

EARLY MARRIAGE OF RURAL GIRLS AS A CAUSE OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

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Received: 24/07/2025 ; Accepted : 27/12/2025

Abstract:

The current study aims to shed light on school dropout: its concept, causes, manifestations, types, and ways to fight it. It will also address early marriage as one of the main factors contributing to the spread of school dropout in rural areas, and finally discuss ways to fight school dropout that could benefit various institutions in society, such as schools, families, and others.

Keywords: School Dropout , early marriage , girls.

Introduction:

School dropout is one of the most pressing issues facing the education system in developing societies, particularly in rural areas where social, economic, and cultural factors intersect to produce complex patterns of exclusion and vulnerability.

Rural schools, which are supposed to be spaces for social advancement and individual empowerment, often become short-term stops that girls quickly leave due to poverty, distance, poor facilities, and low-quality education. The phenomenon becomes even more serious when dropping out of school leads to more precarious social trajectories, most notably early marriage, which may be viewed in some rural communities as a “natural” or “protective” option, but in reality represents a form of compound exclusion that deprives girls of both their right to education and their childhood. In her study on the impact of early marriage on children's educational attainment, Alia Al-Hussein (2017) confirmed that "rural communities consider early marriage to be part of their cultural heritage, and that they are more inclined to marry their daughters early, which may negatively affect them by depriving them of continuing their education, based on their belief that this preserves their chastity and strengthens family ties and village relationships. (Al-Hussein: 2017, p. 93).

Understanding this phenomenon cannot be separated from analyzing the social, economic, and cultural structures that govern rural communities, which makes the sociotermic approach a necessary tool for understanding the dialectical relationship between school dropout and early marriage. Through this approach, it is possible to reveal how mechanisms of social discrimination operate, the role of schools in reproducing or breaking the cycle of marginalization, and the responsibilities of educational and social actors in preventing this phenomenon. Based on this, this research seeks to investigate the pathways of school dropout in rural areas and examine how it leads from poverty to early marriage, through a socio-educational analysis aimed at understanding the roots of the problem and proposing possible ways to intervene to reduce it.

Many studies have addressed the phenomena of early marriage and school dropout, including:

A study by Alia Al-Hussein (2017) concluded that early marriage is a widespread phenomenon in rural areas and considered it one of the cultural legacies of rural communities. She also considered early marriage to have a negative impact on society as a whole, especially on young people in their prime, as it hinders the educational process.

Meanwhile, a study by Ashwaq Ben Ammar (2020) concluded that there are school factors that lead to school dropout, such as a poor relationship between the teacher and the student and between the administration and the student, due to a lack of understanding of the student's situation and problems, or in the educational curriculum and textbooks, among other factors that may cause the student to leave school.

Meanwhile, Rehab Khaled (2020) emphasized in her study entitled *The Role of the Family in Reducing School Dropout Rates among Jordanian Elementary School Students* the need to address the phenomenon of school dropout and develop policies and programs to deal with it as much as possible, as well as to work to help poor families financially to cover their children's educational expenses.

In a study conducted by Nadia Nasser et al. (2022) on the subjective factors of students and their relationship to school dropout in Algerian schools, a set of findings was reached, most notably that there are psychological and physiological factors that lead to school dropout.

From a review of previous studies, it can be said that the current study differs from previous studies in that it aims to identify school dropout, its concept, causes, manifestations, and types. It will also address early marriage as one of the main factors contributing to the spread of school dropout in rural areas, and finally discuss ways to combat school dropout that may benefit various institutions in society, such as schools, families, and others.

The study's problem can be summarized in the following questions:

Is school dropout an inevitable result of poverty on the one hand and early marriage on the other?

What is the reality of school dropout and what are its causes?

What are the preventive measures to reduce school dropout?

Study objectives:

- To determine whether there is a relationship between school dropout and gender on the one hand and early marriage on the other.
- To identify the main causes of school dropout
- To identify preventive measures to reduce school dropout.

Significance of the study:

- The current study contributes to establishing a theoretical background for reducing school dropout, which will facilitate reference for interested researchers.
- This study derives its significance from the importance and sensitivity of the topic, especially in rural communities.

Study concepts:

Early marriage:

Definition:

Al-Sharji (2004: 17) defines it as a marital relationship that arises at an early age, enabling both parties to rely on themselves with regard to the obligations associated with each party towards the other, in addition to enabling them to have and raise children.

Al-Sabaawi (2007: 12) defines early marriage as marriage that takes place before a girl reaches the legal age.

