

JYU DISSERTATIONS 674

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**Merja Pikkarainen**

# Experiences of Detachment in Narratives of Finnish Early School Leavers

A Perspective on Self-Determination Theory

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND  
PSYCHOLOGY

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of Finnish Early School Leavers**  
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Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston kasvatustieteiden ja psykologian tiedekunnan suostumuksella  
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## ABSTRACT

Pikkarainen, Merja Tellervo

Experiences of detachment in narratives of Finnish early school leavers: A Perspective on Self-determination theory.

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This study focuses on school experiences of Finnish early school leavers. The processes of leaving school before graduating were examined through narrative accounts of eleven Finnish early school leavers, who were in prison at the time of being interviewed. The aim was to explore what kind of narratives the participants would share about their experience of leaving school and the kind of meanings they would allocate to what was told. Additionally, the study aimed to identify how aspects in the narrative accounts resonate with the theoretical framework of three basic psychological needs, based on Self-determination theory.

A triangulation of approaches that examine the phenomenon from different perspectives was applied. Firstly, the meanings of what was told were negotiated with the participants during narrative research interviews. The meanings were further interpreted in the context provided by the participants' narrative accounts. Additionally, a theory-driven interpretation for the narratively formulated meanings was applied, focusing on the need for relatedness.

The first paper of this study focused on school experiences of three female participants, who came from a Finnish Roma background, adding elements of intersectionality to the interpretation process. The second paper examined the participants' different paths out of school through the lens of Self-determination theory. The third paper focused on the participants' experiences of detachment from school as a society, which in terms of Self-determination theory can be understood as perceptions of dissatisfaction and frustration of the need for relatedness.

Detachment from school as a society could be identified as a shared experience of the participants, regardless of their backgrounds. Experiences of temporary need support gave a sense of belonging together with people in school and eagerness to participate in school activities. Though, they were followed by need thwarting or indifference, leading to alienation from school again, and experiences of dissatisfaction and frustration. This study highlights the importance of reacting to students' detachment and providing support for students' psychological needs in school context. Furthermore, this study added to conceptualizing of need-related experiences by giving insights to experiences of dissatisfaction and need frustration as well as indifference and need thwarting circumstances, as experienced and narrated by people having lived the process of leaving school.

Keywords: Early School Leaving, Self-determination theory, Indifference, Relatedness, Detachment, Narrative Interview

## TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Pikkarainen, Merja Tellervo

Suomalaisten koulun keskeyttäneiden kertomuksia irrallisuuden kokemuksista, itsemääräämisteorian näkökulmasta tarkasteltuina.

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Tämä tutkimus kohdentuu suomalaisten koulun keskeyttäneiden henkilöiden koulukokemuksiin. Koulunkäynnin keskeytymiseen liittyviä prosesseja tarkasteltiin yhdentoista, haastateltaessa vankilassa olleen koulunkeskeyttäjän kertomusten kautta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli saada selville, millaisia kertomuksia osallistujat tuottavat koulunkeskeytymiseensä liittyvistä prosesseista ja millaisia merkityksiä he kertomuksiinsa liittävät. Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin myös selvittämään, miten osallistujien esille nostamat näkökulmat sijoittuvat itsemääräämisteorian psykologisten perustarpeiden viitekehykseen. Ilmiötä tarkasteltiin eri näkökulmista soveltaen triangulaatiota. Aluksi kertomusten sisältämistä merkityksistä keskusteltiin osallistujien kanssa kertomushaastattelussa ja merkityksiä tulkitettiin osallistujien kuvailemassa kontekstissa. Lisäksi tuotettuja merkityksiä tarkasteltiin yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeen viitekehyksessä.

Ensimmäisessä artikkelissa tarkasteltiin kolmen romanitaustaisen naisen koulukokemuksia, joihin havaittiin liittyvän myös intersektionaalisia elementtejä. Toisessa artikkelissa tutkittiin osallistujien erilaisia polkuja pois koulusta, itsemääräämisteorian viitekehystä soveltaen. Kolmas artikkeli suunnattiin osallistujien irrallisuuden kokemuksiin kouluyhteisössä; nämä kokemukset voidaan itsemääräämisteorian viitekehyksessä ymmärtää yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeeseen liittyvinä tyytymättömyyden ja turhautumisen kokemuksina.

Irrallisuus kouluyhteisöstä oli osallistujille taustasta riippumatta yhteinen kokemus. Kokemukset hetkellisestä psykologisten tarpeiden tuesta edistivät yhteenkuuluvuutta kouluyhteisön ihmisten kanssa ja innostivat koulunkäyntiin. Näitä kokemuksia seurasivat kuitenkin uusiutuva psykologisten tarpeiden tuen puuttuminen tai estäminen sekä edelleen psykologisten tarpeiden täyttymättömyyden ja turhautumisen kokemukset, mikä aiheutti irtautumista kouluyhteisöstä. Tulokset korostavat opiskelijoiden yhteenkuuluvuuden tukemisen ja irrallisuuden kokemuksiin reagoimisen tärkeyttä. Tutkimus avaa näkökulmia psykologisiin perustarpeisiin liittyvien tyytymättömyyden ja turhautumisen sekä välinpitämättömyyden ja estämisen käsitteisiin koulun keskeyttäneiden henkilöiden kertomusten kautta.

Asiasanat: Koulunkeskeyttäminen, itsemääräisteoria, välinpitämättömyys, yhteenkuuluvuus, irrallisuus, kertomushaastattelu.

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## FOREWORD

This journey to the world of academic research has been a dive into learning. During these last seven years, I have visited environments that are very different. I have visited prisons, lecture rooms of universities, and participated in conferences. Due to the pandemic, there was a period when all meetings were held online, and I could take part in international conferences while sitting by my kitchen table with my laptop. From there I could visit the ivory towers of the academic world. However, my daily job as a special education teacher in elementary school effectively kept me at the grass-root level, thanks to every child, parent, and colleague with whom I had the privilege to work with.

The research setting of my research project was deeply at the grass-root level as well. Meeting people who had left school prematurely, listening to them, and talking with them, helped me to create bridges between the theoretical setting of the study and the lived experience shared by the participants. The journey I have made has not been a lonely one. I have felt connected to the participants of the study, as well as co-researchers and other doctoral students I have met. Not one step of the journey would have been possible without other people, to whom I'm happy to express my gratitude.

It's not possible to highlight one person over the others who have been helpful to me during this process. However, some people possess a special status: all those who volunteered to be interviewed for my study. I'm deeply thankful to you all! I have handed over your wisdom about your lived experiences to academics and other readers as best as I could. Considering academic circles, I wish to express my gratitude to all my supervisors. I started my doctoral studies with Associate Professor Kari Kiviniemi, after whom Professor Juha T. Hakala continued as my head supervisor until Professor Heidi Harju-Luukkainen started as a professor and took over our group of doctoral students. From the very beginning associate professor, Virpi-Liisa Kykyri has been an encouraging, kind, and helpful supervisor, of which I'm deeply thankful.

I have been happy to be part of the group of doctoral students at Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius. The group has provided me with encouraging collegial support as well as important feedback during the process. I have also searched and received collegial support from other sources. These include several seminars and conferences I had the possibility to participate. I wish to express my special gratitude to the Specialists who worked at the Finnish National Board of Education, Satu Blomerus and Susanna Rajala, who gave me collegial support with my first academic article when I was pondering issues around the cultural sensitivity of my text. Thanks also to Lassi Lavanti for feedback on my Kappa text, concerning cultural sensitivity as well. It has been important to me to avoid wordings that might intensify prejudices. Thanks also to people who have proofread my texts, Frank Borg (the research plan), Sharon Keavenyi (English texts) and Aune-Inkeri Björkström (Finnish abstract and Finnish Summary). Thanks also to the research group working on Self-determination theory studies in Finnish for collegial support with Finnish terms of Self-determination theory. Thanks to Kälviä Library for excellent work when I needed rare pieces of literature at the beginning of this process.

Before I started this process of studying and learning I received encouragement to give it a chance from two of my lectures during studying special education. Due to that, I started to ponder, whether doctoral studies might be interesting and possible to me. Thanks to lecturer Simo Rönty for pushing me to think about that. Special thanks to my neighbour at the time, Katariina Kallio-Muuraiskangas for inviting me to the group of doctoral students at University Consortium Chydenius in Kokkola. Hanging around with the group and listening to other students encouraged me to start planning how to study the topic of my research interest, issues around early school leaving. After having my research plan approved, I needed time to carry out the research interviews and studies required for the thesis. These were facilitated by a six-month grant from the Cultural Fund of Central Ostrobothnia, Rauha and Heimo Heikkilä Fund. Thanks to monetary support to FinEd network and Chydenius-instituutin Kannatusyhdistys as well.

I'm grateful to my colleagues who encouraged me, and especially to my principal chief Sari Rundgren-Nurkkala who understood my needs for study leaves and supported me during the process. During the process, I have needed and received advice from many specialists, whom I wish to thank, mentioning especially Doctor Matti Kaivosoja for helping me in learning how to provide space for interviewees and encourage the interviewees to go deeper with talking about their experiences, and Information specialist Marja Kokko for helping me with practices of informed consents. I'm grateful to the Ministry of Justice Finland for providing me with permission to carry out research interviews in Finnish prisons. I was welcomed by the prison managers, as well as other prison personnel. Thank you for your cooperation and support during my visits to the prisons.

I'm deeply grateful to my family and all friends who have not been mentioned above for your support and encouragement. Thank you, my husband, Hannu, for PC support, helping to express the findings visually, as well as for your critical but often so wise comments! You have seen both the dark and bright days of the project and treated me with patience and such a good sense of humour. When I came out of my study with dark rings around my eyes and my hair all messed up, you told me that I looked just like someone working on a doctoral thesis – and we could laugh together. Special thanks to my daughter-in-law Bettiina for teaching me how to use referencing and citing tools, when I started writing articles. I'm grateful for having had parents who valued studying and learning. Thank you, my both sons, Antti, and Aki, for being there, as well as my dear grandchildren, whose presence in our lives has made us remember what really matters. Beyond anything else, I'm grateful to the Creator of all life, our heavenly Father. I have felt that divine guidance has sometimes been amazingly detailed and encouraging during these years.

Kälviä 23.6.2023

Merja Pikkarainen



## FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Sharing experience within a research relationship. ....	20
FIGURE 2	Triangulation between narrative interpretation and the theory-driven concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as defined in Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). ....	26
FIGURE 3	An overview of the narrative interviewing process of this study. ....	43
FIGURE 4	Mapping early school leavers' storied experiences linked with detachment in a Self-determination theory framework. ....	69

## TABLES

TABLE 1	An overview of the thesis. ....	57
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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Invitation to participate the study
Appendix 2	Consent form

# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

FOREWORD

FIGURES AND TABLES

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY.....	11
1.1. Early school leaving as a phenomenon.....	11
1.2. The focus of the study .....	15
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	17
2.1. Individual experiences as a tool for understanding early school leaving .....	17
2.1.1. Experience shared through personal narratives .....	18
2.1.2. The researcher as a tool for understanding narrative meanings: autobiographic aspects.....	20
2.2. Self-determination theory as a tool for understanding early school leaving .....	21
2.3. Concept of experience from different perspectives in this study .....	24
3. CONTEXT AND METHOD .....	28
3.1. The national context.....	28
3.1.1. Student support within Finnish comprehensive education .....	29
3.1.2. Early school leaving in Finland .....	29
3.1.4. Being a prisoner in Finland .....	33
3.1.5. Prison as an environment of research interviews .....	34
3.2. Method.....	35
3.2.1. Entering the field .....	35
3.2.2. The participants .....	36
3.2.3. The interviewed specialists .....	37
3.2.4. Entering, living, and closing the research relationship.....	39
3.2.5. Interviewing processes.....	41
3.3. Analysis .....	44
3.3.1. Narrative analysis during the interviews .....	44
3.3.2. Analysing the narrative accounts after field work .....	45
3.3.3. The narrative data set seen from different perspectives .....	46
3.4. Ethical aspects of the study.....	47
3.4.1. Following principles of respect, care and doing no harm .....	48
3.4.2. Biased relations within the research setting .....	50
3.4.3. Confidentiality .....	53
3.4.4. The participants in the research text.....	54

4. OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL PAPERS .....	56
4.1. Study 1: Being an outsider – an experience of three female Roma early school leavers .....	60
4.1.1. Focusing on the perspective of the female Finnish Roma participants.....	60
4.1.2. Summary of Study 1.....	61
4.2. Study 2: Why did they leave school? A Self-determination theory perspective into narratives of Finnish early school leavers.....	63
4.2.1. Focusing on need-related experiences.....	63
4.2.2. Summary of Study 2.....	63
4.3. Study 3: Revisiting the narratives of Finnish early school leavers: mapping experiences of detachment through a Self-determination theory lens.....	65
4.3.1. Focusing on experiences of relatedness.....	65
4.3.2. Summary of Study 3.....	66
5. FINDINGS OF THE OVERALL STUDY .....	68
6. DISCUSSION.....	70
6.1. Enriching conceptualizing within Self-determination theory .....	70
6.2. A sense of safety and other narrative aspects linked with a Self-determination theory Perspective .....	73
6.3. Avoiding stigmatizing problem presentations through choice of methods.....	75
6.4. Afterthoughts shaped by narrative interpretation.....	76
6.5. Limitations of the study .....	79
6.6. Avenues for future studies .....	81
7. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	83
TIIVISTELMÄ (SUMMARY IN FINNISH).....	86
REFERENCES.....	89

ORIGINAL PAPERS

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The origins of this study derive from my pedagogical ponderings as a special education teacher. While student support in Finland is based on the principle of equity (Chong, 2016), it has failed to reach all students effectively enough to prevent early school leaving. The school discontinuation rates have persisted and even increased (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019). From these premises, I started asking, could there be something pedagogical professionals have not been aware of, something we have missed while working hard to prevent exclusion? Maybe there could be a lesson to be learned from people with lived experience of leaving school before graduating. This study has been conducted from these starting points, to learn about reasons behind early school leaving and to provide professional and academic readers with a window to the perspective of early school leavers, as they have chosen to share their views.

In this study, I will first provide an overview about the phenomenon of early school leaving. The second chapter presents theoretical commitments of the study. The third chapter focuses on the national context of the study as well as methodological choices and practices, including ethical aspects. The fourth chapter presents findings of the three sub-studies, and the fifth chapter presents the results of the overall study. In the sixth chapter I discuss contributions of the study, including limitations of the study and suggestions for further inquiries. I conclude the study with practical implications.

## 1.1 Early school leaving as a phenomenon

Early school leaving is a phenomenon of global concern for policy makers, practitioners, and researchers (Bilige & Gan, 2020; Gil et al. 2019; González-Rodríguez 2019; Momo et al. 2019; Montero-Sieburth & Turcatti, 2022; Ripamonti, 2018). When labelling risk factors for discontinuation of education researchers have identified diverse elements, such as a low socio-economic status, problems in parental care, and belonging to a negatively stigmatized group, or to an ethnic

minority, among other things (Gao 2019, Gubbels et al. 2019; Lauritzen & Nodeland 2018; Peguero 2015). These phenomena have been studied worldwide using various research methods, while research designs, results, and conclusions have been shaped by local contexts, such as national curricula and societal circumstances (Consoni et al. 2021; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Fix et al. 2019; Flannery et al. 2020; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Katz & Acquah, 2021; Stroet et al. 2013; Vinciguerra et al. 2021). However, experiences of mismatches or obstacles that break an educational career can also be of a most personal nature, shaping the lives of individuals. People make choices based on their best knowledge, which arises from their lived experiences. While a risk to discontinuation of education can in many cases be foreseen, perspectives of lived experience can provide valuable knowledge of the elements that have affected personal trajectories. For these reasons, the present thesis focuses on experiences of individuals who have left school without graduating, hence being able to provide information about their view to the process of leaving school.

Discontinuation of education and diminishing school engagement have been linked with social and societal exclusion within the large research body of the issue (Bowman et al., 2020; de Witte et al., 2013; Kearney et al., 2019; Quin, 2017; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Furthermore, several risk factors such as mental health issues and familial coping problems often tend to be intertwined and linked with each other causing absenteeism and diminishing school engagement (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Esch et al., 2014; Gubbels et al., 2019; Lebouef & Dworkin, 2021; Murphy, 2019; Schulte-Körne, 2016; Vinciguerra et al., 2021). Considering developing countries, obstacles of schooling have been linked with general aspects and infrastructure, such as access to transportation, poverty, and girls' low status in local societies (Abuya et al., 2013; Biddlecom et al., 2008; Chikoko & Mthembu, 2020; Hartnack, 2017; Momo et al., 2019; Oruko et al., 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2015).

Perspectives of the students' experiences have also been studied in developing countries focusing on especially sensitive issues for female students, among other things (Oruko et al., 2015; Shahidul & Karim, 2015; Sommer, 2010). Momo et al (2019) listed lack of income, parents' low educational and employment status, living in a single-parent household, being an illegitimate child, region of residence and school performance as the most common causes of early school leaving. The fact that many issues on this list include relationships with surrounding people highlight the importance of understanding students' perspectives within their own context. Interplay between individual experiences, contextual factors, and more general elements, such as societal and institutional expectations is multileveled. Similar elements such as poverty, parenting problems and inequality are globally present within debates around exclusion and low school attendance.

In line with this, Finnish studies have suggested that reasons behind early school leaving often include diverse and accumulating elements, such as challenges with coping at home or school, as well as parents with a limited or lower level of education (Erola et al. 2016; Lämsä, 2009; Määttä, 2007; Nyysölä, 2000;

Parviainen et al., 2021; Sinkkonen, 2007; Vanttaja et al. 2019; Vauhkonen et al., 2017; Waltzer, 2017). Further, recent studies have highlighted the importance of relationships with other people as well as school climate, which can either foster or hinder school engagement (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019; Parviainen et al., 2021; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022; Vinciguerra et al., 2021; Virtanen et al., 2022). Furthermore, Morin (2020), Muhonen et al., (2016), Nouwen and Clycq, (2016), and Pöysä et al., (2019) have been focusing on the quality of teacher-student relationships, highlighting teachers' importance in providing support for students at risk of leaving school. Additionally, Fandrem et al., (2021) and Lyyra et al., (2016) have displayed aspects of peer relationships such as loneliness and peer victimization. Moreover, Virtanen et al. (2021) suggested that quality of school engagement in primary school predicted truancy and intentions to quit schooling during secondary education.

Qualitative studies, among other research approaches from different countries show that phenomena related to early school leaving are often linked with relationships between the student and people who are important to him or her, such as peers, teachers and family (Äärelä, 2012; Balenzano et al., 2018; Banks & Smyth, 2021; Clandinin, 2010; Devenney & O'toole, 2021; Gallé-Tessonneau & Heyne, 2020; Kljakovic et al., 2021; Kuronen, 2010; Liu et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2020; Rueda & Sallán, 2021). Furthermore, Virtanen et al. (2022) suggested that relationships with people in the school environment are a crucial element of students' school engagement. Virtanen et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative, longitudinal study of students' perceived school climate and their self-reported truancy in the Finnish context, finding that school absenteeism increased when students perceived the level of support was low. In short, experiencing care and support from people close to the student, such as parents, peers, and teachers, tends to encourage persisting in school, while negative experiences in these relationships tend to diminish school engagement and motivation. For further understanding of these findings and underpinning elements behind them, we need qualitative, in-depth knowledge of students' perspective and their perceptions. These notions highlight the need to explore how students experience their life in school.

While many fundamental obstacles for schooling have been tackled in many countries by providing free basic schooling and access to social support, there are still families and individuals who struggle with poverty, prejudice, and stigmatization. Inequality seems to persist despite there being a good level of general wellbeing and national income. Several studies have addressed educational challenges among people who represent a minority group, bringing forth the importance of students' bonding with people in the surrounding society (Gao et al., 2019; Kennedy & Hue, 2011; Lu et al., 2016; Peguero et al., 2015; Simpkins et al., 2019). Experiences of inequality as well as a lack of cultural or religious awareness and sensitivity within educational settings have been noted to challenge school achievement and persisting in school for minority students in different national contexts, including Finland (Bauer et al., 2022; Bhowmik et al., 2017; Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2016; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014; Bodkin-

Andrews et al., 2013; Dæhlen & Rugkåsa, 2018; Goel & Husain, 2018; Hayward et al., 2021; Helakorpi et al., 2019; Hung et al., 2019; Li et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2020; Moodie et al., 2019; Shoshana, 2020). However, it is the complex accumulation of several risk factors that has been noted to have an impact on school attendance rather than simply an ethnic or cultural background (Robison et al., 2017). In addition to this Hung et al. (2019) suggested that structural racism can create an opportunity gap for minority students. This indicates that an ethnic or cultural background itself doesn't predict school achievement, engagement or drop-out. The processes behind early school leaving are multileveled, including interplay between the individual and environmental elements.

The atmosphere of the surrounding society seems to colour school life and affect interactions taking place in learning environments and outside them. Costa et al. (2021) proposed in a review, that teachers' attitudes are a shared element having an impact on minority students' school engagement in different countries. Furthermore, Artiles (2011) underlined a need for awareness and understanding of educational equity and difference, to avoid the racializing of ability, or inability, of the student. Ko et al. (2020) pointed out in a literature review that students from diverse cultural backgrounds can also have learning problems, and other special needs. This highlights the importance of considering the individual needs of each student.

Literature reviews by Hartnack (2017), and Shahidul and Karim (2015), point out that research studies have often been focusing on either institutional pull-out factors or individually affecting push-out factors which can be identified in the school context. In line with that Hartnack (2017), and Shahidul and Karim (2015), suggested that better to understand and tackle elements behind school drop-outting, studies which consider both pull-out and push-out aspects and interaction between them would be beneficial. Esch et al. (2014) found that research studies about early school leaving have tended to focus on individual, family- and school-related variables, such as cognitive ability, family composition and socio-economic situation. Schulte-Körne (2016) identified students' mental health issues as risk factors to drop-outting as well. These kinds of background elements often appear not to be changeable. Accordingly, Esch et al. (2014) suggested that future studies should explore malleable factors, including school climate, family functioning, and individual coping styles. These are closely related to relationships with surrounding people, to which a perspective of lived experience can provide an insight. Furthermore, Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) noted that studies often fail to account for the interplay between individual students and their environments. Similarly, Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) underlined that students' educational experiences occur not only within school, peer groups and classrooms, but also within a neighbourhood. Moreover, Freeman and Simonsen (2015) pointed out, that there is a need for exploring how to integrate dropout prevention with other school activities in an effective way, widening the perspective of the current research body of empirical studies, which has mostly been focusing on high-school level and single-component, individual or small-group interventions.

Ekstrand (2015) calls for a shift in perspective from focusing on individually related aspects to a larger perspective of school and community. Ekstrand (2015) points out that the most important forces capable of pulling students to school include a sense of possibilities to strengthen core competences and a bond with adults as well as a positive experience of school climate. Furthermore, Vinciguerra et al. (2021) noted in a review, which ruled out studies about minorities, that while school performance, early risk behaviour and psychopathological factors played a direct or indirect role in the prediction of dropping out, lack of psycho-social support had a strong impact on intentions to leave school before graduating. These elements are closely in line with the suggestion of Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2017) that basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy are important elements of human wellbeing, including motivational aspects of education (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Hence, Self-determination theory has been considered as a promising theoretical framework for interpreting storied experiences of Finnish early school leavers produced within the present study.

Though different research approaches include different kinds of challenges and benefits, Clycq et al. (2017) noted, that there have been shared challenges in recruiting participants for studies focusing on early school leaving, the students or their parents having not been willing or able to commit to a research relationship. While early school leaving has been researched in macro, meso and micro levels, Clycq et al. (2017) highlighted a need for exploring the processual nature of early school leaving in future studies. The present study provides a suggestion to fill this research gap by focusing on the individual processes of the participants.

## **1.2 The focus of the study**

While wellbeing as well as institutional structure and support for education is of a relatively high standard in Finland, I considered it to be important to find out what kind of elements still affect processes underpinning early school leaving. Regarding above mentioned research I found it important to explore early school leaving in the Finnish context. I have focused on individual experiences of early school leavers and how these experiences are linked with contextual and general level elements through basic psychological needs. The small minority of students who still leave basic education without graduating can provide an important insight to experienced vulnerabilities which can make people prone to leave school prematurely.

Personal experiences in a narrative interviewing process provide information about sensations underscoring personal attitudes and choices. Lived experience as a source of research data opens access to personal processes and at its best, to perspectives beyond current academic knowledge (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson, 2013). Linking views drawn from lived experience with a theoretical framework that considers a large range of human perceptions provided a tool to identify both expected, as well as less known views of early school leaving. The



concept of three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as defined in Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020), provided a fruitful framework for interpreting meanings produced in narrative interviewing processes with early school leavers in addition to co-operational narrative interpretation with the participants. The framework of the three basic psychological needs provided a tool to catch signals, also weak ones, linked with the participants' processes of leaving school.

The research body about early school leaving in Self-determination theory has mostly consisted of quantitative studies Stroet et al., (2013), Ryan & Deci, (2020), and Vansteenkiste et al., (2020). However, Vansteenkiste et al. (2020) have encouraged qualitative approaches, to gain better understanding about how need support could be operationalized in a beneficial way. Furthermore, it is important to identify how a possible lack of need support has manifested itself in the lives of early school leavers. Though several risk factors have been identified, we still need in-depth investigations about the perspective of lived experience of early school leavers themselves, to widen our understanding about elements that affect their choices in the context they live in. The current research literature indicates that the quality of interpersonal relationships is an important element in school engagement. Hence, focusing on experiences linked with the psychological need for relatedness can provide information about processes behind diminishing school engagement and early school leaving. There is also a need to explore the forms of interplay, such as accumulation, individual experiences have with phenomena and factors in proximate environment of the students and how they are linked with each other behind the processes of early school leaving.

The research questions of this study have been summarized as follows:

1. What kind of narratives do the participants share about their experiences and circumstances in school and what kind of meanings do they give to them?
2. How are experiences of relatedness reflected in the narratives of the participants?

To answer these questions the three sub-studies targeted more specific aspects displayed in the narrative accounts. Study 1 focused on a group of participants who shared a cultural and familial background of people whose voices have rarely been heard in research arenas: young female Finnish Roma imprisoned early school leavers. Study 2 had a wider focus, exploring how the lived and storied experiences of the participants resonated with the need perceptions described in Self-determination theory literature, as well as how the need perceptions shaped participants' trajectories and paths out of school. Study 3 focused on one of the three basic psychological needs, relatedness, as well as lived and storied experiences linked with satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and frustration of relatedness. Furthermore, need thwarting and indifference linked with relatedness, as background factors underscoring lack of need satisfaction, were examined.

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

When examining human mental responses there is a need to define what is understood by the concept of “experience”. As a term that is used in both common and academic language, experience can be linked with multiple meanings and include different levels. In this chapter I describe how the concept of experience is understood in this study, and the underpinning understandings about experience connect with the methodological and interpretative choices of the study. The theoretical framework of Self-determination theory, as well as the concept of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are also presented in this chapter.

### **2.1 Individual experiences as a tool for understanding early school leaving**

While processes underpinning early school leaving tend to be multileveled and complex each person living amid the process has a perspective of their own. Paying attention to an individual student’s school achievement in detail has been noted to be an effective way to predict which students would drop out of school (Bowers et al., 2013). Several other aspects of vulnerability and risk factors have been identified in the research literature (see Chapter 1.1.). However, there is a need to find ways how to identify and meet individual needs of students at risk to be able to tackle educational exclusion. Human beings live, make choices and act in accordance with their best knowledge, which is formulated by personal expectations, which in turn are shaped by former experiences as Dewey (1916; 1938) has proposed. Interaction with one’s environment plays an important role in formulating these expectations (Bruner, 1991; Clandinin, 2013). Hence, personal experiences can widen our understanding of the significance of aspects related to early school leaving, as well as create space to identify unexpected elements (Clandinin, 2010; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

It is also important to find ways to understand emotional responses that may derive from a variety of backgrounds. This can be enhanced by focusing on lived experience and interpreting these experiences in a framework that is not bound to propositions about risk factors but gives space to the participant's personal view. The importance of a risk factor in this kind of a research approach is left for the participant to define. As Clandinin (2013) has stated narrative as a research method provides access to investigate personal experiences, while considering a contextual perspective of each participant. Hence, narrative interviewing provides a research tool for identifying meanings in what has been told. A general theoretical frame of experiences related to human wellbeing, alongside narrative understanding of the storied experiences, creates possibilities to identify aspects that people themselves consider as significant. In this study a sub theory of Self-determination theory, namely the theory of Three Basic Psychological Needs (3BPN, Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020) has been chosen as a tool for interpreting the meanings of what was told. Combining narrative and theoretical interpreting creates space for expanding understanding of practical manifestations of theoretical aspects, as well as organizing the rich narrative data in a meaningful way, without neglecting minor aspects of what has been told.

### **2.1.1 Experience shared through personal narratives**

Narrating and storytelling has been a way to describe and share one's experiences to each other throughout the history of mankind. In this study lived experience is comprehended as a source of knowledge that can widen our understanding of different kinds of phenomena. Access to understanding something about another person's experiences can be opened through a process where someone is telling, and someone is listening. In this study experience has been understood in the way Dewey (1916, 1938) presented it as a continuum which is shaped by former experiences, and which affects forward to further experiences. Moreover, as Bruner (1991, 2004) suggested, narrated experience is seen as a phenomenon revealed and shaped by telling, reflecting, and retelling. As such experience - or storied experience as narrative - are not fixed or immobile, but changing while living and sharing, shaped by interactions between the teller and the audience, as McAdams (2008) has noted. Accordingly, following the conceptualizing of Clandinin (2013) experience is seen in this study as contextual, connected to a place, time, and social interactions, shaped by where, when, and with whom it is lived and shared. As Hyvärinen (2010) has noted, what is told represents something unusual or something of importance in the teller's mindset. Accordingly, the way an experience is understood and put into a verbal or written form shareable with others is also shaped by the larger general narratives, which include cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as institutional, social, and familial environments (Clandinin, 2013, 2022; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As experience is understood to be shaped by former experience, there can also occur an accumulation of experiences, which shape responses to future events. This can

create different layers of experience, which colour and challenge thinking, reflecting and expectations within a larger narrative landscape.

The research relationship shapes what will be shared with the listener to be later provided in a research text to a larger audience (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As Clandinin (2013) noted, a narrative of an experience is composed in a relationship between the teller and the listener. Hence, what people in the situation represent to each other has an impact on what will be shared, and how (Lessard et al., 2018). Clandinin (2013) highlights the co-operational nature of creating a narrative account. In a process with listening, negotiating, reflecting, and retelling storied experience can be formulated and co-composed to a text. Clandinin (2013) described three commonplaces that are present when we are interviewing people and composing narrative accounts with the participants: time, place, and sociality. All these are also intertwined with power relations between the participants and the researcher. Consequently, the researcher needs to be aware of his or her own privileges, as Hewitt (2007), and Josselson (2013) have noted. This is especially important when interviewing people in a vulnerable or stigmatized position, such as people belonging to cultural minorities (Lessard et al., 2018).

The three commonplaces Clandinin (2013) named, are present both when an event happens, and when it is shared and composed to a narrative account. Hence, as Clandinin (2022) notes, continuity is an ontological matter of narrative inquiring. It could be supposed, that when a storied experience has been fixed into a research text and published, it would be stable. However, the context, time, place, and social environment of the readers shape their understanding and interaction with the text, opening new possible meanings. Interaction between a reader's own, perhaps inner unshared story about their lived experience and the participant's storied lived experience, reachable in a text, can affect the reader's future experiences. Hence, in this study, lived and storied experience have been honoured as a valuable and powerful source of information. Figure 1 illustrates how talking about an experience is understood to be linked with aspects of time, place and sociality when lived and afterwards, when shared by memorizing, telling, reflecting, and re-telling within a research relationship. "Ed" represents a participant.

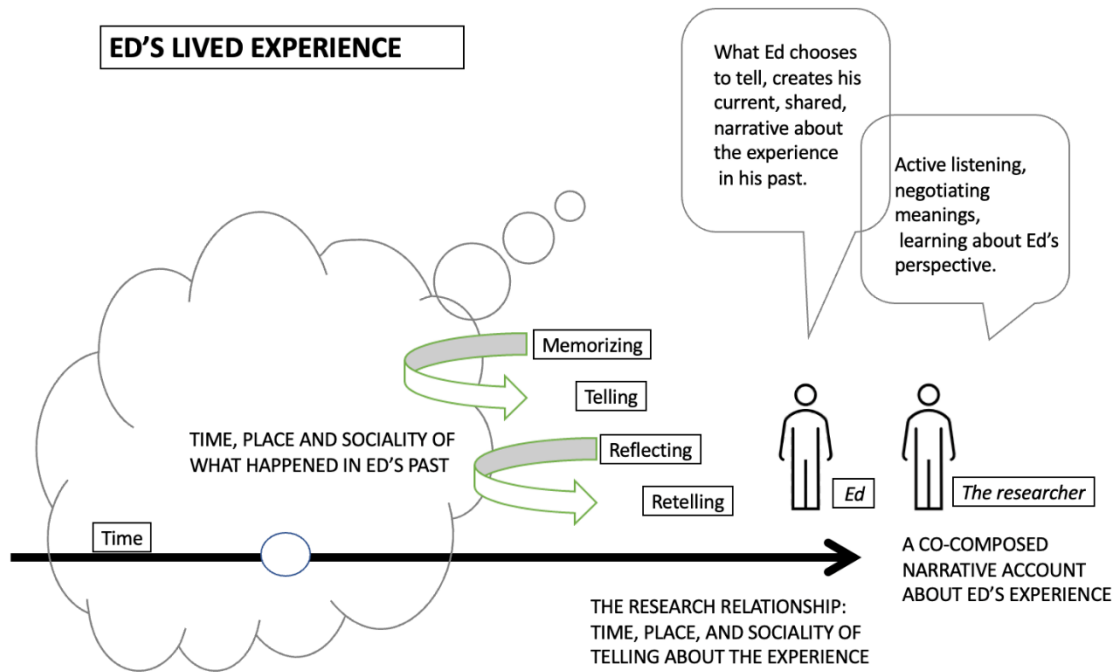


FIGURE 1 Sharing experience within a research relationship.

The researcher's personal contribution to the co-composed narrative account is intertwined with narrative as a method (Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016). Hence, it's important to bring forth how research relationships are shaped, and how the researcher and the participants are positioned in relation to each other, to the theme of the inquiry and, to the commonplaces of narrative inquiry, time, place, and sociality, as well as what kind of power relations affect them (Clandinin et al., 2018; Josselson, 2013).

### 2.1.2 The researcher as a tool for understanding narrative meanings: autobiographic aspects

In this chapter I provide some aspects of my background as a researcher, and how the researchers' position has affected the processes and outcomes of the study. Narrated experiences as a source of information include the impact of the listener as well as the research relationship of the listener and the teller. As Clandinin (2013) points out, the meanings are always to some extent co-authored, either due to the questions and comments the researcher utters, or because they are a negotiated outcome of conversations, telling, listening, negotiating, and re-telling. Who is listening, how they are listening, and what they represent to the teller shape what is chosen to be shared. Furthermore, what the participant as a teller represents to the researcher, shapes the research relationship as well. As Crimmins (2016) and Lessard et al., (2018) have noted it is especially important to consider the position of the researcher and build a research relationship with mutual respect when there exists a biased power-relationship between the researcher and the participants. Additionally, Clandinin, (2013), Clandinin et al., (2018), and

Josselson, (2007) have highlighted the importance of a caring ethical attitude within narrative interviewing processes. With these aspects in mind, I had a look into my research plan, practices, and texts, and found it important to provide readers with a transparent view of my position as a researcher.

I have a background as a class-teacher for twelve years, and after that as a special education teacher for sixteen years in the Finnish elementary school system. My childhood mental landscape was coloured with schooling, as my parents were teachers and my family lived on the upper floor of a village school. This kind of a developmental environment made schooling and education an inevitable part of my mindset. When working as a class teacher I started to ponder how to be able to help each child to learn in the best possible way. My hope was that everyone could maintain motivation for schoolwork and learning from the first graders' enthusiasm for learning how to read onwards. This prompted me to study special education. After having worked a couple of years as a special education teacher, I started to think that the research literature about student support might be missing something. While working with children who needed support for learning, motivation, or both, I continued trying to find out how to best support them. I felt disturbed with the fact that however hard we worked within student support practices in schools, we couldn't reach everyone effectively enough to help them persist – or want to persist – in school. I had questions about how to prevent early school leaving but I didn't find satisfying answers in the research literature of the time. This invited me to have a deeper look and examine the issue myself.

