

# An In-Depth Inquiry into the Impact of Poor Teacher-Student Relationships on Chronic Absenteeism in Secondary Schools of West Java Province, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—The lack of awareness of the significant prevalence of school absenteeism in Indonesia, which ultimately results in high rates of school dropouts, is an unresolved issue. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the root causes of chronic absenteeism qualitatively and quantitatively using the bioecological systems paradigm in secondary schools for any reason. This study used an open-ended questionnaire to collect data from 1,148 students in six West Java Province districts/cities. Univariate and stepwise multiple logistic regression analyses produced a prediction model for the components. Analysis results show that poor teacher-student relationships, bullying by peers or teachers, negative perception of education, and lack of parental involvement in learning activities are the leading causes of chronic absenteeism. Another finding is to promote home-school partnerships to improve school climate and parental involvement in learning to address chronic absenteeism.

**Keywords**—Bullying, chronic absenteeism, dropout of school, home-school partnerships, parental involvement.

## I. INTRODUCTION

CHRONIC absenteeism can lead to an increasing disinterest in school and the chance of dropping out, which is a substantial issue within schools. Various definitions have been used to describe chronic absenteeism. The popular definition usually refers to students with an absence rate of 10% or above throughout one academic year, equivalent to around 18 or more missed school days [1]. Chronic absenteeism encompasses all instances of absence, regardless of whether they are excused or unexcused. Unexcused absence, also known as truancy, fails to accurately assess the issue of chronic absenteeism as it does not typically account for younger children who are missing without their parents' awareness [2]. However, chronic absenteeism in this study refers to students who have been absent from school for one month or longer or have missed more than 30 days during the school year for whatever reason.

The method of school climate encompasses the overall quality and nature of students' experiences inside the school environment. The relationship between students and teachers promotes the acceptance of students among their peers and teachers [3]. Thus, the present study aims to ascertain the underlying cause of the issue by examining the impact of school climate on chronic absence rates in West Java Province, Indonesia secondary schools. In addition, analyses of the relationship between school climate characteristics and chronic

absence rates are also incorporated.

## II. THE ECOLOGICAL OF SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM FACTORS

Multiple factors, including student and environmental characteristics and their interrelation, have been the subject of an abundance of research on chronic absenteeism. Many substantial risk factors indicate that chronic absence is a multifaceted condition. Each has provided different methods for involvement. This study utilized Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to examine the many levels of the school environment, including the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems, to identify the causes of chronic absence [4].

### A. The Micro-System Factors

The main micro-systems most impacting elementary school-age children are their family, home environment, and school [5]. In addition, the proximal process occurs in the immediate contexts around a student, known as the micro-system [6]. In order to clearly distinguish between the variables classified as micro- or meso-system, the risk and protective variables classified as "variables within the micro-system" specifically refer to the child and include factors such as the child's age, biological sex, race/ethnicity, and substance use [7]-[10].

### B. The Meso-System Factors

The term "meso-system" denotes the system comprising a child's micro-systems. Composition is determined by the interactions among the micro-systems that encircle the child [6]. Several issues in the meso-system, specifically between the school and family, have been identified as contributing to poor attendance rates [11], [12]. The main issue in the meso-system is the communication challenges between school staff and families. This leads to parents' need for more comprehension of important school attendance policies and procedures and contributes to their negative perceptions of the school system [5]. Furthermore, to differentiate variables related to the micro-system from those of the meso-system, the risk and protective variables within the meso-system refer to the child's interaction with immediate surrounding systems such as family and school. These variables include the child's perception of parental care or involvement in learning activities, experiences of adversity during childhood, or situations where the child pushed out from class due to disciplinary issues [7]-[9].

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### C. The Exo-System Factors

The exo-system comprises the micro-system and meso-system, yet without exerting a direct influence on the child. The exo-system comprises many elements, including transportation, classroom environment, school type, and organizational attributes within the institution [8]. The child's capacity to attend school is significantly influenced by their parents' employment schedules and responsibilities, particularly in relation to chronic absence. More precisely, parents with work schedules that led to them being either asleep or absent from home throughout the period when their children needed to wake up and get ready for school [5].

