**Research Paper**

# Dropout in Education at High School Level: A Study of Murshidabad District in West Bengal

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*Abstract*
*Dropout is a universal phenomenon of education system in India, spread overall levels of education, in all parts of the country and across all the socio-economic groups of population. The dropout rates are much higher for educationally backward states and districts. Girls in India tend to have higher dropout rates than boys. Similarly, children belonging to the socially disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have the higher dropout rates in comparison to general population. There are also regional and location wise differences and the children living in remote areas/urban slums are more likely to drop out of school.*
*Failure to complete high school not only produces negative outcome for the individuals, but also widens the existing social and economic inequalities. In order to reduce wastages and improve the efficiency of education system, the educational planners need to understand and identify the social groups that are more susceptible to dropout and the reasons for their dropping out.*
*Keeping the above context in perspective, the present study tries to examine the factors that contribute to dropping out by children at the secondary/highersecondary school level. The analysis is based on the empirical study undertaken on the children of middle and lower middle-income families living in villages around Nowda block of Murshidabad District. The study is based on a field survey undertaken in Amtala, Nowda, Patikabari, Dangapara and Sabdarnagar villages in Nowda block of Murshidabad District in West Bengal, India. The study also recommends necessary steps which could be implemented to ensure that every enrolled student completes school education.*

*Key Words: Dropout in Education, High School Level, Murshidabad District, West Bengal, qualitative response model, Kanyashree project*

## I. Introduction

Education is the basic requirement for human development. With education, employment opportunities are broadened and income levels are increased. The development of an individual and the progress of a nation depend on education. It is also the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values and thus is the strongest force in the development and growth of a child in preparing him/her to be a responsible, intelligent, contributes to an increase in confidence and decision-making power within the household. In India, although the percentage of literacy is rising, what is alarming is that the number of illiterate children in the age group of 9 to 18 years is also increasing. Drop out in education at high school level is one of the major causes of it.

Here drop outs at high schools are defined as students, who enroll in secondary and higher secondary education and for some reason other than death leaves school before completing the grade without transferring to another school. Reducing dropouts is a crucial factor in order to reduce poverty and increase standard of living and to achieve greater socio-economic equality. Large number of dropouts usually indicates failure on the part of the Government to provide quality education to the masses.

In the light of the Right to Education Act (RTE), the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, the main vehicle to implement RTE and schemes like mid-day meals, it seems puzzling to think why should there be any dropout at all. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme of the central government for achieving universalization of elementary education in a time-bound manner has been in operation since 2001. But since its inception it has been grappling with increasing dropouts.

It is important to carefully design preventive measures and intervention strategies that could be

adopted in order to help all adolescent dropouts. Certain preventive measures can be implemented throughout the target population, while others must take into account the diversity of dropout profiles.

With this backdrop, our project seeks to examine the socio-economic reasons behind dropouts in the middle and lower middle class and villages around Nowda block of Murshidabad District in West Bengal. Through this article a conscious effort has been made to uncover various factors associated with dropout and to understand at the micro level the mindset of the students and their parents in dropping out of secondary school in spite of all the facilities being provided by the Government that they could ever desire for.

## II.    Literature Survey

Levy (1971) using data from 42 less developed countries tried to explore the relationship between social, political, economic and educational variables and the dropout rate from primary schools. It was found that school systems with high rates of repetition also have high dropout rates over the primary cycle. This suggests that automatic promotion may reduce educational wastage. While increased urbanization and development of communication systems increase school continuation. There is some evidence that the economic returns to education are important determinants of school continuation.

Pratinidhi and Garad's study (1992) showed enrolment of all eligible children of school going age is an important step towards achieving 100 percent literacy. For various reasons children dropout at various levels of schooling the available studies on primary education in India have identified various reasons for why children drop out and why they remain unenrolled. The poor quality of schooling is responsible for low retention. Slum dwelling population is vulnerable due to associated influences such as low socio-economic status, lower parental literacy rates, high of juvenile delinquency, and low status of female children.

According to Avinash Kumar Singh's paper "Drop out from Primary School in Tribal India" (1994), the rate of dropout is higher in rural areas of the country in comparison to urban areas. Lack of adequate funds, furniture and resources affects most of the primary schools in rural area. His study found the polarity between home and schools - parents and child having certain goals and expectations for domestic and school learning while the schools setting the expectations on other things.

