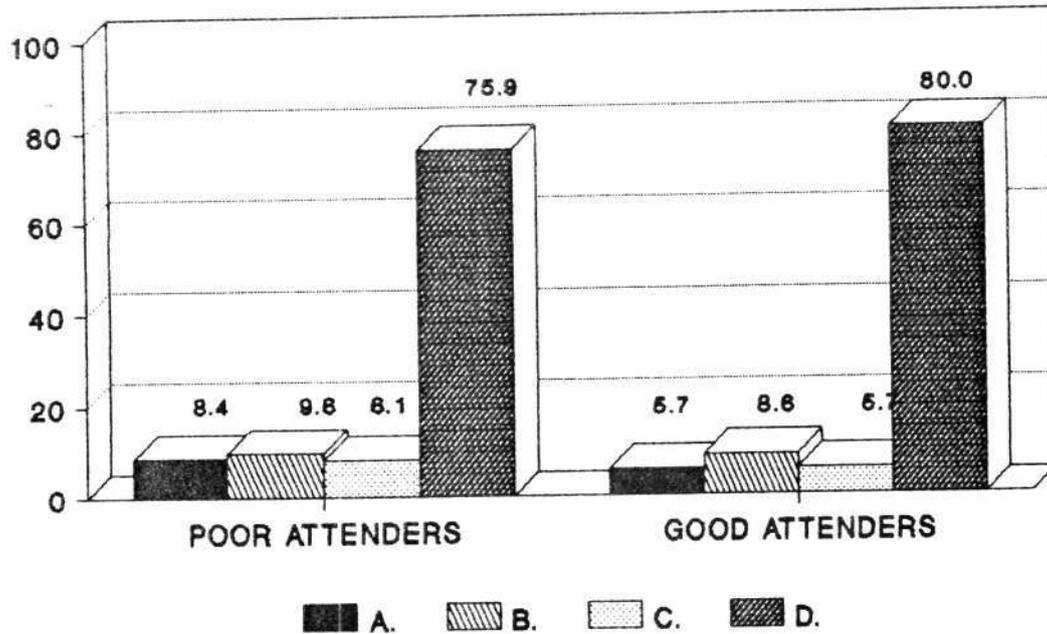
$$df = 1$$

$$p > 0,05$$

It will be noted that a high proportion of parents had a generally positive attitude towards their children. However, a higher percentage of poor attenders' parents had a negative attitude towards their children (9,8% compared to 7,2%). The difference, however, is not statistically significant ($X^2 = 0,3$ $df = 1$; $p > 0,05$). These findings are consistent with those of Galloway (1985:9) who found no significant differences in parents' attitudes towards their children between his sample groups.

4.2.7. Parental Attitude to Education (Item 8)

The distribution of responses of the attitudes of parents towards their children completing their education is presented in figure 4.1



- A - LEAVE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE
- B - FOOLISH TO GO TO TECHNIKION
- C - FOOLISH TO GO TO UNIVERSITY
- D - OBJECT TO MY LEAVING BEFORE MATRIC

FIG 4.1 PARENT'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEIR CHILDREN

The results of this study revealed that generally parents of poor attenders held lower expectations for their children than parents of good attenders. However, the wish of most parents is for their child to complete school, at least, up to standard ten level. During the course of the interview, many parents expressed the view that their children should enter high-salaried jobs as soon as possible, so that they could become self-sufficient or to supplement the family income.

As far as tertiary education was concerned, parents of poor attenders realised that it would be futile to encourage their children in that direction, thereby illustrating that their perceptions and expectations were entirely realistic. Parents of good attenders, on the other hand, were determined that their children attend tertiary institutions. These parents, being educated themselves, realised the importance of education.

It seemed possible that parents who wished for their children to leave as soon as possible did so out of frustration rather than anything else. Some of the reasons gathered by the researcher included the following:

1. Financial hardship
2. Loss of control over children
3. Embarrassment at being summoned to school by the Principal
4. Demands of the family business
5. Constant complaints by teachers
6. Complaints by neighbours and police of delinquent acts

4.2.8. Parental Attitude to Absence (Item 9)

Parents were asked how they felt about the absence of their children from school. The results revealed that a very high percentage of parents of poor attenders (21,7%) were totally unaware of their child's absence or truancy when compared to parents of good attenders (4,3%).

Significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders were found in this regard ($X^2 = 23,89$; $df = 4$; $p < 0,05$). It is possible, then, that there is a breakdown in communication between the school and the home. This also raises further concerns about the relationship between absenteeism and delinquency and crime when children are left untended.

4.2.9. Pupil Perceptions of Father's/Mother's Job

(Items 10,11,12)

The processes of social learning and the activities of the child are largely shaped by the behaviour of the parents. Compared to the influence of teachers and friends, parents are the most potent force in shaping the behaviour of children.

The presence and personality of parents make a continuous contribution to the child's own development and personality as he/she grows. The child identifies with the parents and acquires their attitudes, values and expectations and then makes them his/her own (Sloman, 1954:523-528). In order to determine pupil perceptions of their parents, the investigator combined Items 10, 11 and 12 in the questionnaire (Appendix B).

The responses of the pupils indicated that 22,9% of poor attenders liked their father's occupation compared to 25,7 % of good attenders. In the case of the mother's occupation, only 12 % of poor attenders approved compared to 15,7 % of good attenders.

An interesting statistic was that almost half the sample of poor attenders (42,2%) and good attenders (42,9%) disapproved of their mother's jobs.

The reason for this is that most of these parents held unskilled or semi-skilled jobs which lacked status and paid poorly. The investigator learned, during the interview, that parents often expressed dissatisfaction with their own job situation and often spoke of "getting a better job". Hence, both parent and child found such occupations unappealing.

Many children in the sample expressed disapproval of their mothers working. Girls, especially, complained about being left alone for long hours when their mothers had to work at night. These children found it burdensome that they had to complete the household chores as well as care for their siblings. During the interview, most mothers expressed concern for the plight of their children at home but admitted that financial hardship forced them to find jobs.

These opinions were supported by the responses to Item 12 which asked whether the pupil "was satisfied with the way his/her family lives". The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders is presented in Figure 4.2.

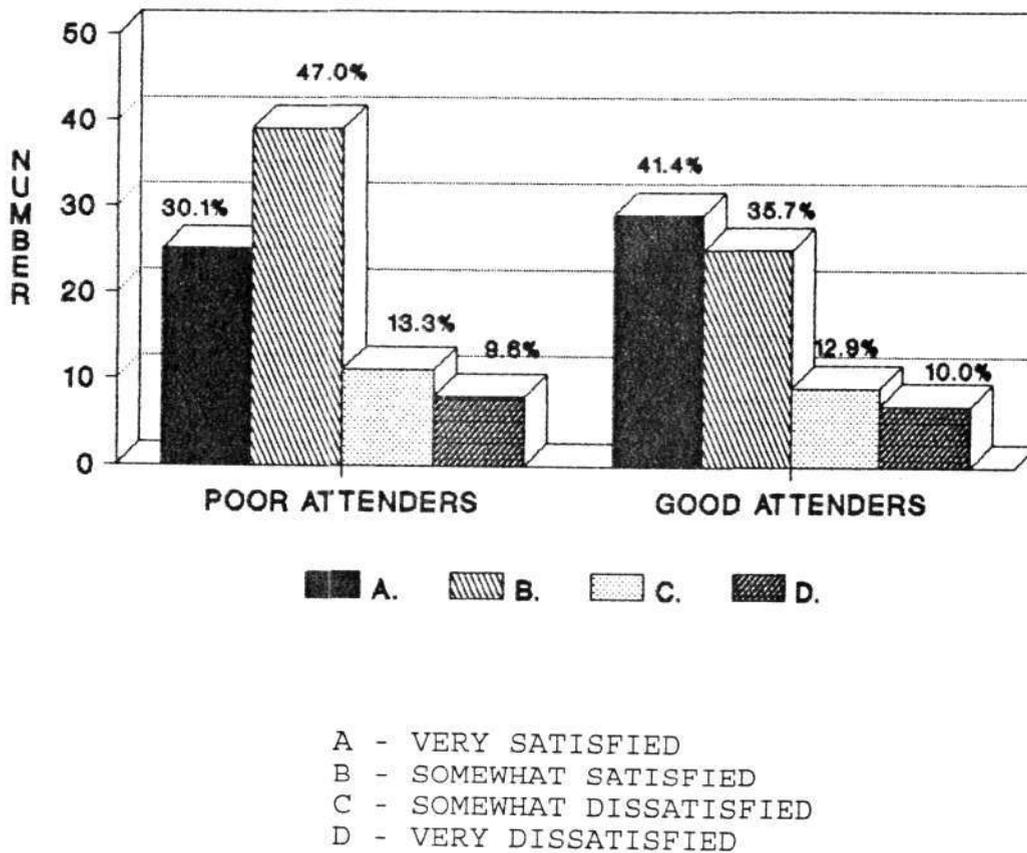


FIG 4.2 DEGREE OF SATISFACTION OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS WITH PRESENT STATE OF THE FAMILY LIFE

The data revealed that 30,1% of poor attenders were "very satisfied" as compared to 41,4 % of good attenders.

Poor attenders complained of unfavourable home conditions such as overcrowding, lack of proper study facilities, broken homes, frequent quarrelling, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of pocket money and the need for luxury items such as stereo sets, video recorders and cars.

Good attenders, on the other hand, were generally happy. Some of their responses during the interview were as follows:

" Every year we go on holiday "

" I get twenty rands a week for pocket money...I even buy my own clothes when I feel like..."

" My parents trust me and I have freedom to go to parties "

" I hate it when my parents quarrel... but they talk again. "

" My parents insist on prayer at home ...I do feel secure at home. "

4.2.10. Pupils' Readiness to Discuss Problems with Parents

(Item 13)

Communication between parent and child is vital if the relationship is to flourish. It is important that children feel free to talk to their parents about what troubles them.

It is equally important that the parents listen to their children and advise them accordingly. Reid (1985), states that when poor relationships with parents exist at home the child feels neglected and even rejected. Hence, the purpose of this question was to discover if differences exist in the relationship between parent and child in the groups under study.

Table 4.9. presents the data about the frequency with which pupils discuss problems with their parents.

TABLE 4.9.

FREQUENCY WITH WHICH PUPILS DISCUSS PROBLEMS WITH PARENTS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Some	42 (60%)	44 (53%)
All	14 (20%)	15 (18%)
Never	14 (20%)	24 (29%)
Total	70	83

The data reveals that more than half of the poor and good attenders do discuss some of their problems with their parents. In contrast, 19 % of all pupils seem free to discuss all problems with their parents.

An important observation is that 29 % of poor attenders and 20 % of good attenders never discuss any problem with their parents. No significant differences were found between good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 1,62$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$).

Although the results were not statistically significant, it did show that when the channels of communication are closed to the child, he/she is forced to seek comfort and support elsewhere.

Reid (1985:54) states that children who come from such unsupportive backgrounds have little ambition and drive and this may contribute to their non-attendance.

To support the perceptions pupils had of their parents, the responses to the following questions were examined:

4.2.11. Parental Understanding (Item 16)

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 4.10.

TABLE 4.10.

ITEM 16: "MY PARENTS NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD ME"
GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
True	15 (21,4%)	20 (24,1%)
False	27 (38,6%)	45 (54,2%)
Do not know	28 (40,0%)	18 (21,7%)
Total	70	83

Significant differences were found between good and poor attenders in regard to this item

($X^2 = 6,33$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,05$). The data indicated that both poor attenders (24,1%) and good attenders (21,4%) agreed that their parents did not really understand them. The following responses were given by the children of both groups during the interview :

" They say we are children and we don't know anything... Look, I am almost an adult... I think I know what's good for me.. "

" I need freedom... I can't go to parties, the bioscope or have a boyfriend/girlfriend... "

" We are always fighting... we never agree about anything...it's like I'm talking about one thing and they another thing...it's frustrating... "

4.2.12. Parental Authority (Item 14)

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 4.11.

TABLE 4.11.

DEFIANCE OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY: GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Very often	9 (12,9%)	7 (8,4%)
Several times	19 (27,1%)	27 (32,6%)
No	42 (60,0%)	49 (59,0%)
Total	70	83

The data indicated that 32,6 % of poor attenders have "defied their parents' authority several times" compared to 27,1 % of good attenders (Item 14). There were no significant differences between the good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 1,08$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$).

4.2.13. Parental Wishes (Item 15)

The data showed that more poor attenders (33,7%) had "gone against their parents wishes" than had good attenders (28,6%). No significant differences were found between the two groups in this regard ($X^2 = 0,58$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$).

It is possible that poor attenders defy their parents more often because discipline is generally lax in such homes or, that such parents are either submissive or too busily engaged in their own work and lives to be able to exert proper parental control. Other factors such as negative peer influence precipitated by the poor living conditions, substance abuse and general frustration are also major contributory factors.

4.2.14. Parental Knowledge of Child's Friends (Item 18)

Having friends is a vital aspect of the growth and development of the child. Children have friends in order to satisfy a need within - the need to feel accepted, secure and important. Parents should understand the nature of these needs and examine ways in which they can be fulfilled. The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 4.12.

TABLE 4.12.

PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD'S FRIENDS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Most	43 (61,4%)	47 (56,6%)
Some	18 (25,8%)	20 (24,1%)
Few	8 (11,4%)	14 (16,9%)
None	1 (1,4%)	2 (2,4%)
Total	70	83

There were no significant differences between the good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 1,15$; $df = 3$; $p > 0,05$). The data indicated that in this study 19,3 % of the poor attenders' parents knew "few" or "none" of their children's friends compared to 12,8 % of parents of good attenders. Poor attenders complained that their parents showed "little" or "no" interest in their friends. As a result, many children in the poor attenders group fell into a delinquent culture in order to satisfy a social or psychological need. Parents of good attenders often invited their children's friends home, got to know their parents and transported their children and friends to parties and the cinema.

4.2.15. Parental Approval/Disapproval of Child's Friends

(Item 19)

Significant differences were found between the good and poor attenders in their responses to Item 19. ($X^2 = 9,96$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,05$). Poor attenders (37,3%) responded that their parents often disapproved of their friends as opposed to only 20% of good attenders. The results showed that in 2,4 % of the cases parents of poor attenders had no idea, whatsoever, about the company their child kept.

Such a weak relationship with parents at home is relevant to this study. It creates anxiety and uncertainty in the child, thereby forcing him/her to reject his/her home and its values. Tyerman (1968), also regards the relationship between parent and child at home as "a crucial influence" and claims in his studies that "three out of four absentees are on bad terms with their parents."

