

Non-schooling, early drop out and high absenteeism in selected communities in Sri Lanka

Chandra Gunawardena^{1*} and Swarna Jayaweera²

¹ Faculty of Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala, Nugegoda

² Centre for Women's Research, Colombo 05

The present study attempted to ascertain the incidence of non-school going in households and identify the factors – economic, social, educational, personal – that have contributed to non-schooling or early school leaving. The sample was selected from 22 districts from six community types, village, low income neighbourhood, plantations, urban lower middle class, fishing communities and other (displaced) consisting of 1014 children and 944 parents/caregivers.

The study found that there were more children in school than out of school with little gender difference. The 60.8% out of school children comprised those who had never been to school (15.7%) and those who had dropped out (44.7%). More girls than boys had never been to school and more boys than girls were school dropouts. There were more out of school children in the 10-14 age group. The percentage of out of school children was relatively higher among the Sri Lanka Tamil and plantation Tamil children. Thirty-six per cent of the dropouts had left school before completing primary education. Almost 10 % had been absent through the two weeks of the survey and 44.5% had been absent for more than 5 of the 10 school days.

Poverty and resultant economic constraints of families, indifference of parents and unstable family environments were found to be the major factors of non-schooling, dropout and high absenteeism leading to engagement in paid employment in occupations such as domestic service, manual labour. School related factors such as refusal to admit poor children, or those without birth certificates, lack of facilities for children with disabilities, harsh punishments and lack of transport facilities had also been barriers. Personal problems such as chronic ill-health, disability peer pressure and learning difficulties had contributed to non-schooling and drop out. The findings indicated that multi-pronged strategies are necessary to ensure to all children the right to education.

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