EDUCATION QUARTERLY, December 2009, Vol. *67* (1), 62-78
U.P. College of Education

Factors in School Leaving: Variations Across Gender Groups, School Levels and Locations[1]

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Abstract

The effect of poverty on school leaving was examined for various *gender* groups, *school levels* and *school locations* based on interview data of *dropouts* (n = 38), *parents* of dropouts (n = 18), *teachers* (n = 13) and *school administrators* of 4 purposively selected elementary and secondary schools in urban and rural locations. By segregating responses according to gender, school level and location of respondents, specific factors related to school level were identified for male and female, elementary and secondary, and urban and rural school dropouts. *Employment activities* were common among older dropouts, especially the *males*, while *domestic duties* such as caring for younger siblings were most true of *females*, especially those from *rural* areas. *Low motivation* was also evident among *male* and *younger* school dropouts.

Keywords: attrition, dropout, school leaving, gender differences, poverty, school adjustment, school attendance, school participation

Ensuring that students stay in school until they complete their education is a major concern in basic education (National Education and Testing Research Center, 1990). Cohort Survival Rates (CSR) for the past 10 years have fluctuated between 60 % and 80 % in both elementary and secondary levels (Department of Education, 2008). These statistics mean that about between 20 to 40 % of Grade 1 pupils do not reach Grade 6; of the 60 to 75 % who enter secondary school, about one-third of them do not finish high school. If the numbers are added up, they indicate that about half of Grade 1 pupils complete secondary level; the other half are, for one reason or another, lost along the way.

These facts reflect a worrisome reality about the holding power of public schools, which is further elucidated by data on dropouts. The statistics on the national average dropout rate for *each* school level has remained higher than expected (1 to 2 %), sometimes as much as 2 digits. Moreover, even if dropouts re-enter school at some point,

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many repeaters eventually drop out at a later time. Re-admission seems to have little positive effect on achievement (Finnan & Chasin, 2007).

Increasing government funding has not also completely addressed the dropout problem. Despite the general increase in allocation for education through the past years, the dropout problem remains one of the challenges for educators. Contrary to expectation, allotting more funds to public education did *not* necessarily bring about substantial reduction in dropout rates. This is because increase in budget did not match increase in population and, consequently, in enrollment. *The per capita* budget has actually *decreased* through the years. The budget for basic education has increased by 25 per cent from 2000 (PhP 80 M) to 2009 (PhP150M). However, the real value of per capita cost has decreased from PhP6,000 in 2000 to PhP4,000 in 2009 (Department of Education, 2009). Thus, increase in dropout rates is not surprising despite increase in the budget because there have been more students accommodated by the public schools than could be adequately financed.

Studies on dropping out have attributed the phenomenon mainly to *poverty* (Barton, 2006). One extensive critical review of about 50 studies on public school education (Barsaga, 1995) described dropouts as coming from *low-income* families whose parents had little or no education, and who were unemployed or had jobs that gave them little or irregular income. The study also identified reasons for dropping out such as *poor health* due to *malnutrition*, *distance* between home and school, *lack of interest*, and *teacher factor*. It concluded that the education system then was "socially selective" since *most* dropouts were from *socio-economically disadvantaged* backgrounds.

More recent studies have revealed other intriguing facts about dropping out. First, majority of those who stopped schooling did so during the *first two* or *three years* of elementary and secondary education. Dropout rates in the first 3 levels of elementary and in the first 2 levels of high school were *higher* than those in other grade or year levels (Department of Education, 2006). For example, dropout rate in Grade 1 (1.97 %) was higher than that in Grade 6 (1.06 %); in the secondary level the dropout rate that in first year (8.09 %) was also higher than that in fourth year (3.77 %). Second, gender comparisons showed that *boys* had *higher* dropout rates in both elementary and secondary levels compared to girls (1.69 % and 0.97 % respectively in the former, and 8.85 % and 4.26 % respectively in the latter). Among out-of-school youth, there were also gender disparities that "weighted against boys" (UNESCO, 2005). There were 1.5 more boys who were out of school than there were girls. Despite such information, lack of carefully planned studies on dropouts has deterred the formulation of long-term solutions to prevent dropping out (Samuels, 2007).

This paper examines specific factors and circumstances that led to dropping out in different gender groups, school levels, and locations. More specifically, it identifies the causes of dropping out for boys and girls, for those in the lower and higher school levels, and for those in urban and rural settings. By comparing the reasons offered by urban and rural male and female dropouts who left school during the first and higher school levels,

this report provides a detailed insight on the unique factors that affect subgroups of dropouts and reveals various contexts in which school leaving occurs.

Method

This study applies the procedures of *qualitative* research design in the selection of participants, data collection and data analysis. The approach was chosen to obtain a *detailed description* of the factors that influenced dropping out (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders that included dropouts, parents of dropouts, teachers and school administrators. The inclusion of various groups addressed the need to validate data collected through triangulation.

