Findings

**Step A—In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews**

After the research questions and goals were defined and the stages of the study were constructed and designed, as described in the Methodology section, the stage of identifying the young people who would take part in the study began and the interview questions were formulated and implemented.

Once all the interviews were completed, the full set of transcripts was reviewed again with fine-tuning and adjustments added. The categories already created were phrased and attributed to broad themes. Table 3 presents the full suite of themes that were created, each theme divided into categories and exemplified by means of a quotation.

Table 3: Categories and themes



 

The findings of the analysis follow:

**Theme 1**: **Future orientation of a complete life cycle**

Future orientation embraces and includes various aspects of the individual’s life cycle, such as choosing a field of higher studies or vocational training, establishing and developing a career and work, couple-hood and starting a family, choosing a place to live, thinking about leisure time, and military or national service. The respondents’ references to their future in these respects are presented below:

*Category 1: Family and couple-hood*

When asked how they envisage themselves in regard to family and couple-hood, the respondents were divided. Those in one group see themselves as definitely engaging in couple-hood and starting families:

*To be married to my current girlfriend, three children, and have a house of my own, not a rental, to work for my brother’s company* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

*What would I like to be? What everyone wants to be: To create a good family, to be well-off (financially), to have a house that’s my own* (S7/M/17—22.5.18).

*I don’t know, like whatever a normal family has, don’t you think? A home, a family, children, happiness, making a good living. And I’d also want to run a small business* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

Those in the other group did not see themselves as such. One respondent did not envisage getting married and starting a family at all:

*Family? Children? Not me, that’s not where I see myself so much. Because I don’t believe in marrying young and all that, because it pretty much stops your life. I see myself more, me and my mother, she’s at home and I go out and study and work. That’s how I see myself* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

One respondent described his reluctance to enter into couple-hood in the present due to fear that it would affect its future:

*But it’s annoying that you’re with a girlfriend and it’s like you know she won’t be with you in the future. There’s a chance that you’ll split up, so it’s annoying. There’s no reason for me to be with someone like that when I know we’ll split up* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

Another respondent noted that while this was not part of her thinking at the moment, the possibility of selecting a male or female spouse in the future remained:

Q. *What about a family? Children? Couple-hood?*

S14: *I haven’t got an idea. I don’t think about it at all. Whatever comes will come. I’m not waiting or saying, like, hey, I really want a boyfriend, or something. If something comes along, someone, male, female. I don’t know what’ll come … Whatever comes.*

Q. *Does that mean it might be a woman, too?*

S14: *Could be* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

**Few respondents referred to future family and couple-hood. Some said with certainty that they see themselves engaging in couple-hood and having families in the future; others made a point of stating the opposite.**

*Category 2: Higher education*

Continuing education, academic study, or vocational training after high school and military service is a highly meaningful stage of future thinking among adolescents and young adults in Israel.

Some respondents see vocational training in their future:

Respondent S6 wants to learn to be a makeup artist:

*It’s what I told you. I’m also almost done with my studies and I want to do matriculation, twelve years of school, and go right on to study cosmetics, but I won’t be able to do it while I’m in the army* (S6/F/16.5—22.5.18).

Respondent S4 sees himself studying music and sound:

*So after I learn the guitar I want to learn the bass and after that … the violin, stuff like that.*

Q. *Do you see yourself going to …*

A. *College?*

Q. *Yes.*

A. *I already have a college in mind…*

Q. *Which one?*

A. *VPN College.*

Q. *Is that a college for sound?*

A. *Sound and production.*

Q. *Just asking: What are the requirements for it?*

A. *It’s a course … It’s not a degree or anything. There are no requirements. You pay some money* (S4/M/17—5–7.5.18).

Some respondents see themselves going to university. Respondent S8, for example, spoke firmly and vehemently about her wish to take higher studies that relate to her occupational aspiration:

*In principle, the reason that I wanted, that I’m taking lots of* [matriculation] *subjects, and lots of units in each subject, is because I want to go to medical school. Because I relate to it personally, brain surgery* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

Respondent S11 expressed the need to attend university as part of a family norm, even though she does not aspire to it:

*Maybe I’ll go to university when I’m a little older. It’s not my aspiration but everyone in my family has a degree and they’re with the police* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

Respondent S1 did not envisage herself attending a university at all:

*University and things like that? That’s not for me at all. It’s not my strong side. It’s not … If I study here, it’s only because I tear my hair out and I really, really want it. Like, there are kids who it comes to easily, but that’s not me…* (S1/F16—8.3.18).

Respondent S12, who is already running a business, linked the need to go for a degree to the possibility of eventual burnout in his occupation:

*I don’t really want to be a deejay for the rest of my life because it really, really wears you out, it’s very demanding, and at some point you find yourself fifty years old, you’re living like a king, usually when you get older you do events where instead of ILS 1,000 for an evening at some club you’re getting ILS 6,000 for a wedding. Then you have a great time, bang out twenty events per month, get a ton of money and live like a king. Then somewhere around age fifty you stop getting jobs. It burns you out, you have no life, and then all of a sudden you find yourself with a home, a wife, a few kids on the side, and you’ve got no schooling and you’ve got no work. I don’t want to go there, that’s why I think sometimes that while I’m still young I want to get a degree in something, maybe music or business administration, I don’t know, something useful* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

Respondent S2 noted the need to study in the present as a way to influence future occupational security:

*I always counted on going to work for my brother if I quit* [studies], *like a carpenter or something. And then I realized that you can’t know what’s gonna happen, that I won’t have security in it ... that if I have a fight with him or if his company shuts down, then I’ll have to have … that I’ll be able to work on my own and not depend on anyone else. I realized that was true and then I began to study* (S2/M/17—2.3.18).

Although he does not see himself enrolling in higher studies imminently, he leaves himself the option in the more distant future:

*An engineer, no. Because you need a strong matriculation* [certificate] *and I’m not counting on getting one. Also, I … I’ve got a problem because I have a pretty big gap in my studies and I don’t think I can make it up*. *Maybe in the future…* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

Respondent S10 drew a connection between studies and obtaining certifications as a key to life:

*In this world, you need certificates. It doesn’t matter if you’re really smart. Let’s say you need matriculation, you need a matriculation certificate, it doesn’t matter whether you’re smart, you can do matriculation. You need a diploma. So, like,* ***I’ll have it, it’s like, let’s say, a set of keys that I’ll have that will open some doors*** (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

And Respondent S13 did not envisage himself taking any form of vocational or academic training; his future learning would be autodidactic, the product of experience:

*Studies? I don’t see any reason to continue for so long, I think I build up knowledge not necessarily by studying…. But, let’s say, I work as an auto mechanic so then I work at home. So we have a tractor and a jeep and at the end of the week I replaced a transmission…. My father teaches me, so the knowledge that I build up is what I know will help me in the future. Because I’ve already been working at the garage for a while. So I know for sure that it’ll help me in the future (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).*

**Most respondents attributed much importance to continuing studies and referred to them extensively. Some saw themselves going on to academic studies, others envisaged vocational training, and yet others saw no formal study in their future.**

*Category 3: Future orientation and military service*

In Israel, by law, military service or civilian national service is compulsory for every male and female who finishes high school unless he or she is exempted from military service on religious grounds or for other personal motives. Analysis of the data shows that the focus on the army as the next station in their lives is a natural point of reference for the respondents. Some clearly explained their plans in regard to military induction. Others were unable to formulate a response and still others did not relate to the question at all. Examples may be seen in the following quotations:

*In five years I see myself in the army, hoping to be in a special unit, that’s what I want* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

*I also saw in my first callup* [for pre-induction testing] *that I hadn’t* *the slightest idea where I wanted to be* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

One female respondent credited her choice of national service (an alternative to military service) to her participation with a group of girls in running a hospitality service that employs national service volunteers work:

*I really want to do national service at the hospitality place where I am now, because sometimes they do national service there and I think it’s really nice there* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

One male respondent regarded military service as a source of development and a potential future workplace:

*So in the army I want to be in intelligence, in computers, and then, afterwards, make a career out of it, continue to work in it* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

**In sum, the youngsters include military service in their future orientation.**

*Category 4—future orientation and place of residence*

Much reference was made to place of residence in various ways, including attention to the place where the respondents wish to raise their children:

*I know that my children will grow up in a rural community, like where I live now, but I do want to go live in Tel Aviv, sometime after the army. I’m crazy about that city* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

*And if we get married and start a family, it’s not gonna be in Lod. I’d get out of here* (S2/M/178—12.3.18).

