ADOLESCENT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PATTERNS AND THE EFFECTS OF COPING STYLE

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate School of
Tennessee State University
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Research Series No. _______

Kelly Madison Eckenrod

May 2011
ADOLESCENT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PATTERNS AND THE EFFECTS OF COPING STYLE

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate School of
Tennessee State University
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Kelly Madison Eckenrod
May 2011
To the Graduate School:

We are submitting a dissertation written by Kelly Madison Eckenrod entitled “Adolescent School Attendance Patterns and the Effects of Coping Style.” We recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy in School Psychology.

Stephen Trotter
Chairperson

Marie Hammond
Committee Member

Joan Popkin
Committee Member

Jim Hunter
Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate School:

Alex Sekwat
Dean of the Graduate School
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members for their support in this endeavor, with special thanks to Dr. Stephen Trotter for years of support, guidance, and professional respect.

This journey has been a long one and certainly would not have been possible without the support, patience, and sacrifice of my precious family, Bob my husband and super parent, and my sweet children whose homework often took a backseat to my own. I also thank my mother, whose surrogate parenting helped to make it all possible as well. Making it this far is, by no means, an individual effort, but only possible with the support and teamwork of family.

I offer a special thanks and dedication to my late father, Richard Madison, who did not get to see the end of this journey, but whose belief in me provided the strength and confidence to complete this enormous endeavor.
ABSTRACT

KELLY M. ECKENROD. Adolescent School Attendance Patterns and the Effects of Coping Style (under the direction of DR. STEPHEN TROTTER).

The focus of this study was to examine the effects of a student’s manner of coping with stressors on school attendance patterns. The primary hypothesis of this study was that avoidant coping style would predict higher rates of student absenteeism. It was also hypothesized that certain specific coping strategies, within the approach and avoidant styles of coping, would be related to adolescent school attendance patterns, and that gender and age differences in coping would also be observed. The sample included 272 12-14 year old students enrolled in a school system in a small Southern town. Specific personal information was obtained from a brief demographic questionnaire, and student participants completed the Coping Responses Inventory for Youth. Attendance data was obtained from the school system’s data base. Results were not supportive of the primary hypothesis, although gender differences in use of specific coping strategies was observed, consistent with previous research. Specific coping strategies were predictive of higher rates of school absenteeism, as was a student’s age. These findings were generally consistent with previous research. Recommendations for future research are suggested.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School as Youth Stressor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and Coping</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Absenteeism Terminology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Factors of School Absenteeism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Theory</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping and Psychological Adjustment</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental, Gender, and Ethnic Differences in Coping</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHOD</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis................................................................. 38
Research Hypotheses...................................................... 38

IV. RESULTS
Data Screening............................................................ 41
Descriptive Statistics....................................................... 41
Hypotheses 1 & 2.............................................................. 42
Hypothesis 3 & 4 (regression analysis)................................. 43

V. DISCUSSION
Summary................................................................. 48
Interpretation of Results.................................................. 48
Limitations................................................................. 52
Implications and Future Research..................................... 53

REFERENCES............................................................ 56

APPENDIX A: BRIEF DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE......... 69
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT................................. 70
APPENDIX C: TSU IRB Approval....................................... 72
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Means and Standard Deviations for School Absence and CRI-Y scales, Summary Indices</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School Absenteeism</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bivariate Correlations for School Absenteesim and Predictor Variables</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Standard Multiple Regression of Independent Variables on School Absences</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Although there are many problem behaviors exhibited by youth in educational settings, unexcused absences, or truancy, remain a critical problem behavior that occurs across different schools, age-groups, and types of communities. Between 1995 and 2004, truancy cases in juvenile courts increased by 69% nationally. In 2004 truancy cases comprised the largest proportion of petitioned status offenses for juveniles of all races nationwide (Stahl, 2008). School absenteeism can be a serious problem with long-standing consequences for these students, their families, and the communities in which they live. At the individual level, school absenteeism has been shown to have a range of deleterious effects such as poor academic achievement, increased engagement in delinquent or at risk behaviors, emotional maladjustment, and school drop-out (Steward, Steward, Blair, Jo, & Hill, 2008; Kearney, 2003; Lambdin, 1996; Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). At the family level, problematic absenteeism has been associated with lower levels of family involvement (Hefty, 1999) and increased family conflict (Kearney, 2003). At the community level, considering the connection between problematic school absenteeism and delinquent behaviors, particularly vandalism, the cost to individual communities can be high. Other factors that
can contribute to community costs are court costs involved in processing truancy cases and the loss of funding to local school systems due to absentee rates.

Current models for reducing rates of school absenteeism are primarily related to addressing the systemic or environmental contributors, such as problems within the school setting itself (e.g. bullying, social fearfulness, academic challenges, etc.). Lauchlan (2003) advocates for the implementation of functional behavioral analyses to determine which environmental factors are supporting the absenteeism, and then addressing those variables in an effort to reduce the student’s absenteeism. More comprehensively, Kearney (2008) outlines suggestions for interventions that include medical, clinical, and systemic approaches.

Although environmental factors many times may be in need of address, and functional behavior assessments coupled with behavioral intervention often have proved to be effective in dealing with reduction of school absenteeism, using this approach solely seems to be ignoring any possible student variables. School refusal has been associated with psychopathology (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003), particularly with anxiety and depression. Taking an approach that primarily addresses only environmental variables may assist with increasing school attendance, but fails to address possible underlying individual factors that may be scaffolding the problem.

School as Youth Stressor

Byrne, Davenport, and Mazanov (2007) note that understanding adolescents’ experiences of stress is important when trying to understand overall adolescent health. Thus, considering the relationship between stress and one’s health, the examination of
school as a primary stressor for youth is warranted. In their exploration of adolescent
stress using both qualitative and quantitative methods, Byrne et al. identified 10
dimensions of adolescent stress which were consistent with the literature. The 10
dimensions included *Stress of Home Life, Stress of School Performance, Stress of School
Attendance, Stress of Romantic Relationships, Stress of Peer Pressure, Stress of Teacher
Interaction, Stress of Future Uncertainty, and Stress of School/Leisure Conflict.* Those
dimensions that were directly related to the school environment accounted for 7.1%
(*Stress of School Performance*), 4.3% (*Stress of School Attendance*), 10% (*Stress of
Teacher Interaction*), and 9.2% (*Stress of School/Leisure Conflict*) of the variance.
However, even other identified dimensions such as *Stress of Romantic Relationships* (9% of variance) and *Stress of Peer Pressure* (8.5 % of variance) could be considered school-
related, because the school environment is a primary setting for which social
relationships (i.e. peer pressure, romantic relationships) occur. Thus, school-related
factors accounted for close to 50% of the variance for the adolescent stressor experience.
Consistent with these findings, others have also noted the stressors reported most
frequently by adolescents are related, both directly and indirectly, to the school
environment (de Anda, Baroni, Boskin, Buchwald, Morgan, Ow, Gold, & Weiss, 2000;
Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski, & Shaffer, 2009; Grannis, 1992; Spirito, Stark,

*Stress and Coping*

Interest in how individuals adapt to life circumstances and how they cope with
stress has long been an interest of those within the behavioral sciences. Being able to
successfully adapt to one’s environmental demands is a major life task for anyone and is a primary objective of healthy human development. Managing conflict and stress is a necessary part of life, and whether or not this adaptation is done successfully has effects on the individual. The coping literature includes studies of children, adolescents, and adults. Of interest to researchers, regardless of age group studied, are the effects of different coping strategies that individuals employ in a given situation. Generally speaking, even a brief review of the literature suggests that coping is associated with psychological adjustment and well-being. In their study of high school students, Erickson, Feldman, and Steiner (1997) found that youth who relied more on projection of blame, denial, and regression (i.e. immature defenses) were more likely to use avoidance coping strategies. Conversely, youth who relied more on mature defenses were less likely to use avoidance coping and showed better psychological adjustment. Youth who have experienced more chronic stressors and negative life events have also been shown to use more avoidant coping strategies. Approach and avoidant coping have been associated with different personal, situation, and contextual factors, with those individuals who perceive situations as more controllable being identified as having more social supports and tending to employ approach coping strategies (Ebata & Moos, 1994).

