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Teacher absences in an HIV and AIDS context: Empirical evidence from nine schools in the Kavango and Caprivi regions (Namibia)

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(ED/UNP/HIV/IAC2008/POSTER/19)

Lessons learned:

- Teacher absences pose a serious problem with major consequences on the teaching process and learning opportunities. The problem exists independently of HIV and AIDS, but it has been seriously aggravated by the disease.
- The silence that surrounds the epidemic makes it impossible to accurately measure its impact.
- Teacher absences are fewer in well-managed schools and their impact on student learning less evident.

Recommendations:

- Management of teacher absences needs to be strengthened by modernizing statistics systems, increasing accountability in schools for record keeping, implementing existing rules and procedures and improving mechanisms for teacher replacements.
- Protocols for early retirement or reduced workload for chronically sick teachers should be investigated.

Background:

- Research from southern Africa suggests that HIV and AIDS are leading to increased teacher absences, with negative impacts on the quality of education.
- This study examined teacher absences in high prevalence areas of northern Namibia to assess the importance of the phenomenon and suggest possible courses of action.

Methods:

- Researchers observed the schools' daily activities for one week, taking note of classroom activities as well as students' and teachers' whereabouts.
- Observations were complemented by an analysis of school files over two years, and focus-group discussions and interviews with teachers, students and school governors.
- An initial review of national teacher policies was also conducted.



Source: Ami Vitale/World Bank

Results:

- Teacher absences in the schools visited pose a serious problem, reducing learning opportunities in schools already under-privileged because of poverty-related factors.
- Many absences were reported to be due to attendance at funerals, sick leave and personal convenience. But HIV and AIDS were never mentioned as the direct cause. Bad record keeping may contribute to underestimations of the problem.
- Findings from this study fed into concurrent discussions and preparations to revise the Ministry of Education's policy as well as the development of a Relief Teacher Strategy for Namibia.

Acknowledgements: Ministry of Education of Namibia; UNESCO Windhoek Cluster Office; UNESCO National Commission; Social Impact Assessment and Policy Analysis Corporation (Pty) Ltd. (SIAPAC).

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