Here is a reference to occupational opportunities that the location offers:

*Eilat, I’m not sure, because just the same, Eilat isn’t a place where it’s easy to develop. It’s, like, a place that’s got jobs but not jobs that you can advance in* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

Or a wish to live in some other place that represents a different social status from that offered by the current place of residence:

*If I have house that’s on its own* [not an apartment], *it won’t have two stories but one big story, spread out. Lots of room. A big kitchen. A big living room* (S5/F/18—22.5.18).

A female respondent associated her future place of residence with her occupational aspiration to become an actress:

*My brother always said, when you finish twelfth grade, I’ll take you abroad with me. That’s because he’s about to leave Israel. He told me, you finish twelfth grade, you come to me. I’ll get you an audition, I’ll set up the whole thing, whatever you want and whatever you don’t want. He said, come live with me, I’ll help you get ahead there* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

**In sum, the youngsters have a clear picture of their future place of residence and express preferences among different places. Generally speaking, few wish to live where they are living now.**

*Category 5—Occupational aspirations*

A dominant and important element in future orientation is the occupational field. Future orientation in this regard is reflected in defining and identifying an occupational aspiration. The occupational aspirations of dropout youth—the main topic of the study—are described in various ways and in different occupational and vocational fields. The respondents even specify the reasons for their choice of particular occupational aspirations.

S1. *No, there doesn’t have to be an office. It might be, like, a secretary. Just sitting around…. Yes, what of it … like things like that or, you know, answering phone calls … with a white buttoned-down shirt…. It could be a secretary or clerk. I don’t care. The main thing, you know if it’s that way… a cup of coffee…. But maybe modeling. If I don’t do well in school, then that’s what I’ll do. If I really want to have a house in Herzliya, that’s what I’ll do* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

S2. *Me, what I want is to be a gas technician with this company…. I also like to mess around with screws and building stuff…. I connect with it* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

S3. *It might even be information security for some company.… If it’s not computers, so … maybe something in engineering, things like that* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

S4. *I told you… Since I was three, I knew I wanted to work in music, you understand?* (S4/M/17.5—7/5/18).

S5. *I’d really like to study home design or anything that’s got to do with fashion and stuff…. So, five years from now I’ll be taking home design or I’ll have a clothing shop. Or both…. I’ll design clothing and home interiors, too* (S5/F/18—22.5.18).

S6. *A makeup artist, and maybe… a psychologist? Not to learn to be a psychologist, to be like a coach.… Because I love to listen to other people’s problems and try to help and it makes me feel really good. In general, I think I have something to contribute to people* (S6/F/16—22.5.18).

S7. *Working with garbage … Nah, those are just words. No way, God forbid. I don’t know; there are all sorts of jobs …. What, what do I want? I don’t know, there are plenty of jobs. Maybe I’d want to have two jobs. To make more money* (S7/M/17—22.5.18).

S8. *I want to be a doctor. To deal more with physics, to be more of a girl who does more with laboratory things because that’s also connected with medicine. I find this whole world, the world itself, interesting. So that’s my occupation. I connect with it personally and I’m really interested in it. Even if I don’t have it, it’s a really interesting occupation* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

S9. *I want to be a fitness trainer in the field of health. I want to help people. It’s a really big problem with people like that today, like this issue of weight, and I come from a place like that* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

S10. *If you ask me, you know, what kind of profession would I go into? I think maybe to be an electrician, like, an engineer…. In the school I went to before, they had an electrician program. I signed up, I wanted to be there, I heard some really cool things. I said, why not? It really is, like, an interesting occupation* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

S11. *I want to be an actress. My brother always told me that if I study now, I’ll become Gal Gadot. If I not an actress, I’ll be a chef or a baker. One or the other…. I’ve seen lots of girls my age who began to take acting lessons. So I said: why shouldn’t I do something with this? I’ve got this talent* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

S12. *In one word, it’s gonna be music. I don’t know how, I don’t know in what role, in what context, in reference to what, how big it’ll be, but it’ll be music. My goal in life is to make a successful living from music that I produce* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

S13. *I’d like to study auto mechanics, to become more of a professional mechanic. ‘Cause it’s something I really like to do. And also guiding, tour guiding* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

S14. *I don’t know so much how to do it and when, but also something in media: television, or film* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

S15. *It’s not being a chef; it’s being a cook, to cook, I like, I love cooking, I don’t know how to explain it. Cooking and baking. To bake things, fix things, make pastries* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

S16. *My aspiration is to work in the food business, to be a chef* (S16/M/14—12.3.19).

**All the participants except one had a specific and explicit occupational aspiration that they drew from a broad field of vocations.**

**Theme 2**: T**he role of parents in formulating future orientation and occupational aspirations**

The family as such is the adolescent’s primary source for his or her understanding of the surrounding world. The family influences our values and beliefs, our knowledge, our cultural capital, our sense of worth and efficacy, and, of course, our present and future choices. Its impact is also evident in future orientation and occupational aspirations. In this study, as in others, the respondents referred to their parents in various ways, including descriptions of relationships at home between their parents or between them and the respondents, and how the respondents think their parents perceive the future of the respondents themselves.

*Category 1: Family structure and relationships*

To further understand the family context, the respondents were asked about their family members and intra-family relations.

About half of the respondents come from divorced families, as S3 describes:

A. *I have seven siblings, divorced parents. They live in Bareket … There’s not much to say. They work, both of them.*

Q. *When did your parents get divorced?*

A. *A year ago, a year and a half ago.*

Q. *And how did it go for you?*

A. *Hard. Like for anyone whose parents split up.*

Q. *Is it still hard?*

A. *Yes. And also, my father just got married… such a mess* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

Several respondents from divorced families are not in touch with their fathers:

*I’ve got an amazing mother. She’s given me everything since I was a little kid. And my grandparents are the ones who brought me up after my parents got divorced. So I’m like really attached to them and the whole family is very warm and loving. I can’t put it into words; I got lucky …. I’m not in touch with my father, I mean, he’s not in touch with me* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

*I’m fourteen, I study at ‘Youth Advancement.’ My parents are divorced. I live with my mother and grandmother. We have an apartment but—that’s basically it, I also have two older brothers, that’s basically it…. My parents got divorced two weeks after I was born and I have no relationship with my father* (S16/M/14—12.3.19).

Respondent S7 reported that he comes from a single-parent household and is conflicted with his mother:

*My mom’s a single mom. We don’t get along. What does it mean not to get along? We fight all the time* (S7/M/17—22.5.18).