Consistent with other findings of the association between avoidant coping and psychological well-being, Steele, Forehand, Armistead, Morse, Simon, and Clark (1999) also provided evidence of the consistency of coping behavior across time. In their study of urban African-American children, results indicated no change in the average frequency of coping strategies used over the course of three years. This possible habitual nature of
coping behavior does seem intuitive, in that any behavior that is reinforced (in this case, reduction of stress) is likely to be repeated. Such may be the case with the issue of adolescent school attendance. School attendance, being the stressor, requires some attempt on the part of the individual to adapt to the situational demands. If one employs approach or problem-focused coping strategies in dealing with the stressor directly, one would formulate a plan and proactively work to deal with the dilemma. Conversely, if school attendance is a stressor for a student, for whatever reason, and the tendency in dealing with stress is to employ avoidant coping strategies, then the student will attempt to disengage from the stressor. In this case, the avoidance or disengagement equates to school nonattendance.

Additional support for the examination of coping styles in relation to school attendance can be found in Kearny & Silverman’s (1993) study which included scale development that identified four potential functions of school refusal behavior. These functions include attention-seeking, pursuit of tangible reinforcement, and avoidance of either aversive situations at school or avoidance of fear/anxiety associated with the school environment. Focusing on the motivating factors related to avoidance, one wonder if avoidance behaviors are primarily a result of school-related variables, as some have suggested, or are they a result of an individual’s typical style of coping with any perceived stressful situation. The interaction or interdependence of these variables seems likely. Any findings related to individual factors and their association with attendance behavior has implications for school psychologists, counselors, and others working with truant youth and the intervention planning and implementation by various professionals.
Despite the intuitive and experimental support for the stability of coping style over time, there is also evidence in the literature for the learning and exhibiting of more adaptive coping strategies in given situations after specific intervention. Although coping strategies utilized by individuals to deal with stressors may be habitual patterns, this is not to say that they are static traits. When examining the effects of participation in self-help groups (i.e. Alcoholic Anonymous), Humphreys, Finney, & Moos (1994) observed that, as individuals increased their involvement in these groups, they relied less on avoidant coping and more on approach coping, from pre-involvement to post-involvement. Additionally, patients were observed to improve on general coping, and coping specifically related to substance abuse, over a 1-year follow-up period. Both types of coping were associated with maintenance of sobriety at follow-up and improved psychological functioning (Moggi, Ouimette, Finney, & Moos, 1999).

Purpose of Study

With the potential severity of impact of school nonattendance on youth and their families, it seems important that a comprehensive approach to intervention be taken. Although there is consistent evidence in the literature for the impact of certain family and school-related variables on youth school attendance, what seems noticeably sparse is the examination of possible student-related variables. Although there are a few studies that examine personality variables, investigations of the possible relationship between school attendance and students’ style of coping are quite limited. In the author’s review of the literature, only one study was found that examined the relationship between school attendance and coping style (Steward, Steward, Blair, Jo, & Hill, 2008).
Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate if the use of selected coping strategies (approach and/or avoidant) by students is related to their school attendance.

**Research Questions**

The specific questions this study sought to answer were:

1. Is there a significant relationship between students’ selected coping strategies and their gender?
2. Is there a significant relationship between students’ selected coping strategies and their age?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students’ selected coping strategies and their school attendance?
4. Is a student’s tendency to employ a particular coping style (approach vs. avoidant) predictive of school attendance?

**Definition of Terms**

*School absenteeism* or *school nonattendance*- excused or unexcused absences from elementary or secondary (middle/high) school (Kearney, 2008).

*School refusal behavior*- student motivated refusal to attend school and/or problems remaining in classes for an entire day (Kearney, 2008).

*School phobia*- refers to anxiety or fear-based absenteeism for school (Kearney, 2008).

*Truancy*- generally refers to unexcused school absences and thus is considered a violation of the mandatory school attendance laws of states (Fantuzzo, 2005; Kearney, 2008). Can be operationally defined as “the habitual engagement in unexcused absences from school” (Zuang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Willson, 2007).
Coping- refers to the “cognitive and behavioral efforts used by individuals to negotiate the demands of an individual’s environment,” (Frydenburg, 2008). It is a dynamic process that changes over time, as the person and environment are constantly influencing each other (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, coping is considered to be a reciprocal process that may be effective or ineffective in managing the stressor (Frydenburg, 2004).

Coping styles- methods of coping that characterize an individual’s reactions to stress over time or across different situations (Frydenburg, 2008).

Coping strategies- the specific actions (cognitive and behavioral) that are employed to manage stress, or the way one deals with a stressor/problem.

Approach coping- generally speaking, approach coping is problem-focused and reflects cognitive and/or behavioral efforts to manage stress (Moos, 1993).

Avoidant coping- generally, avoidance coping is emotion-focused and reflects cognitive and behavioral attempts to avoid the stressor (Moos, 1993).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

School attendance is an issue of considerable and increasing concern. An education is often touted as being important for any individual to be able to live productively and with some degree of fulfillment, particularly in today’s world. Evident in the history of the United States is value of education along with a philosophy of states having the responsibility to educate its citizens. As early as 1852 compulsory school attendance laws were enacted in all states (Coulson, 1999). Although age ranges for required school attendance have varied over the decades, compulsory school attendance has long been a part of our nation’s history. Yet with laws and requirements come opportunities for non-compliance, and thus school non-attendance has long been a challenge in need of address.

Scope of Problem

Every school day that is missed means that content is not covered and skills are not learned by the absent student. Thus, it could be argued that regular school attendance is an essential part of the learning process and potentially can have a direct impact on school performance. According to the last national survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006), 52% of fourth graders missed no days from school, 29% reported missing 1-2 days of school, and 19% reported missing 3 or more days. Among 8th graders, 45% missed no days of school, 35% missed 1-2 days, and 20% missed 3 or more days. Those missing 5 or more days in the preceding month were 7% of
both 4th and 8th graders. The survey also shows that these patterns of absenteeism remained relatively stable between 1994 and 2005. For most of the years observed, 4th graders were more likely to have no days missed from school than 8th graders, and 8th graders were more likely than 4th graders to miss 3 or more days in the preceding month. When these absences per month are extrapolated over the course of a traditional 180-day school year, the scope of the school attendance problem is more clearly illuminated; 2-3 days per month over the course of an academic year results in 20-30 days per year, or 11% and 38% of the academic year missed, respectively. Even more concerning is the consideration that these statistics include only students who missed a complete day of school. As suggested by Kearney (2008), problematic school attendance is a heterogeneous, dimensional construct that includes school attendance under duress, morning misbehavior to avoid school, repeated morning tardiness, periodic or repeated absences with skipping classes, and complete absence from school during certain or extended periods of a school year. To aid in putting these school attendance statistics into perspective, estimates of the prevalence of most childhood mental disorders (combined) range from 3 to 18%, with a median range of 12% (Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005).

Because of such seriousness in prevalence, for some time absenteeism from school has even been viewed as a public health concern by different groups of professionals. As a result, the body of research that has sought to examine the problem of school absenteeism is understandably vast and varied. As Kearney (2008) notes, examining school absenteeism has occurred from different disciplines such as
In his overview of the study of problematic school absenteeism, Kearney (2008) outlines the approaches of these major disciplines. Psychological approaches tend to have concentrated on child symptomology, associated factors, and intervention. Terms often found in the psychological approaches include separation anxiety, school phobia, and school refusal or school refusal behavior.

Contrastingly, sociology and criminal justice approaches toward problematic school absenteeism focus primarily on the unlawfulness of the behavior, the relevant contextual factors, and the interventions from legal and systemic standpoints. Thus, the term truancy is often used with attention placed on social-environmental factors such as poverty, homelessness, delinquent peer group association, family disruptions, teenage pregnancy and neighborhood or social-environmental dynamics. Interventions for change then focus on providing community services for families, education, court referrals, and other systemic approaches (Kearney, 2008).

Educational approaches have been influenced by social/criminal justice perspectives, and therefore are similar in their attempts to intervene, but they also use strategies such as school-based counseling, tutoring to address academic deficiencies, and change within the school environment itself to address such factors as safety in the school setting and bullying (Kearney, 2008).
School Attendance Terminology

Because the school attendance literature has developed from a variety of disciplines with different approaches, different terms can be found across studies when referring to a student’s problematic absenteeism. The terms truancy, school refusal, school phobia, chronic non-attendance, or chronic absenteeism all can be found when examining the topic. At times, distinctions have been made among some of these terms. In his review of intervention approaches for those with chronic non-attendance problems, Lauchlan (2003) outlines the arguments from previous articles suggesting that school refusers are linked to separation anxiety and truants are linked to conduct disorder (Berg, Butler, Franklin, Hayes, Lucas, & Sims, 1993). Although this may be the case in some situations, Berg et al. (1993) also documented that truancy occurred without the presence of either disorder. Similarly, Egger, Costello, and Angold (2003) demonstrated that although the two categories are at times distinct, they are not “mutually exclusive,” and that different designated types often times have similar shared characteristics. Similarly, Lauchlan (2003) points out that despite any possible distinctions, the clinical value of such distinctions is questionable. Kearney (2008) states that truancy usually refers to unexcused absences and is a legal term, with truancy being a status offense for juveniles. School refusal typically refers to absenteeism that is anxiety-based, and school phobia refers to absenteeism that is fear-based. However, it is argued that clear distinctions are difficult to make and that all these terms reflect problematic absenteeism from school (Kearney, 2008).
Because all of these distinctions involve coping or some adaptation to a presented challenge (i.e. school), etiology is not a concern for the scope of this research. Therefore, terms such as chronic school non-attendance or problematic absenteeism will be used.

