School Attendance Problems

A Research Update and Where to Go

Malin Gren Landell, Editor

jerringfonden

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FOREWORD

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION of Human Rights states that everyone has a fundamental right to education. This reflects how essential education is for the individual, as well as for society. However, even when education in a society is free and available to everyone, not all students attend school on a regular basis. School absenteeism and school dropout rates are global problems that seem to increase in the western world as well as in developing countries. Students need to attend school on a daily basis to succeed. Parents, teachers, and policy makers need to know how school attendance can be optimized, and what strategies and programs individual students can benefit from.

Given the importance of school attendance, research is needed to deepen our understanding of absenteeism and to develop efficient methods and tools to improve attendance. There is a need to pool together efforts and research from different disciplines, and from various parts of the world. Moreover, the accumulated knowledge must be made available to educators, policymakers, parents, and students.

The authors of this anthology are all distinguished researchers in the field and represent different disciplines, such as psychology, social work, education, and psychiatry. In their respective articled they outline results and conclusions based on studies conducted in, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the U.S.

The Jerring Foundation is most grateful to Dr. Malin Gren Landell for taking on the responsibility of editing this anthology. Without her dedication and knowledge this project would not have been possible.

The Jerring Foundation is also utterly grateful for the international partnership and the strong global collaboration offered by the International Network for School Attendance (INSA) and its founding executive committee members Drs. Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, Glenn

Melvin, David Heyne, and Gil Keppens. INSA (www.insa.network) has, through its world-wide reach and scope, lead the efforts in commissioning scholars of high academic repute for this anthology.

This anthology is produced following an initiative from the Jerring Foundation, in Sweden. Its aim is to provide up-to-date research on school attendance problems and to convey recommendations and inspiration for future studies. Hopefully, this anthology will be of value for various stakeholders, such as researchers, educators, policymakers, parents, and students.

Stockholm, January 2021

Birgit Rösblad
Chairman
The Jerring Foundation

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Malin Gren Landell

THE CONVENTIONS ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, Article 28, states that every child up to age 18 has a legal right to education. In many cases, children are not granted this right. The global number of out-of-school children, in 2018, was, for primary school, 59 million, for lower secondary school, 61 million, and for upper secondary school, 138 million (UNESCO, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 130 countries closed their schools, and half of the world's student population (990 million children) were not attending school (data published in May 2020).[1] In many countries, poverty is a major reason for why children are not granted their right to education in an equal way. Increased levels of wealth enable more children to access education. However, enrollment is one thing. In countries with high enrollment rates, there are other reasons for why children do not go to school. In many western countries, as well as in developing countries, school attendance problems (SAPs) are reported to increase. Hence, SAPs are a global problem that calls for global collaboration and cooperation, in order to source knowledge and find evidence for ways to prevent it, assess it, and intervene successfully.

What do we know today and where do we need to go? The authors of this anthology will try to answer these questions by presenting knowledge about what we can do about the problem, and how to move forward.

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[1] https://en.unesco.org / covid19 / educationresponse

The Many Names – Concepts and Definitions

Before going into the presentation of contemporary research, there is a need to sort out the concepts, terms and definitions used to describe school non-attendance. Unfortunately, there is a lack of consensus on terms and definitions, within and between countries, as well as between groups of researchers. This constitutes a major barrier to advance the field of research.

Below follows a presentation of the most common concepts used in contemporary research. This is not an attempt to give a complete overview of all concepts used in research studies, but rather a short introduction to concepts that will appear in this anthology. A recent overview of concepts used from 1932 to this date, can be found in an article by Heyne, Gren-Landell, Melvin, & Gentle-Genitty (2019a).

Excused versus Unexcused Absence

Commonly, within the legal framework of school systems in various countries, there is a distinction between absences that are considered excused and those that are not. Excused absence usually implies that a child's non-attendance is due to, for example, illness, a mandated vacation, or attending a funeral. Different terms, with similar meanings, are used to distinguish absences that are reported and sanctioned / mandated by parents and school, from absences that are neither reported nor sanctioned (because of an acceptable / plausible explanation). The following pairs of terms are commonly used in the literature: authorized vs. unauthorized absence, legal / illegal, valid / invalid, excused / unexcused, mandated / unmandated.

Excused as well as unexcused absences constitute a risk of negative outcomes in terms of school performance, grades, mental and physical health, and social problems (Heyne et al., 2019b). Therefore, it is common that researchers and clinicians do not regard this distinction as helpful and are in favor of avoiding the distinction between excused and unexcused absence (Lorentz workshop, 2018). However, the distinction still exists within school systems. One should also remember that in many cases, parents mandate absence although the nature of

the absence should not be regarded as excused. More research is needed to gain knowledge on thresholds and profiles to predict outcomes, like the combination of risk factors and resilience factors, the amount of absenteeism and whether the absence is excused or not.

Problematic Absenteeism
Another way to differentiate the problems of absenteeism, in order to guide action, is to assess if absences can be considered problematic or not. A single absence may be unproblematic, although there is always a risk of negative development and outcomes. An internationally recommended definition of problematic absenteeism is proposed by professor Christopher Kearney (2008). He has offered the following definition:

School-aged youth who:
1. have missed at least 25 percent of total school time for at least 2 weeks,
2. experience severe difficulty attending classes for at least 2 weeks with significant interference in a child's or family's daily routine, and/or
3. are absent for at least 10 days of school during any 15-week period while school is in session (i.e., a minimum of 15 percent days absent from school). Regarding the latter situation, days absent from school would include days a child missed at least 25 percent of the school day.

This definition covers important aspects. It takes into account that a student may be present but with large distress, or the student may have a large amount of repeated absence or persistent absence for a longer period of time. Finally, the definition takes into account authorized as well as unauthorized absence. An Official report of the Swedish government on SAPs, used the term "problematic school absenteeism" and suggested that problematic absenteeism should be defined as absence to an extent that put the student at risk for a negative impact on the development towards the goal of the education (SOU 2016:94). This

proposed definition includes all forms of absences: i.e. authorized and unauthorized, repeated occasional, as well as persistent absence for a longer period. An advantage of this term is that it does not imply not imply that absence is the problem of the individual student (contrary to other concepts like "school refusal") and it signals that absence can become problematic, for the student as well as for society. Also, it takes into account not only the threat of negative academic outcomes but also a negative effect on well-being.

School Attendance Problems
This anthology uses the term "school attendance problems". The reasons for this are that this term focuses on attendance instead of absence, it is atheoretical and implies a neutral aetiology. In addition, the term is acceptable in terms of its wording and it does not place the blame for the problem with the child.

    When it comes to studies on SAPs, research is guided by theoretical models that use different concepts. A short description of the concepts that will appear in this anthology is given below.

–   *School refusal (SR)* – The student is reluctant to go to school, or does not attend school or lessons, due to emotional distress in various forms (e.g. excessive anxiety/fearfulness, depression, temper tantrums, unexplained somatic symptoms). The student does not try to conceal their absence from their parents, and the student typically spends time at home instead of attending school. Further, the parents have made reasonable efforts, currently or at an earlier stage in the history of the problem, to promote school attendance.
–   *Truancy (TR)* – The student skips part of a school day, or full school days, either by being at school but not in class or by not at all being physically present at school. The absence is not permitted by school authorities and the young person typically tries to conceal their absence from their parents.
–   *School Refsusal Behaviour (SRB)* is used as an umbrella term for SR and TR.

– *School withdrawal (SW)* – Absence from school is due to parental efforts to keep the young person at home, or due to there being little or no parental effort to get the young person to school. Examples of this are when a child or youth stays at home to look after a parent with a mental health problem like depression, when a child or youth helps a parent or siblings as the parent suffers from drug problems. Absences occur when the child is acting as an interpreter for a parent in a meeting with the authorities.

There are still other concepts, like school avoidance, that have not been studied in the same exhaustive way as the ones above. Lately, another category of SAP has been identified, namely "school exclusion" (Heyne et al., 2019a). This concerns absence of student due to disciplinary exclusion in an inappropriate manner (e.g., unlawful expulsion, internal suspension for the school's convenience); or when the student is not welcome to school because of a lack of efforts (from the school) to accommodate the physical, socioemotional, behavioral, or academic needs of the student (for example when parents are asked to keep the student at home when their assistant has a day off). This type of absence may also be due to the school encouraging the student not to attend days when students are asked to complete a national academic assessment, as the presence of the student would lower the school's mean results.

To conclude, there is a need to use concepts that capture the nature of SAPs, to reach a consensus on which terms to use, and also to make sure that the terms are worded in a way that is acceptable and carry the correct meaning for the stakeholders. Language matters and the terms used imply values. Some argue that is unwise to use the term problematic absenteeism as it may imply that unproblematic absence exists. The same goes with excused absence. An excused absence may be interpreted as "ok" which is a risk for failure of seeing the true risks of absenteeism.

As will be presented in chapter one, different concepts belong to different traditions within research and clinical work in the field. As knowledge grows, new concepts arise that aim to guide interventions. However, more terms also complicate the way forward, as it hinders comparisons between studies and adds to the confusion among stakeholders.

School absenteeism is not a new phenomenon. In Sweden for example, in order to avoid unauthorized absenteeism, special school vacations were introduced during the forties, fifties and sixties, as a way of dealing with the fact that children were required to work on farms and elsewhere. In this way, a compromise was found, between mandatory school attendance and families' need for additional workforce during extra vulnerable periods.

What is the prevalence of SAPs worldwide? As mentioned above, there is no international consensus on which definition to use. This means that it is difficult to compare figures between countries, and over time. Besides, many countries do not monitor or report national figures on student absences and therefore official registration data is lacking. Below follows an attempt to present recent prevalence data from the countries represented by the authors of the anthology. The presented data varies in the type of absences that have been studied, in which year the data was collected, and in whether the data was sourced from students or from administrative systems. The source of the data also varies (research studies, the PISA-studies, national statistics). In addition, there are studies reporting shortcomings in how absences have been registered by teachers, and the correlation between students' self-reported data and data collected by authorities is weak (see chapter three). The figures should thus be interpreted with caution.

Australia
National statistics, for all schools in Australia, are reported annually since 2018. Data from 2019 showed that in Year 1–10, students attended, on average, 91.4 percent of "available school days" (ACARA, 2019). However, 27 percent of Australian school students attended less than 90 percent of school days, which equals approximately 20 or more days absent in a school year. Attendance rate is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1–10, as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended over the period.

Canada

Canada does not have a national department of education, and data on school absenteeism is not collected on a national level. According to data from the PISA study in 2018, a total of 23.2 percent of the sampled students (aged 15 years) reported skipping a day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). This number can be compared to the OECD average of 21 percent and thus Canada's numbers were close to the average, but slightly below comparative countries. According to the 2018 PISA study, 2.4 percent of the participating students reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

Japan

In Japan, a report on students in middle / lower secondary school (grade 7–9), showed that 3.9 percent of the students missed 30 days or more during 2019. The prevalence has increased with one percent during the past four years (Ministry of Education Culture, Sports, Science, Technology, 2020).

U.S

The most recent federal rates of chronic absenteeism, reported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, shows that 16 percent of the students missed 15 days or more during the 2015/2016 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Thus, 16 percent of the student population were, so called, chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism is defined as absenteeism of at least ten percent of enrolled school days (approximately 18 school days a year).

Europe

In an article by Keppens and Spruyt (2018), data for the European countries from the PISA study of the 2012/2013 school year, was analyzed in relation to the various educational systems in the 24 participating countries. Among the 15-year old European students, 17.8 percent reported skipping school one or two times during the two weeks leading up to the PISA study. The prevalence rates ranged from

5.57 percent in Luxembourg to 30.33 percent in Greece (Keppens & Spruyt, 2018).

England is a country that offer yearly statistics on school attendance. According to the Department of Education, nearly 11 percent of the students in state-funded primary and secondary school missed at least 10 percent of a school year was 11 percent during the 2016/2017 school year (United Kingdom Department of Education, 2018).

The statistics for *Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands* and *Spain* will be presented below, as these countries are represented by researchers contributing to the present anthology. Then follows data from Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Belgium
According to data from the PISA study in 2018, a total of 8.7 percent of the sampled students reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 1.3 percent of the students who reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

France
According to data from the PISA study in 2018, 16.1 percent reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 3.3 percent of the students who reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

Germany
There is a lack of national reports and studies on the prevalence of SAPs. According to data from a study in 2012, 4.1 percent of students aged 11–19 years, reported more than four days of unexcused absences during one month (Lenzen et al., 2013). According to data from the PISA study in 2018, 13.3 percent of the sampled students reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 2.1 percent of the students who

reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

The Netherlands
In 2018/2019 there were 4 958 students in primary and secondary school with absolute absenteeism, another 4 790 students did not attend school during more than three months, without authorization, and another 6 022 students were exempt from compulsory school attendance on the basis of Article 5a of the Compulsory Education Act (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen, 2020). According to data from the PISA study in 2018, 7.2 percent of the sampled students reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 0.8 percent of the students who reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

Spain
According to the 2018 PISA study, 29.6 percent of the sampled students reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 2.7 percent of the students who reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

Nordic Countries
A recurrent survey – The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) – is conducted with 34 participating countries or regions. TALIS 2013 showed that Sweden, together with Finland, had the highest rates of tardiness and unauthorized absences among the countries in the study (Skolverket, 2014). The statistics on absences is sourced from school principals.

Denmark
In 2018/2019, the Danish Ministry of Children and Education reported that a total of 14.2 percent of all school-aged youth were absent for

at least 10 percent of the schoolyear (Danish Ministry of Education, 2019). There has been an increase in absences among elementary and lower secondary students since 2016/2017 (Danish Ministry of Education, 2019). According to the PISA data from 2018, there was 19.7 percent of students that skipped a whole day of school at one or more times in the two weeks before the PISA test (OECD, 2019). Among the sampled students, a percentage of 2.4 reported having skipped a whole school day at 5 days or more.

Norway
Annual, national data on school attendance is not collected or reported by authorities in Norway. In one study, self-reported data for students (grades 5–10) showed that 3.9 percent of the students were absent, for any reason, more than 10 days during the last three months (Havik, Bru, & Ertesvåg, 2015). Female students and older students tended to report higher levels of school non-attendance. According to the 2018 PISA study, 13.6 percent of the sampled students reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 2.3 percent of the students who reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

Sweden
As the Jerring Foundation is based in, and acting in, Sweden, and the anthology is primarily aimed at Swedish agencies, the Swedish data is presented in a bit more detail. There are no official national data on attendance, collected on a regular basis in Sweden. In 2015 a national survey was carried out and data was sourced from headmasters or school administrators, providing estimated numbers (Skolinspektionen, 2016). In total, 18 000 students in grade 1–9 had 5 to 20 percent unauthorized, repeated absences during one months prior to the survey. There were 2 300 students who had repeatedly skipped school during the entire school year. According to the same survey, 1.7 out of 1000 students (1700 students) had not been to school for at least one full month. This absence was not considered authorized.

At the same period as the survey of the Swedish school authority (Skolinspektionen, 2016), another Swedish investigation was conducted by non-profit organization Prestationsprinsen (Öhman, 2016). Data was reported from communities indicated that 52 000 students in grade 4 to 9 were absent 10 to 19 percent and 18 000 students were absent at least 20 percent during one school term. In contrast to the investigation of Skolinspektionen (2016) the survey of Öhman included authorized absence.

There is a lack of data on absenteeism in secondary schools in Sweden. One way to find rates of unauthorized absence is to look into the number of students who are not approved for study allowance. During 2018/2019, a total of 8.7 percent of 339 000 upper secondary students lost their study allowance due to unauthorized absence.[2]

The above studies rely on administrative data. It is also important to look at student reported data. Student reported absence is addressed in a few surveys. In a recurrent survey that examines the students' attitudes towards school, two percent of students in grade 4–9, reported that they were absent from school, without permission, once a week or more in the school year of 2017/2108 (Skolverket, 2019).

According to the 2018 PISA study, 11.9 percent of the sampled students reported skipping a whole day of school or more in the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019). There was 1.5 percent of the students who reported skipping a whole day of school, five or more times during the two weeks prior to the PISA test (OECD, 2019).

Risk and Resilience Factors

There is not one single risk factor which explains the development of SAPs. Usually, at an individual level at least two, and usually more, risk factors contribute in a complex interplay (Kearney, 2008). Commonly, risk factors are categorized into four domains: family, school environ-

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[2] https://www.csn.se / om-csn / press / pressmeddelanden / 2019-07-09-rekordmanga-elever-far-studiebidraget-indraget-pa-grund-av-skolk.html

ment, individual, and social variables like peers and neighborhood. Due to space limitations, and the fact that risk factors will be covered elsewhere in this anthology, only a few will be mentioned below. There are many separate studies on risk factors. A recent meta-analytic overview summarizes the factors, identified in 75 different studies, into twelve risk domains, and each were found to have a large effect (Gubbels et al., 2019).

Resilience factors have not been studied as much. The number of risk factors, or the balance between risk and protective factors, may be more important than single factors in predicting school absenteeism (Ingul, Klöckner, Silverman & Nordahl, 2012). A recent article presents an instrument for the assessment of risk and protective factors related to truancy (van der Put, 2020). Other studies have expanded the knowledge on predictors of SAPs (see chapter four).

At the individual level, mental health difficulties, primarily symptoms of anxiety and of depression, may lead to absences (e.g. Finning et al., 2019). Learning difficulties (Melvin et al., 2019) and special educational needs, such as autism (e.g. Munkhaugen et al., 2019; Totsika, 2019), in combination with a lack of adaption to a student's special needs, or to the learning level of the individual student, are also associated with SAPs.

Among school variables there are risk factors at the organizational level, such as free periods and transitions (Havik, 2015). A poor school climate and a lack of democracy, feeling unconnected to school, and feeling unsafe at school are some factors that contribute (Thapa et al., 2013; Virtanen et al., 2020).

Factors relating to family or home environment are, for example: living with and caring for parents with substance abuse problems, somatic or mental health problems (Ingul, Klöckner, Silverman & Nordahl, 2012), but also living in a family with high levels of conflict (McShane, 2001) or poverty may impede school attendance (e.g. Ready, 2010).

Social risk factors, at the community level, include unsafe neighborhoods, transportation problems, drugs, and a negative attitude towards school (e.g. Teasley, 2004; Kearney, 2016).

Associated Problems and Consequences

There are strong reasons for making efforts to prevent SAPs. A large number of studies show different and debilitating consequences, both in the short and in the long term. How much absenteeism entails a risk? Is there a safe level of absenteeism? At present, there is no data on the exact number of hours or days that is harmful. A wide array of negative outcomes is linked to SAPs. Educational consequences are for example reduced academic achievement, such as lower test scores in reading and mathematics (e.g. Gottfried, 2014), and school dropout (Rumberger, 2011). There are other important effects, besides academic outcomes, such as loneliness, anxiety, depressive symptoms (e.g. Finning et al., 2019), chronic pain (Janssens et al., 2011), and sleeping problems (Hysing et al, 2002). Social problems like drug use and other antisocial behaviors may also result from SAPs (e.g. Henry & Huizinga, 2007). A consequence may as well be a risk factor; for example, sleeping problems may cause SAPs but may also follow from being absent from school and result from staying awake at night.

Future Studies

In summary, the lack of common and shared definitions constitutes an obstacle to reaching shared knowledge and making advances within evidence-based practice. There is a definite need for consensus on concepts, definitions, and for national and international prevalence studies. Studies on the relative contribution of different risk factors, on the identification of resilient factors, and on long-term development and outcomes of absenteeism are needed. Studies should not only focus on academic outcomes, but also on the effects on overall functioning, on physical and mental health, and on general well-being. There is a need of national official data of SAPs, that could also be used for research. In the coming years, it would also be of value to develop the items on truancy in the PISA studies to enable a valid measurement of SAPs and comparisons between countries.

Disposition of the Anthology

The chapters in this anthology are short and aim to provide the reader with a *smörgasbord* of recent, ongoing and upcoming research. The anthology has an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter. The other chapters are found within the four parts of the anthology. Part I focuses on detection and risk factors. Part II deals with assessment. Part III contains chapters on the role of students, teachers and parents. Finally, Part IV focuses on psychological and psychiatric treatment.

The first chapter is written by Christopher Kearney and Patricia Graczyk from the U.S, and Carolina Gonzálvez from Spain. This chapter provides a framework for understanding two branches of work on school attendance and SAPs. Prior international research in the field has mainly been conducted within other disciplines, such as education, law, social work, psychology, and psychiatry. The field has suffered from the barriers that exist between disciplines. In order to increase knowledge, improve practice, and move the field forward, there is an urgent need to synthesize the different branches of research. The field would benefit from adopting an interdisciplinary approach to research, as well as practice. This introductory chapter offers a meta-perspective on the field as a whole.

Part I presents recent research on early detection and identification of SAPs, and studies on risk factors for SAPs. Registration of attendance is one important way to detect absence and to acknowledge attendance. In chapter three, Gil Keppens from Belgium, and Daniel Bach Johnsen from Denmark, demonstrate the power of school attendance data. The use of data on school attendance and absence has contributed substantially to the understanding of SAPs. However, there are challenges to using registration systems and this is described by the authors. Early detection of SAPs is an intervention that serves to prevent chronic absenteeism. However, systems for detection have not been developed and used to their full potential. In the next chapter, Brian C. Chu, from the U. S., reports findings from a study on an alert system which combines the tracking of worrying absences, with data on socio-emotional risk factors, to predict serious SAPs. In chapter five,

two Norwegian researchers, Trude Havik and Jo Magne Ingul, discuss the topic of emerging SAPs and when to intervene, to optimize the effect of interventions. In the sixth chapter, Trude Havik describes some aspects of risk factors relating to the school environment. This chapter is based on Trude Havik's Ph. D. thesis.

