



Research article

Processes on how decisions are made and why around drops outs – A case study of School Dropouts in Mahbubnagar district of Telangana State, India

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Abstract

School dropout is not a distinct event, but rather a process of events, situations and contexts which work together to produce drop outs. There is little research on the processes of drop out, with most studies focusing on who dropout and why. According to Hunt Frances (2008), if drop out is viewed as a process, then children's stories around dropping out from school emerge not in isolation, but as a series of decisions, events and interactions which lead in a certain direction.

As per District Information System for Education (2013-14), Mahbubnagar district topped the chart (53.2 per cent) of school dropout rate in Telangana, about 38.2 per cent of children in the state who had enrolled in Class I did not reach Class X, thus deprived of basic education. In this regard field survey was conducted in 18 villages of six Mandals of Mahbubnagar district of Telangana state to understand who is taking decisions on school dropouts and why. This article attempted to bring qualitative analysis of case studies of 397 school dropouts of Mahabubnagar district of Telangana.

Qualitative data indicates that Child in about 41 per cent of the cases first initiated discussions on their school drop-out and it is almost the same across all social categories. Father in about 34 per cent of the cases first initiated discussions on the child drop-out. Mother too initiated the discussion on the child dropout in about 22 per cent of the cases. Children are also taking decision to drop out from schools, especially when they are not interested in studies. This is nearly four times more among boys than girls. Since the decision is voluntary, they stubbornly hold on to their decision in spite of compulsions from parents and others. The second scenario where children took decision to drop out of the school is when family was facing financial problems. More boys took the decision, nearly four times more than girls to leave studies when the family is having financial problem. These children might have studied further if the life circumstances had been favourable to them.



It was revealed that alternatives discussed to avoid dropouts and observed that some alternatives / strategies were carried out in about 54 per cent of the cases to prevent the child from school drop-out but these efforts were unsuccessful. Also researcher noted that the school administration / school management committee took little efforts to prevent the child from school drop-out. The researcher found that each case is different, and explains how they are different within similar context. The findings of this article will be helpful to all interested policy makers to develop critical intervention points before drop out occurs. **Copyright © WJER, all rights reserved.**

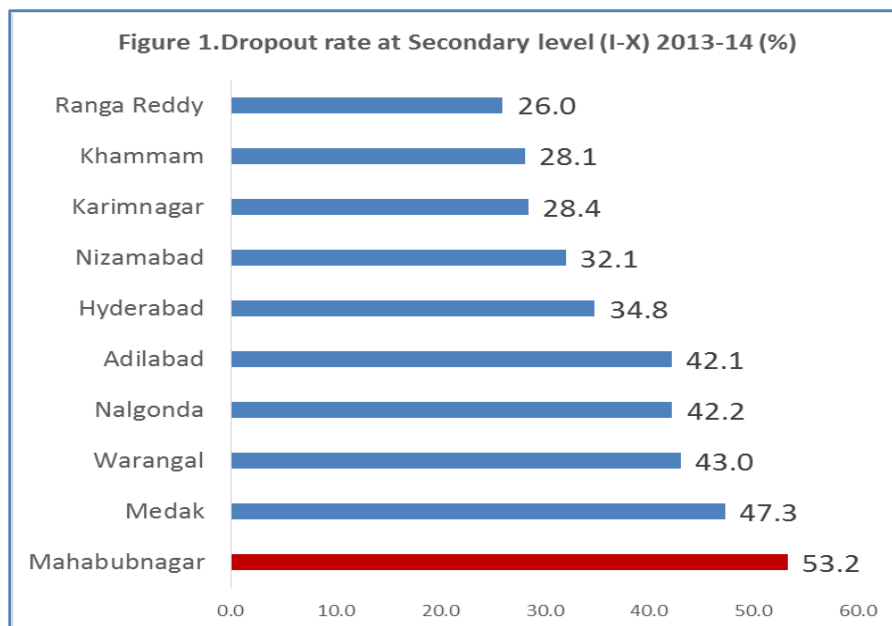
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1. Introduction and Context Setting

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number four is 'Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning'. Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development. Education is recognized as a basic input for empowerment to individual and overall development of the society (Reddy and Rao, 2003). However, the problem of dropout has been continually troubling the education system not only in India but in other developing countries also.

