**Perspectives of School Health Education Program (SHEP) Coordinators on School Absenteeism Among Adolescent Schoolgirls in the Tamale Metropolis, Ghana: A Qualitative Study**

**Abstract**

**Introduction:** School absenteeism, particularly among adolescent schoolgirls, is a significant barrier to educational progress, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana, the Tamale Metropolis is facing challenges related to absenteeism, where girls are disproportionately affected due to socio-economic factors, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural norms. The school health education program (SHEP) coordinators responsible for health-related programs in schools are crucial in addressing absenteeism, but their perspectives remain underexplored.

**Aim:** This study seeks to explore the perspectives of SHEP coordinators on school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls in the Tamale Metropolis, Ghana.

**Methods:** This qualitative study employed a purposive sampling approach, selecting 15 SHEP coordinators from both rural and urban schools in the Tamale Metropolis. The study population comprised teachers who serve as School Health Education Program (SHEP) coordinators in secondary schools within the Tamale Metropolis. Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants were conducted to gather in-depth insight into the coordinators’ perspectives on absenteeism. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns.

**Results:** The results revealed several factors contributing to absenteeism, including poverty, inadequate sanitation facilities, menstrual health challenges, and socio-cultural practices such as early marriages. SHEP coordinators highlighted the lack of menstrual health management facilities in schools as a significant barrier to girls’ school attendance. Additionally, the study identified strategies such as providing menstrual health facilities, improved school infrastructure, and community involvement as effective measures to reduce absenteeism. However, challenges such as inadequate resources and the need for more substantial community support were also noted.

**Conclusion:** This study underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the root causes of school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls in Tamale. There is a need for comprehensive, multifaceted interventions to address issues, such as providing menstrual health support, improving school-community engagement, and implementing anti-bullying policies. By integrating the perspectives of SHEP coordinators, the study offers valuable insights into potential solutions to enhance girls’ education and reduce absenteeism. The findings emphasize the importance of comprehensive school health programs and community engagement in supporting the academic success of adolescent girls in Tamale. Future research should explore the effectiveness of these interventions in practice to further refine strategies for tackling school absenteeism.

**Keywords:** School absenteeism, adolescent schoolgirls, SHEP coordinators, Tamale Metropolis, qualitative study, menstrual health, education

**Introduction**

School absenteeism is a growing global concern that significantly impacts educational outcomes, particularly for adolescent girls (1). Globally, absenteeism is linked to a wide array of factors, including socio-economic barriers, health-related issues, and socio-cultural norms (2). UNESCO reports that approximately 20% of children globally miss significant portions of school each year, with developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, facing the highest rates of absenteeism(3). Adolescent girls, in particular, face additional barriers that exacerbate absenteeism, such as gender-based violence, early marriages, and menstrual health challenges, all of which make it more difficult for them to attend school regularly(4).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the problem of absenteeism is more pronounced due to high poverty levels, inadequate educational infrastructure, and gender inequality (5–7). According to the World Bank, over 20% of children in sub-Saharan Africa miss more than a month of school annually, with girls being disproportionately affected (8). This is mainly due to socio-cultural expectations that prioritize boys’ education over girls’, and the lack of basic educational facilities such as sanitary products and access to menstrual health management (9). During menarche, female students who lack prior information experience adverse feelings such as pain, fear, shame and guilt. Although some girls usually view menstruation as an event that happens normally, the majority of them become ashamed of the onset of menstruation (35). Schoep and colleagues found that the absence of proper menstrual health facilities in schools leads to girls missing school during their menstrual cycles, further contributing to gender disparities in education (10). These challenges are particularly prominent in rural areas, where educational access is limited, and where traditional practices are more deeply entrenched (11).

In West Africa, and more specifically in Ghana, absenteeism remains a critical issue, particularly for adolescent girls. School absenteeism is widespread across the country, with poverty, lack of resources, and gender-based obstacles being key contributors. Girls often face additional challenges such as early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and the need to care for family members, all of which disrupt their education. Moreover, the presence of cultural taboos and stigmas related to menstruation adds complexity to the problem, resulting in feelings of shame and humiliation among girls. These negative emotions can discourage them from attending school when they are menstruating (36). Studies highlight the impact of menstrual health issues on girls' school attendance in Ghana, where the absence of proper sanitary facilities in many schools forces girls to stay home during their menstrual cycles (12–14). Furthermore, societal attitudes that prioritize boys' education over girls’ continue to perpetuate gender inequalities in education, leading to higher absenteeism rates among girls (7,15,16).

