

A STUDY ON THE SCHOOL DROPOUT STUDENT IN PRIMARY AND UPPER PRIMARY LEVELS

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Child Labour' is at times, used as synonym for "Employed child", Working Child. In this sense it is co-extensive with any work done by a child for gain. It suggests something which is hateful and exploitative.

A large number of children are employed in unorganized sector and they work as domestic servants; or as workers in hotels, restaurants, canteens, wayside shops, and establishments; or as hawkers, newspaper sellers, coolies, shoe shine boys, vendors, or helpers in repair-shops. The children are also taken with their parents in construction work for loading, unloading and breaking of stones, etc.

The World Bank has developed successful partnership with government of India to create the environment for broad based social and economic growth, which is an essential element of the process of eliminating child labour. A Review of World Bank Lending for Children and its Bearing on Child Labour indicated that the World Bank and Asian Development Bank supported six major projects related to primary and elementary education in India, having a credit of US\$ 1239 million. Major objective of the projects was improving physical access to schools, developing infrastructure, supporting quality and learning outcomes and supporting policy change and capacity building.

The World Bank also supported District Poverty Innovation Projects (DPIPs) in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu during the period 2000-2005. These projects have a special on release and rehabilitation of hard to reach children and for creating employment opportunities for the parents of these hard to reach children.

Economically School Dropouts Student income of the household consists of income of its adult members. A poor household may have to send its children (aged between 5 to 14 years) to work for earning supplementary income for it. The income of such a household is found to be low as well as insufficient to meet its requirements. The income earned by adult members of household is low on account of illiteracy or low level of education of such members causing low productivity of labour, low opportunity cost of labour arising out of absence of opportunities of earning income from alternative sources, unemployment etc.

KEYWORDS: Employed Child, Child Labour

INTRODUCTION

Every year, a large number of students drop out of school worldwide. A significant number of them go on to become unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents of children who are likely to repeat the cycle themselves.

The dropout issue in India is of particular importance and interest. India has made extraordinary progress over the past decade in increasing access to elementary education, now reaching 96% of school-age children. Having brought so many children into school, particularly those from the most vulnerable groups, it is logical to turn attention to retaining them through the elementary cycle. The 2009 Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act will ensure that the norms, standards and conditions essential to accessible, quality elementary education are in place. Few countries have introduced such far-reaching reforms or demonstrated such commitment to education for all children, including those from the weakest and most disadvantaged groups. Currently, India is a leading player in the UNICEF-UNESCO Out-of-School Children Initiative, which includes children at risk of dropping out of school as a focus.

In 1993, 27 million children entered school in Class 1 in India but only 10 million (37%) of them reached Class 10 in 2003. Dropout rates peak in the transition between Class 1 and 2 and again in Classes 8, 9 and 10. Dropout rates have remained negative between Classes 4 and 5. The state of Pondicherry improved its performance with regards to school dropouts from the fourth place in 1991 to the first in 2001, displacing Kerala as the best performing state. The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh perform poorly in this ranking.

Government data indicate improvement in the rates of school enrolment. However, there may be problems in looking at enrolment data without attention to attendance and retention rates. Thus, the actual rates of dropout from schools may be much higher than those depicted.

SDPP will focus its dropout prevention interventions and activities in Bihar State. The State of Bihar has been a leader in the educational reform process in India. Its progress in implementing the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has been recognized both in India and internationally. An article in the New York Times termed it a “turnaround state,” noting the improvements it has made in several sectors, including education.

Despite this, the Education Development Index (EDI) — which combines 23 key education indicators for primary and upper primary education—shows that Bihar State ranks last among the 35 states and union territories, with a score of 0.421 for 2009/2010. More specifically, Bihar suffers from a high primary school dropout rate at nearly 14 percent (5th worst state/UT ranking), poor transition rate from lower to upper primary of 71 percent (2nd worst state/UT ranking), and moderate gross primary completion rate at 92 percent (11th worst state/UT ranking).

On May 10th, 2011 Bihar Government approved the Right to Education Act (REA) under which the children in the age group of six to 14 years will be imparted free and compulsory education. Both its pro-active approach toward education innovation and research and the severe dropout problem it is experiencing make Bihar State a prime candidate for the SDPP program. Bihar also presents favorable conditions for implementation. Most importantly, MHRD recommended Bihar as a project site and the Bihar education authorities are interested and willing to host the SDPP program.

