Secondary School Teenagers and Early School Leavers:

Differences in Self-Esteem and Other Psychological Variables

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Department of Psychology

DBS School of Arts
Many thanks to all the participants,

my supervisor Dr., Chris Gibbons, my Family,

and Management and staff of Finglas Community Training Centre.
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## Abstract

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Table 1

Lowest and highest possible score, the mean and standard deviation for each of the measures used.

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<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum possible</th>
<th>Maximum possible</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Subjective Happiness</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>3.65</td>
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**Table 2.**

*Descriptive statistics, and correlations for all continuous variables (N = 80)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>SH</th>
<th>SWL</th>
<th>PAP</th>
<th>DCCC</th>
<th>S-EF</th>
<th>Opt</th>
<th>PAAS</th>
<th>S-ES</th>
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<tr>
<td>SH</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SWL</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dispositional &amp; Context Control</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
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<td>.36**</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>.32**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.41**</td>
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</table>

**Means**

- SH: 18.89
- SWL: 22.20
- PAP: 1.84
- DCCC: 8.76
- S-EF: 27.55
- Opt: 27.90
- PAAS: 42.63
- S-ES: 30.33

**Standard Deviations**

- SH: 3.65
- SWL: 6.67
- PAP: .37
- DCCC: 1.92
- S-EF: 5.40
- Opt: 3.05
- PAAS: 9.49
- S-ES: 4.97

Note. Statistical significance: *p < .05; **p < .01
Table 3.

Standard multiple regression of the impact of Perceived Academic Ability and Subjective Happiness on levels of self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$\hat{a}$</th>
<th>$p$ value</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Model</td>
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<td>.215</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic Ability Scale</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Subjective Happiness Scale</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.000**</td>
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</table>

Note: $\hat{a}$ indicates Standardised Slopes of predictors with associated $p$ values, ** significant at .01 level
Abstract

This research project aimed to see if there were significant differences between two groups in relation to Self-Esteem and seven other psychological measures. The participants (N = 80) were from Finglas West, Dublin 11. This research was a between groups cross sectional survey. It was a quantitative design using an opportunistic sample based on a homogeneous group. One group were early school leaving teenagers (n = 40) and the second group (n = 40) students of a formal second level school. Results from the current study did not confirm prior findings. Independent samples t-tests found no significant differences relation to Self Esteem. Results indicated that the early school leavers group scored significantly higher in Optimism than the group engaged in formal second level education. Multiple Regression analysis indicated that two predictor variables explained 21.5% of variance. It was found that the Perceived Academic Ability Scale and Subjective Happiness predicted levels of Self Esteem.
1. Introduction

The aim of this research project is to compare levels of Self Esteem, Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism, Subjective Happiness, Satisfaction With Life, Self Efficacy, the Perceived Academic Ability Scale, Dispositional Control and Context Control, between two teenage groups. The importance of self esteem and how it impacts on teenagers has been studied for many years. Robinson, Vrightsman and Andrews (1991) state that Self-Esteem can be defined in terms of the extent to which one prizes, values or likes oneself. Coleman (1999) tells us the concept of self esteem can go by many names such as self worth, self regard, self respect and self acceptance. Current psychodynamic theorists such as Hendry and Kloep (1999), Coleman and Hendry (1999) and Simmons and Blyth (1987) and Wichstrom (1998) argue for the widespread acceptance of the psychological importance of self esteem.

1.1 Previous Research

Research evidence from the above authors suggests that levels of Self Esteem can be influenced by a multitude of factors including pubertal timing (Alsaker 1999). Other research on self esteem points in the direction of a seasonal variable. Simmons and Blyth (1987) found that levels of self esteem had a less positive change in spring than in autumn. With an emerging multicultural Ireland it may be worthwhile considering Csikszentmilsolyi and Schneider (2001) research findings. They found ethnicity as another variable affecting Self Esteem between Asian American and African American teenagers. Evidence suggests Self Esteem is multidimensional. Factors which may have an effect on Self Esteem, such as Subjective Well-Being, have been found to be higher among adolescence that had high
perceived attachment to parents (Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1991). Hoffman, Levy-Shiff and Ushpiz (1985) have demonstrated the considerable impact that social forces can have on the quality of Self Esteem among adolescent populations. Walker and Greene (1985) examined the social context of adolescent Self Esteem and found self-evaluation of popularity was related to girls’ global Self-Esteem, while evaluation of school performances was more important for boys. They found social relationships are important to the development of global self esteem in adolescence. With reference to satisfaction with life, Leung and Leung (1992) found relationships with parents dominated the prediction of life satisfaction. In comparing the family environment of adolescent, Jewell and Stark (2003) found youths diagnosed with conduct disorders were more likely to describe their family’s discipline style as permissive, while rules within the family did not exist or were poorly communicated and ambiguous. Coleman (1999) found that it is apparent that low Self Esteem is likely to be predictive of adjustment difficulties, while Hoge et al (1995) have questioned whether self-esteem is a predictor of better academic performance, or whether better academic performance leads consequentially to increased self-esteem.

A report by Mary Gordon (2007), Senior Psychologist, Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science, describes widespread anecdotal evidence (pg 3) suggesting a significant number of learners in Youth Reach centres (catering for early school leavers) have disabilities as defined under the provision of the E.P.S.E.N Act (2004). In other words, if these learners were in mainstream education they would qualify for extra supports under the terms of Special Educational Circulars P.P.T OY05, N.C.S.E 02/05 and 02/06, (Department of Education and Science, 2005)

This report highlights in great detail the importance of identifying the difficulties experienced by teenagers who are disengaged from formal education and highlights some
characteristics they have in common with each other, including nature of one’s family background, socio economic status, and levels of education. The 2 target groups for this research are persisters from a Secondary School and early School leavers from a Community Training Centre (C.T.C) who have no, or incomplete, qualifications after attending second level education.