Part II focuses on assessment. Assessment is a fundamental factor for the management of SAPs. Two examples of recent developments in the field are presented in Part II. Carolina Gonzálvez and Christopher Kearney, give an overview of identified risk profiles for SAPs, based on a functional model. Findings from the studies carried out by Gonzálvez and colleagues assist in determining which interventions best apply to different function profiles of SAPs. Marie Gallé-Toussant from France, reports on the evaluation of a new questionnaire that applies specifically to school refusal. This instrument is meant to be used in schools, in clinician settings, and for research.

Part III contains chapters on youth's, teachers', and parents' role in SAPs. Part III opens with the voices of youth. Lisa MacKay-Brown, from Australia, and Anton Birikoukov-Brant, from Canada, present results from their studies on youth's experiences of the school setting. The chapter includes information on what youth commonly miss, and would like to see / experience in schools, in order to increase attendance. Chapter ten, by Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, Eric Kyere, and Sahoo Hong, from the U. S., presents findings in the field of social work. The results of their studies show how teacher discrimination of black students contribute to school absenteeism. Parents are of central importance in understanding and intervening with SAPs. In chapter eleven, Glenn Melvin, from Australia, and Naoki Maeda, from Japan, give an overview of studies that have focused on the role of parents, both in terms of etiology and interventions.

Part IV deals with psychological and psychiatric interventions. Martin Knollmann and Volker Reissner, from Germany, begin by presenting a recent questionnaire that has been developed to guide psychiatric interventions for SAPs. Knollmann and Reissner then describe the studies that have been conducted on in-treatment and outpatient CBT treatment. The last chapter of Part IV gives an

overview of contemporary studies on psychological interventions for SAPs. Here, David Heyne and Evelyn Karel, from the Netherlands, and Daniel Bach Johnsen, from Denmark, present an overview of recent evaluations of interventions for persistent or severe SAPs. The interventions are mainly clinical and psychological in nature, such as CBT-treatment.

Finally, the last chapter of the anthology summarize where the field needs to go, from where we are today, based on what has been presented in the earlier chapters.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Christopher A. Kearney,
Patricia A. Graczyk, & Carolina Gonzálvez

School attendance (SA) and school attendance problems (SAPs) are highly complex and critical indicators of child and adolescent health and psychosocial development. The study of school attendance and its problems (SA / SAPs) has a long, rich history, stretching from the 19th century, that has been informed by professionals in child development, criminal and juvenile justice, education, epidemiology, law, leadership, medicine, nursing, program evaluation, psychiatry, psychology, public and educational policy, social work, and sociology, among other disciplines. Manifold perspectives are thus available for SA / SAPs. All of these perspectives share common core assumptions: that SA is highly beneficial, that SAPs are complex and pernicious, and that strategies to enhance SA and address SAPs are public health necessities. The study of SA / SAPs has, however, generally bifurcated into the systemic and the analytic approach.

In this chapter, Kearney, Graczyk, and Gonzálvez take a bird's eye-view of the field of study, and describe the need of an enhanced synthesis of these two approaches.

Systemic and Analytic Approaches

Systemic approaches to SA / SAPs typically involve (1) wide-ranging contexts such as educational agencies, schoolwide preventative initi-

atives, and large groups of students; (2) interactions among multiple stakeholders such as family-school-community partnerships; (3) focus on upstream, less malleable, distal contributing factors for SAPs such as poverty and systemic barriers to SA; (4) extended duration initiatives such as longitudinal investigations and analyses; and (5) broad and less precisely defined models such as ecological frameworks. Systemic approaches to SA / SAPs are often formulated by professionals in disciplines such as juvenile justice, education, policy, social work, and sociology.

Analytic approaches to SA / SAPs typically involve (1) circumscribed contexts such as mental health agencies, clinical initiatives, and individual students; (2) dissection of main components such as specific categories or reasons for SAPs; (3) focus on downstream, more malleable, proximal risk factors for SAPs such as anxiety and parenting styles; (4) immediate duration initiatives such as cross-sectional investigations and point-in-time analyses; and (5) specific and more precisely defined models such as functional analysis of SAPs. Analytic approaches to SA / SAPs are often formulated by professionals in disciplines such as medicine, nursing, psychiatry, and psychology.

Ways of Synthesizing
Enhanced synthesis of systemic and analytic perspectives on SA / SAPs would ideally lead to greater integrative synergy with respect to theory, research, decision-making, and implementation of key frameworks and methods for this population. Synergy in an interdisciplinary scientific approach may result in common conceptual schemas, cohesive organization of key etiological variables, assimilated evolutionary processes, integrated measurement practices, and coordinated intervention / treatment approaches. Examples of each are provided below.

Conceptual Schemas
Conceptual schemas among systemic approaches to SA / SAPs tend to be dimensional; conceptual schemas among analytic approaches to SA / SAPs tend to be categorical. For example, truancy from a systemic approach is often viewed dimensionally along a spectrum of chronic absenteeism severity, broad-band components (e.g., school and social

justice factors), and encompassing interventions. Truancy from an analytic approach is often viewed categorically along specific distinctions, fine-tuned components (e.g., academic status, disability, functional criteria), and personalized treatments. Integrating systemic-dimensional and analytic-categorical orientations may require a common language that involves fewer core constructs (e.g., school attendance problems, tiers) that are well-informed by dimensional aspects such as functional impairment.

Etiological Variables

Key etiological variables among systemic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on distal contributing factors; key etiological variables among analytic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on proximal risk factors. For example, common broad-band factors that contribute to chronic SAPs in systemic approaches include barriers, negative school experiences, lack of engagement, and misconceptions. In contrast, specific narrow-band factors that enhance risk for acute SAPs in analytic approaches include child (e.g., adverse life events), parent/family (e.g., ineffective parenting styles), and peer (e.g., poor social interactions) variables. Integrating systemic contributing and analytic risk factors may involve a common architecture to arrange key domains (e.g., child, parent, family, peer, school, community, and societal/governmental) as well as an understanding of the relationships among these domains (e.g., classic Bronfenbrenner model).

Developmental Processes

Evolutionary processes among systemic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on continuity, or on viewing phenomena as having a linear, progressive, gradual, and cumulative trajectory; evolutionary processes among analytic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on discontinuity, or on viewing phenomena as having a nonlinear, discrete, abrupt, and tumultuous trajectory. For example, school dropout from a systemic approach is a fluid, ongoing process flowing from gradual disengagement from school. In contrast, school dropout from an analytic approach is often seen in the context of key turning points or stages that can be marked by

sudden stressful events. Integrating systemic-continuous and analytic-discontinuous approaches may involve the use of developmental cascade models to assimilate less malleable upstream factors with more malleable downstream factors and outcomes.

Measurement Practices

Measurement practices among systemic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on evaluation; measurement practices among analytic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on assessment. For example, systemic measurement approaches to SAPs emphasize program and policy evaluation along broad, indirect methods. In contrast, analytic measurement approaches to SAPs emphasize diagnostic and behavioral assessment along specific, direct methods. Integrating systemic evaluation and analytic assessment approaches may involve developing more nuanced early warning systems for SAPs that incorporate academic, household, and other variables, as well as large-scale data mining techniques, to identify practical risk classification algorithms for these systems.

Intercession Strategies

Intercession strategies among systemic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on intervention; intercession strategies among analytic approaches to SA/SAPs focus on treatment. For example, systemic interventions for SAPs often involve schoolwide initiatives and engage large student groups. In contrast, analytic treatments for SAPs often involve tailored clinical initiatives to address the unique needs of individual students. Integrating systemic intervention and analytic treatment practices may involve a multi-tiered system of support models that have emerged in both perspectives and that organize effective intercession strategies by student need across multiple domains of functioning.

Future Studies and Practical Work

SA/SAPs represent a diverse ecosystem comprised of many valid perspectives. Interdisciplinary work must integrate these perspectives to,

synergistically, create grander, more sophisticated frameworks which are able to define, classify, understand, measure, and address this complicated population. Such interdisciplinary work will require redoubled efforts to include those outside one's own perspective, with respect to conferences, grants, initiatives, journal entries, special series, and websites. It's time to break out of comfort zones.

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PART I.

EARLY DETECTION AND RISK FACTORS

TO WORK SUCCESSFULLY with SAPs means to emphasise, and make an effort to promote, attendance and to prevent SAPs. This first part will focus on the promotive and preventive parts of working with SAPs. Firstly, attendance records are necessary to enable schools to identify students with SAPs. Daily monitoring is now a widespread method, but are these records an accurate depiction of reality? Recent data from Belgium is presented in the first chapter and it offers insights into what needs to be done to prevent SAPs. The next chapter focuses on early identification of serious SAPs, as this is key to prevent chronic absenteeism. This chapter describes a detection system and outlines the value of using attendance data in combination with socio-emotional data to predict SAPs, in order to make early intervention possible.

In order to prevent SAPs, school-staff, parents and other adults working with youth need to be aware of risk factors for SAPs. They need to be able to recognise signs of emerging SAPs. Chapter 5 will include an outline of indicators of school refusal and truancy respectively. The last chapter in Part I offers some insight on some essential school-related risk-factors. However, the format of the anthology does not allow for a comprehensive review of all known risk-factors. In Part I, three chapters are based on research conducted in Norway and Denmark.

THE POWER OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DATA: IMPROVING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Gil Keppens & Daniel Bach Johnsen

THE USE OF school attendance data has become indispensable in the management of SAPs. In order to optimize identification of students with emerging and manifested SAPs, many countries have invested in attendance monitoring through centralized student management systems. While this daily record-keeping of actual absences is mainly used to ensure swift detection, in recent years scholars have emphasized that the potential of attendance data reaches much further than its current use. However, there are also potential limitations related to the use of the school attendance data, which can lead to serious negative consequences for the students and their families, such as invalid registrations or economic sanctions. In this chapter, we describe how the use of school attendance data has shifted from being a tool simply used for collecting and monitoring attendance, towards being a vital instrument for evaluating, and optimizing the management of, absenteeism in schools. Finally, we outline and discuss some current limitations related to school attendance data and registration polices.

The Power of School Attendance Data

Compulsory education for children and adolescents (youth) is standard among the majority of the world's countries (UNESCO, 2020). To ensure that youth are receiving compulsory education, many countries use attendance registration to monitor student's school attendance, and to identify students who are not accessing their right to education. We know that a lack of education, in the form of school absence, has been linked to several negative outcomes for youth, such as lower academic achievement (Gershenson et al., 2019) and higher risk of school dropout (Balfanz et al., 2007). Hence, to limit the long-term impact of SAPs, in relation to student's educational trajectories, an accurate and daily record keeping of absences is needed. This, in order to detect SAPs and provide effective interventions that can increase youth's school attendance. Recently, scholars have pointed out that in order to maximize early identification of SAPs, schools need to make better use of their data. They need to analyze their collected attendance data (Chu et al., 2019; Keppens et al., 2019; Moodley et al., 2020). These authors point out that an analysis of school attendance data enables schools to identify the causes of, and school-specific issues with, absenteeism.

Attendance data can be produced weekly, monthly or yearly and can indicate trends related to classes and types of attendance (e.g., seasonal attendance, or extended holidays). By using this information, schools can optimize the monitoring and detection of school absences and create tailor-made strategies according to the context of the individual school. Furthermore, an analysis of attendance data also enables schools to provide attendance feedback to key stakeholders such as students, parents, and counselors. Accordingly, they can use this data to create individualized intervention plans for students, or use the data as part of comprehensive school interventions. This data driven approach seems to be very effective to manage attendance in schools. In a recent study, Moodley and colleagues (2020) used artificial intelligence algorithms to find hidden patterns in the school attendance data, at a primary school in the UK. They then leveraged any identified patterns

and put interventions in place that either encouraged patterns that supported good attendance or discouraged / broke patterns that were detrimental to attendance. Using this approach, the school achieved the UK national required average attendance of 96 percent for the first time in four years, and saw persistent absenteeism (i.e., above 10 percent absence) decrease by over 55 percent from the previous year. Their study demonstrated that, by monitoring and acting on school attendance data, interventions that were both timely and effective could be implemented, resulting in increased student school attendance.

Limitations of Using School Attendance Data

Although the potential of school attendance data in terms of monitoring and managing school absence is great, in order to maximize this potential, we need to account for possible limitations related to school attendance data. When used inappropriately, attendance data collected by schools might fail to account for students with high levels of school absence. In a clinical psychology study conducted in Denmark, by Lomholt and colleagues (2020), discrepancies between the attendance data reported by schools and that reported by parents were found. The sample consisted of 24 families seeking treatment for SAPs. Based on parent-reported attendance data during the last three months the youth were, on average, absent from school 67 percent of the time. All youth in the study had been absent more than 10 percent of the time. However, the schools, their administrative data, reported no absence during the same time-period for seven (27 percent) of the youth in the study. These potential discrepancies between administrative and self-reported school attendance data are currently being studied in a larger sample, in an ongoing research project in Denmark (Thastum et al., 2019). Discrepancies were also found in a Belgian study, by comparing administrative attendance data collected by schools with self-reported attendance data among 4344 students aged 15–16 (Keppens et al., 2019). The results revealed a weak relationship between self-reported, unauthorized school absenteeism and registered, unauthorized school

absenteeism. Males, students in technical and vocational tracks and students who speak a foreign language at home, with mothers with shorter educational backgrounds, and those from lower-income households, had more registered, unauthorized absences than they reported themselves. In addition, pupils who experienced school refusal, and whose absence from school was often authorized, had more registered, unauthorized absences compared to their self-reported, unauthorized school absenteeism. The identified discrepancies highlight certain inaccuracies in school attendance data which could have several negative consequences. Unreliable school attendance data can blindsight schools in identifying students with SAPs, and their attendance problems might not be detected before they require attention due to other challenges (e.g., mental health problems or poor academic achievement). Invalid attendance data might also have serious ramifications for families, as some countries use economic sanctions to motivate school attendance. In Denmark, the UK and Belgium, extensive levels of unauthorized absenteeism are grounds for economic sanctions (e.g., fines or withdrawal of child benefits).

A second limitation is the lack of commonly agreed upon indicators for demarcating problematic from nonproblematic school absenteeism. As a result, many scholars and stakeholders use indicators, to identify (emerging) SAPs, that are not backed by scientific research. In general, the total amount of school absenteeism (as indicated by the school attendance data) is used to identify problematic school absenteeism. Research, however, shows that when differentiating problematic from nonproblematic absenteeism, an analysis of school absenteeism cannot be limited to assessing the amount of absenteeism (Keppens & Spruyt, 2016). It is only recently that scholars have started to investigate other indicators and variables for demarcating between problematic and nonproblematic absenteeism, such as externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems (Fornander & Kearney, 2020; Knollmann et al., 2019), demographic and academic risk factors (Skedgell & Kearney, 2018), and domestic environment variables (Fornander & Kearney, 2019). Indicators for demarcating between problematic and nonproblematic absenteeism will be further explored in a new research project

focused on evaluating how patterns in the time, duration and sequence, of school non-attendance might help to identify SAPs through school attendance data (Keppens, 2020).

Future Studies

Exciting new and upcoming research shows that school attendance data can be used as a powerful tool to detect and manage school absence. It also shows limitations related to school attendance data. Schools face challenges both related to the collection and the interpretation of school attendance data. Future studies should focus on improving the accuracy of school attendance data and on developing systems that can be implemented in schools, which might help them improve detection of students with SAPs. Following on from this, suitable interventions need to promote school attendance among students.

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BUILDING EARLY DETECTION SYSTEMS TO PREVENT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Brian C. Chu

PROBLEMATIC ABSENTEEISM IS a serious concern that impacts student academic development and signals potential greater socio-emotional problems. Early identification of serious school attendance problems (SAPs) is key to detect acute problems before they develop into chronic absenteeism. Accepting this, early warning systems have been developed, but existing systems have limitations, including requiring substantial resources and failing to use real-time tracking. Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence-based cut-offs, peri-attendance phenomena are rarely incorporated, and they seldom assess socio-emotional predictors of chronic problems. Initial efforts have begun to develop standardized, evidence-based, and ecologically valid early alert systems that leverage existing school resources to provide real-time feedback and that ultimately produce individual student data that can inform a personalized intervention system.

Early Detection is Key

Problematic absenteeism is a heterogeneous issue that has serious educational, health related, and legal implications for children and ado-

lescents (Kearney, 2008). In the United States, as many as 7 percent of 4th and 8th grade students miss at least five days in a given month, and 13 percent miss at least 3–4 days (Aud et al., 2012). Left unaddressed, acute attendance problems develop into chronic conditions where 13 percent of middle school students, nationally, miss at least 10 percent of school days (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Unfortunately, many who seek help for attendance issues do so after long delays (often waiting two years between the onset of problems and seeking help; McShane et al., 2001). There is a growing consensus that early warning systems are needed to address this pervasive problem (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Lynch et al., 2015). Consistent with a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework, an early warning system would be essential in distinguishing Tier 1 absenteeism (e.g., doctor's visits, vacations) from acute absenteeism (Tier 2) before it develops into chronic absenteeism (Tier 3) and later results in school dropout. Available alert systems have shown promising effects with severe absenteeism (≥ 20 percent missed days). One line of research (Balfanz et al., 2007; Neild et al., 2007) demonstrated that three 6th grade indicators (a final grade of "F" in math or English, annual attendance below 80 percent, out-of-school suspension) predicted a 75 percent probability of high school dropout. Based on this data, a three-tiered MTSS (Balfanz et al., 2007) was developed, incorporating enhanced attendance tracking, greater school staff coordination, and increased family engagement. This system and others have been implemented in large urban school districts (e.g., Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore) with promising results (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Faria et al., 2017).

Limitations to current systems exist. Most established systems require considerable resources or use year-end data (e.g., 20 missed days; failed math or English grades; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012), making scalability limited and tracking in real-time difficult. Further, no data-driven protocol exists to distinguish transient from acute absenteeism. Current systems send alerts based on arbitrary school decisions (e.g., 5 absences). Peri-attendance phenomena (e.g., tardies, early departures, missed classes) have been ignored, even though an estimated 17 percent-35 percent

of students exhibit problematic levels (Chu et al., 2019; Kearney, 2001; Pina et al., 2009). In addition, existing systems rarely incorporate socio-emotional risk factors that leave parents and schools with little guidance on appropriate interventions to recommend after a problem is detected (Faria et al., 2017). Socio-emotional risk factors, such as perceptions of school climate / engagement, peer relations / bullying, family environment / parenting practices, and youth mental health variables have been shown to be reliably connected with short- and long-term attendance problems (Kearney, 2008). Finally, best practice alert systems should provide feedback to key stakeholders (parents, school staff, teachers) so that schools and families can jointly track progress and identify concerns.

Opportunities exist to leverage current school resources and processes. Attendance tracking is now required in many states, in the U.S., and most schools implement computerized student management systems to input daily attendance data. However, schools rarely commit the resources to analyze this data, to provide feedback to parents, or use it to inform student education plans. These limitations call for a standardized and ecologically valid early alert system that leverages existing school resources, provides real-time feedback, and, ultimately, is prepared to trigger a natural response or intervention system.

Building Real-Time Alert Systems

One series of studies aimed to demonstrate proof-of-concept of an early warning system designed to incorporate socio-emotional risk factors and more flexible definitions of attendance problems (Chu et al., 2019). In the first study, school administrators were to estimate the number of students missing for five or more days due to anxiety or mood problems. Administrators reported low prevalence (M = 6.67, SD = 9.2, range: 1–25 per district). However, they cited an average per-district cost of $94,052 for in-district and $496,657 for out-of-district placements, illustrating the costly scope of attendance problems. Next, in one district, a pilot version of an online attendance tracker was developed

that required manual attendance tracking by elementary school (grades K–5) counselors. With minimal administrative assistance, counselors tracked missed days, tardies, and early departures *for any reason*. A substantial number (17.2 percent) breached the a priori threshold of five or more events on any index. Students averaged 7.94 absences (range: 0–49), 8.58 tardies (range: 0–117), and 1.49 early departures (range: 0–25) (Table 1). Differences in prevalence rates between administrators and counselors reflect the differences in criteria used (absences for anxiety/mood problems vs. for any reason), and they also reflect the value of continuous tracking by school staff more familiar with students. Counselors rated a brief screener of socio-emotional risk factors when students first breached a threshold. Analyses indicated that absences were significantly related to whether a student (a) had received an individualized education plan, (b) had a sibling with similar attendance problems, (c) was older, or (d) had divorced/separated parents. Qualitative counselor feedback indicated that they found that the attendance system supported their job objectives in identifying the students in greatest need of services. The brief socio-emotional screener helped them consider each student in a more comprehensive way and provided a "launching pad" for intervention.

The team repeated the study a second year, but incorporated greater automation by enlisting administrative assistants to download attendance data monthly to alert counselors when a student had breached any of the critical thresholds (5 absences, tardies, early dismissals). This enhanced automation identified a greater number of students (N=773; 32.6 percent). Similar rates were found for absences (M = 7.54; range: 0–40), tardies (M = 8.43; range: 0–68), and early departures (M = 2.56; range: 0–47) (Table 1). In this cohort, divorced/separated parents and similar sibling history continued to predict absences, and quality of student friendships became significant, as rated by counselors. Together, these findings reinforced the significance of attendance problems, they showed that increased automaticity increased tracking sensitivity, and they directed attention to youth and family factors useful for predicting poor attendance .

