

# Familial and individual reasons for student dropout: schools' perception<sup>1</sup>

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The main objective of the research was to identify individual and familial factors students cite as the reasons for dropping out of school or being at the risk of doing so. We interviewed a total of twelve students who dropped out of school or are at the risk of dropping out of primary (six students) or secondary school (six students) and four parents. A semi-structured interview was used. We singled out four categories of students, determined by their perception of the reasons for dropping out of school. Those categories included: underage pregnancy, assuming a parental role, problematic behaviour (thefts, fights) and weak motivation for school and learning. It seems justified to look for a typology of dropout cases since each of the selected groups of students requires specific preventive measures in order to secure continuation of their education. Furthermore, research has shown that, when it comes to their children dropping out of school, parents tend to blame the child's character traits they deem unchangeable. The failure of school staff to help the child further encourages this belief in parents.

**Key words:** school dropout, risk factors, typology of dropout cases, qualitative methodology.

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## Introduction

It is clear that the reasons why students drop out of school are the key question the researchers into student dropout have been trying to answer (Rumberger, 2004). However, this is not an easy task. Namely, there is a consensus that this phenomenon is complex and an empirical confirmation that numerous factors and their interaction can contribute to its occurrence (Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 2004; DeWitte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot & van den Brink, 2013). Attempting to create a conceptual framework that would include research in this area, Rumberger distinguishes between two perspectives (Rumberger, 2004). One is individual (emphasising student characteristics), and the other institutional (emphasising the characteristics of the family, school and wider community).

Family characteristics are one of the most researched areas within the institutional perspective (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). A large number of findings indicate that, regardless of the amount of time and effort invested in increasing educational equity, dropout rates are higher in students from poorer families (Blue & Cook, 2004; Cataldi, Laird & KewalRamani, 2009; DeWitte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot & van den Brink, 2013; Dorn, 1996; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986; Entwisle, Alexander & Steffel Olson, 2005; Ishitani & Snider, 2006; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Teese, & Walstab, 2002) and the families belonging to national minorities (Finn, 1989). The same trend can be expected in Serbia, since a smaller percentage of Roma children are included in both primary (Pešikan & Ivić, 2016) and early and pre-school education (UNICEF, 2014). However, research into these factors is accompanied by some uncertainties. A question often posed when analysing the socio-economic status of a family is how much it has to deviate from the average in order for a child to drop out of school. Some authors claim that socio-economic status of a family represents a significant factor only when the family income is below the poverty line (Orthner, Cook, Rose & Randolph, 2002). Moreover, it is debatable whether low socio-economic status is enough, or whether student attrition takes place when it is combined with other aspects of family life, such as unstable structure and functionality of the family (Pong, & Ju, 2000).

The lack of a parental couple is a factor related to student attrition. The incidence of dropping out of school increases if a child is raised without biological parents or if one parent is not present (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006; Dustmann & van Soeast, 2008; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003; Olsen & Farkas, 1989; Rumberger, 1983; Plank, DeLuca & Estacion, 2005). In other words, children from single-parent families (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006) or those brought up with a step-mother or a step-father have a greater tendency to drop out of school (Olsen & Farkas, 1989; Plank, DeLuca & Estacion, 2005). Interestingly, the data from one longitudinal study

analysing the influence of the change in family structure on dropout frequency indicated that, when socio-economic status is controlled, children living only with their mother are at a lower risk of dropping out of school compared to the children living with a father only or with a stepmother/stepfather (Song, Benin & Glick, 2012). Furthermore, the children raised in families with many siblings, namely, where the number of siblings exceeds five, have less parental support necessary for progressing at school (Dustmann & van Soeast, 2008; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2003).