On the other hand, a strong relationship between parent and child can have positive effects on the development of the child. Majoribanks (1984:690-700), summarises the family influences and shows that within each occupational status group the adolescents' perception of their parents' support for learning had a strong association with their educational aspirations. This in turn fostered generally moderate to strong relations to the adolescents' own occupational aspirations.

4.3. MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

Absenteeism and truancy are not simply perceived as educational problems. They have, in the past, attracted a great deal of attention from criminologists, who regard it as being " ...usually the first step on the downward step to crime - the first premonitory portent of far more desperate misdemeanours " (Burt 1944:445).

The purpose of this part of the questionnaire was to determine which of the two groups of pupils were more prone to delinquent tendencies. Pupils were asked to respond to the following six questionnaire items:

1. Did you ever drive a car without a licence?(Item 20)
2. Do you drink alcohol?(Item 21)
3. Are you guilty of vandalism?(Item 22)
4. Did you ever run away from home?(Item 23)
5. Did you ever cheat in an examination or test?(Item 24)
6. Have you ever smoked in school?(Item 25)

Responses to each of the above questions were grouped to reveal either a "yes" or "no" answer.

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders to maladaptive behaviour variables are presented in Table 4.13.

TABLE 4.13.

RESPONSES OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS TO MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR VARIABLES

Variable	Poor Attender		Good Attender		P
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Driving without Licence	49,4%	50,6%	32,8%	67,2%	< 0,05
Drinking Alcohol	49,4%	50,6%	44,3%	55,7%	> 0,05
Vandalism	24,1%	75,9%	27,1%	72,9%	> 0,05
Running away from home	14,5%	85,5%	38,6%	61,4%	< 0,05
Cheating in Test	62,7%	37,3%	68,6%	31,4%	> 0,05
Smoking in School	36,0%	64,0%	31,4%	68,6%	>0,05

Significant differences were found between the good and poor attenders on two variables. These were:

1. Item 20 : Have you ever driven a car without a licence?
($X^2 = 7,18$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,05$) and
2. Item 23 : Have you ever run away from home?
($X^2 = 13,60$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,05$).

No significant differences were found between good and poor attenders on the remaining four variables:

1. Item 21 : Have you bought or drunk alcohol?
($X^2 = 4,13$; $df = 3$; $p > 0,05$).
2. Item 22 : Are you guilty of vandalism?
($X^2 = 2,20$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$).
3. Item 24 : Did you ever cheat in a test or examination?
($X^2 = 3,67$; $df = 3$; $p > 0,05$).

4. Item 25 : Have you ever smoked in school?
($X^2 = 0,37$; $df = 1$; $p > 0,05$).

The data indicated that more poor attenders admitted to:

1. Driving a car without a licence (49,4% as opposed to 32,8% of good attenders).
2. Consuming alcohol (49,4% as opposed to 44,3% of good attenders).
3. Smoking in school (36% as compared to 31,4% of good attenders).

Past research showed that there is a positive correlation between non-attendance and delinquency. Tennent (1971:189) and May (1975:105) agree that in almost all cases absentees showed higher delinquency rates than do good attenders. However, Carroll (1977b), found that while poor attenders are more maladjusted than good attenders, the differences between the two groups were not wholly significant.

Research also showed that there was a readiness to assume a causal link between poor attendance and delinquency, based all too often, on the flimsiest of evidence. However, Hibbett et al., (1990) believe that of greater importance is the impact of poor attendance on the future lives of absentees and truants.

Farrington (1980), found that truants tended to have a markedly antisocial or deviant lifestyle after leaving school, and that they were more likely to be involved in antisocial activities. Truancy was also found to be significantly related to juvenile delinquency and violence and such individuals had an increased likelihood of being heavy smokers.

It seems likely that maladaptive behaviour is the result of frustration of some sort. The adolescent's need for recognition, security, independence and affection is frequently thwarted to such an extent that anti-social behaviour is employed in an effort to either reduce pent-up tensions or to seek "revenge" on parents or the school because of this perceived slight. Some of the conditions of life which cause frustration and which lead to maladaptive behaviour are poverty, conflict in the family, or at school with teachers, etc.

However, not all delinquents are emotionally maladjusted. Some are relatively well-adjusted but choose to satisfy their normal desires by identifying with anti-social groups.

4.4. CONCLUSION

The stability of the home is a vital contributory factor in school attendance. An investigation into the ethos of the home helps shed light on those factors that contribute to high absentee rates and also those factors that can assist in the control of this problem.

Chapter Five will deal with the findings of this study pertaining to school-based factors and the pupils' perceptions of their future.

CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY
SCHOOL AND SCHOOL RELATED FACTORS

Data pertaining to the first two aims of this study were analyzed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the data relating to the last two aims, ie. Parts Three and Four of the Pupils' Perception Questionnaire (PPQ - Appendix B), will be examined. For easy reference these are numbered sequentially, following on the aims already considered in Chapter Four.

In this chapter answers will be sought to the following questions, each corresponding to the remaining two aims:

1. Are there differences in the attitudes of regular school attenders and persistent absentees in respect of the following:
 - a) The school as a factor in absenteeism(Items 26-36)
 - b) Relationships pupils have with teachers(Items 37-45)
 - c) The effects of school rules and punishment on pupils
Items 6-47)
 - d) The influence of peers on absenteeism and truancy
(Items 48-49)
 - e) The effects of homework on attendance (Item 50)
 - f) The appropriateness of the school curriculum
(Items 51-52)

2. In respect of the regular attenders and persistent absentees, do differences exist in the perceptions they have of the future? (Items 53 - 60)

3. What are teachers' views on good and poor attendance of the pupils in their charge?

There has been an imbalance in the amount of research undertaken into the various aspects of school absenteeism and truancy. Many more investigations have been carried out in relation to the social and psychological aspects; far fewer are concerned with institutional factors associated with non-attendance (Reid and Kendall:1982). Earlier British studies relating to the negative impact of the school on the lives of pupils met with considerable opposition because they were seen as posing ideological, political and practical threats to schools.

However, since the child spends a large proportion of his time at school, the need for such studies cannot be evaded. Rutter and his colleagues (1979) emphasised that the importance of a good school ethos is vital for achieving favourable school outcomes.

This team of researchers found that most successful schools encouraged a prompt start to lessons, placed a strong emphasis on academic progress, had generally low levels of punishment, recognized positive pupil achievement, had well-cared for buildings, and fostered good teacher-pupil relationships to such an extent that pupils felt confident about approaching staff to help them with their personal problems.

5.1. The School

The school is often referred to as the "second home" of the pupil. Here, the teachers and fellow pupils become the "parents and family" of the pupil, respectively. Therefore, it is logical that since the home and family circumstances may influence attendance at school, the school and other related factors may also affect attendance rates. The aim of this section then is to determine whether any significant differences exist between good and poor attenders in respect of their experiences and perceptions of school and in what ways they can contribute to the child missing school. An analysis of some potentially problematic areas in the school situation follows.

5.1.1. Tension and Anxiety at School (Item 26)

Research has emphasized the importance of school-related factors in absenteeism (Eaton 1979:235). Factors contributing to the anxiety syndrome include the type of work being done in school, new or different teachers, teaching styles and subjects, dislike or fear of a particular teacher, punishment, and bullying. Failure to complete homework, unpopularity with peers, and an inability to do well at sport also pose problems for some pupils and cause anxiety.

In this study good and poor attenders were asked whether they felt nervous or tense at school. Table 5.1. shows the responses of the pupils.

TABLE 5.1.

COMPARISON OF ANXIETY LEVELS OF POOR AND GOOD ATTENDERS

	Yes	No	Total
Poor Attenders	34 (40,9%)	49 (59,1%)	83
Good Attenders	22 (31,4%)	48 (68,6%)	70

$X^2 = 1,49$

$df = 1$

$p > 0,05$

The findings in Table 5.1. indicate that although the difference was not statistically significant, poor attenders (40,9%) were more anxious and nervous in school as opposed to good attenders (31,4%).

The interviews with the teachers revealed that pupils often overcome such fears provided teachers and parents show tolerance and understanding. Withrington (1975), makes the interesting observation that anxiety is not only experienced by pupils but by the authorities as well, since they have to uphold the law and ensure that children attend school regularly. It is possible that such anxiety can be passed on to pupils, and may cause some pupils to miss or dislike school.

5.1.2. Frequency of Truancy (Items 27,28)

Children play truant for different reasons. Some children do so merely because they enjoy the "spirit of adventure" which is perceived as a by-product of truancy. In other cases, such as school phobia, the reasons are more complicated. One of the chief concerns of this study was to determine which group of pupils played truant regularly, ie. without parental knowledge or consent, and to investigate the reasons for this type of behaviour.

Table 5.2. shows the distribution of the responses of the sample to this question.

TABLE 5.2.

ITEM 27 : "I PLAYED TRUANT QUITE OFTEN"
GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Yes	6 (8,6%)	19 (22,9%)
No	63 (90%)	63 (75,9%)
Don't Know	1 (1,4%)	1 (1,2%)
Total	70	83

Although the results were not statistically significant ($X^2 = 5,69$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$), the data did reveal that more poor attenders played truant often (22,9%) as opposed to 8,6% of the good attenders. The reasons for this are possibly included in the comments made by poor attenders, during the interview.

Some of the comments were as follows:

" I miss school because I see no point in going to it. "

" The truth is I never meant to start missing school..it was an accident...I started helping my uncle fix cars...it became a habit..."

" I hate coming to school and everything about it. It's a dump...I hate the school...teachers...it's boring. "

A good attender, on the other hand, remarked:

" I love school. I really enjoy my lessons but most of all I like being with my pals...My parents also come regularly to school to check on my progress...I want to do well and become someone important in my community. "

Although most pupils in the sample did not play truant to spend time with their boy/girlfriends, more poor attenders (21,7%), as opposed to 12,9% of good attenders, did absent themselves from school to spend time with a friend of the opposite sex (Item 28). There were no significant differences between the good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 2,03$; $df= 1$; $p> 0,05$).

From the responses of the children it became apparent that truants prefer spending their time watching television, lazing around the house, walking around the town, visiting cafes, smoking, listening to records or helping friends.

5.1.3. Pupil Attitude to School (Items 29,30)

Mitchell and Shepherd (1967) found that dislike for school was strongly associated with poor attainment in class. Certain pupils who make unsatisfactory progress react by staying away from school.

Since these children miss out on lessons more frequently and are, therefore more likely to have an accumulated backlog, one would expect them to lag behind in their school work and also to have a negative attitude towards the institution. The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 5.3.

TABLE 5.3

PUPIL ATTITUDES TO SCHOOL: GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Likes school a lot	33 (47,1%)	26 (31.3%)
Likes School fairly well	32 (45,8%)	46 (55,4%)
Does not care	4 (5,7%)	5 (6,1%)
Dislikes school	1 (1,4%)	6 (7,2%)
Total	70	83

There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 5,96$; $df = 3$; $p > 0,05$). The data in Table 5.3. shows that more good attenders (92,9%) than poor attenders (86,7%) responded that they liked school. This more or less concurs with Reid's study (1985:75), who found that twice as many poor attenders disliked school than regular attenders. In response to Item 29 (" I never cared much for school"), more poor attenders (20,5%) as opposed to good attenders (17,1%) stated that they did not care for school at all. There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders to this item ($X^2 = 4,25$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$).

It is possible that pupils who enjoy school are less likely to deliberately absent themselves.

From the interviews it became apparent that many of the pupils who disliked school were forced to attend because of the compulsory education law or because their parents insisted that they continued with their education. The following remark by a poor attender is a typical one:

" I hate school. There's nothing about it I like. The teachers don't speak politely. They just shout... they get angry...they insult me and slap me..."

Eaton and Houghton (1974), and Cooper (1966:228) also found that poor attenders do not care much for school because they do not enjoy being there.

A regular attender, on the other hand stated:

"... the best thing about school is taking part in the various activities which go on all day. Last week I played football for the school team, this week it will be swimming ..."

5.1.4. The School and Alienation (Items 31-36)

Cohen (1976:75) has suggested that when a pupil fails to gain recognition and a favourable self-image he will tend to withdraw from the particular activity and strive to devalue its worth. By implication, therefore, if a pupil consistently meets unrewarding stimuli at school, he can become alienated from his school. The possibility exists that over a longer period of time this pupil will first decide to withdraw from school and later regress to the point where he becomes a persistent school absentee.

To investigate the relationship between alienation and absenteeism pupils had to respond by marking "agree"; "disagree" or "uncertain" to six alienation-related variables represented by Items 31 to 36 in the PPQ.

The statistical significance of the responses of the pupils to the six variables are set out in Table 5.4.

TABLE 5.4

COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS ON SIX VARIABLES

RELATED TO ALIENATION FROM SCHOOL

Item	Variable	X ²	p	df
31	I Cannot make much sense of what happens at school	12,72	<0,05	2
32	I am a part of this school	1,65	>0,05	2
33	I feel helpless at school	1,50	>0,05	2
34	I feel lost and alone at school	3,42	>0,05	2
35	Life is confusing at school	89,38	<0,05	2
36	The school is too big to get help	32,17	<0,05	2

The data from Item 31 indicated that more poor attenders (25,3%) than good attenders (15,6%) cannot make sense of events which take place in their schools. The interviews with pupils revealed that poor attenders became confused in school and many did not know where to turn for help.

As a result they sought assistance from outside the school from poorly informed individuals. This practice often increases the risk of the pupil's alienation from school.

This finding is reinforced by the data obtained for Item 34 which showed that 7,2 % of poor attenders felt "lost and alone" at school compared to 1,3 % of good attenders.

As a result fewer poor attenders (68,7%) felt "a part of their school" than did good attenders (77,1%) because their schools treated absentees in negative ways (Item 32). Poor attenders spoke of how schools ignored them and favoured pupils from "rich homes" and "those clever ones". Therefore pupils who feel neglected are at greater risk of becoming alienated from their schools.

A noteworthy observation was that 11,4% of the good attenders and 8,4% of poor attenders admitted to "feeling helpless" at school (Item 33). A reason for this is perhaps, that poor attenders feel less helpless because, by withdrawing from school they had already translated their true feelings into action (Reid, 1981:35). Good attenders, on the other hand, were still attempting to come to terms with their problems at school.

Furthermore, poor attenders (6,1%) as opposed to good attenders (1,3%) found the "size of school intimidating" (Item 36). Research shows that smaller schools make possible the development of close relationships between teachers and pupils, which in turn permit the school organisation's use of interpersonal, rather than impersonal controls.

Perhaps smaller schools do not "fragment" into discreet and different sub-units, and therefore give a consistency of response to pupil needs that is impossible in larger schools. Maybe within smaller schools the teachers know the pupils and their problems better, thereby promoting a more "therapeutic" school ethos.