Table 1. Pilot Implementation of an Early Warning System across Four Elementary Schools					
		Mean Totals			
Approach	RRates	Absences	Tardies	Early Departures	Significant Predictors
1. Administrator Estimated	< 1%	–	–	–	–
2. Counselor Tracked and Rated	17.2%	7.94	8.58	1.49	IEP/504 Plan; sibling with attendance Hx; older; divorced / separated parents
3. Admin-Assisted Tracking (Enhanced Automation)	32.6%	7.54	8.43	2.56	Sibling with attendance Hx; divorced / separated parents; friendship quality

Future Studies

Future studies would work to integrate this approach into a school's student management system, to enhance automaticity and to leverage the natural resources within, and ecological validity of, the alert system. Efforts can then focus on integrating alert systems into more comprehensive MTSS frameworks so that intensity of responsive interventions can match the level of concern (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2010). Deriving a reliable and valid threshold of absences (or tardies, early departures) to distinguish Tier 1 and 2 absenteeism is a first step. Socio-emotional factors can then be used to develop student profiles that indicate appropriate placement within school-based behavioral services, or connected with community resources. Together, an early detection system can help identify and triage students in most need to the types of interventions that would be most responsive to their needs.

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EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS

Jo Magne Ingul & Trude Havik

RECENT STUDIES INDICATE that school attendance problems (SAPs) tend to start relatively early in a youth's school career, and increase over time. Studies carried out, on service use for SAPs, show that referrals for intervention commonly first occur in adolescence, when the problems tend to have become severe, complex, and, in worst case scenarios, chronic. There is a need for early identification, assessment, and intervention, to avoid negative consequences for these youth. This chapter presents findings on what constitute indicators of emerging SAPs, on ways to further assess these indicators, and on how to, early on, structure a school's management of SAPs through a school attendance team. In this text we distinguish between two forms of SAPs: school refusal (SR) and truancy (TR). The indicators, for each category, differ to some extent.

Indicators of School Refusal

School refusal has been described elsewhere in this anthology and we rely on this definition when discussing early signs of SR (see page 22). SR is a functional problem that manifests itself in different ways. Many different psychosocial factors have been linked to SR, such as issues related to youth, family and parents, school, and/or peer environment.

This means that youth may be subject to a variety of different risk factors, making early identification difficult. However, in a paper published in 2019, Ingul, Havik & Heyne propose a school-based framework for identifying early signs and risk factors for SR, introducing three factors that that are strongly linked to emerging SR:

1. emotional distress expressed through symptoms of anxiety or depression,
2. emotional distress taking the form of somatic complaints,
3. absence, or any combination of these three.

Emotional Distress – Anxiety and Depression
In established SR, approximately half of the youth meet the full diagnostic criteria for an anxiety disorder. Youth with emerging SR, or reluctance to attend school, have also been found to be more anxious in general than children that show no signs of SAPs. They have also been found to be more anxious when faced with specific, school related situations (e.g. answering questions in class). Symptoms of anxiety and depression are readily assessed by interviewing the student. Sometimes the assessment is paired with self-report measures. In addition, teachers or other school personnel may observe students to monitor signs of anxiety (e.g. an excessive need for reassurance) or depressive symptoms (e.g. trouble getting started, loss of interest in friends). Observations may provide useful information about triggers and about which situations that are suitable for interventions.

Emotional Distress – Somatic Complaints
Somatic complaints (e.g., headache, stomach ache) occur in about 50–80 percent of youth with established SR. Somatic complaints are significantly associated with SR, but not with TR. Research has shown that school reluctant youth report more somatic complaints than anxious, but not reluctant, youth. This indicates that the combination of symptoms of anxiety and somatic complaints might be a better indicator of emerging SR than any of the two alone. Somatic complaints may be observed both at home and at school, in behavior

and through verbalizations. For instance, some youth crouch and hold their hand over their stomach to indicate pain at home, or at school. Or the youth might complain about having a stomach ache before going to school or feel sick before making a presentation at school.

Absence

Absence is not a unique indicator of SR, but rather of all SAPs, and of psychosocial difficulties. Absence is a risk factor of its own, as it tends to lead to more absence. Absence may take several forms, like late arrivals to school, leaving school during school hours, being at school but not going to classes, or being absent the whole day.

Usually, teachers record absences every day. However, routines to monitor absence tend to depend on the individual teacher or school. Schools should therefore be encouraged to develop a system and strategies for how to act when a pattern of absence is identified. There are several actions that should be taken. Most important is to contact parents in order to assess and discuss the reasons for the absence. If the information given by parents indicate avoidance or reluctance to attend school due to emotional issues, further assessment is necessary and, based on that, interventions should be planned.

Indicators of Truancy

Truancy has also been presented elsewhere in this anthology (see page 22). Like SR, TR is a type of SAPs which may take various forms and have several definitions. This makes it difficult to describe typical features or characteristics of TR. The concept of TR has been described as a "first step to a lifetime problem", indicating a need to stop this negative development as early as possible. Like other types of SAPs, TR seems to develop over time, starting small, providing an opportunity to identify and intervene before the problem becomes chronic. Due to different definitions and a lack of longitudinal studies, it is difficult to pinpoint early signs for TR.

However, some factors seem to be robust predictors of TR: poor school performance, involvement with delinquent peers, school disengagement, drug use, and lack of supervision after school. These factors are diverse, stemming from different domains (individual, social, family, and school). Like with SR, to identify TR problems at an early stage, the first step is to record, and follow up on, absence (see description in the section about SR). The assessment of risk factors for TR should be based on communication with teachers, parents and the youth him / herself. The assessment should include multi-method procedures for which competent personnel (for each different procedure and domain) is vital. Therefore, when attempting to deal with early signs of SAPs, the management and interventions could be structured as a collaboration between school personnel and services outside school. Currently, the authors, Havik and Ingul, are working on a framework for identifying early signs and risk factors for TR.

Future Studies

For decades, the attitude towards SAPs have been one of "wait and see". When a youth shows signs of being uncomfortable at school, of decreased motivation, or of a reluctance to attend, it is far too common for schools or parents to not react. Possibly, in these cases, the parents and the schools, believe that the problem is temporary, and will disappear, or that the youth in question will handle the challenges themselves, and" grow out of the problem." In some cases, this certainly happens. When faced with challenges, some youth deal with the distress, master the challenges, and keep up school attendance. Some students, however, need support to avoid their situation developing into severe SAPs. Identifying which youth needs more profound help, and which youth will manage with only moderate attention and support, is an important issue in assessing the problem and intervening early.

Early identification of SAPs is theoretically possible. However, few studies to date have described developmental pathways for attendance

problems. Thus, studies which aim to understand these pathways and that identify early indicators are recommended.

It might be fruitful to structure the work with SAPs arounds school attendance teams, each member providing different kinds of competences and knowledge of risk factors for SAPs. A study with this focus is due to begin in Norway, Germany and the Netherlands. A group of researchers from the INSA network are planning a feasibility study on attendance teams, adhering to a school or municipality. The members of the team will be educated and supervised by the research group. The focus of the study will be: ways of working, relevant risk factors, and ways to identify these factors. The study will also investigate how to prevent and structure individual interventions in SAPs cases, based on case formulations and a thorough assessment. The main aim of the study is to investigate whether such a way of structuring the work will lead to earlier identification and intervention at the schools taking part in the study. Furthermore, does this result in reduced absence and attendance problems in the long term? Given the positive results of the feasibility study, we aim to apply for funding for a large-scale study.

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SCHOOL-RELATED RISK FACTORS

Trude Havik

SCHOOL IS NOT only a learning arena, it is also an important social arena that might influence students' mental health, feelings of belonging in school, general well-being, safety, mastery and attendance. Thus, factors within the school and its learning environment are important for all students and it is important to have knowledge about these factors to promote attendance. When several risk factors are present at the same time, and there is a lack of protective factors, there is an increased risk of the onset of school attendance problems (SAPs). This chapter will cover some of the many school-related risk factors which are important when considering prevention and analyzing emerging or established SAPs. The factors that will be addressed are: classroom interactions, bullying, loneliness, transitions, and fear of failure.

Classroom Interactions

Results from Norwegian studies, presented in the doctoral thesis of Trude Havik, indicates the importance of the social aspects of school when discussing SAPs, including classroom interactions and predictability. Concerning the former, knowledge on classroom interaction is based on development theory and research, which posits that teacher-student interactions are a central driving force for student engagement and academic and social learning. Further, several studies indicate that positive relationships between teachers and students promote attendance and

prevent SAPs. Classroom interaction organizes teacher-student inter-actions into three major domains: classroom organization, emotional support and instructional support.

Positive classroom interactions are characterized by predictability, safety, and positive relationships, and these interactions have a positive effect on attendance. On the other hand, conflicts and other negative relations between the teacher and students, and between students, constitute a risk for SAPs.

Peers and friends are of great importance in childhood and ado-lescence, and students are often more eager to meet their peers than to meet and get to know their teachers. Hence, it is important that teachers are positive role-models for social interactions and that they facilitate safe and positive peer relations. This can be achieved by integrating social interactions within all school subjects and activities, for example by including less structured activities and work in groups. This should be an integrated part of any lesson plan, within all subjects.

Bullying

Bullying is a subject on which extensive research has been carried out, also on the ways it relates to SAPs. Bullying is a risk factor for SAPs and it might take the form of verbal attacks, physical behaviors, relational / indirect / social aggression or cyberbullying. All students have a right to feel safe at school, a fact which in many countries is regulated by The Educational Act. Schools must prevent bullying and engage with the various participants in a bullying situation (victims, bullies, assistants, enforcers, outsiders, defenders, or those without a clear role). Schools need to implement interventions towards the entire peer group and they need to better identify and help students with prior experiences of bullying, and closely monitor that bullying has come to an end. Some students might feel unsafe in their learning environment, even after bullying has stopped. If they have been absent from school, and gradually return, it may take some time before they actually trust that the environment is safe. One challenge is that many victims suffer

in silence. They often prefer to tell a friend than an adult, and their parents instead of their teachers. Therefore, teachers must work with their relations to all students. Students need to feel safe and to know that if they tell their teachers about bullying, the teachers will act and prevent the bullying. It is important to note that some researchers use the term self-exclusion from school, when they discuss bullying. This term should be integrated in the SAPs research related to bullying.

Loneliness

Social beings have a basic need to belong and to form social relationships. Loneliness is experienced when there is a discrepancy between the actual and the desired situation. Loneliness is one indicator of poor social well-being. Feeling lonely is not the same as being alone, and a person surrounded by people may still feel lonely. The prevalence rates of loneliness among children and youth have varied across studies from 8 to 20 percent, depending on, for example, the measurements and the age of students. The results of a Norwegian survey, on students aged 13 to 19, indicates that 1 out of 10 have no close friends (aged 13–19). Loneliness is linked to SAPs and it is a considerable risk factor for school dropout and for students' considering dropping out.

There seems to be differences between types of SAPs when it comes to social relations. Students who present with school refusal often struggle socially, have few friends, are shy, and are socially withdrawn. There is a close connection between loneliness and social anxiety symptoms, which goes in both ways. Social anxiety symptoms are, in turn, related to SAPs. However, students who present with truancy problems usually do not lack friends, but tend to have friends with negative influences.

Transitions

Transitions are hard for many students and are a particular risk factor for SAPs. An ordinary school day has many transitions: going from

lesson to recess, from one subject to another, from one room to another, from one teacher to another, from one activity to another, and from individual work to work in groups. It is important to secure these transitions by providing a safe learning environment and quality classroom interactions, in term of classroom organization, emotional support, and instructional support.

Returning to school after a vacation, or after being away from school for a long time because of illness or because of other reasons, might cause anxiety and result in a student staying home from school even longer, and without authorization. Once a student has stayed home for a longer period of time, it is usually hard to return to school. Students might fear being questioned about their absence by students and teachers, they might experience increased levels of anxiety and depression, and they might have fallen behind other students academically and/or socially. When students enter a new school, they are more vulnerable and some might fear being judged by others for who they are and how they behave, or they might fear being left alone.

Fear of Failure

Research shows that fear of failure and criticism contribute to SAPs. This fear is more common in students with school refusal. Older students have more frequent presentations, tests, evaluations, and higher requirements than younger students. In addition, older students' cognitive development also explains the increased fear of negative evaluation they experience. If teachers mainly focus on results and competition, this may increase the fear and anxiety that vulnerable students experience. This is characteristic of a performance-orientated classroom. A study carried out in Norway indicates that lower-secondary school students, who are mastery-orientated, are less absent from school than those who are performance-oriented. This might be explained by the fact that mastery-orientation promotes engagement, while SAPs tend to be linked to lower levels of engagement in schoolwork. Moreover, mastery-orientation gives students more control over their learning process, and it

therefore aids in reducing stressors. The results of this study indicate that performance-orientated, grade 10 students are more frequently absent from school than their mastery-oriented peers, however the evidence for this connection is weak. The connection was not found among students in grade 8 and 9. This may be explained by 10th-graders being more stressed by their performance and results; final grades in lower secondary school are important when applying to upper secondary school. In addition, there is less fear of failure when the learning environment is safe. It is therefore important to promote a safe learning environment.

Future Studies

Previous research has mainly looked at severe SAPs. Therefore, future studies need to investigate the early stages of SAPs, or when such problems are emerging. Moreover, only a few studies are based on community samples. More studies using community samples are needed in order to provide guidance for prevention and early identification.

There is a need to investigate preventive approaches in accordance with findings presented in this chapter, such as how to promote positive classroom interactions and safe learning environment. Further, bullying, as it relates to SAPs, is of importance. For example, it would be interesting to study if there is a mutual relationship between SAPs and different types of bullying, which might arise as a result of SAPs, can be prevented.

Other study areas of interest are: SAPs in relation to promoting social skills and reducing loneliness, and how goal orientation (mastery vs. performance orientation) is related to SAPs. There is a definitive need for longitudinal studies and studies using community samples.

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PART II.

ASSESSMENT

DIFFERENT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE to the onset and maintenance of SAPs. In order to guide individual interventions and help students to increase their attendance, a systematically conducted assessment is needed. During the assessment, the student should feel listened to; this, in turn, increases the chances of a successful intervention. An early screening and a well-conducted assessment also facilitates early intervention, which per se prevents chronic conditions and costly consequences for the young person and for society.

In this second part of the anthology, two examples of assessments will be presented. Both explain absenteeism in terms of its function. By examining what risk factors are present in the individual case, interventions can be tailored to this particular student.

The first chapter in Part II outlines evidence for making a broad assessment, for identifying risk profiles rather than looking for single risk factors or single functions of absenteeism. Recent research that has focused on analyzing individual characteristics, to identify groups or profiles of students who demonstrate school refusal behavior, indicate that there are five separate, mixed profiles. These profiles are identified in relation to moderate SAPs, i.e. acute or emerging problems.

Few new instruments have been developed, over the last twenty years, to assess SAPs. The questionnaire described in the second chapter of Part II, is based on a functional model. It was developed in order to respond to the need for an instrument to specifically assess school refusal. It is an instrument that is meant to be used in different contexts, like schools, clinical work, and research. Another advantage of the

instrument is that it provides a measure that quantifies SR and provides a reliable cutoff score.

There are more ways to assess SAPs than are reported in this anthology. A full review of questionnaires and other instruments in use for SAPs is not the purpose of the anthology. In chapter 12, a questionnaire is presented which is used in clinical work, within a psychiatric context.

FUNCTIONAL RISK-PROFILES OF MODERATE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS

Carolina Gonzálvez & Christopher A. Kearney

STUDENTS WITH SCHOOL attendance problems (SAPs) are a diverse and heterogeneous group whose patterns of symptomatology can change over time. SAPs have no single cause, but common risk factors include anxiety, depression, learning difficulties, parenting styles, peer victimization, school disengagement, and broader community variables, among others. The heterogeneous and multi-causal nature of SAPs means that developing risk profiles for this population can be challenging. Risk profiles are important in order to match interventions to individual students. Not only an awareness of risk factors for onset, but also an understanding of maintaining factors, is important in order to intervene successfully. A wealth of studies has provided support for a functional model of SAPs. In this chapter new findings of functions of SAPs will be presented.

The Functional Model

One model that may be useful for deriving risk and classification profiles for moderate SAPs involves functional analysis based on principles of reinforcement. Moderate SAPs include emerging, acute, or Tier 2

problems. This model includes four possible reasons or motives – called functional conditions – that can maintain SAPs in young people: (1) avoidance of stimuli that provoke negative affectivity, (2) escape from aversive social and/or evaluative situations, (3) pursuit of attention from significant others, and (4) pursuit of tangible rewards outside of school. In the first two functional conditions, SAPs are maintained by negative reinforcement (e.g., avoiding school situations that cause discomfort or avoiding oral or written tests). In the second two functional conditions, SAPs are maintained by positive reinforcement (e.g., temper tantrum for attention or staying home to play video games).

Scale Development
Prior research has widely used the School Refusal Assessment Scale (Kearney and Silverman, 1993) and the revised version (Kearney, 2002) to conduct a functional assessment to determine motivating conditions for school non-attendance. Recent research has elaborated further on the functional model. In this respect, classificatory data analytic techniques (e.g., cluster analysis, latent class analysis, or latent profile analysis) have been used. These techniques, commonly used in the social sciences, aim to maximize similarity within defined groups and minimize similarity between groups. Various studies utilizing these techniques have sought to clarify SAP profiles that arise from the combination of the four functional conditions mentioned above. These mixed profiles have demonstrated some consistency and are highlighted in the next section.

Mixed Profiles – Five Different Groups

One consistent result involves mixed profiles characterized by elevated strength across several functional conditions: avoiding stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (condition 1), escaping aversive social and/or evaluative situations (condition 2), and pursuing attention from significant others (condition 3). This profile is mixed because negative and positive reinforcement conditions occur together. This functional

profile has been associated with different maladaptive behaviors, such as elevated depression, stress, generalized anxiety, and other internalizing problems, as well as lower levels of social functioning and self-concept.

Other studies have shown elevations on all four functional conditions, a mixed group sometimes characterized by the highest levels of different psychopathological symptoms and social anxiety.

Another consistent profile involves SAPs motivated more purely by negative reinforcement, or a combination of the first two functional conditions. This profile has also been associated with psychological and social difficulties related to internalizing problems and a higher risk of either committing cyberbullying or being victimized by cyberbullying.

In contrast, another consistent profile involves SAPs motivated more purely by positive reinforcement, or a combination of the second two functional conditions, or more exclusively by the last functional condition only. Students in these groups generally have fewer internalizing problems, compared to other profiles, and future work is needed to determine whether these latter groups are more prone to externalizing problems, such as delinquent and aggressive behavior.

Finally, another common profile is a non-problematic group characterized by students who demonstrate low levels of the four functional conditions for SAPs. This group tends to have better overall functioning and fewer internalizing symptoms.

Implications

These findings verify the existence of different functional groups of students with SAPs and provide novel and nuanced information for understanding the complex heterogeneity of unique cases. Based on these results, interventions to improve emotional regulation, training of social skills, and preventing cyberbullying should be a priority when working with children and adolescents with moderate SAPs. In addition, particular attention should be given to students with complex or mixed functional profiles of SAPs. Of course, many other variables impact SAPs in children and adolescents, a limitation of these classificatory studies.

Future Studies

SAPs are part of a broad ecosystem or environment that can enhance or lower the risk of further absenteeism. A suggestion for future studies is to incorporate functional risk profiles within broader models of SAPs, ones that also include parent involvement, social / peer contexts, school climate, and systemic barriers to school attendance. Multilevel analyses that link these functional profiles to family, peer, and school variables will enhance multidisciplinary work and synergy across many perspectives. In addition, such analyses will better inform prevention efforts that often combine individual and developmental factors with broader ecological influences.

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SCHOOL-REFUSAL ASSESSMENT: THE SCHOOL REFUSAL EVALUATION SCALE

Marie Gallé-Tessonneau

THERE IS A real challenge in providing all of the stakeholders (healthcare professionals, education professionals, therapists and educators) with criteria and tools for evaluating school refusal (SR) in order to improve early identification, speed up access to specialized care and maximize the chances of returning to school. A key reason why assessing SR is important is that the prognosis largely depends on early clinical care. In that respect, early diagnosis is crucial and requires a specific measurement for SR. There are a few instruments that have been evaluated for the purpose of SAPs assessment. In this chapter, recent studies on the development of a new instrument are presented.

Background

The School REfusal EvaluatioN (SCREEN) scale was developed specifically to measure SR. Thus, it joins the pool of already existing questionnaires in the SAP field: the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS; Kearney and Silverman, 1993; Kearney, 2002; 2006) which measures the function of School Refusal Behavior (SRB); The Inventory of School Attendance Problems (ISAP; Knollmann, Reissner, and He-

bebrand, 2018); and the School Non Attendance ChecKlist (SNACK; Heyne et al., 2019a).

The advantage of the SCREEN scale is that it offers the following features: a measure of SR that can be used in different contexts (schools, care services, research); an assessment of SR that goes above and beyond indicators that simply reflect absenteeism or anxiety (no absenteeism criteria and no anxiety disorder criteria); and an "SR score" which quantifies SR and provides a reliable cutoff score for diagnosis, research, and clinical practice.

