

**Psychosocial Factors Predicting Hidden School Dropout
among Arab Students in Israel**

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Abstract

Scientific background: The dropping out of young adolescents from the school system is a familiar phenomenon in Israel and abroad, the scope of which varies over time (OECD, 1995). Dropping out of school may have far-reaching negative consequences on the lives and futures of young teenagers (Richman & Bowen, 1997). Teenagers who have dropped out of school are at risk of engaging in criminal activity, drug and alcohol abuse and other risk behaviors, including damaging their well-being (Schmid, 2006). Before the student drops out of school openly, he often displays certain symptoms of being weaker in studies alongside detachment from social life and lack of emotional involvement in school. These symptoms express a condition defined as hidden dropout, a step preceding the actual dropping out of the education system (Wai-Ming, Zhou & Harel-Fisch, 2012).

Looking at the phenomenon of dropout, there is a significant gap between the Arab and Jewish populations, as the hidden and visible dropout rate is higher in the Arab sector compared to the Jewish sector (CBS, 2005a; Cohen-Strawczynski, Dolev and Shemesh, 1999; Hasket & Zohar, 2009; Harel-Fisch et al., 2009).

Against this background, the present study is anchored in conceptual models from the field of health and welfare promotion, including the Assets Model, according to which the more we provide the youth opportunities to experience and accumulate positive effects of strength factors (health assets), the bigger the likelihood they will experience well-being and will preserve this feeling and function well for all through their lives (Morgan & Ziglio, 2007). Another model is the "Youth Resilience" model, that focuses on amplifying strength factors as an effective lever for reducing violence, risk behaviors, and hidden dropout, while improving the social and the mental well-being of the students. The model relates to four strength factors that generate well-being: the presence of a significant adult, intensifying experiences, sense of self value and a healthy connection with society (Harel-Fisch, 2014; Harel-Fisch et al., 2009).

The main insights of these models indicate that the empowerment of protective factors and coping resources will make it possible to reduce the phenomenon of hidden dropout among young people from the Arab sector. This study focuses on this relationship.

Research Objective: in the present study we will try to find the major predicting factors of the hidden dropout phenomenon among the student population at

Arab schools in Israel, while addressing four key social areas: family, school, friends and community. Another objective of this study is to examine the social and cultural variance and the universal compatibility of this model that is being studied across different sub-populations in the Arab sector in Israel. The hypotheses are formulated in a multivariate path model.

Research population: The research population constituted of sixth, eighth and tenth graders (ages of 11-15) at Arab schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The sample included 750 students from Arab schools.

Research Method: The study is cross-sectional quantitative study, based on secondary quantitative analysis of data from the National Survey HBSC-WHO (Health Behaviors in School-Aged Children: A World Health Organization Cross-National Study). The study is based on quantitative (secondary) analysis of data from a national survey that was conducted based on a valid and reliable self-report questionnaire that was handed to the students during class hours. The approximated path model of the research will be examined by a series of statistical analyses gradually performed, using models of multi-variable linear and logistic regression of SEM (Structural Equation Models), by using software like SPSS and AMOS. After testing the suggested model on the general population of the Arab students, a comparative analysis to match the model to subgroups will be done as follows: age and gender groups; ethnic group affiliation, geographical area of school; the families' socio-economical state.

Main Findings: The findings indicate significant relationships between the four subgroups (family, school, friends and community) and hidden dropout, when the top three were found as significant predictors while the last factor (community), contrary to our assumption, was found to significantly predict an increase in the dropout rate, i.e. students who are more involved in the community are more likely to drop out of school. The findings showed the importance of family resilience (support, parental involvement and supervision), the importance of school climate (the support of teachers and school perceptions) and lack of a sense of loneliness in their role in predicting the reduction of hidden dropout and the promotion of well-being. These factors were found to predict healthy behavior among Arab youth.

In addition, the findings show the importance of mental well-being (psychosomatic symptoms and life satisfaction and happiness) predicting the hidden dropout.

The rate of hidden dropout reported is higher among boys, among tenth graders, among students whose families are in a lower economic state and among students who live in northern Israel. Psychosomatic symptoms were higher among tenth grades and life satisfaction was higher among sixth and eighth graders. In addition, life satisfaction was higher among students whose families are in medium or higher economic state.

Path analysis findings indicate that there are significant relationships between the four subgroups (family, school, friends and community) and hidden dropout. The findings show the importance of family resilience, the importance of school contribution and the lack of a sense of loneliness in their role in predicting the reduction of hidden dropout and promotion of well-being. These factors were found to predict healthy behavior among Arab youth. It should be noted that only the community and leisure measures were found not to be predictors for reducing hidden dropout among Arab youth, similar to the findings of the research hypotheses.

Main Conclusions: This study made a great contribution to understanding the main predictive factors for hidden dropout among the student population in Arab schools in Israel. The study highlights the strength measures which have an effect on reducing risk behaviors and improving the well-being of the students and the universality of those measures across the various sub-populations within Israel's Arab sector. The findings accentuate the argument that positive psychology, which includes involvement and support, has a protective effect against mental and physical distress and contributes to a person's – and especially a teenager's - personal well-being.