Bos (1990:177) states that up to now inquiries in several countries have not provided unequivocal evidence of the relationship between absenteeism and school size. He quotes contradictions in the findings of Eggleston (1972) and Stoel (1986) who found no relation between the variables whereas Gill (1977) and Wright (1978) found positive correlations between the variables.

However, overall results of this study show that persistent absentees do experience alienation more often than regular attenders. There is a growing concern about the increasing alienation of pupils from their schools, and the search is on among educationists for the sorts of changes that would help make school more relevant to the needs of the current generation of school children.

5.1.5. Relationship with Teachers

Good teacher-pupil relationships are fundamental if pupils are to enjoy and respond positively to their schooling. Teachers need to understand the formative and influential role they fulfil with young people.

Every word they say and every action they take can affect the way in which pupils think about and act within the school, not least towards their teachers. Words as well as deeds are powerful tools. The school teacher with undesirable teacher-pupil relations, who creates an atmosphere of fear and tension, and thinks primarily in terms of the subject matter to be covered rather than in terms of what the pupils need, feel, know and can do will succeed in alienating some pupils from school.

Items 37-45 aim to tap pupils' perceptions of their teachers and the ways in which they function. The aim is to determine whether regular attenders and persistent absentees differ in their perceptions of their teachers and to determine what aspects of teacher behaviour cause pupils to absent themselves from the school. The responses to the questions are analyzed in the sections that follow:

5.1.5.1. Teaching Tempo (Item 37)

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 5.5.

TABLE 5.5.

**RESPONSES OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS TO THE PACE AT WHICH A
TEACHER TEACHES**

	Yes	No	Total
Good Attenders	40 (57,1%)	30 (42,9%)	70
Poor Attenders	57 (68,7%)	26 (31,3%)	83

$$X^2 = 2,17$$

$$df = 1$$

$$p > 0.05$$

Table 5.5. shows that 68,7% of poor attenders, as opposed to 57,1% of good attenders, agree that their poor performance at school is due to teachers teaching at a pace which exceeds their capacity for comprehension. One persistent absentee explained his experience to the researcher as follows:

" She goes on and on. I put up my hand to ask her to go more slowly but I get scolded. I don't put up my hand anymore. "

Another absentee related her experience at school:

" When I ask her to repeat what she had said, M'am...calls me an idiot and complains about finishing the syllabus...and having no time for slow learners... "

An insensitive attitude on the part of the teacher may cause the child hurt and frustration and this could be a reason for the child's non-attendance at school. By and large, good attenders indicated that most teachers were sympathetic to their questions.

However, there were pupils who accused certain teachers of behaving in an arrogant manner. Similar findings were reported by Buist (1980:46) in her interviews with truants.

5.1.5.2. Victimisation in the Classroom (Item 38)

TABLE 5.6.

**ITEM 38: "TEACHERS WHO PICK ON PUPILS"
GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS**

	Yes	No	Total
Good Attenders	11 (15,7%)	59 (84,3%)	70
Poor Attenders	20 (24,1%)	63 (75,9%)	83

$X^2 = 1,65$

df = 1

p > 0,05

Many absentees believe that they are picked on unfairly, handled inconsistently and dealt with harshly (Reid 1985:92). Table 5.6. shows that more poor attenders (24,1%), than good attenders (15,7%) accused teachers of picking on them regularly. This, they say, causes them to feel uneasy and unhappy in the classroom. Similar findings have been reported by Seabrook (1974), Buist (1980) and Tattum (1982). Case study G illustrates the point under discussion. A sixteen- year-old girl had got into trouble at school. Her teachers picked on her by saying " you're famous"... and they kept annoying her. Since that day, "anything wrong that happened at school was the work of the famous one."

The resentment the child feels by "being picked on" in this manner often causes him/her to react against the teacher and school by either open confrontation, or alternatively, by avoiding the object of resentment through some form of absenteeism.

5.1.5.3. Credit for Effort in the Classroom (Item 39)

Giving pupils encouragement and credit for their efforts is an important aspect of motivation. By doing this the teacher can motivate pupils to perform above themselves whilst simultaneously, assisting the child to develop his self-esteem.

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders to this item is presented in Table 5.7.

TABLE 5.7.

ITEM 39: " TEACHERS WHO GIVE PUPILS CREDIT FOR EFFORT"

GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Yes	No	Total
Good Attenders	5 (6%)	9 (12,9%)	14
Poor Attenders	78 (94%)	61 (87,1%)	139
Total	83	70	153

An overwhelming number of pupils (94% of the poor attenders and 87,1% of the good attenders) indicated that it was important that teachers gave credit for effort. No significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders were found in this regard ($X^2 = 2,13$; $df = 1$; $p > 0,05$).

Rosenthal and Jacobson report that many teachers often discriminated against their pupils on the basis of prior information given to them about the abilities of each pupil (Cuttance, 1980:271).

They found that pupils who were described by informants as "bright" and "capable" received the most encouragement and attention from teachers, while those described as "less able" and "poor learners" suffered from a lack of attention and did not receive the same degree of encouragement even when they performed well. This point was illustrated by an absentee who told the researcher:

" Teachers should be more like the welfare worker and help us."

*"..There should be less favouritism...Teachers only like the clever children...They treat us harshly.
Sometimes I feel I just want to leave school..."*

5.1.5.4. Teacher Expectations (Item 40)

Every teacher has certain expectations of the pupils in his/her class. The purpose of this question is to determine whether, from the pupil's point of view, teacher expectations are lower for absentees than for regular attenders. The attitude of the teacher can, in this regard, play an important part in shaping a pupil's attitude towards school. By placing unrealistically high expectations on a child of low ability it can only contribute to the child's frustration and this can manifest itself in the form of non-attendance.

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 5.8.

TABLE 5.8.

**ITEM 40:" THE KIND OF WORK TEACHERS EXPECT OF PUPILS"
GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Total
Good Attenders	33 (47,1%)	13 (18,6%)	24 (34,3%)	70
Poor Attenders	36 (43,3%)	14 (16,9%)	33 (39,8)	83

$x^2 = 0,48$

$df = 2$

$p > 0,05$

Table 5.8. shows that pupils were expected to perform at levels ranging from excellent to fair. This means that teachers expect both good and poor attenders to perform equally well, academically. This may be unfair to pupils who lag behind because of their absenteeism and to pupils who, although they attend school regularly, are generally weak academically.

Brophy and Good 1974 found that teachers demanded a higher performance from "high expectation" pupils and gave praise when good performances were forthcoming. They also demanded less from the "lower expectation" pupils but tended to withhold praise for good performances (Cuttance,1980:272).Moreover, teachers with unrealistically high expectations of pupils can demotivate pupils to the point where they can drop out of school.

5.1.5.5. Negative Attitude to Teachers (Item 42)

Rutter et al.,(1979) and Grant, (1988) report that teachers play an important role in establishing an ethos that sustains pupils' engagement in school.

Research shows that pupils prefer teachers who are warm, caring, pleasant, sincere and affectionate.

By contrast, pupils dislike teachers who are arrogant, sarcastic, unfriendly, faultfinders, curt and hypercritical (Blair, et al., 1968:306). The purpose of this question was to determine whether, from the pupils' point of view, the personality possessed by certain teachers influenced good or poor attendance at school. The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 5.9.

TABLE 5.9.

ITEM 42: "PUPILS WHO DISLIKE TEACHERS AT SCHOOL"
GOOD vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Yes	No	Total
Good Attenders	23 (32,9%)	47 (67,1%)	70
Poor Attenders	34 (41%)	49 (59%)	83

$X^2 = 1,06$

df = 1

p > 0,05

The distribution of the responses reveal that a greater number of poor attenders (41%), as opposed to good attenders (32,9%), dislike one or more teacher/s at their school. One poor attender verbalised his feelings in the following way:

" What's the point of going to school...everybody fools around... This teacher, he's scared of us... He promises not to give us homework if we stop troubling him....We don't learn anything at school. "

Another persistent absentee reported:

" Teachers are all the same. They don't care for anybody but themselves. One teacher only talks about the poor salary they earn for teaching dunces like us... "

A regular attender, on the other hand, responded more positively: " Teachers at school are fabulous, they really help you...I feel very safe at school."

5.1.5.6. Problem Behaviour in Class(Item 41)

Research shows that the most significant predictor of truancy from secondary school is a rating of pupils as "troublesome" by primary school teachers and peers. In other words, pupils who display marked behavioral problems of one kind or another in primary schools are more likely than their counterparts to become truants at some point in their secondary school careers (Reid, 1985:59). This question aimed to determine whether good or poor attenders were more troublesome in class.

The distribution of responses of the sample are presented in Table 5.10.

TABLE 5.10.

COMPARISON OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS: TROUBLESOMENESS IN CLASS

	Yes	No	Do Not Know
Good	11 (15,7%)	55 (78,6%)	4 (5,7%)
Poor Attenders	24 (28,9%)	46 (55,4%)	13 (15,7%)
Total	70	66	17

$X^2 = 9,36$

$df = 2$

$p < 0,05$

The data indicates that 28,9% of poor attenders admitted to being troublesome at primary school level as compared to 15,7% of good attenders. Significant differences were found between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 9,36$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,05$).

A noteworthy observation was that most of the poor attenders originated from backgrounds of large families, slum housing, marital disharmony, families with low income, separation of parents, poor parental supervision and parents with low interest in education. Such circumstances appear to correlate positively with behavioral disorders in children.

Most good attenders, by contrast, tend to come from homes that were warm, caring, disciplined and stable.

It would appear that the inculcation of positive values in the lives of these children reduced the possibility of troublesome behaviour at school and developed in them a healthy attitude to school and life in general.

The following questions were grouped to determine pupils' perceptions of their teachers' attitudes towards them:

5.1.5.7. Concern for Teachers' Opinions (Item 43)

5.1.5.8. Caring Teachers (Item 45)

The results showed that fewer poor attenders (60,2%), as opposed to good attenders (71,4%), "really cared" about the opinions teachers had of them.

There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 2,10$; $df = 2$; $p > 0,05$). In Item 45, poor attenders (32,6%) as opposed to good attenders (24,3%), felt that teachers displayed indifference to what their pupils did ($X^2 = 6,70$; $df = 3$; $p > 0,05$). These findings are consistent with those of Buist (1980:44-47), who found that truants expressed similar feelings about school and their teachers.

Moreover, they complained that their teachers did not care about them .

One persistent absentee explained his experience to the researcher as follows:

" When I did not understand something I would ask the teacher but she would say she's busy...come later... When I had gone later to see her she would insult me about my non attendance...even called me a part-timer...I wish I had never asked for help...they don't care... I wish there would be a strike again..."

Another persistent absentee told the researcher:

" English and Maths are too hard ... I just couldn't keep up...I do try.. but it's just too hard... The teacher calls me stupid...they don't care for us...they only favour certain pupils... I think I would like school if teachers were more interested in us and gave us better work to do ..."

By contrast, regular attenders were generally concerned about their reputation at school. For the regular attender, it was important that the teacher sent positive comments home to his/her parents. Pupils also reported that teachers took a keen interest in their progress at school and cited the holding of extra classes after school, at week-ends and even during school holidays to support their statements.

5.1.5.9. The Teacher as a Confidant / Counsellor (Item 44)

The role of a counsellor or a confidant from the staff is important in the life of a pupil. Often, pupils with personal and other related problems find it difficult to discuss these with their parents. Advice from their peers may also be limited. The counsellor or confidant, whom the child obviously trusts, can provide the channel for the pupil to communicate his/her problems without fear or anxiety. This question examines from the pupils' point of view, whether good or poor attenders readily confided in any member of staff.

Although most pupils in the study responded that they did have a confidant amongst the staff, more than a third of them indicated that there was really no one on the staff with whom they could share their problems. No significant differences were found between the two groups in this regard ($X^2 = 0,19$; $df = 1$; $p > 0,05$).

Apparently, the counsellor or/confidant is a vital factor in creating the ideal atmosphere to prevent pupil disengagement from school. Inflexible schedules, threats and autocratic control can cut off communication with pupils and this may lead to feelings of isolation. This, in turn, can lead to tension, irritability, aggression and frustration.

A great deal of evidence exists which shows that absentees are often treated harshly, unfairly and disrespectfully by teachers (Seabrook, 1974 ; Sullivan and Riches, 1976 ; Buist, 1980 ; Tattum, 1982).

5.1.6. Rules and Punishment

All schools have rules of one kind or another. These can generally be sub-divided into two kinds. The first sort is the general prescriptive rules which cover such aspects as uniforms, personal appearance, attending assembly, not smoking, and interpersonal behaviour within the school.

The second kind relates to rules for the classroom and concern conduct, talk, movement and work. The aim of this section of the questionnaire was to determine to what extent the attitudes of good and poor attenders differed in respect of the rules set by the school and the kind of punishment meted out to pupils. To obtain such information pupils had to respond to the following questions:

5.1.6.1. Misbehaviour requiring Principal's attention (Item 46)

The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 5.11.

TABLE 5.11.

FREQUENCY OF VISITS TO PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE FOR MISBEHAVIOUR:
GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
True	12 (17,1%)	34 (41%)
False	56 (80%)	47 (56,6%)
Do not know	2 (2,9%)	2 (2,4%)
Total	70	83

$$X^2 = 10,27 \quad df = 2 \quad p < 0,05$$

The results of this study revealed that more than twice the number of the poor attenders (41%) had been sent to the Principal's office for punishment or admonishment as opposed to only 17,1% of good attenders. Statistically significant differences were found between the two groups in this regard ($X^2 = 10,27$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,05$). Some offences committed by the pupils included such acts as coming to school wearing the wrong coloured jersey, not conforming to the school's uniform requirements, wearing long hair, smoking on school property, fighting, using vulgar language, and engaging in disruptive forms of behaviour in the classroom.

One persistent absentee remarked that:

" Rules are confusing... The teacher says it's alright to wear this jacket but the principal thinks differently and embarrasses you at assembly..."

It is possible then that rule enforcement that goes beyond the bounds of logic and common sense may cause pupils to reject school (Reid, 1982a). Regular attenders, generally, felt secure in a controlled atmosphere and expressed concern when teachers allowed unacceptable behaviour to go unpunished.

5.1.6.2. Reasonableness of School Rules (Item 47)

In most schools pupils are expected to conform to different levels of behaviour that is expected of them. For instance, in one class, they may be allowed to express themselves freely.

In the following class, rigid standards may be enforced to prevent all forms of behaviour and expression. Thus there is no norm. Teachers often set their own norms which may confuse children because of the different standards expected of them. The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders is presented in Table 5.12.

TABLE 5.12.

