
School Abandonment - Dropout Risk and Supportive Factors-

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1. Introduction

Education is the main resource from the social and individual point of view. From the social point of view, education is the key to a continuous development of the society. From the individual point of view, education determines the opportunities to every individual to be socially active.

Dropping out school limits in a very sensitive way the opportunities to an individual. In the international aspect it is a very important problem. In this case, in Europe almost 18% of youth do drop school out (Stom, 2006); in America 25% and other countries do have high percentage of schools' dropout. Schools' dropout is a danger to youths' life; sometimes they face with vital problems. This category of people is seen as a social group in danger especially in relation to unemployment, drug consuming, psychological problems etc. In this article, it is treated the phenomenon of children and youth in danger and the disadvantages for the individual in case of schools' dropout.

1.1 Definition of the term "child at risk"

In the literature of recent years we encounter many paraphrases of the term "*at risk*" which tend to be wide and encompassing. The term "*at risk*" is closely linked to the culture and in a wider meaning can concern any child or youngster, whose cultural values and norms are in conflict with the educational and social environment of the dominating culture. For example the term "*at risk*" can concern the stress which an emigrant child feels due to the need to adapt him/herself to another society, or because of his low self esteem and the cultural inequality which comes out from the confrontation between the culture and his social status and the other society.¹

During the 80's the term "*at risk*" was used about those students who were lacking in the learning process, the lack of desire to go to school, poverty, bad economical and educational conditions, who find themselves in the condition of a handicap or physical or emotional deficiency. These students are subject to a higher danger of getting low grades at school and this contingent has a higher potential to abandon school².

Also, the term "*at risk*" is used when an individual at school age is endangered to abandon school, when he/she is addicted to drugs or alcohol, when he/she has become parent at an early age, when he/she faces problems with the law, has failed a school year after his friends of the same age, is a member of a gang which is dangerous for he society, has abandoned school in the past or has not regularly frequented school³.

Different authors have different definitions of the term *at risk*.

Levin⁴ (1989) describes in danger those children who are homeless and cannot benefit from the community so that they can benefit from the traditional practises of the school. Because of the poverty, cultural obstacles or lingual changes, these children tend to achieve low academic grades and higher levels of school abandoning.

We find as just the approach of Natriello⁵ (1990) who realizes in three points of view the concept and social phenomena "*at risk*":

The cultural exclusion/social disadvantage

- Learning difficulties
- The danger which has to do with the characteristics of age

¹ Jay Smink and Franklin P. Schargel. *Helping Students Graduate. A strategic Approach to Dropout Prevention.* (United States: 2004) fq. 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Saha, L. J. *Internatona Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Eduaction.* (Pergamon: 1997) fq. 571.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

The first point of view: the cultural exclusion/ social disadvantage, roots in the reformative movement of the 60's and emphasizes disadvantages deficiencies with which some children begin school. These disadvantages are more common within families of a low socio-economical status or due to the lack of a stimulating environment. The advocates of this point of view emphasize that the interfering and the action at an early stage of childhood is necessary to compensate the shortages of this period.

The second point of view: uses the term *at risk* to describe those children with specific characteristics, which in the future can evolve to different educational problems. The presence of these individual and environmental characteristics can put a child in front of a danger and can serve as an indicator for future educational data as: low education achievements, school abandoning or social problems within the school environment. The interfering can take place later on respecting the characteristics of each student.

The intervention is done first to identify those children and after that to ensure for them a specific learning, adequate to them. After this point of view some children apart from those with disabilities, are considered *at risk*. For example it is seen some characteristics such as: being male, being a member of a minority ethnical group or being part of a family with a low socio-economic status are linked to the high number of school drop-outs. This perspective for the future stimulates the creation of interfering strategies describing a child as *at risk*.

The third point of view: the one of the children who generally is *at risk* is the wider one and the one to be more encountered. This point of view in its essence describes the whole population or at least the young population as exposed to the social problems. Not being clear which are the segments of the population who get touched by these problems, this concept of being *at risk* involves more the youth in itself.

Also this is a point of view which connects to the social and demographical changes like: the increasing numbers of one parent families, criminal activity of the youngsters, drug and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, the increasing number of children who live in poverty.

On the other side, this aspect brings out the necessity of wider changes in national scale and political level, which will anticipate the problems of the youngsters in danger. Each of these points of view has various effects depending on how the interfering strategies are used.

1996 the term in danger described those youngsters who do not fulfil the goals of the educational programmes in continuity, don't go through high school, and don't become productive workers after abandoning high school.

Caterall and Cota Robles⁶ (1998) describe two of the most known concepts of the term "*at risk*" dividing the children in two main classes:

- Children from arm families
- Children with different cultural basis or minorities

At risk children in school

Schreiber-Kittl und Schroepfer⁷ (2002) indentify the groups below as "students *at risk*":

- Students coming from socially arm families
- Students coming from families with lacking members
- Students from families who migrate
- Students with handicaps
- Students who have postponed school
- Students who have fallen from a higher school level to a lower one.

