



SCHOOL DROPOUTS AMONG RURAL CHILDREN: EXAMINING THE SPACE AMONG CAUSES

Satvinderpal Kaur

Assistant Professor,

SDS College of Education, Loapon Dist. Moga Punjab.

Abstract

Rural children being born and developed in the deprived rural setup are always remain at disadvantage in terms of attaining equal opportunities in life. Education means enhanced prospects of social, cultural and economic development of nation. Indian government has initiated many policies and programmes for the universalization of education but the dream remained distant for the nation so far. High incidence of dropouts has been emerged as most critical problem for the education system. The present paper, using secondary data of national level and primary data from villages Bathinda district of Punjab, explores the causes responsible for school dropout among rural children. The perceived reasons for school dropouts yielded nearly twenty three causes. Poverty in the family, illiteracy of the parents, and school related factors etc. have emerged as crucial factors behind out of school children. Other factors include poor infrastructure of the schools, difficulty in learning, lack of motivation, child labour, low socio- economic status, socio- cultural barriers, lack of employment opportunities etc. are found as determining factors behind the incidence of dropping out.

Keywords: rural, causes, dropouts

Introduction

Education is the key that opens the doors of life. The world declaration of human rights stated that everyone has a right to education. It is universally accepted that schooling has innumerable benefits for child. School education is the foundation on which the structure of higher education is built. The irony of the fact is that even after 64 years of independence, a vast majority of the Indian children are deprived from education. The dropout problem is more pervasive among the children of rural settings. Many children, who enter school, are unable to complete even elementary education and multiple factors are responsible for their

dropping out of school. Risk factors begin to add up even before children enroll in school that includes: poverty, low educational level of parents, the weak family structure, pattern of schooling of siblings etc. Family background and domestic problems create an environment which negatively affects the value of education. Further, students could dropout as a result of school factors such as absenteeism, attitude and behaviour of teachers, failure and poor performance etc. when students experience poor performance, they become frustrated with lack of achievement and end up alienated and experience exclusion leading to eventual dropout. It is important to carefully design preventive measures and intervention strategies that could be adopted in order to help all dropouts (Chugh 2011).

Various policies and programmes were initiated by the government of India in the past decades to increase the net enrolment ratio. Efforts have been made by many ways; schooling has been made compulsory for all children up to fourteen years of age, incentives are given to schools with best student and teacher attendance and compulsory pass percentage etc. Under SarvaShikshaAbhiyan the physical infrastructure in schools is improved in the last years, but SSA could not address the social and economic issues related to school dropouts. In spite of all such objectives, universalisation of elementary education in India is still a distant prospect as revealed by (GOI 2008).

The latest education survey reports show that prevalence of the phenomenon of dropouts is more intense in the rural areas. At all sixty percent of all the children from rural areas in the age group of 6-14 years do not enroll themselves in schools and dropout rate at the elementary level is found as high as sixty percent in rural areas of Punjab (DISE 2009).

According to MHRD's latest report (2009), 2.8 million of children are out of school. Out of which slightly less than fifty percent of the children never enrolled in school and slightly more than fifty percent are the dropouts. Out of the dropouts, the percentage of SC, ST, rural and girl children is disproportionately high.

Annual status of education report (2011) highlighted that close to 50,000 children are out of school in Punjab. The dropout ratio shows that more boys than girls are dropping out of school at last levels of both primary and upper primary. Dropout rate at primary level is 2.13 percent for boys and 1.88 percent for girls. Total dropout rate for upper primary is 1.51 for boys and 1.20 for girls.

It is argued that in developing countries with inadequate educational infrastructure, poverty, high fertility inequality, social norms, credit land labour market imperfections and unpredictable employment scenario, children drop out at an early stage. Shortage of teaching faculty, dearth of facilities like; drinking water, separate toilets for boys and girls make children to be dropped out at an early stage. Even when children go to school, they don't find any incentive after completing the school due to lack of post school employment opportunities (Mukherjee 2011). The children dropped out from the school system because there is a widespread prevalence of poor quality of education at the primary and secondary levels across the country. Even though children are promoted to the next grades based on

sheer attendance, they are unable to comprehend material taught to them three grades below. (Govindaraju and Venkatesan, 2010).