SDPP proposes to focus its efforts on Grade 5, the terminal grade in primary school, based on its current analysis of the dropout problem in Bihar. SDPP activities will be implemented in Bihar by the local NGOs, IDEAL and QUEST

DROPOUT TRENDS

Analysis of India’s District Information System for Education data shows that:

- **Grade 5**—the terminal grade in the primary cycle—has the highest dropout (15.9%).

- Grade 5 dropout exceeds dropout in other primary and upper primary grades by 53%
- (grade 1) to 189 % (grade 6).
- Grade 6 and 7 dropout rates (5.5% and 5.8%, respectively) are lower than those of the primary grades, suggesting that students are less likely to dropout at higher grades. (Data not available for Grades 8-12)

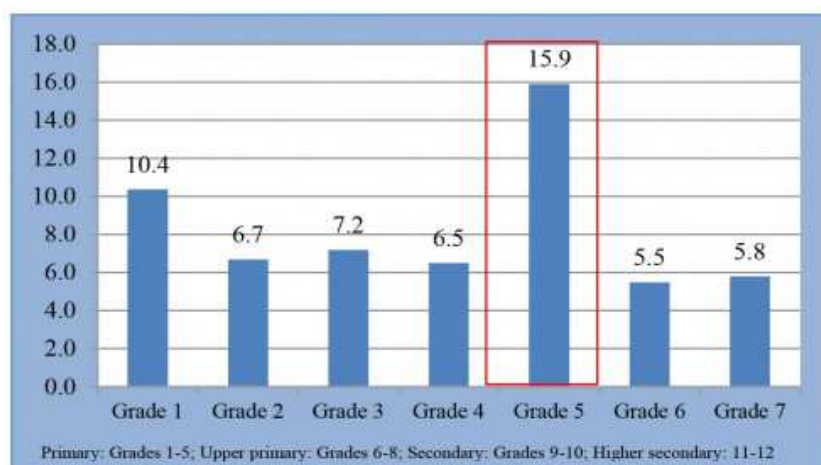


Figure 1: Dropout Rate by Grade: 2009/10

Dropout in Context

A situational analysis was conducted in a high dropout district of Bihar state, reporting 27% Grade 5 dropout, to identify the factors and conditions associated with dropout, develop a profile of a child at risk of dropping out, and inform intervention selection and design. The top reasons of student dropout among 5th grade students in the target district—cited by at-risk students, dropouts, and their parents/guardians—are both economic and academic.

Stage 1

Children who had failed to attend class in the past year were identified by school teachers and Block Education units. Children above the age of 14 years were screened out, since they did not fall under the remit of the programme. Rigorous efforts were made to contact parents of those below the age of 14 years. Teachers and the parents identified a predominant “reason” for dropout. These “reasons” were identified from review of literature examining factors correlated with school dropout.

Stage 2

368 children attended camps held in various panchayaths in the district with their parents or care takers. The medical team assessed children using a Performa to gather information focusing on developmental issues and assigned a diagnosis if relevant. This sometimes resulted in a reassignment of the “reason” for dropout if a medical or psychiatric disorder had been missed in the first screening by teachers. Psychosocial issues were examined in detail with the assistance of social workers.

A management and follow-up plan was outlined following discussions between the various departments. The outcome of the interventions was followed up by local Block Educational Officers.

Stage 3

Children assigned to the categories of “Physical problems,” “Mental Retardation,” “School issues,” and “Family issues” were referred to the outpatient department at the Medical College. 52 attended and were assessed and investigated in different departments within the medical college. Qualitative data were gathered from them. The flow chart for the study is given below

Economic Reasons are the Top Three Reasons Cited

- About 55% of parents/guardians and about 60% of child respondents cited need to supplement income through household chores or domestic work. About 30% of the respondents cited need to work to earn money.
- 30-40% of respondents cited school-related expenses (direct cost appear to be a greater problem for dropouts).

Students also Drop Out of School for Academic Reasons:

- A cluster of school based reasons indicate that school does not provide a supportive environment for academic success or self-esteem.
- Poor academic performance (9-10%)
- Fell behind with lessons (5-8%)
- Discouraged by teachers (14% particularly for dropouts); 46% criticized by teacher
- Did not like school (5-13% particularly for dropouts); 15% participated in school events, projects or clubs
- Chronic absenteeism is a major contributor to dropout. The majority (55%) of dropouts and nearly half (40%) of at-risk students have missed more than 15 consecutive days of school over the academic year. 36% of at risk students and 61% of dropouts have missed 3 or more days per month. 40% of parents/guardians were not or seldom aware of their child’s absences.

