

## Research Brief 8: School enrolment and drop-out among vulnerable rural Zambian children\*

*This is no 9 of a series of briefs providing new insights on the wellbeing of rural children in Sub-Saharan Africa, a previously much under-researched population. Findings are derived from a longitudinal (2008-2010) controlled study in 5 communities of Kafue District, Zambia. This study was aimed at evaluating and developing a results-based intervention programme focussed on the interface between psychosocial wellbeing and livelihood. In addition, the study identified particular risk and protective factors for the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children.*

**According to the Zambian Central Statistical Office (2007), 17% of primary school-age children within the Lusaka Province of Zambia do not attend school. This brief examines the circumstances which contribute to school drop-out among rural Zambian children, and identifies economic and social daily stressors as main risk factors.**

### Research Questions

- What is the prevalence of school drop-out in a population of vulnerable rural children?
- What factors promote school drop out?
- What are the self reported reasons for school drop out?
- Do children who drop out of school have lower levels of psychosocial wellbeing?

### Research Methodology

- Standardised interviews with children in 2008 (10-18 years) and 2010 (12-20)
- 747 participants (50% girls, 50% orphans, 11% other vulnerable, 39% non-vulnerable).
- School drop-out is defined as change in self-reported enrolment status between baseline and follow-up data collection 2 years later (includes only participants who were initially enrolled at baseline).
- Completing grade 9 was considered as successfully finishing school.
- Standardised measures of socio-demographic, socio-economic and psychosocial variables
- Multivariate logistic regression modelling was used

\* In this study, participants were aged 10-20

<sup>1</sup> These figures are not directly comparable with national statistics which give net attendance ratios for primary school age (7-13) and secondary school age (14-18) (ZDHS, 2007).

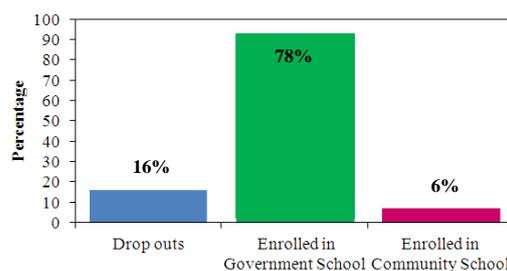
<sup>2</sup> Primary school age in Zambia covers grades 1-7, but grades 1-9 can be attended in basic government schools.

### Key Findings

#### 1. Prevalence of school drop-out among vulnerable rural children

**School enrolment figures<sup>1</sup> are consistent with national estimates for rural areas of Lusaka province:**

- Of the originally enrolled participants who were supposed to still be in school, 84% of (10-18 years) were still school-going 2 years later (aged 12-20); 16% had dropped out prematurely<sup>2</sup>. There were no differences observed in terms of gender.
- 93% of school-going children were enrolled in government schools and 7% were enrolled in community schools (figure 1).



**Figure 1: School drop-out and school type**

#### Vulnerable children are not less likely to be enrolled than other children.

- Orphans and children with an elderly and/or chronically ill caregiver have comparable enrolment rates to non-vulnerable children.
- Age-corrected school grade reached is the same for orphans, vulnerable and non-vulnerable children.

- Children from households with lower socio-economic status were more likely to attend community schools than those from household with higher socio-economic status. Community schools could be a buffer for poverty based school drop-out.

## 2. Factors that promote school drop out

### Factors associated with school drop-out:

Children who drop out from school receive less support from their primary caregivers and friends and are less integrated in their peer group than school-going children. They also experience higher levels of stigma, hunger and daily stress.

### Factors that predict school drop-out:

Factors associated with school drop-out were tested as predictors (multivariate logistic regression). When compared, only two factors effectively predicted drop out:

- **Age:** School drop-out is more common in older children (16 to 20 years) (figure 2).

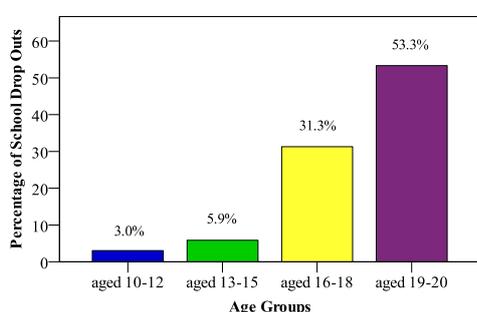


Figure 2: Age and school drop out

- **Daily stress:** The level of current daily stress experienced by children also predicts school drop-out. The daily stressors that best predict school drop-out are: having to worry about school money, excessive household chores and having to look for piece work.

**Interesting non-predictors:** Household level poverty, quality of primary care and Enrolment in a community school did not predict school drop-out.

## 3. Self-reported reasons for school drop out by participants:

- The most important reason for school drop out mentioned by youth was 'financial

problems' (70%) followed by 'pregnancy or marriage' (24%) which was mentioned by girls only.

- Other, less frequent reasons were 'failing exams', 'household duties', 'Illness', 'distance to school', 'loss of interest', 'completion of school', and 'starting a job'.

## 4. School drop outs have lower levels of psychosocial well-being:

School drop outs show lower satisfaction with life, are less positive about their future perspectives and have higher levels of depression than non drop outs.

### Conclusions:

- **Zambian education policies that promote school attendance have been successful in ensuring enrolment and attendance.**
- **However, challenges remain to keep these children enrolled until Grade 9.**
- **Interventions should focus on older children, as they drop out more often.**
- **Daily stressors such as excessive chores, looking for piece work and worries about school fees were found to be the main predictors of school drop-out.**
- **The predominant self-reported reason for school drop-out was a lack of financial means. It therefore seems insufficient just to pay school fees, as other indirect costs (books, uniform, etc.) still pose a financial barrier for poorer children.**
- **Marriage and pregnancy were a major self-reported reason for school drop-out among girls. Interventions should be mindful of such gender-specific issues.**
- **While this study sheds some valuable light on the causes of school drop-out, it was not specifically designed to capture or predict school drop-out, and further investigation is still needed.**

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