

Case Studies on Fifteen High School Underachievers *

*Sr. Tberese Immaculate
Koottiyaniyil, R.A.*

This study was undertaken with the purpose of discovering the problems that are related to underachievement. Through the analysis of many measures and data about each case, the researcher aimed to discover the following:

1. The characteristic patterns of personality traits of underachievers.

2.a. The problem areas through the administration of the Mooney Problem Check List, and the specific problems in these areas that are mentioned by the majority of the underachievers.

2.b. The seriousness of underachievers' problems regarding home and family.

3. The acceptance of the underachievers by their peers.

4. The adequacy of their self-concept.

5. The level of their academic motivation.

6. Their study habits and attitudes, and the specific problems, in the SSHA, that are common to the majority of underachievers.

More specifically, the following research hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1. There are negative personality traits that are common to the majority of underachievers.

Hypothesis 2.a. There are problems identified by the use of Mooney Problem Check List that are common to the majority of underachievers.

Hypothesis 2.b. The area of home and family is a serious problem area for the majority of the underachievers.

* An abstract of a Master's Thesis done at Central Philippine University, Iloilo City, Philippines.

Hypothesis 3. The majority of underachievers is not well-accepted by their peers.

Hypothesis 4. The majority of underachievers does not have adequate self-concept.

Hypothesis 5. The majority of underachievers does not have high academic motivation.

Hypothesis 6. The majority of underachievers does not have good study habits and attitudes. There are problems in this area that are common to the majority of cases.

The subjects of this study were fifteen (nine third year and six fourth year high school) male students of Central Philippine University, in Iloilo City, of the school year 1974-1975. These were students whose IQ's were 110 or higher according to Leila Padilla Philippine Self-Administering Test of Mental Ability. None had a general average of 86 or above. The general average of each student for the previous school year was made the index of academic achievement. All belonged to the lowest twenty per cent of their respective sections in academic achievement.

The Sixteen Personality Factor Test, Mooney Problem Checklist, Sociometric Test, Self-Concept Inventory, Motivation Inventory, Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes,

Personal Data Form, and Interviews with parents, teachers, and the underachievers were the sources of data.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study was the case study method of research. Arbitrary qualitative terms were assigned to values or ranks in order to facilitate the interpretation of different test results. One set of qualitative term used in connection with Motivation, Self-Concept, Social Standing, and Study Habits and Attitudes were also translated into "degree of seriousness" in order to facilitate the presentation of facts expressed in different categories in only one graphic presentation. The results of the diagnosis of the problems of each case were presented in the form of an individual graphic profile and a descriptive case study report. Finally, a color-chart was prepared to enable the researcher to see at a glance the problem areas of all fifteen cases, thus enabling her to draw up a profile of underachievers as a group.

FINDINGS

The following were the significant findings of this study:

1. The Personality Characteristics of the Underachievers. Ten or more of the fifteen cases had the following personality characteristics: they were somber; had high scholastic mental capacity; had average superego strength; were neither submissive nor dominant; neither relaxed nor tense; they tended to be shy, and self-sufficient. Eight to nine cases were emotionally less stable (affected by feelings), apprehensive or prone to worry, suspicious, and controlled. Among the fifteen cases only one -- a different case at each instance -- was trusting, emotionally stable, reserved and casual. None was happy-go-lucky, socially bold or venturesome, and none with high ergic tension.

2. Problems Areas. The use of the Mooney Problem Check List showed that the four most common problem areas of the underachievers were the personal psychological relations, the social recreational activities, adjustment to school work, and the social psychological relations. The problems, in these areas, that are common to the majority of cases were: losing their temper; worrying; daydreaming; being careless; feeling awkward in meeting people; having trouble in keeping a

conversation going; not spending enough time in study; getting low grades; not being interested in some subjects; and having trouble with Mathematics.

As far as the area home and family was concerned, it was among the least serious problem areas for the majority of the cases. The single problem in this area that was common to two-thirds of the cases was "wanting more freedom at home". Six underachievers were identified as having serious problems related to home and family. The most common problems of these six cases were: "wanting more freedom at home"; "being treated like a child"; and "worried about a member of the family".

