Why Did They Leave School? A Self Determination Theory Perspective into Narratives of Finnish Early School Leavers.

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Abstract

The present study aims to provide insights into the experiences of early school leavers within the Finnish context. We conducted a narrative inquiry among eleven early school leavers who were in prison when they were interviewed. Self Determination Theory (SDT), more specifically the concept of frustration of the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy, and the tendency of people to move towards more supporting environments, was used as an interpretative tool, along with contextual information. We identified three pathways out of school, differing in the locus of need thwarting circumstances and the availability of access to transfer into a more satisfying environment. Furthermore, the experienced threat of safety was a shared element in the narrative accounts. Additionally, the findings add information about experienced indifference in the case of the participants, which is a new element in theorising the continuum of perceived need satisfaction within the terms of SDT.

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¿Por qué Abandonaron la Escuela? Una Perspectiva de la Teoría de la Autodeterminación en las Narrativas de Jóvenes que Abandonan sus Estudios en Finlandia

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Resumen

El presente estudio pretende aportar información sobre las experiencias de jóvenes que abandonan sus estudios en el contexto finlandés. Realizamos la investigación narrativa con once jóvenes que abandonaron sus estudios de manera temprana y que estaban en prisión cuando fueron entrevistados. La teoría de la autodeterminación (TAD), más específicamente el concepto de frustración de tres necesidades psicológicas básicas, competencia, relación y autonomía, y la tendencia de las personas a moverse hacia entornos más favorables, se utilizó como herramienta interpretativa, junto con información contextual. Identificamos tres caminos fuera de la escuela, que difieren en el lugar de la necesidad que frustra las circunstancias, y la disponibilidad de acceso para moverse a un entorno más satisfactorio. Además, la amenaza de seguridad experimentada era un elemento compartido en los relatos narrativos. Además de esto, los hallazgos añaden información sobre la indiferencia experimentada en el caso de los participantes, que es un elemento nuevo cuando se teoriza la continuidad de la satisfacción de la necesidad percibida dentro de los términos de la TAD,

Palabras clave: abandono escolar; Teoría de la Autodeterminación; frustración de la necesidad; seguridad; indiferencia

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Experiences of successful learning and positive interpersonal relationships are important for school engagement (Quin, 2017; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013). However, this is not everyone's experience of school and attempts to understand the reasons for early school leaving show that many experience the opposite (Cederberg & Hartsmar, 2013; Nairz-Wirth & Gitschthaler, 2019; Tuck, 2011). Learning about the subjective perspectives of people slipping out of schooling can widen our understanding of the processes behind early school leaving. Research studies carried out during school years do not reach all early school leavers, though, because they have prematurely already left school. On the other hand, individuals who are still engaged in school in some way, despite having been identified as students at risk, cannot be classified as early school leavers and examined as such. Hence, it is important to reach people who have experienced the issue.

In Finland, the leaving rate of compulsory school has been less than a half per cent though showing a slight increase in recent years, now closing to one per cent a year (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019a). The discontinuation rates in vocational schooling for young people have been higher, also slightly increasing in recent years, the current rate holding at around 7,4 % (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019b). The turn in the rates indicates current importance to examine the reasons behind early school leaving. Furthermore, there are groups of people which have faced more difficulties in completing their education than the population in general, such as short- term prisoners (Kivivuori & Linderborg, 2009) and the Finnish Roma (Rajala & Blomerus, 2016), among others. The perspectives of these people, who belong to marginalized groups, and a minority inside a minority, are of special value to be investigated and taken on account as indicators of aspects that may lead to societal exclusion. Hence there is a significant reason for further studies, with methods and theories capable to capture a large range of lived experience.

Self Determination Theory (SDT, Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020) assumes that interest in building relationships with other people, and skill development in learning to master one's life, are inherent in human nature. Environmental aspects can, though, either foster or undermine these crucial processes which are facilitated by satisfaction of three basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Thwarting of these needs and a perceived threat for need satisfaction tend to push people towards other, more promising

environments (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While SDT research has shown that supporting students' psychological needs leads to enhanced learning, motivation, and well-being (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Stroet et al, 2013), much less is known about how students at risk perceive their life and prospects in school. For instance, Fatima etal, (2018), reported that self-efficacy and social support affected intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, not finding predictions for amotivation. For future development of SDT Ryan and Deci (2020) have recently encouraged also qualitative research approaches, in addition to quantitative studies.

