

## Section 6

### Non-attendance And School Dropouts

#### 6.1 Introduction

The issue of non-attendance and school drop-outs was not treated as an independent topic in the previous profiles. Due, however, to growing societal concern over the phenomenon, the present profile attempts to provide more detailed statistical information and analysis on the subject as a separate section.

#### 6.2 Number of school dropouts

Under the present practice, schools are required to report cases of absence of over 14 days to the Education Department. In addition, there may be pupils from Primary 6 failing to report to Form 1. The Education Department keeps records of suspected school dropouts thus reported. Table 6.2.1 compares the trends.

**Table 6.2.1: Number of school dropouts, 1987-1996**

School years	Class levels		Total
	Junior Secondary (S1-S3)	Primary (P1-P6)	
1987/88	2791	786	3577
1988/89	3012	1020	4032
1989/90	3301	1466	4767
1990/91	3025	719	3744
1991/92	2651	653	3304
1992/93	2370	629	2999
1993/94	2275	557	2832
1994/95	1773	490	2263
1995/96	1468	329	1797

Source: Student Guidance Section, Education Department

It can be seen from the table that contrary to what some may think, the number of suspected school dropouts had been on the decline both at the Primary and Junior Secondary level over the past decade.

#### 6.3 Characteristics of school dropouts

Law (1990) conducted a comparative study of 187 school dropouts and 172 non-school dropouts with age range between 13 and 18. According to his findings, the parents of the dropout group had lower, rather than higher, expectation of their children in terms of educational attainment. On the other hand, they also had less control over their children.

Table 6.3.1, 6.3.2, and 6.3.3 give some of the details.

**Table 6.3.1: Parents' expectation towards the educational attainment of their children (%)**

Parents' expectation	School dropouts	Non-school dropouts
No expectation	13.8	23.9
Secondary 3	7.8	29.5
Secondary 5	24.0	30.3
Matriculation	0.6	2.8
Post secondary/College	53.9	13.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Law (1990)

**Table 6.3.2: Would the respondents inform their parents if they wanted to stay out for the night (%)**

	School dropouts	Non-school dropouts
No	16.8	51.6
Just inform	26.0	39.1
Ask for permission	57.3	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Law (1990)

**Table 6.3.3: Respondents' major source of income (%)**

	School dropouts	Non-school dropouts
Earned by myself	13.5	66.3
From parents	81.9	28.6
From friends	1.2	3.1
Other	3.5	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Law (1990)

Since, however, the data collected were retrospective in nature, one should take note how the results should be interpreted. For example, the original data did not specify whether the parents of the young school dropouts had always had low expectation for them.

A study conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d) of 112 school dropouts aged 13-16 also found that most of the respondents had already had troubles at school before they dropped out. Table 6.3.4, 6.3.5, and 6.3.6 give some of the details. It should however be pointed out that the response rate of the mailed questionnaire survey was only 28%.

**Table 6.3.4: Academic performance before dropping out of school**

	%
Very good	0.9
Good	2.7
Quite good	12.5
Quite bad	35.7
Bad	22.3
Very bad	25.0
No answer	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d)

It can be seen from the table that most of the young school dropouts did not do very well in their studies before dropping out of school.

**Table 6.3.5: Ever played truant?**

	%
Yes	71.4
No	25.9
No answer	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d)

It can be seen that most of the young school dropouts had played truant when they were still going to school.

**Table 6.3.6: Ever violated school regulations?**

	%
Yes	68.8
No	27.7
No answer	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d)

Most of the young school dropouts had violated school regulations.

## 6.4 Reasons for dropping out of school

According to the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Group's (1994d) study, most of the young school dropouts attributed the reasons of their dropping out of school to personal, family, and school related problems. Table 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 summarize the responses.

**Table 6.4.1: Did personal/family problems have anything to do with the respondents' dropping out of school?**

	%
Yes	50.9
No	41.1
No answer	8.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d)

**Table 6.4.2: Did problems at school have anything to do with the respondents' dropping out of school?**

	%
Yes	67.9
No	23.2
No answer	8.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d)

Among personal/family problems, reasons cited include 'do not think I can make it' (52.6%), 'bothered by personal problems' (41.4%), and 'poor family relationship' (26.3%).

Among problems related to the school, reasons cited include 'no school identity' (38.2%), 'classes boring' (35.5%), 'school shows no concern to students' (32.9%), and 'curriculum too much too deep' (30.3%).

## 6.5 Feeling about dropping out of school

Both Law (1990) and the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Group's (1994d) study found that the young school dropouts were rather ambivalent about their experience. For example, in Law's study, 46% of the respondents strongly agreed that they liked school after dropping out, while 45% strongly disagreed. Likewise in the

Hong Kong Federation of Youth Group's study, while 30% of the respondents felt free after dropping out of school, 28% felt boring and idle.

## 6.6 Future plans

According to Law's (1990) study, most of the young school dropouts were able to find work within 3 months after dropping out of school. On the other hand, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Group's (1994d) study found that more than half of the respondents claimed that they would like to go back to school (see Table 6.6.1).

**Table 6.6.1: Did the respondents want to go back to school?**

	%
Yes	57.3
No	32.1
No answer	10.6
Total	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994d)

## 6.7 Summary observations

Two general observations may be drawn from the above review:

First, the declining trend of school dropouts should bring relief to people who are concerned about the phenomenon. Although there is no empirical data to explain the trend, the efforts made by the schools, the Education Department, the families etc. should be recognized.

Second, although the number of school dropouts appeared to be on the decline, there is apparently still a need for more in-depth and systematic study of the reasons and life conditions of the young people who have dropped out of school.

## References

Law, C.K. (1990). A study of young school dropouts. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Playground Association.

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## Additional References

The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1996). Youth today. Hong Kong: Author.

The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1997). Tuning in to youth: The setting up of Hong Kong youth indicators. Hong Kong: Author.