



PREVENTING DROPOUT IN BANGLADESH

CREATE BANGLADESH POLICY BRIEF 6

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Effective policies to improve school progression and reduce the numbers of children dropping out of school are critical if Universal Primary Education (UPE) is to be achieved. Although children are starting primary school in greater numbers than ever before, over half of the children who start primary school do not complete the full cycle of education in many low income countries (Lewin and Sabates, 2011). In Bangladesh although entry into Grade 1 has reached near universal levels the primary school completion rate has remained around 60% since 2000 (World Bank, 2009). Repetition and drop out remain substantial problems. This policy brief examines detailed CREATE data from Bangladesh and makes a number of policy recommendations. It is based on the monograph *School Drop Out in Bangladesh: New Insights from Longitudinal Evidence* (Sabates, R., Hossain A., and Lewin, K., 2010)

Dropping out from school

There are many factors associated with the process of dropping out from school. Some of these factors belong to the individual or child, such as poor health, under-nutrition or lack of motivation to learn (Hunt, 2008). Others emerge from children's household situations such as child labour, migration and poverty.

School level factors also play a role in increasing pressures to drop out such as teacher absenteeism, school location and poor quality educational provision (Alexander, 2008). Both demand and supply driven factors, embedded in cultural and contextual realities, impact on the process of dropping out from school.

Most empirical evidence on drop out from large scale surveys is based on information collected at one point in time. Children who are in school are compared with those who were once in school but who at the time of the survey were not enrolled in order to investigate the possible causes of school dropout. This approach has two shortcomings. First, most observable factors are measured after children

have dropped out from school, and are only able to provide post facto explanations of drop out. Second, this approach fails to recognise that drop out is often a complex process which may include sequences of interrelated events (Lewin, 2007; Hunt, 2008). Thus the process of dropping out from school needs to be studied over time and be related to a number of possible determinants in order to understand its dynamics.

CREATE research explored the factors associated with school dropout using longitudinal data collected over a three year period in Bangladesh in a Community and School Survey (ComSS). The ComSS covered 6,696 households with 9,045 children aged 4-15 years from 18 school catchment areas (12 government primary schools and six registered non-government primary schools). These schools were located in six areas, one in each of the administrative divisions of Bangladesh. In 2009 the same children (now aged 6 to 17) were surveyed again.

Four groups of children were identified: (i) those who were enrolled in school in both 2007 and 2009, (ii)

those who dropped out by 2009 (iii) those who were not enrolled in 2007 but were enrolled in 2009 and (iv) those excluded from education in both 2007 and 2009. The longitudinal nature of the data enables us to investigate patterns of school dropout over time.

Precursors of Dropout – School Related Factors

Identifying precursors of dropout can help us to identify policies that will target children at risk of dropout early. The concept of ‘silent exclusion’ identifies three indicators of being at risk of dropout: repetition, absenteeism and poor performance (Lewin, 2007).

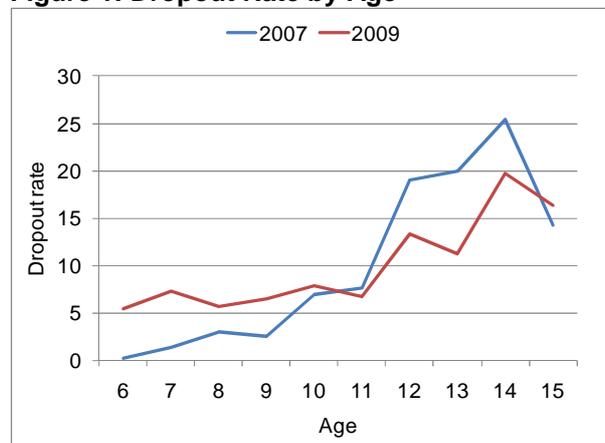
According to ComSS data from Bangladesh, children who dropped out by 2009 already had greater school absenteeism in 2007 than children who remained in school. Similarly, children who dropped out had also higher grade repetition in 2007 than children who remained in school between 2007 and 2009. Finally, children who dropped out were more likely to be identified by their carers as not performing academically relative to other children.

This provides an opportunity for targeting interventions for children who are still in school but who are at high risk of dropping out. Grade repetition, after a few years of primary school, may give schools a clear indication for targeting resources towards children who are at risk, in particular if these children are much older than the rest of their classmates (Lewin, 2007).