Recent studies in Finland have shown that a high number of students at risk are poly-victimized, living among accumulating risk factors (Ellonen & Salmi, 2011). Furthermore, findings of Virtanen (2016), and Vasalampi et al., (2018), highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships for persisting in school. This is in line with the fact that the Finnish Roma, among whom the early school leaving rate is higher than that of the population as a whole (Rajala & Blomerus, 2016), have also faced prejudices (Berlin, 2015; Friman-Korpela, 2014; Roman, 2018). In addition to this, students with a Roma background have been placed in special classes more often than other students (Rajala et al, 2011). Additionally, Honkasilta (2019) found, that students who are openly defined as needing special support may often be prone to experience of otherness. In short, early school leaving seems to be connected to accumulating challenges and obstacles.

Self Determination Theory Perspective into Early School Leaving
In SDT research, reasons behind students' amotivation and early school leaving have been linked to low level of students' perceived satisfaction of their basic psychological needs (Ratelle & Duchesne, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are thwarted, or in danger of being thwarted, this decreases students' motivational level (Cheon et al, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) have proposed, that motivation can be situational, domain-specific, and differ in generality. When people perceive low need support or need thwarting in their daily life, they tend to seek for need satisfaction elsewhere (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Hence, people with low school motivation may experience higher levels of motivation in other life domains, the situation creating a pulling effect out of school. Accordingly, level of motivation may differ within a

context and situation, for instance, during a school day or life span (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). Thus, early school leavers should not be considered as passive. In SDT terms, they could be described as people searching for need satisfaction elsewhere, when facing need frustrating experiences in school.

In this study, we distinguish need thwarting and need frustration as concepts. We understand need thwarting as inadequate qualities of the circumstances and relationships in one's environment, while we see need frustration as one's personal experience of the thwarting, as described by Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013). In SDT, perception of safety is considered a combination of the three needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 335). Chen et al (2015) noticed that people who perceived threat of violence and poverty, increasingly urged for the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs as a whole. We include in the concept of psychological safety both physical and psychological aspects, as well as trust for need satisfaction, which has also been noted to be important for healthy development (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Consequently, experienced threats for need satisfaction are considered as a threat for a person's psychological safety.

Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013, 265) present two general paths of need perceptions, the first starting from need fulfilment, leading via need satisfaction into healthy growth and wellbeing, and the other starting from need thwarting, leading to need frustration and ending up with maladaptive outcomes, some shifting emerging between paths. Drawn from the dynamics of perceived need frustration and its predicted maladaptive outcomes, we assume, that early school leavers, as amotivated towards school, have faced need thwarting and perceived need frustration while still in school. They can be assumed to have sought for need satisfaction from other sources available for them out of school, thus choosing different kinds of paths from need frustration towards more satisfactory environments.

We examine two research questions:
1. What kind of life events and circumstances, as well as personal experiences participants link with their early school leaving?
2. What kind of pathways out of school can be identified in the narrative accounts?

Methodological and Ethical Considerations

We have chosen to conduct a hermeneutic-interpretive study to widen our understanding of reasons behind early school leaving. In the present study we

examine experiences indicating lack of support for psychological needs, by combining narrative interviews of early school leavers and SDT framework. Based on the interviews, we will be able to provide rich descriptions of, and build a deeper understanding about the underlying factors behind diminishing school motivation.

We apprehend lived experience as a rich source of information, a continuum, shaped by telling, reflecting and new experiences, as conceptualized by Dewey (1997, [1938]), Bruner (2004) and Clandinin (2013). Narrative, i.e. storied experience, is understood in this study as a subjective, contextual window for learning about phenomena, which participants identify as important in their life situation. This view of experience differs ontologically from that of quantitative methods, where the conceptualising of experience or perception is predefined by researchers in questionnaires, as is the case among the research body of SDT (Ryan & Deci 2020; Stroet et al, 2013). We refer to the concept of perception, as it is used to describe people's responses to psychological needs in SDT (Ryan & Deci 2000) and concept of experience as a subjective phenomenon.

As Clandinidn et al. (2018) have stated, narrative inquiry, being based on personal experience and interaction between the researcher and the participant, is an ethical act from beginning to end. To avoid causing any harm to the participants, we found it crucial to engage in the ethics of respect and confidentiality as suggested by Josselson (2007). The context and situational aspects of the meeting, as well as the backgrounds of the participant and the interviewer, and what they represent to each other, have an impact on the interaction between them, and hence also on what is told (Lessard et al, 2018).

