

Abstract: Predictors of Educational Attainment in a Disadvantaged French-Canadian Sample: A 30-Year Prospective Study (Society for Prevention Research 25th Annual Meeting)



[Search](#) | [Browse by Day](#) | [Presenter Index](#)

## 150 Predictors of Educational Attainment in a Disadvantaged French-Canadian Sample: A 30-Year Prospective Study

### Schedule:

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

Concord (Hyatt Regency Washington, Washington DC)

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Educational attainment predicts health and well-being throughout the lifespan. Although educational attainment is relatively stable across generations, government policy may facilitate access to education and help break the cycle of poverty for some youth. For example, the Quiet Revolution occurring in the province of Québec (Canada) in the 1960s made higher education more accessible by creating CEGEP programs that are shorter and cheaper than university, and by lowering university tuition. This study looks at individual, family and neighborhood factors that have contributed to educational attainment in a sample of disadvantaged youth who attended school shortly after the Quiet Revolution.

**METHOD.** Children from disadvantaged neighborhoods in Montreal, Canada, were screened for risk behavior when they were in 1st, 4th or 7th grade, in 1976-1978. Behavioral characteristics—aggression, withdrawal, and likeability—were measured using a peer nomination procedure (Pekarik, 1976) and standardized within gender. Academic competence was measured with standardized achievement tests in a subsample of participants. Neighborhood risk was an aggregate of % low-income households, % families headed by a single parent, and % households with unemployed individuals in one's neighborhood based on census data. We measured father absence from home with interview data. Last, we assessed early parenthood using age at 1<sup>st</sup> child from interview data when participants were in their 20s or 30s (standardized within gender). Educational attainment came from government records in year 2003-2006. From the initial sample (n = 4109), current analyses only included participants with valid academic competence data and who reported being a parent (n=1067).

**RESULTS.** We ran multinomial regressions with educational attainment as a dependent variable, coded in 5 groups: (1) high school dropouts, (2) high school completers, (3) CEGEP enrollers, (4) CEGEP completers, (5) university enrollers and completers combined (reference category). Academic competence was the most consistent predictor, allowing to distinguish all groups from the reference category. Early parenthood followed, allowing to differentiate groups 1, 2, and 3 (marginal) from the reference group. Last, being a male and presenting aggressive behavior further distinguished high school dropouts from university students.

**DISCUSSION.** Within this disadvantaged sample, the most efficient predictor of educational attainment was academic competence in childhood. From a prevention perspective, such results suggest that early interventions strengthening academic competence in elementary school could have beneficial educational outcomes in the long-term. To this end, early screening of children's academic difficulties can be easily integrated into school systems using information that is readily available (e.g., results from standardized tests). Early parenthood was the second most reliable predictor of low educational attainment. In light of this finding, enhancing sexual education programs in secondary schools might lead not only to health benefits, but also to better educational outcomes, at least for disadvantaged youth.

[Back to: Promoting Child and Youth Well-being: Examples from Child Welfare and Educational Settings](#)

[<< Previous Abstract](#) | [Next Abstract >>](#)