A CASE STUDY INTO THE CAUSES OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

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Abstract: School dropout leads to failure in social integration, and as a result greatly diminishes a person's chances to achieve personal success in legally accepted fields of activity. The prevention and reduction of this phenomenon are extremely difficult to achieve due to the high complexity of its causes. Research that has been carried out into this problem leads to the conclusion that there has been an increase in the number of students facing school adjustment problems and it also attempts to answer the question whether there has been a real increase in the number of dropouts or if the situation should be put down to a series of very different and complex factors.

A just identification and analysis of these factors would help reveal the action to be taken and eventually lead to a decrease and prevention of school dropout.

Apart from the ineffectiveness of social policies in our country, a successful result of such an intervention would be the result of the joint efforts of a multi-curricular approach, involvement of social institutions and team work.

Key words: School dropout, research, causes

1. Introduction

Research into the issue of school adjustment that has been carried out so far, leads to the conclusion that there is an increase in the number of students who face school adjustment problems. There are 2 main directions of research: one of them tries to give evidence of a real increase in the number of students who have dropped out from school, whilst the other considers this a complex phenomenon, a result of a series of factors.

In order to provide an answer to this question we need to consider the fact that the number of dropouts is not an absolute number, but it differs according to social tolerance which may be higher or lower in different historic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, school adjustment is a result of the social, family and educational environment.

To conclude, school dropout as the most severe aspect of school adjustment, is a phenomenon which should be put down to a multitude of very different and complex factors, and which lends itself to different interpretations and approaches.

2. Methods

This case study under discussion is only part of a larger research which attempts to prevent and decrease the rate of school dropout through the joint efforts of social institutions and inter-curricular and multi-curricular teamwork.

The research was carried out during the 2008-2009 school year and it consisted of 2 steps: the first one consisted in identifying the cases of absenteeism while the second one consisted in an investigation of the previously identified situations. A number of 682 students of primary and lower secondary school from the town of Sarmas were observed in this research which used data related to the students' family and school environment at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. The data has been made available by the city council and students' own schools. The present research took place in 7 schools: Grup Scolar "

Samuil Micu", in Sarmasu, Mures County, as well as in the schools situated in the suburbs of Sarmasu, as follows: Şcoala Generală Clasele I-VIII Balda, Şcoala Generală Clasele I-VIII Sărmăşel-Sat, Şcoala Generală Clasele I-VIII Sărmăşel-Gară, Şcoala Generală Clasele I-IV Vişinelu.

15 cases of school dropout were identified. These students are the subjects of the second step of this research which took place in the 2009-2010 school year.

The 15 students abandoned school during or at the end of the school year 2008-2009, and at the present time they do not attend any schools.

The group of students had been enrolled on school as follows:

- grades I-IV (primary school): 8 students

- grades V-VIII (lower secondary school): 7 students

- students of Romanian nationality: 6, of whom: 1 in the 1st grade, 4 in the 7th grade, 1 in the 8th grade

- students of Hungarian nationality: 1 student in the 8th grade

- students of Romani nationality: 8 students, of whom 6 in the 1st grade, 1 student in the 2nd grade and 1 student in the 5th grade

- 6 female students, of whom 3 in the 1st grade (Romani), 1 in the 2nd grade (Romani), 1 in the 5th grade (Romani), 1 in the 7th grade (Ramanian) and 1 in the 8th grade (Romanian)

- 8 male students, of whom 3 students in the 1st grade (Romani), 1 in the 1st grade (Romanian), 3 in the 7th grade, (Romanians), 1 in the 8th grade (Romanians) and 1 in the 8th grade (Hungarian).