**Associated Factors of School Absenteeism**

Regardless of the nomenclature used, school absenteeism has been shown to have a range of deleterious effects. Associated factors of problematic school absenteeism include poor academic performance, delinquent behavior and accompanying legal difficulties, social alienation, and family conflict (Steward, Steward, & Blair, 2008; Kearney, 2003; Lambdin, 1996). Additionally, those students with histories of problematic school attendance are at high risk for high school drop-out, which in turn has strong negative implications for future employment or occupational difficulties (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997).

Some have suggested that dropping out of school is the eventual result of a process of academic disengagement over time (Ensminger and Slusarick, 1992). Following this developmental theory, increased absenteeism has been shown to be an important factor in the developmental pathways of high school drop-outs, with differences between drop-outs and graduates being observed by examination of absenteeism rates in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). Similarly, higher absenteeism as early as kindergarten has been observed to increase the likelihood of dropping out by 30% (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997).
This educational disinvestment, consisting of low educational aspirations and low academic achievement, serves as a source of disadvantage from which various adult problems develop. In their study of personality traits and school absenteeism, Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson (2004) found that variables that predicted school absenteeism also had been found to predict job absences in previous studies. They suggest that students who experience chronic school absenteeism later mature into adults with a tendency to be absent from work.

From a brief review of the related literature, problematic school absenteeism, then, can be viewed as part of a continuum of academic disengagement, which carries consequences both for the present experience and far into the future. Consequently, high school drop-out can be considered school absenteeism in its most extreme form, with evidence supporting the idea that high school drop-out has negative individual and social consequences (Kaplan & Damphousse, 1994). In their study of the mental health implications of not graduating from high school, Kaplan and Damphousse (1994) found that students who dropped out of high school experienced significantly higher rates of psychological dysfunction, even after controlling for the effects of grade-level, gender, father’s education, and race. Their study provided further evidence of the negative emotional consequences associated with high-school drop-out. Similarly, in a study of students with problematic school attendance, Egger, Costello, and Angold (2003) found that chronic school absenteeism was significantly associated with psychiatric disorders.

The association between school attendance and academic performance is an obvious intuitive one, and one that can be found in numerous studies of school attendance.
patterns. Absenteeism from school is typically found to be negatively related to grade point average (GPA) and other measures of student achievement (Steward, et al., 2008; Hollfors, Venea, Iritani, Cho, Khatapoush, & Saxe, 2002; Henry, 2007). In an examination of students’ attendance and the characteristics associated with absenteeism from school, data from 5684 8\textsuperscript{th} grade students and 5429 10\textsuperscript{th} grade students were collected and studied with regard to different variables, one of which was academic performance. Results showed that 27.1\% of 8\textsuperscript{th} graders who experienced higher rates of absenteeism earned grades of D’s or below, as compared to 3\% of 8\textsuperscript{th} grade students without attendance problems. Similarly, 40.8\% of 10\textsuperscript{th} graders with higher rates of absenteeism earned grades of D’s or below, as compared to only 2.9\% of students without attendance problems (Henry, 2007).

In a study of the relationship between school attendance and academic performance, Lambdin (1996) conducted an empirical analysis of data from 97 public elementary schools in Baltimore, Maryland. Results indicated that student attendance is positively and significantly related to academic achievement. More specifically, of three variables examined with regard to their effect of achievement (teacher/pupil ratio, no free lunch, and attendance), attendance was observed to have the largest relative impact. Similarly, Caldas (1993) looked at the direct effects of several input and process factors on academic achievement. The study assessed the effect of socioeconomic, demographic, and school structure variables on student achievement. Although input factors (i.e. those out of the control of schools) such as socioeconomic status and demographic variables, had the most substantial impact on student achievement, student attendance was the only
statistically significant process factor of academic achievement. The author concluded that the most important factor related to achievement that schools can influence was student attendance.

Logically, absenteeism from school interrupts the learning process and can add additional burden on absentee students in the form of cumulative missed assignments or other requirements. Even in studies that have included absence due to illness, school attendance has been linked to academic performance. In their examination of a large sample of children with asthma compared to their cohorts without illness, both groups showed increased academic failure as absenteeism increased (Fowler, Davenport, & Garg, 1992).

Some have suggested that school absenteeism not only interrupts the learning process, but that it also is an obstacle to peer acceptance and participation in extracurricular activities (Bender, 1995). Bernberg and Thorlindsson (1999) have suggested that the school environment is very important in the prosocial development of youth, providing a plethora of social engagement opportunities, with the advantage of at least some supervision and guidance. Problematic absenteeism can serve to interrupt these social learning experiences and limit opportunities for developing relationships with peers. Supporting the theory that the school environment serves to address not only students academic needs, but their social needs also, Konu, Lintonen, and Rimpelä (2002) examined factors associated with school children’s subjective well-being and found that social relationships in school was significantly correlated with student well-being. They
concluded that the school environment and the inherent social opportunities therein, have a major influence on students’ general subjective well-being.

The complexities surrounding school attendance patterns can continue to be recognized when other associated factors are examined, particularly when the widespread social context wherein school attendance issues occur are considered. Over the last few decades as rises in juvenile crime became an increasing concern, attempts were made by those in the field to address juvenile crime and delinquency at early stages of development. One major area of study within this body of literature is problems related to a youth’s school experience, such as poor school attendance, achievement, school commitment, and school drop-out. In addition to being linked to poor academic performance and disruption of academic and social learning, school attendance has been linked to deviant behaviors that include substance abuse, delinquency, and even the likelihood for future violence (Huizinga & Jakob-Chien, 1998; Farrington, 1980; Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, & Harachi, 1998). The general theory of researchers in this area is that childhood patterns of behavior can significantly affect adolescent and adult functioning. Thus, absenteeism from school is of great interest to those involved in research or intervention of a variety of youth, adolescent, or even young adult concerns (McClusky, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004).

In their meta-analysis, Hallfors, et al (2002) examined school survey data from 28 different communities in an effort to identify potential risk indicator variables for drug abuse. They found that school attendance patterns, GPA, and recent sexual activity all were strong predictors of drug use by students. Results indicated that students in these
high risk groups (poor attendance, low GPA, recent sexual activity) had 2 to 5 times greater risk of substance use compared to students in low risk groups. However, even among the risk indicators, school absenteeism and recent sexual activity were found to be better predictors of drug abuse, particularly among 7th and 8th graders. Henry (2007) found similar associations between school absenteeism and drug use in an analysis of 8th and 10th grade students. Similarly, school attendance, academic performance, family structure, lifestyle (delinquency), and usage of cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs were examined in a sample of over 6000 adolescents. Poor school attendance was found to be strongly related to delinquent lifestyle, living in single parent homes, lack of constructive hobbies, and usage of cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs (Miller & Plant, 1999).

Familial characteristics that have been shown to be associated with school absenteeism are single parent households and more siblings (Sommer & Nagel, 1991). These results were generally consistent with the findings from previous studies that students with problematic school attendance were more likely to be from larger families who tended to be more economically deprived and that were characterized by conflict and inadequate child discipline (Farrington, 1980; Fogelman, Tibbenham, & Lambert, 1980). Other familial factors associated with school absenteeism are parental education level, the amount of parental supervision during after school hours, and family involvement difficulties (Henry, 2007; Hefty, 1999). Similarly, family disengagement was a primary focus of a study of students with chronic school attendance problems. In a study of 76 clinic-referred youth who presented with problematic school attendance, youth with families who placed a lower emphasis on personal development, and who
placed a lower emphasis on out-of-home recreational activities, had significantly higher rates of school absenteeism (Hansen, Sanders, Massaro, & Last, 1998).

