

Early school leaving in the care population – differences by country of origin

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Abstract

In many Western countries, children in immigrant families are considered at increased risk of experiencing social problems and marginalisation and are often overrepresented in the care population. How these children fare in the educational system is crucial for their future adult life. International research over several decades has shown that many child welfare clients quit school prematurely, but less is known about their educational progress by country of origin. Based on a large-scale longitudinal study from Norway, this article examines early school leaving between ethnic minority groups and the ethnic majority in the child welfare population. The results show substantial differences in early school leaving by country of origin, even when adjusted for any differences by gender, school grades and parental educational level. The lowest rate of early school leaving was found among youths originating from Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Pakistan, while youths originating from Afghanistan, South America, Morocco, Western countries and Norway (i.e. the ethnic majority) had the highest rate of early school leaving.

Key words: high school, drop out, immigrants, child welfare clients

1. Introduction

Several decades of international research have shown that many child welfare clients enter adulthood with a low level of education. Not only do they seldom earn a higher educational diploma (Cheung & Heath, 1994; Jackson & Cameron, 2011), but most are unsuccessful in completing upper secondary school (Clausen & Kristofersen, 2008; Olsen, Egelund, & Lausten, 2011; Vinnerljung, Öman, & Gunnarson, 2005).

Failure to complete upper secondary education has long been related to a high risk of social, health and income problems as adults (Falch & Nyhus, 2009; Hammarström & Janlert, 2002), and youths who leave school without obtaining a qualification that is equivalent to upper secondary school are described as 'early school leavers' by the European Union (EU, 2011). Overall, the considerable research on early school leavers and factors related to unsuccessful completion of upper secondary school have established that early school leaving is highly related to a youth's gender and school grades as well as his/her family background, such as social class and immigrant status (Dupéré et al., 2015; Lamb & Markussen, 2011; Rumberger, 2011). However, this body of knowledge has seldom been considered in studies of early school leaving in the care population.

Although the poor educational records of the child welfare population have been common knowledge for years and described in several quantitative studies (Cheung & Heath, 1994; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Vinnerljung et al., 2005), most previous research studies have consisted of small-scale, qualitative studies, which are often written from a social care perspective (Jackson & Cameron,

2011) that rarely analyses early school leaving in the care population in relation to gender, school grades and family background. Therefore, this article considers these insights when analysing the results of a large-scale, longitudinal study on early school leaving in the child welfare population. This study emphasises the differences in early school leaving between ethnic groups, including the ethnic majority in the child welfare population, and examines the importance of gender, school grades and parental educational level as markers of a youth's social class background regarding early school leaving. Youths who had not enrolled in either the third year of upper secondary education or training by the age of 20 were considered early school leavers. The data for this study were drawn from Norwegian population data on child welfare clients who were born between 1988 and 1992.

2. Previous Research and Research Questions

The few available quantitative studies that address child welfare clients' poor educational levels have shown a high risk of early school leaving among the following: children in care who originated from families with low education levels (Vinnerljung et al., 2005), children who have been placed in care before their teens (Cheung & Heath, 1994; Vinnerljung et al., 2005) and child welfare clients with weak school performances (Dæhlen, 2015). Consequently, in the following analyses, we adjust for parental educational level, the point at which the family first received help from child welfare services and school grades. Although the disproportionate representation of (some) ethnic minority groups in child welfare services has been known for several years (e.g. Fluke, Yuan, Hedderson, & Curtis, 2003; Staer & Bjørknes, 2015), less is known about differences in educational attainment in the care population by country of origin.

Despite this gap in the literature, some relevant findings on the education of immigrants in general are notable. Evidence from Western countries has shown an educational disadvantage among youths living in families that emigrated from less developed countries in Western Asia, Central and South America, North Africa and Oceania. In addition, studies have shown that children from India and China outperform the native majority population (Heath, Rothon, & Kilpi, 2008). Consequently, previous research has shown both educational disadvantages and advantages, depending on the immigrant's background.