The lack of parental involvement in the upbringing and the care for children, as well as the lack of support, is a significant predictor of student attrition, independently of income or ethnicity (Cooper, Chavira & Mena, 2005). The results of one study have revealed that if a child has lower cognitive abilities and the parents who left school or dropped out of it early, the probability of the child also dropping out of school if the parents value education highly is 4.5%. However, this probability rises dramatically to 40% if parents dropped out of school and do not value education (Foley, Gallipoli & Green, 2009). It is important to emphasise that research shows a discrepancy between parents' attitudes towards education and their actual behaviour (Anđelković & Pavlović-Babić, 2004). Namely, it is often the case that parents talk to children about the importance of school and education, but they themselves are no role models promoting educational values. In such families parents do not read books to their children and do not equip children's surroundings with cultural-supportive tools that would encourage children's intellectual development and their education. Last but not least, parent-child warmth is one of the most important protective factors of student dropout, which often interacts with other aspects of family functioning (Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010).

Research shows that family functionality can be influenced by the health of its members (Schäfer, 2011). If there is somebody chronically ill in the family, or if its member is currently acutely ill, and the family is of a lower socio-economic status, the child consequently takes on duties from adults and is forced to provide for the family.

Student dropout phenomenon is also characterised by the transfer from one generation to the next. The studies conducted in Canada and the USA have shown that adolescent boys whose parents dropped out of high school have greater chance to do the same (16% of them), compared to the boys whose parents have university degrees, where the possibility of dropping out of school is 1% (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999). Uneducated parents lack the capacity for supporting academic development of their child, which affects children's achievement (Stepanović, Videnović & Lazarević, 2015). Apart from that, it is reasonable to assume that the cultural-pedagogical level of the family is closely related to its economic and educational status because many activities and cultural products (toys, books, theatre, cinema and museum

visits, availability of musical instruments, and so on) have to be paid for. Such household conditions often lead to the neighbourhood becoming extremely deprived and therefore discouraging for children's education (Rumberger, 1983). Hence, the families with low economic and, consequently, cultural-pedagogical status of the parents often cannot support children's intellectual development and their education. In accordance with that are Bourdieu's postulations regarding school as a mechanism for reproducing social inequality (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990).

On the other hand, the most frequently mentioned factors of student attrition within the perspective Rumberger defined as individual are those related to students' academic achievement. There are even theories propagating a thesis according to which student dropout should be perceived as a part of academic failure as a broader phenomenon (Coleman, 1988). If a student has poor performance (particularly in core subjects, such as mathematics and the native language), is often absent from school and is a year older than peers, there is a greater probability of them dropping out of school (Allensworth 2005; Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Particularly important indicators whose contribution to student dropout has proved to be paramount are low achievement in the transition years (final year in primary and the first year in secondary education) (Roderick, 1994), as well as repeating a year (Rumberger, 2004). Plank and associates (Plank, DeLuca & Estacion, 2005) explain this finding assuming that in an educational system organised by students' age, a student being older than everybody else in the class can be interpreted as a sign of a lack of intelligence, falling behind, failure, which is why the degree of acceptance of such a student in the class is low. Besides, student's connection to school weakens if they perceive their classmates as socially and emotionally immature (Ormrod, 2008). Accordingly, one of the most important risk factors is the presence of the very circumstances leading the student to leave school temporarily (Allensworth, 2005). They most often include teenage pregnancies or finding employment.

Conversely, students' high intellectual capacity can reduce the negative effects of familial characteristics. One study showed that the possibility of dropping out of school for a child of high intellectual capacity is minimal, even if their parents are uneducated and do not value higher education (Foley, Gallipoli & Green, 2009).

Still, it should be taken into consideration that although poor academic performance strongly correlates with dropping out of school, research studies have confirmed the hypothesis that it is not the only or sufficient prerequisite, or necessary for that matter (Tinto, 1975; Rumberger, 2004; De Witte et al., 2013). The complexity of this topic, which far exceeds the simplistic "academic failure equals dropping out of school" idea, could be seen even in the first papers addressing this issue (Tinto, 1975; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985). In order for a student not to drop out of school, he/she has to achieve both academic and social integration. A particular problem arises when a student

forms strong social bonds with peers with poor academic performance who are antisocial (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000) and do not value school (Ormrod, 2008). Accordingly, participating in delinquent behaviour, as well as substance abuse, are indicators of dropping out of school (Rumberg & Lim, 2008). The importance of social interactions is also emphasised in previous studies' findings where one of the best preventive measures is the improvement of social support, i.e. creating a social network within school (Prevatt & Kelly, 2003; White & Kelly, 2010). It has been shown that by means of creating a peer mentor system and greater involvement of adults in establishing a positive atmosphere in class, student attrition can be substantially decreased.