Other respondents came from two-parent families that have good relations:

*My whole family has really good relationships* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

Two respondents have parents with disabilities (physical or auditory):

*I was born in France. My parents are deaf. They have six children* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

The respondents’ family composition was such that half of them come from households with both parents at home and the others’ parents are divorced. In some cases, relations among family members are good; in others they are typified by conflicts and complexities.

*Category 2: Family employment tree*

The expression “family employment tree” denotes the vocational structure of the nuclear and expanded family as the respondents relate to it. Among other things, the respondents described the professions and vocations of their parents and other family members, e.g., professions such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, etc.:

*My father is a guard at the Klal Center downtown and my mother teaches preschool* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

*My father is a taxi driver and also a kind of technician at the ritual bath and my mother gets women ready to use the bath* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

[My brother] *was in the food business for a bunch of years and then, like, he got together with all sorts of people who could help him get ahead and then, one day, he heard about an offer to go into partnership on an events hall, and that’s how he got there* (S16/M/16—12.3.19).

Respondents whose parents had higher education said the following:

*My father is a battalion commander with the Border Police and my mother is with the Ministry of Education; she’s trying to improve education in this country* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

*My mother’s going for an MBA. My father does fix-it jobs* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

*My father is Vice President for Human Resources at the Technion. My mother is self-employed in environmental things; she also did a Ph.D. a few years ago* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

Other respondents had an unemployed parent or parents:

S14. *My dad, I don’t know how to define this, but what he does is drink Coke and coffee as a profession. Right now he’s jobless. My mother works in education; now she’s an assistant kindergarten teacher, sometimes high school, too…. I don’t know how it’s going.*

Q. *They don’t work all the time?*

A. *No, my mother always works, my father—sometimes* … (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

*They don’t work, they live on Social Security … that’s about it. What do they do? They take care of us kids* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

*My mother doesn’t work. Well, sometimes she does. She doesn’t work; my father looks for work* (S7/M/17—22.5.18).

*My father’s a farmer and my mother doesn’t work* (S6/F/16.5—22.5.19).

Some respondents saw a connection between their occupational choice and their parents’ vocations.

Below is Respondent S4, who wants to be a sound designer:

*My parents … My father was once a musician. Once he was a musical producer, he was a DJ, a sound man … all kinds of events, concerts, radio stations. He left it and now he and my mother have been running a transportation company for ten years* (S4/M/17.5—7.5.18).

And here is Respondent S3, who wants to work in digital information security:

*My mother has this website and I helped her to put it together…. That was three or four years ago; that’s when we set up the site. A site for Korean translations. She has the number-one site in the country* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

Or Respondent S9, who wants to engage in coaching:

*There were a couple of years when my mom was in school and she also did a degree in coaching. I read her final projects and got a little interested in it* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

Respondent S11 gave a detailed description of the vocations of every member of her family, including extended family, as part of a family tradition in choosing an occupation:

*My father’s sister and brother, both of them are with the Police. The Border Police. My aunt is with the Central Unit. I have one uncle in a special patrol unit and another with the Prisons Service. So it’s like the whole family already … the whole family is Police, Border Police, army, all sorts of things like that. So why should I break with the tradition?* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

**The respondents described the occupations of their parents and other family members. Some parents work; others do not. The respondents linked their parents’ vocations with their own occupational aspirations.**

*Category 3: Parents’ perception of youth’s possible future*

In some interviews, reference was made to how the respondents think their parents perceive their children’s futures. The responses were diverse. In some, for example, the adolescent–parent discourse about the future centered on employment:

*My mother knows that my future is that I like to cook and that’s what I want to do in my life. She says: Is that what you want to be? A chef? I tell her no, I want to go into cyber, but* [to cook] *as a hobby* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

Alternatively, a general reference to the future is made:

Q. *What do your parents think about your future? What do they discuss with you?*

S3. *They think it’s gonna be totally fine* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

*They don’t tell me what, they just say maybe it’ll be this or maybe it’ll be that* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

Some respondents report that no such discourse ever took place at home:

*What do my parents want me to become? Hey, I never asked them* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

**According to the respondents, parents relate to the future in general and in the context of employment and fulfillment of occupational aspirations. Some report receiving words of encouragement and hope for the future; others refer to this discourse as one that never took place.**

**Theme 3: Aspects of the self in regard to the future**

The way adolescents perceive themselves in the future is immensely important, as are their feelings, emotions, or thoughts about the future and how they choose the path, including obstacles to surmount, by which they will fulfill their aspirations for the future. Also important are the effects of their current self-esteem and self-image on their belief in themselves going forward. In the following categories, these topics came up in their responses.

*Category 1: General self-concept*

Self-concept is the set of a person’s beliefs about him or herself in various areas of life. It is composed of personal schemas based on self-assessment, -image, -confidence, and -efficacy. People’s present-day perceptions about themselves affect the way they see themselves in the future.

Our respondents perceived themselves in different ways. The first is the relating of self-concept to character:

*A lot of people tell me that I don’t sound like a 17-year-old girl and I don’t talk like a 17-year-old girl. I don’t have the head of a girl of 17, lots of people tell me that, but it’s one of the things that you develop when you’re alone a lot* (S8/F/18—15.11.18).

*I’ve been pretty much on my own all my life. So they didn’t get involved with stuff like that with me. Sure, they gave me opinions and advice here and there, but I’ve been pretty independent all my life* (S4/M/17.5—7.5.18).

*I say that I’ll stay the way I am, maybe I’ll grow up a little but I’m still going to be me. Maybe I’ll work. Of course I’ll work. I’ll invest in life, but become someone else? Not a chance* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

Self-concept associated with self-induced change:

*Like, I still have that part of that jokes around and bothers people and sometimes I talk not-nice, but now I just … I accept it more, breath more, and tell myself to calm down* (S5/F/18—22.5.18).

*In earlier years, my situation, I don’t know how to explain it, but it was really bad. I didn’t have people to share it with, I got to a really bad mental state; sometimes I had suicidal thoughts. But the moment I found this place here* [the Youth Advancement Unit], *they really helped me to get out of that situation. Now things are better* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

*I really needed this to make myself blossom, to believe in myself, and I think that this, at this age, at least for me—I’m not a psychologist, I’m talking about myself––at this age, it was very, very traumatic, the whole thing of who am I and what are my aspirations. Even today I see myself as relatively grown up for my age. This maturity thing has always, always accompanied me, and socially, you could say, it did me a lot of harm, when I was at the end of grade school* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

Self-concept associated with studies:

*Yes, I’m doing fine. It used to be that I didn’t know how to read anything in English. Now I’m beginning to understand and to know how* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

*Abilities, yes, but not at the highest level. It’s like I understand but… I don’t know how to explain it. A little… Because of this gap that I’ve got, there are basic things that I don’t succeed in…* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

Or self-concept related to the world of work:

*I believe in myself, I’m confident in myself, I think I know what I’m doing, I get positive feedback, I’m getting better all the time* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

*I have this ego thing about supporting myself and building the studio for myself* (S4/M/17.5—7.5.18).

**The respondents associated their self-concept with their personal character and the way others see them, a change that they made in their lives and its effect on them, and self-concept concerning areas of life such as studies or the world of work.**

*Category 2: The possible self*

The “possible self” represents people’s ideas about what they want to become and what they may become—ideas that connect cognitive understanding about the self in the future with the motivation that is needed to bring the ideas to fruition.