Participants were drawn from four schools purposively chosen to represent urban and rural elementary and secondary schools. These four schools were selected from a list of schools with the *highest* dropout rates for the past 5 years. The *urban elementary school*, located in a city in Region III, had a population of 700, and a teacher-student ratio of 1:44. The *urban secondary school* was situated in a relocation area for urban poor in Region III, with a large school population (3,707) and a high teacher-student ratio (1:71). The *rural elementary school* was a small school (126 pupils) and a low teacher-student ratio (1:25), occupying a plain surrounded by hills and a forest in an area of armed conflict in Mindanao. Finally the *rural secondary school* was in a fishing village in Region VI, with 505 students and a manageable teacher-student ratio (1:39).

School administrators assisted in identifying dropouts and their parents, and in transporting them to the school for the interviews. A total of 38 dropouts participated in individual interviews (Table 1), 22 (58 %) from urban schools and 16 (42 %) from rural schools, among whom were 18 (47 %) males and 20 (53 %) females. Of this number, 42 per cent (n = 16) were elementary school dropouts and the rest, 58 % (n = 22), high school dropouts.

Table 1
Distribution of Dropouts Individually Interviewed (N = 38)

LOCATION	ELEMENTARY				SECONDARY				TOTAL	
	M		F		M		F		M	F
	Gr 1-2	Gr 3-6	Gr 1-2	Gr 3-6	Yr I	Yr II-IV	Yr I	Yr II-IV		
URBAN	4	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	11	11
RURAL	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	4	7	9
TOTAL	6	3	3	4	4	5	5	8	18	20
GRAND TOTAL	9 (24%)		7 (18%)		9 (24%)		13 (34%)		38 (100%)	

Parents of dropouts were also invited to come for separate in-depth individual interviews to supplement and validate the responses of dropouts. A total of 18 *parents* and/or family members who stood as *guardian* for the dropout (grandmother, aunt, sister) were able to participate (Table 2). Most of the parents or guardians interviewed were

those of elementary school dropouts (n = 12, 67 %); only one-third were those of high school dropouts (n = 6, 33 %).

Table 2
Distribution of Parent/Guardian in Individual Interviews (N = 18)

	ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY	TOTAL
URBAN	8 (44%)	5 (28%)	13 (72%)
RURAL	4 (22%)	1 (6%)	5 (28%)
TOTAL	12 (67%)	6 (33%)	18 (100%)

In addition to dropouts and parents of dropouts, *two teachers* who had previously taught classes with *high dropout rates* were selected for separate interviews from each of the four participating schools: one teacher who taught a *lower* grade/level (Grade 1 or 2 , or first year high school) and another, a *higher* level (Grade 3 to 6, or second to fourth year high school). A total of 13 teachers were individually interviewed (Table 3), 38 % (n = 5) of whom were elementary school teachers and 62 % (n = 8) were secondary school teachers. Eight (62 %) were from the two urban schools, and 5 (38 %) from the two rural schools. Finally, the *heads* of all four schools were also interviewed, 3 of them principals, and 1 teacher-in-charge.

Table 3
Distribution of Teachers Interviewed (N = 13)

LOCATION	ELEMENTARY		SECONDARY		TOTAL
	Gr 1-2	Gr 3-6	Yr I	Yr II-IV	
URBAN	1	1	2	4	8 (62%)
RURAL	1	2	1	1	5 (38%)
TOTAL	2	3	3	5	13
GRAND TOTAL	5 (38%)		8 (62%)		13 (100%)

A *checklist* of possible *causes* or *reasons* for dropping out was used during the first part of each individual interview with dropouts and parents/guardians. This list of causes was developed from a review of studies on dropouts. It was accompanied by follow-up or probe questions. A Filipino version, which was deemed more suitable for younger pupils, was also prepared. For principals and teachers, a separate *open-ended interview guide* was formulated. The interview guide steered the interviews toward identifying *specific* reasons for dropping out by gender groups (male vs. female), location (urban vs. rural), and grade levels (Grade 1 or 2 vs. Grades 3 to 6, and first year high school vs. higher year levels).

Responses to the checklist were tallied by groups of respondents. *Frequencies* and *percentages* were computed for each cause or reason. Causes or reasons with the highest percentages (relative to sample size indicated in parentheses) as well as those that are unique for each group are displayed in tables. (Complete and detailed tables are available upon request.) Qualitative analysis was performed on data obtained during in-depth

interviews. Using cross-case analysis, responses across different subgroups were compared to find similarities and differences.

