Process of Girls Dropout in School Education: Analysis of Selected Cases in India

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e4e E-Conference Discussion Paper
Week 1: 12th – 16th April 2010

Citation format:


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It is unanimously accepted by many that schooling has innumerable benefits for the child. But the irony of the fact is that even after 62 years of its independence, a vast majority of Indian children, especially girls are deprived of these benefits. As the statistic shows that 60% of all children from rural areas in the age group 6-14 years do not enroll themselves in schools, and dropout rate at the elementary level is found as high as 60% (Sixth All India Education Survey). As with other educational indicators, regional and gender disparities are conspicuous in regard to enrolment and retention. Undoubtedly, due to special measures adopted by several state governments in the past decade, the rate of growth of enrolment of girls at the national level have been higher than that of boys, but disparities still persist in regards to retention aspect of schooling. The dropout rate of girls of the primary and upper primary stage is higher than that of boys. As per the latest estimates available from the Ministry of Human Resource Development, of girls enrolled in classes I-VIII (Elementary), over 26.75 percent dropped out in 2006-07 as against 52.9 percent in 2003-04. Similarly, 61.5 percent of girls enrolled in classes I-X (Secondary) dropped out in 2006-07 as against 64.9 percent in 2003-04. At state level, the dropout rate has been quite high in Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Orissa, Rajasthan, UP, and West Bengal. The latest Educational Survey Reports say that prevalence of this phenomenon is more intense in the rural areas of the educationally backward states. Thus, what makes it a cause of particular concern is that dropout rates have consistently remained higher for the girls in rural areas as compared to boys (Choudhary 2006).

The reasons for high dropouts for girls in particular are diverse ranging from high cost of education, inadequate educational facilities, poverty, familial duties and structural factors (Bhagwati 1973; Duraisamy 1992; Tilak 1996; Dreze and Gazdar 1996; Sengupta and Guha 2002; Vaid 2004; Choudhary 2006). However, dropout is not a distinct event, but rather a process of events, situations and contexts which worked together to produce dropouts. Thus in order to unraveling the factors and the underlying processes of the phenomenon of dropout in relation to those at risk of dropping out, the certain selected in-depth case studies of dropouts and “children at risk” have been done.
To explore the dynamics of silent exclusion that lie in between the domains of home and school, an attempt has been made to analyze qualitatively the household and school related factors which influence the school success or failure of the child. The study has been conducted on the sample of dropouts who had dropped out of school between 2007 and 2009 and the enrolled students, who are at the risk zone of silent exclusion, i.e. potential dropouts in Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh state in India. Similarly both girls of dropouts and ‘children at risk’ and their school experiences, parental perceptions and teachers perceptions on academic matters were included in the sample in order to understand the underlying process of the problem in details. The in-depth study on the selected cases was based on interview and observation techniques. The in-depth case studies of these selected sample not only indicates the magnitude of the problem in the given state but also provides a clear understanding of the phenomenon of dropouts which is not homogeneity in its nature, but it differs from case to case, from situation to situation. Each story is different from one to another. Thus, attempts have been made by linking these small scale in-depth studies to the bigger quantitative picture which would definitely helpful in understandings of the processes of exclusion in order to get clear knowledge about how some children become excluded from school, whilst others remain enrolled and attending within the particular contexts.

**Analysis of the case studies against the wider theoretical framework**

In the analysis of the selected case histories of both dropouts and “children at risk” within the particular contexts of family background, schooling experiences and social surroundings, there are certain patterns of similarities among the dropouts and among “at risk children”. In few of the dropouts it has been found that there are no literate parents/parent in the households that has adversely affected the study habits and the accomplishments of homework of the children. Even in case of families, where parents/parent is some extent educated, the lack of parental support in helping to complete the homework and checking and monitoring the home tasks in a regular basis is proved as a major obstacle of school success\(^1\). In one of the case histories of dropouts as in the case of Mamta Singh, it is clearly revealed that the main reasons of her dropout in addition to taking care of siblings and

\(^1\) This is supported by another previous study by Cairns et al. (1989) that there are strong association with differences in family attitudes toward school achievement and with differences in parental levels of education.
household chores, was the lack of parental or family support to provide academic help to her at home. This trend is also observable in many of the “children at risk”. A growing body of research has shown that students develop more psychological maturity and do better in school when they come from families in which parents monitor and regulate their children’s activities at the same times that they provide emotional support.