2.1. Investigation of the school documents

The rate of school dropout in the 2008-2009 school year in the above mentioned schools is as follows:

- At **Grupul Şcolar, Samuil Micu" Sărmaşu (urban area),** with both Romanian and Hungarian as first language, the **dropout rate is of 1,43%,** which represents only a small percentage compared to the total number of students in the school

- At **Şcoala Generală Clasele I-VIII Balda (rural area),** with Romanian as first language**, the dropout rate is of 1,61%,** which represents only a small percentage compared to the total number of students in the school

- At **Şcoala Generală Clasele I-VIII Sărmăşel-Sat (rural area),** with Romanian as first language, **the dropuout rate is of 2,94%**, which represents only a small percentage compared to the total number of students in the school

- At **Şcoala Generală Clasele I-VIII Sărmăşel-Gară (rural area),** with Romanian as first language, **the dropuout rate is of 2,27%**, which represents only a small percentage compared to the total number of students who attend school

- At **Şcoala Generală Clasele I-IV Vişinelu (rural area**), with Romanian as first language, **the dropuout rate is of 6,89%**, which represents only a small percentage compared to the total number of students who attend school

- **Out of the total number of 682 students** who took part in the research, 15 students abandoned school during or at the end of the 2008-2009 school year, **which accounts for 2,19%**

These facts lead to the following conclusion:

- All five schools included in the study confront themselves with school dropout

- The schools come from both urban and rural areas

- The first language is Romanian in rural areas, and both Romanian and Hungarian in urban areas

- the students who attend these schools are of Romanian, Hungarian or Romani nationality

- The dropout rate is higher among primary students of Romani nationality

- The dropout rate is higher among lower secondary students of Romanian nationality

- **The dropout rate is not very high, that is below 3%**

- Due to the low dropout rate, the phenomenon of school dropout can be kept within accepted limits (that is, it can be prevented, reduced or eradicated) through the joint cooperation of the certified institutions (social care policies, schools), but also through the involvement and implication of the students' families.

The analysis of school documents has also led to a conclusion regarding the causes of school dropout. It has been noticed that there are 4 categories of leading factors:

- family factors
- school-related factors
- social environment- no further information mentioned
- personal factors

a) Family-related factors. As far as family is concerned, the following data (marked **A** below) have been noted:

A1. Parents' lack of interest
A2. Parents' neglect
A3. Separation, divorce
A4. Second marriage
A5. Parents' detention
A6. Conflicts, hostile environment
A7. Parents abandonment
A8. Excessive consumption of alcohol
A9. Parents forcing children to work
A10. Parents' death
A11. Single parenting
A12. Chronicle illness within the family
A13. Parents' inability to raise children
A14. One parent (or both) concubinage
A15. Incorrect educational methods used by parents
A16. Negative examples offered by family members (brothers and sisters, other distant relatives)
A17. Low family income
A18. Improper environment for attending school
A19. Absence of a stable family environment

The frequency of these factors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The frequency of family- related factors for school dropout

Variable	Frequency	%	Number of cases	%
A1	7	46,6%	15	100%
A2	2	13,3%	15	100%
A3	6	40%	15	100%
A4	4	26,6%	15	100%
A5	2	13,3%	15	100%
A6	4	26,6%	15	100%
A7	2	13,3%	15	100%
A8	6	40%	15	100%
A9	8	53,3%	15	100%
A10	2	13,3%	15	100%
A11	2	13,3%	15	100%
A12	1	6,6%	15	100%

A13	15	100%	15	100%
A14	6	40%	15	100%
A15	8	53,3%	15	100%
A16	5	33,3%	15	100%
A17	15	100%	15	100%
A18	7	46,6%	15	100%
A19	7	46,6%	15	100%

The data that was gathered in this research is very relevant as to the fact that low income in 100

% of the cases makes it impossible to get the clothing and things needed by students in order to attend school.

The same is the case in all 100% of the cases in that the parents' low level of education leads to a lack of motivation to attend school. Lack of interest and parents' neglect (in 13,3% of the cases), often associated with domestic violence ond consumption of alcohol (in 40% of the cases) results in a hostile environment, incompatible with a safe learning environment.

Parents divorce and separation also has a great negative influence upon students: 6 dropout students, that is 40% of the cases, left school because of this problem. The fact that one or both parents live with their concubine as well as with the child (in 40% of the cases) also adds to this fact. This is why the child is often abondoned by the parent who had left home, making it very likely for the step-parent to use inappropriate educational methods. However, this is not always the case (53,3% of cases).

Low income makes it impossible for the parents to make their home a comfortable environment for all their inhabitants. This fact makes school attendance almost impossible in 46,6% of the cases.