Parental attitudes toward education and parent monitoring of homework were also found to be important predictors of school attendance problems in a large sample of youth from the United Kingdom (Attwood & Croll, 2006). In their study of anxious-depressed school refusers, Berstein, Warren, Massie and Thuras (1999) found that both adolescents and their parents described their families as having low cohesion and as having low adaptability. Not surprisingly, the social context of the family and the attitudes of family members can have an important impact on the school attendance patterns of youth.

Despite the extensive research on school absenteeism across different disciplines, the systematic evaluation of the role of personality variables in relation to school absenteeism is relatively sparse (Lounsbury, Steele, Loveland, and Gibson, 2004). These authors make the argument that consideration of student personality variables is important in relation to school absenteeism, because an individual’s personality is present even before any situational or environmental variables, which tend to be the most frequently studied. The nature versus nurture debate is as old as the discipline of psychology itself, with most currently taking the stance that both individual and environmental variables are important contributors to any human circumstance or condition. Thus, these authors purport that knowledge about student personality can only serve to further understanding about the contributions of situational/environmental variables when accounting for the variance in school absenteeism.
With this in mind, Lounsbury et al. (2004) examined the Big Five personality traits of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and Openness, as well as the narrower traits of Aggression, Optimism, Tough-Mindedness, and Work Drive in relation to school absenteeism. In a sample of 851 7th-12th grade participants, this study provided clear support of the contention that the Big Five personality traits can predict absences from school for adolescents. Specifically, the Big Five traits were significantly correlated with absences for all grade levels. Openness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability were negatively correlated to absences for all 3 grade levels, while Agreeableness was negatively related to absences for 10th and 12th graders. These results were substantial enough that Lounsbury et al. (2004) make the assertion that when evaluating school attendance in students, it is questionable whether any situational or environmental variables contribute any significant variance in predicting absences beyond the variance explained by the Big Five traits.

Others also have studied personal factors associated with school absenteeism and found support for the importance of considering student individual characteristics in the problem of absenteeism from school. In a study of the relationship between student attendance and personal characteristics of the student, results showed that students with attendance problems scored lower on academic self-concept, self-esteem, social competence, and perceived family cohesion. These students scored higher on anti-social behavior in the classroom and perceived conflict within the family. Although students with attendance problems showed a trend toward higher scores on measures of anxiety
than regular attenders, these scores were not statistically significant (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, and Dalicandro, 1998).

In addition to lower self-esteem, social competence, and self-concept, other studies have examined the presence of certain psychiatric disorders in those youth with poor school attendance. McShane, Walter, and Rey (2001) studied a sample of 92 adolescents who had been assessed and treated for school refusal. Results indicated that students with poor school attendance had a high prevalence of anxiety, mood and disruptive behavior disorders. Additionally, a family history of psychiatric illness was present in over half of the sample.

The association between poorer psychological functioning and higher rates of absenteeism has been shown by others as well. In a community study of school refusers, poor school attendance was associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, somatic complaints, sleep difficulties, emotional and behavioral disorders, and difficulties in peer relationships. Although the authors studied these participants as two groups, school refusers and truants, both types of poor school attendance were associated with higher rates of psychopathology (Egger, Costello, and Angold, 2003).

Not only have higher rates of psychopathology been found among students who exhibit poor school attendance, but individuals with a history of poor school attendance have been shown to experience poor psychological adjustment well into adulthood. In a comparative 20-29 year follow-up study, individuals who had experienced school phobia when young were compared to nonschool refusal psychiatric patients and to a group from the general population. Those with school phobia as children had experienced more
psychiatric consultations and lived with their parents more often than those from the general population. Reasons for psychiatric consultation among the school refusing group included drug addiction, alcoholism, anxiety disorders (panic disorder, agoraphobia/social phobia, other anxiety disorders), obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, dysthymia, suicide, and relationship problems. In general, at least one third of clinical cases continued to experience significant emotional or social difficulties into adulthood (Flakierska-Praquin, Lindström, & Gillberg, 1997).

**Coping Theory**

The systematic use of the term “stress” has been around for a very long time, particularly in the physical sciences. One of the first in modern times who studied the process of stress-related illness was Hans Selye. Selye (1956) outlined his theoretical postulates in the General Adaptation Syndrome, which states that individuals who are experiencing stressful situations do so through the course of three basic stages (i.e. Alarm, Resistance, Exhaustion). Although Selye’s interest in stress was primarily physiological, as with many pioneering works, his work spurred much interest, and spread among those within psychology and the behavioral sciences.

In their historical overview of the study of stress and coping, Suls, David, and Harvey (1996) suggest that there have been three basic periods of investigation of stress and coping within the behavioral sciences, beginning with the psychoanalysts and those associated with the ego development school of psychology. This school of psychologists stressed the connection between, or the equivalence, of coping strategies and personality. These authors describe the second wave of researchers as beginning in the 1960’s and
continuing through the 1970’s and 1980’s, as evidenced by the seminal works of Lazarus and Folkman (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The works of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) differ from that of Selye, particularly because they were more focused on psychological processes in humans. These authors define stress as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.

Of particular interest to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was the difference among individuals with what is considered to be stressful. This model posits that neither the stressor nor the individual’s response defines stress, but that it is the individual’s perception and appraisal of the stressor that makes the determination. These authors point out that any theory of stress needs to allow for individual differences in the evaluation of events and response to stressors. Thus, their definition of stress emphasizes the relationship between the characteristics of the person and the nature of the environmental event. There is no objective manner of prediction of psychological stress as a reaction without considering the characteristics of the individual. Coping is defined, therefore, as “the process through which the individual manages the demands of the person-environment relationship that are appraised as stressful and the emotions they generate.” In sum, the coping process involves first the cognitive appraisal of the environmental stressor. After this primary appraisal, it is then reprocessed in a secondary appraisal at which time coping responses are considered to determine the best course of action. The coping responses fall into two basic categories based on two functions that are being served: managing the problem with the environment causing distress (problem-
focused coping) or an emotion-regulation response to the problem, referred to as emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This dichotomy of coping responses or styles has been adapted by other researchers as well. Also prolific during this time period were the works of Richard Moos and his associates. During this era of research, Suls, David, and Harvey (1996) point out that an emphasis was placed on the relationship between cognitive and situational factors and the coping behavior of individuals. It is from this second wave of researchers that theories of coping emerged which outlined coping strategies as falling into the basic categories of approach coping and avoidant coping (Ebata & Moos, 1991). Compas, Malcarne, and Fondacaro (1988) described the similar categories of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Approach or problem-focused coping involve direct efforts to alter the stressful situation (i.e. thinking about it, making plans, etc.). Conversely, avoidant, or emotion-focused coping includes cognitions and behaviors such as denial, attempts to minimize the stressor, or physically avoid the situational stressor (Ebata & Moos, 1994). In this model of coping, the environmental system includes ongoing stressors in life, whether they be related to physical health or social, environmental demands. Additionally, the system involves one’s coping resources, such as family and peer support. In general, this model suggests that both the characteristics of the person and the social context interact in an individual’s adaptation to life stressors (Holahan, Moos, & Bonin, 1999).

Although some differences between these conceptualizations may exist, Griffith, Dubow, and Ippolito (2000) argue that there is substantial overlap. Similar to problem-
focused coping, approach coping includes direct efforts to modify the stressful event or situation. In contrast, emotion-focused coping and avoidance coping refer to indirect efforts to manage stressors by distancing oneself, either by focusing on feelings or somehow avoiding the situation.

Thus, coping strategies assist an individual in managing stressors and can have an impact on inhibiting the negative effect of stressful life events. The effectiveness of any coping strategy depends on the contextual situation. Although approach/avoidant or problem-solving/emotion-focused coping are not good or bad strategies per se, they have positive and negative aspects, depending on the situation in which they are employed.

Coping and Psychological Adjustment

Much research in the area of coping is focused on the association of coping with psychological, social, and academic adjustment. Studies have shown that adolescents who use more approach coping and less avoidant coping typically have fewer mental health problems and engage in less high risk behaviors (Steiner, Pavelski, Pitts, & McQuivey, 1998). Such links to psychological well-being also have been demonstrated in adults. Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis (1986) examined the relationship between personality variables, appraisal, coping, and psychological symptoms in a sample of 85 married couples. They found significant correlations between coping and psychological symptoms, primarily in regard to problem-focused coping. Proactive problem-solving was negatively correlated with psychological symptoms, with the coping variable accounting for 20% of the variance. Together with personality variables, 43% of the variance was explained. In a study of stress, coping and depression among married
couples, depressed patients relied less on approach coping than either controls or their spouses. Increased reliance on approach or problem-focused coping was associated with less depression across all groups of respondents (Mitchell, Cronkite, & Moos, 1983). Other researchers have also demonstrated the association between coping and depression, with problem-focused or approach coping being negatively associated with depression (Li, DeGuisepppe, & Froh, 2006; Herman-Stahl & Petersen, 1996). More specifically, high levels of approach coping, perceived mastery of coping ability, and low levels of avoidant coping were associated with better adjustment outcomes at both high and low levels of adversity. Overall, coping style (i.e. high approach and low avoidance) perceived mastery, and optimism were observed to be important in differentiating highly stressed adolescents who exhibited depressive symptoms from highly stressed adolescents who exhibited few depressive symptoms. Thus, poor coping was more closely linked to depressive symptoms than the level of stress experienced (Herman-Stahl & Petersen, 1996).

