



## Causes of School Dropouts: An overview

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### ***Abstract:***

*As the world celebrates the International Day of the Girl Child on Friday, the fact remains that though there has been significant progress in improving girls' access to education in the last two decades, seven out of 10 girls drop out of school before they reach class 10. In fact, activists say that Andhra Pradesh reports one of the highest numbers of school dropouts among girls. A primary reason, according to activists, is that AP has the least number of usable toilets in the country. Activists say that around 47,000 of the 76,000 government schools do not have usable toilets. A Unicef-backed survey in 2010-11 had revealed that around 42.6 per cent of government schools have toilets but they are not usable.*

***Key words:*** Girl Child, school dropouts, learning for Life

### **Introduction:**

They may have scaled up the ladder in myriad professions, but in terms of education, a significant number of girls, especially from the marginalized sections of the society, continue to be denied their basic rights. As the world celebrates the International Day of the Girl Child on Friday, the fact remains that though there has been significant progress in improving girls' access to education in the last two decades, seven out of 10 girls drop out of school before they reach class 10. In fact, activists say that Andhra Pradesh reports one of the highest numbers of school dropouts among girls. If the net enrolment rate of girls in primary education is 96%, it gradually dips to 60% in secondary education.

A primary reason, according to activists, is that AP has the least number of usable toilets in the country. Activists say that around 47,000 of the 76,000 government schools do not have usable toilets. A Unicef-backed survey in 2010-11 had revealed that around 42.6 per cent of government schools have toilets but

they are not usable. When contacted, Usha Rani, project director, Rajiv Vidya Mission, said that except teachers, there are no staff in the schools. "Toilets are there but maintenance is a huge issue and it is very difficult to get sanitation staff," she said.

With this year's theme for 'International Day of the Girl Child' being "Learning for Life", Anita Kumar, senior programme manager (south) of Plan India, says it is important to sensitize people about the importance of investing in the education of a girl child. "We need to address the gender bias in the curriculum and the way teaching is done in schools. Girls should be made aware of their rights," said Anita. She added that considering the level of violence to which girls are exposed, India is being rated as the most unsafe place for women in the world.

Consider this: Every third girl born in India dies in the first year of life. One in four does not live to celebrate their 15th birthday. Two out of five girls are malnourished. Every second adolescent girl is anemic. Seven out of 10 girls drop



out of school before they reach 10th standard. Six out of 10 girls become child brides. Four out of 10 have their first child before they turn "In trafficking, AP is ranked among the top and the state happens to be the source and transit point. We have highest number of child labourers in the country," says Mamatha Raghuvier, who runs Tharuni, a Warangal-based NGO which will launch an SMS-helpline called "Tharumopayam" on Friday. According to writer and activist Vimala Morthala, the state also reports one of the highest numbers of child marriages, with the average age of marriage being 16 years. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women in there.

The problem of dropout has been continually troubling the primary education system not only in India but in other developing countries also. 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 primary education system. The subject of 'dropout' or 'wastage' has been studied in India and other countries over the past 65 years and many of the reasons for this educational malady are now known. However, it is not easy to deal with the malady because its origin lies partly within the system itself which has been designed by scholars, politicians and administrators. Their intentions may be beyond reproach but the major lacuna in their designs has been the absence of a comprehensive dialogue with the people to understand their perception of education and of the place of the child in the family. This is the reason why several

developing countries are now reorganizing the primary education system so as to make it people-oriented, instead of official-oriented. It is the administrator's views on 'control' of the system and the teacher's view of the child as raw material to be controlled and shaped that has resulted in the linear nature and illogical uniformity of primary schooling. Recently, however, alternatives have been successfully tried out in countries like China, Indonesia, and some Latin American countries with considerable benefit. To adjust the system of education to the social, economic and cultural circumstances of the children and their community requires a people-oriented administration. Also, teaching-learning techniques need cultural adjustments so as to be more pupil-oriented than teacher oriented as they happen to be at present in our country. The organization of vacations and holidays is rarely adjusted by our system to the occupational and cultural traditions of the community, and this prevents the children from participating at their level in festivals, ceremonials and occupations of interest, to the family and the community. Decentralization of administration to the level of villages or at least a block of villages has to be considered seriously and systematically if universal primary education is to materialize. The proper area for selection and appointment of teachers could be the block so that they may be known to the community and find it easy to obtain community co-operation through dialogue and debate. Seasonal variations can be understood by a local teacher as a factor for adjusting the learning time and days during the year. Alongside, the teacher and the parents can utilize development schemes to enable poor families to increase their



income and ensure that children are not required to earn their keep and miss the school for that reason.