Many plausible processes have been offered to explain the mechanisms behind differences in educational attainment by country of origin. The first relates to social class differences in educational attainment and the evidence of an overrepresentation of school failure among children from families with low socioeconomic positions, which are typical in immigrant populations. Explaining educational inequality by differences in parents' socioeconomic positions has, in this research tradition (i.e. the educational stratification research tradition) primarily been explained by two basic processes: (1)

inequalities in school performances and (2) inequalities in educational choices at given performance levels (these effects are commonly called primary and secondary effects, respectively, see Boudon, 1974). Per these effects, the possibility of acquiring skills that are appreciated by the school system is lower in groups that originate from lower social class strata. Consequently, children who originate from low-social class families will perform poorly in school and will be less likely to either continue their education or pass required exams (i.e. primary effects). In addition, children from low-social class families consider the costs high and feel that the benefits of continuing their education (secondary effects) are few. Differences in educational attainment by country of origin are explained by differences in social class background and thus by differences in school performances and educational choices.

The second plausible mechanism relates to cultural differences in immigrant groups. The hypothesis of 'oppositional cultures', which was developed by (Ogbu, 1992), assumes that some immigrants underachieve in school with the intention of protesting against the middle-class community (Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011). This work by Ogbu has parallels with work on labour class 'lads' by Willis (1977, see also [Levinson, 1992]). Ogbu (1992) divided immigrants into different groups and argued that involuntary immigrants, which in the United States (US) is exemplified by American Indians and Black Americans, differ from other immigrants and interpret education as harmful to both their social identity and self-worth. As a consequence, some involuntary immigrants are disengaged in school and perform poorly.

However, several studies have shown that some ethnic minorities do well in school (for a review, see Heath & Brinbaum, 2007) and that immigrants are highly motivated. This is supported by findings of a Swedish study, where the authors used the distinction between primary and secondary effects to explain any remaining differences in educational attainment among second-generation immigrants after adjusting for parents' socioeconomic positions (Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011). In parallel to arguments that children in the lower social class strata are raised in a home environment that is disadvantageous to school performance, Jonsson and Rudolphi (2011) argued that being raised in families where the parents are not fluent in the new country's language is most likely a disadvantage as well. Jonsson and Rudolphi (2011) also argued that immigrants might consider the costs high and the benefits of education low due to experiences of discrimination and low earnings among immigrant populations. However, it could be reversed; if staying in school is the only alternative to being unemployed, an anticipation of discrimination in the labour market might cause a greater investment in education. The results show that, after considering prior school achievements and parental resources, some groups have higher continuation rates in the academic track of secondary education than the majority, which is explained by high educational ambitions (secondary effects).

This article aims to extend our knowledge of the educational disadvantages in the child welfare population; we cannot assume that we will find the same patterns as those found in the aforementioned studies. For (some groups of) immigrants, it seems reasonable to assume that the care situation is caused by an inability to integrate into the new country and is a marker of their differences from other immigrants. For example, child welfare measures might have to be initiated due to problems related to experiences of war, trauma and distress. Consequently, immigrants in the care population might face a double educational disadvantage, which suppresses any 'drive' and/or higher ability than what is seen in non-immigrants.

3. The Norwegian Context

3.1 Immigration

Compared to other European countries, migration into Norway is a relatively new phenomenon. Immigrants first entered Norway in the late 1960s. This was mainly due to needs in the labour market but also because other European countries had heightened their immigration restrictions (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008). Labour workers, most of whom were men from Pakistan, Turkey and Morocco, were the first group to enter Norway, and they were primarily employed in both the industry and service sectors. Their motivation to migrate was to support their families via better wages than those available in their home countries. The intention of both the migrants and the Norwegian government was that their stay in Norway would be temporary. However, in 1975, the Parliament endorsed a temporary immigration stop, which became a permanent ban in 1981. Because the immigration stop's actions made it difficult for immigrants to travel between Norway and their countries of origin, many settled permanently in Norway. Consequently, family reunification became the second phase in Norwegian migration history. The third phase, which occurred in the late 1970s, involved asylum-seekers who were escaping from countries of war and conflict (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008). Today, people from European Economic Area (EEA) countries can obtain residence and a work permit in Norway. Following enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007, Norway experienced an increase in migration, especially from Poland and the Baltic countries.