1.2 Community Training Centres

Community Training Centres (formally called Community Training Workshops) and Youth Reach’s were created in order to meet the needs of a growing number of marginalised youths in Irish society. These centres were designed to cater for educationally disaffected teenagers ranging in age from 15 years to 20 years (with older individuals in exceptional circumstances). The purpose of Community Training Centres and Youth Reach centres is to provide learners with an education and qualifications which will lead to employment or further study in main stream education. Learners are taught in groups of no more than twelve. These services attempt to provide a more holistic approach.

The ethos of C.T.C’s is one where interventions are made on an individual and group basis. There may be an informal appearance whereby training and education is designed to be flexible enough to suit a learner centred approach. The emphasis is on constructive engagement which is both challenging and caring. Consistent boundaries, rules and activities combine with a sense of community and exist with exemplar behaviour by Instructor. The creation of an environment that both enables and encourages the learner to examine and question in appropriate ways and exhibit modified constructive behaviours is fostered.
To date there has been no significant research on a national level measuring Self Esteem, Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism, Self Efficacy, Dispositional Control and Context Control, Satisfaction with Life, and Subjective Happiness of learners in Community Training Centres (C.T.C’s). Much valuable work has been carried out into the reasons why we have early School leavers and the multiple of variables, false negatives, and false positive have led researchers to many conclusions. Clinical research has shown low scores on these psychological measures would be indicative of the psychopathology of C.T.C learners and predictive of adjustment and learning difficulties (Nevin 2007, Gilman and Hubner 2002, Coleman 1999, Alsaker 1999, Hendry and Kloep 1998, Walker and Greene, Leung and Leung 1992). In seeking to implement a tracking system in primary education which may locate potential early school leavers, the above measures may be more effective than previous ones which solely concentrated on demographics, including socio-economic status, parents education and teacher perceptions.

Learners who participate in C.T.C’s enter training programmes which are learner centred. This independent organisation, funded mainly by F.A.S. and overseen by a board of management, attempt to reintegrate early school leavers (15-20 years of age) back into education and hopefully employment or further training. The three main categories by which C.T.C’s are measured consist of Certification, placement and throughput. The emphasis is on placement in employment or other training and education. It is anecdotally believed that through this process of self esteem building, soft skills and abilities such as communications and the ability to perform in groups improve.

Certification on these courses typically consists of Fetac Level 3 minor and major awards (for high priority learners) that may progress to Fetac Level 4 and 5. Successful completion of modules such as Woodwork, Catering skills, Computer skills, Arts and crafts,
Communications and literacy and numeracy skills, to name but a few are seen, as vital markers in assessing learners progress. Other specialised interventions are introduced intermittently and may include education on teen-parenting, sex education, suicide awareness, and creative writing. The psychological difficulties of a minority of learners are met by a dedicated but limited service provided the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee’s psychological support service. Valuable research has taken place in relation to Youth reach centres, (similar to C.T.C’S) and the needs of their learners and staff while focusing on the need to integrate local and national services. This research has been funded by the Department of Education and Science.

The purpose of this research project is to ascertain whether there are significant difference in levels of Self Esteem, Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism, Self Efficacy, Dispositional Control and Context Control, Satisfaction with Life, and Subjective Happiness between teenage learners in Community Training Centres and learners in formal second level education. Although a small number of C.T.C learners may have been screened at some point using various psychological measures, there has not yet been any attempt to conduct a systematic evaluation of learners in relation to Self Esteem which is only anecdotally attributed to the vast majority of C.T.C learners. Low levels of Self Esteem have been stated as one of the main traits of C.T.C. learners.

1.3 Learner characteristics

C.T.C. learners come from marginalised groups which also comprise of members of the Travelling community. The majority of C.T.C learners may suffer from social, economic and educational disadvantages with long term unemployment and dysfunctional family structures
a key factor in some cases. Substance use and anti-social behaviour may also exist. Characteristics of early school leavers can be seen in previous research.

Boldt (1994) and, Wehlage and Rutter (1986) show school experiences and family context may be predictive of a teenager leaving school early, and before any exams have been undertaken. Much research has shown males to be more susceptible than females to early school leaving. Research by McCoy, Doyle and Williams (1999) has shown boys to be twice as likely as girls to leave school early without any formal qualifications.

Early school leavers are more likely to come from poor socioeconomic status family units with many disadvantages such as parents with low academic achievement, lone parent families, enlarged families and the possibility of one other early school leaver in the family (Greaney and Kellaghan, 1984; Hannan and O’Riain, 1993).

An overrepresentation of lone parent or step parent families has been identified by Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack and Rock (1986) as a significant predictor of early school drop outs. In a study by Hannan and O’Riain (1993), no early school leaver in their sample came from upper middle class families. Of early school leavers studied, only 0.05 of mothers finished the Leaving Certificate. Rumberger (1995) believes more emphasis and focus should be placed on parenting styles or family processes in addressing early school leavers. A lack of parental interest in children’s schooling and a permissive style of parenting are connected with children underachieving in school and early drop-outs (Astone and McLanahan, 1991).

This category of learners is at risk of long term unemployment. They mainly come from at-risk, socially and educationally disadvantaged sections of their community. Gordon (2007) also states that much of the success attributed to these programmes (C.T.C and Youth reach) derive from the priority placed on learners as imaginative and hardy individuals.
If there is no emphasis placed on education within the family network the teenager will lack the impetus to learn and therefore attendance can become an issue. The fact that many potential C.T.C learners may have been out of formal education for many years impinges on their ability to re-adjust behaviourally to the type of educational environment offered by Community Training Centres and Youth Reach centres.

Gordon (2007) informs us that home factors can be a cause of difficulty for some students with unsupportive parents. These difficulties may include abusive parents, chaotic families or substance abuse issue. When engaged in training Gordon (2007) also states that “teenagers achieving accreditation achieve Self Esteem” (pg. 9). Again in this regard we see the importance placed on the nurturing of Self Esteem. It is also stated in the report that staff encouragement can be instrumental in the building of Self-Esteem and a positive self image. It is clear from sociological research that youths disengaged from the education system at an early age run a strong risk of wider social exclusion, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, youth offending, and poverty. This research project will gather its data from a Community Training Centre and a post-primary school in Finglas, Dublin 11. Within certain areas of Dublin 11 there may be small distinct conurbations where there is a history of social welfare dependence and a lack of appreciation for formal education. In these communities we may see a pattern of behaviour where optimism and motivation are non existent in relation to academic performance and where the individual may suffer from low expectations. Personal, social and community development in some cases may be sacrificed for more immediate responses and rewards.