In a study of Gulf War veterans, increased use of approach coping was observed to be related to fewer psychological symptoms, namely depression and symptoms associated with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. As exposure to combat increased, those who employed more approach coping strategies were much more likely to experience fewer PTSD symptoms and less depression (Sharkansky, King, King, Wolfe, Erickson, & Stokes, 2000). Among a sample of college students, increased family support, self-confidence, and a term they referred to as “easygoingness,” predicted increased reliance on approach coping. Negative life events and reliance on avoidant coping predicted more
health problems and more depressive symptoms (Meams and Cantanzaro, 1990). Holahan & Moos (1986, 1987a, & 1991) demonstrated the association of personal and social resources such as self-confidence, easygoing disposition, and family/social supports with the use of approach coping. The authors refer to these personal and social resources as “resistance factors.” These factors predicted psychological and physical health in both adults and children (Holahan & Moos, 1987b). Even in high stress situations, approach coping seems to be associated with psychological health and well-being.

The impact of different coping styles on depressive symptoms was studied in a sample of 194 adolescents over the course of 4 years (Seiffge-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000). Longitudinal analyses revealed long-term differences in depressive symptoms, depending on the coping style of individuals. Adolescents who employed approach coping style reported the fewest depressive symptoms at year 2 and 3, whereas those who used avoidant coping reported the most symptoms at both times. Overall, results suggested that most adolescents demonstrated a generally adaptive way of coping. However, a small subgroup exhibited a rather rigid use of avoidant coping, and that all forms of avoidant coping, whether stable or not, were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. This effect was enduring over time and independent of gender. Seiffge-Krenke and Klessinger (2000) note that this gender-independent effect of avoidant coping is so note-worthy that it might warrant consideration as a risk factor for developing depression on a clinical level.
These authors make the distinction between functional and dysfunctional coping styles. Functional coping refers to efforts to manage a problem by seeking support, outlining concrete actions to solve a problem, or considering possible solutions. In functional coping, the problem is defined, solutions are generated, and actions are taken to solve the problem. Dysfunctional coping refers to efforts to withdraw from the stressor or deny its existence, avoid seeking solutions, and attempting to manage one’s emotions. These authors further state that the conceptualizations of approach and avoidant coping are very similar, and that many studies have generally shown that a coping style that tends to avoid or ignore the stressor is typically shown to be associated with higher rates of maladjustment (Seiffge-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000). In a previous study by Seiffge-Krenke (1993), withdrawal and avoidant coping were used twice as often by individuals in clinically referred samples than by those in nonclinical samples, irrespective of the stressor involved.

In addition to emotional symptoms such as depression, there is also evidence supporting the association of coping and certain behaviors. The relationship between coping and substance use was examined in a sample of over 1600 participants in a longitudinal study. Certain types of avoidant coping (e.g. anger coping, helpless coping, and hangout coping) were found to be positively related to adolescent substance use and the continued increase of substance use, particularly at high levels of stress (Wills, Sandy, Yaeger, Cleary, & Shinar, 2001). In a study of personality and related predisposition to engage in risky behaviors, avoidant coping predicted involvement in substance abuse, the experience of underachievement, sexual behavior and delinquent behavior. Additionally,
results suggested that dysfunctional styles of regulating emotion are core features of
problem behaviors in adolescence (Cooper, Wood, Orcutt, and Albino, 2003). Although
school attendance was not included in their study, the variables of substance abuse, poor
school performance, and delinquent behavior have previously been correlated with school
attendance (Steward, et al., 2008; Henry, 2007; Weist, Paskewitz, Jackson, & Jones,
1998).

Other behavioral problems, as reported by mothers and self-reported by children,
have also been shown to be correlated with emotion-focused or avoidant strategies, while
problem-focused coping was observed to be negatively correlated with behavioral
problems (Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988). In this study of 130 youth, ages 10-
14, the implementation of problem-focused coping strategies were negatively related to
emotional/behavioral problems. Students who were less adept at utilizing problem-
focused coping experienced more adjustment problems. Additionally, the number of
emotion-focused strategies utilized was positively related with emotional/behavioral
problems that were reported by students and mothers (Compas et al., 1988). These
authors surmised that coping is related to emotional and behavioral problems, with
coping serving as a risk or protective factor for a variety of emotional/behavioral
difficulties in these youth. Hampel and Petermann (2006) also demonstrated a link
between emotion-focused coping and adjustment problems, while problem-focused
coping was negatively associated with internalizing and externalizing disorders. In this
study, youth coping responses were examined in relationship to the two stress domains of
interpersonal and academic stressors with the results being consistent with much of the
literature and concluding that approach coping serves as a protective factor for internalizing disorders (Hampel & Petermann, 2006).

In an examination of coping responses in youth, adolescents with conduct disorder were observed to use more avoidance coping, along with depressed adolescents, than did either healthy adolescents or those with rheumatic disease (Ebata and Moos, 1991). The authors concluded that the tendency to use more approach coping is related to better adjustment. Other types of psychopathology beyond depression have also been linked to coping style. Watson and Sinha (2008) observed emotion-focused or avoidant coping to be a strong predictor of psychopathology. They examined a variety of psychological symptoms in relation to coping and found emotion-focused coping to be a substantial predictor of all the scales of the Brief Symptoms Inventory (e.g. Somatization, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoid Ideation, and Psychoticism), with the majority of the variance ranging between 15.4% for paranoid ideation and 32.4% for anxiety.

*Developmental, Gender, and Ethnic Differences in Coping*

Adolescence is a complicated segue from childhood to adulthood that is characterized by increased demands for coping with a variety of stressors related to the many social, biological, and psychological changes taking place in this developmental stage. With the vast developmental differences that exist across the ages between childhood and adulthood, interest in the possible developmental differences in coping is not surprising. Research findings, in general, indicate that there are important coping differences across the lifespan. In a cross-sectional study of the coping actions of youth
ages 11-19, older adolescents were observed to be less likely to use problem-solving strategies, while also experiencing an increase in avoidant strategies such as substance use (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1999b).

Hampel and Petermann (2005) also reported age differences in coping, with findings indicating that the adolescent group (7th graders, both male and female) used significantly more maladaptive, avoidant strategies, such as rumination, than the late childhood group (3rd & 4th graders). Thus, these studies suggest that there are some developmental changes in coping, with early adolescence representing a shift toward using more maladaptive, avoidant coping strategies.

However, with regard to situation-specific coping (e.g. academic or interpersonal stressors), significant differences were not found across age groups (Hampel & Petermann, 2005). This same pattern was also demonstrated by Griffith, Dubow, & Ippolito (2000), who investigated developmental and cross-situational differences in coping strategies used by adolescents. In this study of 375 adolescents (7th, 9th, & 12th grades), participants used more avoidance than approach coping strategies for family stressors, and more approach than avoidance strategies for school and peer stressors.

In their comprehensive review of the literature, Fields and Prinz (1997) conclude that, in general, children progress from the pre-school years through adolescence utilizing a changing set of coping strategies to deal with life stressors. Younger children tend to employ concrete behavioral avoidance coping strategies across a variety of stressors, with minimal differentiation in strategies used for different stressful situations. As they progress to primary and early elementary ages, children tend to use both approach and
avoidance strategies, with an increase in using cognitive distraction rather than behavioral escape. They also begin to better differentiate among stressful situations and apply specific coping strategies for specific situations. With adolescence comes the advent of metacognition, and thus, the ability to use a greater variety of problem-solving and emotion-regulation strategies, as compared to younger children. They have the ability to think abstractly and consider various points of view. Although metacognitive skills can encourage consideration of the use of different strategies, and thus, potentially increased coping specificity for a given situation, it may also contribute to an increase in cognitive avoidance strategies such as rumination (Fields & Prinz, 1997). Hampel and Peterman (2005) found that adolescents in the 6th and 7th grades were characterized by decreases in adaptive coping strategies and increases in maladaptive coping strategies. Thus, a maladaptive coping pattern was found in middle adolescence.