According to the report of Indian Institute of Education (2004), dropout does not mean mere rejection of school by children. It leads to wastage of the funds invested in school buildings, teachers' salaries, equipment, textbooks and so on. It also means the existence of some deficiencies in the organization of the education system. School dropout is caused by many factors. Some have greater influence as compared to the others (Basumatary, 2012). 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, lack of interest from both parents and child etc. (Govindaraju and Venkatesan, 2010).

The state government provides schooling facility to school-aged population, which stands at 61.78 lakh children. During 2014-15, there are 43,208 schools of various managements functioning in the state.





The District Information System for Education (DISE) data for 2013-14 academic year collected across the 10 districts of Telangana presents a pathetic situation of primary education in the state of Telangana. Mahbubnagar district topping the chart (53.2 per cent) of school dropout rate in Telangana, about 38.2 per cent of children in the state who enrolled in class I did not reach the Class X, thus deprived of basic education.

If the drop out situation continues with the same rate, future of dropout children and adolescents are in dark and also expected limited contribution to achieve Goal 4 of SDGs. Interestingly, there is little research on the processes of school dropout, with most studies focusing on who dropout and why. According to Hunt Frances (2008), if drop out is viewed as a process, then children's stories around dropping out from school emerge not in isolation, but as a series of decisions, events and interactions which lead in a certain direction.

The continuous rejection dropouts experienced while in school and from society after they dropped out leads to psychological dysfunction in adulthood (Kaplan, Damphousse, and Kaplan, 1996). Researchers have explored the negative relationship between dropping out and specific mental health consequences including rebelliousness and delinquency (Bachman, 1972), self-esteem (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986), and depression (Fine and Rosenberg, 1983).

It is expected that this article will support government programs like 'Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan' (SSA) and 'Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyaan' (RMSA) to draw innovative strategies to understand the process of dropouts, intervention points and establish effective communication systems between parents, children and school management. Researcher has also looked into reasons for school dropouts; who was the first person had initiated discussions on dropout for the child formally which has finally led to dropout? Is there any alternative(s), to avoid dropout? did any alternatives /strategies were carry out by parent /child / school / community to continue school, but failed and resulted to dropout of child from school ?

2. Brief Profile of Mahbubnagar District

The state of Telangana, in southern India, is divided into 10 districts. Mahbubnagar is the largest district by area. This district is predominantly a rural district with 85 per cent of the population living in the rural areas with a population of 40.5 lakhs. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population was 7 lakhs and 3.6 lakhs respectively accounting for 17.5 per cent and nine percent of the total population of the district (Census 2011). The basic indicators of Mahbubnagar district revealed that it is one of the lowest per capita income districts in the state of Telangana. It is also lagging behind of all other districts of the state in all the three indicators of human development i.e. education, health and standard of living; even though the literacy rate improved over the years, it still has the lowest female literacy rate of 45 per cent (Census 2011). As per National Sample Survey, 68th Round, in the age group of 6 to 18 years, the Net Enrolment Rate for rural boys was 75 per cent and rural girls was 76 per cent whereas urban boys was 93 per cent and urban girls was 94 per cent in the district. The current attendance rate among 6 to 18 years' boys was 82 per cent and girls was 80 per cent in the rural areas whereas in the same age group, for urban areas, it was boys 97 per cent and girls 95 per cent in this district. However, Mahbubnagar district topping the chart (53.2 per cent) of dropout rate in Telangana (District Information System for Education, 2013-14) against 38.2 per cent of state average who enrolled in Class I do not reach Class X, thus deprived of basic education.

The above data shows clear disparity between rural and urban areas. Looking at the disparity and disadvantage situation in rural areas, the study was primarily focused in the rural areas of Mahbubnagar district.

