Chapter VI: Discussion of the Findings

1. Discussion of findings from Research Question 1: “How, in your opinion, do dropout adolescents who receive care from the Youth Advancement Units see their future?”

The first research question asks whether young dropouts have a future orientation and how they perceive their future.

1.1 Tendency: Dropout youth have a future orientation

The analysis of the data shows that all the respondents, with one exception, have a future orientation. Most were able to describe their future clearly and coherently, apart from a few who expressed it in more general and abstract terms. Their references to the future included feelings related to couple-hood and family, future academic or vocational studies, place of residence, military induction and service, and career development and occupational aspirations. This finding is consonant with theories that attribute much importance to future orientation in adolescence and claim that thinking about the future becomes more focused, concrete, and meaningful at this age because it is a developmental mechanism for the adolescent in her or his transition into adult life (Erikson, 1968; Seginer, 2009).

However, this finding clashes with the conventional way of viewing at-risk youth from families in distress and disadvantaged neighborhoods, adolescents involved in crime or substance abuse, those who have learning disorders and poor scholastic achievements, young people with poor self-image and self-efficacy, and school dropouts. Namely, the conventional belief is that these individuals have difficulty envisioning and thinking about their future, and that they do not see their actions in the present as having an effect on their future (Hatala et al., 2017). The discrepancy between this finding and the conventional theories may be connected to several factors and lend itself to several explanations:

The respondents belong to the population of clients of Youth Advancement Units. Many have been with the Units long enough to have undergone a meaningful personal process that allows them to assess their strengths and to reinforce their self-confidence and self-image—a process that also affects their ability to look toward the future. The personal process dovetails with the agenda and the policies of the Youth Advancement Department, which encourages actions that promote future orientation (Hertz, 2018), both in the efforts by Youth Advancement workers who steward these young people individually and in systematic programs that the Youth Investment Units run, such as Shehakim and Reshatot—preparatory programs for the world of employment that teach young people to contemplate the future in a structured and clear way (Arkin & Lahav, 2013).

Another explanation relates to the change in recent years in the characteristics of dropout youth who reach the Youth Advancement Units. Recent clients of the Units, particularly those from the secular Jewish sector—from which the research population was chosen—are not typified only as young people who come from complex disadvantaged families and exhibit typical risk behaviors, as the literature describes (Kaim & Lahav, 2000; Romi, 2014). Instead, they are characterized as a population that left school due to social problems, psychological and psychiatric issues, behavioral difficulties, acute learning disorders (mainly attention and concentration issues), expulsion from special education, or inability to adjust to a structured setting due to lifestyles at home that stand in opposition to the formal education system. Although they dropped out, they still belong to functioning if not normative families. They have higher self-efficacy than others and receive support and encouragement from their parents to reflect on, investigate, and make progress toward their future.

This disparity in the findings recurred in the focus group of Youth Advancement Unit facilitators. When the members of the group were asked how, in their opinion, dropout youth perceive their future, their initial answers were that they lack a future orientation, find it hard to think about the future, and, insofar as they do think about it, depict it in grandiose and unrealistic terms. To some extent, the group members reflected the conventional wisdom among professional teams that escort these young people: that the exclusion of socially disempowered groups that exists to begin with—manifested in inequality, discrimination, and racism that affect education, health, and employment—instills in these youth a sense of alienation from school and teachers, poor scholastic achievements, and lack of faith in their ability to succeed, ultimately inducing them to drop out (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007). The same manifestation of faithlessness within a paradigm of exclusion recurs somewhat among teachers of dropout youth, educational-therapeutic staff, and the heads, facilitators and staff of the Youth Advancement Units. This finding corresponds with Razer (2009), who, examining professionals who treat at-risk populations, saw how the difficulties that arise in treating such populations, with their resulting helplessness and burnout, create and construct professional outlooks and behaviors that identify with the experience of protracted failure of the young people and perpetuate the situation.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth is perceived as a dialectic between its existence and its nonexistence.**

The first theme that emerged from analysis of the data related to the range of areas within a life-cycle that find expression in future orientation. This theme is composed of various categories that yield a deeper understanding of the way these adolescents perceive the future:

Category 1: Future orientation in the context of couple-hood and family

Analysis of the data shows that the respondents made very few references to future family and couple-hood. Some were able to say with certainty that they see themselves in a couple-hood relationship and having a family; a few were able to say that they did not wish to establish a family. The explanation for the paucity of references may be that half of those interviewed come from complex families—divorced parents, conflicted families with poor relations among members, single-mothers who are out of touch with fathers, or parents with disabilities. Since these youth were raised within complex and conflicted family models, before they can think about establishing a family they have to work through the meaning of their current nuclear family; they cannot reflect on the future in the family context without going through a process of acquiescence and change regarding their families in the present.

By the same token, fantasies about establishing a family that will correct for the current family are common among young people from disadvantaged households, foremost girls who consider getting pregnant and marrying early as a way to “escape” their original families and change and repair their situation through the fantasy of creating a normal, functioning family.

The scarcity of references to family-formation and parenting clashes with studies on at-risk youth that find the topic of the future family more meaningful, by and large, than other areas of life including employment (Cinamon & Rich, 2014). This finding also contradicts the perceptions of the facilitators in the focus group, who expected the female respondents’ future orientation to center on establishing a family and raising children. This view of theirs represents an entrenched social concept that expects women to play the traditional role of establishing a family and having children even if they develop careers. Furthermore, the facilitators’ outlook in this matter represents a covert, unspoken opinion about dropout girls as people who have poor cognitive and behavioral abilities and, accordingly, low future aspirations. There is a lack of faith in the ability of at-risk girls to surmount socio-cultural hurdles such as family, culture, and surroundings, and to develop strong future aspirations.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth in the family context is perceived as less defined and opaque.**

Category 2: Higher academic studies and vocational training

Most respondents treated this theme with great importance and gave it extensive attention. Most of them did not see themselves going on to academic studies but did imagine themselves as learning a trade in some other way—through formal vocational training, autodidactic study via online video, or learning from experience by actually practicing the occupation. The trades that the young people spoke of were in the fields of music and sound, cooking, acting, cosmetics, and coaching.

The respondents did not see academic studies in their future because the learning experiences of dropout youth are traumatic to begin with, and are accompanied by a grim sense of failure and negative self-perception as to their scholastic capabilities. These adverse experiences, expressed vehemently in the interviews, attest to the frustration and pain that the dropout experience inflicts on those who undergo it. In addition, many respondents reported having learning difficulties and/or attention and concentration issues that render them unable to study in a regular class. All these circumstances lead to distrust in their ability to advance to higher academic studies. Therefore, if they choose to study, the respondents revise their preference in favor of short-term courses that are focused and tailored to their occupational preferences. This finding is consonant with theories that speak about adolescents who have been evaluated with learning disorders, learning difficulties, and poor achievement. Young people who drop out of school cannot imagine surmounting their scholastic hardships and acquiring higher education (Worrell & Hale, 2001). Additionally, they tend to choose less-prestigious occupations that do not entail high-level learning skills, such as technical or practical trades and service and trade occupations (Rojewski, 1999; Kortering et al., 2010). The wish to learn in some other way, e.g., by means of intensive or online courses, corresponds to the theory that education programs for dropout youth should be tailored to their particular needs and should stress, among other things, experiential, experimental, and non-frontal study (Himi, 2014). It also accords with theories that relate to the new twenty-first-century form of teaching known as “future-oriented pedagogy.” This model assumes that the world of education is influenced by the dramatic changes that are taking place in this century and, by implication, needs to change and adapt to these changes and respond to the foreseen challenges. Accordingly, future-oriented pedagogy bases itself on optimal use of ICT, learning from every source and at all times, accessing diverse sources of validated information, combining new media with experimental and creative learning, developing thinking skills and abilities, and embracing flexibility in teaching methods (Ministry of Education, 2019). According to this way of thinking, the entire education system—from preschool, to primary, secondary, and higher-education institutions—must adjust to these changes and adopt innovative pedagogy. A possible example is the crisis that currently besets universities that for centuries were the sole authority for the imparting and investigation of knowledge. In recent years, they have been at a critical crossroads that will affect their survival. A combination of social and economic forces is threatening their modus operandi with a tough critique: that the academic establishment is accessible solely to a certain stratum of the population, the hegemonic one, and excludes other population groups, thereby perpetuating the discrimination that evolved in education over many years. The change is evidenced in the introduction of, for example, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) that are offered to the public at large, often at no charge and in a manner that is simple, friendly, and accessible, allowing many population groups to acquire knowledge and schooling (Kirsch, [איות שמה?] 2017). Another aspect of the matter, visible specifically among the young generation, is the growing use of mass wisdom and experience as well as large numbers of online videos that impart knowledge in many diverse fields, either as a hobby or as a way to develop an occupation.

Despite all their scholastic hardships, the respondents realized that study is an important sphere that may influence their future. Thus, Respondent S10 related to the importance of formal diplomas and defined it well: “*So, like, I’ll have it, let’s say it this way, I’ll have a set of keys that will open some doors*.” This finding is important because it reveals the respondents’ motivation to learn—a motivation that they often lack and that results in frequent absences from the program of studies at the Youth Advancement Unit, failure to persevere, and inability to qualify for meaningful formal diplomas.