Results

Differences between gender groups. Most male (n = 18) and female (n = 20) dropouts left school because of ***financial reasons*** (Table 4). Half of them had to ***work*** (both 50 %); some ***lacked money for projects*** (44 % and 50 %), ***contributions*** (39 % and 45 %), and ***daily allowance*** (33 % and 55 %). About one-third dropped out because they ***lived far*** from school, or did not have transportation money; for this reason, about one-third of male elementary school dropouts also mentioned *tiredness from walking* to school as a reason for leaving. In addition, male dropouts cited school-related causes such as poor *attitudes* (***laziness*** to attend class, 44 % and ***lack of interest*** in the lessons, 11 %), ***absences*** (6 %), and ***poor academic performance*** (6 %). The crucial role played by a child-friendly teacher particularly for young boys in the early grades was reflected in the attribution of dropping out to ***teacher factor*** (fear of teacher) by some 40 % of them. On the other hand, half of female dropouts left school because they had to ***take care of siblings***, a task shared by both young and older females, but seemingly delegated more to younger girls (86 %) than to older ones (31%). This was also true of male elementary school dropouts; about one-third of them left school to take care of siblings. Younger pupils are also more prone to sickness which explains why it was identified as a cause for dropping out by 33 % of boys and 43 % of girls interviewed.

Table 4

*Causes for Dropping Out by Gender and Level**

MALE (n = 18)		**FEMALE (n = 20)**	
Work (50%) **Lazy to attend class (44%)** No money for projects (44%) No money for school contributions (39%) Lived far from school (33%) No pocketmoney for lunch (33%) **Not interested in lesson (11%)** **Absences (6%)** **Parental abuse (6%)** **Poor academic performance (6%)**		**No pocketmoney for lunch (55%)** **Taking care of siblings (50%)** Work (50%) No money for projects (50%) No money for school contributions (45%) Lived far from school (35%) **Sibling sick (35%)** **No money for transportation (30%)**	
ELEM (n = 9)	**HS (n = 9)**	**ELEM (n = 7)**	**HS (n = 13)**
Lived far from school (56%) **Fear of teacher (44%)** **Lazy to attend class (44%)** Work (44%) No pocket money (44%) No money for projects (44%) No money for school contributions (44%) **Take care of sibling (33%)** **Sickness (33%)** **Tired of walking (33%)**	Work (56%) Lazy to attend class (44%) No money for projects (44%) **Difficulty meeting requirements (33%)** No money for school contributions (33%)	**Take care of siblings (86%)** Work (57%) **Lived far from school (57%)** No pocket money for lunch (57%) **Sibling sick (57%)** No money for projects (43%) **Sickness (43%)** No money for school contributions (43%)	No pocketmoney for lunch (54%) No money for projects (54%) Work (46%) No money for school contributions (46%) No money for transportation (38%) Take care of siblings (31%)

(*All percentages are computed relative to the sample size as indicated in parentheses.)

That dropping out was attributed to "work" by many of the participants, regardless of age, substantiates the earlier findings that poverty is the major cause of school leaving. One urban elementary school teacher (TUE502) explained, "Oftentimes our young boys would be requested by parents to help them in vending vegetables and picking up bottles and other trash for money." It is typical of poor Filipino families for children to share in the economic plight of parents by finding various means of earning money no matter how little.

A first year high school teacher (TRH08) in a rural fishing village observed,

> Most of the boys enrolled (in my school) were overaged, being 15 to 17 years old. After a few months in school they would drop out to look for jobs, being the breadwinners of their families, especially if they had absentee fathers. Majority of them had jobs such as hauling fish from 1 to 5 in the afternoon, often attending class only 2 or 3 times a week. Many fathers would ask their young male children to join them in their work and help them earn more in order to meet their family's basic needs.

Most of the dropouts helped their parents earn a living, and the kinds of work they engaged in depended on their gender, ages and communities. A male school dropout from an urban elementary school sold plastic bags in the marketplace, while another one from a rural elementary school weeded rice fields and pastured farm animals. An older male dropout from an urban high school worked as "barker" for passenger jeepneys and occasionally as hauler ("kargador") in the neighborhood wet market; another one from a rural high school joined his fisherman father at sea. Young female dropouts who were too young to do any kind of income-generating work did housework and took care of siblings; on the other hand, one female dropout from an urban high school worked as salesperson in a local grocery store, and another from a rural high school went off very early each morning to clean fish brought in by fishermen, and to arrange them on drying plates before sunrise. These stories confirm how typical it is for poor Filipino families to engage their children in income-generating activities, no matter how little they earned, and thus have them share responsibility in the family's economic plight.

