

Parent's experiences of managing school refusal: A qualitative study

Alison Koeck¹, Dr Chris Bowden¹

¹Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

Biography

Originally from America where she trained as an elementary and special education teacher. Alison taught ASD children before moving to Germany. There she worked in a variety of educational settings and had a family. Since 2014, she lives with her family in Wellington. Alison gained her full teaching registration and have just finished her Master of Educational Psychology at Victoria University of Wellington. She hopes to complete the internship in educational psychology practice in 2023.

ABSTRACT

Decreasing school attendance is a topic of growing concern in Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ) and around the world. This studies focus is on one type of attendance problem, School Refusal (SR). It is defined as a child experiencing severe emotional or physical turmoil and refusing to attend school despite their parent's/caregivers attempts to have them attend. The responsibility for school attendance lies with the parents, but few studies have explored their perspectives and strategies for managing SR. This study sought to explored parent's experiences of managing their children's refusal to go to school to identify:

- a) contributing factors to SR and development of SR;
- b) effective and ineffective strategies they used to help their child transition back to school (e.g., how parents coped, what actions they took);
- c) what information, advice/guidance, support (e.g., from agencies, school, or other people) was helpful or unhelpful; and
- d) what parents need in order to support their child's transition back to school.

A purposeful, criterion-base sample and a convenience sample was used to recruit sixteen participants. Data collection was conducted by conversational, semi-structured interviews. A reflexive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clark's six step method was used to analyse the data. This revealed 5 key themes: responsibility, "we've tried it all", filling a void, moving forward, and "it's a trauma". The analysis shows SR is a problem that occurs alongside other developmental issues and that parents try many strategies (some successful, some not) and reach out to many services to reengage their children. Recommendations include enhancing early identification; collaborating, and communicating with families; adapting the school environment, and developing interventions based on the strengths of students; and trauma informed practice to help re-school and hopefully prevent chronic school refusal.