EMOTIONALLY BASED SCHOOL AVOIDANCE
A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Contents

1.1 What is EBSA?

Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school Sussex

> **What is reluctant attendance and school avoidance behavior?** This refers to avoiding attending school or difficulties remaining in school for an entire day. It can result in a student missing school for lengthy periods of time or missing specific classes or particular times of the day. It can involve challenging behaviors in the morning as the child or young person attempts to miss school. This avoidance behavior can range from mild sporadic difficulties with school attendance to severe and persistent difficulties that require collaboration with the family/carers and multi-agency input. NEPS 2020

The terminology and discourse used to refer to CYP who have difficulties in attending.

school because they have an anxiety/fear response have been extensively.

debated in the literature (Pellegrini, 2007). Early literature focused on "school phobia".

(Miller, 2008), school refusal behaviour" (Kearney, 2007) and "extended school

non-attendance" (Pellegrini, 2007) More recently "emotionally based school refusal" (West Sussex County Council EPS, 2004), "chronic non-attendance" (Lauchlan, 2003), ". Some researchers have criticised the use of terminology such as "school phobia" because according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), a phobia suggests that exposure to a specific phobic stimulus almost invariably provokes a fear response and Kearney and Silverman (1990) highlight that this is not always the case with school refusal because behaviours could be reflective of social anxiety or separation anxiety from the caregiver. When considering "emotionally based school refusal", Pellegrini (2007) argues that this terminology may overlook.

pupils whose anxiety is not the most visible area of need, for example children and young people who have medical needs who are anxious about returning to school.

In addition, non-attendance may be constructed differently according to the discourse.

used by different parties (Pellegrini, 2007). For example, local authorities

may view non-attendance as a behaviour fostered by low parental interest, clinical.

discourse emphasises within child factors, and parents and CYP may construct nonattendance in relation to school-related factors (Pellegrini, 2007).

1.2 Why does ESBA happen?

"School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support. When risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance" (Thambirajah et al, 2008: p. 33).

There is no single cause for EBSA and there are likely to be various contributing factors for why a child may be finding it difficult to attend school. It is well recognised in the research literature that EBSA is often underpinned by a number of complex and interlinked factors, including the child, the family and school environment (Baker and Bishop, 2015). Kearney & Spear (2012) found four main reasons for EBSA:

1 – To avoid negative feelings provoked by school-related stimuli.

2 – To escape from social aversion and evaluation, often to avoid being rejected or disliked.

3 – To gain attention from significant others, e.g., parents.

4 – To seek tangible reinforces outside of the school setting, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.

According to this model, the avoidance of uncomfortable feelings or situations described in the first two points could be viewed as negatively reinforcing the EBSA, whereas in the second two points, the EBSA could be seen as positively reinforced by factors outside of school (Kearney and Spear, 2012).

1.3 What are the risk factors?

1.3.1 Individual/ CYP Risk Factors

According to the West Sussex Educational Psychology Service(2019) child and young person risk factors for EBSA can be categorised into

- **Family**
- **Learning**
- **Social Personal**
- **Psychological wellbeing**

1. **Family:**

Poor relationship with parent/ dynamic

Jacequemin and Gaudron (2017) contend that there is a direct correlation between parents' relationships and involvement in their children's lives and the effect on the student's school engagement and school performance. They also explore the role of attachment between parent and child and found that when there is an insecure attachment the child finds it difficult to trust and leads to a sense of ambivalence. This in turn can create a poor parent and child dynamic. It can be thought that there may be a relationship between school refusal and attachment styles. People with a form of insecure attachment are uncomfortable with getting closer to the others, and they have trouble to completely trust people; they are less adaptable to social life, more vulnerable to stress, and cannot control their feelings too much (Kesebir, Kavzoğlu, & Üstündağ, 2011). It is thought that insecure attachment style may lead to school refusal.

Other aspects of the parent child dynamic can be classed as over- involvement. O Malley (2015), Author of Bully-Proof Kids and Cotton Wool Kid, contends that "There may be over-involvement with a child in terms of the child's emotions". She highlights that if a parent is over-protective about a teenager the teenager can pick up on this and create a risk factor for school refusal. School refusal can be down to a very complex series of factors – everything from family dynamics to the individual child's personality and their social milieu.

In care

Darmody et al (2020) explored the differences between children in care and the rest of the pupil population in terms of school attendance, participation, and attainment levels. They found that children in care face more challenges such as changing schools, limited attention from carers and disruption within the home environment which create a web of risks for the young person

2. Learning

Learning needs/ASD

Ochie et al (2015) contend that school refusal significantly occurred earlier in children with ASD than in those without. In addition, bullying was significantly associated with school refusal in both boys and girls with ASD.

3. Social personal

Friendship issues

Erbstein (2014) postulate that one in five chronically absent students identified challenges with relationship issues with other students as well as adults at the school as a major reason for school refusal. Havuk and Magen Ingul (2021) identify this a school alienation. If students feel they have no friends in school this may lead *to a process* of increased distancing from different aspects of school.