3. Operational Definition

Under normal circumstances, dropout indicates continuous absenteeism of a child to school. But the duration of absenteeism varies according to the adopted frame of time.

For the present study, it is understood and considered that any child aged 6 to 10 years, 11 to 14 years and 15 to 18 years who is absent to class continuously for one calendar month (30 days) for any reason is a dropout and does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:

- Transfer to another public school district, private school, out-of-state, a correctional institution, or a state- or district-approved education programme;
- Temporary absence due to expulsion or school-approved illness; or



- Death

A never enrolled is child aged between 6 to 10 years, 11 to 14 years and 15 to 18 years who failed to enrol in formal schools.

4. Study Methodology

Mandal-wise drop-out data in the age group 6 to 18 years in Mahbubnagar District during 2013-14 was provided by Education Department of Telangana State. Researcher has used rural Mandal-wise details of 2011 census population to calculate drop-out rate of children in the age group 6-18 years as a percentage of population in the age group 7 years and above.

The sample selection is at three stages i.e. selection of Mandals; selection of villages within the selected Mandals and selection of households where the children aged 6 to 18 years dropped out of educational institution. Mandals were selected based on the dropout index generated for the purpose. Random sampling was adopted in the selection of villages within each of the selected Mandals.

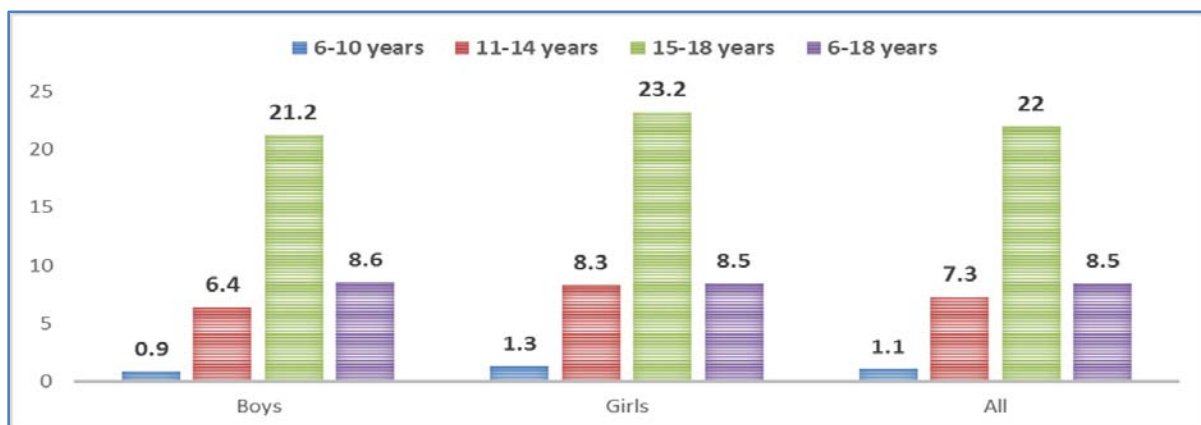
Thus, the final sample comprises of 18 villages spread over in six rural Mandals of Mahbubnagar district. The sample Mandals are Mahbubnagar, Bujinepally, Addakula, Bawabpet, Utkoor and Pangal. A listing survey was conducted in the sample villages of *Yerravalli, Kadur, Manganur, Bijinapalle, Vaddemanu, Nandipeta, Sankalamaddi, Kandur, Deepalle, Yemmanagandla, Karoor, Teegalapalle, Yergatpalle, Kollur, Nagireddipalle, Panagal, Sakhapur and alvarala*, to identify the dropout children in the age group of 6 to 18 years and all those who dropped out are considered for the detailed study. Among all, 401 households were identified as school dropouts, out of which 397 households had given consent for further probing and were selected for the study.

5. Findings of Field Study

5.1. Magnitude of school dropout by age and gender of dropouts

The school dropouts and never enrolment rate among 6 to 10 years old children is negligible at (1.1 per cent) and among 15 to 18 years is (22 per cent). Overall, dropout increased steeply in the age group of 15 to 18 years.