Other factors cited for dropout were: illness and marriage. Factors not frequently cited: conflict, distance to school, too old, pregnancy, school safety, and lack of latrines.

About 12% were mentally retarded and had physical mobility problems in addition. They had been placed in the Physical disability category in Stage 1 and were reassigned to the category of Mental Retardation in Stage 2. 21% of the children were deaf and attended special school. 10% of students were blind; some attended special schools.

Children with severe, some congenital, cardiac problems were kept at home on the recommendation of their doctors. One child who had diabetes attended the local primary care clinic for insulin injections twice a day and missed school. 4% had severe skin lesions (psoriasis), considered as contagious by the family and teachers and hence missed school. Lack of money for treatment, poor parental literacy, and a general lack of alternatives could be cited as adding on to this “reason” for dropout.

Mental Retardation

Most had moderate or severe mental retardation with additional problems such as cardiac disorders and epilepsy. A few among these children had severe behavioral problems often repetitive behaviors such as rocking, head banging, and aggression.

Family Issues

There were several strands in the narrative around family issues and dropout from. Parental separation and ill health often led to the need for girl children to work or stay back at home to care for younger siblings. Older boys dropped out to find work. Children who were orphans found foster homes with relatives. However, these were often short lived with the children being moved from home to home. Education was the loser in these cases. Alcohol abuse, dependency, and illicit brewing of alcohol by the parents were issues in some. The outcome was family bickering, quarrels, and the development of problems in children. A few children were from families who led a nomadic existence, moving from place to place seeking employment resulting in the child moving from school to school.

Issues Related to School

Some families pointed out issues such as an inability to buy textbooks and a lack of transport to attend school. Several had failed a class and dropped out of school in subsequently. Some were moved to a different school and later stopped attending. There was reason to suspect academic backwardness in most of these children. All of them were given an opportunity to attend the outpatient department of the medical college for a more detailed evaluation. 14 attended and 9 of them were thought to have Specific Developmental disorders of Scholastic skills. This could not be confirmed since all of them had poor opportunities for schooling and a general deprivation making the diagnosis uncertain.

Financial

This constituted the largest group amongst reasons given for dropout at Stage 1 of screening. In Stage 2, financial issues fell to the fifth place (13.6%) as a reason for school dropout. This occurred because another, more proximal and predominant, “reason” was found for the dropout. However, it must be stated that financial issues remained significant in most cases of dropout.

Employment

This remained a significant reason for dropout accounting for 17% of the cohort. The problem was commoner in older males (girls accounted for less than 20%). Dropout occurred at a later age as compared to other groups.

Change in “Reasons for Dropout”

In Stage 2 of the programme, children were assessed by the Medical team. As a result, 51 (13.9%) children were reassigned other “reasons”