Poor sleep hygiene

Suni (2022) states that poor sleep can harm academic achievement in several ways such as: decreased attention, impaired memory, poor decision making, aggression, excessive daytime sleepiness and depression and anxiety. Consequently, sleeping problems have been tied to increased absences in school. Furthermore, poor sleep is tied to physical problems such as headaches and pain and in turn contributes to absence due to illness.

Poor diet and nutrition/obesity/energy levels

Finn et al (2018) contend that childhood obesity may in fact have a significant impact on engagement and subsequent academic success. In school settings, students with obesity encounter lower expectations for school success which can lead to avoidance. They found that simple relationship between BMI and achievement was confirmed and demonstrated that BMI was negatively related to

academic achievement. There is evidently a link between obesity and general health complaints. Moreover, Havik et al (2015) identify subjective health complaints, such as headache, stomach-ache, muscle pain, feeling unwell, or feeling tired as the most frequently self-reported reasons for absences from school. Therefore, poor health is evidently a risk factor for EBSA.

4. Psychological wellbeing

Cyp temperament

Temperament can be defined as an individual difference in the ability to experience and express primal emotions (Potmesilova and Potmesil, 2021) Temperament has an effect on school results amongst children (Keogh, 2003). For school education, therefore, what is important is how the child is able to manage its temperament and project it into activity, perseverance, and balance in response to stimuli (McClelland and Wanless, 2012). Without this ability school refusal behaviours may begin to occur.

Lack of resilience

Finning et al (2019) in their study identified a lack of resilience as a key risk factor for attendance problems. They found a difference in levels of resilience between young people that experienced adversity and those who hadn't. Effectively they found that students with a lack of resilience were described as being sensitive to seemingly small triggers such as minor peer conflict. O Malley(2015) coins the term 'snowflake generation'. The snowflake generation is kind, thoughtful and compassionate, with a tendency to be over-introspective, overly concerned with their emotions and manifest "a glaring lack of tolerance to stress or emotional difficulties".

Mental health diagnosis

EBSA or school refusal in itself is not a diagnosis however it is a symptom that can be associated with several other diagnoses, for example, social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobia, major depression, oppositional defiant disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, among others (Kawsar et al 2022). These diagnoses all generate extra risk factors for EBSA.

ACES

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) relating to poverty, homelessness, school violence, bullying, violence in the home, bereavement, family separation, divorce, neglect, addiction and neighbourhood violence can all impact on young person's ability to attend school. Stempel et al (2017) cited in Devenney and O Toole (2021) have linked ACEs with prolonged school absenteeism and therefore can be linked to EBSA

Identity issues including sexual identity.

According to Glen (2021) young people experiencing identity issues have had a negative experience in school and the stress that this causes puts them at a greater risk of not achieving their full potential, leaving school early and experiencing mental health problems. Members of the LGBTQ community are a group at risk for increased absenteeism due to fear, avoidance, and higher rates of depression and anxiety than their heterosexual peers, particularly when they are trying to figure out their identity (Burton et al 2014).

1.3.2 Family Risk Factors

Family risk factors can be categorised as follows:
- **Poor Parental Health**
- **Addiction/substance misuses**
- **Parenting Style**
- **Family Transitions**
- **Parents educational Experiences**
- **Cultural differences**

1. **Poor parental mental health**

If there are poor parental mental health children may not be as organised and ready for school. From a psychodynamic perspective, school refusal can be an emotional problem arising from a dependent relationship especially with mother (Christogiorgos & Giannakopolous, 2014). Illness and poor physical health are also identified as risk factors.

2. Addiction/Substance Misuse

Parental alcoholism constitutes a risk for their children for poor academic performance (Chanely, Harris, Blum, & Resnick, 1993a, 1993b). Casas- Gil and Navarro-Guzman (2002) found that where there are parental substance misuse children scored significantly lower on all school performance measures than children in control group. Key factors were number of school grade, s repeated academic performance and skipped school days. Increased school absenteeism and dropout risk has also been linked to parents with alcoholism.

3. Parenting Style

Diana Baumrind (1967) identified two key dimensions of parental behaviour.

- Warmth versus hostility

- Restrictiveness versus permissiveness

Combining these dimensions yields four parenting styles that are associated with different patterns of child development (Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002).

Permissive parents are not demanding, with children not having many responsibilities and being allowed to regulate their behaviour and the majority of their choices. Children are thought of as equal to the parent.

Authoritative parents are controlling but warm they establish clear rules, consistently enforce them and reward children's compliance with support. This style is thought to be the most positive for childhood outcomes with children having higher self-esteem and higher achievers in school with fewer conduct problems.

Neglectful parents provide neither warmth nor rules or guidance. Their children are most likely to be insecurely attached having low achievement motivation and disturbed peer relationships and to be impulsive and aggressive. This is thought to be associated with the most negative developmental outcomes.

Authoritarian parents also exert control but do so within a cold, unresponsive or rejecting relationship. Children are thought to have lower self-esteem, be less popular with peers and perform poorly in school (Holt et, al, 2019).