### D. The Macro-System Factors

According to Bronfenbrenner et al. [9], a macro-system is defined as "a system that differs in a fundamental way from the preceding forms in that it refers not to the specific contexts affecting the life of a particular person but to general prototypes, existing in the culture or subculture". Therefore, the macro-system covers broader cultural and institutional norms with socio-economic resources that affect the systems covered by the macro-system (e.g., cultural values, government policy, neighborhood). The micro-system and exo-system levels are related to the larger macro-system issues like housing, lack of transportation, and limited parental employment options, all of which relate to the economic and political system in which the families operate [8].

Within the Indonesian educational framework, "school climate" is related to the personal perspectives of faculty and staff concerning a multitude of elements associated with the institution. This concept encompasses four distinct dimensions: the relationship between students and staff/teachers, the atmosphere of safety and security, the standard of instruction and learning, and the physical surroundings of the school as a whole [13]. Furthermore, this concept explained that a measurement of school climate can be accomplished by considering four interconnected variables: (1) learning experience, which includes teacher support such as showing an interest in each student's learning, providing additional assistance when necessary, and persistently teaching until all students understand the subject matter; (2) school environment, which includes engagement, illustrated by deriving satisfaction from personal growth and improvement, truancy, indicated by cases of skipping classes, and a culture of competition, where students appear to place value on competing with one another; (3) relationships including familial assistance (e.g., experiencing a sense of belonging at school) and camaraderie among peers (e.g., feeling accepted within the school community); (4) safety factors involving one's mindset (e.g., recognizing that participating in bullying is morally incorrect) and instances of bullying (e.g., being subjected to physical aggression or mistreatment by fellow students). Furthermore, the results also indicate that truancy, non-verbal bullying, and mental bullying have a significant negative association with academic achievement [13].

Prior research conducted in Indonesia has indicated that schools need to establish a positive school environment to

enhance students' academic performance [13], [14]. Nevertheless, there is a need for more research investigating the correlation between school climate characteristics and the reduction of chronic absenteeism, primarily due to the lack of studies on the causes contributing to chronic absenteeism in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to identify the factors contributing to chronic absenteeism.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional design with a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches utilizing an online questionnaire to examine the factors that lead to chronic absenteeism. The study recruited 1,148 formal and non-formal education students in three cities and three regencies of West Java Province. The variable being measured is chronic absenteeism factors, whereas the variables used to assess it are related to the school climate within the bioecological systems paradigm. The *micro-system* factors include age, gender, home location, family size, siblings' order of birth, level of education, academic achievement, and the household head's educational attainment, which must be at least a university degree. The *meso-system* factors encompass the perspective of education, family participation, perception of teacher-student relationships, perception of teacher quality, inability to pay school fees, and bullying by peers or teachers. The *exo-system* factors include parental employment, transportation tools for going to school, school distance, time available for helping the family, and working while at school. The *macro-system* factors encompass government policies regarding cash assistance programs and living without parents' status.

Analyses were performed using Stata 17 for quantitative analysis (specifically logistic regression analysis) and Max Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) to conduct qualitative analysis (specifically content analysis). Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the characteristics of the sample of students with chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, a chi-square test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. Collinearity was diagnosed using the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) test. VIF values detected no multicollinearity among dependent variables. The determinant factors of OOSC were identified according to adjusted odds ratios with corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CI) and p-values < 0.05.

