

# **Role of Social Workers in Reducing School Dropouts**

**Hemantha Kumar K P**

Faculty, Department of Social Work, University College of Arts, Tumkur University, Tumkur

## **Abstract**

A significant number of children in India drop out of school each year. This issue negatively impacts the country's literacy rate, economic growth, and social development. School dropouts are defined as students who enrolled in school but left before completing their last level of education. Despite efforts such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and the National Policy on Education, school dropout remains a persistent challenge. Students often leave school due to financial hardships, family responsibilities, or lack of motivation. This study highlights the vital role of social workers in addressing this issue. School social workers help prevent dropouts by identifying at-risk students, building supportive relationships, assessing needs, working with school staff and families, and addressing personal or social problems that hinder learning. This paper explores the causes of school dropouts, particularly in Karnataka, and emphasizes the need for more research in this area. There is a gap in understanding how social workers can effectively support students with special needs and collaborate with key stakeholders. To create lasting change, it is essential to include social workers in policy and decision-making related to education and student welfare.

**Keywords:** School Dropouts, School Education, Social Work, Risk Factors, Research in Karnataka

## **Introduction**

Socioeconomic underachievement, a lack of family support, academic underachievement, a lack of guidance services, a rigid curriculum, disregard for individual differences, a lack of teaching methods, and socioeconomic and cultural aspects of the school environment were all contributing factors. One out of every eight students enrolled in a school or college drops out before finishing their education, with school dropouts making up approximately 62 percent of all dropouts, according to a survey conducted by the Indian government's National Statistical Office (NSO). 62.9 percent of all dropouts happen in high school. Every kid has the right to free elementary education under the Indian Constitution's Right to Education. Numerous kids are pursuing their education as a right. The number of enrolled students has significantly expanded thanks to this right, which has undoubtedly made a huge difference in the sphere of education. The government has done fantastic work by offering free education in public schools, where in addition to instruction; they also provide free meals, clothes, and books. But if we look at the opposite side of the coin, we find that there are a lot of students in general, who leave school in the primary, senior, and secondary grades. There may be a number of local and global factors influencing these dropouts. We cannot put the blame for everything that happens in our nation on the poor. Evidence suggests that school dropout rates among boys are higher at the secondary and senior secondary levels than they are among girls at the primary level. In this article, we will discuss the general school dropout

rate in India and attempt to analyse the dropout rates overall as well as by gender. We'll make an effort to identify potential causes of dropouts and offer solutions to help the nation experience fewer dropouts. Education is the cornerstone of any country's development, and when it comes to India, which has a sizable and productive population, education can only be the icing on the cake for increasing the effectiveness and production of the country.

**Definition of Dropout:**

Dropout refers to quitting school and a class before finishing the required coursework. The definition of the word "dropout" varies depending on the author. A dropout is widely understood to be "someone who has missed at least seven days of school; these kids are called dropouts." Depending on the compulsory age of registration, the term "dropouts" refers to "students who have not completed a cycle of basic education, which should generally encompass children from the ages of five or six to fifteen years," according to Frances (2008).

A **dropout** refers to an individual who leaves a formal education program or institution before completing the required course of study or obtaining a qualification. Dropouts may occur at any level of education, including primary, secondary, or higher education.

**Factors of School Dropouts:**

The problem of educational dropouts affects individuals, families, schools, and society as a whole. It is a complicated procedure that is impacted by numerous variables. However, it is a phenomenon that occurs in schools, and several school-related elements may act as risk or protective factors. In Serbia, the dropout rate is still very high. Reducing dropout rates from primary and secondary education is one method to strengthen the educational system and ensure that every child receives an equal education. Dropping out means that society has failed to create the human capital necessary to support a thriving economy. According to social capital theory, part of the solution is in encouraging the kind of reassuring social structures that demonstrate to kids that society genuinely cares about their welfare and values their active engagement in communal life.

