

Ability School Engagement Partnership Project – shifting behaviours and perceptions

This snapshot summarises a body of work undertaken by Life Course Centre researchers Lorraine Mazerolle, Sarah Bennett, Emma Antrobus, Stephanie Cardwell and Elizabeth Eggins at The University of Queensland.

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The context

The Ability School Engagement Partnership (ASEP) Project is an innovative third-party policing partnership that brings together police, schools, students and parents to tackle the complex and costly problem of school truancy.

The problem

School truancy is highly correlated with delinquency, contact with the criminal justice system and negative adult outcomes. It comes with major social and economic costs such as crime and welfare dependency.

Our research

The Life Course Centre has funded follow-up longitudinal research on the 2011–2013 ASEP randomised field trial, covering 102 students at 11 schools in disadvantaged urban communities, to deliver detailed findings on its outcomes, impact and potential for upscaling to larger populations. A partnership between Queensland Police and the Queensland Department of Education, ASEP engaged young truants and their families in a proactive police-school intervention. In facilitated family sessions, truancy laws were communicated to students and parents in a procedurally just manner so they better understood the laws and the consequences of failing to comply. The control or business-as-usual group continued to receive formal letters warning of prosecution. Longitudinal analysis shows those who participated in ASEP had sustained gains in school attendance, improved perceptions of police legitimacy and decreased antisocial behaviour.

More information on Life Course Centre research is available at lifecoursecentre.org.au

Our findings

- 2 years after participation in ASEP {
 - students were more willing to go to school
 - students attended school more
 - students offended less
- Perceptions {
 - students' perceptions of police legitimacy improved
 - parents' perceptions of school legitimacy improved
- Behaviours {
 - risk factors for violent behaviour reduced
 - self-reported anti-social behaviour reduced

The ASEP intervention has demonstrated that it can disrupt the pathway from adolescent school truancy to youth delinquency and adult criminal offending over an important period of the life course. This is achieved by engaging at-risk students and their parents and positively shifting perceptions and behaviours over time.

Why this matters

Educational attainment is fundamental to positive life course outcomes and it is therefore critical that young people remain in school and are not truant. Strategic interventions targeting school truancy have an important role to play in addressing the personal and community costs of this issue over the life course. Such interventions can also weaken the risk factors for violent offending and anti-social behaviour over time and improve perceptions of the legitimacy of authorities.

Citation: Mazerolle, L., Antrobus, E., Cardwell, S. M., Piquero, A. R., & Bennett, S. (2019). *Harmonizing Legal Socialization to Reduce Antisocial Behavior: Results from a Randomized Field Trial of Truancy Young People*. *Justice Quarterly*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1618894>