Borooah (2003) examined a large Indian database and observed that while only 11 per cent of children lived in villages without a primary school, 30 per cent lived in villages without a middle school. A similar picture is reflected in urban areas. A neighbourhood primary school is frequent while the same cannot be said about upper primary schools. Similar results have also been reported by Shariff in 1995 and Sengupta and Guha in 2002.

According to Upendranath (1995), Indian education has been experiencing with high incidence of dropout at middle level (6th to 8th classes) and this is more for girls than boys. Data shows that in most countries, like India, more girls than boys drop out, resulting in a widening of the gender gap between primary and secondary and between secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios.

Y. Yokozeki (1996) in his paper "The Causes and Consequences of Student Drop out from Junior Secondary School in Ghana" pointed out the gender gap in the rates of dropout - drop out of girls being higher than that of boys. The quality of education, low education budget and uneconomical allocation of it are responsible for low quality education. Schools lacking teaching materials including textbooks, materials for practical classes, only one third of the schools having enough furniture, School fees, and family condition are the reasons for low education level and unmotivated students. Also, opportunity cost of education is high in such poor economy.

Rao (2000) also indicate that poverty is one of the main causes of drop out of girls. The research by Rusell W. Rumberger (2001) showed that dropout of school is influenced mostly by an array of individual and institutional factors. Dropping out is simply not an academic failure but results from both socio and academic problems in schools, lack of support and resources in families, schools and communities are primary reasons. Those problems appear early in students' school career suggesting for early intervention. Reducing dropout rates will require comprehensive approaches both to help at risk students address the social and academic problems that they face in their lives and to improve the risk settings that contribute to these problems. Building social capital, having enough political will and improving the life of lower middle-class families are the way out of the problem of drop out.

Another study by Rao and Mohanty (2004) concluded that the gender differentials in school enrolment and school attendance persisting in all the states. Lall and Marie (2005) found that despite efforts to incorporate all sections of the population into the Indian education system, through mechanisms such as positive discrimination and non-formal education, large numbers of young people are still without schooling. Although enrolment in primary education has increased, it is estimated that at least 35 million and possibly as many as 60 million, children aged 6-14 years are not in school.

Severe gender, regional, and caste disparities also exist. The main problems are the high drop-out rate,

low levels of learning and achievement, inadequate school infrastructure, poorly functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, the large number of teacher vacancies, poor quality of education and inadequate funds. The children "at risk", such as orphans, child-labourers, street children and victims of riots and natural disasters, do not necessarily have access to schools.

The fact that dropout rate of Muslims is higher in India has also been borne out by the analysis carried out by Bhat and Zavier (2005). They argued that communities that took to education earlier had the advantage that was passed onto the next generation. Higher illiteracy or educational backwardness of Muslims is a legacy of the past. Consequently, in urban India, following independence, upper caste Hindus was in a better position to take advantage of opportunities for secondary education than Muslims who lagged behind in primary education and literacy.

Husain in his study (2005) found that the low level of literacy within the Muslim community is traditionally explained in terms of the conservative values characterizing Muslim society. Based on a field survey of slum dwellers in selected areas of Kolkata, he argues that economic factors and uncertainties in the labour market combine to create a different perception of the cost-benefits of education. Choudhury (2006) argued that as student moves from primary school to a higher stage of school, the chance of dropping out of school increases 2.7 times. The chance of Muslim student discontinuing is 1.9 times than that of Hindus. Further he mentioned that the total number of siblings has been found to be a highly significant predictor of school drop-out. An increase in family size by one increases the chance of dropping out 1.7 times. His analysis confirms that father's level of education is significantly related to dropout behaviour. For each higher class of father's education, the likelihood of a student dropping out reduces by 16 per cent. However, "mother's primary education or middle level schooling did not have significant influence on dropouts".

Sengupta and Guha (2002) in their analysis of female dropouts in the state of West Bengal have observed that father's level of education is significantly related to dropout behaviour. In the paper "School dropouts or push outs: Overcoming barriers to RTE ", Anugula Reddy (2010) talks about poverty and child labour, household decisions, school quality, and irrelevant curriculum. In total, 23.3% of boys and 22.3% of girls were not attending school because they were engaged in an activity like paid work, household work or taking care of siblings. Around 18% of children dropped out of school because it 'costs too much'. Many other reasons like school too far away, repeated failures, got married, etc. also cited by several parents as the reasons for dropout. Present examination system is also a cause for dropout. Examination results should identify the strengths and weakness of the child to further facilitate him and not force him to dropout due to inability to cope with studies. The paper also identifies as lack of systematic help to first generation learners (i.e. children of illiterate parents) as a major contributor to number of dropouts.