A real lack of expectation in relation to educational attainment and paid employment becomes a barrier to those with some desire to improve their own educational wellbeing. This research projects aims to produce sound empirical data in order to determine whether existing
anecdotal evidence that early school leavers attending C.T.C.’s and other such organisations experience significantly lowered levels of self-esteem, particularly in comparison to those who remain in formal education. Since no research has to date conducted a rigorous assessment of the differences in self-esteem between early school leavers attending C.T.C.’s and ongoing secondary school attendees, this research will make an important contribution to the relevant literature.

1.4 C.T.C Statistics

There are forty-one C.T.C’s nationally with a total spend of €44.3 million in 2011. In that time 2,300 early school leavers were availing of training at any one time and a total of just over 2,100 finished their training. Over 20,000 FETAC minor awards at level 3, 4 and 5 were achieved in 2010 with an average of 6 minor awards achieved by each C.T.C. learner. C.T.C’s are a major contributor in addressing the educational needs of teenagers who otherwise would not be given a second chance at formal education beyond primary schooling.

C.T.C funding and budgets are decided upon when analysing the needs of early school leaving teenagers. As low Self Esteem is seen anecdotally as a characteristic or trait of the typical Youth Reach and C.T.C learner it is then safe to believe that a significant proportion of this budget is spent addressing this anecdotal need.

This research will concentrate on two groups, teenage learners in C.T.C’s (n=40) and teenagers studying in formal second level education (n=40). Both groups will be from Finglas, Dublin 11. The profile of a C.T.C. learner is an individual who is an early school leaver and who has not attained five passes in the Junior Certificate programme. 63% of C.T.C. learners were 18 years of age or under according to an Irish Association of
Community Training Organisations (I.A.C.T.O) report of 2008. I.A.C.T.O defined priority one learners as 16-21 years of age with five passes or less in the junior cycle, this accounted for 85% of all learners engaged in training in C.T.C’s in 2008. It should be stated that with a heightened emphasis on value for money in government funded agencies, the emphasis may shift strongly to attainments which are more tangible. This may be to the detriment of the early school leaver as the emphasis may be removed from the psychological needs of the learner. The same vigour applied to the attainment of certification should be applied to addressing their deeper psychological needs. The more immediate but not necessarily more beneficial rewards may be taking priority.

1.5 An Irish context

A recent report on Irish adolescents conducted by Headstrong (Bates et al., 2009) stated that over one third of teenagers studied said they did not have one adult who they could talk to in relation to various issues on an ongoing basis. Only thirty-eight percent of teenagers felt they had the ability to cope with the various problems they faced. Ten percent believed they had serious problems but did not seek help. In this report, mental health was noted as the most significant issue facing young Irish people today.

High Subjective Well-Being of teenagers (subjective well-being) has been shown to be connected with less personal and family life stress events (Nevin et al., 2007). This study showed teenagers with low Subjective Well-Being (SWB) were less likely to have problem solving skills, Self Esteem and having less resource such as family and social supports than those with high SWB.
Studies of Irish teenagers have demonstrated the best way to engage individuals with mental health issues is through individually focused and multisystem programmes which are youth friendly and easily accessible. Much clinical literature makes the strong link between particular aspects of negative experiences in early childhood with the resulting psychopathology of the emerging teenager. Maladaptive behaviours may emerge due to a number of causes in early childhood, such as the lack of reciprocal play or interaction and a social belief which is negative and detrimental to the child.

Gilman and Huebner (1999) suggest high Life Satisfaction is associated with some mental health benefits that are not found amongst youths reporting lower levels of life satisfaction. Phelps and Jarvis (1993) state “the manner in which individuals adapt and cope with stressful situations may influence growth development such as a variety of coping skills” (p. 359). The lack of parental guidance which may be a characteristic of C.T.C. learners may also affect psychological well-being. Shyamala, McGee and Stanton (1991) suggest high perceived attachment to parents could be crucial to the well being of adolescents. This may also have been shown in a study by Hoffman, Levy Shiff and Ushpig (2001) who reported that “a correlation analysis revealed heightened orientation towards parents was associated with higher levels of perceived parental support, whereas heightened orientation towards peers was associated with higher levels of peer support and lower levels of parental aid” (p. 23). The individual selectively filters out and seeks external influences.

Research by Leung and Leung (1991) into life satisfaction found relationships with parents dominated the prediction of life satisfaction. Hersch and DeBois (1990) conducted a study of Self Esteem in early adolescence and found peer social support was the strongest predictor of Self Esteem. Van Houtte (2005) found Self Esteem for boys in technical / vocational schools was significantly lower than self esteem for boys in General school. This
research project will attempt to discover if there is a similar outcome when comparing levels of self esteem in teenage C.T.C. learners and those teenagers studying in formal second level education.
1.6 Aims of the Current Study

This research will have four main hypotheses:

1. Teenage students studying in Community Training Centres will report lower levels of self-esteem than students of a similar age studying in formal second level education.

2. Teenage students studying in formal second level education have higher levels of perceived academic ability but the same levels of self-esteem as compared to learners studying in Community training Centres.

3. Teenage students studying in formal second level education have higher levels of dispositional control and context control index than teenage learners in Community training Centres.

4. Teenage learners in Community Training Centres have lower levels of Perceived academic ability, Dispositional control and control index, but similar levels of self esteem to teenage students studying in formal second level education.
2. Method

This research was a between groups cross sectional survey. It was a quantitative design using an opportunistic sampling method and based on a homogenous sample.

2.1 Materials

The materials used were pen and paper. Students completed a number of questionnaires based on demographics, a questionnaire designed by the author (Perceived Academic Ability Scale) used in conjunction with the Perceived Academic Performance scale. Other measures used were Self Esteem, Optimism, Self Efficacy, Dispositional Control and Context Control, Satisfaction with Life and finally Subjective Happiness Scale. These measures were chosen as they are recognised (except the measure designed by the author) to be valid and reliable across different population domains. The language used was deemed suitable for the participants and could be administered to either groups or individuals. The measures were child friendly and no adverse reactions were reported.