Other individual characteristics of students, such as temperament, have not been thoroughly analysed as predictors of student attrition (De Witte et al., 2013). However, conscientiousness is the most stable predictor of academic achievement (Blickle, 1996; Busato et al., 2000; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003a, 2003b; De Raad, 1996) while impulsiveness as its negative pole is linked to violent behaviour, vandalism, thefts (Higgins, Kirchner, Ricketts & Marcum, 2013; Komarovskaya, Loper & Warren, 2007) and substance abuse (Verdejo-Garcia, Lawrence & Clark, 2008), which indirectly influences the decreasing connection with school and the increase in the probability of dropping out.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that research into possible factors and the intensity of their influence mostly relied on quantitative methodology (De Witte et al., 2013). Yet, the criticism of this methodological solution as the only one is becoming more and more common. A certain number of authors state that the idea of empirically identifying all the factors influencing student attrition, as well as their interrelationships and models, is utopian (Frank, 1990; Rumberger, 2004). There are also authors who believe that the existing empirical works most often overlook the heterogeneity of the phenomenon and the complexity of its aetiology (Janosz et al., 2000). Moreover, the existing findings are deemed insufficient, unless they include those regarding how students at risk construct their life experiences (Smyth & Hattam, 2001). All presented observations indicate the need to introduce qualitative research into this field, which is still scarce (De Witte et al., 2013). The choice of this methodological solution also seems justified since this phenomenon is both complex and rare.

## **Methodological framework**

### *The aim of the study*

The aim of this study was to examine how students (who dropped out or are at the risk of dropping out) and their parents perceive the reasons why they found themselves in this situation. Qualitative methodology was used in

answering research questions, which is rare in this field in the Serbian region. For that reason, it is difficult to formulate an empirically grounded hypothesis. Our border expectation is that the obtained results will be concordant with the empirical findings examined in the introduction, with different individual patterns (or combinations of factors) identified, which will contribute to a better insight into the complexity of the examined phenomenon.

### *Sample*

The sample in this study consisted of students who dropped out of school in the course of primary or secondary education, as well as those at the risk of dropping out. A student is considered to be at “great risk of dropping out of school” if they have poor attendance, i.e. if they do not come to school for several months, unless it is a consequence of some other condition, e.g. illness. They actually have so many absences from school that they are only formally still its students. It is well established that irregular attendance most often immediately precedes dropping out of school (Allensworth, 2005; Neild & Balfanz, 2006). When it comes to primary school, according to the law currently in force, a student cannot be expelled or signed out of school. Hence, from an administrative point of view, a student is still at school, although that is objectively not the case.

The procedure of selecting the sample was performed in several steps. Based on the data obtained from The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (data provided by DevInfo, 2013<sup>3</sup>), the municipalities with the highest dropout rate were identified. We established contact with schools in these municipalities and asked them to provide us with contact information regarding the students who had dropped out of school or were at risk of doing so. The students whose contact data had been provided were asked to participate. All of them were available and willing to be part of the study. Finally, twelve case studies were conducted in eight Serbian municipalities (Nova Varoš, Negotin, Grocka, Belgrade, Bosilegrad, Merošina, Brza Palanka, Sokobanja), and they included 8 male and 4 female respondents. Six of them dropped out of primary school, one did not start secondary education, while another five dropped out of secondary school. A more detailed description of the sample is presented in Appendix 1. Combining students who did not finish primary with those who did not finish secondary education added to the significance of this research since empirical studies examining student attrition in final years of secondary education are predominant in this field (De Witte et al., 2013). The sample participating in the qualitative analysis involved four parents (who agreed and were able to participate) of children who dropped out of school, two mothers and two fathers. In that way, we

3 <http://devinfo.stat.gov.rs/DI6Web/home.aspx>

aimed to better represent the ecological environment in which children who dropped out of school or those at the risk of dropping out lived.

