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PARTICIPATION OF EARLY SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

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Background to the study

The educational system of Sri Lanka prior to the period of the State Council (1931-1947) suffered from several remarkable shortcomings that in turn affected the provision of educational opportunity to all. Educational opportunities were provided in only a few urban areas while the existence of two types of schools; one in English which charged fees, and the other in the local or native languages which provided free education, further eroded the opportunity for education. This dual system of schools reinforced by urban-rural imbalances prevailed through out the nineteenth century and in the first four decades of the twentieth century.

The educational reforms that were undertaken during the period of the State Council and the post-independence era, after 1947, however, led to an expansion of educational opportunity. Some of the more salient of these reforms were the creation of Central Schools in 1940; the introduction of a system of free education in 1945; the introduction of native languages as the media of education from 1945; the commencement of a system of scholarships and the creation of more school plants and teacher training facilities* in the subsequent years. As a result of these changes the enrollment in schools gradually increased. The enrollment of those in the 5-14 age group* which was 57.6 percent in 1947 swelled to 71.6 in 1953 and increased further to 75.6 by 1968. Even though the enrollment rates reached a plateau stage in the seventies it still remained at 83.7 according to the census of 1981. In spite of this increase in enrollment early dropping out from school nevertheless remains a grave problem plaguing the educational system of Sri Lanka: table I gives some of the statistics of the prevailing situation. The absence of a compulsory age of education (5-14) that could be enforced by law is also largely responsible for this situation in spite of the fact that the Education Ordinance of 1939 made provisions for regulations to be enforced to ensure compulsory attendance.

* For further details read: Rupasinghe, S. *Progress of the School system of Sri Lanka during fifty years of Universal Adult Suffrage*, University of Colombo Review, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Colombo, 1983).

* 5-14 age group: this was considered as the age of compulsory attendance by the Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939.

The Problem :

A large number of students leave school without completing even the minimum 8/9 years of compulsory schooling. For instance in 1979, 72,928 pupils dropped out between grades 1-8. The corresponding figure for 1982 was 1,37,340. (Table 1). The average drop out rate per grade in 1982 was around 5.3. Since dropping out from school is a recurrent problem, it is useful to examine the way these dropouts spend their lives after leaving school. It is important to see their capability as effective earning units either as individuals or as a member of the family. Moreover, we have to know how they earn their livelihood and how they do contribute towards the economy. Another question to which an answer is needed is the strength of their earning power. The present study has been designed by the writer to answer some of the above questions.

TABLE 1

**Dropout rates in Government Schools: Grades 1 - 8 for selected years
(Age group 5 - 14)**

Grade	1973 %	1976 %	1979 Number	%	1982 Number	%
1	—	.8	5,259	1.3	7,582	2.1
2	5.3	2.3	4,270	1.2	7,753	2.2
3	5.3	5.5	11,130	3.4	18,725	5.2
4	6.4	7.4	12,413	4.3	22,576	6.3
5	7.3	10.2	12,112	4.9	20,961	7.0
6	9.3	7.5	10,346	5.4	19,526	7.5
7	4.7	6.3	8,409	6.5	16,033	7.2
8	8.4	13.9	9,027	4.9	13,914	7.4
1—8	—	—	72,928	—	1,37,340	5.3

Source : Ministry of Education. School Census.

The objectives of this study are to : ascertain the characteristics of the socio-economic background of the early school leavers ; determine the nature of their employment pattern ; assess their level of income ; and obtain information on their leisure time activities and social activities and then determine their needs.

It is proposed to realize the above objectives by using a sample of 500 early school leavers. The criteria used in selecting this sample are as follows.

1. they had to be below 24 years of age ;
2. they had to be individuals who attended school, but left school without completing grade 8 ;
3. they had to be persons who are employed in some way ; and
4. they also had to be persons who had an income ; regular, seasonal or one that cannot be declared specifically.

The sample represents the following geographical areas :

1. municipal areas : Colombo and Negombo.
2. rural areas located in the wetzone including fishing villages : Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Matara, Galle, Ratnapura, Kurunegala, Kegalle and Kalutara districts.
3. colonies located in the dry zone : Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Hambantota districts, and
4. suburban areas : areas around Colombo Municipality.

The practical difficulties encountered in determining the population of early school leavers who are employed in economic activities in the above areas forced the researcher to select an accessible sample. Persons were selected on the availability of information about each person or in other words was dependent entirely on accessibility.

The sample inevitably had to be one drawn from those in the lower socio-economic levels as the problem of early school leaving is primarily one related to the lower socio-economic strata. The sample is also a homogenous one in so far as the spoken language is concerned.