Despite improvements in school enrollment, absenteeism remains a significant problem, particularly among adolescent girls. Girls in Tamale, especially those in rural areas, face several barriers to regular school attendance, including extended distances to school, inadequate sanitation facilities, and societal expectations that require girls to take on domestic chores or get married at an early age (5,6,17,18). In addition, teachers in Tamale have reported that absenteeism harms girls’ academic performance, leading to a cycle of underachievement and disadvantages. School absenteeism is associated with deficits in numeracy and literacy achievement, and these deficits appear to become cumulative over time. In related fashion, lower grade point average has been associated with multiple levels of absenteeism severity, and course failure with absenteeism is often a key element of early warning systems that predict later school dropout (37, 38).

At the regional and district levels, the School Health Education Program (SHEP) coordinators—designated Ghana Education Service (GES) point persons—are responsible for the day-to-day coordination and supervision of SHEP activities and programs. These coordinators play a pivotal role in addressing absenteeism, especially by promoting health and well-being in schools. Despite their critical position, limited research has been done on how SHEP coordinators perceive the causes of absenteeism and the strategies that can be implemented to reduce it. Given their involvement in health-related education and intervention programs, SHEP coordinators are uniquely positioned to provide valuable insights into the barriers preventing girls from attending school regularly.

The problem of school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls in the Tamale Metropolis continues to be a significant barrier to educational progress, despite efforts to increase access to education. Girls in this region are disproportionately affected by factors such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, lack of menstrual health facilities, and cultural practices that prioritize boys' education. While existing studies have highlighted these issues, there is limited research focusing on teachers' perspectives regarding the causes of absenteeism and the potential strategies to address it. Teachers, particularly those who coordinate SHEP activities, have invaluable knowledge of the barriers affecting girls’ attendance and can offer suggestions for more effective interventions.

This study aims to explore teachers' perspectives on school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls in the Tamale Metropolis, focusing on the role of SHEP coordinators. It seeks to identify the key factors contributing to absenteeism, examine its impact on girls' academic performance and overall well-being, and explore the strategies that can be implemented to reduce absenteeism. By focusing on the perspectives of SHEP coordinators, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the specific barriers girls face in this region and offer recommendations for schools and communities to address these barriers, ultimately improving girls' school attendance and academic success.

**Methods and materials**

**Study design**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' perspectives on school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls in the Tamale Metropolis. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for exploring complex social issues, such as absenteeism, that involve personal experiences, perceptions, and cultural contexts (19,20). This method allows for rich, detailed data collection, enabling the researcher to capture the nuances of teachers' experiences and insights, which would be difficult to quantify using a purely quantitative approach.

**Study setting**

This study examines school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls in the Tamale Metropolis, Ghana, using a qualitative approach to gather teachers' perspectives. Tamale, the capital of the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly, includes both urban and rural communities, each facing unique educational challenges. With a population of 374,744, the metropolis presents diverse socio-cultural and infrastructural factors that affect girls' school attendance. By interviewing teachers from various areas, the study aims to uncover the distinct barriers girls face in both urban and rural settings. The qualitative method is well-suited to explore these complex issues and provide context-specific insights to inform interventions that address absenteeism and improve educational outcomes for girls in Tamale.

**Study Population**

The study population comprised teachers who serve as School Health Education Program (SHEP) coordinators in secondary schools within the Tamale Metropolis. SHEP coordinators were selected due to their direct involvement in promoting health education and addressing issues related to school absenteeism among students, particularly adolescent schoolgirls.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The inclusion criteria for the study required that participants were actively involved in teaching at the school level and were the designated School Health Education Program (SHEP) coordinators at their respective schools. SHEP coordinators were selected as they play a central role in promoting health education, including issues like absenteeism and its related factors.

The exclusion criteria for this study were teachers who were not involved in the School Health Education Program, teachers outside the Tamale Metropolis, and those who were unable or unwilling to participate in the study.

