

FAILURE TO STAY IN SCHOOL: A STUDY ON FEMALE ADOLESCENT DROPOUTS

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ABSTRACT

This study delved on the profile, reasons for dropping out, difficulties and insights of female adolescent dropouts. The respondents were 10 female adolescent high school dropouts residing in San Pablo City, Philippines. They were either high school juniors or seniors aged 16-19. A case study method was employed in this research and interviews conducted were aided by a self-made instrument, an interview guide that was translated to Filipino. The results revealed that there were numerous reasons why the participants left school before graduation such as financial issues, illness, peer pressure, teenage pregnancy and family-related problems. On the other hand, difficulties encountered by the dropouts included coping with the new lifestyle as a dropout and a teenage mother, finding a decent job and experiencing boredom. The author concluded that family, as well as peers had a great impact on the lives of the female adolescent dropouts.

Keywords: adolescent, dropout, family, peer

INTRODUCTION:

School is a second home to most adolescents. It opens opportunities for academic learning and widens the teenagers' social horizons as they interact with their teachers and peers (Ormrod, 2011). Despite the efforts of parents and teachers in encouraging the adolescents to complete their education, many of them still leave school before graduation. Those who fail to finish high school may face more problems as they enter adult life than do individuals who graduate. Thus, the future of these dropouts, as well as their potential for success seems bleak, as they are more likely to be unemployed or to earn less than those who hold diploma. Thus, past studies have tried to identify who drops out of school in order to deepen the understanding of the issue and to help stakeholders in developing appropriate programs that will cease the increasing number of high school dropouts (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

According to Santrock (1998), adolescence is a phase in life where one is in transition from childhood to adulthood. It has also been viewed as a period characterized by various conflicts and confusion. Many young people who lack behavioral and emotional stability often engage in activities which seem to have negative effects on their well-being. Such activities include smoking, drinking, using prohibited drugs, engaging in premarital sex and committing delinquencies in school which may result to the event of dropping out. Some parents do agree that it is difficult to raise adolescent sons and daughters because they are struggling hard to be adults and to be accepted by peers (Mendoza, 1994). Teenagers, on the other hand, feel that their parents do not understand them at all especially when they begin to relate their problems (Castelo, 1994).

Numerous researches have attempted to identify the various reasons for dropping out of school. Most of these studies focused on family, peer, community, and education-related factors, as well as the student themselves as being the root of the problem. As for many cases of female adolescent dropouts, teenage pregnancy was considered the culprit (Cavanaugh, 2007).

According to Ormrod (2011), the following are the characteristics of a potential school dropout:

- from low socioeconomic background
- with poor academic achievement and school attendance
- has repeated one or more grades or has history of academic failure
- has friends or family members who dropped out of school
- has an illness or disability
- is pregnant
- has low self-esteem or self-efficacy
- has less academic support from family, peers and teachers
- works to support the family
- experiences peer pressure
- is involved in school delinquencies

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED:

Some of the high school dropouts consider life as a living prison. They spend their unproductive hours either at home or out on the streets. Most female adolescent dropouts miss going to school, to learn and to socialize with their peers. Other seems to worry that their friends and family members may treat them indifferently or may label them as outcasts or losers. Furthermore, the teen dropouts' lack of purpose and direction jeopardizes their likelihood for success and the realization of slipping into poverty if they do not finish school seems irrelevant for them. Those who are fortunate enough to land a job either receive a minimum or below the minimum wage for lack of educational qualifications (Panday, 2008).

According to Papalia, Olds & Feldman (2007), teenage mothers who dropped out of school are faced with new roles and big responsibilities both as a parent and life partner. They seem to lack the maturity and skills to be good parents which may lead to their children ending up in the same fate as them. In addition, the adolescent mothers might find it difficult to provide the financial needs of their children, since they are most likely to stay at home while their partners who are also dropouts seek for menial jobs.

INSIGHTS GAINED:

The hackneyed line "Experience is the best teacher" is probably one of the realizations of the female adolescent dropouts. What they fail to learn in school, they hope to learn from their everyday life experiences.

Some of the dropouts express their willingness to go back to school if given the chance. The realization that

education was important did not seem to dawn on them before they dropped out, but seems to have hit home now that they are dropouts and struggling to live a productive life (Dusek, 1996).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

This paper specifically attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the personal and academic profiles of the female adolescent dropouts?
2. What are their reasons for dropping out of high school?
3. What are the difficulties they have encountered as a dropout?
4. What are their realizations or insights?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This research was significant to the study of psychology because it provided a better understanding of a critical stage in life, which is the adolescence stage. The data gathered gave a glimpse on the behaviors, feelings and thoughts of the female adolescent drop-outs. Furthermore, it was important to know their reasons for dropping out because it involved issues on family and education.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE:

The respondents in this study were 10 female adolescent dropouts whose ages range from 16-19. They were either high school juniors or seniors at the time of dropping out. All were residents of San Pablo City, Laguna. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. A case study method was employed in this research to arrive at a comprehensive knowledge of the respondents' profile, reasons for dropping out, difficulties as dropouts and insights or realizations on being dropouts.

