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## **A Study of School Dropouts in an Urban Slum Community**

### **Introduction**

As a part of 'Health for all by 2000,' various areas were indentified and targets for achievements were laid down by Government of India. Education for all is one of the important aspects from the point of view of human resource development. Enrolment of all eligible children of school going age is an important step towards achieving 100 per cent literacy. It is, however, observed for various reasons children dropout at various levels of schooling. Slum dwelling population is vulnerable due to associated influences of low socioeconomic status lower parental literacy rates, high rates of juvenile delinquency and low status of female children. A study was, therefore, undertaken in urban slum population to find out the extent and cause of school dropouts from the point of view of its prevention.

### **Material and Methods**

This study was conducted in a slum population adopted by the Urban Health Centre, Mangalwar Peth, Pune, from August 88 to April 89. A house to house survey was undertaken on a pretested proforma by the trained Medical Social Workers to find out school dropouts. Children were designated as dropouts if they did not attend the school for more than 6 months in consecution. Information like parental education, present age and age of the children at school leaving, sex, religion, reasons for the dropout etc. were collected from the parents of the dropouts. During the survey, children not enrolled inspite of eligible age were also identified and reasons for non-enrolment were noted down.

### **Results**

There were 1,080 children in the age range of 5 -18 i.e., school going age, out of whom 38(3.5 per cent) children were not enrolled in the school at all. From the remaining 1042 children 89(8.5 per cent) children were identified as school dropouts. Age and sex distribution of these children is given in Table 1. The dropout rate in males was 9.0 per cent and in female it was 7.9 per cent. This difference was not statistically significant. There was no significant difference in the non-enrolment rates for males in age groups of under fifteen and over fifteen, however a significantly reduced non-enrolment rates we observed in case of female children in these two age groups.

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TABLE 1: AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN

<i>Male</i>	<i>Total children</i>	<i>Dropout</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Nonenrolled</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
5-	466	15	3.3	15	3.2
15-18	129	37	29.6	4	3.1
Total	595	52	9.0	19	3.2
<i>Female</i>					
5-	398	18	4.6	9	2.3
15-18	87	19	24.6	10	11.5
Total	485	37	7.9	19	3.9

Children dropping out of school and not entering the school at all (non-enrolment) are considered together for further analysis. The findings are present in Table-2.

TABLE 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARENTS REPORTING DROPOUT OR NON-ENROLMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN

<i>Characteristics of Parents</i>	<i>Total No. of Children</i>	<i>Dropout + non-enrolled</i>	
		<i>No.</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Religion</i>			
Hindus	906	95	10.5
Muslim	169	32	18.9
Christian	4	-	-
Others	1	-	-
<i>Educational level of Father</i>			
Illiterate	348	55	15.80
Primary schooling	142	25	17.60
Secondary schooling	341	32	9.38
SSC	145	5	3.45
College	41	3	7.32
NM	63	7	11.11
<i>Father's occupation</i>			
Labourer	357	67	19.0
Service	502	37	7.4
Small business	146	16	10.96
Others	11	-	-
N.M.	64	7	10.93
<i>Mother's occupation</i>			
Working mother	253	46	18.2
House wife	827	81	9.8
Total	1080	127	11.7

The dropouts were significantly more in Muslims (18.9 percent) where as in Hindus it was 10.5 per cent only.

The relationship of father's education with school dropouts shows that with increasing education of father there was a significant decline of the school dropouts except the parents with college education. This was due to two children with learning problem in this group.

The dropout rate was highest among children of labourer, 67 out of 357 (19 per cent) followed by children of self employed small enterprenucrs. Children of those engaged in service had least school dropout rate (7.4 per cent)

Children of working mothers had a significantly higher dropout rate (18.2 per cent) compared to children of house wives (9.8 per cent). There was no statistically significant difference with the education of woman as well as with their income and the school dropouts.

The mean age of dropouts at the time of study was 15.3 years with Sd of 2.8 years. The standard where the child stopped attending the school is given in Table 3. It was observed that 42.7 per cent of all the dropouts were from Primary school. The reasons for non-enrolment and dropouts is given in Table 4. Poverty and learning disability were important causes for school dropouts as well as non-enrolment.