For the purpose of data analysis the sample consisting of 513 is being classified into three sectors : urban, suburban and rural. The number belonging to each sector are 148, 153 and 212 respectively. Seventy eight percent of them were boys while the other 22 percent constitute girls. (Table 2).

TABLE 2

The Sample (percentages)

Sex		Rural	Suburban	Urban	Total
Boys	..	72%	78%	83%	78%
Girls	..	28%	22%	17%	22%
Total	..	212	153	148	513

The collection of data for this sample of 513 was carried out by field interviews. Persons were selected by contact agents and their homes were visited and person to person interviews were conducted at convenient places. The interview schedule consisted of structured as well as open ended questions. Interviews were carried out during a period of approximately nine months lasting from May 1984 to January 1985.

Characteristics of the sample of dropouts :

In examining the agewise composition of the sample it is seen that the vast majority, 77 percent of the dropouts in this sample, belong to the age group 15-20 (400 out of 513). (Table 3). It is also a pity to note that 16 percent of the sample belong to the age group 9-14, the group that should have been attending school. Furthermore, 52 percent of the sample could have been in the secondary school (9th -12th grade) and 32 percent of them could have been in a tertiary educational institute if they had continued their education without interruption.

Table 4 gives the grade from which the individuals dropped out. From a perusal of this table it is clear that 58 percent of the total sample had dropped out in grade six and seven, after completing primary education. The remaining 42 percent have failed to complete even their primary education. In other words, forty two percent have an incomplete primary education. A comparison of the three sectors : rural, suburban and urban reveal that in the urban sector, (50.7 percent), the drop outs from the primary stage is greater than in the suburban (41.2) and rural (36.4) sectors.

TABLE 3
Composition of the Sample: Agewise

	Age	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Total	%	
Tertiary age level	22	6	4	6	16	32	
	21	2	6	6			14
	20	16	12	10			38
	19	42	23	32			97
Secondary School age level	18	44	33	22	99	52	
	17	32	20	20			72
	16	24	18	12			54
	15	18	12	10			40
Belong to Compulsory School Age	14	8	10	8	26	16	
	13	5	4	6			15
	12	8	5	6			19
	11	3	4	4			11
	10	2	1	4			7
	9	2	1	2			5
Total Number		212	153	148	513		

TABLE 4
Dropouts - Gradewise composition

Grade	Rural Number	%	Suburban Number	%	Urban Number	%	Total Number	%
7	83	39.2	43	28.1	40	27.0	166	32.4
6	52	24.4	47	30.7	33	22.3	132	25.7
5	34	16.1	30	19.6	36	24.3	100	19.5
4	23	10.8	20	13.1	28	18.9	71	13.9
3	10	4.7	6	3.9	5	3.4	21	4.1
2	5	2.4	4	2.6	4	2.7	13	2.5
1	5	2.4	3	2.0	2	1.4	10	1.9
Total	212	100.0	153	100.0	148	100.0	513	100.0

The type of school from which individuals dropped out is given in Table 5. According to the table 98.5 percent of them have dropped out from Maha Vidyalayas and Junior Schools. The number of students who dropped out from Collegiate Schools and Central Schools is insignificant. The Maha Vidyalayas and Junior Schools referred to in the Urban sector are schools in the slum and shanty areas. The Junior Schools mentioned under the rural sector are mainly village schools.

TABLE 5
Dropouts – a schoolwise breakdown

<i>Type of School</i>	<i>Rural</i> %	<i>Suburban</i> %	<i>Urban</i> %	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Number</i>
Collegiate Schools	.. —	—	.6	.1	1
Central Schools (M.M.V.)	.. 1.5	—	2.7	1.4	7
Maha Vidyalayas	.. 56.6	62.7	70.3	62.4	320
Junior Schools	.. 41.9	37.3	26.4	36.1	185
Total	.. 100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	513

Factors associated with dropping out are listed in Table 6. The percentages therein reveal the extent to which the individuals have been affected by each factor. From the list of factors it is evident that economic factors such as the low income of parents, the necessity to seek employment early in life, lack of clothes and stationery and the need to help in the household chores have induced students to leave school in all the three sectors. Factors related with learning such as low interest in school work, backwardness and difficulty in coping with some subjects taught in school too have contributed somewhat towards students leaving school rather early. Peer influence, poor health and punishment in school are three other factors that have considerable importance.

The size of the family also play a considerable role in determining the practice of students to stay longer in school. In this study nearly 81 percent of the dropouts in the urban sector, and 66 percent of them in the suburban sector are from families which have six or more children. The corresponding figure in the rural sector is 47 percent. (Table 7). The number of dropouts that belong to the ideal small family of 2 children is insignificant. Only 5.8 percent in the rural sector, 6 percent in the suburban sector and 3.2 percent in the urban sector belong to small families of 2 or less children.