Many researchers intend to explore the reasons for school dropouts. The studies reflect that poverty, disinterest of the child in studies, lack of motivation, child labour, illiteracy of the parents etc. are found as major factors behind discontinuation of study among children at elementary stage (Jayachandran 2007), (Zaidi 2008) (Okumu,Isoke et al. 2008), (Ricardo et al. 2010) and (Chirtes 2010). In an extensive study, Chugh (2011), examined the factors that contribute to dropping out of children at the secondary level on marginalized group of children living in the slum areas of Delhi, which revealed that both family and school related factors were responsible for school dropouts and appeared to be highly correlated with each other. Kaur (2012) in her study on selected districts of Punjab concluded that poverty, illiteracy and lack of employment opportunities for adults are the major causes responsible for school dropouts.

School dropout is a complex phenomenon. Thus, in order to bring the underlying causes on surface which make children vulnerable to be out from the school system, a field survey has been done in rural areas. The present study explores the domains of silent exclusion that lie in between the domains of home and school in a qualitative way, which act as determinants and influence the school success of the children or to compel them to be dropped out from school.

Methodology and Procedure

The present study is carried out on a sample of 60 children (including 35 boys and 25 girls) identified and designated as school dropouts. School dropout as in the study referred to those 'subjects' who had not attended the school continuously during the past one year or more. The sample was collected by random sampling technique from Bathinda district of Punjab. The sample was exclusively selected from the rural areas. Data collection involved the use of interview schedule developed exclusively for the purpose of this study. Interview schedule was used to record details on age or grade at which the child dropped out of school along with perceived reasons for going out of school and reported by children. Data were collected individually and personally in the native language by the investigator by interviewing each respondent. The whole inferences are presented in the form of tables and discussion.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study elicited almost 24 reasons for school dropouts as given by dropout respondents. The analysis has led to conclusions regarding the causes of school dropouts.

Table 1

Causes Related with Family Factors cited by respondents

| Cause | Boys(In%age) | Girls (In %age) |
|--|--------------|-----------------|
| The child belongs to poor family | 83 | 88 |
| Illiteracy of the parents. | 56 | 77 |
| Home atmosphere is not peaceful | 41 | 61 |
| Large family size can't afford education | 27 | 37 |
| The child has to take care of siblings. | 60 | 77 |
| No proper room and light in home. | 26 | 46 |
| Parents are planning for marriage. | 15 | 35 |
| Parents are engaged in labour work. | 81 | 77 |
| The child has to do household work after the school. | 58 | 83 |
| Monetary expectations of parents. | 78 | 55 |

Table 2 demonstrates the percentage causes of school dropouts related with family factors. Figures show that out of the total respondents, 83 percent of the boys and 88 percent of the girls expressed that they dropped out from school due to poverty in the family. It is emerged from the results that 77 percent of the girl respondents and 56 percent of the boys dropped due to illiteracy of their parents. Parental illiteracy is more predominating cause to dropout in case of girls as compared to boys, due to which they eventually leave the school. Further, 41 percent of the boys and 61 percent of the girl dropouts complained that their home atmosphere is not peaceful for their study. Use of drugs and drink by the elder male members of the family make the atmosphere unsuitable for education. As girls are more sensitive towards home environment this factor compels them rigorously to be dropped out.

The figures further reveal that 27 percent of boys and 37 percent of girl respondents agreed that the family size is large and parents cannot afford education for all the children. Poverty is a triggering which again stands as strong factor behind school dropouts. The girls are again at double disadvantage discontinue education due to large family size.

77 percent of the girls and 60 percent of boy school dropouts mentioned that they have to take care of siblings as their parents go at work away from home. Thus home responsibility leads to exclusion of children from school. The cause is more prominent behind girl dropouts. Poor home conditions also viewed as reason by 26 percent of boys and 46 percent of girls. Dropouts complained that they have single room and poor lightening facility for the whole family. It means lack of facilities at home forced girls in comparison to boys to

give up school. Again Girls (70 percent) and boys (60 percent) complied that parents do not motivate them to study. They expressed their desire to study but lack of awareness and motivation from the part of parents lead to dropping out from school.