Figure 2. Age wise distribution of school dropouts



The dropping out in the age group of 15 to 18 years is observed across social categories making it clear that there are other factors, which are influencing dropping out. The study indicates that being a member of socially downtrodden group increases the chance of being a drop out. In all age groups and social category, girls are dropping out more than boys indicating being a girl is a drawback in continuing education.



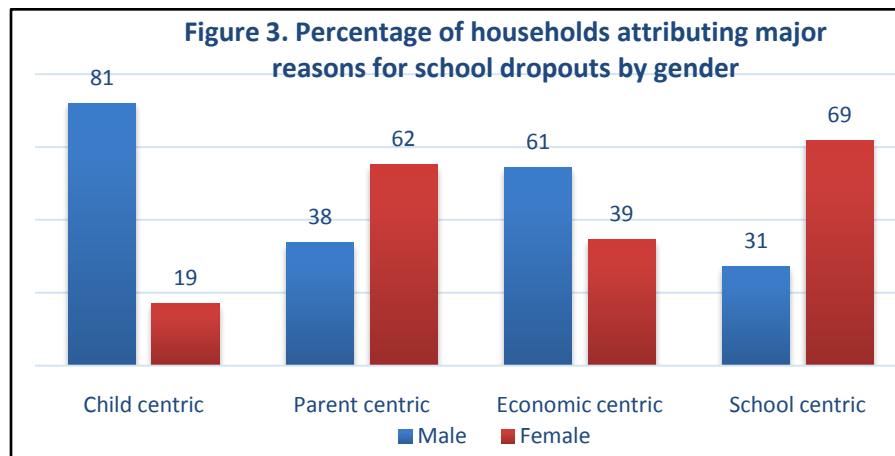
5.2. Parental education and their occupation level

Majority of the drop out children have illiterate parents. About 94 per cent of mothers and 82 per cent of fathers of dropout children are illiterate. In general, illiteracy is more concentrated among SC, ST and BC categories. This finding is consistency with Ersado (2005), educational level of household members is influential particularly on children and it determines their access to schooling. Parental education and retention in school has been linked together by putting forward many reasons and opinions of scholars. It has been observed that non-educated parents cannot provide the support or often do not appreciate the benefits of schooling (Juneja, 2001).

5.3. Reasons of School Dropout

In a study, Sikdar and Mukherjee specified 20 reasons for school dropouts and categorized them into eight groups (Sikdar S and Mukherjee A N., 2012). To make it more precise, in this study, researcher has grouped reasons of school dropouts into four broad categories i.e. (i) School centric, (ii) Economic centric, (iii) Child centric, and (iv) Parent centric.

Researcher presented here under the detailed content analysis of 397 school dropout children. The broad categories within each reasons which are aligned with social disorganization theories are (a) School centric: The school drop-outs due to school is far-away and lack of transport to school; teachers beating children in the schools due to irregular attendance and or poor performance are classified under School centric, (b) Economic centric: The school drop-outs due to economic problems and the children involved in live-stock management are classified under Economic centric, (c) Child centric: The school drop-outs due to child not interested in studies, child health problems and repeated failures are classified under Child centric, and (d) Parent centric: The school drop-outs due to parents not interested in children's studies, migration, sibling care and household works, parent health problems and child marriages are classified under Parent centric.



The above figure clearly describes that boys and girls have different reasons for dropouts within each categories. Girl's dropouts are mostly due to parent and school centric whereas Boy's dropouts are mostly child centric and economic centric. A few observations emerged from the data were following:

- i. Child not interested in studies (26 per cent) is the dominant component of school drop-outs within Child centric category.
- ii. Economic problems (20 per cent) and Live-stock management are the two important components within Economic centric category.