In examining the education level of the father it is seen that 63.5 percent in the rural sector, 63 percent in the suburban sector, and 72 percent in the urban sector possess either an incomplete primary education or have no schooling at all. (Table 8). The number who have G. C. E. (OL) qualifications and above are very few. (Rural : 2.6%, Suburban : 7.26%, and Urban 8.0%). The overall situation is thus very distressing indeed.

As in the case of the education level of the father, the mothers' education level too is very low. Sixty eight point four percent in the rural, 64 percent in the suburban and 71.4 percent in the urban sector have mothers with either an incomplete primary education or no schooling at all. (Table 9). Here too the number who possess G. C. E. (OL) qualifications and above are meagre. (Rural: 4.3% Suburban : 2.0% and Urban : 3.0%).

TABLE 6

Factors responsible for dropping out: Factors and Percentages in each sector affected by them

Factor	Rural	Suburban	Urban
<i>Economic factors :</i>			
1. Low income of parents	50%	58%	65%
2. To seek employment	23%	26%	23%
3. Lack of clothes and stationery	28%	40%	33%
4. Work in the household	30%	23%	16%
<i>Factors related to learning :</i>			
5. Low interest in education	40%	22%	12%
6. Backwardness in school work	28%	20%	10%
7. Difficult school subjects	22%	24%	16%
<i>Factors related to family environment :</i>			
8. Parental persuasion to leave school	9%	3%	—
9. Lack of parental interest	2%	1%	5%
10. Disruptive family environment	6%	10%	12%
11. Separation of parents	2%	4%	4%
12. Death of a parent	2%	—	—
13. Migration of family	2%	—	—
<i>Factors related with peers :</i>			
14. Influence of bad friends	8%	3%	6%
15. Peer influence	13%	14%	10%
16. Love affairs	7%	—	—
<i>Factors related with school :</i>			
17. Punishment in school	10%	10%	12%
18. Conflict with the teacher	5%	—	—
19. Distance to school	1%	—	—
<i>Personal :</i>			
20. Poor Health	14%	12%	10%

TABLE 7

Number of siblings in the family

No. of siblings	Rural	Suburban	Urban
1	2.6%	2.0%	—
2	3.2%	4.0%	3.2%
3	12.8%	5.0%	—
4	17.8%	12.5%	9.6%
5	16.8%	10.3%	6.4%
6	18.9%	18.8%	20.8%
7	12.8%	22.0%	29.0%
8	5.7%	18.0%	18.2%
9	4.7%	5.0%	3.2%
10	4.7%	2.4%	9.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

TABLE 8
Education Level of father - (percentages)

<i>Education level</i>		<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Passed G.C.E. (AL)	..	.5%	—	—
Passed G.C.E. (OL)	..	2.1%	7.2%	8.0%
Educated between 6-9 years	..	30.3%	24.8%	20.0%
Educated below 5 years	..	50.3%	48.0%	36.0%
No. schooling	..	13.2%	15.0%	36.0%
No. data available	..	3.6%	5.0%	—

TABLE 9
Education Level of mother: (percentages)

<i>Education level</i>		<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Passed G.C.E (AL)	..	.5%	1.0%	—
Passed G.C.E. (OL)	..	3.8%	1.0%	3.0%
Educated between 6-9 years	..	21.1%	22.0%	14.8%
Educated below 5 years	..	40.0%	42.0%	28.6%
No schooling	..	28.4%	22.0%	42.8%
No data available	..	6.2%	12.0%	10.8%
Total	..	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The occupational pattern of the fathers reveal that the greater majority have socially low ranking jobs that correspond to their low educational qualifications. Fourteen percent in the rural, 10.4 percent in the suburban and 13.5 percent in the urban sector are either unemployed or deceased. Only 4.2 percent in the rural and 2.6 percent in the suburban sector occupy middle level jobs that demand relatively high educational qualifications. (Table 10.)

The occupational categories of mothers as revealed by table 11 are also mostly low ranking ones which correspond to the low educational level. Here the most striking feature in all the three sectors is the high rate of unemployment. Seventy percent in the rural sector, 42.5 percent in the suburban sector and 54 percent in the urban sector are either unemployed or deceased. Only 1.4 percent in the rural sector have occupations which require any educational qualifications.