ATTITUDE OF GOOD AND POOR ATTENDERS TOWARD SCHOOL RULES

	Firm & just	Too lenient	Harsh	Total
Good attenders	51 (72,9%)	8 (11,4%)	11 (15,7%)	70
Poor attenders	52 (62,6%)	18 (21,7%)	13 (15,7%)	83

The data indicated that more than half of both groups of children found the rules at their schools "firm and just". By contrast, many poor attenders (21,7%) found school rules to be too lenient when compared to the good attenders (11,4 %).

There were no significant differences between the responses of good and poor attenders in this regard

($X^2 = 3,44$; $df = 3$; $p > 0,05$). Pupils who feel threatened and insecure in this type of environment may reject school. It is possible that there are factors within the school climate that cause absenteeism and truancy.

A noteworthy point that arose during interviews with school personnel was that many schools did not have the time or the personnel to manage disciplinary problems and, therefore, admit to having become lax in enforcing their rules.

A relatively small proportion of poor attenders (15,7%) and regular attenders (15,7%) reported that their school rules were "harsh and stifling". The interviews revealed that some children rebelled against this by becoming uncooperative or even absenting themselves from school.

Beresford and Croft (1982), reported that pupils reject schools that use forms of corporal punishment.

5.1.7. Influence of Peer Group

The importance and influence of peer group relationships are emphasized in the Plowden Report which states that the child ".....learns how to play and live in co-operation and competition, how to control his feelings, establish roles and social techniques and become accepted for what he is and can do outside the close relationship of his family on the one hand, and the more formalized relationship of school on the other." (1967, para. 72)

The aim of this section was to determine to what extent regular attenders and persistent absentees were influenced by their peer groups. Pupils responded to the following questions:

5.1.7.1. Relationship With Classmates (Item 49)

The fundamental importance of peer group unpopularity should never be overlooked as an explanation of absenteeism from school. Ralphson (1973), makes the often overlooked point that if a child has no friends in his class, life at school can be extremely unpleasant for him. Table 5.13. shows the distribution of responses among good and poor attenders in this -regard.

TABLE 5.13.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS:

GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
Good	55 (78,6%)	57 (68,7%)
Pleasant	13 (18,6%)	24 (28,9%)
Unpleasant	1 (1,4%)	1 (2,4%)
Superficial	1 (1,4%)	0 (0,0%)
Total	70	83

$$X^2 = 11,20$$

$$df = 3$$

$$p < 0,05$$

The chi-square analysis shows that fewer poor attenders (68,7%) enjoy good relationships with their peers as opposed to (78,6%) of good attenders. In this regard there were statistically significant differences between the two groups

($X^2 = 3,56$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,05$).

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that poor attenders generally were unpopular and kept few friends. Reid (1984a), reported that poor attenders had significantly fewer friends than regular attenders.

Mitchell (1972), also reported that poor attenders were more often inclined to associate with friends from their own localities who did not go to the same institution than did the good attenders. Good attenders, on the other hand, preferred the company of pupils from their own schools. Tyerman (1968) reported a similar finding.

5.1.7.2. Friends who Have Quit School (Item 48)

Coleman (1961), focuses on the power of the peer group in influencing the attendance rates of its members. Pupils who belong to cliques whose members do not value regular school attendance will have higher rates of absence than pupils belonging to cliques whose members do value regular school attendance (Birman and Natriello, 1978:33).

The responses of the children indicated that poor attenders (21,7%) as opposed to good attenders (12,9%) had, at least, one of their best friends who had "quit" school before completing the full year.

The interviews exposed the strong influence the peer group can have on the behaviour of its members.

For example, a girl who is a member of a group which has no plans for education at a tertiary institution would not easily fall in line with a group who views higher education as desirable. Similarly, a boy who joins a group of smokers will most often emulate standards and behaviour of his peer group. For this reason, the fundamental influence of the peer group in promoting absence from school should not be overlooked (Reid, 1985:91).

5.1.8. Homework (Item 50)

Homework is an important aspect of a pupil's life. Homework helps the pupil to reinforce what he/she has learned at school and also helps to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the child which could thereafter be brought to the attention of parents and teachers. A reliable yardstick to measure the pupils' involvement in schoolwork is to examine the amount of time he/she spends on homework. The aim of item 50 was to determine whether there is any marked difference in the length of time regular attenders and poor attenders spend on homework. The distribution of responses of good and poor attenders on this item is presented in Table 5.14.

TABLE 5.14.

TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK: GOOD ATTENDERS vs POOR ATTENDERS

	Good Attenders	Poor Attenders
None or almost none	2 (2,9%)	6 (7,2%)
About half an hour	18 (25,7%)	29 (35,0%)
One or two hours	31 (44,3%)	41 (49,4%)
Three hours or more	19 (27,1%)	7 (8,4%)
Total	70	83

The data indicated that there was a significant difference in the number of hours spent on homework between regular attenders and persistent absentees ($X^2 = 10,47$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,05$). Table 5.14. reveals that only 8,4% of poor attenders, at the secondary school level, spend three hours and more on homework, as opposed to 27,1% of good attenders.

A point of concern was that 7,2% of poor attenders and 2,9% good attenders spent little or no time on homework. Hirschi (1971:191) reported a similar finding.

A poor attender complained that:

" I get too much homework... in every subject, there is work to complete at home... when I don't know what to do , who is going to help me ?... my parents can't. I just copy it at school to please the sir.

Regular attenders, on the other hand, were able to appreciate the value of homework. Many told the interviewer that their parents often assisted them when they experienced difficulties. By contrast, the parents of poor attenders rarely assisted their children. One reason for this was the fact that their educational levels were too low to enable them to assist with the tasks set.

Another noteworthy feature that emerged from the interviews was the fact that a large number of pupils complained about the excessive homework being set. Reid (1985:103) reported similar observations, especially among poor attenders. It is possible that setting too much homework, especially that which is beyond the ability of the child to cope can be demotivating and may contribute to a pupil's decision to stay away from school.

5.1.9. Relevance of courses in Curriculum (Items 51-52)

Only a few studies have examined the relationship between the curriculum and absenteeism from school.

This is a serious omission because some pupils deliberately miss school in order to avoid unpopular lessons (Sullivan and Riches, 1976). Further, research showed that the content and organisation of the curriculum can either encourage or discourage regular attendance at school (Galloway, 1985:142).

This investigation examined the responses of good and poor attenders to their curriculum at school.

The results showed that 77,1% of good attenders, many of whom were generally satisfied with their schools, found the curriculum acceptable to their present and future needs. No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups in this regard ($X^2 = 0,29$; $df = 1$; $p > 0,05$).

Poor attenders (19,2%) on the other hand, thought that the curriculum was a waste of time. Many poor attenders regarded the subjects being studied at school as a waste of time because they felt that they served no purpose in preparing them for a career in the future.

One persistent absentee remarked that:

" I was forced to accept these subjects because the counsellor threatened to send me to another school if I refused. I asked to do a course with technical subjects included, but the Principal said that the Department would only allow the course if there were twenty pupils in the class... We could only get fifteen... Now I am doing History and Geography...It serves no purpose for me...I "duck" classes most of the time..."

The data extracted from the responses to Item 52 where pupils were asked to identify subjects that, in their opinion, were a waste of time, indicated that absentees tended to favour a curriculum based on Basic Maths and English (excluding Literature) with technical and vocational subjects. It is possible that pupils begin to miss classes when they become frustrated with a purposeless curriculum.

Overall, the results revealed that certain pupils dislike the curriculum being offered. Therefore they perceived it as being irrelevant if they are unable to relate to its academic slant; if they cannot meet the demands it makes; and if the content or teaching style or teaching input leaves them feeling failures (Bird et al., 1980 ; Tattum, 1982).

5.2. PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE

The aim of Part Four of the Questionnaire was to find out whether any differences exist between the ambitions and desires of regular attenders and persistent absentees. To determine this the children in the sample were asked to respond to eight questions (Items 53-60). In order to avoid repetition of responses, certain items were grouped together.

5.2.1. Career Aspirations (Items 53, 54, 57)

Research suggests that pupils' career aspirations affect their attitudes towards their schools and teachers (Reid, 1985:126).

In this study the persistent absentees and the regular attenders were asked what jobs they hoped to get upon leaving school.

5.2.1.1. Choice of Job in Adulthood (Item 53)

The data indicated that some poor attenders had made unrealistic choices, like becoming aeroplane pilots or engineers. This would not be possible because many of these children were placed in the standard grade, thereby effectively blocking entry into tertiary institutions.

However, significantly more persistent absentees hoped to obtain employment in unskilled or semi-skilled work. This would probably explain why absentees generally place so little emphasis on the value of school and education. By contrast, regular attenders aspired towards higher or further education, the professions or prestigious technical occupations.

5.2.1.2. Likelihood of Achieving desired Job (Items 54,57)

The responses of the pupils in this study showed that 61,4% of regular attenders saw their chances of getting to their desired occupations as "good" as opposed to 50,6% of poor attenders. No significant differences were found between the two groups in this regard ($X^2 = 3,21$; $df = 4$; $p > 0,05$).

Overall, more poor attenders (18,1%) than good attenders (7,1%) conceded that their chances of "getting ahead and being successful" in life as "somewhat limited". There were significant differences between the responses of the good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 12,18$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,05$).

A persistent absentee remarked that :

" I used to want to be a doctor... and have lots of money...but now I think I'll take any job. I find school difficult...What's the use of going to school when we have so little at home compared to my friends... "

5.2.2. Educational Desires (Items 55,56)

To be educated and with its concomitant association with success in later life, is the desire of all pupils. However, if one hopes to be academically successful then regular attendance at school is essential (Fiordaliso, et al., 1977:188).

In order to determine the extent to which good and poor attenders differed in their educational desires (ie. their school plans) pupils were asked to respond to two items. An analysis of the data from the two items revealed that poor attenders had lower educational ambitions and desires than did good attenders. There were statistically significant differences found between the two groups in this regard ($X^2 = 11,20$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,05$).

However, there was minimal difference between the responses of what the children in the study thought they "liked" and what they "actually" wanted.

In response to Item 56 poor attenders (59%) as opposed to good attenders (27,1%) were satisfied with "just completing school" and finding a job. More regular attenders (68,6%) than poor attenders (38,6%) anticipated a career at university or technikon. In this regard, statistically significant differences were found between the good and poor attenders ($X^2 = 29,39$; $df = 3$; $p < 0,05$).

It is possible that regular attenders who generally come from middle class families realise the power of and necessity for education, and, together with the support and encouragement of their parents, have positive outlooks for their future. Persistent absentees, on the other hand, who are unhappy at home and/or at school have lower educational desires and ambitions. Consequently, they are unenthusiastic and wish to leave school as soon as possible. Hirschi (1971:185) also found that the educational and occupational expectations of poor attenders were low.

5.2.3. Self-Esteem (Items 58-60)

How a child sees himself/herself in relation to his/her goals and others, the kind of person he/she believes himself/herself to be, and the kinds of fears and aspirations he/she has, are major factors in delineating the things for which he/she strives (Blair et al., 1968:178).

In this study the children were asked to place themselves on one of the five given points which increased in distance from the centre of activities at school (Item 58). Thereafter they were asked to position themselves at a point where they would like to be (Item 59). They were then asked to state how they would like to be remembered after finishing school (Item 60).

The results showed no significant differences between the responses of the good and poor attenders to Item 58 ($X^2 = 3,92$; $df = 4$; $p > 0,05$). However, the findings of the study did show that more than half of the poor attenders (55,5%) as opposed to 47,2 % of good attenders tended to hover around the middle or distant levels relating to life and activities at school. Only 14,4% of poor attenders as opposed to 24,2% of good attenders enjoyed being close to or at the centre of activities at school.

The study showed no significant differences in the responses between the good and poor attenders in regard to Item 59 ($X^2 = 4,10$; $df = 4$; $p > 0,05$). Poor attenders (51,7%) did indicate that they preferred to be closer to the centre of the scale but felt shy and were often afraid that other pupils would ridicule them. This desire to be "noticed" was evident in the responses given to Item 60, where 46,9% of the absentees expressed their desire to be remembered as a "bright student" rather than an "average" pupil.

Regular attenders on the other hand were more confident in their choices. They openly preferred to be close to the centre of life at school at all times and wished to be remembered as "bright" , or as "a leader" or as "a popular student" at school. However, there were no significant differences between the responses of the good and poor attenders in this regard ($X^2 = 1,72$; $df = 4$; $p > 0,05$).

Overall, it appears that an important factor in the child's choice of goals and level of performance is his self-esteem. Reid (1985:73) found that absentees had statistically significant lower self-esteem and aspirations than non-absentees.

It is also important for the child, the parent and the school to set realistic levels of achievement. Otherwise he/she is likely to experience frustration and this can hamper the learning process and his/her attendance at school.

5.3. TEACHERS' VIEWS ON REGULAR AND POOR ATTENDANCE

Thus far, this study has examined the differences in attitudes and perceptions of regular attenders and persistent absentees towards their parents, the home, the school, the teacher, and their desires for the future.

Teachers, as opposed to parents whose focus on their children's academic progress forms a mere fragment of their preoccupation with other equally or more important factors, are better able to evaluate pupils' poor and/ or good attendance by virtue of the specific nature of their task. The academic environment at schools, facilitates involvement in all spheres pertaining to education which enables the teacher to hone in to problem areas, or to single out pupils with exceptional abilities.

In this section, form-teachers were asked to provide possible reasons for the poor and/or regular attendance of the pupils in their classes. The responses given by teachers for the poor attendance of their pupils are itemised in rank order in Table 5.15.

TABLE 5.15.

REASONS GIVEN BY TEACHERS FOR PUPIL ABSENCE

Reason for absence	Rank Order	Percent
Domestic problems at home	1	31,3
Both parents are working	5	6,0
Weak academically	3	10,8
Religious reasons	8	2,4
Transport problems	8	2,4
Peer group influence	4	6,2
Has to care for siblings at home	6	4,8
To spend time with boy/girl friend	8	2,4
Comes from wealthy family	7	3,6
Experiences problems at school	2	21,7
Victim of child abuse	7	3,6
Failed more than once and is embarrassed to be oldest in class	6	4,8

The data in Table 5.15. reveals that factors within the home and the school are largely responsible for poor attendance. Domestic problems at home (31,3%) and problems at school (31,7%) were ranked as the most probable factors in causing poor attendance of pupils.

These findings are consistent with earlier results in this study which found aspects related to the home and school as the main contributory factors in understanding absenteeism.

Table 5.16. itemises in rank order, the reasons given by teachers for the regular attendance of children at school.

TABLE 5.16.