Individual Factors Associated with Dropout

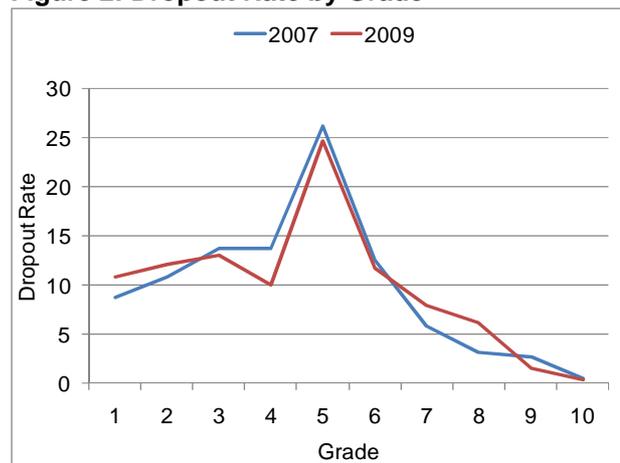
Our results show that gender is associated with likelihood of drop out. Only 34% of children who dropped out were girls. This difference is statistically significant at one percent level (t-test for mean differences 5.89).

Figure 1: Dropout Rate by Age



Drop out children were more likely to be over age by two or more years (33%) compared with children who remained in school (23%). An additional year of age is associated with an increase of 1.57 times in the likelihood of dropping out relative to remaining in education. Dropout peaks at age 14 (Figure 1), but is highest in Grade 5 (Figure 2), at the end of the primary school cycle, when children should be aged 11 – indicating the problem with over age children.

Figure 2: Dropout Rate by Grade



A higher proportion of underweight and overweight children dropped out compared with children who remained in education. Similarly, a higher proportion of children who did not play normally and those who were disabled dropped out.

Household factors

The average time that drop out children spent doing household work was 89 minutes compared with 55 minutes for children who remained in school. The higher the proportion of time that children spend working, the greater the likelihood of dropping out relative to remaining in education.

Bivariate analysis to compare the dropout rates of different subgroups of children revealed that 77% of children who were enrolled in school and who asked for help from their parents received it; only 56% of drop out children received help from their parents. The proportion of drop out children who asked for help and did not receive it (13%) was more than double the proportion of children enrolled in school who asked for help and did not receive it either (6%). Similar differences were found for children who did not ask for help at all.

Using multivariate analysis to reveal the effects of a range of variables on the probability of dropout revealed that compared to children who asked for

help and received, those who asked for help and did not get it were nearly twice as likely to drop out rather than remain in education. Similarly, children who did not ask for help were 1.7 times more likely to drop out than children who asked for help and received it.

The variables that relate to parental interest in the child’s schooling were statistically significant between these groups. A higher proportion of parents whose children remained in school attended parent-teacher meetings, spoke with the teacher or had been visited by the teacher. This last association may indicate that where teachers visit households of those at risk of drop out, their interventions have the effect of reducing subsequent drop out.

Bivariate analysis showed that the education of parents of children who dropped out was lower than for parents of children who remained in school, and a higher proportion of parents of children who dropped out had unskilled occupations, compared with children who remained in school. Multivariate analysis revealed that children of parents with secondary or higher levels of education were 0.61 times less likely to drop out compared with children of parents with less than secondary education.

Finally, there was evidence of differences in child dependency ratio but not in total dependency ratio. A higher child dependency ratio was estimated for the families of children enrolled in education.

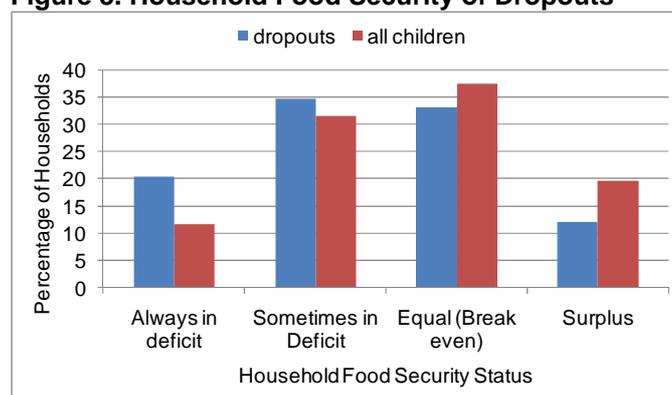
Table 1: Socioeconomic indicators for households of dropout and other children, 2009

