Does best friendship quality protect teenagers with a negative relationship with their teacher from dropout?

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Background

- Dropping out of high school is associated with high risks of unemployment, mental and physical health problems, and criminal behavior (Lafond, 2010) and is influenced by poor teacher-student relationships, which diminish the social support students can receive (Lagana, 2004; Downing & Harrison, 1990).
- However, friendship quality is associated with school engagement and achievement levels, and could therefore act as a protective factor.
- In fact, Lagana (2004) showed that the main difference between students who are at low versus high risk of dropping out is their peer support.
- Furthermore, socializing with peers is an important factor motivating teenagers to stay in school (Kortering, Konold & Glutting, 1998).

Hypothesis

Hypothesis: having high-quality relationships with best friends protects students who are at risk for dropping out of school because of their negative relationships with teachers (see Figure 1).

Method

Participants and Procedure
- 141 participants (mean age = 16.60, 43 boys, 98 girls) from two high schools in the suburban areas of Montreal, Canada
- Assessed in Grades 10 and 11, they filled out online questionnaires in school.

Measures
- Quality of student-teacher relationship
  - Perception of School Context Questionnaire (10 items; α = .82; likert 1-4; Gallaud & Phillips, 2005).
  - Friendship quality: Positive feelings towards one’s best friend
    - McGill Friendship Questionnaire – Respondent affection (8 items; α=.93; likert 1-4; Mendelson & Alboad, 1999)
- Dropout risk
  - Evaluation Toolkit for Potential Dropouts (Janouz et al., 2007)
- Multiple linear regression controlling for sex, age and initial dropout risk level using PROCESS (see Table 1; Hayes, 2012)

Results

- Student-teacher relationship quality negatively predicts teenagers’ dropout risk.
- This link is marginally moderated by best friendship quality (see Table 1).
- When breaking down the interaction at three levels of the moderator (low, average and high), results indicate that a low quality of student-teacher relationship increases dropout risk at low and average levels of best friendship quality, but it does not affect dropout risk when the quality of this friendship is high.
- Furthermore, one’s dropout risk is the highest if one has both a low relationship quality with his or her teacher and best friend.
- Results also suggest that if one suffers from a low-quality relationship with his or her teacher, one’s high quality of best friendship can act as a protective factor regarding one’s dropout risk (see Figure 2).

Discussion

- In contrast with our hypothesis, the link between student-teacher relationship and dropout risk is marginally moderated by friendship quality.
- Interestingly, the high level of adolescents’ dropout risk induced by having a low-quality relationship with teachers can be diminished by having a high-quality best friendship.
- Prevention efforts aiming to decrease school dropout rates must continue to promote positive teacher-student relationships, and must pay close attention to adolescents who are at heightened risk due to their low-quality relationships with both teachers and close friends.
- Furthermore, prevention programs should strive to increase adolescents’ abilities to develop a high-quality best friendship, knowing that this relationship could protect them from a high dropout risk related to their poor relationship with their teacher.

Table 1: Multiple linear regression

<table>
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<th>Grade 11</th>
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<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.34</td>
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<td>Dropout Risk</td>
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Figure 1: Simple slope of the regression (conditional effect of X on Y at different values of the moderator)

References


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