Parenting style can result in school withdrawal which is a significant risk factor for EBSA. Reid (2002) categorised school withdrawal as : 1) parents who have an antieducation perspective (belligerent); 2) laissez-faire parents who support any actions taken by their child; 3) frustrated parents who have failed in their efforts to get their child to school; 4) desperate parents who need their children at home to

look after them; and 5) adjusting parents who are young, single, or come from ethnic minority backgrounds. These are all significant risk factors for EBSA.

4. Family transitions

Separation

There are some well documented factors that place children at risk of EBSA alongside with these, changes in circumstances in the home such as separation, parental conflict; bereavement may have an impact on EBSA (Learnsheffield.co.uk., 2022).

Parental conflict

The study shows that inharmonious family with busy parents who do not emphasise on academic achievement could contribute towards school absenteeism (Zahari & Low, 2015), regardless of what type of family the child comes from whether its intact or broken one. When the adults are not taking care of the child's well-being and education the children will take advantage of this situation by skipping school (Learnsheffield.co.uk., 2022).

5. Parents Education experiences

Parent's educational attainment

Parental involvement is a key aspect of a child attendance, families of youths with school refusal behaviour are often marked by poor cohesion and considerable conflict, enmeshment, isolation, and detachment. Recent evidence affirms these findings (Chapman, G., 2007, March, Lagana, 2004). In the study of inpatient and outpatient youths with school attendance difficulties presented earlier, many reported conflict at home (43%) and family separation (21%) (McShane et al., 2001). Increased school absenteeism and dropout risk has also been recently linked to parents with alcoholism (Casas-Gil & Navarro-Guzman, 2002).

Parent's value of education

Most school refusing families are very close. They display little mobility from generation to generation, often living in the same house or next door. Further, "schooling" goes against their traditions in that it prepares the child to lead an independent life away from home and family. One hundred years ago they represented the norm; the multi-generational nature of the phenomenon should not

be overlooked. School refusal is a complex phenomenon involving many variables and can be conceptualised as a dysfunctional social system involving the child, the family and the wider social context (M, Lang, 1982).

Parents fearful of schools and professionals/ Class differences

School officials commonly lament that many parents are uninvolved in their child's education and school attendance. Several researchers have ascribed this partially to cultural factors such as parent–school official language barriers and other cultural differences, lower family acculturation, parental opposition to a child's distance from the family via pursuit of higher education, relaxed attitudes about developmental milestones or self-reliance skills, school-based racism and discrimination, and parental mistrust of school officials (Franklin & Soto, 2002).

6. Cultural differences

The Irish education system's failure to consider Traveller culture has meant that that a community that is already segregated is isolated even further.

Discrimination also plays a significant role in Traveller experiences of school. 56.3% of participants claimed that they had experienced discrimination by teachers or staff while in school. Participants spoke about being put to the back of class, not being allowed to partake in certain subjects and being called names by teachers or staff. 68.8% of participants also claimed they had been discriminated against by other students. being excluded from games, being ignored and being talked about like you were not in the room. When asked about their overall experience in school many said they had received no encouragement from teachers or staff. Participants who had not received direct discrimination from teachers, felt that the general attitude from teachers in schools was that of indifference. Many participants said that further education never occurred to them those that had considered further education said they did not receive much support when they expressed desire to progress. Most of the participants said that while they did not receive any active discouragement from parents to leave school, they did not receive encouragement to stay either. These findings have confirmed previous literature on the subject including areas of segregation and discrimination. 50% of participants said they received educational supports in school. Educational supports were described as a helping teacher or a separate class. Of the participants that received educational supports in school 31.7

% said they were not assessed as having needed the supports. Some parents also spoke about their lack of awareness when it came to furthering their own children's education claiming they would not know where to go if their child wanted to progress. Certain participants also felt that Travellers themselves were a barrier to staying in school. They felt that cultural pressures played a part with early school leavers. Structural issues were also mentioned as a barrier with participants acknowledging that they found it hard in their current unofficial accommodation to get children ready for school. Washing facilities and lack of central heating in winter was emphasized as a big problem.

1.3.3 Community Risk Factors

Community Risk factors can be categorised as follows:

- **Antisocial behaviour**
- **Criminality**
- **Wealth and Social Status**
- **Increased pressure to achieve academically.**
- **Inconsistent professional advice.**

Antisocial behaviour

Johnson et al (2009) explored connection between adult antisocial behaviour and poor academic achievement and school refusal. Young people entering adulthood that display behavioural symptoms such as stealing and setting fire to things tend to perform poorly within the school environment which is evident through low grades and achievement test scores. They are more likely to drop out of school and not attend college. Although this study was carried out on both boys are girls between the ages of 17 and 25 the study discusses that this stemmed back to early childhood due to generalisation and children and young people growing up with violence in the household.

Criminality

Sobba (2018) postulates that students who came from communities with high levels of social disorganization and neighbourhood disorder were more likely to fear

victimisation and develop school avoidant behaviours in areas with high levels of criminality. Therefore, the community can also create risk factors for EBSA.