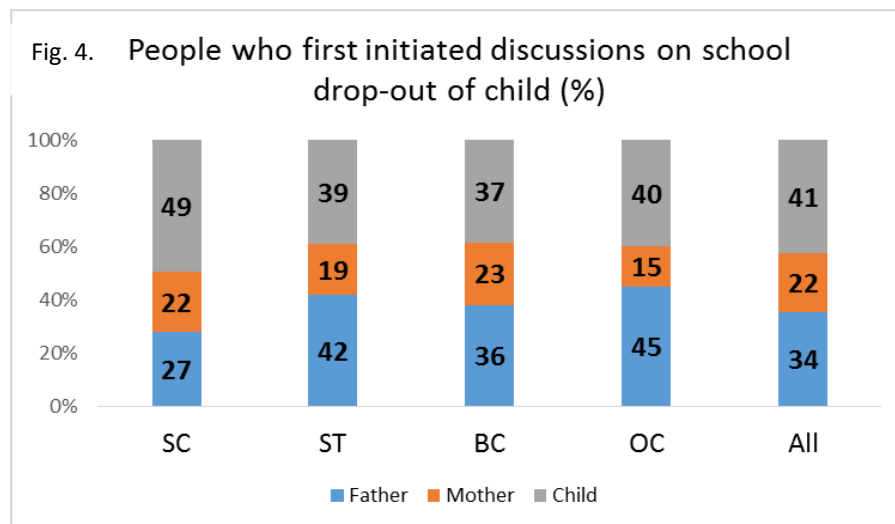


- iii. The two important and sensitive categories of school drop-outs within School centric category are Beatings of children by school teachers (5 per cent) and School is very far and lack of transport to go to school (4 per cent).
- iv. Researcher had also noted that there are 25 school drop-out children due to Beatings/Scolding by the school teachers. Among them, 9 are girls and 16 are boys. All of them belong to socially and economically weaker castes. Some of these boys dropped out at class 9 and some of these girls dropped out at class 8. Possibly, it needs attention to arrive a meaningful solution.
- v. Researcher had also noted that there are 17 school drop-outs due to school is far away and lack of transport to go to school / college. All of them are girls from socially and economically weaker castes. Most of them dropped out after completing class 10. Possibly this also needs special attention to arrive a workable solution.

The findings are consistence with several research indicates that irregular attendance and temporary withdrawals can both be precursors to dropping out (Grant & Hallman, 2006; the PROBE Team, 1999). Irregular attendance and temporary withdrawals can be caused by a range of factors including: child ill health; ill health of family members; distance to school; labour requirements.

5.4. People who first initiated discussions on school drop-out of child

- ❖ Researcher investigated the process on how decisions on dropout took place by concentrating the latest dropout in the household if there are more than one dropout, preferring the younger child among those dropped out in the household and similarly for the male over female child. It was revealed that Child in about 41 per cent of the cases first initiated discussions on the drop-out and it is almost the same across all social categories.



- ❖ Father in about 34 per cent of the cases first initiated discussions on the child drop-out and it is relatively higher among OC (45 per cent) and ST (42 per cent) categories.
- ❖ Mother too initiated the discussion on the child dropout in about 22 per cent of the cases and it is relatively higher among BC (23 per cent) and SC (22 per cent) categories.
- ❖ Researcher has also collected information on the alternatives discussed to avoid dropouts and observed that some alternatives / strategies were carried out in about 54 per cent of the cases to prevent the child from school drop-out but these efforts were unsuccessful. Also we note that the school administration / school management committee took negligible effort to prevent the child from school drop-out. However, we will be presenting separately elsewhere on the details of the processes and the alternatives explored by the households to prevent dropouts.



5.5. People who were involved in making final decisions for school drop-out of child

It was revealed that when the family experienced financial strain, parents and other family members became the major decision makers about dropping out. With greater understanding of the family finance, boys have opted to drop out of studies than girls. More girls were asked by parents/ family to drop out of studies when financial strain was experienced.

Decision to drop out of school was taken more often by parents/ family than by self. This occurred three times more with girls than boys and twice more when there are financial problems involved.

Mothers took decision to drop children out of school more often when there is financial problem in the family. Case studies shows that single parents especially mothers ask their children to drop out of school to add to daily income.

