

School Refusal Behaviours: The Roles of Adolescent and Parental Factors

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Abstract : School refusal behaviours refer to behaviours to avoid school attendance, chronic lateness in arriving at school, or regular early dismissal. Poor attendance in schools is highly correlated with anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, delinquency, violence, and substance use and abuse. Poor attendance is also a strong indicator of lower achievement in school, as well as problematic social-emotional development. Long-term consequences of school refusal behaviours include fewer opportunities for higher education, employment, and social difficulties, and high risks of later psychiatric illness. Given its negative impacts on youth educational outcomes and well-being, a thorough understanding of factors that are involved in the development of this phenomenon is warranted for developing effective management approaches. This study investigated parental and adolescent factors that may contribute to school refusal behaviours by specifically focusing on the role of parental and adolescents' anxiety and depression, emotion dysregulation, and parental rearing style. Findings are expected to inform the identification of both parental and adolescents' factors that may contribute to school refusal behaviours. This knowledge will enable novel and effective approaches that incorporate these factors to managing school refusal behaviours in adolescents, which in turn improve their school and daily functioning. Results are important for an integrative understanding of school refusal behaviours. Furthermore, findings will also provide information for policymakers to weigh the benefits of interventions targeting school refusal behaviours in adolescents. One-hundred-and-six adolescents aged 12-18 years (mean age = 14.79 years old, SD = 1.78, males = 44) and their parents (mean age = 47.49 years old, SD = 5.61, males = 27) completed an online questionnaire measuring both parental and adolescents' anxiety, depression, emotion dysregulation, parental rearing styles, and adolescents' school refusal behaviours. Adolescents with school refusal behaviours reported greater anxiety and depression, with their parents showing greater emotion dysregulation. Parental emotion dysregulation and adolescents' anxiety and depression predicted school refusal behaviours independently. To date, only limited studies have investigated the interplay between parental and youth factors in relation to youth school refusal behaviours. Although parental emotion dysregulation has been investigated in relation to youth emotion dysregulation, little is known about its role in the context of school refusal. This study is one of the very few that investigated both parental and adolescent factors in relation to school refusal behaviours in adolescents. The findings support the theoretical models that emphasise the role of youth and parental psychopathology in school refusal behaviours. Future management of school refusal behaviours should target adolescents' anxiety and depression while incorporating training for parental emotion regulation skills.

Keywords : adolescents, school refusal behaviors, parental factors, anxiety and depression, emotion dysregulation

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