

2018 RESEARCH FELLOW

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education



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PROJECT INFORMATION

How the perceived risks of going to university influence the decision by people from low SES backgrounds to participate in Australian higher education

This project will examine how perceived risks influence university participation by people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Within the contemporary career context, vocational decision making is characterised by uncertainty, with a proliferation of occupations, increasingly unstable prospects and speculative futures. In the shifting vocational landscape, 'employability' is based on transferable skills as a buttress for increasingly fluid portfolio careers (Savickas, 2009) and university education is no longer a reliable path to a defined and stable occupation. Nonparticipation may now reflect "a rational, pragmatic strategy of risk avoidance, rather than a lack of aspiration or talent" (Archer et al., 2002, p. 106).

The notion of perceived risk on the decision to go to university by people from low SES backgrounds has been largely overlooked in widening participation (WP) literature and praxis. This project will address that gap.

The project aims to:

- explore the types of perceived risks that people from low SES backgrounds associate with the decision to go to university
- develop an evidence base about the role of perceived risks in participation decision making
- develop and test a model of the influence of perceived risks on the decision to go to university by people from low SES backgrounds
- seed new thinking and rethinking of WP praxis related to people from low SES backgrounds, and the optimisation of career construction in an era of increasing vocation risk.

Mixed methods research will incorporate a systematic content analysis of grey literature and manual thematic analysis of secondary, qualitative data from two recent large-scale HEPPP funded projects, and the testing of the project model using quantitative, survey-based data with structural equation modelling the primary data analytic technique.

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