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Leiden



School non-attendance among UK children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders

Vaso Totsika, Richard Hastings, Yoko Dutton, Alison Worsley

Glenn Melvin, Kylie Gray, Bruce Tonge & David Heyne

School attendance in ASD

- Rates of school absence higher in special schools (UK DfE, 2019).
- Attending school may be more difficult when special educational needs relate to difficulties in social skills and social interactions (Able et al., 2015).
- To date, school refusal only type of school attendance issue studied in ASD:
- 23.7% of 135 Japanese students with ASD and/or ID presented with school refusal – parental report (Kurita 1991)
- School refusal behaviour was present among 42.6% Norwegian students with ASD (no ID) compared to 7.1% TD students– teacher report (Munkhaugen et al., 2017)

Aims of the study

- To provide a more comprehensive description of school non-attendance in ASD
- To use a systematic typology to describe reasons for non-attendance (using SNACK; Heyne et al., 2019)
- To begin to explore correlates of non-attendance in students with ASD

Method

- Online survey open for 6 weeks asking about non-attendance in the month preceding the data collection (March 2017)
- For every school day, respondents indicated if it was missed, and if so the reason why (SNACK)
- 486 respondents who were caregivers of a child with ASD currently enrolled in school
- 96% of respondents were mothers
- About 50% educated to degree level and in paid employment

Participants: 486 children with ASD

- Average age 11 yrs (range 3 to 18 yrs).
- 69% male
- 21% also had intellectual disability (ID)
- 75% lived at home with 2 parents
- 81% attended mainstream school

Defining school non-attendance

1. Day absence (yes/no)
2. Total number of days missed (range 0 to 23)
3. Persistent absence (missing 10%+ of available sessions)

Rates of non-attendance in ASD

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| 100% attendance | 173 (36%) |
| Mean number of days missed (of 23) | 5 |
| Persistent absence | 211 (43%) |

| | Total number of days missed | Persistent absence | Day absence |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Child male | | | |
| ID present | | | |
| Child age | + | + | + |
| Not a 2-parent HHD | + | + | + |
| Parent not in paid employment | + | + | + |
| Low par. educational qualifications | | | |
| Family has more children with disabilities | | | |
| Total number of children in HHD | | | |
| Child attends a mainstream school | + | + | + |
| Child goes to school independently | | | |
| Child has changed schools | | | |

| | Total number of days missed | Persistent absence | Day absence |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Child male | | | |
| ID present | | | |
| Child age | 1.07 (1.02, 1.11) | 1.07 (1.03, 1.10) | 1.08 (1.03, 1.14) |
| Not a 2-parent HHD | 1.59 (1.18, 2.14) | 1.37 (1.10, 1.70) | 1.75 (1.16, 2.64) |
| Parent not in paid employment | 1.57 (1.18, 2.10) | 1.52 (1.22, 1.89) | 1.78 (1.22, 2.60) |
| Low par. educational qualifications | | | |
| Family has more children with disabilities | | | |
| Total number of children in HHD | | | |
| Child attends a mainstream school | 1.79 (1.20, 2.66) | 2.04 (1.14, 3.62) | 2.00 (1.20, 3.31) |
| Child goes to school independently | | | |
| Child has changed schools | | | |

Adjusted Relative Risks: the risk of non-attendance increased by...

- 79% to 104% for students in mainstream school
- 37% to 75% for those not living in a 2-parent household
- 52% to 78% when parent not in paid employment
- 7% to 8% for older students

Type of non-attendance

| | % of days missed because of this reason |
|-----------------------------|---|
| School Refusal | 43% |
| Non-problematic absenteeism | 32% |
| School exclusion | 9% |
| School withdrawal | 9% |
| Truancy | <1% |

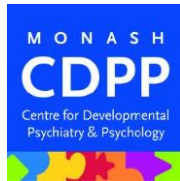
Among 313 students with 1+ days absent..

- Refusal was more likely in older children
- Non-problematic absenteeism was more likely when the child had ID
- Exclusion was more likely in mainstream and in single parent hhds, but less likely when parental educational qualifications were low - interaction? Yes. Students who were excluded were more likely to come from single-parent HHDs, where the parent was unemployed and had high levels of educational qualifications

- High levels of school non-attendance (17.3% persistent absence in English students with ASD vs 43% in our study): could be related to sampling
- Students in mainstream more likely to miss school, once all other factors are taken into account
- 4 in 10 days missed because of refusal. Among persistent absentees, refusal accounted for 5 of 10 days missed. Refusal is likely a sig. issue in ASD – link to mental health difficulties?
- Non-problematic absenteeism mostly related to health issues; children with ID more vulnerable
- Qualitative evidence suggests exclusion might be linked to the way the (mainstream) school environment is set up and inability to meet student needs
- Variability in reasons for non-attendance in ASD and more work needed to understand correlates of reasons for non-attendance so that solutions are tailored.



UCL



Universiteit
Leiden



v.totsika@ucl.ac.uk



[@vasototsika](https://twitter.com/vasototsika)

Absence reasons and persistent absence

| | Persistent absence | Non-persistent absence |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Non-problematic absenteeism | 25% | 47% |
| School refusal | 49% | 31% |
| Truancy | <1% | 1% |
| School withdrawal | 6% | 14% |
| School exclusion | 11% | 6% |