Another cause for school dropout is the lack of a stable family environment (it is the case of 46,6% of the students). This is usually due to harder living conditions, lower incomes which can greatly affect students. Furthermore, these problems make parents less involved in their children's education and up-bringing, which finally results in their children abandoning school. In 53,3% of the cases students have also been forced by their parents to work or help raise their younger siblings.

Detention of one or both parents, the child being in the custody of only one parent, the absence of a secure home, also cause significant trauma which finally lead to school dropout.

b) Personal factors. Personal factors are marked with B below:

B1. Attention deficiency disorder, memory deficiency
B2. Visually impaired
B3. Low learning abilities
B4. Misbehaviour
B5. Low motivation and lack of interest

The frequency of these factors are presemted in Table 2.

Tabel 2: The distribution of frequency of personal factors in school dropout cases

Variable	Frequency	%	Number of cases	%
B1.	9	60%	15	100%
B2.	3	20%	15	100%
B3.	11	73,3%	15	100%
B4.	4	26,6%	15	100%
B5.	15	100%	15	100%

It can be observed that the most frequent personal factor (in 100% of the cases) is concerned with lack of interest as far as school is concerned, and a very low degree of motivation which is added to low

learning abilities (in 73,3% of the cases) and attention deficiency disorder and memory deficiency (60% of the cases), as well as visual problems.

Misbehaviour is the case in 26,6% of the cases and it is associated with other factors (such as absenteeism, low motivation, lack of interest).

c) School environment-related factors bring out the following variables marked with C below:

C1. School adjustment failure
C2. Not promoting school
C3. Discipline problems
C4. School fobia
C5. School violence
C6. Conflicts (with teachers, school mates)
C7. Ethnic discrimination

The frequency of these factors is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The frequency of school-related factors in school dropout cases

Variable	Frequency	%	Number of cases	%
C1.	9	60%	15	100%
C2.	5	33,3%	15	100%
C3.	6	40%	15	100%
C4.	7	46,6%	15	100%
C5.	3	20%	15	100%
C6.	6	40%	15	100%
C7.	8	53,3%	15	100%

The resulting data is relevant. It can be concluded that there is a higher rate of school dropout due to inability to adapt to school (in 60% of cases), fear of school (in 46,6% of the cases) and also ethnic discrimination (the case of 53,3% of the students) for students in primary school. The situation is rather subject-related or connected with national identity.

For lower secondary students it can be noted that there is a higher degree of non-promotion (33% of the cases), correlaterd with discipline problems (40% of the cases) and school conflict (20%) or school violence (20%). As far as these students are concerned it should be pointed out that it is rather a problem of external manifastation of the real causes of school failure.

3. Discussion

To sum up, in the case of this group of students, the main cause of school dropout is represented by the family factors, namely the low family income (100%), but also the parents' low level of education and educational abilities (100% of cases)

Another reason given by the respondees is the lack of motivation and interest in school (100%), associated with students' low learning abilities (73,3%).

The second important factor of school dropout is related to the fact that parents force upon their children responsabilities that are not related to school, such as helping with household chores instead of doing school work (53,3%).

Excessive consumption of alcohol by the parents has resulted in the children's abandoning school in 40 % of the cases.

Parents' lack of interest (46,6%), divorce, concubinage (40%), bad examples (33,3%), conflicts and hostile environment, as well as school-related variables, discipline issues (40%) and conflict relationships (40%) led to early dropout.

To conclude, we should point out that the most frequent causes of dropout are related to the students' family and personal backround, which is also the cause of their educational environment.

Analysis and interpretation of questionaire data

In order to get a clear view of what causes children to abandon school, we have conducted a questionnaire, which consists of 34 items (Appendix 1).

The questionnaire has been completed by all of the 15 students at the schools mentioned in chapter 3 above.

Next, we are going to look closely at some of the most important questions in the questionnaire in order to explain the relation between the factors that have been discussed and the data in the school reports. We will take a closer look at the items related to family backround, namely questions 7, 8, 9 10, 21, 27 and 28.

Question number 7: 'What is your family income?'

All students answered „very low", which means that the answer (variable) came up in 100% of the cases. As a result, this is one of the most important factors for school droput. This demonstrates the correlation of the questionnaire and school reports data.