Figures further show that 35 percent of girls and 15 percent of boys viewed that they dropped out from school because their parents were planning for their early marriage. This cause of dropout is more intense in case of girls. It is cited by 81 percent of the boys and 77 percent of the girls that their parents are engaged in labour work they also have to go along with them. The next cause which is emerged out behind dropping out of children from school that they have to look after household work after the schooling hours. 78 percent of the boys and 55 percent of the girls expressed that their parents have monetary expectation from them. Children are engaged in labour work by their parents and this enforced them for their exclusion out from school. Parents view that education of child does not give any immediate monetary benefits to them. They perceive education as wastage of time and send children to earn money which are used for the whole family.

Table 2
School Related Factors cited by respondents

| Cause | Boys (In %) | Girls (In %) I |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| Teachers do not care for students | 58 | 49 |
| Crowded class rooms | 57 | 53 |
| Teaching methods are not interesting | 38 | 58 |
| Poor facilities like drinking water, separate toilets etc. | 55 | 64 |
| The child has to walk 2-3 kilometers. | 37 | 39 |
| Teachers give corporal punishment. | 35 | 21 |
| Disinterest in classroom teaching | 59 | 46 |

Table 3 represents the causes of school dropouts related with school related experiences. Teachers do not take interest and do not care for the students are expressed by 58 percent of the boys and 49 percent of the girls. Further, 57 percent of the boys and 53 percent of the girl dropouts cited that they have crowded classrooms and teachers do not pay

attention to them. It means shortage of teachers in schools, high student-teacher ratio and engagement of teachers in non-teaching duties etc. justify this cause. Recent survey report also highlighted that more than 30,000 posts of teachers are lying vacant in the government schools of Punjab. Further, 38 percent of boy respondents and 58 percent of the girls expressed that they do not have interest in studies. Teaching methods do not enable them to understand the subjects. Boys (55percent) and girls (64 percent) expressed that schools are having poor facilities like separate toilets, clean drinking water etc. Almost equal percentage of boys and girls (37 percent of boys and 39 percent of girls) told that they have to walk 2-3 Kilometers daily for the school. It means the absence of neighborhood schools is also perceived as barrier in education access of children. 35 percent of the boys and 21 percent of the girl children complained that they do not like school because teachers give corporal punishment.59 percent of the boys and 46 percent of the girls expressed their disliking in classroom teaching, which is a question on school system and quality of education imparted in schools.

Table 3
Causes Related to Social and Psychological Factors cited by respondents

| Cause | Boys (In %) | Girls (In %) |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| School outside activities are more tempting. | 39 | 7 |
| Going to school is not safe. | 16 | 25 |
| The child falls ill frequently. | 46 | 50 |
| Lack of Employment Opportunities after school education | 66 | 37 |
| Negative attitude of parents towards co education | 17 | 58 |

he figures presented in Table 4 show that 39 percent of the boys and 7 percent of the girl dropouts admitted that they left school because school outside activities are more tempting to them .The reason is more prominent among boys as compared to girls. Hence disinterest in school system and outside activities distract boys from studying and forced them to leave school. The cause is directly elated with lack of parental involvement and poor home atmosphere.

It is found that out of the total sample, 16 percent of boys and 25 percent of girls felt that it is not safe to go school due to some family feud in the community .It is examined from

the table values that boys (46 percent) and girls (50 percent) dropped out because they frequently fell ill. Further, 66 percent of the boys and 37 percent of the girls expressed that there is no employment after school education. Education is wastage of time. Further 58 percent of the girls admitted that their parents withdrawn them from school due to co-education school. It means lack of separate schools for girls in rural areas are barrier before education access.

From the above results it is concluded that various factors interplay to compel the children to make them out of school. It is examined that out of the family factors, poverty in the family seems to have a vital role in determining the status of children and is important in pulling children out from the school. Poverty compels the children to give up studies. Parents believe that their wards will not get any employment after getting education. The engagement of the child in labour work seems more beneficial for the parents, even if they are provided incentives under various schemes. Illiteracy of the parents, engagement of the children in the labour work and in domestic help is all due to low socioeconomic status of the family. It is clear from the findings that most of the dropout children belong to families with low socioeconomic status. Lack of earning opportunities for the adults also affects the children's schooling. Since poverty is the important factor responsible for the persistence of out of school children, hence employment schemes are required to augment the earning of parents which would be immensely helpful in combating this problem.