### *Data collection and analysis techniques*

We carried out interviews with the respondents in their homes, whereby we had the opportunity to familiarise ourselves with the real conditions these children lived in. The interview covered the following groups of topics: a wider range of socio-demographic data and data about the family the respondent lives in (including medical history); perception of the reasons for dropping out; data about academic performance and extra-curricular activities; problems regarding behaviour and discipline both in and outside of school; reactions of the people from their environment to their decision to drop out of school; information on the way they spend their spare time; imagining their own future; motivation for studying; relationships with teachers; teachers' practices regarding reward and punishment. Besides interviews, researchers' observations also included information about the living conditions, characteristics of the neighbourhood, parents' and children verbal and nonverbal behaviour, the general impression a child leaves on others etc.

After collecting data, we proceeded with the inductive thematic qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the content related to individual and familial factors mentioned in the interviews. In the previous research with the same sample (Stepanović, Videnović & Lazarević, 2015) a different approach was applied – data were analyzed “top down”, using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a starting point.

### **Research results**

The analysis of the content of the data obtained by semi-structured interviews singled out four categories of the collected case studies on the basis of the perception of the main reason for dropping out of school or for being at the risk of doing so. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that most often a great number of factors are stated as the most immediate reasons for dropping out of school, as well as that different patterns of their interrelationships can be determined.

One group consists of two students who listed **teenage pregnancy** as the direct cause for dropping out of secondary school. This is the only category that stated only one factor as responsible for leaving school early. Two out of four female respondents dropped out of school because they got married and became pregnant. They were both eager to go back to school and complete their secondary education externally when the baby is “a bit older”. Socio-

economic and educational status of the family did not appear significantly below average (parents completed secondary education and were employed). The respondents claimed to have a good relationship with both their original family and the one they had recently started. Still, certain inconsistencies were noticeable in the statements which seemed to be idealising the relationships with family members. For example, one of the girls who dropped out of school insisted she got on well with her parents, but then she said she had once run away from home for five days. We established that the parents were actually against her getting married and starting a family, which had led to disagreements that culminated with her abandoning the family home. Furthermore, from their current perspective, female respondents seemed to be relatively satisfied with social relationships they maintained with their peers and teachers in school. One respondent described her Serbian teacher in the following way: *“We could tell her everything, she would always help us. She easily repeated things even ten times if we asked for it.”* One of them reported moderate discrimination as a consequence of “everybody knowing everybody in a small town”, so students whose parents were educated got to be treated better by teachers than those living in student residences. This kind of division transfers onto relationships between students, so they tend to choose friends who have preferential treatment in school.

The second group contains students who dropped out of school because they come from families where they had to **take on parental role**. It is interesting to notice that all students belonging to this group left or are at the risk of leaving primary school. Four boys from this group had to work in order to feed their family and hence they dropped out of the final years of primary education. The boys started providing for the family when a family member who used to have that role died (grandmother and father) or became seriously ill. Material status of the family corresponded to extreme poverty, or as one child described it: *“We depend on other people’s charity.”* The furniture was in a very bad condition, they had no basic household appliances such as a cooker or a fridge, and there was no regular power supply. In one family, the child was malnourished and hygienically challenged. Parents’ level of education was rather low (completed only four or eight years of primary education). This group also includes a girl who still has not dropped out of school but is believed to intend to do so due to long absences from school, or even if she does complete primary education, it seems rather unlikely she will start secondary education. She comes from a family where the father suffers from alcohol abuse and is violent towards the mother. The girl does not attend school regularly because she is trying to protect the mother from her father’s violent attacks or stays at home to look after younger siblings while the mother tries to earn some money. The parents completed only primary education and the family are very poor but their basic needs are met. It is also interesting to point out that the girl likes school and is always trying to



catch up with what she missed when absent and has no problem with keeping up with her peers' level of academic achievement. Still, she estimated that she would most likely discontinue her education because her parents cannot afford to send her to secondary school. She also claimed not to have enough parental support to finish school: *"My dad doesn't care whether I go to school or not, and my mum only occasionally asks about it."*