Question number 8: „Have you got suitable clothing and footwear to go to school?", 8 respondents gave the answer „Yes, but only some" (53,4%), whilst the other 7 answered „No" (46,6%). There are no other responses**.** Thus one of the most important reasons why children abandon school is lack appropriate conditions.

These results prove that there is a connection between the results of the questionnaire, those of social inquiries and those presented in the school reports.

Question number 10: „Which members of your family drink alcohol on a daily basis?"

The respondents gave the following answers: „No one" – 3 answers (20 % of the respondents)

„My father drinks alcohol almost every day" – 6 answers (40%)

„My mother drinks alcohol almost every day" – 3 answers (20%)

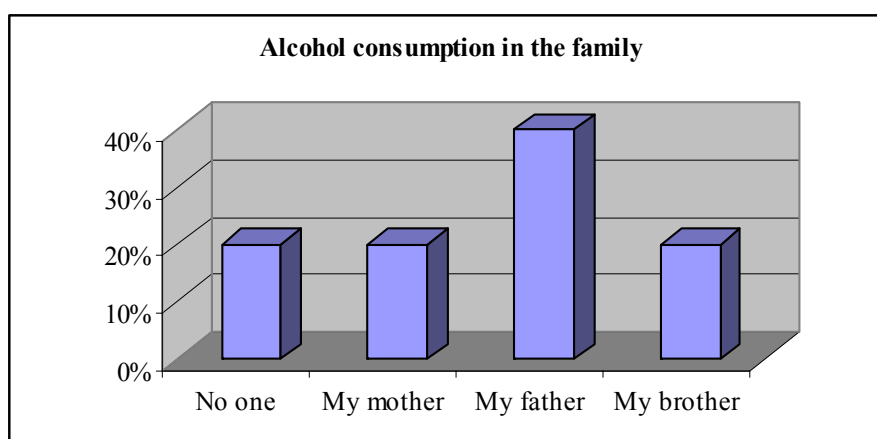„ My elder brother" - 3 answers (20%)

Figure 1. Frequency of the answers regarding alcohol consumption within the family

It can be concluded that in the case of 60% of the respondents the consumption of alcohol within their family contributed to their leaving school, and 20% of them have their elder brother as a negative influence.

Question number 21: „Do your parents keep in touch with your school/form teacher? Are they informed about your school problems?"

The students answered as follows: 7 of them gave a negative response (that is 46,6% of their total number), 5 students said „Rarely" (which stands for 33,4% of the respondents) and 3 of them said „Yes"(20 %).
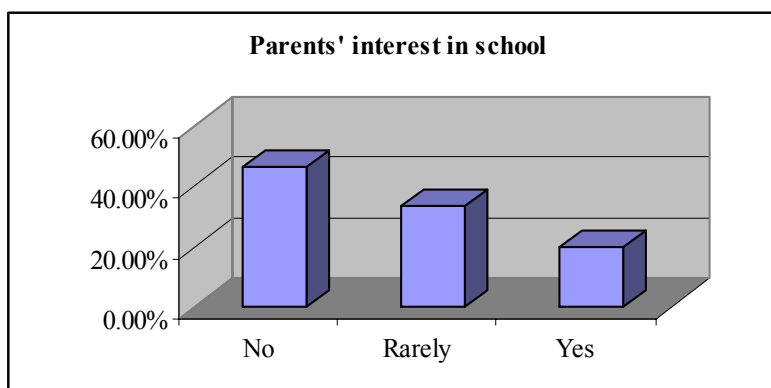
Parents' interest in school

Figure 2. Frequency of the responses regarding parents' interest in school

The responses show that parents' involvement in school has greatly influenced the students or even led to their leaving school in almost 50% of the cases. The answers are in agreement with the information found in the school documents, thus confirming our hypothesis.

Question number 28: „Which of your parents, brothers or sisters have abandoned school?"
refers to 2 aspects: parents degree of education and their parental educational model.

