

## **Assessment of School Phobia Among Elementary Students in Nineveh Governorate**

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### **Abstract**

School phobia is one of the most common symptoms among children in the elementary stage, which affects their psychological, social and scientific formation, as the child expresses his fear of coming to this strange environment and reflects this in a set of psychological and physical symptoms.

A descriptive study design carried out to assess school phobia among elementary school students in Nineveh Governorate during the period from September 1, 2019 to August 10, 2020. The sample of the study consisted of (806) elementary school pupils selected randomly from many elementary schools from inside and outside Mosul city which selected by stratified method. Data were gathered by a structured questionnaire based on previous studies and sources related to the research topic. It composed of two main parts; Demographic data and expected reasons or causes behind the phenomenon of the study. Its validity was checked through the opinions of (16) experts, and its reliability was measured by applying it to (50) students who were excluded from the main sample of the research, its value was (0.71). Data were collected through personal interview with each pupil in order to address the causes of the fear from the school, while the pupils' commitment to the school and absenteeism from it was checked by reviewing each pupil's file in the school. The interview was carried out by the researcher himself or by one of the teams of teachers assisting the researcher after their approval and engagement if the study. The study found a positive relationship between fear of school and fear from colleagues. The study concluded that there are large numbers of pupils in the schools, also in comparing with the numbers of teachers. High rate of absenteeism from the school

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among females. The study recommends building more schools in the governorate, establishing an educational and psychological counselling programs to deal with the phenomenon of fear, refusal and truancy from the school. Also, the school administrations, personnel and teachers should create an appropriate school atmosphere based on dealing with pupils equally without differences, caring for them and follow up their academic levels, as well as working to control the school's surroundings and prevent any transgression and bullying among pupils and create the spirit of intimacy, love and cooperation among them.

Key words: Assessment, School phobia, Elementary school student.

## Introduction

One of the most common constructs that educational and mental health professionals have studied over the past century is the behavior of school refusal, or a child's rejection of motivations to go to school and / or the difficulties of staying in classes for an entire day. School rejection behaviors is an umbrella term that covers many behaviors accompanied with problematic absenteeism, and includes school phobia, truancy, and anxiety-based school refusal that is reflected in a range of psycho-physiological, cognitive, and motor reactions that expressed by individuals in the school and have been identified as ambiguous, threatening, and / or dangerous. More specifically, it includes missing long periods of school time, skipping lessons or periods of the school day, constantly late to attend school, exhibit bad behaviors at morning trying to miss school, display extreme behaviors, and insistently request others to take them out of school. (García-Fernández and Martínez-Monteagudo, 2014, Kearney, 2008, and Kearney, 2003).

School refusal behaviors is common, it affects "5-28%" of youth at any given time,

and is generally observed equally among boys and girls. They are heterogeneous and complex phenomenon consisting of many internal and external symptoms. In addition, severe short and long-term consequences of prolonged absenteeism from school have been found. Behaviors are often seen as an underlying problem or a problem embedded in a group of problems. Therefore, its accurate assessment, classification, and treatment is of high importance for clinicians. (Kearney, 2001). The common used definition of school refusal behaviors includes (a) reluctance or refusal to go to school, which often leads to prolonged absenteeism, (b) staying home during the school hours with parents' knowledge rather than hiding the problem from parents, (c) experiencing emotional distress while going to school (for example, physical complaints, unhappiness, and anxiety), (d) the absence of antisocial behaviors, and (e) parents' efforts to ensure that their children attend school. These criteria help differentiate between school refusal and school truancy behaviors (based on the criteria B, C, and D, and school withdrawal (based on criterion E). The school rejection rate in the general population ranged between "1% to

2%", while it ranged "5% to 15%" in youth samples referenced in the clinic (Heyne, 2006; Egger and Angold, 2003). School phobia is described simply as the fear and anxiety associated behaviors that accompanied with going to school (Rettig and Crawford, 2000). If they left untreated, it can lead to development of life-long panic disorder, social phobia, and mental conditions (Fremont, 2003).

