

## A Study on School Drop-outs in Rural Settings

R. Govindaraju\* and S. Venkatesan\*\*

*\*Department of PG Studies in Psychology, University of Mysore, Mysore 570 006, Karnataka, India*

*\*\*Department of Clinical Psychology, All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysore 570 006, Karnataka, India*

*Phones: 0821-2514449/2515410/2515905, Cell: 098447 37884*

*Email: psycon\_india@yahoo.co.in*

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**ABSTRACT** A cross sectional survey of school drop-outs in rural settings was carried out using open-ended interview formats and demographic data sheet on a sample of 120 parents, teachers and drop-out children. Their perceived/reported reasons for school drop-out yielded nearly sixty causes. Their empirical domain wise classification revealed three major clusters with significant differences in the reported causes in relation to gender, occupation and educational status of teachers; SES and education of parents; and, gender of the drop-out children themselves. The results are represented and implications for their remediation are discussed illustratively on a triple Venn diagram with intersecting subsets of overlapping and independent perceptions between the respondents-parents, teachers and drop-out students respectively.

### INTRODUCTION

While the rest of the world frets about the economic effects of an increasingly aging population, India is increasingly growing young. By 2050, it is estimated that the present billion populations will hit 1.57 billion. According to India's Census, 40% of the populace is below the age of 18. By 2015, 55% will be under 20. The bad news is that India could easily squander its demographic edge. Despite the success of a few world-class business, medical and engineering schools, India's education system is in dismal state. India spends just 3.5% of its gross domestic product on education, way below China's 8%. Of its one million schools, most are state-run and sub-standard. It is alleged that the teachers just sit around talking and children learn nothing. While 96% of India's children enroll in primary schools, by the age of 10 about 40% have dropped out. Out of the 20 crore children between 6 and 14 years, three crore do not go to school while another 8.5 crore are dropouts who discontinued their education (Census of India 2001).

Schooling has been made compulsory for all children under fourteen. The government spending on education is being raised to six per cent of the GDP. Incentives are being given to schools with best student and teacher attendance. The Government sponsored Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Universal Elementary Education), focuses on increasing enrollment rates and reducing drop-out rates. There is 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.

The good news is that there are more kids going to school than ever before! The annual 2006 child census figures show that out-of-school children in the 7-14 age group in the state of Karnataka has dropped from 1.05 lakh in 2005 to 75,825 this year. With the introduction of several incentive schemes, the drop-out number has shrunk from 59,002 in 2005 to 50,569 this year. In the 'never enrolled' category, the figures are down from 46,035 to 25,166. One of the main reasons for children dropping out of school is migration. Within Karnataka, the highest number of drop-outs are in Gulbarga (57.15%), followed by Belgaum (20.73%), Bangalore (14.41%) and Mysore (7.71%). According to the census, 60% of the out-of-school children are in 10 districts-Yadgir, Gulbarga, Bellary, Raichur, Bijapur, Koppal, Bidar, Bagalkot, Bangalore South and Uttara Kannada. Yadgir has the highest number of out-of-school children (13,258), ahead of Gulbarga (8,733) and Raichur (7,560) respectively. The Government insists on schools maintaining registers of out-of-school children and monitoring their status through School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) and Gram Sabhas. Figures show that there are more girls, who have remained out of school than the boys. Of the 75,825 children,

39,084 are girls and 36,741 in the 7-14 year category (Kanhare 1987).

A large number of children in India remain out of school (Arun 2000; Anupreet 1999). Many of them are those who do not get enrolled at all. Some of them are those who drop out at one stage or other. The reasons for dropping out may be many like, failure in academics, non-availability of schools, inaccessibility of schools, pushing out due to teachers' behaviour/school environment, financial problems etc. (Roderick 1993; Kronick and Hagen 1998; Khokhar et al. 2005; Bhanpuri and Ginger 2006).