Existing research has found that parental involvement in schooling is one of the most important indicators of child success of schooling. In most of the case studies of dropouts and “children at risk”, it has been found that parents neither have ever participated in school PTA meetings nor ever have visited the schools to keep monitoring of their children academic performance. Most of the selected cases of dropouts, parents were either least concerned or gave less value of their children’s education. Whereas in most cases of “at risk children”, parents valued their children’s education, but were least concerned in their personal visits to schools to keep track of their children’s academic records and achievements. The previous research on school’s success also supports that students perform better in school if their parents are more involved with their schooling. Furthermore, other studies also give support to the theory that the degree of parental involvement varies by socio-economic structure of the family and thus may explaining differential achievement levels among such families. It is also found to be true that all the repeaters and the very low achieving students among the dropouts are from low earning income groups and socially backward groups. Similarly, the repeaters and the very poor school performers in the category of “at risk children” are belonging to low socio-economic family background than


3 However, Rush and Vitale, 1995, in their “A meta-analysis to examine the developmental process of dropping out in kindergarten through high school” showed that family income and parental support were less important than academic achievement, age, or retention in a majority of studies reviewed.


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the non-repeaters and high performers from the wealthier socio-economic family backgrounds. The parents of non-repeaters and high achieving students have had frequently visited or involved in school PTA meetings than the repeaters and students of very low standard according to the school records. Thus, socio-economic status measured by parental education and income is a powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior.

It has been found that students from single-parent families are more likely to dropping out of school than students from two-parent families (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al, 1986; Astone & McLanahan, 1991). The case history of Parvati Singh a thirteen years school going child, who belonged to single parent family, indicates that she is at the risk of dropping out. In one of the incidences of field observation, Parvati herself narrated that in the absence of her mother in the family (who was dead), she does cooking and other household chores, so she does not get time to come school regularly. She has a poor academic record in school, mostly irregular, and lack of getting family’s emotional and academic support have led her to take disinterest in studies and finally pushing her to leave the school as soon as possible before jumping to the next grade. Previous studies have noted that the family backgrounds of dropouts generally differ from those of graduates. There is a strong link between socialization in a home where primary relationships are dominant and success in the school context. Also, children from families in which parental punitiveness is high as it is in the case of Parvati’s life story, are more likely to drop out of school than are other children. Thus, participating in school and successfully completing the whole cycle with no one at home to support and to understand schooling processes is a most difficult task for school learners.

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7 The case of Parvati’s schooling behaviour is supported by the results of the previous study by Astone and McLanahan (1991; 318-319).

8 See Cervantes (1965; 223) “Family Background, Primary Relationships, and High school Dropout”.

9 See Bachman et al. (1971) “Dropping Out: Problem or Symptom?”


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A lot of research has consistently found that there is strong correlation between education and socioeconomic status of the household (Bhwagwati & Kamat, 1973; Tilak, 1996; Dreze and Gazdar, 1996; Kabeer, 2000; Thilak 2002; Sayed et al., 2007; Dholakia & Iyenger, 2000). Household socio-economic status is a very powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Bryk & Thum, 1989, Rumberger, 1995). In most case histories of dropouts, it is clearly observable that the main reasons for their dropout was poverty or poor economic conditions of the households. Parents could not afford to bear the school expenses of their children. Similarly, due to poor economic conditions of the households, two girl children (Gomti and Radhika) left the school before completing the grade in order to earn and financially support the households. By analyzing the NSSO data in one of the NCAER’s study Tilak (2002), has pointed out that there is nothing like “free” education in India. Household expenditures are sizable. All kinds of households like SCs/STs, low income groups; all spend considerable amounts on acquiring education at elementary level even in government schools, which is expected to be provided to all by the state. And it is true that poor households have to spend a larger proportion of their meager household incomes on education than the rich (Tilak, 2002; 22)\(^1\). However, in terms of intersections with poverty in the household, girls are more vulnerable to permanent exclusion from the school\(^2\). The existence of poor families is heavily dependent on the labour of children especially the girls and of women. In such situations of poverty, the costs in real terms are too high and schooling is seen as a poor investment which provides no sure access to better employment\(^3\). In respect to access, retention and schooling achievement behavior, the research findings suggest that there is a problem of access of the poor households to the primary education services in rural areas\(^4\).

\(^1\) For more details to see Tilak’s (2002) “Determinants of households expenditure on education in Rural India”, here he has discussed that important items of household expenditures consist of books, uniforms, stationary, transportation, school fees, etc. Also see the PROBE – India, 1999.

\(^2\) Annual Report of Chronic Poverty Research Centre-2005 publishes that in many situations poor women, and girls, and children are especially likely to be trapped in poverty and as a consequence of it are adversely affect the societal and individual developmental processes.

\(^3\) See Bhagwati & Kamat (1973). Here they have analyzed the girls’ education in economic perspective, i.e., opportunity cost of education. Also see Boyle et al (2002; 46).

