Family Factors in Early School Leaving

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Introduction

- Early school leaving
  - Social exclusion

- Risk factors
  - Parental separation and divorce

- Protective factors
  - Parental engagement in the secondary years
  - Parental engagement post-separation
Early school leaving – a definition

- Multiple pathways to completion
  - Academic
  - VET

- Early school leaver is
  - A young person who exits the school system
    - Prior to completing Year 12 or equivalent certificate
    - No uptake of alternate pathway
## International comparisons

### OECD Country comparison 20-24 year olds (2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>School retention rates (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia *</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Robinson & Lamb 2012
Long-term outcomes

- Poorer current and future employment prospects
  - Not engaged in education employment or training (NEET)

- Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth Y03
  - Early School Leavers 2005 (17 years)
    - Half were NEET in the following year
  - NEET 2010 (22 years)
    - 30.0 % left in Year 9
    - 16.4 % left in Year 10
    - 11.3 % left in Year 11
Long-term outcomes cont..

- Early school leavers are at higher risk for
  - Social exclusion
  - Long term welfare dependence
  - Reduced life satisfaction
  - Mental health problems
  - Increased vulnerability to involvement in crime
Cumulative risk

- Family and family relationships
- Individual factors
- School environment
- Macro-economic factors
Disengagement

- Long-term multi-dimensional process
  - Not a one time event
- Begins with disengagement
  - Early warning signs
    - Doing less homework
    - Less effort in school
    - Less participation in school activities
    - More discipline problems at school
    - Social difficulties and negative attitude to school
    - Absenteeism, truancy, suspension, expulsion
Family-related risk factors

- Low parental education level
  - Low parent aspirations for child education
  - Child aspirations, poor school experiences & participation in risky activities
    - *More influential* than parental education
- Underscores multi-dimensional aspects
Family-related risk factors cont..

- Family structure
  - Context
  - Transitions
- Socio-economic status
  - Separation, divorce, earning capacity
- Residential mobility
  - Divorce and residential mobility combined
  - Key social supports lost
Family-related risk factors cont..

- Parenting practices
  - Lower levels of supervision
  - Young people left to make own decisions about engagement with school
  - Reduced parental engagement with school
  - Negative reactions to underachievement in school
  - Less verbal interaction between mothers and children
  - Low aspirations for children’s schooling

- Parenting Styles
  - Authoritarian, Neglectful
Individual risk factors

- Aspirations and attitudes to education
  - Goals, motivation and capacity

- Gender
  - Males at higher risk for early school leaving than females

- Special needs, disability and health
  - Physical and mental health
  - Homeless and other disadvantaged groups
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

- Over-represented in early school leaving statistics

  - Multi-dimensional factors:
    - Geographical location
    - Discrimination
    - Cost of schooling
    - Low levels of literacy
Environment and Policy

- Education and employment policies
  - Buoyant market can encourage early school leaving

- School-level policy and environment
  - Negative environment / rejection
  - Disconnection
Parental separation

- Separation and divorce
  - Decline in family income
  - Poor mental health, ineffective parenting by resident parent
  - Child’s loss of contact with non-resident parent
  - Conflict / uncooperative parenting

- Intact Families
  - Pre-existing behavioral and education concerns
Parental separation

- Long-term outcomes for children
  - no differential impacts based on age at time of separation

- Immediate aftermath
  - Reactions and behaviours can vary according to age
Parental separation during the secondary school years

- Disruption and uncertainty
  - Coping with difficult family circumstances
  - Family conflict
  - Lack of family support

- Vital family functions
  - Threat to predictability
  - Early parenting
  - Leaving home early
Softening the impacts

- Softening the impacts
  - Shift in dependence
    - Family, peers, partners, colleagues

- Parents remain important
  - Secure base
  - Caring connectedness
  - Support and belonging
  - Boundary setting
The voices of young people

- Parent / child relationships post separation
  - Not feeling close to either parent
    - Poorer academic achievement
    - Poor psychological well-being
  - Close relationship with one or both parents
    - Greater self-rated school achievement
    - More self-confidence
    - General happiness with life
The voices of young people

I wish someone had noticed… I think there’s a whole extended network of people out there that just didn’t, teachers at school that saw my school work dropping off, and extended family who were very much there to support my dad, but yes, I just, I just wish someone, that there was someone that was keeping an eye on those things and seeing how things are working out (aged 15 at time of separation, 29 at time of interview; Fortin et al., 2012, p.291).
Oh yeah I do. Not that I blame (my mother) but yeah it was her role and had been all those years and suddenly she hadn’t been there at a crucial time in my life…I didn’t have the structure at home to take on with me through my education because my dad…was at work and would just leave me money out expecting me to go which I very rarely did

(aged13 at time of separation, 27 at time of interview; Fortin et al., 2012, p.52).
The voices of young people

- Important for parents to remain
  - Sensitive and responsive
  - Flexible around adolescent's schedules
- Equal-care time arrangements
  - Greatest ease in seeing each parent between
    - schoolwork
    - playing sport
    - or seeing friends
Protective factors in early school leaving

- Parental engagement
  - Parental expectations, high levels of support
    - Greater impact than SES
  - Positive academic, social and behavioural outcomes
    - Good quality and stimulating home environments
    - Supportive parenting styles
    - Parental self-efficacy
Protective factors in early school leaving cont..

- Parental engagement
  - Partnerships between schools, families and communities
  - Raising awareness of the importance of parental engagement in a child’s education
  - Providing parents with the skills to become involved
Parental engagement in secondary school

- *Level* of commitment remains consistent but the *Nature* of engagement changes over time:
  - Less in school activities e.g. reading in class
  - More at home support for education activities
  - Discussion content more mature
  - Staying connected and involved
Parental involvement in school post-separation

- Parental involvement can offset impacts on educational outcomes in the secondary years
  - Talk to school personnel about what is happening
  - Ask for more support and additional feedback than normal
- School facilitation of two-way communication with both parents
The dinner time discussion

- **Outside of school**
  - Most effective strategy for adolescents
    - Promote discussions between parents and young people about school

- **Dinnertime discussions**
  - *more effective* strategy than
    - Helping with homework
    - Doing voluntary work at the school

- Doesn’t rely on school policy
The dinner time discussion

- Discussion starters
  - Best and worst thing that happened today?
  - Ask about world events
  - What is their favorite song or band/group?
  - Ask philosophical questions

- Google “dinnertime conversation starters”
Acknowledgements

- Paper available on the Child Family Community Australia website
  - Questions?