

1 CONTEXT

Although research conducted in Québec and elsewhere has revealed that students who drop out of school have certain risk factors in common, they are not all the same in terms of psychosocial and academic characteristics. Indeed, it seems that students who drop out can be differentiated by whether or not they present behavioural problems, in addition to academic ones.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following fascicle: JANOSZ, Michel, Sophie PASCAL, Luc BELLEAU, Isabelle ARCHAMBAULT, Sophie PARENT and Linda PAGANI (2013). "Elementary School Students at Risk of Dropping Out of High School: Characteristics at 12 Years of Age and Predictors at 7 Years of Age," *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010) – From Birth to 12 Years of Age*, Institut de la statistique du Québec, Vol. 7, Fascicule 2. http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/education/frequentation-scolaire/décrochage_an.pdf

Note that the QLSCD has been following a cohort of children who were born in Québec in 1997-1998.

2 HIGHLIGHTS

In analyzing the three main predictors of school dropout, namely low performance, delays and a low level of school engagement, 15% of 12-year-old students already presented a serious risk of dropping out later in high school. Among these, nearly half presented discipline problems in class, in addition to those related to academic performance or engagement.

Though there was no significant difference between boys and girls among children at risk with no discipline problems, proportionally more boys than girls were in the group of children at risk with discipline problems.

The main characteristics of children at 7 years of age and 12 years of age at risk of dropping out of high school

Whether or not the children had discipline problems, five main characteristics differentiated 12-year-old children at risk of dropping out of high school from those who presented no risk:

- A more negative academic self-concept in reading
- A more negative academic self-concept in mathematics
- Attention problems
- A lower level of altruism
- A greater need for parental help with school work.

A large number of problems observed among children 12 years of age at risk of dropping out of high school were already present when they were 7 years of age. This was especially the case in terms of a more negative academic self-concept in reading and inattention.

In general, difficulty in reading at 7 years of age was the main sign of risk at the end of kindergarten of dropping out of high school later on.

School dropout is a process which for many children begins at school entry. Already when their child is 7 years of age, parents of children at risk are often called to the school to discuss their child's poor academic performance, and have greater difficulty in creating the conditions that foster learning.

2 HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

Children with discipline problems at risk of dropping out compared to those not at risk

In addition to the characteristics listed above, these students presented specific traits compared to students not at risk. They came from households in which:

- Parenting practices were less positive, namely where the parents spent less time encouraging their child, speaking with or engaging in activities with him/her (at 12 years of age).
- Parents were dissatisfied with helping their child with his/her homework (at 12 years of age).
- Family income was lower (at 7 and 12 years of age).
- There was less stimulation for reading on the part of the parents (at 7 years of age).

Already at 7 years of age, children at risk with discipline problems tended to present a lower quality of participation in class than those not at risk of dropping out later in high school.

Children with no discipline problems at risk of dropping out compared to those not at risk

In addition to characteristics already listed which distinguish them from students not at risk, they mainly presented interiorization of their problems:

- Less indirect aggression and more symptoms of anxiety (at 12 years of age)
- Fewer signs of hyperactivity (at 12 years of age).

They also were more likely to come from households in which:

- Parents ascribed less importance to academic performance (at 12 years of age)
- Mothers were more likely to present symptoms associated with restless legs syndrome (uncontrollable need to move their legs), which was associated with attention deficit in the child (at 7 years of age).

Children with no discipline problems at risk of dropping out compared to those at risk with discipline problems

Many characteristics differentiated the two groups at risk. For example, children with discipline problems at risk of dropping out had less interest in school and were more likely to be in a class with other children with discipline problems (at 12 years of age). Children with no discipline problems at risk of dropping out presented lower scores in a knowledge-of-numbers activity at 7 years of age and were more likely to receive special needs help at 12 years of age.

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3 OF NOTE

Analyses resulting in elementary school students being categorized as at risk of dropping out of school later were based on an index initially validated for high school students. The capacity of this index to predict school dropout could be verified when the data on the children's high school trajectory become available.

4 DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

Academic self-concept

Academic self-concept is defined as the subjective evaluation a student makes of his/her skills in a given subject. For example, a student who tells himself he is capable of rapidly learning mathematics has a high academic self-concept in this subject.

INTERVENTION PATHS

The results underline the importance of a number of intervention targets, notably instilling an interest in reading and improving reading comprehension skills at school entry, providing support to parents in their child-rearing practices, and improving children's attention skills, feeling of self-efficacy, social skills, and emotional self-regulation.