In this study, as a teacher, to the participants I represented school as an institution. Though, as a researcher I also represented someone who might be able to carry messages they had in their mind, things rising from their personal experiences, that they might want to be heard by school personnel and authorities. Throughout the research relationship I highlighted that I was there to learn, that I was interested in the participants' personal perspective about their school experiences, and their process of leaving school. By positioning myself as a learner, and an active listener, I wanted to point out that I valued the participants' knowledge, and that I thought it would be of importance not only to myself as a teacher and a researcher, but also to academic readers.

## **2.2 Self-determination theory as a tool for understanding early school leaving**

Self-determination theory argues that human beings have an inherent urge towards learning and growing (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002; 2017). Self-determination theory also claims to be a theory of a global validity and suggests that the three basic psychological needs are shared with all humans and in different cultures (Chen et al., 2015; Deci & Ryan, 2008b, 2012; Lynch et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Vansteenkiste et al., 2008). As a sub theory of Self-

determination theory 3BPN theory focuses on perceptions of competence, relatedness and autonomy as elements of motivation and wellbeing in various domains, including education (Bowers & Sprcott, 2012; Deci et al., 1991; Deci & Ryan, 2008a, 2012; Iaconelli & Anderman, 2021; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2009, 2017; Tian et al., 2013, 2014; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). According to Self-determination theory, while a high level of satisfaction of the basic psychological needs promotes intrinsic motivation, low levels of perceived need satisfaction cause diminishing motivation and maladaptive activities (Renaud-Dubé et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Taylor et al., 2012, 2014; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Hence, diminishing school engagement and early school leaving have been linked with weak need support among the research body of Self-determination theory (Stroet et al. 2013 Stroet et al., 2015a; 2015b).

According to Self-determination theory all people share psychological needs the satisfaction of which is nutriment to a healthy development and inherent motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Within Self-determination theory these needs have been conceptualized as a need for autonomy, a need for competence, and a need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vansteenkiste et al., 2008, 2010, 2020). For the wellbeing of a human being all these three basic psychological needs need to be met in a way matching one's developmental age (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan et al., 2016; Soenens et al., 2017). The research body of Self-determination theory is clear in showing the benefits of need satisfaction for a successful school career, among other aspects of a good life (den Broeck et al., 2016; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Núñez & León, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, thwarting or ignoring one's basic psychological needs tend to lead to maladaptive outcomes and a lower level of wellbeing (Costa et al., 2014; Olafsen et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Self-determination theory focuses on the functioning of need perceptions and outcomes of perceived need statuses at different levels of need satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Vansteenkiste et al., 2010, 2020). The needs are conceptualized in a two-fold way. The researchers have created theoretical definitions for each need within Self-determination theory literature (see Deci & Ryan 1985; Deci et al. 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; 2017; Vansteenkiste et al. 2020), but also described practical manifestations of different levels of need satisfaction linked with each need. The latter formulate a basis for questionnaires used in research studies in the field (Cheon et al., 2019; Center for Self-determination theory, n.d.; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003; Guay et al., 2000; Pelletier et al., 1995; Tian et al., 2014; Van der Kaap-Deeder, 2020). As Ryan and Deci (2017) have defined, in Self-determination theory autonomy is understood as a person's option to make choices with capabilities to do so, competence is understood as an ability to engage in activities and complete them, as well as learn and develop one's skills, and relatedness is understood as a sense of belonging together with other people both in one's imminent proximity as well as with people and groups further away.

Acts and circumstances that are beneficial for satisfaction of a need are conceptualized as need supportive (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Perceptions of need satisfaction are often linked with interactions with other people. Due to that, relatedness

plays an important role in support for autonomy and competence, in addition to relatedness as a need of its own accord (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Wood, 2016). In the school context, the perceived level of relatedness manifests itself in the quality of relationships with important people such as teachers, peers, siblings, and parents (Furrer et al., 2014; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ruzek et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2013; Wood, 2016).

In Self-determination theory the quality of need perceptions has been understood as a continuum, satisfaction being situated at the high and frustration at the low end of the continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to the conceptualizing of Ryan and Deci (2017) need support is an act or circumstance underpinning perceived need satisfaction, and accordingly, need thwarting leads to perceived need frustration. However, the mid-section of the continuum has been lately recognized as a topic of research interest on its own accord: there has been a suggestion for a third need status in the middle of the two ends, namely dissatisfaction, resulting from indifference to one's needs (Cheon et al., 2019). Cheon et al. (2019) studied indifference and dissatisfaction related to the need for autonomy in a classroom setting. There remains a research need to investigate this mid-section of need perceptions also considering the other two basic psychological needs, relatedness, and competence.

Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) also suggested a hierarchal model to explain different need statuses and people's motivational responses to need support or need thwarting. The hierarchal model includes three levels of generality: a general level, a contextual level, and a situational level. Katz et al. (2008) included personality traits in the general level of need-related perceptions. Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) suggested, that if positive need perceptions accumulate, that creates a general positive attitude and motivation. Accordingly, when negative need perceptions accumulate, that would lead to generally negative attitudes and prospects. The general level attitude would affect in the contextual level either in a positive and encouraging way, or in a negative way hindering personal motivation, as well as affecting responses to either need support or need thwarting.

Furthermore, as both Katz et al. (2008), and Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) have proposed, general level perceptions underpin context-bound perceptions. Accordingly, contextual level has an impact to perceptions in a situational level and further affect a person's choice whether to take a challenge or to withdraw from it. In line with this Ratelle et al. (2017), and Ratelle and Duchesne (2014) found that high levels of need support in the long term resulted in a high level of school adjustment. Moreover, Stroet et al. (2013) proposed that a general support for autonomy resulted in high levels of students' school motivation and engagement. While positive effects seem promising, we still need more knowledge about the accumulation of negative need-based perceptions, which is one of the research interests of this study.

I used the concept of three basic psychological needs as an organizing tool of narrative data. By this I aimed to identify links and relationships between elements the participants experienced as significant in their processes of leaving school and the levels of need satisfaction as they have been described within Self-



determination theory literature. The experienced levels of need satisfaction were identified by comparing the meanings in the narrative accounts with the descriptions linked to perceived need statuses in questionnaires used in Self-determination theory research literature (Cheon et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2014). In this study the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017) are understood as elements underpinning human emotional responses, behaviour, and choices.

### **2.3 Concept of experience from different perspectives in this study**

Within the research body of Self-determination theory, the terms 'need satisfaction' and 'need frustration' are commonly used to describe perceptions related to the basic psychological needs (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Ryan and Deci (2002), and Vansteenkiste et al. (2020) distinguished 'need-based experiences' from circumstances and social environments that can either promote or hinder one's sense of need satisfaction. Ryan and Deci (2002) described a need as a perception of a mental quality, a psychological sense of being competent, autonomous, or related to others rather than a skill, capability, or a social status. Need support enacted in the social environment of an individual underscores need satisfaction and provides nutriment for positive motivational processes and healthy development (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Accordingly, need thwarting has been understood as circumstances or social relations hindering need satisfaction, resulting as perceptions of frustration as conceptualized by Patall et al. (2018), Ryan and Deci (2017), and Vansteenkiste et al. (2020). Hence, in the framework of Self-determination theory, the terms 'experience', 'need-based experience', and 'perception' can be understood as a concept that is distinguished from its' background factors. However, Costa et al. (2014, p. 12) noted that need thwarting can also be called need frustration within Self-determination theory literature. In this thesis I have distinguished background factors from human responses to them by using the term 'circumstances' to refer to background factors.

As Lynch et al. (2020), Ryan and Deci (2020), and Stroet et al. (2013) have noted, the research body of Self-determination theory consists mainly of quantitative studies. Consequently, assessing aspects for investigation has been conducted within theoretically driven definitions. These can also be translated and used in different countries and research settings (Barkoukis et al., 2008; Guay et al., 2000; Katz et al., 2008; Katz & Cohen, 2014; Pelletier et al., 1995; Tian et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2006). For research purposes the questionnaires created within Self-determination theory are reachable from the webpage of the research community (CSDT, n.d.). For participants, definitions of the aspects under investigation have been operationalized in statements and questions, using a Likert-scale to measure how much the participants agree or disagree with the statements. Hence, in research studies using questionnaires, what is experienced is defined

by the researchers, and the participant expresses to what extent he or she has experienced the aspect, in the sense of meaning he or she understands the terms and scale used in the questionnaire. To fill this methodologic gap Katz et al. (2008) developed a projective tool for assessment of autonomous motivation in children, using pictures to prompt children to give their own expression to what they thought a person in the picture might feel or think. Katz et al (2008) suggested, that this kind of a projective assessment captured additional aspects of motivation compared to the questionnaires they used alongside the projective method in their study. This indicates that qualitative studies and a narrative understanding of experiences might provide important perspectives to enrich the research body of Self-determination theory.

Differing from the research approaches based on theory-driven definitions of what is experienced, a narrative conceptualizing of experience positions a participant as a subject: he or she defines what has been experienced. Furthermore, the participants as tellers can go into details, backgrounds, and interpretations in what their experiences mean or have meant to them. Moreover, the participant chooses what and how is shared of his or her experiences. Consequently, the theoretical frameworks within Self-determination theory have a different perspective to experience, compared to a narrative view. To distinguish the differences between the conceptualizing of 'experience' in this study I have used term 'perception' when meaning experiences and sensations as they have been defined within Self-determination theory research body. Accordingly, the term 'experience' is used about experience in the narrative sense of meaning.

Within Self-determination theory literature, Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) linked a general level of need perceptions with an individual's motivational orientation, which was considered to be rather stable. In line with that Katz et al. (2008) described the general level as the personal features of an individual. Furthermore, Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) postulated, that like a general level, a contextual level of an individual's motivation would be rather stable, contexts described as life domains such as education, leisure, and social relationships. Vallerand and Ratelle (2002, p. 51) suggested, that situational negative feedback from one's environment can have a negative impact on one's sense of motivation, starting a process affecting contextual and general levels as well. Hence, interplay between need-based perceptions in general, contextual, and situational levels shapes a person's acts and choices. This contextual perspective resonates with a larger view of aspects underscoring individual experiences highlighted by Clandinin and Murphy (2009), namely that storied experiences are situated and shared within cultural, institutional, and linguistic narratives in which both the participants and the researchers live. Clandinin (2022, p. 8) states that "narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world". Drawn from Vallerand and Ratelle (2002), as well as from Ryan and Deci (2017), it can be proposed, that within 3BPN theory of Self-determination theory the researchers study people's need-based perceptions in the world, in a specific domain or in a specific situation. Figure 2 illustrates how the experiences displayed in the narratives and the

concept of the three basic psychological needs have been situated in relation to each other in this study.

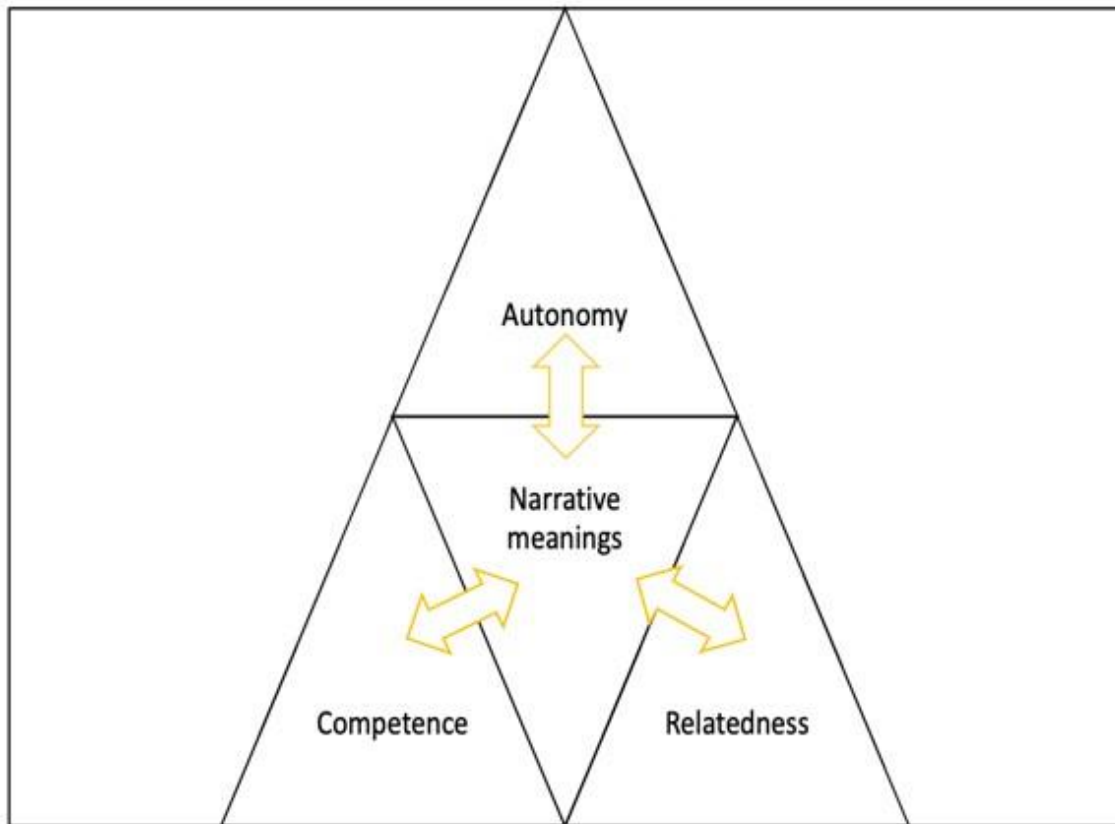


FIGURE 2 Triangulation between narrative interpretation and the theory-driven concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as defined in Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020).

Using approaches arising from two different research traditions to study individual experiences provides a fruitful arena for triangulation. As Fusch et al. (2018) have noted, theoretical triangulation in qualitative study can consist of interpreting the data in different or contradicting theoretical frameworks. In both narrative research tradition and in Self-determination theory an individuals' relationship with their environment has been considered important. Though, methodological, and conceptual traditions differ from each other. In this study theoretical triangulation derives from the different perspectives to the concept of experience, the research design including narrative interpretation of the storied experience and a theory-driven interpretation following conceptualizing of Self-determination theory. I have explored storied experiences of the participants, as well as need-based perceptions identified in the narrative accounts, considering relationships with people and environments described by the participants. As conceptualized within Self-determination theory research literature (Chen et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2017), perceptions related to the basic psychological needs were considered as shared with all humans, while cultural and other differences were

additional elements affecting individual people's experiences. Accordingly, the participants' narrated experiences linked with autonomy, competence, and relatedness have been understood as shared mental aspects of humanity, while cultural and familial background has been understood as a circumstance within which the individual experiences had been lived. Of the three basic psychological needs this study focuses on the need for relatedness.

### 3 CONTEXT AND METHOD

In the following chapter I provide a short overview of the Finnish national context, including a short presentation of the backgrounds linked with the participants of the study. I further present methodological choices and practices, as well as describe processes of interpretation of the narrative research data. After that I describe ethical aspects linked with the study.

#### 3.1 The national context

The Finnish school system and curricula have developed through several changes. The act of basic education (Laki Oppivelvollisuudesta 101/1921) determined free compulsory schooling. After establishing access to basic schooling for all children both in cities and rural areas during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the societal debate about educational equity led to a system with nine years of compulsory schooling starting at the age of seven (Laki Koulujärjestelmän Perusteista No 467, 1963). This has recently been extended to compulsory attendance to schooling until 18 years of age (Ahonen, 2021; Oppivelvollisuuslaki 1214/2020).

The latest curriculum reform highlighted that there is a need for an ongoing development so that schools can react proactively to changes in the surrounding society, as well as include local emphasis in their practices (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Within these changes students in need of support have been considered by a model for pedagogical support which includes three levels of intensity (Laki perusopetuslain muuttamisesta 642/2010) as well as by providing student welfare services (Oppilas- Ja Opiskelijahuoltolaki 1287/2013). Linguistic and cultural groups such as Swedish, Sami, and Finnish Roma have been taken notice of in the Finnish National Core Curriculum as national minorities, to protect and encourage cultural equity (OPH 2014, 86-93).

### 3.1.1 Student support within Finnish comprehensive education

The Finnish core curriculum highlights the importance of coherent school transitions and individual support for each student (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016; Laki Perusopetuslain Muuttamisesta 642/2010). After compulsory schooling students can choose general upper secondary education or vocational education or a combination of these two (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.). In each grade students have a right to support and guidance, immediately when a need has been noticed, with inclusive solutions to enhance studying and learning. Student support is arranged in co-operation with the student and his or her guardians following a pedagogical model of three intensity levels. The first level of support includes short-term support, the second level includes intensified support with an individual learning plan, and the third step individual goals, which are documented for individual evaluation (Laki Perusopetuslain Muuttamisesta 642/2010). Applying adequate practices to support each student has created an ongoing learning process for school personnel as Eklund et al., (2020) have noted.

Student support services include school social workers, psychologists, health nurses and doctors, co-operating with school personnel and a larger network that may include therapists, rehabilitation personnel and other specialists, in addition to the students and their families. Following the act of student welfare services (OHL 1287/2013), the whole school community is involved in supporting students' wellbeing. In this thesis school community is understood as consisting of students and all adults working in a school setting with students, as well as of relationships and bonds that develop between these people and enhance healthy development, growth, and thriving.

Buli-Holmberg et al. (2022) noted that understanding of how inclusive support should be defined and operationalized varies among research studies in Finland. In line with this, variations have been found in teachers' opinions about inclusive support approaches (Honkasilta et al., 2019). Furthermore, Saloviita (2020) noted, that teacher's attitudes to inclusion are closely linked with the availability of school resources, such as co-operative assistance personnel in the classroom.

### 3.1.2 Early school leaving in Finland

The percentage of young people having left compulsory comprehensive school without a leaving certificate in 2018–2019 was 0,59 %, equaling 352 students (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). The discontinuation rate in post-comprehensive schooling in Finland in 2019 was 5,9%, the rate showing a slight increase yearly from the year 2017 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019). During a longer period, between years 2001 and 2019, the discontinuation rate of education in upper secondary general education aimed at young people has varied from 3,0% to 4,5% between 2001 and 2019, while discontinuation in vocational education during the same period has varied from 7,3% to 13,1% (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019). Within these rates there are overly represented groups of people among early

school leavers, such as short-term prisoners (Kivivuori & Linderborg, 2009), youth of immigrant families (Harju-Luukkainen & McElvany, 2018; Kalalahti et al., 2017), and the Finnish Roma (Mäenpää et al., 2018; Rajala et al., 2011; Rajala & Blomerus, 2015).

According to Vauhkonen et al. (2017), and Järvinen et al. (2023) accumulating family disadvantages, such as parental school dropout, familial need for social assistance and parents' unemployment had a negative impact on the children's school career. It's important to note, that these risk elements may occur in families representing minorities as well as in families representing a national majority. However, in a family targeted with a negative stigma other risk elements may have a stronger impact on children's wellbeing and schooling than in families without negative labelling.

### **3.1.3 The Finnish Roma minority within educational trajectories**

There are estimated to be approximately 10 000 Finnish Roma living in Finland and additionally 3000 people who identify themselves as Finnish Roma but live in Sweden (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2004). At a European level, including Finland, various attempts have been made to develop the educational trajectories of Roma minorities, as well as research approaches (Alexiadou & Norberg, 2017; Bhopal & Myers, 2009; Claveria & Alonso, 2003; European Commission, 2019; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Harris et al., 2017; Hemelsoet, 2015; Kyuchukov & New, 2016; Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018; Matache, 2017; Myers & Bhopal, 2009; O'Hanlon, 2016; Pecek & Munda, 2015; Salgado-Orellana et al., 2019; Santiago et al., 2019; Scullion & Brown, 2013; Wauters et al., 2015). European General Data Protection Regulation of the European Parliament (2016) prohibits creating statistics drawn from ethnic information and is followed by Finnish data protection instructions (Data Protection Ombudsman's Office, (n.d.). Due to that statistics by ethnicity about Finnish Roma are not available in Finland (Nieminen, 2013). However, reports and surveys have revealed shortcomings within education, for instance a lower level of school-continuation compared to the population as a whole and miss-matches in special-class placements of Finnish Roma students (Rajala et al., 2011; Rajala & Blomerus, 2015; Stenroos & Helakorpi, 2021).

The percentage of young people having left comprehensive school without a leaving certificate was 0,59% among the population as a whole (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). On the other hand, approximately 80% Finnish Roma students had completed basic education. Therefore 15–20% of Finnish Roma students had left basic education before graduating, as noted in Finland's National Roma Policy by Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (ROMPO, 2019, p. 25). However, many people coming from a Finnish Roma background have also been active and societally influential, for instance in developing national policies as well as working at a European level (Friman-Korpela, 2014; Roman, 2020). Furthermore, there have been successful academic careers at a doctoral level among people publicly representing the Finnish Roma cultural group, such as Friman-Korpela and Stenroos (Friman-Korpela, 2014; Stenroos, 2020; Vuorela, 2014). Moreover, students coming from a Finnish Roma background have graduated

with other kinds of thesis, such as in polytechnic studies (Ärting, 2010; 2018, Nyman, 2012). There has also emerged polarization among the Finnish Roma, following the tendency in society as a whole, due to accumulating challenges and social ill-being in some of the families (Vähemmistövaltuutettu, 2014). Adding to this, Weiste-Paakkanen et al. (2018) reported lower rates of employment among the Finnish Roma compared to the population as a whole. This is in line with the findings of Anttonen (2009) and Jauhola et al. (2019), that expectations of not getting a job due to a Finnish Roma background decreased school motivation among some of the Finnish Roma youth. However, intertwined with general changes in the labour market over the last decades, schooling has also seen as a beneficial way to get a job as noted by Mäenpää et al. (2018), and Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, THL (2021).

Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH) has considered supporting minority cultures, including the Finnish Roma culture and language as well as monitoring the success of educational attempts (Huhtanen & Puukko, 2016; OPH, 2014; Perusopetuslaki 628/1998, n.d.). There are guides for childcare and school professionals about how to meet children who come from families with a Finnish Roma background (Luttinen et al., 2007; Mallinen & Nivalainen, 2010; OPH, 2012), as well as reports and thesis on how to support Finnish Roma students (Boelius, 2017; Gripenberg, 2011; OPH, 2013; Nissinen & Nurminen, 2010; Rajala et al., 2011; ROMPO, 2019; Svart et al., 2014). The fact that these kind of guides and papers exist indicates that there might be a need for improving current practices. As Berlin (2015a), Friman-Korpela (2014), and Granqvist (2020) have noted, cultural prejudice targeting the Finnish Roma has affected and still affects Finnish society.

A Finnish Roma individual who follows cultural habits, especially when choosing to wear traditional clothing, is visibly recognizable among people wearing a more common western outfit such as jeans and t-shirts. The Finnish Roma women's traditional outfit consists of a long dress and a decorated blouse, sometimes covered with a short jacket, while Finnish Roma men typically wear black trousers and a white shirt, often with a black suit jacket and black shoes (Huttu, 2009; Viljanen, 2012). Young Finnish Roma make a choice whether to start wearing traditional clothing or not (Huttu, 2009; Stenroos, 2012; Viljanen, 2012). By choosing to wear traditional clothing the young Finnish Roma commit themselves to the cultural group and at the same time take the challenge of facing prejudice which their families have been targeted with. However, some of the Finnish Roma end up living in between the cultures. Individuals not fully integrated in the way of life the majority represents nor the tradition of one's Finnish Roma family have been noted to be more prone to struggling with fitting in and belonging to either group (Roman, 2018).

The choice to follow Finnish Roma cultural habits also includes deeper aspects, which Roman (2018) described as a moral code which defines distinctions between permissible and shameful, private, and public, Finnish Roma ("Kaale") and non-Roma ("Kaaje"), old and young, male, and female, giving directions to power relationships and how one is suggested to act and behave. Viljanen (2012)



conceptualizes these aspects by using symbolic purity as a term to describe the Finnish Roma perspective to permissible behaviour and shameful behaviour. According to Viljanen (2012) and Roman (2018) symbolic purity also includes practical aspects such as making food, using kitchenware, how to handle food and what to talk and not to talk about with Finnish Roma of other gender and age. In line with this Roman (2018) noted that the issues related to shame, modesty, and family honour affected the daily lives of the Finnish Roma, in the school environment as well as in other life domains.

Though some aspects of Finnish Roma cultural habits have an impact on the lives of the families and individuals, there are also elements affecting the lives of the families and individuals regardless of a cultural background. According to a recent study by Ferreira et al (2021), a Roma minority background didn't affect how children and families responded to an educational intervention. On the contrary, Ferreira et al (2021) found, that low-income majority families and low-income Roma families responded similarly to a pre-school intervention. As another non-cultural factor Virtanen (2016) pointed out that positive emotional engagement in the teacher-student relationship played an important role in students' school engagement in the Finnish context. In line with that Vinciguerra et al. (2021) highlighted that the lack of socio-emotional support made students prone to dropping out of school. Furthermore, Roman (2020) suggested that improvements in the economic and social wellbeing of Finnish Roma families affected positively on discourses about the future of the children, and consequently on the community, that being a phenomenon not bound to a cultural or familial background. Drawn from these notions, it remains unclear how aspects linked with a cultural background, such as cultural habits and facing cultural prejudice, and non-cultural aspects, such as socio-economic issues, are intertwined and accumulate or affect separately students' school trajectories. This underlines the importance of exploring the experiences of Finnish Roma students in a non-culturally specific framework, in addition to research designs focusing on ethnic and cultural aspects. Furthermore, it's crucial to give space for people themselves to define which aspects are linked with their cultural background, and which are not.

It's important to note that the Finnish Roma are not a homogenous group. There are individuals and families some of whom follow cultural habits such as traditional clothing and symbolic purity more strictly than others (Roman, 2018; Stenroos, 2012; 2019; Viljanen 2012). Children of Finnish Roma families learn the habits of their family, adapting ways to cope with the surrounding society and possible prejudices. Furthermore, all family members live amid practices linked with power relationships between families inside the community of Finnish Roma, and sometimes obligations to avoid another Finnish Roma family, or limitations to choose a place of residence to which Berlin (2015b), Viljanen (2012), and Stenroos (2019) have referred to. The moving permit custom is applied as an instrument to control in which areas a Finnish Roma family lives. The authority to support or prevent a Finnish Roma person to move to a new city is in the hands of elder members of the family lines already living in the area (Berlin, 2015b;

Stenroos, 2019). Berlin (2015b) noted that the aim of the moving permit custom is to prevent conflicts between Finnish Roma families with a history of feuding, which has been described by Grönfors (1977). Accordingly, Stenroos (2019) pointed out, that avoidance custom between conflicted families and the members of the families provides a way to show respect to the offended party. According to Roman (2018), Stenroos (2019) and Berlin (2015b) the avoidance duty and practices related to it affect all life domains of Finnish Roma individuals and families. There is a need for members of Finnish Roma families to be aware of the custom and possible duties to avoid someone to be able to act accordingly. As Stenroos (2019) has pointed out, that affects an individual's possibilities to participate in social activities, including education.

In a national context, Lehti (2019, p. 34) reported, that male Finnish Roma appeared as victims of homicide ten times more often than males of the Finnish population as a whole. Weiste-Paakkanen et al., (2018) noted in a survey that approximately 40% of Finnish Roma people reported that they avoid certain places because of feeling unsafe in them. Junkala and Tawah (2009) described Roma youth's experiences of their family members being followed by shop guards in an inappropriate way, and almost a half of the Finnish Roma children had felt a sense of insecurity of being accepted when starting school (Junkala & Tawah, 2009). This indicates an increased possibility for the children and youth of Finnish Roma families to experience a threat of physical or mental violence. If other kinds of risk elements, such as problems in parental care and poverty are present simultaneously, the situation can decrease the sense of security in the developmental environment of the children. On the other hand, according to Viljanen (2012) the Finnish Roma families often have deep bonds and the support of one's extended family protects individuals who are facing challenges.

### **3.1.4 Being a prisoner in Finland**

There are 26 prisons in Finland, run by the Criminal Sanctions Agency, including both closed and open institutions. According to Prison and Probation Service of Finland (RISE), 70% of prisoner places are in closed prisons and 30% in open prisons or units (RISE, 2020). The trend over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen a decrease in the number of prison sentences given. The rate of committed crimes has been decreasing as well, in spite of drug related crimes, which have shown a slight increase (Elonheimo, 2014). However, Finnish prisons have been noted to be overcrowded in recent years (Lappi-Seppälä, 2019), which may indicate challenges in providing effective rehabilitation and support for integrating into society when a prisoner is released.

General social tolerance among the population and trust to institutions have been relatively high in the Nordic countries, including Finland (Lappi-Seppälä, 2011). Low socio-economic status increased punitive attitudes among the Finnish population, while a higher educational level and knowledge of criminology and prison practices decreased punitiveness (Balvig et al., 2015; Kääriäinen, 2016), indicating attitudes to people involved in crimes. Interestingly, Savolainen et al. (2013) found that students choosing vocational schooling after compulsory

school seemed to be more prone to minor crimes than those in schools considered to be of a higher educational level. Hence, a lower educational status seems to be linked with both increased rates of criminality and more harsh attitudes to punishments of crime. This indicates that in Finnish society there might be polarization of both attitudes to crimes and perpetrating them. Among young people placed in a residential school there was found to be a 13 times higher rate of committing crimes later in life than among matched general population controls (Manninen et al., 2017). This is in line with the notion of Savolainen et al. (2015) that societal exclusion and a low educational status tend to be intergenerational phenomena. However, public opinion in Finland has been rather tolerable to criminal youth, so that rehabilitation and other alternative institutional responses to a crime have been preferred in the case of young people instead of a prison sentence (Ekunwe et al., 2010).

Before release many prisoners report they are worried about their future living conditions (Antikainen, 2008; Granfelt, 2014). One reason, as reported by Antikainen (2008) concerned difficulties in renting a flat after being in custody. This indicates a prejudice against people who have been imprisoned. With people who are considered as known criminals, especially in small cities, in some cases, there have been problems in dealing with social services, when both the social workers and the person being released already may have shared, problematic experiences of a non-successful co-operation (Antikainen, 2008). Despite attempts to decrease homelessness in people released from custody, a tendency to see released former prisoners as a threat or a problem may cause stigmatization and maintain prejudices (Granfelt, 2014). However, prisoners tend to have positive visions hoping to live “a normal life” after their release (Villman, 2021). Support services for this have been developed and there are ongoing processes to support prisoner’s integration into society and the labour market, for instance by improving co-operative practices (Rantanen et al., 2016; Seppänen et al., 2021), facilitating empowering experiences for prisoners (Menard, 2018), and by rehabilitative programs during the period in custody (Asmussen & Kolind, 2012; Holmberg, 2022) as well as programs for probation (RISE, 2022).

### **3.1.5 Prison as an environment of research interviews**

As Smyth and Hattam (2010) highlighted, when exploring early school leaving we need methods that are attentive to the people under study, as well as reflexive to research aims and presuppositions of the researcher. As Townsend et al. (2017) have noted, students who end up leaving school prematurely tend to drop out from research studies conducted in school settings. Furthermore, students still reachable within a school context cannot be considered as early school leavers. The researcher has no right to predict a participant’s future choices. Hence, it’s important to apply research approaches through which the people with lived experience are reached after living through the process of exiting school. In Finland, people meeting these aspects can be found in different life settings, one of which is prison.

The prison environment was chosen as a place for data gathering for three reasons. Firstly, according to reports and research literature (Gullman et al., 2011; Koski & Miettinen, 2007; Muiluvuori et al., 2015; RISE, 2021) there have been more early school leavers among prisoners than among the population as a whole. Consequently, educational activities have been provided for people during their time in custody (Mertanen & Brunila, 2017), which might be a fruitful situation for reflecting on one's school transitions. Secondly, the volunteered participants would be reachable for the interviewing process via the researcher's co-operation with the prison personnel. Thirdly, approximately half of a prisoner's daily hours has been labelled passive time (Muiluvuori et al., 2015), when the prisoners are neither occupied with prison activities nor with their daily activities and relationships. Consequently, there could be time and mental space for memorizing and reflecting on one's past, if willing to do so.

When sharing her experiences of interviewing people living in the margins of society Granfelt (2017) highlighted the importance of creating a narrative space of mutual trust and respect between the researcher and the participant. Institutions, such as prisons, can provide a narrative space for sharing individual experiences from a new perspective. Granfelt (2017) highlighted that from the margins it can be possible to talk about many things in a clear and insightful way. When people are in prison, they are disconnected from their ordinary life and daily activities. The situation may encourage reflecting on one's past experiences as well as re-thinking the future.

## **3.2 Method**

In this sub-chapter, the procedures and practices of this study is presented. The present chapter includes descriptions of the different kinds of environments in which the interviews took place, as well as descriptions of building research relationships, hence also including information about individual participants. Descriptions of the participants, and their school careers based on their narrative accounts are published in the second paper of this thesis.

### **3.2.1 Entering the field**

The research data of this study was gathered by interviewing people who were in custody while interviewed. After achieving the status of a doctoral student at the University of Jyväskylä, University Consortium Kokkola, in June 2015, I could apply for permission to interview people in prisons. I contacted four Finnish prisons with my research plan and was welcomed by all the prison managers. They named contact persons from the prison personnel to arrange the recruiting of the participants, as well as guidelines for the interviews. With this information it was possible to apply for the permission to interview people in custody in the named prisons from the Ministry of Justice, Finland. The permission was given in December 2015.

Clandinin (2013) suggested that pilot interviews would be beneficial before actual interviews. Following this, I started practicing interviewing in November 2015 with a pilot interviewee, who was an acquaintance of mine. He suggested to me another person, whom I invited to be a pilot interviewee as well. These pilot interviewees were not in prison. During the pilot interviews I prepared a set of information that would be necessary to provide for the interviewees, made myself familiar with recording equipment and tried different devices, ending up using a Garmin Wirb action camera, which was pointing to the ceiling or to a wall, but recording the conversation. This was a practical solution due to the efficient battery of the device and easiness to listen to the interviews during the transcription phase, while using Microsoft Word. I transcribed the interviews literally, reporting also silences and laughter, but didn't report tones of voice. To check what kind of a tone a participant had used I could listen to the recordings again, which I did several times during the process.

With the pilot interviewees we met in different places, in their homes and in different cafés, three times with each. It was easy to negotiate timetables because they were eager to participate and share what they had in mind. The timetables were adjusted mostly in accordance with my ability to transcribe the interviews and create an interim narrative account to be taken along and presented to the interviewee in the next meeting. This appeared to be crucial, because I noticed the importance of being able to ask if I had understood things correctly. While reading the interim narrative account of the first meeting the first pilot interviewee asked me, what I meant by something, and it appeared that he had meant something different. With the interim papers on the table, it was also possible to reflect on the former interview by referring to what had been said and to encourage more discussion about certain issues, and to negotiate what was meant by what had been told. The pilot interviews were included in the study with pseudonyms of Iiro and Aaro. With the pilot interviewees I established for myself a procedure of recording and transcribing the interviews. Additionally, I learned the importance of not deciding myself which points within the narrative to focus on, but to ask the participants to tell me more and so direct me to a new understanding of the issues that held meaning or importance for them. I closed the research relationships with the pilot interviewees with warm thanks and giving a small gift to show my gratitude.

### **3.2.2 The participants**

In this study recruiting interviewees started with sending e-mails to the contact persons named by the prison authorities (see closer Josselson 2013). The e-mail included attached information (Appendix 1) to be presented to the people contact person evaluated suitable to be informed about the study. After a person had expressed his or her volition to participate, the contact persons informed me, and we established a time for the first meeting, the contact person also asked the participant which time would be suitable. Due to the different practices of the prisons, in some prisons I had an opportunity to meet and recruit more participants

while visiting the prison and interviewing one participant. The participants signed a consent form including the invitation information (Appendix 1 and 2).

The data set of this study consists of narrative interviews of eleven people met in a prison environment, added with the interviews conducted with the pilot interviewees. Six of the volunteered participants, three female and three males (including the pilot interviewees) represented the Finnish majority background, while there were seven people who came from a Finnish Roma background (three female, four male). Having prematurely left school as well as being under custody all of them represented a minority among the Finnish population, the Finnish Roma participants representing additionally a cultural minority.

The female Finnish Roma participants were recruited solely by prison personnel, as well as one female and one male participant representing the Finnish majority population. The rest of the participants were recruited in face-to-face contacts with me, in the presence of a contact person from the prison personnel. This was possible due to open prison practices, where the prisoners could attend lessons and spend time together, and I was provided with an opportunity to talk with them. A closer presentation and basic information about the participants' age, school attendance, and living circumstances has been published within Study 2.

