

## School Dropout: Features and Coping Mechanisms

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There are many reasons why an individual may be driven to drop out of school. Inclination to dropout begins to develop during early childhood years and grows within maturing traits during high school years. This paper defines school dropout, illustrates its forms and causes and recommends changes at the level of parents and school that can be applied to alleviate this social plague.

Omar, a sixteen-year-old young man, left ninth grade after he came to the conclusion that school will never benefit him. He didn't know how he passed his classes when he was in school. According to him, he never succeeded in reading or mathematics. He is now working in an electricity workshop with his cousin in Ma'aleh Adumim settlement.

Salma, a sixteen-year-old girl, from Shu'fat Refugee Camp is engaged to her neighbor. She insisted on leaving school because she did not see a future in the academic field although her fiancée did not want her to leave school. She believes that her future husband would meet her needs. She said so while she turned to him and said: "Are you not enough my dear?"

In a restaurant on the corner of Sultan Sulaiman Street, Salim, a seventeen-year-old young man, is waiting for the owner of the restaurant where he works to open the locks. He quickly enters the kitchen to change his clothes and start arranging chairs and tables. He rearranges them every evening after he rinses the floor, cleans the kitchen and other manual labor tasks.

A few dozen meters from there, inside the Old City of Jerusalem, Mariam helps her mother clean the house. Since she left school two years ago, after completing the seventh grade, she has no plans. There are no opportunities for her to practice or learn anything. She wants to resume her studies but does not know how. She does not receive any encouragement from her parents, she expressed that they lost hope of her return to school and achievement of any academic success.

### Dropout Definition:

According to UNESCO, a school dropout is defined as anyone who does not complete his or her studies and leaves school before the end of school years. Elsewhere, Al-kala defined dropouts as "partial or complete interruption of pupils from school, whether due to financial or psychological reasons, in such a way that dropout students cannot successfully attain their learning objectives."<sup>1</sup> Educators distinguish between actual and masked dropout. The masked dropout has different forms centered on physical presence of students at school while they are psychologically and mentally absent<sup>2</sup>. The masked dropout phenomenon is more dangerous than actual dropout and requires more intensive interventions compared with physical dropout.

1 Al-Kala, Fakher Eddin, *Level of Primary Education and Its Reflections on Illiteracy*, the Egyptian Company for Publishing, Cairo, 1977, page 10

2 Bin Issa Ali, *Child Labor and Relation to Educational Dropout*, PhD Thesis, Mohammed Khudier University, 2016

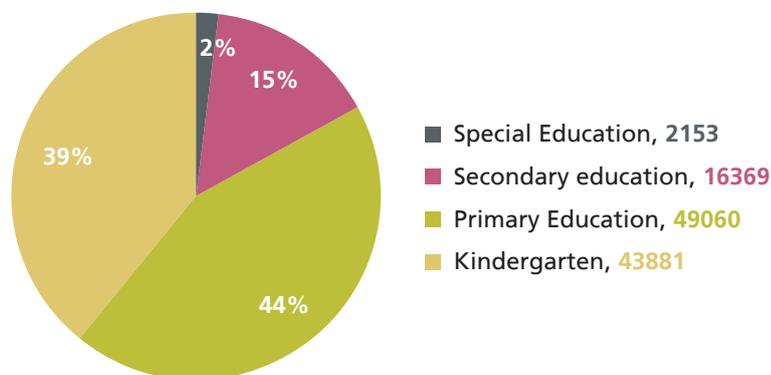
Although dropout rate in Arab countries around Palestine is very high, for example, dropout rate in Jordan is 25%<sup>3</sup> while dropout rate in Palestine 2015-2016 is considerably low as it does not exceed 1.5%<sup>4</sup> according to official statistics. This ratio is small compared with the situation in Jerusalem, where dropout and child labor rates are higher than reported in the Palestinian or Israeli statistics.

In the city of Jerusalem, about 115,000 students<sup>5</sup> study in schools, as shown in figure 1, less than half of them study in the schools under Israeli municipality of Jerusalem.

**Figure 1:**

**Distribution of students by educational stages**

According to the 2017 Municipal Statistical Book, 111,463 students are enrolled in all Arab schools in Jerusalem