Contrastingly, the three respondents who did want to go on to higher studies (S3, S8, S12) had strong scholastic abilities and dropped out for reasons other than learning disorders. Accordingly, their sense of efficacy as students was higher and more strongly oriented toward advanced studies in the future.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth in regard to future studies is perceived as an aspiration that, while hard to attain, is attainable by means of short and focused courses.**

Category 3: Military and national service

Another category that belongs to this theme concerns enlistment in military or national service. In Israel, as stated, one of these two forms of service is compulsory by law for all males and females who finish high school, unless they are exempted from military service for religious or other personal reasons. According to Israeli social norms, too, service is not only a statutory obligation but also a privilege; most young people perceive military service as a way to serve and contribute to the country (Rabinowitz, [איות?] 2009). Military or national service is a vehicle and, to a large extent, a condition for successful integration going forward—an admission ticket to Israeli society that also influences the threshold of entry to the world of work. All this aside, it is one of the main and most basic experiences that young people can have; often it is key to changing the course of their lives. Military or national service takes place during the period between adolescence and adulthood and is defined as the near future (Hertz, 2018). Despite reference to the army as part of future orientation, most respondents were unable to specify what they wanted to do in the army and some even claimed that they did not wish to enlist. This finding accords with several studies on the military induction of dropout populations that are poorly motivated to serve. Many members of these groups fail to meet the induction criteria and, among those who join, a high percentage is discharged during their first year (Rabinowitz, 2009). The reason for the respondents’ reluctance to enlist evidently originates in fear of coping with a rigid, authoritative setting and their subjective sense of being unsuited to one.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth in regard to military or civilian service is undefined and opaque, reflecting emotions of fear and lack of motivation to enlist.**

Category 4: Future place of residence

The interviews showed, almost across the board, that the respondents were able to specify their future place of residence in clear terms, most speaking about moving to somewhere other than where they are living now.

The respondents’ wish to move away in the future symbolizes their wish to navigate from their current situation to a different one, to make a change. The transition is meaningful in many ways: socially, economically, familially and personally. Mobility allows a person to progress, develop, and improve his or her status and well-being. The respondents realize that moving away will allow them to access a structure of opportunities other than the one they have known thus far. They expressed this in the contexts of employment opportunities, a good place to raise their children, a larger and more spacious dwelling, or a different city that represents high socioeconomic status. Some respondents live in localities or neighborhoods that offer dead-end and narrow structures of opportunities. According to theories, at-risk youth who live in disempowered urban neighborhoods or rural areas suffer from lack of scholastic and employment opportunities due to poor access to the centers of these advantages, paucity of economic investments, scanty development of infrastructure, and lack of higher-education and vocational-training institutions. All of these shortcomings crimp local opportunities, including those related to employment (Rojewski, 1995).

Furthermore, mobility as a principle is immensely important for personal and overall human development. Physically changing one’s place of residence opens up new opportunities. In the past, it involved migrating in search of sources of nourishment, in the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that triggered large-scale urbanization (Sun, 2013), and up to the great transformations of the world of work in the globalization-influenced twenty-first century—processes that allow trade barriers between countries to fall, private investors to join the global economy, business firms and enterprises to move to Third World countries, and, in turn, new labor forces to move freely (OECD, 2016). The respondents’ wish to move away, as was found, is consonant with the theory that the twenty-first-century world of work is a dynamic and incessantly changing one that accommodates a great deal of mobility.

Another reason for choosing to move elsewhere is very personal, associated with the respondents’ wish to escape from the difficult and complex relationship with their home and childhood environment, i.e., their family of origin and neighborhood influences. Many participants in the Youth Advancement program claim that their homes and neighborhoods place them in risk situations and that they can change this only by moving elsewhere, to a place that does not draw them into behaviors such as violence, crime, vagrancy, and substance abuse.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth in regard to place of residence aims for a place that they perceive as one of change and social mobility.**

1.2 Emotions, beliefs, and coping with obstacles en route to the future

1.2.1 Emotions

It stands to reason that thoughts about the future evoke emotions about the future: fear, hope, expectations, thrill, or even apathy (Cinamon & Rich, 2004; Seginer & Halabi, 1991). In this study, too, the respondents expressed a broad range of emotions, some negative, some positive, and others in-between. Showing emotion in response to thoughts about the future is common and normal among all adolescents, including school dropouts. There is a strong connection between thoughts and emotions; each may stimulate the other. Thus, a round of thoughts about the future that elicits emotions about the future, and vice versa, is part of the internalization of attitudes toward the future. The very fact that the respondents knew how to express emotions about the future is indicative of the process that they are already undergoing as to their future conception and orientation. This was reflected in the interviews themselves because the first questions asked revolved around cognitive thoughts about the future and the way the respondents perceive it. From this point of departure, emotions also bubbled to the surface. The data show that the respondents conversed about future-related fears and apprehensions from the unsafe and unstable place that they occupy in the present, one that is out of their control and that affects their feelings about the future (Hatala et al., 2017). The discrepancy between the findings and theory reflects, in a certain sense, optimism among the young respondents and attests to their ability to face the future head-on even if their present is one of uncertainty or complexity. It also attests to their strengths, the construction and reinforcement of their personal self-confidence, and their strong ability to express emotions—an ability associated with the continual support and care that the Units’ educational-therapeutic staff provides. Part of the service that the Units offers is emotional work, in individual and group settings, that allows the youth to practice and experiment with expressing emotions as part of the toolkit for a sound life.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth is influenced by their ability to express a broad ambit of emotions.**

1.2.2 Beliefs about the future

People base their reality, among other things, on their beliefs and, in turn, their concept of others and of the surroundings. They construct their beliefs from the totality of their experiences, relationships, culture, legacy, or religion, and the results influence their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. The way people perceive their future, and the beliefs that they attach to it, are immensely meaningful for personal development and include the ability to plan for the future and construct it in practice. Our analysis of the data in this study shows that the respondents expressed various beliefs about their future and that most were positive, including faith in their ability to influence their future. Despite this overall sanguinity, the respondents were able to pinpoint the distance between their current place as dropout youth and their aspirations for the future, as well as the connection between what they are doing in the present and the effect of these factors on the future. Their positive attitude about their future may be explained in that they see the future as a time when they can bring about change in their lives, pursue personal development, and still have a chance to make dreams and aspirations come true—an optimistic outlook that represents their strengths and their motivation to lead a different life. Even though some studies find that children and adolescents raised in a difficult environment develop a pessimistic take on their future (Nurmi, 1991), other studies claim contrastingly that the building of aspirations and dreams creates optimism about life and the belief that significant change in life is possible—a conviction that produces a positive sense of self, particularly when thoughts about the future may generate anxiety and fear (Oyserman et al., 2004). This is particularly important for at-risk youth whose lives have brought them many disappointments and caused them to doubt themselves and others. By encouraging these young people to think positively about the future, one enables them to plan for the future, find meaning in these plans, and work out ways to attain their goals. Planning for the future creates order in a place where their present lives are chaotic (Raffaelli & Koller, 2005).

**The implication of this finding is that dropout youth base their future orientation on beliefs that promote positive thinking about their lives.**

1.1.3 Coping with obstacles en route to the future

Analysis of the data shows that the respondents identified the obstacles that they expect to encounter in the future but manage to find ways to cope with them; they also displayed optimism about their ability to vault these hurdles.

It is much like an Indian folk proverb about a boy who finds a butterfly cocoon in his yard. The boy keeps the cocoon and observes it every day until the butterfly emerges. One day, he sees a narrow fissure in the cocoon and the butterfly struggling to climb out through it. Several hours later, when he sees that the butterfly has not come out, he picks up scissors and slices the cocoon open. The butterfly steps out of the cocoon but falls straight to the floor because its wings are too creased and its body too crooked to fly. The boy does not know that the butterfly’s struggle to emerge from the cocoon is what enables it to strengthen its wings and body for flight [source?...].

Similarly, when the respondents realize that the path to their future is still likely to present them with obstacles and struggles, it is probably an important insight that allows them to bolster their self-confidence, self-efficacy, and relevant skills for adult life. The respondents expressed various ways of coping with the hurdles that they expect to find, e.g., not letting themselves wallow in feelings of fear and apprehension, not heeding opinions from those in their surroundings who do not believe in them, strengthening themselves, and not succumbing to despair. Respondent S15 tellingly defined the struggle as the road to success:

*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—March 12, 2019).

The explanation for this is that many respondents are indeed coping with daily challenges and obstacles that originate in family, studies, or other areas of life, and these troubles are already teaching them about their ability to contend with hurdles in the general sense. Therefore, when they contemplate the future they are already aware of the obstacles that they will probably face and are prepared for the possibility of having to deal with them. Furthermore, the respondents are learning to develop positive and optimistic thinking about their lives, the kind that will allow them to contemplate and plan for the future as well. It is theorized that when individuals have a relevant personal plan that includes goals and dreams for specific areas of life, they presumably also have a clear self-orientation that affects their behavior for the better (Oyserman et al., 2004). Accordingly, it is the very act of planning for the future that enhances the respondents’ ability to cope with expected obstacles. Coping with hurdles along the way includes thinking about the future but also taking concrete actions; thus, many respondents were already able to specify measures that they would have to take to pave their way to the future. These proactive steps not only abet progress in the stages on the way to fulfilling their aspirations but also develop their thinking skills, abilities, and self-efficacy and reinforce their self-confidence, steadfastness, and resilience. This analysis accords with many theories that note the ability to think positively about the future in letting at-risk youth focus on planning for the future, find meaning in these plans, and develop directions of action in which to attain them, thereby putting the chaos of their lives into order (Raffaelli & Koller, 2005). In addition, a positive future orientation among at-risk adolescents is indicative of their steadfastness in coping with risk and stress situations, the solidification of an inner focus of control, and the socio-emotional ability to adjust (McCabe & Barnett, 2000).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation of dropout youth promotes steadfastness and resilience, mitigating risk behaviors in the present.**

Research question 2—What are the occupational aspirations of dropout youth?

