

Long term effects of dropout from school

Follow up expert-seminar – International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) Europe

Documentation of the ICSW follow-up seminar of experts on long term effects of drop-out from schools of secondary education.

Malmö, Sweden 14 - 15 December 2012.

Participants were members of ICSW member associations from the Nordic countries, see list of participants in Annex 1.

Background to the expert seminar.

The seminar was a follow-up to the conference held in Oslo in March 2012. A report from the conference is available at www.icsw.se. The report from the earlier conference raised the issue of consequences of dropout, factors behind dropout and some distinctive features of young people dropping out of school. It also looked into the reasons at individual level for dropping out. Further the conference reported on actions taken by authorities to counter act and prevent dropout and discussed what actions are effective. The conference concluded by discussing what to do and how to go on to improve the response of society to challenge the situation.

In recent years, the need for more systematic work directed towards problems for youth in the Nordic countries, has increasingly been recognized. Young people with special needs and problems have been in focus with regard to this. In short the problem concerns youngsters at risk of severe problems of behaviour and dropout from secondary education and also, for many dropouts, from work. Media and policy makers are expressing worries about this and so are the educational institutions.

The young people affected are in an international terminology identified as NEET, which stands for: Neither Education, Employment or Training. The dropouts from schools are reported to be more likely to be unemployed, users of social assistance support and receivers of disability pension from an early age.

Nordic overview

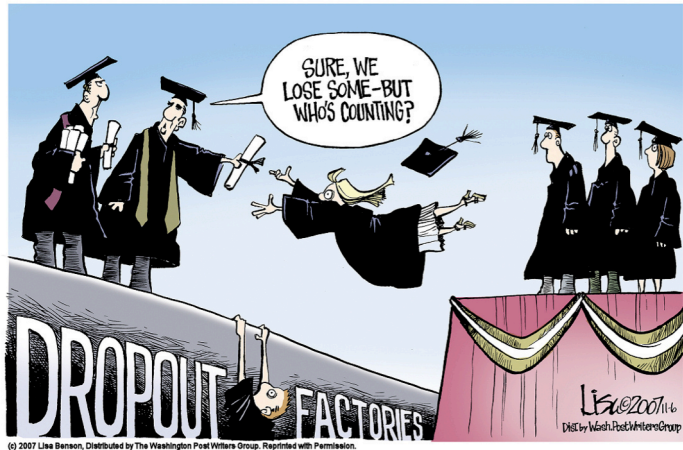
An overview of the general situation for young people and with special focus on marginalized or excluded young people concluded that most young persons in the Nordic countries complete their secondary education and con-

tinue in higher education or are employed. But a fairly large number of young people do not.

Faroe Islands – an example

For the small society of the Faroe Islands the problem of school dropout is particularly difficult affecting society in many ways. One major phenomenon in the country is the widespread attitude of *indifference* and *lack of dreams* and *hope for the future* among young people. More common is the longing for the weekend.

The dropouts are mainly found in the ages 14 to 18 years of age and the main causes are considered to be lack of resources in school. There is no mental health care program for children and youth as is the rule in the other Nordic countries. There is a deficiency of preventive measures and social programs. The main resources are the school nurses and the social services child welfare programs. The misuse of alcohol and drugs is significant especially in some smaller communities. A dramatic rise in the number of divorces may also be part of an explanation.



Worrying Nordic facts

The figures vary between the different Nordic countries. In the period 2008/2009 between 2 and 4.5 per cent of young people aged 20 – 24 years were long term unemployed. Between 8 and 26 per cent of the age group had not completed secondary education. In the year 2011 6 to 9 per cent of the age group 15-24 years were neither in education or employment or training (NEET). Many were dependant of social assistance, 5.5 – 11 per cent. About 10 % of the age cohorts (15-24) are at risk of being permanently left behind from education and work. This is about 300,000 persons. Up to half of them are already excluded permanently.

What is being done?

Efforts by society are taken within mainly four policy areas: Economic policies, labour policies, education policies and social and health policies. What is needed seems to be an economic policy that is more focused on all in employment rather than a balanced budget. In labour policies there is a need for general reinforcement of policy actions of guarantees for youth as well as follow up of actions and policies. In the areas of social and health policy there is need for actions to address mental ill-health and coping oriented projects.

What are the results in the Nordic countries?

Evaluations of labour market programs in the Nordic countries seem to conclude that they are:

- Positive, but limited effects generally
- Best effects are found in programs targeted at vulnerable groups

But we lack systematic knowledge about these things.