The importance of this study stems from a group of matters and has many obvious and hidden effects, because, in the event of dropping out large number of children from the school, this will expose them to many risks and perhaps social and behavioural deviations, from another hand, it will increase the burden on their families financially, socially, behaviourally and morally, whereas, the very important point was the deterioration in their educational level and thus scientific, professional and practical aspects of their lives, in addition to increasing the number of unemployed persons in the community which can alone constitute a social and economic problem affecting the present and future.

The study aims to assess the different factors that can play an important role among elementary pupils and make them more prone to suffer from school phobia, refusal and truancy.

## Method

A descriptive study design was carried out concerning the assessment of school phobia, refusal and truancy among elementary pupils

for the period the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 through the 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020. The study was conducted in primary schools in Nineveh governorate that were selected via stratified method after division Nineveh governorate to two districts inside Mosul city (the capital city of Nineveh governorate), and outside Mosul city. Sixteen schools were chosen randomly from each district inside Mosul city and thirty-two schools were selected randomly from outside Mosul city. The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> levels of elementary school pupils were selected among all elementary school levels, whereas (806) pupils were selected randomly from these levels as a simple random sample method. A structured questionnaire was developed via: related scales aiming to assess the school phobia, reviewing many related literatures in regard to the phenomenon under study and counselling many specialist persons from educational and medical fields, it composed of two parts: demographical data (age, gender, academic school level, number of the pupils in the school, number of pupils in class and number of teachers in school), and twenty-seven items covered three expected causes of the phenomenon under the study (Fear from the teacher, Fear from colleagues and Fear from examination), each item had two options (Yes=1, No=0). Validity of the instrument was checked through (16) experts, and its reliability was measured through spearman-brown coefficient split half method ( $r=0.71$ ). Data were collected by assistance of two to three teachers after their formal approval and willingness in the study (after explanation of the whole instrument and how

to collect the data). Interview method with each pupil was carried out to collect the data (Each interview lasted twenty minutes). Statistic used to demonstrate the data was (descriptive as Number, Percentage, Mean,

Standard deviation, Mode, Minimum, Maximum, and inferential statistic as Chi-square “Phi and Cramer’s v. test and Pearson correlation”)

## Result

**Table (1): Demographic Characteristics of the Sample:**

Variables	Number	Percentage
<b>Age (Years):</b>		
<b>Nine</b>	64	7.9%
<b>Ten</b>	153	19%
<b>Eleven</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>26.6%</b>
<b>Twelve</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>31.5%</b>
<b>Thirteen</b>	101	12.5%
<b>Fourteen</b>	20	2.5%
<b>Total</b>	806	100%
<b>Gender:</b>		
<b>Male</b>	393	48.8%
<b>Female</b>	413	51.2%
<b>Total</b>	806	100%
<b>Residence:</b>		
<b>Left side / Mosul city</b>	228	28.3%
<b>Right side / Mosul city</b>	233	28.9%
<b>outside / Mosul city</b>	345	42.8%
<b>Total</b>	806	100%

Table (1) shows that the majority of pupils were from the age groups (Twelve and Eleven years) as (31.5% and 26.6%) respectively. Whereas, the gender groups were nearly equal as female (51.2%) vs. males

(48.8%). Distribution of pupils' residence were as (42.8%) from outside Mosul city, (28.9%) from right side of Mosul city and (28.3%) from left side of Mosul city.

**Table (2): General Statistics corresponding the Variables undertaken in the Study:**

Statistics	Pupils' Age	Number of Pupils in the School	Number of Teachers in the School	Number of Pupils in the Class	Ratio of Teacher / Pupil in the School
<b>Mean</b>	11.28	430	10	45	-
<b>Standard deviation</b>	± 1.239	-	-	-	-
<b>Mode</b>	12	400	9	45	-
<b>Minimum</b>	9	150	4	18	0.027
<b>Maximum</b>	14	1300	26	78	0.020

Table (2) presents that the students' age was fluctuated between (9 – 14 years), with a mean and standard deviation of ( $11.28 \pm 1.239$  year). The number of pupils in the schools was ranged between (150 – 1300 pupils) with a mean of (430 pupils) and a mode of (400 pupils). The number of teachers in the schools

was ranged between (4 - 26 teachers) with a mean of (ten teachers) and a mode of (nine teachers). The number of pupils in the class was ranged between (18 - 78 pupils) with a mean of (45 pupils) and a mode of (45 pupils). Eventually, the ratio of teacher / pupil was between (0.020 – 0.027).