Overall, this review of the literature by Fields and Prinz (1997) suggests that the findings on the nature of change in use of coping strategies in the transition from childhood to adolescence are mixed. While some researchers have found a trend for less use of problem-solving strategies and less use of both cognitive and behavioral avoidance strategies with age, others have shown an increase in the use of cognitive avoidance strategies.

In her review of the literature on adolescent coping, Frydenberg (2008) points out that gender is a strong discriminator of coping, and that the differences among males and females with regard to coping increases with age. Regarding specific differences in strategies employed, girls report using more social support strategies and less productive
means of coping (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1991). These authors conclude that girls report experiencing more anxiety, lower self-esteem, and appear to be more inclined to develop psychological distress and maladaptive coping. Girls are more likely than boys to use coping strategies that involve tension reduction, self-blame, and worry. In contrast, boys report using more strategies that involve seeking diversions or physical activity and to ignore the problem and keep it to themselves (Frydenberg, 2008). Similar gender differences also have been found by other researchers, with girls scoring higher in seeking social support and problem-solving, and boys scoring higher in avoidant coping (Eschenbeck, H. Kohlmann, C. & Lohaus, A., 2007). In a sample of 286 adolescents, girls were observed to use significantly more social support, passive avoidance, rumination, and resignation (Hampel and Peterman, 2006).

With regard to differences in coping based on ethnicity, in general, there are usually more reported similarities than differences in adolescent coping across cultures. Differences that are observed are often determined by the specific context as a result of the social and cultural norms that exist in a given community (Frydenberg, 2008). Griffith, Dubow, and Ippolito (2000) did find ethnic differences in relation to coping in their study of 375 adolescents. African-American students reported higher levels of approach coping that Caucasian students, but they also reported more use of avoidant coping than other ethnic groups for peer stressors. Hispanic students did not differ from African-American or Caucasian students. These authors expressed caution in consideration of results due to the inconsistent pattern of ethnicity differences and because the sample was primarily Caucasian, with the African-American and Hispanic
groups comprising only 12% and 9% of the sample, respectively. Thus, for later analyses, they did not include ethnicity as a demographic variable.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

The participants for this study included 272 students, ages ranging from 12 to 14. Student participants were recruited from a school system in a small town in the South. The school system is located in a district with approximately 6300 students, approximately 1000 of whom are of middle-school age (6th – 8th grades). Demographically, the district serves a population comprised of 81% Caucasian (48% female; 52% male), 13% Hispanic (57% female; 43% male), and 6% African-American (38% female; 62% male).

Power Analysis

In order to determine sample size, a power analysis was conducted using the software package G* Power (Version 2.0; Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). Based on the power analysis, 111 participants were needed to provide this study with a medium effect size of .30 (small, .10; medium, .30; large, .50) and a power of .95.

Instruments

Participating students completed a brief demographic questionnaire and the Coping Responses Inventory for Youth (CRI-Y) ages 12-18.
**Demographic Questionnaire.** Participants completed a demographic information sheet that contained information about the participants’ age, grade, and ethnicity.

**Coping Responses Inventory-Youth Form (CRI-Y).** The CRI-Y is a 48-item self-report measure that represents eight coping strategies subscales reflecting both approach and avoidance coping (Moos, 1993). The CRI-Y assesses coping processes in response to stressful life circumstances in adolescents 12 to 18 years old and can be completed in about 15 minutes. These eight scales were conceptually derived as cognitive approach (logical analysis, positive appraisal), behavioral approach (guidance/support seeking, problem solving), cognitive avoidance (cognitive avoidance, resigned acceptance), and behavioral avoidance (seeking alternative rewards, emotional discharge). The first set of four scales measures approach coping, and the second set of four scales measures avoidance coping. Each of the two sets of coping responses is further delineated into two categories that reflect cognitive or behavioral coping methods. According to the test’s author, approach coping is problem-focused and covers cognitive and behavioral efforts to master or resolve life stressors. In contrast, avoidance coping is generally emotion-focused and includes cognitive and behavioral attempts to avoid thinking about a stressor, or to try to manage the affect associated with it. Respondents rate the frequency with which they used each of the strategies to cope with a selected stressor on a 4-point scale (0=”no” to 3= “yes, fairly often”). Based on an individual’s responses, raw scores ranging from 0-18 for each scale are obtained, which are then converted to T-scores, with a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 (Moos, 1993). According to the author of the instrument, based on the eight scales, two index measures, the Approach Summary Index
and the Avoidance Summary Index, can be computed that yields a single score to measure a tendency to rely on either approach or avoidance coping. The Summary Indices are the sum of the \( T \)-scores for the four scales (approach or avoidance) divided by the sum of the \( T \)-scores of all eight scales.

Moos (1993) reported internal consistency coefficients in the 0.70 range across subscales, and found moderate intercorrelations among subscales within each domain (approach and avoidance). With regard to stability of coping over time, in general, the coping scales were shown to be moderately stable over time among males and females, with reliability coefficients of .29 and .34, respectively.

*Student Attendance.* The number of student absences were obtained from the school system’s attendance data base. The calendar year for the student participants requires 180 days of school attendance.

*Procedure*

Prior to collection of all data, an Internal Review application was submitted to the University Internal Review Board. Upon receipt of approval, participants were recruited from a pool of approximately 600 7\(^{th}\) and 8\(^{th}\) students. Students in the 6\(^{th}\) grade were not included for recruit because of the 12-year old age requirement of the CRI-Y. Informed parental consent and student assent forms were distributed through students’ homebase classes. Because students who missed none to very few days were over-represented in comparison to those who missed many school days in the initial data collection, a second data collection was conducted, per Internal Review Board approval. The additional data collection process followed the same protocol as the initial collection, but with students
who had been identified with excessive days missed from school, according to school system policy. The students who assented and whose parents provided written consent participated in this study by completing the brief demographic questionnaire and the CRI-Y. Data collection was conducted during the winter/spring semester for both episodes of data collection, and during a non-instructional time of the school day. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw their participation at any time. Participants’ anonymity was maintained by keeping consent forms separate from the measures that were completed. Although initially participant identity of completed measures was needed to match to school attendance for each participant, once obtained, identifying information was replaced with identification number.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0) program. Pearson r correlations were conducted to examine the associations among the study variables. Correlation coefficients provide an index to describe how sets of data are related. To predict student attendance, multiple regressions were conducted on the CRY-I scores for each scale and the two index measures, Approach Summary Index (ASI) and Avoidance Summary Index (AVI).

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. There is a relationship between the students’ use of coping strategies and their gender.

Hypothesis 2. There is a relationship between the students’ use of coping strategies and their age.
Hypothesis 3. There is a relationship between the students’ use of coping strategies and their school attendance.

Hypothesis 4. Students’ coping style (approach vs. avoidance) will predict their school attendance pattern, with those students who employ more avoidant coping strategies having a higher rates of school absenteeism.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Data collected from 276 participants was coded and entered into the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences, Version 16.0 (SPSS 16.0). Data was coded to ensure anonymity of the participants. Before proceeding with the data analysis, variables were screened for possible code and statistical assumption violations with SPSS Frequencies and Regression procedures. Cases with missing values were very few (less than 5) and therefore were discarded, leaving data from 272 participants for analysis. Prior to the main analyses, data screening was performed using SPSS REGRESSION and SPSS EXPLORE for evaluation of the assumptions of multivariate analysis. Results of evaluation of assumptions led to a logarithmic transformation of the absences from school variable due to extreme positive skewness and kurtosis.

Demographic Data

The demographic composition of those completing the study was very similar to the demographics of students served within the county school system. Study participants included 58% female and 42% male, 81% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, and 7% African American, with a mean age of approximately 13 years. 13 year old participants accounted for 48% of the sample, 18% were 12 years old, and 34% were 14 years old.
**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and ranges for absenteeism, each of the CRI-Y scales, and the index scores calculated for total Approach and Avoidant coping.