Research Question 2 proposes to map the occupational aspirations of dropout youth who are cared for by the Youth Advancement Units. To produce this map, two research tools were used: interviews in which the respondents described their future occupational aspirations, and analysis of documents that were obtained from two programs, used by the Youth Advancement Units in recent years, that prepare such youth for the world of work.

2.1 The leading aspirations of dropout youth—computers, sports, and psychology

The interviews show that all the respondents, with one exception, had clear and specific occupational aspirations in diverse vocational fields. They were able to describe the occupations that they wished to practice in the future, methods they could use to develop their aspirations, and difficulties and obstacles that they expected to encounter in pursuit of their goals. This finding clashes with theories that describe how young people with learning disorders experience the transition from school to the world of work, reflected in their finding it difficult to specify and select an occupational aspiration (Rojewski, 1999). Similar to the previous finding, in which the respondents did have a future orientation, the explanation for this may be related to the fact that the discourse in the Youth Advancement Units encourages future thinking about the areas of life in general, and employment in particular; this is reflected in the Units’ programs and activities.

Analysis of the documents and the data shows that the respondents had diverse occupational aspirations, with the three leading vocations related to computers, sports (e.g., managing a football team or training in a gym), and psychology and mental health care. One may see, for example, that the respondents’ choices in the field of computers are associated with the realization that twenty-first-century life is packed with technology and digitization and that many respected and in-demand occupations are associated with the computer world. The rapid development of IT, advanced digital systems, robotics, AI, and nanotechnology lie at the very core of the current world of work and the one that is expected in the future, and they have a definitive influence on the structure of the labor market, the physical workplace, and the workforce. The future world of work will demand people with high-level skills in computers and technology; those who lack these skills will find themselves jobless (Moshe, 2016; Pasig, 2008; Karoly & Panis, 2004). Young people who focus their occupational aspirations on the digital field are making a wise and correct choice, tailored to the future development of the working world.

The choices of occupational aspirations in sports are also highly meaningful and definitely associated with the social status that many athletes command as role models for success and emulation. Given the path to economic and social mobility that sports offer, many adolescents, including those from disempowered and low socioeconomic-status groups, consider them a way to break out of poverty and distress. This explanation concords with Wong (2016), who searched for and mapped the occupational aspirations of young people from ethnic minority populations in Britain and found that despite the desire to do well scholastically, becoming a successful athlete is one of the leading occupational aspirations of these young people.

The third most common aspiration comes from the fields of psychology, mental care, and caregiving at large. Generally speaking, the choice of care-related occupations is stereotypically characterized as the preference of an occupation that has feminine attributes associated with women’s social role, for which reason many girls choose to head in these directions. As a PISA study that examined fifteen- year-olds in OECD countries showed (OECD, 2012), even if girls’ occupational aspirations are higher than those of boys, girls prefer to choose occupations associated with healthcare, caregiving, or education as gendered roles. Another study found that girls prefer occupations grounded in helping others, work that involves relations and communication with others, and vocations that enable others to develop, such as those in the caregiving field (Weisgram et al., 2010). Specifically, however, among the adolescents who participate in the Youth Advancement program, these choices may be explained as originating in their specific position in life, which brings them into contact with many caregivers (e.g., school counselors, family’s social workers, or Youth Advancement staff). Apparently, the experience of this encounter, and the awareness that there is someone listening to and helping them as a role model, have instilled in them the wish to choose this kind of occupation. Additionally, these youngsters’ experiences of distress and pain draw them to helping professions as paths to self-correction and -fulfillment. This explanation concords with Gottferdson (1981), who claims that the main theories about career development find that individuals choose an occupation that they encounter up close and get to know by means of nearby personalities and are consistent with their beliefs and values. In this manner, people create a map of occupational aspirations that corresponds to their knowledge, abilities, skills, credentials, or wishes.

**The implication of this finding is that the respondents’ leading occupational aspirations tie into their personal life experiences and relate to aspirations of social and economic value.**

2.2 Occupational aspirations that point toward university or vocational training

Most of the occupations that were mentioned, in both the interviews and the documents, require technical or certification studies that do not have the kind of high admission thresholds that degree-granting institutions set. If so, the respondents cannot imagine themselves engaging in academic study and even stated vehemently, in their interviews, that they are unsuited to such studies. As stated, most respondents have learning disorders, went through negative experiences in school, and consider their scholastic capacity weak. This is clearly observable in their statements: *“Practical engineer, no. Because you need a strong matriculation [certificate] and I’m not counting on getting one”* (S2), or “*What would I like or what’ll I do? There’s a difference […] If I do cyber, then I’ll be a chef as a hobby. But most likely I won’t do cyber […] because, you know, you have to invest, you have to pass all the matriculation [exams], and afterwards go and invest in university studies. […] That’s not where I see myself. You have to work to reach those places […] Did you ever see a Youth Advancement kid who made it to cyber?”* (S15). These two statements strongly and clearly emphasize the gap between the respondents’ chosen aspiration and the one they would have preferred had they not dropped out of school. This explanation accords with Bartlett and Domene (2015), who found that dropout or delinquent youth do not see themselves as the kinds of people who can attend university or practice an esteemed occupation; they diminish and limit their occupational options ab initio. In any case, choosing a normative and positive occupational aspiration is very important for young people because it gives them a motive for developing a self-concept, self-efficacy, and personal identity (Creed et al., 2011). The perception that dropout youth limit their occupational aspirations is matched by the outlook of the focus group, which described the occupational inspirations of these young people as well. The focus group, however, took the lowering of aspirations to a place where these aspirations are absent or geared to setting up a business, even a criminal (drug trafficking) business. Here again, the professional team belittles adolescents’ abilities and labels them on the basis of stereotypes that view these youth as juvenile delinquents. Although some respondents do have criminal records including drug trafficking, their occupational aspirations are fundamentally legal, normative, and positive.

**The implication of this finding is that the occupational aspirations of dropout youth focus on study, not necessarily formal, that leads to the acquisition of an occupation.**

**Another conclusion is that the professionals at the Youth Advancement Units perceive the occupational aspirations of dropout youth as negative and lowly.**

Is there a difference between boys and girls in occupational aspirations?

In the interviews, the occupations to which girls aspired were being a secretary or model, interior designer, cosmetician or coach, doctor, actress, and media personality. Boys aspired to be a gas technician, digital information security specialist, sound designer, fitness trainer, electrical engineer, musician and business manager, tour guide, chefs, and confectioner.

Analysis of the documents shows that the girls’ chosen occupations belonged to the arts, e.g., acting, singing, clothing design, home design, and graphic design; beauty-related fields such as makeup artist, hairdresser, or cosmetician; and education and caregiving—teaching, coaching, psychology, or counseling at a drug rehabilitation center. Very few girls chose medicine or computers. Boys, in contrast, chose occupations in the fields of computers, music, and sports, and working as a chef. Some wanted to own a repair garage or other business, not necessarily in a specific and defined way but in order to make a lot of money. The gender division in occupational aspirations is typified by a distinct differentiation between “women’s” and “men’s” occupations. Girls chose occupations associated with women’s traditional roles, leaning toward education and childcare, whereas boys aspired to occupations that are thought to have economic and social value. These choices accord with gender differences in the labor market. Ever since they took up wage-paying labor, from the Industrial Revolution up to today’s integration of women into STEM (scientific, technological, engineering, and mathematics) professions, women have been suffering from structural gender inequality. The obstacles that they face concern unequal terms of employment, different employment structures, wage differences, narrower opportunities for advancement (particularly to executive positions), and coping with home-versus-career conflicts (Volti, 2011; European Commission, 2016; Dagan-Bozaglo & Hasson, 2015; Rimlet, 2008). Accordingly, female respondents realized that their occupational future is tilted toward opportunities available to women. Even though women’s employment has made enormous strides in recent years, these girls still aspire to epitomically gendered occupations. Thus, career development and preparation for the world of work is critical for girls so that they may recognize and discover additional opportunities; experience other, not gender-labeled, occupations; revise their stereotypical views on choice of occupation; and adopt views that promote autonomous, path breaking, and egalitarian thinking (Novakovic & Fouad, 2012). Furthermore, the girls in question, as dropouts from the education system, lack the formal education and skills that the twenty-first-century job market demands. Absent a process of acquiring this education, they will find themselves in a tough occupational world or may be left out of it, as may be seen in the phenomenon of the young population known as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). In this population, young women outnumber young men due to labor-market barriers associated with women generally and women who dropped out of school specifically (OECD, 2016).

**The implication of this finding is that the occupational aspirations of dropout youth are gender-baised in a manner that resembles the tendency among the population at large.**

Discussion of findings from Research Question 3—What sociological-psychological factors are involved in the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth?

