

## Absenteeism patterns of Grade one children in Sri Lanka: A Longitudinal study

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A longitudinal research was initiated in 2002 to study student participation in primary school education and the way the students develop their competencies. All new entrants in January 2002 to Grade 1 of the forty-three classrooms from forty-one schools were included in the student sample (1021). Representative sample was drawn by considering the variables such as social, cultural, economic, demographic, geographical and educational backgrounds of the country. As one aspect of student participation data were collected from classroom registers on children absent daily. A data collection sheet was used for the purpose and classroom teachers daily entered data into the sheets. The reason for absenteeism was marked either using letters sent by parents or If the letters were not sent informal interviews with children. The objectives were to find out absenteeism patterns during the year, to find out reasons for absenteeism and to find out associated variables for absenteeism. Percentage of absenteeism was calculated and association of variables was tested using Chi square test (P-Value is less than 0.05).

Only one child (a girl) attended the school every day out of 1021 children of the sample. The highest number of absenteeism was in the months of April, May and June. Lowest is in January. 102 reasons for absenteeism could be identified. They were categorized into 12 themes, ie. Illness, minor accidents, social/ religious customs, no reason given, influence of the family members, student specific reasons, socio political reasons, school related reasons, economic reasons of the family, climate/ environmental reasons, transport related reasons, and no data on reason. The main reason for the absenteeism was illness of children. Patterns of absenteeism during the year show that the illness of children was the main reason for the each month of the year. Other than climate other twelve variables (school type, ethnicity of school, medium of instruction, socio economic zone, province, relief zone, climate, sex of child, ethnicity of child, religion, residence, way of coming to school are associated with the absenteeism of students of grade one.

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