**Sampling Method and Sample Size**

A purposive sampling method was employed to select 15 SHEP coordinators from a combination of urban and rural schools within the Tamale Metropolis. This method was chosen to ensure the inclusion of participants who had relevant experience and insights into the issue of school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls. Saturation was reached after conducting interviews with 15 participants. The study was conducted in 15 schools, representing both urban and rural areas of the Tamale Metropolis. In each school, the SHEP coordinator was recruited to participate in the study. The selection of schools and participants ensured that diverse perspectives on absenteeism were captured, reflecting the unique challenges faced by girls in both urban and rural settings.

**Data Collection Tools and Procedures**

Data collection for this study was carried out using semi-structured interviews, a widely recognizedqualitative method that provides flexibility while allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in capturing complex, multifaceted issues, such as school absenteeism, where the researcher seeks to gain rich insights into underlying causes and potential solutions. This method allowed participants to express their views in their own words while ensuring that key topics related to absenteeism were addressed (21).

The primary tool for data collection was an interview guide that included open-ended questions aligned with the study's objectives. The guide was structured to cover four main sections: (1) Background Information, where basic demographic details about the participants were gathered; (2) Causes of Absenteeism, focusing on the factors contributing to absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls, such as socio-economic challenges, health issues, and cultural factors; (3) Impact of Absenteeism, which explored the consequences of absenteeism on academic performance and student well-being; and (4) Strategies and Interventions, where teachers provided suggestions on how to address absenteeism and improve attendance rates among adolescent girls. The questions were open-ended to allow for comprehensive responses and to capture the nuances of teachers' experiences (22).

To ensure the accuracy and completeness of data collection, all interviews were audio-recorded with the participants’ consent. Recording the interviews allowed the researcher to fully engage with the participants without the distraction of taking detailed notes. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, and translations were made during transcription for interviews conducted in the local language (Dagbani). In addition to the audio recordings, field notes were taken during each interview to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information that could provide additional insights into the data (22).

The data collection was carried out with careful attention to ethical standards. Ethical approval was sought and granted before the study commenced. Participants were provided with informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. This process ensured that the rights and privacy of all participants were respected throughout the data collection phase (19).

A pilot study was conducted with three SHEP coordinators from schools outside the Tamale Metropolis to refine the interview guide and ensure the questions were clear and relevant. The feedback from the pilot participants led to minor revisions to improve the clarity of the questions, ensuring they effectively captured the necessary data for the study.

Interviews were conducted between January and March 2024. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the responses. The interviews were conducted in a private and quiet setting to facilitate an open and comfortable discussion. To accommodate language barriers, interviews were conducted in English or Dagbani, depending on the participant's preference, with the help of a translator if needed. The combination of both languages ensured that participants could freely express their thoughts and experiences.

**Data analysis**

The data for this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a flexible qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for a deep understanding of complex issues, such as school absenteeism, and provides a detailed view of the teachers' perspectives without forcing data into pre-existing categories. The analysis was conducted systematically, following the steps outlined below. The first step in the data analysis process involved transcribing the recorded interviews verbatim. The researcher transcribed all interviews and, where necessary, translated from Dagbani (a local language) to English. This ensured the accuracy and consistency of the data. After transcription, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading through the transcripts and listening to the audio recordings. Once the data were transcribed and familiarized, the next step involved open coding, which refers to generating initial codes from the data without preconceived categories. This approach allowed the researcher to inductively identify key pieces of information that were significant to the research questions. After initial coding, the next step was to group similar codes into categories and themes. This involved examining the codes for patterns and relationships. Codes that were related to factors contributing to absenteeism, such as poverty, family issues, and health problems, were grouped under the main theme “Causes of Absenteeism.” Similarly, codes related to the effects of absenteeism on students' performance and well-being were categorized under the theme “Impact of Absenteeism.” The process of categorization was iterative, with the researcher revisiting the data and refining the themes to ensure they were a true reflection of the participants' perspectives. Once the themes were identified, they were reviewed and refined. This step involved checking for consistency and relevance by revisiting the data and adjusting themes to ensure they accurately captured the essence of the data. The final step in the analysis was interpreting the data. This involved making sense of the patterns and relationships between the identified themes and linking them back to the research objectives. The researcher explored how different factors—such as socioeconomic challenges, health-related issues, and school climate—contributed to absenteeism. The findings were organized into main themes and sub-themes, with each theme supported by illustrative quotes from the participants. This allowed the voices of the teachers to be directly heard, providing insight into their perceptions and experiences. The results were presented thematically, with each theme summarized before relevant quotes were provided to support the findings. The use of direct quotes gave depth to the results and ensured the participants' perspectives were faithfully represented.