Two secondary school students exhibit behaviour disorders belonging to **juvenile delinquency** (fights, thefts et al.). Students' behaviour indicates increased impulsiveness, accompanied at the same time by low parental monitoring. Breaches of discipline (fights, unjustified absences from school) are the reason why one female student was expelled from school, and another student with unjustified absences from 400 school lessons meets the criteria for that disciplinary measure. A boy who is at the risk of dropping out of the second year of secondary education has manifested behaviour issues since the seventh year of primary education, when the police had to be involved for the first time because of theft. A girl dropped out of secondary school where she committed numerous breaches of discipline and was prone to expressing physical aggression towards her peers. Both students were unhappy with their choice of secondary school. The male student wanted to go to a type of school that did not exist in his hometown. Parents did not let him go to school in another town, and leave home. The female respondent lacked motivation to continue her education in a grammar school, but she was not allowed to change the type of educational profile to that of a vocational school coexisting in the same building. These students shared a strong connection with peers outside of school. At the same time, their school-mates were deemed not mature enough because they were in fact younger (these students had to repeat a year of secondary school). It is not clear how they support themselves, nor were the parents familiar with the children's statement *"I'm doing odd jobs here and there."* In both families, parents completed secondary education and the family is not poverty stricken. What was immediately noticeable was the lack of parental monitoring. The boy's father described his own control over his son's behaviour in the following way: *"He leaves the house to go to school every day. Still, I don't know whether he gets there or not."* Moreover, he explicitly stated that they had *"almost given up"* on their son, because they did not know how to help him so they devoted themselves and all their mental and financial resources to their daughter who is at the university. The boy is considered to be the black sheep of the family because he is thought to be the only one to blame for its poor functioning. Similarly, the girl's mother suffers from depression and feels helpless about her daughter, has three more children from another marriage, while the girl's father (the parents are divorced) does not want to have any contact with her.

Finally, as the main reason for dropping out, two students listed not liking to study, hence struggling to learn what the teachers demand, and

**not being motivated to complete their education or/and having learning difficulties.** Lack of motivation is related to the impression that there is no support from parents and teachers in order to increase motivation and overcome difficulties the students have while learning. One student repeated the fifth year of primary school five times and exhibited real difficulties when attempting to meet academic criteria, without being provided psychological or pedagogical support. Furthermore, the boy blamed only himself for the problem he had and did not realise that school staff could have helped him solve it. The conclusion in this case is that the problem had nothing to do with the existence of intellectual deficiency (the child successfully handles money at work, he is literate, seems eloquent, has no problems using modern mobile phones...), but that it lay in reproducing what he had learnt in front of the teacher (the child's statement: "*But when I see the teacher at the door, I get confused and then I start answering his questions and other kids help me and the teacher helps me, but I can't remember things, I just get confused.*"). That is why the boy avoided going to school, so as not to be orally examined by the teacher. Over time it became increasingly difficult for him to attend classes since he felt embarrassed for skipping so many lessons. Outside of school, he earns for a living doing seasonal jobs. He describes his relationships with his father (the mother abandoned them) and brother as good. His father's statement is in accordance with that: "*Apart from school, we get along well.*" The father completed only primary school and is not competent enough to support his son in learning and doing homework. The other student dropped out of secondary school because he did not want to study anymore and was extremely bored. The school, having expelled him, decided to offer him another chance – to return and complete his secondary education externally, but he was not interested. The parents are not of low educational status (the mother completed secondary school and the father college) but they accepted the child's decision. He is currently engaged in agricultural jobs and other family members describe him as extremely hardworking: "*He loves the countryside, land, cattle...*" Both boys are described by their family members as very diligent and responsible in duties outside school. The students performed minor breaches of conduct (throwing paper planes, arguing with peers and teachers), but they were not deemed serious.

