



Leisure boredom and high school dropout in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

This prospective cohort study investigated whether leisure boredom predicts high school dropout. Leisure boredom is the perception that leisure experiences do not satisfy the need for optimal arousal. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire which included the Leisure Boredom Scale. The original cohort of grade 8 students ($n = 303$) was followed up twice at 2-yearly intervals. Of the 281 students at the second follow-up, 149 (53.0%) students had dropped out of school. The effect of leisure boredom on dropout was investigated using logistic regression taking into account the clustering effect of the schools in the sampling strategy, and adjusting for age, gender and racially classified social group. Leisure boredom was a significant predictor of dropout (OR = 1.08; 95% CI: 1.01–1.15) in students 14 years and older, but not so in younger students (OR = 1.0; 95% CI: 0.95–1.05). The study has shown that measuring leisure

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boredom in grade 8 students can help identify students who are more likely to dropout of school. Further research is needed to investigate the longitudinal association between leisure boredom and school dropout. © 2007 The Association for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Introduction

In South Africa, a major concern in adolescent health and education is school dropout, which is defined as leaving school before completing a given grade in a given school year (Department of Education, 2006). Although as many as 60% of South African children who start school dropout before completing high school (Department of Education, 2003), very little is known about the complexities surrounding the problem.

South Africa has 12.3-million students attending 26,292 schools (SouthAfrica.Info). This figure includes 1098 (4.2%) registered independent or private schools catering for 340,000 students (2.8% of the total schooling population). There are about 6000 high schools (grades 7–12) and the rest are primary schools (grades 0–6). There are three recognised levels of education: General Education and Training (GET), Further Education and Training (FET), and Higher Education and Training (HET). Students start school in grade 0 and proceed through 13 years of school until grade 12—the final year of schooling. GET runs from grades 0 to 9. Under the South African Schools Act of 1996, education is compulsory for all South Africans from age 7 (grade 1) to age 15, or the completion of grade 9. FET takes place from grades 10 to 12, and also includes career-oriented education and training offered in other FET institutions, such as technical, community and private colleges.

Research regarding school dropout has been conducted primarily within the developed world. Apart from being faced with the threat of economic and social difficulties, adolescents who dropout of school prematurely are at greater risk of behavioural, mental and family disorders, sexual and physical abuse (Franklin, 1992), substance use (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; Aloise-Young, Cruikshank, & Chavez, 2002; Fuller et al., 2002; Krohn, Lizotte, & Perez, 1997; Zimmerman & Maton, 1992) and involvement in crime (Beauvais, Chavez, Oetting, Deffenbacher, & Cornell, 1996). In an integrative review of literature, Rosenthal (1998) grouped non-school correlates of dropout into socio-economic status, minority group status, gender, community characteristics, household status, taking adult roles, social support for school staying, family process, student involvement in education, autonomy needs versus social conforming, deviance and personality traits.

Despite the severity of the problem and the resulting burden on society, there has been scant research in developing countries to investigate the dynamics contributing to early school leaving. Flisher and Chalton (1995) investigated the characteristics and risk-taking behaviour of high-school dropouts living in a working-class community in Cape Town, South Africa. They found that adolescents who dropped out of school had higher rates of cigarette and alcohol use compared with those still in school, and that girl dropouts were more likely to engage in sexual intercourse. Of the dropouts, 62.1% left school after less than 9 years of schooling. However, this study was limited by a small sample size, a cross-sectional design, and different methods of data collection for the dropouts and those in school.

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