A particularly vulnerably group of migrants is youth in their teens who are originating from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, Somalia and Morocco and arriving in Norway alone as asylum seekers; they are known as 'unaccompanied minor asylum seekers'. Before 2007, immigration authorities cared for all unaccompanied minor refugees and asylum seekers. Since then, immigration authorities have cared for unaccompanied minor refugees and asylum seekers aged 15–18 years, while youths

younger than 15 are, by law, under the protection of child welfare authorities. Between 2010 and 2016, 2,020 unaccompanied minors—mostly boys— arrived in Norway. These young boys were housed in reception centres, which became an unstable situation that lasted several years. For many, their future in Norway is uncertain; they are often not granted a permanent residence permit and therefore must leave Norway when they turn 18.

Depending on their time spent in Norway, the reason for their migration and the ways in which their processes of migration and integration progress, immigrant youths likely face greater challenges than native youths do (Liden, 2017; Skytte, 2008) because they have less schooling, weaker Norwegian language skills, transnational family relations and obligations and experiences of war and trauma. Youth with backgrounds from countries with war and conflicts, such as Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq, might have experienced severe violence and killings, and they have likely lost family members as well as their security. Such experiences would have undoubtedly caused them stress and trauma, which might easily influence their educational progress (Varvin, 2015). Young unaccompanied minors often both miss and worry about family and friends who were left behind, and they might have social and economic responsibilities regarding their siblings and/or parents (Eide, 2012; Liden, 2017).

In 2017, immigrants and Norwegians born to immigrant parents (i.e. first- and second-generation immigrants, respectively) constituted 17% of the population. A comparison with 1970, when only 1.3% of the population in Norway had immigrant backgrounds (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008: 179), shows how quickly the immigrant population in Norway increased. At present, immigrants from Poland, Lithuania and Sweden constitute the three largest first-generation immigrant groups in Norway, while Pakistan, Somalia and Poland constitute the three largest second-generation immigrant groups (Statistics Norway, 2017b).

3.2 Child Welfare System

The Norwegian welfare state is characterised as both child oriented and family friendly (Gilbert, 1997; Skivenes, 2011). Universal social and political rights, which are fundamental principles of the Norwegian welfare state, ensure that all citizens have the same civil rights and duties. The rights and welfare of children are central to the fundamental principles, and this is reflected in a substantial and broad approach concerning how children's and adolescents' needs are facilitated by the state (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Skivenes, 2011). This approach places importance on education, health and a safe childhood for all children as well as emphasises preventive work, family support and a high degree of in-home interventions and voluntary out-of-home placement.

Child welfare authorities in Norway are required by law to ensure that children who are living under circumstances that are harmful to their health and development are provided with the

necessary help and care. This is in contrast to care systems that are more child protection orientated and described by late intervention and often involuntary out-of-home placements (Gilbert, 1997). The high portion of children receiving voluntary assistance underlines this distinction; in 2016, approximately 81% received voluntary assistance, while 19% received involuntary measures (Statistics Norway, 2017a).

Consequently, the child welfare system's mandate not only protects children from unhealthy living conditions but also ensures and supports both development and growth (Skivenes, 2011). In the last few decades, poverty has been increasing in Norway, and an increasing number of children have grown up in low-income families (Fløtten & Skevik, 2014; Sandbæk & Pedersen, 2010). In addition to lower living standards and the absence of certain material goods, many youths who are living in poverty experience marginalisation and/or social isolation because their economic situation can limit their participation in various social arenas (Fløtten, 2009). For many, this might provide fewer opportunities to either participate in recreational activities or establish social relationships with other adolescents, which again might influence their integration, participation and potential in school. More than half of all children living in poverty in Norway have immigrant backgrounds (Dzamarija, 2016; Kirkeberg & Epland, 2016), which makes immigrant youth even more vulnerable to the consequences of poverty.

Almost 4% of all children younger than 19 receive help from Norwegian child welfare services (Backe-Hansen, Madsen, Kristofersen, & Hvinden, 2014). Child welfare assistance is more often given to families with low educational levels and/or low-social class backgrounds (Berridge, 2007), is given somewhat more to boys than girls (Backe-Hansen et al., 2014) and the number of child welfare clients with an immigrant background is increasing (Kalve & Dyrhaug, 2011). In 2015, approximately 23% of all child welfare clients had an immigrant background (i.e. they were either born abroad or both parents were born abroad) (Bufdir, 2016). Per out-of-home placement statistics, an insignificant difference exists between immigrants and native Norwegians. The overrepresentation of assistance to immigrants is connected to in-home initiatives and to needs that relate to compensation for poverty and counselling (Berg et al., 2017; Skivenes, 2015).

