

Hear our stories: Voices of students with
neurodevelopmental disorders that have been school non-
attendees

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Background

- ▶ Increasing number of referred students to Statped, with school non-attendance and neurodevelopmental disorders
 - ▶ ADHD, Tourettes and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ▶ The students
- ▶ Systemic change and inclusion



Research background

- ▶ Multifactorial risk factors
- ▶ Anxiety and depression most commonly stated as the main individual symptoms to treat (CBT) (Kearnley, 2008, Maynard et al, 2018, Reissner et al, 2019)
- ▶ Not necessarily a better school attendance as an effect of treatment, especially if the treatment is given outside the school setting (Kearnley & Bates, 2005, Ingul, 2014).
- ▶ The importance of looking into what actually happens in the classroom – what environment do we send the students into?

Aim of our study:

- ▶ View school non-attendance through the personal stories of students with diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorders, with previous or existing school non-attendance.
- ▶ Get a better knowledge of how these students function at school
 - ▶ Everyday wellbeing
 - ▶ Adaptations in the classroom setting
 - ▶ Social interactions

This study

- ▶ Small scale qualitative study
- ▶ Individual interviews
- ▶ Semi-structured interview guide
- ▶ The interviews were carried out by senior advisers at Statped

The informants

- ▶ 9 informants, aged 11-18
- ▶ 6 boys, 3 girls
- ▶ Recruited from the regional interest organisations for ADHD, Tourettes syndrome and autism.
- ▶ All were enrolled in the special education support system in their municipality.
- ▶ All have or have had school absenteeism

The informants - diagnosis

- ▶ ADHD (7)
- ▶ Tourettes syndrome (5)
- ▶ Aspergers syndrome (2)

- ▶ ADHD and Tourettes syndrome (4)

The informants - comorbid difficulties

- ▶ Sensory difficulties (7)
- ▶ Psychosomatic complaints (6)
- ▶ Dyslexia (5)
- ▶ Insomnia/sleeping disorders (4)
- ▶ Behavioral difficulties, including Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) (4)
- ▶ Social phobia (3)
- ▶ Depression (3)
- ▶ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (2)
- ▶ Diagnosed trauma caused by situations at school (2)
- ▶ Separation anxiety (1)
- ▶ General anxiety disorder (GAD) (1)
- ▶ Misophonia (1)
- ▶ Hyperakusis (1)

4 main themes emerged

1. Bullying and social exclusion
2. The teachers competence and adaptive response to the students needs and difficulties
3. Learning activities
4. Experiences with public support bodies

1. Bullying and social exclusion

- ▶ All the informants had experienced either bullying or social exclusion.
- ▶ Some responded with violence, others responded with social withdrawal.
- ▶ One informant changed school because of bullying.

Bullying and social exclusion

- *«It was like that sometimes before, for having ADHD or Tourettes...*
- *So they teased you for that?*
- *Not for that long. I got mad. So one time, the ambulance had to fetch one of them.*
- *Yes, because you got...*
- *I smashed him into a door».*

Boy, 13

«One boy tried to strangle me and kicked me. The teacher went past me and tried to calm him down (..) The teacher said; «Get up and go into the classroom».

Boy, 15

Bullying and social exclusion

«And then by Christmas in 9th grade they started to do things without me and rejected me, like if I came and sat down, they told me that the chair was taken, even if nobody sat there (..)»

Girl, 17

«I came home one day, and I was totally destroyed, and then dad called school and said «She is not coming back».

Girl, 13

2. The teachers competence and adaptive response to the students needs and difficulties

- ▶ There seems to be a lack of knowledge among the school staff about how to adapt for students with neurodevelopmental disorders
 - ▶ Missing plans or change of plans during the same day
 - ▶ Lack of information given to substitute teachers
 - ▶ Detention
 - ▶ Confrontational teachers
 - ▶ Negative situations occurring with other students, without the awareness of the school staff
- ▶ Some individual teachers care a lot
 - ▶ Have time to listen
 - ▶ Ask questions about the students well-being
 - ▶ «Someone who really sees me»

The teachers competence and adaptive response to the students needs and difficulties

- *«I wrote the text like I wanted it, and the teacher erased it (..)»*

Several times.

- *I got very angry*

So then I didn't want to do it, so when the teacher went away

I went to the toilet and sat there (..) Even if I could do the task perfectly well, I lost motivation.

So I sat there in the window at the toilet and looked out (..)

it was quite nice to look out at the forest».



Girl, 17

The teachers competence and adaptive response to the students needs and difficulties

*«The teachers usually tell the substitute teachers
«Yes, she is a lot outside of the classroom, so just
make sure she is inside of the classroom». So..
when they block the door and push me inside the
classroom again.. in front of all the others, then I
don't really want to be there any longer»*

Girl, 15

The teachers competence and adaptive response to the students needs and difficulties

«And then, at the start of 9th grade, I thought: If this is going to continue during the big transitions, I don't know how far I'll come in life. Because if they don't pay attention to the ones with problems, and realise that the transition is too big for those persons, I don't know.. If they don't start to take this into consideration soon, I don't believe the world will come that far».