The equation for logistic regression analysis is derived as:

$$\ln\left(\frac{\pi}{1-\pi}\right) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \beta_n X_n, \quad (1)$$

where  $\pi$  is probability of chronic absenteeism;  $\beta_1 \dots \beta_n$  are regression coefficients indicating the relative effect of particularly dependent variables on the dependent variable,  $X_1 \dots X_n$  are independent variables.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. Participant's Characteristics

The comprehensive and gender-specific synopses of the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, and macro-system components are provided in Appendix I. Of the 1,148 children in the survey, 59.05% were girls, and the mean age of the participants was 16.53 years (SD = 2.07). More than 45% of children were not living with their parents, and 70.29% of them with chronic absenteeism in school. Of the 1,148 that participated in the survey, 40.41% were lower secondary school students, and 56.44% were upper secondary school students in three cities and three regencies in West Java Province, Indonesia.

##### B. Quantitative Analysis

The primary determinants of chronic absenteeism at the micro-system level in West Java Province, as shown in Table I,

are male gender (OR = 2.058), deviant behavior including illegal drug use (OR = 6.271), peer conflict (OR = 2.402), and school suspension (OR = 2.070). The absence of students residing with their parents was a factor in chronic absenteeism (OR = 2.294).

Table II presents the meso-system factors associated with chronic absenteeism: parental involvement in education (OR = 1.869\*\*\*), perception of student-teacher relationships (OR = 2.975\*\*\*), and peer or teacher bullying (OR = 2.589\*\*\*). Perception of education is associated with an odds ratio of 2.722%.

The exo-system chronic absenteeism factors, as shown in Table III, include time spent assisting family members with household chores and daily business after school (OR = 0.209\*\*\* and OR = 1.681\*\*\*, respectively), school distance exceeding 10 km (OR = 1.544\*), school type (public school) (OR = 0.552\*\*\*), and working while attending school (OR = 1.695\*\*\*).

TABLE I  
THE MICRO-SYSTEM CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FACTORS

Variables	Odds Ratio
Gender (male = 1, female = 0)	2.058*** (0.494)
Age	1.237*** (0.082)
Home location (urban = 1, rural = 0)	1.007 (0.237)
Family size (big = 1, small = 0)	1.043 (0.052)
Siblings' order of birth	0.911 (0.078)
Level education (lower secondary school = 1, upper secondary school = 0)	0.653*** (0.168)
Academic performance (low = 1, high = 0)	1.614 (0.515)
Household head education at least university degree	0.954 (0.477)
Mother's education attainment at least University degree (Yes = 0, No = 1)	2.666*** (0.785)
Deviant Behavior:	
a) Fought with peers (yes = 1, no = 0)	2.402*** (0.663)
b) Using illegal drugs (yes = 1, no = 0)	6.271*** (4.363)
c) Suspend from school (yes = 1, no = 0)	2.070** (0.628)
d) Smoking/drinking alcohol	1.086 (0.542)
Not living with parents (yes = 1, No = 0)	2.294*** (0.619)

Note: \*\*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*\*p ≤ 0.05, and \*p ≤ 0.1.

TABLE II  
THE MESO-SYSTEM CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FACTORS

Variables	Odds Ratio
Perception of education (negative = 1, positive = 0)	2.722*** (1.039)
Perception of parental involvement in education:	1.869*** (0.410)
a) Your Parent ever talked/discussed with teacher about your academic performance/activities in school (no = 1, yes = 0)	1.387 (0.633)
b) Your Parent encourage you to study well in school (no = 1, yes = 0)	1.065 (0.105)
c) Your Parent helping your homework at home (no = 1, yes = 0)	
Perception of teacher-student relationships (poor = 1, good = 0)	2.975*** (1.076)
In ability to pay school fees (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.720 (0.160)
Bullied by peers or teachers (yes = 1, no = 0)	2.589*** (0.602)

Note: \*\*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*\*p ≤ 0.05, and \*p ≤ 0.1.

TABLE III  
THE EXO-SYSTEM AND MACRO-SYSTEM CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FACTORS

Variables	Odds Ratio
Time helping family with household chores (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.209*** (0.119)
Time helping family with daily business (yes = 1, no = 0)	1.681* (0.486)
Father's occupation (employment = 1, unemployment = 0)	1.420 (0.389)
Mother's occupation (employment = 1, unemployment = 0)	0.800 (0.173)
School distance over 10 km (yes = 1, no = 0)	1.544* (0.372)
School type (public = 1, private = 0)	0.552*** (0.119)
Working while at school (yes = 1, no = 0)	1.695** (0.257)
Government's cash transfer program (unreceived = 1, received = 0)	1.152 (0.257)

Note: \*\*\*p ≤ 0.01, \*\*p ≤ 0.05, and \*p ≤ 0.1.