The researcher utilized a self-made instrument which was an interview guide translated to Filipino and validated by experts. It was through referrals from peers and information obtained from various schools, that the author was able to obtain her 10 participants. Aside from note-taking, the researcher also made use of a recorder throughout the interview sessions. Since qualitative method was used in this study, the data gathered were transcribed and were presented in narratives and tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The results of this paper focused on four major areas, namely, the profile, reasons for dropping out, difficulties encountered and insights gained by the female adolescent dropouts. These variables would allow us to have a better understanding of the factors which would account for the occurrence of dropping out.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Profile	Respondent A	Respondent B	Respondent C	Respondent D	Respondent E
Age	17	18	17	18	16
Current Status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Birth Order	Eldest (Brood of 6)	Eldest (Brood of 2)	Youngest (Brood of 4)	Youngest (Brood of 4)	6th (Brood of 10)
Socio Economic Status	Low income	Low income	Average income	Low income	Low income
Parents' Occupation	Father: Businessman Mother: Housewife	Father: Unemployed Mother: OFW	Father: Gov't Employee Mother: Storekeeper	Father: Employee Mother: Housewife	Father: Carpenter Mother: Laundry woman
History of Drop-outs in the family	Relatives	Relatives	Brother	Father and Relatives	Parents and Siblings
Year Level at the time of dropping out	4 th Year H.S.	4 th Year H.S.	3 rd Year H.S.	3 rd Year H.S.	4 th Year H.S.
Presence of a Guidance Center in the school last attended	Has guidance center	Has no guidance center	Has guidance center	Has guidance center	Has no guidance center
Academic Performance	Above Average	Average	Average	Average	Average

Profile	Respondent F	Respondent G	Respondent H	Respondent I	Respondent J
Age	16	18	17	16	19
Current Status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Has a live-in partner
Birth Order	2 nd (Brood of 4)	Only child	Eldest (Brood of 2)	Eldest (Brood of 3)	Eldest (Brood of 3)
Socio Economic Status	Low income	Average income	Low income	Low income	Average income

Parents' Occupation	Father: Unemployed Mother: Saleslady	Father: Businessman Mother: Employee	Father: Factory worker Mother: Fish vendor	Father: Unemployed Mother: Performer	Father: Businessman Mother: Housewife
History of Drop-outs in the family	Sisters	None	Brother	Relatives	None
Year Level at the time of dropping out	3 rd Year H.S.	3 rd Year H.S.	4 th Year H.S.	4 th Year H.S.	4 th Year H.S.
Presence of a Guidance Center in the school last attended	Has no guidance center	Has guidance center	Has no guidance center	Has guidance center	Has guidance center
Academic Performance	Below Average	Average	Average	Average	Above average

PROFILE:

Majority of the participants were from lowincome families and who had family members who were also high school dropouts. Previous studies on dropouts revealed that many students who left school before graduation came from low socioeconomic background and had history of dropouts in the family. Apparently, conditions at home, as well as family dynamics seemed to have an impact on the lives of the respondents. Two of the female dropouts had fathers who were involved in extra marital affair, while some had fathers who were unemployed. In the case of Respondent B, her mother worked abroad and was left under the care of her father who was an alcoholic and a womanizer. Other respondents felt that no matter how hard their parents work, they would always end up struggling to make both ends meet. Even more unfortunate was the fact that some of the respondents were a few months away from graduation and it did nothing to stop them from quitting high school. The schools that the participants attended were either private or public school which indicated that the occurrence of dropout exist to both school systems in the Philippines. In addition, some of the dropouts were aware of the existence of the guidance center or office in their school, but seem to have not availed of its services one of which is counseling. On the other hand, Respondents B, E, F and H admitted that their schools had no guidance office or center. Past researches showed that poor academic achievement was one of the various reasons for dropping out. Surprisingly, eight out of the ten participants had average to above average academic performance. The participants had different reasons for dropping out, none of which included poor academic performance or achievement.

Table 2. Reasons for Dropping-out, Difficulties Encountered and Insights Gained by the Participants

	Respondent A	Respondent B	Respondent C	Respondent D	Respondent E
Reasons for Dropping-out	Father had an illicit affair.	Distressing family condition	Teenage Pregnancy	Peer Influence	Financial Difficulties
Difficulties Encountered	Difficulty coping with situation at home; envies her friends who are still in school	Difficulty coping with situation at home; having regrets; difficulty looking for a job	Getting low grades; difficulty coping with the new situation as a drop-out and an expectant mother	Financial difficulties; Difficulty looking for a job	Not being able to share her problems with her family; Financial Difficulties; Missed school life
Insights Gained	Family and education are both important. Never waste an opportunity. Never Lose Hope. Trials make a person stronger.	Family is important. One must be brave in facing challenges. One must learn to be independent.	It is hard to be a dropout. Experiences are the best teachers in life. One must not lose hope and always be optimistic. Never waste an opportunity.	Never waste an opportunity. One must learn to take risks. Be decisive. Family should come first.	Experience is the best teacher. One must prioritize his or her family. Never lose hope. Strive harder. A big family can pose financial difficulties.