11 students answered: „Parents" (that is 73,3%) and 4 subjects said „Siblings" (that is 26,7%). None of the students answered „ No one".
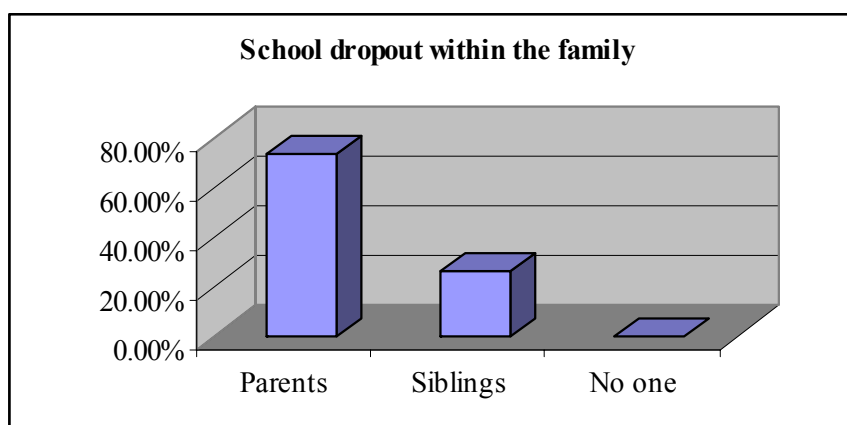
School dropout within the family

Figure 3. Frequency of responses regarding school dropout within the family

It can be concluded that in 100% of the cases school dropout is a direct consequence of a negative educational model and degree of education within the family.

This item can be related to 2 of the variables identified in the social inquiries and school documents, namely A13 (parents' inability to educate children) and A16 (negative examples offered by family memebers). The hypotheses have been once more confirmed.

Question number 27: „ Which of the following reasons made you abandon school?"

The responses are presented in the Table 4.

Table 4. Subjective factors for school dropout

Question	Possible answer		Number of answers	Percentage
Why did you abandon school?	I do not have proper clothing and footwear	V1	11	73,3%
	I do not have school supplies	V2	13	86,6%
	School is very far away from home	V3	4	26,6%
	My parents forced me to stay home and work	V4	8	53,3%
	I did not fit in at school	V5	13	86,6%
	My classmates treated me badly	V6	8	53,3%
	I am not capable of learning	V7	11	73,3%
	I was not getting on with my teacher	V8	6	40%
	I did not promote the class three years in a row	V9	3	20%
	I considered that school was not important for my future	V10	7	46,6%
	My parents did not care whether I went to schoool or not	V11	7	46,6%
	Other reasons	V12	4	26,6%
Total number			15	100%

The answers confirm the data in the school inquiery and school documents, which means that school dropout is closely related to these factors.

4. Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire are a confirmation of the fact that poverty represents the main cause of school droput, along with lack of interest and parents' low level of education and learning difficulties faced by almost all of the respondents.

Final conclusions

School dropout is a very complex phenomenon, a very dangerous one, due to the fact that it happens much too easily and frequently. It is enough for one of the mentioned variables to be present, for the student to fail at school and eventually abandon school.

The risk of school dropout is much higher in families with a low standard of living, which have to deal with poverty and marginalization. Even though the role of the family is to guarantee a healthy environment for a child's development, the families that have participated in this research are far from conferring the security of a safe environment, which is why the students' standard of living is below acceptable standards.

As a result of this research, the following conclusions arise:

- it has been confirmed that there is a strong connection between the family environment and the rate of school dropout

- the family-related factors (standards of living, parent-child relationship, models of parenting) represent the main causes for school dropout

- school dropout rate is highest in the poorer families

- parents' lack of interest and lack of supervision   of teenage children can result in their abandoning school

- the low standards of living, as well as school dropout are due to the same factors: low income, low educational abilities of the parents, no workplace, excessive consumption of alcohol, divorce

- using teenagers in rural areas for labour is one more cause for school dropout

- difficulties in learning and the lack of support on the part of the parents, can also lead to school failure and dropout

- parents, as well as teachers using incorrect means and methods of education, may cause demotivation and dropout

The prevention and anihilation of school dropout are complex problems which require the ivolvement and implications of social institutions (ministries, national authorities, city councils, social care, educational institutions, health departments, NGOs). Whether the different projects which involve multi and cross-curricular fields work, depends on how each programme is put into practice.

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