Pratinidhi et al. (1992) identified 172 school drop-outs from 16 schools in an epidemiological survey covering rural Maharashtra. A home visit was paid and information about socio-economic and cultural aspects was collected and a psychological screening was undertaken. Although there was no significant difference in overall drop-out rates for both sexes, it increased sharply at 11 years of age in girls. The majority of children dropped out due to financial problems or unsatisfactory scholastic performance.

As per Selected Educational Statistics, 2000-2001, given by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, the drop-out rate for classes I to VIII is 54% and for classes I to X it is 69%. In this way, only 31% children appear for class X public examination. Of these children, only 40% pass this examination. It is visualized that some of the students who drop out from their studies at different stages may be talented and their talent needs to be explored. Going by these observations, it was deemed appropriate and necessary to undertake an in depth exploratory survey on the phenomenon of school drop-outs in rural areas. Subjective reports of the teachers, parents and drop-outs themselves constitute an important dimension to the problem of school drop outs than mere governmental reflections and attributions about the same.

### **Aims and Objectives**

- (i) Elicit reported reasons for school drop-out from students, teachers and parent respondents in a sample of persons from rural areas; and,
- (ii) Explore the relationship of reported reasons to respondent variables like age, gender, education, occupation, SES, caste, etc.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

### **Participants**

The study was carried out on a sample of 40 children (including 20 boys and 20 girls) identified and designated as school drop-outs. School drop-outs as defined in this study referred to those 'subjects who had not attended the school continuously during the past one year or more'. The sample was collected by covering schools in the rural areas of the notified and so-called backward district of Chamrajanagar in Karnataka. The children were in age group between 5-14 years. They were drop-outs in the grades between 1 and 10 respectively.

### **Measures**

Data collection involved use of two semi-structured and open-ended interview schedules developed exclusively for the purpose of this study. The '*Demographic Data Schedule*' covered queries on personal details of parent, teacher and student respondents who participated in this study. Another '*School Drop Out Interview Schedule*' was used to record details on age or grade at which the child dropped out of school along with perceived or confessed reasons for going out of school and as reported by the parent, teacher or student informants. Open ended questions and non-directive interviewing techniques were used to gather as much information on these details. Wherever possible, several examples of reported cases were collected to substantiate the declarative statements of respondents.

### **Procedure**

Data were collected individually and personally in the native language by the first author by interviewing each respondent (usually the father, teacher and the drop-out child). For the first 15 cases, inter-rater reliability was randomly established between the authors. The resulting Agreement Coefficient (CAg) was measured for the two schedules to be between 0.92 and 0.94 respectively. Data was coded and compiled in Microsoft Excel format before subjecting them to statistical analysis by using freely downloadable statistical software/calculators on the web.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study elicited almost 60 reasons for school drop-out as given by parent, teacher and student respondents. The first series of analysis is based on the content of the reasons given by the respondents. This is followed by another series of analysis based on the relative importance given to these indicated reasons by the three groups of respondents.

### A. Analysis of Content of Responses

For the ease of understanding, the analysis of content of responses or reported reasons for school drop-out was classified into four domains of attributed reasons: (i) Child-Centered; (ii) Parent-Centered; (iii) Teacher-Centered; and, (iv) Environment-Centered. The findings are analyzed and discussed separately for the different sets of respondents under the following headings:

**(i) Teacher Centric:** Among the various teacher-centered reasons for school drop-out elicited in this study are: neglect, poor or lack of interest in teachers, fear of teachers, misbehavior by teachers, irregular classes, poor teaching, overly strict discipline, discrimination, cruelty or punishment meted out by teachers, absence of teachers or female teachers in school, etc.

**(ii) Parent Centric:** In relation to parent centered reasons for school drop-out obtained in this study are: poor interest or neglect by parents, taking on parenting jobs and responsibilities, being left to the care of relatives or grandparents, over freedom and affection of parents, denial of school for female children, gambling, alcoholism and other vices in father, death of a parent, parent discord, illiteracy among parents, apprehension on insults to family dignity, parental force or coercion of their interests etc.