3.3 Educational System

Compulsory school in Norway consists of 10 years of schooling—7 years in primary school and 3 years of lower secondary school. No one fails lower secondary school, and everyone has a statutory right to attend upper secondary school, irrespective of their grades and qualifications in lower secondary school. Upper secondary school is free of charge. More than 95% (Hernes, 2010) of students continue directly from lower to upper secondary school. However, approximately 3 out of every 10 students leave school prematurely, and the dropout rate reaches its highest after the

second year of schooling (Markussen, 2016). In Norway, pupils who have not completed upper secondary school within five years after they started (aged 21) are described as early school leavers. However, descriptions of early school leavers differ. For instance, in the EU, early school leavers are those aged 18–24 who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in either education or training (EU, 2011). In the present study, school leaving refers to those who failed to start the last year of upper secondary school in the school year in which they turned 20 years old (i.e. they are unable to complete upper secondary school by the age of 21). Upper secondary school consists of one academic track and one vocational track, both of which take three years of schooling/training. However, the vocational track also includes periods of apprenticeship in enterprises. The typical progress in the vocational track is two years of school followed by two years of apprenticeship, where the latter is divided between one year of training and one year of productive work for the training enterprise.

We measured school leaving as not having started the third school year by the age of 20 for two reasons: (1) The drop-out rate is relatively low after entering the third school year; and (2) the youngest birth cohort turned 20 years old in 2012, which was the latest available educational record.

4. Data and Methods

The present study is part of the project *Upper secondary education and training in the child welfare population*. The data in this project were obtained from public registers of Statistics Norway and comprise all child welfare clients who received assistance during at least one year from 1993 to 2009. The database provided information about the child welfare client's sex, birth year, area/country of origin and parental educational level. In addition, each individual was linked to the National Database of Education using a personal identification number, which provides information on educational progress from the beginning of 2000 until 2012. In the present study, we limited our study population to five birth cohorts (1988–1992).

4.1 Dependent Variable

One dependent variable was constructed to determine whether the youth had enrolled in the final year of upper secondary school before the year (s)he turned 21 years old. The variable was dummy coded as follows: 1 = early school leaver; 0 = not early school leaver.

4.2 Independent Variable

This study used the following six independent variables.

Area/country origin. The database includes information about the youths' and/or the parents' background countries. Youths with two parents who had originated from countries outside Norway were categorised as ethnic minorities. If one of the parents was born in a Western country and the other was born in a country outside Western countries (e.g. Eastern Europe, Asia or Africa), the youth was categorised as originating from a Western country. If the parents were from different countries outside Western countries, the mother's country background was used. The youths' background countries were coded as 15 dummy variables (see Table 1) in addition to their native background (i.e. Norwegian).

Sex. Sex was dummy coded as 0 = boys and 1 = girls.

Parental educational level. Parental education was the highest level attained by either parent. Four dummy variables were constructed (Unknown, Compulsory school or less, Upper secondary school and Higher education).

School failure. In the analyses, we examined information about school failure by including the youths' school grades from compulsory school (i.e. lower secondary school). When finishing compulsory school, students are given grades in 13 different subjects on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (= lowest) to 6 (= highest). Based on the means of all 13 grades, a grade variable was constructed. Youths who had achieved poorly, corresponding to the poorest 10% of performers, were considered school failures. Not all students obtained grades in every subject; thus, if information was missing, the mean grade was calculated based on the grades that were given. However, if the students missed grades in more than half of the subjects, their application for upper secondary school followed other rules than for students with grades in at least half of the subjects. These students were likely to be a heterogenic group of students who probably struggled with their school tasks. Consequently, three dummy variables were constructed (Not school failure, Lowest 10% and Missing).

Point of time when given child welfare interventions. One dummy variable was constructed based on whether child welfare measures were given for the first time either after the teens (= 0) or before the teens (=1).