TABLE 10
Occupational category of father

<i>Occupational Category</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Deceased ..	.. 18	6	8
Unemployed ..	.. 12	10	12
Labourer ..	.. 66	64	60
Farmer ..	.. 60	16	1
Small trader ..	.. 11	26	42
Mason/Carpenter ..	.. 6	12	8
Fisherman ..	.. 8	—	—
Driver ..	.. 12	10	14
Security guard ..	.. 6	3	2
Mechanic (garage etc.) ..	.. 4	2	1
Clerical ..	.. 8	4	—
Sub post master ..	.. 1	—	—
Total ..	.. 212	153	148

TABLE 11
Occupational category of mother

<i>Occupational Category</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Deceased ..	.. 6	2	2
Unemployed ..	.. 136	63	78
Labourer ..	.. 34	47	46
Small trader ..	.. 12	32	23
House maid (local) ..	.. 6	4	3
House maid (abroad) ..	.. 5	3	4
Farmer ..	.. 10	2	2
Nurse ..	.. 2	—	—
Teacher ..	.. 1	—	—
Total ..	.. 212	153	148

Summary of the characteristics of the sample of dropouts :

The greater percentage of dropouts that belong to this study came from the very low socio-economic strata of the society. Prestige wise their parents occupy very low occupational status or are faced with unemployment. Forty two percent of them had left school without completing their primary stage of education. This figure is compatible with the figures in other studies. The

factors given here as reasons for leaving school early are also consistent with findings of other recent studies.¹ The main reasons that have precipitated early school leaving is poverty, lack of interest in school learning, backwardness in learning, and the need to secure employment for economic reasons. The dropouts also came from very large families. Most of them have attended the non affluent schools both in the rural and urban sectors. The fact that a considerable percentage of them belong to the age group which is regarded as the age of compulsory attendance in school, need to be also taken into consideration.

Economic activities of dropouts

From a glance at the economic activities of dropouts as given in Table 12 it is evident that 26% in the rural sector 25% in the suburban sector, and 18% in the urban sector do not have a specific occupation. Their occupations shift from time to time depending on employment opportunities available within the locality and as such they do not possess a fixed or a permanent income. During one part of the year one might obtain casual employment depending on opportunities that arise in the locality ; during another part of the year one will shift on to another casual job if opportunity demands. Still during another part of the year, having nothing to do he might be toiling on his own home garden supporting the family to contribute to its' income.

An example may be cited to illustrate the pattern. Sunil is 20 years old. He had only five years of schooling. He obtains casual employment according to the following cycle. For four months of the year during 2 seasons he obtains casual work in paddy fields ; and the work mainly involves ploughing of the land and harvesting. During the peak coconut season around May he obtains employment in a dessicated coconut mill for about three months, and during the rest of the year he finds various jobs on a casual/daily basis, depending on the contacts he could establish. On days that he cannot find any such work he works in his home garden. His income varies weekly. The average daily wage is around Rs. 20/- but the number of working days per week fluctuates to a great extent. Low educational qualifications has barred Sunil from obtaining even a small permanent job.

The plight of most of the dropouts in the category under unspecified is similar to that of Sunil. Low educational qualifications act as a barrier to permanent employment. Most of them are faced with a lack of fixed employment. The greater majority of them are underpaid because of the high competition that exists for the few available jobs. In this context the position of the girls is even more disappointing. The lack of regular employment in turn leads to irregular living standards, low confidence and a feeling of insecurity among hundreds and thousands of such youths.

(1) Jayaweera. S. Universalization of Primary Education in Sri Lanka, *Journal of the National Education Society of Sri Lanka*. Vol. XXIV, 1985. pp. 50-63.

TABLE 12
The employment pattern of the dropouts

<i>Employment</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Unspecified	55 (26%)	38 (25%)	26 (18%)
*Fisherman	4	—	—
*Peeling Cinnamon	11	—	—
*Farmer	11	8	2
Labourer	33	40	30
Driver	1	2	—
Lorry cleaner	4	3	4
House maid/boy	18	8	3
Carpenter	4	3	1
Pavement pedlar	6	1	10
Private Bus Assistant—conductor	2	12	14
Industrial Labourer	4	8	6
Worker in free trade zone	3	2	—
Sales Assistant (Shop)	14	3	12
Assistant in motor Garage	4	2	4
Sinhala Typist	1	—	1
Restaurant Waiter	4	6	10
Watcher	3	1	—
Fruit seller	3	—	2
Cattle rearing	3	—	—
Vegetable seller	3	2	3
Hospital attendant	1	—	—
Sales assistant (market)	6	4	10
*Cracker industry (cottage)	8	—	—
Cycle repairer	3	1	4
Fish seller	2	—	6
Brewing Liquor	1	—	—
	212	153	148

* Non perennial jobs.

The rest of the sample, 64% in the rural sector, 75% in the suburban sector and 82% in the urban sector are employed in 26 occupations. Out of these twenty six occupations, four are not perennial occupations. They are fisherman, cinnamon peeler, farmer and fire cracker industry worker out of which peeling cinnamon and the fire cracker industry are strictly seasonal thus causing seasonal unemployment and an undependable income. Thus they have to look for alternative work during unemployed periods. Fishermen and farmers too are unemployed during some slack seasons of the year.

