

Age: A Determinant of Employee Absenteeism in Trans Nzoia County

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Abstract

Employee absenteeism is a persistent problem in many countries; it tends to reduce the quality of education and results in poor performance of students. Despite the extensive research on the subject of personal characteristic and absenteeism, little has been done in schools in spite of its importance. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of personal characteristics on employee absenteeism in Transnzoia County. The specific objectives of the study was; to determine the relationship between gender and employee absenteeism, to determine the relationship between age and employee absenteeism, to establish the relationship between educational level and employee absenteeism, and to establish the relationship between marital status and employee absenteeism. Social exchange theory grounded the study. A survey research design was used for this study. The institutions studied were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The two strata considered are public and private secondary schools. A linear regression model was constructed to establish the relationship between employee absenteeism and personal characteristics from each institution that was sampled, the respondents was the head of the institution and employees. The personal characteristics was identified as the independent variable, while absenteeism as the dependent variable. Data was analyzed statistically using SPSS version 19. Both descriptive and inferential statistics was used to test the hypotheses. The study found that age had a positive significant effect on absenteeism, educational level of the employee has no significant effect absenteeism and marital status had a positive significant effect on absenteeism. The results of the study form the basis for better management of institutions. The findings of this research is important to management of academic institutions who will find vital direction when making decisions related to recruitment, selection training and staff development processes.. These institutions should consider personal factors when selecting and recruiting staff as the results suggest that personals factors plays a role in employees absenteeism. The study suggests that future research could consider ways of reducing bias by controlling for the contribution of other factors to the employees absenteeism and use of longitudinal design is recommended to adequately examine the causal status of personal factors on absenteeism.

Keywords: age, absenteeism, recruitment, personal characteristics, employee

INTRODUCTION

For decades business and industry have struggled with the problem of employee absenteeism, a fact that is supported by the vast body of literature that addresses the issue. In fact, absenteeism and turnover are the two most frequent outcomes studied in organizational research (Long and Ormsby, 2001). One of the key pillars of Vision 2030 in Kenya is provision of quality education for all. School systems have been engaged in a system of educational reform designed to change school culture and to improve student achievement. That reform is fueled by a level of accountability that includes not only the performance of the students, but also the performance of the employees and the administrators. Schools must meet stricter qualifications for the quality of their teaching staff and for their performance. Some of the greatest challenges facing the schools include hiring and retaining qualified

employees, maintaining excellent curricula, providing the necessary resources, providing continual professional development of the staff, and procuring the necessary financial resources to meet these challenges.

Employee absenteeism has the potential to be very costly, not only in terms of finances, but also in terms of student achievement. First, the financial cost of employee absenteeism is significant. Second, employee absence often means that students have lost opportunities to learn. Studies have shown that employee absence translates to lower student achievement (Miller, *et al.*, 2007; Clotfelter, 2007). Further, employee absences disrupt the routines and relationships which support the learning process (Miller, *et al.*, 2007). Third, student achievement gaps in the less developed countries exist partially because of employee absence (Clotfelter, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of employee absenteeism is of growing concern. Grant (2001) called excessive absenteeism among school personnel one of the most neglected problems in public education. While employee absenteeism is widely recognized as a serious problem, there is surprisingly little systematic data as to the pervasiveness or extent of the problem in Kenya. In the current economic conditions in our Nation, and the emphasis of using education (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 1991; to attain the Vision 2030 goals and the difficulty principals have in hiring extremely well-qualified employees, it is important that researchers be able to identify causes of employee absenteeism in order to develop and provide solutions to this eminent problem. Consequently, most of the data as to the pervasiveness of the problem is anecdotal but none-the-less real. There is widespread consensus that employee absenteeism is a major threat. In Kenya a study by Mugambi (2001) shows that employee absenteeism contributes, to a greater extent, to poor performance in national exams. Perennial shortage of employees in many schools possesses undue pressure on employee in schools because of excessive workload in form of lessons assigned. While research has clearly demonstrated that employee absence has a negative effect on student achievement Clotfelter, 2007; Miller *et al.*, 2007), the research has not been as demonstrative about the causes or predictors of employee absence. Conflicting evidence exists about the effects of characteristics such as gender, age, experience, time of week and school culture. For instance, some studies have shown that female employees are absent more frequently than male employees (Scott, 1990; Clotfelter, 2007), while others have found that men are absent more frequently than women (Chaudhury, *et al.*, 2006) or that there will be no association between absenteeism and gender (Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2005). The results of various studies appear to be contextual in nature, and therefore, are inconclusive for the environs in which they were conducted. As a result, there was need to do a study of the employee absence behaviors in the Kenyan context with special attention on age as a determinant of absenteeism.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Absenteeism is often explained by psychologists as a pain-avoidance mechanism (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Rhodes and Steers, 1978), by sociologists as a consequence of organizational socialization and prevailing absence culture (Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson, & Brown, 1982; Hill & Trist, 1953), and by economists as a way for employees to restore the balance of effort-reward ratios or as a way for workers to make trade-offs between labor and leisure (Allen, 1981; Gowler, 1969).