To reach people with lived experience of early school leaving, we conducted research interviews among early school leavers in prison. People who live in the margins of society often face multiple challenges in daily coping (Ellonen & Salmi, 2011), which creates variation in life settings. Prison as a context, where people are separated from their daily activities, provides a relatively stable space for research interviews, more similar to each other with each participant than it would be possible to arrange in the midst of their daily lives, as well as mental space for memorising, telling, and reflecting for the subjects (Granfelt, 2017).The first author, who also conducted the research interviews, has a background in teaching. In this study, she aimed to provide an invitation to encourage talk about school and the things the participants would find important to be heard by the representative

of school as an institute. Furthermore, as Josselson (2007) highlights, the process of telling and being heard as itself, triggers the participant's reflective thinking and enriches his or her meaning-making of the past events that were told, as well as gives a sense of meaning for the act of telling about personal experiences.

Interviewing participants who are positioned in the margin of society calls for careful consideration of power relations (Josselson, 2007). Crimmins (2016) suggests that to balance the power relations, the researcher should speak with others rather than for others, placing herself explicitly as an author in research text. To enhance this and provide access to interviews for the readers, we have included not only turns of the participants, but also turns of the interviewer, as well as presented all relevant facts that the participants had felt important enough to reveal concerning their background (Table 1).

Participants, Interviews, and Data Management
We started the interviewing process with two pilot interviewees, known by the first author, who were not imprisoned. After that, in collaboration with contact persons named by prison directors, we recruited the participants by providing an information leaflet about the study for potential participants. Eleven early school leavers, six of which were women, volunteered. Seven participants described themselves as Finnish Roma, while four represented the Finnish majority. All participants were Finnish speaking, which was also the language of the interviews. The interview extracts presented in this paper were first translated into English by the first author, who can provide the Finnish originals on request, and then proof-read by a native English speaker. All names in narratives and interview extracts are replaced by pseudonyms. Permission for research interviews was granted by the Finnish Ministry of Justice, and the research procedures followed the guidelines of the Ethical Committee of Jyväskylä University. All participants signed an informed consent after having received written and verbal information about the study by the contact person and the interviewer.

The first author conducted the interviews between November 2015 and June 2017. With each interviewee we carried out three meetings, which took place within three months for each participant. This procedure was used with nine participants. In four cases, the interview processes were shorter, consisting of two meetings in two cases and one meeting in the additional two

cases, due to changes in the participants' prison sentence and placement, as ordered by the prison administration.

The first interview started most often with participants eager to share their experiences. If needed, the researcher prompted the participant to start by asking them to reflect on their feelings about starting the first grade of school, and later, drawing a timeline on paper and asking further questions about what had been told, which elicited more telling. The possibility to withdraw from the interview, and end a meeting when the participant wished, was also pointed out, hence supporting the participants' sense of autonomy.

Between the interviews the first author transcribed the interviews and created a draft of summary of the narrative accounts. During the second and the third interview, she placed the narrative account on the table so that it could be seen by both the participant and interviewer, and used pencil marks for changes, to underline the draft nature of the text, to generate more interest and to get more information about an issue, as well as to provide an opportunity to make any changes participants felt necessary. By this we emphasized the participant's role as a specialist of the study, in SDT terms, supporting the participant's sense of competence. Each participant was also asked, how he/she felt about the meetings. By this we wanted to give a message of the unique value of the participant as a person, as well as to facilitate further mental support provided by prison personnel, if that would be needed. During the interviews, the interviewer acted as a listener, giving her full attention to the participant. The participants expressed gratitude to that by volunteering to continue and arriving to the next meeting, and also by saying that the meetings were like therapy to them, because someone was there just for them, to listen to, what they had in mind to tell.

The interviews were audio recorded. Memory sticks and printed materials are kept in locked archives of the interviewer. An overview of participants' context and backgrounds is provided in Table 1, as well as information regarding which research group, A, B or C, they belong to later in the text.

Table 1.
*Presentation of time, school arrangements and social relations of the participants' school years. Elements indicating fragility in perceived physical and/or psychological safety marked with **bold italic.***