REASONS GIVEN BY TEACHERS FOR PUPILS REGULAR ATTENDANCE

Reason for absence	Rank Order	Percent
Parents show interest in child	1	25,7
Pupils motivated for success	2	21,4
Pupils enjoy school activities	5	7,1
To see boy/girl friend	6	2,9
Avoids unpleasant home situation	6	2,9
Stability at home	4	8,6
Pupil is a prefect	4	8,6
Friendly relationship with teachers	3	20,0
Parents are teachers	7	2,8

The data in Table 5.16. highlighted three factors that could be used to improve attendance at school. These are as follows:

1. The interest shown by parents (25,7%)
2. The pupil was motivated for success either by his parents or the teacher or himself/herself (21,4%), and
3. Pupils generally enjoyed friendly relationships with one or more teachers at school (20,0%).

The conclusions and educational implications of the findings of this study as well as the recommendations flowing from them will form the content of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on some of the more important findings of this study, present the conclusions that were drawn, and offer recommendations that could assist teachers, principals, social workers and education authorities in improving existing situations and conditions relating to the understanding and management of absenteeism and truancy in secondary schools.

It will be recalled that the broad intention of this study was to present a scientific and objective investigation into the problem of absenteeism and truancy in the Tongaat area.

Specific objectives of the research included establishing, inter alia, the following:

1. The incidence of absenteeism and truancy in Tongaat.
2. The home and familial circumstances of regular attenders and persistent absentees.
3. An examination of the differences, if any, between poor and good attenders with regard to maladaptive behaviour.
4. The role of the school and school-related factors as contributors to absenteeism and truancy.
5. The different conceptions that regular attenders and persistent absentees have of their future.
6. The reasons offered by teachers for pupil absenteeism.

Overall, this study examined absenteeism and truancy as complex, multi-dimensional problems. The recommendations made in this chapter are made in the hope of persuading teachers and other interested professionals into adopting more innovative and realistic approaches that would be of assistance to absentees and truants. The section that follows is an amalgam of the findings of this study, the relevant literature, personal experience and research, interviews and discussions with pupils, teachers and other interested parties.

6.2. DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that the majority of absentees fall into the 15-16 age category. Headmasters and social workers see this period as a vital phase in secondary school education. It is during this period that pupils are beginning to adjust to the demands and pressures of high school.

In addition, pupils are confronted with the difficult problem of subject-course selection. Therefore, the authorities feel that it is imperative for pupils to be at school during this critical stage. Absenteeism and truancy exacerbates adjustment problems for such children. This study found that absentee rates were not consistent throughout the year. Test days, activity days and Mondays and Fridays were found to be the days when absenteeism rates were relatively higher. This is in line with the findings of past research.

Although a large number of absentees comprised females, their absence, generally, took place with the knowledge or consent of their parents. Whilst at home these children had to care for sick members of the family or had to accompany them to clinics or hospitals every month. Many girls often missed school because they felt that they were being burdened with the household chores and therefore needed time to rest. These girls also had little or no time for homework. They also had limited time to prepare for tests and the next day's lessons. Fearing the wrath of their teachers, they often opted to miss school.

The results also showed that more poor attenders (39,8%) than good attenders (35,7%) lived in high-rise, congested flats. As a result, overcrowding was a problem. Often bedrooms had to be shared by adults as well as children. Hence, the parents often lacked privacy. Furthermore, since most families were large in size, other rooms such as the lounge and dining-room had to double as sleeping quarters.

Indeed, 21,7% of poor attenders as opposed to only 5,7% of good attenders openly admitted to feeling ashamed of their home conditions. Consequently, many poor attenders often left to live with wealthier relatives in order to escape from embarrassment and poverty.

The interviews with parents revealed that over-crowding often led to undesirable sleeping practices: many children were unable to go to sleep until the household had finally settled down. Consequently, they were too tired to go to school the next morning. Research confirms that absentees and truants are more likely to come from such conditions (Tyerman, 1968; Fogelman et al., 1980). In contrast, good attenders often live in better-constructed and more comfortable homes. These children generally have their own bedrooms and many of these are equipped with study units.

As far as television viewing is concerned, parents of good attenders generally imposed controls on the extent of viewing time allowed and the types of programmes that be seen.

Poor attenders tended to come from larger families (ie. an average of more than five members) than did good attenders. This is in line with May's findings (1975:100). He found that poor attenders lived in families of five or more members as opposed to good attenders who came from families of less than five members. The advantages and disadvantages of family size has already been discussed in Chapter Four.

Another factor that was found to affect pupils' attendance at school was the parents' state of health. In many cases, children were forced to remain at home to care for sick parents. In some instances emotional blackmail was being used by parents in order to have their children remain at home to care for them.

More than 60% of the poor attenders were unhappy with the vocations of their parents. Often they (poor attenders) felt ashamed to talk about this aspect. This has implications for the type of careers these pupils preferred for themselves. Many poor attenders set their sights on high status jobs even though it was obvious that they did not possess the ability to attain them. Good attenders were more realistic in the choice of their careers. Often they chose to follow in the footsteps of their parents.

The study showed that there was a clear link between the educational level of the parents and regularity with which children attended school. Children from these homes also tended to be more positive about school. They were more highly motivated and held views about education that were comparable to those held by their parents about the value of education.

An interesting point emerged from the interviews with the parents. Most parents wanted their children to complete their Matriculation. However, amongst parents of poor attenders, their interest often ended at that point.

They did not visit the school voluntarily to enquire about their children's progress or to discuss related problems. The parents of good attenders, on the other hand, showed markedly greater interest in their children. This was evident from their regular visits to schools and questions they asked about their children's progress.

The investigation into the relationship between parents and children showed that most poor attenders seemed unhappy. They often found it difficult to discuss their problems with their parents. Only 18% of poor attenders stated that they enjoyed open communication with their parents. Most of them complained that their parents did not understand them, nor did they make attempts to get to know the friends of their children. Thirty seven percent of the parents of poor attenders expressed outright disapproval of their children's companions.

A persistent absentee expressed his feelings in the following way:

" I can't speak to my parents. They have old ideas. They won't hear of me having a girlfriend. Look I'm sixteen... All my friends have a girl... They just want me to stay home and study all the time. Even my friends are not allowed to come home. All this is too frustrating... We just cannot talk to each other... It must end in a quarrel... "

A weak family bond can contribute to absenteeism. In this study more poor attenders than good attenders noted that their poor relationship at home was responsible for their unhappiness. These children often sought substitute satisfaction through various forms of anti-social behaviour.

The attitude of parents towards their children was also significant. It is interesting to note that 21,7% of parents of poor attenders, as opposed to only 4,3% of parents of good attenders, admitted to being ignorant of their children's absence from school. In this connection it is disturbing to note that schools often delay too long before informing parents of their children's absence. This matter needs urgent attention

The communication gap that often exists between parents and children was confirmed by the responses to another question. It was found that poor attenders (29%) and good attenders (20%) "never discussed" their problems with their parents. They preferred to seek assistance and counsel from outside people, many of whom are unqualified to offer such guidance. Under these circumstances it comes as no surprise that 32,6% of the poor attenders defied their parents' authority at some time. Children, whose parents are more actively involved in their lives and activities often attend school more regularly. Research emphasises the positive effects that a favourable home and family can have on the child's development, personality and attitude to life (Majoribanks, 1984:690- 700). Of the maladaptive behaviour patterns exhibited by absentees "driving a car without a licence" and "running away from home" were only two factors that were of significance between good and poor attenders. The urge to run away from home arose largely from unhappy home conditions and poor communication with parents. Many poor attenders stated that they drove the family car as an act of defiance.

Although research showed strong correlations between absenteeism and delinquent behaviour later in life, by and large, no statistically significant differences were found on the remaining variables tested. As in the home, so too at school, there are difficulties and deficiencies which have to be addressed. The findings of this survey show that there were substantive differences between the attitudes of good and poor attenders in certain aspects pertaining to the school.

Some features of life alienate pupils from school. Although only three of the six variables tested were found to be statistically significant, the responses of poor attenders generally indicated that they felt "lost" and "lonely" at school. Hence, more poor than good attenders saw "no point in going to school". Many pupils "hated school and the teachers" and found the experience "boring". Good attenders, on the other hand, found school to be more fulfilling.

This study also examined pupils' relationship with teachers and the teachers' attitudes towards their pupils. The following points were highlighted by the poor attenders:

1. Most teachers "teach too fast". Some pupils complained about this but to no avail.
2. Teachers are often perceived to be arrogant and insensitive to the needs of slower learners.

3. Some teachers were accused of being abusive, ill-tempered, having unrealistically high expectations of all their pupils, not giving credit for efforts made, and being partial towards higher achieving pupils.

In general, responses of the regular attenders were more positive. They enjoyed a better relationship with their teachers. They valued the following qualities in teachers:

1. Being strict but fair
2. Giving individual attention to pupils
3. Assisting pupils with personal problems
4. Having patience and understanding and
5. Having a sense of humour

These findings are in line with those of Docking (1980). The pupils, in general, agreed that teachers who are ineffective, rigid, harsh, uncaring, remote and who incite physical confrontations can provoke resentment which may lead to indiscipline and disruption.

An important finding of the study was that "troublesomeness" in class was a reliable indicator of absenteeism and truancy amongst pupils. More poor attenders (28,9%) than good attenders (15,7%) were "troublesome" at school. Often this trait manifests itself quite early in the child's high school career.

Poor attenders also expressed greater dissatisfaction with the curriculum offered at their schools. They prefer to see a greater number of technical and vocational subjects on offer. Foisting a curriculum on pupils to suit administrative expediency rather than pupils' interest and aptitude leads to frustration.

Career aspirations of persistent absentees tended to be lower than those of regular attenders, especially since many of them were relegated to standard grade. This blocked their entry into tertiary institutions.

6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Flowing out of the discussion, the following recommendations are made with the purpose of helping reduce absenteeism in schools.

6.3.1. PROCEDURES TO PROMOTE BETTER ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOLS

School administrators are in a position to see first hand the impact of absenteeism on pupils. These pupils need sympathetic guidance and support so that they can come to understand the negative consequences of their behaviour and the need to modify it.

In the section that follows guidelines will be suggested about how the main role players can help create a more positive social climate and foster a warm, friendly atmosphere that will encourage good attendance.

6.3.2. THE KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN COMBATING ABSENTEEISM

6.3.2.1. The Teacher

Although the pupils' physical presence is required for learning to take place, it is the teacher who holds the direct key to school attendance. It is the teacher who is the role model for the pupil, often assuming the role of parent- replacement in school.

The teacher can be either a positive or negative influence on the pupil depending upon the role that he/she assumes. If the pupil is led to perceive himself as a failure, then schooling will become a painful experience and failure will lead to more failure. Brodbelt (1985:67) reports that when absentees perceive themselves to be academic failures, this becomes a reason for their absence from school. The pupil, consequently, will take aversive action and stay away from school. The role of the teacher in such a situation should be positive in helping his pupils perceive the school as a learning environment of reasonable academic expectations. Negative labelling, with its concomitant stigmas, has no place in school.

Teachers need to be able to distinguish between genuine pleas for help from those truants and absentees whose home backgrounds, social and educational circumstances, require understanding and positive remedial assistance and those, whose non-attendance is but one manifestation of aggressive, anti-social conduct which often lies outside the scope of many to counteract. Teachers need to maintain control in class through empathetic and positive behaviour rather than harsh and provocative means.

Teachers need to be more aware of their significance in affecting pupil attendance. Research shows that the self-fulfilling prophecy works against many lower achieving pupils who fail, who are absent frequently and who may even drop out because of negative teacher expectations and treatment (Brodbelt, 1985:68).

The professional teacher must treat each pupil with respect regardless of individual abilities and family background. Each pupil needs to be provided with the best learning environment. Miller, (1986) emphasises that teachers are the key to success in a school programme. By following some of the techniques listed below the teacher can make a significant contribution to the improvement of pupil attendance :

1. Set an example by coming to school and class regularly and on time.
2. Maintain accurate records for referral purposes.
3. Follow attendance procedures closely.

4. Emphasise and reinforce good attendance through telephone calls to parents, and reward systems made at school assembly.
5. Create a pleasant classroom atmosphere.
6. Consider pupil capabilities in workloads given and test construction.
7. Reorganise Monday and Friday activities to encourage attendance.

Although these procedures require considerable time and effort, teachers and administrators should commit themselves to doing everything possible to ensure their pupils' regular attendance.

6.3.2.2. The Pupil

Any programme designed to keep pupils in school must address pupil attitudes because ultimately the pupil holds the key to any improvement in attendance. Sometimes peer counselling or the "buddy system" can have positive consequences. When pupils, in general, become aware of the different incentives offered, the lesson is gradually learned. Attendance is necessary for success.

There should be increased pupil participation in school governance and an increase in pupil input into the curriculum. Presumably, this will heighten pupil commitment to school and assist in making the curriculum more relevant, thereby increasing the likelihood of attendance.

Suggestions made by pupils in general, include, changes of form and form teachers, subject options and timetable, less severe rules on uniform and hairstyles, and changes in teacher attitudes. These demands are hardly excessive and may have a sound basis.

What the pupils are saying is that schools must be less inflexible and take heed of individual pupils' needs. Such small changes, subtly and speedily implemented can forestall and prevent absenteeism.

6.3.2.3. The Principal

The Principal needs to be aware of the school ethos through regular classroom visits. His role is of critical importance because it is through his leadership that a specific tone and policy is set for dealing with absenteeism. The Principal alone has the time to put together a policy that is based on a total school assessment. That assessment must first address the problem of absenteeism, defining it and determining what resources are available in the school and community for solving it. In fact, teachers' morale will be higher if they knew that the Principal has a strong anti-absenteeism policy consisting of parent involvement, written excuses, pupil monitoring, consistency of treatment and truancy proceedings. Kube and Ratigan (1991:69) state that " our policy works because it clearly states expectations; we arrived at it with the support of parents, pupils and teachers; and pupils are motivated by our reward system."

Principals must take the lead, together with their teachers, in developing new enlightened policies if they are to successfully combat absenteeism in their institutions.

Teachers should be encouraged to adopt sympathetic attitudes to absentees which is absolutely essential if the self-esteem of these children are to be raised. Further, principals can assist by providing able and willing teachers to help the child with additional reading and writing lessons, implementing bonus schemes for good attendance and offering general encouragement and praise whenever an opportunity arises. It is thus obvious that good practice in schools begins with a firm Principal and radiates to include the level one educator. In this way every member of his staff will realise that he/she has an important role to play in the prevention of absenteeism. Condoning absenteeism by omission or neglect is a clear sign to absentees that their schools do not really care about them.

6.3.2.4. Other Personnel

Other personnel such as the school psychologist, the school counsellor and social workers can help with career planning, by initiating parental conferences, by advocating behavioral modification procedures that use positive reinforcement to shape behaviour favourably and by investigating stressful home conditions. They can ensure that incentives such as prizes, certificates, early dismissal, special field trips, etc., are awarded for good attendance.