The SCREEN

The SCREEN scale is an 18-item, multidimensional, self-report measure of SR. The higher the SCREEN score, the greater the symptomatology of SR. The overall SCREEN score, as well as the score for each of the factors, is obtained by adding up the relevant items. This scale can be broken down to dimension (questionnaire score), category (use of the cutoff score), or level of risk of SR (standardized T-scores). The SCREEN scale can be used regardless of the amount or severity of the attendance and absence for an individual student. The scale is useful in the early identification of students who might otherwise go unnoticed, because they are not identified as an absentee or have only a moderate level of absenteeism, even though they are at high risk of SR. The child may complete SCREEN alone or with the help of an adult (especially for younger children). The wording of the items has been designed to allow for an autonomous completion by the child. The questions are fairly simple and written in the first person.

Construction, Validation, and Psychometrics

Method
The SCREEN items were identified through interviews with different participants: middle school professionals, middle school students, care

professionals, and adolescents displaying SR. Validation of the SCREEN scale (the selection of items by factor analysis, internal consistency of factors, convergent and divergent validity, standardization and ROC curve) was conducted among middle school students and adolescents displaying SR. Convergent and divergent validity were tested alongside the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS), the school phobia subscale of the Schedule Children Anxiety (SCARED), and the Child Behavior Checklist and Youth Self-Report (CBCL-YSR). Additional information about the method is provided in Gallé-Tessonneau and Gana (2019), in Gallé-Tessonneau and Heyne (2020), and Gallé-Tessonneau et al. (2018).

Results

The SCREEN scale reliably measures four interrelated aspects of SR. First, the anxiety surrounding school attendance and the fear of being confronted with the school environment, which in clinical practice corresponds to reluctance attending school or frequent refusal to go to school. Second, the adolescent-parent relationships in SR, referring, in clinical practice, to difficulties in dealing with the transition and the separation from home and parents, for adolescents displaying SR. Third, the interpersonal relationship difficulties at school for adolescents displaying SR and the impact of these difficulties on their self-perception. Fourth, the avoidance of school, expressed through absenteeism and somatic manifestations. This dimension is related to visits to the nurse and total number of absences. The results indicate good structural validity and the internal consistency is satisfactory for the whole scale (by Cronbach .84) as well as for the four factors (respectively .85; .79; .69 and .62).

The reliability of the SCREEN scale's total scores was good. As expected, validity correlations revealed that the SCREEN scale's total scores correlated both with SRAS and school phobia as assessed through SCARED. However, the coefficients of determination showed no substantial overlap between these measures, suggesting that SCREEN scores were capturing specific information, different from the SCARED scores, on the one hand, and the SRAS scores,

on the other hand. Simply put, the SCREEN scale has a sufficiently unique, reliable variance to warrant separate interpretation from both the school phobia subscale of SCARED and the functions of SRB, as assessed with SRAS.

Finally, a key and satisfactory outcome is that, when using a recommended cutoff score of 41, the diagnostic accuracy of the SCREEN scale is 96 percent. This is very satisfactory (AUC = .96 and Ferguson Index = .98), with a sensitivity of .94 and a specificity of .88. This means that 94 percent of children displaying SR are detected with the SCREEN scale, when the cutoff score is 41. More recently, a standardization of the SCREEN scale, carried out among adolescents 10–16 years old, revealed three additional cutoff scores: a score below 31 means no SR problems; scores between 32 and 40 means moderate symptomatology of SR; and a score above 41 means SR.

Future Studies

The SCREEN scale can be used in multiple contexts and for different purposes – both in field practice and for research. First of all, it can be used in clinical settings to screen SR and to assess symptoms and severity of SR during treatment and to assess the outcome of the intervention. SCREEN can also be used for early identification in prevention processes. Owing to the importance of somatic complaints in SR, family physicians as well as pediatricians, who are essential first-line professionals in this process, may need a psychometrically sound measure of SR. Moreover, during clinical interviews, this scale can be used as a mediation support and as a tool to strengthen the therapeutic alliance between the therapist, the child and the parents.

In research, the SCREEN scale can be used as a measure of SR, in a dimensional or categorical way. It can also be used as a criterion for inclusion or exclusion of participants in a study.

To date, the SCREEN scale is used by school professionals (especially school nurses, doctors and psychologists in school). It has also found its place in the clinical practice of psychologists and child psychiatrists.

SCREEN is also used by physicians and pediatricians in consultations. Somewhat marginally, it is occasionally used by social workers. Like any assessment, this scale must be followed by a clinical examination. Indeed, its use may constitute a first step, but is not sufficient to confirm or invalidate the presence of SR.

Further investigation into the utility of SCREEN is required, for example in relation to treatment sensitivity (factors, reliability, and stability during treatment, test-retest, predictive power). It would also be interesting to study the value of SCREEN as a complement to other existing measures (SNACK, SRAS, ISAP, and so forth). Cross-cultural validation of SCREEN, in other languages, would also be of value. Measurement tools and measurement invariance are the foundation for international empirical research. The research group is ready to contribute to any relevant initiative with this aim.

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PART III.

YOUTH, TEACHERS, PARENTS

THE YOUTH, THE TEACHERS, and the parents are important actors to advance the field of SAP. Part III of this anthology will focus on these three actors. The young people are one of the primary stakeholders in research on SAPs. Accordingly, their participation is necessary to find successful interventions and approaches that teachers, clinicians and parents can use. Research has shown that letting young people influence issues that relate to them, and to participate in a substantial way in those processes, has a positive effect both on their mental health and on school attendance.

Chapter 10, in Part III, addresses the perspective of social work, with a focus on the central role teachers play in students' school situation. Students' school life is embedded in a broader ecological system of peers and parents. This is illustrated in research carried out on black students' experiences of teacher discrimination, and on the mediated support role which parents and peers take on in these interactions between students and teachers. School bonding is an important aspect in the discussion surrounding SAPs, and this is addressed in chapter 10.

Parents are, at the same time, part of the problem and part of the solution. Parents who acknowledge the importance of education usually experience strong negative emotions when their child does not attend school. In the final chapter of Part III, the parental role is reported on from several different angles: the wellbeing of parents and how this effects school attendance, parents and schools working together,

and the parental role in prevention and intervention. This chapter is a suitable bridge to the final two chapters of the anthology, that deal with treatment for youth presenting with SAPs.

EXPLORING THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM: WHAT SCHOOLS NEED TO KNOW

Lisa McKay Brown & Anton Birioukov-Brant

SCHOOL REFUSAL (SR), a subset of SAPs, has been a focus of clinicians and educators. However, while the efficacy of clinical and school programs has been presented by professionals in the field, there is scant research that features the perspectives of young people. Researchers need to engage with young people and include their voices in the design of school and clinic-based interventions. The research presented in this chapter focuses on the experiences of youth involved in a re-engagement program in Australia and alternative settings in Canada.

Australian Voices of Young People

In2School is a three-phase re-engagement program for school refusing youth. The model uses a transitional classroom to support students to return to school and it is facilitated by an interdisciplinary mental health and education team (McKay-Brown, et al., 2019). The research reported here drew on the voices of 46 students who participated in In2School and were between 11 and 15 years old (M=13.05, SD=1.02). All participants had mental health diagnoses, with social anxiety being

the most common. Half of the students either had, or were diagnosed with, Autism Spectrum Disorder. The students had been having trouble attending school for anywhere between three months and two years (M=12.08 months, SD=8.24 months). The data presented was gathered from a self-report questionnaire administered at the commencement of the program. Questions focused on worries or troubles that impacted school attendance, learning difficulties, other difficulties experienced, and return to school supports needed.

Barriers and Facilitators to School Attendance
Analysis of the student voice data highlighted four major themes that represented barriers and facilitators to school attendance. The themes of school climate, learning, social relationships, and wellbeing described the most frequently given responses, with sub-themes focused around peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, perception of learning challenges, and mental health issues.

School Climate
School climate barriers encompassed teacher relationships, the size of the school, and, in secondary school, the number of different classes youth were required to attend. Students also spoke about the perceived lack of support provided by the school and teachers. Students needed teachers to understand school refusal and acknowledge that this was a legitimate presentation. In fact, for these students, teacher involvement up to and including the point of school disengagement was perceived as unhelpful and not a potential facilitator in returning to school. As teachers can have a positive role in reducing the risk of social exclusion and increasing participation (Havik et al, 2015b) this was a worrying finding.

Learning Difficulties
Over half of the young people indicated that learning difficulties had, in some way, contributed to their worry about school or their problems with attendance. These learning challenges included difficulties with concentration, not understanding the expectations of certain tasks,

or having the skills necessary to solve problems they encountered. An inability to ask for help was also noted. Mathematics was highlighted as an academic learning area that was particularly troublesome for students. These findings align with research that reports that students with specific learning disabilities, or who experience low academic achievement may exhibit higher levels of SR than those who are more academically able (Filippello, Buzzai, Messina, Mafodda, & Sorrenti, 2019).

Social Factors
Social factors linked to attending school included difficulty making friends and a recognized lack of social skills. Social avoidance strategies were also present, with students preferring to avoid school to escape peer interaction and engagement, with some noting social anxiety. In line with research by Spence, Donovan, and Brechman-Toussaint (1999), these avoidance strategies were exacerbated by long term absence and resulted in higher levels of fear when returning to school.

Canadian Voices of Young People

Students in their late teens can exhibit psychological distress at the prospect of coming to school. The second author's doctoral research focused on how "last chance" alternative high schools, designed to assist struggling students to graduate, responded to absenteeism (Birioukov, 2020). The research drew on interviews with 40 students, aged 17–20 (M=18.6, SD=0.73), attending four alternative schools in Ontario, Canada. Interviews with the students were carried out through a life-course perspective (Blossfeld & von Maurice, 2019), where the youth discussed absenteeism during their high school careers. Most students had attended at least two mainstream high schools (M=2.1, SD=1.53); therefore, some questions revolved around the students' past absenteeism in the mainstream setting.

The interviews revealed that SR behavior was evident in the high school student population, with 12 out of 40 students reporting SR for

predominantly anxiety and depression-related reasons. School refusing students reported similar barriers and facilitators to attendance as was reported in the In 2 School sample. Namely, key barriers being school climate, learning, and social relationships.

Barriers to Attending

The students spoke at length about feeling lost and invisible in large, inhospitable schools that numbered well into the thousands. Being thrust into overcrowded classrooms of over 30 students only served to exacerbate the feelings of alienation that was reported by many youth. To make matters worse, students reported being singled out and ridiculed by their teachers for their inability to attend. The teachers did not appear to be cognizant of the mental health difficulties – such as anxiety – the students were experiencing, and hence did not respond to their absenteeism in a constructive manner. This lack of understanding was also evidenced by the lack of flexibility and/or accommodations provided to absent students. They reported receiving little, if any, additional instruction or assistance for the work they had missed, and were expected to complete any outstanding assignments independently. As a result, the students quickly fell behind in their schoolwork and, overwhelmed, missed even more classes. The increased absenteeism strained the precarious relationships the students had with their classmates. Being absent for days and weeks at a time, the youth reported difficulties in maintaining friendships, and they slowly became outcasts who felt disconnected from the school community. Cumulatively, the students reported a vicious cycle of absenteeism: As their anxieties and depressions worsened, the schools became a hostile and negative environment that served to push the students further to the margins of the education system.

Shared Findings

Students in both studies provided suggestions for what would support them to attend school. For students in the In 2 School program these

included organizational and learning supports. Students needed safe spaces in the school setting as well as school staff they could rely on, to support their re-engagement, and who understood their mental health struggles. Academic expectations needed adjustment as well as the removal of punitive measures for not meeting learning goals. Students also highlighted the importance of being supported to use coping, communication and social skills in the mainstream setting. The students in the Canadian alternative schools too wished for compassionate and caring educators, who were aware of the mental health difficulties their students undergo. Moreover, the students desired more agency in relation to their education, namely being able to choose content and learning tasks that allow for an individualization of the learning experience. Lastly, there were suggestions for reducing school and class sizes.

Future Studies

The two studies examined in this chapter found that SR leads to student marginalization from mainstream schooling and a silencing of student voice. Both studies suggest that individuals need to be recognized as competent and credible within their systems to minimize feelings of disempowerment and marginalization (Rothery, 2007). Other shared findings included students' need to be recognized and understood within their mainstream school setting and feel a sense of legitimacy and belonging. Students also expressed a need for empathetic educators with knowledge of SR and its impacts.

In conclusion, student voice and agency should be integral in the development of interventions for SR and SAPs in general. Given the opportunity, students can provide a unique perspective on their school climate, as well as on their learning and social relationship needs, which in turn can inform the work of professionals and, in particular, the work of schools to proactively address this complex presentation.

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TEACHER ROLE IN ABSENTEEISM: DISCRIMINATION, IDENTITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY – A PERSON-IN-ENVIRON- MENT ANALYSIS

Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, Eric Kyere, & Saahoon Hong

AS PARENTS PLAY an integral role in students' absenteeism, so do teachers. A large part of the day, for students, is spent in schools and with teachers. In this chapter, the focus is on discrimination in teacher-student interactions and its direct influence on minority students regarding their school attendance problems. The data used, literature findings, results, and recommendations are shared from a person-in-environment perspective. The authors recommend exploring discrimination in teacher-student interactions as one mechanism to respond to absenteeism.

Person-in-Environment Perspective

The Person-in-Environment (PIE) perspective examines the relationship between the individual and multiple systems (Kondrat, 2013). Using psychodynamic approaches which expand the scope of PIE, researchers have explored power differentials, race, and other aspects of oppression

(Lee & Rasmussen, 2019). School is one of the most influential systems within which students interact. It provides a context for their physical and their developmental growth (i.e. their maturity and their identity, respectively), their peer interactions, their intelligence, and their abilities. The school context is where students receive substantive experience of socialization, learning to become productive members of society. It is also where they solidify their identity and frame their self-worth. This identity, from a PIE perspective, may directly influence a student's decision to attend school or not. School attendance infers the internalized capacity to perform in a student role, while agency – individual meaning-making and norms for interaction – influence implicit motivations for school attendance (Nasir, 2011). Therefore, students' appraisal of their interactions may increase school bonds and encourage decisions to attend. If the appraisal fails to verify internalized self-meanings and instead engender negative emotions, it can lead to lower school bonds, and impede decisions to attend school (Stets, Burke & Savage, 2018).

Absenteeism is an umbrella term for broad school attendance problems. Absenteeism, a student goal-directed action, exposes interruptions in development and meaning-making, where students determine whether they are perceived as capable learners (identities) within their immediate learning ecology (e.g., in teacher-student or student-to-student interactions). Defining absenteeism in this way recognizes the intersectionality of the problem, and that one cannot exist without the other. This, just as one cannot separate who one is from being black or white, while being boy or girl. Grounded in identity theories, this chapter draws on two current studies (Kyere, Karikari, & Teegen, 2020; Kyere, Hong, & Gentle-Genitty, forthcoming) and underscores the critical role the teacher-student interactions play in the decision to attend school.

Study Data

Study #1. In Kyere, Karikari, & Teegen (2020) a sample was drawn from the National Survey of American Life, Adolescent Supplement

(NASL-A) 2001–2004, African American only (n=810, mean age=13). Using cross-sectional, nationally representative data, relating to black youth, and applying hierarchical regression modelling, the associations among teacher discrimination, parental and peer emotional support, and youth school bonding regarding absenteeism were examined. An integrated theoretical framework – the ecological perspective, an integrative model for developmental competencies in minority children, social support, and critical race theory – guided the study. The goal was to examine the independent effects of teacher discrimination, parental (mother and father) support, and peer supports, on youth's school bonding. Given knowledge about teacher discrimination and associated psychosocial and academic effects on students, an objective was to study whether parental and peer supports mediate the effect of teacher discrimination on black students' school bonding. This study was driven by a limited focus, as it is evidenced in current and past studies, on discrimination and student-teacher interactions around school disengagement and absenteeism. The hypothetical question was "Would the supports offered to students at home and from peers – without direct school intervention with regards to teacher discrimination – be enough to respond to the negative impacts of teacher discrimination? In the model building, school bonding was regressed due to teacher discrimination at the baseline. Next, mother's and father's emotional support, and peer emotional supports, were added to the model, to estimate the unique effects of these constructs on school bonding, absent of the covariates. Finally, family income, neighborhood safety, Grade Point Average (GPA), and gender were added, as control variables within the full model, to examine the simultaneous effects of all predictors on school bonding.

The findings suggest that 33 percent of the sampled population reported experiencing teacher discrimination. The regression analyses revealed – independent of the covariates and the various predictors – that teacher discrimination was negatively associated with students' school bonding. In contrast, parental and peer supports were positively associated with school bonding. In the final model, although the effects of parental and peer support significantly reduced the influence of

teacher discrimination, when controlling for family income, GPA, and neighborhood safety, these supports did little to mediate or eliminate the impacts of teacher discrimination. The conclusion was that support from parents and peers confer positive effects on black students' school bonding, and may mitigate some negative influences of teacher discrimination. However, these supports, even if always present, were not enough to foster a higher level of school bonding in black students, in the presence of teacher discrimination. Offering multilevel student interventions, inclusive of teacher-student relationships, may increase black students' school bonding and school attendance.

Study #2. The current study (Kyere, Hong, & Gentle-Genitty, forthcoming) draws on prior research associated with race, gender, and class, in teacher discrimination and students' psychosocial and academic outcomes. It applies an intersectional lens to absenteeism, with an aim to investigate its influences on students' academic performance. Structural equation modelling, using a cross-sectional sample from Maryland and the Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS, N=704, mean age=14.30, 65 % black; 35% white), formed the analysis. Forty-seven percent of the participants were male, and the majority had family incomes below $49,999 (49%), followed by those with income levels of $50,000 to $74,999 (33.9%), and levels that were higher than $75,000 (17%). Despite MADICS being a longitudinal dataset, collected during 1991–2000, only one wave was used in this study. The hypotheses were (a) that race, gender, and income have independent, collective, and direct associations to discrimination in teacher-student interactions, academic self-efficacy, absenteeism, and performance, and (b) that race, gender, and income have indirect associations to absenteeism and performance, via teacher discrimination and academic self-efficacy. The analysis revealed that race and gender negatively affected GPA. Findings showed that black and male students were more likely to have lower GPA scores. Additionally, income, inversely related to race, was directly associated with absences. Students with higher-income levels were less likely to display absenteeism problems as compared to lower-income level students.

Findings suggest discrimination in teacher-student interactions may respond to racial economic equality, which might aid in mitigating contributing factors to absenteeism and academic performance problems.

Synthesizing Findings and Existing Literature

The extant literature and current findings confirm absenteeism as a multi-dimensional problem requiring a multi-dimensional solution. The influence of parents, their income level, the school, environment, and other factors have been examined in the literature, but have looked at the intersection of these variables, with a focus on teachers and their perceptions. As shown in this chapter, the use of the person-in-environment perspective, and theories of identity, provide us with evidence that practitioners, researchers, as well as policymakers must consider what happens in the learning environment. Teacher-student interactions are critical intervention points for preventing absenteeism and increasing attendance. The various forms of capital at play in school – economic, social, and cultural capital – implicitly and explicitly communicate competence, exposure, and legitimacy (Diamond & Lewis, 2019). These forms of capital, and the way in which they are activated in school, establish students' social position as well as that of their families (Marks & Garcia Coll, 2018). These social positions are structural constructions and function through social relationships. Many give access to educational resources in ways that produce unequal experiences, thereby directly influencing school bonding and subsequent premature or permanent exits from school (Superville, 2019), suggesting that learning is a socio-cultural and psychological process, and one that is intimately linked to identity (Nasir, 2011). Identity entails a process of exposing a set of system controls intended to manage meanings attributed to the self in social roles and contexts. Anytime an identity is activated, a feedback loop linking identity (*any of four components: self-meanings, reflected appraisal, comparison of environment and standard, and output vs. outcome of meaningful behavior*) is established (Burke, 1991).

These loops are evident in deficit narratives. Deficit-oriented narra-

tives are rooted in the social identities created by society. Many operate in schools – a microcosm of the larger society – and serve to undermine educators' ability to look deeper into students for their internalized standard about themselves as educable (Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Superville, 2019). Deficit narratives show up through lower teacher expectations in students of color and in those from lower-income backgrounds (Diamond & Lewis, 2019), as well as in those with disability and various other statuses. Indeed, there is a culturally accepted narrative about females in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) (McGuire et al., 2020). Further, African Americans and students with disabilities are stereotyped as intellectually inferior, violent, and emotionally disordered (Theoharis, & Causton, 2016). Children who are less economically privileged – the majority of whom are often racial-ethnic minorities – are perceived as rude, disruptive, and as having parents who are less interested in their education (Flores & Kyere, 2020). Additionally, exclusionary discipline practices – expulsion and suspension in school segregation (Theoharis & Causton, 2016) and harsh grading are other ways deficit narratives rooted in that initiate discrimination occur in proximal learning contexts. These practices contradict internalized meanings of students as capable learners. They generate distressful emotions and influence responses, like school avoidance (Lindström et al., 2014), resulting in absenteeism.