	Respondent F	Respondent G	Respondent H	Respondent I	Respondent J
Reasons for Dropping-out	Peer Influence	Traumatic Experience	Financial Difficulties	Illness (Leukemia)	Teenage Pregnancy
Difficulties Encountered	Jealous of her sister who is still in school; Financial difficulties	Difficulty dealing with her traumatic experience as a victim of harassment	Financial Difficulties; Missed school life; feels bored; lifestyle adjustment difficulty	Financial difficulties; Difficulty going through a serious illness	Strained family relationship ; missing her children; difficulty looking for a job
Insights Gained	Be decisive. Never waste an opportunity. Education is important.	Learn to deal well with people. One should not trust easily. Learn to value family and education	It is hard to be a dropout. One must be decisive. Never lose hope. Family should come first. Experience is the best teacher.	One must value life more. Appreciate simple things in life. Live life to the fullest. Education is important.	One must prioritize family. Success can be achieved even if the person is a dropout.

REASONS FOR DROPPING-OUT:

The reasons why the participants were unable to finish high school included family- related problems, peer pressure, teenage pregnancy, financial issues, illness and traumatic experience.

Respondents A and B shared their sentiments regarding their family condition. Both have fathers who had illicit affairs which created tension among their family members. The former was forced to withdraw from school because her father could no longer support her education. She later found out that he financially supported his mistress and her children. Similarly, Respondent B was experiencing strained relationship with her father, who was a womanizer and an alcoholic. Her mother, who worked abroad, would come home once a year. It did not come as a surprise that they view family-related problems as reasons for dropping out.

Respondents C and J left school before graduating from high school because they were expectant mothers. Both were honest enough to admit that they were already engaging in premarital sex at an early age without realizing its negative consequences. They thought that it is a normal occurrence, since some of their friends were also having sexual intercourse with their boyfriends. They felt that their peers played an important role in the way they handled relationships and viewed sex. When they learned about their pregnancy, they were worried and scared especially when the school authorities asked them to drop out. However, Respondents D and F, cited peer pressure as their reason for dropping out. Respondent D was convinced by her friend to work as an entertainer in Japan. She was also encouraged by her other friends and neighbors, who had family members working as performers abroad. On the other hand, Respondent F had friends who would always skip school. She would tag along with them whenever they cut classes. They also taught her to engage in some vices such as drinking alcohol and smoking.

Respondents E and H dropped out of school because their parents were no longer capable of sending them to school. As high school seniors, they were required to submit more projects which would entail additional expenses. The financial struggles they had, made them withdraw from school and allowed them to consider entering the work force.

Respondent G quit high school because of a traumatic experience she had in school. She was a victim of harassment which caused her emotional distress. She decided to leave school and was hoping to return next school year.

An unexpected illness prompted Subject I to leave school before graduation. She was diagnosed with leukemia and with a poor prognosis. She constantly needed to go to the hospital for treatment and the doctor soon advised her to drop out.

DIFFICULTIES AS DROPOUTS:

The difficulties of the respondents included difficulty coping with the conditions at home, as well as difficulty adjusting to a new lifestyle as a high school dropout. They would spend most of their time at home, feeling bored and less productive. Furthermore, some of the respondents had a hard time looking for a job because they were minors. The teenage mothers, on the other hand, worried about their babies' future as well as theirs. Most of the respondents envied their friends and classmates who were still in school. One respondent found, dealing with her illness challenging while the other was still struggling to cope with the trauma she experienced in school.

INSIGHTS GAINED:

Most of the participants realized the importance of education and family. They believed that education was one of the key factors to success and regret having to leave school. For some, they learned the value of optimism and independence. Some claimed that experiences for them were the best teachers in life. Majority of respondents said that one should never waste an opportunity and should be brave enough to face life challenges. Ultimately, they realized that being a dropout was a no laughing matter.

CONCLUSION:

- Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the event of dropping out can happen to anyone, as evidenced by the participants' diverse background. Furthermore, family, as well as peers had a great impact on the lives of the female adolescent dropouts.
- Droppingout of school is not an escape from the difficulties encountered at home and in school. By quitting school, the existing problems and difficulties of the dropouts escalate and new ones emerge.
- Overall, the event of droppingout of high school is not just a problem in our education system. It is a societal issue concerning the family, community, and even the economy. As the rate of dropouts increases so does the unemployment rate.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Conduct further researches with more participants so that more valuable information can either support or refute past researches on school dropouts
- Conduct follow-up studies which might look into the other areas of dropping out such as its impact on culture and the education system
- Schools should create programs or activities for students who are at risk or for those who are potential dropouts.
- School and home coordination must be established so that personal, family and academic issues of students can be properly addressed.
- Students should be made aware of the different services that their guidance centers/offices offer in their school so they know where they can turn to for counseling.

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