Name, gender/ group Starting school	The school arrangements Years spent in school	Circumstances in the home environment	Issues and relationships in the school environment
Saara female/ B 1990s	Rural school, normal classes till the 7th grade, special schools till 18 yo, Didn't complete the 9th grade.	Mother and siblings, moved to rural area when 6 yo, and back to city when 13 yo, *taken into care* soon after that, adolescent friends didn't attend school **Prejudices against the Roma in the local community**	***Avoidance by peers in the beginning of school*** ***Lack of cultural knowledge in school***
Viljo, male/ B 1990s	City school, normal classes, repeated a grade Didn't complete the 4th grade.	No family members mentioned, *taken into care* **General prejudices against the Roma**	***Dyslexia, ADHD***
Ritva, female/ B 1990s	Rural and city schools, normal and special classes Didn't complete the 4th grade.	Siblings, no mentions of parents, *taken into care* in her early teens Felt ashamed of her home **Lack of support for persisting in school** Teen pregnancy	***Didn't get along with peers in normal class*** ***General prejudices against the Roma***
Markus, male/ A 1990s	The 1st grade normal class, the 2nd grade abroad, after that special school Didn't complete the 5th grade.	The family moved abroad for one year when Markus was 8 The family had a stable	Being a lively child ***Placed in special class against his will*** ***General prejudices against the Roma***
Allan, male/ B 1990s	Special classes Didn't complete compulsory school	***Taken into care*** when 2 months old, met his siblings at age of 15, ***no connections to parents***	***Fights and bullying*** in the detention home and school ***Felt that the adults couldn't protect him***
Siir,i female/ B 1990s	City school, normal classes, didn't complete vocational school	Mother, ***father (alcoholic)*** Pregnancy during vocational school	***Dyslexia not attended to in school*** Drug abuse in vocational school was not noticed by teachers

Name, gender/ group Starting school	The school arrangements Years spent in school	Circumstances in the home environment	Issues and relationships in the school environment
Johanna, female/ A 1990s	Rural school, normal classes, didn't complete the 5th grade	Mother, father, siblings, no connections to extended families Starting a family when 16 ***Lack of support for persisting in school***	***Exclusion from peer group*** ***Outspoken prejudices by a teacher and parents of the peers***
Kaisa, female/ C 1980s	Rural school, norrnal classes, several attempts to start high school and vocational schooling, not completing any	Mother, father, two sisters Coached sport training till age of 13 ***Domestic violence by father***	Bullied others, by making them do forbidden things Alcohol and drug abuse after 18 yo
Tuomas, male/ B 1980s	City school, normal classes till the 6th gr, then special class, didn't complete the 9th gr	Mother, brother, no mentions of father, ***taken into care*** in adolescence ***Hooked on heroine when 13***	Bullied his teacher in special class ***Considered the peers childish, felt school was all in vain to learning***
Rikhard male/ B 1980s	City schools, the 1st grade normal class, after that special classes, didn't complete the 6th gr	Mother, siblings, extended family ***Moving every year*** Had friends out of school Started a family when 15	***Avoidance and bullying by peers***
Sanna, female/ A End of 1970s	Rural school, normal classes, didn't complete vocational school	Father, mother, siblings Family with a good reputation	***Problems with understanding texts, not attended to in school***
Aaro, male/ B 1960s Pilot interviewee	Rural school, normal classes, didn't complete 8th grade	Mother, father, siblings No place to sleep well at home: violent dad (war trauma) Felt easily allowed to stay home and work on the farm	*"I was hyperactive, always in trouble at school"*
Iiro, male/ B 1960s Pilot interviewee	Rural school, normal classes, didn't go to vocational schooling	Mother, father, siblings, Lived as a lodger from the 2nd to the 6th grade ***Weak adult care during that period***	***Felt that the teacher (the 3rd— the 6th grades and handicraft) was scary and used public humiliation***

Data analysis started during the co-operative interview process, when the interviewer discussed with the participants about the issues and meanings brought forth by them. We used the theoretical frame of SDT as a tool for organising and interpreting the contents of the narrative accounts after the interviews had been conducted, not as a tool for defining or suggesting what should have been experienced or what should be told by the participants during their interview. By this we aimed to provide space for issues significant from the participants' point of view. Later, with the written material, we used ATLAS.ti7, coding parts of transcribed conversations by the psychological need to which they were related. For instance, telling about friendships was coded as "relatedness", telling about school achievements or difficulties in learning as "competence" and telling about choices or lack of possibility to make them, as "autonomy", following descriptions of Ryan and Deci (2000). We coded issues linked with several needs, like domestic violence and lack of trust in adult support, as "multiple", for further interpretation related to each need relevant to the issue, to take on account the layers of different needs concerning of what was told. For further analysis we used written narrative accounts and mind maps, to find points, where the participants described need support, as well as need thwarting and frustrating experiences, and in which environments these were situated. We created three groups of the participants according to weather the need thwarting circumstances appeared mostly in school or home environment, or both.

Findings

In this chapter we firstly provide an overview of the findings, secondly the participants' storied experience and thirdly a summary of the findings. As assumed, we identified need thwarting circumstances and experiences of need frustration, related to all three basic psychological needs, as well as experiences including multiple needs, in the narrative accounts. Additionally, threats of physical and psychological safety accumulated, keeping the participants occupied with daily coping, distracting them from school issues. Adding to the theoretical assumptions we found a difference between the environments in which the need frustration was mostly experienced and the consequences which followed. Whereas need frustration in school led to activities outside school, need frustration in the home environment created inner burdens, which indirectly affected the participant's life in the school environment as well.