Future Studies

While acknowledging a multi-dimensional context to absenteeism, students' reasons for absence are goal-directed and fueled by a perceived threat to identity. When the person-in-environment construct and identity theories are injected, with particular attention to the proximal learning context, teacher-student interactions are shown to be critical points for intervention. Such contexts are influenced by intersecting social identity markers (e.g., *race, gender, class, immigration, disability*, and *sexual orientation*) which organize students' experiences differently. Such differing experiences can threaten identities and influence levels

of absenteeism and school engagement. In sum, teacher-student interactional contexts and discrimination, based on intersecting social identities, contribute to absenteeism and school attendance problems and must be researched further.

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PARENTS AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Glenn A. Melvin & Naoki Maeda

AT THE START of a child's schooling career, parents hold the main responsibility for their child's school attendance. While this responsibility wanes, as children develop into more autonomous adolescents who are more accountable for their actions, parents remain influential in supporting attendance until schooling concludes. It follows that when children and adolescents have difficulty attending school, parents can be instrumental in promoting attendance. This chapter will present current research and recommendations for future studies, with a focus on four domains: parental wellbeing; school withdrawal as a parent-motivated absence; parent and school partnership; and finally, the parental role in prevention and intervention.

Parental Wellbeing

Parents of children with school attendance difficulties may be challenged in their role of facilitating school attendance by their own struggles. For example, Carless et al. (2015) found that mothers of adolescents with school refusal reported higher levels of depressive and anxious symptoms, plus poorer family functioning, compared with mothers without a child with school refusal. Providing support to parents in distress and with mental illness forms a part of a comprehensive response to school attendance problems (SAPs). Further research is required to understand the needs of parents, as different

SAPs will likely be associated with common, but also varying, stressors and challenges.

School Withdrawal

School withdrawal (SW) is a type of SAP in which the parent's role is central. School withdrawal occurs when parents condone or initiate a child's absence from school (Heyne et al., 2019a). Little empirical or descriptive literature on school withdrawal exists (Albers & Ricking, 2018). Reasons for parental withdrawal of children from school vary and include family-related (e.g., to provide assistance to another family member or to help in a family business) and school-related reasons (e.g., to keep the child safe from danger at school) amongst others (Heyne et al. 2019a). In a recent study, Maeda and Hatada (2019) examined 35 students with SAPs at a junior high school in Japan and showed that 74.3 percent of students with SAPs (n=26) were cases of SW. It was also reported that more than 90 percent of the students did not take advantage of any support from specialists. This finding suggests that it is imperative to provide appropriate supports to students with SW and their parents alike. Totsika et al. (2020) found that 9 percent of a community sample, of 486 children with autism spectrum disorder in the UK (aged 3–18 years, M age=11 years), missed at least one day in the past month due to SW. It is noted that school withdrawal may be viewed as a socially undesirable behavior. This may result in under-reporting of SW by parents, prompting the need for further research into optimal methods of assessing SW. Beyond the need to establish the prevalence of SW, greater understanding of the causal factors that underlie school withdrawal is also needed.

Parent and School Partnerships

Creating partnerships between schools, families, and the community can lead to improvements in attendance (e.g., Sheldon, 2007). Parents

can be involved in schooling at multiple levels, including volunteering at the school (e.g., committees, or learning activities), supporting homework, and attending informal events such as school performances (Kearney, 2016). Communication between school and parents is central to developing a strong and engaging partnership. Schools can promote the importance of regular attendance to parents and provide feedback about their child's attendance. A recent study demonstrated the benefits of communication between school and parents, and how it can improve attendance rates by challenging parental belief that a high number of absences is normal. Rogers and Feller (2018) provided parents of students with a high number of absences with one of three personalized feedback letters regarding their child's absenteeism and tracked attendance levels. Students whose parents received a letter that included a comparison between their number of absences and a typical student's number of absences were associated with greater subsequent attendance compared with parents who received a letter that provided only the number of absences, without comparison to a typical student, or a letter with only information about the importance of attendance. Thus, feedback to parents, that their child's attendance was abnormal, was thought to stimulate an improvement in attendance.

Parent Involvement in Intervention and Prevention

Parents are commonly included in interventions for school attendance problems and typically have a key role in supporting their child's attendance. For example, treatments for school refusal typically involve parents being provided with psychoeducation and supported in the use of behavior management strategies aimed at improving the student's school attendance. A case study conducted by Maeda (2016) reported that providing information on the following topics to the parents of student with SAPs, during the psychoeducation process, was effective in increasing school attendance: (a) basic behavioral theory; (b) the process of the formation of school avoidance behavior; and (c) the

negative effects of prolonged SAPs, which included academic underachievement, unemployment difficulties, and increased risk of psychiatric illness. Maeda and Heyne (2019) reported on an intervention in which parents of adolescents with school refusal had been provided with information about somatic complaints (e.g., stomach-ache, feeling unwell) and resistive behaviors (e.g., temper tantrums, violent behavior) when youth with SAPs are forced to go to school. Heyne and Rollings (2002) suggested the importance of providing consultation to parents of children who refuse school, based on behavioral theory and instructing them in strategies for facilitating school attendance, such as (1) minimizing secondary gain from school non-attendance; (2) establishing a smooth household routine; (3) clarifying the date and process of school return; (4) giving instructions; (5) planning to ignore behaviors that accompany school nonattendance; (6) modelling confidence; (7) escorting the child to school; (8) leaving the child at school; (9) dealing with running away; and (10) providing positive reinforcement.

The amount and type of parent involvement in intervention varies between programs (Maynard et al. 2012). For example, some interventions for school refusal largely focus on the child (e.g., Last, Hansen & Franco, 1998), while others provide as much clinical contact to parents as to the child (Melvin et al., 2017). Moreover, evidence-based parent-only interventions exist for some child and adolescent mental health problems. For example, parenting programs benefit child behavior problems (Buchanan-Pascall et al. 2018) and recently a parent-alone anxiety intervention was found to be equivalent to a child-only approach, in the treatment of anxiety disorders (Lebowitz, Marin, Martino, Shimshoni & Silverman et al. 2019). Parent-focused intervention for SAPs may be highly valuable, as some children and adolescents with SAPs are reluctant or refuse to come to counselling, even if their parents ask them to attend (e.g., Maeda, Hatada, Sonoda, & Takayama, 2012), which limits the opportunity for intervention. In such circumstances, only the parents (mostly mothers) visit the school counsellors or psychologists, who may then inevitably discuss indirect intervention without interviewing the student or conducting

any direct assessments. This presentation further underscores the need for the development of effective parent strategies for SAPs. The optimal amount and type of parent involvement in treatment is not currently known for any SAP. Few studies have empirically investigated the benefits of parent-focused treatments for SAPs. One exception, conducted by Heyne et al (2002), demonstrated that a parent-focused therapy for school refusal was equivalent, in terms of improvement in school attendance in a group of children and teens with school refusal, to a child-focused therapy and a child-and-parent-focused therapy. Parenting programs and interventions that target modifiable parenting and family factors, known to underlie school non-attendance, constitute a promising direction for further research.

As well as intervention, opportunities exist for parent involvement in prevention of SAPs. Universal approaches involving provision of information about the importance of attendance, the signs of SAPs, and how best to respond. For example, psychoeducation may be included in school newsletters or presented at parent evenings. In any case, it is likely that the more evidence-based information about the mechanism of the development of SAPs and the benefits of behavioral management is provided to parents, the greater the school attendance and the lower the extent and burden of SAPs.

Future Research

In summary, parents play an influential role in school attendance, and a greater focus on parenting may translate into substantial gains in school attendance. Several ideas for future research are suggested above, including furthering understanding of the challenges faced by parents whose children experience SAPs; enhancing parent-school relationships and evaluating the impact; extending understanding of the factors underlying school withdrawal; and developing and evaluating approaches aimed at targeting modifiable parenting and family factors related to SAPs.

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PART IV.

PSYCHIATRIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

PART III OF this anthology focused on different actors that play a central role in students' return to school. Chapter nine and eleven presented various interventions. Interventions may be social, psychological, or psychiatric in nature. In Part IV of this anthology, the chapters focus exclusively on psychological and psychiatric treatments.

Chapter twelve firstly describes an inventory to use in relation to psychiatric treatment, and secondly, a modular treatment used within psychiatric care. The treatment aim at helping the student back to school and at the same time offering treatment of mental health problems. The modules consist of cognitive behavioral therapy in an individual or a group format, family counselling, school counselling, and a psychoeducational physical exercise program. These interventions are delivered by different professionals and thus constitute a multidisciplinary as well as multimodal and multilevel treatment.

Chapter thirteen is an overview of the recent developments in psychological treatments for persistent or severe SAPs, those that have been evaluated over the last five years, or are underway. These developments are highly valuable as it is challenging to find ways to encounter the complexity and heterogeneity of SAPs. Among the presented treatments are different formats in terms of the delivery of treatment and adaptions of treatment to different groups of youth, such as students with ADHD or PTSD. The overview constitutes a

helpful tool in guiding further studies. This chapter is an overview and as such it refers to some of the findings that are mentioned in other chapters in this anthology.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

Martin Knollmann & Volker Reissner

MISSING A HUGE AMOUNT of school time cannot be treated as equivalent to the presence of a mental disorder. However, missing school to a problematic extent is often a "red flag" that signals the need for an investigation into the student's psychosocial situation. School refusal (SR) has been described elsewhere in the anthology (see page 22), and it is associated with anxiety or depressive symptoms, psychosomatic complaints, or other internalizing symptoms. Truancy, on the other hand, is often accompanied by externalizing problems, such as lack of school connectedness, school aversion, and oppositional behaviors. Until now, there have been no instruments to evaluate or assess psychiatric symptoms like these, in relations to SAPs. Also, there has been a lack of studies examining the treatment of SAPs within a child psychiatric context. In this chapter, the authors present a newly developed questionnaire that assesses the prevalence of psychiatric problems, in order to guide interventions. Further, this chapter offers a presentation of studies of multimodal treatment, in child psychiatric care, for youth with SAPs.

A Questionnaire for Use Within Psychiatric Care

School attendance problems are associated with a range of internalizing and externalizing problems that are commonly seen within child and adolescent psychiatric care (Knollmann et al., 2010). For example, depressive symptoms, like sleep disturbances and loss of energy, are often seen in youth with SAPs. Also, not going to school because of separation anxiety, social anxiety, or agoraphobia is associated with SAPs. Avoidance behaviors, like not going to school due to fears, play a prominent role in theories of the etiology and maintenance of anxiety disorders. In a similar vein, school absence due to being bullied, losing a family member, or the divorce of parents can be considered symptoms of an adjustment disorder. In cases of truancy, SAPs may represent one of the many oppositional-defiant symptoms of conduct disorder. Even in the case of a "mixed" presentation of truancy and school refusal (e.g., school absenteeism with both depressive and oppositional features), these symptoms may be operationalized as Depressive Conduct Disorder.

A plethora of diagnostic tests are available for the standardized assessment of the symptoms mentioned above. The symptoms may, on the one hand, be associated with mental disorders and, on the other hand, describe SAP-related behavior. There is, however, no instrument that, at the same time, take both psychiatric symptoms and SAPs into account. Therefore, the authors developed a measure for the assessment of dysfunctional cognitions and emotions linked to SAPs (Knollmann et al., 2017). As the basis for the inductive construction of the Inventory of School Attendance Problems (ISAP; Knollmann et al., 2019), diagnostic information was gathered by collecting data from 245 outpatients at a German child and adolescent psychiatric clinic treating youth with SAPs. Drawing on these results, a questionnaire was constructed for the integrated measurement of symptoms of SAPs and the impact of these symptoms on school attendance.

A three-row-design was used. In the left column of the questionnaire, under the heading "Prior to or at school/school time…", the items were presented in rows (e.g., "…I feel sad."). In the middle column,

students rated how often an item describes their thoughts and feelings (heading: "Applies to me"). Then, in the right column, students rated how strongly this item is connected to their school (non)attendance (heading: "That's why I miss school / attending school is hard for me"; response scale for both questions: "never–sometimes–often–most of the time").

An explorative factor analysis resulted into 48 items, loading on 13 factors. The 13 scales assess internalizing and externalizing symptoms, as well as emotional distress due to problems in the school or family context:

Depression
Social anxiety
Performance anxiety
Agoraphobia/panic
Separation anxiety
Somatic complaints
Aggression
School aversion/attractive alternatives
Problems with teachers
Dislike of the specific school
Problems with peers
Problems within the family
Problems with parents

All scales showed good internal consistencies, and correlations with other questionnaires indicated convergent and discriminant validity. Furthermore, positive associations between most of the scales and the extent of school absenteeism were obtained. For descriptive purposes, separate scale values for the presence of a symptom and its functional impact on school attendance can be calculated, so that the relation between these two aspects can be estimated for each scale. Thus, the ISAP can be used both as a screening tool and to explore the ranking of different symptoms prior to, or at, school with regard to their impact on school absenteeism and in order to prioritize treatment targets.

Multimodal and Multi-Professional Treatment of SAPs

When SAPs co-occur with mental disorders there is a need for special treatment options. Therefore, we developed a manualized modular treatment of problematic school absenteeism (MT). This semi-standardized treatment procedure has two aims: to achieve school (re-) integration and to offer treatment of the underlying mental disorder (Reissner et al., 2015a).

The MT targets a broad spectrum of mental disorders and uses cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) as well as motivational interviewing. The main reason to employ both therapeutic methods was the clinical notion that a central driver, for reintegration into school, is to improve intrinsic motivation to change dysfunctional thoughts (Reissner et al., 2019). In addition, the MT is based on a multilevel model of problematic school absenteeism, which enables different professions to work together in a treatment-team to communicate and share a joint understanding of the patients´ problem. The team is comprised of psychotherapists, family therapists, teachers, and physical exercise trainers, which deliver the core interventions. These are assigned within four modules: cognitive behavioral therapy, family counselling, school counselling, and a psychoeducational physical exercise program.

Module 1 – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

One or two CBT sessions, lasting one hour, are delivered each week in an individual or group setting. After case conceptualization and treatment planning the patient enters the active treatment phase. In the first phase – case conceptualization – the therapist builds up a therapeutic relationship with the young person, and his or her parents, in order to enable the assessment procedures and foster motivation for participation. As the case manager, the CBT-therapist presents the information gathered at a multidisciplinary case conference to the other professionals and they decide on adding one or more of the other modules. In this phase, a cognitive behavioral micro- and macro-analysis with regard to problematic school absenteeism, psychosocial functioning, and motivational status is discussed with the treatment

team. It is used for the development of the treatment plan with the patient, and parents, in the second phase of the CBT-module. The third phase includes disorder specific interventions from published treatment manuals, which are adapted to, and employed with, children and adolescents with problematic school absenteeism. The module also fosters an individualized graduated approach for school reintegration including elements such as "Plan A-B-C" which is a stepwise intensification of the interventions, a precise planning of the "comeback-scenario" (the first day back at school) or "Time-outs" to facilitate re-integration.

Module 2 – Family Counseling
The main indication for this module is family-based reinforcement of problematic school absenteeism (e.g. poor parental educational abilities and family communication). Interventions may include family visits and counseling and/or supporting/strengthening parenting skills. The intervention, "accompanying students to school", often helps the patient to overcome his/her overwhelming anxiety during the first day back at school, with the help of a trained family therapist. In addition, counseling in a group-setting, for parents only, gives parents the possibility to exchange their thoughts, anxieties and feelings about their own and their children's problems.

Module 3 – School Counseling
In treating patients with SAPs, it is common that learning problems and the wish or need to change school class, grade, or type of school prevails. These problems are carefully assessed, talked through, and represent indications for the need of further school counselling. Giving advice on school career/education, training learning techniques, and assessment of school-related abilities are additional interventions. Teachers from regular schools may be supported by cooperative counseling/advice given by the specially trained teachers working on the team

Module 4 – Psychoeducational Exercise Program
Participation of patients in the psychoeducational exercise program is optional after attending at least three sessions. Psychotherapeutic

interventions are combined with physical exercises. Psychotherapeutic interventions pertain to the improvement of social competencies and coping strategies for everyday life, as well as to enhancing feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The program starts with PC-aided sports games and gradually moves to out-door sports.

The MT-program was evaluated in a randomized controlled trial (Reissner et al., 2015b). Patients with mental disorder and school refusal, school truancy, or mixed SAPs were randomly assigned to one of two treatments:

1. MT – Patients received multimodal treatment according to the manual.
2. TAU – Treatment as usual: Patients received standard out-patient treatment by child- and adolescent psychiatrists within the child- and adolescent mental health care system.

Study outcomes were the percentage of classes attended in the five days prior to the first measurement (before the intervention), as well as 6 and 12 months after taking part in the study. In addition, other measures of outcomes were the severity of anxiety and depressive symptoms, the level of self-efficacy, and the quality of family life. For both treatments, the percentage of regular school attenders increased to about 60% in 6 months. The improvement persisted 12 months after taking part in the study. In contrast to the TAU-patients, those from the MT-group reported an improvement in depressive symptoms over time.

Future Studies

The findings, with regard to re-integration at school, were in accordance with earlier studies, showing that specialized programs did not mitigate school avoidance to a greater extent than treatment as usual. However, improvement with regard to depressive symptoms was seen in the MT-group. Future studies should include larger sample sizes and focus

on the conditions for successful reintegration in school, and on the differential indicators for outpatient versus inpatient treatment.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR SCHOOL REFUSAL AND TRUANCY

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THE NEED TO HELP persistently absent youth engage with education is underscored by the high prevalence rates and the adverse outcomes associated with missing school. It could be argued that the solution lies in re-imagining education, an argument echoed in social media since COVID-19 disrupted education in school settings. But even as new approaches to education are implemented (e.g., the e-learning platforms), some youth will have difficulty engaging in education. To make confident recommendations about how to help youth with school attendance problems (SAPs), there need to be advances in the evaluation of interventions for these problems. As a step in that direction, this chapter presents developments in interventions for persistent or severe SAPs. Specifically, we describe research published in the last five years and some studies that are underway. The overview is based on our familiarity with the literature and projects, rather than on a systematic review methodology. With some exceptions, it focuses on interventions that are fundamentally psychological in nature, often conducted in clinical settings.

Because school refusal (SR) and truancy (TR) differ in form, associated risk factors, and the function likely serve by non-attendance (e.g., avoiding emotional distress in SR; seeking more pleasurable activities

outside of school in TR), interventions are also likely to differ (Heyne & Maynard, 2016). Thus, the first section addresses interventions designed to target SR and the second section addresses interventions designed to target SR and/or TR.

Interventions for School Refusal

Treatment programs for SR often include interventions targeting youth anxiety and/or depression (e.g., Heyne et al., 2011). This is explained by the fact that youth meeting SR criteria often display symptoms of anxiety and/or depression and meet diagnostic criteria for one or more internalizing disorders, whether they be youth in community or clinical samples (Maynard et al., 2018). Interventions to help youth manage their emotional distress and increase school attendance serve the broader aim of treatment for SR: positive progress on a pathway of academic and social-emotional development (Heyne & Sauter, 2013). Alongside youth-focused interventions targeting SR, are interventions to help parents respond to their child's behavior (e.g., avoidant or oppositional behavior) and interventions to help school professionals "lower the hurdles" to make it easier for youth to attend school (e.g., Heyne & Rollings, 2002). Family-focused intervention, such as communication and problem-solving between the young person and their parents, is often embedded in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) manuals for SR (Heyne et al., 2015).

The most commonly evaluated treatments for SR are behavioral or cognitive-behavioral (Heyne et al., 2020; Maynard et al., 2018), but variations have been reported in the last five years. A small open trial of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) was conducted by Chu and colleagues (2015). It includes "walking the middle path", a dialectical approach to oneself, others, and one's problems. Case reports demonstrate the addition of narrative therapy alongside CBT (Chhabra & Puar, 2016); the addition of components from acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), group sessions with youth, and adaptations to account for chronic medical illness (Rohrig & Puliafico, 2018);

and the application of behaviorally-focused parenting strategies for a complex case involving separation anxiety, ADHD, and PTSD (Blumkin, 2016). A non-randomized trial evaluated behavioral consultation with school staff and parents, applied in cases in which youth will not participate in treatment (Maeda & Heyne, 2019). Minamitani and Matsumoto's (2018) group-based CBT parent support program included stress management and cognitive restructuring focused on parents' well-being and parenting practices, because of the role parents need to play in supporting their child. Two studies described case series in which youth participated in an alternative educational program where CBT procedures were also employed (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019; McKay-Brown et al., 2019). An open trial of an intensive CBT with higher dosage of session time (15 sessions of 1.5–2 hours) and frequency (daily for 3 weeks) showed promising results (Hannan et al., 2019). Melvin and colleagues (2017) evaluated CBT augmented with medication (fluoxetine) in a randomized controlled trial (RCT), but it did not yield superior outcomes relative to CBT alone.

Three technological developments warrant attention, one of which occurred in the previous decade. Gutiérrez-Maldonado and colleagues (2009) reported an RCT in which school-related virtual environments were projected onto a screen to enhance cooperation in exposure tasks among youth displaying SR. Immersive virtual reality is yet to be evaluated in the treatment of SR. Chu and colleagues (2015) included web-based coaching as part of their DBT for SR, allowing therapists to observe and support youth and parents in the home setting. Høiseth and colleagues (2020) described the development of a mobile game to supplement early intervention and treatment for SR. Using the mobile game as a tool, youth, parents, and professionals can work together to address mental health problems associated with SR. The effectiveness of the game awaits evaluation.

