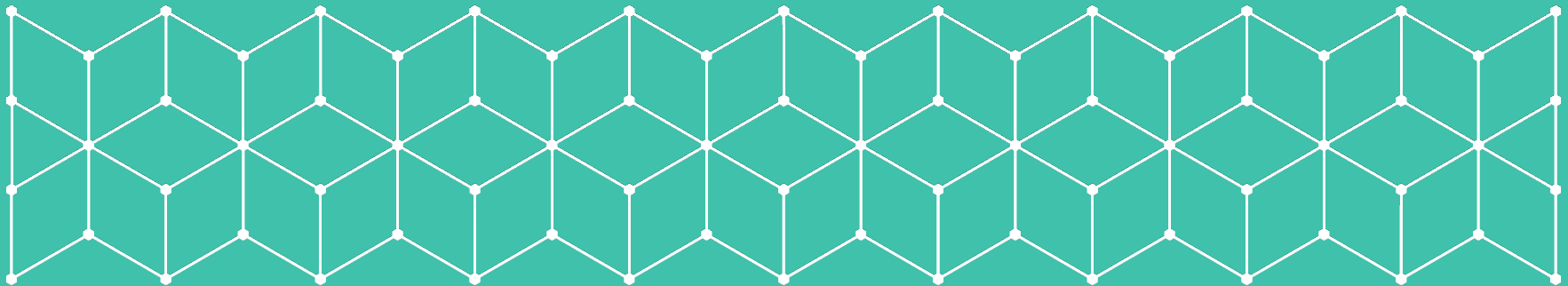


Hear our stories: Voices of students with neurodevelopmental disorders that have been school non-attendeers

2nd Nordic Conference on School Absenteeism, November 2021



Background

- Increasing number of referred students to Statped with school non-attendance and neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD)
- The students
- Our work



Research background 1

- Multifactorial risk factors
- Lack overview of how to view school absence and insufficient knowledge of which interventions that yields positive effects (Elliot & Place, 2019)
- Children with autism spectrum diagnose have significantly higher risk of showing school refusal behavior (Munkhaugen, E.K., Gjevik, E., Pripp, A.H., Sponheim, E. & Diseth, T.H., 2017).
- Lack of adaptation is a risk-factor (Bühler, Karlsson & Österholm, 2018)
- Parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders and severe school absence report (Riksförbundet Attention, 2020):
 - 67 % pointed to lack of adaptation during teaching situations
 - 64 % meant that the school did not have sufficient knowledge about neurodevelopmental disorders
 - 58 % meant that the school's requirements were too high compared to the child's capacity
 - 55 % answered that the child had too little support in social situations
 - 55 % said that the absence was due to mental illness

Research background 2

- Anxiety and depression most commonly stated as the main individual symptoms to treat (Kearney, 2008; Maynard, Heyne, Brendel, Bulanda, Thompson & Pigott, 2018; Reissner, Knollman, Spie, Jost, Neumann & Hebebrand, 2019)
- CBT very common treatment approach (Kearney, 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 (Kearney & Bates, 2005; Ingul, 2014).

Aim of our study

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

The study

- Small scale qualitative study
- Individual interviews
- Semi-structured interview guide
- The interviews were carried out by senior advisers at Statped
- Duration of the interviews: 20-60 minutes
- Not peer-reviewed

The informants

- 9 informants, aged 12-18
- Recruited from the regional interest organizations for ADHD, Tourettes syndrome and autism.
- All were enrolled in the special education support system in their municipality.
- Main diagnoses:
 - ADHD and Tourettes syndrome (4)
 - ADHD (2)
 - Aspergers syndrome (2)
 - Tourettes syndrome (1)

The informants – co-occurring difficulties

- Sensory difficulties (7)
- Psychosomatic complaints (6)
- Dyslexia (5)
- Insomnia/sleeping disorders (4)
- Behavioral difficulties, including Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) (4)
- Social phobia (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)

Method

- Explorative
- Qualitative data analysis
- Systematic text condensation (Malterud, 2012)

Four main themes

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 - quotes

- *«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».*

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

Bullying and social exclusion - quotes

«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 (..) I had some friends outside of school, but I felt very alone at school. So I was a bit away from school in 10th grade because I couldn't handle coming to school».