Because either I, as the interviewer, or the co-writers of the sub-studies, were not especially acquainted with the Finnish Roma culture, I considered it important to make myself familiar with aspects related to the Finnish Roma perspective by learning from people with sufficient knowledge, in addition to the research literature about the issue. I considered that important to be able to write culturally sensitive texts and to avoid authoring research texts that might intensify prejudices. This attempt was operationalized by interviewing people with professional experience about Finnish Roma educational trajectories. Four people working in projects supporting Finnish Roma schooling were interviewed for the study, two of them coming from the Finnish Roma background. These project workers are referred to in the texts as interviewed specialists.

### **3.2.3 The interviewed specialists**

Seven of the participants came from a Finnish Roma background. Even though the aim of the study was not to reach people with any special cultural background, the volunteering of Finnish Roma participants shaped the study. The contextual elements of representing a national minority were important to be taken on account. Furthermore, while representing a minority facing cultural prejudice in the Finnish society, the participants represented a minority inside a minority, as having committed a crime or crimes, and additionally, having not completed their schooling. Since I was not a specialist of Finnish Roma culture, and neither were my supervisors or co-writers, there was a need to expand our knowledge about contexts related to the Finnish Roma perspective. Accordingly, after having interviewed the participants, I contacted and interviewed four people with professional experience about supporting Finnish Roma students in completing schooling. By talking with the four specialists, I could reflect which

kind of wordings and terms used in a research text might be biased otherwise might intensify cultural prejudice.

One of the interviewed specialists was working in one of the prisons I visited for the interviews. She represented the Finnish majority, having been decades as a teacher at high school. She had been teaching classes and organizing lessons for Finnish Roma, among other students, in the prison premises. She was familiar with negotiating practices that would follow Finnish Roma cultural habits and encourage the Roma prisoners to participate in classes. There had been a need to make special arrangements, such as how a classroom could be situated so that a young Finnish Roma person would not have to go to upper floor classrooms above a classroom where a Finnish Roma person his or her senior was studying. In such a situation the younger person would not have been able to attend a lesson. This kind of contextual information helped me to understand tensions the Finnish Roma students may face in school settings.

Two other specialists worked as a pair in a project supporting Finnish Roma students to complete comprehensive schooling. One of them represented the Finnish Roma culture and the other the Finnish majority, both female. Their expertise included both lived experience, and expertise gained by living alongside and supporting Finnish Roma students. These specialists highlighted the importance of having people representing Finnish Roma and people representing the Finnish majority as workers in student support projects. From their point of view that enhanced co-operation with both school personnel and the families of the Finnish Roma students. The specialist representing the Finnish Roma culture pointed out, that in supporting Finnish Roma students the commitment of the student's family in encouraging his or her studies is especially important.

The fourth specialist represented the Finnish Roma culture. He had been working as a school assistant for more than ten years, supporting Finnish Roma students, among others. He had also given lessons in schools about Finnish Roma culture as well as about respecting and understanding cultural differences. He had children of elementary school age himself. The lived experience as a Finnish Roma himself, as a father, and a school assistant with also university studies of education, gave him a broad perspective of the issues related to the early school leaving of Finnish Roma students.

The specialists were interviewed in places they chose, in the cities they lived in. All of them signed a written consent (Appendix 2) after receiving both written (Appendix 1) and verbal information about the study. I as the interviewer signed the consent as well, as a commitment to keep the anonymity of the interviewees. We met with the specialists only once, after which I transcribed the interviews. Parts of these conversations, and the aspects they displayed have been included in the sub-studies of this thesis. Talking with these specialists widened my understanding about how deeply intertwined with daily life facing prejudice can be, as well as about the strength of the Finnish Roma culture as a social network. The richness of levels and complexity of aspects related to living as a Finnish Roma in Finland surprised me, and made it clear, that in the limits of this study it would be possible to explore these perspectives only to a small extent. Hence,

the Finnish Roma cultural background has been presented when relevant to the participants, focusing on the school experiences and interpreting the experiences within the same theoretical framework as the other participants, as experiences of the individual person. By this I have aimed to provide space for shared elements of experiences despite differences in a cultural or familial background.

### **3.2.4 Entering, living, and closing the research relationship**

Clandinin (2013) highlights the contextual nature of the research process, as the researcher and the participants live their lives alongside the research process. My context as a researcher differed from that of the participants in many ways. We came together to the meetings from different sides of the prison walls, I as a free person from outside, while the participants came as prisoners, from inside the walls and what the walls represented to them. The short time we spent together represented to the participants different things than to me as a researcher. While I entered with a sense that the situation was defined by others more than myself, they entered into a situation providing them with a freedom to stay or to withdraw, a freedom to choose what to share, and a freedom to establish the schedule for the next meeting. The participants informed me which days were not suitable for a meeting due to them being occupied with something they felt important, such as going shopping with a guard in a grocery store, having a lesson, or being busy with duties given only to trustworthy prisoners. Negotiating a schedule for the next meeting appeared to be a good ending for a session, emphasizing the active role of the participant and underlining the voluntary nature of participating in the interviewing process.

There was also another perspective in which entering a meeting was different for me compared to the participants. I came from outside the institution, both physically and mentally. The places were unfamiliar to me, and I didn't know the habits, slang, or behavioural codes. Due to that, every journey to a meeting was exciting, and a new experience, even when I had already visited the same prison earlier. For the participants, though, the meetings were a break in daily, institutionally defined routines. I viewed each participant as a specialist of prison life as well as a specialist of the process of leaving school. The participants were clearly aware of that given their kind explanations about how things work in prisons and what a certain word meant.

Though I was welcomed with friendly manners by the prison staff, I found it important to distinguish myself from the institution's personnel. That was rather easy, due to the formal clothing of the staff. I looked like a visitor, and behaved like one, not knowing daily routines or protocols of prison life, as the staff and the participants did. I was treated as a guest, having to leave my possessions not needed for the interviewing in a separate room, following the visiting rules of the prison. My being an outsider from the prison life was underlined when negotiating the timetable for the next meeting. The participants told me about prison rules and practices, as well as their own wishes for the time of the next meeting. On the other hand, I as an interviewer sensed trust in the participants, when they showed eagerness to tell me about their school times, as well as when



they showed their volition to participate by coming to the second and the third meeting. These elements enhanced a sense of mutual trust in the research relationships, which Clandinin (2013) claims to be an important element within narrative research interviews.

The prisons where the interviews took place are situated about two hours or further from the city where I live. Travelling to an interview focused my mind on the meeting and served as mental preparation for attentive listening. After arriving at the prison premises, I gave my name to the receptionist, in the case of open prisons, and in closed prisons I was signed in by prison personnel and guided to my contact person. The contact person then guided me to the room reserved for the interview and fetched in the participant. For the first meeting I explained who I was and showed a paper containing the same information I had provided for the participants through the contact person when recruiting the volunteers (Appendix 1). I said that I was interested in the school experiences of people who had left school prematurely, to learn what it was all about, and what they themselves thought were the reasons why they had left school before graduating. Most participants were eager to share what had come to their mind about the issue. Hyvärinen (2017) highlights that listening is the most important skill of a narrative interviewer. Following that principle, I decided not to disturb the narrative flow by asking the participants to stop talking and first sign the consent form (Appendix 2). Due to that, some participants signed it later during the first meeting, while some of them signed it right in the beginning of the first meeting. I reminded them that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any phase of the process, including the end of the last meeting, after reading the narrative account composed with them. I also signed the consent form myself, committing to confidentiality and keeping the participants anonymous.

Some participants started talking before I had started recording, while I was placing the go-pro-camera in the room facing a wall, and showing that it would record only the voices, not the face of the participant. I wrote down what was said before recording started, distinguishing those sentences from the transcribed text. Only one of the participants didn't start talking spontaneously but asked me to provide questions. I asked her to tell me about how it had been to start school in the first grade, which helped her to start talking. At the beginning of each meeting, I also placed a couple of white sheets of paper and a pencil on the table, in reach of the participants, to allow for drawing or making marks, as some people tend to do when talking or focusing on an important conversation. The participants didn't use them, but I used them for another purpose during the meetings. With each participant, when the narrative tailed off, I draw a timeline of what had been told on the white paper, asking about years and incidents they had already told me about, ensuring that I remembered correctly what they had told me. By this I followed the principle of listening, not asking questions, which Hyvärinen (2017) has suggested for narrative interviews. By focusing on what the participants had told me I highlighted the importance of their perspective. When I made markings on the timeline according to what the participant said,

this prompted more talking and underlined my purpose to learn from the participants.

The research relationship with each participant had its own atmosphere. All the participants were more than ten years younger than me, which eased possible tensions between the male participants and me as a female interviewer. My ignorance about the participants' daily lives in prison made them explain things clearly, in such a way that someone outside their life circle would understand what they meant. Furthermore, as one of the female Finnish Roma participants said, the interviewer being a non-Roma person also opened possibilities to the Finnish Roma participants to talk about things that would have been for them inappropriate to talk about with a Finnish Roma woman of the same age as me, or with a male interviewer. As I had introduced myself not only a researcher, but also a teacher, I also represented to the participants school as an institution.

At the end of each meeting I, emphasized the importance of what the participant had shared, as Josselson (2007) has suggested. When knowing that the next meeting would be the last one, I had asked prison personnel for permission to bring a little gift to the participant to show my gratitude. I also asked how the participant had felt about remembering and sharing school time experiences. None of participants had bad feelings about our meetings, even though they admitted that all the memories were not good ones. They said that it had been helpful to talk about the past, to reflect on experiences, to arrange their own thoughts about things they had lived, while having someone listening.

At the end of the last meeting I asked, if the participants wished to receive a copy of the study when it was completed. Some of them gave me their email, so that I can send a link to the study for them to read. Some the participants were not interested in the published work but were happy to get a written version of their narrative account, which I delivered to them via prison personnel after having completed it on the basis of what we had negotiated during the last meeting.

### **3.2.5 Interviewing processes**

The interviewing process was a learning experience for me as a researcher. Indeed, the research relationships grew from the commonplaces of narrative inquiry: time, place, and sociality, as Clandinin (2013) has suggested. Furthermore, I found it important to respect everything what was shared, not only things related to school. That was only partly because it might later appear to be related to the process of leaving school. The main reason was to respect the participants feelings and provide space to talk about what was on their mind at the time, to be interested in what they would choose to talk about his or her current interests and circumstances, as well as aspects related to my research interest. As Josselson (2007) has claimed, there was no space for neglecting or ignoring anything that was told, there were no wrong stories during the interviews. This was linked with a need to be honest about my not knowing what would be important in the process of leaving school, because that was the very thing I was there to learn. Moreover, respecting my own ignorance as a basic element of the research aiming to find out something new, positioned me the researcher as a learner in

relation to the participant. The mutual respect to the researcher's not knowing was especially present when talking about the interim narrative accounts during the second and the third meeting, when the participants had an opportunity to correct and expand my understanding of what they had meant.

The interviewing process consisted of three meetings, the duration of which was about one hour each. As Clandinin (2013) has suggested, it's important to meet the participants more than once, to be able to negotiate about the meaning of what has been told. The three meetings, in chronological order, had a different nature and a different aim in relation to the research interest. The first meeting started the research relationship. The second meeting established it, deepening and adding to the meanings of what was told. The third meeting had an air of closing the research relationship and highlighting what had been thought to be most significant. Between the meetings I transcribed the recorded material and wrote an interim narrative account. The interim texts were on the table for the participant to read, comment and correct if needed, during the second and the third meeting. Talking about the former texts also prompted more telling and provided an opportunity for me as an interviewer to ask more about things that I was especially interested in, that I didn't understand or of which I was not sure if I had understood quite right. Figure 3 describes the interviewing process and illustrates the activities in between the meetings, as well as activities before and after the actual interviews. In between the meetings I worked with the text, my understanding and non-understanding, while the participants could reflect on what they had shared and mentally get ready for possibly re-telling a part of the narrative they felt it was important to revisit, adding more details or giving more specific information about an event they had shared.

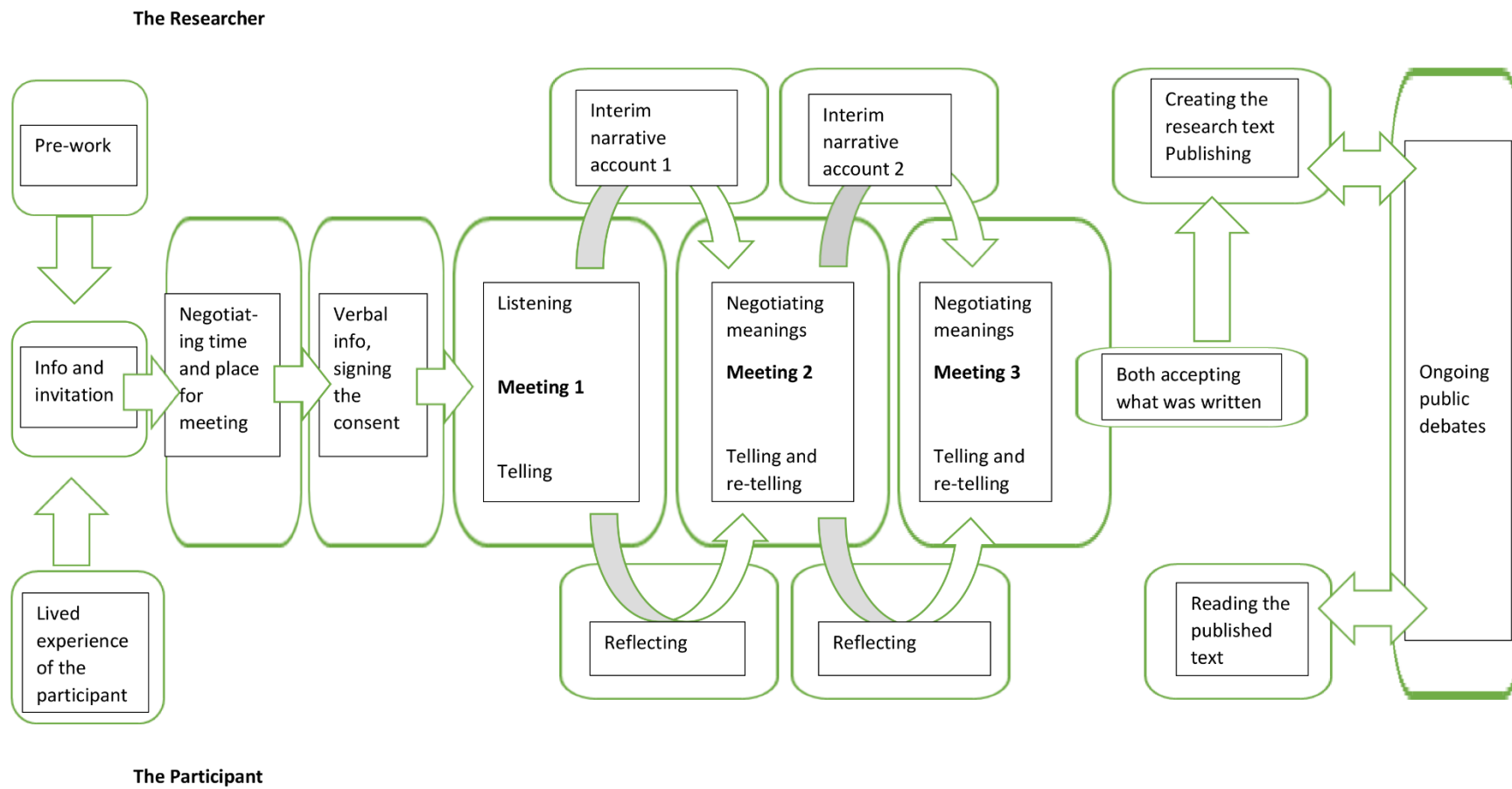


FIGURE 3 An overview of the narrative interviewing process of this study.

The third meeting was a moment of truth for me as the interviewer. There was a need to keep open the possibility that the participant could withdraw at the last minute. For me the moments waiting for a participant to read the interim narrative account were filled with inner tension, which was broken by the participant's comments. All the participants were happy with what was written, which indicated that the corrections and additions talked over in the second meeting had been successfully made. Some of the participants asked me to clarify what I had meant by certain words, and after getting clarification, were satisfied with the text.

### 3.3 Analysis

The analysis was two-fold. Firstly, the meanings of what had been told were negotiated with the participants during the meetings as a narrative analysis. Secondly, these meanings were analysed in the framework of the three basic psychological needs. Interpretations based on these two approaches are presented in the sub-studies.

#### 3.3.1 Narrative analysis during the interviews

Narrative analysis was conducted co-operationally with the participants, as Clandinin (2013) has suggested. The participants told what they identified as significant to their process of leaving school. The participants provided the interviewer with an access to their storied experiences by telling, reflecting, and re-telling, so that there was space for the interviewer to learn what was meant. During the second and the third meeting the participants could clarify what they had previously told, and what they had meant, and broaden their perspective from the first meeting. I, as the interviewer had an opportunity to ask the participants to tell me more about things that I was interested in, especially things that I didn't understand, to find perspectives novel to myself. The following script from the second meeting with one of the Finnish Roma participants, Richard, illustrates the importance of providing the possibility to ask for re-telling and clarifying the meaning of what had been told.

The interviewer: "You told me that when you decided to stay out of school that it was a kind of once and for all. How did it happen, do you recall?"

Richard: "Ay, I had other things to do."

The interviewer: "Yes?"

Richard: "With grown-ups, of course."

The interviewer: "Well, was it so that one morning you decided that you don't go to school anymore? You just stayed at home and didn't bother to go (as Richard had said during the previous meeting)?"

Richard: "No it was not like that. I went visiting relatives to another city, with my (other) relatives (before stopping going to school)."

After saying this, Richard talked about the traditions of his family, related to the transition from a boy to an adult member of the family. After the period of visiting relatives Richard had felt too grown up to go to school anymore and explained that he started a family with his first wife at the age of fifteen. These additions to what had been said earlier added to my understanding of what had happened and what it had meant to Richard. Furthermore, this provided some context for his decision making, and made it possible to understand why it was, for him, a meaningful choice not to attend school anymore.

Interviewing the specialists provided further context and aided my understanding of what the Finnish Roma participants had told me, in addition to the information the participants had provided themselves. Talking about what it had been like for them and their family to live amid social prejudices affecting the Finnish society, the specialists with a Finnish Roma familial background widened my understanding of minority people's perspectives. The contributions of the specialists confirmed what the participants had displayed about prejudices underscoring their lives in today's Finnish society. Prejudices tended to create a life condition with a constant need to cope with possible negative attitudes of surrounding people.

### **3.3.2 Analysing the narrative accounts after field work**

After closing the last interview, and having transcribed it, I had 3 689 kilobytes of transcribed material in rtf format, including the narrative accounts of the participants, which consisted of approximately fifteen written pages each. I used an external storage to archive the recordings of the interviews, as well as all the written material. They were kept in a locked archive with the consent forms, with a booklet containing information about the participants, as well as pseudonyms used for them, as Josselson (2007) has suggested.

I started organizing the transcribed data by coding with ATLAS.ti 7 the meanings the participants had described, using either quotations from the transcription, or a shorter version about what was told, such as 'bullying', 'peer rejection', 'friendship', 'teacher not interested', or 'I was not interested'. After having worked through the transcribed texts and checked the meanings, if needed, from the narrative accounts, I used the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and the three satisfaction levels of them (satisfied, dissatisfied, and frustrated), as additional codes. Relatedness appeared more frequently than the other two needs in the data, and it also co-occurred with autonomy and competence more frequently than the other needs with each other. Hence, I decided to focus on the experiences linked with relatedness. I also distinguished background factors, such as life conditions and environmental circumstances which the participants described, from experienced sensation they had talked about. In order to follow actual meanings defined in Self-determination theory literature for the need-related concepts, I used published definitions to identify in which need category each coded experience was linked with (see Cheon et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020) as well as wordings used in Self-determination theory

questionnaires for children (Self Determination Theory, n.d.a; Self Determination Theory, n.d.b).

ATLAS.ti 7 and ATLAS.ti 9 were also used to find co-occurring codes, to identify links between need-related experiences. Furthermore, I wanted to find out how need-related experiences, and choices the participants had made, were underscored by different kinds of circumstances and life conditions. Transfer effects and the accumulation of need-related experiences were searched for using codes within ATLAS.ti 7 and later ATLAS.ti 9 as an organizing tool of identified and coded types of experiences. The accumulation of need-related experiences as the participants had displayed provided a construct resonating with the conceptualizing of different generality levels among Self-determination theory. Moreover, in addition to interpreting the processes of leaving school in the framework of the three basic psychological needs, additional data-driven perspectives to enrich theoretical conceptualizing of the need perceptions were explored and found (see Chapters 4.3. and 6.1.).

### **3.3.3 The narrative data set seen from different perspectives**

The narrative data interpreted in the framework of the three basic psychological needs provided several lines of inquiry to widen understanding about the participants' processes of leaving school. Each need and all need statuses could be identified in what was told, as well as transferring effects and the accumulation of need-related circumstances and experiences. However, the three Finnish Roma female participants appeared to be a coherent group with shared elements. In addition to similarities in a cultural background, the interviewing processes with each of them had successfully consisted of three meetings. They were about the same age, each having children, hence sharing experiences of motherhood, as well as ponderings about how to react to their own children's experiences in school. Furthermore, imprisoned Finnish Roma women have been a rarely studied group of people, and giving voice to their experiences was considered important, when choosing perspectives for the sub-studies of the present dissertation. For these reasons Study 1 focuses on a sub-group of the participants, the three female Finnish Roma participants and what they told about their experiences in school.

The narrative data of the pilot interviews included experiences linked with relatedness with peers and other people during the school time, similarly with the data gathered with the participants who were in prison when interviewed. Both imprisoned participants and the pilot interviewees shared experiences which they identified as important to their diminishing interest in attending school. Moreover, the experiences shared by the imprisoned participants had mostly occurred before they had a history of committing crimes, during time, when it was not predictable what kind of turns their life course might take. Though the narratives of the imprisoned participants also included elements related to minor crimes during adolescence, these experiences were included in analysis of this study only when the participants identified them as important and linked with their process of leaving school. Hence the data provided by the

pilot interviewees can be considered as relevant as the data gathered with the imprisoned participants concerning the research interest of this study. For these reasons the data gathered with both the pilot interviewees and the imprisoned participants has been included in the analysis of Study 2 and Study 3.

In the original research plan, I had a table of potential perspectives for sub-studies following the distinguished three needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The narrative data set was a promising source of information for that, but after interviews I found it more important to explore accumulated experiences, which the participants had displayed, because the participants had highlighted the importance of those kinds of experiences to their process of leaving school. Hence, instead of splitting the storied experiences in the three aspects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, I chose to focus on the transitions as well as similarities and differences in the participants' paths from attending school to leaving school. Need thwarting circumstances and need frustration appeared in chains that were intertwined with the participants' actions and choices. The accumulation of negative experiences in what was told resonated with the concept of a general level need frustration which represents an underpinning element in the hierarchical model of the needs, presented by Vallerand and Ratelle (2002). Furthermore, locus and source of negative need-related experiences appeared to be linked with how the participants reacted to them, providing an interesting line of inquiry, which has been discussed in more detail in Study 2.

When exploring elements that were shared with the participants, I found that all the participants sensed detachment from their peers and adults within school society. A sense of not belonging together with their peers or being different and not interested in the same things, or not understood by their peers, was shared with all the participants regardless of cultural background, gender, age, or the family's socio-economic status. The experiences shared by the participants might also shape the theoretical conceptualisation of need perceptions: the accumulated experiences of a weak need support had affected how the participants reacted to need confrontations later in life. This was especially true in the case of the most novel of need statutes, namely dissatisfaction, which has been linked with indifference as a background factor. What the participants told, provided an insight into a chain of experiences, that made the participants prone to a sense of dissatisfaction, having been indifferent to school tasks themselves due to former need frustration. These findings have been discussed more closely in Study 3.

### **3.4 Ethical aspects of the study**

Narrative inquiry carries ethical aspects on several levels. In addition to the general ethics of scientific work, ethical principles of human interaction must be applied. Moreover, it's important to consider how a published work may affect the participants or groups they represent. Issues concerning legality and permissions needed for conducting the interviews have been presented in chapter 3.2.1. The following chapters present which actions were taken to ensure confidentiality



and doing no harm, as well as ethical aspects of interviewing people in a prison environment, and the power relationships linked with the current research setting.

Freeman et al. (2007, p. 30) asked: “How can we best listen to, work with, and re-present the people our work is intended to serve?” With this question in mind, I made myself familiar to ethical principles of researching, focusing on multileveled ethical aspects of narrative inquiry. Clandinin et al. (2018) have described ethics of narrative as relational. In addition to basic ethical norms, such as honesty, careful citing and referencing, non-plagiarism, submitting only original work to be published, and transparency about funding and stakeholders, a study conducted in relationship with other human beings holds several other ethical perspectives to be considered (Clandinin, 2013; Josselson, 2007, 2013). This kind of a study is an ethical act, the principle of doing no harm underpinning the whole process.

Within the current thesis, ethical thinking was a conscious element of the research from the outset. From planning the research design and learning the ethical principles of the university of Jyväskylä, to choosing whom to recruit as participants, pondering how to protect the privacy and volition of the participants, considering how to carry out the interviewing and writing processes, and publishing, as well as participating in further debates after that as Josselson, (2007) and Clandinin et al. (2018) have suggested. Moreover, following the notion of Lessard et al. (2018), when researching phenomena related to people or groups who represent a minority, or negatively labelled people, aspects of vulnerability have been considered throughout the research process.

### **3.4.1 Following principles of respect, care and doing no harm**

Ethics of respect and care were essential in all phases of this study at multiple levels. Doing no harm has been an underpinning principle of planning the research design, living through practical procedures of the study, as well as choosing perspectives for sub-studies and choosing terms and wordings for the research texts. The participants of this study, being convicted of a crime and having not completed schooling, tend to be considered as marginalized individuals, carrying a negative label. Hence, when writing about their experiences and about them, it is important to be aware of how to enhance equity rather than intensify prejudices. As Fremlova (2018), and Silverman (2018) highlighted it is important to critically examine researcher’s own privileges, as well as consider carefully how to represent the people participating in the study by wording the text, when the researcher is unfamiliar with the cultural background of the participants. I found this especially important in the case of the Finnish Roma participants, due to the general level of prejudice affecting Finnish society (see Chapter 3.1.3.). For this reason, I used collegial support when creating the research texts, as well as adding interviews of four specialists to the research setting.

Narrative interviewing as a research method was chosen to enable each individual participant’s perspective to be recognized and equally valued as an important source of information. While researchers themselves rarely have lived

experience linked with early school leaving, it was essential to apply a research setting that would enhance finding and reaching people with appropriate lived experience. For a theoretical framework to interpret what was told, I chose a framework focusing on psychological elements shared with all people. By this I aimed to avoid the dominance of a research-literature-driven mind set about early school leavers, as well as to enhance perspectives yet unfamiliar to me as a researcher to be identified. In this study an individual's shared experiences have been valued as subjective truths while theoretical frameworks have been positioned as interpretative tools.

At a practical level, following the principle of doing no harm included respectful manners in relationships with all people involved. The interviewer was not able to choose what might be important to be shared, nor could she know which aspects might be painful for the participant. Hence, it was important to be sensitive, and not to push the participants into talking at any phase of the research relationship. At the same time, anything that was told was taken with gratitude, keeping the choice of what to share in the hands of the participant.

The principle of doing no harm extends itself beyond the actual meetings, confidentiality, and composing research texts. In addition to themselves the participants in the research text may represent to readers other people in a life situation resembling that of the participants. Although in a multi-case qualitative study the number of the participants doesn't allow generalization, what is published may affect already existing prejudice and attitudes, sometimes intensifying them. While people tend to believe and accept opinions that are in line with their current opinions, I found it especially important to clearly point out the individual nature of the narrated experiences in the study. Though interpreted within a large framework, the experiences are unique. The value of the participants' experiences as a source of information in this study lies in the participants' subjective, contextual understanding of the meanings of what was told. Consequently, I found it essential to bring forth, within the research texts, elements that provided a window into the participants' view of the life conditions and circumstances linked with the storied experiences. By this I have aimed to provide the readers with the possibility to widen their present understanding of early school leaving.

The inclusion of the participants' own words in the texts had a two-fold task. On the one hand the personal wordings can bring the participant close to the reader. On the other hand, words that were said to share one's experiences can resonate through shared humanity in the mind of the reader and open new perspectives to processes linked with leaving school. The general nature of the chosen theoretical framework provides a contrast to the intimacy of shared lived experiences, underlining the personal nature of what was told. Within ongoing academic debates, the findings of this study aim to give voice to the human experiences of people with a background of leaving school prematurely, as well as interpreting the storied experiences as a way of highlighting the equal value of all people's lived experience.

When evaluated in the perspective of Self-determination theory the research design provided the participants with support for their psychological needs. Prison as an institution operates restrictions that tend not be supportive of the three basic psychological needs. The interviews supported the autonomy of the participants by being volitional. Furthermore, each participant had the opportunity to either continue participating or to withdraw. Moreover, the participants' autonomy was supported by the fact that they could choose what to tell and what they allowed to be further interpreted and elaborated on within the research texts. The participants were positioned as specialists from whose perspective the interviewer aimed to learn things new to her, which supported the need for competence of the participants. Furthermore, the participants' need for relatedness was supported within the interviews by attentive listening, and an opportunity to talk about things that the participants felt important to them not limiting the topics talked about to aspects the interviewer was willing to discuss.

### **3.4.2 Biased relations within the research setting**

When interviewing people living in institutions the researcher may become prone to consider participants as victims. The researchers need to be aware of their own privileges and biased power relationships between themselves and the participants. The research relationship, starting from the information the participant first receives, shapes what will be shared during the meetings with the researcher. Josselson (2007) underlined the importance of a humble attitude from the interviewer, in enhancing a fruitful research relationship. As the co-composing of narrative accounts is conducted in a research relationship including the person of the researcher and the person of the participant, what the researcher and the participant represent to each other, affects what will be told and how (Clandinin et al., 2018). Furthermore, mutual trust and confidentiality create an atmosphere in which the participants feel comfortable to share their experiences (Kim, 2016). In this study, biased power-relationships can be identified at multiple levels.

Firstly, the participants were recruited from a group of people who were serving a custodial prison sentence while the interviews took place, while I as the interviewer was free to enter and exit the physical site of the interviews. Clandinin (2013) claimed that a research relationship is built within contextual conditions, which include time, place, and the social relationships of the meetings. Granfelt (2017) included in the contextual environment of a research interview, in addition to a physical place, a mental space for telling and listening. The differences such as age difference, and representing the opposite gender, also play a role in formulating a research relationship, as Kyngäs (2000) noted about her being a young female researcher interviewing young male prisoners. In the case of this study the age difference was beneficial for the research relationship. As an elderly woman compared to the ages of the participants, I represented a relatively harmless person considering tensions between different genders.

Furthermore, the relationship with prison personnel was different for me and the participants. As the interviewer I was a guest and treated as such by the

prison personnel, while the participants were prisoners and however well treated, controlled by the personnel. To support the participants' sense of volition and autonomy I negotiated with each participant about further meetings at the end of the meeting. I asked my contact person if it was possible to come back at the time the participant had suggested. The rooms for the meetings were arranged by prison personnel and I was unable to offer participants any freedom of choice in that matter. However, inside the room I could arrange our chairs so that we could be placed face to face rather than me as an interviewer behind a desk.

In this study the fact that one of the people within the research relationship came from freedom, outside the prison, and the other from inside the prison created a mental space in between the two people. We entered the meetings from opposite sides of the prison walls, though the rooms provided for the meetings were inside the prison area. During the interviews the participants were in contact with a person from outside the prison and were engaged with something in which they had voluntarily chosen to participate. Hyvärinen (2017) highlighted that listening is the most important skill of a narrative interviewer. Hence, there is a need to tolerate silences and uncertainties without trying to fill the narrative space with the researcher's own assumptions or questions that might distract the tellers from something important to them to be brought into the awareness of the researcher. Hence, as an interviewer I was careful not to push my own ambitions but to be sensitive and give participants time and space to talk about things they were willing to share, and to listen with attention, interest, and respect to what was told.

There is always a reason why someone is in custody, and although that was not the focus of the research interests of this study some of the participants talked about that as well, in spite of it never being asked of them. Most of the participants also talked about their plans after being released, about their children and other important people. Following instructions, restrictions, and practices of prison the lives of the participants while in custody differed from their normal life conditions. The relationships with friends and family were shaped by institutional restrictions, and interactions with important people had often been observed by prison personnel, because they needed to be closely aware of what the participants were doing. The research interview was an exception within the prison context, the visiting interviewer being neither known before by the participants nor representing prison personnel. By continuing to participate in the second and the third meeting when the interview procedure was already familiar to them, the participants showed their volition and willingness to share their experiences.

While imprisoned people go through different conversations with prison personnel, such as an interview when entering the prison, and counselling during their time in custody (Castrén & al., 2021; Kaskela & Tourunen, 2018). My discussion with Johanna at the beginning of the first meeting with her illustrates the reflection process that may occur during custody, perhaps triggered by interviews conducted by prison staff. Before the recording started, we had already talked about the purpose of the interview, that I aim to listen to people who have

left school without graduating. I had also ensured that Johanna had received the written information I had sent to the contact person via e-mail.

The interviewer: "Ok, now it's recording. So, we already got to there that you belong to this group of people who have not much of a school background. Ok, well, what about if we start from the first grade, when you started there?"

Johanna: "Well, the first grade went quite ok, and the second grade as well, we had a very nice teacher, kind of a believer, those [years] went quite well, but then, during the third grade already, it started to go wrong. Actually, I realized myself a couple of days ago why all this happened. I was talking to someone else (prison staff) about this, and it is linked with all this, and my criminal background is linked with it, too, all this starting from school."

After this Johanna continued describing her experiences of rejection by her peers, followed by outspoken prejudice by a teacher. Having already talked with someone else about her past seemed to prompt Johanna to go further with reflecting on her school time experiences. Concerning the research aim of this study that was beneficial. On the other hand, the research interviews provided Johanna with an arena to go further with her ponderings with a person who showed interest in what she chose to talk about.

At the end of the last meeting with each participant, I asked the participants how they felt about remembering and talking about their past experiences. I was prepared to provide information about how to contact professional guidance if participants felt they needed mental support. One of the male participants said, that the remembering had somewhat disturbed his feelings, but not to the extent of a need for counselling. He said that he already had an ongoing mental care contact for other reasons and would be able to further share his feelings within that context. The other participants didn't report any negative sensations about the meetings but said that it had been good to reflect on their school experiences, and to have someone listening to them.

Secondly, the participants had a background of an unsuccessful school career and quitting school, while I was studying at a higher educational level, working on my doctoral thesis. Though my personal educational career does have some twists and turns, there was never anything that would have indicated leaving schooling. Hence, I didn't have any lived experience on the matter under investigation. To support the participants' sense of competence I highlighted that I was there to learn from them and their lived experiences. Asking what they thought were the reasons behind their leaving school triggered vivid recounting of past experiences. Furthermore, asking more specific questions in response to their spoken narratives resulted in deeper perspectives and more personal experiences being shared. Clandinin (2010) and Clandinin et al. (2013) noted after having conducted a narrative study among early school leavers in Canada that many of the participants appeared to be eager to tell their stories related to school leaving. Some of the stories important to the participants in the study of Clandinin (2010) couldn't have been told in a school, or in a family context. The narrative inquiry space can provide the participants with an opportunity to share stories difficult to share elsewhere. In line with this the participants of this study were eager to share their experiences within the research relationship.

Thirdly, as a teacher I represented school as an institution. More specifically, the expectations of the institution which the participants had either failed to or felt it unimportant to fulfil. As Josselson (2013) highlighted, the concept of the actual interview affects what and how is shared within the research relationship. Through the interviews the participants were provided with an opportunity to express thoughts or opinions they might wish to be heard by teachers and school authorities.

Fourthly, some of the participants represented the minority of the Finnish Roma in the national society, while I represented the Finnish majority. The cultural choice to follow the habits of the Finnish Roma culture was expressed both in words and by wearing culturally acceptable clothing. The fact that the participants themselves raised the issue that coming from a Finnish Roma cultural background they sensed that they belonged to a group facing prejudices, made it possible for us to meet and interact as equal individuals. I as a researcher underlined that I was there to learn about the participant's perspective, lived experience, as well as about cultural aspects that the participants felt important to share. The fact that I was an outsider from the Finnish Roma culture placed the Finnish Roma participants in the position of an expert of the cultural aspects in addition to their knowledge of their individual school experiences.