Two studies of SR treatment are underway in the Netherlands. The LANS project (a Dutch acronym for "All Students To School") evaluates the effectiveness of the @school program. The @school program is a manualized modular intervention developed to support the developmentally-sensitive application of CBT for SR (Heyne & Sauter, 2013). Based

on a case formulation, the practitioner selects, sequences, and doses modules for working with youth (9 standard, 3 optional) and parents (9 standard, 3 optional), along with consultation to education professionals at the youth's school. The @school program was initially evaluated in a non-randomized study, conceptualized as an *efficacy* study because stringent conditions applied (e.g., implemented in a research setting; high level of therapist training and supervision; exclusion of youth with ASD; Heyne et al., 2011). The current LANS project constitutes an *effectiveness* study of the @school program, whereby treatment is conducted within an educational setting (De Berkenschutse), by professionals working in that setting, and with less stringent exclusion criteria. Effectiveness studies help bridge the gap between the ivory tower (i.e., research-based settings) and real-life practice (e.g., an educational setting) because research occurs under circumstances more typical of daily practice. Data gathering in the LANS project will be completed in 2021. Early indications are that a high proportion of youth seen within LANS have ASD, a diagnosis that previously led to exclusion from treatment studies (e.g., Hannan et al., 2019; Heyne et al., 2011).

The other study is "Knowing What Works", a qualitative review of 21 SR interventions provided by education and/or mental health services (www.insa.network/netherlands). The primary focus of the study is "what works" according to professionals delivering the interventions, youth participating in the interventions, and parents. A secondary focus is the way in which education and mental health services can collaborate to address SR. The final report, to be released in 2021, will include a roadmap for the development of interventions for SR and a model via which services and regions can conduct their own evaluation of interventions for attendance problems.

Interventions for School Refusal and/or Truancy

Some youth display characteristics of both SR and TR although this group appears to be considerably smaller than the group displaying SR only and TR only (Heyne, Gren Landell et al., 2019a). Interventions

for youth who display both types of SAP should address the specific needs of this group (e.g., internalizing and externalizing behavior). An early approach to planning and delivering treatment for SR and/or TR can be seen in the functional analytic model of Kearney and Silverman (1990). Case studies (e.g., Kearney et al., 2001) and a small controlled study indicate positive outcomes when treatment is guided by functional analysis (Kearney & Silverman, 1999). More recently, other interventions have been designed to address multiple SAPs and mental health problems (e.g., Lomholt et al., 2020; Reissner et al., 2015; Walter et al., 2010). Next, we describe two of these, one that has already been evaluated in an RCT and the other currently being evaluated in an RCT.

In Germany, Reissner and colleagues (2015) developed a Multimodal Treatment (MT) for SAPs (presented in more detail in chapter 12). MT was evaluated in an RCT conducted in a psychiatric hospital setting (Reissner et al., 2015). Youths were randomly allocated to receive MT or treatment as usual, the latter involving outpatient treatment with collaborating child and adolescent psychiatrists. After 12 months, the proportion of regular school attenders increased from 13 percent to 66 percent in the MT condition and 20 percent to 61 percent in the TAU condition, with no significant between-group difference. There was a significant group difference in the reduction of depressive symptoms, favoring the MT condition, and a significant increase in youth self-efficacy for both groups.

In Denmark, a research project is underway to evaluate a transdiagnostic intervention for SAPs called Back 2 School (B2S; Thastum et al., 2019). The overall aim of B2S is to increase school attendance among youth with SAPs (i.e., SR and/or TR) by decreasing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. B2S is a manual-guided CBT program which includes adapted elements from the @school program (Heyne & Sauter, 2013) and the When Children Refuse School intervention (Kearney & Albano, 2007). It is designed to be used together with a transdiagnostic CBT program called MindMyMind (MMM; Jeppesen, 2017). Altogether, the intervention consists of 10 treatment sessions and one booster session. Eight sessions are conducted with the

youth and their parents together, and two sessions are conducted with parents only. The content and order of the sessions, and the selection of MMM modules, are determined based on a descriptive functional analysis and the case formulation developed following a clinical interview with the youth and their parents. This interview explores the nature of the youth's SAPs and co-occurring mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, and/or behavioral problems). In a recent feasibility study, Lomholt and colleagues (2020) found that the B2S intervention showed positive results related to increased school attendance and reduced symptoms of mental health problems. Currently, a large RCT evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention is underway, compared with treatment as usual (Thastum et al., 2019).

Future Studies

The studies outlined in the preceding section are valuable developments for the field of school attendance and absenteeism. To help the field as it moves forward, we offer six general considerations for conducting research and a range of specific questions to be addressed.

First, because of changes in the educational and social landscape (e.g., education reform, online learning, social media), it is vital that interventions are developed and evaluated on the basis of close collaboration between researchers, professionals in education and mental health, youth, parents, policy-makers, and representatives of specific cultural and indigenous groups (Heyne, Gentle-Genitty et al., 2019b). The International Network for School Attendance (INSA; www.insa.network) offers a forum for communication among stakeholders in SAP research.

Second, although this chapter focused on psychological interventions for SAPs, we recognize the heterogeneity of SAPs and the need for a multiple disciplinary approach to helping youth and families engage with education (Heyne et al., in press). The practicalities of developing and delivering interventions across professional borders are challenging (Elliott & Place, 2019), but there are noteworthy examples

of collaboration, between education and mental health, in delivering treatment for SR (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019; McKay-Brown et al., 2019) and in designing and delivering treatment for SR and/or TR (Reissner et al., 2015).

Third, there is still a great need for interventions to be supported by rigorous trials including RCT designs and long-term follow-ups (Elliott & Place, 2019). In the last five years there have been just three RCTs (one of which is underway). To date, the longest follow-ups reported in larger studies were 9 months (Maeda & Heyne, 2019) and 12 months (Melvin et al., 2017; Reissner et al., 2015). Scientifically, "the extent to which a return to school is necessarily helpful for later adult functioning remain[s] unanswered" (Elliott & Place, 2019, p. 11).

Fourth, alongside robust evaluation in research settings, there need to be more effectiveness studies carried out in community settings (e.g., within mental health services; across schools in a region). Knowledge about treatment effects expands when evidence-based treatments are evaluated in these settings because there is greater heterogeneity among participants due to less stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria (e.g., more cultural and economic diversity; Blumkin, 2016). Practitioners and families need access to evidence-based treatments for SAPs (Blumkin, 2016), and effectiveness studies facilitate this access. Collaboration between researchers and practitioners also affords opportunities for practitioners (e.g., they gain support in their working methods; it contributes to the development, delivery, and evaluation of interventions) and researchers (e.g., understanding needs in the field).

Fifth, when new treatments for SR, such as DBT or ACT, are evaluated in RCTs, the comparison intervention would ideally be CBT. This is because CBT is currently the best-supported treatment for SR (Maynard et al., 2018). Most CBT manuals for SR treatment encourage flexibility according to the needs of the young person (e.g., selection, dosing, and sequencing of modules), so highly standardized interventions will be less appropriate as the comparison treatment. In addition, CBT for SR commonly includes work with parents and consultation with school staff, so these elements should be included when CBT is used as a comparison intervention.

Sixth, the field will benefit from greater consistency in how treatment studies are conducted and reported. When conducting studies, there can be greater consistency in criteria used to include and exclude cases (Heyne et al., 2020), in the use of standardized instruments to describe the sample (e.g., parenting style and family functioning; Heyne et al., 2015), and in the measurement of treatment outcome, perhaps via a core outcome set (Heyne et al., 2020). When reporting research, there should be clear specification of participants (e.g., severity, strengths, and difficulties), of the primary aim of the treatment (e.g., to reduce anxiety and/or to increase school attendance; Elliott & Place, 2019), and of the extent and nature of treatment components such as parent involvement (Heyne et al., 2015). Greater consistency would facilitate our understanding of *what works for whom* as we interpret the results of individual studies and undertake meta-analyses of moderating influences on outcome. For example, we could better identify: which youth are more/less likely to benefit from intensive and costly interventions such as inpatient treatment (Sibeoni et al., 2018); which treatments best serve the needs of youth displaying SR together with social anxiety, loneliness, or low friendship quality (Heyne et al., 2015); whether family-focused work improves outcomes among youth displaying SR (Elliott & Place, 2019); and the extent to which school-related factors account for outcomes, such as security and belonging at school (Nuttall & Woods, 2013) and motivation of the school system (Hannan et al., 2019). Multi-site studies across countries would improve consistency among researchers.

With these general considerations in mind, we propose the following questions for research:

(a)   Do promising interventions evaluated in small trials (e.g., DBT for SR) yield positive outcomes when evaluated in large RCTs?

(b)   Relative to type-specific interventions (e.g., @school program for SR), are interventions that provide scope to address SR and/or TR (e.g., MT, B2S) more or less effective and implementable?

(c) How much do technological developments (e.g., web-based therapy, immersive virtual reality, mobile game applications) contribute to the outcome of treatment for SR and/or TR?

(d) To what extent does treatment intensity (e.g., daily sessions [Hannan et al., 2019] versus 1 to 2 sessions per week [Heyne & Sauter, 2013; Lomholt et al., 2020]) influence school attendance?

(e) Which treatment components enhance outcomes when addressing SAPs in adolescence, relative to childhood (e.g., family communication and problem-solving; Heyne et al., 2015)?

Collaboration among stakeholders will help to prioritize these questions and develop methodologies for yielding answers.

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WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

Malin Gren Landell

THIRTEEN CHAPTERS. Twenty distinguished researchers. When looking at the lists of references in this anthology, the diversity and amount of research activities that have taken place over the last decade becomes clear. The field of study has certainly moved forward. But even so, there is more to be done. Vice President Kamala Harris has described it as an "absenteeism crisis" (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). This is illustrated in a study referred to in chapter seven, where the participants had been absent between three months and two years. Two years is a very long time. There is no time to waste, and this is not the time to wait and see, or to lock in research into different disciplines or paradigms. As Kearney, Graczyk and Gonzálvez put it in chapter two, it is "*time to break out of comfort zones*".

This final chapter will sum up some suggestions for future research, in the light of the research reported in the previous chapters. Where can we go from here? What do we need to learn more about? And where do we need to go?

Detection First

Acting on a problem requires an awareness of the fact that there is a problem. Much of the recent knowledge on SAPs comes from studies using school attendance data – big data (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). These studies have not only provided new knowledge, the findings

have also changed previously accepted views on SAPs, ones that had been seen as evident. At the first inaugural INSA conference in Oslo, 2019, professor Michael Gottfried called attention to the need of "unlearning" what has prior been thought of as truths in the field of SAPs (see also, Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). The design of these studies has contributed in more ways than by "just" adding knowledge to the field. The take away from this is that progress can be achieved by the schools themselves by using administrative data. As pointed out in chapter three, "The Power of School Attendance Data", *"being a tool simply used for collecting and monitoring attendance, towards being a crucial instrument for evaluating, and optimizing the management of absenteeism in schools."* In addition, school attendance data is not "only" an educational issue. In the U. S., a majority of states includes chronic absenteeism as a school quality indicator. School absenteeism is indicative of other problems in children's and young people's lives. Ex-President, Barack Obama, initiated a national campaign to combat chronic absenteeism, called "Every Student, Every Day", which involved several central departments, such as the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice.[3]

School staff in many countries are obliged to use registration systems. However, there are issues with data registration. As pointed out by Keppens and Bach Johnsen, in chapter three, the data collected by daily registrations are not always reliable. For example, in the studies referred to, differences were found between systems data and what students reported. A similar problem was addressed by Brian Chu, in chapter four, where reports from counsellors showed higher rates of absences than the reports from administrators. This, unfortunately, means that systems are not used in a way that utilize their full potential, and they are not used in a fair way. A Danish thesis (Bach Johnsen, 2020) revealed discrepancies in parent-reported and registry-based school attendance. Bach Johnsen calls for improved accuracy in the

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[3]   https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/every-student-every-day-obama-admin-istration-launches-first-ever-national-cross-sector-initiative-eliminate-chronic-absen-teeism-our-nations-schools

monitoring of school attendance, and in the registration processes, in Denmark and other countries.

An awareness of the potential of data registration is needed among various stakeholders, like politicians. Also, teachers need to have an understanding and awareness of the fact that registration of attendance and absences are very potent tools for predicting difficulties for students in their learning.

In addition, parents need to be aware of the problem. Research shows that parents lack knowledge about the consequences of absenteeism. For example, in an American survey, parents reported that they believed that it was acceptable to miss more than three days of school each month, and that they did not believe students would fall behind academically (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Parents also tend to underestimate the child's total absences, but the good news are that interventions to correct parental misbeliefs can reduce chronic absenteeism (Rogers & Feller, 2018).

In addition, children of parents who believe that regular attendance is important in early grades are more likely to have considerably higher levels of attendance, compared to children of parents who do not hold this belief (Ehrlich et al., 2014). Studies show that informing and educating parents, about the importance of attendance, have promising positive effects in increasing attendance (Robinson et al., 2018).

School staff in various countries commonly experience that they are drowning in managing a large number of students with SAPs, and that the management becomes impossible. One way to make detection a meaningful and effective intervention is to develop and validate ways to distinguish between problematic and nonproblematic absenteeism. An example of this is the planned research by Keppens and colleagues (see chapter three). Also, the study of Chu and colleagues (2019) shows promising and interesting results from an alert system which aims to identify a reliable and valid threshold to differentiate between different types of absences, in terms of severity and amount. The use of an alert system will aid in detecting students in most need, and to match the needs to powerful interventions. This way of working is comparable to the way that emergency clinics triage patients. It seems necessary to

add to results like the above, and to develop nation specific systems to facilitate detection and to guide interventions. If this is not done there is a risk that school staff, as well as help services, give up on managing the high numbers of students with different levels of SAPs. Advances in monitoring systems also strengthen the quality of data.

In Sweden there is an ongoing project, with mobile devices and apps, that make use of attendance / absence data to increase the understanding of the needs of students and to predict individual students' future absences. The plan is to use the system to guide interventions for individual students and thus tailor the interventions (see INSA my country).[4]

Further, providing feedback to the stakeholders – such as teachers – may encourage them to register absences in a more consistent way, as the time invested aids in foreseeing absence, and the data also informs on difficulties the student might have. The same holds true for students. In Sweden, there are empirical examples of schools giving feedback on attendance to students. This is done in a personalized manner, where the student feels involved and empowered. The feedback to students, with regard to their attendance, is promoting increased attendance.[5]

When daily monitoring is used in a way that is not reliable, nor in accordance with the relevant laws, it counteracts the child's right to education. In addition, if the tool is not reliably used, it only becomes time-consuming, ineffective, and costly. Providing teachers knowledge on risk factors is one way to ensure awareness and to foster reliable registration. The framework to detect emerging SR, suggested by Havik, Ingul, & Heyne (2019), is an important contribution to the practical work of detection. Their article presents a system that can be used, not only for detection, but also to guide strategies on how to act when a pattern of absence is identified.

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[4]   https://www.insa.network / sweden

[5]   Projekt PlugInnan – Nossebro skola. https://www.goteborgsregionen.se / GR / toppmenyn / detta-jobbar-gr-med / skola--utbildning / fullfoljda-studier / plug-innan---tidiga-insatser / delprojekt / nossebro-skola.htm

Promoting Attendance

In order to prevent and decrease absenteeism, we need to understand its etiology. The format of this anthology has not allowed for considerations of all risk factors for SAPs. Some of the risk factors we know about, so far, have been reported in this anthology. However, as pointed out earlier, more in-depth analyses are needed to move beyond what we know, and what we think we know. For example, in chapter five, Havik and Ingul report that students, who are reluctant to go to school, tend to have more somatic complaints than anxious but not reluctant students have. Does this mean that students who are going to school, and feeling anxious, are at less risk for SAPs, than students who do not want to go to school, that experience somatic complaints, but not anxiety? On the same topic, Gonzálvez and Kearney present promising measurements based on mixed risk-profiles.

The society is developing rapidly and what we know about risks today, may not be the whole truth in the future. Hence, research is needed to predict future risks. Will there be more student absenteeism due to difficulties in returning to school after pandemic-related lockdowns, when online teaching has become commonplace and when school attendance might be less valued than before? And another example, one study from Texas U.S., reported that air pollution – high levels of carbon monoxide (CO), statistically increase absences (Currie et al., 2009).

A Safe and Fair School Environment

There are several pieces of research indicating that the school environment – contraindicated – affects attendance. An example of this is the relationship between discrimination and low teacher expectations for students of color, or students from low-income backgrounds (described in chapter ten). Instead of fostering capable learners, the authors highlight that these kinds of experiences may cause distress in students, that in turn generates absenteeism. A similar example is reported by Keppens and Bach Johnsen in chapter three, on unequal school attendance registration. When the absences of a certain group

of students are systematically registered as being more frequent than the absences of other students, the willingness of those students, to attend school may be affected. Since their attendance is not valued in an equal way as the attendance of other students. Other examples of school-related risk factors are unsafe and unpredictable learning environments, described in chapter six. Focus also needs to be paid to students that, as yet, have low levels of absenteeism. Calabro-Pepin (2020) reports that students with low, chronic absenteeism from school identified "not safe at school" as their top-reason for absence. Further, as reported in chapter six, students experience bullying, in spite of the declaration that schools should be safe for all students. Research is needed on how to help students, who experience bullying, to overcome fear or even PTSD, and on how to aid a re-integration into a safe school environment. Suggestions how to promote attendance are given by students from Canada and Australia. They describe anxiety due to overcrowded schools and classrooms, lack of flexibility, instruction and assistance once they return to school, lack of understanding from teachers about mental health problems faced by students, and so forth. Student voices as sources of information to promote attendance and to prevent SAPs are important. An ongoing Swedish research project is investigating what students in four countries – Sweden, Japan, England, and Germany – find helpful in terms of support and interventions, when struggling with SAPs.[6]

The Family Sucks, and Supports
Research shows that in Sweden, one in ten students, aged 15 years, provide care to a family member.[7] A recent study from Switzerland showed an estimated prevalence of 7.9 percent of students, in grades

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[6] International Comparative Perspectives on School Attendance Problems. https://www.edu.su.se / english / research / international-comparative-per-spectives-on-school-attendance-problems / international-comparative-perspec-tives-on-school-attendance-problems-1.490141

[7] https://www.anhoriga.se / samverkansprojekt / psykosocialt-stod-for-att-framja-ps-ykisk-halsa-och-valbefinnande-bland-unga-omsorgsgivare-i-europa-me-we /

4–9, providing practical or emotional care and support to a family member (Leu et al., 2018b). Young caregivers are thus numerous. Absence from school is a consequence of care-giving responsibilities – so called school withdrawal (SW). Despite the high prevalence of this phenomenon, this group seems to have flown under the radar, and research is needed to find ways to help these students and reduce absenteeism. They do not themselves tend to inform their teachers that they are caregivers, as they do not believe that telling anyone will change the situation (Sempik & Becker, 2013). In addition, teachers are not aware of this group (Leu et al., 2018a) and don't regard it as their duty to be attentive, not even to the extent of merely asking a student if there is a problem at home. Thus, future studies need to address the issues of frequent SW and evaluate teachers' awareness and knowledge of this kind of absenteeism. Not enough effort has been made to find ways to reach out to this neglected group. In chapter eleven, Melvin and Maeda report that more than 90 percent of the students, identified with SW, did not take advantage of any specialist support. In light of the findings, that mothers of adolescents with school refusal reported higher levels of depressive and anxious symptoms plus poorer family functioning, compared to mothers without a child with school refusal, future studies should evaluate models to offer support to parents that suffer from mental health problems. Finally, there is an urgent need to find ways to reach out to young carers, to offer the help needed to stay at school instead of staying home because of reasons relating to the parents.

Families and parents are also a source of resilience to absenteeism. As reported by Gentle-Genitty, Kyere, and Hong, in chapter ten, their data show that parental support increased levels of school bonding in students. Parental support also significantly reduced the influence of teacher discrimination. Schools should be a safe place where students do not risk teacher discrimination. Interventions to prevent discrimination is absolutely key. Sometimes, parental support does not occur spontaneously. The overview of recent studies on psychological treatment, mentions interventions that include strategies for parents to support their child's return to school.

In the near future, a substantial number of parents will themselves have experience of longstanding and severe SAPs. Difficulties attending school is not a new phenomenon. However, the prevalence and severity of SAPs tend to have increased over the last decades. What will the self-lived experiences of SAP mean for parents whose children are meant to attend school? Several authors in this anthology want to see future studies on development trajectories. Not only is there a need to understand how SAPs develop over time, but there is also a need to study how this "heritage" affect the roles of being an adult and parent. A Norwegian study found that absenteeism was more common in families where one or both parents stayed at home due to long-term sick-leave or unemployment (Hysing et al., 2017). Another study showed that having a sibling with chronic absenteeism is a predictor of absence during the following school year (Chu et al., 2019).

Research and clinical work should be guided by models that take the many systems that operate on youth in the development of SAPs into account. One such framework is the KiTeS model that address development, maintenance, and alleviation of SA and SAPs (Melvin et al., 2019).

Measurement and Assessment

In some cases, the mere detection of absence will prevent SAPs. In other cases, SAPs continue and there is a need to assess the reasons behind the absenteeism. There are validated measurements to use in assessment, and new developments have been presented in this anthology. However, not covered in this piece is assessment tools specifically designed for use in social work. Future assessment methods need to take into account a broader spectrum of arenas that influence SAPs. As Gonzálvez and Kearney point out, parental variables, social / peer contexts, and school organizational variables are sources to consider during the assessment. It is also important to use multilevel analyses.