The Acceptance of the Underachievers by Their Peers. The Sociometric test results showed that the majority of the cases was not very popular among Their Peers. More specifically, out of fifteen cases, four were well accepted; six were average; and five were not well accepted. Of these five, two were ignored or rejected by their peers.

4. The Adequacy of Their Self-Concept. The use of the Self-Concept Inventory indicated that out of

fifteen cases only three had adequate self-concepts; six had average self-concepts; and six had inadequate self-concepts. The majority of the cases was found to be easily discouraged by failure. The most common problems of the six underachievers who were identified as having inadequate self-concepts were: being easily discouraged by failure; being afraid to recite in class; having to tell lies to impress people; and finding themselves trembling and sweating before they take a test.

5. The Level of Their Academic Motivation. The findings on the Motivation Inventory showed that out of fifteen cases, none had high academic motivation; two had average motivation; three had low motivation; and ten had very low motivation. The majority of the cases agreed with the statement, in the Motivation Inventory, "Most young people do not want to go to school." The Education Acceptance Scale in the SSHA, which also measured the academic motivation, showed that all, except two, had one or more of the following problems: "lack interest in some subjects"; "lack interest in school work"; "made to take subjects I do not like"; and "if I do not like a

subject, I believe in doing only enough to get a passing grade."

6. Their Study Habits and Attitudes. It was found out through the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes, that although none of the fifteen cases had shown a very poor work method, only three had good study habits and attitudes.

The problems, with regard to study habits, that were common to two-thirds or more cases were: not keeping their work for each subject together and carefully arranged in some planned order; not talking it over with the teacher when in trouble with their school work; not doing their assignments at school so as to reduce their home work; not completing their home work assignments on time; and not studying an hour or more each day outside of school.

The majority of underachievers did not make up their missed lessons without a reminder from the teacher. If the assignments were dull, they did not complete them. Their place of study at home was not kept neat and business-like. They did not keep their assignments up to date by doing them regularly.

The poor study attitudes common to eight or more cases were

the following: "I feel that the teachers expect students to do too much studying outside of class"; "I believe that the main job of the schools is to teach students the things that will help them earn a living"; "My teachers do not make their subjects interesting and meaningful to me"; "I feel that the teachers do not try to give the same amount of attention and help to all their students"; and "I feel that I would have studied harder if I were given more freedom to choose subjects that I like."

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following hypotheses were sustained: (1) there are negative personality traits that are common to the majority of cases; (2) there are problems, identified by the use of Mooney Problem Check List, that are common to the majority of cases; (3) the majority of cases does not have adequate self-concept; (4) the majority of cases does not have high academic motivation; and (5) the majority of cases does not have good study habits and attitudes.

The hypotheses which were not strongly supported by the findings of this study were: (1) the

area home and family is a serious problem area to the majority of the cases, and (2) the majority of the cases is not well accepted by their peers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. It is recommended that similar studies should be conducted on the third and fourth year high school students, of the same school, having IQ's of 110 or higher on the Leila Padilla Philippine Self-Administering Test of Mental Ability but belong to the highest twenty per cent of their sections in academic achievement. The comparison of the results of the present study with those of the one proposed will help identify problems characteristic of underachievers and thus help identify factors causing underachievement.

Similar studies should be conducted in other schools to find out whether their underachievers have similar problems.

3. More studies should be conducted on the relationships between: (a) interest in the subjects and achievement; (b) attitudes toward teachers, and interest in the

(Continued on page 43)

Case Studies . . .

(Continued from page 27)

subjects, and achievement; (c) study habits, and motivation, and achievement.

4. A follow-up study of the same fifteen cases should be done by the researcher herself, if possible, with the purpose of scrutinizing the most serious problem areas of each case.

5. Educators and competent teachers should undertake more re-

searches on how to motivate under-achievers.

6. A study on the relationship, if any, between birth order and achievement should be conducted on a larger scale in order to find out which of the following tend to be underachievers: (a) the eldest; (b) the youngest; (c) the middle ones, and to delineate problems that are characteristic of birth order. □