



# Psychosocial profiles and self-perception of juveniles in detention in Greece

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## Introduction

- Juvenile delinquency occurs in every community affecting children of all religious beliefs, socio-economic classes and ethnic groups. No area, no group is immune (Mohammad & Matin, 1995).
- Nevertheless crime statistics indicate that levels of academic achievement, school attendance and graduation rates, play an important role in the involvement of youth in the criminal justice system (Vacca, 2008, Maniadaki & Kakouros, 2008).
- On the other hand, several behaviours both in and out of school – including absenteeism, delinquency, and substance abuse – are strong indicators of dropping out. (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).
- Studies of school dropouts suggest that, sometimes, capable youth are leaving school prior to graduation to escape the feelings of insecurity due to the unequal school competition because of their low self-esteem (Gottfredson, 2001).
- The most significant predictors of global self-worth are the perceptions of scholastic, social and physical competence, as well as the adolescents' perceptions of concurrent family conflict, which is the major factor predicting the level of self-esteem and peer relationships among adolescents (Campbell, Pungello & Miller-Johnson, 2002).
- According to a relevant study, supportive parenting is also linked to adolescent self-esteem (Dekovic, Noom & Meeus, 1997). Conversely, lack of parental support is cited as a strong correlate of adolescent substance problems and delinquent behaviour (Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998).
- Both antisocial behaviour and academic failure are context specific; each occurs within a climate, in which conditions can be identified that reasonably predict problematic behaviour and can be modified to reduce such behaviour (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

## Aim of the study

The present study aimed to investigate:

- schooling history,
- self-perception regarding relationship with parents, and
- self-perception regarding scholastic competence in a sample of juveniles and young adults in detention in Greece.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of ninety-three males, aged 13-24 years (mean age=19.29, sd=2.83 ), recruited from three Correctional Centers for Minors in Greece.

### Measures

- A questionnaire constructed by the authors exploring demographic characteristics and psychosocial profiles of the participants.
- The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985) for the investigation of the participants' perceived competence in the domains mentioned above.

### Procedure

The self-report measures were completed by the participants themselves, on an individual basis, in the presence of one of the researchers who read aloud and explained the questions whenever needed.

## Results - Psychosocial profiles

- Almost 1/4 of the participants were immigrants, half of them Albanians.
- Most of the participants came from large families with more than three siblings and one third of their families faced serious financial problems.
- More than half of the participants' parents were totally illiterate or of very low educational level.
- Almost half of the participants (45%) had one or several members of their families being involved in some kind illegal actions.