Apart from the family factors, school related factors also contribute for the dropping out of children. It is examined that the incidence of out of school children is related with lack of facilities in schools, poor infrastructure absence of neighborhood schools, poor quality of education etc. The school related factors contribute for such children, as children of vast majority of poor families study in government schools which are in shamble. Children of the rich and elite have access to good quality private and specific types of school. A recent survey conducted by government to comply with RTE highlighted that in Punjab, there are 122 habitations with no primary or upper primary schools in the neighborhood to enable children for access of education. It is evident from the findings that the inefficiency of the school system is a determining factor behind the incident of dropouts. The phenomenon of dropouts is also related with the quality of education being imparted to the children of the government schools. In the present study both boys and girls of rural-rural settings complained that they understand nothing in class teaching and showed disinterest in study. As per the new policy of education without any examination and assessment of the achievement level children are promoted to the next grades. As a result of which the under achievers are promoted to next class who cannot follow the prescribed syllabus of the higher grade and show disinterest towards studies and ultimately dropped out. Recent survey report (2011) also highlighted that 20 percent of the children from class I to VIII cannot do simple calculations of addition and subtraction in government schools. 57 percent of the schools do not have computers. The school attendance of the rural children is dropped from 84.5 to 79.6 in the year 2011 and is further dropping. It is needed to be mentioned here that mere enrolment

figures are not sufficient to provide access to education but the need is to provide quality education and to make the children to learn minimum levels of skills and competencies.

Out of the social and psychological factors, outside activities attract children more instead of studying in school. Beside this, most of the rural parents do not like to send girl child in co- education and it becomes the reason for their dropping out of school. Hence the lack of separate schools for boys and girls also seems to be barrier for the girl child due to social taboos. Also illiteracy and social backwardness in the rural areas give rise to many socio-cultural misconceptions which play determining role in the dropping out of the child.

Although government started various schemes like mid-day meal, free books, free uniform, no fee, compulsory pass percentage etc. but even than rural poor people do not like to send their children to formal school system. Because the engagement of children in labor work and house hold chores give them more immediate benefits as compared to free education.

Hence from the aforesaid discussion, it is clear that family factors, school related factors and socio psychological factors interplay to determine the status of child in school. Each of these factors cannot work in isolation but in accumulation with the others. The school related factors contribute for such children as children of vast majority of poor families study in government schools which are in shamble. The teaching in schools is of poor quality. Children of the rich and elite have access to good quality private and specific types of school. Illiteracy and social backwardness give rise to many socio-cultural misconceptions which play determining role in the dropping out of the child. Persistently high dropout rates are one of the biggest challenges before the education system in India.

Education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social conditions of the people. The removal of all types of educational disparities has invariably been accompanied by improvements in the health and longevity of the population and their economic well-being. It is an established fact that educated peoples are likely to be more productive and have better participation in socio- political decision process. Only well aware, educated and self-reliant citizens can contribute for sustaining social harmony and national integration. Universalization of school education is the most effective measure for building an inclusive society.

Conclusion

Most of the population in India resides in rural areas. The huge number of out of school children means the exclusion of a vast number of children from school education and thus, a colossal waste of human resources. Education is the worst form of exclusion because it excludes from all other walks of life and activities also. Findings of the study show that dropout problem is deeply rooted in the socioeconomic structure of the country. The suppressed rural economy further face double setbacks. Poverty, illiteracy of the parents, engagement in labour work, lack of awareness among parents, need of children in home for domestic duties, poor and unattractive school system, lack of facilities in schools, absence of

neighborhood schools especially in rural areas and lack of employment opportunities after education etc. are emerged as reasons behind the incidences of school dropouts among children. In the last decade, emphasize has been made through various policies and schemes for the universalization of education, but the dream remained distant up to now. Rather than merely improving entry, the focus must be on the retention aspects. The educational policies must reflect local socio-economic conditions of the country by considering regional and gender dimensions. Dire need is to solve the socio-economic problems of the state and to generate employment opportunities and raise the farsightedness among the rural community.

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