Threat to physical or psychological safety was a shared experience among the participants, despite of differences in arrangements during the school years, the decade when at school, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomical conditions, and family relations. Table 1 shows, that five of the participants had been taken into custody by child-care authorities, indicating long-lasting problems in experienced safety in their childhood. Participants mentioned learning problems as a cause of threat for experienced competence support, especially when these had not been treated with support in school. Learning problems, combined with a lack of support, accumulated with inner burdens due to external pressure, creating a state of continuous need frustration, diminishing the participants' interest and capacity to focus on school tasks. In addition to this, the Roma participants described experiences of prejudice, both generally, and as personally targeted exclusion.

Withdrawing from a Rejecting School Environment

Two of the Roma participants, Johanna and Markus, described need thwarting circumstances mainly related to their school environment. In their narratives, need thwarting was related to all three psychological needs. They related their experiences of being different from their peers, bullying, rejection by peers, loneliness, and prejudices expressed by adults, indicating frustration related to need of relatedness. Related to competence, Johanna described a lack of support for learning after absences from school.

> "… and when I went to school again, I didn't know what they were talking about… they (peers) said: 'Don't you know even that… of course not, she's a gipsy!' … and so I wanted to go there even less!"

In Johanna's case the prejudices were targeted at her also by the class teacher of the third and fourth grade. During these grades the peers started to express their rejection openly, directly at Johanna, by saying that their mothers would not allow them to play with 'gypsies'. Johanna said that she was mostly alone at school and didn't want to go there because of that. Due to poverty she didn't have all the toys and sport equipment the others had, and said she felt detached from her peers because of that as well. She started to stay at home at the age of ten, taking care of her siblings, describing the relationships within the family as warm.

Markus explained–that he went to school in Finland, but after his first school year, the family moved to Sweden for a year. After returning to Finland, Markus said he was placed in a special school.

> "The first year I was in a real school,… then I was placed into a special school… wasn't interested in school then, it was also because I was placed in the special class,… they didn't kind of teach there… the other kids there, they were kind of disturbed… and disabled, and those who didn't show up. We also had that moving then, couldn't go to school that much… it was kind of,… the first thing in the morning, that you have to go to such a school."

Markus said that he didn't have problems with learning and that the special school was not a proper placement for him, that he didn't belong there. On the other hand, Markus described his teacher of the three first school years as understanding particularly considering his liveliness. Markus talked about her and her retirement.

> " It was good for me until the second, third, grade, we had a good teacher… we needed to have a break and she could handle it. It was not… to feel that you want to rebel against the teacher… but then she retired. After that I started to stay in the stables. I thought that I don't, I'll let the school be."

At about the same time, when Markus was about eleven years old, there had been a conflict at school, something that he did not disclose in detail in his interview. However, the outcome of the incident had been that Markus remembered the headmaster saying; "Enough of them, no need to come back!" That was the end of his school career. Instead, he had an opportunity to work in the stables owned by his family and to feel competent and welcomed there. Consequently, he chose that instead of going to school. When asked about interventions by school or child-care authorities, Markus said he didn't remember any, and that it seemed to him, that they were not interested in getting him back to school.

Struggling with Coping both in School and Home Environments

We identified need thwarting elements in both school and home environments in most of the narrative accounts. Combinations of learning problems with lack of attention or adequate support, combined with a lack of parental care, accumulated, creating a condition of need frustration extending to both school and home environments. Two participants in this group mentioned thwarted autonomy, saying that school was "so compulsory" for them. However,

thwarting of autonomy was present in all the narratives in a more indirect way, through lack of support for developing skills needed for self-determined choices later in life. The Roma participants also talked about the prejudices they had to overcome to gain the acceptance of their peers. Four Roma participants even shared experiences of becoming openly rejected by peers and their parents. In addition to this, two of the Roma participants said that their families avoided other Roma families.

> Richard: "My uncle killed a gypsy man, and after that we moved to Sweden, since then we had to move every year, always to a new city. So, I wanted to go to school even less."
> Interviewer: "Yes, into a new place and…"
> Richard: "Always new kids, they bullied us… I don't think they would have bullied us if we were not gypsies"

The family relationships inside the Roma group and the power relationships between the Roma minority and the surrounding majority left a narrow space for Richard and his family. At the age of fifteen Richard stopped going to school and moved back to Finland. The interviewer asked about that in the second meeting.