Differences between school and grade levels. Among the 38 dropouts interviewed, 16 (42%) were elementary pupils, and 22 (58%) were secondary students. Aside from ***work*** and ***lack of pocketmoney*** (both 50%), ***caring for younger siblings*** and ***distance between home and school*** (both 56%) were also major causes for leaving school according to elementary school dropouts (Table 5). A Grade 1 dropout (EMU02), whose father was a farmer and whose mother worked as a laundrywoman, said he had to stop going to school to take care of his 5-year old sibling. Another Grade 1 dropout (EFU03) narrated that she had to stay home and skip school to feed a younger sibling ("pinagtitimpla ko ng gatas ang aking nakababatang kapatid") and to lull the sibling to sleep ("pinapatulog") while her parents were out working. Another (EFR13) said, "*Nagluluto ako ng pagkain para sa aking mga batang kapatid dahil wala ang nanay ko* (I

cooked meals for my young siblings because my mother was not at home)." "*Nagtatrabaho si nanay sa bundok at nagkakaingin si tatay kaya ako ang nagbantay sa mga kapatid ko* (My mother worked in the mountain and my father in the field so I had to take care of my siblings)", explained a young elementary school dropout from a rural school (EMR12).

Distance of schools from their homes was also a major cause of dropping out for young elementary pupils. A few dropouts complained about the hike they had to do each day to go to and from school. One Grade 1 dropout (EMR09) from an urban elementary school had to walk alone to school for about 20 minutes. According to him, his parents were fearful of him being run over by speeding vehicles if he were to cross the major road on his own, so when no one could accompany him to school, he was told to stay home. His absences accumulated and he was eventually dropped from the class roll.

The daily hike to school was more difficult for pupils in rural schools. Dropouts from a rural school narrated that they had to walk 6 to 10 kilometers over mountainous terrain. One dropout (EMR12) said, "*Masakit 'yong paa ko maglakad papunta sa iskul; pag umulan hindi ako pumapasok dahil maputik*" (My feet hurt when I walked to school; when it rained, I could not got to school because the road got muddy).

One teacher in the same rural elementary school (TRE103) described a typical family, "*Ang tatay nasa bukid, ang nanay naman may mga anak pang maliit na aalagaan kaya hinahayaan na lang nilang magpunta sa iskul ang bata nang mag-isa araw-araw, dapat sana ay hinahatid sila ng magulang*" (The father would be in the farm, the mother had other young children to take care of, so the parents would let the pupils walk to school on their own everyday when they should be taking their children to school). For this reason, the teacher continued, "*Nawawalan ng gana sa pag-aaral ang mga bata*" (The pupils lose their interest in school).

Table 5
*Causes for Dropping Out by School and Grade Level**

ELEMENTARY (n = 16)		**SECONDARY (n = 22)**	
Take care of siblings (56%) **Lived far from school (56%)** Work (50%) No pocket money for lunch (50%)		Work (50%) Lack of money for projects (50%) No pocketmoney for lunch (41%) No money for school contributions (41%) **Peer influence (14%)** **Family problems, e.g, parental abuse (13%)** **Absences (4%)** **Poor academic performance (4%).**	
GRADE 1 / 2 (n = 9)	**HIGHER LEVELS (n = 7)**	**FIRST YR (n = 9)**	**HIGHER LEVELS (n = 13)**
Fear of teacher (67%) Take care of siblings (56%) Lived far from school (56%).	Take care of siblings (57%) **Work (57%)** Lived far from school (57%) No money for daily pocketmoney (57%) No money for projects (57%) **No clothes to wear (43%)** Sibling sick (43%) No money for school contributions (43%)	No pocketmoney for lunch (56%) No money for school contributions (56%) Work (44%) **Lived far from school (33%)** No money for projects (33%)	No money for projects (62%) Work (54%) **Difficulty meeting class requirements (31%)** No pocketmoney for lunch (31%) **No money for transportation (31%)**

(*All percentages are computed relative to the sample size as indicated in parentheses.)

A fellow teacher (TRE102) concurred, "*Hindi matiis ng mga bata ang maglakad nang maaga papunta sa iskul at umuwi sa hapon, napapagod sila sa layo ng nilalakad*" (The pupils could not bear walking early in the morning to school and walking back in the afternoon; they got tired because of walking the long distance). She also lamented that some of these young children had to take the long walk to school without any breakfast or packed lunch. Some children brought root crops (camoteng kahoy) for lunch but from what she observed, this was not enough if children had to stay until the end of the day. A Grade 5 teacher from the same school (TRE504) deduced that those who were unable to bear the trek and the hunger eventually dropped from school.

Financial reasons were a major cause for school leaving among secondary school dropouts. Many of them had to work (50 %), lacked money for projects (50 %), and for daily allowance or pocketmoney (41 %). Those who had to work part-time were also beset by school-related problems. One male dropout from an urban high school (HMU17) recalled that he was frequently ***absent***, and found it hard to cope with his numerous school requirements, which consequently led to his ***poor school performance***.

Moreover, the impact of social influences on school life was pronounced among this group of dropouts. High school dropouts cited ***peer influence*** and ***family problems*** (both 14 %) as reasons for leaving school. This finding concurs with those of an earlier study (Ballo-Alzate, 2007); peer pressure played a crucial role in what adolescents did and did not do. It is characteristic of many secondary school dropouts from urban areas, according to one teacher (TUH07) from an urban high school. "Adolescent students could

easily be swayed by their *barkada* (peers), some of them sacrificing their schooling in order to be accepted." she explained.