**Methodological rigor**

This study employed several strategies to ensure methodological rigor, which were specifically implemented to enhance the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the findings. Credibility was achieved through member checking and triangulation. After data analysis, the researcher shared the preliminary findings with a subset of the participants (SHEP coordinators) to verify that the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. This ensured the findings resonated with the participants' experiences. Additionally, the study utilized triangulation by comparing the findings with existing literature on school absenteeism, ensuring the results were consistent with broader trends in the field. Transferability was facilitated by providing comprehensive details about the study context, including the socio-demographic characteristics of the 15 teachers interviewed, as well as the rural and urban settings of the schools in the Tamale Metropolis. This rich description allowed future researchers to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts. Dependability was maintained through a thorough audit trail, documenting each stage of the research process, from data collection through to analysis. This detailed record ensured that the research process was consistent and transparent, allowing for replication and validation of the findings. Additionally, the systematic approach to data collection—conducting interviews until saturation was reached—ensured that the findings were consistent and reflective of the data. Confirmability was addressed through reflexivity, where the researcher actively reflected on their potential biases and influences on the interpretation of the data. The researcher kept detailed field notes and engaged in reflective journaling, allowing for constant self-awareness of their impact on the study and ensuring the findings remained grounded in the participants' views rather than the researcher’s own assumptions.

**Results**

**Summary of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Teachers**

The study included 15 teachers, with a majority being female (66.7%). Most participants were aged between 31-40 years (40.0%), while a smaller proportion (13.3%) were over 50 years old. Teaching experience varied, with the largest group (33.3%) having 6-10 years of experience. The majority of teachers (80.0%) were from public schools, while 20.0% were from private institutions. In terms of school location, slightly more teachers were from rural schools (53.3%) compared to urban schools (46.7%) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Teachers**

| **Characteristic** | **Frequency (n = 15)** | **Percentage (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** |  |  |
| Male | 5 | 33.3% |
| Female | 10 | 66.7% |
| **Age** |  |  |
| 20-30 years | 4 | 26.7% |
| 31-40 years | 6 | 40.0% |
| 41-50 years | 3 | 20.0% |
| 51+ years | 2 | 13.3% |
| **Teaching Experience** |  |  |
| 1-5 years | 3 | 20.0% |
| 6-10 years | 5 | 33.3% |
| 11-15 years | 4 | 26.7% |
| 16+ years | 3 | 20.0% |
| **School Type** |  |  |
| Public | 12 | 80.0% |
| Private | 3 | 20.0% |
| **Location** |  |  |
| Urban | 7 | 46.7% |
| Rural | 8 | 53.3% |

**Themes and Sub-Themes**

Table 2 categorizes the main themes and sub-themes related to school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls. The first main theme, "Key Factors Contributing to Absenteeism," includes five sub-themes: socioeconomic barriers, menstrual health challenges, family responsibilities, bullying and peer pressure, and cultural norms and gender roles. The second main theme, "Impact of Absenteeism on Students' Academic Performance and Well-being," is divided into two sub-themes: academic challenges and emotional and psychological impact. The third main theme, "Strategies and Interventions to Reduce Absenteeism," outlines five sub-themes: menstrual health support, school-community engagement, mentorship programs, flexible learning options, and anti-bullying initiatives.

**Table 2: Themes and sub-themes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main Theme** | **Sub-Themes** |
| **Key Factors Contributing to Absenteeism** | 1.1   Socioeconomic Barriers |
| 1.2   Menstrual Health Challenges |
| 1.3   Family Responsibilities |
| 1.4   Bullying and Peer Pressure |
| 1.5   Cultural Norms and Gender Roles |
| **Impact of Absenteeism on Students' Academic Performance and Well-being** | 2.1   Academic Challenges |
| 2.2 Emotional and Psychological Impact |
| **Strategies and Interventions to Reduce Absenteeism** | 3.1   Menstrual Health Support |
| 3.2   School-Community Engagement |
| 3.3   Mentorship Programs |
| 3.4   Flexible Learning Options |
| 3.5   Anti-Bullying Initiatives |

**Key Factors Contributing to School Absenteeism**

This theme encompasses the various factors that contribute to school absenteeism, as identified by the teachers. These factors include:

**Socioeconomic Barriers**

Financial constraints, such as inability to pay for school fees, transportation, and other necessary materials, were identified as key factors contributing to absenteeism. Teachers observed that students from poorer backgrounds often struggle to afford the basics required for attending school, which forces them to miss class frequently.