## Results - Educational level

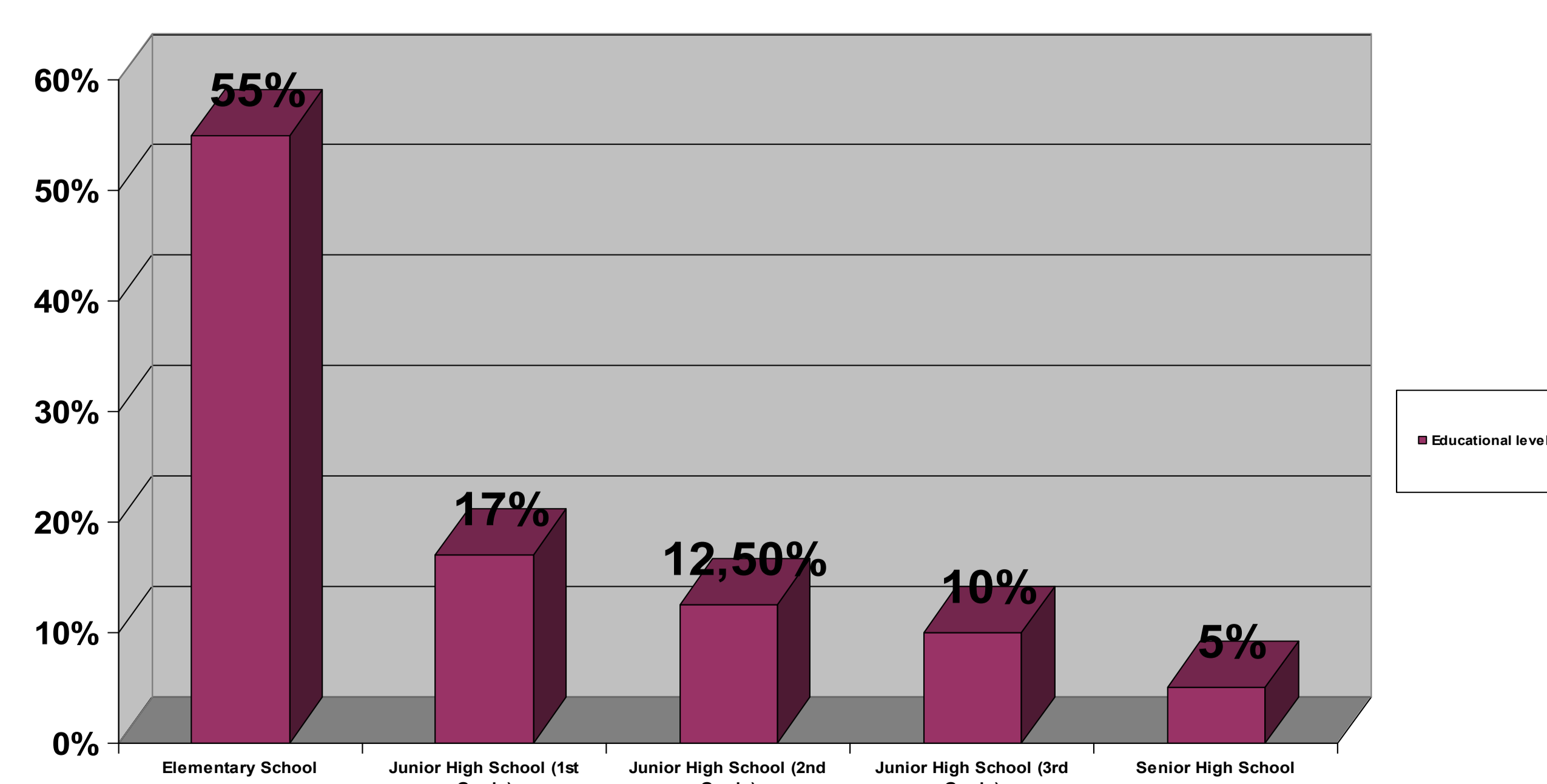


Diagram 1 Educational level of the sample

The 56,4% of the sample received only elementary education. There was only a 5% that graduated from junior high school. The 90% of the sample had dropped out before the age of 16.