### **3.4.3 Confidentiality**

As Josselson (2007) has highlighted, confidentiality and trust are crucial for a fruitful research relationship. By signing the consent form the participants gave permission to use what they would tell, or had already told, in studies conducted by the interviewer and her research group. In addition to this the consent form included the interviewer's commitment to confidentiality. Consequently, the consent form also needed to be signed by the interviewer. By signing the consent form, at the same point in the meeting when the participant signed it, I as the interviewer promised to keep the material produced during the interviews anonymous, and to ensure that the participant couldn't be recognized by details revealed in research texts. As Josselson (2007) has noted, a consent can be given in different ways. In the case of this study the consents were given by signing, but also verbally, as the conversation about information and agreeing to sign was audio recorded. While transcribing the interviews I replaced the name of the participant with a pseudonym and all the names of other people and places with a general wording, such as "a friend", "a city", or "a relative" as Josselson (2007) has suggested.

Keeping the participants anonymous to surrounding people was sometimes problematic in the prison environment. The ways in which the prison personnel talked about the participants, and to them, didn't always support anonymity. For instance, when coming to meet a participant, an office worker to whom I needed to enlist myself, called loudly to a back room using the participant's name asking whether she would come to meet me, while there was a queue of other women in the office. However, I was not introduced to the other women, and everything that was discussed within the interview was kept anonymous and confidential.

The need of the prison personnel to be aware of what the people in custody do, with whom they have interactions, and who visit them, also seemed to colour the privacy practices followed in the prison environment. Hence, it was important to highlight the confidentiality of the interviews. To underline this, I asked the participants if they accepted the pseudonym chosen for them, and if so wished, they could change it.

When talking with the Finnish Roma participants it appeared that the Finnish Roma people are generally well informed and aware of their own, as well as family members of other Finnish Roma families. Due to this I removed details about the participants' family and friends to keep their identity out of reach of people that might recognize them by life incidents or other information shared in the interviews. Principles of confidentiality also included that the interviewer would not talk with the prison personnel about the participants or what they had told.

Openness of data has been encouraged to enhance more effective ways to share research ideas and to provide researchers opportunities to explore data sets from different perspectives. Even though anonymized, narrative data sets may include personal information about the participants' life from which a participant might be recognized. Additionally, storied information can include wordings specific to a person, a way of telling recognizable to someone who knows the participant. For these reasons, it was not possible to make the data set of this study openly reachable for research or other purposes.

#### **3.4.4 The participants in the research text**

Kim (2016) suggested that three aspects should be considered in writing the research texts: what was told, what the teller meant by it and, what the reader might understand of it when reading the text. I have included contextual information about the interviews as well as quotations from the actual interviews. This study lies on what the participants told me, and how that has been analysed and interpreted. Hence, it's important to note how the participants are presented, and represented, in the research texts. All information in the text relating to the circumstances and backgrounds of the participants, has been told by the participants themselves. As such, the information is their subjective truth, and more accurately, the version of their subjective truth they felt convenient to share with the interviewer.

Kim (2016, p.190) described narrative data analysis and interpretation as a "meaning-finding act". Furthermore, Kim (2016) underlined ethical aspects of representing what was told by referring to narrative smoothing, through which the researcher aims to make the participant's story coherent as well as understandable and interesting to the reader. When composing the research text, it's important to distinguish our own presuppositions and interpretations from what was told by the participants. This can be done by placing the researcher as an author within the text, and hence providing space for the participants' perspective to reach the reader (Crimmins, 2016).

The researcher as an author presents the participant's story in the research text. Hence, she needs to make visible which aspects have been identified within co-operational narrative interpretation with the participant, and which aspects are further interpretations based on a theoretical framework, or another perspective that is different from the mindset of the participant. To enhance this, I have included extracts from the interviews in the sub-studies, chosen to illustrate important aspects and add to the understanding of what was told. In the quotations from the interviews, I used the words used by the participant, or as close a translation as possible. For instance, when a participant used the word "gypsy" [translated from the Finnish word "mustalainen"] the same word has been used in the quotation, though elsewhere in the text I have used the term "Finnish Roma" ["suomalainen romani"]. The words of the interviewer are included, when helping to understand the context, the ongoing conversation, or when the interviewer asked the participant to talk more about something she was interested in or thought she might not have understood correctly. Using the actual words of the participants was possible in Study 1, because it was written in Finnish, which was also the language of the interviews. For the English texts the chosen extracts were translated by the interviewer, who is also the first writer of the sub-studies, and after that proof-read by a native English speaker with knowledge of the Finnish language.

Because I was not especially familiar with Finnish Roma culture, I as an author asked for collegial support for an interim text for Study 1 from two people working at the National board of Education, Finland. One of these specialists came from a Finnish Roma background and worked as an advisor for Finnish Roma issues in the Finnish National Board of Education, the other represents the Finnish majority. Discussions over my interim text with them helped me to make the text more culturally sensitive, as well as to avoid problem presentations and generalizations that might intensify prejudices.

As Grady et al. (2018) suggested, making the shared stories visible makes the participants' lived experience matter. Following these principles, I chose to quote the participants' words from the transcribed interviews instead of narrative accounts, for three reasons. Firstly, I wanted to share with readers a genuine account of what had been told, so that the reader would be able to evaluate how the interpretation had succeeded. Secondly, I wished to create a sense of proximity with the reader in relation to the participant, an air of shared humanity. The aim has been to reach from the participant to the reader and back, so as to provide readers with access to an account of what has been told which is as near as possible to the original narrative. The extraordinarily brilliant and touching wordings that some of the participants uttered, helped me in that task. Unfortunately, all the strength of the participants' verbal skill cannot be translated into English. Thirdly, respecting the very words used of the participants – or as close a translation as possible, carrying the same meaning – highlighted the expertise of the participants in relation to the researcher and the readers. Giving value to what was said and shared positioned the participant as a specialist of the issue under investigation.



## **4 OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL PAPERS**

Three sub-studies were conducted based on different aspects driven from the meanings displayed by the participants, and further interpretation in the framework of Self-determination theory. In this chapter I describe how the sub-studies relate to the main research questions, and the different perspectives the sub-studies are focused on. An overview of the study has been presented in Table 1. The original articles are attached at the end of the thesis.

TABLE 1 An overview of the thesis.

<i>An overview of the thesis</i>					
	<i>Focus of contribution</i>	<i>Research questions</i>	<i>Method and focus of analysis</i>	<i>Main results</i>	<i>Topics for discussion</i>
The overall study	<p>Lived and storied experiences of early school leavers about the processes behind early school leaving.</p> <p>Perspectives of early school leavers interpreted in Self-determination theory framework.</p> <p>How experienced need statuses can accumulate and manifest themselves, providing additional suggestions to current Self-determination theory literature.</p>	<p>1. What kind of narratives do the participants talk about their experiences and circumstances in school and what kind of meanings do they give to them?</p> <p>2. How are the experiences of relatedness reflected in the narratives of the participants?</p>	<p>Narrative interviews including negotiating of meanings of what was told as a narrative analysis.</p> <p>A theory-driven analysis of the co-composed meanings in the framework of three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness)</p> <p>Manual data management added with ATLAS.ti 7 and ATLAS.ti 9.</p>	<p>1. A sense of detachment from the school society was a shared experience regardless of gender, cultural background, age, or qualities of familial context.</p> <p>2. Experienced detachment from school society resonated with the conceptualizing of indifference and dissatisfaction within Self-determination theory, providing additional information about need-related experiences.</p>	<p>Strengthening sense of belonging for all students</p> <p>Accumulating of need perceptions shaping further experiences</p> <p>Detachment as an element of dissatisfaction of the need for relatedness</p> <p>Possible counter effects of positive need perceptions</p>
Study 1	<p>Identifying a sense of being an outsider as an experience of need frustration and a manifestation of intersectionality in the narratives of</p>	<p>1. How did the interviewed young women position themselves as students?</p> <p>2. What kind of aspects did the</p>	<p>Focusing on the three female Finnish Roma participants' narrative accounts</p> <p>Bringing forth specific aspects related to</p>	<p>1. The participants positioned themselves in between expectations of the Finnish Roma society and the school society</p>	<p>Co-operation with families and school professionals</p>

*An overview of the thesis*

	<i>Focus of contribution</i>	<i>Research questions</i>	<i>Method and focus of analysis</i>	<i>Main results</i>	<i>Topics for discussion</i>
	female Finnish Roma early school leavers	<p>interviewees identify as reasons for leaving school before graduating?</p> <p>3. What kind of accumulating aspects linked with the early school leaving can be identified in the narrative accounts of the interviewees?</p>	cultural prejudice and intersectionality inside the group, as well as accumulating challenges of persisting in school	<p>2. Loneliness, rejection, outspoken prejudice, and a sense of being an outsider in school, weak parental support for persisting in school</p> <p>3. Cultural prejudice of the surrounding society manifested itself in peer relations and in relationships with school adults, added with challenges arising from poverty and coping problems</p>	<p>Awareness of privileges, prejudices, and power relationships</p> <p>Developing further cultural awareness and respect within Finnish school settings</p>
Study 2	Identifying trajectories from need frustration and amotivation in the school environment towards life out of schooling	<p>1. What kind of life events and circumstances, as well as personal experiences do participants link with their early school leaving?</p> <p>2. What kind of pathways out of school can be identified in the narrative accounts?</p>	Focusing on how experiences of need frustration were located and what kind of an impact it had on choosing environments out of school, based on the individual narrative account of each participant	<p>1. The participants had experienced a lack of safety, weak parental care, a sense of loneliness, being rejected by peers, a lack of support to persist in school, mismatches of support arrangements</p> <p>2. Pathways leading out of school:                      - a transition from school to the labour market by taking a job before graduating,                      - choosing maladaptive substitutes for basic</p>	<p>Identifying and reacting to negative need perceptions of students at risk</p> <p>Providing a sense of safety in relation to physical and psychological safety within school societies</p>

*An overview of the thesis*

	<i>Focus of contribution</i>	<i>Research questions</i>	<i>Method and focus of analysis</i>	<i>Main results</i>	<i>Topics for discussion</i>
				psychological needs that were frustrated in school - maladaptive behaviour due to need frustration in the home environment, ending up quitting schooling	
Study 3	Identifying detachment as participants' shared experience and interpreting it in Self-determination theory perspective by terms of indifference and dissatisfaction of the need for relatedness	<p>1. What kind of circumstances and experiences do the participants identify as individually relevant, concerning indifference and dissatisfaction of relatedness, in their process of leaving school?</p> <p>2. What kind of accumulation could be identified in relation to experienced status of relatedness?</p>	Focusing on aspects that resonated with the concepts of indifference and dissatisfaction concerning the need for relatedness within Self-determination theory framework	<p>1. Detachment from school as a society due to different interests from peers' interests, inability to share one's experiences with peers, being invisible to school adults as well as positive experiences out of school society</p> <p>2. The participants' own indifference towards school arising from former negative need perceptions, lack of trust to beneficence of schooling, a sense of not being accepted or respected in school</p>	<p>How does the accumulation of dissatisfaction affect need-related experiences later in life?</p> <p>A vicious circle of indifference: facing indifference makes one indifferent</p>

## **4.1 Study 1: Being an outsider – an experience of three female Roma early school leavers**

Published 2019 in *Kasvatus*, 50 (2), 120–35, under the Finnish title "Ulkopuolisuu-  
den olo": tapaustutkimus peruskoulun keskeyttäneiden romaninaisten kouluko-  
kemuksista, with Juha Hakala and Virpi-Liisa Kykyri. I, Merja Pikkarainen,  
acted as the first writer and corresponding author of the article, having also car-  
ried out the research interviews and analysis of the data. Juha Hakala and Virpi-  
Liisa Kykyri provided ideas on which aspects of the data to focus on, as well as  
advice how to create a coherent structure for the text.

### **4.1.1 Focusing on the perspective of the female Finnish Roma participants**

The perspective of Study 1 arises from the experiences displayed by three female participants, who came from a Finnish Roma background. The narrative inter-  
pretation of what was told by these participants indicated that they shared an  
experience of belonging to a minority inside a minority. When further interpret-  
ing the narrative accounts from the perspective of need perceptions, we identi-  
fied accumulation of need thwarting, which was linked to cultural prejudice  
within the surrounding environment. Moreover, the participants described as-  
pects that had challenged their school engagement as female students with a  
Finnish Roma familial background. This differed from other participants in rela-  
tion to cultural background, and gender. Due to these signs of intersectionality,  
we found it important to explore the specific experiences described by the female  
Finnish Roma participants.

While exploring the narrative data we also noticed that the three Roma fe-  
male participants formed a coherent group with elements that to some extent  
differed from the other participants. Being of 20–30 years of age, having left  
school at about the age of thirteen or earlier, being mothers, and having had con-  
flicting experiences within the cultural minority they were born into and had  
chosen to represent as adults as well, they formed a group that could provide an  
insight into experiences of people rarely represented in research studies. The nar-  
rative interviewing process with each of these three participants was the same:  
we had three meetings with each participant, each meeting was about one hour  
of duration, and each participant was actively reading and commenting on the  
interim narrative accounts in the second and third meeting. Furthermore, these  
three mothers extended their narrative accounts from talking about their own  
school experiences to include those of their children, providing an up-to-date  
glimpse of a Finnish Roma child's experience in today's elementary school in Fin-  
land. Bringing all these aspects together we found it important to give space to  
the perspective of the Roma female participants as a separate research paper, in  
addition to including their narrative accounts in the other papers alongside the  
other participants. We decided to publish Study 1 in Finnish for the following  
reasons: to reach readers in the national context whose awareness of the matter  
might benefit the group the participants represent, to facilitate the participants

and their family members a readership, and to encourage their participation in national debates on the schooling of the Finnish Roma.

#### 4.1.2 Summary of Study 1

Study 1 focuses on narratives of three female Finnish Roma participants. Even though more than 80 % of the Finnish Roma population of about 10 000 people do currently complete compulsory education, the remaining approximately 15 % formulate a minority inside a minority, which is at risk of educational and societal exclusion. Berlin (2015b), and Syrjä and Valtakari (2008, 37), have pointed out that there is polarization going on among the Finnish Roma, following the tendencies in the surrounding society. Furthermore, Roman (2018) highlighted the vulnerability of living in between cultures, not being integrated either into the main culture nor the Finnish Roma culture. The transition from a girl to an adult Finnish Roma is, among other things, a visible act, when a teenager chooses to wear the traditional clothing of Finnish Roma women, which in many ways differs from the clothing of the majority population. By making the choice to visibly follow traditional habits of her familial culture, the young individual also takes on the vulnerability linked with cultural prejudice (Huttu, 2009; Markkanen, 2003; Roman, 2018; Stenroos, 2012 and Viljanen, 2012). Though, in this study we didn't have a belonging to a minority group as a starting point. On the contrary, when we were recruiting the participants, Finnish Roma women were the first to volunteer and were eager to share their school experiences.

As a theoretical frame to organize the meanings of what was told we followed the conceptualizing of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the perceived satisfaction levels of those needs, as defined in Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Self-determination theory postulates, that when the basic psychological needs are perceived as satisfied, the consequences are positive, such as internal motivation and wellbeing. Accordingly, outcomes of low levels of need satisfaction tend to be of a negative nature, such as diminishing motivation, amotivation, and maladaptive substitutes for need satisfaction (Ryan & Deci 2000b, Vansteenkiste & Ryan 2013), which are often linked with societal exclusion and general illbeing. As an additional theoretical framework, we applied intersectionality, from the field of which we focused on inequality forming between and inside groups (Cho et al. 2013, p. 785–787; Collins 2015). Study 1 focuses on the following research questions:

1. How did the interviewed young women position themselves as students?
2. What kind of aspects did the interviewees identify as reasons for their leaving school before graduating?
3. What kind of accumulating aspects linked with early school leaving can be identified in the narrative accounts of the interviewees?

The narrative interviewing process consisted of three meetings with each interviewee. Between interviews the interviewing researcher transcribed the interviews and created interim narrative accounts to be negotiated with the interviewees during the following meetings. After interviewing processes, the narrative accounts were interpreted using ATLAS.ti 7, searching for shared experiences and themes. The shared experiences were organized following the concept of the basic psychological need satisfaction levels and the concept of intersectionality.

The participants positioned themselves as students in a two-folded way. A sense of detachment due to cultural prejudice, and experiences of rejection, created a need to actively seek acceptance in the school environment. The participants' school life was coloured with balancing between the expectations of school and their familial culture. In addition to this, the participants talked about elements such as poverty, familial coping problems leading to child-care interventions, and not being in contact with the parents' families at all, thus being disconnected from their Finnish Roma extended families due to which they situated themselves as a minority among the larger cultural group of the Finnish Roma. From the perspective of intersectionality, this indicates vulnerability to inequality inside the minority group.

As reasons for leaving school before graduating, the interviewees named the prejudice targeted to them in school and in their surroundings, loneliness in the peer group in school, and weak parental support for persisting in school. In addition to this poverty was identified as a cause of detachment from the peer group. Warm relationships with one's Finnish Roma family were described as strengthening, providing belongingness which was not linked with school, nor did it insist on persisting in school in the cases of the interviewees.

When organizing the meanings of what had been told by the participants in the conceptual framework of Self-determination theory we identified an accumulation of need thwarting elements. The awareness of a difference between the majority culture and the familial culture was present in the minds of the interviewees from the beginning of school. Cultural prejudice within the surrounding society affected the participants' lives at a general level as a life condition. Furthermore, important adults, such as some of the teachers, and parents of peers, expressed their prejudice in an outspoken way, thus limiting the interviewees' possibilities to integrate with the peer group. In addition to that, actively pronounced and acted rejection by peers and their parents caused a sense of loneliness in the school environment. Through a Self-determination theory lens, thwarting elements of the basic psychological needs accumulated, especially concerning the need for relatedness, affecting need frustration and a tendency to avoid school as a place coloured by negative responses to one's needs. The cases of a weak need satisfaction in the home environment also added to experiences of need frustration, leaving the participants in a situation shaped by a lack of support to persist in school.

## **4.2 Study 2: Why did they leave school? A Self-determination theory perspective into narratives of Finnish early school leavers**

Published 2021 in *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 10(1), 48–72, with Juha Hakala and Virpi-Liisa Kykyri. I, Merja Pikkarainen, acted as the first writer and the corresponding author of the article. Juha Hakala and Virpi-Liisa Kykyri provided ideas on which aspects of the theoretical framework and narrated experiences to focus on.

### **4.2.1 Focusing on need-related experiences**

In Study 2 we included all the participants, including the pilot interviewees, and the interviewed specialists. We examined the participants' storied experiences about need perceptions of the three basic psychological needs or autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The different statuses of need satisfaction were examined, as well as in what kind of circumstances and environments the perceptions had occurred. We focused on identifying what kind of links could be identified between the meanings displayed by the participants and need perceptions described in Self-determination theory research literature.

### **4.2.2 Summary of Study 2**

While Self-determination theory is clear in showing the benefits of support for basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, we know less about consequences and experiences related to need thwarting. In research literature of Self-determination theory, reasons behind premature school leaving have been linked to a weak need support of the students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ratelle & Duchesne, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Stroet et al., 2013). Additionally, Vansteenkiste & Ryan (2013, p. 265) have suggested, that while need support leads via need satisfaction to healthy growth and wellbeing, need thwarting leads to frustration and maladaptive outcomes. To better to understand processes behind diminishing motivation we need to explore how early school leavers themselves perceive their relationships and prospects in school, and how their experiences resonate with the basic psychological needs' satisfaction levels.

Recent studies in Finland indicate, in line with Self-determination theory research studies, that early school leaving seems to be connected to accumulating challenges and obstacles, such as poly-victimization, weak interpersonal support, sense of otherness, and in cases of minorities, cultural prejudice (Berlin, 2015a; Ellonen & Salmi, 2011; Honkasilta, 2019; Rajala & Blomerus, 2015; Roman, 2018; Vasalampi et al., 2018; Virtanen, 2016; Vähemmistövaltuutettu, 2014). At the same time, the relatively small rate of discontinuation of compulsory schooling in Finland has been slightly increasing, indicating the importance of investigating reasons behind premature school leaving (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019).



Furthermore, some groups of people have faced more difficulties to persist in school than the population in general, such as short-term prisoners (Kivivuori & Linderberg, 2009) and the Finnish Roma (Rajala & Blomerus, 2015). Personal narratives and perspectives of people belonging to marginalized groups, and those who represent a minority inside a minority, are valuable to be considered and investigated as indicators of aspects which may lead to educational and societal exclusion. Study 2 aims to answer the following research questions:

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

We conducted a narrative inquiry among eleven early school leavers who were in prison when they were interviewed. We applied the concept of frustration of the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013) as an interpretative tool, along with contextual information. We negotiated with the participants about the meanings of what was told during the interviews, thus conducting a qualitative analysis of the research data. After that we analysed the narrative accounts and meanings co-composed with the participants searching for aspects resonating with perceptions of each psychological need as the need statuses are described in Self-determination theory literature. In data management we used ATLAS.ti 7. By this triangulation we aimed to reach the meanings provided by the participants, as well as recognize weak signals, that might be of importance and enrich understanding of the processes linked with early school leaving.

The participants described need thwarting elements, as well as aspects indicating indifference, which in the school environment consisted of outspoken prejudice, rejection, a sense of being an outsider, and detachment from school society. The home environment, as well as a peer group outside school provided a more need satisfying context, pulling the participants away from school. 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. The first path lead from need thwarting and neglect within the school environment to withdrawing from the environment which was not experienced as beneficial or important. The second path included need thwarting and neglect in both the school and home environments leading to frustration, maladaptive behaviour, and need substitutes. The third path started with need thwarting in the home environment, which created inner burdens that indirectly affected the participant's life in the school environment as well. Additionally, an experienced threat of safety was a shared element in the narrative accounts.

Persisting in school didn't play a major role for the participants, as their focus of interest was on coping and finding more need satisfactory environments. The findings add information about experienced indifference in the case of the participants, which is a new element in theorizing the continuum of perceived

need satisfaction within the terms of Self-determination theory. Furthermore, the findings indicate that need frustration, especially a sense of fragile psychological safety as a life condition, might increase people's sensitivity for need confronting experiences later in life. The accumulation of need thwarting and frustration, as well as the consequences of it to further need-related experiences, provides an avenue for further studies around issues related to diminishing motivation, participation, and engagement in school, as well as in other life domains.

### **4.3 Study 3: Revisiting the narratives of Finnish early school leavers: mapping experiences of detachment through a Self-determination theory lens**

Published 2022 in *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, Early online, with Virpi-Liisa Kykyri and Heidi Harju-Luukkainen. I, Merja Pikkarainen, acted as the first writer and the corresponding author of the article. Virpi-Liisa Kykyri and Heidi Harju-Luukkainen provided ideas about how to present the central findings and conclusions of the study in a clear and coherent way.

#### **4.3.1 Focusing on experiences of relatedness**

In Study 3 we focused on the experiences linked with the need for relatedness. When examining the meanings of what was told we found that most of the storied experiences had something to do with people around the participant. In line with this data-driven observation, the themes identified and coded by ATLAS.ti 9 showed, that relatedness was the most often appearing of the three basic psychological needs. Furthermore, when examining how the codes overlapped each other, the inserts linked with the need for relatedness co-occurred with other needs more often than the other needs co-occurred with each other. Hence, we found it important to investigate aspects linked with the need for relatedness, as well as the perceptions of how well or weakly the need was met. While the term 'school' includes multiple perspectives, such as learning and pedagogy, the relationships and bonds between people involved in school activities have been labelled with the term 'school as a society' in this paper.

The need perceptions we identified turned out to fall into the most novel category of need perceptions in the conceptualizing of need perceptions in Self-determination theory, dissatisfaction, deriving from indifference as a background circumstance. Additionally, we identified experiences of frustration deriving from need thwarting as could be predicted based on Self-determination theory research literature. Furthermore, the narrative accounts seemed to have potential to add knowledge about perceptions linked with indifference and dissatisfaction of the need for relatedness. Moreover, the narrative accounts included chains of experienced linked with need dissatisfaction and need frustration of the need for relatedness. Hence, we also explored the perspective of accumulating need perceptions.

### 4.3.2 Summary of Study 3

Basic psychological needs and the experiences people live affect the choices they make and further shape the trajectories taken through school. This study focuses on the perspectives of people who have left school without graduating, aiming to identify the participants' experiences related to basic psychological needs during their process of leaving school. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020) postulates, that human beings share an inherent tendency to seek satisfaction for three essential needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Of these we focus on experiences of relatedness in this paper.

Levels of need satisfaction have been described as a continuum, with need support manifesting itself as perceived satisfaction at the high end and need thwarting which manifests itself as perceived frustration at the low end of the continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Recently, Cheon et al. (2019) have suggested a new concept in between the ends of satisfactory continuum, need indifference, which manifests itself as perceived dissatisfaction. When examining the low end of need perceptions, it is important to consider the borderlines between higher and lower need satisfaction levels. Because the concepts of dissatisfaction and indifference are rather new in Self-determination theory, there is a need to investigate how people experience elements linked with them.

A need supporting structure promotes need satisfaction, enhancing good quality in relationships with important people, such as family members, caretakers, and peers, while a weak structure diminishes opportunities to build a healthy attachment and feel safe in close relationships (Ratelle et al. 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This is in line with recent studies, which suggest, that problems in interpersonal elements, such as parenting, teacher-student relationships, and relationships with peers are often linked with a weak school engagement (Fandrem et al., 2021; Lyyra et al. 2016; Muhonen et al., 2016; Nouwen & Clyck, 2019; Parviainen et al., 2021; Pöysä et al., 2019, and Vauhkonen et al., 2017). Drawing from these aspects of current research literature we found it important to investigate the participants' experiences linked with relatedness. We aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What kind of circumstances and experiences do the participants identify as individually relevant, concerning indifference and dissatisfaction of relatedness, in their process of leaving school?
2. What kind of accumulation could be identified in relation to the experienced status of relatedness?

Through narrative interviewing processes we collected storied experiences with eleven imprisoned early school leavers in Finland. With each participant we highlighted the participant's role as a specialist of the issue by providing opportunities for them to comment on and correct, if wished, the interim narrative accounts. We used triangulation with data-driven themes and as theory, the satisfactory levels of the need for relatedness, with background circumstances related

to each level of need perceptions. Of the basic psychological needs, relatedness was the most common and a shared topic displayed by the participants.

Experiencing dissatisfaction and frustration of the need for relatedness played an important role in the participants' narratives. The experienced dissatisfaction consisted of a sense of detachment from school as a society of peers and adults, loneliness within the peer group, a sense of being different from others, and a sense of being invisible to teachers. Circumstances linked with these experiences consisted of a lack of possibility to share one's feelings with the people in school, a lack of understanding, acceptance, or respect, as well as a weak parenting structure. Furthermore, frustration of the need for relatedness could be identified in participants' narratives as a sense of being targeted by outspoken prejudices or being rejected. In addition to this, we identified low levels of satisfaction of the need for relatedness in both societal and familial contexts, which predicted the participants' reported indifference towards school tasks. Experiences of being ignored, neglected, or rejected created a state of mind, in which coping with obstacles was a major concern, leaving school tasks in a diminishing role in the minds of the participants. Adding to the findings of Cheon et al. (2019) we suggest that past negative experiences might shape a student's perceptions of dissatisfaction in the school context, as well as within other life domains. The findings of this study indicate that a background of negatively shaped need perceptions may make people more sensitive to experiencing dissatisfaction in situations of indifferent circumstances, and, accordingly, more prone to experience frustration when facing need thwarting circumstances.

## 5 FINDINGS OF THE OVERALL STUDY

The first research aim of the study was to explore what kind of narratives early school leavers would relate about their experiences and circumstances in school and what kind of meanings they would give to these experiences and circumstances. Through data-driven narrative interpretation we identified detachment from school society as a shared experience, which affected the participants' choices and further experiences. Detachment manifested itself in various ways, depending on a participant's familial, leisure time, and school contexts.

The second research aim was to investigate how experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness reflected in the narratives of the participants. The participants described experiences linked with relatedness more commonly than experiences linked with the other needs. Furthermore, experiences linked with competence or autonomy most often included other people involved in the event or happening, hence being intertwined with aspects of relatedness as well. The accumulation of need thwarting, and indifferent circumstances prompted frustration and dissatisfaction linked with the need for relatedness. Indifference was identified in part from the educators involved, but also from participants themselves. The participants' indifference towards school activities derived from a sense of schooling not being beneficial for them, their negative past experiences within the school environment, as well as their minds being occupied with other issues taking precedence over school tasks.

Detachment from the school society, which was a data-driven finding, resonated with the concept of dissatisfaction as a need-related experience. Storied experiences linked with indifference and dissatisfaction provided tentative new perspectives to the accumulation of need-related perceptions. A summary of the findings has been presented in Figure 4.

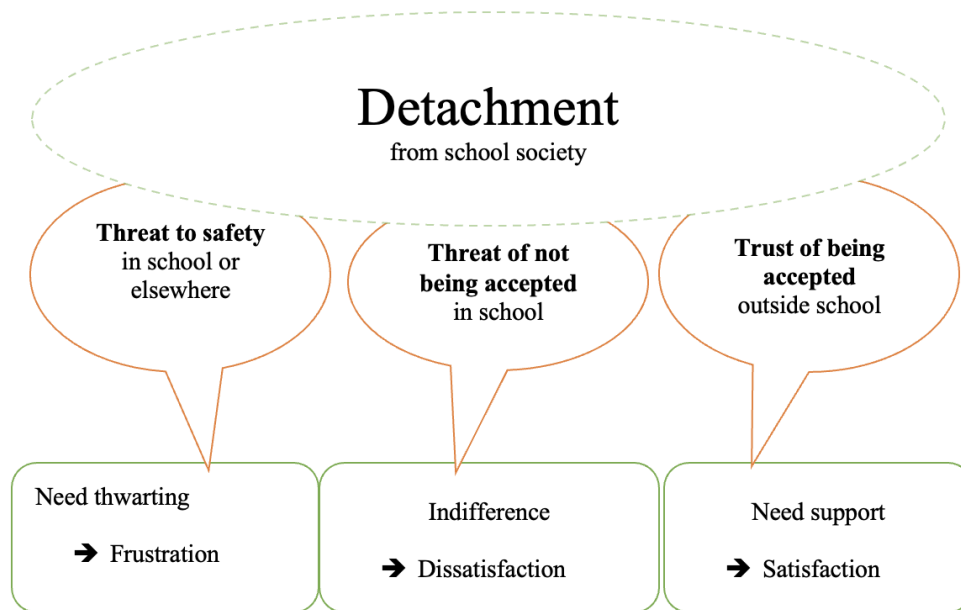


FIGURE 4 Mapping early school leavers' storied experiences linked with detachment in a Self-determination theory framework.

The present thesis has focused on lived experiences of Finnish early school leavers. The narrative accounts co-composed within narrative interviewing processes with each participant have been further interpreted in a theoretical framework which consists of the concept of three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness as defined in Self-determination theory research literature. Experienced detachment from school as a society was a central finding as a background for early school leaving, shared with all participants regardless of when they attended school, cultural or familial background, gender, or age when interviewed. Aspects linked with detachment in the narrative accounts resonated with elements linked with indifference and dissatisfaction, as well as need thwarting, and frustration of relatedness as described in Self-determination theory research literature. Hence, the participants' perspective of detachment provided additional views about dissatisfaction of relatedness, and indifference behind the perception.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The present dissertation focused on school experiences of Finnish early school leavers, of which detachment from school as a society was a shared experience to all participants regardless of age, gender, or familial background. Detachment as an experience resonated with the conceptualizing of need dissatisfaction within Self-determination theory. The concept of the three basic psychological needs provided a theoretical network to capture aspects displayed in narrative interviewing processes. Furthermore, perceived need statuses were distinguished from background factors. The current research approach combined individually experienced elements with a theory of a general nature, responding for its part to the research need of expanding from an individual perspective to include a wider viewpoint. In the following chapters I discuss contributions, limitations, avenues for future studies, and practical implications of the thesis.

### 6.1 Enriching conceptualizing within Self-determination theory

The findings of this study provide an additional view to the mid-section of the need continuum suggested by Cheon et al. (2019). Dissatisfaction of the need for relatedness manifested itself as detachment from the school society. Furthermore, indifference as a background circumstance prompted an indifferent attitude in the mind sets of the participants concerning environments where they had faced indifference themselves. Additionally, the accumulation of need perceptions documented within the study added information regarding the kind of underpinnings former experiences create to experiences that are lived later.

Experiences of detachment arose from various backgrounds. Within the narrative interpreting process, the participants described a sense of not belonging together with their peers in school. As reasons behind that feeling they identified negative, neutral, and positive elements related to their daily activities. Negative elements were the most obvious in the light of present research literature, namely cultural prejudice linked with ignorance and disrespect, impacts of weak

parental care on a child's behaviour as well as a lack of ability to formulate friendships based on mutual trust, and bullying within the school environment. A sense of threat that one's psychological needs might not be supported, or might be neglected or thwarted, also triggered detachment from people in environments where the threat was experienced. A sense of being interested in different kinds of activities from peers in school was a neutral element, and as such didn't enhance bonding with peers but rather prompted detachment as well.

In addition to negative experiences in the school environment, positive experiences out of the school environment resulted in detachment from school society. As these positive experiences occurred alongside the negative or neutral experiences in the school environment, the environment outside of school provided an alternative to the less than positive school environment. Close relationships with one's family combined with family members' acceptance of the participant's absence from school created a situation where persisting in school was harder than staying away. In the light of Self-determination theory these experiences of detachment can be interpreted as a weak need support for the need of relatedness. As proposed in the research literature of Self-determination theory (see Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Ryan & Deci, 2017) a sense of belonging together with other people, relatedness, is an essential nutriment for human wellbeing. Furthermore, Self-determination theory claims, that when a need is thwarted, people perceive frustration and tend to search support for the need from other environments (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). The narrative accounts reveal a similar tendency of the participants moving from unsatisfying environments towards more promising life settings to find friends and experience belonging together and bonding with other people. However, a closer look into the aspects related to bonds with other people in the narrative accounts reveals a multileveled nature of experiences. The need-related experiences not only concerned negative experiences such as outspoken prejudice, rejection, or bullying, but also more silent elements, such as a sense of not being seen by teachers, or not being asked why they were not coming to school. This kind of ignoring by school personnel has been conceptualized as indifference within recent Self-determination theory research literature, when exploring students' perceptions about need support (Cheon et al., 2019).

Indifference has been linked with dissatisfaction as a need-related experience in the study of Cheon et al. (2019). On the continuum of need-related backgrounds, indifference has been situated between need thwarting and support, while dissatisfaction has been situated between need frustration and satisfaction in the middle of the continuum. Cheon et al. (2019) studied perceptions of autonomy, but as Wood (2016) has noted quality of relatedness as a need is intertwined with qualities of need support of other needs as well, when activities take place within relationships with other people. The findings of this study indicate that perceptions of relatedness do not always fit in categories of frustration or satisfaction but can fall between them. This is in line with Costa et al. (2014), who proposed, that lack of need satisfaction is not equivalent with need frustration. Accordingly, background factors behind the perceptions may not always fit in



the categories of need support or need thwarting but can more accurately be defined as indifference. Based on the findings of the present thesis and adding to work of Cheon et al. (2019), and Costa et al. (2014) I suggest that the continuum of need-related experiences might better be understood by using three categories, frustration – dissatisfaction – satisfaction and thwarting – indifference – support, instead of merely the two at the opposite ends of the continuum (frustration – satisfaction and thwarting – support).

Adding to this, an accumulating effect of a sense of being continuously ignored was identified. In addition to an experience of dissatisfaction, accumulating manifested itself as an indifferent attitude on the participants' part towards a new environment within the same life domain, where they had faced indifference. Facing indifference in daily life, as a life condition, resulted in diminishing school motivation and engagement, coming close to already explored effects of need thwarting, which have been reported within Self-determination theory research literature. This indicates that there might be differences between students' presuppositions about possibilities to receive need support when entering a new environment, such as a new school, arising from different experiential backgrounds linked with need-related experiences. In short, the students' responses to indifference or need thwarting can be shaped by their background of need-related experiences, in addition to situational elements.

In addition to the accumulating effect, the findings of this study indicate a transfer effect related to low levels of need support. Need thwarting in the home environment resulted in wariness and defensive reactions of a child not only in the home environment, but also in the school environment. Former experiences of a threat to safety shaped the children's responses to need confrontations, making them sensitive to possible threats of safety in other environments as well. The participants of the study described this as leading to attempts to protect themselves from being dominated in school, since it was not possible in their home environments. Protecting oneself from a threat to safety manifested itself as maladaptive behaviour such as dominating, manipulating, and bullying peers.

