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Self-efficacy and academic achievement in Australian high school students: The mediating effects of academic aspirations and delinquency

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Abstract

Studies have shown that self-efficacy, aspirational, and other psychosocial influences account for considerable variance in academic achievement through a range of mediational pathways, although no research to date has tested the mediational relationships identified. The present research investigated the structural relations among self-efficacy, academic aspirations, and delinquency, on the academic achievement of 935 students aged 11–18 years from ten schools in two Australian cities. The *Children's Self-Efficacy Scale*, *Adapted Self-Report Delinquency Scale (Revised)*, and *Children's Academic Aspirations Scale* were administered to participants prior to academic achievement being assessed using mid-year school grades. Structural equation modeling was employed to test three alternative models for the relationships from academic, social, and self-regulatory efficacy on academic achievement. A partial mediation model showed the best overall fit to the data. Academic and self-regulatory efficacy had an indirect negative

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effect through delinquency and a direct positive effect on academic achievement. Academic and social self-efficacy had positive and negative relationships, respectively, with academic aspiration and academic achievement; however, the relationship between academic aspiration and academic achievement was not significant in the final model.

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Research indicates that students who develop strong academic and self-regulatory self-efficacy beliefs are better able to manage their learning and to resist the temptations and social pressures to engage in behaviors, such as delinquency, that can undermine their academic achievements. As a result, students with strong self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to successfully complete their education and be better equipped for a range of occupational options in today's competitive society (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Zimmerman, 1990).

Conversely, it has been found that students who have a low sense of self-regulatory and academic self-efficacy are more likely to engage in problem behaviors such as delinquency, dropping out of school, and school failure (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bandura, Barbaranelli, et al., 2001; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regali, 2001), jeopardizing their chances at academic success and subsequent employment prospects.

Bandura and colleagues (Bandura, Caprara, et al., 2001; Bandura et al., 1996) analyzed the network of psychosocial influences through which efficacy beliefs affect academic achievement. More specifically, direct and mediated paths of influence of children's self-efficacy beliefs to academic achievement were analyzed with a range of factors including socio-economic (status), familial (parental self-efficacy, parental academic aspirations), peer (peer preference) and self (academic aspirations, problem behavior, depression, prosocial behavior, moral disengagement) variables hypothesized to affect academic achievement. The results indicated that the full set of self-efficacy, aspirational, and psychosocial influences accounted for a large amount of variance in academic achievement, although the mediational effect of academic aspirations was not tested in their model (see Bandura et al., 1996 for a full discussion).

By examining the predicted relationships between self-efficacy, academic aspirations, delinquency, and academic achievement, the present research replicates and extends the work of Bandura et al. (1996) in three ways. First, while Bandura et al. analyzed problem behavior in their model, the present research extends this work by examining hard-core delinquent activities (e.g., property offences, physical aggression, motor theft). Second, the present study examines the mediating roles of academic aspirations and delinquency in the relationships between self-efficacy and academic achievement. In particular, we hypothesize that academic aspirations mediates the relationships between academic and social self-efficacy and academic achievement, and that delinquency mediates the relationship between academic and self-regulatory efficacy and academic achievement. Finally, rather than using path analysis, the full hypothesized model will be tested using structural equation modeling. This will allow not only for all relationships to be tested at

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