People think and act via two main processes that affect them. One is intrapersonal, including thoughts, emotions, perceptions, opinions, or views; the other is interpersonal, comprised of interaction with the surroundings, relations with others, communication, authority, leadership, acceptance, and accommodation. Together with their intereffects, these two main processes comprise the person’s holistic contemplation of the totality of his or her life, including future orientation and occupational aspirations. According to our findings, two main factors affect the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth: sociological influences, exemplified through three domains—parents, school, and other significant individuals exemplified by role models, and psychological effects, manifested in the construction of the ego in the three dimensions of time—adolescents’ self-image and self-conception, and their various experiences, foremost occupational experiences, as vehicles of self-development. Analysis of the findings based on these two sources of influence—the sociological and the psychological—finds connections with various theoretical approaches toward the effects of society, family, and personality on time and future orientation (Boyd & Zimbardo, 1999; Seginer, 2001). Career-development theories also identify psychological and sociological effects as dominant in choice of occupation (Brown, 2002; Watson & McMahon, 2005).

Sociological elements

1. The influence of parents and family on future orientation

The family unit is our first source of learning and development; it figures importantly in satisfying physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs for sound personal development. The family is also the prime source of its offspring’s socialization because it is geared to accepted social norms and is the receptacle of the society’s culture, symbols, and heritage. Adolescents, of course, distance themselves from parents and reach out to peer groups in a process that often creates discord and dispute between youngsters and their parents. The extent of parental influence in adolescence, however, is immensely important because this is a transitional age between childhood and adulthood that brings much stress and anxiety to the fore. Therefore, many adolescents search for an adult figure with whom to consult and seek guidance, and they resort to their parents for this developmental task. Parents’ influence includes the spheres of developing a future orientation, career development, and choice of occupational aspirations. The extent of parental influence in these respects depends on the state of relations between the adolescent and his/her parents, the family structure, and the parents’ parenting style, level of education, occupation, and extent of their involvement in the adolescent’s life.

The composition of our respondents’ families was such that about half had both parents living at home and the others had divorced parents or single-parent homes. Some respondents were totally out of touch with their fathers, as recurs in many studies in which a large share of dropout youth come from divorced families and single-mother households (Dupéré et al., 2018). This finding sheds light on the diversity of the respondents’ families. Some youngsters come from relatively normative families; they dropped out due to some personal or social crisis or due to a mismatch and poor adjustment to school due to their specific nature and anti-establishmentarianism. For example, they left school because they wished to engage in music full-time instead of attending school, or due to social problems or depression. Other respondents came from distressed families; for them, many reasons for dropping out had to do with family structure and status issues such as parents’ divorce, intra-familial conflicts, parental nonfunctioning due to disability or illness, lack of parental authority over the adolescent, scanty parental involvement in their lives, absence of one parent (usually the father), or economic problems that affect the family’s well-being for the worse. The style of these families accords with research literature that finds a direct relation between states of familial distress and the risk of children’s dropping out (Vininger, 2014; Wergen, 2009; Forgin et al., 2006). Surprisingly, most respondents reported having good relations with at least one parent or some other family member, such as an older brother or a grandparent. These relations included sound communication, advice and guidance in various matters, mutual assistance, desire to learn from parents, and parental support of their child’s specific choices, including the choice to drop out of school. A few described conflictual relations including disputes and quarrels, failure to listen to each other, discipline problems, and disconnection. Indeed, theory has it that relations between parents and dropout youth may be even more complex than otherwise due to multiple tensions and difficulties stemming from the act of dropping out itself (Hertz, 2019). The findings show that youngsters who reported good relations with their parents were also those who received advice and guidance from parents and other family members in fields related to their future and, particularly, to career development and occupational aspirations. These parents encouraged their children to strive for a specific occupational field, helped them to acquire the relevant equipment, and let them experience the occupation in practice. One respondent, for example, reported that his father bought him his first sound system so that he could become a deejay. Another recounted how his father taught him to repair tractors and engage in other kinds of auto mechanics. A girl reported that she did makeup for all the women in her family ahead of celebrations. These examples demonstrate the importance and significance of parents in developing occupational aspirations in the sense of giving advice, guidance, and opportunities for the youngsters to experience and test their occupational aspiration in practice. Indeed, various theories define the family unit as the main source of learning and experience in developing areas of interest and skills, with it being the role of parents to provide and offer this platform for experimentation, provide constructive feedback for their children’s advancement and development (Kerka, 2000), and develop in their children the ability to think for themselves in order to make life decisions and choose an occupational aspiration, whatever it may be (Young et al., 1991).

Conversely, adolescents who came from families in crisis, especially children of divorced parents who are out of touch with their fathers and mired in internal conflict, lacked support and guidance for the future, particularly in respect of career development and choice of occupational aspirations. This corresponds to the theory that intrafamilial conflict typified by suboptimal communication with adolescent children adversely affects the children’s joining the labor market, creates stress and anxiety surrounding commitments to this market, and inhibits their occupational choices (Lustig et al., 2017).

Namely, parents play a dominant role in developing future orientation and career development. Good communication between dropout youth and their parents allows the adolescents’ future orientation and occupational aspirations to advance. When good communication with parents is absent, other family members should step in to fill this need.

**The implication of this finding is that there is a perceptible relation between the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth and the youngsters’ communications with parents and family.**

Parents’ occupation as promotive of their children’s occupational aspirations

The differences between respondents’ families that relate to the future, get involved in career development, and offer advice and mediation in choosing occupational aspirations, and families that lack this reference and involvement are also connected to parents’ education, socioeconomic status, personal occupation, and employment status (employed/unemployed) (Trust, Watts, & Erdman, 1997). The respondents described the occupations of their parents and other family members, which included the service industry, manufacturing, agriculture, culinary crafts, and education. Some parents were well educated and others not. In some families, at least one parent was unemployed; in a few, both were jobless. This diversity created a range of parental vocations and occupations, from joblessness to advanced degree positions including academia. This unevenness is exceptional compared with the family profiles of dropout youth, who are usually labeled as coming from households headed by poorly educated parents, households struggling with livelihood, and long-term unemployment (Fortin et al., 2006). Furthermore, the respondents drew direct connections between their parents’ vocations and their own occupational aspirations. Examples may be seen in the case of a male respondent who chose to be a sound designer and is actually working in this field; he chose his occupational aspiration because his father had once engaged in it and because he had learned the trade as a child by accompanying his father as the latter set up sound productions. Today, his father is helping him establish a sound studio and even donated equipment to it. Another male respondent wished to become a confectioner because his family owns two bakeries; it was by helping out with his parents’ business that he came to this occupational aspiration. These cases dovetail with theories that stress how children’s occupational identities evolve from childhood and how children observe the parents in work contexts. They may do so by visiting their parents’ workplaces, adopting a perception of life associated with the importance and values of the world of work, or testing their attitudes toward the concept of work and their parents’ occupational functioning. A positive parental approach toward work also allows children and adolescents to assume a positive outlook of their own and, in turn, to develop an occupational aspiration (Kerka, 2000; Rogers et al., 2018). Conversely, families in which parents do not work regularly or are unemployed for a long period find it difficult to offer their children a favorable outlook on the working world and are prone to express resentment, frustration, and disappointment with this sphere—reflecting to a perceptible extent their own lack of success. Consequently, adolescents from such families find it difficult to develop a future orientation and occupational aspirations. In this study, this may be observed in the case of a male respondent who came from a single-parent household and has weak relations with his father and conflicted communication with his mother. Neither parent was working and the household was mired in economic distress. The boy found it difficult to picture the future and express an occupational aspiration, and much of the reason for this almost certainly traces to his parents’ occupational plight. This example corroborates the theory of the effect of a family’s socioeconomic status (SES) on many areas of its adolescent children’s lives, including their occupational aspirations. Young people from socioeconomically strong households express a higher level of expectations of the labor market and occupational aspirations than do peers from low-SES households, whose personal, psychological, medical, and scholastic development is influenced by their economic situation at home and the extent of their parents’ functioning. Accordingly, they lower their general and occupational aspirations (Ali et al., 2005).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are dependencies of parents’ employment and the family’s economic situation.**

Parents and their role in stimulating and promoting discourse about the future with their children

Another role of parents as sources of influence on their children’s future orientation and occupational aspirations relates to stimulating, encouraging, and promoting discourse on the topic. Parents’ ability to converse with their children depends largely on the strength of their communication and relations as well as their adolescent offspring’s willingness to listen. Even though adolescents appear to frown on accepting information and advice from their parents, this parental role remains meaningful for them, especially today as online social networks burst with uncontrolled information. According to the respondents, when future-related discourse takes place at home, it revolves around general references to the future and is seldom associated with a scholastic or occupational field. By implication, while the existence of such a discourse among families of dropout youth is important and meaningful as a basis for parent–child communication and for strengthening connections and relations between them, its principal function is as a source of influence on the development of future orientation and occupational aspirations. Among the respondents, however, this discourse was largely limited to general utterances about the future, with little reference to future studies and employment. This may be related to the fact that the adolescents in question have dropped out of the formal education system after enjoying no scholastic success. This causes parents to perceive the question of continued studies in the future, and *a fortiori* academic studies, as a mission impossible that, accordingly, is not articulated. The pessimism and concern that parents may display in these conversations may explain why these exchanges are often accompanied by statements associated with hopes and expectations for the future. This conforms exactly to theories about future vocation, the construction of future aspirations, and the structuring of the “possible selves” as a process that promotes optimism in the individual and amplifies the sense of self-worth, resilience, and personal well-being (Oyserman et al., 2004). The role of a meaningful adult, such as a parent, in discourse about the future is doubly important for at-risk youth becau**s**e it not only encourages the adolescents to contemplate the future but also conveys a sense of confidence, optimism, belonging, and faith in self (Hatala et al., 2017).

