



學生中途輟學與經常缺課

對政策和服務帶來的啓示

School Dropouts and Truants

Implications for the Formulation of Policy and Services

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Summary Report

1. Introduction

School dropouts have become a major problem since the implementation in 1978 of compulsory education up to the age of 15. In the past three years, over 17,000 children from form one to form three have been reported by their schools to the Education Department as suspected dropouts, and of these 8,046 were confirmed. However, the figure may be an underestimation because quite a number of schools do not report cases on schedule and a few do not make any report to the Department. Moreover, an increasing number of students are playing truant, staying at home or fooling around in the streets, sometimes even for weeks. Even though some of them may wish to seek employment, it is illegal to employ anyone under 15. Their prolonged absence from school exposes them to triad influences and increases their chances of becoming a delinquent. Furthermore, if they are readmitted to school after a prolonged absence, they may suffer adjustment difficulties.

Before we suggest ideas for helping these young people, we need a clearer understanding of their problems and needs. The present research on school dropouts and truants has been carried out with the following objectives:

- i. To identify the current procedure for handling dropout cases and to examine its adequacy.
- ii. To explore the problems and difficulties encountered by students before they drop out from school.
- iii. To explore the respondents' reactions to and expectations of the likelihood of dropping out of school themselves.
- iv. To elicit the respondents' comments on the services of the Education Department.

2. Methodology

The survey was carried out by means of mailed questionnaires. A sample of 400 dropouts, who were randomly selected by the Education Department from the full list of 5,221 dropout cases of 1992 to 1993, was invited to complete a self-administered questionnaire. A total of 112 students completed the questionnaire and returned them. Some dropouts not known to the Department had been referred by the school authorities to school social workers. A sample of these cases was also useful to our study. With the help of the school social work services of eight welfare agencies, questionnaires were distributed to the dropouts and 43 completed ones were returned. The sample from the Education Department is the main focus of this study.

3. Respondents' Profile

- 3.1 Male dropouts outnumbered females in the ratio of 4 to 1. Most of the students had dropped out from school at around 14.
- 3.2 Most of the dropouts came from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 32.1% of cases the families earned less than \$7,500 per month. In 67.7% of cases the respondents had two siblings or more. In terms of education, 62.5% of the fathers and 75.9% of the mothers had only had primary education. Single-parent or broken families accounted for 21.6% of the dropouts.

4. Problems Encountered before Dropping Out

- 4.1 Half of the respondents had dropped out in Form 2 and 36.6% in Form 1. Subvented grammar schools accounted for 42.8%, 18.7% were from government schools and 14.3% from prevocational schools.
- 4.2 In terms of academic performance, 83% of respondents had a poor record; the performance of 40.2% had become poor in the previous / present academic year and 33% had been academically poor at primary school.
- 4.3 Around half of the respondents turned to their parents or teachers for help with their academic problems but 17.9% of them did not approach anyone. As claimed by the respondents, 45.3% of parents scolded their children for not working hard but practically no parents directly supervised their children. 13.2% of parents even ignored their call for help.
- 4.4 29.1% of the teachers saw the students or their parents when academic problems arose. 23.6% of the respondents claimed that their calls for help were ignored.
- 4.5 The most common personal problems were emotional, mischievous behaviour, conflicts in the family, inter-parental conflicts and relationships with peers.
- 4.6 About 30% of the respondents turned to their parents, teachers or peers for help with their personal problems. Whereas 13.4% turned to school social workers for help, 29.1% did not approach anyone.
- 4.7 44.7% of the respondents said their parents were concerned about their children whereas 47.1% did not know how to help them.
- 4.8 37.5% of the teachers interviewed the students with problems. 31.3% referred them to school social workers for assistance but 18.7% ignored their calls for help.
- 4.9 66.9% of the personal problems had appeared in the previous twelve months.

5. Experience of Truancy

- 5.1 71.4% of respondents played truant of whom 58.8% had started in the previous twelve months.
- 5.2 50.2% had played truant for less than 7 days and 47.8% for more than 7 days. Most of the latter had been reported to the Education Department and 20.3% had been referred to the school social worker. However, 8.8% of schools had not responded to the respondents' truancy.
- 5.3 Among the truants, 58.9% had been interviewed by teachers and 57.6% of their parents had also been interviewed.

6. Violation of School Regulations

- 6.1 68.8% of respondents had violated school regulations before dropping out. The most common violations were truancy, fighting in school, creating a disturbance in class, being late for school, smoking in school and being disrespectful towards teachers.
- 6.2 33.1% had been suspended from school and 56.7% had been suspended from three days to three months.

7. Process of Expulsion

- 7.1 16.1% of the respondents had been expelled from school and 39.3% had been asked to withdraw. 12.9% had been expelled because of poor academic performance.

8. Reactions towards Becoming a Dropout

- 8.1 67.9% of them considered that schools were to blame for their dropping out. The most common causes were that they *have no sense of belonging* (38.2%), *the teaching methods are unattractive* (35.5%), *the school does not care about the students* (32.9%), *the curriculum was too difficult* (30.3%), and they *have been harassed by triad members in school* (19.7%).
- 8.2 50.9% of them considered that their personal/family problems were related to their dropping out. The most common reasons were that they felt *unable to study* (52.6%), *upset by personal problems* (41.4%), *they wanted to do better but failed* (33.3%), there were *poor relationships in the family* (26.3%) and *their friends also quit school* (26.3%).
- 8.3 The most common feelings about dropping out were *feeling free* (30.4%), *feeling all right because I will soon be 15* (30.4%), *bored because I am too young to work* (28.6%) and *feeling useless* (17.9%).