## Results -Self perception

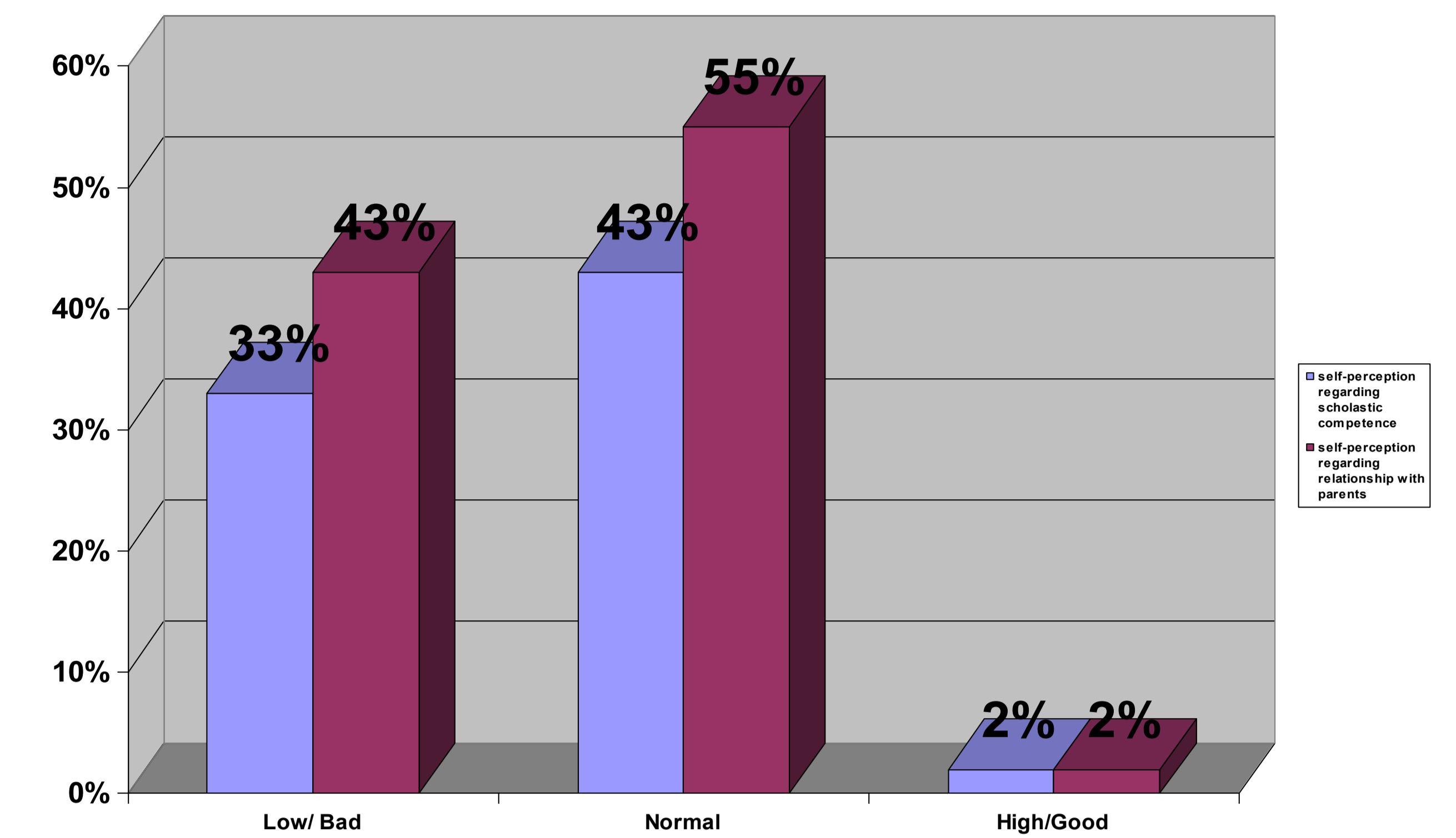


Diagram 2 Self-perception regarding relationship with parents and scholastic competence

- The 33% of the young offenders had low perception of scholastic competence.
- The 43 % of the participants assessed their relationship with their parents as bad.

## Discussion

- While the age-adjusted proportion of the Albanians in Greece is only 9% , their presence in the correctional centers for minors is far bigger. This shows that the social exclusion of the immigrants in relation to their bad financial situation might be considered as important predictable factors for juvenile delinquency.
- The other main demographic findings of this study are consistent with other studies which link juvenile delinquency with high levels of psychosocial adversity (Loeber, 1990; Maniadaki, Kakouros & Karaba, 2010). Large family size, low parental educational level, poverty and family history of offending were all characteristic of our sample.
- Regarding the schooling history of the participants, high numbers of drop-outs were revealed, confirming a strong relationship between school attendance and juvenile delinquency.
- Coming to the scholastic competence, the findings correspond to those of Millan et al. (1994), who report that within the teenagers, a 10% to 24% had a negative self-image and 50% was unsure about their study goals.
- It seems that children who, for several reasons, cannot develop high self-esteem within their families and school, are vulnerable to connect with delinquent counterparts and involve in criminal acts in order to feel social approval and self-worth.
- To conclude, schools can play a central, coordinating role in collaboration with families and social service agencies in addressing the challenging problems presented by students with learning and behaviour problems.
- A program of early intervention should focus not only on socio-demographic characteristics that might place youth at risk for delinquent behaviours but on family relationships and youth scholastic competence as well, which , in turn, are driven by relevant beliefs.

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