The number of working hours too vary from occupation to occupation in the above four categories. For instance, a cinnamon peeler will have to work from 7 a.m. to about 9 p.m. earning about Rs. 20-30 per day depending on the weight of dry kilos of cinnamon produced. A cinnamon peeler's job requires the services of many hands and is involved with several stages of

production such as cutting the tree, transport, scraping the bark, peeling and joining the sticks. Weather is a formidable factor affecting the process of production, and the income depends on the output and the output depends on several factors beyond the peeler's control. The fire cracker industry too is not a steady one. Income depends on the amount of work available which is primarily determined by the market. The market in turn is dependent on festivals and peak seasons such as Christmas, Sinhala New Year Seasons, etc. The four non-perennial occupations, fishing, peeling cinnamon, farming and the fire cracker industry do not bring an uninterrupted income to the employee. Most of the persons interviewed in the sample were youths and as such they were working under older persons who were more competent and experienced. The majority of the persons engaged in non-perennial occupations were in the rural sector. (34 out of 44 in a sample of 513).

Three hundred and fifty out of 513 or 68.2% of the sample belong to the twenty two perennial occupations listed in Table 12. From the table it is discernible that these occupations vary in status, income and so do the number of hours of work per day. Some of their more salient characteristics are described in the sections that follow.

The occupations listed in Table 12 even though they differ in social status, as a whole are not prestigious occupations. Most of the occupations given in this list command socially inferior positions. The incomplete education that most of the respondents have received appears to have been a leading factor responsible for this situation. Only one person, the hospital attendant is in government service. All the others are working in private establishments or in ventures carried out by individual persons.

Another conspicuous feature regarding all these occupations is that none of these jobs fall into the category of responsible positions: all of them are subordinate or insignificant positions. The data reveals that if the drop outs are to continue in these present jobs they may continue to occupy the same subordinate positions even in the future. In other words it means that their incomplete education does not pave for them the way for promotion or improvement of status. For example, the categories such as lorry cleaner, labourer, house maid or house boys, sales assistant, watcher, fruit seller, garage assistant etc. do not hold any prospects for improvement in the foreseeable future. Undoubtedly their incomplete educational level will always be a drawback and obstruct their progress in this respect. Even one in the category: Sinhala typist and with low educational qualifications has very limited future prospects.

The occupational categories, within each, represent a wide range of labour, demanding different types of skill and work and the actual working hours vary widely. For example, the category house maid/boy represents a wide range of roles. Mallika, an eleven year old girl who dropped out from school very early owing to economic pressure is employed as a housemaid. Her work load includes several activities such as taking care of the children, attending to house work and gardening. Her income does not exceed Rs. 50 a month. Under the category of pavement pedlar are included boys selling different trivial items near schools, bus-stands etc. the nature of the things they sell and their incomes vary to a great extent.

Most of these youths have provided a source of cheap labour. They have no predetermined working conditions. The number of hours they work vary according to the nature of the employees. For example some hotel waiters have to work from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. It is very unfortunate that even big entrepreneurs have exploited these youths taking advantage of their low educational level. Private bus assistant conductors get about Rs. 10/- to 15/- per day after a hard days' continuous work lasting about 12-14 hours. In this respect the workers employed in the free trade zone are relatively fairly better off with fixed working hours and a salary.

A distinction could also be observed in the type of job according to sex. The 113 girls in the sample are distributed in only a few categories. (Table 13).

TABLE 13

Distribution of girls in employment categories

Unspecified	..	..	36	out of	119	—	30%
House maid	..	..	24	out of	29	—	83%
work in FTZ	..	..	5	out of	5	—	100%
Sales assistant	..	..	21	out of	29	—	72%
Sinhala Typist	1	out of	1	—	100%
Sales assistant (Market)	3	out of	20	—	15%
Labourer	23	out of	103	—	22%

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The 113 girls are distributed in only 7 employment categories whereas the 400 boys are spread in 27 employment categories. This is also indicative of the high incidence of unemployment among girls as females tend to avoid choosing certain job categories traditionally regarded as unsuitable for the gentler sex.

Another noteworthy feature in the pattern of employment among dropouts is the lack of any significant number in self employment. Only three of the school leavers have engaged in self employment projects. One of them is the illicit liquor brewer who also has the highest income in the group. The other two are bicycle repairers who have started their own shops. The general poverty that prevails among school dropouts precludes investment in self employment projects. It was stated in an earlier section that these dropouts came from very low income families whose parents were poor and less educated. As such they have no alternative, but to seek employment under someone else.