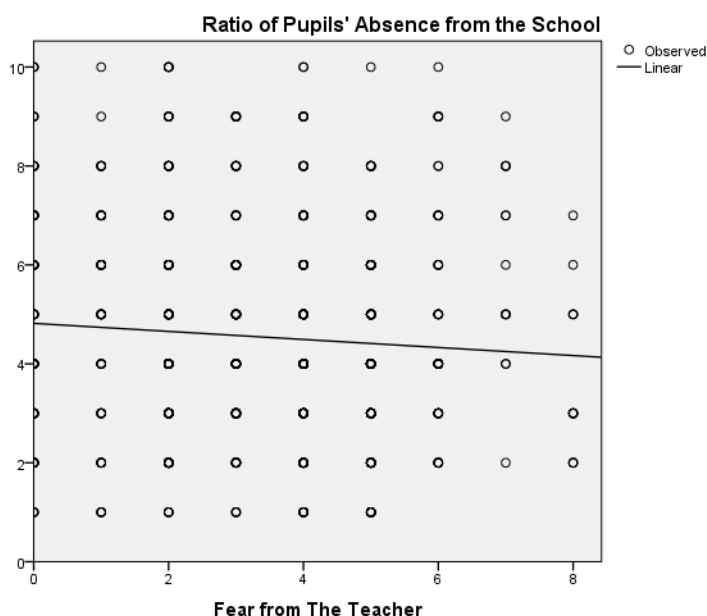
**Table (3): Distribution of Fear, Refusal and Truancy of Pupils from the School as a Total absence from the School:**

<b>Fear (Non-Attendance):</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
- Never (Less than One week)	144	17.9%
- Low (1-2 weeks)	291	<b>36.1%</b>
- Moderate (3-4 weeks)	242	<b>30%</b>
- High (5-6 weeks)	105	13%
- Very high (more than six weeks)	24	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>806</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table (3) depicts that the largest percentages of non-attendance of pupils were (36.1% and 30%) for the low and moderate level of absence from the school.

**Figure (1): Association of Fear, Refusal and Truancy of Pupil from the School in regard to the Fear from Teacher:**

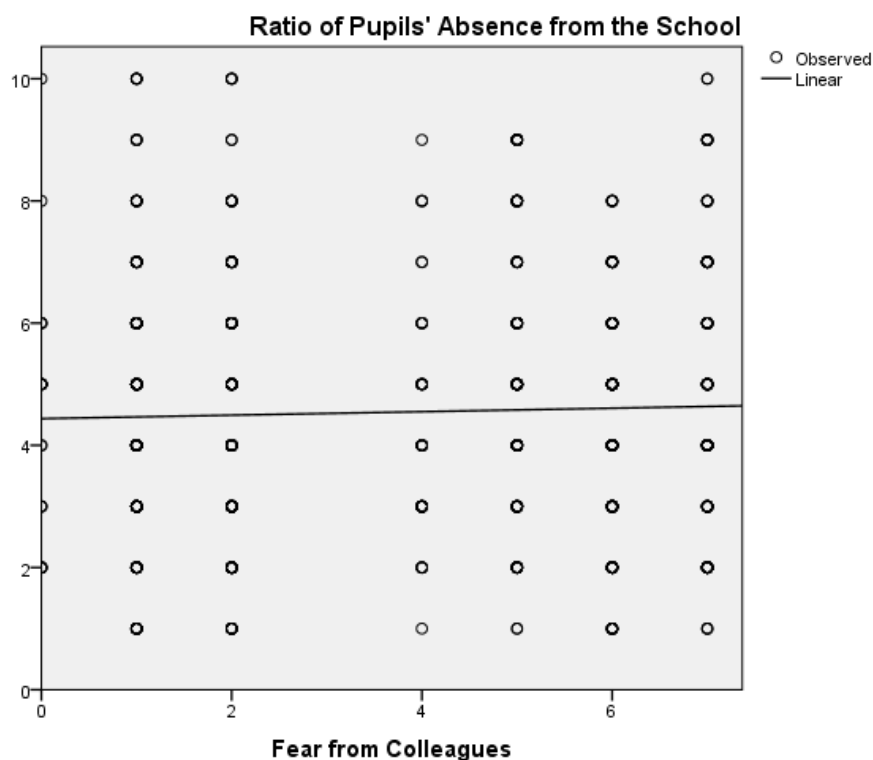
Figure (1) presents that there was a significant negative association between fear, refusal and truancy of pupil from the school and the fear from the teacher.