Even with these theories, both Nicholson (1977) and Steers and Rhodes (1978) concluded that much of the research on absenteeism has only led to speculation and propositions applied ex post facto to case studies and vague conceptual frameworks. It seems that in many instances, empirical studies were formulated not to test a given theory but to search for absenteeism correlates among variables for which measures were available.

Social exchange theory presented a case for the theory of absenteeism that is social, not individual in emphasis Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, (1982). The first step Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, (1982) assumed the interdependency of members of work organizations. It seems obvious that individuals do have some mutual obligations to peers, subordinates, and superiors (as well as other relationships outside the work situation). In this context the rights and duties of individuals are both subject to, and representative of, a set of rules about activities in the work situation. What individuals do is therefore likely to be in answer to, on behalf of, in defense of, as well as achieving a compromise with the rules of the group.

The second assumption made by Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, (1982), is that under the employment contract, some form of social exchange is taking place between employers and employees. Whatever they exchange in this situation – whether its their time, effort, or skill or money, security, congenial friends, or anything else - it was only what is possible for employees in the organization. Exchanges were conceived as between individuals and work groups, or between work groups and management, but it would not be realistic to conceive of the exchange between ‘the individual’ and ‘the organization’ while disregarding the social conditions and rules. In summary, then, the group is in the equation – on one or both sides – and the explanation use must recognize it.

Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, (1982) think of social exchange between employees and employers as developing in, or as revealed by, a pattern of behaviour in the work situation that includes absences with all the other factors that constitute the contract, formal and informal, between employers and employees. Formal factors include pay, hours, disciplinary rules, job duties, and promotion lines. Informal ones include supervisory styles, peer group relations, and – salient to their analysis – absence from work. Chadwick-Jones *et al.*, (1982) however, do point out that absences may not enter into the exchange at all, insofar as some employees or employee groups, especially those with higher status – supervisors in factories, managers in banks – are absent very little or hardly at all. It is quite possible, however, that managers possess greater control

over the allocation of their working time and may take periods of 'time out' that are not recorded. Absenteeism levels reflect the social exchange within an organization and that it is 'agreed' behavior. This implies that employees understand that their absences should fall within certain limits and, therefore, those employees' decisions to be absent or to attend conform to a normative frequency level (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982). Employees can be expected to have a definite notion of the appropriate frequency and duration of their absences. The question for them is not only whether to be absent today, but how often they have already been absent in this month or year. This study therefore hypothesized that:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Age and employee absenteeism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Examination of the effects of age on employee absenteeism is often confounded by the inclusion of other factors in the results. Findings are often contradictory as a result. For instance, Scott's (1990) study of junior and senior high school employees found that age will be a significant factor in predicting the absence of men and women during the child bearing years. On the other hand, Unicom *et al* (1992). found that the number of absences claimed by female employees increased with age and that male employees claimed more days in their thirties than at any other age. In their study of employees in Maltese secondary schools, Borg and Riding (1991), found that employees under 31 years of age had a higher frequency of absenteeism than employees in any other age category. In their study of employees in Israeli elementary and middle schools, Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005), found that employees who were absent more frequently tended to be younger and less educated. According to Robbins et al. (2003) available research indicates that married and older employees have fewer absences than their unmarried co-workers. The authors postulate that marriage imposes increased responsibilities that make a job more valuable and important, therefore married employees will be less likely to miss work. The question of causation however, remains unclear as it is possible that unmarried employees might also report low levels of absenteeism, given that absenteeism is dependent on different factors.