Respondent S15 described this amazingly well:

Q. *So let’s talk a little about the future. Okay? Imagine yourself for a moment five years or ten years from now, it doesn’t matter which. What would you like to be doing then?*

A. *What would I like to do or what would I do? There’s a difference.*

Q. *Why?*

A. *Because, you know, you have to invest, you have to pass all the matriculation exams, and then you have to invest in studies afterward, at the university.*

Q. *And you don’t see yourself there?*

A. *No, it’s not that I don’t see myself there. It’s that you have to work to get to those places.*

Q. *Do you think that your having dropped out of school stands in your way, or that your studying here holds you back from attaining this aspiration?*

A. *Of course. What do you mean? Why wouldn’t it hold me back?*

Q. *I don’t know; explain it*.

S. *Sure, yeah, it holds me back. Did you ever see a student at Youth Advancement who went into cyber? Or who went, I don’t know, something like that, whatever, at a top level?* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

**Several respondents described the distance between what they would like to become and their “possible self” in view of their being dropout youth.**

*Category 3: Future orientation and emotions*

Thoughts about the future and the “possible self” evoke a broad range of emotions and feelings: fear, excitement, expectation, hope, or happiness. Examples may be seen in the way the respondents expressed the ambitus of their emotions in reference to the future:

Emotions of fear:

*Crazy scared because I want things and if it doesn’t happen then I’m going to be depressed right away and I’m going to get really upset. What happened? Why?* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

*It’s a scary world … the world itself and the world of music…. It’s not something that’s stable* (S4/M/17.5—7.5.19). A

Or lack of fear:

*I’ve got nothing to fear. Whatever comes comes. God writes our life; we have no way to change it. We try to make the future good* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

Emotions of concern:

*I’m concerned about next year… About the army… I don’t want to do the army* (S2/M/17—8.3.18).

*I’m not worried but more like anxious about heading out … into the outside world* (S5/F/18—22.5.12).

*First of all, there are always concerns because it’s a field where a self-employed person isn’t assured anything. As for the future, I’m not worried and, I know that I come from a really great home; I won’t be heading to the streets* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

Or lack of concern:

*I have no concerns or expectations, I don’t know, when things get started, like finishing the matriculation exams and starting to do an occupation for real, then it really begins, I’ll have to wait* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

*No, I’m not concerned. I know it’ll work out in the end* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

*Concerned? No! I’m going to eat it up, conquer it, take it apart. That nonsense doesn’t scare me, I’m too big for it…* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

Emotions of worry:

***Of course it worries me!*** *You have no idea how much…. because if you know that everything is connected to studies, you have to study in order to make a living, you get most jobs if you’ve done more studies. If you have diplomas, so you’ve got it … If you don’t, then you get worried because you want to get somewhere good, so if you can’t, you go for other options… other things* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

*The future, I’m not looking at it in the eye. I don’t know how to explain it, I’m worried about it but I don’t deal with it* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

Optimism about the future:

*Yes, yes, of course you have to be optimistic in order to succeed…* (S8/F/16—8.3.18).

Or pessimism about the future:

*I don’t see it happening even though I really want to live where I want and work in what I want* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

*I want to work in construction, but a more sophisticated kind, at the highest possible level. But that’s a dream that probably won’t come true* (S2/M/17—8.3.18).

Indifference about the future:

*Nothing. The usual* (S6/F/16—22.5.18).

Or just to get there already, as Respondent S16 tellingly explained:

Q. *When you imagine the future, let’s say age twenty-two or thirty, what emotion does it evoke in you?*

A. *I already want to be that old. I want to grow up* (S16/M/14—18.2.19).

**When they thought about and reflected on the future, the respondents expressed a broad range of emotions: some negative, some positive, and some oscillating.**

*Category 4: Future orientation beliefs*

One of the things that promotes or impedes individuals’ future orientation is their beliefs about their future and their ability to advance toward their future. The respondents expressed this in several ways:

*Yes. I definitely see myself there…* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

Respondent S13 expressed his belief that he would succeed in the future if he does something he loves:

*Afterwards, I’ll bounce around, I don’t know…. Of course I hope to do something that I love. I think that’s the purpose of life. To do something that you love. If you don’t like something, don’t do it* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

Respondent S15 noted that although he was concerned that he would amount to nothing, he believed he would overcome it:

*You’re afraid that nothing will become of you, but I’m bigger than that; I’ll get over it and I’ll stand on my own two feet and keep going* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

Respondent S14 expressed confidence in what she would like to become but noted that she had little control over it:

*I also don’t know, practically, what I really want to do. I only know that, in general, it’s media and film…. I don’t know if I’ll be a scriptwriter or an actress in films and television. I don’t have a clue; it’s also not really up to me* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

Respondent S10 believes that he will have a better future if he starts building it today:

*I still don’t know, like, the future’s not clear. Let’s put it this way: I’m sure the future will be good if I build it from now on* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

**Most of the respondents have positive beliefs about their future and their ability to influence it. Some see a connection between their present-day efforts and their future and some statements are attributable to the concept of whether or not they have the ability to control and influence the future.**

*Category 5: Coping with obstacles*

Alongside the emotions that surfaced in thoughts about the future, foremost concern and fear, the respondents also related to the possibility of obstacles along the way.

*Yeah, it sucks and it brings you down, but no matter how much you’re knocked down, you always have to know how to get up. Like I told you, you shouldn’t connect with your emotions too much. As much as it got me down and drove me down from where I was, I managed to pick myself up again, focus myself, and tell myself “I’ve got to.” I owe it to myself. If she tells me that I can’t, I’ll do it anyway. I’m very stubborn; everyone knows that about me. My mother knows it, I’m really stubborn. If they tell me no, I’ll do the exact opposite. And she said no and I proved it to her* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

*Listen, if a guy’s a real fighter he doesn’t give up his dreams. If he says “I want this, I accept this,” then, yeah, he can get there* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

*That I won’t fail, that something hard comes up, then I won’t give up and suddenly say, “What do I need this for?” and leave it. I want to go for it all the way* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

**The respondents identify the pitfalls that they expect to encounter in the future but manage to find ways to cope with them.**

**Theme 4: The relationship between past educational experiences and occupational aspirations**

The experience of school and study is often harsh if not traumatic for young dropouts. It affects their self-concept as students in the present and going forward. It may influence their choices of academic or vocational studies and their occupational aspirations.

*Category 1: Reasons for dropping out as perceived by the youth themselves*

Young people have many reasons for dropping out; the reasons are most often expressed by professionals in the field or by researchers. The respondents’ own voices and the subjective reasons for their dropping out yield a different understanding.

Reasons focusing on learning difficulties:

*I don’t understand a thing. I repeat to myself what [the teacher] tells me and afterwards I don’t remember* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

*I didn’t get along in class, I mean like, the material. When I study with lots of students it’s harder, and when there’s personal attention I do better* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

*I didn’t make it as a student at all; I stayed home a lot. They threw me out every other day … for the way I behaved and for not participating in class* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

Reasons focusing on behavioral problems:

*In grade school I wasn’t the easiest kid around. I’d stir up lots of trouble and in high school, when I came to get enrolled, they didn’t enroll me* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

*Again, I’m a* chutzpah *type. If I’m the* chutzpah *type, they write me off. I’m not smart. I can’t learn. I can’t do a thing* (S5/F/18—22.5.18).