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### Schemes and Programmes

1. Primary Education Schemes, 2. Non-Formal Education, 3. Construction of School Buildings, 4. Schemes for Students Belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Nomadic Tribes and Vimukta Jatis, 5. Book Bank, 6. Attendance Allowance for the Girl students, 7. Shaleya Poshan Aahar Yojana (National Programme of Nutritional Support), and 8. Scholarships. The Government of Maharashtra decided (in 1987) that free education to girls be given from standard I to XII throughout the state in approved, aided and un-aided schools.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective was to examine the dropout in the selected districts with regard to :

- Extent of dropouts and absenteeism at each standard from I – VII.
- Cause analysis of the dropout problem with emphasis on dropouts by caste and gender.
- To examine the societal, attitudinal and socio-economic environment associated with high dropout rates of girls at various levels of elementary school education.
- Interventions necessary for improving retention and reducing absenteeism at different levels.
- To study the reasons for dropouts from SC/ST/OBC and minority children.

Out of approximately 200 million children in the age-group 6-14 years, only 120 million are in schools. The overall dropout rate was 40 per cent at the primary level and 55 per cent at the



upper primary level in 1999-2000 (India Vision, 2020). At all levels, Maharashtra has a lower dropout rate compared to the All-India average. However, dropout rate still remains a substantial problem to be addressed. It has to be noted that 22.53 per cent of the children in Maharashtra do not reach the upper primary level and a total of 39.14 per cent children do not reach the secondary level. Though the absolute dropout rates (boys and girls) are lower in Maharashtra, and are almost half the national level, the gender difference in dropout rates is higher in the State in comparison to the national average.

### **Parents' perceptions**

The fact that parents have stated lack of encouragement from the school, particularly in the case of girls relates to the lack of faith in school as an instrument of social motion. Yet, parents continue to have a faith in the power of education related to parents' expectations of schooling and to their hopes for their children's future. In the rural areas, primary school is not perceived as an end in itself but the parents' occupational aspirations for their children are not unexpectedly, as ambitions.

The poor quality of schools is regularly quoted as another factor which negatively affects the demand for education. And this poor quality of schools indirectly influences school drop outs because it leads to the discouragement and demotivation of pupils (no encouragement reason). Despite this parents also contradictly state they are satisfied with the school. What can explain this contradiction between poor school quality and parents' satisfaction? Three factors can intervene.

First, for many parents the village school is one of the few they know and as such they cannot compare it to a model school. Second, parents take the view that the quality of a school is determined mainly by the teachers. A third factor, which partly explains the second is that contacts between the parents and teachers are rather tenuous. A non-negligible proportion of them especially in the tribal area have never even met their child's teachers. The positive opinions of parents about the school quality are therefore no surprise.

Pupils' home environment certainly plays a role in school failure and dropping out of children. As seen earlier, many pupils in the rural areas live in houses without electricity and more often than not running water. Many children, especially girls are made to fetch firewood and potable water. Children have little contact with the written word outside of school due to paucity of reading materials and to the low level of education of parents. This last element is fundamental. Parents with little formal education on average are poorer, offer their children less opportunity to study are less able to assist the in school and need them more to help out at home or in the field. Moreover, such parents have generally a more limited knowledge of the language used in the school which is often different from the one spoken at home.

Two specific factors are further highlighted by the data on pupils' living conditions that make school attendance irregular leading to drop out : The fact, mentioned above, that children have to help with work inside and away from the house; and health problems. Although response on childrens' health is low, it is



one of the main reasons invoked for absenteeism.

Bad teaching and other school-related factors are rarely mentioned as such by parents or teachers in the rural areas, but there is little doubt that they play an important role in demotivating students. Two aspects are disquieting here. Firstly, as they function at present, many schools are not capable of stimulating and sustaining the motivation of a considerable proportion of their pupils. Drop out is caused, at least in part, by factors inherent to school. A second cause for concern is that teachers in all three districts seem hardly aware of the school's responsibility for pupil failure and drop out. They have a natural tendency to blame the pupils and their family environment and they do not believe very much in the school's ability to change things. This conviction is unfortunately strongest in rural areas, which is where repetitions and drop outs are most numerous.