Birth year. Five variables were constructed based on the youths' birth years (1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 or 1992).

4.3 Methods

The statistical analyses included descriptive statistics and a logistic regression model. Results from the logistic regression model were estimated as average marginal effects (AME), and Wald tests were conducted to examine whether the estimates were statistically different from zero.

5. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for youths with immigrant and native backgrounds. The results show that approximately 50% had not enrolled in the third school year before turning 21 years old; thus, they were considered early school leavers (49% had immigrant backgrounds and 51% had native backgrounds).

Table 1 about here

Regarding the characteristics of the two groups of youths, the results show relatively small differences. The immigrant group comprised a statistically significant lower share of girls than the native group, but only by two percentage points. The results also show that the parental educational level differed somewhat between the two groups. In the native group, 28% of youths had originated from families with a compulsory school education compared to 30% in the immigrant group. However, in the native group, a higher share of youths (54%) than those in the immigrant group (31%) had originated from families with an upper secondary education. Conversely, a higher share of youths in the immigrant group (25%) than those in the native group (18%) had parents with a higher education. It is difficult to conclude any differences in the composition of the parents' educational levels because information was lacking for 15% of the immigrant group. Moreover, approximately 13% of the immigrant group had missing school grades compared to 6% among the youths with a native background. The share with poor school grades was 2 percentage points less than in the immigrant group (14% in the immigrant group and 16% in the native group). Relatively small differences were evident in the age compositions of the two groups (e.g. the age composition in the minority group contained two more percentage points of youth born in 1992 compared with the composition in the majority group).

Finally, Table 1 provides information on the youths' country/area background. Approximately 40% of the immigrants had originated from a Western country (15% from East Europe and 23% from Western countries outside Norway). The remaining 60% were distributed between the remaining 13 countries or areas of countries, with Indians being the smallest group.

Table 2 about here

Table 2, model I provides the AME for country background on the probability of early school leaving. The results show that the probability of early school leaving differed by country background, and an educational advantage was evident for most immigrants in the child welfare population, particularly for the following Asian countries: India, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Vietnam. Youths with a background from Sri Lanka and Vietnam had almost a 20-percentage point

lower probability of early school leaving compared with native Norwegians. Among child welfare clients who had originated from India, Iran, Pakistan and the Philippines, the probability of early school leaving was approximately 11–14 percentage points lower than for child welfare clients with non-immigrant backgrounds. A relatively low probability of quitting school prematurely was also found among child welfare clients who had originated from Eastern Europe (four percentage points lower) and African countries, except Morocco and Somalia (six percentage points lower). However, child welfare clients who had originated from Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq had a higher probability of quitting school prematurely compared to those with a native Norwegian background. Youths from Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan had an 8-, 12- and 20-percentage point higher probability of being an early school leaver, respectively, compared to native Norwegians. The results also show that the difference in the probability of early school leaving among child welfare clients from Western countries, such as Morocco, South America and the remaining Asian countries, when compared with native Norwegians, was small and not statistically significant.

Modell II shows the AME of country background on the probability of early school leaving with adjustments for sex, parental educational level, school grades from lower secondary school and whether the first child welfare initiative occurred either before or during the teens. The results show that the difference in the probability of early school leaving by country background has increased. Overall, child welfare clients from Asian countries had a relatively low probability of quitting school prematurely compared with child welfare clients in the native population (i.e. child welfare clients without immigrant backgrounds). Figure 1 shows the probabilities of early school leaving by country background.

Figure 1 about here

As Figure 1 shows, almost 60% of the child welfare clients without an immigrant background and child welfare clients with an immigrant background from South America, Afghanistan, Western countries and Morocco were early school leavers. The child welfare clients with a background from the remaining countries had a lower probability of leaving school early than those of other countries, and the probability was particularly low among child welfare clients with a Sri Lankan background. Consequently, the relatively high probability of early school leaving among child welfare clients from Somalia and Afghanistan (as seen in Table 2, model I) seems to relate to their overrepresentation regarding low socio-economic background (i.e. either low or unknown parental educational level), low school grades, more boys than girls and early child welfare interventions.