The pattern of employment also has a very close relationship to the economy and the major occupations of the locality. For example fishing, cinnamon peeling and farming are related closely to the local economy. Employment within the free trade zone too is strictly bound by geographical location. The category labelled as labourer includes several types of employment such as tapping rubber, brick making, jobs connected with the coconut industry, etc. which are highly related to the agricultural and industrial activities of a locality. Then in the suburban and urban areas, jobs related to trade, and transport occupy a predominant position. Out of 28 persons working in private buses, 26 are from the municipality and its suburbs. Most of the labourers, 70 out of 103 came from the urban and suburban sectors and are mainly centered around construction projects.

Another characteristic feature in the employment pattern of the dropouts is that nearly all the persons are working in the immediate vicinity or neighbourhood of their parents' homes. In the suburban and urban sectors this is quite normal. But it is rather strange that migration from the rural sector is very negligible. The available information points to several tentative ideas :

1. increasing cost of living in urban areas as compared with the rural areas ;
2. availability of job opportunities in rural areas itself within a developing economy ;
3. high competition from the urban areas itself for the available jobs in that sector, and
4. lack of contacts.

In a study of this nature it is pertinent to examine the general characteristics of the waiting period before one secures employment. There is a relationship between the waiting period and the grade or age from which one drops out from school. Nearly all the employed drop outs are 11+. Therefore, one

who drops out early, say from grades 1 or 2 at the age of 6+ or 7+ will have to wait for about 5 to 6 years before one could obtain a job. The earlier the grade from which one drops out the longer is the waiting period and this rule is more applicable in connection with permanent or regular employment. But this rule does not apply to some categories of employment such as house maids and some who support the parents as an additional unit of income for the family.

Income

In examining the income of dropouts it is evident that a large percentage of persons do not possess a direct or declared income. (Table 14) The highest percentage of this category is in the rural sector which gradually decreases towards the urban sector. Those who belong to this category generally work with parents or elder siblings thus increasing the income of the family. All persons mentioned under the job category: unspecified, in Table 12 comes under this group. In addition some of those in categories: fishermen, cinnamon peelers, farmers, labourers and even trade and sales assistants fall into this group.

TABLE 14
Income per month

Income level	Rural	Suburban	Urban
No direct or declared income. Mainly supporting family ..	85 (40%)	52 (34%)	26 (18%)
Less than Rs. 99 ..	7	6	10
Rs. 100 — 199 ..	22 (41%)	26 (52%)	14 (54%)
200 — 299 ..	24	23	20
300 — 399 ..	34	24	36
400 — 499 ..	15	14	32
500 — 599 ..	7 (16.7%)	3 (14%)	6 (28%)
600 — 699 ..	8	2	3
700 — 799 ..	5	2	1
800 — 899 ..	1	—	—
900 — 999 ..	1 (2.3%)	—	—
Over Rs. 1000 ..	3	—	—
	212	153	148

Another noteworthy feature is the generally low income level of persons in all sectors. According to Table 14, 41% in the rural, 52% in the suburban, and 54% in the urban sector fall into the income category below Rs. 400. To state this in another way, 81% in the rural, 86% in the suburban and 72%

in the urban sector have either no direct or declared income or have an income less than Rs. 400 per month. On the other hand only the rural sector has 3 persons (1.4%) in the highest income bracket of over Rs. 1,000 per month. Among them is the liquor brewer who has the highest income of Rs. 2,100 per month. The person who occupies the second place according to receipt of income is a labourer whose monthly income is around Rs. 1,300.

The level of income does not reveal any close relationship to the categories of employment. If we isolate one employment category the income of individuals within the category is highly diverse. In the same way if we consider a particular income level or bracket then the persons falling into this bracket comes from different employment categories. For example, if we take the employment category : labourer the monthly income ranges from Rs. 100 to Rs. 1,300 depending on the nature of the work and the locality. As stated earlier those within the income bracket of over Rs. 1,000 per month consists of a liquor brewer, labourer and a trader. However, there is a close resemblance between the employment category : unspecified and the income group : no direct or declared income.

Another striking finding of this study is that over 500 of the 513 in the sample do not enjoy the benefit of a provident fund.

In general the income level of the persons in this sample is low. Only 103 out of 513 or 20 percent have an income of Rs. 400-800 p.m. One hundred and sixty three out of 513 or 32% cannot declare their income which in other words mean they supplement the family income. The greater proportion 247 out of 513 or 48%, have an income which is less than Rs. 400 p.m. Table 15 gives a breakdown of the different income groups in the 3 sectors : urban suburban and rural and the total sample.