> The interviewer: "You told about your decision not to go to school anymore… how was it?"
> Richard: "Ay, I had other things to do!"
> The interviewer: "Was it just like that, did you just stay at home?"
> Richard: "No it was not like that. I went to other cities to visit people, with the kids of my (extended) family. I don't remember it so clearly, but... did the teachers come to my home? Maybe for an hour or two… I wasn't at school because of that (visiting relatives), too… I felt I was too big to go to school… took my first wife when I was fifteen."

From Richard's point of view the school was not interested in him, nor was he interested in school. He had other matters in his mind and went for them. Tuomas, was also spending a lot of time out of school during his childhood. Tuomas described his peers as being too childish for him, because he "had already seen so many things". He recounted how he used to go loitering in the city during school hours, from the first grade on. The fact that he was later taken into care by child welfare authorities indicates a lack of parental care. After he had developed drug dependency with heroine at the age of thirteen, Tuomas ended up in a life dominated by drug abuse and crimes. From his

point of view, the better need satisfying environment, compared to school, was out in the city and its surroundings.

There was no school in the village where the first pilot interviewee, Iiro, was born. Therefore, he had to live as a lodger in families near the school. Iiro described the fragility of his daily care during the first six grades, between eight and twelve years.

> "There was no decent care. I had to warm up my room, by firewood, this could have been dangerous. Just weekends at home… after school we gathered in the school yard with other boys. Once I sang there some stupid songs… our teacher overheard it and shouted that if I don't stop, I must not come to the school yard again… I was like... where can I go then?"

Throughout the interviews, Iiro repeatedly talked about his teacher between third and sixth grades, who was harsh and angry. Iiro said that he was afraid of asking for help with mathematics, which was a difficult subject for him. This teacher had a habit of revealing poor achievement to the whole group. Iiro remembered that he tried to hide his mathematics test, but the teacher took his paper and showed it to the others. Iiro explained that he did not understand much about mathematics but was too afraid to ask for help. The atmosphere during handicraft lessons was another issue which was repeated several times during Iiro's interviews. Iiro had heard a rumour that his teacher had been violent to another student. Iiro said that his teacher often behaved in an angry and unpredictable way. The school system at the time would have required a low achieving student (like Iiro in mathematics) to change into a lower level school, civic school, which was more focused on practical subjects like handicrafts, but Iiro did not, despite the fact that he had to do extra tests in summertime and go back to middle school for an additional year. The interviewer asked about that at the end of the third meeting.

> The interviewer: "…last time I asked whether the challenges in woodwork had an impact on your staying in middle school, I mean, there was the angry teacher,… was there more handicraft in civic school, or did the handicraft issue affect your choice?
> Iiro: "Can't say, just couldn't make the decision… "
> The Interviewer: "Well, so that I don't overly interpret it, the handicraft… "
> Iiro: "Well, it can have been… I don't identify it consciously but… it can have been that I felt it more safe to hang along in middle school, …the general atmosphere was different, …even though I had to do the same grade again."

Iiro described his memories about woodwork lessons as nightmares, and, although this had not been fully conscious, he had chosen a school path which was not the best choice for him, but the one where he could avoid what he was scared of.

Loaded with Inner Burdens

Kaisa was the only participant in this study who did not describe need thwarting or frustration in the school environment. Instead, she told about need thwarting related with traumatic experiences in her relationship with her father, who was physically violent towards her. The relationship had been a conflicted one, because Kaisa also described the discipline maintained by her father as a good thing and her being a 'daddy's girl', her father being her sport couch. Kaisa told that the violent abuse at home, as well as a need to keep this abuse secret, caused her an inner burden that alienated her from the peers.

> "I could not talk about it to anyone. They all had normal homes… they never could have understood, if I told them that he spanked us like every day… maybe that is why I had the feeling that I couldn't let anyone behind my back, to dominate me…I had to be the one to dominate, myself, I pulled the strings of others and made them do (forbidden) things,.. and laughed at them… when I was at high school, I got new friends… there was no need to push them into shoplifting or smoking, they were already doing it. "

Not wanting to have anyone "behind her back" at school indicates that Kaisa experienced threat of psychological safety, caused by incidents that had happened elsewhere, in the home environment. Kaisa described also another, practical element, disconnecting her from the peers during elementary school years. She was talented at sport and was practicing hard.

> "When others planned what to do after school, I always said, no, not me, I need to go training. But when I was thirteen… I started to feel it's not mine, it's my father's idea. It was a huge shouting, but I stopped my training just like that."