The most influential factor was school grades obtained in compulsory school. The probability of early school leaving increased by 38 percentage points for child welfare clients with grades in the

lowest 10% and by 40 percentage points for child welfare clients with missing grades. Furthermore, child welfare clients who had originated from families with either upper secondary education or higher education were less likely to quit school prematurely than those with parents possessing only a compulsory school level education (8 percentage points and 18 percentage points, respectively). The highest probability of early school leaving was found among child welfare clients from families with an unknown educational level (nine percentage points higher than in the reference category). Moreover, girls had a two-percentage point lower probability of early school leaving compared to boys. However, conversely to our initial presumption, child welfare clients who received measures before their teens had an 11-percentage point lower probability of school leaving than did those who received measures in their teens.

In summary, the results show differences in school leaving by country background. Nevertheless, the increase in the adjusted R^2 from model I to model II and the decrease in Loglikelihood indicate the effect of background characteristics (i.e. sex, parental educational level, school grades and when the first intervention was initiated) on the probability of early school leaving.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Child welfare clients have a high risk of becoming early school leavers. Immigrants and children of immigrants are also high risk-groups for low educational attainment. The aim of this article was to examine whether immigrants in the care population might either face a double educational disadvantage or if their educational progress resembles that of the non-care population. Overall, the results support the latter. The findings of this study can be summarised as follows.

Approximately half the youth in the care population left school prematurely (i.e. they had not enrolled in the final year of upper secondary school by age 20).

In addition, the probability of early school leaving differed by country of origin, with the highest probability found among Afghans, Somalis and Iraqis, which (to some extent) related to their overrepresentation with characteristics that previous research has shown are associated with a high drop-out rate from upper secondary school. When adjusted for school grades, parental educational level, sex and when child welfare measures were initiated, the differences in early school leaving rate by country of origin changed. The results show that the risk of becoming early school leavers was highest among non-immigrants (i.e. Norwegians), South-Americans, Afghans, Moroccans and immigrants from Western countries. As expected, early school leaving was lowest among immigrants from South-Asia, including Pakistan, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. However, the early school leaver rate was somewhat higher than expected among immigrants from India.

The results of this study also support previous research that points towards a relatively high risk of early school leaving among boys, youth from families with a low educational level and those with low grades in compulsory school. However, the results also show that youth who first received child welfare measures in their teens had a relatively high risk of early school leaving, which contradicts previous research from both the US and Sweden (see Cheung & Heath, 1994; Vinnerljung et al., 2005). One explanation could be that the present study was not limited to child welfare clients in out-of-home care but comprised a high share of child welfare clients with in-home measures. It thus seems reasonable to argue that initiation of a care order reflects a more severe situation than initiation of in-home measures, and the severities of the two initiatives differ by age. Notably, this study was unable to confirm the accuracy of that argument.

The probability of early school leaving in the care population by country of origin mainly resembles the early school leaving rate in the general population. However, there are exceptions, such as the aforementioned high drop-out rate in the ethnic majority. The question is, why? Could it be that child welfare clients with an ethnic majority origin have more severe problems than immigrants in the care population due to social exclusion, which has perhaps occurred over generations? Although a disadvantaged position due to social exclusion could also be the case in the immigrant population, the fact that either they or their parents have migrated might be a sign of high motivation for educational progress, which previous research has shown (Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011). Based on the present study, we argue that it is quite difficult to explain the mechanisms behind the differences in early school leaving in the care population by country of origin. Youth who originate from the same country might be quite heterogeneous, such as in their reasons for migration and ethnic and religious affiliations. Further research that explores such dimensions is needed to explain why young child welfare clients from certain countries are doing better than others in the care system. Could it be that they are more motivated? If so, why?

The strengths of this study include its longitudinal design, a large national sample and the presence of the background variables. However, this study also has some limitations. Firstly, we lacked important information on the child welfare situation, such as reasons for seeking help from child welfare services, the severity and/or number of years receiving help from child welfare services and more detailed information about family environments. Secondly, we lacked important information about immigration situations, such as the reason for migration, years of residence in Norway and the number of unaccompanied minors. These shortcomings restricted our study to being mainly descriptive. However, to our knowledge, this study is the first to explore differences in educational attainment by country of origin in the care population.