$$r = -0.006; R^2 = 0.07; \text{Significant } (P \leq 0.05)$$

**Figure (2): Association of Fear, Refusal and Truancy of Pupil from the School in regard to the Fear from Colleagues:**

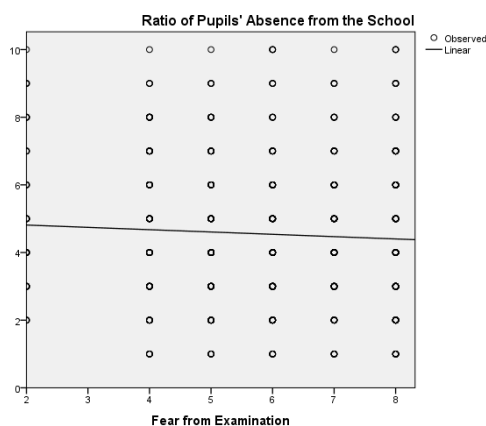
Figure (2) illustrates that there was positive association between fear from colleagues and fear, refusal and truancy of pupils from the school.



$$r = 0.001; R^2 = 0.03; \text{Non-Significant}$$

**Figure (3): Association of Fear, Refusal and Truancy of Pupil from the School in regard to the Fear from Examination:**

Figure (3) depicted that that there was a negative association between fear from examination and fear, refusal and truancy from the school.



$$r = -0.003; R^2 = 0.05; \text{Non-Significant}$$

## Discussion

One of the big serious emotional problems that face pupils, families and school personnel is school attendance (Fear, refusal or truancy), it has adverse short and long term consequences (Fremont, 2003). It is mostly detected as a result of changing in the normal routine life as beginning of school or advancing from educational level to another (Balakrishnan and Andi., 2019).

The phenomenon under study was presented as periods of students' absenteeism that resulted from fear, refusal or truancy from the school, and it divided into different levels. It was clear from table (3) that two-third of absenteeism from the school were at low level (1-2 weeks) as (291; 36.1%), followed by moderate level (3-4 weeks) as (242; 30%), while non absenteeism was low as (144; 17.9%). From another hand, attention must be paid that the study covering justly the first half of the school academic year, whereas, if this comment takes into account, the need to examine its results is vital and important and its causes must be recognized in depth. Many previous studies agreed upon that school's fear, refusal, and truancy considered a problem faced the educational institutions, while they fluctuated in its percentages. Fremont (2003) referred that school refusal was accounted (1% - 5%) among all school - aged pupils. Boyd (2008) indicated that school phobia considered an international problem and constituted (2.4%) among all school pupils' age world widely who refused attending the school. Thambirajah and colleagues (2008) and

Kearney (2008) agreed upon that (20%) of unexecuted school non-attendance- which was due to school refusal and truancy- were relatively common, whereas truancy and delinquent juvenile behavior in addition to juvenile crime were linked. Mihalas (2014) pointed out that school refusal affected (28-35%) of pupils resulting from pursuit of other activities and interests outside the school and anxiety. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) mentioned that (28%) of pupils in Spain had presented unexecuted absenteeism from the educational institutions. Stevens and Rodin (2011) indicated that school refusal accounted (1%) of all school absenteeism. Zahari and Low (2013) referred that truancy cases accounted (17343) cases between (2006) to (2012) in Malaysia, while Harits (2018) indicated that truancy increased dramatically to (67.053) cases in the year (2017).