*I got into fights …. They told me “You don’t fit in here.” We’d throw toilet paper at the teachers* (S7/M/17—22.5.18).

Reasons related to social problems:

*I had a problem … first of all, of violence, I’d fight with almost everyone and I couldn’t sit still in class, copy from the board, do the homework. I’d bother the teachers and they’d kick me out and I pretty much didn’t learn a thing* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

*At first, it was a social thing that I didn’t fit in well …. They picked on me so much that finally I couldn’t take it anymore and I dropped out* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

*They’d use it as an excuse that I lose my temper fast and get pissed off fast. So guess what, they would bait me, bait me, bait me, and I’d get pissed at them and jump on them and fight with them and then, guess what, they’d say I beat them up and they’d say it’s my fault. So slowly I lost my good reputation at school and afterwards things got to where I wouldn’t come to school because I said what for, I get into fights every day there, what’s the point of going?* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

Reasons related to personal, psychological, or health problems:

*Mostly, because I didn’t go to school … Then they defined me as a “youth at risk.” I couldn’t get up in the morning, I didn’t sleep well, I had no reason to get up … I didn’t feel well, at school* (S16/M/14—12.3.19).

*I came to Youth Advancement because I wasn’t getting to school all that much because I spent a lot of time in the hospital. So I missed lots of material and couldn’t keep going to a regular school* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

*I went to school but not ... it’s like I wasn’t there … I wasn’t there 90 percent of the year … I really flip-flopped .… One year I was the honor student of the school, in math or in English. I got the highest grades and in eleventh grade I dropped out 90 percent of the time… I don’t know, it was this flip-flopping thing … Maybe it was part of my mood* (S4/M/17.5—7.5.18).

Reasons related to family problems:

*My learning issues were more emotional than mental. Up to fourth grade I was a really good student, but after my parents got divorced, emotional problems began a little and it got in the way of my studies* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

**The respondents are able to explain why they dropped out from their own perspective and in their subjective judgment**.

*Category 2: Relationship with school*

The respondents’ reasons for dropping out tie into their relationship with the school and its effects on their scholastic experience.

Respondent S5 explains with special vehemence that she had not dropped out at her own initiative; instead, the school expelled her:

*I didn’t leave; they threw me out!!!* (S5/F/18—22.5.18).

Respondent S10 mentions the poor treatment she received from the teachers:

*They’re not respectful. They yell at you all the time. You’re not doing anything special, and they just always shout at you. I couldn’t take it. They also, like, exaggerate about everything, exaggerate like I don’t know how. So I left … It wasn’t for me; I left* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

Respondent S11 finds a connection between her scholastic difficulties and her repeated suspensions from school:

*If, say, I showed up at math class, they’d inspect my bag at the door. “You don’t have a math notebook; go home” …. I dropped out because I had a hard time with the schedule and the whole setup, a really, really hard time … having to get up at seven every morning to be at school by eight. So it’s complicated for me …. It’s hard for me to get up in the morning* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

Respondent S12 articulates the frustration and helplessness that he experienced when his school failed to understand him:

*The faculty didn’t understand me from my side, yeah? Even if, say, I talked a lot in class, in junior high that totally happened, so, they’d come and yell at me after class about how I was talking in class, they’d kick me out, teachers tore their throats out screaming at me, this big dramatic thing, I’d simply answer them: okay, but Jeez, you don’t have to shout, let’s talk it over. They saw that as my looking down on them, for instance. Except for my homeroom teachers, one in junior high and one in senior high, no one figured me out and accepted me, and there’s this helplessness, you know, at first when you’re younger and less sure of yourself, you think there’s something wrong with you. Afterwards, you start to figure it out a little* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

**The respondents have hard feelings about their relations with school: anger, frustration, being misunderstood, and being treated with contempt.**

*Category 3: Scholastic self-perception and occupational aspirations*

Negative experiences at school and subjective reasons for dropping out, as exemplified in the previous categories, may give the respondents a self-perception about their future scholastic abilities, affecting their choice of occupational aspirations.

*I have no desire. If it interested me I would sit there and study. But it doesn’t interest me. There are lots of other things I’m saying …. You know, like the modeling I’m talking about…. If there’s, like, something I can do without studying then I can go to do modeling. If they accept me, then why not start something that’s easier for me?* (S1/F/16—8.3.18).

S15. *There really are places like that, like the best of the best, and places that you can get to, you know, like electrical engineering, stuff like that, things that are all over and that are good occupations.*

Q. *Things that matter?*

S15. *Things that matter. And you can get there even if you study at Youth Advancement.*

Q. *But not cyber, you say.*

S15. *Cyber, no. There’s a ceiling* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

*Engineering, no. You need high matriculation scores and I’m not counting on getting high matriculation scores* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

*Because for university you need matriculation and for matriculation you need this and that. Why make a guy suffer for nothing? I don’t want to do matriculation, leave me alone* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

**The respondents associate their scholastic abilities with choosing or forgoing various occupations and occupational aspirations.**

**Theme 4: Experiences as a way to build an occupational aspiration**

The principle of learning and understanding through experience is dominant in the world of education generally and in informal education particularly. It also corresponds to the meaning of Erikson’s concept of the moratorium, which denotes adolescents “writing off” obligations, without judgement or criticism, as a way to form personal identity. The respondents in this study also had experiences that they linked to the choice of an occupational aspiration.

*Category 1: General experiences*

General experiences in various domains relate to an occupational aspiration in one way or another.

Respondent S6 aspires to be a makeup artist:

*A friend of my mother’s, they had a family event and I did a makeup job for the mother, the grandmother, and the little sister …. It was a little while ago. I knew how to do makeup but now I know how to do it better* (S6/F/16.5—22.5.18).

Or Respondent S13, who aspires to be a tour guide:

*Yes, even at boarding school we would walk 30 kilometers a day, five days [a week], I love it very much, I love nature, the quiet* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

**The respondents mentioned various experiences that reinforced their areas of interest and linked them to occupational aspirations.**

*Category 2: Hobbies and leisure time*

The respondents mentioned having various hobbies:

*My hobbies? I really like technology. I’m also into online communication here. I really like technology and math. It’s what I do most days* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

*I just like to paint, I like to make jewelry ... It's something that's fun for me, I didn’t learn it. And in ten years maybe I'll have a business* (S5/F/18—22.5.18).

**The respondents connected their present-day hobbies with their future occupational aspirations.**

*Category 3: Occupational experiences*

Most respondents hold jobs or have held them in the past. This experience lets them test the world of work from up close, understand the importance of this world and its values, acquaint themselves with various occupations, and identify their occupational aspirations by means of experience.

Some respondents began to work through their intervention programs at the Youth Advancement Unit. Respondent S3, for example, went to work at the information systems department of a mineral water company. His eagerness to work with computers is also his occupational aspiration:

*And then, when they brought me into Neviot* [the mineral water company], *I learned about computers and they told me there’s information security here and I liked it* (S3/M/16—May 7, 2018).

Or Respondent S10, who works via the Youth Advancement Unit when school is not in session:

*I’ve worked in lots of places. Work that Youth Advancement sets up, it’s a kind of job at City Hall. But I didn’t work during school because it would mess up my studies* (S10/M/17—28.1.19).

Several respondents began to work at an early age and now have small businesses:

*Until I was fourteen, I took piano lessons and singing lessons, and at age thirteen I started working for a friend of my father’s.*

He adds:

*Today they send me music so I'll mix it, it’s for the sound design for other artists. I'm a producer* (S4/M/17—7.5.18).