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

Summary

- Social inclusion and good relations with teachers and peers are important factors for staying in school. Lack of relations and bullying contributes to school absence (Nordahl, Flygare & Drugli, 2016; Ramsdal, Bergvik & Wynn, 2018; Spurkeland & Lysebo, 2016; Kearney, 2008; Amundsen, 2019; Hattie, 2009)
- Students with autism or ADHD have an increased risk of being bullied and/or socially excluded. This often has more severe health implications than for neurotypical students (Kaland, 2017; Cappadocia, Weiss & Pepler, 2012; Chen & Schwartz, 2012; Chou, Liu & Yang, 2014; Kloosterman, Kelley, Parker & Craig, 2014)

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 - quotes

«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»

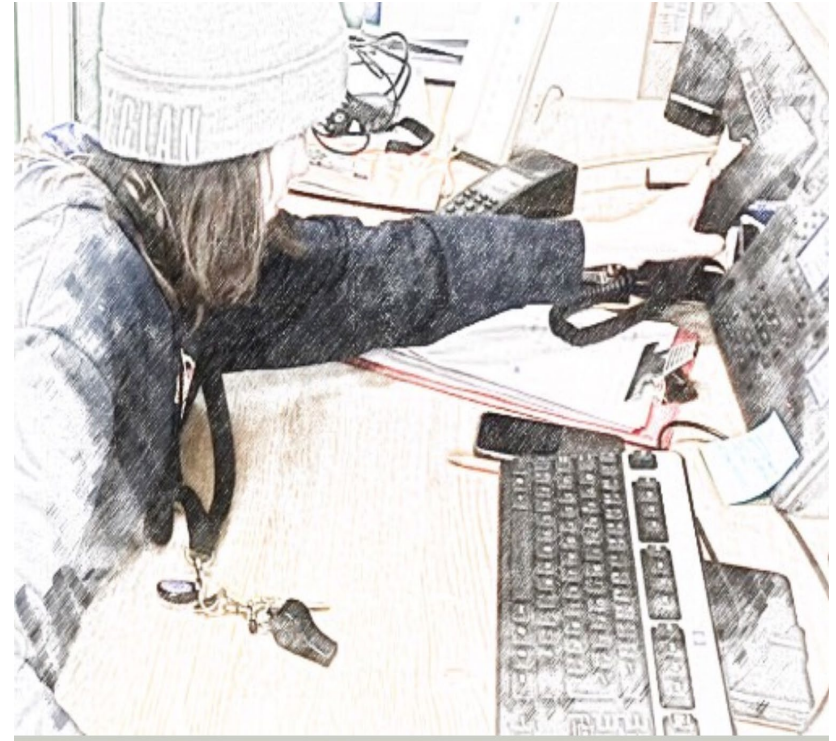


*«And then, at the start of 9th grade, I thought:
If this is going to continue during the big transitions,
I don't know how far I'll come in life. Because
if they don't pay attention to the ones with
problems,
and realise that the transition is too big for
those persons, I don't know.. If they don't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

*«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».*

Learning activities

- Variation
- Boring lessons
- Traditional
- Formalistic
- Not suited to their interests or strengths.
- They want more activity



Learning activities

...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.

Learning activities

This one time we were going to write sentences... I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was something like what I like to do in my spare time. Then I wrote «I like to do», «I like to do», «I like to do» on each line. My teacher felt that I should write one completely first in case I used more than one line, but I wanted to write all three of «I like to do»'s. She erased it and I wrote them once more and she erased them again.

Learning activities

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.

Learning activities

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



Summary

- Students who are bored at school, who find the learning activities less engaging and meaningful, and do not experience mastery, are more likely to feel a low degree of belonging to school. These students are at risk of developing severe school absence (Kearney, 2008; Vaughn, Maynard, Salas-Wright, Perron, Abdon, 2013).
- Giving students learning activities that engage, that is viewed as meaningful, and that gives mastery, could be an important way to minimize the risk of school absence.

Experiences with public support bodies

- Everyone has had experiences with several public support bodies such as Educational and psychological counselling (PPT) and child and adolescent psychiatric outpatient clinic (BUP)
 - We know this, but they dont necessarily know.
- Child Welfare services
- Mixed experiences
 - Mostly negative
 - Some really positive experiences

Key take-home messages

- Talk to the students in question – Actually get to know them – strengths, interests and weaknesses
- The situation is often far more complex than what can be ascribed to a single condition and there are multiple risk-factors at play at the same time.
- Work with the school environment to make it more likely to be an inclusive one.
- Stop looking for one-size fits all-solutions.