**Family factors:**

In terms of shaping the atmosphere that fosters achievement, family socioeconomic position is related to educational attainment. Family issues include any deaths in the family, older children caring for younger siblings, parents' attitudes towards children being treated unfairly, family harassment and abuse, poverty or poor economic conditions, etc. These are the reasons why students leave their schools.

**School Factors:**

A greater dropout rate in primary and secondary schooling is a result of school factors. The primary factor in the greater percentage of female dropouts was the way teachers treated female students in the classroom. In terms of academic achievement and performance, teachers frequently privilege boys over girls, which causes dropouts. The school atmosphere, teacher attitudes towards students, a lack of infrastructure, quality and skilled teachers, prejudice, poor adaptability to the school environment, etc. are all factors that contribute to school dropouts.

**Social environment factors:**

In order for personalities to develop in society, the social environment is crucial. Although the social environment may also play a role in schooling, social problems or issues can sometimes result in school dropouts. The causes of school dropouts include things like child marriage, child labour, peer pressure, cultural practises, and involvement in the community. In developing nations, migration is a factor in dropout rates from education. Certain people are particularly vulnerable to having their children drop out of school because they frequently travel in search of work. It has been demonstrated that migration has both a positive and negative relationship with school dropout. The students leave their schools as a result of this environment. Absenteeism from school may have a slightly worse impact on female pupils who leave school early. In upper elementary school, girls perform less academically than boys and are more likely to repeat a grade or drop out of school. There are numerous reasons why females drop out of school due to absences. For instance, frequent absences from school at first, followed by a permanent or temporary dropout, are frequently linked to teen pregnancy among females.

**Personal factors:**

Compared to other variables, personal considerations are more significant. School dropouts may be caused by personal causes such as students' interests, health, inferiority complex, lack of self-awareness, lack of concentration, misunderstanding, and environment maladjustment, among others, in many different geographic areas. Physical infirmity and starvation might lead to students' dropping out of school. Children with disabilities frequently cannot finish the entire school year. The individual features of the children and their parents, especially the household head, the structure and composition of the home, as well as community variables, can sometimes influence school attendance in addition to school-related issues.

What a social worker can do?

Effective dropout intervention solutions can be created by doing a number of things. First, intervention techniques might concentrate on either or both sets of issues because both institutional and individual factors affect dropping out. This means that without attempting to change the traits of families, schools, and communities that may contribute to those individual aspects, intervention efforts can concentrate on addressing the individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that are linked to dropping out. By offering potential dropouts more resources and supports to keep them in school, several dropout prevention programmes adopt such programmatic initiatives. As an alternative, intervention efforts may concentrate on seeking to reinforce or restructure the social and environmental surroundings of potential dropouts by offering them resources and supports. Such systemic approaches are frequently a component of broader initiatives to enhance the social and academic results of at-risk pupils more broadly. More information about both tactics is provided below.

Second, since academic and social issues are linked to dropping out, both must be addressed in effective preventative measures. Therefore, in order for dropout prevention methods to be successful, they must be all-encompassing, offering resources and supports in all facets of students' lives. Additionally, because dropouts have a variety of reasons for leaving school, the assistance offered to them must be adaptable and personalized.

Third, dropout prevention methods can and should start early in a child's academic career because the school. Programmes to prevent dropouts frequently focus on pupils in high school or middle school who may have previously endured years of academic failure or unresolved issues. Similar to this, dropout

rehabilitation programmes must make an effort to solve enduring issues in order to help dropouts finish their education. As a result, such programmes could be expensive and ineffective. In contrast, early intervention might be the most successful and economical strategy for dropout prevention.

**Role of School Social Worker** In the schools under consideration, social workers who serve as school counsellors stress that the majority of their work with families involves counselling and teaching parents. Insufficient parental cooperation was sometimes cited by school counsellors and teachers as a major contributing factor in cases where a kid dropped out of school. The duties of a school social worker are as follows.