2.2 Measures

These measures were selected due to their reliability, validity and suitability with the populations of interest. In relation to C.T.C learners, it was necessary to use an assistant in order to help learners who had extremely low literacy levels. This was done by a teacher familiar to the learners and took place on a one-to-one basis and within small groups.

The Perceived Academic Performance (P.A.P ) scale consists of a single item and asked students to rate their overall academic performance. This is a single item measure used
due to its reliability and the brevity of time needed. Time needed to complete the questionnaires had to be a consideration due to the participant profile and the number of measures being used. With P.A.P, the participants rate their overall academic performance on a range of “Failing/Below average/Average/Above average”. Answers are then coded into a two category variable consisting of either “Failing below average” or “Average, above average”.

The author designed the “Perceived Academic Ability Scale” (P.A.A.S) in order to get a detailed account of how these participants viewed their own academic ability. It was believed that P.A.P was not detailed enough. The P.A.A.S measure consists of ten child friendly questions measured on a seven point Likert scale with five questions reverse scored. The author and his Supervisor deemed this item to have face validity. The measure demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.7.

Costa and Mc Crea’s big 5 personality was used to measure personality traits. As this measure is only valid for learners of 17 years and older, fewer numbers of participants qualified for this measure. This measure consists of 25 questions and used a 1-5 likert scale method, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Participants under the age of 17 years were informed not to complete this section and move onto the next measure. As this measure consists of 25 questions, it was quite long and difficult for some participants to complete and some confusion expressed over some of the questions.

The Values in Action (V.I.A) measure constructed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) was also used. This inventory of strengths was devised in order to operationalise their Character Strengths and Virtue Handbook (C.S.V.). This is the counterpart to the Diagnostic
and Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders, (D.S.M.) and forms part of their process of classifying positive human strengths. For this reason, and for its brevity of time, measuring “Optimism” was chosen. This measure was also chosen to see if there was a correlation between C.T.C. Learners and specific character strengths. Namely, a positive association which could be explored in relation to positive psychology. This measure demonstrated acceptable reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.76.

Schwarzer (1992) General Self Efficacy Scale (G.S.E.) is a ten item psychometric scale which is undertaken to asses optimistic beliefs in ones abilities to cope with some demands in life. Responses to ten questions are made on a 4 point Likert scale. This measure has been proven to be reliable and valid internationally for two decades and is applicable to respondents over the age of 12 years. This measure was chosen as it has been viewed as a positive resistance resource factor and may be of importance in determining the constructs of persistence in adversity and resilience with both samples of participants (C.T.C and formal second level students). This proved to be reliable measure for the current sample with a reported Cronbach Alpha level of 0.82.

Dispositional Control and Context Control measure was administered. This is constructed of 3 questions measuring on a 1-5 likert scale. This measure is valid and reliable and indicates the amount of control the participant feels he or she has over the life events which affect them directly. The feeling of loss of control may be a significant factor in both groups of participants. A high score denoted high dispositional control and context control. This scale yielded a low internal reliability level of 0.5 which was likely due to the low to the presence of just three items. Internal consistency may be underestimated in scales possessing less than ten items (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2007) therefore such a finding should not be taken as evidence of poor reliability.
Satisfaction with Life Scale (S.W.L.S.) is a five item measure which uses a scale from 1-7. 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (Diener, Emmons, Larson and Griffin 1985). The Satisfaction With Life measure is a global measure of life satisfaction. It is just one factor in the construct of Subjective Well-being, the others being positive affective appraisal and negative affective appraisal. This measure proved reliable using Cronbach’s alpha (.77).

The final measure used is the Subjective Happiness Scale (S.H.S.) designed by Lyubomirsky (2002). It is a four item scale of global subjective happiness. This has been validated in over 2,500 participants from the United States of America and Russia. The S.H.S. has shown high internal consistency and to be stable across samples. The ease of administration also added to its suitability in this research. The S.H.S. demonstrated acceptable internal reliability (Crohbach Alpha = 0.70).

A total of 91 questions across nine measures were asked. On average it took participants 15 minutes to complete. A special needs assistant was used in order to assist those with extremely low levels of literacy and cognition.

2.3 Participants

The participants chosen for this research project were chosen from a convenience sample. The author had direct access to learners in both C.T.C’s and a second level school in Finglas. Eighty participants took part in this research project (N = 80) and were made up from a C.T.C (n = 40) and a second level school (n = 40). This was the total population of 15-18 year old in the secondary school and approximately 80% of all students attending the C.T.C aged 15-20 years. Within the secondary school sample all participants were male (n = 40) while among the C.T.C. group twenty-five participants were male (n = 25) and fifteen were females (n =
15). Participants volunteered to complete the measures and were briefed as to the purpose of the study prior to agreeing to participate in the study. On completion participants were debriefed and a number of psychological supports available were discussed. In the case of the participants within the C.T.C, a number of issues needed to be addressed.

2.4 Participant Literacy Levels

As literacy levels were relatively poor with some learners compared to the average levels for this age group, it was necessary to get the assistance of a teacher from the C.T.C. when working in small groups of 10 or more. The teacher was made available when filling out the demographic questionnaire. It was also necessary to read aloud the questions as some participants had difficulty understanding some of the measures. Instructions were given on how to fill-out the measures.

Due to the complex nature of some questions asked, it was necessary to reword orally, or re-phrase questions at times in order for the participants to fully answer as truthfully as possible. It is believed the results will not be altered in any way due to the explaining of some questions. Due to some of the characteristics of early school leavers and the length of time required to complete all 91 questions it may be necessary to allow participants a 5-10 minute interlude. This was not necessary for this research and all participants completed the questionnaires in one sitting which lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. The length of time taken to complete all measures is dependant on respondent’s level of literacy and ability to concentrate. Any replication of this research should be cognisant of this matter.
2.5 Possible Confounding Variables

As this research is investigating and comparing levels of Self Esteem, Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism, Self Efficacy, Dispositional Control and Context Control, Satisfaction with Life, and Subjective Happiness between two groups (C.T.C. and secondary school going teenage students), it should be recognised that of the 40 learners studied in the C.T.C, 80% had been attending for 18 months or less and 20% had been attending for 3 months or less.