Wealth and status/ hidden shame

Luthar (2003) discusses the pressures on students that come with a wealthy status and are compared to other students that come with a poor status. Although these students' attainment and grades in the education system are flawless, they come with their own problems. Compared to students with a lower status, wealthy students are at a high risk of suffering with anxiety, depression, and substance misuse due to the pressure to achieve and in turn they suffer emotionally by isolation from their parents.

Increased pressure to achieve academically.

Vatterott (2019) argues that pressure to succeed academically can lead to psychological stress and overwork. This can create a feeling of being overwhelmed which in turn can lead to anxiety and then avoidance of the situation.

Inconsistent professional advice

Karmakar(2017) discuss the importance of consistency for youths in all aspects of development. Karmakar doesn't explicitly discuss EBSA but does state that when parents and professionals provide consistent and complimentary advice young people engage in more pro social behaviours and have improved mental health. Therefore, leading to conclusion that inconsistency can lead to risk factors for EBSA

1.3.4 School based Risk Factors

School based risk factors can be categorised as follows:
- **Lack of knowledge re EBSA and wellbeing/anxiety**
- **Not reviewing attendance early**
- **Bullying**
- **Transitions**
- **Relationship difficulties/peers and teachers**

- **Journey to school**

Lack of knowledge of EBSA

EBSA is a multifactorial concept which therefore requires a broad understanding of how to respond to this. Some school staff may not fully understand it and best ways to respond. Jones et al (2019) contend that it is imperative for all principals, teachers, and all staff to have a shared understanding and awareness of EBSA so it can be identified as soon as possible. They should demonstrate a commitment to the social and wellbeing of the young people and ensure that plans, policies, systems, and activities are all in place which then should be monitored and evaluated. Without these commitments EBSA may be misunderstood and unfortunately exaggerated by incorrect responses

Not reviewing attendance early

Section 22 of The Education Welfare Act (2000) outlines that schools should have mechanisms in place for the identification at an early stage of students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems. In line with this requirement Tuslas guidance document on Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance(2015) highlights the importance of noticing concerns re attendance at an early stage to respond appropriately

Bullying

According to Ochi et al (2020) and Sobba(2018) one of the leading causes of school refusal is bullying, which is defined by the feelings of students who are bullied or not, and psychological suffering caused by a psychological or physical attack. Sobba (2018) states that schools need to ensure that bullying is identified and addressed at an early stage to remove risk factor for school refusal.

Transitions

Smyth(2017) in a growing up in Ireland report highlighted the significance of transitions for children, particularly the move from primary to post primary school. She contends that while the transition to post primary offers challenges for all students, some groups of young people have been found to experience greater

difficulties than others. O'Brien (2004) reports that students in schools serving a more disadvantaged population appear more reluctant to transfer to second-level school and are worried about more difficult schoolwork in the new school. Therefore, times of transition are a risk factor for EBSA to emerge.

Relationship difficulties

Malcolm et al (2003) in their research found that reasons for absences from school can be problems with their subjects and with teachers. They also found that students can struggle with the amount of school rules, the size and complexity of secondary schools. These difficulties can lead to increased illness and absence from school leading to total avoidance.

Journey to school

Michail et al (2021) explored young people's experiences travelling to school which highlighted some issues with the travel to school. The study found that some young people had fears for their personal safety such as crossing the roads and the speed of cars and being abducted, others noted that they would come across bullies on the street. For some cycling and walking to school, would cause them fatigue and sometimes falling off bikes and scooters and injuring themselves. Traveling by car or public transport often made them late for school due to slow traffic and late buses. Therefore, it would be worth considering the journey to school as another risk factor for EBSA

1.4 What are the Protective/Resilience Factors

1.4.1 Individual/CYP Protective Factors

Individual protective factors can be categorised as follows:

- **Developing ambition, aspiration and motivation**
- **Increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, value in themselves**
- **Developing feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging**
- **Having positive experiences where they can succeed.**
- **Holding positive relationships with peers or staff**
- **Feeling listened to and understood.**
- **Emotional Literacy-Understanding the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour.**
- **Coping Skills**

Developing ambition, aspiration and motivation

The importance of early intervention and engaging young people in learning educational progression (Knowles, 1997) is crucial considering that, according to research by Gottfredson (2002), young people form more realistic ambitions about their future between 11–14. It is at this age that the influence of peers and wider society increase in importance and at which disengagement from learning is likely to develop (Haywood et al., 2009).

Increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, value in themselves

One of the leading causes of school failure according to much of the professional literature is school avoidance/absence (Gullatt & Lemoine, 1977 cited in Hassan, Jami and Aqeel, 2016) The research suggests that school avoidance is more likely to exist among young people who have low self-esteem (Barth, 1984 cited in Hassan, Jami and Aqeel, 2016). Studies have showed the positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement, and this has shown to impact on worthiness, competence and

a higher sense of self-esteem with seven to fifteen year olds. Some research suggests that academic success becomes less central to self-esteem during the late secondary school years (Bankston & Zhou, 2002 cited in Hassan, Jami and Aqeel, 2016). Further research noted that positive peer relations were instrumental in enhancing self-esteem (also an indicator in its own right as a protective factor against school avoidance/absence) (Hassan, Jami and Aqeel, 2016).