These research results raise several education policy questions. The fact that parents in the rural areas keep faith in the value of schooling and that they are on the whole rather positive about the quality of schools, does not imply that education decisions-makers can simply shrug their shoulders, hiding behind the claim that school failure and drop out are social more than educational problems. There are limits to what schools on their own can achieve but this research also points at the responsibility of the school and at the need to adapt its functioning in order to achieve better results. At least four questions could be raised in this respect.

The first is to determine to what extent and how the school could adapt to

family living conditions which vary widely from one rural setting to another. Some of the hypotheses that underpin traditional school organization, namely : children are available to attend school regularly, they are in good health, their parents can help them, etc. While it is clear that these hypotheses apply in privileged urban areas this is not the case in the rural areas. Therefore, adapting school practices to the specific living conditions of pupils (for example, adjustments in school hours and calendars, constructing crèches close to schools, opening reading centers at school, etc) seems indispensable to making schools more effective, which implies, putting into question the uniform organizational model that currently prevails.

The second question is even more complex. It is a matter of determining to what extent the school can go beyond mere adaptation and actively influence certain factors in its environment such as the level of education of parents (for instance through literacy and post-literacy programmes), or the state of health of children (for instance through proper school meals and illness-screening programmes). This question is far from new, but it remains relevant. Creation of student newspapers would give both pupils and parents better opportunity to read, which is of benefit in particular to the otherwise disadvantaged rural families.

Third, parental expectations of their children's educational and occupational career have to be taken into consideration when it comes to determining basic education policies. Most parents in the rural areas express the desire for their children to continue schooling and continue studying after



they finish primary education and most hope for their son or daughter to find a middle level professional post which would take them out of the village. Voluntarist policies that fly in the face of parental demand and aspirations generally yield little fruit. But this does not mean that policy should simply reflect the demand and be prisoner to parents' expectations, at times unrealistic. If policies and planning have any meaning, it is precisely in the setting of goals and the formulation of collective projects. The key is to know who defines these projects and how. The urban elite for the rural masses? This is what often happens, without consideration for the needs and aspirations of local communities. Basic educational planners would gain much by listening to communities before acting.

Finally, the need for communication between policy makers and communities is reflected by a similar need for more communication between schools and teachers and their 'client': parents and students. Analysis of school withdrawals shows that teachers consider lack of parental support to be the main reason for failure at school resulting in drop out. These problems cannot be solved if contacts between parents and schools is almost non-existent. Such contacts need to be promoted also in order to break the vicious circle whereby defeatism of certain teachers echoes and sustains the discouragement of some pupils and parents.

#### **Consequences for the agenda of planners and managers**

The importance has been stressed in basic education planning of paying greater attention to the diversity of local situation. Therefore, the intention is not

to offer recipes for the best strategy or strategies to develop this type of education, but simply to point out a number of themes that should be at the heart of planners' concerns. Being more attentive to the demand side

The planning of education has not paid enough attention of demand issues. Most of the time it has assumed that demand is guaranteed, and that it is enough to make the school accessible for making children go. Similarly, the issue of whether the content of education is relevant and suited to community needs is debated at length among specialists, but rarely discussed with parents. The main reaction to parents who might not want to send their children to school has been to decree school attendance compulsory.

But compulsory education has little impact on poor parents who are not in a position to send their children to school regularly, because they need their help at home or in the fields, nor on children suffering from malnutrition or debilitating illnesses, or who have quit simply been discouraged by a negative experience at school. These problems of the interaction between supply and demand, deserve more attention than they generally receive. The study suggests that when decision makers want to introduce changes, they should realize that dialogue with the users of educational services is indispensable as is adoption of the changes to local realities.

The first challenge for the planner is to adapt the school to the real living condition of families, in order to make it culturally and economically more accessible and more attractive. To meet this challenge, he/she can learn from his/her colleagues in the non-formal





education sector, who have always manifested great flexibility in the way they organize their programmes. For example, while recognizing that logistics may be more complicated than in the case of formal education, standardized school calendars and timetables could be adjusted, for they are often poorly suited to local conditions in certain zones. Similarly, one could relax rigid criteria of promotion and repetition that prevent normal progress of disadvantaged children.