While the research body of Self-determination theory is clear in showing that need thwarting tends to lead people to need substitutes (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), the findings of this study indicate that outcomes of need thwarting may, in addition to need substitutes, also result in heightened sensitivity to negative need-related experiences. Hence, after perceiving need frustration people might be sensitive to a mere lack of need support, also conceptualized as indifference, not only the thwarting of needs. According to the findings of this study, heightened sensitivity to need-related experiences was linked not only with one's environment or a life domain but affected several environments in which the participants were occupied. Sensitive reactions and vulnerability to negative need-related experiences manifested themselves also as avoiding behaviour. Lacking interest to stay in non-need-satisfying environments resulted in leaving school without graduating.

Drawing from these ponderings, the sphere of aspects related to dissatisfaction and frustration as need-related experiences seems more complex and

multileveled than the present research body of Self-determination theory manages to explain and conceptualize. This study suggests tentative additions to attempts to understand and conceptualize need-related experiences. The findings indicate that accumulating perceptions of dissatisfaction, linked with an indifferent environment which is coloured with lack of need support, can make people more sensitive to react negatively to future need confronting experiences than they otherwise might be. In line with that it can also be suggested that there might be a transfer effect from one life domain to another, when need frustration or dissatisfaction has grown to be an inner burden to an individual, and hence affects their wellbeing at an inner personal level.

## **6.2 A sense of safety and other narrative aspects linked with a Self-determination theory perspective**

This chapter provides an exploratory view of how contextual elements of narrative landscape and generality levels of Self-determination theory might resonate with each other. Narrative landscapes consist not only of individual views but include contextual elements such as cultural, linguistic, and societal environments. As Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) suggested, contextual aspects have also been noted to affect personal need related perceptions at different levels within Self-determination theory conceptualizing. However, the generality levels have not been largely explored within the Self-determination theory research body. Another aspect discussed in this chapter is narrated experiences linked with living in environments not providing a sense of safety, which in Self-determination theory terms is linked with a sense of insecure need satisfaction and a threat of need thwarting.

While Ryan and Deci, (2020) and Vansteenkiste et al., (2020) have encouraged qualitative approaches for better understanding how to operationalize principles of Self-determination theory, this study moved from lived experiences towards theoretical interpretations. By this it provided insights as to how narratively described elements of need statuses had manifested themselves in the lives of the participants. Furthermore, we explored how these need-related perceptions, displayed in narrative interviews as storied experience, had affected the participants' choices and acts in relation to schooling.

Following the conceptualizing of Vallerand and Ratelle (2002), the storied experiences, as well as the circumstances the participants had described, can be categorized in general, contextual, and situational levels. Life conditions, such as facing social prejudice, weak parental care, or poverty, were categorized as general level circumstances. In turn, these affected contextual level circumstances, affecting the school climate, and attitudes among school adults and peers, as well as presuppositions of the participants themselves. Situational level circumstances consisted of events and incidents such as rejection from a peer group, defensive behaviour, and withdrawing from the peers and school society.

Experiences linked with general level circumstances included detachment from school society, as well as a constant pressure and uncertainty as to how to cope with prejudice or other challenges colouring the daily lives of the participants. At a contextual level the participants experienced loneliness and alienation from peers with whom the participants had earlier experienced positive relationships. At a situational level the participants had experiences such as shame of being rejected or shame of one's home being different from those of one's peers', disgust at inappropriate outspoken prejudice of school adults, and helplessness, which manifested itself as withdrawing from the peer group. Drawing from these findings of this study, I suggest that three levels of generality could be identified within the storied experiences of the participants, and that circumstances and experiences at different levels created an accumulating effect, adding to the challenges the participants faced.

According to Ryan and Deci (2017) insecurity of need satisfaction as itself is a need thwarting element. When living amid a constant threat of need thwarting, or being ignored within indifferent environments, experiences of frustration and dissatisfaction start to accumulate and become a life condition, creating a general attitude as described by Vallerand and Ratelle (2002). A continuous threat of a need not being supported, caused by an element such as poverty, weak parental care, or cultural or other kind of prejudice, shaped the presuppositions of the participants related to people around them, as well as their responses to further experiences. In terms of Self-determination theory it can be said that the participants of this study had lived within a life condition shaped by general level need thwarting or indifference. In terms of narrative thinking the negative elements described by the participants shaped the narrative landscape in which they told, reflected, and re-told their experiences. Hence, the perspective provided by Self-determination theory, and the narrative view, can be understood as complementing each other, the concept of need-related experiences and the accumulation of them resonating with the concept of a narrative landscape.

The findings of the thesis indicate that a threat to physical safety can keep a person focused on coping with issues related to the threat. Furthermore, knowing that peers do not share the same kind of experiences of threat can hinder possibilities to create friendships based on mutual trust. This phenomenon is close to a threat of being humiliated, as well as being afraid of not being accepted as a peer or a friend. Avoiding shame or humiliation can be linked with avoiding the environment where the threat might be operationalized. As in the cases of the participants, when the school environment or a part of it was an arena of potential humiliation, the participants tended to avoid situations and places where they might face that. When it was not possible the participants were distressed and sometimes reacted in maladaptive ways. A threat to safety either carried along as an inner burden or faced in the school environment made the participants prone to be socially disconnected to people in school.

From a Self-determination theory perspective, one's trust to receiving need support is essential for healthy functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 102). Accordingly, a threat of need thwarting has been noted to have negative, even

pathologic consequences. However, the findings of the current thesis indicate that not mere actual thwarting but also a lack of support, such as indifference, being ignored or neglected can result in negative experiences. Consequently, capturing weak signals of students' detachment may be important when we try to find ways to support students at risk of failing to persist in school. This is highlighted by the findings of Kang (2022), and Yoon and Järvinen, (2016) who found weaknesses in quality of students' wellbeing in Finland. Considering students' need-related experiences might be a beneficial tool for student welfare services in fostering better school engagement.

Another perspective to safety is linked with the fact that drug-induced deaths among young people are more common in Finland than in other European countries (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022). There has been an ongoing public debate about youth's substance abuse and the negative consequences linked with it in Finland (Niemi, 2022). In research literature substance abuse has often been linked with early school leaving (see Chapter 1.1.). Some participants of the current thesis were familiar with substance abuse as well. However, according to their narrative accounts, their substance abuse had started after they had already experienced a sense of detachment from the school environment. This might indicate that there could have been shared background elements behind early school leaving and substance abuse. Drawing from the findings of the present thesis it could be suggested that both early school leaving, and substance abuse might be prompted by a low level of relatedness, which can manifest itself as a tendency to search for need substitutes. While need thwarting has been identified as a background factor for maladaptive need substitutes (Ryan & Deci, 2000b), this study indicates that also a more neutral need status, dissatisfaction arising from indifference, may lead to negative consequences and prompt people to make choices that will not be beneficial for them in the long term. Multiple aspects have been intertwined with issues linked with substance abuse, including families and parents of students. However, school as an institution that reaches each age cohort can be a fruitful arena for improving students' wellbeing and creating supporting networks in cooperation with youth and their families, as well as other actors around students.

### **6.3 Avoiding stigmatizing problem presentations through choice of methods**

The research setting of this study allowed for the personal perspectives of the participants by focusing on the participants' experiences and providing space for interpreting possible cultural links in the terms of the participants themselves. This is important when studying issues related to people belonging to ethnic minorities or being vulnerable to negative stigmatizing. Using the basic psychological needs of Self-determination theory as a theoretical framework allowed avoiding focusing on the problem of representation, which according to Lauritzen and

Nodeland (2018), and Stenroos and Helakorpi (2021) has been a tendency within research studies concerning Roma people. I aimed to avoid creating "Roma specific problems", such as explaining early school leaving solely from a cultural or ethnicity perspective. This study produced important knowledge about early school leaving by describing and analysing experiences the participants identified as important to them as individuals.

By focusing on experiences storied by the participants, and interpreting what was told in a theoretical framework that was not linked with the suggested backgrounds of the participants I aimed to capture what the participants themselves found important in their processes of leaving school. Using a framework that allowed categorizing what was told as human sensations, in terms of Self-determination theory as need-related experiences, enabled considering a large variety of experiences. By applying this kind of an approach, it was possible to identify qualities of experiences as they were described by the participants without creating culture-specific problem representation. The participants themselves defined what was considered as culture-specific, and what they found being of a more general nature, or an individual aspect not related to their familial background. Drawing from this it can be suggested that narrative inquiry, and Self-determination theory as a theoretical framework, might be fruitful approaches when further exploring issues concerning people belonging to minorities.

#### **6.4 Afterthoughts shaped by narrative interpretation**

The central finding of this study about the effects of detachment from school society is supported by recent studies. As the internationally high PISA scores of Finland have seen a decrease, an increasing influence of sociodemographic factors and inequality has been noted (Muench et al., 2022). Furthermore, Eklund et al. (2020) noted, that teachers tend to have too little time to provide support for all their students. Moreover, Kang (2022) suggested that in Finland the pressure of school accountability may have a weakening impact on student wellbeing, naming peer competition and decreased sense of school belonging as climate factors. These up-to date suggestions resonate with the experiences of the participants of this study. When relationships with people in school became shallow or non-existent, a sense of belonging decreased, which resulted in diminishing school engagement.

Within the Finnish education system, the pedagogical support is aimed at covering needs concerning learning problems, while student welfare services aim to provide support in more general aspects of wellbeing. The participants of this study identified both kinds of support needs during their school years, linking the experienced lack of support with people involved, thus highlighting the importance of relationships with the people in the school environment. While the aims of support systems and welfare services have been commonly accepted, there has been a debate about how to improve intersectoral and intra-school cooperation as well as collaborative work with school personnel and families, as

suggested by Nordmyr and Forsman (2021). This is in line with the suggestion of this study that the quality of human relationships is important for the students' welfare and school engagement.

As Yoon and Järvinen (2016) have noted, the level of Finnish students' happiness and satisfaction has not been going hand in hand with high scores of academic achievements. It would be important to consider these signals, to be able to tackle elements of the possible decreasing of students' wellbeing in Finnish schools. Improving students' wellbeing and bonding with people in school society might also help to decrease youth's interest to maladaptive need substitutes, such as substance abuse. Background factors, such as a lack of time resources may on its part hinder building trustful and satisfying relationships between teachers and students, as well as between peers, resulting in a sense of dissatisfaction, detachment, and frustration. There remains a question about how to prioritise the time and personnel resource that is available during school days. Who has a right to define what is most important and best for students? The quality of meeting with the student is an important factor in students' sense of being accepted, as Äärelä (2012), among others, has suggested. Curricula and achievement goals tend to create a pressure which affect life in schools and occupy teachers' minds. This may have a negative impact on possibilities to invest teachers' time to be spent in meeting with and getting to know the students. While it is said that Finnish teachers are highly qualified, perhaps even some of the best in the world, there is a need to enhance space for creating respectful and warm relationships with students. How we communicate with students is especially important with students who face prejudices or other negative attitudes. Strengthening an atmosphere of respect, care and mutual trust within school societies could provide students with experiences of belongingness, which in turn would encourage persisting in school.

In this study the participants identifying themselves as Finnish Roma described both non-cultural and culture-related challenges in their narrative accounts about their experiences in school. Culture-related issues were two-fold. On the one hand, the cultural prejudice from the surrounding society resulted in different levels as negative experiences. On the other hand, belonging to the cultural group of the Finnish Roma included intersectional elements in the case of the participants. The participants represented a minority inside a minority, having a criminal background, having left school without graduating as well as coming from families with a short history of schooling. Non-culturally related risk factors, such as weak parental care and poverty added to these culturally related, or familial, challenges. On the one hand, this kind of accumulation of challenges created a load partly deriving from the cultural background. On the other hand, belonging to a Finnish Roma family enhanced trust in support – and a need to support – within the familial context, independently from qualities of need support in the school context. The participants also reported trust in the support of their own family members when they had talked about needing to avoid another Finnish Roma family. However, when relationships to a participant's parents extended Finnish Roma families were problematic, the participants tended to be

more prone to react to need confrontations in a negative way or to avoid the environment where the need confronting had occurred and might be expected to occur again.

Prolonged absences from school were noted to be a step towards leaving school among all participants. Though, the Finnish Roma participants and their school-aged children had reasons for absences differing from those of the participants representing the Finnish majority. For the Finnish Roma participants, it was important to participate in gatherings of the extended family, such as funerals. The school personnel, as well as peers had found it difficult to accept that the presence of the Finnish Roma children in a family gathering was essential and required several days of absence from school. However, from the perspective of the Finnish Roma participants the participation of the whole family seemed something very important and was not questioned but described as a self-evident necessity. Searching for ways as to how the students could accomplish school tasks during absences in co-operation with their families could be beneficial for Finnish Roma children's school engagement. Which issues or events are considered important enough to justify an absence from school could also be questioned. Respecting habits of building and deepening relationships with one's relatives, and bonds between generations of a family could be considered valuable and beneficial for overall wellbeing of children and youth as well as adults. There remains a question of what is valued and who has the right to define what is important.

Drawing from these aspects it can be suggested that non-cultural and culturally related elements behind early school leaving of the Finnish Roma were intertwined and accumulated in the life situations of the participants. Accordingly, elements hindering school engagement of the Finnish Roma youth might best be tackled considering individually what might support a student's persisting in school. However, the general level of cultural prejudice experienced by the participants is an issue for the whole society and indicates a need to continue ongoing processes aiming to enhance equity, respect and understanding between different groups of people. Though, aspects related to power relationships inside Finnish Roma families, such as a need to avoid another family, cannot be mastered from outside the cultural perspective. This kind of a sensitive but sometimes personally influential aspect can, and should, be considered from an inside perspective by actors capable of understanding and affecting power relationships that shape dynamics between people and families among the Finnish Roma.

The findings of the present thesis indicate that there are both positive and negative experiences which can make a student prone to early school leaving. In this framework negative experiences were noted to push the participants out of school. However, at the same time, positive experiences tended to pull the participants in the same direction, out of school. This is in line with the suggestion of Bradley and Renzulli (2011), among other studies, which have highlighted the complex nature of processes behind early school leaving. The framework provided by the concept of the three basic psychological needs provides a platform for these dynamics. This study added to current Self-determination theory

literature aspects from the individual perspective of the participants. The accumulation of dissatisfaction, and detachment deriving from faced indifference can be situated in the middle section of the need continuum, thus enriching the current definition of need-related experiences.

## 6.5 Limitations of the study

The narrative data set was rich and included information over multiple levels. Within the limits of this thesis, it was not possible to investigate all the important aspects which could be identified as potential lines of inquiry and interpretation. The participants also talked about non-school-related issues, and experiences not linked with their process of early school leaving. Many of those experiences were positive and described empowering elements in the lives of the participants. These could be reported only shortly within the sub-studies of the present thesis. Accordingly, choosing an approach that would have allowed a thorough narrative account of all aspects described by a participant might have enhanced deeper interpretation of what was told. However, that was not possible in the limits of the papers published for this thesis. Furthermore, inviting researchers coming from a Finnish Roma background into the research group would have enhanced the potential for deeper views concerning the Finnish Roma cultural background, as well as cultural prejudice, in addition to the perspectives of the participants.

The focus of the need-related interpretation was on the need for relatedness, because interpersonal relationships were identified as important both during the narrative interpretation with the participants, and within the interpretation in the framework of 3BPN theory. Autonomy and competence as basic psychological needs would have been relevant and interesting aspects of interpretation but remained aside of the main interests in the present thesis. Having been left out here aspects linked with competence and autonomy might be interpreted in further studies.

The research design included three meetings with each participant. However, that could not be accomplished with four participants. With two participants only two meetings were carried out, and with the additional two participants only one meeting. This was due to unexpected placements of the participants by the prison authorities to institutions for which the research permission had not been applied. This has been reported in each of the sub-studies, in which these participants' narrative accounts have been included.

The group of interviewed early school leavers included people from different backgrounds, the pilot interviewees not being in custody when interviewed. Although the research interest focused on childhood and youth of the participants, there might have been overlapping with years still in school and the beginnings of a criminal history of the participants. It remains unclear and was ruled out of the focus of this study, what kind of aspects could be found affecting the beginnings of criminal actions of the participants. Moreover, a comparison



between experiences of early school leavers without a criminal account and the participants' experiences has been left for further studies.

As a qualitative research approach this study includes a small number of participants. Accordingly, that limits the possibilities to generalize the findings. However, while the theoretical framework of the study, Self-determination theory, has a strong quantitative tradition, qualitative studies carry a possibility to add knowledge about the perspectives of people who are difficult to reach for studies and due to that stay outside or in the margins of quantitative research settings. This study added knowledge about the perspectives of early school leavers and provided an important contribution to a specific area of the theoretical framework applied, the mid-section of need satisfaction continuum. These aspects can open interesting research avenues for further studies, also for quantitative approaches, through which the ideas of this study might be proved to be of a general or of a specific nature.

The researcher's role in both formulating and interpreting the narrative data was essential. That creates a potential vulnerability to presuppositions of the researcher might affect thinking processes and interpretation during the study. To enhance the readers opportunity to evaluate whether that is the case, an autobiographic chapter providing information about the background of the researcher has been included.

Combining a narrative approach and Self-determination theory created a dilemma of how to conceptualize the concept of experience. Perceived need support or thwarting have been central elements within Self-determination theory concerning basic psychological needs. While using terms such as 'perceived need support' and 'perceived need thwarting' research literature of Self-determination theory has also used the terms 'satisfaction' and 'frustration' when referring to 'need-related experiences', which is another term in the Self-determination theory literature. The concept of experience as understood from a narrative perspective includes continuity, when former experiences affect those that come later. Furthermore, within narrative tradition experience is understood as subjectively defined, while within quantitative Self-determination theory studies what is experienced is defined by researchers. Within Self-determination theory literature need perceptions are operationalized in questionnaires considering the participants' momentary sensations. Despite these contradictory understandings of the concept of experience there also are fruitful links. The narrative view includes both momentary sensations and the accumulation of experiences. In this study I have interpreted storied experiences of the participants from a Self-determination theory perspective in addition to narrative interpreting. However, during the research process, I have also come to interpret theory-driven definitions from the perspective of the participants, especially concerning the accumulation of need-related experiences, the meaning of which comes close to continuity of experience. Though, it remains unclear to what extent Self-determination theory conceptualizing of need-related experiences can be extended to cover aspects of continuity of experience as they are understood within narrative tradition.

## 6.6 Avenues for future studies

This study provides several interesting avenues for future studies. Firstly, indifference and dissatisfaction on the continuum of need perceptions have been a novel concept in Self-determination theory literature. The findings of this study indicate that accumulating dissatisfaction may affect people's further experiences and make people more prone to react negatively than they would react after a positive continuum of experiences. A threat of not receiving support for one's basic psychological needs as an element of dissatisfaction would be an important issue for future studies. Investigating the accumulation of need perceptions and its impact on peoples' further experiences might widen our understanding of contextual underpinnings of need-related experiences.

Secondly, it would be interesting to explore how circumstances which can be supporting, indifferent, or thwarting of the basic psychological needs can be intertwined with need-related experiences or be distinguishable from experiences as background factors. It might be important to ponder whether need-related experiences and background factors behind the experiences should be distinguished from each other within research studies more clearly than it is done within the current research body. While studies within Self-determination theory literature investigate human perceptions related to psychological needs, the theoretical framework might benefit from a thorough defining of terms, such as perception and need-related experience, thwarting and frustration, support and satisfaction, distinguishing mental responses from the environmental backgrounds behind them.

Thirdly, the concept of experience has been a topic discussed within narrative research tradition, the debate continued by Clandinin (2022), among others. Within narrative research literature 'experience' is comprehended as subjectively defined by a participant. Contradicting this, in Self-determination theory research literature a need perception, what is experienced, is defined by researchers, and the participant rates to what extent he or she perceives the aspect described in a questionnaire. It would be beneficial for future studies to clarify resemblances and differences between concepts linked with human emotional responses used in different research traditions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore, how the accumulation of need perceptions and generality levels of them as defined in Self-determination theory literature, might resonate with contextual concepts of narrative research literature, such as narrative landscape or institutional narrative. The attempts to develop the research body of Self-determination theory, as well as conceptualizing need-related aspects, might benefit from a research network also including qualitative studies.

Fourthly, investigating detachment as a need-related experience of dissatisfaction might widen our understanding about weak signals and hidden aspects behind phenomena linked with negatively shaped behaviour. Indifference as a background factor of dissatisfaction has been studied as linked with the need for autonomy. It might be interesting to carry out studies about links between

indifference and dissatisfaction concerning the needs for competence and relatedness as well. A threat of not receiving need support has been noted to be need thwarting by Ryan and Deci (2012). This kind of a threat as well as a threat to safety, especially as a life condition, may have an impact on future experiences, which might be important to acknowledge in the research field of need-related experiences.

Fifthly, as it was found in the present thesis that people avoided an environment because of accumulating need dissatisfaction, it might be interesting to explore more long-term outcomes of accumulating need-related experiences. Furthermore, investigating transfer-effects, when a need-related experience affects one's behaviour and sensations in another environment, might shed light on the choices people make in challenging life situations – as well as in positive ones. Moreover, pondering further, it might be interesting to explore the borderlines between accumulating need-related dissatisfaction and frustration. Could accumulating dissatisfaction result in need frustration?

Sixthly, studying empowering aspects of Finnish Roma culture, the values behind it, and belonging to the group would be beneficial for learning about resilience and coping with prejudices, among other things. Many Finnish Roma individuals have succeeded in educational aims, and their experiences combined with the findings of this study might provide a better picture about living amid a prejudice-coloured national society. Moreover, it would be important to study the complexity of prejudice targeted at Finnish Roma by research groups including researchers from both Finnish Roma and majority backgrounds. This might enable building bridges of understanding between the minority and majority peoples.

Seventhly, studying minorities and stigmatized groups might benefit from research designs applying general psychological theories such as Self-determination theory. That might help to avoid group-specific problem presentations. On the other hand, qualitative approaches such as narrative inquiry also might highlight aspects not linked with one's background due to focusing on individual people's experiences. Combining different research approaches might be beneficial for studying ethnic minorities so as to enhance capturing elements linked with cultural background but also non-culture specific aspects, consequently adding to the understanding of factors underpinning people's experiences, choices, and behaviour.

## 7 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A sense of not of belonging together with people in the school environment was an important element in the narrative accounts of the participants. Detachment from one's peers, among other elements of dissatisfaction and need frustration were identified. These made the participants prone to avoid the school environment. Moreover, as Weckstöm et al. (2023) noted, many Finnish Roma students still face - and must cope with - cultural prejudice. Hence, it is essential to find supportive ways to meet the psychological need for relatedness of students vulnerable to need frustration in the school environment. This highlights the importance of interventions encouraging social participation and practices creating acceptance and bonding between students. Finding students who live amid low levels of need satisfaction, as well as identifying elements behind negative need-related experiences would enhance improving students' wellbeing. Assessing students' perceived level of need satisfaction, dissatisfaction and frustration by surveys applied at the appropriate age might be a beneficial tool for student welfare services. Positive need-related experiences might promote the social wellbeing of students within individual interventions as well.

The findings of this study indicate that promoting sense of belonging together with people in school society would be beneficial for persisting in school. This is in line with the findings of Virtanen et al. (2021) that positive teacher - student and peer relationships in primary school can reduce truancy and prevent cynicism toward the value of schooling during further educational levels. There are many projects in Finnish schools, that aim at supporting social inclusion as well as promoting a sense of safety and acceptance for each child, such as Askeleittain (Step by step, an emotional awareness and management program: Kyöstitä, 2018), KiVa (an anti-bullying program: Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017), Lions' Quest (providing teachers with practical tools for promoting students' wellbeing: Talvio et al., 2015), TCM (Teacher Classroom Management: Maunula et al., 2022; Nye et al., 2019), and Verso (Restorative peer compromising: Gellin, 2018). Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) noted that anti-bullying programs including the whole school community proved to be the most efficient. When informing and

involving a whole school community into a project or a certain practice there is a need for sufficient time and personnel resources. However, after establishing the current three-level support system in Finnish education, there has been a debate regarding teachers' tiredness and exhaustion. Findings of Pyhältö et al. (2021) inclined, that half of the teachers in Finland may face a risk of socio-contextual exhaustion. Moreover, among the background elements in teacher burnout Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021) found a lack of teacher assistance services, which could provide adult relationships to students within the school context. Furthermore, recent findings of the decreasing educational level in Finland by Kalenius (2023) have triggered public debate over the lack of sufficient resources in schools as the Finnish public broadcasting company YLE has displayed (YLE, 2023). However, developing co-operational practices among educators within students' networks can be beneficial to both students and school personnel, as Rytivaara et al. (2021) have noted when examining co-teaching. These aspects are in line with the findings of this study. Lack of perceived support for psychological needs of the participants may, in some cases, derive from lacking resources of personnel and time. That in turn can decrease qualities of teacher-student relationships and consequently diminish students' sense of relatedness and belonging to the school society, affecting school engagement and motivation as well.

Within the Finnish school system there are attempts to encourage interests of talented youth. In Finland, there are high schools enabling students to participate in sport training by providing coaching and facilities, sometimes named as sports academies, and more recently called double career programs (Nikander, 2022; Suomen Olympiakomitea, n.d.). Moreover, some high schools have been specializing in art education (Erikoislukiot, n.d.). Obviously, these undertakings do not exclude a positive attitude to cultural differences. However, the existence of possibilities to focus on one's sporty or artistic ambitions within high school indicates that sports and arts have been valued high within the national educational policy. While the national context is becoming increasingly multicultural it would also be important to establish school settings highlighting cultural awareness and diversity, including cultural societies already existing and those entering the country. This might enhance the potential of increasing richness of cultural diversities and encourage them to flourish. This kind of a setting, 'a culture academy', might add knowledge and understanding about different cultures, strengthen equity and enhance respect of different worldviews. Educational policy strengthening cultural awareness might enhance developing special expertise for national, as well as global needs for instance concerning negotiations of culturally sensitive issues, following the path of President Martti Ahtisaari, and other internationally successful negotiators.

The present thesis highlights the importance of a positive pedagogical relationship with each student, as well as providing all students with support for psychological needs, to enhance students' ability to build mutual trust and respectful relationships with each other. To facilitate a platform for this we might need to provide resources of personnel and time within school societies. For instance, school assistants in addition to teachers might be of a high value to work

alongside students and create supporting relationships with all of them. School personnel and students share an aim of independent adulthood for the students. The adults in school are there to help young people achieve this aim. Aaro, the second pilot interviewee, illustrated this by saying: "They (the students) need to feel that the teacher is on their side, not against them."

## TIIVISTELMÄ (SUMMARY IN FINNISH)

Tämä tutkimus kohdentuu suomalaisten koulun keskeyttäneiden henkilöiden koulukokemuksiin. Koulutuksen keskeytymisen taustoja käsittelevä tutkimuskirjallisuus osoittaa, että syyt koulun keskeyttämiseen ovat usein monitahoisia. Lasten ja nuorten kouluympäristön ja lähipiirin ihmissuhteilla on kuitenkin havaittu olevan suuri merkitys koulusta pois jäämisessä. Koulun keskeyttäminen on Suomessa varsin vähäistä, peruskoulun osalta alle yhden prosentin luokkaa. Keskiasteen koulutuksen keskeyttää huomattavasti suurempi joukko nuoria. Ammatillisessa koulutuksessa keskeyttämisprosentti on viime vuosina yltänyt 13 prosenttiin. Lisäksi on havaittu ihmisryhmiä, joiden keskuudessa koulutuksen keskeyttäminen on yleisempää kuin muissa väestöosissa, mm. vankilatuomion saaneet, maahanmuuttajat ja Suomen romanit.

Tässä tutkimuksessa haluttiin selvittää koulutuksen keskeyttäneiden henkilöiden kokemuksia heidän kouluajaltaan ja heidän omaa kertomustaan siitä, miten he päätyivät jäämään pois koulutuksesta. Kokemuksen käsite ymmärrettiin kerrostuneena jatkumona, jonka tutkiminen voi avata ymmärrystä sekä tutkittavaan ilmiöön että siihen liittyviin teoreettisiin ajatusrakennelmiin. Teoreettisena tulkinnan viitekehyksenä ja aineiston jäsentelyn työkaluna käytettiin itsemääräämisteorian määrittämiä psykologisia perustarpeita ja niihin liittyvää kokemusmaailmaa. Tutkimustehtävänä oli vastata seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin:

1. Millaisia kertomuksia osallistujat tuottavat koulun keskeytymiseensä liittyvistä prosesseista ja millaisia merkityksiä he kertomuksiinsa liittävät?
2. Miten osallistujien esille nostamat näkökulmat sijoittuvat yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeen viitekehykseen?

Tutkimusmenetelmäksi valittiin kertomushaastattelu, johon sisältyi kolme tapaamiskertaa kunkin haastateltavan kanssa. Osallistujia kutsuttiin haasteltaviksi vankilan nimeämien yhteyshenkilöiden kautta. Haastatteluihin osallistuneista yhdestätoista koulutuksensa keskeyttäneestä henkilöstä seitsemän identifioi itsensä perhetaustaltaan Suomen romaniksi. Lisäksi haastateltiin neljää kouluttautumisen tuen asiantuntijaa ja toteutettiin kaksi pilottihaastattelua ennen varsinaisia tutkimushaastatteluja. Opettajataustani vuoksi edustin haastateltaville tutkimuksen lisäksi koulua ja koululaitosta, mikä rohkaisi osallistujia kertomaan, mitä he omien kokemustensa perusteella halusivat viestittää koulun työntekijöille.

Koulun keskeyttämiseen liittyviä kokemuksia tarkasteltiin eri näkökulmista. Aluksi kertomusten sisältämistä merkityksistä keskusteltiin osallistujien kanssa kertomushaastatteluissa ja merkityksiä tulkittiin osallistujien kuvailemassa kontekstissa. Lisäksi tuotettuja merkityksiä tarkasteltiin itsemääräämisteorian viitekehyksessä. Itsemääräämisteorian mukaan psykologiset perustarpeet – autonomian, kompetenssin ja yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeet – ovat yhteisiä kaikille ihmisille. Näiden tarpeiden täytyminen luo pohjan inhimilliselle

hyvinvoinnille ja sisäiselle motivaatiolle. Vastaavasti näiden tarpeiden täyttymisen estäminen ja siihen liittyvät turhautumisen kokemukset johtavat motivaation vähenemiseen. Tässä tutkimuksessa kompetenssin ja autonomian tarpeet olivat osallistujien kertomuksissa yhteenkuuluvuuden tarvetta vähemmän esillä. Lisäksi ne esiintyivät ihmissuhteisiin liittyviin prosesseihin kietoutuneina, sisällyttäen itseensä näin myös yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeen kokemusmaailmaa. Tämän vuoksi tutkimuksessa keskityttiin yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeeseen liittyvään kokemusmaailmaan.

Tutkimuksen eettiset näkökulmat olivat monikerroksisia. Tutkija-haastattelijan asema poikkesi osallistujien asemasta vankilan tiloissa tapahtuneissa kohtaamisissa. Osallistujien asiantuntijuutta tutkimuksen aihepiiristä korostettiin, ja he saivat mahdollisuuden halutessaan muokata työn alla olevia kertomushaastattelujen tekstejä, koska tapaamiskertoja oli yhteensä kolme. Lisäksi huomioitiin tapa, jolla osallistujat esitettiin julkaistavissa teksteissä, sisällyttäen lukijan saataville mahdollisimman paljon suoria lainauksia heidän sanoittamistaan kokemuksista sekä tuomalla esiin osallistujien kuvailemaa kontekstia. Tekstien sanamuodoissa pyrittiin sensitiivisyyteen erityisesti vähemmistöjä edustavien kohdalla sekä yhdenvertaisuuden edistämiseen. Tutkimukseen valitun teorian yleisinhimillinen näkökulma mahdollisti kiinnittymisen yksilönäkökulmaan kulttuurisen näkökulman takana. Se, mikä kokemuksissa liitettiin kulttuuri- tai perhetaustaan, jätettiin osallistujien itsensä määritettäväksi.

Ensimmäisessä artikkelissa tarkasteltiin kolmen romanitaustaisen naisen koulukokemuksia. Heidän kokemusmaailmassaan korostui romaniperheen jäsenyyteen liittyvä yhteenkuuluvuus, mutta myös perheen sisäiset ja perheidenväliset jännitteet, joita he olivat kokeneet. Suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa vaikuttava ennakkoluuloisuus romaneja kohtaan heijastui myös kouluympäristöön. Osallistujat toivat esiin tilanteita, joissa he olivat ennakkoluuloista huolimatta onnistuneet luomaan sosiaalisia suhteita pääväestön edustajien kanssa. Kouluuyhteisössä ilmeni kuitenkin myös torjuntaa niin muiden oppilaiden ja heidän vanhempiansa kuin koulun aikuisten taholta. Koettu negatiivinen asenteellisuus irrotti osallistujia kouluuyhteisöstä. Ajoittaiset positiiviset yhteenkuuluvuutta tukevat ihmissuhteet kouluympäristössä eivät riittäneet säilyttämään koulunkäyntiä osallistujille mielekkäänä.

Toisessa artikkelissa tutkittiin osallistujien erilaisia polkuja pois koulusta itsemääräämisteorian viitekehystä soveltaen. Kouluuyhteisöä ei koettu yhteenkuuluvuuden tarvetta tukevana, vaan sen täyttymistä estävänä. Tästä lähtökohdasta löydettiin kolme polkua kohti koulun keskeyttämistä. Ensinnäkin kotona koettu yhteenkuuluvuus ja mahdollisuus jäädä kotiin tai työpaikan löytäminen tarjosivat osallistujille mielekkään vaihtoehdon koulunkäynnin sijaan. Tällöin kotona saatu tuki yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeelle ohjasi valintoja ja toimintaa pois päin kouluympäristöstä. Toiseksi tilanteissa, joissa koti, koulu tai työ eivät tarjonneet tukeaa yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeelle, polku eteni kohti yhteenkuuluvuuden etsimistä itselle vahingollisista ympäristöistä, kuten päihteiden käytön parista. Kolmas polku pois päin koulunkäynnistä liittyi läheisissä ihmissuhteissa, esimerkiksi kotona, koettuihin yhteenkuuluvuuden ristiriitoihin. Tällöin osallistujat



kantoivat sisäistä taakkaansa mukanaan myös muihin ympäristöihin kuten kouluun, toimivat siellä oman koulunkäyntinsä onnistumisen kannalta epätarkoituksenmukaisilla tavoilla ja kokivat ulkopuolisuutta ja irrallisuutta vertaisryhmässään.

Kolmas artikkeli suunnattiin osallistujien kokemaan irrallisuuteen koulu-yhteisöstä. Tämä voidaan itsemääräämisteorian viitekehyksessä ymmärtää yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeeseen liittyvinä tuen puuttumisen, tyytymättömyyden ja turhautumisen kokemuksina. Irrallisuus kouluyhteisöstä oli kaikille osallistujille yhteinen kokemus, riippumatta taustatekijöistä. Irrallisuuden kokemus kietoutui kouluympäristön ihmissuhteisiin, mutta myös osallistujien lähipiirissä koettuihin yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeeseen liittyviin ristiriitoihin. Itsemääräämisteorian kannalta osallistujien kertomukset tarjoavat näkökulman yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeeseen liittyvän tuen estämisen ja tuen puuttumisen kokemiseen.

Irrallisuus kouluyhteisöstä oli osallistujille taustasta riippumatta yhteinen kokemus. Kokemukset hetkellisestä psykologisten tarpeiden tuesta edistivät yhteenkuuluvuutta kouluyhteisön ihmisten kanssa ja innostivat koulunkäyntiin. Näitä kokemuksia seurasivat kuitenkin psykologisiin perustarpeisiin liittyvä estäminen tai välinpitämättömyys, joita seurasivat uusiutuva koulusta vieraantuminen sekä psykologisten tarpeiden täyttymättömyyden ja turhautumisen kokemukset. Haastateltujen romanien kouluttautumisen haasteet olivat yksilöllisiä kuten muillakin osallistujilla, mutta yhteisenä tekijänä romanien osalta näkyi välttämättömyys löytää keinoja selviytyä ennakkoluulojen sävyttämässä ympäristössä.

Psykologisiin perustarpeisiin liittyvää tarpeiden täyttymisen jatkumon keskialuetta on viime vuosina kehitelty itsemääräämisteorian jäsentelyssä. Osallistujien kertomukset ympäristön välinpitämättömyydestä ja yhteenkuuluvuuden tukemisen puuttumisesta antavat sisältöä tähän teoreettiseen pohdintaan. Myös psykologisiin perustarpeisiin liittyvät kokemusten kasautuminen, siirtyminen sekä ilmeneminen eri tasoilla – yleisellä, kontekstuaalisella ja tilannekohtaisella tasolla – tulivat esille osallistujien kertomuksissa, tarjoten samalla aiheita jatkotutkimuksille. Tutkimuksen rajoitteena voidaan pitää rajautumista yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeeseen, jolloin muut psykologiset perustarpeet jäivät tulevien tutkimusten haasteiksi. Tulokset korostavat opiskelijoiden yhteenkuuluvuuden tukemisen ja irrallisuuden kokemuksiin reagoimisen tärkeyttä sekä kouluyhteisön ja perheen välisen yhteistyön merkitystä lasten ja nuorten koulunkäynnin tukemisessa.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Invitation to participate the study

#### *Kutsu haastatteluun*

Haluaisin haastatella henkilöitä, jotka ovat jättäneet koulun kesken tai joita koulu ei jaksanut kiinnostaa. Jos kuulut tähän ihmisryhmään, olet aiheen asiantuntija. Tarkoitukseni on kuunnella **sinun kokemuksiasi koulusta**.