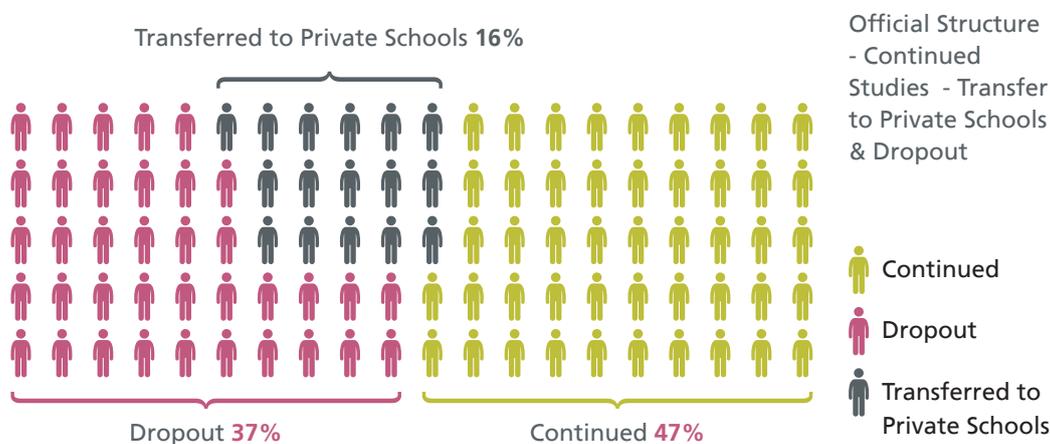


According to the Israeli municipality, as indicated in Figure 2, dropout rates in secondary grades are about 37%<sup>6</sup>. In other reports, there has been a marked decline in the last two years, where the percentages reached the 30% mark. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of students who drop out are students from Jerusalem municipality schools compared with private schools and schools under the jurisdiction of Palestinian Education Directorate, where rates reached more than 50% in more than one secondary school in the city between 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

**Figure 2:**

**Dropout, transferred and continued rates among high school students 2015**

The situation among Students between 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> grades - 2015



Before making any recommendations, it is essential to understand reasons behind this societal scourge, which, if not treated at the national level, would have repercussions and costs that will comprise a social and economic burden that no society can bear. A person who begins his life in poverty and dropping out of school is often trapped in the cycle of destitution, poverty and ignorance. In consequence, his/ her children repeat the same cycle as they cannot escape if they are unable to take their future into their own hands and rediscover the importance of education.

3 Queen Rania's Administration for Education Technology and Information 2015-2016

4 Palestinian National Information Center Wafa, School Dropout Phenomena, <http://info.wafa.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=3207>, accessed 01.03.2018

5 Israeli Municipality of Jerusalem Statistics 2017

6 Ibid.

## Main Reasons:

1. Poverty and poor economic situation: Underprivileged families find it difficult to cover school costs for their children combined with low value for education in these families resulting in using children as a tool to help them cover daily expenses by engaging in them labor market. In that case, children are sent to a scenario worst than dropout which is child labor<sup>7</sup>. Child labor consumes children's physical and psychological potential and turns them into adults with limited horizons and capacities.
2. Forced school dropout: lack of teachers' knowledge of how to deal with differences in educational capacities of their students, allowing students to feel incapable and incompetence. Many of interviewed students revealed school practices that made them think of dropping out such as teachers' discrimination among students and use of violence in its various forms. Some even mentioned physical violence as a mean of dealing with students, especially towards students with low academic achievement, in addition to lack of extracurricular activities within the school. Interviewed students stated that extracurricular activities reinforce their sense of belonging including a variety of activities such as Dabkeh, sports teams, drawing courses, music...etc.
3. Lack of counseling frameworks, guidance programs and vocational guidance in schools deprives students from the opportunity regardless of their level of education -especially those students with low academic achievement- to learn about different professions and to recognize their abilities, professional tendencies and work ethics. If professional skills are properly developed, it can result in increasing students' motivation through the existence of space that makes them feel distinguished and accomplished.
4. Parents' attitudes towards education complicate the role of workers in the field of school dropout control to change the attitudes of some parents, especially those who have dropped out of the educational system themselves. Their attitudes are negative or neutral about their children completing their education and joining the university or enrolling in vocational education.
5. Early marriage as 4 out of 10 women marries when they are under the age of nineteen in Palestine. Many young women get married before their 15th birthday. One of the implications of early marriage is that it accelerates the dropout process of young female students and determines their societal roles; a housewife where reproduction and raising children is their sole responsibility. To this day, societal attitudes continue to favor this social phenomenon associated with deteriorating health, social and psychological effects on the girl and her family.

## Reduction of Dropout Rate

How can Samir, a young man in the seventh grade who suffers from low academic achievement in mathematics, be prevented from dropping out of school? How can Salma, who feels discriminated against because of her behavior or her skin color by her teacher, change her attitude? How can parents keep their children in school for as long as possible? We will present some recommendations that could be followed to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon:

1. Early intervention as this phenomenon begins to form in early years. Many students who showed signs of dropping out in primary school later dropped out. As a result, there is much that can be provided to educators and teachers to raise the level of education for these students to ensure that they stay in the school.

2. Improve quality of education in schools and provide adequate budgets to build student's abilities, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, the philosophy of not leaving any student behind motivates students with low academic achievement and behavioral challenges and gives them a reason to stay in school.
3. Implement guidance and rehabilitation of school staff to deal with educational disorders, special needs and address behavioral issues through proficient methods. This needs radical changes within educational systems in colleges and universities to educate teachers.
4. Establish effective frameworks in schools to enable students to plan for their future while integrating awareness-raising and skills development as well as empower students to identify their abilities, professional tendencies and work ethics by offering capacity building workshops within schools to heighten their sense of belonging and success.
5. Target parents, especially those who have negative or neutral attitudes towards the importance of education or those who have positive attitudes towards early marriage through imparting necessary knowledge and awareness of risks pertaining to dropout and early marriage in addition to supporting them in developing positive attitudes towards completing one's studies and its contribution to elevating quality of life for the individual and family.
6. Initiate collaboration between schools and civil society in order to create participatory space and implement extracurricular activities including: arts, culture and sports within schools that would further heighten student's sense of belonging and excellence.

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