A recent systematic overview by Kearney and colleagues (2021) gives an update on questionnaires for SAPs.

Interventions and Treatments

A range of suggestions for future studies is given in chapter thirteen. There have been developments in interventions for SAPs over the last five years. Actually, at the time of writing this text, one of the authors – Daniel Bach Johnsen – is preparing to defend his thesis on SAPs treatment.

According to present developments, do they cover and relate to the current knowledge on SAPs, and do they prepare for future challenges? Yes, for example, the alternative educational program, together with CBT procedures (McKay-Brown et al., 2019; Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019), are examples of developments that relate to what has been described as challenges in the school environment.

Also, the use of technological devices, described in chapter thirteen, speaks in favor of researchers and clinicians keeping up with modern and future challenges and possibilities.

As pointed out by Melvin and Maeda, in chapter eleven, it is common that school staff do not get access to the absent student. One way to face this challenge is to apply behavioral consultation with school staff and parents, as described in chapter thirteen. Interventions aimed at parents seems to need far more attention in the future. One example of this was mentioned in chapter thirteen: the evaluation of a group-based CBT parent-support program, including interventions focused on parents' well-being and on parenting practices that are risk factors for absenteeism. Above all, other disciplines than psychology and psychiatry will need to be taken into account to offer interventions that meet the needs of families and parents. Not only parents, but other caregivers and people close to the student, may need to be involved. Children and young people in foster care, young refugees without any adult relative, and other children and young people in vulnerable situations may require special considerations.

Other areas of interest, for future treatment and intervention studies, are evaluations of interventions for younger vs. older students and interventions aimed at the most persistent and severe cases, using an extended, four-tier, Tier-model (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

The article by Heyne and colleagues (2020) provide an overview of constructs used for the evaluation of treatments for SR. This article serves as a guide for clinical work with SR.

Collaborative and Coordinated Efforts
The recommendation for successful interventions of SAPs, is to give multisystemic support involving different actors, such as school, mental health service providers, and social welfare, among others. In order to make this work effective, resources and interventions need to be coordinated. There is a definite need for research on how to organize interagency interventions. A few were mentioned in chapter thirteen, such as the models used in alternative school settings in the Netherlands (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019) and in Australia (McKay-Brown et al., 2019). The Dutch model addresses the needs of students with special educational needs (a group that is at risk of SAPs and that we need to learn much more about).

There are also studies on truancy, that focus on collaborations and partnerships between schools, family, police, justice systems and community services (Haight, 2014; Mazerolle et al., 2017). Another specific form of SAPs is mandated absence due to medical illness. In many cases mandated absence is used to cover other causes, for repeated absences, than actual medical reasons. Vanneste and colleagues (2016) have conducted research on collaborative interventions for students, in vocational schools, that present with problematic medical absenteeism.

There are models and formats that are empirically evaluated to address other problems, like conduct disorders, that could be tested for SAPs as well. Models to look into, and eventually develop and modify, for SAPs might be: Treatment Foster Care Oregon (formerly Multi Treatment Foster Care (Åström et al., 2019) and Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST; Henggeler & Shaeffer, 2016). These programs already exist and have been rigorously evaluated for use with children, young people, and families. Thus, there is a knowledgebase to build on, among staff, within different service agencies.

There are several examples of coordination and collaboration aimed at helping youth with complex medical conditions that may be mod-

els to learn from. Two examples are: studies on coordinated care for children with special health care needs (Lindly et al., 2020), and interventions provided as a Multidisciplinary Hospital-based School Program (MSP; Colbert et al., 2020).

Moving Beyond Present Models and Understanding

Children and young people not attending school is not a new problem, and it is not one that seems to diminish in frequency. Maybe we do not have to invent new models, instead we could make use of evidence-based models that have been used for similar biopsychosocial problems. We could also turn to research that has been carried out on problems within the adult population, such as returning to work after long-term sick-leave. What can we learn from other problems that have a bearing on society and that result from changes in society? We need to stay one step ahead of the problem of SAPs. Currently we seem to be lagging behind.

A final note. What do stakeholders, such as teachers, social workers, and mental health professionals need and want from research? Students probably just want help; they do not care what the interventions are called. It is essential, though, that students are listened to in order to find effective ways to promote attendance, and to prevent and manage absenteeism. We await the qualitative review, mentioned in chapter thirteen, on what works in terms of SR interventions, in an educational setting and/or within mental health care, according to the professionals providing interventions, the youth participating in the interventions, and their parents. More research based on the opinions of students, parents, and teachers is warranted.

Swedish Research

From a Swedish point of view, there is a need for studies on the prevalence of SAPs in preschool, primary and secondary school. When looking back at the studies referred to in this anthology, student reported data, as well as administrative data from schools daily monitoring,

should be used. We should not rely solely on one source of information. There is a need for national, regular surveys on school attendance and SAPs to track trends. In addition, a recommendation is to introduce a cut-off that other countries use (for example in Denmark, the U.S and the U.K) i.e. to view a school absence of ten percent of the school year as problematic.

At present, there is no research that indicates whether or not Sweden differs from other countries, concerning risk factors for SAPs. However, research relating to the Swedish school-system, such as research on the curriculum is of interest. Also, research on preventive efforts, as well as research on interventions to manage established SAPs, needs to be evaluated in a Swedish context.

As a first step forward, it would be of value to add attendance as a variable in studies on mental health issues and psychosocial problems in youth. One example of this are the studies conducted by Hagborg Melander and colleagues (2018) on maltreatment. Also, Bolin and Sorbring (2016) used attendance as an outcome variable in a study on strengthened school mental health. Their study did not specifically look at interventions for SAPs.

Recently, Uppdrag Psykisk hälsa Stockholms län and a nonprofit, independent, research and development institute – Ifous; Innovation forskning och utveckling i förskolan och skolan – has taken an interest in, and responsibility for, publishing reports that focus on SAPs (Uppdrag Psykisk hälsa och Ifous, 2019; 2020).

In search for multi-dimensionals solutions

In the first chapter of this anthology, Kearney, Graczyk, and Gonzálvez wrote that: "*Interdisciplinary work must integrate different perspectives – to achieve grander, more sophisticated frameworks.*" Further, Gentle-Genitty, Kyere, and Hong stated that absenteeism was: "*a multi-dimensional problem requiring a multi-dimensional solution.*" This anthology is an attempt to create an interdisciplinary discourse, by letting researchers from various disciplines make contributions. However, gathering

authors from different disciplines to contribute to an anthology does not automatically make the field more interdisciplinary. It is worth considering the multidisciplinary nature of the SAPs field a strength. As has been pointed out by Lyon and Cotler (2009), studies on truancy have contributed to the research field by taking a holistic approach to youth, and by placing the problem of SAPs in the wider context of family, school environment, and society. Also, Melvin and colleagues (2019) use the KiTeS framework to combine knowledge from psychology, psychiatry, criminal justice, social work, sociology, disability, and youth justice as a basis for the *development of a multidisciplinary research agenda for absenteeism and SAPs which the field is currently lacking*".

What ideas do you, the reader, have? You are one of the professionals that take an interest in the field. How will you implement and build on your knowledge of the field? Let us hope that more studies on the subject will be published over the next ten years, and that we will be able to say that the "absenteeism crisis" is over.

There is a lot of work going on in schools that aim to promote attendance and prevent and manage absenteeism. An important task for the research society is to reach out to the stakeholders involved in these projects, and to society at large, to be able to make use of the clinical work that is carried out within our research. One way to find out about projects and activities is to visit https://www.insa.network/my-country

A summary of the suggestions given by the authors of the anthology is given below.

Six Suggested Areas for Future Research

#1. Detection
– Using detection systems and reliable and valid thresholds of absences, in order to guide interventions. Which students will need mild attention and which are in need of more intensive support?
– Improving the accuracy of school attendance data, and developing systems that can be implemented by schools to help them improve the detection of students with SAPs.

#2. Developmental pathways and risk factors
– Using community samples to find out more about early indicators for SAPs.
– Studying contexts for teacher-student interactions, as well as discrimination and its connection to SAPs.
– Investigating how to enhance parent-school relationships, and evaluating their impact.
– Increasing the understanding of underlying factors for school withdrawal.

#3. Promoting attendance and preventive interventions
– Studying different types of bullying and the mutual relationship between SAPs and bullying.
– Prevention of SAPs by increasing social skills and reducing loneliness.
– Using longitudinal designs and community samples.

#4. Assessment
– Developing and evaluating methods and models that incorporate functional risk profiles, within broader models of SAPs, ones that include parent involvement, social/peer contexts, school climate, and systemic barriers to school attendance.

- Studying the SCREEN in relation to treatment sensitivity, as well as cross-cultural validation of the SCREEN in other languages.

#5. *Parents and youth*
- Exploring challenges faced by parents whose children experience SAPs.
- Evaluating strategies that enhance parent-school relationships.
- Developing and evaluating approaches aimed at targeting modifiable parenting and family factors related to SAPs.
- Involving youth. They are the most important stakeholders. Ensure that their voices are heard when exploring interventions that promote attendance and prevent and manage SAPs.

#6. *Treatment and intervention studies*
- Investigating moderators and mediators for re-integration to school.
- Studying indicators for outpatient versus inpatient treatment for SAPs.
- Evaluating treatment models for SAPs in large RCTs, using multisite designs with different countries participating to achieve evidence-based models,
- Evaluating coordinated, interagency interventions. Which agencies are needed to achieve change? Does the order of interventions make a difference to the outcome?
- Investigating the outcome of interventions that are specifically aimed at SR, as compared to interventions aiming at both SR and TR.
- Evaluating the use of technological developments.
- Evaluating the effect of treatment intensity on outcome.
- Investigating which treatment components enhance outcomes when addressing SAPs in adolescence, as compared to childhood.

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SAMMANFATTNING PÅ SVENSKA

Malin Gren Landell

DENNA INTERNATIONELLA ANTOLOGI har tagits fram på initiativ av Jerringfonden. Den syftar till att ge en översikt över aktuell forskning på närvaroproblem för att stimulera till forskning och bidra till kunskapsutveckling. Texterna är skrivna av tjugo framstående forskare från olika länder som ingår i ett internationellt nätverk för kunskapsspridning kring närvaroproblem, the International Network for School Attendance – INSA. Antologin visar att det internationellt har bedrivits mycket forskning under de senaste tio åren. Den visar också att forskare över världen och mellan olika discipliner har närmat sig varandra och befruktat varandras forskning liksom hela forskningsfältet. Den redovisade forskningen har bedrivits i USA, Australien, Japan, Canada och i olika europeiska länder vilket visar att närvaroproblem är en utmaning världen över. I den svenska sammanfattningen har referenserna utelämnats och läsaren hänvisas till antologins engelska kapitel.

Ett problem med många namn

Ett tydligt gemensamt problem är att det saknas internationell konsensus om hur närvaroproblem ska definieras och mätas. Det behövs enhetliga definitioner för att kunna jämföra resultat från olika studier så att kunskapen inom forskningsfältet kan öka. Ett begrepp som vanligen refereras till är problematisk frånvaro. Det användes i direktiven från Utbildningsdepartementet för en statlig utredning av skolfrånvaro för några år sedan. I bland annat USA och Storbritannien talar man om

kronisk frånvaro (chronic absenteeism) respektive bestående frånvaro (persistent absence), vid frånvaro som överstiger tio procent av den obligatoriska undervisningen under ett läsår. Både giltig och ogiltig frånvaro räknas in i dessa tio procent. Giltig frånvaro är den vanligaste frånvaron, men vi vet att giltig frånvaro inte alltid innebär att det finns giltiga skäl. Och även när det finns giltiga skäl, som sjukdom, så innebär omfattningen av frånvaron en risk. Forskning visar att både ogiltig och giltig frånvaro innebär en risk för negativa konsekvenser. I dagsläget finns inte något vetenskapligt stöd för om det finns en exakt gräns för när frånvaro riskerar att ge negativa konsekvenser.

I antologin används en samlingsterm – närvaroproblem. Inom forskningen är det vanligt att man delar in närvaroproblem i kategorierna skolvägran och skolk. Ibland används dock begreppet skolk i vardagstal för all form av skolfrånvaro vilket är olyckligt. Skolvägransbeteende (school refusal behavior) är en term som en del forskare använder internationellt som ett övergripande begrepp för skolk och skolvägran.

Närvarodata upptäcker problem och ger närvaro

En bidragande faktor till kunskapsökningen inom det här fältet har varit skolornas närvarostatistik. Genom att använda sig av data från de dagliga registreringarna av elevers frånvaro har man kunnat studera riskfaktorer och konsekvenser av närvaroproblem på ett detaljerat och nyanserat vis. Man har även kunnat undersöka och utvärdera vad som främjar närvaro. Samtidigt visar flera rapporter som redovisas i antologin, att det finns ett stort mått av osäkerhet i registreringarna som görs i skolorna. Data skiljer sig bland annat åt mellan vad elever eller föräldrar rapporterar och vad skolan registrerar. När registreringarna inte är tillförlitliga försvårar det både slutsatser och jämförelser mellan studier. Det framkommer även i antologin att registreringarna sker godtyckligt, det vill säga att vissa elevgruppers frånvaro registreras som ogiltiga trots att de är giltiga, medan ogiltig frånvaro hos andra elever registreras som giltig. I Sverige, liksom i flera andra länder, är det alltför mycket närvaro och frånvaro som inte alls registreras av lärare.

Det krävs alltså insatser för att skapa en medvetenhet hos skolpersonal om vikten av att uppmärksamma och registrera frånvaro och närvaro. Det kan ske genom att göra personal, elever och föräldrar delaktiga, samt genom att ledning och beslutsfattare intresserar sig för närvarodata. Forskning visar att man kan öka närvaron genom att medvetandegöra för föräldrar hur hög frånvaron är hos det egna barnet, samt hur hög den är på skolenheten och vilka konsekvenserna kan bli av upprepad frånvaro.

Tidig upptäckt av närvaroproblem och risk för sådana, är centralt. Det har dock saknats smarta system för detta. Antologin tar upp exempel där man har utvecklat varningssystem som baseras på kunskap om riskfaktorer och tidiga tecken på närvaroproblem. Den här typen av system kan bidra till en mer effektiv närvaroregistrering och optimerad användning av data. Utifrån data på frånvarons omfattning och svårighetsgrad kan bedömning göras av elevens behov av insatser. Resultaten från studien visar att starka prediktorer för skolfrånvaro under kommande läsår är att ha ett syskon med skolfrånvaro, kamratsvårigheter samt skilda föräldrar.

Närvarodata kan användas inom forskning men också av myndigheter som gör återkommande mätningar av barn och ungas levnadsförhållanden. Det är alltså lågt hängande frukter för myndigheter inom utbildning, sociala frågor och hälso- och sjukvård. I många länder används skolfrånvaro som en indikator på andra problem hos barn och unga. Likaså använder man närvarodata som en kvalitetsindikator för skolutveckling.

För att närvarodata ska bli meningsfulla är det värdefullt att återkoppla dem till de som närmast berörs – elever och föräldrar. I antologin beskrivs en brittisk studie där användandet av registreringssystem och AI bidrar till att hitta dolda mönster i orsaker till frånvaro. Systemet ger återkoppling till elever, föräldrar och stödpersoner och utgör ett underlag för insatser som ökar närvaron hos den enskilda eleven. På nationell nivå visade resultaten på en generell ökning av närvaron i skolorna och på att andelen elever med omfattande frånvaro (över 10 procent på ett läsår) minskade avsevärt.

I Sverige finns olika exempel på hur skolor har försökt göra elever

delaktiga och ha regelbunden koll på sin egen utveckling vad gäller närvaron i skolan. Genom att få regelbunden återkoppling på att den egna närvaron ökar, har motivationen till skolgång blivit starkare.[8] Samarbete mellan systemförvaltare inom IT och de som forskar på skolfrånvaro vore intressant för att utveckla nationella, användarvänliga system som ger tillförlitliga data. I Sverige pågår ett forskningsprojekt på hur en mobilapp kan använda närvaro- och frånvarodata för tidig upptäckt av orsaker till frånvaro. Syftet är att kunna skräddarsy interventioner för enskilda elever utifrån den data som framkommer.[9]

Riskfaktorer

Antologin ger av utrymmesskäl inte en uttömmande presentation av riskfaktorer utan nämner bara några. En bra översikt över riskfaktorer finns bland annat i en meta-analys från 2019 (se referens i Introduktionskapitlet). Det finns flera studier från Norge som har undersökt olika riskområden för skolfrånvaro, vilket inte minst är intressant ur ett svenskt och nordiskt perspektiv. En värdefull, praktisk vägledning ges i en artikel av Trude Havik och Jo Magne Ingul från Norge och David Heyne från Nederländerna. De beskriver ett ramverk för att upptäcka tidiga tecken på så kallad skolvägran, men ger även rekommendationer för insatser vid olika indikationer och riskfaktorer.

Skolfaktorer

Den fysiska och sociala skolmiljön har betydelse för närvaro. I antologin beskrivs till exempel att en dålig relation med lärare, eller med andra elever, eller en otrygg skolmiljö där man till exempel upplever kränkning,

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[8]   Projekt PlugInnan – Nossebro skola. https://www.goteborgsregionen.se / GR / toppmenyn / detta-jobbar-gr-med / skola--utbildning / fullfoljda-studier / plug-innan---tidiga-insatser / delprojekt / nossebro-skola.html

[9]   https://www.insa.network / sweden

diskriminering eller mobbning är riskfaktorer för skolfrånvaro. Vi vet att skolfrånvaro kan utlösas av en faktor och sedan vidmakthållas av andra. Här är det viktigt att förstå att även när skolan har kommit till rätta med dålig behandling av en elev, kan erfarenheterna kvarstå som ett hinder för att gå tillbaka till skolan. Forskning behövs på hur elever med erfarenheter av mobbning kan få hjälp med de känslor och tankar som kommer av erfarenheterna efter att skolan återigen har blivit en säker plats.

Oförutsägbarhet är en annan faktor som kan skapa otrygghet och är en riskfaktor. I studier från Kanada and Australien vittnar elever om sina känslor av oro, rädsla och ångest inför överfulla skolor och klassrum, om brist på flexibilitet och tydliga instruktioner, och hur det gör det svårt att vara i skolan. Eleverna vittnar också om att lärare inte förstår att de kämpar med de här känslorna och eleverna uttrycker att de önskar att lärare hade bättre kunskap om psykisk ohälsa. Data från elever bidrar med värdefull kunskap om riskfaktorer och vad som främjar närvaro. Det pågår ett svenskt forskningsprojekt som i tre internationellt jämförande studier ska ta reda på vad skolpersonal och elever i Sverige, Tyskland, England och Japan upplever som stöd vid närvaroproblem.[10]

Skolbyten och skolövergångar är riskfaktorer för skolfrånvaro, liksom förflyttningar under skoldagen och håltimmar. Det kan vara extra kännbart för elever som är mer blyga och försiktiga, eller som har besvär av oro och rädsla. Framför allt elever med neuropsykiatrisk funktionsnedsättning är sårbara för förändringar och för brist på struktur och förutsägbarhet. Elever med neuropsykiatrisk funktionsnedsättning har uppmärksammats på senare år men det finns ett stort behov av svensk forskning på hur skolmiljön, i kombination med stöd till föräldrar, kan främja skolnärvaro.

Press och rädsla för att inte prestera tillräckligt väl är andra riskfak-

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[10] International Comparative Perspectives on School Attendance Problems. https://www.edu.su.se / english / research / international-comparative-perspectives-on-school-attendance-problems / international-comparative-perspectives-on-school-attendance-problems-1.490141

torer för skolfrånvaro som tas upp i antologin. Känslor av ensamhet och att ha besvär av social ångest bidrar också till att elever är rädda för att gå till skolan, även om det också finns elever med stark social rädsla som har god närvaro men lider i tysthet.

Kapitlet av de amerikanska forskarna Gentle-Genitty, Kyere och Hoong, beskriver studier som visar hur lärare diskriminerar utifrån etnicitet och socioekonomiska faktorer genom till exempel lägre förväntningar på lärande hos elever som tillhör vissa grupper. Den här typen av erfarenheter kan bidra till att elever misstror skolan, inte känner tillhörighet till skolan och stannar hemma eller inte går in på lektionerna.

Vi vet inte lika mycket om riskfaktorer för skolk som för skolvägran. Några av de risker som nämns i antologin är svaga skolresultat, umgänge med kamrater som uppvisar antisocialt beteende, en svag skolanknytning, droganvändning och avsaknad av vuxennärvaro eller tillsyn efter skoltid.

Familjefaktorer

Familjefaktorer har också betydelse för skolnärvaron. En vanlig orsak är att elever är borta från skolan hela dagar eller en del av dagen, för att ge praktiskt eller känslomässigt stöd åt en familjemedlem. Det kan handla om att föräldern har en psykisk eller fysisk sjukdom och vill ha sällskap, tröst eller helt enkelt inte klarar att stiga upp på morgonen, handla, ordna måltider till barnen på grund av sjukdom eller missbruk. Det kan även handla om att barnet följer med föräldern på möten som tolk eller för att på andra sätt stötta föräldern. Den form av frånvaro som orsakas av att eleven är hemma för att ge stöd åt en förälder, eller för att föräldern inte kan stötta barnet att ta sig till skolan, kallas för föräldrastödd frånvaro (school withdrawal). Ibland är det föräldern som medvetet eller omedvetet håller barnet hemma och ibland är det barnet som tar initiativet till att stanna hemma för att hjälpa till. Föräldrastödd frånvaro handlar inte alltid om att barn tar hand om en familjemedlem, utan kan också bero på förälders inställning till

skolan, på grund av dålig ekonomi eller svårigheter med transport till skolan.