Some respondents, however, reported never having entered into discourse with their parents about the future. The reason may be the absence of good relations between them and their parents, lack of parental involvement in their lives, and parents’ inability to converse with their children about matters that evoke anxiety and fear, such as the future. This finding matches a theory about parents who have a past-oriented perspective of time or are coping with difficulties, challenges, and acute stress in their present lives: it is said that they lack the emotional reserve that is needed to stimulate thinking about the future. Accordingly, their children lack a future orientation, possibly leading to risky behaviors such as delinquency, drug use, and dropping out of school (Voisin et al., 2018).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are based on optimal communication and discourse about the future with their parents. Enhancing parents’ awareness of the importance of future orientation would enable the discourse with their children to progress.**

2. Influence of the school on future orientation and occupational aspirations

To appreciate the connection between school and the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth, one must first understand the respondents’ experiences of dropping out and how they interrelated with their schools before doing so.

The dropout experience from the dropouts’ perspective

In this study, the respondents were well able to explain the precipitants of dropping out of school from their subjective perspective. Their explanations included severe learning problems and disorders, inability to adapt to the setting, behavioral problems including violence and class disruption, social rejection, lack of belonging to the peer group, and problems associated with home and family. These precipitants correspond to studies that sort dropping out into four main categories: problems related to the youngster’s personality, behavior, and scholastic abilities, and those associated with residential environment and neighborhood (Lahav, 2013; Vininger, 2014). Formal explanations aside, however, the analysis of our data shows that the respondents found these dropout experiences difficult, traumatic, agonizing, frustrating, and onerous. They were also constitutive events in their lives. Rather clearly, one may understand why the respondents mentioned these emotions as having “accompanied” them when they quit school. Their act symbolizes their enormous sense of failure and of falling short of society’s conditions. If school is a socialization agent that symbolizes normality, dropping out is its antithesis. Dropout youth are perceived as aberrant and marginal carriers of scholastic, emotional, social, and functional problems. The theoretical definitions of dropout youth, as set down by professionals and academics, describe youngsters who fail to navigate the education system, who typically have learning disorders, and who engage in risky behaviors such as drug use and trafficking or consumption of alcohol, and indulge in violent or criminal conduct (Romi, 2007; Lahav, 2000; Kaim & Romi, 2014). For them, the pain expresses the realization and internalization that at the moment of their departure, society has labeled them and doomed them to life on its fringes. Studies show how professionals and policymakers cause pejorative stereotypes about dropout youth (mainly concerning delinquency and joblessness) to become entrenched (de Witte et al., 2013). By the same token, one may see how the respondents themselves have internalized these definitions and noted their problematic behavior in school. In contrast, however, they expressed resentment of the definitions and even noted that from the moment the definitions clung to them, they reconciled their behavior with that expected of at-risk dropout youth. This finding accords with the social construction of the role of the dropout adolescent as the denizen of a subculture that reinforces the dominant culture (the school faculty and their good students) by stressing and confirming the accepted values. The school’s normative narrative is constructed relative to the dropout kid, who, from the contrasting direction perpetuates this subculture by adopting marginal behaviors that find expression in attention-seeking, extreme passivity, or hyperactivity (Blackman, 1997). Although dropouts obtain relief by no longer having to contend with the hardships of school, their departure thrusts them into a moment of crisis typified by uncertainty about the continuation of studies, the absence of a systematic setting, and the lack of a regular daily routine, resulting in situations of stress and agitation. In replacing day with night, dropout youth are drawn toward risk situations and decline as part of a syndrome accompanied by feelings and emotions of repression and distress. Nevertheless, the respondents’ ability to describe the experiences of dropping out may be considered a personal strength: The very fact of expressing the experience attests to their strong self-awareness.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are influenced by the very act of dropping out, which includes feelings of pain and suffering.**

Relations with school as a precipitant of dropping out

One of the main reasons for dropping out, as noted, is the adolescents’ grim relationship with the teachers and administration of their erstwhile schools. The data show that the respondents’ feelings about this relationship are grim indeed: anger, frustration, misunderstanding, and contempt on the part of the school, and alienation and non-belonging among the youngsters. When the respondents were asked about their relations with their schools and why they left, they insisted on correcting the wording, stressing that instead of their having left school, the school threw them out. This terminology is fraught with meaning for these adolescents; it emphasizes who was responsible for their departure. For them, there is a difference between standing up and walking out of school, for which the student is responsible, and being expelled by the school, making the school liable. This accords with the understanding of dropping out as a lengthy process that does not occur overnight and is defined in two principal ways: students who are “pushed out” of school due to behavioral problems, faulty discipline, and so on, and those who leave due to “pull factors” endogenous to their conduct in school, such as the need to support their families, the illness of one parent or of the youngster him- or herself, early pregnancy, and so on (Doll et al., 2013). This attests to adolescents’ focusing on some internal or external source of control. An external source of control allows them to blame the school for their departure and to take little responsibility for their behavior and achievements. An internal source of control, in contrast, which allows young people to acknowledge their share of responsibility for the process that led to their leaving, offers a basis for therapy, growth, and development of the young person who has dropped out. The school’s responsibility for pupils who are at risk of dropping out, however, cannot be ignored. The respondents’ accounts of their schools’ treatment of them are disquieting and make a dismal statement about the ability of school faculty to accommodate young people who are different from the overall profile. The respondents’ subjective perception of their schools’ treatment of them as contemptuous, humiliating, and estranged may square with reality or may not. It does accord with theories about the process that schoolteachers undergo when they face at-risk youth. When warm relations between teachers and students exist—relations of intimacy and affection—then of course there is a favorable influence at the level of school participation and activity. Achievements improve and both students and teachers come away with a sense of success. In contrast, when students with multiple difficulties who come from socially excluded population groups are present, a parallel process unfolds, in which exclusion persists on school grounds as well. The feelings of discrimination, frustration, and anger that accompany this exclusion make students hostile toward the teachers and unwilling to connect with them, to the detriment of their studies and achievements—ultimately infecting the teachers, too, with a sense of failure. This vicious cycle creates estranged behavior among faculty, who take painful measures against students such as suspension, exclusion from activity, and offensive speech. The students, in turn, react to the administration with violence and vandalism, and round and round it goes (Razer, 2014). These findings also correspond to the sociological perspective on adolescents as society relates to them, as a menace. Young people are perceived as irresponsible, verbally abusive, and rebellious. One can encounter an exaggerated form of this attitude when the adolescents in question belong to minority and socially disempowered groups: these youngsters are seen as juvenile delinquents, substance abusers, social misfits, and underachievers in studies and in school (Green, 2010). Furthermore, the school plays an important role not only as the place where knowledge and erudition are acquired; it also has a socio-educational role as one of the most important and meaningful agents of socialization for the individual and for society. Schools teach pupils to discern the values and norms, the rules, cultural codes, and symbols that society accepts. They teach social skills by hosting daily encounters with peer groups and inculcate a sense of belonging to the group itself, whether it is the class or the institution at large. Schools develop responsibility and a sense of independence by the very fact of youngsters spending the time away from their home and parents. Through the encounter with the school, pupils learn about it and its capabilities and develop their personalities and selfhood. Students who do not attend school regularly, skip class, or fail to participate actively in class lose not only scholastic material but also an opportunity for personal and social development.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are related to the two-way adverse relationship that exists between the school and the young people before the latter drop out—an attitude that affects their educational, personal, and social development.**

The nexus of the school’s attitude toward dropouts and the dropout experience itself, and the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth

In view of the foregoing, we can understand that, for the respondents, the attitude of their erstwhile school as well as the experience of dropping out—their transformation from being educated to being dropouts—has broader dimensions of personal, affective, and social influence. This effect ties into future orientation and occupational aspirations. The data show how the young people ascribed a future effect to their having dropped out. They expressed this by revealing the fear that they will never “amount to anything,” showing intensive concern about life going forward, or expressing lack of control over the present and, in turn, the future as well. They articulated this by contemplating their future nebulously or through highly structured and stringent plans for life. One may explain this by understanding the process the young people undergo when they drop out. Dropping out, as a constitutive event in their lives, affects their self-confidence and self-image above all. In the resulting situation, they oscillate between two extremes. The first is a stinging experience of failure, loss of self-confidence, formation of negative opinions of self, and depreciation of their abilities, self-efficacy, and aspirations. The second is a sense of omnipotence, the ability to do “anything,” live without restrictions, and attain anything. They see the act of quitting school as something that is good for them, through which they can attain other goals in life such as making money, having a good time, and living without obligations, even if it is not all certain that these feelings correspond to their actual abilities. Either way, the situation is unhealthy and harmful to the adolescents in question. It denies them the possibility of undergoing a deep and sincere process of developing a future orientation and constructing occupational aspirations. The inability to develop a future orientation defeats the adolescent’s main task, forming personal identity. Indeed, Erikson (1968) considers future orientation a critical part of the adolescent’s identity-formation process. He also puts much weight on the importance of adolescents’ engaging in future-related matters, experiencing future-related tasks, and testing their self-image in its future context. The absence of a future orientation impairs the identity-formation task, possibly dooming the adolescent to unsound development that may even lead to personality disorders and criminal or antisocial behavior. Additionally, dropping out of school and prior conflicts with teaching faculty may create feelings of suspicion and mistrust of the adult world in adolescents, resulting in lack of counseling, guidance, support, sense of confidence, and so on. Schools have an inescapable role to play in developing and promoting a positive view of the future for their students in regard to various fields of life, foremost preparation for the world of work, career development, and choice of occupational aspiration. Since career development is a years-long process that spans the period from childhood to adulthood, it is the school that brings this process into being. The school should be its pupils’ source of relevant knowledge about the world of work and the development of relevant skills and tools with which they may become part of it (Patton & McMahon, 2001). These are the fundaments of the student’s sound future development; they prepare students for adult life and create a basis for the transition to it at the end of twelve years of study. Accordingly, students with suboptimal integration into school activity, poor achievers who are not appreciated by the staff, those whom the school labels as disruptors of its sound conduct, and those who ultimately drop out are denied the privilege of correct guidance in this respect (Brown, 2002; Busharian, 2016). Dropout youth will find themselves excluded from the labor market, trapped in unrewarding and jobs that offer no benefits and limited possibilities of development and advancement, limited in their structure of occupational opportunities, or liable to unemployment and the need to receive government welfare. A study performed among young people, some of whom failed to complete high school and others having done so with a partial matriculation certificate, demonstrates this. In this study, it was found that 51 percent of those who dropped out lacked regular work or were totally unemployed in the course of the research year (MJB, 2011).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth depend on the role of the scholastic setting in developing and consolidating their personal identity, including the future one, and in preparing them for the transition from school and the adult world generally and the world of work particularly.**

