

All types of school absences can be damaging to exam results and career prospects: UK Report

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Credit: Pavel Danilyuk from Pexels

Even moderate levels of school absence, not just extreme absences, can have a negative impact on exam results and career prospects, but they

are frequently overlooked, according to a University of Strathclyde [report](#).

In England, [pupils](#) with consistently moderate absences across schooling were found to account for more than a quarter of all pupils and to be 8.7 percentage points less likely than those with consistently low absences to gain five or more GCSEs.

The report on the short-term and long-term impact of absence in England, Wales, and Scotland, found that, while absences at all levels of education are detrimental, those occurring during the transition from primary to [secondary school](#) had the greatest impact on achievement. Absenteeism has an impact on [educational attainment](#), in part because it increases risky and problem behaviors in students while decreasing educational motivation.

Another finding was that absences not only affect [academic achievement](#) but also reduce students' chances of entering the labor force after they leave school.

Targeted strategies

The problem of absenteeism has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the researchers have called for it to be addressed at all levels, not solely in cases where it is persistent, and with equal emphasis on authorized and unauthorized absences.

In addition, they recommend targeted strategies to reduce absenteeism and "break the cycle" of disadvantage by addressing the underlying causes of absenteeism. These should include physical and mental health screenings and interventions for students, which have become increasingly important since the pandemic began.

Commenting on findings from the detailed report, Dr. Markus Klein, of the Strathclyde Institute of Education, co-leader of the study with his colleague, Professor Edward Sosu, said, "The current policy focus is on persistent or unauthorized absences, which means moderate and authorized absences are not being targeted. Our findings show that they should receive the same level of attention.

"All pupils should be supported to improve their attendance, and in catching up on missed learning during the period of absence. The benefit of this support is likely to extend to pupil behavior and educational motivation.

"This is particularly important at the time when pupils are making the transition from primary school to secondary, where they are dealing with a new school environment, a new curriculum, new teachers and fellow pupils.

Dr. Emily Tanner, program head at the Nuffield Foundation said, "The long-term detrimental effects of missing school identified in this report are deeply concerning following another year of high absence rates. We need a better understanding of the complex reasons for school absence in order to develop effective solutions."

The research examined data from the 1970 British Cohort Study, which tracks more than 17,000 people born in England, Wales, and Scotland in that year, the Millennium Cohort Study, which follows around 19,000 people born in the U.K. between 2000 and 2002, and school administrative data from England, Wales, and Scotland.

More information: Report: [Understanding School Attendance, Educational Attainment, and Labour Market Outcomes](#)

Provided by University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

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