Reasons for early marriage: There are several reasons for early marriage, the most prominent of which are as follows:

- Customs and traditions: These play a fundamental role in marriages between families, which are often arranged without the consent of the children. Early marriage is also seen as a means of producing more children to work and help their parents, while in other families the reason for early marriage is the desire to increase the number of offspring.

- Discrimination between males and females in treatment and appreciation: The family considers the presence of girls to be a burden on them financially and socially, and when they reach the age of ten, they are considered adults and restrictions begin to surround them on all sides under the pretext of preserving the family's honor. Their only concern becomes marrying them off to the first suitor who comes along under the pretext of protecting their honor. Marrying girls at an early age is also seen as a way of protecting them.
- Economic conditions are one of the most important and fundamental reasons for early marriage, as some poor people tend to marry off their daughters at an early age to reduce expenses and education costs, especially families with a large number of children and low incomes.
- School dropout.

Effects of early marriage: There are many problems, risks, and consequences that result from early marriage, some direct and some indirect. In both cases, their impact on the girl and her future cannot be ignored. The most important of these consequences are as follows:

- **Psychological effects:** The psychological effects of early marriage for girls include emotional deprivation from parental affection, which leads to psychological stress and the emergence of multiple psychological problems, such as disturbances in sexual relations between spouses as a result of the girl's lack of understanding of the nature of that relationship. which may lead to early symptoms of depression and constant anxiety about new family responsibilities.

- **Social effects:** The social effects of marriage may include parents' lack of awareness of the proper upbringing of their children due to their low cultural and educational levels, which leads to failed family relationships between spouses and their children and other undesirable social effects.

- **Health effects:** The health effects of early marriage for girls include increased rates of miscarriage, which can lead to health risks that may result in death, as well as risks to the newborn, low birth weight, and suffocation among infants born to teenage mothers, which can lead to infant death or multiple health problems in the future.

- **Economic effect:** This is the result of girls remaining confined to their homes and unable to break out of their cocoon to pursue careers or other activities, given that working individuals contribute effectively to economic development through their contributions, which leads to the development of their personal abilities and the improvement of their family circumstances. This is what girls who marry early need in order to raise their families' standard of living.

- **Burdening them with hard work and repeated childbirth and depriving them of participation in comprehensive sense,** it refers to any student who leaves school for any reason before the end of their educational stage, which represents a waste of society's future potential and a negative economic loss for the educational process from an economic perspective.

UNICEF (1992) defined it as children of school age not enrolling in school or leaving school without successfully completing the educational stage they are studying in, whether voluntarily or as a result of other factors, as well as not attending school regularly for a year or more.

The concept of dropout: In one of its publications, UNESCO refers to a dropout as a student who leaves school family decision-making.

School dropout:

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (1973) defined dropout as a form of educational poverty in the field of education, i.e., a student leaving school at any stage of their education. In a

before the final year of the educational stage in which he or she is enrolled.

Overlap between the concept of school dropout and other concepts:

Dropout is the interruption of schooling before completing the educational stage in which the student is enrolled for any reason other than death, meaning the refusal to continue studying and attending the educational institution at a time when the student still has the right to continue his or her education, for subjective and personal reasons related to the student or for reasons related to the educational and social environment.

Flunking or Failure: This refers to academic failure and lack of success, defined as a student's failure to pass a particular stage of education according to specific educational standards. One of the most important factors contributing to failure is the student's poor reading skills or other academic abilities and difficulty in advancing from one grade level to the next due to difficulty in understanding the curriculum or lesson content.

Academic delay: Academic delay is a problem that requires consideration of solutions, as it is linked to several factors and dimensions, including psychological, educational, and social factors. It is defined as a decline in the grades a student obtains in achievement tests. On this basis, the forms of academic delay have been identified as follows:

Academic underachievement: Academic underachievement is a problem that requires consideration of solutions, as it is linked to several factors and dimensions, including psychological, educational, and social ones. It is defined as a decline in the grades a student obtains in achievement tests. On this basis, the forms of academic underachievement have been identified as follows:

- General academic delay: This refers to a decline in a student's achievement in all subjects. Some scholars have interpreted this type as being linked to a student's intelligence level, which is below average.
- Specific academic delay: This refers to a student's poor or low achievement in a particular subject or only in some subjects.
- Permanent academic delay: This refers to a student's achievement falling below their ability level.

School absenteeism: Absenteeism is one of the most widespread phenomena among students at present, which occurs most often when students fall in with bad company or lose interest in studying. It is defined as a student's failure to attend school, and may be justified or unjustified, temporary or recurrent.

School waste: This concept refers to the outputs of the education system and the total costs incurred by the Ministry of Education, compared to the financial losses incurred due to student dropouts and the wasted efforts of administrators and teachers.