Examination of responses by specific grade level reveals that for Grade 1 and 2 dropouts, ***fear of teacher*** (67 %) was also a significant cause for leaving school. One Grade 1 dropout (EMU01) described his teacher as *cranky* ("masungit") and *punitive* ("nananakit"). Another one (EMU05) said she *dreaded* her teacher ("natatakot ako sa kanila"). Due to their age and lack of school experience, young pupils are not used to the kind of classroom discipline imposed by teachers. Young dropouts said that they were punished for being talkative (EFU03) or for being late (EMR10), and the punishment took various forms—from verbal reprimands (EFU04) to physical or corporal punishment (EMU05).

A Grade 1 teacher (TUE101) pointed to the *lack of school readiness* as a critical factor for retention in the first grade. She noted, "Some Grade 1 pupils preferred *playing* to attending school; they were *not ready* to enter school." Comparing her students to Grade 1 pupils, a Grade 5 teacher (TUE502) explained, "Grade 1 pupils have not yet developed a sense of *personal responsibility* and are still *fearful* of being left by their parents in the classroom." Another teacher (TRE105) believed that there were *practices* concomitant to going to school that new Grade 1 pupils and parents were not used to doing. She referred to *habits* such as getting up early, packing lunch, and putting aside money for daily school expenses. Grade 1 dropouts admitted to feeling *lazy* to attend class, due to the *distance* between their homes and the school. One of them (EMR10), from a rural elementary school, said that he found it hard to get up early in the morning, dress and walk to school. It was particularly most difficult during the rainy season when the road to school became too muddy to trek on his own. He was often late for school, and lagged behind school work which led him to eventually drop out. A teacher from the same school (TRE304) expounded that in contrast, older elementary pupils were not prone to dropping out because by the time children reached the higher levels, the *social bonds* among them had already developed. She noted that children were more inclined to attend school if they had some friends to walk with to school. Another teacher (TUE502) shared her take on the matter: older pupils would have developed school-related *routines*, parents would have learned how to set aside money for school-related expenses.

Higher dropout rates in lower school levels were also possibly influenced by parents' valuation of education as an *investment*. While all 18 parents/guardians who were interviewed believed that sending their children to school was an important step in improving their economic situation, they also admitted that when their limited income could not provide for school-related expenses such as transportation fare and pocketmoney, they thought it best for their children to stop schooling. This was confirmed by one school principal (PRH4) who attested that parents did *not* hesitate to pull out their youngest child if needed, saying that the child was "joven pa" (still young). She added that if parents experience financial difficulties, they will not hesitate in pulling one child out of school, and more often, the older one is preferred, and the younger one is "sacrificed". "*Nanghihinayang sila na magdrop out ang bata kung malapit na itong magtapos*" (They would feel it would be a waste if the graduating child is to drop out),

she said. A high school graduate would have better employment options, which would consequently redound to improvement of the family's economic conditions.

Aside from domestic and financial reasons already mentioned by many dropouts (e.g., taking care of siblings, distance between home and school work, and lack of money for lunch projects and contributions), ***lack of clothes or school uniform*** emerged from the interviews with elementary dropouts in higher grade levels. Unlike their younger counterparts who were easily spared hand-me-down school uniforms by older siblings, this group of dropouts needed new schoolwear, which their parents could not provide. One male dropout (EMR09) said, "*Tatlong piraso lang ang damit ko, pag basa 'yong isa hindi na ako pumapasok*" (I owned only 3 pieces of clothes, and when one of them had not dried, I would not go to school). A female dropout (EFR14) recalled, "*Pagkatapos ko manggaling sa iskul nilalabhan ko agad ang damit para maisuot uli, kung minsan hindi agad natutuyo kaya di na lang ako pumapasok*" (After arriving from school, I would wash my clothes right away so I could use them again, but sometimes they did not get dry so I would skip school).

Similar factors led to dropping out in the secondary school level. Most prominent, as expected, are **financial reasons** such as *work* and *lack of money for school requirements* and *contributions*. About one-third of this group of dropouts also pointed to problems with **commuting to school**: ***distance between home and school*** for first year dropouts, and ***lack of transportation money*** for higher level dropouts. A first year teacher (TUH106) hinted that, like Grade 1 pupils, first year students are in an *adjustment period*. These younger students have not fully grasped the difference between elementary and secondary school life, and therefore have difficulties coping with the demands in high school. "*Hindi nila naintindihan na iba na ang high school sa elementary, na mas istrikto ang pagtuturo sa high school*" (They do not realize that teaching approach in high school is more strict). Comparing students of various levels, a second year high school teacher (TUH208) noted that student attitude explains why there are more dropouts in the first year level than in higher levels. According to her, high school freshmen have a playful and "easy-go-lucky" *attitude*. They were quite "immature" with regard to schoolwork, and are less conscientious in doing their homework. They have a "carefree attitude" and are "easily persuaded" by peers to engage in leisure activities even during school hours. In contrast, students in higher levels tend to be "more serious" with their studies and "more committed" to finish their schooling. These older students are "more aware of their career goals and of the importance finishing their studies."