The answers of one respondent regarding the main reasons for dropping out of school were not easy to classify into separate groups since they belonged to two groups. It is a Roma boy who uses "Svratište"<sup>4</sup>. He completed the school for adults. He was transferred from a regular primary school, as he says, primarily because of the problems with discipline, such as fights. He was faced with discrimination in school, and he solved it in the following

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4 A non-governmental organisation whose aim is to support children involved in life or work on the streets or those who are at such risk.

way: *“At first, all my female school friends hated me, they thought I was the same as all the other Roma, they called me “Gypsy”. Then I once defended them from a Roma guy who wanted to take their money and everything, I beat him up. Then they were happy, they thanked me and invited me to hang out with them.”* He finished school for adults, and then enrolled into an artisans and skills course, which he later abandoned. As the reason for dropping out he stated having to take care of his mother who was in a hospital and of his twin brother who exhibited more pronounced behavioural disorders: *“My mum was ill and I was constantly worried. The doctors in the hospital did not want to tell me what was wrong with her. It turned out that I had to take care of mum and dad when she was ill because there was no one else to do it. My twin brother is also constantly making problems. He is away from home for a month and then our parents argue and yell at me to go look for him.”* In other words, the reasons given for dropping out of school belong both to the group of disciplinary problems and the group of taking on a parental role.

Contrary to expectations, the majority of the interviewed children (seven of them) who dropped out of school, as well as all the interviewed parents, did not express dissatisfaction with the cooperation with the school staff. They easily singled out one person they had established rapport with (the school psychologist, class teacher, and so on). Moreover, all respondents declared that they valued education highly. Only one female respondent emphasised that *“school is not the place where you acquire knowledge.”* Parents even stated that the school staff talked with them, tried to talk the child into continuing education, supported them, but that this did not result in positive outcomes, since the child in question was *“a handful”, “did not like studying at all”* and *“there’s nothing one can do about it.”* This failure of the school staff further confirmed the belief of some parents that their children were innately hard work and problematic and nothing could be done about it. On the other hand, it remains unclear what exactly the school staff did and what kind of support they really did provide, apart from forgiving students for unjustified absences.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

At the end of this research, we can conclude that, as expected, the factors considered important in many studies also turned out to be prominent here (for example, socio-economic status of the family, lack of parental support and bad relationships with parents, chronic illness of a family member etc.). However, no universal factor present in all cases was established. This means that the students dropping out of school do not always come from families with low socio-cultural and economic level, nor all of them have bad relationships with parents, nor they have had poor academic performance. Besides, in most cases there is a combination of factors responsible for student attrition.

Only teenage pregnancy is seen as the sole reason for female students dropping out of school, with an estimate that school leaving is temporary. The implication that teenage pregnancies represent a serious problem that needs to be systematically addressed has been additionally confirmed by research results obtained by the Institute for Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut", indicating that only in 2008 there were 5,000 recorded pregnancies with mothers aged 15 to 19 (Knežević, Simić & Ivanović, 2009). It is necessary to introduce preventive measures in order to develop sexually responsible behaviour in young people, as well as to enable young parents to continue their education. At this particular moment, the only option for them is to continue their secondary education externally, which requires funds, not necessarily available to all the families.

Lower socio-economic status (Blue & Cook, 2004; Cataldi, Laird & Kewal, Ramani, 2009; DeWitte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot & van den Brink, 2013; Dorn, 1996; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986; Entwisle, Alexander & Steffel Olson, 2005; Ishitani & Snider, 2006; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Teese & Walstab, 2002) and parents' low level of education (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999) undoubtedly correlate with dropping out of school. In this research, there was a special group of students who were forced to take on the parental role due to unfavourable family circumstances (they had to work or were protecting one parent from the other's violence), which obstructed their education. In the examined cases, this happened when lower socio-economic status was combined with the lack of a family member fit to work or the presence of violence and alcoholism in the family. In such cases, there was no support from the educational system or cooperation with social services.

One unexpected finding is that poor academic performance in most interviews has not been stated as a reason for dropping out of school. In other words, this research has confirmed the thesis that student attrition cannot be solely perceived as a special case of academic failure (Tinto, 1975; Rumberg, 2004; DeWitte et al., 2013). Even when a child has this kind of problem, we believe it is more to do with school anxiety and the lack of motivation than the inability to meet academic requirements.