Kertomiasi tietoja käytetään sen selvittelyyn, miksi koulunkäynti ei enää kiinnostanut ja miten koulun toimintaa voitaisiin sinun mielestäsi parantaa. Teen tästä aiheesta tutkimusta Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Työssä olen erityisopettajana alakoulussa.

#### **Näin toimin:**

Kaikki henkilötiedot, joita keskusteluissamme tulee esille, muutetaan. Myös sellaiset yksityiskohdat, joista joku voisi tunnistaa sinut, muutetaan. Kertomiasi tietoja pääsevät tarkastelemaan minun lisäksi vain ne henkilöt, jotka ovat opintojeni ohjaajia tai osallistuvat tutkijoina. En siis raportoi kertomiasi asioita vankilan henkilökunnalle tai muille viranomaisille.

Nauhoitan ja arkistoin keskustelumme, jotta voin tarvittaessa myöhemmin palata siihen ja tehdä uutta tutkimusta tai julkaista tekstiä sen pohjalta. Arkistoitu, kirjoitettu ja julkaistava materiaali on sellaisessa muodossa, ettet ole tunnistettavissa siitä.

**Jos olet ensimmäisen keskustelun jälkeen halukas jatkamaan, olen valmistautunut tulemaan uudelleen vielä kaksi kertaa.** Niillä kerroilla voit täydentää asioita, joita mieleesi on ehkä tullut sillä välin. Tapaamisten välillä kirjoitan keskustelut tekstiksi. Kirjoitan myös muistiin kysymyksiä, joita mieleeni nousee ja esitän ne sinulle, jotta voimme tarkistaa, ymmärsinkö sinut oikein.

Tutkimukseni työnimi on *“Miksi he jättivät koulun kesken? Tutkimus koetuista tekijöistä heikenevän koulumotivaation taustalla.” (Why Did They Leave School? A Narrative Inquiry about Perceived Determinants Behind Diminishing Motivation and School Engagement).*

Jos haluat tutkimuksen valmistuttua siitä kopion tai suomenkielisen lyhennelmän, pyydän ilmoittamaan osoitteen, johon voin toimittaa sen.

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**Kiitos arvokkaasta kokemustesi jakamisesta ja yhteistyöstä kanssani!**

Merja Pikkarainen

## Suostumus haastatteluaineiston käyttöön

Käyttölupa koskee kääntöpuolella kerrottua tutkimusta varten vuonna 2016 nauhoitettua haastatteluaineistoa.

Aineiston käyttö rajoittuu Merja Pikkaraisen (e. Tikkanen) laatimaan väitöskirjaan, hänen suorittamaansa tutkimustyöhön sekä hänelle niissä annettuun ohjaukseen, tutkimuksen esittelemiseen seminaareissa, konferensseissa ja opetuskäytössä sekä Pikkaraisen kanssa yhteistyössä tutkijoina toimiviin henkilöihin sekä mahdolliseen Pikkaraisen myöhemmin tekemään tieteelliseen tutkimukseen.

**Käytettävästä aineistosta ei ilmene tutkittavien henkilöllisyys.** Aineisto arkistoidaan tutkijan omassa lukolisessa arkistossa. Tutkimuksen tuloksia julkaistaan kansallisissa ja kansainvälissä julkaisuissa.

Tutkimuksessa ohjaajina toimivat professori KT Juha Hakala (pääohjaaja, Jyväskylän yliopisto, Kasvatutieteiden tiedekunta, Yliopistokeskus Chydenius, Kokkola) sekä tutkijatohtori Virpi-Liisa Kyyry (Jyväskylän yliopisto, psykologian laitos).

Lisätietoa: Jyväskylän yliopiston henkilökunta ja toiminta on vakuutettu. Vakuutus sisältää potilasvakuutuksen, toiminnanvastuuvakuutuksen ja vapaaehtoisen tapaturmavakuutuksen. Tutkimuksissa tutkittavat (koehenkilöt) on vakuutettu tutkimuksen ajan ulkoisen syyn aiheuttamien tapaturmien, vahinkojen ja vammojen varalta. Tapaturmavakuutus on voimassa mittauksissa ja niihin välittömästi liittyvillä matkoilla.

Tutkimuksesta on täytetty henkilötietolain edellyttämä rekisteriseloste, jonka tutkittava halutessaan saa tutkijoilta nähtäväkseen.

Tutkimukseen on myönnetty puolen vuoden tutkimusapuraha Keski-Pohjanmaan kulttuurirahastosta.

**Olen perehtynyt tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitukseen ja sisältöön, kerättävän tutkimusaineiston käyttöön, tutkittaville aiheutuviin mahdollisiin haittoihin sekä tutkittavien oikeuksiin ja vakuutusturvaan.**

Kyllä

**Tutkimustuloksiani ja kerättyä aineistoa saa käyttää ja hyödyntää sellaisessa muodossa, jossa yksittäistä tutkittavaa ei voi tunnistaa.**

Kyllä

Päiväys \_\_\_\_\_

Haastateltavan allekirjoitus

Päiväys \_\_\_\_\_

Tutkijan allekirjoitus



## ORIGINAL PAPERS

### I

#### **"ULKOPUOLISUUDEN OLO": TAPAUSTUTKIMUS PERUSKOULUN KESKEYTTÄNEIDEN ROMANINAISTEN KOULUKOKEMUKSISTA**

by

Pikkarainen, Hakala & Kykyri, 2019

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## **”Ulkopuolisuuden olo” — Tapaustutkimus peruskoulun keskeyttäneiden romaninaisten koulukokemuksista**

Pikkarainen, Merja – Hakala, Juha T. – Kykyri, Virpi-Liisa. 2019. ”ULKOPUOLISUUDEN OLO” – TAPAUSTUTKIMUS PERUSKOULUN KESKEYTTÄNEIDEN ROMANINAISTEN KOULUKOKEMUKSISTA. *Kasvatus* 50 (2), xxx–xxx.

Artikkelissa tarkastellaan kolmen peruskoulun keskeyttäneen, vapausrangaistusta suorittavan romaninaisen kertomuksia koulukokemuksistaan. Tutkimusta varten toteutettiin jokaisen osallistujan kanssa kertomushaastattelu, johon sisältyi kolme tapaamiskertaa. Haastattelija kirjoitti kertomusluonnokset, joiden sisällöistä keskusteltiin osallistujien kanssa.

Kertomuksista etsittiin haastateltavien nimeämiä koulun keskeyttämisen syitä sekä näiden tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksia intersektionaalisuuden näkökulmasta. Lisäksi tarkasteltiin yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemuksia sekä tapoja, joilla osallistujat asemoivat itseään koululaisina. Koulun keskeytymisen osasyiksi osallistujat nimesivät muiden muassa syrjivän kohtelun, yksin jäämisen koulun vertaisryhmässä ja omien vanhempien puutteellisen tuen koulunkäynnille. Osallistujat asemoivat itsensä koululaisina ulkopuoliseksi, mutta samalla koulu yhteisön hyväksyntää ja yhteenkuuluvuutta tavoitteleviksi. Koulun oppilaana olemiseen liittyi tasapainoilua aktiivisen osallisuuden ja ulkopuolisuuden kokemuksen välillä.

Asiasanat: ennakkoluulot, koulupudokkaat, intersektionaalisuus, eriarvoisuus, romanit, sosioekonominen asema

### **Johdanto**

Koulu-uran katkeaminen on merkittävä syrjäytymisen riskitekijä, jonka taustalta on tunnistettu useiden yksilöllisten ja yhteisöllisten haavoittuvuustekijöiden ketjuuntumista ja kasautumista. Koulupudokkuutta aiheuttavien tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksia tunnetaan kuitenkin vielä puutteellisesti etenkin haavoittuvimmissa asemassa olevien ryhmien näkökulmasta. Etnisistä vähemmistöistä Suomen romanien koulutustilanne on jäänyt näissä

keskusteluissa vähälle huomiolle. Vaikka suomalainen romanikulttuuri on säilynyt elinvoimaisena sulauttamispyrkimyksistä ja jopa suoranaisesta syrjinnästä huolimatta, kielteisiä asenteita ja romanikulttuuriin kohdistuvaa tietämättömyyttä ilmenee edelleen eri elämäntilanteilla. (Anttonen 2009; Erilaisena arjessa: Selvitys romanien syrjintäkokemuksista 2014; Friman-Korpela 2014; Pulma 2005; Viljanen 2012.) Tutkimuksellisesti romanit ovat haastava kohde, sillä äidinkieleltään suomen- tai ruotsinkielisinä he eivät erotu Suomen virallisissa tilastoissa. Esimerkiksi heidän koulutautumisastettaan ja työllisyystilannettaan ei voida kattavasti selvittää nykyisistä tilastoista (Nieminen 2013). Myöskään romaneihin kohdistetuissa haastatteluselvityksissä kaikkein huono-osaisimmat eivät ole useinkaan valikoituneet mukaan tutkimusjoukkoon (Rajala, Salonen, Blomerus & Nissilä 2011).

Yleisesti yhteiskunnassa ilmenevät, huono-osaistumiseen liittyvät mekanismit vaikuttavat myös romaniyhteisössä. Ryhmän sisäiset samanlaisuuden, erilaisuuden ja eriarvoisuuden dynaamiset jännitteet näyttäytyvät myös tämän tutkimuksen kontekstissa: osallistujat edustavat Romanin (2018) nimeämiä kulttuurien väliin jääviä ryhmiä, koska he ovat olleet kasvuvuosinaan osittain irrallaan laajemman romaniyhteisön välittömästä yhteydestä joko perheen valintojen tai lastensuojelun toimien seurauksena. Leimaaville ja syrjäyttävälle prosesseille erityisen alttiilta ihmisryhmiltä voidaan olettaa saatavan tärkeää, aiemmin vähälle huomiolle jäänyttä tietoa. Tämä artikkeli valottaa peruskoulun keskeytymiseen liittyviä tekijöitä ja niiden yhteisvaikutuksia kolmen vapausrangaistusta suorittavan romaninaisen kertomuksen avulla.

### ***Suomalaiset romanit ja koulutus***

Suomalaisia romaneja arvioidaan olevan noin kymmentuhatta. Romanien historia maassamme on kulkenut karkotusuhasta irtolaisuuden, eriateisen syrjinnän ja sulauttamispyrkimysten kautta oikeuksien tiedostamiseen ja aktiiviseen yhteiskunnalliseen toimintaan. (Friman-Korpela 2014; Pulma 2005.) Yhteiskunnan ja ympäröivän yhteisön romaneihin kohdistama kielteisyys on vuosisatojen aikana saanut aikaan romaniyhteisön sulkeutumista, mutta myös suoranaista epäluuloa valtiollisia instituutioita, myös koulua, kohtaan (Grönfors 1979, 1981; Syrjä & Valtakari 2008). Yhteiskunnan muutos on kuitenkin vaikuttanut myös romanien elintapoihin ja toimeentulon keinoihin (Tervonen 2012; Viljanen 2012). Samalla integroituminen ja toisaalta erottautuminen pääkulttuurista on tuottanut uusia,

myös yksilöllisiä ratkaisuja korostavia toimintatapoja, jotka hakevat muotojaan kulttuurien välisessä tilassa, esimerkiksi romanien suhteessa koulutukseen ja ammatinvalintaan (Roman 2018).

Opetushallitus on todennut koulutuksen arvostuksen romanien parissa viime vuosina nousseen (Opetushallitus 2016). Huolimatta asenteiden muutoksesta ja romanien koulutustason kohentumisesta koulu keskeytyy romaninuorilla yhä selvästi muuta väestöä useammin: 18–24-vuotiaista romaneista ilman perusopetuksen päättötodistusta on edelleen noin 16 prosenttia, kun vastaava osuus koko väestöstä jää alle yhden prosentin (Rajala & Blomerus 2016; Suomen virallinen tilasto 2014). Rajala ja Blomerus (2016) sekä Jeskanen (2014) ovat esittäneet romanien koulun keskeyttämisen syiksi muissa ulkopuolisuuden tunteen, kokemukset syrjinnästä, köyhyden, muutot, varhaisen perheen perustamisen ja – edelleen – epäilyn koulutuksen hyödyttömyydestä.

Kuten yleisemminkin rikoskäyttäytymisen yhteydessä, vankilaan joutuneilla romaninaisilla huono-osaisuuden tekijät näyttävät kasautuvan ja ketjuuntuvan (Kivivuori 2013). Berlin (2015b) tuo esiin myös eron koko romaniyhteisön ja syrjäytymisriskissä olevien romanien välillä. Syrjä ja Valtakari (2008) pohtivat romaniväestön selviytymistä ja syrjäytymistä sekä pääkulttuuriin että omaan vähemmistökuultuuriin integroitumisen näkökulmista.

Pääkulttuuriin vahvasti integroituneita, hyvin menestyviä romaneja leimaavat mukanaolo työelämässä ja lasten koulutuksen pitäminen välttämättömänä, toisaalta myös vahva integroituminen omaan kulttuuriin suojaa syrjäytymiseltä. Haavoittuvimpaan asemaan jäävät Syrjän ja Valtakarin (2008, 37) mukaan ne romaniperheet, jotka jäävät erilleen omasta kulttuuristaan, eivätkä myöskään integroidu pääväestön kulttuuriin. Pääkulttuuriin integroitumisessa ja kouluttautumisessa romanit ovat siis jakautuneet hyvin ja heikosti menestyviin. Iso-Britannian sekä Keski- ja Etelä-Euroopan romanien parissa on havaittu saman suuntaista eri tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksena syntyvää eriarvoistumista muun muassa kulttuurissa, koulutuksessa, terveydenhoidossa ja naisten oikeuksissa (Hamilton 2018; Schultz 2012). Kansainvälistä tutkimusta Suomen romanien kouluttautumisesta ei ole saatavilla. Koko Euroopassa on kuitenkin todettu tarve selvittää romanien omaa kokemusta koulutuksesta (esim. Bhabha ym. 2017; Lauritzen & Nodeland 2018).

### *Yhteenkuuluvuus ja erilaisuus romanityttöjen koulumaisemassa*

Tämä tutkimus asemoituu itsemääräämisen teorian (Self Determination Theory, SDT) viitekehykseen (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2012). Tulkinnassa sovelletaan mallia psyykkisistä perustarpeista ja keskitytään erityisesti yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemuksen merkitykseen. Menetelmältään laadullisena ja narratiivisena tämä tutkimus poikkeaa kuitenkin SDT:n viitekehyyksessä yleisimmin toteutetusta tutkimuksesta, joka on pääosin määrällistä (Stroet, Opendakker & Minnaert 2013). Toisena tulkinnallisena viitekehyyksenä toimii intersektionaalisuus, jonka laajasta merkitysalueesta tarkasteluun on valittu erityisesti sekä ryhmien välinen että ryhmän sisällä muodostuva eriarvoistuminen (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 2013, 785–787; Collins 2015). Intersektionaalisuuden avulla jäsennetään samanlaisuuden, erilaisuuden ja eriarvoisuuden kokemusten dynamiikkaa.

Yhteenkuuluvuuden kokeminen koulu yhteisössä on tärkeää erityisesti niille lapsille ja nuorille, jotka taustansa vuoksi kohtaavat ennakkoluuloja. Ryan ja Deci (2000a) sekä Vansteenkiste ja Ryan (2013) ovatkin todenneet, että jos yhteenkuuluvuuden kokeminen tiettyssä ympäristössä tuntuu epävarmalta tai jopa estyy, yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemusta suuntaudutaan etsimään muista elämämpiireistä. Costa, Ntoumanis ja Bartholomew (2014) havaitsivat, että tarkoitukselliseksi koettu poissulkeminen, jota myös kulttuuritaustaan perustuva syrjintä on, aiheuttaa vetäytymistä sosiaalisesta kanssakäymisestä. Cousikin (2015) mukaan opettajan osoittama kiinnostus oppilaan erilaisuutta kohtaan sekä opettajan tapa puhua muista kulttuureista vaikuttivat oppilaiden asenteisiin. Jussim ja Harber (2005) ovatkin esittäneet, että opettajan oppilaaseen kohdistamat odotukset voivat toimia itseään toteuttavien ennustusten tavoin. Erityisen vahvasti ne vaikuttivat kielteisesti leimautuneisiin ryhmiin kuuluviin oppilaisiin.

Romanikulttuurissa yhteisöllisyys ja suvun elämässä mukana oleminen ovat aina olleet tärkeässä roolissa (ks. Grönfors 1979; Viljanen 2012). Etnisesti muista erottuviin ryhmiin kuuluvat ottavat kuitenkin vaikutteita sekä perheensä kulttuurista että valtakulttuurin piiristä (Benjamin 2014). Romanilapset kasvavat tietoisuuteen oman perheensä, sukunsa ja kulttuurinsa tavoista olemalla mukana suvun arjessa, mutta myös juhlissa, esimerkiksi hautajaisissa. Samalla he elävät osallisina ympäröivässä kulttuurissa ja tutustuvat siihen, kohdaten myös heihin itseensä romaneina kohdistuvat ennakkoluulot. Romanityttöjen portti aikuisuuteen on perinteisesti ollut romaninaisen vaatetuksen käyttöön ottaminen. Päättyessään käyttää romanivaatetusta nuori valitsee tietoisesti ja näkyvästi romani-identiteetin ja sen mukanaan tuomat vahvuudet, kuten yhteisöllisyyden, mutta toisaalta myös ympäristön

ennakkoluuloihin liittyvän haavoittuvuuden. (Huttu 2009; Markkanen 2003; Roman 2018; Stenroos 2012; Viljanen 2012.)

Romanikulttuuriin liittyy myös ihmiskehon, ruokatavaroiden ja astioiden symboliseen puhtauteen liittyviä arvoja ja merkityksiä, jotka ohjaavat romanien arjen rakentumista muun muassa terveydenhoidossa, synnytyksissä, ruokailussa ja asumisessa (esim. Berlin 2015a, 2015b; Niemenmaa & Suomilammi 2009; Roman 2018; Viljanen 2012). Markkanen (2003, 108–111) kuvailee romaniperinteiden mukaisten tapojen oppimista arjessa aikuisten toimintaa seuraten sekä työnjakoa, jossa naisten ja tyttöjen tehtävät sijoittuvat kodin piiriin. Suuri osa romanioppilaista on koulujensa ainoita romaneja (Rajala ym. 2011). Tämä voi osaltaan aiheuttaa kulttuurista yksinäisyyttä ja korostaa tarvetta kuulua omaan sukuun ja kulttuuriryhmään. Intersektionaalisuuden näkökulmasta voidaan havaita, että yhteenkuuluvuutta ja hyväksyntää etsiessään romaniperheiden tytöt kohtaavat haasteita sekä yleisellä tasolla ilmenevien ennakkoluulojen vuoksi että lähiyhteisön ja koulun vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Perheiden elämänhallinnan ongelmat voivat edelleen vaikeuttaa yhteenkuuluvuutta tarjoavan ryhmän löytymistä ja viedä erilleen sekä koulusta että romaniyhteisöstä.

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan kolmen peruskoulun keskeyttäneen, vapausrangaistusta suorittavan romaninaisen koulukokemuksia. Heidän kertomuksensa lisäävät ymmärrystä romanien, mutta myös muiden syrjintää kohtaavien lasten koulun keskeytymisen syistä. Aiemman tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan olettaa, että romaneihin kohdistuvat yleiset ennakkoluulot ja perhekohtainen huono-osaisuus voivat altistaa koulutuksesta syrjäytymiselle. Artikkelissa vastataan seuraaviin kysymyksiin:

1. Miten tutkimukseen haastatellut nuoret naiset asemoivat itseään koululaisina?
2. Millaisia tekijöitä haastateltavat tunnistavat ja nimeävät koulun keskeytymisen syiksi?
3. Millaisia eri tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksia koulun keskeytymiselle aineistosta voidaan tunnistaa?

## **Tutkimusmenetelmä ja aineisto**

Tämän tutkimus noudattaa fenomenologis-hermeneuttista traditiota ja sen aineiston keruussa keskityttiin tutkittavien kokemuksiin. Kokemus nähdään tässä tutkimuksessa alun perin

Deweyn (1997, 2004) ja myöhemmin Clandininin (2013) muotoilemalla tavalla jatkumona, jota refleктоiminen ja uudet kokemukset muuntavat. Kokemukset kiinnittyvät ja saavat kielellisen muotonsa kerronnan kautta. Kertomuksen hermeneuttinen tulkinta puolestaan edellyttää, kuten Bruner (1996) ja Polkinghorne (1988) ovat esittäneet, kertomuksen kokonaisuuden ja sen merkityksiä kantavien osien vuorovaikutusta. Aineiston analysoinnissa tutkija voi käyttää kerronnallista lähestymistapaa, mutta myös itse kertomusten tulkintaa. Tutkija voi siis tarkastella esimerkiksi asiasisältöjä ja merkitysten suhteita sen tunnistamiseksi, miten kertoja asemoi itsensä kertomuksen muihin elementteihin nähden. (Heikkinen 2002; Hyvärinen 2010.)

Aineiston keruun menetelmänä on ollut kertomushaastattelu (engl. narrative interview), jossa korostuu tutkijan ja kertojan keskusteleva yhteistyö (Clandinin 2013; Hyvärinen 2017). Syrjälä, Estola, Uitto ja Kaunisto (2006) muistuttavat, että tutkijan ja kertojan välinen valtasuhde ei kuitenkaan ole yhteistyöhön perustuvissakaan tutkimuksissa tasa-arvoinen, vaan tutkijalla on aina kertojaa aktiivisempi rooli tulosten esille tuojana. Haavoittuvassa elämäntilanteessa olevien ihmisten tutkimisessa on erityisen tärkeää tiedostaa ja huomioida luottamuksellisuus, kerrottujen asioiden mahdollinen sensitiivisyys, anonyymiyys ja tilanteen tutkijalle tarjoama valta (Josselson 2007). Crimmins (2015) esittääkin, että valtasuhteen tasapainottamiseksi tutkimusprosessi olisi rakennettava niin, että tutkija puhuu osallistujan kanssa, ei hänen puolestaan tai hänestä. Tutkijalla on myös tekstin kirjoittajan rooli, jolloin hän välittää keskustelussa reflektoitua kokemusta lukijalle (Josselson 2007).

Kertomushaastattelun yhtenä elementtinä on myös haastateltavan elämäntilanne. Kertomisen hetki elämäkulussa vaikuttaa paikan ja inhimillisen tutkimussuhteen lisäksi kertomuksen sisältöön. (Hyvärinen 2017, 175.) Vapausrangaistusta suorittavat on katsottu otolliseksi tutkimuksen kohderyhmäksi, koska heillä voidaan olettaa olevan koulun keskeytymiseen liittyneiden syiden selvittämisen kannalta tärkeää kerrottavaa. Vankilassa oleminen irrottaa normaaliarjesta, joten se tarjoaa henkistä tilaa reflektoida omaa elämää ja tehtyjä valintoja erityisesti syrjäytymisen näkökulmasta, johon koulun keskeytyminen liittyy (Granfelt 2017). Vaikka vankila sinänsä muodostaa askeettisena ja ahdistavanakin ympäristönä haasteen tutkimushaastattelulle, tässä tutkimuksessa kiinnitettiin haastattelujen toteutuksessa erityistä huomiota sellaisen tilan löytämiseen, jossa kokemuksia voi turvallisesti jakaa. Tutkimuksen osallistujat kommentoivat haastattelukokemustaan positiivisena mahdollisuutena purkaa ajatuksiaan, jopa terapeutisena keskusteluna. Tämä artikkeli nostaa esille kertojan

näkökulman. Jotta myös lukija voi peilata esille nostettuja asioita haastateltujen elämän kontekstiin, kertomuksista on tuotu esille myös kokonaisuutta valottavat tiivistelmät sekä merkityssisältöjä kantavia suoria lainauksia haastatteluista.

### *Haastattelut ja aineiston analysointi*

Tämän artikkelin tutkimusaineisto on osa laajempaa, neljäntoista koulu-uransa keskeyttäneen henkilön haastatteluaineistoa. Haastatteluja varten haettiin Rikosseuraamuslaitokselta tutkimuslupa. Osallistujat ilmoittautuivat mukaan koulun keskeyttäneiden koulukokemuksia tarkastelemaan tutkimukseemme vankilan nimeämän yhteyshenkilön heille välittämän, tutkimuksen kohdentumista lyhyesti avanneen informaation perusteella. Isompaan aineistoon kuuluu kantasuomalaisia naisia ja miehiä sekä romanimiehiä.

Aineistosta valittiin tarkasteluun kolme peruskoulun keskeyttänyttä romaninaista, Saara, Johanna ja Ritva (nimet muutettu) kertomuksineen. Haastateltavat olivat 20–30-vuotiaita, joten he olivat käyneet peruskoulua 1990-luvun lopussa ja 2000-luvun alkupuolella. Haastatteluhetkellä he olivat suorittamassa lyhyehköä vapausrangaistusta. Artikkeleihin valitut haastateltavat edustavat koko aineistossa keskenään toisiaan vastaavinta ikäryhmää sekä koulun keskeytymisen ajankohtaa, ja he ovat aineiston ainoat romaninaiset. Heidän kohdallaan myös haastattelujen toteutus oli keskenään yhteneväinen, kolmen tapaamisen kokonaisuus. Sen sijaan osalla haastatteluista romanimiehistä voitiin toteuttaa vain yksi tai kaksi tapaamista osan heistä päästyä koevapauteen kesken haastatteluprosessin. Laajemman aineiston käsittely artikkelissa vaatisi toisenlaisen, yksittäistä kertomusta suppeammin esille tuovan esitystavan, joka ei mielestämme olisi tehnyt oikeutta romaninaisten kertomuksille ja niissä havaituille ilmiöille.

Kertomushaastattelut toteutti tämän artikkelin ensimmäinen kirjoittaja, 25 vuotta alakoulussa työskennellyt tutkiva erityisopettaja. Haastattelut tehtiin vuoden 2016 aikana siten, että haastatteli tapasi jokaisen osallistujan vankilan osoittamissa tiloissa kolme kertaa, muutaman viikon välein. Kukin haastattelu kesti noin tunnin. Haastatellut antoivat sekä suullisesti että kirjallisesti suostumuksensa aineiston käyttöön. Heille myös kerrottiin aineiston käsittelyn tavoista, ja he saivat katsottavakseen aineiston käsittelyyn liittyvien kertomusluonnosten tekstit. Anonymiteetin varmistamiseksi henkilöiden nimien lisäksi myös paikkakuntien nimet on muutettu. Osa yksityiskohdista on häivytetty muuttamalla kuvauksien sanamuotoa yleisemmälle tasolle.

Tutkimussuhteen eettisessä tarkastelussa korostui välittämisen etiikka: kunnioittava suhtautuminen ja ihmissuhteisiin yleisesti sovellettavat periaatteet. Herkkyys reagoida kertojan tunnetiloihin ja mahdolliseen tarpeeseen vetäytyä osallistumisestaan tutkimukseen oli tarpeen luottamuksellisen tutkimussuhteen onnistumiseksi. Eettisen tarkkaavaisuuden tärkeys ei rajoittunut vain tilanteisiin, joissa tutkija ja osallistujat kohtasivat toisensa ihmisinä, vaan eettisyys oli läsnä koko prosessissa. Yleisten eettisten periaatteiden ohella huomioitiin kertojan näkökulman esille tuominen sekä se, ettei julkaistulla tekstillä aiheuteta haittaa osallistujille, heidän ihmissuhteilleen eikä ryhmille, joita he edustavat. (Ks. Clandinin 2013; Josselson 2007; Syrjälä ym. 2006.)

Haastattelut toteutettiin siten, että ensimmäisessä tapaamisessa kerronta oli vapaata. Toisessa ja kolmannessa tapaamisessa keskustelun pohjana oli haastattelijan litteroimastaan nauhoituksesta työstämä kertomusluonnos, joka oli molempien keskustelijoiden nähtävillä ja ulottuvilla. Haastatteliija otti esille kertomusluonnoksista ilmenneitä aiheita, avoimeksi jääneitä kysymyksiä sekä tarkennuksia. Jokaisella haastattelukerralla annettiin tietoisesti tilaa kertojan esiin nostamille uusille aiheille. Haastateltavien kertomat asiat käytiin läpi viimeisellä tapaamiskerralla tutkijan laatimien kertomusluonnosten muodossa.

Haastateltaville tarjottiin myös mahdollisuus muuttaa tai poistaa asioita tekstistä.

Kerronnallinen työskentely jatkui siten, että tutkija tiivisti kertomukset lukijalle esitettävään muotoon. Kertomusten analysoinnissa merkityksiä kantavia yksiköjä etsittiin aineistosta luokittelemalla ja nimeämällä keskusteluista löytyviä asiasisältöjä. Erityisesti nostettiin esille asioita ja aiheita, jotka kertojat itse nimesivät keskeisiksi koulun keskeytymisen syiksi. Lisäksi tarkasteltiin, miten haastateltavat kuvailivat suhdettaan koulumaailman ihmisiin ja ihmisryhmiin sekä romaneihin ja romanikulttuuriin. Aineiston hallinnan työkaluna käytettiin manuaalisten merkintöjen lisäksi ATLAS.ti-ohjelmiston versiota 7. Aihepiiriä koskevan aiemman tutkimuksen vähäisyyden vuoksi romanikulttuuriin liittyvänä teoreettisena viitekehystenä käytettiin myös opinnäytetöitä ja selvityksiä, joissa romanikirjoittajat kuvailevat kulttuurinsa tapoja.

### ***Yhteiset kontekstit ja kertomusten tiivistelmät***

Tässä artikkelissa laajempaa taustamaisemaa edustavat suomalainen romanikulttuuri sekä institutionaalisenä kontekstina suomalainen perusopetus ja koulujen käytännöt. Kaikki haastateltavat olivat peruskoulun keskeyttäneitä ja kaikilla oli myös omia lapsia, kahdella



alakouluikäisiä. Haastateltavat kertoivat sekä omista että lastensa koulukokemuksista. Lisäksi haastateltaville oli yhteistä vapausrangaistus sekä se, ettei heillä ollut kouluajaltaan omia kokemuksia oppimisvaikeuksista. Jokainen haastateltava oli myös päättänyt toimia siten, että heidän omat lapsensa suorittaisivat koulunsa loppuun. Kaikkien taustaan liittyi myös romaniyhteisöstä irrottavia tekijöitä, kuten sijoittumista lastensuojelun laitoksiin tai sukujen pidättäytymistä yhteydenpidosta haastateltavan ydinperheeseen. Seuraavaksi esitellään osallistujien kertomukset tiivistelminä, joihin suorat lainaukset nivoutuvat.

Ensimmäisen kertomuksen päähenkilö Saaran tarinassa korostui lapsuudessa koettu ulkopuolisuuden tunne: ”Ulkopuolisuuden olo oli aika ratkaiseva mun lapsuudessa”. Saara muutti äidin ja sisarustensa kanssa kuusivuotiaana kaupungista maalle, satojen kilometrien päähän. Uudella kotipaikkakunnalla ei asunut muita romaneja, joskin siellä asui muuhun kielivähemmistöön kuuluvia perheitä suomenkielisen väestön lisäksi. Saara tuli usein ensimmäisen luokan aikana kotiin kesken koulupäivän ja päätyi kertaamaan ykkösluokan. Alkuvaiheessa Saaralla oli ollut hankaluuksia kavereiden saamisessa romaneihin kohdistuneiden ennakkoluulojen vuoksi. Kiusaaminen oli loppunut isompien sisarusten puolustettua Saaraa. Hän kertoi myös itse olleensa aktiivinen ja sosiaalinen ja saaneensa itseensä kohdistuvan torjuvan suhtautumisen loppumaan nopeasti.

Kun Saara oli käynyt alakoulun, perhe muutti takaisin kaupunkiin. Koulunkäynti ei kiinnostanut enää Saaraa. Hän alkoi liikkua päivisin romaninuorten porukassa, jonka koulunkäynti oli epäsäännöllistä. Saaralla oli murrosiässä vahvaa uhmaa, eikä mikään sellainen kiinnostanut, mihin hän koki pakkoa. Saaralla oli kavereita myös koulussa, mutta elämä koulun ulkopuolella vei kuitenkin voiton kiinnostavuudessa. Saara kertoi itsellään menneen ”niin lujaa”, että hänet otettiin huostaan. Saara kävi kolmessa eri koulukodissa peruskoulun lähes loppuun, mutta täysi-ikäiseksi tultuaan hän lopetti koulunkäynnin.

Toisen kertomuksen päähenkilö Johanna kuvasi lapsuudessa kokemansa yksinäisyyden vaikutusta koulunkäyntiinsä: ”Olin mustalainen ... ei ollu kavereita sen takia.” Johannan lapsuudessa perhe asui paikkakunnalla, jossa ei asunut muita romaneja. Perhe piti poikkeuksellisen vähän yhteyttä muihin romaneihin; edes suvun hautajaisissa ei käyty. Johanna aloitti koulunsa kyläkoulun 1.–2.-yhdysluokalla. Kahden ensimmäisen vuoden opettajansa Johanna muistaa lämpimänä aikuisena, joka piti huolta siitä, että Johannakin sai puheenvuoron. Ensimmäisen ja toisen luokan aikana Johannalla oli useita kavereita. Kolmannen ja neljännen luokan opettajasta Johannalle oli jäänyt ikävä muistikuva. Hän ei

pitänyt opettajan tavasta vitsailla romaneista ja kommentoida poissaoloja tai tekemättömiä läksyjä romaneille tyypillisiksi tavoiksi. Koulukaverit sanoivat, etteivät he saa leikkiä Johannan kanssa, koska tämä oli romani. Johanna olikin välitunneilla yksin. Kolmannella luokalla Johanna alkoi jättäytyä pois koulusta. Hän ei muistanut, että koulussa olisi kysely hänen poissaoloistaan, vaan selitykset ”kipeänä olemisesta” riittivät opettajalle. Neljännen luokan kuluessa Johanna jäi kotiin tekemään kotitöitä ja huolehtimaan pienemmistä sisaruksista. Hän kertoi, ettei muista neljännessä luokasta paljonkaan. Viidennellä ja kuudennella luokalla Johanna kertoi käyneensä koulussa ehkä muutaman päivän.

Kolmannen kertomuksen päähenkilö Ritva korosti perheen vaikutusta koulunkäynnin keskeytymiseen: ”Rupes siellä kotityöt olemaan jo, meidän kulttuurissa”. Ritva kävi aluksi pientä maalaiskoulua, jossa oli muitakin romanilapsia. Hänellä oli kavereita eikä hän kertonut tulleen syrjityksi romanitautansa vuoksi. Kaikki koulun oppilaat leikkivät yhdessä.

Kolmannella luokalla Ritva alkoi olla yhä useammin pois koulusta. Hän kertoi, että heidän perheessään noudatettu ”vanhoillinen” näkemys edellytti hänen osallistumistaan kotitöihin. Hän kertoi vastustaneensa kodin sääntöjä lapsena ja kokeneensa koulussa olonsa vapaammaksi tiukoista kulttuurisista säännöistä. Ritva kertoi valinneensa romanikulttuurin mukaisen elämäntavan kapinavaiheensa jälkeen, noin 13-vuotiaana. Ritvan kouluvuosien aikana perhe muutti paikkakunnalta toiselle useita kertoja.

Neljännellä luokalla Ritva siirrettiin erityisluokalle. Erityisopetukseen siirtämisen syiksi hän kertoi keskittymisvaikeudet ja sen, ettei tullut muiden oppilaiden kanssa toimeen. Ritva oli erityisluokan ainoa romanioppilas. Erityisluokassa vallitsi hyvä yhteishenki. Ritva kuvaili itseään villiksi nuoreksi. Hänet otettiin huostaan 13-vuotiaana. Hän sai suorittaa tenttimällä ala-asteen oppimäärän, josta selviytyikin muutamassa kuukaudessa. Ritva asui pienryhmäkodissa ja kertoi ”kaiken” lopahtaneen hänen alettuaan odottaa lasta 16-vuotiaana. Ritva kertoi miettineensä, onko hänestä suorittamaan peruskoulua loppuun aikuisena ja päättäneensä, että hänestä on siihen.