Developing feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging

According to Gristy (2012) a weak sense of belonging at school might also discourage students from pursuing further education. Research data shows that, on average across OECD countries, students in the bottom quarter of the index of sense of belonging were 11 percentage points more likely to expect to end their education at the secondary level or before, than students in the top quarter of the index with a higher sense of belonging

Having positive experiences where they can succeed.

A study by Bandura et al (2001) on the correlation between self-efficacy and career trajectory, cited many social influences as being responsible for a child's perceived efficacy. This was not always linked to actual academic achievement as a key determinant to feeling that they can succeed, but intrinsically related to influences of those around them (Bandura et al., 2001). All of the features that constitute positive school culture and a child centred approach impact on sense of self-efficacy and potential to succeed.

Holding positive relationships with peers and staff

A UK study by Carroll (2010) on significant absence from primary school and peer relationships, revealed that the poor attenders were found to make and to receive fewer friendship choices than those with better attendance records. The participants were year 6 students, 140 whose attendance was 80% or less, of whom 133 were matched with comparable student profile but with better attendance records and across 89 classes (Carroll, T., 2010). Further research data reveals that students report their school experience almost entirely as a social activity. Promoting and supporting

this element of school life may well be a key element in motivating young people to attend school and support their wellbeing (Gristy, 2012).

The implications of student well-being, performance outcomes, belonging and therefore attendance is impacted by positive teacher-student relations according to data from The Programme for International Student Assessment (2012) (OECD, 2015a cited in Gristy, 2012).

Feeling listened and understood

Disciplinary issues impacted on student teacher relationships negatively, with parental involvement factored favourably toward retention. In essence, a "strict but fair" disciplinary climate and balance between **school structure boundaries and respect, listening and a child centred approach contributed to retention** (Malone & McCoy, 2003 cited in Byrne & Smyth, 2010).

Understanding the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour – Emotional literacy

A paper discussing the data behind studies designed to find out how well children aged 7-8 and 10-11 to complete a task requiring them to distinguish between thoughts and behaviours concluded that there was a significant difference between younger and older children, older children performing better. (based on Greenberger and Padesky, 1995) (Quakely et al., 2003). The paper explored ability to meet cognitive demands based on age and selecting the most appropriate intervention/educational tool to support children with emotional literacy from an early age.

Coping skills

Transition from primary into secondary school and the negative effects on self-concept, and experience of anxiety have been widely documented (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittberger, Galton, Morrison & Pell cited in Qualter et al., 2007). It is argued by Qualter et al (2007) that the initial decrease in grades as a common process

of the transition for a student with poor coping skills or weak social support can lead to negative self-concept that begins to undermine the students' academic motivation. In turn, low motivation can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to a further decline in performance.

1.4.2 Family   Factors
Partnership with schools

Examined the significance of school partnership programs in helping families create supportive home environments, increase parent-school communication, recruit parents to help at school and serve on school committees, and provide information to families about how to help students with homework and integrate community-based resources to strengthen school programs . This study showed that schools that had implemented this partnership program had significantly greater student attendance than schools that did not Aswell, schools' effort in engaging families have shown lower levels of chronic absenteeism and lower levels of student behavior problems .

1.4.3 Community Factors

Kearney (2008) and Maynard et al. (2015) also identified community factors that can influence school attendance, including:

• The safety of the neighbourhood

• The availability and adequacy of health and other important services

• The availability of jobs

1.4.4 School Factors

School protective factors can be categorised as follows:

- **Developing CYP's ambition, aspiration and motivation increasing CYP's confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy**
- **Developing CYP's feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging and how this intersects with the schools willingness to work in partnership with others to support the CYP**
- **CYP having positive experiences where they can succeed.**
- **CYP having positive relationships with peers and/or staff**
- **CYP feels listened to and understood.**
- **CYP and staff understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours**
- **School have a willingness to work in partnership with others to support CYP**
- **School support parents in developing their skills and understanding.**
- **Flexible approaches are used in school, including a focus on remaining child centred**

Developing CYP's ambition, aspiration and motivation increasing CYP's confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy

Research by Cassen and Kingdon (2007) and Hayward et al (2008) indicate that young people with more practical than academic aptitudes are more likely to become disengaged from school and that the possibility that more work-based and practical learning objectives could improve engagement. In essence, linking learning with employment may improve ambition, aspiration and motivation to engage in school. Longitudinal research data from a work-related learning programme for 14-16 year olds found that the programmes offered skills-based learning, learning within a new peer group and "being treated like an adult" rated as valued factors to young people in their process (Hall and Raffo, 2004 cited in Haywood et al., 2009).

Developing CYP's feelings of safety, security and a sense of belonging and how this intersects with the schools willingness to work in partnership with others to support the CYP

Clarity, communication and partnership are key to cultivating a culture of inclusivity and partnership between parents, students and teachers and is discussed in the General Awareness Raising Strategies (Section 7.2, Tusla, 2015). The importance of support programmes is raised in section 7.4 with suggestions of breakfast and afterschool groups, a range of activities; art, music, IT, leadership and development programmes, enterprise skill based groups, and mentoring. In a review of research around School Based Mentorship Programmes (SBMPs), Randolph and Johnson (2008) found that connectedness at school is increased, in addition to family and community (Gordon, Downey and Bangert, 2013). Social learning theories, modelling, and exposure to the Zone of proximal learning are implicated in the school experience through both teacher-student and mentor-student relationship (Bandura, Vygotsky, (Holt et al., 2019)

CYP having positive experiences where they can succeed.

