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School attendance in Australian school students with an intellectual disability

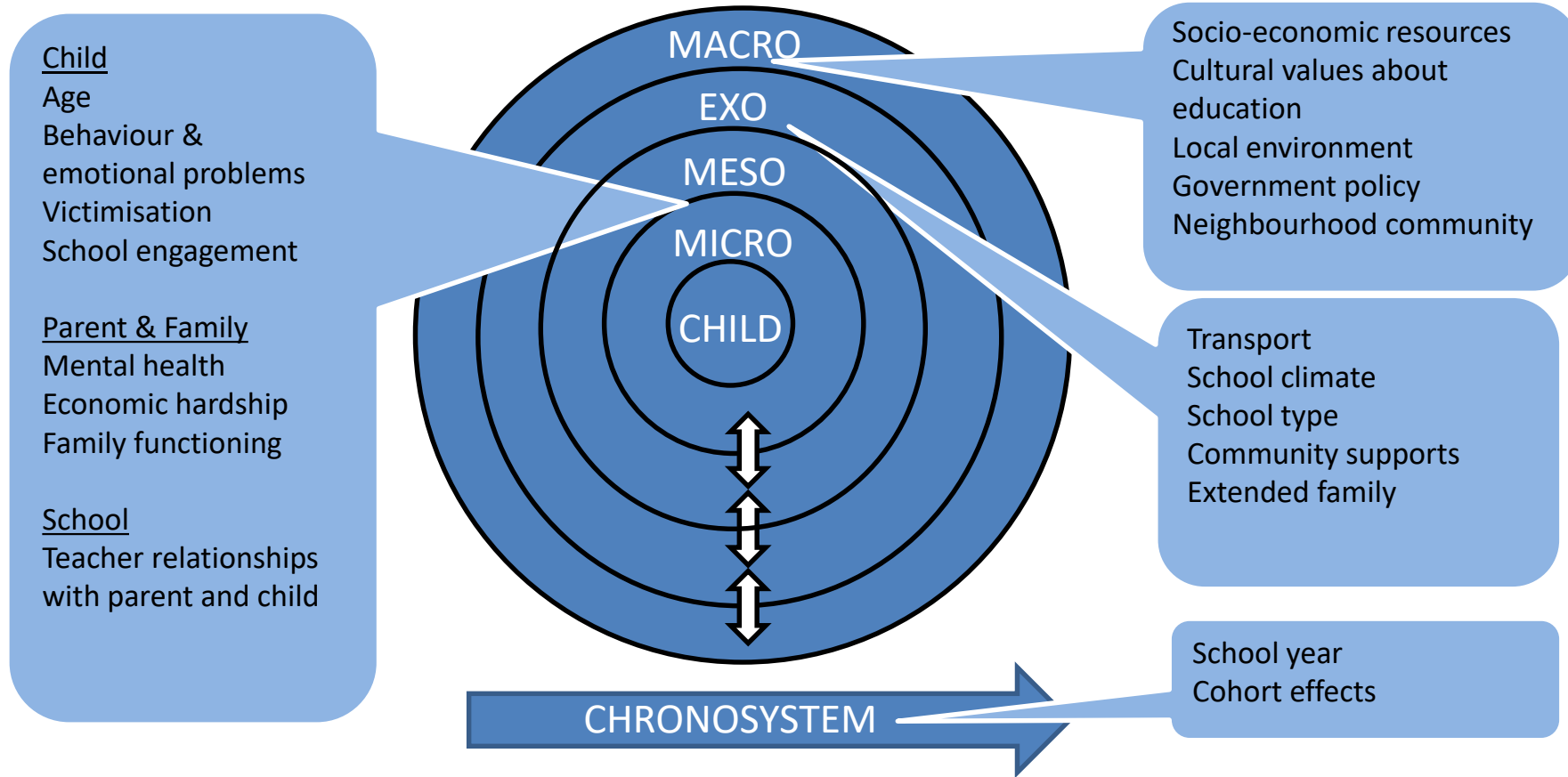
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Previous research

- Poor school attendance linked to negative outcomes: lower academic attainment, impaired social and emotional development, and early school drop-out
- Students with intellectual disability (ID) have lower school attainment and poorer post-school outcomes than their typically developing peers
- Limited research shows students with ID and / or autism (ASD) have more school absences than their typically developing peers