Part of the adjustment for first year students is getting used to a *different* school environment. One teacher in a large urban secondary school (TUH209) observed that first year students who come from smaller elementary schools seem to be "overwhelmed" by the overcrowded school environment. Observing some of them while taking lunch in a crowded school cafeteria, she noticed that they looked "uneasy", "nervous" and "fearful". She suggested that those who cannot get accustomed to a new school environment, especially one that is drastically different from that of their elementary school, eventually drop out.

The *transition* from Grade 6 to First Year is sometimes quite *abrupt* for students who have learning gaps. A first year teacher in an urban school (TUH107) observed that students who did not have prerequisite skills and knowledge had difficulty tackling the work in first year. She recalled that dropouts in her class were not "really ready for academic work, because they had reading problems: either they could *not* read, or were *slow* readers, or had poor reading *comprehension*." "Hindi kaya ng isip ng iba sa kanila ang leksyon" (Some of them could not grasp the lessons), affirmed one principal (UH03).

Besides the foregoing reasons, ***difficulty in school requirements*** was particularly brought up by about one-third of high school dropouts in higher levels. When asked to elaborate on such difficulties, one dropout in this group specifically referred to problems with multiplication tables in Math and singular-plural nouns in English (HFU19). She also recounted that some school requirements necessitated school supplies and materials which her parents could not provide. Responding to the same question, one male dropout (HMR28) from a rural secondary school regretfully sighed, "*Bago bilhin (ang mga gamit) ay uunahin ang pambili ng gatas ng kapatid ko, bago bumili ng kailangan sa project uunahin muna ang pagkain ng pamilya*" (Before my school materials, milk for my sibling came first; before buying what I needed for a school project, getting food for the family came first). Another dropout (HMR24) narrated, "*Hindi ako nakapasa dahil 'yung ibang gamit sa project hindi ko mabili*" (I failed in one subject because I could not buy the materials for the project). Not only did high school dropouts in higher levels encounter cognitive difficulties with regard to school requirements; shortage in school funds *directly affected* their *academic standing*, which then resulted in their leaving school.

Differences between urban and rural locations. Twenty-two (58 %) of the 38 dropouts interviewed came from urban schools while 16 (42 %) from rural schools. Lack of money for lunch, school projects and contributions were major reasons for both urban and rural school dropouts (Table 6). Interestingly, however, ***attitude*** and ***health*** were more common among urban school dropouts while *work*, *domestic duties toward parents and siblings*, and *accessibility* were more prevalent among rural school dropouts. More urban school dropouts acknowledged that they left school because they felt ***lazy to attend class*** (32 %) and because they were ***sick*** (32 %). One dropout from an urban school (HMU20) explained, "*Tinamad akong pumasok sa klase dahil sa maraming bagsak na subject*" (I felt lazy to attend class because I failed many subjects). Urban elementary school dropouts admitted that they often missed class, especially during rainy seasons, because of common ailments such as *fever*, *cough* and *colds*.

From responses of rural school dropouts, three major reasons surfaced: ***financial difficulties***, ***family responsibilities*** and ***accessibility***. Four-fifths (81 %) of them left school because they had to *wor**k*** and about half had to *take care of siblings*, particularly when they were *sick*. Some (31%) had to *take care of sick parents* also. This would not be surprising because the dropouts came from communities characterized by poverty, and the family-centered culture of Filipinos compelled them to share in alleviating their families' economic difficulties and in preserving the well-being of family members (Mangawit, 1981; Jocano, 1988; Sobritchea, 1990). Rural communities are geographically *remote* and *thinly populated*, thereby deterring the construction of schools and the delivery

of educational services for schoolchildren. They also lag behind in *infrastructure development*, thus bad roads dissuade children from going to the "nearest" school which would most likely be a good distance away.

Breaking down the responses of urban and rural school dropouts according to school level clarifies the link between location, school level, and the causes of dropping out. ***Teacher factor*** (50 %), ***sickness*** (50 %) and ***physical exhaustion*** from walking school (40 %) were most typical of urban elementary school dropouts. On the other hand, ***poor attitude toward school*** (42 %), ***peer influence*** (25 %), and ***family problems*** (25 %) were descriptive of urban secondary school dropouts. The effects of ***poverty*** were more pronounced among rural school dropouts.

Rural elementary school dropouts were most disadvantaged by economic conditions. All dropouts in this group claimed they had to leave school in order to ***work***. Percentage-wise, there were more of them who reported not having pocketmoney and money for school projects, compared to other groups of dropouts. This group was also the most burdened when it came to ***family responsibilities***. Most (83 %) of them had to *take care of siblings*, especially those who were *sick* (67 %), and of *parents* who were *sick* (50 %).