In another example, Respondent S12 has become a successful deejay in his area:

*Right now I have a business in the bureaucratic sense, it’s registered with the state, it’s an “exempt transactor.” I’m a deejay at parties, more productions, parties at clubs, and private events too. There’s it’s really less for the fun of it and more for the money, because at events they always pay more. I also play at parties.*

He also describes the value that he derives from his work:

*One of the things I like best in my work is that I work where people come to be happy* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

Respondent S11 also speaks about her work and its value for her:

*I work at a stadium and at snack bars, I sell things there, I also do waitressing, I don’t know, I like to work. It’s what I am, that’s what interests me. I get self-satisfaction from work. I’m preparing myself for life because I know I’ll have to work for the rest of my life. So I’m preparing myself.*

She also remarks on the mitigating effect of her work on risky behavior:

*Before I began to work, I’d go out at night until late, really late, and wander around all day. I’d mess around and get into trouble. But then I began to work and got into a kind of structure, going to school and coming home, getting organized and then going to work. And coming home at 11:00 without goofing around too much. I earn my money* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

Some respondents work or have worked for family businesses:

*Yeah, I do two or three jobs per day. I work at the family bakery but also at a tortilla bar and, when I have a chance, at a farm for one of my neighbors. But since I started working at the bakery, I’ve discovered that this is my love* (S15/M/16—12.3.19).

*I waited tables for a while, around a year, and then I stopped because my middle brother is opening an event hall right now. So I’ve been working with him, helping him to do whatever needs to be done until the hall opens a week and a half from now. Whatever has to be done: cleaning, some fixit jobs if you have to. He’s mainly a chef, like top-notch* (S16/M/14—12.3.19).

And Respondent S13, who preferred to drop out of school in order to go to work:

*Yeah, dropping out. I wanted to go to work wherever. Just to go to work on some farm or something* (S13/M/16.5—18.2.19).

**Half of the respondents are working and the others worked in the past. Apparently, their occupational experiences allow them to discover their abilities, develop their capacities, find a vocation that suits them, and probe their future aspirations.**

**Theme 6: Proactivity in realizing the aspiration**

Proactivity occurs when a person takes an initiative to create change in their lives and better their future, unlike action, which is a mere response to a situation. The respondents made various comments about proactivity that they invoked to advance themselves. Some of their statements belong to the realm of thought and others are practical, including self-learning.

*Category 1: Thoughts and ideas about proactivity*

Respondents’ remarks on proactivity were couched in terms of thoughts and ideas about developing an occupational aspiration or making plans for the future:

*I’ll go for something just a little safer and probably learn something, even before the army, as part of my studies. I’ll learn a little about this, this field of cooking, and in between, like between these studies and cooking school, I’ll also fit in work and lots of things* (S/16/M/14—12.3.19).

*Aspirations for the future means being persistent, to keep going. I think most of what’s happened to me is because I believe in myself and have self-discipline and am focused on the goal, which are values that I had the privilege to receive. I hope I keep them forever because once you think big and believe big and aren’t scared of anyone, you just succeed* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

*You always have to have an open mind, see where things are heading, see where life is gonna lead me. You know what I mean? So that’s pretty much what I’m trying to do, like, yes, keep the dream alive and build a path to the dream, but don’t stay just with what I built. Give life more possibilities* (S8/F/17—18.2.19).

**Some respondents expressed proactive thoughts about their future, including plans to fulfill their aspirations and positive thinking about their success.**

*Category 2: Actual proactivity behavior*

Proactivity manifested in real actions for self-advancement:

Respondent S9 describes the personal change that he underwent by doing fitness training, an activity associated with his choice of becoming a health trainer in the future:

*Yeah, in the past few years I’ve done really big work on myself and I see results…. I was always an introverted guy, I didn’t talk to people, I was always in my own corner. But in the past few years I’ve been working on this as much as I can, I’m beginning to develop connections with people, I go out with friends, and in the physical thing, too, I’ve begun to train in the gym in order to make the change* (S9/M/17—28.1.19).

Respondent S14 describes real actions that she is learning and experiencing in order to progress toward her occupational aspiration of joining the media industry:

Q. *You said something interesting before: that the things we do now are really the ones that will build our future, and you said that your aspiration is to go into media. How do you see what you’re doing today as building toward media?*

S14. *First of all, I’ve already been practicing writing since around the beginning of the year or since summer vacation. At the start of the year, I didn’t know how to write an essay at all, okay? Ask my Hebrew teacher. I told her, that’s enough, I don’t want to know how to write an essay in English, or in Hebrew, and that’s that. But now I write literally whole pages on all sorts of things* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

**Some respondents are busy being proactive for their future advancement.**

*Category 3: Discovering occupational aspiration through autodidacticism*

Autodidacticism is the ability to learn an occupation or topic on one’s own: independently of any formal institution, undertaken actively by the person him or herself. Many respondents describe their autodidactic learning in the context of choosing an occupational aspiration.

For example, Respondent S3 describes the way he learned computers:

Q. *Tell me a little about how you got into computers.*

S3. *I don’t know; I just liked it.*

Q. *At home? What kinds of things would you try?*

S3. *Yes, I checked out what seems good and stuff ... things like that.*

Q. *Do you mean hardware? Programming?*

S3. *Both. But software more. I took an interest in it and just learned it. I didn’t really study; I taught myself* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

Respondent S6, who wants to be a makeup artist, has already tried her hand at cosmetics and explains how she learned it:

*You can learn to do make up everywhere today: on the Internet, on YouTube, personal blogs, places like that. But I go more for videos* (S6/F/16.5—22.5.18).

Respondent S4, working in design and sound production, describes how he acquired all of his knowledge: by himself, using the computer, or from people around him:

*So here’s the thing: Lots of things happened in my life where I found myself alone in my room for lots of time, on purpose. I didn’t come out of there and I would just learn and learn and learn. If was sitting there I would just read more about sound and more about producing and more about things like that…. I have a cousin who’s a producer and in the past three years I’ve learned a crazy amount about sound from him* (S4/M/17—7.5.19).

**The respondents gave lengthy descriptions of their independent path to learning of matters associated with their occupational aspiration—informal online learning.**

**Theme 7: Influential role models in establishing occupational aspirations**

A role model is a person whom one aspires to be like and who inspires one’s actions. In their interviews, the respondents describe various role models: family members, mentors or employers, alumni of Youth Advancement Units who changed their lives, or even themselves as their own role model.

*Category 1: Family members*

*My brother is more or less my inspiration. He succeeded in life. He has a wife, he does what he likes, it’s important because most of the population in Israel doesn’t do what it likes, it does what it has to* (S16/M/14—12.3.19).

*My twenty-three-year-old brother is my role model. He’s my older brother; he’s part of me. We have a bond, like, I also have a sister and we don’t have it, I don’t have it with anyone in the family the way I have it with him. We do everything together, he even comes with me to Tel Aviv whenever I have to, he gives me a shoulder to lean on, he’s got my back, he is everything. He does everything for me* (S11/F/16—28.1.19).

*I had a very good guide, my mother. She always taught me these things and always repeated them with me. Besides that, even though I’m only almost seventeen, I’ve gone through a lot. So I’ve managed to learn a little more about myself than kids my age have learned about themselves* (S8/F/17—15.11.18).

**Some respondents described family members as their role models.**

*Category 2: Employers*

*Most of the time he* [an occupational mentor] *tells me, like … Somebody’s email message got destroyed—so he tells me to go fix it .… It’s like, simpler problems, like the computers are working but one of them has a problem … and he shows me what to do about it* (S3/M/16—7.5.18).