TABLE3:STANDARD AT THE TIME OF LEAVING

	<i>Dropouts</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
-4	38	42.7
5-8	38	42.7
9-10	11	12.3
10+	2	2.3
Total	89	100

TABLE4:REASONS FOR NON-ENROLLMENT AND SCHOOL DROPOUT

	<i>Dropouls</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Non -enrollment</i>	<i>%</i>
Poverty	39	43.8	9	23.7
Incapable of Learning	14	15.7	3	7.9
Difficulties <i>iii</i> attending school	2	2.2	3	7.9
Reigion & cultural believe	2	2.2	1	2.6
Psychological problem	1	1.1	3	7.9
Marriage	5	5.6	-	-
Death of Father	3	3.4	-	-
NM	23	26.0	19	50
Total	89	100	38	100

35 out of 127 (28 per cent) of the dropouts and non-enrolled were regularly employed as labourers, temporary workers or helping hands to small businessman, of whom 86 per cent were males and 14 per cent were females. The minimum age when a child was asked to work for bread earning was 8 years. The mean age of commencement of earning was 13.9 years with Sd 2.4 years. Eight hours was the average duration of work and Rs. 75 was the average wages per day earned by these children.

## Discussion

The literacy rate in State of Maharashtra is 47.2 per cent according to 1981 census which is higher than all other Indian states except Kerala and Goa. In order to improve literacy status, enrolment drive for all children completing 5 years of age is undertaken. Some children are enrolled at older age having missed the opportunity at their right age. This results in enrolment figures exceeding 100 per cent as seen from Maharashtra figures for enrolment for Primary education during 1987-88, of 126.3 percent for boys and 110.8 percent for girls. The problem of dropout during primary school is a serious one as indicated in this study by 42.7 per cent dropouts below 4th standard. These children are likely to forget even reading and writing due to non practice. Efforts, therefore, are needed to be concentrated on this group so as to complete education minimum upto 7th Std. This will enable these children to preserve functional literacy.

The enrolment figures have always indicated a male preponderance, since male members have to shoulder the responsibility of bread earning and females are traditionally expected to look after the management of kitchen. Overall impression, therefore, is that the main future role of a female child as an adult is of restricted at home for child bearing and rearing irrespective of educational status. It is encouraging to note that over period of time there is a change in this thinking in the right direction as indicated by improved enrolment figures for female children. In order to improve the educational status of females the Government of Maharashtra has started free education for girl children upto 10th Std. Female literacy is closely linked with improvement in the maternal and child health and acceptance of small family norm. Investment in female literacy therefore will pay rich dividends in future.

Enrolment figures for middle school level for state of Maharashtra for calendar year 1987-88 are 84.8 per cent and 58.1 per cent for boys and girls respectively. Dropout rate at secondary school level in the present study is 57.3 per cent. An important reason for dropping out of school after primary education is poverty. In the present study 43.8 per cent children had to supplement family income by giving up school and take up a role of bread earner. Mental retardation, aberrated mental development, difficulties in learning were identified by the parents among 15.7 per cent dropouts and 7.9 per cent non-enrollments (Table 4).

In order to provide learning opportunity to children coming from lower socioeconomic groups timing of the school may have to be adjusted in such a way that the child is able to perform both the duties, namely supporting the family and getting education. His pace of education may not be the same as those children getting education without any other responsibilities. An allowance of some period may have to be made while planning the curriculum. More weightage should be given on vocational training and short courses in order to enable the students to obtain meaningful employment. Special educational facilities at a cost affordable to all may have to be provided to those with mental retardation and learning difficulties.

Religious and cultural beliefs including early marriages were responsible for 7.8 per cent of dropouts which need education of the parents. Difficulty in attending school and family

difficulties like parental death can be overcome by education, motivation and making the help available from the neighbours.

Parental illiteracy, low per capita income are well known determinants of educational status of children but difficult to control as medical, social and political reforms and long term strategies are needed to overcome these problems. Till then one may have to rely on need-based curriculum setting with emphasis on vocational training.

#### **References**

- 1. Health Information of India, 1987.**
- 2. Education at a glance (Maharashtra State) 1987-88.**