Voices of the young

In a thesis from 2009 the long term effects of exclusion on living conditions and problems for young adults with persistent establishment problems during a ten year period of prolonged and troubled establishment was studied.¹ This was done through a study of register data of all persons born 1973 and a survey of a small group of 74 young adults, born 1973 – 1977, who have been long-term unemployed and in need of social assistance since their late teens.

The study showed that the risk to remain in establishment problems (persistently marginalised) is 6-7 times higher among those with early problems and that there is a connection between early marginalisation (age 19-21) and later marginalisation (age 27-29).

There is a greater risk of being long-term unemployed and dependant on social assistance for those with working class or other ethnical background than Swedish. The group of persistently marginalised also leave home earlier and are more often (lone) parents themselves before age 22.

The persistently marginalised have also considerably higher rates of financial problems and social assistance as well as number of days in unemployment. The education level is very low with a substantial part of the group with only compulsory education.

When it comes to health and quality of life, the persistently marginalised have more health related problems than the never marginalised and they are less satisfied with their quality of life in terms of economy, housing, leisure time, friends and society as a whole.

Financial troubles constitute a major problem for almost all of the respondents and that they often experience their standard of living as unreasonably low. A vast majority also have social support from their parents and friends.

The will to work is shared by all the interviewed young adults. An employment is something almost all of them wish more than anything. But regarding participation in active labour market programmes, demanded by the social services, the general attitude towards activation of this kind was negative. Many had been attending several activation programmes of which none led to work.

The young adults in the study reported feelings of shame and inferiority as they are financially depending on others; the social services, parents and

¹ Angelin, A. Den dubbla vanmaktens logik En studie om långvarig arbetslöshet och socialbidragstagande bland unga vuxna. Lund: Lunds universitet; 2009.

creditors and have an experience of powerlessness and decreased autonomy as a consequence of depending on social assistance. The hardest thing about being unemployed and a social assistance recipient was shame, loss of dignity and lacking social recognition, which meant being regarded as work shy, lazy and morally inferior.

The persistently marginalised experience multiple deprivation and more problematic living conditions than the normal population of the same age. They live with many different problems at the same time and lack the resources that could enhance their possibilities to employment e.g. difficulties in completing unfinished upper secondary education.

Three themes stand out in the experiences of the young adults.

- Poverty in the sense of “surviving but not living” (Swedish: *Överleva men inte leva*) with constant worry and stress, psychosocial and health problems.
- Powerlessness in relation to social services and the employment services, when living on the terms of others and still not getting employment. “The tyranny of social subordination”.
- Shame and humiliation reported by 60 per cent[1].

School well-being

School dropout is a good indicator for social exclusion. Some of the causes for dropout and subsequently social exclusion are violence in the home, experiencing bullying by peers and disapproval from adults in school and having learning disabilities.

Two types of social exclusion are described. Silent exclusion can start with signs of shyness in day care, as the child does not speak and may be offered speech therapy and is labeled as different. Later it may develop as school fear around the age of 10 years, when the child is often offered psychotherapy. This may in upper teens result in depression

Overview of research and efforts in Norway

Background

The need to focus on youth depends on several factors. There are far too many drop outs. In the past two decades there has been a tripling of the number of dropouts; currently 36,000 below the age of 30 are to be considered as dropouts. The costs for the dropout phenomenon relates to loss of production, permanent loss of resources, loss of welfare for individuals and families, third party losses e.g. victims of crime etc. For every young person dropping out the costs can be estimated to 13 – 13 million Norwegian kroner, NOK (approx. € 1.6 – 1.8 million). This equals a total cost of almost NOK 500 billion or € 65 billion a year.

There is now a need for more focus on prevention as large amounts of professional and financial resources have and are being spent on child welfare, mental health, substance abuse care and correctional care. These efforts

by different parts of society can be portrayed as “drying up the floor while the taps are still running”.

There are a number of paradoxes seen in Norway such as a tripling of the number of young people below the age of 30 on disability or rehabilitation benefits. Psychological problems are prevalent with 20 percent reported to have mental health problems and one in five of those who leave high school has serious mental health problems. Norway is in top in Europe when it comes to the number of deaths in overdoses.

The most important arenas for promoting mental health and preventing mental illness are outside of the health sector such as communities, work-places, schools and pre-school.

Youth at risk and the failure zone.