A study by Bandura et al (2001) on the correlation between self-efficacy and career trajectory, cited many social influences as being responsible for a child's perceived efficacy. This was not always linked to actual academic achievement as a key determinant to feeling that they can succeed, but intrinsically related to influences of those around them (Bandura et al., 2001). All of the features that constitute positive school culture and a child centred approach impact on sense of self-efficacy and potential to succeed.

CYP having positive relationships with peers and/or staff.

Weller (2007) argues that young people see school as a social encounter and not just a learning environment. Positive peer relationships in this context requires significant amounts of thought and energy by schools to support friendship development "particularly in transition phases (Galton and Morrison, 2000).

Student engagement is greatly influenced by teacher-student relations, and promoted by the promotion of healthy social and emotional development by creating a caring and respectful learning environment by school staff (Anderman, 2003; Battistich et al., 1995; Chiu et al., 2016; Ma, 2003; Noble et al., 2008 cited in Gristy, 2012). The Programme for International Student Assessment data (2012) has shown better performance outcomes and a stronger sense of belonging at school when teacher-student relations are positive and constructive (OECD, 2015a cited in Gristy, 2012).

CYP feels listened to and understood.

Disciplinary issues impacted on student teacher relationships negatively, with parental involvement factored favourably toward retention. In essence, a "strict but fair" disciplinary climate and balance between **school structure boundaries and respect, listening and a child centred approach contributed to retention** (Malone & McCoy, 2003 cited in Byrne & Smyth, 2010).

CYP and staff understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours

The biological and psychological developmental stage and its significance in the school setting will inform delivery of programmes to cultivate this understanding and also

A paper discussing the data behind studies designed to find out how well children aged 7-8 and 10-11 to complete a task requiring them to distinguish between thoughts and behaviours concluded that there was a significant difference between younger and older children, older children performing better. (based on Greenberger and Padesky, 1995) (Quakely et al., 2003). The paper explored ability to meet cognitive demands

based on age and selecting the most appropriate intervention/educational tool to support children with emotional literacy from an early age.

School have a willingness to work in partnership with others to support CYP

Tusla's Statement of Strategy also addresses the importance of the child as an individual and within the spheres of family and school, highlighting standards and proficiencies of staff, parental and interdisciplinary collaboration (working in partnership), valuing diversity and challenging stereotypes and fostering personal and academic responsibility in students (Tusla, 2015).

School support parents in developing their skills and understanding.

A recent report by the Social Exclusion Task Force (December 2008) notes that parents are the most important influence on children's aspirations. It is noted that schools can encourage parents to engage in their child's learning by providing parents with frequent information about their child's progress, providing general information about parenting and information about how to deal with bullying (Owen et al, 2008).

Re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools Ofsted 2008 undertook a survey of 29 secondary schools to identify good practice in re-engaging disaffected students in their learning. The report emphasises the importance of engaging parents and carers in supporting young people. 36 All the schools identified a close partnership with parents or carers as fundamental to re-engaging students. One head-teacher commented that 'working in partnership with parents or carers is the most powerful process that we have in schools for bringing about lasting and effective change.' (Goodall et al., 2010)

Flexible approaches are used in school, including a focus on remaining child centred

According to Tunnard et al (2008) flexibility in learning provision gives young people a sense of control over their learning and also encourages those who have initially disengaged to re-engage in learning (Hillage and Aston, 2001 cited in Haywood et al., 2009). Barnardo's (2008) posits that flexibility in learning provision in the form of

afterschool, part-time, blended learning for example is a primary means of helping young people to re-engage with learning (Haywood et al, 2009).

In a review of research around School Based Mentorship Programmes (SBMPs), Randolph and Johnson (2008) found that connectedness at school is increased, in addition to family and community (Gordon, Downey and Bangert, 2013). Social learning theories, modelling, and exposure to the Zone of proximal learning are implicated in the school experience through both teacher-student and mentor-student relationship (Bandura, Vygotsky, (Holt et al., 2019)

1.5 What works with EBSA?

Baker and Bishop, 2015 identified key factors that increase the probability of reducing EBSA. These include:

 - Intervening early

 - Working with parents

 - Working in a flexible manner paying attention to the individual case and function served by non-attendance.

 - Emphasising the need for rapid return to school alongside good support and adaptations within the school environment

Kearney emphasised the importance of questions that help to reveal the function of the behaviour, e.g.,

- Finding out about what provokes distress while in school, e.g., finding out whether the student shows ***avoidance*** of non-social/evaluative school-related situations.
- Checking which specific social / evaluative situations at school the student may be avoiding by not attending, i.e., ***escape***.
- Questions about ***attention***, e.g., Is the student willing to attend school if a parent accompanied him/her? Are symptoms evident on weekends and holidays?
- Questions about ***tangible reinforcers***, e.g., What does the child do during school hours? Is the child more willing to attend school if incentives were provided for attendance?