It may be the case that the length of time attending the C.T.C and the interventions accessed by these learners will have negated some of the differences in measures which might have been present if these learners were surveyed on entry to the C.T.C.

2.6 Participant/Community Health and Demographics

Because both groups are taken from an area of high educational and socio-economic disadvantage (Finglas West), the variance in scores across all measures may not be too different. The difference in values may be more significant if the C.T.C. learners were compared to the scores of another school in a less disadvantaged area of Dublin.

In a report conducted by the department of Community Health and General Practice, Trinity College Dublin, commissioned by the Northern Area Health Board (2003), a number of key issues were highlighted. This survey interviewed Primary or Principle Care Givers (P.P.C.G.) and Health Service Professionals (H.S.P) working in Finglas Dublin 11. Of the 420 households sampled, 35% had medical cards, 40% of P.P.C.G had only primary schooling or less. 41% consulted their general practitioner because of stress. A notable area
of concern for P.P.C.G. showed 37% were worried that their teenagers would develop a problem with, or, as a result of drugs or alcohol.

2.7 Health Service Professional Perspectives

Over half of the H.S.P said depression was the most common mental problem in the area. It stated depression and anxiety affected people of all ages, young and old, (H.S.P. 5). Another cause of anxiety and depression in Finglas was isolation and loneliness. A number of H.S.P stated socio-economic factors and ill health contributing to poor mental health.

H.S.P 16 stated ‘the young population definitely seem to be more drugs orientated but the older population……a lot of women and men would be alcoholics…….I see the consequence of that’, (pg 2, Part 2.). Another H.S.P stated that the use of alcohol was ubiquitous (pg 4.) All H.S.P stated the strong relationship between social issues/deprivation and how this impacts on the overall health of the community.

They made a clear connection between loneliness, deprivation, social isolation, substance misuse and ill health. One H.S.P said there were many reasons why people here were unwell but ‘almost all of them returned to the fact that they are living in poverty or very close to it’ (H.S.P 16). The issue of overcrowding in households was also raised by H.S.P 10, stating the length of time lone parents were waiting for a house resulted in two and sometimes three generations living in the one house.

In a report by Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development, (R.A.P.I.D, 2003), Finglas West was identified as an area of high crime, anti-social behaviour and home burglaries.
It is important to understand the biopsychosocial related issues within this community, as reported by Health Service Professionals, and to analyse, to some degree, the underlying economic, social, educational, and medical difficulties with which this demographic are faced with. Both sets of respondents for this research are drawn from Finglas West.

2.8 Design.

This research was a between groups cross sectional survey. It was a quantitative design using an opportunistic sample based on a homogeneous group. This research is conducted using eight psychological measures: Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism Scale, (Peterson and Seligman), Self Esteem (Rosenberg), Satisfaction With Life, Disposition and control context, Subjective Happiness and The Self Efficacy Scale and the Perceived Academic Ability Scale which has been designed by the author.

Independent samples t-tests with a Bonferonni adjustment method were conducted to explore for any statistically significant difference between the C.T.C and Secondary School groups on a number of psychological variables. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were conducted in order to explore for statistically significant relationships between self-esteem and the other psychological variables. This analysis was conducted a precursor to the multiple regression analysis in order to establish association between the predictor and criterion variables, and to develop the most parsimonious model possible. A standard multiple regression analysis was subsequently conducted to examine the level of variance explained in self-esteem scores.
2.9 Procedure

Students for this research project were drawn from a Community Training Centre in Finglas West Dublin 11. This group (n = 40) were given a demographic questionnaire consisting of fifteen questions along with the already mentioned Psychological measures. In total the questionnaire consisted of ninety one questions.

The measures took approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Due to the quite low literacy levels of some C.T.C learners, it was necessary to take students in smaller mixed ability groups. A potential barrier to replication of this study may exist when we look at the overall cognitive abilities of some participants. Some may have difficulty in understanding what is being asked and some questions may need to be rephrased as accurately as possible in order to be understood by participants. Due to the length of time needed to complete the questionnaire and the underlying literacy needs of these learners it may be necessary to provide a small time out for four or five minutes. Some participants may seem bored and it may be necessary to insure that the answers are not completed in a hap-hazard way. Students needed to be three feet apart to avoid copying.

All participants were brought into a bright room with desks 3 feet apart from each other. All were instructed on their right to withdraw at any point, and anonymity was assured. The plausibility of this research may be questioned when we analyse the length of time these participants were engaged in education at the C.T.C. of these early school leavers, 80% of the participants were in training / education with this C.T.C for 18 months or less. It may be asked, at what stage should the term, “early school leaver” be removed as a label or used as an identifying variable. Further research in this area should focus on new participants to C.T.C’s in order to get amore accurate picture in relation to the psychological measures used.
The control group consisted of $n = 40$ boys from a secondary school in Finglas West, Dublin 11. All of these students were located within the same demographic area as the learners in the C.T.C. They were of a similar age and the same procedure was applied in this regard. The same recommendations are also considered for this group although higher levels of literacy were exhibited. Further research should include a control group from a different demographic area.
3. Results

This research project used Independent t-tests, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients, and standard multiple regression analysis. A multiple regression was used to examine relationships between predictor variables and their effect on the Criterion variable, Self-Esteem.

Non psychological data was obtained by the author with the use of a demographic questionnaire. Student age, gender, location of study, the importance of education and other data was investigated.

Students were asked if education was important to them, n = 71 stated that it was important, n = 37 C.T.C students, n = 34 secondary school students, (C.T.C students = 92.5%, secondary school students = 85%). Students living with both parents n = 46, n = 18 C.T.C students, n = 28 secondary school students (C.T.C. students = 45%. Secondary school students 70%). Students living with their mother only n = 27, n = 19 C.T.C. students, n = 8 secondary school students (C.T.C students = 47.5 %, secondary school students = 20 %).