- Collaboration with institutions and experts - A social worker may work alongside psychologists, doctors, and psychiatric practitioners;
- Research - To develop ideas that can be used at the school, research and surveys can be conducted there;
- Ongoing education - Social workers must take use of available courses to stay motivated and develop fresh, original approaches;
- Supervision - To avoid burnout, the social worker needs support when handling delicate situations.

Based on the scientific investigation, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 1995) code of ethics identifies the following issues: The social professional conducting the research should carefully assess any potential negative effects on people. Social workers involved in research should protect participants from unwarranted physical or mental discomfort. Social workers who evaluate services or cases should only discuss them for professional reasons and with people who are directly and professionally involved with them. Researchers should ensure that participants' consent is voluntary and informed.

### **Future Solutions**

**Government, non-profit and individual awareness campaigns:** Cities and rural areas should launch awareness campaigns to raise public understanding of the negative consequences that unemployment and illiteracy can have. In situations where dropouts are brought on by ideological conflicts and kids are compelled to stop going to school because some people believe that education is not important or that women shouldn't go to school, this is not a physical issue; rather, it has to do with how people view the world. Only through educating parents and families about these issues and causes of dropouts will these issues and reasons for dropouts be resolved.

**Infrastructure:** There are numerous regions where kids must travel far to get to school or colleges, which also contributes to dropout rates in these areas. The national education policy for 2020 said that in order to lessen this issue, the government would provide effective and enough infrastructure to all pupils as well as establish cutting-edge educational facilities for migrant laborer children.

**What parents can do:** Despite having all the resources available to them, there are occasions when students still wish to leave school. There could be a number of causes for this. In these situations, parents can play a crucial role by maintaining open lines of communication with their children and attempting to understand their motivations for wanting to drop out of school. They can also encourage their children to continue their education by helping them understand the realities of the job market without exerting undue pressure. Parents can also encourage the youngster to consider switching schools or taking a break rather than giving up. All of the parental actions help the child psychologically and emotionally, and he emerges stronger as a result.

**Skill-focused Education:** Students occasionally drop out of school at different points in their academic careers because they believe their basic education will not prepare them for a suitable profession. Education needs to become more skill focused in order to address this issue. Such an educational programme can support the child till he enrolls in college, which can help him become independent and find suitable employment. The government, private boards, and even the students themselves will have to put a lot of effort into this idea, but it still has a chance.

**Early warning system:** It is possible to strengthen the early warning system, which is currently in place as part of the UNICEF/UNESCO programme for out-of-school children. To determine the danger of dropping out of school, this method identifies school-level data on attendance, performance, and behaviour. Such a move could improve the school's ability to cater to the needs of pupils who are at risk. It also aids in lowering school absences.

**Increased educational attractiveness:** To make learning more enticing to pupils and encourage them to attend class, leisure activities may be introduced. There are several instances where youngsters live on the streets while their parents are at work since their parents are daily wage workers. Such children can be encouraged to attend school if the school provides an engaging educational experience, perhaps by providing them with a lunch or assisting them in taking part in enjoyable activities like sports, art projects, and other games.

**Government initiative to reduce the dropout rate** Making ensuring that kids are in school is one of the main objectives outlined in the National Education Policy, or NEP 2020, which was just approved. India has seen a considerable rise in dropout rates after Grade 5, despite numerous government measures, such as the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act, which expanded student participation in primary classrooms. "The GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for Grades 6-8 was 90.9%, while for Grades 9-10 and 11-12 it was only 79.3% and 56.5%, respectively," stated the NEP 2020 paper. According to the 75th wave of the NSSO's household survey conducted in 2017–18, 3.22 crore children between the ages of 6 and 17 are not enrolled in school. With a target of achieving 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio from preschool to secondary level by 2030, it will be a primary priority to re-engage these kids in learning as soon as possible and to stop more pupils from dropping out, according to the document.