Girl, 15

The teachers competence and adaptive response to the students needs and difficulties

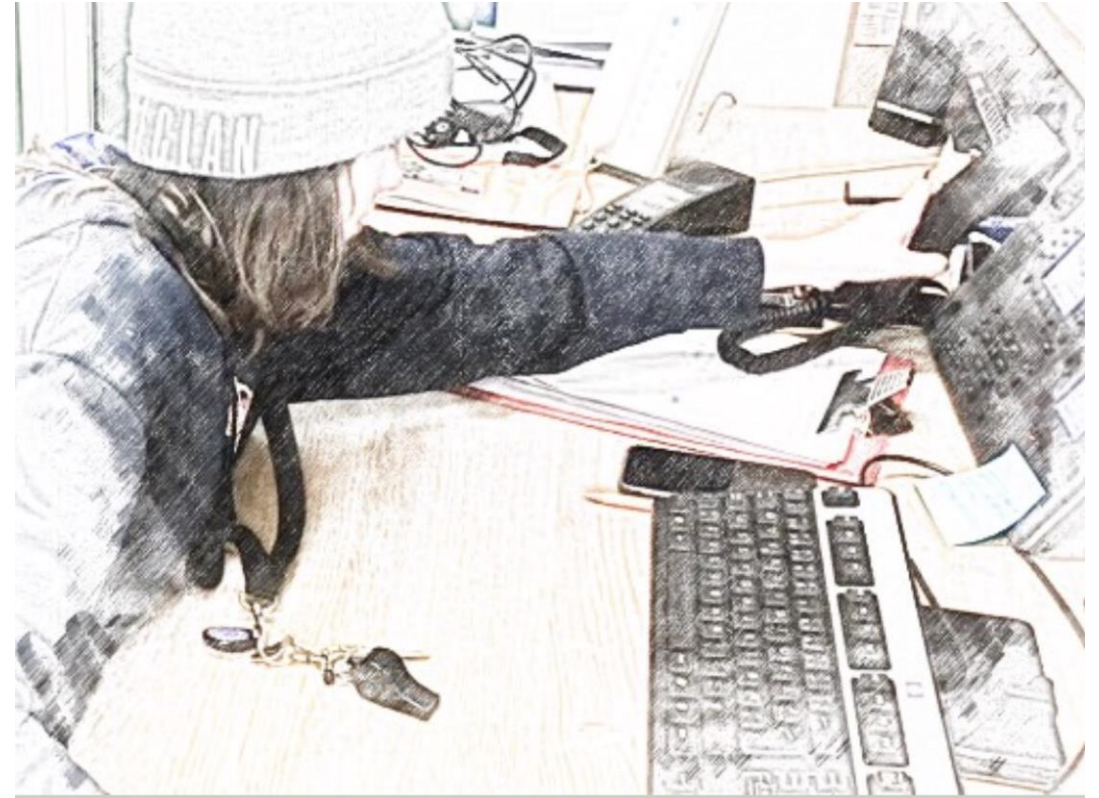
«She kind of understood what I needed. (..) She saw that I was tired, so then she told me I could go home earlier or she found other solutions. If something was difficult for me, she tried to find a solution. And then I talked a lot with her. And then I ate lunch with her every day because I didn't have anyone else to eat lunch with (..) We could talk about everything. I felt I had someone I could really talk to».

Girl, 17



3. Learning Activities

- ▶ Variation
- ▶ Boring lessons
- ▶ Low sense of mastery
- ▶ Traditional
- ▶ Formalistic
- ▶ Not suited to their interests or strengths.
- ▶ They want more activity



Learning Activities quotes

...And it has always been like this, that I have to do it my own way, so when the teachers didn't let me do things in the way I wanted to do it, then it became hard. Then I rather chose to not do anything.

Girl, 17

Learning Activities quotes

The teachers lecture and write on the digital board. Every student has his or her own laptop, but if the teachers see you use it, they take it. We only use the laptop when we are allowed. We use it very rarely. We don't use books either. We mainly sit quiet. Sit quiet and listen. And it doesn't work for me.

Girl, 15

Learning Activities quotes

The best day I have had in school was when I was allowed to hand in a video of something I made in Minecraft as an assignment

Boy, 11



4. Experiences with public support bodies

- ▶ Experiences with several public support bodies
 - ▶ Educational and psychological counselling (PPT)
 - ▶ Psychiatric out-patient clinic for Children (BUP)
 - ▶ Child Welfare services
- ▶ Mixed experiences
 - ▶ Mostly negative
 - ▶ Some really positive experiences



Quote other social bodies

- *How is it to meet at BUP?*
- *I hate it. Really a lot. You just sit there... It is just like sitting at school. Hear someone talking and just answering. Continue hearing them talk. And sit quiet. It is really boring*
Girl, 15

Take home message - Children with neurodevelopmental disorders are at high risk of developing school refusal

- ▶ Important to listen to what the students tell us
- ▶ Low quality of life
- ▶ Bullying/harassment
- ▶ Look at the underlying reasons for school absenteeism
- ▶ Lack of understanding
- ▶ Non-adapted teaching
- ▶ Formalistic and traditional teaching
- ▶ Boredom and low sense of mastery
- ▶ Individual adaptation