A review of the literature, especially in the American schools indicated the determined and creative efforts of schools and their personnel in attempting to reduce absenteeism and increasing attendance rates at schools. Martin (1991:111) describes a school in Ohio, which has developed "The Perfect Attendance Incentive Programme" to combat absenteeism. The school works with the community to achieve perfect attendance. Community businesses donate prizes such as radios, shirts and food coupons. Persistent absentees enter their names voluntarily, thereby making themselves accountable for their own attendance. At the end of the week the pupils with the best attendance are awarded the prizes publicly. The programme also awards pupils who achieve perfect attendance throughout the year. In this way absentees are encouraged to attend school because they have a chance to be recognised and rewarded.

Vincent and Bostdorff (1990), also implemented an effective attendance reward policy that was easy and inexpensive; the "Crestline Attendance Reward Policy" which rewarded the pupil's perfect or near perfect attendance by allowing him/her to be exempted from writing one of his/her courses in the examinations. Eastwold (1989), also makes the following suggestions to improve attendance:

1. Offer employment as an incentive for potential dropouts to remain in school
2. Make career information available to at-risk pupils
3. Introduce a "buddy-system" for secondary school pupils with attendance problems

4. Withhold grades of a pupil who has been excessively absent.

Miller (1993:43) feels that no method has been as effective as taking truants to court. He adds that as a result of prosecutions there has been a 45% reduction in the country's dropout rate since 1989. However, the success of this method still requires further investigation. Community based agencies need to play a greater role in combatting absenteeism and truancy. Providing counselling to the families can also be helpful in reducing truancy.

6.3.2.5. The Parents

Appropriate measures must be designed to monitor attendance. The first step would be to involve parents. Regular newsletters can help make parents aware of the importance of their children being in school, as well as informing them of the consequences of non-attendance. Telephone calls to parents can help make them aware of any absenteeism in their households. One effective way of improving attendance is to send a computerized telephone message to parents of absent pupils. To successfully implement this method, the Principal will record a message and the computer will dial the parent in the evening. The message explains the call and the nature of the absence.

Such machines can make fifty calls an hour and produce a print out indicating which parents were called and which were not.

Although the machines are costly, they do pay for themselves by increasing attendance at school. This was supported by the findings of a study by Helm and Burkett (1989:364-365) which showed that pupils whose homes were called by computer had a better overall attendance record than pupils' whose homes were not called.

In another study, Heron (1990:3), describes the Leeds Scheme which had been set up by the Department of Education and Science for the purpose of combatting absenteeism and truancy. Parents of persistent absentees will now be forced to work with education welfare officers to ensure that their children return to school. In addition, new computer software will be introduced to the schools to help them identify absentees quickly so that action can follow. The names of the absentees will be identified and even a link with their past absences will be provided.

Thereafter, telephone calls will be made to the parents to inform them of their children's absence from school. At one school home visits are made by members of staff. They impressed upon the parent the importance of regular attendance and tried to identify reasons for absence. If the child returns to school then all attempts are made to ensure he/she remains at school by the teacher/s spending time with the child during or after school, to catch up with missed work.

6.3.2.6. The School

Reid (1980:78) suggests that the following preventative actions be taken by staff members in schools:

1. All pupils found to be absent illegally should have their conduct investigated. This should include an interview with the pupil and parents. Authorities must note that these procedures will be time-consuming if issues are to be tackled effectively.
2. The prime purpose must be to enable the pupil to return and readjust to schooling. Schools must involve professionals from social, psychological and educational services. The multi-causal facets of school absenteeism need to be recognized in practice and not just in theory.
3. Inside schools, every good pastoral care team should start with and include the form teacher, whose role is vital in liaising with individual pupils. Regular meetings need to take place to assess the progress being made and to review any difficulties faced by staff or pupils.

Good attendance needs to be praised just as bad attendance is punished. Special bonus schemes could be introduced to encourage good attendance. These might include the presentation of attendance certificates, the planning of trips or viewing of films for pupils who have maintained excellent attendance rates.

Incentives need to be found which will encourage good attendance habits to persist, especially in primary school children and the 14-16 year category in secondary school. This section has reviewed the findings and implications of absenteeism and truancy among secondary school pupils. In essence, the findings indicate that differences do exist between good and poor attenders on many of the variables tested. Clearly, there are factors within the home as well as the school which contribute to good or poor attendance at school. In order that absenteeism and truancy be may controlled and thereby reduced, it is necessary for changes to be made within the home and the school environment.

While acknowledging that these environments cannot be changed overnight, some steps can be taken immediately, to help combat absenteeism and truancy at secondary schools. While it was necessary to discuss some recommendations in the preceding sections, a summary of the recommendations of this study will form the content of the next section.

6.4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Since absentees tended to have poor perceptions of their homes it is imperative for parents to take positive action and to convert their houses into "homes" where children can be made to feel happy, secure and contented. Hence, parents themselves need to be educated in this regard.

In the study, the following areas emerged as "problematic" and are particularly pertinent to parents of absentees and truants.

- a. Material and spiritual impoverishment
- b. Unrealistic educational demands upon their child
- c. Indifference towards child's friends
- d. Severe restriction of freedom
- e. Lack of communication

To this end, the role of the school counsellor is especially relevant not only to assist parents in identifying parental and familial "weaknesses", but also in directing parents towards initiating positive action that result in the upliftment of the child.

Guiding parents towards catering for the child's material and/or spiritual needs or by making parents aware of their unrealistic expectations, the counsellor, in effect, serves a dual function: he assists parents in assessing their contribution to the problem and he assists the child in overcoming the problem. Also, by virtue of his position and authority within the school structure, his suggestions are more likely to be implemented by both parents and child.

2. Efforts should be made to improve the general living conditions and circumstances of disadvantaged families through broad social reforms so that parents and children can live more satisfactory lives. Such improvements will also help to break the vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation, thereby reducing the problems of the next generation.

If the home is perceived by the child as being seriously deficient in some way, his/her development and integration into society becomes difficult. Factors which may contribute to such an environment include, inter alia, a low level of educational development of the parents, a poor standard of living, lack of essential amenities in the home, violence and physical abuse, and a lack of interaction and understanding between children and parents.

3. The school has a vital role to play in preventing absenteeism and truancy. It enjoys a privileged position by virtue of its being a place where children spend a good part of their waking hours, do much of their playing, and interact with adults and age-mates. Therefore, the school and its teachers have considerable potential to help detect and prevent cases of absenteeism and truancy.
4. Schools must design and offer curricula in accordance with the ability levels of their pupils as far as possible. Prescription and the desire to satisfy departmental officials must be discarded for methods that meet the needs of pupils.
5. It is difficult for a teacher to help his pupils if his relationship with the school administration, especially the principal, is insecure. Principals are therefore urged to give serious attention to improving relationships with staff on a professional basis.

6. The value of laying a sound educational foundation for future academic progress and, later, for suitable employment and upward mobility, must be impressed upon absentees and their parents.

7. Education departments must review their policy of rationalisation whereby counsellors were removed from schools. In this regard it is important to heed the warning of Pringle:

"Failure to provide the necessary programmes for children at school and their families at home merely postpones the day when the community has to pay a much higher price for not being willing to meet the needs earlier. The cost in the long run is extremely high - not only in terms of human misery and wasted potentialities, but also in terms of unemployability, crime, and a renewed cycle of inadequate parenting (and unsympathetic schools). Even in the short run, it is by no means economical to do too little and to do it too late" (Pringle, 1975:154).

8. Schools have many functions to serve including the fostering of healthy personalities. If, within the academic programme itself, the teachers and the counsellors can promote the mental health of children by undertaking a remedial role, these children, when they become parents, would be more likely to establish satisfactory relationships with their own children and to create within their homes a climate conducive to proper personality development.

9. Efforts must be made to involve parents more fully in programmes aimed at combating absenteeism at schools. In this way they can acquire a better understanding of the aims and procedures of these programmes thereby assisting in reducing the workloads of the already overburdened teaching staff at schools.

10. More school social workers should be appointed. These workers should be readily available to teachers and should assist them in securing prompt assistance from specialized social services. Social workers who are also trained in education, should be appointed as members of a school staff. They can play an invaluable role in interpreting the home situation for the class teacher and in working directly in a counselling relationship with pupils exhibiting signs of neglect or presenting disciplinary problems beyond the normal means of correction.

Moreover, their special knowledge about the available community resources and services can be invaluable in making the proper referral, interpreting treatment to the school and helping the social agency.

11. Teacher training courses should take greater cognisance of the social factors that affect school attendance and hence school performance and also of the structure and functions of the social services.

Faculties of education and colleges need to widen their curricula to include the study of absenteeism and its concomitant repercussions on all affected parties.

It is acknowledged that a number of tasks mentioned above cannot be easily performed by the school or any other social agency. The origins of the underlying problems often lie in family and social history and they are sustained and reproduced by prevailing social conditions and structures. If basic improvements in education are to take place in South Africa, there will need to be transformation of many aspects beyond the schooling system. Poor housing, low income, uncertain health and unemployment will almost certainly lead to a rise in the number of absentees, poorly behaved, disenchanted or alienated young people.

For a start, both the parents and teachers need to be informed of the vital role they can play in improving a child's chances in life by combating absenteeism and truancy.

The results of the present inquiry also serve as a reminder that the child is part of a larger environment and that his progress and presence at school is vitally affected by this environment: the attitude which it encourages, by the motivation it provides, and by the stability and security which he can derive from it.

6.5. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As regards the future, it is obvious that more action-based research in schools is needed which can give useful leads into the educational processes involved in absenteeism. For example, it is not yet possible to answer why Pupil A misses school when Pupil B who comes from the same form and similar home and social background attends regularly. As long as these "mysteries" remain, solutions will be difficult to find.

Up to the present, research has emphasised the importance of socio-educational, socio-psychological, institutional and multi-disciplinary facets in the genesis and continuation of school absenteeism. Although this study also points the way forward in the understanding of absentees, considerable work is required before it can be asserted with any certainty that particular features of schools contribute to and foster absenteeism. In particular, research is needed on the link between teachers, teachers' styles, the curriculum, discipline, school rules and absenteeism.

Further studies are also required on the relation between attendance and factors such as alienation, pupil behaviour and peer group. To date, evidence clearly suggests the multi-disciplinary aspects involved in the phenomena of absenteeism and truancy. Absentees and truants tend to come from unfavourable and unsupportive home backgrounds, have low social class origins, display psychological or behavioral problems, have fewer friends, have poor pupil-teacher relations and have difficulties conforming to rules at school.

Unfortunately too little is known about the links between the home, social, psychological and institutional factors involved in absenteeism and truancy. There is still a dearth of research in these fields and much work needs to be done using both qualitative and quantitative measures, in large and small scale samples.

6.6. CONCLUSION

This study makes no claim to a simplistic solution to this mammoth, multi-faceted problem of absenteeism. What is clear, however, is that there is something fundamentally wrong not only within the family, but also with the secondary school system when schooling for certain sectors of the population becomes less rewarding than for others.

If, as previous studies suggest, schools alone do not cause absenteeism, they can at least, be agents which increase or decrease absenteeism.

Only a great deal of hard work by staff, social workers, educational authorities and institutions, working in co-operation, can alleviate this "sickness" in our society. It is crucial that new and experienced teachers come to terms with the fact that their own contribution matters and that their attitudes or responses to their pupils have a direct bearing upon the absentee rates in their school.

Finally, if fewer pupils were unhappy, perhaps there would be less absenteeism. One of the greatest challenges facing educationists today is to make schools rewarding institutions for everybody concerned. If this could be achieved, then everyone would benefit - the able and less-able pupils, the teachers and parents - indeed, society as a whole.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ATKINSON, L. ET AL., (1985) : School Refusal: The Hetrogeneity of a Concept. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 55, 83- 107.
- BAUM, T. (1978) : Surveys of Absenteeism: A Question of Timing. Educational Research, 20, 3, 226-230.
- BEHR, A.L. (1973) : Methods and Techniques in Educational and Psychological Research. Pretoria, Van Shaik.
- BEHR, A.L. ET AL., (1987) : An Educational Psychology for Schools in Africa. Durban, Butterworth.
- BERG, I. (1971) : Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery. Boston, Beacon Press.
- BERG, I. ET AL., (1969) : School Phobia - Its Classification and Relationship to Dependency. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 10, 123-141.
- BERRY , G.L. ET AL., (1993) : The School Phobic Child and the Counsellor. Education, 114,1, 42-43.

- BERTHOUD, R. (1976) : The Disadvantages of Inequality : A Study of Social Deprivation. Macdonald and Jones, London.
- BILLINGTON, B.J. (1978) : Patterns of Attendancy and Truancy: A Study of Attendance and Truancy Amongst First Year Comprehensive School Pupils. Educational Review, 30,3, 221-225.
- BIRD, C. ET AL., (1980) : Disaffected Pupils. Uxbridge, Brunel University Extension Studies Unit.
- BIRMAN, B.F. ET AL., (1977) : Perspectives on Absenteeism at High School. Journal of Research Development and Education, 11, 4, 29-38.
- BLAIR, G.M. ET AL., (1968) : Educational Psychology. Third Edition, Macmillan Company, Canada.
- BLAGG, N.R. (1984) : The Behavioral Treatment of School Refusal : A Comparative Study. Behavioral Research Therapy, 22, 2, 119-127.

- BLYTHMAN, M. (1975) : Truants Suffer more From 'The Disadvantages of Life'. Scottish Educational Journal, January, 80-4.
- BORG, W.R. (1967) : Educational Research: An Introduction. New York, David McKay and Company.
- BOS, K.J. ET AL., (1990) : Truancy, Drop-out, Class Repeating and their Relation with School Characteristics. Educational Research, 32, 3, 175-185.
- BOYSON, R. (1974) : The Need for Realism. From: Truancy:(ed.), Turner, B., Ward Lock Educational, London.
- BRODBELT, S. (1985) : Absenteeism: Critical Problem in Learning. Clearing House, 59, 2, 64-68.
- BROOKS, D.B. (1974) : Contingency Contracts with Truants. Personnel Guidance Journal, 52,5,315-320.

- BROPHY, J.E. and GOOD, T.L. (1974) : Teacher Student Relationships : Causes and Consequences. New York, Holt, Reinhart and Winston.
- BROWN, T.F. (1984) : Improving School Climate - The Symptom vs The Problem. NASSP Bulletin, 68, 472, 3-7.
- BROWN, D. (1983) : Truants, Families and Schools: A Critique of the Literature on Truancy. Educational Review, 35, 3, 222-235.
- BRYK, A.S. ET AL., (1989) : The Effects of High School Organisation on Dropping out: An Exploratory Investigation. American Educational Research Journal, 26, 3, 353-383.
- BUIST, M. (1980) : Truants Talking. Scottish Educational Review, 121, 40-51.
- BURT, C. (1925) : The Young Delinquent. London, University of London Press Ltd.