Asked how many times they were in trouble with the police, n = 35 stated that they were in trouble with the police between 1 and 5 times in the past, n = 24 C.T.C students, n = 11 secondary school students, (C.T.C students = 60%, secondary school students = 27.5 %). Students were asked if they thought violence was necessary n = 55 answered yes, C.T.C students n = 26, secondary school students n = 29, C.T.C. students = 65%, secondary school students n = 72.5%.
Table 1

Lowest and highest possible score, the mean and standard deviation for each of the measures used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum possible</th>
<th>Maximum possible</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with life</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>6.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived academic ability scale</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>9.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional control and context control</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived academic ability</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self efficacy</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>5.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Happiness</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1 Independent samples t-test Results

An independent samples t-test was carried out to examine possible differences in self-esteem between both groups of student. An independent samples t-test found that there was no statistically significant difference between levels of self-esteem and students studying in C.T.C and secondary school, (t (78) = .358 p > 0.05, 2 tailed). C.T.C students (M = 30.53, S.D = 4.379) were found to have similar levels of self-esteem to secondary school students (M = 30.13, S.D. = 5.548)

Further Independent samples t-tests with a suitable Bonferroni adjustment method were carried out using the remaining psychological variables used in this report. There was no statistically significant difference between groups and location of study except for Optimism.

An independent samples t-test was carried out and found a statistically significant difference in Optimism between C.T.C students and secondary school students (t (78) = 2.51, p< 0.01, 2 tailed). C.T.C students (M = 28.73, S.D = 2.309) were found to have significantly higher level of Optimism than secondary school students (M = 27.08, S.D = 3.47).
3.2 Correlation results

A Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient found that there was a moderate positive significant relationship between self-esteem and the Perceived Academic Ability Scale (r = .413, p < 0.05, 2 tailed). The mean score for self-esteem was 30.33 (S.D. = 4.97) and for Perceived Academic Ability Scale was 41.63 (S.D. = 9.479).

The mean score for Satisfaction with Life was 22.20 (S.D. = 6.571). The mean score for Self-Esteem was 30.33 (S.D. = 4.97). A Pearson’s correlation coefficient found that there was a moderate positive significant relationship between Satisfaction With Life and self-esteem (r = .291, p < 0.05, 2 tailed).

The mean score for Subjective Happiness was 18.89 (S.D. = 3.66) and for self-esteem was 30.33 (S.D. = 4.97). A Pearson’s correlation coefficient found that there was a moderate positive significant relationship between Subjective Happiness and self-esteem (r = .316, p < 0.05, 2 tailed).

The mean score for Satisfaction with Life was 22.20 (S.D. = 6.57) and for Subjective Happiness was 18.89 (S.D. = 3.66). A Pearson’s correlation coefficient found that there was a moderately-strong positive significant relationship between Subjective Happiness and Satisfaction with Life, (r = .513, p = 0.05, 2 tailed).

The mean score for Self Efficacy was 27.55 (S.D. = 5.41) and for Perceived Academic Ability Scale was 41.63 (S.D. = 9.50). A Pearson’s correlation coefficient found a weak-to-moderate positive significant relationship between self-efficacy and the Perceived Academic Ability Scale (r = .343, p <0.05, 2 tailed).
Table 2.
Descriptive statistics, and correlations for all continuous variables (N = 80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>SH</th>
<th>SWL</th>
<th>PAP</th>
<th>DCCC</th>
<th>S-EF</th>
<th>Opt</th>
<th>PAAS</th>
<th>S-ES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWL</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability Dispositional &amp; Context Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means
18.89  22.20  1.84  8.76  27.55  27.90  42.63  30.33

Standard Deviations
3.65  6.67  .37  1.92  5.40  3.05  9.49  4.97

Note. Statistical significance: *p < .05; **p < .01
3.3 Multiple Regression Results

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if Perceived Academic Ability, Subjective Happiness, Dispositional control and context control, Self Efficacy, Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism and Satisfaction With Life significantly predicted ratings on self-esteem. The results of the regression indicated that two of the predictor variables explained 21.5% of variance $F(6, 74) = 5.57, p<0.05)$. It was found that the Perceived Academic Ability Scale significantly predicted Levels of Self Esteem ($\beta = .35, p <.05$), as did Subjective Happiness ($\beta = .22, p< 0.05$).

Table 3.
Standard multiple regression of the impact of Perceived Academic Ability and Subjective Happiness on levels of self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$\hat{a}$</th>
<th>$p$ value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic Ability Scale</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Happiness Scale</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: $\hat{a}$ indicates Standardised Slopes of predictors with associated $p$ values, ** significant at .01 level*
4. Discussion

For many years the image portrayed of an early school leaver, by a wealth of evidence, would be one of an individual who is a teenager twice as likely to be male rather than female, from an area of economic, education, and social deprivation. Studies have shown that a significant proportion of early school leavers come from areas of high unemployment and social exclusion.

Other research has focused on the family structure. The importance of parental education has been highlighted as has the impact of unemployment and economic difficulties. Research has shown that many early school leavers are from lone parent families and this report shows more than twice as many early school leavers are from lone parent families as opposed to secondary school students, but as we have seen there is no significant difference in self esteem or any of the other measures used. Indeed the learners from the C.T.C showed significantly higher levels of Optimism.

This research examined the demographics of this homogeneous population. Levels of self-esteem were examined to see if they differed between early school leaver and those who stayed in school. All participants were from Finglas west in Dublin 11. Finglas west is an area where some of the population experience many of the traits explained by previous research as predictors of early school leaver yet many, or the majority, of the population decide to remain in formal education. Finglas is an area of high unemployment, high crime and displays many of the features of a community struggling to do its best in harsh economic times. The question remains as to how much an impact lower levels of self-esteem has on the early school leaver and is it actually a contributing factor at all. It has been shown that teenagers with high subjective well being had high perceived attachments to parents which
may in effect impact positively on self-esteem (Raja et al., 1991), while popularity and school performances has also been shown to have an impact on self esteem.

