

2009 International Campbell Collaboration (C2) Colloquium

Submitter Information

Bernd Weiss

Email: bernd.weiss@wiso.uni-koeln.de

Abstract Information

Abstract Title:

The Prevalence of Unexcused School Absenteeism in Germany: A Meta-Analysis

Format:

Paper

Themes:

truancy school meta-analysis

Authors:

Dr. Bernd Weiss, University of Cologne

Abstract:

There are numerous reasons why truancy (unexcused school absenteeism) should be examined extensively: Adolescents who play frequently truant are more likely to get a low educational degree or to drop out of school. Truancy often marks the beginning of a criminal career. In this sense, truancy is a risk factor for present and further delinquent acts. Dealing with students playing truant takes a lot of teachers' time, and truants may deteriorate class and school climate. Enduring truancy indicates structural school problems, as the school does not ensure a sufficient integration of truant students. Furthermore, truancy can result from difficult family situations, which may require intervention and support as well. Even if truancy is a well known problem and has been widely discussed in the German scientific community as well as in German media, its prevalence has been hardly systematically studied so far. Therefore, an individual person data meta-analysis has been applied focusing on the prevalence of truancy in Western Germany. A literature search revealed 15 individual person data sets. Two types of truancy were distinguished, namely moderate and frequent truancy. The empirical analyses were threefold: First, the average percentage of pupils playing truant has been estimated. All in all, the percentage of students playing truant moderately is about 17%. As expected, frequent truancy occurs less often (2%). Second, a rather prominent but unsound estimation of the prevalence rate states that about 500,000 pupils play truant on a regular basis. Using Bayesian methods, this estimate has been compared to the meta-analytical findings revealing that the number of 500,000 pupils playing frequently truant might be too high. Third, empirical analysis shows that the findings are considerably heterogeneous. So, even more interesting than estimating an overall proportion are heterogeneity analyses which aim at explaining the different study outcomes. Due to the fact that individual person data is available, relevant predictors at the pupils' level are school type, class level as well as sex. At the study level, the unit of observation (pupils vs. parents or teachers) and the observation period have been identified as having a strong impact on the prevalence of truancy.