A particular challenge for society is to identify the youth at risk and so called failure zones. The important ages are 13 - 25 years and the transitions from child to adult, from secondary to high school and from high school to employment. Characteristically the youth at risk are often lacking or have unsatisfactory housing such as youth in boarding away from home. They quickly come into vicious circles of substance abuse and crime. The youth at risk can often be victims of abuse or neglect; many have a minority background and struggle with mental health problems. They often have poor skills to live a normal life and are difficult to reach with dismissive and aggressive behaviour.

The support system does not like these young persons and they do not like the support system as they do not feel that they are understood.

Projects

The Nordland project *Ungdom i Svevet (Hovering youth)* in the years 2008 to 2011 had the main objective to identify, test, document and disseminate knowledge on effective approaches, methods and forms of cooperation aimed at young people at risk aged 15 - 25 years in nine municipalities in the north of Norway.

Some recommendations presented were

- Leave the offices and find the youth where they are
- Don't give up
- Let them maintain contact with persons whom they trust
- Communicate with them – do not talk to them
- Care for them and believe in them
- Ask what they need
- The youth are the responsibility of the whole local community
- Tailor initiatives and measures for the individual young person locally and with high level of discretion and individual adaptation

The report, "Don't let go of me" (Ikke slip meg) from Nordland Research, 2012 included 150 young people in education and employment with mental

health problems and showed that an increasing number of young people drop out of education and employment because of mental health problems. 50-89 percent of the young persons had experience of mental health problems, loneliness, bullying and poor economy. Many reported experiencing loneliness and the need for someone to talk to even though many are in treatment. They have sleeping problems and difficulties in getting up in the mornings as well as physical problems. The dropping out often takes place in the transition periods.

Another research report, *Mind the Gap* shows that there is a need for early intervention and prevention, as well as an overall support system that is able to provide coordinated and individual support to young people who drop out. It is not enough to offer basic services if there are gaps between them.

New Possibilities – Ny GIV

The government's strategy to come to terms with the problem of young persons dropping out has the following goals. It is a national task to increase successful completion in Upper Secondary Education and Training from 70 to 75 percent. The project, Ny GIV, was introduced in the autumn 2010 and will last until 2013.

The main focus is on robust follow up of the pupils with the poorest results in the final part of 10th grade and in upper secondary education and training. The target group for Ny GIV is youth between 16 and 21 who are outside of both education and work. The purpose is to strengthen cooperation between schools, monitoring services, vocational training and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV).

Some of the important factors are:

- Employment is the most important factor to prevent poverty
- Completed secondary education is essential for later integration into working life
- Intensive training in reading, writing and mathematics is offered to the weakest students attending last year at secondary school

Changing patterns

The young people of today live under different conditions compared to earlier generations. The transitions that the youth of today experience are more protracted. Adolescence is just a transition between childhood and adulthood. Each generation has different patterns of transition and exhibit different patterns of being juvenile. The young of today move out of home and back in again, often several times (yo-yo patterns).

The rapid changes in society from an industrial society to a service oriented one has resulted in insecure employment conditions with temporary and short time project employments. The young are faced with requirements of both experience and education/training e.g. secondary school is now required to work in a hamburger restaurant. With a quarter of the youth not having completed secondary school this is a serious problem although half of them complete their higher secondary school at a later stage. In addition

the chances for a second chance through complementary schooling have been reduced through cut backs and apprenticeships no longer exist.

Challenges and remaining problems

Remaining problems

The remaining problems seem to be the following

- Too many young people do not complete high school.
- There is a mismatch in the employment sector – young people do not have the skills that the working life demands.
- There is a need for new entrances into working life and employment.
- Too many young persons – particularly persons with a foreign origin/background – are outside: Not in Education, Employment or Training, NEET.
- These factors and conditions create long-term social and socio-economic costs.
- Young people in criminality generate vastly costs.

Persistent troublesome social problems

- There are increased economic divides – lack of social insurances is spreading and growing.
- Unemployment levels remain at high levels regardless of economic fluctuations.
- The pattern of transition into working life of many young people is often unemployment, stress, confusion and exclusion.
- The integration processes of immigrants are lengthy and uncertain, with a low employment rate
- The increasing segregation leads to that we more and more live alongside with people who are similar to ourselves, 'us and them', with few venues for meeting and exchange.

Whose responsibility is this?

The individual young person's non-establishment is being individualized and policies are focused on identifying causes of this within the individual. The result of this kind of policies is that the responsibility is planted on the individual.