The issue of self-esteem and its importance has been highly researched and the impact of high and low self-esteem attributed to many psychological perspectives in troubled adolescence. Its impact on education and how it may appear to be a trait of the early school leaver may have been exaggerated to a significant degree. This research has shown no significant differences in levels of self-esteem between early school leaver and persisters. It may often be the case that when psychological terminology finds its way into popular culture that it is overused, misdirected and all too easily applied to individuals as an easy or lazy option. What word would we use if the concept of “self esteem” did not exist at all and have clinicians developed a dependency on the concept of self-esteem? It may be the case that there is not a deficit, but an excess of a particular variable or group of variables.

There may be strong evidence to support the importance of self-esteem which may be all too visible when we examine an individual suffering from chronically low self esteem but to what extent it is a significant factor in the life of an early school leaver?

Much of the literature from organisations assisting early school leaver emphasises the needs and traits of this group. In almost all cases, from C.T.C’s to youth reach it may become apparent that one of the main traits of their core group is a learner with low self-esteem. This research asks, is this accurate description of an early school leaver and is self-esteem a key factor which needs addressing?

As mentioned already, previous research places a lot of emphasis on demographics using a qualitative method of investigation. Family structures, education of parents, teacher perceptions, family structures and socio economic status are explored. This research applied a
quantitative method using proven psychological measures targeting 80 learners from a homogeneous group. It must be emphasised that all of the students came from the same socioeconomic background, but not all left school early. As well as investigating self-esteem, part of the main hypothesis, this research examined in a scientific manner levels of Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism, Subjective Happiness, Satisfaction with Life, Self Efficacy, Perceived Academic Ability, Dispositional Control and Context Control and attempts to find significant differences in these measures and most importantly self-esteem which is only anecdotally attributed to early school leaver.

All students were given the same measures to complete and all data was processed using PAWS18. In relation to demographics a number of points warrant mentioning. Question 6 asked students if education was important to them. Of the students who answered (N = 71) 92.5% of students in the C.T.C answered yes, while just 85% of second level students answered yes. This may appear at variance with other studies. It might be believed that teenagers who leave school early believe education to be of no importance to them. Here we have two homogeneous groups, early school leavers and persisters, yet the importance of education is understood by more C.T.C learners than secondary school learners. This may lead us to a number of conclusions. The C.T.C learners appreciate the importance of education but left school for other reasons, or possibly the impact of training and education and the structure of the C.T.C system acted to re-enforce the belief that education is a worthwhile pursuit.

Students living with both parents, n = 46, 45% of C.T.C learners and 70% of secondary school students, while students living with their mother only n = 27, 47.5% of C.T.C students and 20% of second level students. Here we can see evidence that students studying in second level school have a significantly higher number of students living with
both parents but we also see a significant number who are living with their mothers only. As previous research has shown, not all children of lone parents leave school early. We see here a significant number of secondary school students living with their mother only but still engaged in second level education. An independent samples t-test found no significant differences in levels of Self Esteem, Perceived Academic Performance, Optimism, Subjective Happiness, Satisfaction with Life, Self Efficacy, Perceived Academic Ability, Dispositional Control and Context Control, between those students living with either both parents or their mother alone.

It may seem peculiar that students who attend second level school and C.T.C would have similar levels of these measures. Eighty percent of students within the C.T.C were attending for 18 months or less with 20% attending for 2 months or less. Most of these learners were classed as category 1, meaning they had minimal formal education on entry to the C.T.C. Not only were levels of self-esteem similar between both groups but their levels of self-esteem ranged between average and above average. One might expect, judging from previous research, that these levels may vary greatly in favour of the persisters. Even considering the fact that this is a homogenous group, and that the early school leavers have re-engaged in education, previous research indicates that the early school leavers should still have significantly lower levels of self esteem. It may be the case that self esteem is not as resilient to change as previously thought. It might be the case that levels of Self Esteem can increase dramatically in a short period of time given the right interventions.

The environment within the C.T.C is key to the highlighting the abilities, not inabilities, of the learner. The focus here is primarily on the individual. An environment which is challenging and caring persists and students are treated as individuals. Students are encouraged to engage constructively by dedicated staff that enforce strict attendance and
behavioural policies and place the onus back onto the learner for various outcomes. A system of almost subconscious behaviour modification occurs without labelling.

The issue of staffing within the C.T.C is crucial. There is a system of key working which exists whereby each student has constant and direct contact with an instructor allocated to him/her. Students may elect to have a key worker of their choice appointed also. Communications are on a first name basis with respect shown by both parties. The creation of a challenging learner focused environment which is safe and places the emphasis on positive re-engagement into the education system and personal development is essential. Without a caring, educated, responsible and responsive staff, along with consistent rules which are fair and made very clear to the individual, the risk of ghettoization within these centres may be a very real threat. But as with many state and semi state funded agencies, it is of paramount importance that policy makers and individuals who affect serious policy changes within C.T.C’s are proven subject matter experts. It is recommended that a process of 360 degree feedback is used when carrying out performance evaluations of these individuals.

With increasing emphasis on value for money the emphasis may shift from centres that emphasised personal growth through respect and education to one of pure certification. If certification is now the only measure, staff may lose or be encouraged to negate one of the most important aspects of their job (a holistic approach) and focus purely on tangible results.

Within this group of early school leavers there are many subgroups. Early school leavers exist for a multiple of reasons. At one end of the spectrum we may see the individual who is out of school for many misdemeanours and poor attendance while at the other end we may see another individual where social norms are skewed to suit an exaggerated appetite and instinct, and where motivation and emotions appear disfigured. This latter group may find themselves even more marginalised and located on the periphery in relation to training and
education. This could be due to the fact that they may be perceived to be low achievers in relation to certification. This in turn may lead to their exclusion from training by Centres who may be forced into meeting the needs of their funding body rather than the needs of the potential participant.

The measures administered in this research project should be used on a longitudinal basis to evaluate progress in relation to aspects of C.T.C student lives. It may be argued that C.T.C learners came to the centre with these levels of self esteem already in place, this could be argued and a longitudinal study is needed. But there was one significant result between our two groups.