The multivariate analysis of school climate according to the micro-System, meso-System, exo-System, and macro-System is presented in Table IV. The main factors of chronic absenteeism are deviant behavior using illegal drugs (OR = 6.271), not living with parent (OR = 3.321), fought with peers

(OR = 2.402), perception of education (OR = 2.393), bullied by peers (OR = 2.221), perception of teacher-student relationships (OR = 1.951), and time helping family with daily business (OR = 1.916).

TABLE IV  
THE ECOLOGICAL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FACTORS

Variables	Odds Ratio
The micro-system factors	
Gender (male = 1, female = 0)	2.002*** (0.486)
Mother's education attainment at least University degree (Yes = 0, No = 1)	2.071** (0.785)
Deviant Behavior:	
a) Fought with peers (yes = 1, no = 0)	2.402*** (0.663)
b) Using illegal drugs (yes = 1, no = 0)	6.271*** (4.363)
c) Suspend from school (yes = 1, no = 0)	2.070** (0.628)
Not living with parents (yes = 1, No = 0)	3.321*** (0.839)
The meso-system factors	
Perception of education (bad = 1, good = 0)	2.393** (1.028)
Perception of parental involvement in education:	
Your parents ever talked/discussed with teacher about your development/activities in school (no support = 1, support = 0)	1.586* (0.393)
Bullied by peers or teachers (yes = 1, no = 0)	2.221*** (0.567)
Perception of teacher-student relationships (poor = 1, good = 0)	1.951* (0.753)
The exo-system factors	
Time Helping Family with household chores	0.205*** (0.125)
Time Helping Family with daily business	1.916** (0.299)

Note: \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , and \* $p \leq 0.1$ .

### C. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis is employed better to understand the quantitative analysis results in greater depth. 65 out of 101 chronically absent children were male at the micro-system level. Additionally, 62 children attend private schools, while 39 attend public schools. A correlation exists between chronic absenteeism and deviant behavior in children. For instance, among the 101 children surveyed, 39 have engaged in peer fights at school, 15 have used tobacco or alcohol, eight have used illegal substances, and 28 have been suspended from school for disobeying school regulations.

Concerning familial situations, it was found that among the 101 children with chronic absenteeism, 49 were from poor households, 30 excluded living with their parents, 25 did not have school supplies, 20 had unemployed fathers, and 22 were required to spend time for earn money to support their parent. Regarding parental involvement, 12 students admitted that their parents would be present at school if they received a phone call from a teacher informing them that their child had violated school regulations. In comparison, 49 students admitted that their parents were never present at school to discuss academic progress and activities with teachers.

Concerning school situations, 50 of the 100 children with chronic absenteeism in school admitted to being bored with the learning process in class and the school environment; 19 children reported having difficulty understanding lessons; 12 children said they struggled with particular lessons; and 16 children said the teacher failed to motivate them. Meanwhile, 36 students reported being bullied by their peers, 20 students disclosed that they had poor relationships with their teachers, and 16 students admitted that they frequently received different kinds of treatment in class, including public humiliation or bullying at the hands of the teacher. Then, nine students

reported that their teacher was frequently absent from class and left assignments to be completed.

According to data collected from 101 students with chronic absenteeism, the following are the outcomes:

1. 31 students completed their education level but did not pursue further studies.
2. 55 students ultimately dropped out of school.
3. 15 students are enrolled in school at this time.