After compulsory school Kaisa tried several times to start high school. Each attempt lasted only a few weeks. Instead, Kaisa went out having fun in bars, using alcohol and drugs, being absent from school the next day several times a week.

Kaisa's narrative account illustrates how her experiences at home also affected her school life. As an inner burden, domestic violence, and keeping it hidden from others, affected the dynamics in her peer relationships. Conflict

about the sport career illustrates lack of support for her autonomy. This may have affected the ways in which Kaisa selected her friends and free time activities during adolescence in a maladaptive way.

Summary of the Findings
As a summary of the pathways based on the narrative accounts, we made a graphic overview of the groups A, B and C, and the paths leading to early school leaving (Figure 1). Two main factors distinguish the paths: the environment where the need thwarting elements were mainly located and the possibility to transfer into another, more need supportive environment. Those having access to a more potential environment for need satisfaction took the chance. It's notable, that the choices might not have led to a life generally considered as decent, but were reasonable given the situation, from the point of view of the participants.
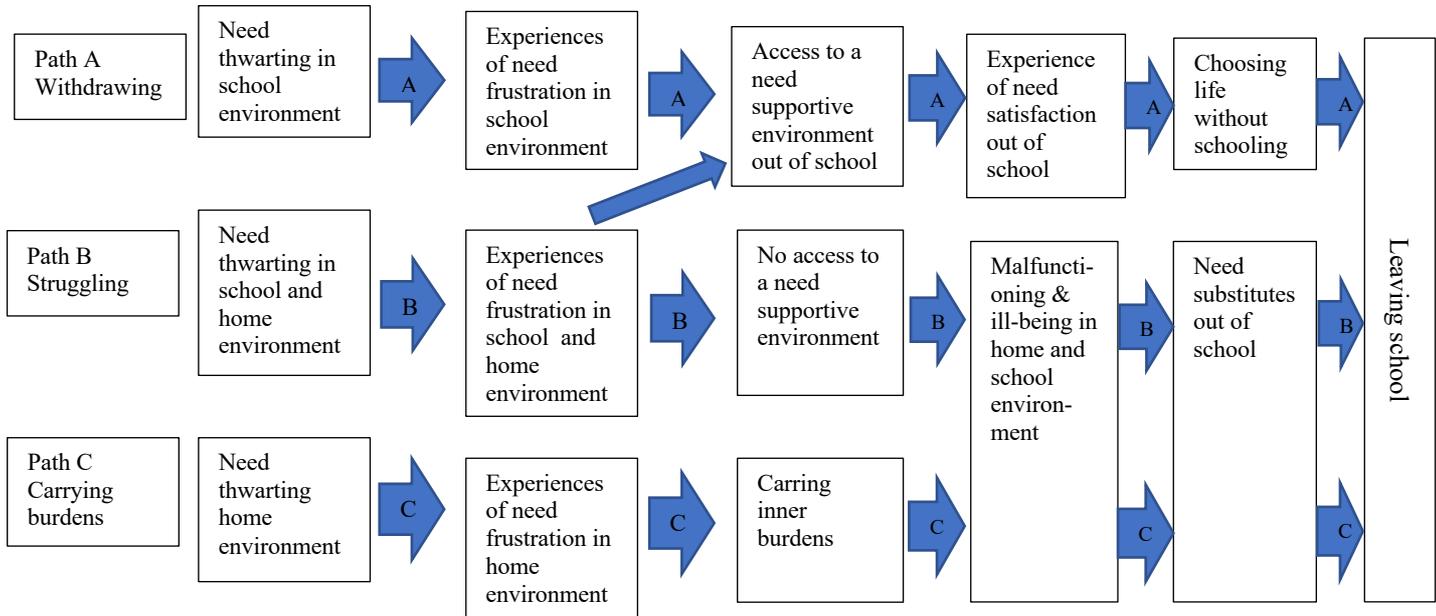
Figure1. A graphic overview of the paths identified in the narrative accounts.

Path A, "withdrawing", starts from need thwarting at school, followed by experienced need frustration. As need frustration took place mostly in the school environment, the participants had access to more need satisfying environments elsewhere. Experiences of need satisfaction outside the school environment had an impact on their choice not to return to school.

Path B, "struggling", starts from need thwarting circumstances both at school and at home, consequently affecting participants' need frustration in both environments. Weather there was an opportunity to choose another environment or not, determined how the path continued: to a life considered as good without schooling, or a life with maladaptive need substitutes, which prevented studying.

Path C, "carrying burdens", starts from need thwarting circumstances at home, the experience shaping further experiences and actions in other environments as well, affecting behaviour at school accordingly.