A study on early dropout of primary schools of Kolkata, which was conducted by Kolkata Konsutants a unit of community action society (2010) with support of Sarva Shiksha Mission found out low pupil-teacher ratio, not having classroom with enough space, lack of drinking water and toilet facility are the main problems of the education system of West Bengal. Poor family condition, one teacher schools and teacher being pulled out from smoothly functioning schools are also affecting child to drop out. Recommendations of the paper include jointly by the state and central govt relocating these schools and upgrading them with specialized facilities. Govt. is to provide resident teaching learning system to the needy students. Regular meetings with parents of the children, not burdening parents with fees, donations and other charges and alsoa need to track child's progress beyond exams through basic indicators were also mentioned in this paper. This study also revealed that post sarvo siksha abhijan (SSA) there has been an improvement in the enrolment and retention scenario yet a large number of children who are dropping out or are in the danger of dropping out needs to address. The drop out especially before they complete class I or soon after they reach class II has been identified in the study to be the most vulnerable class. It has also been reinforced that children who are currently irregular are at greater risk of dropping out. The stakeholders pointed out economic condition of the family being one of the primary reasons for children dropping out but several other important factors like poor infrastructure of schools, lack of interest in teaching and learning and demonization of the parents have been highlighted too. It has strongly emerged that a dynamic and proactive multi-stakeholder approach has to be undertaken to curb drop out in early years of primary schooling so as to ensure the Right to Compulsory Elementary Education of all children.

In Dipa Mukherjee's paper titled, "Reducing out of school children in India" (2010), there has been an attempt to explore trends in school dropouts and reasons behind leaving schools. The author has identified low level income of families and earning opportunities for children as a major factor contributing to out of school children. Other reasons also indicate lack of awareness on the part of parents. The paper recommends change of operation of SSA from infrastructure-based approach to facilitating approach. The paper also focuses on gender and regional differences and stresses that poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth must go hand in hand with education expansion programs.

R. Whannell and W. Allen (2011) in their study found that students between 18-22 years of age who

haven't completed secondary school were adversely influenced by the poor nature of the student-teacher relationship perceived by the student. This also demonstrated low levels of emotional engagement with school. Poor classroom experience, environmental instability are also contributors to drop out. In the paper by Sunita Chugh (2011) titled, "Dropout in Secondary Education: A study of Children living in Slums of Delhi", both family and school factors are highly correlated with each other and contribute to dropouts. Apart from poverty and financial constraints, the paper identifies a need for needs-based approach in delivering education. The paper points out the need to adopt a holistic approach and not a broad-based approach in delivering quality education without reference to the broader socio-economic setting. The paper focuses on preventive and restorative approaches to be used to tackle problem of dropouts. Some of the major reasons identified are to look after younger siblings, disputes within the family, lack of time for studies at home, no need of education for employment. No need of education for girls, insecurity of the child, fear of rape, sickness of the child or family, lack of interest in studies, poor comprehension or academic performance, no effective teaching in school and medium of instruction. Some of the ways to retain children in school could be to make course structure in school for student friendly, students could be given scholarships or stipends to incentivize them; to address issue of poor comprehension, schools could address the issue of organizing bridge courses during summer breaks or after school to help students cope up. Skill oriented curriculum needs to be introduced. Finally, readmission for dropouts must not be a difficult process.

A study on the dropout problem in West Bengal by Chandan Roy (2011) suggests pupil teacher ratio, classroom teacher ratio, percentage of repeaters, gender specific issues cause dropouts. The paper proposes immediate revision of pupil teacher and classroom student ratio and process of learning should be more students oriented, fun and attractive. Arun k Kishore's paper on "School dropouts: Examining the space of reason" (2012) looks into the problem of school dropouts in Kerala. Though Kerala has an extremely high literacy rate, reasons for a mere 0.5 % dropout include lack of interest in studies, poverty, poor quality of education and failure in education. Broad factors include physical health, financial status, mental retardation, school issues, family issues and employment. Poor academic performance related to learning difficulties, physical illness and exclusion due to perceived slowness leads to reluctance on the part of the child to attend school which is very difficult to overcome. Once a child drops out of school the lack of motivation of the parent with the lack of perception of the benefits of accruing literacy and numeracy is to be kept in mind. The best possible alternative which the parent of a dropout typically chooses is to let the girl child look after younger siblings and the boy going out to earn money. Parental decisions and household environment are key elements to be considered while finding solutions to reduce dropouts.