3. Role models as factors of influence on future orientation and occupational aspirations

Adolescents often search for someone to emulate and admire. These models may be celebrities from the worlds of sports, music, modeling, or politics; other opinion influencers; or, alternatively, familiar figures from their close surroundings such as family members, teachers, youth-movement counselors, sports coaches, and so on (Valero et al., 2019). The need to adopt a role model is rooted in the developmental tasks of this age, which are associated with personal-identity formation, separation from parents, and transitioning to independence and the adult world. By emulating the model, the adolescent can test, experiment with, and adopt other opinions, thoughts, and behaviors, thereby expanding their “selves.” These find expression in various and diverse respects: style of clothing, music preferences, rooting for a sports team, or deeper matters such as social and political attitudes, moral conduct, and internalization of values.

The data show several times how the respondents adopted role models such as family members, mentors at work, or even alumni of the Youth Advancement Unit, and were able to link the influence of these role models to their future orientation and their choice of occupational aspiration.

Family members as role models and their connection with occupational aspiration

The data show that the respondents see family members as their main models to learn from and emulate. Some respondents mentioned special relations with parents and siblings as powerful factors of influence on their way of life and their choices. They noted explicitly how these family members serve them as models for emulation and inspiration and described specific characteristics that they sought to emulate. Examples are the resilience and steadfastness that these family members display in complex situations and their ability to cope with challenges, crises, and hardships. Additional motives are associated with success in life and the wish to “become something,” as the family member did even if the path was not easy. These two topics were noted as objects of emulation because they are important characteristics for at-risk youth who themselves are coping with such situations and are fearful about what will happen to them going forward (Oyserman et al., 2004). Additionally, respondents described family members who serve as role models as the sort who have very strong emotional bonds with them. These bonds are helpful when it comes to giving advice and support on various matters, and the respondents perceive these personalities as guides and mentors. This concurs with theories that consider family members prime sources for emulation and learning and that explain how parents or siblings fill this role (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003). The data demonstrate the preponderance of siblings, mainly older siblings, among role models who are part of the family. The explanation for this is that such individuals serve these adolescents as surrogate parents. Half of the respondents come from single-parent households; some are totally out of touch with their fathers, making the choice of a sibling as a role model understandable. This explanation accords with the theory that considers the choice of siblings as role models an indication of the absence of relationship and communication between the adolescent and his or her parents, placing siblings in the position of substitute parents (ibid.). One of the central matters in which family members serve as role models concerns employment. Parents are immensely important in developing their children’s careers (Jodl et al., 2001; Lindstrom, 2007). Parents who take their young children to work with them show them a normative way of life and daily practice, immersing them in a learning process in proper workplace conduct—rules, what has to be coped with—and exposing them to various fields of endeavor. This learning helps children to understand how the world of work fits into life itself. Additionally, children who help their parents at work and teens who actually work in the family business become intimately familiar with the family member’s vocation. When they observe his or her occupational success, they make him or her into a role model. Some respondents even adopt the occupation of the role-model family member as their occupational aspiration (e.g., in music, confections, or cooking). These models also help to promote the aspiration in practice by giving emotional support, guidance, an opportunity to gain experience, and even a monetary investment in occupational courses or equipment.

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are shaped by family members who serve as models for emulation. For dropout youth who come from single-parent households, older siblings step into this role.**

Occupational mentors and employers as role models who influence future orientation and occupational aspirations

Apart from family members who serve as role models, adolescents may assign this function to various members of their community, e.g., their employers or occupational mentors whom they encounter on the job or in career-development programs. Some of the respondents did describe their employers or occupational mentors as role models. When employers develop close relations with teens, they become significant adults for them in one way or another. The data give several examples. One of the respondents, who works as a deejay, described his employer—a successful deejay, well known in his field—as a source of professional inspiration and also as a meaningful father-figure. Another respondent, employed by a program called Ma’asik-Yadid(literally “Friend-Employer”), was placed in a job with a mineral-water company and received structured and planned stewarding from one of the workers, who served him as an occupational mentor. This respondent described how the mentor taught him the job (in digital information security) and how this convinced him that he wishes to learn and practice this occupation in the future. This corresponds to theories that speak of the importance of an adult mentor in an adolescent’s life who promotes personal and social development, imparts knowledge, reinforces self-confidence, affords an opportunity to practice optimal relations, develops diverse skills, and bolsters the youngster’s sense of value. By creating a nexus with the community and bolstering the sense of belonging, mentors avert risk behaviors and develop personal resilience. They also share their personal or professional existence with their mentees and help them to develop future aspirations in various areas of life, particularly in the context of their careers (Arbeit et al., 2019).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientations and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are shaped by employers and occupational mentors who serve as significant figures in their lives, and who they can learn from and develop.**

Role models from proximate peer groups as sources of influence on future orientation and occupational aspirations

Additional role models may be members of a peer group who are close to the adolescent or who experienced something similar to the adolescent’s experience in their own lives. One respondent specified alumni of the Youth Advancement Unit who visit the Unit and tell their life-stories as his role models. As stated, the experience of dropping out of school is a harsh one for those who do it. It affects their self-image and sense of self-efficacy and triggers anxiety, depression, and pessimism about the future. When these adolescents encounter peers who went through the same thing not long ago and report that they have managed to surmount the hurdles and obstacles, change their lives meaningfully, and progress in terms of establishing families, pursuing studies, and, in the main, employment, the youngsters find these stories inspiring and treat Youth Advancement Unit alumni who have done well as role models. The very fact of the encounter gives dropout youth hope and reinforces their concept and view of the future. This meaningful activity of the Youth Advancement Unit accords with the theory of role models from proximate peer groups as highly meaningful models, particularly for youngsters with learning difficulties. These role models, identical to those who adopt them in terms of age, gender, ethnic and cultural origin, or life history, are paramount agents of influence because their success stories demonstrate the action to be emulated in practice (Muir, 2018). This also corresponds to Bandura’s social-learning theory, which states that one way of developing self-efficacy is by emulating actions of others who resemble us, in the sense of “If he did well, so can I” (Bandura, 1977, 1986, in Muir, 2018).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientations and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are shaped by role models who resemble dropout youth in their life stories.**

Psychological elements

Apart from the sociological elements that affect the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth, psychological elements deserve emphasis. Psychology, as the study of the mind, wishes foremost to understand the structure of the individual’s personality, outlooks, thoughts, and emotions. Psychology is a multifaceted science that accommodates many schools of thought—all of which, however, have the common foundation of seeing the individual’s inner world as a unique riddle that should be deciphered. The psychological structure of the individual evolves from cradle to grave. In adolescence, the main psychological processes focus on mental adjustment to physical and sexual changes, processes of separation from parents, transition to independence, and formation of personal identity (Erikson, 1968). As corollaries, matters of self-image, self-conception, and change processes become daily issues that affect the adolescent’s way of life. For dropout youth, issues of self-image or personal identity, particularly if they are perceived as poor or negative, become more meaningful as precipitants of difficult psychological situations and risk behaviors. Furthermore, psychology is closely related to the perception of time and, in turn, matters associated with future orientation. Various psychological approaches view the concept of time as a foundation for the construction of self, ego, identity, and consciousness, in which life and the experiencing of life acquire their meaning in reference to the various dimensions of time (Holman & Cohen-Silver, 1998). In adolescence, individuals can perceive all three dimensions of time cognitively and psychologically and may integrate their three “selves,” those of the past, the present, and the future. This integration helps them to solidify their self-image, self-conception, and identity (Mello & Worrell, 2015). The findings of an analysis of documents from the Shehakim program (Ministry of Education, 2019) show how adolescents who participated in a “past-present-future” exercise were able to illustrate or describe themselves in all three dimensions of time, demonstrating the development of self-conception and self-image between past, on the one hand, and present and future, on the other. A boy who once attended a residential school sketched himself in the past wearing the clothing of a homeless person (signifying his being homeless as a residential inmate) and defined his friends as a family. In the present, he depicted himself in what he considered “fine” clothing and made no reference to a family. In the future, he drew himself wearing a suit and defined himself as married and with children. The exercise allowed him to construct a new narrative, in which he grew from a former residential inmate into an esteemed family man of the future and, in this manner, to build a positive self-conception for himself. Another boy described his past as negative because he defined himself as a student with “behavioral problems and skipping class.” In the present, in contrast, he viewed himself as a good and diligent student, and in the future he called himself a “winner” and an aspiring leader. This positive view of the future attests to his strengths and strong self-conception in the present and his faith in future success. These examples demonstrate the importance of future orientation as an impetus for resilience, psychological well-being, and strengthening of self-image and self-conception. They correspond to theories that consider positive future orientation, especially for at-risk youth, evidence of their ability to withstand risk and stress situations and to cope with complex emotional states. Positive thinking about the future promotes action in the present and helps to find meaning in current doings (McCabe & Barnett, 2000; Raffaelli & Killer, 2005).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are built in a manner that integrates the self into the three dimensions of time: past-present-future.**