- LFPR in CWS for male of age 15 years and above in rural and urban areas were respectively 78.3% and 75.1% during May, 2025 which marked a marginal decline from the corresponding LFPR estimates of 79.0% and 75.3% respectively for rural and urban areas during April, 2025.
- LFPR among female of age 15 years and above for rural areas was 36.9% during May, 2025.
- Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in CWS in rural areas among persons of age 15 years and above was 54.1% during May, 2025. WPR in urban areas among persons of the same age group was 46.9% in May 2025 with the overall WPR at the country level observed as 51.7% during May, 2025 as compared to 52.8% observed during April, 2025.
- WPR for female of age 15 years and above for rural and urban areas were respectively 35.2% and 23.0% in May, 2025 and the overall female WPR of the same age group at the country level was observed as 31.3%.
- Unemployment Rate (UR) in CWS among persons of age 15 years and above has increased to 5.6% in May, 2025 from 5.1% in April, 2025. The female UR was a touch higher at 5.8% compared to the male UR of 5.6% at the country level during May, 2025.

**Universal Participation In School** The government hopes to attain universal participation in education by ensuring that students are enrolled and attending classes under the NEP 2020. The NEP paper states that



this will be accomplished by "carefully tracing" children and their academic progress and ensuring that they have the chance to "catch up and reenter school." NEP 2020 suggests ensuring quality education in addition to infrastructure and participation, so that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and girls do not lose interest in going to school.

Male Participation In April 2025, male participation stood at 63.5%. In May 2025, it declined slightly to 63.1%. Change: A decrease of 0.4 percentage points, indicating a marginal drop in rural male engagement. Female Participation In April 2025, female participation was 23.8%. It dropped to 22.9% in May 2025. Change: A decrease of 0.9 percentage points, which is relatively more significant than the male decline. The rate is slightly higher for upper primary students (Classes 6-8), with an average of 3 percent. However, the dropout rate for secondary school students (Classes 9-10) is significantly higher at 12.6 percent. The data also reveals that boys are likelier to drop out of school than girls in all three categories. The average dropout rate for girls in primary school is 1.4 percent, compared to 1.6 percent for boys. In upper primary, the dropout rate for girls is 3.3 percent, while it is 2.7 percent for boys. Similarly, in secondary school, the dropout rate for girls is 12.3 percent, while it is 13 percent for boys.

### Conclusion:

To achieve the objective of ensuring education for all, regardless of caste, religion, or gender, dropout rates must be reduced. To solve this issue, cooperation between government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is required. This paper makes several recommendations, including implementing a free education programme, increasing scholarships at the primary and secondary levels, reducing the culture of paid coaching, lowering the cost of private schools, improving school infrastructure, increasing parent awareness, preventing early marriage of girls, ensuring equal access to education, combining various curricula into one or two unique systems, providing quality training for teachers, and providing all necessary resources.

### References:

1. Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2021). *Educational Statistics at a Glance*. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.in>
2. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). (2020). *Dropout Rates in India: Trends and Patterns*. New Delhi: NCERT Publications.
3. Right to Education Act. (2009). *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*. Government of India.
4. National Education Policy (NEP). (2020). *Ministry of Human Resource Development*, Government of India.
5. UNESCO. (2019). *Out-of-School Children: South Asia Regional Study*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
6. Chakrabarti, R., & Chatterjee, P. (2017). *Socio-economic Determinants of School Dropouts: A Study of Rural India*. *Journal of Social Science Research*, 11(3), 45–53.
7. Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR). (2018). *Role of Social Workers in Addressing Educational Inequality in India*. New Delhi: ICSSR.
8. Government of Karnataka. (2022). *Annual School Education Report: Karnataka*. Department of Primary and Secondary Education.

9. Jain, S. (2016). *The Impact of School Social Work on Student Retention*. Indian Journal of Social Work, 77(2), 183–200.
10. Save the Children India. (2015). *Children Out of School: A Study on Dropouts in India*. New Delhi: Save the Children.