**Means and Standard Deviations for School Absence and CRI-Y scales, Summary Indices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism (days missed)</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>53.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Analysis</td>
<td>46.49</td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td>49.33</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek Guidance/Support</td>
<td>48.75</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>79.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>48.32</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>74.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Avoidance</td>
<td>53.74</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/Resignation</td>
<td>53.15</td>
<td>10.68</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Altern Rewards</td>
<td>50.79</td>
<td>10.25</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>74.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Discharge</td>
<td>52.84</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>79.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach Sum Index</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>58.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Sum Index</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>63.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N= 272
Participants missed an average of 5.67 days from the beginning of the school year in August until March in the spring semester. Absenteeism among the study’s participants ranged from 0 days absent to 53 days absent. Table 2 presents the descriptive data relevant to school absenteeism among study participants.

Table 2

*School Absenteeism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Days Absent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>62.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>22.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-53</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=272

To provide information regarding hypotheses 1 and 2, a between subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationships among gender, age, and the use of specific coping strategies. The dependent variables for the analysis were the 8 scales of the CRI-Y (logical analysis,
positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and support, problem-solving, cognitive avoidance, acceptance and resignation, seeking alternative rewards, and emotional discharge). The independent variables were participant age and gender. No extreme scores, outliers, or statistical assumption violations were noted. A statistically nonsignificant Box’s M test ($p > .05$) indicated equality of variance-covariance matrices of the dependent variables across levels of the independent variables.

Using Wilks’ lambda, the dependent variate was significantly affected by the main effect of participant gender, Wilks’ lambda = .906, $F(8, 259) = 3.35, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .094$. There was no main effect for participant age, Wilks’ lambda = .935, $F(8, 518) = 1.01, p < .005$. The multivariate interaction effect of Age $\times$ Gender was not statistically significant, $F = 1.09$.

Univariate ANOVAs were conducted on each dependent measure separately to determine the locus of the statistically significant multivariate main effect of participant gender. Females reported more frequent using of the coping strategies of logical analysis, $F(1, 266) = 8.05, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .029$, positive reappraisal, $F(1, 266) = 7.93, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .029$, seeking guidance and support, $F(1, 266) = 9.44, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .034$, seeking alternative rewards, $F(1, 266) = 7.39, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .027$, and emotional discharge, $F(1, 266) = 16.561, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .059$.

Regression Analysis

To provide information related to hypotheses 3 and 4, a standard multiple regression was performed between absences from school as the dependent variable and gender, age, CRI-Y scales (logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and
support, problem-solving, cognitive avoidance, acceptance or resignation, seeking alternative rewards, emotional discharge), and total Approach and Avoidance coping as the independent variables. Analysis was performed using SPSS REGRESSION and SPSS EXPLORE for evaluation of assumptions.

Results of evaluation of assumptions revealed extreme positive skewness of the school absences variable and three multivariate outliers. Because of extreme skewness, the school absences variable was transformed with a log base-10 transformation. Three residual outliers were eliminated using the SPSS casewise diagnostics routine.

_Bivariate Correlations Among Variables_

Table 3 displays the inter-correlations among the variables. Most notably, participant age, and the use of seeking alternative rewards and acceptance or resignation were correlated with school absences, \( p < .05 \). Additionally, gender was correlated with the use of emotional discharge as a coping strategy, with females reporting using this strategy more than males. Age was also positively correlated with the use of emotional discharge as a coping strategy. Specifically, with regard to age, older students were absent more and reported more use of emotional discharge as a coping strategy than younger students.
Table 3

*Correlations for School Absenteeism (log base 10) and predictor variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>School abs (log)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School abs (log)</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.138*</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical analysis</td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>-.158*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive appraisal</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>-.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek guid/support</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>-.175*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>-.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoidance</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>-.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/resignation</td>
<td>-.107**</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>-.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek alt rewards</td>
<td>-.108**</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>-.171*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disch</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.153**</td>
<td>-.251*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach Summ</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Summ</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>-.020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (one-tailed)

**correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed)
Regression results are summarized in Table 4, with school absences (log base 10 of absences) as the criterion variable and with gender, age, the 8 coping strategies scale scores, and the total index for Approach and Avoidant coping styles, as the independent variables. Multiple $R$ for regression .324, was statistically significant, $F(12, 256) = 2.51$, $p < .05$. The adjusted $R^2$ value of .063 indicates that approximately 6% of the variability in school absences is predicted by the independent variables. Three of the 12 independent variables (seeking alternative rewards, problem-solving, and age) contributed significantly to the prediction of school absences ($p < .05$). Older students and students who reported higher rates of problem-solving as a specific coping strategy had higher rates of school absenteeism. The use of seeking alternative rewards as a coping strategy was negatively correlated to school absenteeism.
Table 4

*Standard Multiple Regression of Independent Variables on School Absences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE_B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.142*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical analysis</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive appraisal</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek guid/support</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.269*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cog avoidance</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept/resignation</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek alt rewards</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.251*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disch</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach Summ</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Summ</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.543</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed)*

Note: $R^2 = .063$
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between adolescent coping and patterns of school attendance, while also examining the effects of student gender and age. The purpose of this research was to evaluate whether the ways in which adolescent students cope with stressful events are related to school attendance patterns. Because previous research has associated school attendance problems with risky adolescent behavior, the hypothesis was made that individual coping style is associated with higher rates of student absenteeism. The discussion will begin with a summary and explanation of results of each hypothesis, along with inclusion of relevant past research findings. Limitations, clinical implications, and directions for future research will also be addressed.

Hypothesis 1. There is a relationship between the students’ use of coping strategies and their gender.

The data in this research study established a relationship between gender and the specific coping strategies employed by a student. Females reported more frequently using the coping strategies of logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking guidance and support, seeking alternative rewards, and emotional discharge. These results are generally consistent with previous research that reports girls being more likely than boys
to use more social support seeking strategies and less productive means of coping (Frydenberg, 2008). Other researchers, as well, have found that girls use more social support and problem-solving strategies, in addition to passive avoidance, cognitive rumination, and resignation (Eschenbeck, Kohlmann, & Lohaus, 2007; Hampel & Petermann, 2005).

Hypothesis 2. There is a relationship between students’ use of coping strategies and age.

The data in this research study did not support a relationship between a student’s age and the use of any specific coping strategy, as measured by the CRI-Y. Although past research examining the association between age and coping strategies used by individuals often times has shown that age is significant factor in coping, overall, findings in the literature have been mixed. Older adolescents have been shown to be less likely to use problem-solving strategies and more likely to employ rumination or cognitive avoidant strategies (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1999; Hampel & Petermann, 2005).

However, although there is some evidence for decreased use of problem-solving strategies and cognitive and behavioral avoidance strategies with age, others have demonstrated an increased use of cognitive avoidance strategies (Fields & Prinz, 1997). A possible explanation for this variety of findings may depend on situation-specific coping, which this study did not address. Researchers have found that sometimes coping differences are found based on situation-specific stressors. Adolescents have been shown to use more avoidance coping when dealing with family stressors and more approach coping when dealing with school and peer stressors (Hampel & Petermann, 2005;
Griffith, Dubow, & Ippolito, 2000). Another possible explanation for the lack of support concerning the association between age and coping in this present study is that the relative age differences among study participants is somewhat marginal. Studies in the literature that have examined age and developmental differences and coping typically have involved comparing younger with older age groups. This present study included only 7th and 8th graders whose ages ranged only from 12 to 14 years.

Hypothesis 3. There is a relationship between students’ use of coping strategies and school absenteeism.

The data in this research study did support a relationship between the use of certain coping strategies and higher rates of student absenteeism. Specifically, students who reported higher rates of problem-solving (an Approach coping response) as a specific coping strategy had higher rates of school absenteeism. The use of seeking alternative rewards (an Avoidance coping response) as a coping strategy was negatively correlated to school absenteeism, meaning that those who employed this strategy less frequently were more likely to have higher rates of school absenteeism.

The significant results obtained from this study do suggest that a student’s use of specific coping strategies may play a role in school attendance patterns for adolescents. However, the strength of any effect of coping on school absenteeism was not observed to be substantial from these data. Only about 6% of the variance in school absenteeism was explained the predictor variables, with the use of problem-solving as a coping strategy having the most relative influence, followed by less use of seeking alternative rewards as
a coping strategy. Additionally, age was the third predictor of higher rates of student absenteeism, which was not hypothesized.

_Hypothesis 4. Students’ coping style (approach vs. avoidance) will predict school attendance patterns, with those students who employ more avoidant coping strategies having higher rates of student absenteeism._

It was hypothesized that adolescents with avoidant coping style would be more likely to experience attendance problems, as coping style has been associated with a variety of adolescent problematic behaviors. Although results do suggest that coping has some influence on the experience of problematic school attendance, a student’s overall coping style (Approach vs. Avoidance) was not found to be significantly influential. The data in this research study did not support a relationship between coping style and higher rates of student absenteeism. Instead, a student’s age and the use of specific coping strategies were found to be predictive of higher rates of student absenteeism.