When the children are chronically ill, the parents had taken the decision of dropping out of school but in case of disabled children, children themselves, parents or even school has made the decision to drop out.

Content analysis of the case studies also shows that children are taking decision to drop out from schools, especially when they are not interested in studies. This is nearly four times more among boys than girls. Since the decision is voluntary, they stubbornly hold on to their decision in spite of compulsions from parents and others. The second scenario where children took decision to drop out of the school is when family was facing financial problems. More boys took the decision, nearly four times more than girls to leave studies when the family is having financial problem. These children might have studied further if the life circumstances had been favourable to them.

The findings are in consistence with the arguments that dropout decisions are being made are determined by an 'interaction of social, cultural and economic factors working through power relations within the household'. On another note, bargaining power will be dependent on an individual's characteristics, and therefore the attributes of other household members, as well as the household heads', will be relevant when looking at schooling decisions. (An educated mother) is likely to have more bargaining power within the household and her preferences for educated children will play a larger role in the decision to send her children to school (Al Samarrai and Peasgood, 1998: 397).

5.6. Parent's views on re-entering school

In the very few cases where parents are willing to opt for sending their dropped out or never enrolled children to school, interest of the children in studies (18 per cent) and governmental support (11 per cent) are the two major features influencing the children going back to school. The PROBE report (1999: 35) states, for example, that, 'leaving school is, by and large, an irreversible process: once a child has dropped out, even for a relatively short period, it is often hard to send him or her back to school'. While some of these cannot be foreseen, there may be ways that schools, education authorities and households.

5.7. Dropout children's views on the decision making process

In cases where decision was made by anyone other than the child, the child felt that the decision was made due to financial conditions (18.4 per cent), migration (5.7 per cent) or to look after the household chores and younger siblings (14.2 per cent). Also, many children reported that lack of transportation was a major factor in them dropping out of education (6.4 per cent).

It is apt to mention that about 40 per cent of the children who indicated that they are not interested in studies are actually interested but dropped out and are working to help the household needs. When most of the girl children drop out, it is either due to marriage or marriage proposals or lack of transportation.

5.8. Child's reaction/feeling while accepting dropout decision (%)

An analysis of outcome of dropping out from school reveals that 29 per cent of the children regrets that they are not educated, 17 per cent were happy in dropping out of education, nearly 30 per cent is engaged in wage labour and about 36 per cent in agricultural, business or other work.



On the negative side, a few drop outs are due to the influence of deviant behaviour or affiliation and are complained to be involved in alcohol consumption, roaming around, eve-teasing etc.

6. Conclusion

According to Hunt Frances (2008), if drop out is viewed as a process, then children's stories around dropping out from school emerge not in isolation, but as a series of decisions, events and interactions which lead in a certain direction. The sample study clearly describes that socio-economic strains in the family, peer group influence and delinquency are leading to dropping out in majority cases. The decision to drop out is taken by either parent(s)/child or jointly. Boys decide to drop out on their own more than girls. When financial pressure increases in a household, parents ask the children to drop out so that they can add to the family income. More girls are dropped out due to decision by parents than boys. Single parent, especially mothers asked more frequently to the children to drop out to support them, here social protection instruments would play important roles. Dropout decision also depends upon the academic performance of the student. Research Poor school performance, low attendance and late enrolment are likely to be signals for teachers that children with these characteristics are more likely to drop out (Richardo, Sabates, et al. 2010).

This findings are in consistence with the study results of Grant & Hallman, 2006; the PROBE Team, 1999. Therefore, it is expected that Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan' (SSA) and 'Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyaan' (RMSA) programs would draw innovative strategies to improve bargaining power of parents, two-way communication system, and identify students are in risk of dropping out by knowing the degree of child(s) - (i) academic learnings (performance), (ii) family socialization, (iii) school performance, (iv) general deviance, (v) deviant affiliation and (vi) structural strains. At the same time, it is important that government should concentrate more in designing strategic interventions to bring all children in school and improve learning environment.

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