After Sagor⁸ (2004) the term "*at risk*" describes the student who possibly won't graduate after the programme, so he won't dispose of the required skills to practise a profession, of the culture and knowledge for social matters and interpersonal relations.

Although affirmations from different research generally concord about the general concept "*at risk*", the identification which of the children are really "*at risk*" is a difficult and complicated process. One has to be careful when using the term "*at risk*". The implementation of this term has to be specified concerning the phenomena by which the student is endangered, because this term has been used in many ways: for example, in danger because of a low self esteem, in danger from being alcoholism. Others identify in danger students with wealth problems, geographical location which causes inferiorities or non amateness or economical disadvantages.

The term "*at risk*" is specifically used for those youngsters, whose perspectives to become an active member of the

⁶ Saha, L. J. *Internatona Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Eduaction*. (Pergamon: 1997) fq. 571

⁷ Schreiber-Kittl, Maria und Haike Schröpfer. *Abgeschrieben? Ergebnisse einer empirischen Untersuchung über Schulverweigerung*. (Mynih: 2000)

⁸ Sagor, R. & Cox, J. *At-risk students: Reaching and teaching them*. (Larchmont, NY: 2004), fq. 1

society are low. In the educational institutions nowadays this term is more linked to the phenomena of dropping out of school, which we will treat further on.

Dropping out of school has a special importance, especially today, in the situation where Albanian society finds itself. It shows up as the most usual consequence of the disadvantages at the educational possibilities which are involved at being in danger:

The student abandons school, but also school abandons the students. This happens when society doesn't have the necessary capacities to offer all aspects of the educational systems in full quality and spread geographically in a beneficial manner.

1.2 Identifying pupils in danger of school's dropout

Most of the students are able to reach some specific results, but a considerable part of them have problems with the daily school life. These children are forced to look for other ways and find alternative solutions to their problems. Some cases, which are not rare at all, bring them to school's dropout. Interruption, avoiding or school's dropout must be seen as interactive structures which mean that there are different factors which interact with one another. In specific cases, special tendencies for school dropout can be reduced only in a biographic, school, familiar or social aspects.

What we already know is that pupils with familiar characteristics such as: low socio-economical levels, some specific ethnical group, are more predisposed to drop school out. Students that are on the right academic way (those who have the right level) at the end of the first year, have four times more opportunities to be graduated than the other part that have not.⁹ School directories, by having this kind of information since the first moment and by identifying the ones that are not in the right way, can become part of the intervention and monitoring program which will help them diminish the risk for them to drop the school out. Those who end up in dropping school out can become part of alternative programs.

1.3 Factors that could influence in students' decision to drop out school

Reasons for school dropout are not found in the educational institution. Most of the researchers see the causes for school dropout as, educational, social, familiar and individual as well in the mutual interaction of these factors. Most of the cases with his passing the time can be transformed in consequences and vice versa. In this way we are faring a circle which is very difficult to be stopped.

However, it is important to be identified and understood those factors that influence in the process of school's dropout in a way that a full support is provided to those students who are in danger. Some of the factors might be:

1. Community characteristics where they belong to, such as socio-economical low level, high level of unemployment and crime.

Especially children from families with low social economical background mostly do not have a good performance at school. They more often face with failure and in their passing from school life to the professional one; they are more losing than winning. Clark¹⁰ has proved that children with low economical position tend to be more motivated in order to archive something over the average. Meanwhile, they face failure more often, are more insecure in their opportunities to their goals. They feel more charged and they develop a sense of fear toward school and its demands.

2. Family characteristics, such as low educational level, single parents or the cases when the language spoken at school is not their mother tongue.

Children performance at school is influenced even by their parents' educational level. Children that come from families with economical problems have a tendency toward short ways of education and most of the cases they are not graduated, or have lower results then the others. So, in the trade market they are mostly influenced from unemployed or have very low paid jobs.¹¹

2. Conclusions

This brief framework aimed to introduce the problem of the phenomenon of "children and youth in danger". The term "in danger" is used especially for those youth people whose perspective to be an active citizen are very low. In the

⁹ Barney, M. & Wells, Shannon. *Understanding Drop out: Accuracy of Reporting & Risk & Protective Factors*

¹⁰ Keneth Clark (1972) *A possible Reality*. New York. Fq 13.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

educational institutions this term is mostly used with the phenomenon of school's dropout.

In our days, school's dropout in the present situations, take the role to the main importance. It is seen as the part of those disadvantages that are included in the case of those "being in danger". A child can drop school out in a way or another, but in the other hand the school do drops him out as well. This is in the cases when the society does not have the right capacity to offer the proper education or include all the elements in the educational system in a geographical area and in the right quality.

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