In terms of planning an intervention he maintained that it is key to gather specific information on how much school attendance the student can currently tolerate and the importance of their continuing to attend for those periods while being supported and building further attendance from there.

He emphasised also the importance of considering:

- What contextual factors influence the child's absenteeism?
- What cultural or language variables might be impacting on a child's absenteeism/

- What procedures, timelines and obstacles exist for reintegrating the child to school?

Dr Kearney advocated **multi-agency collaboration** not only in addressing absenteeism but in terms of sharing information, tracking students and even joint policy development. He cautioned that we should avoid deficit and reductionist approaches and should shift focus from absenteeism toward positive policies on school reengagement. He suggested that the focus should be on the intersectionality of poverty and disability, root cause analysis and multiple risk factors.

Kearney (2018) explores intervention strategies for children with considerable anxiety about attending school, or refusing school for negative reinforcement. These strategies focus on the key response components of anxiety, including physical, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. Interventions for the physical aspect of anxiety include somatic management techniques such as muscle relaxation training and breathing retraining. Interventions for the cognitive aspect of anxiety include cognitive restructuring techniques that focus on developing more realistic thoughts and challenging negative thoughts. Interventions for the behavioural aspect of anxiety include different ways of gradually reintegrating a child into school, or exposure-based practices.

His chapter covers contingency management and family-based practices for children refusing school for positive reinforcement outside of school. Detailed recommendations are made for instituting morning routines, attending to appropriate behaviours, providing incentives and disincentives as needed, and altering parent commands. In addition, family work can include agreements for problem-solving and enhanced communication, such as contracts, as well as work with parents to modify academic requirements in line with a particular youth's attendance status and potential pathway toward graduation. Other recommendations include escorting youth to school, increasing supervision, helping a youth refuse offers to miss school, and implementing attendance journals, among others.

School based intervention factors

Study 1: Nuttall and Woods (2013) propose an "ecologically situated model of intervention for school refusal behaviour" which "indicates an interaction of child, psychological support, family support, professional and systemic factors" (p.347).

Nuttall and Woods (2013) selected two case studies within their U.K. local authority which were deemed initially to be school refusers and who through the interaction of family, professional and school interventions had returned to school for attendance of 80% or above for at least one term within the last two years. In this instance no specific interventions were described, rather the study sought to examine the critical success factors across both case studies in order to consider critical elements in terms of psychological factors, support for psychological factors, factors supporting the family and role of professionals and systems. They gathered data in relation to the cases through interview with parents, young person, school staff and other professionals and used six stage thematic analysis to analyse data. The findings are reported in Table 2 using the themes identified across the data including 'psychological factors', 'support for psychological factors', 'factors supporting the family' and 'role of professionals and systems':

Critical Success Factors in intervention across both case studies in Nuttall and Woods (2013)

Psychological factors
-Developing feelings of safety, security and belonging at home and school
-Developing confidence, self-esteem and value
-Developing aspiration and motivation
Support for psychological factors
-The school having a positive, nurturing approach
-Positive experiences at home and at school such as socialising and friendship development
-Encouragement and positive attention from family members and peers
-Taking an interest in the person as a whole such as personalised rewards and personalised contact whether at school or not
-"A flexible and individualised approach to ensure preparation for and access to learning" (p356) such as reintegration planning including sufficient time for reintegration, flexible and reduced timetable
- Making a positive contribution such as collaboratively developing goals
-Supporting social interaction and communication. In this case the student was unable to cope with large groups

- "Developing understanding of thoughts, feelings and behaviour" (p.356) (in one case)

Factors supporting the family.

-Positive relationships between home and school

-Developing parental skills in implementing firm boundaries and not allowing enjoyable activities which reinforced non-attendance

-Avoiding comparisons to family members (in one case)

Role of professionals and systems

- "Early identification and assessment of need to inform intervention" (p.358). Frequent monitoring of attendance with immediate follow-up by learning mentor

- "Collaborative working between professionals" (p.358)

-"Discussions about the impact of not going to school" (p.358)

-"A key adult who was available" (p.358). The importance of a key adult and flexible access to 1:1 support was deemed very important.

- A whole school approach which ensured the support and communication of senior leadership

-The "persistence and resilience of professionals" (p.359) was also deemed important

Study 2: Baker and Bishop (2015) explored 'extended non-attendance' from the perspective of four student's aged 11-16 using semi-structured interviews. Findings are reported as themes including 1) Perception of causes of non-attendance, 2) School and other support experiences, 3) Punishment, blame and control, 4) Friendship and belonging and 5) The future impact on the child's phenomenon.

Causal factors perceived by the participants refer to difficulties with mental health, bullying, fatigue and social difficulties. Factors across participants in relation to school and other support experiences include the following:

- Participants reported not enough emphasis on a gradual approach to reintegration.
- Participants reported considerable delays (months) between non-attendance and receiving support.