*I have this mentor, that’s what you’d call him, a really, really well-known deejay here in the area, who took me under his wing—and nowadays we work together. I work with him at 18+ parties, soldiers; once we also deejayed for college students* (S12/M/16—18.2.19).

**Some respondents described their employers or occupational mentors as role models.**

*Category 3: Friends*

*The truth is that there’s also a lot of inspiration from people who come here to visit, who are 30 years old now and they say that they were kids like me and they didn’t study and then they completed their studies in, let’s say, engineering. It seems impossible to me but we’ll wait and see* (S2/M/17—12.3.18).

**One respondent mentioned alumni of the Youth Advancement Unit as a source of inspiration.**

*Category 4: Me*

*No. I don’t see anyone as a role model other than myself. Even though it sounds arrogant, I don’t think I have anything to learn from other people because I have to learn from myself, to be inspired by myself, what my ambitions are and who I am* (S6/F/16.5—22.5.18).

*I think Niv Sultan’s amazing. She’s this great actor and Nadav Guedj sings fantastic and Neve Tsuf’s also a really great actor but that’s that, I wouldn’t really say that they’re my role models. I’m my own role model* (S14/F/16—18.2.19).

**Two respondents stated plainly that they are their own role models.**

**Step B—Focus Group Findings**

The focus group met after all the youngsters were interviewed, the findings were analyzed, and the categories and themes were identified. Its purpose was to set in motion a process of reflection over the interview findings.

Seven Youth Advancement facilitators from two districts in Israel—two men and five women—were recruited for the focus group. All have master’s degrees in therapeutic occupations: clinical criminology, social work, or drama therapy, and vast experience in facilitating educational-therapeutic staff at the Advancement Units.

The group met in the morning for around seventy-five minutes.

After presenting the study and describing its goals and its rules, the author asked the members of the group to answer, on their own, questions that had been presented to the adolescents.

The first question was: “How, in your opinion, do dropout adolescents who receive care from the Youth Advancement Units see their future?”

The initial spontaneous responses were the following:

*They can’t conceive it; they don’t imagine it* (IN1).

*Anxiety and strong denial, I’d say. They don’t talk about it. There’s really a lot of anxiety about it* (IN2).

*It’s one of their characteristics that they can’t plan for their future. They don’t think about it; it threatens them. There’s lots of anxiety; there’s no future* (IN4).

In additional responses, group members described adolescents who did think about the future but in a manner that was unrealistic and incongruous with their situation as dropout youth:

*Or, alternatively, there are grandiose delusions. Exactly so. And there’s this idealization of a future that’s very, very far from them, which is really the same as being unable to think about the future* (N3).

*I think there’s future but it’s really foggy; there’s something grandiose about it but I don’t think it’s nonexistent. I think it’s a little far-fetched to say that it isn’t there* (N5).

**According to their initial responses, the facilitators do not believe the youngsters have a future orientation and, when they have one, it is vague or grandiose.**

The continuation of the discussion yielded additional responses about future orientation from other angles:

One response connected the inability of dropout youth to think about the future to their being teenagers, who give little thought to the future to begin with, as opposed to a difficulty that comes particularly from their being dropouts:

*I think it’s kids. Me too, did I do so much planning? No, I didn’t. You live* (N2).

One female group member, in her response, related to differences between youth at risk and normative adolescents:

*Perceptions of the future—it’s true that even now, if I asked you, “What do you want for yourself ten years from now?” You’d have to think about it, it’s not something you’re conscious of and that you deal with all the time. For youth at risk, what you said before is actually typical of normative youth, too: They don’t really know what they’ll be doing but they know that there’s some kind of continuation, that they’ll definitely be studying; they realize there’s a future. But for youth at risk, it isn’t there. When you stop and ask them, they wouldn’t even know how to give you some general kind of plan. It’s one of the characteristics of youth at risk* (IN4).

Another response concerns other dropout population groups that take part in the Youth Advancement Units, some of which do have occupational aspirations but are exceptional among the dropout population.

*When I look at detached youth, some of whom are more like the young people we define as “special education” because of psychological problems or being on the* [autistic] *spectrum, the young people who are really normative and come from normative families, we meet young people who have very clear career plans, in high tech by the way. They are detached kids. It’s a population group. They dropped out of school, didn’t they? And they definitely have a very clear path* (IN7).

Yet another response related to adolescents who dropped out because they excelled in some field and had occupational aspirations:

*I’ll tell you, every year there’s some athlete, right? on whom the regular school imposes limits. It doesn’t suit them and it doesn’t let them really develop their careers, so yes, they’re cared for by the Unit* (IN7).

**The facilitators believe that insofar as dropout youths do have a future orientation, it is because they are outliers in Youth Advancement’s regular dropout population.**

Another question put to the members of the focus group concerned the occupational aspirations of dropout youth: Do they have aspirations, and if so, what are they? The responses follow:

*To be self-employed, to have a business* (IN7).

*To make lots of money … Look, lots of them go into drug trafficking for this business* (IN2).

*To be independent; I mean, that no one should have authority over them* (IN2).

*Real estate of some kind; lots of them talk about real estate* (IN6).

Respondent IN6 described another style of occupational aspiration and attributed it to more and more kinds of dropout populations:

*It’s really very hard to generalize because today we actually encounter different kinds of youth at risk. It’s true: I see the sort who want to become lawyers and whatnot* (IN6).

**The facilitators describe the occupational aspirations of dropout youth as relating to establishing their own businesses and making money.**

Pursuant to the first two questions, a discussion developed about the reasons for the various choices of dropout youth and the factors that influence them.

Reference to choosing a different place of residence in the future:

IN5. *I think there’s a piece of this that we’re not relating to and it finds expression, again, much of it is via the Internet, the whole wish to be somewhere else, and the somewhere else is America…. It’s also this thing, it looks like a daydream: I’ll learn English… and I’ll say, but in fact it’s a different horizon. How much it really comes to pass or not is something you may ask; it’s a separate question. But there’s some kind of horizon there and it includes what I’m doing, where I’m going. It’s not vague, it’s not “I don’t have a dream.” Now, you can say all sorts of things about this dream, but it exists. Now I feel, at least, again, that it’s qualitative, I feel that there are plenty of kids whom I meet via my staff, who have this.*

Q. *Who* *have a dream?*

IN5. *Who have a dream that deliberately takes place somewhere else. A place somewhere that will somehow take me in. I’ll get there.*

IN1. *Like turning a new leaf?*

IN5. *Yes, a new leaf.*

**The facilitators regard moving to a new place of residence as an opportunity to turn a new leaf and change.**

There are also references to starting a family and to couple-hood.