Kids and Teens at School Framework: Understanding school attendance problems

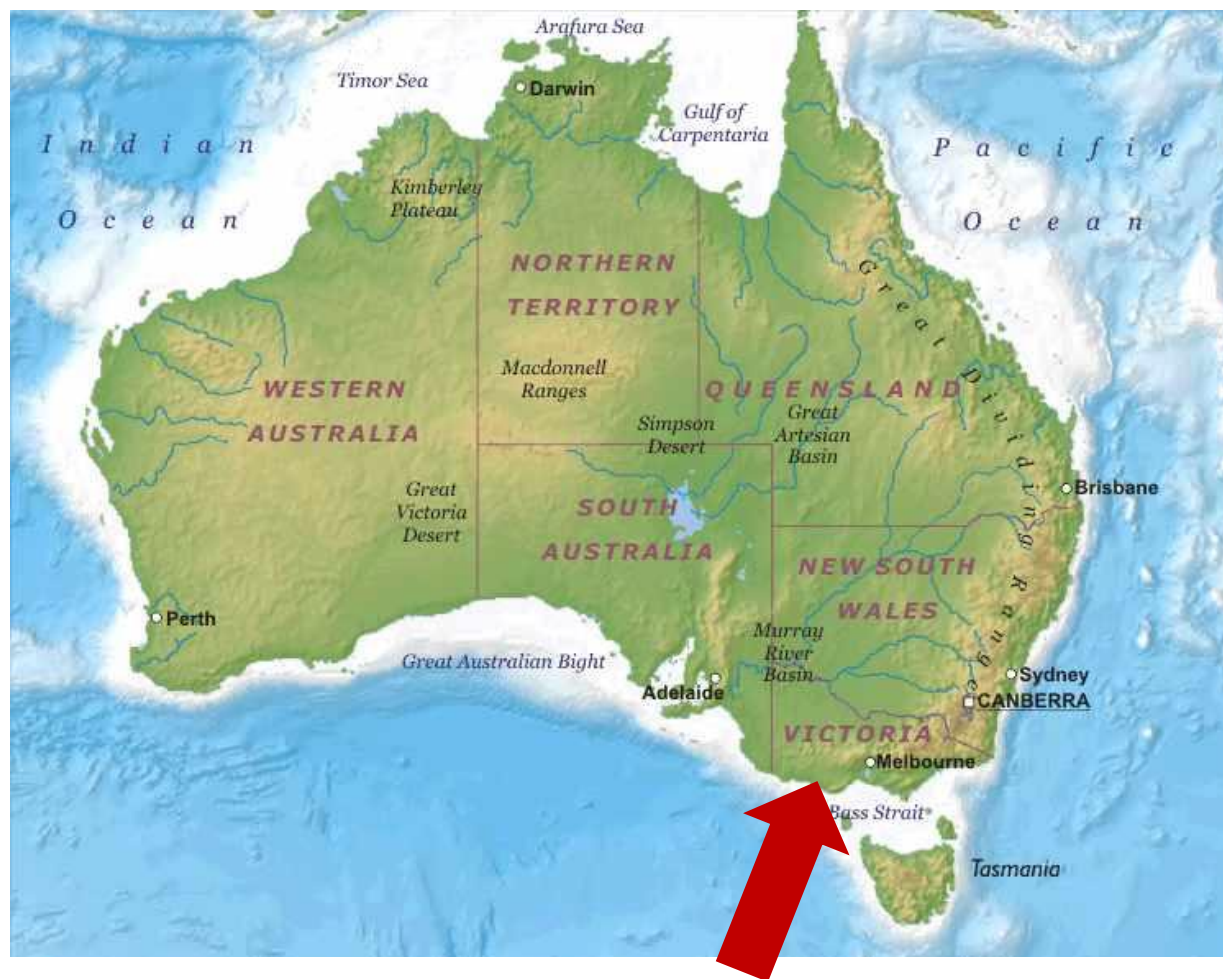


Melvin et al., (2019). *Frontiers in Education*, 4,
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2019.00061

KiTeS project aims

1. Identify rates of school non-attendance in children with ID in the State of Victoria, Australia
2. Establish the most common reasons for non-attendance and rates of types of problematic non-attendance
3. Informed by the Kids and Teens at School (KiTeS) Framework – to understand factors associated with school (non)attendance