**(iii) Child Centric:** With regard to child-centered reasons for school drops-outs derived in the study, include transient or prolonged illness, accidents, disabilities or handicaps in the child, early menarche or marriage of the child, age of child, disinterest in studies, distraction in play or games, inferiority feelings, problem behaviors in child, poor academic performance or achievements, preference to go for work and earn money, fear of punishment by teacher, love affairs, perception that there are no job opportunities after studying, pride and ego in children, etc.

**(iv) Environment Centric:** The environment

centered reasons for school drop-outs got from this study include caste factors, poverty in family, tradition, change of schools or medium of instruction, influence by television or mass media, drought or famine in the village, tribal life, frequent shifts or migration of family, poor or non-enriched school or home environment, distance between home to school, poor school maintenance, absence of toilets at school, intimidating system of examination, etc.

### B. Analysis of Respondent Variations

The results of the study is also analyzed in terms of variations in the perceptions of the three types of respondents participating in this study, *viz.*, parents, teachers and drop- out student themselves.

**(i) Teacher Respondents:** Among the various reasons listed for drop-out phenomenon observed in their respective classes/schools, the teacher--respondents prioritized factors like children doing parent jobs (N: 23), poverty (N: 21), tradition and/or lack of interest in studies (N: 20), transient or prolonged illness in students and need for rearing or caring for younger siblings (N: 19), parent discord (N: 17), influence of television or films (N: 15), illiteracy among parents (N: 14), etc. It is evident that teacher respondents more often (47 out of 50) attribute parents, environment and/or children themselves as the reason for school drop-out. Self-attribution of causes for school drop-out is limited to only 3 out of 50 reasons as given by the teacher respondents. An analysis of teacher respondents in relation to various variables do not reveal any statistically significant differences for the patterns of their attribution of causes for school drop out in relation to gender, age, experience, education, and/or the subject/s taught by them ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 1).

**(ii) Parent Respondents:** For the same sample of student drop-outs, the parent respondents give different reasons for school drop out, such as, misbehavior by teachers (N: 12), neglect and discrimination by teachers or fear of teachers, absence of female teachers at school (N: 9), need to do parent jobs at home (N: 8), lack of interest in the child for studies (N: 6), and so on. The parent respondents attribute 12 out of 17 reasons for school drop-out phenomenon on teachers, environment and/or children themselves. Self - attribution of causes for school drop out by par-

**Table1: Distribution of reported reasons for school drop out according to teacher respondents**

Reasons	Gender*		Age**			Experience***			Education****			Subject*****			Total
	Male	Female	25-34	35-44	45+	0-10	11-20	21+	UG	G	PG	L	O	LO	
Child	22	18	11	12	17	14	15	11	18	13	9	6	18	16	40
Parent	56	56	33	46	33	42	46	24	54	35	23	15	46	51	112
Teacher	130	101	50	83	98	86	89	56	120	58	53	32	91	108	231
Environment	4	12	3	9	5	6	6	4	12	6		2	6	8	16
Environment	41	38	19	33	27	31	34	14	42	22	13	8	35	36	79

(\* $\chi^2$ : 6.46; df: 3; p: <0.091; \*\* $\chi^2$ : 7.88; df: 6; p: <0.247; \*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 1.67; df: 6; p: <0.949; \*\*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 7.34; df: 6; p: <0.291; \*\*\*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 1.12; df: 6; p: <0.981)

ents is limited to 5 out of 17 reasons as given by the parents of drop out children. An analysis of parent responses in relation to various variables reveals statistically significant differences for the patterns of their attribution of causes for school drop out in relation to SES (p: <0.01) and Occupation (p: <0.03). Parents from higher SES find more reasons to blame teachers for school drop-out phenomenon than their own children or themselves. However, there are no differences for the patterns of their attribution of causes for school drop-out in relation to gender, age and education (p: >0.05) (Table 2). In a related study, using snowball sampling and interview techniques, it was found that there was reluctance in parents and their need for participation in domestic activities that was reported as the major cause for school dropouts in rural girls. Further, financial constraints and lower educational status of par-

ents was another reason for their not giving much importance to the education of girl child as they did to their sons. They also reportedly perceived that sons support them in their old age (Kotwal et al. 2007; Kukreti and Saxena 2004).