Attempts to go beyond the simple adaptation of the supply is by exercising a direct impact on the demand factor that hinder regular school attendance. Among such measures one can randomly mention the following : literacy courses for parents and/or programmes to inform them or make them aware of the role they can play in making the schooling of their children more successful, organization of school meals, use of the school as a center of medical screening and health care for their children etc. These types of measures have often been successfully applied to projects on a limited scale, but they have rarely been generalized. Part of the reason, of course, is again lack of resources, But this sort of initiative also requires a considerable amount of time and commitment from local officials, including teachers; while there is in many cases a manifest lack of motivation and organization, often accompanied by indifference to the problems of families. These realities must be kept in mind when one asks the school to go beyond its traditional role and to exercise a direct influence on demand. What can be obtained from a particularly dynamic staff in a certain school is not necessarily transferable elsewhere. In fact, the success if this type of initiative is

dependent first and foremost on the reinforcement of local management capacities, and on the ability to generate and maintain sufficient involvement by the teaching staff. As a further point, the decision-maker should also be aware of the importance of parents' opinion and of what they expect from school for their children. In all cases, the school is seen primarily as an instrument of social promotion, and as a means for children to escape the harsh conditions of rural life. As a result, parents have a traditional and academic perception of education. For them, primary school serves essentially to teach their children to read and write and to prepare them for secondary school. Thus, it is not surprising that they are often suspicious of reforms that move school away from their traditional function. Of course, there can be no development without proposals for change. Some tension between the objectives of education policy and the expectations of parents is quite normal, provided it does not simply amount to contradiction. When they want to introduce changes, decision-makers should realize that dialogue with the users of educational services is indispensable, as is adaptation of these changes to local realities. It is likely that the above described measures to bring the school and pupils' parents closer together could also have an encouraging effect on these parents. But the two problems are not necessarily the same. There area host of reasons for parents not to want to continue to send their children to school because the cost (including the opportunity cost) is too high, or because they do not perceive schooling as being useful, or because they reject school for socio-cultural reasons. The first case is relatively easy to resolve, because it is



solely a supply problem, but the other are more complex.

### Primary Education Schemes

The programme of universalization of primary education requires that the facilities for primary education should be available within walking distance of 1.5 km from the residence of students. To implement this policy, grants are being paid to the zilla parishads for making available the required facilities of primary education within the area of 1.5 km on the basis of the Fifth Educational Survey of villages and habitations having a population of 200 and above.

### Non-Formal Education

A primary school has been opened in each revenue village except in a few which are sparsely populated. Many children in the rural areas cannot attend full time schools because of their poverty and household work, resulting in high dropout rate. Therefore, the government started the scheme of part-time classes for such cases during the Fifth Five Year Plan for non-formal education. The idea of non-formal education was given by the Central Advisory Board of Education. The Board had pointed out that the traditional system of education will not achieve the goal of universal education of the age-group of 6-14 years. The argument was that the system of elementary education, with its single point of entry and subsequent promotions year after year, is very costly and so the Board had recommended the scheme of non-formal education to be implemented by the zilla parishads. Under this scheme, a part-time teacher conducts classes for children in the age-group of 9-14 year, at a time convenient

to them either in the morning or in the evening.

### Conclusion:-

Since the constitutional directive to universalize elementary education could not become a reality by 1960, the Fifth Plan envisaged facilities of education to 100 per cent children in the age-group of 6-11, and 60 per cent children in the age-group of 11-14. During the period of the Fifth Plan, a sub-plan for the educational development of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was prepared, as 12 per cent of the population in the state belongs to the SCs and STs. At the village level, Village Education Committees have been established as bridges between the schools and the society. The objective of establishing these committees was to get the cooperation of influential and educated villagers in the implementation of the various government schemes of primary education, to raise resources for maintaining schools, to participate in the socio-cultural activities of the school, to supervise the attendance of the students and teachers, to make available educational material and help the sale of crafts prepared by students, to maintain the school property through repairs, and to help the students gain from their knowledge and experience.

### Recommendations

From the foregoing results and conclusions of the study the following Recommendations emerge.

- a) For enhancing accessibility to the school, the content of education must be relevant and suited to community needs.





b) Dialogue with the users of educational services is indispensable to the adoption of changes to local realities.

c) Decision-makers should be aware of the importance of parents' opinion and what they expect from school for their children.

d) Health services like regular health checks, for distribution of medicines, counseling, referral services should be provided.

e) Local teachers should be made available for teaching in schools so as to reduce the problem of teacher absenteeism and improve punctuality.

f) Incentives be provided to encourage women and teachers with good qualifications and experience and train them to work in schools in rural areas. This will reduce migration to urban schools.