Conclusions and Discussion

We examined which life events, circumstances and experiences the participants linked with their early school leaving and what kind of pathways out of school could be identified in their narrative accounts. As we assumed, on the basis of SDT theory, frustration of the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence shaped the pathways out of school. Adding to former literature, the findings indicate firstly, that accumulation of need frustration started early, from the first school years, and continued throughout childhood and adolescence. Secondly, accumulating did not occur only in relation to time but also included different kinds of psychological elements. Thirdly, threat of safety was a shared experience in the narrative accounts, as a starting point for accumulating need frustration. The circumstances indicating a fragile experience of safety in the narrative accounts were threat of physical safety, weakness of parental care, poverty, and a lack of trust of adult support. Need thwarting and experienced frustration were factors that pushed the participants out of school, while simultaneously, need support and satisfaction was available for them in other environments and were thus pulling them in the same direction.

In their interviews, participants recounted their difficulties in learning and the lack of support given, which led to increased experiences of frustration, related to competence. This is in line with Ryan and Deci (2009, 118), who name learning problems as elements of need thwarting. Relatedness, as a

need, was violated by experiences of not belonging to peer group, rejection and outspoken prejudices. Frustration of autonomy was described as school being "so compulsory", as perceptions related to thwarted autonomy are described in SDT studies (Niemiec & Ryan 2009; Ryan & Deci 2000, 2009). In addition to this, the development of skills that are needed for self-determined actions and adulthood responsibilities was hindered by a lack of support for learning, thwarting autonomy at a more general level.

The fact that the participants of Roma background faced prejudices (Authors, 2019), to which Berlin (2015) has referred to as cultural racism, was an element of need thwarting, in this case one of many, as other need frustrating elements accumulated. Related to this, the Roma participants shared their experiences of rejection and bullying, as well as placements in special classes, which they felt were unnecessary, these indicating frustration related to both need for autonomy and relatedness. This is in line with the finding of Honkasilta (2019), that being labelled as being in need of special support can cause otherness. The fact that special education rates have been higher among the Roma than among the population as a whole (Rajala et al., 2011), indicates, that experiences of mismatches in special education placements can be more common among the Roma than the general population.

The findings of the present study show that experienced threat of safety as a life condition can have an impact on participants'/pupils' choices and actions, increasing avoidance of the school environment which they had experienced as threatening. As Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) point out, need perceptions can be situational, but also of a more general nature, hence affecting further experiences in an accumulating way. Furthermore, Chen et al (2015) proposed that threat of financial and environmental safety increase urge for need satisfaction. Adding to former SDT literature, the results of the present study suggest that need frustration, especially fragile psychological safety, as an overall life condition, might cause increasing sensibility for need confronting elements later in life.

Our findings resonate with the proposition of a third state of need states between frustration and satisfaction, namely dissatisfaction by Cheon et al (2019), which was linked with teachers' and learning activities' indifference to students' need for autonomy. In the narrative accounts, from the participants' point of view, indifference emerged in powerless or non-existent support by school adults or parents of the participants, consequently

diminishing the participants' interest to school. It was also noted that school did not play a major role in participants' life, as the focus of the participants' interest was in coping and finding more need satisfactory environments. Thus, interpreting the storied experience of need frustration in the light of SDT framework facilitated new insights for the ongoing conceptualizing.

Study Limitations and Future Research

In this study, the participants' positive experiences, which in the narrative accounts mostly appeared out of school, were not examined. In the limits of this article, we could not include the narrative accounts of the participants or a thorough interpretation of the narrative accounts related to each psychological need named in SDT, even though it would be fruitful.

For future studies in the framework of SDT, we suggest examining the borderlines of the proposed concepts of indifference and dissatisfaction, including the narrative understanding of experience as an accumulating phenomenon, as well as further developing the concept of generality levels of need perceptions, brought forth by Vallerand and Ratelle (2002). Combining different methodological approaches would enhance developing research practices, better to capture the variety of ways people experience and perceive phenomena around motivation. Furthermore, the findings invite researchers to explore, how accumulating need frustration and the threat of safety affect people's perceptions of psychological needs, as well as psychological development later in life.

Practical Implications

An atmosphere of trust and safety is important for students' school engagement. Based on our findings, teachers' ability to pay attention and respond to students' need frustration would be particularly urgent when students are at risk for fragile safety and accumulating frustration because of their stigmatized background. For policymakers, the results emphasize the importance of generating ways to provide support for families, as well as flexible ways to transfer from school to the labour market. Furthermore, the co-operation of actors around the student and their co-operation with the student, and his/her family, are essential. As one of the participants of the present study said: "Students need to feel that the teacher is for them, not against them."

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