### **Haastateltujen kokemuksia koulussa**

Seuraavassa esitellään yksityiskohtaisemmin haastateltujen kertomia tapahtumia ja kokemuksia koulunkäynnistään. Haastatellut korostivat eri asioita koulukokemuksistaan, mutta myös samanlaisia kokemuksia nousi esiin. Jokainen haastateltava mainitsi omat sisaruksensa. Koulussa sisarukset olivat tukiverkostona, kavereina ja puolustajina. Kotona

korostui sisarusten välinen huolenpito. Seuraavaksi haastateltujen koulukokemuksia ja niiden yhteisvaikutuksia tarkastellaan kulttuuriseen vähemmistöön kuulumisen, kasautuvan huono-osaisuuden sekä syrjinnän kohtaamisen näkökulmista.

Haastatellut kertoivat olleensa jo koulun alkaessa tietoisia kuulumisestaan kulttuuriseen vähemmistöön, romaneihin. Erillisyys pääkulttuurista tuli esille myös toisten lasten lausumista rajauksista. Johanna kertoi, että kaverisuhteet katkesivat kolmannella luokalla: ”...kaverit rupes olee sillee et he ei oikee voi olla mustalaiden kans ja vanhemmat ei antanu olla.” Alakoulun kavereiden vanhemmat olivat suhtautuneet torjuvasti myös Saaraan: ”... oli ennakkoluuloja, mustalaiset varastaa ja mustalaisilla on puukko ja tämmöstä...” Tietoisuus kuulumisesta muista erilliseen ryhmään ilmeni myös toteamuksina siitä, miten ennakkoluuloista oli selvitty joko oman sosiaalisuuden tai sisarusten tuen avulla. Ritvan vertaisryhmään kuului myös muita romanilapsia, ja hän kertoi koulun kaikkien oppilaiden leikkineen yhdessä. Kysymykseen syrjivistä asenteista hän vastasi kuvaillen selviytymistään niistä: ”Ei... se on käyny aika nopeesti, ennakkoluulot on lähteny.”

Kaikki haastatellut kokivat romanikulttuurin ja koulun toisistaan erillisiksi elämänalueiksi. Koulu ei ollut haastateltujen perheissä tärkeysjärjestyksessä keskeisellä sijalla, vaan se jäi arjessa sivurooliin. Saara kertoi: ”...mulle tehtiin vähä pakon omaiseksi se koulu, että ku mä oon itse romani, niin sei oo ollu niin tärkeetä se koulunkäynti niinkään.” Muutto uudelle paikkakunnalle aiheutti omat haasteensa koulun alkuvaiheessa. Saara kertoo: ”Mulla oli se että ku mä olin ainut romani siellä koulussa, se ei oikee sujunut hyvin, että jäin ensimmäiselle luokalle... mä lintsasin niin paljo... et sitte ku tutustuin niihin muihin lapsiin, niin sit se alko mennä paremmin. Se oli niin semmosts uutta ja sit ku siellä ei asunu ketään muita mustalaisia, nii se oli ehkä se alku vähä semmonen.” Saaran tapauksessa syrjäyttävien tekijöiden yhteisvaikutus näkyy sekä kulttuurisena yksinäisyytenä että uuteen vertaisryhmään mukaan pääsyn haasteina.

Myös perheen kouluperinteen ohuus vaikutti koulunkäynnin sujumiseen. Johannan äiti oli toivonut lapsensa menevän kouluun, mutta asia ei ollut perheessä erityisen merkittävä: ”Kyllä äiti yritti ja halus että mä oisin menny kouluun, mutta mä en suostunu meneen sinne, ei se ollu sillä tavalla hirveesti tapetilla, koulu.” Ritva kertoi, että tyttöjen osallistuminen kodin töihin kouluun menemisen sijasta oli tavanomaista. Suvun aikuiset eivät reagoineet tilanteeseen erityisemmin: ”Se oli jotenki niin tavanomaista ... se oli ihan tapa.” Suhtautuminen koulunkäyntiin oli positiivista, mutta koulun käymistä ei kuitenkaan pidetty niin tärkeänä, että

säännöllistä läsnäoloa olisi vaadittu. Kuten Markkanen (2003) kuvailee, tyttären osallistuminen kodin töihin kuului luonnollisena osana perheiden arkeen.

Haastatellut kertoivat myös asioista, jotka liittyivät romanikulttuurin puhtauskäsitteeseen ja erityiseen tarkkuuteen astioiden käsittelyssä. Saara kuvaili tilanteita kotitaloustunnilla: ”... ku ois joku ihminen ketä voi selittää ja sitte ei tulis semmosta ulkopuolisuutta, oloa, että en haluu mennä tuonne ku ne ei ymmärrä mua.” Romanikulttuurissa vallitseva häveliäisyys tietyistä aihepiireistä puhumisessa oli aiheuttanut koulutehtävien salailua kotona. Saara kertoi: ”... jotkut asiat on meille tabuja, et silloin voi olla tosi vaivautunu olo, ihmisen anatomia ja nää.” Saara toivoi, että koulussa käsiteltäisiin myös asioita, joista ei kotona omien vanhempien kanssa voi keskustella.

Osa haastateltujen ja heidän lastensa poissaoloista liittyi romaniyhteisössä mukana elämiseen, esimerkiksi hautajaisten yhteydessä. Johannan miehen suvussa useita ikäihmisiä oli kuollut saman talven aikana. Johanna kuvaili, miten toiset koululaiset olivat reagoineet hänen lapsensa poissaoloihin, jotka olivat perheen näkökulmasta välttämättömiä: ”... meillä mustalaisilla on hirveen tärkeätä olla aina hautajaisissa ...se on mejän kulttuuris tosi iso juttu. Nythän me oltii sit sielä ja hän oli paljo pois koulusta ...et ongelma tuli siinäki ku hän oli pois ja sit siinä ku lapset oli häntä ruvennu haukkuu mustalaiseks, ...mä tiedä, tai manneks.”

Oman perheen erilaisuus kavereiden perheisiin verrattuna oli aiheuttanut myös häpeän tunnetta. Ritva kertoi tasapainoilustaan kaveripiirin ja kodin välillä: ”Siinä 10, 11, 12 iässä, käyny sen oman kapinan läpi, hävettää kaverit, et kehtaa sanoa että oot mustalainen... et kehtaa tuoda kavereita kotii, ku se kulttuuri, se ero, on nii erilainen näkymä.” Tilanteessa, jossa perheen yhteys romanisukulaisiin oli poikki, painottuivat muiden aikuisten, erityisesti opettajien julkituomat käsitykset romaneista (vrt. Cousik 2015; Jussim & Harber 2005). Johanna kuvailikin tutustuneensa romanikulttuuriin suurelta osin sen perusteella, mitä hän kuuli romaneista puhuttavan. Koulussa ja lähiyhteisössä kohdattu torjuva käyttäytyminen ja irrallisuus laajemmasta romaniyhteisöstä kietoutuivat näin yhteen aiheuttaen kasautuvaa ulkopuolisuuden kokemusta, jossa sekä lähiyhteisöön että romaniyhteisöön integroituminen oli hyvin vaikeaa tai jopa mahdotonta.

### ***Kasautuvaa huono-osaisuutta***

Haastateltavat kuuluivat paitsi suomalaiseseen kulttuurivähemmistöön myös ihmisryhmään, jota yleisesti pidetään huono-osaisena: ongelmia oli kasautunut heidän ajaututtuaan rikoksiin. Haastateltavien lapsuus- ja nuoruusajan tukiverkosto oli puutteellinen, koska he elivät erillään romaniyhteisöstä joko asumiseen liittyvien ratkaisujen tai lastensuojeluun liittyvien sijoitusten sijoittelujen vuoksi. Seuraavat lainaukset ilmentävät syrjäyttävien tekijöiden yhteisvaikutusten monikerroksisuutta, eli niiden kasautumista ja ketjuuntumista haastateltavien elämäntilanteissa (Collins 2015).

Haastateltavat toivat esille, että rikollisuus tai varastaminen ei kuulu romanikulttuuriin. Johanna kertoi: ”...se ei oo kulttuuri, et se on ihan väärin... nykyään se on mejjän kulttuurissa, se on jotain noloa, ne on vähä alkukantasia ne ketkä varastaa.” Johanna kuvaili myös elämäntilanteen heijastumista lapsiin ja heidän koulunkäyntiinsä: ”...mun rikollinen tausta ...totta kai se vaikuttaa, kun itekki oot vähä hakoteillä, ni lapsetki on.” Jokapäiväiset rahahuolet veivät perheiden huomiota pois koulunkäynnistä sekä osallistujien omassa lapsuudessa että heidän aikuistuttuaan. Samalla köyhyys näyttäytyi lasten kouluelämään vaikuttavana tekijänä. Johanna kuvaili varusteiden puuttumista: ”...omat sukset, tai luistimet... meillei koskaa ollu varaa semmosii.” Johanna liitti välineiden puutteen myös ulkopuolisuuden tunteisiin: ”Ni et se (lapsi) saa olla siellä, ku muillaki on, ni hänelläki on, ettei oo semmonen erkaantunu olo, et mä oon ainut kellei oo sisäpelikenkiä.” Johannan kohdalla myös perheen köyhyys kietoutui yhteen edellisessä luvussa mainittujen yhteisöistä syrjäyttävien tekijöiden kanssa. Edellisten lisänä oli vaikuttamassa kodin melko salliva suhtautuminen koulusta pois jäämiseen ja sen myötä mahdollisuus saada yhteenkuuluvuuden ja arvostuksen kokemuksia kouluelämän ulkopuolella.

Oppivelvollisuusiän loppupuolella itsenäistyminen ja oman elämän aloitus toivat haastateltaville mukanaan vastuuta ja haasteita. Koulun tukitoimilla ja lastensuojelulla oli pyritty vaikuttamaan osallistujien tilanteeseen, mutta peruskoulun loppuun saattaminen ja ammattiin opiskelu eivät olleet toteutuneet. Ritva kuvaili omaa aikuistumistaan: ” Mä olin tommoses pienryhmäkodissa itse ja mä olin aika villi nuori... sit ku mä aloin oottaa nii mulla oli niinku kaikki menny,... lopahti siihen.” Ritva oli irrallaan perheen ja suvun tuesta ja koki, ettei saanut tukea lapsen kanssa elämiseen myöskään pienryhmäkodin henkilökunnalta. Kulttuuritaustasta riippumaton huono-osaisuus näyttäytyy Johannan ja Ritvan arjessa selviytymisen lisähaasteena etniseen ryhmään kuulumiseen kiinnittyvien ympäristön paineiden lisäksi. Lapsetta huolehtiminen romaniäitinä korosti sisarusten antaman tuen tai sen puutteen merkitystä, ja kulttuuritavat rajasivat lähintä tukiverkostoa synnytykseen liittyvien

häveliäisyyskäsitysten vuoksi (ks. Niemenmaa & Suomilammi 2009).

### ***Kamppailua yhteenkuuluvuudesta***

Ilmaisu ”ko mä oon romani” toistui usein haastateltujen kertoessa kouluajastaan. Perheen tapakulttuurin lisäksi ilmaisu liittyi tilanteisiin, joissa haastateltuihin tai heidän lapsiinsa oli kohdistunut nimittelyä tai sulkemista pois vertaisryhmästä. Ulkopuolisuuden tunteeseen liittyi myös kokemus, ettei koulussa tiedetty romanikulttuurista. Saara kertoi pohtineensa identiteettiään suhteessa paikkakunnalla asuneisiin muihin ryhmiin: ”... siellei ollu mitään tietoo, siellähän oli toinen vähemmistöryhmä ...sitä käy miettiin et mihin mä kuulun et... se ulkopuolisuuden olo on aika ratkaiseva omasta lapsuudesta.” Muuttaminen uudelle paikkakunnalle vaikeutti oman paikan löytämistä koulun vertaisryhmässä.

Romanikavereiden merkitys yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteen lähteenä oli läsnä haastateltujen kertomuksissa. Omat sisarukset koettiin tärkeinä kavereina, mutta myös muiden romanilasten läsnäolo ryhmässä vähensi kielteisten ennakoasenteiden vaikutusta. Ainoana erilaisena olemien koettiin haastavaksi. Saara toi esille ulkopuolisuuden kokemuksen jouduttuaan erotetuksi romanikaveristaan: ”...jos koulussa on muita romaneja niin samalle luokalle, ettei erotettais niitä ...että just se on se ulkopuolisuuden olo, et sais olla sen toisen kanssa, yhteenkuuluvuutta siihen, ettei ois vaa ainut.” Yläkouluun siirtymisen vaiheessa Saaran perhe muutti uudelleen. Saara kertoi elämän rakentumisesta murrosiässä: ”Piti sit solmia uusia (kaverisuhteita) ja sit ku siellähän on romaaneit enemmän, mun kaveripiiri oli enemmänki heidän kanssaan ja... sit se koulu vähä niinku jäi. Mut sit, sithän sen jälkeen ku ... mulla meni niin lujaa, nii mut huostaanotettii ja mää jouvui koulukotii.”

Johanna liitti koulun keskeytymisen selkeimmin kaverisuhteiden puuttumiseen: ”Se oli mun koulunkäynnin este, koska mä olin mustalainen, ja mulla ei ollu kavereita sen takia.” Johanna kuvaili lapsena kokemaansa häpeää yksin olemisesta: ”Hävettäki se et sä oot yksin, mut sit sä yrität vaan niinku näyttää siltä et sulla ei oo yksinäistä ja sitte sä oikeesti oot ihan yksin, kuitenkin.” Johanna kertoi yksittäisestä uudesta oppilaasta, josta hän oli saanut kaverin. Yhteisleikki loppui, kun kaveri oli saanut tietää, että Johanna on romani: ”Mä sit kävin kouluu innoissani ku mää tiesin et se oli mun kaveri. Sit se yhtenä päivänä sanoki mulle, että emmä saa leikkii sun kans, mun äiti sano et mä en saa leikkii mustalaisten kans ... sit mä vaa, loppu seki into.” Yhteyksiä romanikulttuurin ulkopuolisiin ikätovereihin ei mainittu kertomuksissa koulun keskeytymisen jälkeen.

Johannan kokemus 1.–2.-luokkien opettajasta oli myönteinen, ja hän oli kokenut saaneensa osakseen huolenpitoa. Tuohon ajankohtaan sijoittuivat myös muistot yhteisistä leikeistä ja toisten lasten hyväksynnästä. Johannan kuva 3.–4.-luokkien opettajasta oli kielteisesti väritynyt. Johanna muisteli omia tuntemuksiaan ja opettajan toimintaa sekä sen vaikutuksia omaan koulunkäyntiinsä:

Hän oli mulle jotenki semmonen ... vastenmielinen aikuinen, ...se hänen puhetyylinsä mua kohtaan... että eihän teillä muutenkaan käy hirveesti koulua eikä opetella mitää ja eihä teillä nyt muutenkaan tehdä läksyjä. Jossain vaiheessa mä jäin ite koulusta pois ... mun vanhemmat ei ees tienny että mä en käy koulua ja mä olin vast kuitenkin kolmasluokkalainen. Mä jäin johonki sit vaan istuu sen aikaa, menin sit sen jälkee vasta kotii, koulu ku ois pitäny päättyä.

Poissaoloja alkoi kertyä, mutta kodissa tai koulussa ei tehty riittäviä toimenpiteitä Johannan koulunkäynnin jatkumiseksi. Poissaoloihin liittyi myös jääminen jälkeen opetetuista asioista. Johanna kertoi koulukavereiden huomautuksista, joissa poissaoloista johtuva osaamattomuus liitettiin romaneihin ihmisryhmänä: ”Sitte ei oo enää mielenkiintookaa ees, et se että ku sitte muut: eksä totakaa osaa... no ei tietenkää ku se on mustalaine.” Sekä Saara että Johanna hakeutuivat ympäristöön, jossa he löysivät koulua paremmin vastetta yhteenkuuluvuuden tarpeelleen (vrt. Ryan & Deci 2000a; Vansteenkiste & Ryan 2013). Kumpikin myös vetäytyi epätydyttävästä vuorovaikutuksesta (vrt. Costa ym. 2014). Erityisesti Johannan haastatteluissa tuli esiin usean syrjäyttävän tekijän yhteisvaikutus: sekä kodin että koulun toimet jäivät puutteellisiksi hänen koulunkäyntinsä toteutumiseksi, ja lähiyhteisön aikuiset, kuten kaverien vanhemmat sekä koulun vertaisryhmä, käyttäytyivät torjuvasti. Lisäksi poissaolojen seurauksena jääminen opinnoissa jälkeen yhdessä leimaavan suhtautumisen kanssa vaikeuttivat kouluyhteisöön liittymistä entisestään.

Haastatellut kertoivat kielteisten asenteiden tuottaneen haasteita myös omille lapsilleen. Ritvan haastattelun aikaan hänen kahdeksanvuotias tyttärensä oli kertonut, ettei kehtaa koulussa sanoa olevansa romani, koska toiset eivät sitten leiki hänen kanssaan. Ritva pohti ilmiötä ja sen vaikutuksia lasten kehittyvään identiteettiin ja kuvaan maailmasta: ”...pitäs pitää lapset lapsina ja ymmärtää ja luoda semmosta tasa-arvoa myös mustalaisten kohdalta, ... niille tulee pienenä se, että valkolaiset sitä, valkolaiset tätä.” Johanna oli huomannut omalla lapsellaan samantyyppistä reagointia kuin hänellä itsellään oli alakoululaisena ollut: ”... rupes itkemään, että mä en mee kouluun... no se opettaja tuntu hänen mielestä inhottavalta ... hälle ei oo kavereita välitunneilla enää ollenkaa.” Pelko siitä, että myös oma lapsi kieltäytyy

menemästä kouluun, kuten Johanna itse oli tehnyt, kuvastui Johannan kerronnassa. Johanna ilmaisi myös oletuksensa, ettei romanilapsen koulunkäynti ole nykyäänkään helppoa: ”En halua tehdä samaa virhettä mun lasten kans vaan mä haluan et ne kävi ne koulut... vaikka verikyynelillä, mutta ne on käytävä!”

## **Ulkopuolisuus kouluelämästä eri tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksena**

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin koulukokemuksia ja koulusta syrjäytymiseen liittyneiden tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksia kolmen peruskoulun keskeyttäneen, nuorehkon romaninaisen kertomusten avulla. Tutkimus tuotti merkityksellistä uutta tietoa nostamalla esiin tämän aiemmin vaille tutkimuksellista huomiota jääneen ihmisryhmän näkökulmaa. Tutkimuksessa kiinnitettiin huomiota myös siihen, miten osallistujat asemoivat itseään koululaisina. Haastateltavien kokemuksissa nousi esiin keskeisenä koulusta pois jäämiseen vaikuttaneena tekijänä koulussa koettu, jokapäiväiseksi muodostunut ulkopuolisuuden tunne. Ulkopuolisuus liittyi hyljeksityksi tulemisen kokemukseen, mutta myös siihen, että oma kulttuuri koettiin pääväestölle vieraaksi. Näin tutkimus valotti myös sitä, miten kulttuurinen yksinäisyys heijastui koululaisen kokemuksena.

Osallistujien kertomuksissa havaittiin eritasoisia intersektionaalisuuden ilmentymiä. Yleisellä tasolla haastateltavien elämään vaikuttivat yhteiskunnassa ja lähiyhteisössä vallitseva ennakkoluulon ilmapiiri sekä taloudellinen ja elämänhallintaan liittyvä huono-osaisuus. Kulttuuriseen yhteenkuuluvuuteen puolestaan vaikutti oman kulttuuriryhmän ja sen ulkopuolisen yhteisön odotusten erilaisuus romanitytön valintoja kohtaan. Toisaalta näissä odotuksissa oli myös asenteellista samankaltaisuutta, sillä molemmat ilmaisivat romanitytön poissaolon koulusta tavanomaisena tilanteena, johon ei koulussakaan reagoitu, vaikka poissaoloihin puuttuminen yleisesti on kouluissa vahva institutionaalinen perinne. Lisäksi yksilötasolla tulivat esille ainoana erilaisena oleminen ja elämäntilanteeseen liittyvinä haasteina köyhyys, muutot ja nuorena toteutunut äitiys. Näiden tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksena osallistujien arjen painopiste ja yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemus suuntautuivat koulun sijaan kotiin ja perheeseen sekä niin ikään koulutuksen ulkopuolella olevaan ystäväpiiriin. Oletus haavoittavien tekijöiden yhteisvaikutuksesta suomalaisten romaninaisten koulun keskeytymisen taustatekijänä sai näin vahvistusta.



Varhaisen koulun keskeytymisen syiksi haastateltavat nimesivät heihin romaneina kohdistuneet ennakkoluulot koulussa ja laajemmin lähiyhteisössä, yksin jäämisen koulun vertaisryhmässä ja omien vanhempien puutteellisen tuen koulunkäynnilleen. Lisäksi tuli esille perheen köyhyyteen liittynyt irrallisuuden tunne. Peruskoulun oppilaana oleminen näyttäytyi elämän osa-alueena, jota määrittivät yhtäältä romanikulttuurin, toisaalta pääväestön reunaehdot. Osallistujien kertomuksissa ilmeni pyrkimys ja toive osallistua tasavertaisena samoihin asioihin kuin muutkin koululaiset. Romaniperheeseen ja -sukuun kuuluminen esitettiin yhteenkuuluvuuden tarjoajana. Hyvät suhteet muihin romaneihin ilmaistiin voimavarana, jonka puuttuminen toi mukanaan haavoittuvuutta. Samalla jo koulun alkuvaiheessa tuli esille tietoisuus romanitaustasta johtuvasta erillisyydestä muihin lapsiin.

Haastatelluilla oli ollut perheen ja suvun lisäksi kasvuympäristönään koulun ohella myös lasten- ja nuorisokoteja. Kuten Benjamin (2014) ja Roman (2018) kuvailevat, osallistujat olivat eläneet sekä perheensä kulttuurin, että pääkulttuurin vaikutuspiirissä. Kamppailu kulttuurivaikutteiden yhteensovittamiseksi heijastui myös omaan taustaan liittyneinä häpeän tunteina. Osallistujat tasapainoilivat romaniyhteisön ja kouluyhteisön asettamien odotusten ja ennakkoluulojen sävyttämän suhtautumisen ristiaallokossa. Koulussa koettu hyväksyntä tai torjunta vaikutti sekä osallistumiseen oppitunneilla että poissaolojen määrään koulun alkuvaiheesta lähtien. Koulukavereiden vanhempien sekä opettajien suhtautuminen kulttuuriseen erilaisuuteen korostui ulkopuolisuuden kokemusten yhteydessä. Cousik (2015) korostaakin, että koulussa on tärkeää huomioida kulttuuriset piirteet positiivisella tavalla.

Haastateltavat kokivat sekä koulun vertaisryhmän että ympäristön aikuisten suhtautuneen heihin torjuvasti. Myös opettaja saattoi puheteoillaan osallistua leimaavan prosessin syntyyn. Puheteolla viitataan tässä siihen, että puhuja toteamisen lisäksi saa puheellaan aikaan muutosta vallitsevassa tilanteessa. Johannan opettajan kommentin ”eihän teillä muutenkaan tehdä läksyjä eikä opetella mitään” voi nähdä torjuvan asenteen syntymiseen vaikuttavana tekona, joka Johannan kertomuksessa tulee esiin ainakin siinä, että luokkatoverien puheissa alkoivat toistua samanlaiset ilmaukset. Johannan reaktio kuvastaa suuntautumista pois ympäristöstä, jossa yhteenkuuluvuuden toteutuminen koetaan tarkoituksellisesti estetyksi (ks. tarkemmin Costa ym. 2014; Ryan & Deci 2000a; Vansteenkiste & Ryan 2013.)

Kouluyhteisöstä irrottavina tekijöinä tulivat esille myös kuuluminen kielteisillä ennako-odotuksilla leimattuun ryhmään sekä opettajan ääneen lausumat odotukset, joihin ovat aiemmin viitanneet myös Jussim ja Harber (2005). Tässä osallistujien kokemukset vastasivat myös muiden, koulussa ennakkoluuloja kohtaavien lasten ja nuorten tilannetta. On kuitenkin

huomattava, että romaninaisten kertomuksissa esiin tulleet tuen puutteen kokemukset poikkeavat Lyyran, Välimaan, Leskisen, Kannaksen ja Heikinaro-Johanssonin (2016) havainnosta, että yksinäiset oppilaat yleensä saavat koulussa opettajiltaan sosiaalista tukea. Pienestä aineistosta huolimatta tutkimuksemme tulos on merkittävä havainnollistaessaan sitä, että koulun tarjoama arjen tuki ei tavoita kaikkia oppilaita. Aineistomme antaa aiheen olettaa, että koulunkäynnin varhaisessa vaiheessa käytösongelmilla, kuten luvattomilla poissaoloilla oireilevat romanitytöt voivat jäädä muita oppilasryhmiä useammin ja herkemmin koulun tukitoimien ulkopuolelle samalla kun kodin tuki koulun käynnille on ohutta tai se puuttuu kokonaan. Tämä haastaa erityisesti koulujen oppilashuoltoa kehittämään tapoja, joilla ennakkoluuloja kohtaaviin ryhmiin kuuluvien lasten tuen tarpeet voidaan tunnistaa aiempaa tehokkaammin ja joilla heidän yhteenkuuluvuuttaan ja osallisuuttaan kouluyhteisöissä voidaan parantaa. Olisi myös selvítettävä laajemmalla aineistolla ja riittävän moniaineksisella asetelmalla, miten koulunkäynnin tuki tavoittaa vähemmistöihin kuuluvat lapset.

Romanit ovat aiempaa koulumyönteisempiä. Omien lasten itseä parempi kouluttautuminen oli myös tähän tutkimukseen osallistuneille tärkeää. Toisaalta havaittiin asioita, jotka eivät ole juuri muuttuneet viime vuosikymmeninä. Rajalan ym. (2011, 49) mukaan romanioppilaiden poissaolojen määrä on pysynyt runsaana, mikä ilmeni myös osallistujien kertomuksissa. Tähän tutkimukseen haastateltujen lapset kohtasivat kouluissaan edelleen, ollessaan perusopetuksen alaluokkien oppilaina vuonna 2016, etniseen taustaan perustuvaa torjuntaa tai nimittelyä. Havainto on yhdenmukainen niiden selvitysten kanssa, joissa on tarkasteltu romaneihin kohdistuvia asenteita yleisemminkin (mm. Anttonen 2009; Berlin 2015a; Erilaisena arjessa – – 2014; Sime, Fassetta & McClung 2018). Myös havainto romaniväestön sisäisestä polarisoitumisesta sekä huono-osaisuuden kasautumisesta ja kärjistymisestä (Erilaisena arjessa – – 2014; Syrjä & Valtakari 2008) sai vahvistusta osallistujien kertomuksista. Erityisesti omien vanhempien vähäinen aktiivisuus koulun suuntaan ja irrallaan oleminen romaniyhteisöstä näyttäytyivät haavoittavina tekijöinä. Romaniyhteisöstä irralleen joutuminen huono-osaisuuden yhtenä aiheuttajana haastaakin pääväestön toimijoiden lisäksi erityisesti tahoja, joiden mielipidettä kuullaan ja arvostetaan romaniyhteisön sisällä.

Aineisto-otteet antavat lukijalle mahdollisuuden arvioida analyysin ja johtopäätösten osuvuutta. Analyysin ja siinä tehtyjen tulkintojen luotettavuutta lisäsi haastattelutapaamisten yhteydessä toteutettu kertomusluonnosten yhteinen tarkastelu haastateltavien kanssa. Yhteinen pohdinta vahvisti samalla osallistujien näkökulman nostamista esiin.

Tämän tutkimuksen rajoitteena voidaan pitää tarkastelun kohdentumista koulussa koettuihin epäkohtiin. Laajempi elämänpiiri ja positiiviset kokemukset jätettiin vähemmälle huomiolle, jolloin ihmisten väliseen vuorovaikutukseen liittyneitä onnistumisia jäi mahdollisesti havaitsematta. Tutkijoiden ulkopuolisuus romanikulttuurista näytti avaavan mahdollisuuden keskustella myös romanien kesken aroiksi koetuista aiheista. Romani tutkijaryhmän jäsenenä mahdollistaisi kuitenkin merkitysten ja niiden taustojen tulkintaa ulkopuolista tarkastelua syvemmällä tasolla.

Yleisemmin koulumotivaatioon liittyen Ryan ja Deci (2000b) ovat esittäneet, että syrjäytymiskehityksen taustoja tarkasteltaessa olisi kiinnitettävä huomiota yhteenkuuluvuuden, autonomian ja kompetenssin kokemuksiin. Itsemääräämisen toerian viitekehityksessä tässä aineistossa havaitut ulkopuolisuuden kokemukset edustavat koetun yhteenkuuluvuuden jatkumon negatiivista ääripäätä ja siten tarkentavat kuvaa motivaation kadottamiseen liitetystä kokemusmaailmasta. Jatkossa selvitämme laajemman haastatteluaineiston avulla, millä tavoin koulu-uran keskeyttäneiden kertomukset heijastavat autonomian, kompetenssin ja yhteenkuuluvuuden kokemuksia.

Tutkimusjoukon pienuus rajoittaa tulosten yleistettävyyttä. Haastateltujen pieni määrä on kuitenkin leimallista osallistujien kokemusta korostavalle laadulliselle tapaustutkimukselle (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2014). Tutkitun ryhmän kertomukset antavat viitteitä siitä, että syrjäytymiseen liittyvää jatkotutkimusta olisi kohdennettava paitsi koulukontekstissa myös laajemmassa lähiympäristössä koettuihin irrallisuuden, erilaisuuden ja eriarvoisuuden kokemuksiin. Jatkotutkimusta tarvitaan myös romanikulttuuriin liittyvien suojaavien tekijöiden, kuten yhteisöllisyyden, merkityksestä laajentamalla tarkastelua myös koulun suorittaneisiin ja hyvin koulussa menestyneisiin romaneihin sekä molempiin sukupuoliin.

Tässä tutkimuksessa poissaolojen määrän lisääntyminen oli välivaihe kohti koulun keskeytymistä. Osaan poissaoloista liittyi omassa perheyhteisössä arvokkaaksi koettuja elämänsisältöjä. Myös lasten läsnäoloa suvun kohtaamisissa arvostetaan. Tämä luo koulun näkökulmasta tarpeen pohtia, millainen poissaolon syy on painoarvoltaan riittävä, jotta se voitaisiin hyväksyä. Koulunkäynnin järjestäminen poissaolojen aikana on tuotu esiin muun muassa oppaassa romanioppilaiden kohtaamisesta (Lillberg & Opetushallitus 2013). Koulun toiminnassa olisikin tärkeää tunnistaa kulttuurisesta arvomaailmasta nousevia valintoja ja toimintamalleja sekä ottaa romaniperheet aktiivisesti mukaan keskusteluun, etsien ratkaisuja kaikkia tyydyttävien käytäntöjen löytämiseksi (esim. Flecha & Soler 2013; Wauters, Van

Mol, Clycq, Michielsen & Timmerman 2017). Toteutuakseen tämä edellyttää opetushenkilöstöltä kuuntelevaa ja arvostavaa yhteydenpitoa romaniperheisiin sekä kulttuuritietoisuuden lisäämistä opettajankoulutuksen eri vaiheissa.

Koululla on tärkeä rooli syrjäytymisriskissä olevien lasten pitämisessä mukana koulu yhteisössä ja ohjaamisessa kohti vastuullista osallisuutta yhteiskunnassa. Lähtökohtaisesti kielteiset asenteet romaneihin, kuten muihinkin ennakkoluuloja kohtaaviin lapsiin, haastavat kasvatuksen ja opetuksen ammattilaiset tarkastelemaan sekä omaa ihmiskuvaansa että ammatillista toimintaansa. On tarpeen tutkia tapoja, joilla kommunikoimme haavoittuvassa asemassa olevien oppilaiden ja heidän huoltajiensa kanssa, sekä etsiä keinoja, joilla hyväksynnän viesti tavoittaa kohteensa. Samalla on havainnoitava koulun tasapuolisuutta tukitoimien tarjoajana marginaaliryhmiin kuuluville lapsille. Erityistä huomiota on kiinnitettävä siihen, että oppilaat, joiden elämässä on nähtävissä useita riskitekijöitä, saavat riittävästi ohjausta ja tukea. Tässä tutkimuksessa haastateltujen romaninaisten kertomukset haastavat tunnistamaan herkästi etenkin ne tilanteet, joissa koulussa poiketaan tavanomaisista ongelmatilanteisiin puuttumisen tai tukitoimien käytännöistä.

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## II

### **WHY DID THEY LEAVE SCHOOL? A SELF DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE INTO NARRATIVES OF FINNISH EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**

by

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

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# **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.

**Keywords:** early school-leaving; Self Determination Theory; need frustration; safety; indifference.

# ¿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

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 percent 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 et al, (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 Clandinin 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.

## 56 Pikkarainen et al.,- Finnish early school leavers

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 7 <sup>th</sup> grade, special schools till 18 yo, Didn't complete the 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.	Mother and siblings, moved to rural area when 6 yo, and back to city when 13 yo, <b><i>taken into care</i></b> soon after that, adolescent friends didn't attend school <b><i>Prejudices against the Roma in the local community</i></b>	<b><i>Avoidance by peers in the beginning of school</i></b> <b><i>Lack of cultural knowledge in school</i></b>
Viljo, male/ B 1990s	City school, normal classes, repeated a grade Didn't complete the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade.	No family members mentioned, <b><i>taken into care</i></b>	<b><i>Dyslexia, ADHD</i></b>
Ritva, female/ B 1990s	Rural and city schools, normal and special classes Didn't complete the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade.	<b><i>General prejudices against the Roma</i></b> Siblings, no mentions of parents, <b><i>taken into care</i></b> in her early teens Felt ashamed of her home <b><i>Lack of support for persisting in school</i></b>	<b><i>Didn't get along with peers in normal class</i></b> <b><i>General prejudices against the Roma</i></b>
Markus, male/ A 1990s	The 1 <sup>st</sup> grade normal class, the 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade abroad, after that special school Didn't complete the 5 <sup>th</sup> grade.	Teen pregnancy The family moved abroad for one year when Markus was 8 The family had a stable	Being a lively child <b><i>Placed in special class against his will</i></b> <b><i>General prejudices against the Roma</i></b>
Allan, male/ B 1990s	Special classes Didn't complete compulsory school	<b><i>Taken into care</i></b> when 2 months old, met his siblings at age of 15, <b><i>no connections to parents</i></b>	<b><i>Fights and bullying</i></b> in the detention home and school <b><i>Felt that the adults couldn't protect him</i></b>
Siiri, female/ B 1990s	City school, normal classes, didn't complete vocational school	Mother, <b><i>father (alcoholic)</i></b> Pregnancy during vocational school	<b><i>Dyslexia not attended to in school</i></b> 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 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Mother, father, siblings, no connections to extended families Starting a family when 16 <b>Lack of support for persisting in school</b>	<b>Exclusion from peer group</b> <b>Outspoken prejudices by a teacher and parents of the peers</b>
Kaisa, female/ C 1980s	Rural school, normal classes, several attempts to start high school and vocational schooling, not completing any	Mother, father, two sisters Coached sport training till age of 13 <b>Domestic violence by father</b>	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 6 <sup>th</sup> gr, then special class, didn't complete the 9 <sup>th</sup> gr	Mother, brother, no mentions of father, <b>taken into care</b> in adolescence <b>Hooked on heroine when 13</b>	Bullied his teacher in special class <b>Considered the peers childish, felt school was all in vain to learning</b>
Rikhard male/ B 1980s	City schools, the 1 <sup>st</sup> grade normal class, after that special classes, didn't complete the 6 <sup>th</sup> gr	Mother, siblings, extended family <b>Moving every year</b> Had friends out of school Started a family when 15	<b>Avoidance and bullying by peers</b>
Sanna, female/ A End of 1970s	Rural school, normal classes, didn't complete vocational school	Father, mother, siblings Family with a good reputation	<b>Problems with understanding texts, not attended to in school</b>
Aaro, male/ B 1960s Pilot interviewee	Rural school, normal classes, didn't complete 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Mother, father, siblings <b>No place to sleep well at home: violent dad (war trauma)</b> Felt easily allowed to stay home and work on the farm	<b>"I was hyperactive, always in trouble at school"</b>
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 2 <sup>nd</sup> to the 6 <sup>th</sup> grade <b>Weak adult care during that period</b>	<b>Felt that the teacher (the 3<sup>rd</sup>— the 6<sup>th</sup> grades and handicraft) was scary and used public humiliation</b>

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 whether 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.”