The responses provided by four students in response to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire of children who are dropping out of school are as follows:

"Since my family is poor, I struggle to pay my school fees. I received government assistance via the Family Hope program; however, the Smart Indonesia program does not extend any support. There are specific lessons that I find difficult to understand and dislike. Also, the teacher was frequently absent from class, and my academic performance was poor. My lack of academic motivation comes from the influence of my peers who dropped out of school. During my absences from school, I worked to be helpful financially to my family". Participant 1

"Since I wasn't accepted to the public school of my choice, I was required to attend a private school far away from my domicile; as a result, I stayed with another family member and far away from my parents. I am tired during the learning process and dislike particular subjects. My parents ignore my academics because I do not reside with them. In addition, I frequently receive differential treatment from teachers in the classroom and engage in conflicts with my peers. In response to the punishment, I received a suspension from the teacher, which caused our relationship to worsen. As a result of social interactions

and infrequent absences from school, I became dependent on alcohol and illegal substances. My parents were finally invited to the school, where I was threatened with expulsion or a recommendation to transfer to another school; however, I ultimately opted to drop out". Participant 2

"My family is poor; contrary to some of my peers, I don't have school supplies. I engaged in fights with my peers at school because he was bullying me. Following that, my parents received a call to school, and I was suspended. Since then, I have no desire to attend class and frequently skip lessons without telling my parents". Participant 3

"The classroom learning process is boring, and I dislike my school environment." Due to situations beyond my control, including living with my grandmother following the death of one of my parents and the lack of attention from my guardians, my academic performance declined to the extent that I lost interest in attending, frequent absences resulted in suspensions, and ultimately I dropped out my schooling". Participant 4

#### V. DISCUSSIONS

Chronic absenteeism is influenced by various risk factors, including the individual characteristics of children, their surrounding environment, and the interactions that occur within those situations. The bioecological model was a suitable framework for investigating absenteeism behaviors since it offered a comprehensive theoretical approach, previously lacking in studies on chronic absenteeism, to understand students' chronic absenteeism [7], [15].

Based on this study, children who participate in deviant activities, such as drug use and fights with their classmates, are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism at the micro-system level. If this happens in the school environment, the student will be subject to disciplinary actions enforced by the school, which could involve suspension. These findings indicate that drug usage is a current factor linked to school absenteeism [16], [17]. A study on the prevalence of drug usage among youngsters in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic used participants ranging in age from 13 to 20 years and revealed temporal fluctuations in drug use. The prevalence of substance use differs among various types of substances, with alcohol consumption exhibiting the highest rate, followed by cigarette usage and, ultimately, drug consumption. Adolescence is characterized by asserting independence, the importance of social connections, and exploring life choices [18]. The pandemic-induced financial and social upheavals may heighten teenagers' vulnerability to elevated risks. Consequently, a favorable school climate may prevent the beginning of substance use and enhance academic achievement [13], [19].

The logistic regression analysis in this study reveals that, in addition to deviant behavior, children not living with their parents is a significant factor at the micro-system level. The findings of the qualitative analysis indicate that children who are not living with their parents lack sufficient educational

support and cannot effectively communicate their school-related issues to their parents, including problems with peers and deteriorating relationships with teachers. Hence, the student's perception of discomfort in school increases the likelihood of being absent. The characteristics of children who do not reside with their parents ultimately influence the development of micro-system factors in the study mentioned previously.

Previous studies have established a strong correlation between poor teacher-student relationships and low academic performance [5]. Nevertheless, the results of this study suggest that students' perception of teacher-student relationships plays a substantial role in their chronic absenteeism, particularly in the meso-system factors. Furthermore, this study reveals that students who were victims of bullying are more likely to be absent from school, which is an additional aspect of the meso-system level.

Previous studies [20], [21] discovered a positive correlation between poor teacher-student relationships and both active bullying and behavior that encourages bullying. Hence, the school setting, particularly positive student-teacher connections, has a little more significant influence in deterring deviant behavior, such as drug addiction and other forms of misconduct [19].

