

Challenging the low academic expectation narrative. Findings from the Growing Up in New Zealand Study exploring parents' and children's academic expectations within ethnic groups

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Biography

Millie Taylor is secondary trained teacher who has recently completed an Honours degree in Psychology at the University of Auckland where she worked with the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) longitudinal study data.

Millie was supervised by Dr Elizabeth Peterson who is a named investigator on the GUINZ study, and is also based at University of Auckland's School of Psychology.

ABSTRACT

Students' academic expectations are reported to vary across ethnic and social economic groups with the blame for lower academic expectations frequently directed towards others (e.g. teachers and parents) (Peterson et al., 2012; Tennebaum & Ruck, 2007; Wang, 2018). The majority of research in Aotearoa on student academic expectations has focused on teachers expectations, are cross sectional or 1 year follow ups, and have looked across ethnic groups (e.g., Rubie Davies, 2007; Rubie Davies et al., 2015; 2016). The current study is novel as it focuses on the predictors of parent and child academic expectations in Aotearoa using data collected over an 8-year period and explores the relationships within four ethnic groups (Māori N = 1100, Pacific N = 782, Asian N = 768, European N = 2000) to see if patterns of associations are similar to those observed in prior research. Further this study explores for the first time, the impact of a parental history of educational discrimination on academic expectations over time.

Drawing on Growing Up in New Zealand data, structural equation modelling was used to test whether maternal factors (academic expectations for their child at age 4.5, education, involvement, material hardship, history of educational discrimination) and student factors (academic self-concept, and perception of material hardship) were associated with student academic expectations at age 8.

The final models differed for each ethnic group and explained between 2.1 and 3.1% of the variance in student academic expectations. Only the European model was similar to the hypothesised model suggesting that prior research on students' academic expectations with similar predictors may be Eurocentric. In contrast, in the Pacific sample, only student factors (concern about money and academic self-concept) were related to students' academic expectations at age eight. Experience of discrimination in education was only a statistically significant predictor in the European model. The study's findings challenge existing generic models of students' academic expectations and suggest within group differences need to be further explored. They also challenge the ethnic expectation bias, with 93% of eight-year-olds in each ethnic group reporting they expected to finish secondary school and 70% expecting to pursue further education or training.