Finally, it is worth emphasising the poor educational results among non-immigrants. In contrast to the assumption that immigrants face a double disadvantage in the educational system,

the results indicate that educational progress is only poorer among immigrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia than among native Norwegians. In addition, these differences in early school leaving rates can be explained by differences in certain background characteristics, such as school grades and parental educational level. The educational situation among native Norwegians is therefore as worrying as that of the most vulnerable immigrants. Notably, we anticipated that immigrants would face additional educational disadvantages due to less schooling, weaker Norwegian language skills and experiences of migration, war and trauma.

The findings in this article indicate that there are differences in early school leaving by country of origin, and (some) country differences either remain or even strengthen when adjusting for background factors. However, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind the differences in educational progress in the care population. We hope that the present study will encourage other researchers from different disciplines and with different methodological approaches to conduct research that generates robust knowledge about the mechanisms behind the high educational disadvantage in the care population to facilitate a smoother transition into adulthood. In the meantime, the message to educators, social workers and other practitioners is that educational obstacles differ by country of origin and, perhaps surprisingly, are most severe in the native majority.

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Table 1

Descriptive statistics

	Immigrant Background		Native Background		p
	Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.	
<i>Early school leaving</i>					
Yes	0.494	0.500	0.514	0.500	**
No	0.506		0.486		
<i>Sex</i>					
Girls	0.452	0.498	0.476	0.499	**
Boys	0.548		0.524		
<i>Parental educational level</i>					
Compulsory school	0.297	0.457	0.280	0.449	**
Upper secondary school	0.310	0.462	0.537	0.499	**
Higher education	0.245	0.430	0.179	0.383	**
Unknown	0.148	0.355	0.004	0.067	**
<i>School grades at age 15-16</i>					
Poor (lowest 10%)	0.143	0.350	0.164	0.370	**
Missing	0.134	0.340	0.059	0.236	**
Not poor/missing	0.276		0.223		
<i>First child welfare measures</i>					
Before teens	0.557	0.497	0.662	0.473	**
In teens					
<i>Birth year</i>					
1988	0.172	0.377	0.182	0.386	*
1989	0.175	0.380	0.196	0.397	**
1990	0.204	0.403	0.204	0.403	
1991	0.216	0.412	0.209	0.407	
1992	0.233	0.423	0.209	0.407	**
<i>Area/Country origin</i>					
Western countries	0.232	0.422			
East Europe	0.152	0.359			
Morocco	0.025	0.156			
Somalia	0.052	0.223			
Africa (the rest)	0.086	0.280			
Afghanistan	0.042	0.201			
India	0.012	0.109			
Iran	0.044	0.206			
Iraq	0.063	0.242			
Pakistan	0.051	0.220			
Sri Lanka	0.027	0.161			
The Philippines	0.026	0.160			
Vietnam	0.049	0.217			
Asia (the rest including the Middle East)	0.069	0.253			
South America	0.069	0.254			

Number of observations 9834 23,899

Note. St.dev = standard deviation, *, ** = a difference in means is statistically significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level, respectively (independent sample test).

Table 2

Average marginal effects from logistic regression models of the impact of country background and background characteristics on the probability of early school leaving in the care population

	Model I			Model II		
	AME	SE	<i>p</i>	AME	SE	<i>p</i>
<i>Area/Country origin (ref.: Norwegian)</i>						
Western countries	0.008	0.011		-0.015	0.010	
East Europe	-0.042	0.013	**	-0.079	0.012	**
Morocco	0.013	0.032		-0.016	0.030	
Somalia	0.120	0.021	**	-0.054	0.023	*
Africa (the rest)	-0.059	0.017	**	-0.120	0.017	**
Afghanistan	0.203	0.022	**	-0.012	0.028	
India	-0.144	0.044	**	-0.116	0.042	**
Iran	-0.119	0.024	**	-0.127	0.022	**
Iraq	0.078	0.020	**	-0.054	0.020	**
Pakistan	-0.111	0.022	**	-0.168	0.020	**
Sri Lanka	-0.192	0.029	**	-0.264	0.025	**
The Philippines	-0.106	0.031	**	-0.075	0.029	**
Vietnam	-0.197	0.021	**	-0.198	0.020	**
Asia (the rest including the Middle East)	-0.002	0.019		-0.063	0.019	**
South America	0.014	0.019		-0.009	0.019	
<i>Girls</i>				-0.022	0.005	**
<i>Parental educational level (ref.: compulsory school)</i>						
Upper secondary school				-0.084	0.006	**
Higher education				-0.175	0.008	**
Unknown				0.092	0.015	**
<i>School grades at age 15-16 (not poor/missing)</i>						
Poor (lowest 10%)				0.376	0.010	**
Missing				0.397	0.011	**
<i>Child welfare measures before teens</i>						
LL				-0.113	0.005	**
LL		-23171.712			-21034,77	
Pseudo R2		0.009			0.100	
Number of observations		33,733			33,733	