These same conditions were faced by rural secondary school dropouts, although to a *lesser* degree. Most (80%) of them had left school in order to ***work***, and like other dropouts, they also experienced ***financial difficulties*** in terms of school-related expenses such as *projects* (60 %), *contributions* (50 %), *lunch money* (40 %) and *transportation* (40 %), and fulfilled ***family responsibilities*** such as *taking care of siblings* (40 %) and *parents* (30 %).

Table 6
*Causes for Dropping Out by Location and Level**

URBAN (n = 22)		**RURAL (n = 16)**	
No pocketmoney for lunch (45%) No money for school contributions (41%) No money for projects (36%) **Lazy to attend class (32%)** **Sickness (32%)** Tired of walking (18%)		**Work (81%)** No money for projects (62%) **Take care of siblings (50%)** **Lived far from school (44%)** No pocketmoney for lunch (44%) No money for school contributions (44%) **Parents sick (31%)** **Sibling sick (31%)** Sickness (19%)	
ELEM (n = 10)	**HS (n = 12)**	**ELEM (n = 6)**	**HS (n = 10)**
Fear of teacher (50%) **Sickness (50%)** No money for school contributions (50%) Lazy to attend class (40%) Take care of siblings (40%) Lived far from school (40%) No pocketmoney for lunch (40%) **Tired of walking to school (40%)** No money for projects (30%).	No pocketmoney for lunch (42%) No money for projects (42%) No money for school contributions (33%) **Poor attitude toward school (42%)** **Peer influence (25%)** **Family problems (25%)** Sickness (17%) **Absences (8%)** **Poor academic performance (8%)**	**Work (100%)** **Take care of sibling (83%)** **Lived far from school (83%)** No pocketmoney for lunch (67% No money for projects (67%) **No uniform (67%)** **Sibling sick (67%)** **Parent sick (50%)** **Family income (50%)** No money for school contributions (33%) Sickness (17%)	**Work (80%)** No money for projects (60%) No money for school contributions (50%) **Take care of siblings (40%)** No pocketmoney for lunch (40%) No money for transportation (40%) **Parent sick (30%)** Sickness (20%)

(*All percentages are computed relative to the sample size as indicated in parentheses.)

Breakdown of responses of urban and rural school dropouts according to gender (Table 7) provides greater understanding of the causes attributed to school leaving. ***Poor attitude*** (*laziness to attend class*) was more overtly expressed among urban male students, in both elementary and high school level. Urban female dropouts were affected by several many financial difficulties, but most especially by ***lack of money for daily allowance*** (58 %). ***Sibling care*** was most prevalent among rural female dropouts (56 %), but it was also a factor for about two-fifths of rural male (43 %) and urban female (45 %) dropouts. Although ***accessibility*** was a problem for all dropouts from both urban and rural schools, it was most acutely felt by rural male dropouts (57 %). These dropouts were also the most obligated to ***work*** (100 %).

Table 7
*Causes of Dropping by Location and Gender**

URBAN (n = 22)		RURAL (n = 16)	
MALE (n = 11)	**FEMALE (n = 11)**	**MALE (n = 7)**	**FEMALE (n = 9)**
Lazy to attend class (64%) No money for projects (36%) Fear of teacher (27%) Sick (27%) Difficulty meeting requirements (27%) No money for lunch (27%) Work (18%) Lived far from school (18%) Difficulty understanding lesson (18%)	**No pocketmoney for lunch (58%)** No money for contrib. (50%) **Take care of siblings (45%)** Work (36%) Lived far from school (36%) No money for projects (36%) No money for transport (36%) Sick (36%) Fear of teacher (18%) Difficulty meeting requirements (18%) Difficulty understanding lesson (9%)	**Work (100%)** **Lived far from school (57%)** No money for projects (57%) No money for school contributions (57%) **Take care of siblings (43%)** No pocketmoney for lunch (43%) Sick (28%)	**Work (67%)** No money for projects (67%) **Take care of siblings (56%)** No pocketmoney for lunch (44%) **Sibling sick (44%)** Lived far from school (33%) **Parents sick (33%)** No money for school contributions (33%) Sick (11%)

(*All percentages are computed relative to the sample size as indicated in parentheses.)