(iii) *Student Respondents:* When drop-out students were themselves queried for reasons, they came up with explanations like the need to do parent jobs at home (N: 16), poverty and parent neglect (N: 14), poor teaching (N: 8), cruelty or punishment by teachers (N: 7), lack of toilets at school (N: 6), and so on. The child respondents attribute 24 out of 31 reasons for school drop-out phenomenon on teachers, environment and/or their own as reason for their school drop-out. Self-attribution of causes for school drop-out is limited to 7 out of 31 reasons as given by the affected children. An analysis of child responses in relation to various variables reveal

**Table 2: Distribution of reported reasons for school drop out according to parent respondents**

Reasons	Gender		Age*			Education**		SES***		Occupation****			Total
	Male	Female	25-34	35-44	45+	IL	Pry	Lo	Hi	C	Ag	Ser	
Child	40	0	25	14	1	22	18	19	21	27	11	2	40
Centered	8	-	4	3	1	1	7	1	7	2	5	1	8
Parent	23	-	13	10	-	14	9	9	14	19	3	1	23
Centered	55	-	38	19	1	31	27	26	32	37	16	5	58
Teacher	6	-	5	1	-	3	2	6		6			6
Environment	6	-	5	1	-	3	2	6		6			6
Centered													

(\* $\chi^2$ : 2.22; df:3; p: <0.528; \*\* $\chi^2$ : 5.90; df: 3; p: <0.116; \*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 11.1; df: 3; p: <0.011; \*\*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 8.97; df: 3; p: <0.030)

**Table 3: Distribution of reported reasons for school drop out according to pupil respondents**

Reasons	Gender*		Guardian**		Siblings***			Caste****			Total
	Male	Female	Parent	Hostel	None	One	Two	SC	ST	Other	
Child centered	20	20	38	2	28	8	4	15	3	22	40
Parent centered	11	11	21	1	14	5	3	13		9	22
Teacher centered	25	40	61	4	46	15	4	12	9	44	65
Environment centered	20	14	33	1	25	5	4	15	1	18	33
Environment centered	13	8	19	2	16	3	2	4	2	14	21

(\* $\chi^2$ : 5.60; df: 3; p: <0.133; \*\* $\chi^2$ : 1.14; df: 3; p: <0.767; \*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 0.963; df: 3; p: <0.810; \*\*\*\* $\chi^2$ : 16.7; df: 3; p: <0.001)

**Table 4: Distribution of reasons for school drop-out as given by different respondents**

S. No.	Reason for drop-out	Parent	Child	Teacher
<i>Child Centered</i>				
1	Transient/prolonged illness		+	+
2	More interested in play		+	+
3	Inferiority feelings	+		+
4	Accidents or handicaps in child		+	+
5	Problem behaviors in child			+
6	Disinterest in studies	+	+	+
7	Going for work			+
8	Poor academic achievement			+
9	Fear of punishment			+
10	Influence of films/TV		+	+
11	Love affairs			+
12	Poor job opportunities after studying		+	+
13	Pride and ego in children		+	+
<i>Parent Centered</i>				
14	Parental neglect		+	+
15	Doing parents jobs	+	+	+
16	Stress			+
17	Poor interest in parents/guardians		+	+
18	Left to stay at relatives homes			+
19	Left to stay with grandparents			+
20	Over affection by parents			+
21	Over freedom given by parents			+
22	Rearing or caring for siblings		+	+
23	Denial of school for female child	+		+
24	Gambling/alcoholism in father	+	+	
25	Menarche & menstruation		+	+
26	Parental discord		+	+
27	Death of parents			+
28	Illiteracy among parents		+	+
29	Parent fears on family dignity			+
30	Too many kids at home			+
31	Caste			+
32	Poverty	+	+	+
33	Tradition			+
34	Early marriage	+	+	+
35	Admitted to school before age			+
36	Parents forcing their interests			+
37	Change of medium of instruction			+
<i>Teacher Centered</i>				
38	Lack of Interest in teachers	+		
39	Neglect by teachers	+	+	
40	Fear of teachers	+	+	
41	Misbehavior of teachers	+	+	
42	Discrimination by teachers	+	+	
43	Irregular classes	+	+	
44	Poor teaching		+	
45	Cruelty/punishment by teachers		+	+
46	Lack of teachers			
47	Over strict discipline		+	+
48	Absence of female teachers	+		+
49	Absence of teachers		+	
<i>Environment Centered</i>				
50	Drought or famine			+
51	Migration	+	+	+
52	Roaming for jobs or gypsy culture	+	+	+
53	Tribal life in the forest			+
54	Addiction to bad habits	+		+
55	Poor environment near home		+	+
56	Poor school environment			+
57	Distance from home to school		+	+
58	Poor school maintenance			+
59	Lack of toilets at school			+
60	Faulty system of examinations		+	+
Total		17	31	50