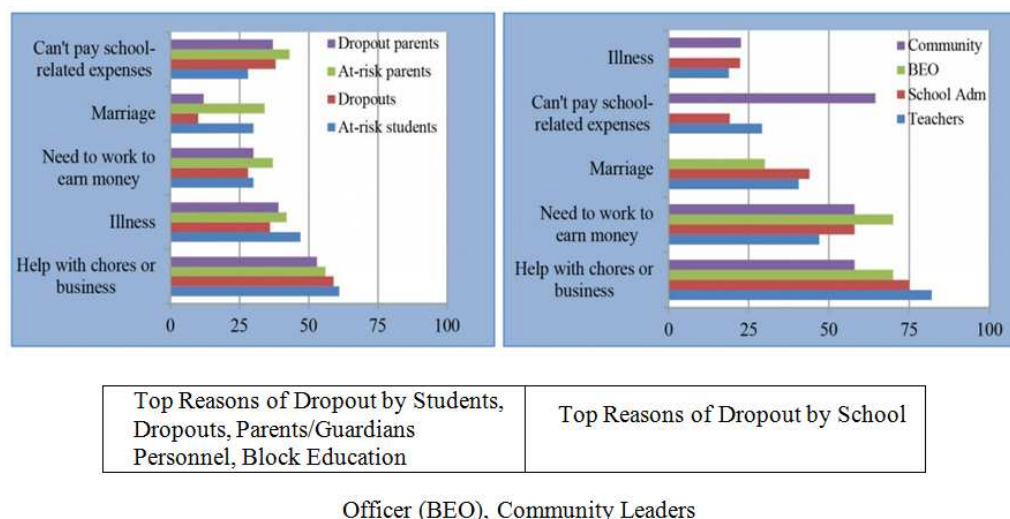


Figure 2

The Interventions

In agreement with the Bihar Education Project Council, SDPP will target grade 5 in 13 blocks of Samastipur district.

Key education stakeholders attended a design workshop to develop ideas for dropout mitigation through a consultative process. Two priority interventions—an Early Warning System and in-school Recreation/Enrichment Activities were developed consistent with the government's strategic sector plan and reliability requirements. Implementation is planned to start in July 2012.

Early Warning System (to reduce student absenteeism and support at-risk students in school)

- Use existing school level data on attendance, performance, behavior etc. to identify students at-risk of dropping out of school
- Enhance the capacity of schools to address the needs of at-risk students
- Strengthen the partnership between school personnel and the parents/guardians of at-risk students

Recreation/Enrichment Activities (to increase attractiveness of education to students and motivate attendance)

- Program activities for unstructured SUPW (life skills) class to encourage students to participate in creative, entertaining activities (arts and craft, sports and games, reading and storytelling) that develops learning skills
- Engage teachers and community volunteers to lead and facilitate the recreation and enrichment activities

Impact Assessment

Intervention impact on dropout will be assessed using randomized control trials. Outcome measures include in- and between-grade dropout, grade completion, promotion, attendance, and performance. Changes in student, teacher, and parental knowledge, attitudes and practices for dropout prevention will also be measured. Data will be collected and analyzed at baseline, mid-term, and end-line.

A sample of 220 schools was selected (based on an anticipated dropout reduction of 7 percentage points).

Only schools that have target grades, are not flood prone, are accessible, have a playground, and agree to participate in SDPP were included in the sample. Schools were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups: 113 schools will receive the intervention while 107 schools will not receive the intervention and serve as the control group.

Social programme aimed at returning children back to school by helping remediate what was perceived as the predominant reason for dropout. There was a great degree of overlap between parents' and teachers' perception on "reasons" at Stage 1. In Stage 2, 51 (13.9%) had a reassignment of these "reasons." It would be important to unpick this. Of these 51, 25% were in employment, a fact that had been hidden from teachers at stage 1. Most parents feared reprisal and action by law enforcement agencies. Some were ashamed to admit that their children were working to supplement family income.

31% were diagnosed with Mental Retardation in the mild category in Stage 2. This had not been recognized by teachers or parents. 17% with school-related issues were children who were suspected to have some form of learning difficulty. Children in these two groups reported recurrent failures in examination though they were not retained in a class. This led to truancy and finally a refusal to go to school. Some of these children had been reenrolled in schools for mentally retarded children later. A small number of children who were in the mild category dropped out due to an inability to cope with the curriculum in mainstream schools.

Various developmental disorders have been implicated as a reason for dropout from school. [3:8] In the NFHS III survey (IIPS 2007),[13] "lack of interest" was cited as the most common reason for dropping out of school (36% boys and 21% girls). In an earlier NSSO survey (1998), 24.4% of respondents gave this as a reason for dropping out of school. [12:14] In this study, we had combined the two "reasons"—"problems at school" and "lack of motivation" of which the latter is similar to "lack of interest." This study has shown that lack of motivation is determined by complex dynamics beyond socio demographic factors. The role of poor academic achievement related to learning difficulties, poor physical health, exclusion due to perceived "slowness in learning," and nutrition would need to be elucidated further. [15–17] The Problem [18] survey suggests that if a child is unwilling to go to school, it is often difficult for the parents to overcome her reluctance (just as it is hard for a child to attend school against his parents' wishes). The fact that school participation is contingent on the motivation of the child is another reason why various aspects of "school quality" are likely to matter.

Physical disorders of various types accounted for the largest amongst the "reasons" for dropout and this calls for action from health departments and social service agencies. A third of children, though capable of attending, could not because of mobility issues. Children with specific disabilities of vision or hearing benefitted from special schools.