Trots den höga förekomsten av unga som är omsorgsgivare (young carers) och av föräldrastödd frånvaro, finns det mycket lite forskning på skolfrånvaro inom den här gruppen. Unga omsorgsgivare söker i liten utsträckning hjälp. Det kan bero på att de inte tror att de kan få hjälp eller att de upplever att hemsituationen inte ska avslöjas för andra. Ett annat problem är bristande medvetenhet om den här elevgruppen hos skolpersonal. Forskning behövs på att förebygga föräldrastödd frånvaro och på metoder att nå fram med hjälp till eleverna. Slutligen behöver skolans kunskap om elevgruppens öka för att stötta lärare i att våga se problemet. Här behövs även forskning på samverkan mellan myndigheter och verksamheter. Det pågår europeisk forskning där bland annat Sverige och Nationellt kunskapscentrum för anhöriga (nka) medverkar.[11] Studierna är inte direkt fokuserade på närvaroproblem, utan på att pröva tekniska hjälpmedel och stödinsatser för att nå ut till de här barnen och ungdomarna.

Inom en snar framtid kommer vi att ha föräldrar som själva har haft omfattande frånvaro från skolan. Vad betyder deras erfarenheter av skolgången och stödet för att gå i skolan för hur de stöttar sina barn? Det behövs förstås forskning på den långsiktiga utvecklingen hos barn och ungdomar med närvaroproblem, men det är även angeläget att studera hur "arvet" av närvaroproblem påverkar nästa generation. Vi vet redan nu att det finns en ökad risk för frånvaro när föräldrar är hemma på grund av långvarig sjukskrivning eller arbetslöshet, samt om man har ett syskon med kronisk skolfrånvaro.

För att minska skolfrånvaro behövs insatser som riktar sig till föräldrar. Bland annat har man sett att mödrar till ungdomar med skolvägran rapporterar mer depressiva symtom och ångestsymtom, samt en lägre grad av familjefungerande, än mödrar till barn utan skolvägran. Det är därför viktig att kunna ge stöd till föräldrar som lider av psykisk

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[11] http://anhoriga.se / samverkansprojekt / psykosocialt-stod-for-att-framja-psy-kisk-halsa-och-valbefinnande-bland-unga-omsorgsgivare-i-europa-me-we / grupptraf-far-for-unga-som-ger-stod-eller-hjalp /

ohälsa eller som står inför andra stora utmaningar i sin livssituation. I antologins översikt av de senaste studierna på psykologisk behandling finns exempel på stöd och interventioner som är riktade till föräldrar.

Riskfaktorer och konsekvenser nu och i framtiden

Vi vet en hel del om riskfaktorer och om dess konsekvenser. En riskfaktor kan även vara en konsekvens. Exempelvis kan sömnproblem, droganvändning och kronisk värk utgöra risk för närvaroproblem men också bli konsekvenser av att vara borta från skolan. Forskningen visar att skolfrånvaro, redan från förskoleålder, kan ge negativa effekter på skolresultat och att det inte krävs mycket frånvaro för att se de här konsekvenserna. Skolfrånvaro innebär ökad risk för att inte få gymnasiebehörighet och att inte få gymnasieexamen. På lång sikt har man även sett en ökad risk för arbetslöshet och kriminalitet.

Slutligen, vad vi vet om riskfaktorer idag är inte detsamma som det vi behöver veta imorgon. Samhället utvecklas snabbt och forskarsamhället, utbildningsväsendet och samhället i övrigt behöver vara på tårna och forska på vad som kan vara "bubblare". Kommer skolfrånvaro öka till följd av händelser som pandemin med Covid-19, när digital undervisning blivit mer vanligt förekommande och fysisk närvaro nedvärderas? Hur påverkar barn och ungas klimatångest motivationen att gå till skolan och bry sig om sin framtid? Kroppsliga sjukdomar som diabetes och astma bidrar till närvaroproblem. I det moderna samhället, där dessa sjukdomar ökar, finns även risk för ökning av närvaroproblem. En studie på luftföreningar visade en koppling till ökad skolfrånvaro.

Bedömning och utredning av närvaroproblem

Ibland räcker själva upptäckten av frånvaro för att vända frånvaro till närvaro. I andra fall krävs att man tar reda på förklaringarna till frånvaron för att kunna sätta in rätt insatser. En viktig uppgift för att

hjälpa elever till skolnärvaro, är att ta reda på orsakerna till frånvaron och också identifiera skyddande faktorer som kan understödja närvaro. Det behövs därför instrument som på tillförlitligt sätt kan underlätta utredningen och bedömningen av faktorer. I Sverige är det sedan 1 juli 2018 lagkrav på att utreda orsakerna till skolfrånvaro. De senaste åren har det utvecklats flera nya formulär som presenteras i antologin. En dominerande modell för att förstå närvaroproblem har varit en så kallad funktionell modell där man har utgått från att frånvaron fyller en funktion som att undvika något som upplevs negativt (som att redovisa inför klassen), eller för att frånvaron ger något positivt (som att få vara med en förälder, att få spela dator eller liknande). Man har använt ett formulär, the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (SRAS-R) som specifikt fångar in de här funktionerna. De sista åren har forskningen på den här modellen identifierat stöd för så kallade sammansatta (mixed) riskprofiler. De här profilerna har visat sig vara förknippade med specifika psykiatriska besvär och psykosociala problem. Bland annat har man identifierat en riskprofil som är associerad med inåtvända symtom och en förhöjd risk att bli utsatt för eller utsätta andra för kränkningar på nätet.

Det är vanligt med psykiatriska besvär hos elever med omfattande skolfrånvaro. Det har saknats ett instrument som väger in både skolfrånvaro och symptom på ohälsa, samt känslomässiga besvär relaterade till skola eller familj. Ett nytt formulär som har tagits fram i Tyskland, Inventory of School Attendance Problems (ISAP), mäter internaliserande och externaliserande symptom samt upplevda problem i skolan, med kompisar och i familjen. Formuläret har översatts till svenska. Det pågår studier i Sverige, Finland och Nederländerna för att utvärdera formulärets psykometriska egenskaper.[12] Antologin presenterar ännu ett formulär – School refusal Evaluation scale (SCREEN) – som kan användas för utvärdering av interventioner och inom olika områden såsom skola, klinisk verksamhet och inom forskning.

En översiktsartikel av bland annat flera svenska forskare, går igenom utfallsmått som har använts för att mäta effekt av behandling vid

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[12] https://www.insa.network / sweden

skolvägran. Det skulle även vara värdefullt att utvärdera metoder som mäter effekt av interventioner vid andra närvaroproblem än skolvägran.

Interventioner och behandling

Antologin innehåller en genomgång av de senaste fem årens vetenskapliga utvärderingar på företrädesvis psykologiska interventioner vid skolvägran. Författarna beskriver behandling för att öka närvaro men också specifika insatser för problem med ångest och/eller depression. Den vanligaste formen av behandling som har prövats för skolvägran är KBT. En mindre studie har prövat behandling med dialektisk beteendeterapi (DBT) och det finns fallstudier där man tillsammans med KBT har använt narrativa metoder och inslag från acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Även gruppbehandling och behandling som har anpassats för barn med kroniska sjukdomar har utvärderats. Det finns också beskrivningar av interventioner riktade till föräldrar som har anpassats för ADHD och för PTSD. Likaså har en utvärdering av KBT i kombination med medicinsk behandling gjorts.

Två studier från Nederländerna respektive Australien har utvärderat interventioner där eleven får behandling och undervisning i en alternativ lärmiljö och där man aktivt arbetar med elevens återgång till ordinarie skola. Nära samverkan sker med elevens skola och med externa aktörer som till exempel psykolog.

I Nederländerna har man även prövat en behandling med KBT-moduler som riktas både till föräldrarna och till barnet. Parallellt ges konsultation till skolpersonalen. Det har publicerats data från en icke-randomiserad studie och det pågår en *effectiveness*-studie i skolmiljö. Det finns ett stort behov av RCT-studier och långtidsuppföljningar som utförs i barns naturliga miljöer såsom skolan.

Stöd till föräldrar har utvärderats, bland annat i form av konsultation till skolpersonal och föräldrar i fall där man inte lyckats få med ungdomen i behandling. Likaså har gruppbehandling med KBT för stresshantering till föräldrar prövats. Det behövs dock mer forskning på föräldrastöd. Likaså behövs forskning på andra primära vårdgivare

än föräldrarna, som till exempel i fall där barn och unga är i samhällets vård. Ett annat intressant område är att utvärdera interventioner som är anpassade till olika åldrar och olika svårighetsgrad.

Det är vanligt med psykiatriska besvär vid omfattande skolfrånvaro. I Tyskland har man prövat en manualbaserad behandling som både syftar till att öka skolnärvaron och behandla psykiatriska besvär. Behandlingen använder sig av KBT-metoder och av MI (Motivational Interviewing). Den baseras på fyra moduler: KBT, rådgivning till föräldrarna, rådgivning till skolan och psykoedukation för ett fysiskt träningsprogram. Behandlingen ges av ett team som består av psykoterapeuter, familjeterapeuter, lärare och fysioterapeuter. Behandlingen har prövats i en RCT-studie som har visat på positiva resultat på skolnärvaro Även andra har prövat liknande behandlingsupplägg. I en nyligen publicerad avhandling från en av författarna i antologin, Daniel Bach Johnsen, redovisas till exempel resultaten från en RCT-studie i Danmark. I Sverige har det inte gjorts någon vetenskaplig utvärdering av behandling eller interventioner vid närvaroproblem.

Det har även gjorts studier av användningen av teknologiska hjälpmedel. En RCT-studie prövade behandling med hjälp av en virtuell skolmiljö för att hjälpa eleven att närma sig den riktiga skolmiljön. I en behandlingsstudie av DBT användes webbaserad coachning som ett sätt att guida föräldrarna och barnet genom behandlingen i hemmiljön. Ytterligare en studie, där resultaten inte har publicerats än, undersöker effekten av ett mobilspel som komplement till tidiga insatser för psykisk ohälsa och skolvägran.

När det gäller forskning på interventioner är det även intressant att undersöka vilka utfallsmått som bör användas för att mäta effekten. Det är inte ovanligt att vägen tillbaka till skolgång tar lång tid. Det är angeläget att, utöver närvarostatus, även undersöka andra förändringar hos eleven som till exempel förbättrad psykisk hälsa, en högre grad av familjefungerande, förbättrade sociala färdigheter, förändringar i skolmiljön, deltagande i fritidsverksamheter och ökade kontakter med kompisar. I antologin nämns en studie som har gått igenom vilka utfallsmått som har använts i tidigare forskning på skolvägran.

Utmaningar för Sverige

Det är många olika aktörer som kan dra sitt strå till stacken för att öka kunskapen om närvaroproblem. De senaste åren har två rapporter på närvaroproblem publicerats av Uppdrag Psykisk hälsa Stockholms län och ett fristående forskningsinstitut för Innovation, forskning och utveckling i förskola och skola – Ifous. Den ena rapporten är en forskningsöversikt över metoder för att främja närvaro och den andra över metoder för att utreda närvaroproblem. En tredje rapport, om samverkan vid närvaroproblem, publiceras i februari 2021. Det är ansvarsfullt av de här aktörerna att ta sig an kunskapsspridning på området.

Kunskapen om närvaroproblem kan även öka genom att använda "närvaro" som en variabel i undersökningar och forskningsstudier på barn och ungas psykiska hälsa, välbefinnande och livssituation. Enhetliga definitioner och begrepp är angeläget för det här ändamålet.

I Sverige, liksom i andra länder, behövs nationella närvarodata. Under de senaste åren har just användandet av närvarodata lett till en kraftigt ökad kunskap på området. Internationellt finns forskning på frånvaro i förskolan och det skulle vara värdefullt att studera även i Sverige. Det skulle också vara intressant att samla kunskap om betydelsen av närvaro i förskolan upp till gymnasieskolan och knyta ihop med den kunskap som finns från svenska projekt på unga som varken arbetar eller studerar.

Ett interdisciplinärt slutord

I litteraturen på närvaroproblem rekommenderas ett interdisciplinärt (tvärprofessionellt) angreppssätt. Det betyder att kunskap integreras från olika discipliner. Det går inte att använda endimensionella lösningar på multidimensionella problem. Den här antologin är ett försök att skapa en sådan diskurs genom att bjuda in forskare och kliniker från olika discipliner. Men att låta forskare från olika discipliner bidra genom att författa texter till en antologi leder inte automatiskt till att fältet blir tvärprofessionellt. Låt oss använda styrkan i att vara flera

discipliner som bidrar, istället för att låsa in oss i separata silos. Det finns etablerade modeller för att förstå närvaroproblem som till exempel en bio-ekologisk modell. Den kan användas för att sätta agendan för forskning, med kunskap från psykologi, pedagogik, socialt arbete, kriminologi, psykiatri med flera. Vi behöver inte uppfinna allt, bara gå vidare från det vi redan vet – tillsammans.

Förhoppningen är att den här antologin landar i händer och hjärtan som inspiration för olika yrkesgrupper som alla behövs – lärare, socialpedagoger, psykologer, skolsköterskor, kuratorer, läkare, poliser med flera discipliner. För att lyckas behövs olika funktioner som beslutsfattare, rektorer och andra ledare, medarbetare, föräldrar, elevråd och elevkårer, patient- och anhörigföreningar, systemförvaltare för registreringssystem, ekonomer och företrädare för civilsamhället.

Vilka uppslag får du som läsare när du tar del av vad som beskrivs i antologin? Hur kommer du inom din specifika profession ta kunskapen vidare? Låt oss hoppas att antologin lägger grund för många forskningsstudier så att vi i framtiden inte har skäl att känna oro över att barn inte får sin rätt till utbildning.

Sammanfattande lista av de
forskningsfrågor som föreslås i antologin

#1. Upptäckt
–   Använda signalsystem för tidig upptäckt av frånvaro och tidiga tecken på närvaroproblem samt utforska vad som är tillförlitliga gränsvärden för att vägleda vilka elever som enbart behöver lite stöd för ökad närvaro och de som behöver mer omfattande och intensivt stöd.
–   Utveckla användningen av närvarodata och utveckla användarvänliga system för att upptäcka elever med närvaroproblem.

#2. Utveckling av närvaroproblem
–   Studera barn och unga i normalpopulationer för att utforska tidiga tecken på närvaroproblem.

- Använda longitudinella studier.
- Studera interaktionen mellan elev och lärare och lärares förväntningar på elevers närvaro och skolprestation.

#3. Främja och förebygga
- Undersöka kränkande behandling och mobbning i relation till närvaroproblem.
- Studera hur närvaroproblem kan förebyggas genom att öka sociala färdigheter och genom att minska förekomsten av att elever känner sig ensamma i skolan.
- Studera föräldrastödd frånvaro – prevalens, förebyggande åtgärder och sätt att nå fram med stöd till barn, unga och föräldrar.

#4. Bedöma och utreda
- Utveckla och utvärdera metoder och analysmodeller och inte minst för skolk och som del i socialt arbete.
- Anpassa och utvärdera egenskaperna hos etablerade kartläggningsinstrument, i olika länder.

#5. Föräldrar och ungas röster
- Utforska föräldrars erfarenheter av utmaningarna som är förknippade med närvaroproblem.
- Utvärdera strategier som stärker samarbete mellan skola och hemmet.
- Utveckla och utvärdera sätt att arbeta med föräldrars förhållningssätt för att öka skolnärvaro.
- Gör unga delaktiga i utformandet av interventioner för att främja närvaro, förebygga och hantera frånvaro.

#6. Åtgärder och behandling
- Undersöka vilka faktorer som medierar och moderar återgång till skolan.
- Studera vad som indikerar öppenvård respektive slutenvårdsbehandling för närvaroproblem.

- Utforska utfallet av interventioner specifikt riktade mot skolvägran jämfört med interventioner för både skolk och skolvägran.
- Utvärdera användande av tekniska hjälpmedel.
- Utvärdera effekten av intensiteten i behandling.
- Undersöka vilka behandlingskomponenter som förstärker ett positivt utfall, hos yngre respektive äldre barn.
- Utvärdera behandlingsmodeller i randomiserade kontrollerade studier och av olika forskargrupper.
- Utvärdera effekten av att ge interventioner i samverkan mellan skola, socialtjänst, hälso- och sjukvård, polis, föräldrar och civilsamhälle. I vilken ordning behöver insatser ges för att ge bäst effekt, av vilka aktörer, med vilken intensitet och så vidare. Finns det evidensbaserade modeller som har använts vid andra sammansatta problem som skulle kunna anpassas till närvaro-problem?
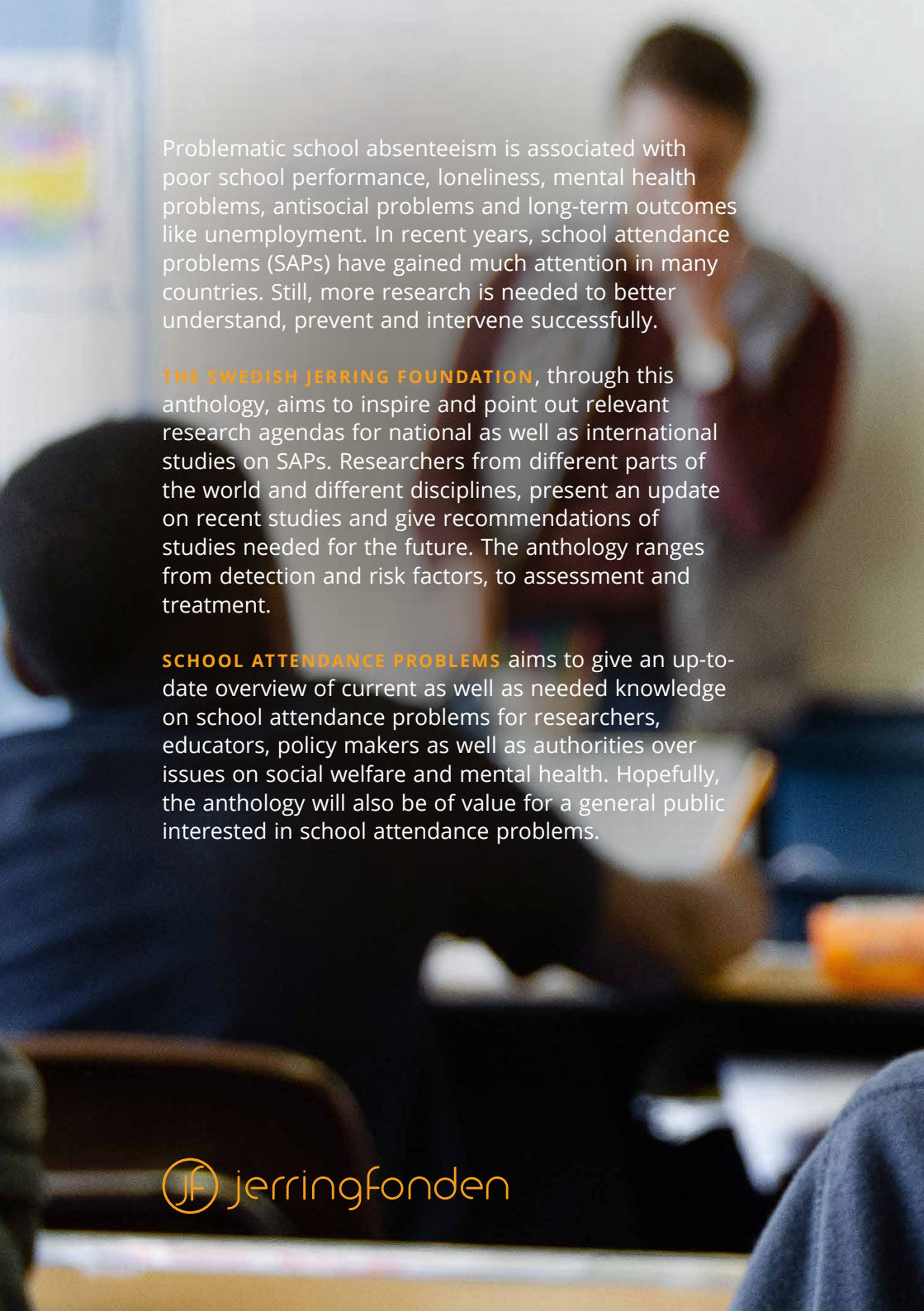
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Problematic school absenteeism is associated with poor school performance, loneliness, mental health problems, antisocial problems and long-term outcomes like unemployment. In recent years, school attendance problems (SAPs) have gained much attention in many countries. Still, more research is needed to better understand, prevent and intervene successfully.

THE SWEDISH JERRING FOUNDATION, through this anthology, aims to inspire and point out relevant research agendas for national as well as international studies on SAPs. Researchers from different parts of the world and different disciplines, present an update on recent studies and give recommendations of studies needed for the future. The anthology ranges from detection and risk factors, to assessment and treatment.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS aims to give an up-to-date overview of current as well as needed knowledge on school attendance problems for researchers, educators, policy makers as well as authorities over issues on social welfare and mental health. Hopefully, the anthology will also be of value for a general public interested in school attendance problems.

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