Moreover, the novelty of the findings in this study indicates that students' negative perceptions of education have a vital role in shaping the development of meso-system factors. Student's negative perceptions towards education, such as their unwillingness to go to school and the view that school is a waste of time, contribute to a higher probability of chronic absenteeism.

Nevertheless, school climate is not the only factor determinant in mitigating strange behavior problems inside schools. Parental involvement is well recognized as having several significant benefits, such as effectively addressing behavioral issues in the school setting [13], [22]. Increased parental involvement in their children's education facilitates contact with school staff regarding their children's adaptation and conduct. It accelerates a more comprehensive comprehension of children's social challenges in schools by promoting and strengthening positive behaviors within the home environment. Additionally, it enables the resolution of students' behavioral issues and concerns, including instances of violence and lack of discipline in school, particularly chronic absenteeism.

#### VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study employed the bioecological systems paradigm to identify the main factors of chronic absenteeism in West Java Province, explicitly focusing on the school environment. The micro-system factors, determined through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, include deviant behavior such as substance usage and engaging in fights with peers, which have led to the individual being suspended from school. Moreover, the meso-system factors, such as poor teacher-student relationships, a poor perception of education, lack of parental involvement in school, and bullying by peers or teachers, contribute to

students' chronic absence. Thus, implementing a program that promotes positive relationships between teachers and students and fosters parental involvement in home-school partnerships may prevent chronic absenteeism and other deviant behavior.

This study is limited to examining the perceptions of students

in Indonesia on both formal and non-formal education, as collected by a questionnaire. Further investigation is required to explore the effectiveness of home-school partnership programs in decreasing chronic absenteeism, as perceived by children, parents, teachers, and school administrators.

#### APPENDIX 1

TABLE V

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARIES OF THE MICRO-SYSTEM, MESO-SYSTEM, EXO-SYSTEM, AND MACRO-SYSTEM FACTORS

Variables	Obs	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
<b>Dependent variable</b>					
Chronic absenteeism	1,148	0.087	0.283	0	1
<b>Independent variables</b>					
<i>The micro-system</i>					
Gender	1,148	0.409	0.491	0	1
Age	1,148	16.532	2.076	13	21
Home location	1,148	0.472	0.499	0	1
Family size	1,148	5.628	2.176	3	23
Siblings order of birth	1,148	2.333	1.523	1	12
Level education	1,148	0.595	0.490	0	1
Academic performance	1,148	0.737	0.440	0	1
Household head education at least university degree	1,148	0.089	0.285	0	1
Mother's education attainment at least university degree	1,148	0.086	0.280	0	1
<b>Deviant behaviors:</b>					
a) Fought with peers	1,148	0.121	0.327	0	1
b) Using illegal drugs	1,148	0.010	0.101	0	1
c) Suspended from school	1,148	0.103	0.304	0	1
d) Smoking/drinking alcohol	1,148	0.032	0.176	0	1
Not living with parents	1,148	0.413	0.492	0	1
<i>The meso-system</i>					
<b>Perception of education</b>					
<b>Perception of parental involvement in education:</b>					
a) Your Parent ever talked/discussed with teacher about your academic performance/activities in school	1,148	0.039	0.194	0	1
b) Your Parent encourage you to study well in school	1,148	0.531	0.224	0	1
c) Your Parent helping your homework at home	1,148	2.077	1.088	0	1
<b>Perception of teacher-student relationships</b>					
Inability to pay school fees	1,148	0.471	0.499	0	1
Bullied by peers or teachers	1,148	0.181	0.385	0	1
<i>The exo-system</i>					
Time helping family with household chores	1,148	0.983	0.127	0	1
Time helping family with daily business	1,148	0.721	0.448	0	1
Father's occupation	1,148	0.137	0.344	0	1
Mother's occupation	1,148	0.628	0.483	0	1
School distance over 10 km	1,148	0.195	0.396	0	1
School type	1,148	0.539	0.498	0	1
Working while at school	1,148	0.410	0.492	0	1
<i>The macro-system</i>					
Government's cash transfer program	1,148	0.610	0.487	0	1

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