Lack of parental monitoring (i.e. their lack of interest) represents a risk factor in adolescence when combined with increased impulsiveness, opting for an unwanted type of school as well as developing a friendship network with peers prone to problematic behaviour.

It is interesting to notice that certain differences can be singled out depending on whether a student dropped out of primary or secondary school. The students who left primary education generally found themselves in this situation because they had to assume the parental role (five out of six students who dropped out of school or are at the risk of dropping out of primary school). On the other hand, the juvenile delinquency group consists

of secondary school students only. Subsequently, an empirical analysis of a larger sample would yield an answer to the question of whether the perceived differences can be generalised.

It appears that parents and school staff sometimes form a coalition with the aim of blaming the child as the only one responsible for dropping out. Smyth and associates call this phenomenon a process of "blaming the victim" (Smyth & Hattam, 2001).

A question that needs to be answered is what the life without school is like for the children who dropped out. Namely, what their everyday routine is like and how different it is in comparison with that of the children included in the educational system. When it comes to developing intervention measures, the answer to this question seems relevant so that these measures would be created in accordance with the specific characteristics of the context a child grows up in.

Finally, we need to emphasise that the findings of this study have confirmed the assumption that one model of factors and their interrelationships cannot explain each individual case. In other words, when it comes to research, it comes across as justifiably challenging to search for particular patterns, i.e. different factor clusters or typology of student attrition cases.

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## **Porodični i individualni razlozi napuštanja školovanja: percepcija učenika**

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Osnovni cilj istraživanja je bio da se identifikuju koje individualne i porodične faktore učenici navode kao razloge zbog koga su napustili školu ili su pod rizikom da je napuste. Ukupno je ispitano dvanaestoro učenika koji su napustili ili su pod rizikom da napuste osnovnu (šest učenika) ili srednju školu (šest učenika) i četvoro roditelja. Korišćen je polustrukturisani intervju. Kvalitativnom analizom sadržaja njihovih odgovora izdvojeno je četiri kategorije u koje se mogu grupisati učenici s obzirom na njihovu percepciju razloga za napuštanje školovanja. Te kategorije su: maloletnička trudnoća, preuzimanje uloge roditelja, problematična ponašanja (krađe, tuče) i slaba motivacija za školovanje i učenje. Potraga za tipologijom slučajeva osipanja se čini opravdanom jer je za svaku od izdvojenih grupa učenika potrebno obezbediti specifične mere prevencije kako bi se obezbedio nastavak školovanja. Takođe, u istraživanju se izdvojio podatak da je kod roditelja prisutna tendencija da za napuštanje školovanja smatraju odgovornim osobine deteta koje doživljavaju kao nepromenjive. Neuspeh zaposlenih u školi da pomognu detetu učvršćava ovo uverenje roditelja.

**Ključne reči:** osipanje, faktori rizika, tipovi, kvalitativna metodologija

## Appendix 1

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

Gender	Age	Dropping out from primary or secondary school?	Municipality	Mother's education	Mother's employment	Father's education	Father's employment
Female	15	secondary school	Negotin	completed secondary	employed	completed secondary	employed
Female	18	secondary school	Bosilegrad	completed primary	seasonal, temporary jobs	completed primary	deceased
Male	14	primary school	Sokobanja	completed secondary	employed	completed primary	deceased
Male	13	primary school	Sokobanja	completed secondary	employed	completed primary	deceased
Male	15	primary school	Brza Palanka	not completed primary	unemployed	not completed primary	receives assistance and care benefits
Male	16	primary school	Brza Palanka	not completed primary	unemployed	not completed primary	receives assistance and care benefits
Female	12	primary school	Negotin	completed primary	seasonal, temporary jobs	completed primary	employed
Female	16	secondary school	Grocka	completed secondary	employed	completed secondary	left the family
Male	16	secondary school	Nova Varoš	completed secondary	unemployed	completed secondary	employed
Male	16	secondary school	Bosilegrad	completed secondary	unemployed	completed higher education	Employed abroad
Male	15	primary school	Merošina	completed primary	left the family	completed primary	seasonal, temporary jobs
Male	17	not in role in secondary education	Belgrade	completed primary	unemployed	completed secondary	unemployed