\(^4\) Based on planning commission’s definition of poor household (BPL), Dholakia and Shreekant (2008) prove that there is a problem of access of poor households to the primary education services in rural India. Primary
Another most important and powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior of girls are familial duties including household chores and taking care of younger siblings. The four case histories of dropouts and three case studies of “children at risk” in this selected in depth study, have pointed out that the main reason of their dropouts or not regularly attending the school and poor performance in the life histories as in the cases of “at the risk children” was due to do the household chores and taking care of siblings at the households. Gendered practices at the household level affect the opportunities of girls and boys to access and complete education. Moreover, gendered division of labour within households often sees girls taking on household duties and child care duties which take them out of school (Karlekar, 2000; Boyle et al, 2002; Hunt, 2008). Thus child labour in the forms of domestic and household duties often influence the processes of dropping out from the school. A range of studies prove that children who combine work with school, depending on the nature and volume of work, can have erratic school attendance, and regular school absences (Croft, 2002; Ersado, 2005; Guarcello et al., 2005 cited in Hunt, 2008:12). Thus, child labour is seen as a “prime cause for absenteeism, repetition and most particularly dropout rates” (Dachi & Garrett, 2003 cited in Hunt, 2008).

The empirical research on dropouts has consistently shown that a host of negative school-related experiences serve as powerful precursors to the decision to formally leave the school. Studies have shown that students who drop out of school are more likely than other students to have poor performance, disruptive behaviour, poor attendance, negative attitudes towards school, and early school failure, particularly repeating grades. The in-depth qualitative life histories of the selected cases of dropouts and “children at risk”, has found that each story of the child is unique one though there are some common characteristics

enrolment ratios among the children of poor households are considerably lower than the respective state averages and also the aggregate enrolment ratio of the country.

15 See Brock & Cammish (1997) “Factors affecting female participation in education in seven Developing Countries”.


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found among the dropouts and “children at risk”, but a group of situational factors at the school interact and work together to foster the process of gradual withdrawal and ultimately, dropping out. In one of the case histories, Sandhya Yadav, it has been found that the initial antecedent to her school withdrawal was the sudden breakdown of her mental balance/emotional balance because of the death of grandmother who was very much attached to her in the family, which in turn led her to lose interest in studies and then pushed her to leave the school finally. In Yashodha’s case the antecedent to her school withdrawal was the time factor as she was taking much time to eat because of a throat problem and ill-health, which in turn pushed her to miss the most of the post-lunch periods and caused her to become late and finally to leave the school permanently.

By analyzing the case histories of ‘children at risk’, it has been found that in most of the stories, the antecedent of pushing them at the risk of dropping out is early school failure particularly repeating grades. They had either repeated once or twice of their schooling careers and had detained in the classes due to fail in the class examinations. The recent past experiences of schooling also point out that some of them either had long absent or irregular attendance behaviour patterns. Thus, the repetition and grade-detention acted as strong antecedents which in turn led them to lack of interest in studies and then problem behaviour such as absenteeism, and poor performance. In Durga’s story, the antecedent was teacher’s indifferent attitudes and capital punishment which in turned led her to take no motivation in study and then long stay in school. The life sketch of Kamleswari showed that along with grade repetition the lack of participation in class was one of the strong factors which influenced her greatly and led her to poor learning and low self-confidence and then put her at zone of silent exclusion.

From the analysis of the in-depth qualitative studies of the selected cases, it has been found that family background and schooling experiences jointly influenced the students’ decision to remain in or leave schools. There are multiple causes of dropping out, and dropouts reported

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18 In this context see the arguments of Cuadra (1989) where she points out that repetition is the main cause of dropping out and a reduction of failure and consequent repetition leads to reduced dropout rates and higher rates of completion of the school cycle.

19 See Lewin (2007) “CREATE’s models of zones of exclusion” for better understanding the concept of silent exclusion.
more than one reason for dropping out. Of course each story is different from the other, but certain factors can be identified as indicators of risk for dropping out as a outcome of the interplay of household and school environments from the above case histories. These factors as indicators of risk are: low educational status of the parents, lack of parental academic support, lack of parental involvement in schooling, single-parent family, improper socialization, low economic status of the family/poverty, child labour within households, low self-esteem, lack of participation in the class, low confidence level, grade-detention and repetition, inadequate school academic atmosphere, and lack of teachers’ support for better learning.

Thus, from these stories, it is clear that dropout was not a distinct event, but rather a process of events, situations and contexts which worked together to produce dropouts. Nevertheless, from the analysis of the above selected case histories it can be directly linked to the wider picture of those children who are at the risk in the major parts of the government schools in rural India.