Independent samples t-test showed students within the C.T.C had significantly higher levels of Optimism than those studying in second level education. It may be shown to be highly unlikely that an early school leaver will have significantly higher levels of Optimism without ongoing significant and relevant interventions. It may also be the case that this has more to do with the resilience and hardiness of the early school leaver.

As stated already, the emphasis on certification alone may be to the detriment of C.T.C. If the only measure of success is certification, important time and recourses will be wholly diverted to these objectives. A Pearson’s correlation coefficient showed a strong positive significant relationship between subjective happiness and satisfaction with life. As subjective happiness raised so too did satisfaction with life. The pressures on students in Ireland are many, and as already stated by Headstrong, Mental health is one of the most important aspects facing young people in Ireland today.
Another Pearson’s correlation coefficient result showed that there was a strong positive significant relationship between subjective happiness and self-esteem. As subjective happiness increased, so too did self-esteem.

A standard linear Multiple Regression Analysis found the Perceived Academic Ability Scale and Satisfaction with life significantly predicted Self-Esteem. This result indicates that perceived academic ability and satisfaction with life are predictors of increased self-esteem for the current sample.

It may be found that while making the difficult transition to secondary school education some learners may attend for a while, dealing with difficult personal issues. The student may fall behind in their studies and not engage fully. The student may then develop further behavioural problems and become labelled with the tag of trouble maker. The labelling may be crucial to the future development of the child. If the same expectations are not placed on these individuals as are placed on other students, the teenager may fall to the way-side. Perceived Academic Ability and the other measures mentioned in this study may go into decline. It is believed by the author that optimism is the last characteristic to be adversely affected by dropping out of school and this is why it appears to be the a key denominator in determining the difference between C.T.C learners and secondary school teenagers. Optimism (as opposed to the other measures examined here) is significantly increased while attending the C.T.C as it may have been the last characteristic drastically altered by the process of dropping out of formal education.

The results of this data do not support the author’s first hypothesis. Students studying in C.T.C’s do not have significantly lower levels of self-esteem than students studying in formal second level education. This may be due to the various issues mentioned in this research including the structure of the C.T.C. Also students had been attending the C.T.C. for
as long as 18 months prior to participating in this study and it’s possible these individuals had experienced an increase in their levels of self-esteem as a result of attending the C.T.C. training course. Future research targeting early C.T.C. attendees is required to determine if this explanation is correct.

The second hypothesis is not supported. Students in the C.T.C had similar levels of the perceived academic ability but the same levels of self esteem as those students in formal second level education. The reasons for this may be because there was no initial difference in these levels or that C.T.C students were in the C.T.C for 18 months or less.

The third hypothesis was not supported as no significant difference was found between groups in relation to Dispositional control and context control. Again there may have been no initial difference or students in the C.T.C improved levels of this measure over the period of up to 18 months while studying.

The fourth hypothesis also failed to receive support. There was no significant difference between the two groups in relation to perceived academic ability, while similar levels of self esteem were found. This may be due to no initial significant difference or the amount of time spent studying in the C.T.C.

The practical implications of the results of this study are many. It may be difficult to believe that there was no initial difference between C.T.C students (early school leaving group) and students studying in formal second level education in relation to all of the measures studied by this report. Indeed much research has shown that these measures would be indicative of early school leavers and the fact that they do no present as a significant difference is significant in itself.
It is the opinion of the author that the inputs, procedures and approach taken to delivering training and education to the early school leaving group significantly increased the measures studied in this report. Much research has attempted to locate the specific characteristics of early school leavers. The trait of self-esteem has been frequently proposed as a key factor. If self-esteem is not an issue which needs addressing than one must ask the question, is it a waste of resources when dealing with an issue which does not seem to be apparent.

A short coming of this research project is the fact that it was not a longitudinal study, therefore it is impossible to say with any certainty that levels of self-esteem in relation to C.T.C learners was initially low and developed to average and above average ratings. The same notion applies to all of the other measures which were studied. A comprehensive, national systematic research should be undertaken on a longitudinal basis. This could be done by a dedicated team of research psychologists using the measures used in this research project. On entry to every C.T.C each new learner would fill out a similar questionnaire. On completion of the course the same learner would complete the same questionnaire and an analysis undertaken.

Teenagers who drop out of school early are usually the bearers of multiple labels. These labels only serve to reinforce their own, at times, confused and distorted internal beliefs and values and as these labels become ever more engrained, so too do the behaviours which are associated with those labels. This process is androgynous. At what stage do we start to remove these labels? An illiterate person is no longer illiterate when they can read and write, a provisional driver is no longer a provisional driver when they pass a driving test. An early school leaver is no longer an early school leaver, when?
Further research should expand on this issue and attempt to find a solution to this question. The removal of this label or the introduction of another more positive one should be explored. The author suggests after 12 months of consistent attendance and the attainment of relevant goals the student is no longer labelled an early school leaver.

The implications for further research are many. It needs to be clarified whether early school leavers in C.T.C’s and youth reach organisations indeed have low levels of self-esteem. As stated, much research of a qualitative nature has taken place. The views of parents and teachers have been taken into account and international research has shown self-esteem to be related to poor academic achievement and indicative of early school drop-out rates.

This research has shown something different. It has shown average to above average levels of self-esteem and significantly higher levels of Optimism within a group which judging by national and international studies should have shown significantly lower levels than those in mainstream education. As already stated there may be a number of reasons for this finding. It is recommended by the author that a more definitive study be carried out on a longitudinal nationwide basis using these psychological measures to gather more reliable data.
References:


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Scoring versions of psychological measures used.

Cover page.

Dear participant,

I am currently conducting research on teenagers, how they see themselves in relation to happiness, satisfaction with life, how much control you believe you have over some issues, optimism, personality traits, how you see yourself in relation to self esteem and how you believe you perform in school. I would be most grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaires.

There are no right or wrong answers so please take your time to answer as accurately as you can. You may withdraw from this survey any time you wish. do not write your name on any of the sheets as confidentiality is assured.

Thank you very much,

Paul Meagher.