Indicators			Level of significance
	Dropout children	Other children	
Monthly household income	Tk. 5,441	Tk. 6,417	p<0.000
Food security status, always in need	15.7%	12.4%	p<0.002
proportion where HHH works as a day labourer	32.2%	25.9%	p<0.000
Has a daily newspaper	1.0%	3.1%	p<0.000
Has a radio	8.5%	12.3%	p<0.001
Has a television	13.1%	21.7%	p<0.000
Has a mobile phone	30.7%	45.5%	p<0.000

Dropout and Poverty

Children who dropped out were more likely to come from poorer households compared with children who remained in school in both periods. This was true of households measured by income (Table 1) and household food security (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Household Food Security of Dropouts



In addition, household income for children who dropped out from school dropped by 2.4% compared with a zero percent real change in household income for parents of children who remained in school.

A higher proportion of children who dropped out lived below the US \$0.50 a day poverty line in 2007 and remained below this poverty line in both time periods, compared with children who were in school. Per capita expenditure in education was associated with likelihood of drop out relative to remaining in education. The higher the per capita expenditure, the lower the chances of school dropout. This may be interrelated with household interest in child schooling as well as income.

Children whose parents have been visited by the teacher have a lower probability of dropping out relative to remaining in education compared with children whose parents have not been visited by the teacher. This result has to be contextualised with respect to reasons why some parents are visited by teachers.

Among household level factors household income and parental education were associated with the likelihood of drop out. Interestingly for income, we found that both the level of income and income growth reduce the likelihood of school dropout. The result for income growth is particularly important. Higher income growth during this period was associated with lower chances of school dropout.

Policy Recommendations

When children who dropped out were compared with those who remained in education clear areas for policy interventions emerge.

- School absenteeism, poor attainment, and grade repetition are precursors of drop out. Schools then, have an important role to play in identifying these children and in targeting efforts to prevent them from leaving education.
- The link between these indicators of 'silent exclusion' and the risk of dropout needs to be made clearly through further research and communication to policy makers and administrators.
- A late start to education provides a clear signal to teachers and head teachers of the probable difficulties that these children will face over time. Clearly late starters will be over age. The older they become, the higher the opportunity cost of schooling in terms of the forgone income that is needed to cover for household needs, even if this income comes from unpaid activities within the household such as child care. Hence, late starters face a high risk of leaving schooling, possibly without even completing a full cycle of primary education. Late starters are identified as possible targets for educational interventions aimed to secure their progression and completion of basic education.
- Children identified as being at risk of dropout need to be given extra support both in school and outside to encourage them to continue. This can involve help with school work for those who are struggling, incentives to attend regularly – in terms of meaningful quality learning as well as financial incentives for the family, and an automatic promotion policy to eliminate unnecessary repetition.
- The relationship between teachers and parents is important in reducing the risk of drop out. Schools need to strengthen links and communication with parents and communities.
- Teachers should be obliged to visit the family of any child who is at risk of dropping out, according to the indicators identified in CREATE research.
- Parents also have an important role to play, not only with the provision of material resources for children, but also helping them when school work. If children do not see that their parents care, perhaps they do not see the value of education either.
- Children who dropped out came from poorer households across this sample of materially deprived children. Direct and indirect costs of education have to be reduced to zero.

- Current stipend schemes are not sufficient to reduce costs to zero so these must be either increased and better targeted or abandoned in favour of school based improvements in health and feeding programmes, school materials as well as more schools and teachers.
- Bangladesh must spend more on education as a proportion of its GDP if there is to be a real improvement in the quality and attractiveness of education.

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This Policy brief is based on CREATE Pathways to Access Monograph No. 49: *School Drop Out in Bangladesh: New Insights from Longitudinal Evidence* (Sabates, R., Hossain, A., and Lewin K., 2010). It has been written by Benjamin Zeitlyn.



CREATE is a DFID-funded research programme consortia exploring issues of educational access, transitions and equity in South Africa, India, Bangladesh and Ghana. For more information go to: www.create-rpc.org