IN7. *I think lots of girls talk about getting married. It’s as though they don’t see past it.*

IN3. *To have children.*

IN7. *That’s the wish, that’s the dream, that’s the salvation.*

IN5. *And it really is salvation. Look, again, we’re injecting something judgmental into this, but here you have a kid, in principle, there’s a man, there’s a kid.*

IN2. *A change: from bad to worse.*

IN5. *That’s a change.*

IN1. *I’ll start a family of my own and I’ll fix things somehow.*

IN4. *I’ll get away from my parents’ home.*

IN1. *And look at the fantasy of this fixing, of the place, to start a family instead of my f\*\*ked-up family. To find a way to heal myself.*

**The facilitators consider the future orientation of the youngsters, especially the girls, the kind that leads to marriage and starting a family as a path to change and repair.**

At this stage, the author corroborated the findings of the focus group with the actual findings of the study and confronted the focus group with them, raising the following issues:

Gender differences between boys and girls:

IN2. *There are differences between girls and boys. There are differences.*

Q. *Like what? What you see? Do you ask?*

IN2. *I ask. I’d say he’s cyber; she’s a secretary. It’s as though their aspirations are lower, more realistic, I don’t know, but lower. It’s depressing. Like a makeup artist, a secretary, Hi, I’m calling from Harel Insurance. It’s a bummer.*

IN7. *It’s like the girls’ having the wedding more in mind.*

IN4. *It puts the girls in a much lower station.*

IN3. *Or getting married, you also hear lots more from girls about it than from boys.*

IN5. *No, what’s really depressing is our stigmas.*

**The facilitators noted that boys and girls have different occupational aspirations and that the girls’ aspirations are lower.**

In other responses, the role of parents is pointed out as a source of influence on future orientation and occupational aspirations:

*But I think about the role of the family; if we’re talking about dreams, I think about, we have, for example, a girl who wants to be a doctor. That is, she really talks about it; she actually brings it up and has a very clear plan of how it’ll happen. So I really try to think about the family: She has parents there and they really trust her; they give her the feeling that she’s equal, that she can, that she’s capable. That is, this place, I think, I don’t know if it’s something you related to somehow, but I think it’s also worth checking out the aspirations of boys who have relatively strong families behind them, again, they’re detached, I’m saying, and in contrast to those who come from families that are less so …* (IN6).

One respondent deemed parental influence more meaningful than the activity of the Youth Advancement Unit:

*Let’s take this up in regard to the work of the Youth Advancement Unit with parents, all right? What’s this whole concept of “This kid has parents”? It says that he wasn’t born as the result of his encounter with us* (IN5).

**The facilitators see and understand the importance of parents as a factor of influence on the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth.**

The results of the study raise questions about the nature of the research population and whether it reflects the entire Youth Advancement clientele.

First, remarks were made about the diversity of the dropout population:

IN6. *But they are still, I think those who come because they dropped out for emotional reasons, the whole thing about shaming and things like that: we have lots of that kind, who dropped out of school but have highly focused occupational aspirations.*

IN4. *Against the background of social problems? I’m talking about social problems.*

IN6. *Oh yes, yes, and we’ve had quite a few of them lately*.

IN3. *That’s right, also those who come from what’s called home schooling and reach us all of a sudden: this is also a different population.*

IN4. *But that’s the result of social changes, isn’t it?*

IN3. *But it’s a population that’s starting to reach the Units*.

Respondent IN4 mused:

*I ask myself all the time: just a minute, is it really a new generation, a different generation of youth at risk, or are the ones who came to this interview specifically the ones who have more strengths?* (IN4).

**The facilitators detect the diversity of population groups among dropout youth, different from those with which the Youth Advancement Units was familiar.**

Another kind of meaningful content that emerged when the data were corroborated was the facilitators’ perception of the adolescents and the facilitators’ ability to believe in them:

IN5. *No, what’s really depressing is our stigmas…. Look, we’re in a place where it’s ostensibly no joke. That is, yes, I suppose we’re supposed to hold out against staff who often don’t really believe in these kids. We’re really supposed to keep believing. And it turns out that our faith also goes only so far.*

IN4. *Hold on. Do you think what we said is what we think about them? I didn’t say what I think about them, that she should have a child. I said what she thinks about herself. It’s not what* I *think.*

IN5. *But the very fact that you ultimately keep the… and again, when I’m talking to you, I’m also talking about myself, about all of us. That I look at a kid, okay, and I say, “This kid really has no aspirations and doesn’t know what he really wants,” then it says something about my pair of eyes…. From the outset I think there’s something subtle here that says I’m still a captive of something that stigmatizes. That’s what I see….*

**A strong message that surfaced in the discussion is that the facilitators have prejudices and stereotypes about the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth.**

Just the same, the professionals stressed the importance of believing in the youngsters as a way of triggering change in them:

*I agree with you at the level of intervention. If we find an authentic place where we can believe in the ability to change and achieve among our young people and our children, they’ll go farther that way. I totally agree with you about that…. It’s also the family behind them that matters. I don’t think we disagree about this. Rather, we have to find the inner place that believes in the ability to bring about change and* [we have to know] *that this age bracket, the one where we meet them, is not the one that paints their future, and that there’s a possibility of making enormous change …. But you do have a period here that’s close to the future, when there’s an opportunity for change in their sense of esteem, their sense of capacity. At this age, it doesn’t depend on scholastic ability and the way things are taught in school because, as you say, a great many of them find the way afterwards—to self-learning that’s just a lot more suitable than the school method of learning that’s unsuitable for them. And today they have the ability, we all have the ability, to self-teach in totally other ways that are much better suited to this population* (IN7).

**The facilitators stress the importance of authenticity and belief in every youngster’s ability to change as factors that promote their occupational aspirations in the near and distant future.**

To conclude, the focus group was asked for its general opinion about the study:

*It seems very normative, this document that she’s got. It looks very normative* (IN2).

*Listen, if they teach your study, if that’s what’ll really happen, really, then I say, hey, this can actually change all of our textbooks, if these are really the findings. You know what I’m saying?* (IN4)

*My conclusion from this is not to look at everyone. At this table, of all places, an attempt to do that was made. Don’t look at everyone as if they’re all the same; there’s a need to ask and see each of them in terms of where he or she is at* (IN2).

*I actually interpret this not just for the purposes of the study itself, but maybe also for that. But when we work with staff, we work with their conduct, and look, I think you had here a small example of some closed-mindedness of ours, it’s okay to say it, it doesn’t make us into criminals* (IN5).

**The facilitators acknowledge the contribution of the study to understanding the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth.**

Step C—Document Analysis Findings

From the documents that were analyzed for two different programs that prepare dropout youth to enter the world of work and that look into their occupational aspirations, the following findings emerged.

Table 1 presents the occupational aspirations that appeared in the Reshatot and Shehakim programs and the frequency of each.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Occupational aspiration** | **Frequency** | **Occupational aspiration** | **Frequency** |
| Computers | 5 | Architect  | 1 |
| Sports | 4 | Factory owner | 1 |
| Psychologist | 3 | Masseur/euse | 1 |
| Singer | 3 | English teacher | 1 |
| Hairdresser | 3 | Tour guide | 1 |
| Makeup artist | 3 | Electrical engineer | 1 |
| Bookkeeper | 2 | Diamantaire | 1 |
| Doctor | 2 | Career soldier | 1 |
| Chef | 2 | Actor | 2 |
| Director/scriptwriter | 2 | Welfare officer | 1 |
| Photographer | 2 | Auto mechanic | 1 |
| Graphic artist | 2 | Fashion designer | 1 |
| Business owner | 2 | Guitar repair person | 1 |
| Home decorator | 2 | Counselor at detox center | 1 |
| Sound technician | 1 | Medical clown | 1 |
| Lawyer | 1 | Journalist | 1 |
| Tattoo artist | 1 | Soccer team manager | 1 |

Table 2: Occupational aspirations appearing in the Reshatot and Shehakim programs.

**The data show that the three leading occupational aspirations are computers (5), sports (4), and psychology (4). Furthermore, the occupational aspirations of dropout youth, as reflected in the analysis of the documents, span many diverse vocations.**