The self-image and -perception of dropout youth as factors of influence on future orientation and occupational aspirations

Self-conception is the totality of the individual’s perceptions of self as the products of interaction and experiences with the surroundings, heavily influenced by significant others’ reinforcement and assessments. Self-conception is multidimensional, embracing self-esteem, self-confidence, stability, and personality formation. Although it is attributed to a general assessment, self-conception is actually composed of various categories through which individuals judge themselves in respect of the extent of subjective importance of each category from their standpoint. For example, an individual may have a poor self-conception in reference to learning but a strong one in regard to sports or the arts. The respondents were able to express two forms of self-conception: in their own eyes and as others tend to define them. The data show that most of them perceive themselves as independent and mature people, often in advance of their age. To understand this finding, one may recall that these youth have faced no few challenges and obstacles in their lives, either in very act of dropping out of school or due to family or ambient complexity, forcing some to develop accommodation skills and abilities “naturally” and indeed precociously. One female respondent, for example, dropped out due to medical problems that forced her to spend much time in the hospital alone; this experience, she says, made her mature beyond her years. Indeed, dropout youth are often tested early in life in complex situations that require them to adopt adult behaviors, causing their self-conception of their maturity to change as well. This corresponds to Michael, Solenko, and Karnieli-Miller (2015), who looked into the perspectives of at-risk youth from the Youth Advancement Units about meaningful events in their lives. These scholars found that in the aftermath of some dramatic event, the adolescents tended to assume more responsibility for their lives as an internal focus of control and discovered inner strengths and abilities. Notably, however, the respondents also fluctuated between manifestations of strong self-image and the opposite. This may be seen in their ambivalence in choosing an occupational aspiration and the devaluation that they carried out between the high occupational aspirations that they wished to attain and the “realistic” ones that they specified— the kinds of things that they could study or do as dropout youth. One female respondent, for example, described her wish to be a secretary for an insurance company, in which capacity she would wear a respectable buttoned-down white blouse. If she ultimately failed in her studies, however, she wanted to be a model, because “to be a model you don’t need to be smart.” A male respondent wanted to work in the cyber industry but considered this unattainable due to inadequate investment in studies and his situation as a dropout. One may also explain this ambivalence as a characteristic of adolescence, in which individuals’ emotions, abilities, and perceptions oscillate between extremes. Thus, self-image wobbles between a sense of omnipotence and one of impotence, between strong self-image and poor. A more appropriate explanation ties into the weak self-image that often typifies dropout youth and the way it affects their occupational choices and aspirations. Indeed, according to theory, young people who have learning disabilities and difficulties encounter more obstacles in the transition from school to the world of work than do non-dropouts, particularly in identifying and defining an occupational aspiration that corresponds to their abilities and credentials (Rojewski, 1999; Kortering et al., 2010). The poor self-image of most of the respondents finds powerful expression in all matters relating to study and self-conception as students. The personal identity of dropout youth as failures in school and as poor students is firmly internalized and affects their faith in themselves and their self-efficacy by making it indeed difficult for them to master a well-regarded trade or engage in higher studies in the future, as in the theory that links adverse learning experiences and school with poor self-image and self-conception about these young people’s learning possibilities (Jackson et al., 2006).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are influenced by self-image and self-conception, particularly those associated with their identity as students.**

Change as a precipitant of future orientation and occupational aspirations

An important element in constructing the respondents’ formative self-conception had to do with processes of change that they went through in their lives. The respondents described themselves as having undergone a recent life-change that strengthened their self-conception and connected with their future orientation and occupational aspirations. One male respondent reported that thanks to a therapeutic process that he had experienced with a staff member of the Youth Advancement Unit, his mental well-being had changed and his self-image had improved, helping him to develop positive thinking about his life. For this reason, he continued, he had formed a future orientation and an occupational aspiration to be a coach in order to help others in the future. The context of these changes is related to the educational-therapeutic process that every youngster who reaches the Youth Advancement Units goes through. These adolescents are stewarded individually by the Unit’s staff, who come to this work from various caregiving professions. This individualized stewarding, the very basis of the youth-advancement work, includes gathering information about the adolescent, identifying specific needs, setting goals, and putting together an intervention program that covers various fields including high-school equivalency, working with parents and family, and preparation for meaningful army service and the world of work. The core of the intervention is the educational-therapeutic act itself, in which those being treated go through a process of heightened awareness of their conceptions and behavior by working through internal personal experiences and those associated with relations with others (Hertz, 2018). A male respondent described the centrality in his life of the music that he compiles and added that he also makes a living from it as a deejay. This helped him to consolidate his self-conception and instigated an inner process of change and intensified development of self-confidence and faith in his abilities—mainly thanks to the positive feedback that he receives from those who dance to his music as a deejay. The recognition that a crowd of people gives him has healing power, promotes change, and gives him mental well-being that encourages him to think positively about himself and, in turn, about the future. This accords with Nurmi’s (1991) theory, which stresses that to develop future-oriented thinking an individual must be emotionally and mentally receptive to this goal. The better one’s mental well-being is, the better one may imagine one’s future and, as a result, the stronger one’s motivation to plan and construct it will be (Nurmi, 1991).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are powered by internal processes of change that promote mental well-being.**

Forming occupational aspiration by experience

Confucius (551–479 BCE), one of the greatest of Chinese philosophers, stressed the immense value of experience in the learning process:

*By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.* (Confucius, retrieved from Brainyquote, August 30, 2019)

By implication, practical experience is dominant in the individual’s learning and personal development and is often weightier than amassing knowledge or information. Life experiences allow individuals to develop skills, understanding, and knowledge at the personal and social levels; they create a link between past experiences, new experiences in the present, and those to come. They may be formal and planned out within the setting of a school, community center, volunteer project, or workplace, or informal, encountered in the overall course of life. In adolescence, the idea of experience is central in development at this age and in the transition from childhood to adulthood. In this study, the respondents spoke a great deal about their assorted experiences in the past and the present, in activity groups or enrichment courses, on the job, or with their families, and they described how these experiences are helping them to develop and consolidate their occupational aspirations.

Promoting occupational aspirations by personal experience

Some respondents described general experiences that they have had. One male respondent, for example, reported the way his previous school took him for outings as part of the scholastic environment. Due to this experiential exposure to the outdoors, he was able to connect to his occupational aspiration to be a tour guide. A female respondent expressed her wish to become an interior designer and took advantage of moving house to design her bedroom. Another girl, who wishes to work in television and media, undertook to write the newsletter of the girls’ home where she spends her afternoons. Other respondents explained how participating in enrichment groups gave them experience in various fields of interest through which they formed their occupational aspirations. One girl, for example, wished to become an actress and was already participating in an acting group at the community center. Another, who was interested in computers, took a computer course sponsored by the Youth Advancement Unit as part of her individually designed intervention program. This broad range of experiences does give gives young people a chance to directly experience the occupation that they wish to practice in the future. In this manner, they test their abilities in the area in question, the intensity of their personal interest in it, their skills, and the knowledge that this occupational development entails, and zero in on the occupation that they will wish to practice. This conception of experiential learning is common in informal education and, for this reason, in the activity of the Youth Advancement Unit. It is reflected in scholastic programs that encourage project-based learning (PBL) by means of short courses that expose young people to various areas of interest; it is also manifested in volunteer and empowerment programs (Hertz, 2018). The principle is that these experiences are important elements in young people’s development. Part of the characteristic of adolescence is the “right” of adolescents to be exposed to a variety of experiences through which they may formulate their personal identity. Erikson (1968) attributed great significance to these experiences and coined the term “moratorium” as illustrating this meaning:

*A moratorium is a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time. By psychosocial moratorium, then, we mean a delay of adult commitments, and yet it is not only a delay. It is a period that is characterized by a selective permissiveness on the part of society and of provocative playfulness on the part of youth, and yet it also often leads to deep, if often transitory, commitment on the part of youth, and ends in a more or less ceremonial confirmation of commitment on the part of society. Such moratoria show highly individual variations, which are especially pronounced in very gifted people (gifted for better or for worse), and there are, of course, institutional variations linked with the ways of life of cultures and subcultures* (p. 157).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth evolve and are concretized by means of experiences and are meaningful due to their role in adolescent identity formation.**

Promoting future orientation and occupational aspiration by experiencing the world of work