- BURT, C. (1944) : The Young Delinquent. London, University of London Press Ltd.
- CARLEN, P. ET AL., (1992) : Truancy: The Politics of Compulsory Schooling. University Press, Buckingham.
- CARROLL, H.C.M. (ed) (1977a) : Absenteeism in South Wales: Studies of Pupils, their Homes and their Secondary Schools. Swansea, University of Swansea Faculty of Education.
- CHAZAN, M. (1962) : School Phobia. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 32, 209-217.
- CHERRY, N. (1976) : Persistent Job Changing- Is it a Problem? Journal of Occupational Psychology, 49, 203-221.
- CILLIERS, C.D. ET AL., (1993): Proposed Programme for Managing Juvenile Delinquency Within the Mainstream of Education. Suid Afrikaanse Tydskrif Opvoedkundige, 13, 2, 64-70.

- COHEN, L. (1976) : Educational Research in Classrooms and Schools. London, Harper and Row.
- COHEN, L. (1980) : Labelling and Alienation in British Secondary Schools. Educational Review,
- COOMBES, F. (1974) : Truancy on Trial. From: Truancy, (ed.), Turner, B., Ward Lock Educational, London.
- COOPER, M. (1984) : Self-Identity in Adolescent School Refusers and Truants. Educational Review, 36, 3, 229-237.
- COOPER, M. (1986) : A Model of Persistent School Absenteeism. Educational Research, 28, 1, 14-19.
- COOPER, M.G. (1966) : School Refusal. Educational Research, 8, 115-127.
- COPE, E. and GRAY, J. (1978) : Figures and Perspectives on the National Problem of Truancy. Newsletter 3, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh.

- CULLEN, K. (1969) : School and Family.
Gill and Macmillan, Dublin.
- CUTTANCE, P. (1980) : Do Schools Consistently Influence
the Performance of their Students?
Educational; Review, 32, 3, 267-
280.
- DAILY NEWS (1994) : One in seven children don't attend
school. August, 26, 1.
- DAVIE, R. (1972) : From Birth to Seven. Longmans,
London.
- DAVIE, R. (1980) : Promoting School Adjustment. From:
A Fairer Future for Children,
PRINGLE, M.K. (ed.), London.
Macmillan.
- DAYTON, N.A. (1928) : Mental Deficiency and other
Factors that Influence School
Attendance. American Journal of
Psychiatry, 7, 809-835.
- DEIGHTON, L.C. (1971) : Encyclopaedia of Education.
(ed. in chief) Vol.1, Macmillan and Free
Press.

- DENZIN, N.K. (1970): Sociological Methods. Aldine, Chicago.
- DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS(1988): Report of the Commission of Enquiry, chaired by Lord Elton. Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London.
- DOCKING, J.W. (1980) : Control and Discipline in Schools: Perspectives and Approaches. London, Harper and Row.
- DORNBUSCH, S. (1974) : To Try or Not To Try. The Stanford Magazine, 2, 50- 54.
- DOWNIE, N.M. ET AL., (1970) : Basic Statistical Methods. Harper and Row, New York.
- DOUGLAS, J.W.B. ET AL. (1965): The Effects of Absence on Primary School Performance. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 34, 221-225.
- DUNHAM, J. (1981) : Disruptive Pupils and Teacher Stress. Educational Research, 23, 3, 205-213.

- EASTWOLD, P. (1989) : Combatting Truancy in the Secondary School. NASSP Bulletin, 73, 28-31.
- EATON, M.J. (1979) : A Study of some Factors Associated with the Early Identification of Persistent Absenteeism. Educational Review, 31, 3, 233-242.
- EATON, M.J. and HOUGHTON, D.M. (1980) : The Attitudes of Persistent Teenage Absentees and Regular Attenders Towards School and Home. Irish Journal of Psychology, 2,3, 159-175.
- EGAN, K. (1993) : Roles of Schools. Teacher's College Records, 93, 4, 641-655.
- FARRINGTON, D. (1980) : Truancy, Delinquency, the Home and the School. From: Out of School, (eds.), HERSOV, L.and BERG, I. John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- FERRI, E. (1976) : Growing Up in a One Parent Family. Windsor, NFER.

- FIORDALISO, R. ET AL., (1977) : Effects of Feedback on Absenteeism in the Junior High School. Journal of Educational Research, 188-192.
- FINN, J.D. (1989) : Withdrawing from School. Review of Educational Research, 59, 2, 117-142.
- FITT, A.B. (1956) : An Experimental Study of Children's Attitude to School in Auckland, New Zealand. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 26, 25-30.
- FOGELMAN, K. and RICHARDSON, K. (1974) : School Attendance: Some Results from the National Child Development Study. From: Truancy, (ed.), TURNER, B., Ward Lock Educational, London.
- FOGELMAN, K. ET AL., (1980) : Absence from School: Findings from the National Child Development Study. From: Out of School, (eds.) HERSOV, L. and BERG, I., Chichester.

- FRASER, E.D. (1959) : Home Environment and the School. London, University of London Press Ltd.
- GALLOWAY, D. (1982) : A study of Persistent Absentees and their Families. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 52, 317-330.
- GALLOWAY, D. (1985) : Schools and Persistent Absentees. Pergamon Press, England.
- GALLOWAY, D. (1980) : Problems of Assessment and Management of Persistent Absenteeism from School. From: Out of School, (eds.) HERSOV, L. and BERG, I., John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- GALLOWAY, D. ET AL., (1981) : School Attendance following Legal or Administrative Action for Unauthorised Absence. Educational Review, 33, 1, 53-65.
- GALLOWAY, D. (1982) : Persistence Absence from School. Educational Research, 24, 3, 188-196.

- GALLOWAY, D. (1976a): Size of school, socio-economic hardship, suspension rates and persistent unjustified absence from school. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 46, 40-47.
- GALLOWAY, D. (1976b): Persistent Unjustified Absence from School. Trends in Education, 30, 22-27.
- GARVEY, W.P. and HEGRENNES, J.R. (1966) : Desensitization Techniques in the Treatment of School Phobia. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 36, 147-152.
- GLUECK, S. and GLUECK, E. (1951) : Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- GLUECK, S. (1957) : Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency. Oxford University Press, London.
- GOODACRE, E. (1970) : School and Home Slough. NFER.
- GRANT, G. (1988) : The World we Created at Hamilton High. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

- GRAY, G. ET AL., (1980) : Attendance and the First Year of Employment. From: Out of School, (eds.), HERSOV, L. and BERG, I., John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- GREER, H.D. (1992) : Improving Attendance in Urban Schools. NASSP Bulletin, 76, 126-128.
- GRIMSHAW, R.H. and (1984): "Truancy and Delinquency in Perspective: a review of their relationship in the light of recent U.K. evidence. University of Sheffield.
- PRATT, J.D.
- HALL, M.B. (1951) : Psychiatric Examination of the School Child. Arnold, London.
- HAMBLIN, D.H. (1977) : The Teacher and Pastoral Care. Blackwell, Oxford.
- HARGREAVES, D. (1967) : Social Relations in a Secondary School. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- HARGREAVES, D.H. (1982) : Challenge for the Comprehensive School. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

- HARGREAVES, D.H. (1975) : Deviance in Classrooms.
 ET AL., Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- HARRIS, F. (1974) : Rebels with a Cause. From:
 Truancy, (ed.), TURNER, B., Ward
 Lock Educational, London.
- HEALY, W. (1915) : The Individual Delinquent.
 Heinemann, London.
- HELM, C.M. ET AL., (1989) : Effects of Computer - Assisted
 Telecommunications on School
 Attendance. Journal of Educational
 Research, 82, 6, 362-365.
- HERBERT, M. (1975) : Problems of Childhood. London, Pan
 Books Ltd.
- HER MAJESTY'S (1978) : Truancy and Behavioral
 INSPECTORATE OF SCHOOLS Problems in some Urban Schools,
 London.
- HERON, E. (1990) : Radical Steps to Stop Truants
 going too Far. Times Educational
 Supplement (30:11:90), 3.
- HERSOV, L.A. (1960b) : Refusal to go to School. Child
 Psychology and Psychiatry, 1, 137-
 145.

- HERSOV, L. & BERG, I. (1980): Out of School. John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- HIBBETT, A. ET AL., (1990) : Future Lives of Truants: Family Formation and Health Related Behaviour. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 60, 171-179.
- HIRSCHI, T. (1971) : Causes of Delinquency. University of California Press, Los Angeles.
- HODGES, V. (1968) : Non-Attendance at School. Educational Research, 11, 58-61.
- HSIAH, H. (1984) : Structural and Strategic Approaches to School Phobia. Psychology in Schools, 21, 3, 360-367.
- HUSEN, T. ET AL., (1988) : International Encyclopaedia of Education, vol. 9, Pergamon Press.
- JACKSON, B. and (1962) : Education and the Working
MARSDEN, D. Class. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- JONES, A. (1980) : The School's View of Persistent Non-Attendance. From: Out of School, (eds) HERSOV, L. and BERG, I., John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- JONES, D. (1974) : The Truant. Concern, 14, London, National Children's Bureau.
- KAHN, J.H. (1964) : Unwilling to School.
NURSTEN, J. London, Pergamon Press.
- KELLY E.W. (1973) : School Phobia: A Review of Theory and Treatment. Psychology in School, 10, 33-42.
- KENNEDY, W.A. (1965) : School Phobia: Rapid Treatment of Fifty Cases. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 70, 285-9.
- KIRKPATRICK, M. and (1935) : Some Factors in Truancy.
LODGE, T. Mental Hygiene, 19.
- KUBE, B.A. ET AL., (1991) : A No-Nonsense Policy for School Attendance. The Education Digest, December, 67-69.
- LEVENTHAL, T. and (1964) : Self-Image in School Phobia.
SILLS, M. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 34, 685- 694.

- LICHT, G.L. ET AL., (1991) : Modifying School Attendance of Special Education High School Students. Journal of Educational Research, 84, 6, 368-373.
- MAJORIBANKS, K. (1984) : Occupational Status, Family Environment and Adolescent Aspiration. The Laosa Model, Journal of Educational Psychology, 1984, vol.76,no.4, 690-700.
- MARTIN, L.D. (1991) : Improving Student Attendance with Recognition. NASSP Bulletin, 75, 111-112.
- MASITHELA, N.J. (1992) : An Investigation of the Role that High School Teachers can play in Reducing Truancy in the Galeshewe area, with specific reference to Tlhomelang High School. M.Ed. dissertation, University of Natal.

- MAY, D. (1975) : Truancy, School Absenteeism and Delinquency. Scottish Educational Studies, 7, 2, 97-102.
- McELWEE, E.W. (1931) : A Study of Truants and Retardation. Journal of Juvenile Research, 15.
- MEI, D. ET AL., (1981) : High School Attendance Improvement Drop-out Prevention 1986-7: End of Year Report. New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn Office of Educational Assessment.
- McGUINNESS, J. (1974) : Out of School - What Next ?
From: Truancy, (ed.), TURNER, B.,
Ward Lock Educational, London.
- McNITT, G.D. (1983) : Excused and Unexcused Absences -
Setting the Limit. NASSP
Bulletin, 67, 467, 125.
- MILLER, D. (1986) : Fifty ways to Improve Attendance.
NASSP Bulletin, 70, 492, 74-79.

- MITCHELL, S. ET AL., (1980) : Reluctance to go to School From:
Out of School, (eds.),HERSOV, L.
and BERG, I., John Wiley and
Sons, Chichesters
- MITCHELL, S. (1967): The Child who dislikes
SHEPHERD, M. going to School. British Journal
of Educational Psychology, 37,
32-40.
- MOOS, R.H. ET AL., (1978) : Classroom Social Climate and
Student Absences and Grades.
Journal of Educational Psychology,
70, 263-269.
- MULLEN, F.A. (1950) : Truancy and Classroom Disorder as
Symptoms of Personality Problems.
Journal of Educational Psychology,
41, 97-109.
- MUSSEN, P.H. ET AL., (1969) : Child Development and Personality.
Third Edition, New York, Harper
and Row.
- NAFPAKTITUS, M. (1985) : Natural rates of teacher
ET AL., approval and disapproval and their
relation to student behaviour in
intermediate school classrooms.
Journal of Educational Psychology,
3, 362-367 .

- NAGLE, R.J. ET AL., (1979) : Truancy intervention among secondary special education students. School Psychology Digest, 8, 464-468.
- NAIDOO, M.S. (1957) : A study of truancy among the pupils in the Indian schools in the Clairwood area. M.Ed. dissertation, University of Natal.
- NASH, R. (1978) : Classrooms Observed. Routledge and Keegan, London.
- NATRIELLO, G. (1984) : Problems in the Evaluation of Students and Student Disengagement from Secondary schools. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 17, 4, 14-23.
- NEWMAN, F.M. (1980) : Reducing Student Alienation in High Schools: Implications of Theory. Harvard Educational Review.
- NIESWIADOMY, R.M. (1987) : Foundations of Nursing Research. Connecticut, Appleton and Lange.

- PACK COMMITTEE (1975) : Truancy and Indiscipline. Scottish Educational Journal, March, 256-258.
- PENNEBAKER, J.W. (1981) : Social Factors Affecting
ET AL., Absenteeism Due to Illness in
Nursery School Children. Child
Development, 52, 692-700.
- PETZKO, V.N. (1991) : School characteristics and
Attendance rates - What is their
relationship ? NASSP Bulletin, 75,
121-125.
- PHILLIPSON, M. (1971) : Sociological Aspects of Crime and
Delinquency. London, Routledge and
Kegan.
- PINKERTON, P. (1974) : Childhood Disorder. Crosby,
Lockwood, Staples, London.
- PITTMAN, R.B. (1991) : Social factors, enrolment in
vocational/technical courses, and
high school drop-out rates.
Journal of Educational Research,
84, 5, 288-295.

- POWERS, M.J. ET AL., (1972) : Neighbourhood School and Juveniles Before the Courts. British Journal of Crime, 12, 2, 111-132.
- PRINGLE, M.K. (1975) : The Needs of Children. London, Hutchinson Educational Ltd.
- RALPHSON, H. (1973) : School Absenteeism in a Remedial Department. Remedial Education, 8, 29- 32.
- RAMPHAL, R. (1979) : An investigation into the home background factors of a group of Indian children who are presenting behaviour problems at school. MA. Thesis, University of Durban-Westville.
- RANKIN, L. (1961) : Irregular Attendance of Children at School. Educational Review, 13, 121-126.
- REID, K. (1984) : The Behaviour of Persistent School Absentees. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 54, 320-330.