Australia



Methods

- Caregivers of children with an ID enrolled in a primary or secondary school in state of Victoria (Australia) invited to participate and complete a questionnaire
- A total of 794 caregivers signed up to participate
 - 36 were ineligible
 - 125 withdrew or did not return the caregiver survey
 - 4 removed from analysis because attendance data from the child's school was not forthcoming
- Schools provided attendance data for preceding 20 school days, identifying days missed
- Parents completed measure on reasons for non-attendance (SNACK)

School Non-Attendance Checklist (SNACK)

- a. Brief measure accounting for a range of possible types of absence: non-problematic (e.g., illness, funeral) and problematic (truancy, school refusal, school withdrawal, school exclusion)
- b. Reasons for non-attendance grouped by Child, Parent, Family, School, or Other factors
- c. Jargon free definitions supported by examples
- d. One month timeframe (20 school days)

SNACK: Reasons for non-attendance Child

My child:

- was sick
- had an appointment
- was reluctant or refused
- skipped/wagged/truanted

SNACK: Reasons for non-attendance Parent

I or my partner:

- gave my child a day off
- kept my child home for other reasons
- arranged extra holidays

SNACK: Reasons for non-attendance Family

Our family:

- had an urgent situation
- had other difficulties
- had a religious holiday or cultural observance

SNACK: Reasons for non-attendance School

The school:

- was closed
- sent my child home due to his/her behaviour
- asked that my child stay away from school

SNACK: Reasons for non-attendance

Other

Other:

- weather conditions
- something else, please describe

Sample recruited

- N=629 caregivers/parents of children with an ID

Parents / caregivers	84.6% mothers
Child sex	410 male (65.2%)
Child age	$M = 11.18$ years ($sd=3.5$) Range = 5-18 years
School type	559 special school 60 mainstream
Autism Spectrum Disorder (parent report)	312 (49.6%)
Country of birth	569 (90.7%) born Australia 11 (1.8%) Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander descent

Overall attendance

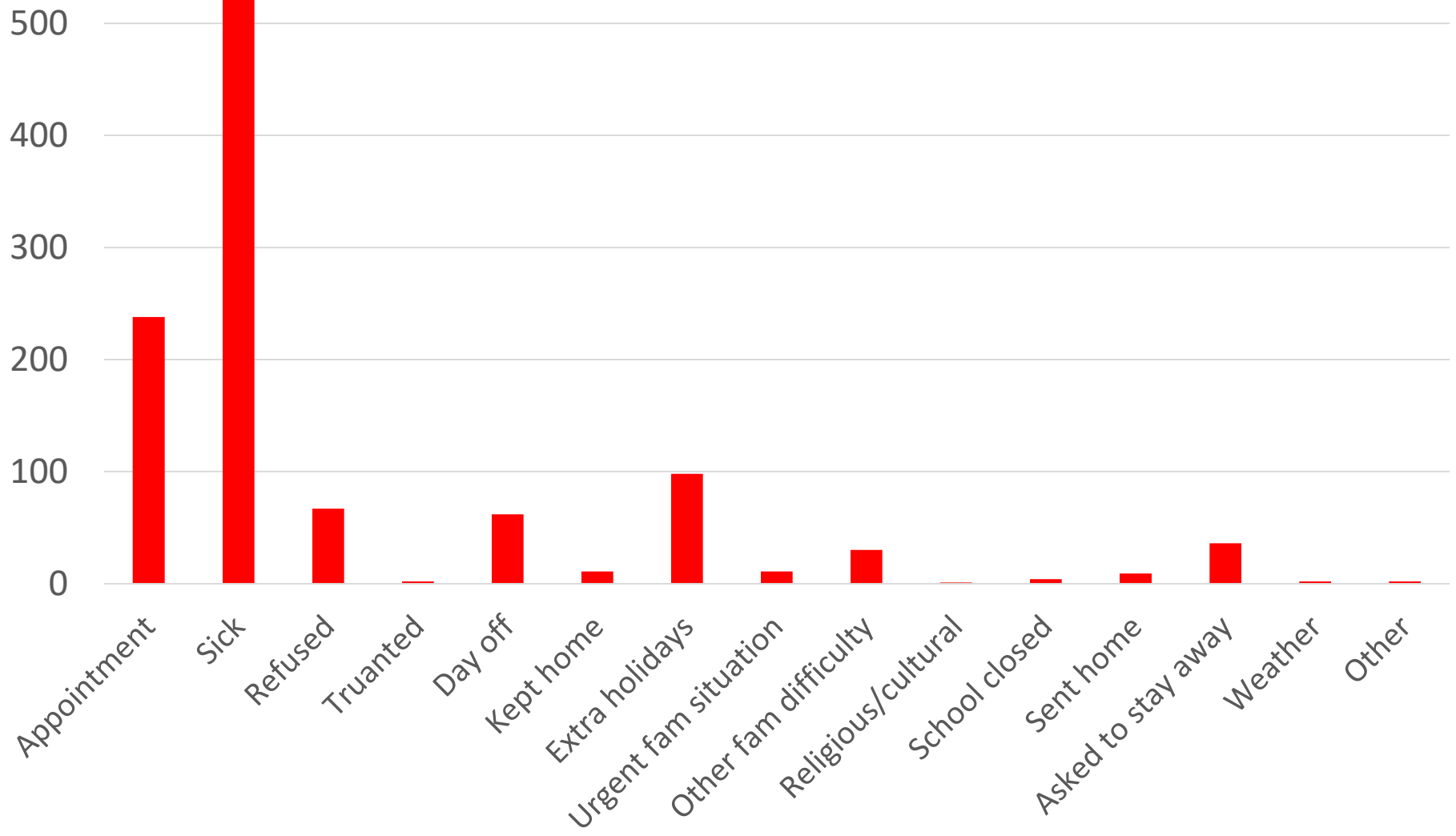
100% attendance	267 (41.8%)
% attendance for entire sample	92% of time
Absent $\geq 10\%$ (<i>chronic absence</i>)	184 (29.3%)
Withdrawal	70 (11.13%)
School Refusal	33 (5.25%)
Exclusion	12 (1.91%)
Truancy	2 (0.32%)