Complicating these results is the observation that one approach coping strategy (problem-solving) had influence on school absenteeism in the positive direction, while one avoidant coping strategy (seeking alternative rewards) had influence on student absenteeism in the negative direction. When considering the results from the examination of specific coping strategies used, as opposed to overall style, problem-solving as a strategy had the most influence on higher rates of student absenteeism, and problem-solving is an Approach coping response. Moos (1993) defines the coping strategy of problem-solving a behavioral attempt to deal directly with the problem. As other researchers have found poor school achievement to be highly correlated with
absenteeism, it could be argued that proactive school avoidance is an attempt for a struggling student to deal directly with what is perceived as an insurmountable problem. Similarly, the negative association between seeking alternative rewards and school absenteeism initially seems counter-intuitive as well. This strategy is defined as a behavioral attempt to get involved in a different activity or diversion and develop new sources of satisfaction (Moos, 1993). Students with higher rates of school absenteeism have been observed to have greater social difficulty, which could inhibit the ability to find the many different activities and potential sources of satisfaction that are often available in a school setting (Bender, 1995). Because this is not a strategy more frequently employed by these students, possibly they avoid the highly social setting of the school altogether. Other authors have noted that sometimes when dichotomizing coping styles, particularly in to what is considered adaptive vs. maladaptive, results can be confounded (Hampel & Petermann, 2006).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, other variables were not measured that might have served as control variables (e.g. family variables, SES, GPA, personality factors). Also, this study involved participants in a single school district, and it lacked ethnic diversity. Additionally, reasons for school absence were not taken into account. Arguably, the most potentially impacting limitation was that the school absence rate for this sample was quite low, even after a second attempt to gather data from participants with higher rates of school absenteeism. The mean number of absences was 5.67, and those students missing 15 days or more only accounted for approximately 8% of the
sample (11 students). Although this study involved a relatively large sample size (N = 272), the extent of the variability of the dependent measure (school absenteeism) was limited. Likely exacerbating this weakness is the previously reported heterogeneity of youth who experience school attendance problems and the wide range of problems these youth experience that ranges from poor academic achievement, social alienation, family discord, to delinquent behavior (Lyon & Cotler, 2007; Steward, Steward, & Blair, 2008; Kearney, 2003; Lambdin, 1996).

Another limitation worthy to note is not only the complexity involved in any study of the problem of school absenteeism, but also the complexities involved in the study of coping as well. How coping is measured has long been debated. Some researchers have called for stronger consensus in the conceptualization and measurement in coping in childhood and adolescence (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). The use of a self-report coping measure is one more limitation to this study. Others have argued that self-report coping measures provide an incomplete and sometimes distorted view of coping behavior (Coyne & Gottlieb, 1996). This study’s reliance on only a self-report measure for coping is a major limitation. Although supporting measures from other informants such as parents or teachers might be beneficial, such measures are unavailable.

Implications and Future Research

Because certain coping strategies did contribute to the variability of school attendance patterns, additional research examining student coping as it relates to student attendance patterns might be worth pursuing. It is essential that interventions for problematic school
absenteeism be driven by a clear understanding of all possible contributing factors to the problem. Some contributing factors may be related to systemic and environmental factors, but there are also a wide variety of factors that are likely specific to the individual that need to be considered as well. Successful interventions need to address a student’s specific circumstances, both regarding environment and personal characteristics. Targeting schools in different locations and which experience more extensive challenges with student absenteeism might be advantageous, although similar patterns in school attendance data has been reported throughout the relevant literature (Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson, 2004). To combat this common problem in school absenteeism research, students who have been referred to juvenile court for truancy could be recruited as one group, while students with similar demographics, yet without problematic school attendance, could be recruited as a comparison group. However, even this plausible design might be hindered by the limitation of having to dichotomize the school absence variable and the inherent problem of defining the number of days absent that is considered problematic.

In related future research, other student variables could be included such as personality traits and family relationship variables. Because at the middle school level, one would assume that youth were still under more influence of their parents (as opposed to high school youth), it might be interesting to explore the coping style of parents of students, with and without school attendance problems, to evaluate parental coping as either a correlate of student coping or as a predictor of school attendance patterns. With the complexity of the problem of school attendance in adolescents, it may be that a more
complex design is needed which aims to provide a description or profile of those youth who experience chronic school absenteeism. More accurate and thorough information provided by well-designed research studies could assist in development of more effective interventions to target this population.
REFERENCES


doi: 10.1097/01.chi.0000172552.41596.6f


doi: 10.1016/S0190-7409(00)00096-7


doi: 10.1097/01.CHI.0000046865.56865.79


doi: 10.1016/S0272-7358(97)00033-0


Frydenberg, E. & Lewis, R. Adolescent coping: the different ways in which boys and girls cope. *Journal of Adolescence, 14*(2), 119-133.

doi: 10.1016/0140-1971(91)90025-M.


doi: 10.1177/0272431692012001001


doi: 10.1037//0735-7028.34.1.57


doi: 10.1207/s15374424jccp2201_9


Appendix A

Brief Personal Information

NAME:

MALE  FEMALE  (circle)

AGE:__________

GRADE:______

ETHNICITY: (circle)
Caucasian       African-American
Hispanic        Other

NOTE: This form will be removed from the completed questionnaire to protect confidentiality of responses.

Thanks for participating!!
Appendix B
Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am Kelly Madison Eckenrod, M. A. and I am a doctoral student at Tennessee State University. I am also a school psychologist with Warren County Schools. I am conducting a research study on the relationship between school attendance and coping strategies of students.

The purpose of this study is to gain information and insight on factors associated with school attendance. School system staff need accurate information so that they can provide the necessary support, the right kind of school environment, and accurate insight into helping students be successful at school. Sometimes there are factors that may be contributing to a student’s reluctance to attend school. Educators need to know and understand the factors associated with school attendance so that they can provide the necessary support and intervention, well beyond disciplinary measures.

Your voluntary response to this request constitutes your informed consent for your child to participate in this activity. You are not required to participate.

**Participation will involve completion of a brief questionnaire that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be conducted during a time that does not interfere with a teacher’s instructional time.** Results of the study will be provided to Warren County Schools at its conclusion and will be provided to you as well. **ALL INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. NAMES WILL NOT BE**
ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND THE CONSENT FORMS WILL BE KEPT SEPARATE.

If at any time during the completion of the questionnaire, your child wishes to withdraw, this perfectly OK. His or her agreement to participate can be withdrawn at any time. This activity has been approved by the Warren County Schools Research Committee and the Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. This Committee (TSU-IRB) administers both the General Assurance of Compliance with the United States Department of Health and Human Services Policy for the protection of Human Subjects and the University policy covering the protection of human subjects.

Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research. If you have any questions, before or after participation in the study, I will be available at kmeckenrod@hotmail.com or you can reach me at (931)-607-2113.

Please note your signature indicates that you have read all of the information within this consent form and that you can call if you have questions. Your signature indicates your willingness to participate in the study.

Signature of participant _______________ Signature date _______________

Signature of parent/guardian _______________ Signature date _______________
Research and Sponsored Programs
Tennessee State University
3500 John A. Merritt Blvd.
Nashville, Tennessee 37209-1561

Office of the Vice President

To:
Kelly Madison Eckenrod
kmeckenrod@hotmail.com
strotter1@aol.com
Dept.: Psychology

From:
(Signer's identity unknown) Signed by G. Pamela Burch-Sims, Ph.D., CCC-A
<psims@tnstate.edu> Time: 2011.03.16 15:30:05 -05'00' Reason: I am approving this document

Dr. G. Pamela Burch-Sims, Chair, Institutional Review Board
Re:
Protocol #HS2010-2558

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2011

The document listed below has been carefully reviewed and found to be in compliance with OPRR document title 45, Code of Federal Regulations part 46, the protection of human subjects, as amended by Federal policy, effective August 19, 1991. This project is approved as it presents minimal or no research risks to the pool of impending human subjects. Please make note, that any deviations in the administration of the protocol, accidental or otherwise should be reported to the IRB as soon as possible. The FWA for Tennessee State University is #FWA0000309, which is effective from September 23, 2008 to September 23, 2011.

"Adolescent School Attendance Patterns and the Effects of Coping Style"

This approval is valid for one year from the date indicated above. Continuation of research beyond that date requires re-approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Please contact me at 963-5661 or e-mail irb@tnstate.edu for additional information.