- REID, K. and
KENDALL, L. (1982) : A Review of some Recent
Research into Persistent School
Absenteeism. British Journal of
Educational Psychology, 30, 3,
295-310.
- REID, K. (1982) : The Self-Concept and Persistent
School Absenteeism. British
Journal of Educational Psychology,
52, 179-187.
- REID, K. (1981) : Alienation and Persistent School
Absenteeism. Research in
Education, 26, 31-40.
- REID, K. (1980) : Some Social, Psychological and
Educational Aspects related to
Persistent School Absenteeism.
Research in Education, 31, 63-82.
- REID, K. (1983) : Retrospection and Persistent
School Absenteeism. Educational
Research, 25, 2, 110-114.
- REID, K. (1985) : Truancy and School Absenteeism.
Hodder and Stoughton, Great
Britain.

- REID, K. (ed.) (1979) : Helping Troubled Pupils in Secondary Schools. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- REYNOLDS, D. (1976) : The Delinquent School. From: The Process of Schooling: A Sociological Reader, HAMMERSLEY, M. and WOODS, P. (eds.), London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- REYNOLDS, D. (1977) : Towards A Socio-Psychological View of Truancy. From: Working Together for Children and Families, KAHAN, B. (ed.), London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- REYNOLDS, D. and MURGATROYD, S.J. (1974) : Being Absent from School. British Journal Law Society, 1,1, 78-81.
- REYNOLDS, D. and MURGATROYD, S.J. (1977) : The Sociology of Schooling and the Absent Pupil: The School as a Factor in the Generation of Truancy. From: Absenteeism In South Wales, CARROLL, H.C.M. (ed.), Swansea, University College, Faculty of Education Journal.

- RIECK, W.A. (1984) : An Alternative Means for Improving Student Attendance. NASSP Bulletin, 68, 92-95.
- REYNOLDS, D. ET AL., (1980) : School Factors and Truancy. From: Out of School, (eds.), HERSOV, L. and BERG, I., John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- RIP, C. (1966) : Contemporary Social Pathology. Academia, Pty. Ltd., Pretoria.
- ROBINSON, W.P. (1975) : Boredom at School. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 45, 141-152.
- ROHRMAN, D. (1993) : Combating Truancy in our Schools - A Community Effort. NASSP Bulletin, 76, 549, 40-45.
- ROZELLE, R.M. (1968) : The Relationship Between Absenteeism and Grades. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 28, 1151-1158.
- RUBEN, A. (1989) : Research Methods for Social Work. Wadsworth Publishing Company, California.
- BABBIE, E.

- RUTTER, M. (1975) : Helping Troubled Children. Penguin Books, London.
- RUTTER, M. ET AL., (1974) : Attainment and Adjustment in Two Geographic Areas - Some Factors Accounting for Area Differences. British Journal of Psychiatry, 126,520-533.
- RUTTER, M. ET AL., (1979) : Fifteen Thousand Hours. London, Open Books.
- SAYER, J. (1987) : Why have you come to school today? A pathology of presence. From: Combating School Absenteeism, (ed.),REID, K., Hodder and Stoughton, London.
- SEABROOK, J. (1974) : Talking to Truants. From: Truancy, (ed.), TURNER, B., Ward Lock Educational, London.
- SENN, J. ET AL ., (1974) : Delinquent Behaviour and Academic Investment Among Suburban Youth. Adolescence, 9, 481-494.

- SCHLOSS, P.J. ET AL., (1981) : Truancy Intervention with Behaviour Disordered Adolescents. Behaviour Disorders, 6(3), 175-9.
- SLOMAN, S.S. (1954) : Vol. 18, Feb.(ch.4).
- SMERKA, T.J. (1993) : Promoting Perfect Attendance: One School's Approach. NASSP Bulletin, 7, 95-96.
- SMITH, H.W. (1975) : The Strategies of Social Research. Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- SOMMER, B. (1985): What's Different About Truants ? A Comparison Study of Eight-Graders. Journal of Youth and Adolescent, 14, 5, 411-422.
- STOLL, P. (1989) : Officially Present. London
 O'KEEFE, D. Institute of Economic Affairs.
- STOTT, D.H. (1966) : Studies of Troublesome Children. Tavistock, London.

- SULLIVAN, R. and RICHES, S. (1976) : "On your Marks." Interviews with Truants in East London. Youth Social Work Bulletin, 3,5, 8-10.
- TATTUM, D.P. (1982) : Disruptive Pupils and Units. John Wiley, Chichester.
- TENNENT, T.G. (1971) : School Non-Attendance and Delinquency. Educational Research, 13, 3, 185-190.
- TERRY, F. (1975) : Absence from School. Youth in Society, 11, 7-10.
- TIBBENHAM, A. (1977) : Housing and Truancy. New Society, 39, 501-502.
- TIMES EDUCATION (1986) : Runaway Success. December, 12
- TIMES EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT (1990) : Bewildered Land of the Rising Sun. March,9.
- TIMES EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT (1990) : Cops and Computers are new "kid-catchers". March,9.
- TURNER, B. (ed.) (1974) : Truancy. Ward Lock Educational, London.

- TRICKETT, E.J. and MOOS, R.H. (1973) : Social Environment of Junior High and High School Classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 65, 1, 93-102.
- TYACK, D.B. (1976) : *Ways of Seeing: An Essay on the History of Compulsory Schooling*. *Harvard Educational Review*, 46, 355-389.
- TYERMAN, M. (1974) : Who are truants ? From: *Truancy*, (ed.), TURNER, B., Ward Lock Educational, London.
- TYERMAN, M. (1968) : *Truancy*. University Press, London.
- TYERMAN, M. (1958) : A Research into Truancy. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 28, 217-225.
- VINCENT, D. ET AL., (1990) : An Effective Attendance Reward Policy That's Easy and Inexpensive. *NASSP Bulletin*, 74, 93-95.
- YULE, W. ET AL., (1980) : Behavioral Treatment in School Refusal. From: *Out of School*, (eds.), HERSOV, L. and BERG, I., John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.

- WALDFOGEL, S. ET AL., (1956) : The Development, Meaning and Management of School Phobia. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 27, 754-776.
- WEBB, E.J. ET AL., (1966) : Unobtrusive Measures in Non-Reactive Research in the Social Sciences. Rand McNally, Chicago.
- WEHLAGE, G.G. and (1986) : Dropping out: How much do Schools Contribute to the Problem? Teachers College Record, 87, 3, 375-392.
- RUTTER, R.A.
- WITHRINGTON, D. (1975) : Anxieties over Withdrawal from School: Historical Comment. Research Intelligence, 1, 20-22.
- WILSON, K.G. (1993) : Tough on Truants. American School Board Journal, 180, 4, 43-46.
- WHITEHEAD, L.E. (1980) : Student Absenteeism. ET AL., Education Canada, 20, 1, 28-31.
- YOUNG, A.J. (1947) : Truancy: A study of Mental, Scholastic and Social Conditions in the Problem of Non-Attendance at School. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 17, 50-1.

APPENDIX A

Dear Fellow Teacher

As your colleague and as a post-graduate student at the University of Durban-Westville, I appeal to you for your co- operation in a research study that will be of considerable benefit to all persons involved in the education process. I am presently engaged in researching Absenteeism and Truancy in the Tongaat area. The research aims to discover the reasons for frequent absenteeism among certain high school pupils and to suggest ways of improving attendance.

Your school has been selected to participate in this study. I would be grateful if you could fill in, as accurately as possible, the details required on the forms provided for each of ten children in your class. Be assured your responses will be STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. Please consider pupils only from standards 6 -9. After you have completed the questionnaire, please return the sealed file to your Principal.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

K.S. NAIDOO

4. Do you belong to a
1. two-parent family
 2. one-parent family
 3. no-parent family
5. Are your parents
1. Employed regularly
 2. Employed casually
 3. Unemployed.
6. Describe your parents state of health
1. Good
 2. Average
 3. Poor
7. Is your father/mother satisfied with you just the way you are?
1. I am pretty sure he/she is
 2. I am very sure he/she is
 3. I am sure he/she is not
 4. I am very sure he/she is not
 5. I do not live with my parents
8. Which of the following best describes your father's /mother's attitudes towards continuing school after this year?
1. Would like me to leave as soon as possible
 2. Would think me foolish to go to technikon
 3. Would think me foolish to go to university
 4. Would object to me leaving before matric.
9. How do your parents feel about you staying away from school?
1. I have never stayed away
 2. They do not know
 3. They do not care
 4. They approved
 5. I am not living with my parents

PERCEPTION OF PARENTS

10. How would you like to have your father's job?
1. I like it
2. I dislike it
3. I do not know
11. How would you like to have your mother's job?
1. I like it
2. I dislike it
3. I do not know
12. When you grow up and have your own family, how would you feel if you lived the same way your family does now?
1. Very satisfied
2. Somewhat satisfied
3. Somewhat dissatisfied
4. Very dissatisfied
13. How many of your problems do you talk over with your parents?
1. Some
2. All of them
3. Never
14. Have you defied your parent's authority?
1. Very often
2. Several times
3. No
15. I have often gone against my parent wishes
1. True
2. False
3. Do not know
16. My parents never really understood me
1. True
2. False
3. Do not know

17. Sometimes I feel like I want to leave home.

- 1. True
- 2. False
- 3. Do not know

18. How many of your friends do your parent's know?

- 1. Most of them
- 2. Some of them
- 3. Few of them
- 4. None of them

19. My parents often disapprove of my friends

- 1. True
- 2. False
- 3. Do not know

PART TWO

MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

20. Have you driven a car without a driver's licence?

- 1. No
- 2. Very often
- 3. Once or twice

21. Have you bought or drunk beer, wine, or liquor?

- 1. Very often
- 2. Several times
- 3. Once or twice
- 4. No

22. Have you purposely damaged property that did not belong to you?

- 1. No
- 2. Once or twice
- 3. Several times

23. Have you 'run away' from home?

- 1. No
- 2. Once
- 3. Twice

24. Did you ever cheat in a test or examination?

- 1. Yes
- 2. Never
- 3. Once or twice
- 4. More than two times

25. It's none of the school's business if the pupil wants to smoke outside the classroom

- 1. Agree
- 2. Disagree

PART THREE

SCHOOL AND SCHOOL-RELATED ISSUES:

ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL

26. I feel nervous and tense in school

- 1. Agree
- 2. Disagree

27. During my earlier school days I played truant quite often

- 1. True
- 2. False
- 3. Do not know

28. Did you play truant from school to spend time with a friend of the opposite sex?

- 1. Never
- 2. Once

29. I never cared much for school

- 1. True
- 2. False
- 3. Do not know

30. Some people of your age like going to school and some do not. How do you like school?

1. Like school a lot
2. Like school fairly well
3. Do not care
4. Dislike school

ALIENATION FROM SCHOOL:

31. I cannot make much sense of what happens at school

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain

32. I feel I am really a part of this school

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain

33. I feel helpless at school

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain

34. I feel lost and alone at this school.

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain

35. Life at school is confusing.

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain

36. The size of the school makes it difficult to get help.

1. Agree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain

RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS:

37. I would do better in school if teachers did not go so fast

- 1. Agree
- 2. Disagree

38. Teachers pick on me

- 1. Agree
- 2. Disagree

39. Teachers should give credit for effort

- 1. Agree
- 2. Disagree

40. What kind of work do teachers expect from you?

- 1. Excellent
- 2. Fair
- 3. Good
- 4. Poor

41. In earlier standards at school I gave the teachers lots of trouble.

- 1. True
- 2. False
- 3. Do not know

42. Do you dislike any teachers at school?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

43. Do you care what teachers think of you?

- 1. I care a lot
- 2. I care some
- 3. I do not care much

44. Is there any teacher in school that you feel you could go to if you needed advice?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

45. How many teachers seem to care how well you do?

1. Almost all
2. Many
3. A few
4. None

RULES AND PUNISHMENT

46. I have sometimes been to the Principal for misbehaving

1. True
2. False
3. Do not know

47. Do you feel school rules

1. Firm and just
2. Too lenient
3. Harsh
4. Stifling

PEER INFLUENCE

48. Have any of your friends quit school?

1. None
2. One
3. More than one

49. How would you describe your relationship with your class mates?

1. Good
2. Pleasant
3. Unpleasant
4. Superficial

HOMEWORK

50. How much time do you spend doing homework?

1. None or almost none
2. About half an hour
3. One or two hours
4. Three hours or more

THE CURRICULUM

51. Are there any courses that you think are a waste of time?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

52. Identify the courses _____

PART FOUR

PERCEPTION OF THE FUTURE

53. If you could have any job you wanted, what job would you like to have as an adult? _____

54. What do you think are your chances of getting that job?

- 1. Vey good
- 2. Good
- 3. Fair
- 4. Poor
- 5. Very Poor

55. Let's think a minute about school plans. How far would you like to go in school?

- 1. Leave as soon as I can
- 2. Finish high school
- 3. Go to a Technikon
- 4. Go to university

56. How far in school do you think you will actually go?

- 1. Leave as soon as I can
- 2. Finish high school
- 3. Go to technikon
- 4. Go to university

57. Realistically speaking, how good do you think are your chances of getting ahead and being successful?

- 1. Excellent
- 2. Fair
- 3. Somewhat limited
- 4. Not very good

58. The lines represent the activities that go on at your school. On which line would you place yourself ie. how far from the centre of things are you?



59. Now ring the number where you would like to be.



60. If you could be remembered here at school for one of the following, which one would you most want it to be?

1. A bright student.
2. A leader
3. Popular
4. Well dressed
5. Just average

APPENDIX C

Dear Parent

As a teacher at the Buffelsdale Secondary school and a post-graduate student at the University of Durban-Westville, I appeal to you for your co-operation in a research study that will be of considerable importance to education.

My research intends to discover why some pupils stay away from school regularly. As you are aware, frequent absenteeism hinders a child's progress at school and, in many cases such children eventually drop out. This creates problems for the parents, the school, the state and the child himself. The research will also suggest ways in which attendance can be improved.

You and your child have been selected to assist in this research. I require your permission to visit your home at some time convenient to you to speak about this problem. The interview should last about one hour. Be assured your responses will be STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

Please indicate in the space below whether you would agree or disagree to my interviewing you and return it to the class teacher. Should you agree, suitable dates and times will be arranged.

Thank you

K.S.NAIDOO

APPENDIX C (continued)

Please return this page to your child's class teacher.

I _____ ,

parent / guardian of _____ ,

grant / do not grant permission for the interview.

SIGNATURE

DATE