Discussion

Students in various gender groups, school levels, and locations are at-risk of dropping out for various reasons. Some of these factors are common to all dropouts, while others are more keenly associated with specific groups. The adverse effect of ***poverty*** on children's participation in school is clearly manifested in all dropouts, and in many different ways depending on whether they are male or female, are in elementary or secondary, in lower or higher school level, and in urban or rural areas. Those who come from ***rural areas*** are most vulnerable in two ways. First, because their parents have little and irregular income, they often lack money for ***school-related expenses*** such as school allowance, transportation, uniforms and class requirements. Families with limited financial resources prioritize their expenses, allotting whatever little money they have to more urgent family needs like food, a finding which supports earlier studies (Capili, 1992). Only when parents have sufficient income are they able to provide for school supplies and expenditures. Second, children from rural areas are forced to engage in household tasks and income-generating ***work*** by virtue of their economic conditions. Boys from rural areas, regardless of age, help parents earn money; they take on whatever means of livelihood is available, from simple tasks like weeding, to physically demanding work such as farming and fishing. This finding is consistent with an earlier report that documented a rather large percentage of young boys engaged in child labor (National Statistics Office & International Labor Organization, 2001). Young girls, on the other hand, are often asked to be caretakers for younger siblings and, when necessary, for sick

parents; older ones find employment either as farm help or housemaids. While parents consider education as a valuable option for alleviating their poverty, they are compelled to withdraw their children from school whenever it becomes more economically beneficial for the family.

Aside from financial difficulties, ***school-related causes*** such as loss of ***interes***t and lack of ***motivation*** are also associated with dropping out. ***Teacher factor*** is particularly most prominent among young boys. As for older boys, ***family*** and ***peers*** wield a strong influence on their school attendance; family problems and peer pressure affect attendance and performance in school.

Inaccessibility also induces school leaving, particularly among young children who are compelled to hike to and from school for hours, and among those who lack transportation money on a daily basis. ***Adjustment*** problems become a deterrent to regular school attendance for those in the first school levels; ***school readiness*** is crucial for children in the early grades, while a certain level of psychological and social ***maturity*** is necessary for those beginning high school. Finally, all schoolchildren are prone to ***sickness*** from time to time; many children from poor families do not eat well nor properly. They are also deprived of the necessary means for strengthening their immune system such as health-boosting vitamins. Many of them engage in long hours of work or household duties. It is not surprising that many of these children often get sick. Illness keeps them away from school, and the more absences they incur, the more difficult it is for them to make up for lost time in class. When this happens, the most practical recourse is to leave school.

The variety of causes impinging on different groups of dropouts, males and females, elementary and secondary, urban and rural, indicate that school leaving is a ***multi-dimensional phenomenon*** which involves not only ***economic*** reasons but also ***psychological***, ***cultural***, and ***sociological*** factors. While poverty has been blamed for the incidence of dropping out, it is more likely that poverty combines with several other critical conditions in the learner, in his/her school and community environment, and in his/her family, to draw them away from school. Dropping out does not happen as a result of one single cause, but rather a combination of them, and because of this, dropping out should be viewed as a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that it really is (McPartland, 1994).

The complexity of the dropout phenomenon requires ***manifold*** and ***concerted solutions***. Where poverty adversely deters schooling, parents, schools and communities can work together to mitigate its effects on young learners. For example, lack of money for school-related expenses can be resolved through donations and assistance from charitable organizations, private companies and local community members. Transportation services, breakfast programs, book loans, financial aids, and other kinds of services have already been shown to be effective in preventing dropout (Bureau of Elementary Education, 1992; Petilo, 2006). Schools should coordinate with and seek support from the local government and the community to institute similar programs for students who are at-risk. School-related causes such as fear of teacher and ineffective

classroom management can be worked out through ***teacher re-tooling*** and ***curriculum planning***. Family-related causes such as childcare and other domestic duties can be addressed through community-based interventions such as daycare services designated for children of working mothers. Student-related causes such as poor health, peer influence, and low motivation can be managed using local government health programs and school guidance services.

Knowledge about the dropout phenomenon should be advanced by continued and more systematic studies on the reasons for school leaving. For example, large-scale surveys should be able to confirm the variables that have been identified by this study and other studies as predictive of dropping out (Suh, et al., 2007). Studies that trace the progress of at-risk students should help stakeholders understand the factors that *can* reverse the situation. Evaluation of dropout intervention programs have to be carefully designed and systematically implemented. Among the interventions already in place are the UNICEF child-friendly school system and student tracking system (STS), the *No Dropout Learning System for Education For All* (NO-DROPS), and the *alternative learning system* (ALS). Studies that examine the effectiveness of these programs should be purposefully formulated and conducted. Finally, advocacy programs that create awareness of the factors associated with school leaving among key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, school administrators, and local DepEd officials and community leaders should be initiated by policy makers and government agencies, and pursued in all areas with high dropout rates. Such awareness should lead to the formulation of coordinated and appropriate strategies that should specifically address the issues threatening potential dropouts.

Endnote

1. This paper is a derivative of the UNICEF-DepEd project study "Management Intervention Approach To Reducing Drop-Out" of which the author was a co-team leader. The author wishes to thank the UNICEF, the Department of Education and Dr. Julian Abuso, Project team leader, for permission to present a part of the study in this paper.

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Date received: October 2009

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