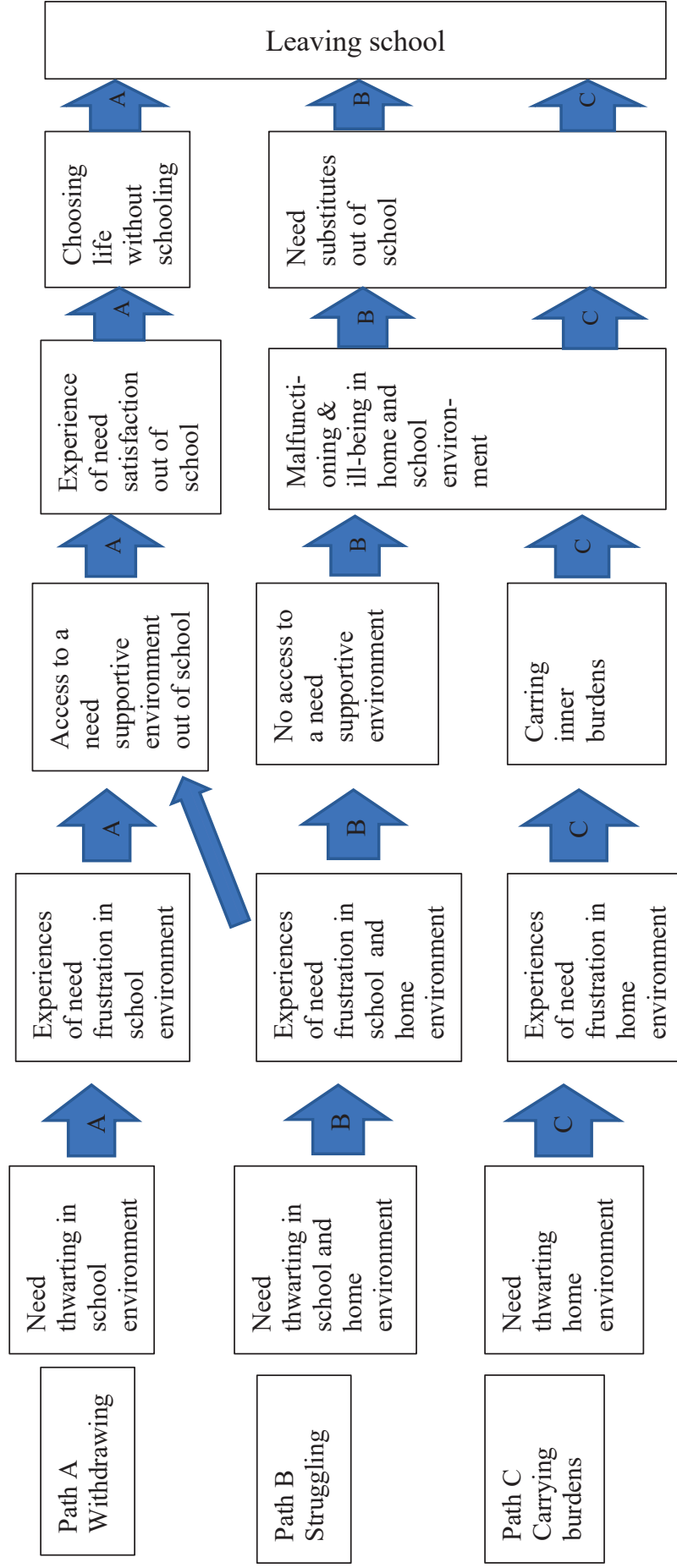
After compulsory school Kaisa tried several times to start high school. Each attempt lasted only a few weeks. Instead, Kaisa went out having fun in bars, using alcohol and drugs, being absent from school the next day several times a week.

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.



*Figure 1. 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. Whether 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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72 *Pikkarainen et al.,- Finnish early school leavers*

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### III

## REVISITING THE NARRATIVES OF FINNISH EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS: MAPPING EXPERIENCES OF DE-TACHMENT THROUGH A SELF DETERMINATION THEORY LENS

by

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Merja T. Pikkarainen, Virpi-Liisa Kykyri & Heidi Harju-Luukkainen

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# Revisiting the Narratives of Finnish Early School Leavers: Mapping Experiences of Detachment through a Self-determination Theory Lens

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## ABSTRACT

Basic psychological needs and people's experiences affect the choices they make, and further shape the trajectories followed through school. The present study focuses on the perspectives of people who left school without graduating. Through narrative interviewing processes we collected the storied experiences of eleven imprisoned early school leavers in Finland. We triangulated data-driven themes and used as theory the concept of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Of these, relatedness was the most common and a shared topic brought forth by the participants. Experiencing dissatisfaction and frustration as a result of the need for relatedness played a crucial role in the participants' narratives. The dissatisfaction experienced manifested itself in a sense of detachment and alienation from school as a society of peers and adults. The conclusion of this study discusses different kinds of structure that can either support or hinder the need for satisfaction.

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Early school leaving; relatedness; frustration; indifference; dissatisfaction; detachment; self-determination theory; storied experience

## Introduction

While self-determination theory (SDT) shows clear benefits in terms of supporting needs, especially the need for autonomy in classroom settings (Filippello et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017), much less is known about need perceptions of students who are at risk of leaving school before graduating. Moreover, there is a gap in knowledge about perceived dissatisfaction, which is linked with indifference in need support, being a rather new concept on the continuum of need perceptions (Cheon et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2015). To widen our understanding of the reasons behind premature school leaving, it is important to explore processes and experiences linked with diminishing school motivation and engagement.

Self-determination theory postulates that human beings share an inherent tendency to seek the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that are basic nutrients for healthy development, motivation, and wellbeing (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Perceptions of the satisfaction level of each need have consequences according to how well the need is satisfied; high levels of perceived need satisfaction promote intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A low state of need satisfaction of one or more needs tends to lead to amotivation

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and maladaptive outcomes, such as substantial sources of need satisfaction, defensive and aggressive behavior, and avoiding environments in which needs are thwarted or poorly met (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). People who leave school prematurely have been, in SDT terms, amotivated towards school (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In Finland, the discontinuation rate in education is 5.9 per cent (Statistic Finland, 2021). However, there are groups of people among whom the discontinuation rate tends to be higher than among the general population, such as short-term prisoners (Kivivuori & Linderborg, 2009) and the Finnish Roma (Rajala & Blomerus, 2016), among others. These groups of people tend to be stigmatized, the Finnish Roma facing a special cultural prejudice as well (Berlin, 2015; Friman-Korpela, 2014; Roman, 2018). Vauhkonen et al. (2017) suggested that reasons behind early school leaving often include diverse and accumulating elements, such as problems with parenting and coping. Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the importance of relationships with other people, which can either foster or hinder school engagement (Nouwen & Clycq, 2019; Parviainen et al., 2021). Muhonen et al. (2016), and Pöysä et al. (2019) highlighted the quality of teacher–student relationships and the role of teachers in supporting students. Additionally, Fandrem et al. (2021) and Lyyra et al. (2016) suggested that loneliness and peer victimization are elements that can diminish school engagement.

Within the research body of SDT, issues related to school motivation and engagement have mostly been studied using quantitative methods, the findings showing benefits of students' perceptions of need support in the school environment (Ratelle & Duchesne, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Stroet et al., 2013). Ryan and Deci (2020) encouraged qualitative research approaches for deeper understanding of need perceptions and phenomena around them, especially in school settings. Furthermore, as each need can emerge on different levels of satisfaction, Bartholomew et al. (2011) proposed that, when examining negative experiences, it is important to include need thwarting and perceptions of frustration of each need to better understand need perceptions at the low end of motivational functioning. While early school leavers can be considered amotivated in relation to school, they may have more positive perceptions of other life domains. Accordingly, we believed it important to include all levels of experience and circumstance linked to relatedness in the present study to provide space for what the participants told us so as to also identify issues not following the presuppositions of the theoretical framework. The perspective of early school leavers can expand our knowledge of these research problems by providing insights into need perceptions among students within the process of leaving school. Furthermore, Granfelt (2017) suggested that a prison environment, where people are separated from their daily activities, provides a mental space for reflecting on one's past experiences. Therefore, we conducted a qualitative study using narrative interviews with Finnish early school leavers, who were imprisoned during the time of the interviews, to examine the participants' experiences of need satisfaction in different contexts (Pikkarainen et al., 2019, 2021). Here, we develop further our analysis of the data set. Focusing on the need for relatedness, we aim to identify aspects of need dissatisfaction and indifference, as well as dynamics between different need states, as expressed in the participants' narrative accounts.

### **Conceptual and ethical commitments of the study**

Narrative research approaches are based on the proposition that people shape and share their experiences by the telling of them and also a commitment to respect this kind of storied experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative accounts, produced through interviews, consist of the storied experiences of a group of participants with whom the interviewer has created a research relationship (Clandinin, 2013; Heikkinen, 2002). Following the conceptualizing of Dewey (1938/1997) and, later, Bruner (2004) and Clandinin (2013), we understand lived experience as a dynamic continuum shaped by former and present interactions with one's environment. As Clandinin (2013) highlights, a storied experience is a co-operative product of the conversational interaction between the teller and the listener. Accordingly, while

interpreting meanings identified in narrative accounts in a theoretical framework, the researcher needs to acknowledge the borderlines between presupposed, researcher-driven conceptualizing of phenomena and lived experience storied by people participating in the study. As suggested by Jonsen and Jehn (2009), we applied triangulation by using a theory, which in the present study is the concept of the three basic psychological needs as an organizing tool of the data.

Conducting a narrative study is an ethical act from the first steps of the research plan to the production of the research texts and their publication (Josselson, 2007). An ethical attitude of respect and care, as well as the principle of not harming the participants or the group they belong to, are the basic guidelines of the research practices and further use of the research texts (Josselson, 2007). While negotiating with the participants the meanings of what has been told, the researcher emphasizes the nature of the participant as a specialist on the issue at hand and posits herself as a listener and learner (Clandinin, 2013).

In the present study we used a theoretical framework provided by SDT, the research body of which mostly consists of quantitative studies (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Stroet et al., 2013). Following the conceptualization of Ryan and Deci (2000, 2017, 2020) and Vansteenkiste et al. (2020), we understand by relatedness a sense of belonging, being connected with other people, feeling significant to others, as well as a desire to be integrated with a social group or groups, either with people imminently present or with a group physically further away. Relatedness, as a basic psychological need, plays a crucial role in school motivation and engagement throughout the school years, as it is especially interwoven in the developmental tasks of school age, when skills needed for independent adulthood are learned in interaction with surrounding people (Ratelle & Duchesne, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, perceptions of relatedness play a role in support for other psychological needs, when need support is provided by other people (Ricard & Pelletier, 2016; Wood, 2016). Hence, we have also included in this article support, indifference, or thwarting of competence and autonomy when linked with interaction with other people.

While examining autonomy support, Cheon et al. (2019) proposed the existence of three distinguishable states of need satisfaction rather than two: frustration at the lowest end of need satisfaction and satisfaction at the highest, adding dissatisfaction in between these two levels of need satisfaction. Elements predicting these perceived experiences have been divided into three levels as well—need thwarting, indifference, and support for each need—from the low end towards the higher-level facilitators of need satisfaction (Cheon et al., 2019). Cheon et al. examined perceived dissatisfaction with autonomy using questionnaires for students to provide self-reported responses to indifference on the part of teachers, thus providing descriptions of the practical implications of manifestations of indifference and dissatisfaction. To identify the different aspects of circumstance, the background factors that enhanced or prohibited satisfaction of the need for relatedness, and in addition to identify aspects indicating indifference, we distinguished between circumstances as background settings and circumstances as experiences, as shown in Table 1. These descriptions, composed for the questionnaires, provided an operationalized view of the theoretical framework and enabled the identification of meanings resonating with the framework in the narrative accounts. While the narrative accounts provided insights into the kinds of experience the participants identified as individually relevant to their path out of school, the operationalized descriptions in the questionnaires enabled us to find matches between these two.

In SDT, structure is seen as a crucial element of facilitating a need-supporting environment and interaction, within which need satisfaction can emerge (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The research body emphasizes that good structure in educational settings consists of clearly informed expectations, consistency, and informational feedback that acknowledges effort, improvement, and mastery (Jang et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Structure is a crucial element of healthy development in other life domains too. Parenting and familial structure, within the cultural and societal environment, shape the quality of circumstances for children's experiences of need satisfaction (Ratelle et al., 2017, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, during the developmental age, when the children are dependent on their family, experiences of physical and



**Table 1.** Description of circumstances and experiences linked with the three basic psychological needs.

Circumstances	Experiences
Supporting Respect, care, and safety Informative, encouraging, and understated feedback Structure providing consistency in guidelines and expectations Listening to a person's perspective Acknowledging improvement and mastery	Satisfaction Sense of belonging, connection, and trust Feeling significant to others Experiences of warmth, bonding, and care
Indifferent Neglecting, ignoring Important others pay little or no attention to a person's needs Weak structure Important others ask a person to set aside his/her psychological needs	Dissatisfaction A sense of disregard A sense of detachment A sense of being detached from peers A sense of being insignificant to important others A sense of being ignored or neglected
Thwarting Controlling relationships, exclusion Non-existent structure, chaos Rejection Controlling behavior Suppressive or contradictory feedback Verbal and/or physical violence Leaving without care or support Abusive behavior	Frustration A sense of social exclusion A sense of hopelessness A sense of alienation A sense of helplessness A sense of loneliness A sense of coldness from important others Feeling distant from important others

Sources: Cheon et al. (2019), Costa et al. (2015), Ryan and Deci (2000, 2017, 2020), Van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2020), and Vansteenkiste et al. (2020).

psychological safety are crucial for healthy development, as well as trust in receiving care and need support for the three basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As Ratelle and Duchesne (2014) proposed, the developmental tasks of age shape the dynamics and manifestations of need perceptions, for instance in adolescent students' adjustment to school.

According to the SDT research literature, it can be presupposed that people who leave school prematurely have encountered need thwarting in school settings and experienced frustration of one or several of the basic psychological needs. However, what roles perceived dissatisfaction and circumstances shaped by indifference play in school disengagement, as well as how these experiences are shaped by earlier qualities of need perceptions, remain unknown. By using a narrative approach, we aim to widen our understanding of need frustration and dissatisfaction from the perspectives of people involved. Our research task is two-fold, as we focus on the concepts of indifference and dissatisfaction in relation to the need for relatedness. We aim to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What kind of circumstances and experiences did the participants identify as individually relevant concerning indifference and dissatisfaction with relatedness in their process of leaving school?
- (2) What examples of accumulation could be identified in relation to participants' experiences of relatedness?

### Participants, interviews, and data management

After obtaining a research license from the Ministry of Justice, Finland, the first author conducted the interviews between November 2015 and June 2017. They began with two pilot interviews, followed by interviews with 11 imprisoned participants, as described by Pikkarainen et al. (2021). Data analysis started during the co-operative interview process, when the interviewer discussed with the participants the issues and meanings described by them to establish, as far as possible, an accurate and mutual meaning of what had been said. Interim narrative accounts were negotiated with the participants, and they could make changes to the text, if they wanted to. This enabled an atmosphere of mutual trust and highlighted the participants' roles as experts on the issue. All participants' names were changed and names of places were replaced with general expressions.

We used ATLAS.ti 7 and ATLAS.ti 9 for managing the narrative data and created codes by applying manifestations of need perceptions, presented in Table 1 as a basis for key codes. The coding process produced a set of described circumstances and storied experiences for each code. When a storied experience or a described circumstance was linked with several needs, it was coded with all matching codes accordingly. Following this process, we found that most extracts coded as descriptions of competence or autonomy co-occurred with descriptions of relatedness. The narrative accounts provided illustrative descriptions of how the participants viewed their school time and what kind of experiences and circumstances they considered significant in their process of leaving school. As a result of the in-depth narrative interviewing process, we could identify participants' real-life experiences and find matches with the theoretical pre-assumptions. Furthermore, the storied experiences illustrated how different levels of need frustration were manifested during the participants' school years and how that affected their process of leaving school.

## Findings

The main topics in the narrative accounts were linked with indifference and thwarting of relatedness in the school context. Perceived levels of support for autonomy and competence included descriptions of people involved and interactions with them. The participants' need perceptions were strongly linked with interpersonal relationships. Illustrative scripts of how the storied experiences and circumstances were coded are presented in Table 2. An overview of the decade participants spent at school and descriptions of school arrangements and social relations described during the interviews have been published by Pikkarainen et al. (2021). In the current article, we focus on the participants' views on what they identified as individually relevant concerning experiences around relatedness.

### *Teachers' indifference*

In the present study, the teachers performed different roles in the narrative accounts of the participants. Need supportive and warm relationships with teachers were described as elements creating eagerness to go to school. Teachers who provided a need supporting structure and a sense of safety were described as good teachers. On the other hand, need thwarting manifested as external control without informative explanations; for example, creating situations in which a student's low level of achievement was publicly shamed, and suppressing talk, coloured by prejudice, about the minority culture of a student. Indifference emerged in the form of neglecting to provide support for students' learning difficulties, ignoring a need to intervene or a weak reaction to a student's increasing absence from school, as well as ignorance about a student's cultural background, with no attempt to learn more about it.

Siiri, a woman of approximately 30 years of age, representing the Finnish ethnic majority, talked about a neglected learning difficulty that made her try to avoid reading because others would be listening:

I remember language lessons, Finnish, English and Swedish lessons, we had to read out loud a bit of text. I was always hoping that the lesson would end before it was my turn. I always tried to avoid those situations. No one paid attention to it, only myself. I had learned properly how to read quite late, in the third grade. My mom told me that she noticed that I have dyslexia, but it was never given any attention during my school time.

Later, in vocational school, she said that she had been invisible to teachers, that is, nice and quiet. In the third year there, she had started to use drugs, even in school, and to be absent more and more frequently, often explaining her absences beforehand. She said that the teachers did not notice or react in any way. Pregnancy ended Siiri's attendance at vocational school, and during the interview, several years later, she was still pondering on whether she could complete her studies.

**Table 2.** Circumstances in the background of need perceptions and experiences storied by participants—examples from the narrative data.

Supporting	Satisfaction
Sanna "I had a good home and a good family. I can't blame them for anything."	Saara "The school assistant, her persistence with me, was that why I got along with her so well? Maybe I tested her a little, how much she would stand."
Saara "I think I got enough support at school. I wasn't in normal classes; I was placed in a youth home. It was different, less kids in a class."	"When she encouraged me, said that I can do it, I felt that I really will be able to do it! Small things, they mean so much!"
Johanna "When she [the teacher] noticed that I hadn't raised my hand for a long time, she would ask me, 'Johanna, what do you think of this?'"	Aaro "If you feel safe, it's easy to do things; you don't need to use energy being alert all the time."
Indifferent	Dissatisfaction
Iiro "There was not an actual care-keeper; I was managing things quite a lot on my own."	Tuomas "I didn't spend leisure time with my classmates. They were so childish. I spent my time with a little bit older people."
Siiri "I had been quiet and harmless for two years [in vocational school], so they didn't pay much attention. I invented good reasons for absences and later on I often went to school high on drugs. The teachers didn't notice it at all."	Tuomas "There was nothing to do in school. It was boring. I didn't learn a thing. There was nothing but sitting. I found much more to do elsewhere."
Sanna "The teacher, he was in the habit of showing off; he kind of needed to gain authority and he always wanted that his word was the law."	Siiri: "I was kind of invisible to teachers." Markus: "I think they didn't focus on how to make me interested in school. It might have [interested me] if I had been in a normal class. They just threw me among the special kids, in the special class."
Thwarting	Frustration
Sanna "I remember the first Swedish lesson, when the teacher came in: 'I love children and the children love me. I have a whole dozen of them and everything is done as I say.' When someone was slow in learning, he singled out that child and asked again and again. He did it to me the very first day and after that, I didn't speak a single word of Swedish."	Johanna "Especially with my own child I realized that it's not the school. It's the being alone, the reason that I couldn't stand it. Because I didn't have even friends, nothing interested me."
Markus: "The headmaster said, 'Enough of you, no need to come back!'"	Johanna "From a child's point of view, you are ashamed of being alone, but you just try to show that you are not lonely. But then you really are so lonely anyway." Saara: "The sense of being an outsider, that's how I felt in my childhood [among peers in elementary school]." Sanna "I hate when someone is singled out. She may have some real problems with learning, but she is singled out and made to seem even more stupid than she is, not even given an opportunity to learn. You get kind of locked up, even if you would want to learn you cannot. I hated it, and I couldn't even hide it; if nothing else, you could see it in my eyes." Johanna: "If a child can hate an adult, I did hate him [the teacher]. He used such a tone of voice to me and used to say that you [the Finnish Roma] usually don't do homework, don't much go to school."

### ***Dissatisfaction and frustration within peer relations***

Lack of friendships with peers in the school environment detached the participants from school society. Five of the participants said that they had moved to a new school at least twice during their comprehensive school years. Reino, a male participant in his forties, stated that he and his siblings were bullied as a result of their family's Roma background. He described how he felt about moving to a new school:

During the breaks, we were in the same yard with the bigger kids, I told the teacher [about bullying] but they didn't stop. Once a teacher took hold of the back of my neck and he shouted at me. I was shy, and I was always

afraid of that teacher. We were placed in a small group with my siblings, and it was better; I didn't need to fear the teacher or the other kids. But then we had to move to another city, and it started all over again. It wasn't nice.

Cultural prejudice manifested as bullying, but Reino also described a helpful intervention by the school staff. The help was only temporary, though, due to moving to another school again. Reino emphasized also that the reason for being bullied was not only prejudice against Finnish Roma but also being the only one (with his siblings) who somehow differed from the others in the school.

Being interested in different issues from classmates also limited friendships and a sense of belonging to the peer group at school. Two of the participants had been coached for competitive sports during their school years. Sanna, a female participant in her forties, representing the Finnish ethnic majority, talked about her school time and sporting activities:

I was one of the top athletes in Finland when I was young. I had the sport, I lived kind of in my own world, so that the school class didn't interest me at all. I had the sport and the school had a side role. I had more friends among sports. At school I was kind of different. I think the others were so spoiled, they spent an hour to prepare their make-up in the morning. And I had started with training at six and slept in the school bus. I didn't bother to do any make-up.

The sense of being different from one's peers was also expressed by Tuomas, a 40-year-old male participant representing the Finnish ethnic majority: "Some [students] find it difficult to learn, but I didn't. Some are bullied, but I never was bullied or bullied someone myself. I have just been kind of odd in my own way."

### ***Accumulating need frustration intertwined with indifference***

Accumulating need thwarting circumstances were identified both generally and as obstacles accumulating from particular circumstances (poverty, belonging to a stigmatized minority group, learning difficulties at school, weak parental care). Illustrating the former, cultural prejudice stigmatizing the Finnish Roma was described as a life condition, the manifestations of which emerged in the school context as rejection by peers and negative attitudes in the form of suppressing comments made by some teachers. Johanna, a female participant in her early thirties who came from a Finnish Roma background, described her school situation and experiences:

During the third grade, the classmates started to say that they cannot hang out with a gypsy, that their parents wouldn't let them. I was not allowed to visit anyone anymore, because I was a gypsy. One teacher was kind of, what I remember from a child's perspective, that he didn't like gypsies. I felt he was a disgusting adult; I didn't like him at all. His behavior, the way he talked to me, "You are not in the habit of going to school anyway, or doing homework," and things like that. At some point I just didn't do any homework anymore. Nobody told me one can stay out of school, but at some point, I just stopped going. My parents didn't know that I didn't go to school. I just stayed somewhere outdoors, played that I was sleeping in a bus stop or something. I went back home after school hours. At school they didn't know where I was.

Johanna described her mother's reaction when she learned that Johanna did not show up at school: "My mother tried to tell me to go to school, but I didn't. It wasn't such a big thing [in our family], school." Johanna said that her mother had not completed school either. Johanna also said that, because Finnish Roma have low expectations of gaining a job in the labour market, her family did not perceive education as a route to a better future and, as such, deemed it to be not worth bothering with.

The teacher's outspoken prejudice combined with a weak educational tradition within Johanna's family gave space for Johanna to stay at home rather than persist with school. The situation also indicates indifference on the part of the adults: neither the parents nor the school personnel knew where a third grader was during school hours. Johanna was allowed to stay at home, participating in household work and taking care of her younger siblings. During the fourth and fifth grades, Johanna said she went to school only occasionally and, after that, never again.

### ***Experienced need frustration shaping the participant's attitude in another context***

Kaisa, a female participant in her early thirties, representing the Finnish ethnic majority, experienced physical abuse, and the threat of it, at the hands of her father, who also followed a disturbed parenting pattern and provided inadequate care. She described the consequences of domestic violence and the coping strategies she had created in response. Her experience also included being a “daddy’s girl” and her father coaching her in competitive skiing during elementary school. Their relationship thus involved two conflicting elements. Kaisa described the consequences of domestic violence on her relationships with her classmates:

Maybe it’s the fear at home, the fact that you cannot rebel against your own father, that you won’t let others do it to you, so that you try to keep the control [of others], so that you just have to show that you cannot be bossed around.

Later in the interview, Kaisa described how the need to dominate classmates had manifested itself in her case:

When someone said that she wouldn’t dare to do something, I was like, I will do it then. Everything, from shoplifting to all other things. I said to others that they are so sissy. I was terrible to them. The other kids, they mostly obeyed me, they were so different from me, more sensitive than me, from happy families. They didn’t know a thing of the evil world.

Kasia did not share her experience of domestic violence with her peers at school. Kaisa said she had a feeling that her peers would not have understood her if she had told them about her experiences: “I somewhat knew their family lives, and no others had this, they had everything okay. So, if I had told that my dad beats us and does it frequently, they would have been so confused.”

Not being able to share her experiences and her need to dominate peer relations created and maintained a distance between Kaisa and her schoolmates. Additionally, the situation meant that Kaisa’s mind was occupied with things other than studying and learning.

### ***Cultural aspects as elements promoting need thwarting***

Indifference to the participants’ cultural background manifested as a lack of attempts by teachers to try to learn about and understand cultural habits that shaped the participants’ daily lives. On the other hand, the participants talked about their own sense of being different from their peers and even being ashamed of their familial background. Ritva, a female participant from a Finnish Roma family, described her conflicting perceptions of her familial culture and the majority culture of the school environment:

At the age of eleven to thirteen I went through my own rebellion, when you are ashamed to say you are a gypsy and all that. You are ashamed to take friends to your home because of the culture and the difference; it’s such a different view.

Transition from adolescence to adulthood was described by the Roma participants in a way that indicated maturing and taking responsibility for one’s own family at a relatively early age. At the same time, the choice to follow the cultural habits of the Finnish Roma was realized, including wearing cultural clothing and becoming an adult member of the extended family. Reino talked about his transition to adulthood, after which he no longer attended school:

Interviewer: You talked about your decision not to go to school anymore. How did it happen?

Reino: Ay, I had other things to do. With adults, of course. I went to a visit in another city, with relatives. A Roma boy, at that age, he needs to know all the Roma things. The boy wears this kind of dark trousers, at about the age of 13, as I did. At 15 he is kind of an adult, even though he is not, but in certain issues he is.

Regarding the reaction of his parents to his leaving school, Reino said that his parents tried to tell him to go to school. The school personnel attempted to persuade him to persist in school. Instead of

continuing at school, like his siblings, Reino started a family of his own at the age of fifteen. In line with Reino's observations, all female Finnish Roma participants talked about starting their own families as teenagers, some before the age of 16, which added to the difficulty of persisting at school.

Ignorance of the habits of Finnish Roma families was described especially by Saara, a female participant in her twenties. When she was six years old, she moved with her Finnish Roma mother and siblings into an area that was mostly inhabited by another Finnish minority in addition to the main population. Saara told about her sense of being an outsider within a cultural setting different from her familial culture:

It would be important for the teacher to know something about the habits, to understand, so that if there is not a Roma assistant or a teacher, there would be some knowledge. I wish I would have had things like that when I was at school. They didn't know a thing of my culture; there was the other minority. And you start to ponder, where you belong to. The sense of being an outsider was quite crucial in my childhood.

### ***Accumulating indifference and need thwarting leading to maladaptive activities***

The fact that the participants had committed crimes indicates that they might have participated in maladaptive activities at some point in their youth. Five of the participants talked about being involved in drug abuse or being addicted to drugs. Tuomas, mentioned earlier, described the turning point in his life, shaped by drugs: "During elementary school I went to school, but I wasn't keen on studying, it was just 'have to' to me. When I started junior high, I was hooked on heroine, when I was 13."

After that, Tuomas was placed in a special class. He described his attitude to school as being that he didn't see any point in studying because all he needed to know, he learned somewhere else. When asked what would have been interesting to learn in school, he answered that it might have been nice to learn how to make drugs. He described a period of drug use at school as a good period to be there: "Well, in a good mood, it was easy to be there!" When drugs were not available, Tuomas said that he couldn't bear to go to school.

David, a 20-year-old male participant from a Finnish Roma background, said that he started "to do bad things" when his absences from school increased during the third grade. He described his experience of the combination of amphetamine and ADHD. He underlined that he was not an addict but had used drugs:

Other people, with no ADHD, they get such an energy from speed [stimulant], but me, I'm not talking all the time, I can focus on things, and I notice things. Something must be wrong, when amphetamine makes me calm down.

Both Tuomas and David, as well as three other participants, had been taken into care by childcare authorities. This indicates a weak parenting structure as an indifferent or need thwarting general level circumstance, shaping the development of the participants during their childhood.

### ***Between supporting and indifferent circumstances***

Need-supporting circumstances and need satisfaction created counter effects that temporarily overpowered the negative impacts of dissatisfaction and frustration on motivation to attend school. A shared positive element described by the participants, was the circumstance in which a teacher had time for them as students. Furthermore, a teacher's sense of humor and an informal and friendly way of communicating with students were described as encouraging and inviting in terms of engaging with schoolwork. Teachers who could explain issues in a clear way and practiced equality were described as good teachers. Kaisa, the participant who had experienced domestic violence, described a teacher she labelled a good one: "He could explain things in such a clear way, so that even I could understand."

Johanna talked about her relationship with her peers, which had been shaped by cultural prejudice towards the Finnish Roma. She had been rejected by them as a result of their own parents'

outspoken prejudices. In between disappointments, she also had an encouraging experience of friendship: “I remember a girl who had been a good friend of mine for a couple of months, a new girl in the school. I went eagerly to school, because I knew she was my friend.”

Siiri, who described feeling invisible to teachers, talked about the importance of friends during elementary school: “We disturbed the others; the studying was not so interesting for me. We were often kept after school because of that. The friends were much more important than the actual schoolwork.” While her motivation to attend school was the opportunity to be with friends, actual schoolwork had a marginal role.

### **Summary of findings**

Indifference on the part of important others in the school environment was reflected in dissatisfaction and diminishing interest in school tasks. Accumulation of dissatisfaction and need frustration at a general level distracted the participants from studying, making them indifferent to educational tasks. Moreover, the participants talked about a sense of detachment from people involved in school society. The detachment resulted from various sources: cultural prejudice, being interested in different issues compared to their peers, a sense of not being understood by peers or school personnel, inner burdens not shareable with people in school, and a sense of simply being kind of odd compared to one’s peers. However, in addition to negative experiences, we identified other kinds of interest outside the educational setting that overpowered school in the lives of the participants, such as starting a family, pregnancy, and a sporting career.

### **Discussion**

Detachment from people within the school context was a shared experience in participants’ process of removing themselves from school. When relationships with important others had been shaped by indifference or thwarting rather than need support, the participants described experiences that indicated a weak sense of belonging with people in the school environment. Regardless of gender, age, and cultural background, the participants described the sense of being an outsider in the school society as an important element during their removal process. This alienation was described as experiences of loneliness, a sense of being rejected or targeted by prejudice, a lack of acceptance, understanding or respect, and the lack of a possibility of sharing one’s feelings with people within the school society.

Indifference and experiences of dissatisfaction could be identified in two separate ways. As predicted, based on the SDT research body, the participants talked about experiences of dissatisfaction and frustration related to educational settings: loneliness, a sense of being ignored, neglected or rejected, and a sense of not being respected. In addition, the participants reported that they themselves were indifferent to school tasks. As a predictor of reported indifference to school we identified low levels of satisfaction of the need for relatedness in both societal and familial contexts. These circumstances created a state of mind in which coping with obstacles outside school tasks was a major concern of the participants and the importance of school diminished. This created an accumulating transfer effect, in which a past negative experience shaped a further experience, affecting the participants’ expectations, attitudes, and behavior in school settings. Adding to the findings of Cheon et al. (2019), we suggest that dissatisfaction perceived in a school setting might be shaped by students’ past negative experiences. This may create an accumulating effect, which makes these students more prone to react with dissatisfaction when facing indifference on the part of teachers or other school staff than an average student would be.

From the perspective of their life situation and the developmental age of the participants, the choice to leave school can be seen as meaningful for them; that is, because they did not perceive need satisfaction in the school environment, it became meaningless to them. A lack of connecting experiences within the school society gave space for and invited the participants to seek satisfaction of the need for relatedness elsewhere, out of school. The need for relatedness was involved in most

of the descriptions of circumstances and experiences. This may seem to contradict the suggestion of Yu (2019) regarding the greater importance of perceived competence compared to other needs in educational settings. Furthermore, the research body of SDT highlights the importance of autonomy support to students' motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020, among others). However, the participants in the present study may have reacted to feedback from other people in a more sensitive way than the average student as a result of their past dissatisfaction or frustration with fulfilment of the need for relatedness. Moreover, the participants did not report high expectations of educational achievement, if any at all, and hence may not have paid attention to perceptions of competence. Additionally, support, indifference, or thwarting of the need for autonomy and competence included interaction with teachers, parents, or peers. Consequently, the findings highlight the importance of satisfaction of all the psychological needs for a successful school path. However, as supporting a need included elements of relatedness, experienced support level of each need was intertwined with the satisfaction level of relatedness.

Structure has been noted as a crucial element of need support and healthy development too (Jang et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Based on the present study, structure can be seen from multiple perspectives. While a good structure is seen as a safe and predictable environment, the experiences of the participants indicate a weak structure or lack of structure, called chaos by Vansteenkiste et al. (2020). A general indifference to needs and weakness of structure created a space and invited the participants to turn to other sources of structure as a need supportive element, when parenting and school did not meet their needs. These kinds of alternative structure either provided elements for a good life without completing school, when the participants could choose taking a job, or created an externally controlled, maladaptive, and need-thwarting lifestyle, as in the case of drug addiction. The participants who had been taken into care lived through a fundamental change of structure: from a situation indicating structural chaos to an institutionally-defined structure that provided need support within the resources provided by childcare professionals.

The fact that the interviewer was also the interpreter of the data can be seen as a limitation of this study, as the whole process was shaped by the same researcher. On the other hand, the narrative interpretation, which started during the interviewing process, had an important role in identifying the meanings of the feelings and experiences described by the participants and, hence, also in choosing categories for coded extracts. Furthermore, the participants represented expertise on the issue, having lived through the process of leaving school prematurely, as well as experiencing tough circumstances and confronting obstacles. Hence, understanding the meanings of their observations requires taking a look at the participants' backgrounds, descriptions of which could be provided here only in a shortened version. Additionally, a deeper look into the triangulation process might have provided a broader understanding of the data.

The results of the present study invite future investigation of the borderlines between the concepts of indifference and thwarting, as well as the experiences of dissatisfaction and frustration, among the SDT research body. The dynamic interplay of need perceptions, as well as their accumulating and transferring effects, provide interesting avenues for research. Different forms and qualities of structure, as facilitating elements of need support, would also be interesting issues for future studies. Furthermore, quantitative studies among the research body of SDT might benefit from the findings of the present study when further developing the questionnaires investigating need perceptions; for example, by including aspects of past experiences and life circumstances of the participants in the research plan.

## Conclusions

According to the findings of this study, the participants highlighted the lack of a sense of belonging to the school community and a lack of being accepted and respected by teachers and peers during their path out of school. We concluded that accumulation of negative experiences, and the circumstances related to them, made the participants more sensitive to further indifferent or thwarting



circumstances and hence more prone to a sense of dissatisfaction and frustration regarding their needs than they might have been with a more positive background. The findings invite educators to apply pedagogies that enhance the support needed to create a sense of belonging within the school environment for every student, as well as strategies and programs preventing negative behavior such as bullying. In addition, concerning the field of children's welfare, it is important to co-operate with families and support parenting structures beneficial to children's development. For policy makers, in terms of SDT, need support can be operationalized by providing schools with enough time and personnel to enhance the quality of communication and childcare professionals with sufficient resources. From the perspective of a student at risk of leaving school, lack of such time, personnel, and resources indicates indifference, even need thwarting, on the part of society.

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