% time missed for those in special schools 7.3%

% time missed for those in mainstream schools 13.3%

$p < .05$

Reasons sessions missed

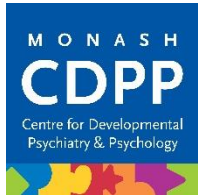


Parent-teacher agreement reason for absence

SNACK reason	Parents	Teachers	Kappa
	absences reported (n)		
Sick	524	254	.591**
Appointment	238	144	.575**
Refusal	67	39	.289**
Kept home rest	63	33	.374**
School asked child to stay away	36	25	.726**
School sent home behavioural	9	5	.665**
Family urgent situation	11	12	.535**
Kept home other	10	14	.095*
Family other difficulties	30	17	-.011
Truancy	2	2	

Conclusions

- Just over 40% had full attendance during the 20 day period, although the sample attended for over 90% of the sessions
- 29.3% of children had problematic level of non-attendance ($\geq 10\%$)
- Truancy and exclusion were rare
- Withdrawal (11.13%) and refusal (5.25%) the main school attendance problems
- Sickness, followed by having appointments (often for health reasons) were the main reasons for non-attendance; each child missing school for these reasons typically missed 3/20 days
- *Examine correlates of attendance, informed by theory*



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Australian Government
Australian Research Council



Parent questionnaires

- Demographics
- Reasons for absences using the SNACK (Heyne & Melvin, 2015)
- Difficulty in getting the child to school in the morning
- Child's connectedness and attitude to school
- Child's experiences of bullying victimisation
- Child's emotional and behavioural problems
- Child's adaptive behaviour and skills
- Parental values regarding education and engagement with school
- Parental mental health
- Family functioning
- Socio-economic disadvantage
- School type & location
- Method of Transport to school

Teacher Questionnaire

- Reasons for absences using the SNACK (Heyne & Melvin, 2015)
- Parent-teacher relationship and communication
- Student-teacher relationship
- Student victimisation experiences
- Student's emotional and behavioural problems
- School climate

SNACK REASON	Parents Total absences reported	Teachers Total absences reported	Kappa
Holidays	98	61	.841**
School Asked Child to Stay Away	36	25	.726**
School Sent Home Behavioural	9	5	.665**
Sick	524	254	.591**
Appointment	238	144	.575**
Family Urgent Situation	11	12	.535**
Kept Home Rest	63	33	.374**
Refusal	67	39	.289**
Kept Home Other	10	14	.095*
Other	2	15	-.016
Family Other Difficulties	30	17	-.011
Weather	2	4	-.004
Truancy	2	2	-.003
Religious/Cultural	1	2	-.002
School Closed	4	1	-.002