TABLE 15
Breakdown of monthly income

<i>Monthly income</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Total</i>
No declared income ..	40%	34%	18%	32%
Low income group (less than Rs. 400) ..	41%	52%	54%	48%
Middle income group (½. 400-800) ..	16.7%	14%	28%	20%
High income group (over Rs. 800) ..	2.3%	—	—	—
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Leisure activities :

The main leisure activities are concentrated around reading, T. V. radio and films : the main forms of entertainment and education available in any locality. (Table 16) Apart from the above four, association with friends and sports or recreational activities too occupy prominent places. However, when comparing the rural and urban sectors, the difference in the numbers engaged in each activity is remarkable. It is also interesting to note that an appreciable number, specially in the rural sector have no leisure activities at all. It should also be born in mind that the nature of employment, specially the number of working hours in some of the cases do not provide opportunities for leisure time activities.

TABLE 16
Leisure activities

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Rural</i> (212)	<i>Suburban</i> (153)	<i>Urban</i> (148)
Reading : Newspapers	36	30	28
Picture Stories	7	10	20
Books	10	4	3
Playing Cards	4	6	12
Visiting the bazar	8	1	4
Cultivating	8	1	1
Weaving crafts	7	—	—
Visiting friends	32	30	38
Watching T. V.	30	40	62
Viewing Films	27	30	42
Listening to radio	52	60	80
Taking part in sports	20	18	12
Acting	1	—	—
Playing chess	1	—	—
Listening to cassettes	4	8	18
Walking	4	1	1
Playing musical instruments	3	—	1
Horticulture	2	—	—
Cycling	3	2	4
Dancing	1	—	—
Touring	1	1	3
Gambling	3	2	3
Fishing	2	—	—
Swimming	2	—	—
Helping others	2	—	—
No leisure time	2	1	2
Doing Nothing	36	22	18
Imagining about future	2	—	—

Participation in educational programmes

It was revealed that 94% of the sample do not take part in any educational programmes (Table 17) The major cause for a situation of this nature is the lack of opportunity. The small percentage who do take part, do so in a

few programmes like learning of English, Music, crafts, dancing, etc. Most of them are not properly organized and attendance is very irregular. The majority in the sample have expressed their willingness to take part in some form of educational cum training programme. Most of the programmes available at present demand either G. C. E. (OL) or at least 8th standard qualifications. Therefore, the early school drop outs are obviously excluded from the programmes that are being conducted by the state and volunteer agencies.

TABLE 17
Participation in educational programmes

<i>Response</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Total</i>
No	.. 200 (94%)	145 (94%)	137 (93%)	94%
Yes	.. 12 (6%)	8 (6%)	11 (7%)	6%
Total	.. 212	153	148	513

Participation in social activities

The data reveals that 62% of the sample do take part in social activities. (Table 18) But in examination the percentage decreases from the rural sector to the urban sector. All these social activities are taking place within organizations such as Youth Clubs, Community development Societies, Temple Societies, Sports Clubs, Welfare societies, Political organizations, etc. The lower percentage of social activity in the urban sector may be explained partly in terms of the availability of opportunity for different or alternative types of entertainment (See Table 18).

TABLE 18
Participation in Social Activities

<i>Response</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Total</i>
No	.. 70 (33%)	60 (39%)	64 (43%)	38%
Yes	.. 142 (67%)	93 (61%)	84 (57%)	62%
Total	.. 212	153	148	513

Willingness for further education

The dropouts were asked to express their willingness to participate in educational or training programmes. The responses are given in Table 19.

TABLE 19**Willingness to be educated further**

<i>Response</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Total</i>
No	50 (24%)	60 (39%)	72 (49%)	35%
Yes	162 (76%)	93 (61%)	76 (51%)	65%
Total	212	153	148	513

According to Table 19, 35 percent of the sample have definitely refused any form of education or training. The percentage who refuses an education is greater in the urban sector (49%). On the other hand, 76% of the rural youths feel the need for some kind of education or training. On the whole 65% of the sample have felt a need for further education. This is a very important aspect that should be taken into consideration in planning out development strategies. The types vary from technical education to education in aesthetics, and languages. A small number even expressed their desire to return to formal school education.

The majority of the sample however now feel that they have been ignored because they possess an incomplete education. A large number in the sample lament that they missed a vital component in their life by giving up schooling rather early in life. Most of them feel that they were compelled to do so through various background factors such as family environment, economic position and disinterest. They also feel that even though late it is desirable to go through some educational cum training programmes to improve their future employment prospects. The major problem that threatens them at this point is insecurity about the future which is a result of the lack of permanent employment which in turn has led to a state of economic instability.