Note. AME = average marginal effects, SE = Standard errors, *, ** = statistically significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level, respectively (Wald tests). Control variables for birth year are not presented.

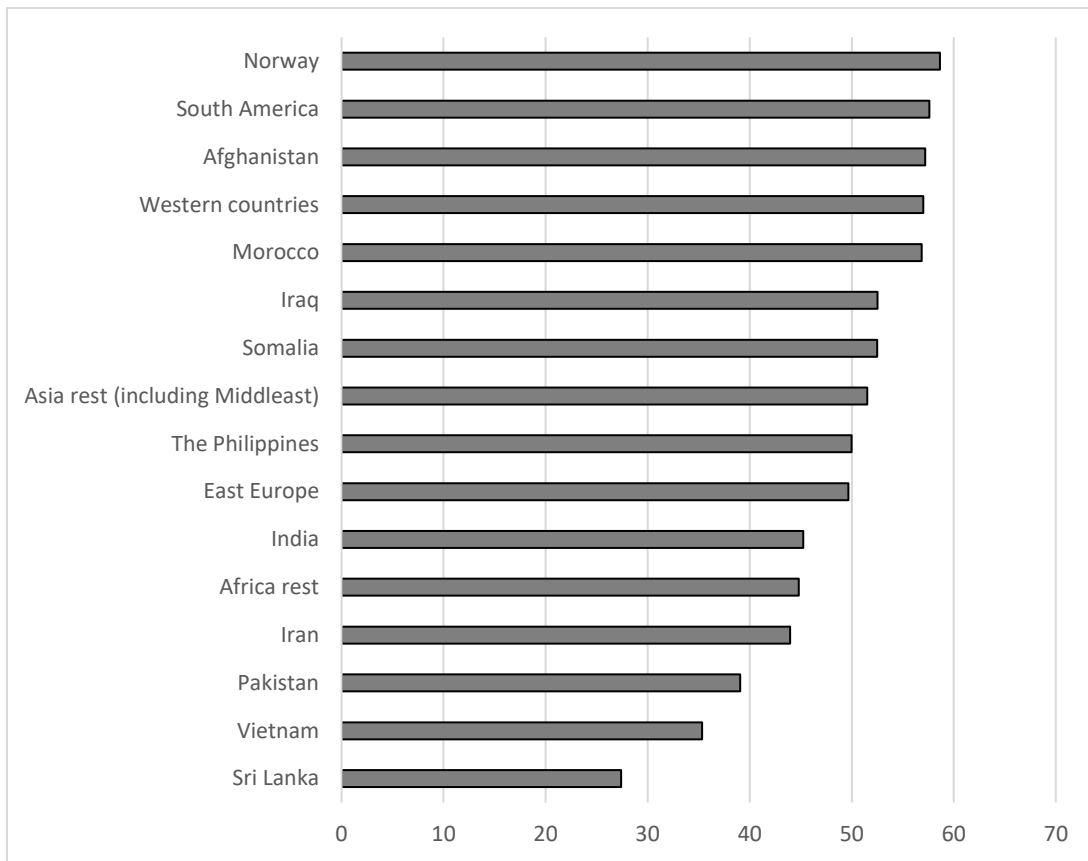


Figure 1. Early school leaving by area/country of origin. Based on estimates from Table 2, model II for boys, originating from families with upper secondary education as the highest educational level, with no poor or missing school grades and with child welfare measures first given in the teens