Apart from the experiential activities in which young people engage, joining the world of work has immense multidimensional meaning in the personal development of dropout youth. The data show that half of the respondents are working and that the others worked in the past or are seeking work in the present. This may be understood as part of a global trend in youth employment. By joining the world of work in adolescence, young people can get to know and learn about this sphere and develop values, attitudes, and beliefs about it. This is part of the transition from adolescence to adulthood and the preparation of youth for the adult world. The world’s adolescent population is a source of strength that propels global society; it is represented in its importance as the future generation. Accordingly, education systems, economists, policymakers, and researchers are concerned about how to integrate this population into the world of work. Working youth attend formal venues as part of their school curricula and partake of informal activities in their after-school leisure time. Although the question of whether concurrent work and study impedes young people or helps them advance is debated, most agree that joining the labor force at an early age is helpful for the personal, scholastic, and social development of youth and promotes the acquisition of skills that are critical for adult life. This consensus reinforces studies showing that youth should be encouraged to combine work and study as long as the requirements of both fields are kept in proper balance (Zelson-Warshavski, 2013). The respondents described past or present jobs including waiting on tables, catering, restaurant work, agriculture, and participation in a family business. The most common positions that they held usually combined unskilled labor and services, as one may see in Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer (2006), who asked how adolescents’ working experience promotes not only their career development and choice of occupation but also their scholastic abilities in the broad sense of the term. Along with these mundane jobs, one finds entrepreneurial respondents who developed their own micro-businesses in the field of music, e.g., sound design and deejaying, from which they are already making a living and derived their occupational aspiration. Here we see a direct connection between daily experience, including personal development in the present, and the aspiration to even greater professional development in the future. The combination of work and studies may be suitable for young people who participate regularly in formal education; for dropout youth, however, employment is part of the educational-therapeutic intervention program and is many times more important. Arranging employment for dropout youth has several goals, e.g., providing an alternative to the school that nevertheless enhances adolescents’ awareness of the importance of studies and vocational training; something that strengthens their sense of belonging, resilience, and personal well-being; an alternative to, and a preventive measure against, risk behaviors; a source of correct use of time; a gateway to the development of personal skills and reinforcement of the sense of value, confidence, and self-image; and a model that introduces dropout youth to a normative adult world, through which they may learn about interpersonal relations, experience good and active citizenship, and develop optimism and trust toward the adult world—emotions that are often lacking among dropout youth who have gone through hardships and have lost some of their faith in adults. Various respondents noted the effect of working on their personal lives. One female respondent described how she invests many hours in her job and how this job steered her away from risk behaviors. “I do less nonsense,” she explained, than she had done before she went to work. She is very fond of her job, she added, and realizes that it is preparing her for adult life. A male respondent who works with his parents at a family bakery noted the satisfaction and pleasure he gets from his job, which allows him to invent confections and develop his cooking and baking skills. Another male respondent described the enjoyment that he gets from his work as a deejay because it is the deejay’s role to make people happy. These on-the-job experiences apparently allow respondents to discover their abilities, develop their credentials, and find the vocation best suited to them while gaining an understanding of the values associated with working and the specific contribution of these values to their personal development. This corresponds to theories that see the world of work as potentially able to shape adolescents’ personal identity and abet their development in both the short and the long terms. Experiencing the world of work has an effect on understanding the value of work, wishing to work in the future, acquiring personal and social skills, accumulating knowledge and tools for optimal participation in the labor market, connecting with occupational opportunities, and developing networks (Houshman et al., 2014). Joining the working world is immensely important specifically for dropout youth because unless these young people complement their education and develop requisite skills for the twenty-first century world of work, they will encounter a complex and difficult labor market that will offer them very few opportunities and a great many obstacles due to their lack of formal schooling along with ethnic discrimination, dropout-youth stereotypes, or lack of family and community support (Kahan-Strawczynski, Yurovich, & Hoffman, 2007). Accordingly, at-risk youth who enter the labor market and persevere in it come away with a stronger sense of confidence, belonging, and well-being, have stronger feelings of optimism about the future, and are more willing to define aspirations and devise plans to fulfill them (Purtell & McLoyd, 2011). When dropout youth have an optimal early experience in the world of work, they are less likely to join the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population. Studies show that young people who fail to earn a high-school diploma or who finish school without a full matriculation certificate end up in poorly paying part-time jobs that offer little chance of promotion and economic security (MJB, 2011). Israel ranks slightly above the average among OECD member states in its share of young people defined as NEET (OECD, 2019). A male respondent worked for a mineral-water company after having been placed in this job through the mediation of the Ma’asik-Yadid program, which prepares participants for the world of work, at the Youth Advancement Unit to which he belonged. In Ma’asik-Yadid, a large business firm adopts the Unit for the purpose of offering enrichment activities by company staff. It also gives the young participants an opportunity to hold jobs with the firm, with everything this implies including stewarding by company employees as occupational mentors. Through the program, dropout youth acquire direct and authentic experience in a pressured working environment, tasks to perform, a certain level of functioning, and skills to practice as occur in the real world of work, but within an accommodative setting that provides instruction and guidance. The male respondent mentioned above joined Ma’asik-Yadid as part of his personal intervention program so that he could develop a future orientation and occupational aspiration. Indeed, when asked about his occupational aspiration, he described how his experience with the firm, as an assistant to the director of information security, helped him to narrow down his wish to work with computers. This is consonant with career-development theories that consider it the goal of professional counseling and work-preparation programs to expose young people to a wide variety of occupations, relevant information, and diverse working environments with which they may identify occupational preferences or wishes and, in turn, formulate an occupational aspiration (Patton & McMahon, 2001). For youth attending normative schools, it is the school, among other institutions, that should prepare adolescents for the world of work and help them to develop occupational aspirations (Patton & McMahon, 2001, 2014). For dropout youth, in contrast, this function is handed to the Youth Advancement Unit. Indeed, one of the core areas of the Unit’s activity is preparing its participants for the labor market, with special emphasis on future orientation and occupational aspirations. One of the main activities in developing these areas is the possibility of experiencing the world of work in practice. This corresponds to the Youth Advancement perception of employment, in which experience generally, and working experience particularly, is seen as a way to develop the “selves” of young people and, in turn, future orientation and occupational aspirations (Arkin & Lahav, 2013).

**The implication of this finding is that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are based on on-the-job experience as an important and practical step toward constructing and defining identity. It is the role of the education system to facilitate these experiences as part of the curriculum.**

This broad discussion shows that the future orientation and occupational aspirations of dropout youth are affected by a rich suite of reasons and explanations that have sociological and psychological elements. Even as we contemplate the phenomenon at large, we really cannot separate these elements; we can only accept them as a whole composed of parts that feed each other and interrelate. For dropout youth, focusing on future orientation and occupational aspirations is a way to enhance their abilities, preferences, capabilities, skills, consciousness, and self—and, thus, to formulate personal identity and solidify mental well-being, optimism about life, and resilience, all without overlooking the effects of the environment, parents, teachers, peer groups, and other meaningful figures.

The exception that proves the rule?

In accordance with the findings in the previous section and in this Discussion, one may say that all the respondents, with one exception, were able to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and uncertainties about the future and also to clearly define their aspirations in various and diverse occupational fields. Everyone, that is, with one exception. One might argue that it is of no significance that one respondent lacked a future orientation and an occupational aspiration. By giving thought to this sole outlier, however, we may enhance our understanding of the phenomenon at large. In a general analysis of this case, harvested from the data in his interview, we find a boy who comes from a large and struggling household and a broken home. He grew up with a single-mother. Neither of his parents is working. He struggles in his studies and has been diagnosed with learning disorders as well as a medical condition. He fits the profile and exhibits the characteristics of an at-risk or dropout youth (Kaim & Romi, 2014; Lahav, 2000; Etzion & Romi, 2015); the educational-therapeutic facilitators in the focus group concur. This boy, one way or another, represents the majority of clients of the Youth Advancement Unit, i.e. he is the rule. Even though qualitative research does not purport to produce a generalization, the question remains: Did this study actually investigate young people who are “prototypes” for the rest of this population? To answer, one needs to understand the changes that occur in the characteristics of dropout youth generally and those who reach Youth Advancement Units particularly. The reasons and circumstances of dropping out, foremost among the nonreligious Jewish population of Israel (i.e., neither immigrants nor ultra-Orthodox nor Arabs), have been changing in recent years. On top of factors associated with learning disorders, delinquency, and substance abuse, one encounters many youth who dropped out for reasons related to complex mental conditions such as depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal. In fact, today one finds a wide range of reasons for dropping out. This change may be related to the characteristics of the “Z-Generation” (Ran et al., 2019)—the kind who struggle to form social relations away from digital platforms, the sort positioned in an intensive world packed with rapid changes, the type diagnosed with more states of depression and anxiety, and the kind for whom the concept of learning or success in study is less meaningful, less prestigious, or less important than it had been in previous generations (Bencsik et al., 2016). They no longer perceive dropping out of school as an experience of failure; instead, they see it as a legitimate course of action for young people who are ill-suited to formal settings. It is on this basis that we may understand how the respondents, who have future orientation and occupational aspirations, actually represent the change that has occurred in the characteristics of dropout youth and do not match most studies about the future orientations and occupational aspirations of dropout youth. From this perspective, we may realize that much additional research work is needed in regard to the specific dropout patterns of the twenty-first century generations and also, in turn, about the future orientations and occupational aspirations of dropout youth.