- 8.4 57.3% of them had the desire to go back to school. 28.6% preferred another similar school, 25% preferred the original school and 20.5% preferred a special practical school.
- 8.5 The favourite subjects of the special practical schools were haircutting (33.9%), cookery (33%) and computers (28.6%). 68.8% supported the proposed exchange scheme among secondary schools.

9. Follow-up Service of the Education Department

- 9.1 54.5% of respondents confirmed that they had been contacted by the Education Department, 65.7% of those contacts had been made within a month.
- 9.2 Through the Department's intervention, 16.4% went back to school after having been at home for an average of five and a half months before being readmitted.
- 9.3 Despite the Department's intervention, 82% did not go back to school. 48% had no intention to or interest in continuing to study. 16% were rejected by the original schools. 10% were rejected by the school introduced by the Department and 8% received no offer from the Department.

10. Discussion

10.1 Deprived background of the respondents

Quite a number of the respondents came from a deprived background. Their parents mostly had only primary education and had a relatively low income with which to support a family with more than two children. One-fifth of the respondents came from single-parent or broken families. The findings show that in the opinion of the respondents, many parents had conflicts, did not know how to help their children or did not have time to attend to them. Consequently, few of the respondents wanted to approach their parents for help.

10.2 Causes of dropping out

The process of becoming a dropout is cumulative. From six months to two years before dropping out, 70% of the respondents had played truant and the school had interviewed the parents many times. Most of them were poor academic performers, some had been ever since primary school. After their admission to secondary school, they found the curriculum difficult, the teaching method not stimulating, felt that the school did not care about them, and that triad members in school harassed them. The combination of a deprived background coupled with the personal adjustment problems which often appear in adolescence but for which they lacked proper guidance from parents and teachers, triggered off truancy which led to eventually dropping out of school altogether.

10.3 *The procedure for handling dropout cases*

The existing procedure cannot respond quickly enough to the dropouts. A majority of cases were contacted by the Education Department three weeks after non-attendance. Under the present procedure, the school is only required to report the non-attendance to the Department, but not prior symptoms of potential dropouts like truancy. Moreover there is no standard practice for the schools to deal with these symptoms. A majority of the respondents were asked to leave school on account of their poor conduct and academic performance. For those who still have an interest in studying, it is not desirable for them to do nothing for a few months before going back to school. The whole process of handling dropout cases needs to be expedited.

10.4 *The role of school social workers*

If a student is in the habit of playing truancy, e.g. twice or more, the involvement of a school social worker in the helping process is a good idea. The findings indicate that of the 46.5% respondents who played truant for more than 7 days, 20.3% had been referred to school social workers for assistance. The rest were awaiting follow-up action from the Education Department which takes time to make contact. The schools should make more effective use of the school social workers who are stationed in school on a regular basis.

11. **Recommendations**

11.1 *To increase the resources and improve the quality of primary education*

The study reveals that many students have had a poor academic performance since they were in primary school. These students would naturally find it difficult to catch up in secondary school. The government should allocate more resources to primary education with special attention to underachievers.

11.2 *Provision of alternative education*

Most of the dropouts cannot adjust to a grammar school syllabus. The Education Commission has endorsed the setting up of four special practical schools. The one on Hong Kong island is in service while another one in Yuen Long will open in September 1994. We strongly support the early implementation of the other two schools so that alternative education can be made available.

11.3 *More resources to band 4 and 5 schools*

Since most of the dropouts are from a deprived background, the government should apply positive discrimination and allocate more resources to band 4 and 5 schools where dropping out is likely, in order to support remedial teaching and more skills training and visits. Activities in school should help students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and provide more information and advice on the choice of career.

11.4 *Early intervention and joint efforts from schools and school social work service*

The findings indicate that many symptoms like poor academic performance, personal problems or truancy appeared six months or two years before the respondents dropped out. We propose a quick approach to render assistance. If a student plays truant for more than two days, the counselling teacher and school social worker should be called upon to follow up the case. The purpose is to help students resume schooling as swiftly as possible and the school social worker should continue to assist the student and his/her family. Difficult cases can be transferred to the Non-attendance Cases Team of the Education Department for service.

11.5 *Setting up a district exchange scheme among schools*

Some students do not adjust well to the present school environments and some may be at odds with the teaching staff or their classmates. Some may have been harassed by triad members in school. A district exchange scheme, probably to be monitored by the District Education Office, could help students carry on their studies in another school. The Student Guidance Section of the Education Department can offer guidance and school social workers of both the original and the new school can work together to enable the smooth transition of the students.

11.6 *Employment entry programmes*

Some dropouts prefer to quit school and to start working. However, many of them do not have good working habits and cannot adjust to the working environment. Hence, they tend to change jobs frequently and some even give up finding a job which is legal. We believe that the commercial sector has an important part to play in helping these youngsters who can become good sources of labour. The companies could offer quota for these youngsters in their operational departments who would work under the supervision of a placement officer from a welfare agency for three to six months and could learn working skills from other staff of the company. The close supervision would help youngsters adjust smoothly to the world of employment.

11.7 *Joint efforts to combat triad influence in schools*

About one-fifth of the dropouts who quit schools say they were once threatened or harassed by triad members in school. We believe that triad members are active in a number of schools though some students who harass others in the name of a triad society are not genuine members. It is essential for the Police, schools and the Education Department to come together to help students recognize and deal with triad harassment in school.