METHODOLOGY

According to Kerlinger (1973) research design is the plan and structure of investigation so conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions. The research was based upon the philosophical and methodological foundations of logical positivism. A logical positivist

researcher deduces and formulates variables and hypotheses and operationalizes definitions based on existing theory. Contemporary social science research is dominated by logical positivism (Hayes, 2002). This study was quantitative in nature and will employ an explanatory research design. Explanatory research design was chosen as the most suitable method for this study because of the need to gain an understanding of the broader contexts of the relationships among the research variables. Explanatory research is used for understanding phenomenon in terms of likely causes. Explanatory research implies that the research in question is intended to explain, rather than simply to describe, the phenomena studied (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2008). Most social scientists seek causal explanations that reflect tests of hypotheses. Causal effect occurs when variation in one phenomenon, an independent variable, leads to or results, on average, in variation in another phenomenon, the dependent variable (Somekh and Lewin, 2005).

Stratified random sampling method was used for the purposes of this study so as to obtain a true representation of the population that was heterogeneous. Stratification was based on the type of school the employees are working in as either private or public schools. Thus the strata considered for this study was public and private schools. The respondents for this study were obtained from each stratum using a random table by Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins (2001). After using the stratified random sampling to obtain the number of institutions for each sample, simple random sampling was used to obtain the respondents for each stratum. Age was measured by the number of years while absenteeism was captured by considering the frequency of the employee being away from workplace without official permission.

RESULTS

Out of the 112 teachers who were expected to participate in the study 81 (72%) responded by completing and returning the questionnaire. The respondents were required to provide information about their gender, work experience, age, and education. The gender distribution of the survey respondents was 42.5% female and 57.5% male. Considering age; 12.7% were in the age bracket 20-30, 12.7% age bracket 31-40, 41.7% age bracket 41-50, and 32.9% were above 50 years old. The results indicated that majority of the respondents were in the age bracket 31-40. The educational level for the managers indicated that 6.6% had masters, 83% had degree level, 6.6% had diploma level and 3.8% had other qualifications. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	
Age	20-30	7.5
	31-40	13.2
	41-50	36.8
	Above 50 years	42.5
	Totals	100.0
Gender	Male	57.5
	Female	42.5
	Totals	100.0
Education Level	Master's degree	6.6
	Degree	83.0
	Diploma	6.6
	Others: CPA,CPS	3.8
	Total	100.0

Correlation analysis was done to determine relationships between the study variables. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used. This test was done as a precursor to regression analysis so as to determine whether the variables were linearly related. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 1. It was established that there was a significant positive relationship between age and absenteeism ($r = 0.459, p = 0.000$).

Table 1: Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Absenteeism	1				
2. Age	.459**	1			
3. Experience	.065	-.003	1		
4. Gender	.013	-.025	-.466**	1	
5. Education	-.017	-.096	.087	.213	1

The control variables of experience, gender and educational level were regressed against absenteeism. The results showed that experience ($\beta = -0.083, p = .470$) and education level ($\beta = -.032, p = .751$) had a negative and statistically non-significant effect on absenteeism, while gender was found to be negative and statistically non-significant ($\beta = -.023, p = .837$) as shown in appendix (table 5). After controlling for age gender and educational level, regression was done for direct effects and the results are presented in Table 1. The results of the regression analysis ($\beta = .653, p > 0.05$) suggested that age had a positive significant effect on absenteeism. The finding suggests that as the older the employee, the higher the level of absenteeism.

Table 2: Regression Results

Controls		Absenteeism
Constant		3.716(.416)*
Experience		.024(.083)
Gender		-.042(.150)
Education		-.126(.127)
Model 1		
Constant		.840(.705)*
Age		.653(.126)*
F Statistic		6.934
R		.464
R ²		.215
Adj. R ²		.184
Durbin-Watson		1.396

Source: Survey data (2015)

Values of standardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parenthesis while * $p < 0.05$ indicates the value is significant at 95%.

CONCLUSION

Absenteeism is one of the most important issues to be resolved by an organization, due to its serious costs. Age is one of the most studied demographic factors for absenteeism. Most studies report a positive relationship between age and absenteeism among employees in general. Older workers will exhibit a higher absence rate because of a higher job commitment and a poor person-organization fit that emerges over time (Martocchio, 1994; Kristensen, 1991; Harrison and Martocchio, 1998). Absenteeism not only damages the workflow and manpower planning in the workplace, but also reduces production efficiency. When the production efficiency of company falls off, competitiveness of the company is negatively affected. Top management team needs to avoid these consequences, starting by identifying factors causing the absences and then must think ways to eliminate these factors determined. From this point of view, the findings of this study have demonstrated that age has a positive significant effect on employee absenteeism. According to the results of multiple regression analysis, the older the employee, the greater the absenteeism.

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