In their paper "Why Students Dropout from Upper Primary and Secondary School: Evidence from a Combined Laboratory and Field Experiment in Slums and LMC'S of Delhi", P. Yadav and S. Bhardwaj (2014) have observed parents of non-drop out students were poorly educated than parents of non-dropout students. Also, specifically mothers of dropouts were quite poorly educated. This may be considered to be a crucial factor causing dropouts considering education of mother is extremely important for a healthy upbringing of the child. A positive relation between family size and dropout rate can be explained keeping in mind the larger financial burden of the family and a smaller number of resources per child. A negative relation between the number of dropouts and family income is also observed. With regard to dropout by class, maximum dropouts are obtained in classes 6, 8 and 10th. A study of school environment revealed that distance of school was not a factor at all for explaining dropouts.

## III.    Objective of the Study

In this study we are going to analyze which one of the factors among the per-capita annual family income (PCAI) of the student, educational qualification (years of schooling) of the head of the family (EQHOF) of the student, size of agricultural land (SAL) owned by the student's family, distance of school from the house (DSFH) of the student, benefit of mid-day meal program (MDMP), benefit of Kanyashree project (KSB) and the benefit of other scholarship (BOS), if any, is mainly responsible for the reduction of dropout in education at high school level in Nowda block of Murshidabad district in West Bengal, India.

## IV.    Methodology

We have applied a qualitative response model by considering the binary response regression model. Three approaches available in the literature to develop a probability model in binary response situation. They are-
1)  The Linear Probability Model (LPM);
2)  The Logit Model;
3)  The Probit Model;
Because of its comparative simplicity and because it can be estimated by Ordinary Least Square (OLS) method, we have applied the LPM, leaving out other two available methods. Further, because of the non-availability of readily accessible computer packages to estimate the logit and Probit models, the LPM remains appropriate.

The binary variable $DO_i$ takes the values –

$DO_i=1$, if a dropout in education happens at high school level; $DO_i=0$, otherwise.

The binary variable ($DO_i$) is then regressed on a set of explanatory variables that include the per-capita annual family income (PCAI) (in rupees) of the student, educational qualification (year of schooling) of the head of the family (EQHOF) of the student, size of agricultural land (SAL) (in decimal) owned by the student's family, distance of school (in KM) from the house (DSFH) of the student, benefits of mid-day meal program (MDMP), benefits of Kanyashree project (KSB) and the benefit of other scholarship (BOS).

The regression model used for the analysis (both statistical and econometric) of data is given below:

$$DO_i=\alpha+\beta_1 PCAI_i+\beta_2 EQHOF_i+\beta_3 SAL_i+\beta_4 DSFH_i+\beta_5 MDMP_i+\beta_6 KSB_i+\beta_7 BOS_i+u_i$$

where $DO_i$=dropout of student (Yes=1, No.=0), $PCAI_i$= per-capita annual family income (in rupees) of the student, $EQHOF_i$=educational qualification (year of schooling) of the head of the family of the student, $SAL_i$=size of agricultural land (in decimal) owned by the student's family, $DSFH_i$=distance ofschool (in KM) from the house of the student, $MDMP_i$=benefits of mid-day meal programme, $KSB_i$=benefits of Kanyashree project and $BOS_i$=the benefits of other scholarship.

The model looks like a typical linear regression model but because the regressand ($DO_i$) is binary or dichotomous (Yes or No response) in nature, it is called a linear probability model (LPM).The conditional expectation of $DO_i$ given $PCAI_i$, $EQHOF_i$, $SAL_i$, $DSFH_i$, $MDMP_i$, $KSB_i$ and $BOS_i$, i.e., E [$DO_i$/( $PCAI_i$, $EQHOF_i$, $SAL_i$, $DSFH_i$, $MDMP_i$, $KSB_i$, $BOS_i$,)] can be interpreted as the conditional probability that the event will occur given $PCAI_i$, $EQHOF_i$, $SAL_i$, $DSFH_i$, $MDMP_i$, $KSB_i$, and $BOS_i$, that is, P[$DO_i$ /( $PCAI_i$, $EQHOF_i$, $SAL_i$, $DSFH_i$, $MDMP_i$, $KSB_i$, $BOS_i$,)]. Thus, in our analysis E [$DO_i$/( $PCAI_i$, $EQHOF_i$, $SAL_i$, $DSFH_i$, $MDMP_i$, $KSB_i$, $BOS_i$)] gives the probability of a student drop out of high school whose per-capita annual family income (in rupees) of the student, educational qualification (year of schooling) of the head of the family of the student, size of agricultural land (in decimal) owned by the student's family, distance of school (in KM) from the house of the student, benefit of mid-day meal program, benefit of Kanyashree project and the benefit of other scholarship are denoted by $PCAI_i$, $EQHOF_i$, $SAL_i$, $DSFH_i$, $MDMP_i$, $KSB_i$, and $BOS_i$, respectively.