- Community Adolescent Mental Health Service involvement was helpful with three participants reporting medication usage.
- Other support services were fragmented.
- Friendship can be a positive connection to returning to school or it can be an exacerbating factor through being excluded from social groups

Baker & Bishop (2015) make a number of recommendations based on their research including training for schools to improve their understanding of school refusal, ensuring that schools have a key person with lead responsibility and ensuring that intervention is offered quickly.

In the case of Baker and Bishop (2015) and Nuttall and Woods (2013) the findings suggested a couple of factors common to both studies as important to successful attendance and resolution of difficulties including:

- Early intervention
- A key or lead adult within school
- The role of peer friendships as a protective factor or barrier

The evidence regarding strategies which work in schools is currently limited but emerging, and further studies with greater participant numbers are needed to establish the evidence regarding efficacy and the applicability across causative factors and duration of the refusal.

2. Primary Aged Intervention

Study 1: Kearney, Chapman and Cook (2005) explored the assessment and treatment of students aged 5-9 years presenting with school refusal behaviour. They base their recommendations on the assessment of data collected in an out-patient clinic for 55 students with school refusal behaviour. Data examined included "structured diagnostic interviews, child self-report measures, parent and teacher checklists, daily logbooks and consultations with school officials" (p.216). They used combined parent and child information from the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule and note that approximately 80% of the sample displayed anxiety or phobias. Kearney et al. (2005) subsequently examined functional profiles which indicated attention from significant

others to be the primary function in 55% of the sample with avoidance of negative stimuli and pursuit of reinforcers outside school to be the function in 20% of cases. They delineate their recommendations for treatment based on function and are outlined as follows:

Predominantly attention seeking behaviour:

- Parent based treatment approach which focuses on the establishment of routines, the use of incentives and disincentives for attendance and non-attendance, and the effects of "avoidance and acquiescence" (p.220).

Predominantly anxiety about school:

- They advocate somatic management techniques, education about anxiety, cognitive intervention depending on capacity and exposure-based practices.

Predominantly reinforcers outside of school:

- Kearney et al. (2005) advocate family-based support which emphasizes contingency contracts, and increased supervision

Study 2: Gosschalk (2004) describes the treatment of acute onset school refusal behaviour in a five year old girl with separation anxiety disorder using behavioural approaches. Gosschalk (2004) notes the behavioural approach of the parent being to keep the child at home when she cried or complained of being sick and to take her home if the child had tantrums at the class door. Treatment consisted of the following:

- Parent consultation regarding SAD
- Parent and child session coaching and modelling separation techniques
- Weekly telephone support
- One session with the class teacher regarding management of separation at the classroom door
- Reward system for successful attendance daily
- Shaping: Practicing separation on non-preschool days including weekends using reward and relaxation techniques

Results indicate successful resolution of school refusal behaviours after seven weeks with follow-ups noting successful attendance and improved emotional well-being. This study is useful in its illustration of treatment method used to successfully resolve school refusal behaviour in a five-year-old student with separation anxiety.

Studies using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

The four studies reviewed are not outlined here for the sake of brevity. Of the literature reviewed in relation to cognitive behavioural approaches all four CBT based studies showed improvement with considerable return to school, therefore indicating a positive role for each CBT based treatment. However, in all cases follow up assessment showed that there was a considerable number who returned to school refusal/reluctance to attend school or left school altogether. In reviewing the studies it appears that the intensive time commitment (duration varied between 3-12 weeks and frequency varied from daily to once weekly) with support from knowledgeable professionals using psychological strategies and not just CBT was a key driver in the return to school. Of note is the success of the medication and CBT approach over the CBT and placebo approach. What is also clear is that without ongoing intensity of treatment there is considerable relapse in this group in general and the mitigating factor for why some do and others don't relapse may be to do with initial complexity. The link between initial complexity and potential to return to school refusal (within the same school as opposed to alternative provision) once treatment is completed warrants further research.

Parents and EBSA

he aim of this study was to explore parents' perspectives on the role of school factors in school refusal (SR). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 parents who had experienced SR with their own child. They identified several school factors related to SR. Some of these findings suggest that students who are prone to SR need more predictability and more teachers' support than they sometimes get in school. Their need for predictability seems to occur particularly during less structured activities and during transitions in school. Findings also imply that disruptive behaviour among classmates and harsh management from teachers affects perceived predictability and support for SR-prone students. All parents expressed concern about bullying, and roughly a third of them reported that their child had been a victim of bullying.

Insufficient adaptation of schoolwork was also mentioned relatively frequently. Parents emphasized that adaptation of schoolwork needs to be done in close cooperation with the student and parents to avoid negative differentiation from classmates or stigma. Finally, several parents commented that teachers and schools need more knowledge about SR and felt that schools needed a more coordinated approach to supporting students who are at risk of SR.

Summary

Emotionally based school avoidance is a multifactorial matter which encompasses risk and resilience factors across all domains from the child/ young person, family, school and the community. It is therefore evidence that supports need to exist in a continuum with collaboration at the core. Due to its multifactorial nature supports need to be tailored as no child or young person experiencing EBSA are the same.

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