

Researcher finds factors linked with chronic school absenteeism

June 6 2023, by Brian Consiglio



Chronic school absenteeism. Credit: University of Missouri

More than 7 million school-age children, or 16% of the student population, in the United States are missing at least 15 days of school during an academic year—an issue known as chronic absenteeism.

To identify the most common factors linked with chronic [school](#) absenteeism, Knoo Lee, a postdoctoral fellow in the University of

Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing, analyzed survey results from the Minnesota Student Survey, which included responses from more than 120,000 Minnesota students in eighth, ninth and 11th grade.

In this anonymous, statewide, school-based survey, which is distributed to more than 100,000 public school students in Minnesota every three years, a myriad of questions broadly cover various topics, including the frequency of students missing school, school climate, bullying, out-of-school activities, [emotional health](#) and connections with school and family.

Using data-driven analytics including machine learning techniques, Lee and his team identified 18 [risk factors](#) that were predominantly linked with students who reported missing school commonly. Some of the risk factors included drug or [alcohol use](#), [peer pressure](#) and the approval of friends, staying home due to sickness, behavioral issues that may lead to out-of-school suspensions, family struggles, and adverse childhood experiences.

While researchers were aware of some of these factors, the challenge is untangling the cause and effect.

"Are these activities causing the [student](#) to miss school, or is there a different underlying root issue causing the absences and these activities are simply the outcome or byproduct?" Lee said. "The first step toward solving a problem is getting a better understanding of the problem in the first place, and that is what we are trying to dig into with this research. We want to ultimately develop more tailored interventions that improve student engagement, which lead to better long-term life outcomes."

Going forward, Lee plans to research if students with partial-day or full-day absences are more likely to struggle with chronic absenteeism, as well as the role school nurses play in identifying at-risk youth.

"Through interviews with school nurses, we are learning that some kids who miss part of the school day are more likely to go see the school nurse first before they come to class or before they leave school for the day," Lee said. "We typically tend to think of school nurses as only helping kids with physical health related issues, but they also interact with students who may be struggling with a family issue or mental health issue. Therefore, they are in a good position to possibly identify personal factors, family factors or environmental factors that may be at play."

"Using data-driven analytics and ecological systems theory to identify risk and protective factors for school absenteeism among secondary students" was recently published in the *Journal of School Psychology*

More information: Knoo Lee et al, Using data-driven analytics and ecological systems theory to identify risk and protective factors for school absenteeism among secondary students, *Journal of School Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jsp.2023.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2023.03.002)

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