The link between child labour and dropout from school has been studied from different perspectives. It is thought that children drop out of school due to a need to supplement family income through work. [19] In Kerala, children prefer less arduous work and choose ones they believe will get them some skills such as diamond polishing or gold smithy.[20] Thus, this "reason" for dropout is more complex than a direct connection between child labour and school dropout. Basu and Van argue that the issue of poverty and child labour needs to be disaggregated.

Otherwise, poverty alleviation alone would be seen as a solution. Lack of finances combined with a lack of access to credit when faced with a need to buy books, uniforms, and pay school fees could lead to dropout from school. This in turn could lead to child labour. On the other hand, once a child drops out of school, poor parental motivation

combined with lack of perception of the benefits of accruing literacy and numeracy, could lead to child labour. These findings imply that easier access to credit could help reduce child labour and improve school attendance. [21] Dreze and Kingdom [22] considered parental decision making and the household situation to play an influential role in sustaining school access for the child. When children do not want to attend school, parents find it difficult to make them continue. Often, there is no cost benefit analysis of the benefits of attaining cognitive skills. The best available alternative is often chosen (girl children looking after a younger child, boys earning money through employment). In this study, financial “reasons” though seen as predominant in 13.6% of children, actually ran as a common factor in most of the other “reasons.” Issues in families accounted for 17% in this cohort. The narrative around this point to an intimate link between issues in families, financial issues, and child employment, calling for action from health and social sectors.

Thus, one could argue that school dropout is a phenomenon or symptoms which could be explained based on a variety of “reasons,” none of which are watertight compartments. There is relatively little research into determining the reasons why so many children drop out of schools in India. This in turn leads to a tendency to highlight single causes or explanations.[3,23–25] In Kerala, attention to pedagogical factors has increased retention of children in schools and it is perhaps time to look at other approaches to reduce dropouts further.

- It might be better to think of “proximal mediating risk factors” as associated with school dropouts. [8] We would advocate that in examining the causes for dropping out of school, a “space of reasons” is examined. In this “space of reasons,” we would include poverty and lack of finances being associated with childhood developmental factors (such as learning difficulties, intellectual disorders, ADHD) and school pedagogical factors (access to school, irrelevant curricula, and poor parental perception of these issues). Thus, one would need to approach the issue from different angles or through many lenses. A multipronged approach would work better.

Broad Strategies

- Institutional reforms in the states to improve efficiency of the delivery system.
- Sustainable financing.
- Community ownership of school based interventions through effective decentralization.
- Institutional capacity building for improvement in quality.
- Community based monitoring with full transparency in all aspects of implementation.
- Community based approach to planning with habitation as a unit of planning.
- Special focus on girls, scheduled caste (SC)/ scheduled tribes (ST) working children, urban deprived children, children with special needs, children in marginalized families and children in hardest to reach groups.
- Thrust on quality and making education relevant.
- Recognition of the critical role of the teacher and focus on the human resource development needs of teachers.
- Preparation of District Elementary Education Plans reflection all governmental and non-governmental investments.

Table 1: Gender-Wise Dropout Rates at Primary and Upper Primary Stages in India

Year	Primary Stage		Upper Primary Stage	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1980-81	56.20	62.50	68.00	79.40
1984-85	45.62	51.41	61.83	70.87
1989-90	46.35	50.35	61.00	68.75
1995-96	37.79	37.92	54.99	61.70

Source: K. N. Bhatt "Child Labour in India: Determinants and Policies, 2002

The obvious fate of the dropout children is relapse to illiteracy and drudgery of either paid work as child labour or unpaid household/other monotonous activities. Those who complete their five or eight years of education in schools also could achieve nothing to cheer about because of abysmally poor quality of elementary education in the country. To illustrate the functioning of our primary school system the findings of an empirical study conducted in U. P. are presented in the following paragraphs.

CONCLUSIONS

- The government and the NGO's should take the responsibility of appointing /utilizing professionally trained social workers to create awareness/through social case work and social group work.
- All Medias like televisions, radios, hoarding, slideshows, and documentary films should be utilized to create awareness among the general public and the parents about the evils of child labour and school dropouts level.
- Rural level Increase in Awareness.
- Extensive and Intensive Rural and Urban Community Development Programmes to Create full Employment.

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