*"Many of my students come from very poor families. They just can’t afford the school fees or even the bus fare. Some of them don’t come because they have to work or take care of things at home." (Teacher 1)*

*"The financial problems are a huge barrier. Some girls can’t buy the required materials like books or even uniforms. It’s difficult for them to focus on school when they’re thinking about surviving day by day." (Teacher 3)*

**Menstrual Health Challenges**

Menstrual health was identified as another significant barrier to school attendance. Girls who lack access to menstrual hygiene products or proper sanitary facilities often miss school during their periods due to discomfort or embarrassment.

*"Girls, especially when they have their periods, miss school a lot. They don’t have pads, and the school doesn’t offer any help. This makes them feel embarrassed to come to school." (Teacher 4)*

*"Some girls don’t even come to school because they can’t manage their periods at school. The facilities are not good enough, and there’s no privacy for them to take care of themselves." (Teacher 8)*

**Family Responsibilities**

Teachers observed that many girls were expected to stay home due to familial obligations, such as caring for younger siblings or performing household chores. This was particularly true in families where girls were seen as primary caregivers.

*"In many homes, girls are expected to take care of younger siblings or even elderly family members. It makes sense for them to stay at home rather than attend school." (Teacher 2)*

*"Girls are often pulled out of school because they have to clean, cook, or do other household chores. This is especially true for girls from poor backgrounds." (Teacher 7)*

**Bullying and Peer Pressure**

Bullying and social exclusion were commonly cited reasons for absenteeism. Teachers observed that girls who are bullied or who feel marginalized within the peer group often avoid school to escape negative social experiences.

*"The bullying problem is a big one. Girls who are bullied don’t feel safe, and they stop coming to school. They’re afraid to face the other students." (Teacher 5)*

*"There’s a lot of peer pressure. Some girls don’t come because they’re just not part of any group. It can be really isolating for them, and they feel unwanted." (Teacher 10)*

**Cultural Norms and Gender Roles**

Teachers also identified cultural expectations, such as early marriage and the prioritization of boys' education, as factors that contribute to absenteeism. In some communities, girls are expected to stay home to perform household duties, and education is not prioritized for them.

*"In certain communities, education for girls is just not a priority. Girls are expected to marry young and stay home. This limits their opportunities to attend school." (Teacher 6)*

*"In some cultures, girls are expected to stay home and do the housework, while boys are encouraged to go to school. This gender bias is a big issue for absenteeism." (Teacher 11)*

**Impact of Absenteeism on Students’ Academic Performance and Well-being**

Teachers highlighted several adverse effects of absenteeism on students’ performance and well-being:

**Academic Challenges**

Teachers observed that girls who missed school frequently faced significant academic challenges, falling behind in their coursework and struggling to catch up with the rest of the class.

*"The girls who miss school a lot can’t catch up. They fall behind, and their grades get worse. They become frustrated, and it shows in their performance." (Teacher 3)*

*"It’s difficult for a student to recover if they miss too many days. The lessons move quickly, and if you’re not there, you just get lost." (Teacher 12)*

**Emotional and Psychological Impact**

Emotional and psychological well-being is adversely affected by absenteeism. Teachers noted that absentee girls often experience anxiety, isolation, and low self-esteem, which can exacerbate their academic struggles.

*"These girls often feel ashamed. When they miss a lot of school, they feel like they don’t belong, and that can lead to anxiety and depression." (Teacher 7)*

*"Some girls even get anxious about returning to school after missing too much. It affects their mental health and their willingness to participate." (Teacher 9)*

**Strategies and Interventions to Reduce Absenteeism**

Teachers provided several strategies that could potentially address absenteeism:

**Menstrual Health Support**

Teachers emphasized that providing sanitary products and improving menstrual health facilities would significantly reduce absenteeism among girls who face challenges related to menstruation.