statistically significant difference for the patterns of their attribution of causes for school drop-out in relation to caste variable ( $p: <0.01$ ) while there are no such differences in relation to gender, guardian and siblings ( $p: >0.05$ ) (Table 3). The variety and preferences of the reasons for school drop out by the three types of respondents in this study are given under table 4.

Evidently, there is a clear criss-cross between the perceived or reported reasons for school drop-out between parents, teachers and the affected pupils themselves. There appears to be a mutual blame game happening between the three groups of respondents. This is mathematically depicted in the form of a Venn diagram wherein three mutually exclusive and yet overlapping segments, sets and sub sets of attributions are noticed (Fig. 1) (Oliveros 2007).

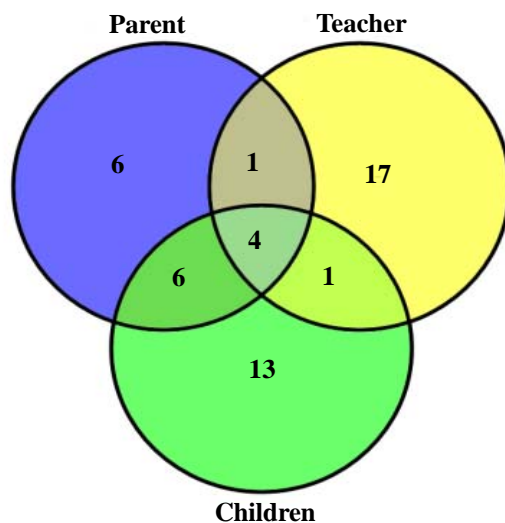


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic representation for distribution of reasons for school drop-out as given by different respondents.

While there are overlapping and intersecting perceptions of causes for school drop-outs (examples: disinterest in studies, poverty, doing parent jobs, early marriage, migration, and roaming for jobs or gypsy culture), there are also attributions that are not shared by one another or those given by the teachers. Likewise, the teacher respondents in this sample allege problem behaviors in children, poor academic achievement, fear of punishment, their going off to work, psychological stress and love affairs between students, caste, absence or over-indulgent parents,

traditional practices, etc., as the reasons for school drop out in children (Dusk 1985). In sum, the findings highlight the immediate and imperative need to bring into congruence the divergent perceptions of the three parties involved in drop-out phenomenon. This would enable strategies to solve the problem (Schargel and Smink 2001; Goodland 1984). Otherwise, the mutual blame game is likely to continue unmindful of the growing tragedy of drop-outs across schools in the country.

In sum, the present cross sectional survey in rural settings using open ended interview formats and demographic data sheet on a sample of 120 parents, teachers and children has elicited nearly sixty 'causes' as their perceived/reported reasons for school drop-out. Their empirical domain wise classification of the reported reasons reveal three major clusters with significant differences in relation to gender, occupation and educational status of teachers; SES and education of parents; and, gender of the drop out children themselves. The results lend themselves as amenable for representation on a triple Venn diagram with intersecting subsets of overlapping and independent perceptions between the respondents parents, teachers and drop out students respectively. The findings are presented and discussed along with their implications for bringing the affected children back to school.

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