The responsibility of the social welfare services to be informed about the social situation of its inhabitants may need to be expanded and include monitoring of young drop outs.

A growing number of young people live on/with disability or rehabilitation benefits and are permanently excluded.

Most families with children have experienced more and more improvements, but those who are outside have gotten it worse. The richest ten percent of the population has in less than 20 years almost doubled (72%) their income, while the poorest ten percent has increased theirs by barely 5 percent..

The income protection system has deteriorated and those who are outside and are economically poor have increased to 24 percent.

The Marmot report shows that all other inequalities can be discussed but health inequalities cannot be denied or warded off. The Marmot report has been repeated in national counterpart units in Denmark and Norway.

Conclusions

- The welfare systems are reversible – can be eroded.
- There is an increasing polarization between the included and the excluded in society – creating poverty.
- This has led to the emergence and reinforcement of dual welfare solutions – separate for the established and the non-established groups.
- These factors lead to serious challenges to the cohesion of society.

Recommendations for action

Seminar participants agreed on the following points as key to reduce / mitigate the alienation of youth.

- Schools must be/become more reality adapted – be inclusive.
- The welfare system must have a compensatory function – remunerations and benefits must be adapted to needs and conditions of today.
- Roles and responsibilities of civil society need to be clarified.
- Respect, protect and fulfil article 12 in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, regarding young people's own influence.
- Strengthen children's and young people's own ability of development (social and emotional learning)
- Develop and make available alternative ways/paths to enter into employment e.g. apprenticeships, mentorships etc.
- There needs to be a more flexible access to supplementary education.
- Basic security is to be guaranteed during illness and unemployment.
- Recreate opportunities to come back – a second and third chance.
- The welfare systems should be rights-based not based and focused on obligations and duties – only.
- We need to do away with the shame of the excluded.

Annex 1

List of participants

Björn Halvorsen	the Nordic Council of Ministers
Sjurdur Johannesen	Faroe Islands
Päivi Nykyri	Finland
Solveig Askjem	Norway
Njål Petter Svensson	Norway
Ellen Therese Sörensen	Norway
Einar Vetvik	Norway
Anna Angelin	Sweden
Elis Envall	Sweden
Thomas Goldberg	Sweden
Eva Holmberg-Herrström	Sweden
Tapio Salonen	Sweden

Annex 2

Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö



The Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö, or the “Malmö Commission” finished their work, 1 of Mars 2013. The Commission was independent and consisted of fourteen commissioners, each with specific areas of expertise within the domains of social sciences, health economy, urban studies and the city of Malmö.

The results of the commission’s work is a report with 24 goals, 72 actions and two over all recommendations:

1. Establish a social investment policy that can even out differences in living conditions and make social systems more equal
2. Change the processes by creating knowledge alliances and democratizing governance

The Commission

The decision to launch a commission was made in May 2010 by the local council of Malmö followed by the appointment of Professor Emeritus, Sven-Olof Isacson to chair the commission in November the same year.

The commission came about in light of the present differences in health observed among different population groups and different areas in Malmö. The quality of health, mortality rates and the ability to self-assess one’s health varied across the city, essentially creating a situation that was considered both unethical and unjust and contradicting of the city’s strategic goals for a socially sustainable Malmö.

Propose strategies for reducing health inequalities

The main task of the commission was to assemble evidence and based on those propose strategies for reducing health inequalities and improve the long term living conditions for the citizens of Malmö.

It is a well-known fact that people in some parts of Malmö live nearly seven years longer than in other parts of the city. Known causes behind this discrepancy in life expectancy and health are that many people lack the fundamental conditions for good health, such as work, education, acceptable housing conditions and economic and social resources.

The commission's task was to propose evidence-based strategies for reducing health inequalities and improve living conditions for all citizens of Malmö, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society.

This assignment means taking on a complex set of challenges to the city of Malmö that demands long term strategic decisions and actions. The entire life span is to be taken into consideration.

WHO central source of inspiration

The Malmö Commission draws on the findings of the WHO report Closing the Gap in a Generation by the Marmot Commission, a leading authority in the study of public health, which, according to the Swedish National Institute of Public Health, constitutes one of the most important contributions to the public health debate during the last decades.

The message from the report is clear: social injustice is literary a question of life and death. It is possible to do something about it, but it requires a shift in the way authorities operates and the transition is likely to take time, at least a generation.

Three priorities

The Malmö Commission focused on three areas of society

- Conditions of growing up for children and young people
- Democracy and influence in society
- Social and economic conditions