"If we could provide free sanitary products, many girls wouldn’t have to stay home during their periods. The school needs to be more supportive in this way." (Teacher 4)

"It would be helpful if schools provided pads, especially for those who cannot afford them. This would really reduce absenteeism due to menstruation." (Teacher 13)

**School-Community Engagement**

Strengthening the relationship between the school and the community, including increased parental involvement and awareness programs, was suggested as a strategy for reducing absenteeism.

*"We need to involve parents more. Regular communication with them is crucial to ensure that they understand how important it is for their daughters to attend school." (Teacher 2)*

*"Community programs can help raise awareness about the importance of girls’ education. When the community supports education, it’s easier to keep girls in school." (Teacher 8)*

**Mentorship Programs**

Teachers suggested that mentorship programs, where older students or teachers support younger girls, would help reduce absenteeism by providing emotional and academic support.

*"Older students can help guide the younger ones. Mentorship programs are really important to provide the support that girls need, especially if they’re going through tough times." (Teacher 5)*

*"If we had mentorship programs where older students support younger ones, many of these girls would feel more motivated to stay in school." (Teacher 10)*

**Flexible Learning Options**

Teachers advocated for the introduction of flexible learning options, such as online or weekend classes, to help students catch up on missed work and reduce absenteeism.

*"Offering online classes or weekend catch-up sessions would help a lot. If students miss school, they need other ways to stay connected to their lessons." (Teacher 6)*

*"Flexible learning options, like weekend classes or online tutorials, would help keep girls engaged in their education even when they miss regular school." (Teacher 12)*

**Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

Implementing anti-bullying initiatives was seen as essential for creating a safe and supportive environment for girls. Teachers believed that this would encourage more girls to attend school and reduce absenteeism caused by bullying.

*"Anti-bullying campaigns are very important. If we create a safe environment, girls will feel more comfortable coming to school." (Teacher 9)*

*"There needs to be more support for students who are bullied. Counseling and anti-bullying initiatives would really help with absenteeism." (Teacher 11)*

**Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight various key factors contributing to school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls, from the perspectives of teachers. These findings provide insight into the complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors. The results both align with and diverge from existing research, with valuable implications for addressing absenteeism in the educational system.

The teachers in this study identified socioeconomic barriers, such as poverty, inadequate school fees, and the need for adolescent girls to work and support their families, as significant contributors to absenteeism. This is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role of socioeconomic factors in absenteeism. For instance, studies have shown that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often miss school due to the financial demands placed on them and the pressure to contribute to household income (23,24). In contrast, while the teachers in this study recognized the impact of financial challenges, the specific role of school fees and how these could be mitigated was not deeply explored in the interviews. Previous research has indicated that offering free school supplies or financial support can reduce absenteeism (25). There is a need for targeted interventions that address financial barriers, such as scholarships, free meals, and transportation services, which could support at-risk students and reduce absenteeism.

A prominent finding from the study was that inadequate menstrual health management (MHM) facilities in schools were a significant factor in absenteeism. This observation is supported by existing literature, which highlights the widespread issue of period poverty and its adverse effects on girls' school attendance. In many regions, adolescent girls miss several days of school each month due to the lack of access to sanitary products and proper hygiene facilities (5,10). Teachers in this study emphasized the need for providing free sanitary products and creating private spaces for changing as effective solutions. While this aligns with other studies, the current research did not explore the extent to which the absence of MHM facilities directly correlated with absenteeism rates in the specific schools surveyed. Further research could involve quantifying the impact of MHM interventions on school attendance. Addressing menstrual health challenges through school-based interventions, including the provision of sanitary products and improved sanitary facilities, could significantly reduce absenteeism among adolescent girls.

The study also found that family responsibilities, particularly caregiving and performing household chores, contribute to absenteeism among adolescent girls. This finding aligns with research showing that gender norms often lead to girls taking on domestic roles that interfere with their education. In many cultures, girls are expected to care for younger siblings or assist with household chores, which often causes them to miss school (26,27). However, the study did not specifically address how these domestic responsibilities interact with economic factors, such as poverty or family structure. Further research could examine how these factors overlap and exacerbate absenteeism. Schools and policymakers need to develop initiatives that support girls' education while also recognizing the importance of their role in the family. Programs that involve parents and

Bullying and peer pressure were also identified by teachers as key reasons for absenteeism. The negative effects of bullying on school attendance are well-documented in the literature, with studies indicating that bullying often leads to school avoidance and mental health issues (28–31). In this study, teachers reported that bullying—especially related to appearance or academic performance—was a significant factor in girls’ decision to stay home.