Committing of crimes/offences

It was also questioned from the sample whether the drop outs were convicted of crimes or charged for any offences. It was revealed that 30 out of 513 or nearly 6% of them had been charged or caught for crimes or offences. The numbers for the three sectors rural, suburban and urban are 7, 11 and 12 respectively. The offences included minor thefts, illegal gambling, and illicit

liquor brewing. In the majority of the cases the commitment of the crime had been joint, either with elders or peers. On the whole it is heartening to note that the prevailing situation in this respect is very satisfactory. Absence of drug and sex offences is a very conspicuous feature.

Conclusion and implications of the study

The background data on the sample of dropouts revealed that their agewise composition range from 10-22 years. This indicates that there are persons belonging to different stages of development, such as late childhood, early adolescence, late adolescence and youth. Looking at this from another point of view those who should have been in the higher grades of the primary section, and those who should have been in the initial grades of junior secondary school, all of them coming under the compulsory school going age, are actively engaged in the workforce. Another interesting feature is that if they had not left school so early some of them would have been attending either school or university or some other tertiary educational institution. But a multitude of factors and circumstances have decided that it should not be so.

The factors that have contributed to early school leaving are many. The dropouts come from poor families located in rural and congested environments. The education level of the parents is very low which in turn has led them to have a low income. Poverty has hence been the major cause for leaving school early. In addition general disinterest in school work, punishment, and need for employment also have been contributory factors for this phenomenon. Most of the pupils have dropped out from rural and urban deprived schools and this itself portrays the socio-economic position of the individuals we are concerned with in this study.

In analysing the employment pattern of the dropouts it was revealed that the incomplete education they had received have forced them to end up with manual jobs. Some of them have fitted themselves as an additional unit in swelling the income of the family. Nearly all of them occupy very subordinate positions, a feature which could be explained in terms of two characteristics: lack of experience and education. Coming from families whose income is very low and being young and without much education, most of them have been subject to subordination, thus providing themselves as a source of cheap and exploitable labour; they have no means of bargaining for better terms. Naturally therefore their contribution to the economy is meagre. Most of them have to be satisfied with jobs available in the locality, and cannot move out to better pastures. Occupation of the parents and the type of employment available in the immediate locality play a vital part in determining the nature of the job one could secure.

The 513 dropouts in this sample represent only those who have some kind of employment and income. Analysis of their income reveal that it is not so satisfactory ; a great majority of them live below the line of poverty. They have been the victims of a continuous vicious process : low or no education and poverty from one generation to another. Low education of parents leads them to poverty which in turn promote early dropping out in the children ultimately leading the latter too to an impoverished position in society.

They are also constantly concerned of the lack of security about the future. This is a problem that has arisen from the non perennial and unstable nature of employment. Here it is pertinent to draw our attention to a study made on the needs of youth in Sri Lanka.* A study of the needs of the 15-30 age group, of different educational qualifications, revealed that employment is the basic and immediate need, and the employment to a great extent will solve other problems like food, clothing, housing, and marriage. Therefore, it is very essential that the needs of this group be given due consideration through studies of the above nature.

It is also very essential that we explore the possibilities of providing further education to these youths who have set foot into the world of the adults. Most of them have expressed their willingness to learn or undergo some technical training. The dropouts need some form of sandwich courses which combine elements of training with general education, specially for those who have left school with an incomplete primary education.

Due emphasis should also be paid to the importance of schooling. Parents should be educated not only about the importance of family planning but also, education. Early dropping out from school as revealed from this study is partly due to parental apathy and disinterest. It is already too late when the dropouts begin to realise the fact that they have missed a vital component in life. Thus every effort should be made by society to educate all members if its younger generation at least up to age of 14 or to grade 8. The effort of all possible social, political and religious organizations should be harnessed to achieve this goal.

The 513 individuals in this sample represent those who are employed in some way with some sort of income. Their position as revealed from the data and discussion is not heartening. The problem gets even worse if we take into account the entire population of dropouts both employed and unemployed. About 1-1½ lakhs of students dropout from school annually without completing the compulsory period of education (5-14 years).¹ Then they join the labour market awaiting to be absorbed into the economy. A study at the national level is required to ascertain the nature of this problem.

* Needs of Youth in Sri Lanka, National Youth Service Council, Sri Lanka 1985.

Finally it should be mentioned that an attempt should be made at the national level to study the needs of this age group, 10-25 years, and adopt remedial measures regarding their education and training and employment.²

Most of the available programmes start from a slightly higher age level, very often 16 or 18. The age group 10-15 forms a very crucial group as the transition from late childhood to adolescence take place around this time. A large number of dropouts also belong to this age group. As such effort should be made to understand their problems and help them to live in harmony with the society by contributing to its development as well.

1. 1982 School Census.

2. The ministry of Education has launched several projects in this respect. The nonformal unit has organized 95 for out-of-school children in 15 districts since 1981.