## V. Data

The study is based on primary data. The data of the aforementioned eight variables have been collected by sample survey of ninety-nine families from five schools of Nowda block of Murshidabad District in West Bengal. The total sample size is, therefore, 99 and the data on the above eight variables have beencollected at random from five schools of the same. Here we have considered general education (education of the head of the families) at graduation level that covers arts, commerce and science. No professional courses completed by them have been considered. The reason behind focusing on the general education of the head of the families is that a large percentage of the head of the families have been completed general stream education. As most of the students' families have low per capita annual income, and the schools are in most cases located at distant places and the education of the head of the families of the students is, in most cases, very low, the students can hardly go to the schools for education.

## VI. Results and Findings

The estimation of the coefficients of the LPM is done by OLS method. The estimated regression becomes

$$\hat{DO_i}=0.79-0.00001 PCAI_i-0.04 EQHOF_i-0.00007 SAL_i+0.06 DSFH_i-0.09 MDMP_i-0.26 KSB_i-0.50 BOS_i .. (1)$$

SE = 0.09   0.000       0.006       0.001       0.018       0.071       0.117   0.152

 t= 8.65   -2.31       -6.66       -0.05       3.27     -1.23       -2.21     -3.29

Sig. = 0.00   0.023       0.000       0.957       0.002         0.222       0.029     0.001

$R^2$=0.60 Adj.$R^2$=0.57 F=19.24 Sig.F=0.000

Let us now interpret the above regression results. The value of intercept of the regression is positive and statistically significant at less than one percent probability level implying that probability can never be negative. The coefficient 0.00001 attached to $PCAI_i$ implies that, other things remaining same, a one rupee increase in per-capita annual income of the students' family will lead to about a 0.00001 decrease in the probability of a student to have dropout of school. In other words, if there is an increase in per capita annual income by Rs.100, the probability of school dropout will reduce by 0.001 percent which is very negligible. Similarly, other things being equal, an increase in the education (year of schooling) of the head of the family of a student by a yearwill lead to reduce the probability of school dropout by about 0.04, i.e., about 4 percent. Further, the increase in the size of agricultural land by one decimal of the students' family will reduce the probability of school dropout by 0.00007 which is, however, statistically insignificant. Moreover, the larger the distances between the residences of a student to his school the probability of his/her dropout will be raised by 0.06. Furthermore, increase in mid-day meal to an extra one student will reduce probability of dropout

by 0.09 although it is not statistically significant; whereas an increase in Kanyashree benefit to an extra one student will reduce probability of school dropout by 0.26 i.e. by 26% which is statistically significant too at less than one percent probability level. Lastly, an increase in the benefit of other scholarships will also reduce the probability of school dropout by 0.5 i.e. by 50% which is also statistically significant at less than one percent probability level.

## VII. Conclusion

The study concludes that among the seven chosen factors, the Kanyashree projects and other scholarships have the greatest impact on the probability of school dropout such that an increase in Kanyashree benefit and an increase in other scholarships too, mostly reduced the probability of school dropout and they are also statistically significant at less than one percent probability level. Increase in education of the head of the students' family and an increase in distances between the schools and residences of the students are two other significant factors that affect school dropouts. Further, an increase in education of the head of the students' family will reduce the probability of school dropout but an increase in distance between schools and residences of the student will increase the probability of school dropout and they are a l s o statistically significant. The impact of other two factors, namely, the income (per capita annual) of the students' families and the size of agricultural land of a student's family are very much negligible and the latter is not statistically significant too.

Here the most striking result is that the increase in Kanyashree benefits and the benefits of other scholarship reduced the probability of school dropouts most significantly where the Kanyashree project became the world wide most appreciated project of the Government of West Bengal. The findings are also statistically significant at less than one percent probability level. This may be happened due to the fact that those benefits were optimally utilized.

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