Although the study emphasizes the role of bullying, it does not fully explore the various forms of bullying (e.g., physical, verbal, cyberbullying) and their differential impact on absenteeism. Future research could focus on distinguishing between different types of bullying and how they affect absenteeism rates. Addressing bullying through stricter policies, mental health support, and awareness programs is essential. Schools should foster a safe environment to encourage regular attendance and prevent students from withdrawing due to peer pressure.

The study highlights the impact of cultural norms, such as early marriage and gender-based expectations, on absenteeism. In many societies, girls are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities or marry early, which often results in them missing school. This finding aligns with global studies on the impact of gender inequality on educational outcomes for girls (32). However, the research did not delve into the intersection of cultural norms and economic factors, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of absenteeism. Education policies should work to challenge cultural norms that prioritize boys' education over girls' education. Additionally, programs should address early marriage and encourage families to support girls in continuing their education.

Teachers in this study emphasized that absenteeism negatively impacts both academic performance and overall well-being. This finding is consistent with existing research linking absenteeism to poor academic outcomes and increased vulnerability to mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (33,34). The study did not explore the psychological consequences of absenteeism in depth, but it highlights the importance of addressing absenteeism to improve both academic achievement and students' emotional well-being. Future studies could further investigate the emotional and psychological costs of missing school. The findings underscore the importance of addressing absenteeism not only for academic reasons but also for the mental and emotional well-being of students. Mental health support and academic interventions are necessary to mitigate the long-term effects of absenteeism on students’ development.

Teachers in the study proposed several interventions to reduce absenteeism, including providing menstrual health support, enhancing school-community engagement, offering mentorship programs, and implementing anti-bullying policies. These recommendations align with literature suggesting that multifaceted approaches can help reduce absenteeism and support at-risk students, however, the study did not assess the effectiveness of these interventions. Future research could evaluate how these interventions work in practice and their effectiveness in reducing absenteeism. The results emphasize the importance of developing comprehensive intervention strategies that address both the direct causes and broader socio-cultural factors contributing to absenteeism. Schools should implement programs that involve the community, support girls' health needs, and ensure a safe learning environment.

The strength of this study lies in its qualitative approach, which provides in-depth insights into teachers' perspectives on school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls. By focusing on the lived experiences of educators, the study captures nuanced factors such as socioeconomic barriers, cultural norms, and menstrual health challenges that contribute to absenteeism. Additionally, the teachers' suggestions for interventions offer practical solutions that can inform policy and practice. However, the study also has limitations, including a relatively small sample size of 15 teachers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the research does not explore the direct impact of some factors, such as menstrual health facilities, in greater depth or examine how the interventions proposed by teachers are implemented in real-world settings. Future studies could address these gaps by expanding the sample size and exploring the effectiveness of the proposed interventions in reducing absenteeism.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

This study highlights the key factors contributing to school absenteeism among adolescent schoolgirls, as identified by teachers, including socioeconomic barriers, menstrual health challenges, family responsibilities, bullying, and cultural norms. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive, multifaceted interventions to address these issues, such as providing menstrual health support, improving school-community engagement, and implementing anti-bullying policies. Teachers’ perspectives offer valuable insights into practical solutions that could reduce absenteeism, enhance academic performance, and support the well-being of adolescent girls. Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools and policymakers prioritize financial support, improved health facilities, and community involvement to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for girls. Future research should explore the effectiveness of these interventions in practice to further refine strategies for tackling school absenteeism.

**Ethical Approval and consent**

Ethical principles were rigorously followed to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique participant codes and securely storing the data. Participants were treated with respect and dignity, providing a comfortable space for open discussion. Given the sensitive nature of the study, potential harm was minimized, and a debriefing session was held to address any questions or concerns after the interviews. These ethical measures ensured the integrity of the research and protected participants' privacy and rights throughout the study.

**Data Availability**

Data used to support this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declared that they have no competing interests.

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models, etc. have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include the name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology and as well as all input prompts provided to the generative AI technology

Details of the AI usage are given below:

Authors at this moment declare that generative AI (ChatGPT) has been used during the editing of manuscripts.

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