Figure (1) demonstrated negative significant association between fear from the teacher and the phenomenon under the study ( $r = -0.006$ ), also it found that fear from the teacher affected fear, refusal or truancy of pupils from the school at (7%) individually for coefficient of determination was (0.07). Teachers' classroom management involving enhancing social interactions among pupils is crucial to prevent bullying, prevent unpleasant, threatening experiences with peers and build supportive relationships among pupils which protect from stress and adverse emotions (Murberg and Bru, 2009), frustration and helplessness (Sorrenti et, al., 2015), motivate school commitment and prevent school refusal

behaviors (Havik et. al., 2015; Pianta et, al., 2012; Luckner and Pianta, 2011; Ertesvåg, 2009; Roland and Galloway, 2002). Cheon and Reeve (2015) referred that teachers' manipulation of pupils is vital to ensure commitment with their directives. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) indicated that hindrance the satisfaction of pupils' basic psychological needs in the school, had negative effects in the school involvement (increasing absenteeism) and reducing academic performance, this finding was consistent with previous studies (Filippello et, al., 2019; Molinari and Mameli, 2018; Malu and Reddy, 2016, and Niemiec and Ryan, 2009). From another side, when the teacher acts a control behavior (as, exhibiting disapproval, induction of guilt, ignoring pupils due to their low academic performance), the students may experience a sense of poor self-imposed control, feel excluded, doubt their ability, experience shame, anxiety, and guilt (Filippello et, al., 2019, and Soenens et al., 2012). Consequently, pupils seek such school refusal behaviors to avoid the school-related distress, be away from the adverse social situations, or seek satisfaction outside the school (Kearney and Spear, 2014, and Kearney, 2008).

It was noticed from figure (2) the presence of weak positive association between fear from colleagues or peers and the phenomenon under the study ( $r=0.001$ ) individually, it affected in fear, refusal or truancy of pupils from the school at (3%) for coefficient of determination was (0.03). Inability and weakness coping skills in

friendship, fear from asking about the cause of absenteeism can be the cause of school refusal (Good Practice Guide for Schools "GPG", 2013). The most common behaviors faced by pupils with school refusal or truancy are bullying, shy and socially withdrawn (Trude et, al., 2015, and Egger et, al. 2003), victimization by other peers (Gastic, 2008, Reid, 2005, and Malcolm et, al., 2003), feeling left out by peers at school and unpopularity among peers at school, feeling lonely, and insecure and lack friends (Scholte and Van Aken 2006, and Arnett 2003).

Figure (3) illustrates the presence of weak negative association between fear from examination and the phenomenon under the study ( $r= - 0.003$ ). individually, it affected in fear, refusal or truancy of pupils from the school at (5%) individually for coefficient of determination was (0.05). Difficulty in controlling the classroom, increase the number of pupils in the classroom, the weak academic level of the pupil, the difficult life conditions many pupils exposed to, all those can be forced the pupils in such a way to resort to crooked methods in the examination such as cheating, as well as to some unacceptable behavior from some teachers, all of that reduce the fear from examination among pupils.

### Conclusions:

1. There are large numbers of pupils in the schools, also in comparing with the numbers of teachers.
2. High rate of absenteeism from the school among females.



3. presence of positive association between Fear, refusal and truancy from the school with Fear from peers or colleagues.
4. Presence of negative association between fear, refusal and truancy from the school with Fear from the teacher ( $P. \leq 0.05$ ), and Fear from examinations.

#### Recommendations:

1. Establishing an educational and psychological counselling programs to deal with the phenomenon of fear, refusal and truancy from the school.
2. Importance of building more schools in the governorate in order to reduce the momentum for preparing students in schools.
3. Emphasizing the need to increase appointments of teachers in schools.
4. Providing entertainment means in schools in order to urge students to be more commitment to the school and not to evade school.
5. The school administrations, personnel and teachers should create an appropriate school atmosphere based on dealing with pupils equally without differences, caring for them and follow up their academic levels, as well as working to control the school's surroundings and prevent any transgression and bullying among pupils and create the spirit of intimacy, love and cooperation among them.

6. Urging parents to follow up their pupils' (Sons and Daughters) academic performance and home works.
7. In-depth researches related to the fear, refusal and truancy from the school must be carried out.

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