Reasons for school dropout:

These can be summarized as follows:

A. Educational reasons: This is considered one of the main reasons for dropout, as the average time spent by dropouts in a single grade is longer than that spent by those who continue in school. A report by a United Nations committee states that: The longer a student stays in a class, the more he feels discouraged and neglected, and that continuing in school is of no benefit to him. This may have a negative impact on the student, which is what a study (Al-Sheikhi: 2002) concluded, confirming that educational factors, represented by failure, are among the most important factors leading to dropout.

The content of the curriculum, its difficulty and length, the large number of subjects, and its lack of relevance to the student's environment also have a significant impact. Teaching methods, especially those based on memorization and rote repetition, burden students, causing them to dislike and abandon their studies. Factors related to the personality of the teacher, educational administration, and assessment are all educational factors that lead to school dropout.

B. Poor academic achievement and learning difficulties

- Lack of interest in studying and low value placed on education
- Student maladjustment to the school environment.

- Indifference to schoolwork. (Al-Hamdani: 2007, p. 15)

C. Family reasons:

- Parental separation.
- Low economic status.
- Lack of information.
- Low cultural level.

Types of school dropout:

Although the meaning of dropout varies and differs, in all cases it refers to a student's discontinuation of schooling at a certain stage while still of school age. From this, we can list the types of dropout as follows:

A. Children dropping out of primary school: This type of dropout is related to the learner's ability to meet the demands of society, understand all obligations, and ensure that education is provided to all those of primary school age.

B. Students dropping out of school before reaching the end of the stage: This type of dropout corresponds to its definition, which means that the student drops out of school at a certain stage. It is the most common type of dropout, and this may highlight the close relationship between dropout and failure, as a student's failure at a certain stage pushes them to drop out or repeat the year, only to fail again (Boudouira, 2009, p. 25).

Theories explaining the phenomenon of school dropout:

A. The Tinto Vinent model, which appeared in 1975-1987 and was developed in 1993. The basic principles of this model explain school dropout as a result of academic disintegration and social integration among students. This model assumes that each student has family and personality traits and a previous level of academic achievement that prepare the individual to commit to academic systems aimed at cognitive and emotional development, which is what achieves what is known as academic integration. Students at school also interact with their peers and faculty members, which achieves social integration.

B. Van's model (1989): which explained the dropout process in light of two models:

- The first model: the self-defeat model, which views dropout as resulting from students' failure to achieve any academic success, leading to failure and disappointment, which in turn leads to low self-esteem and self-worth, reflecting feelings of frustration with school and ultimately leading to dropout and complete withdrawal from school.
- The second model: the participation and communication model: Van explained school dropout in light of the extent of the student's participation and success in dealing positively with their classmates and teachers. Active participation in classroom and extracurricular activities makes the student an active member of their school or university and creates a sense of belonging to their learning environment, which increases the student's retention in their studies. The opposite is true if students lack participation and integration with their peers and teachers, which creates a lack of desire and love for school and thus leads to school dropout.

School dropout treatment measures:

School dropout is a social and educational phenomenon that has negative effects on individuals and society. Therefore, solutions have been sought to reduce it. The consequences of school dropout cannot be ignored; rather, the educational system must make every effort to improve the conditions of the educational process:

A. The role of teachers in addressing the phenomenon of dropouts: Teachers play a role in addressing the phenomenon of dropouts. If teachers treat students with love and mutual respect and build parental relationships with them, this will encourage students to stay in school and not drop out. The environment may require teachers to play a dual role, combining the role of teacher with that of family member. Teachers must also use flexible teaching methods that respond to students and rely on appropriate educational tools that encourage a love of learning. Teachers must also have sufficient

knowledge of their subject matter and present it in an appropriate manner, encouraging students to take an interest in and love the subject. In addition, teachers should use rewards and praise for outstanding students, take weak students by the hand and encourage them to make greater efforts and try harder to overcome difficulties, and not try to humiliate them or belittle them in front of their classmates. This will lead to their self-confidence, self-esteem, and commitment to their studies.

B. The role of the family in addressing the phenomenon of school dropout: The family plays a major role in shaping the individual, as it is the small community in which the child grows up and is raised according to its values, and in which the child discusses the problems he or she faces so that the family's opinions, suggestions, and actions can serve as solutions to the child's problems. The role of the family in addressing the phenomenon of school dropout is manifested in the following:

- Reinforcing the child's desire to prove and assert themselves among others.
- Encouraging the child's feelings of joy and excitement at starting school.
- Encouraging the desire to enter a new community and the ongoing desire to be part of the group.
- Encouraging the desire to read and write by providing the necessary means and equipment.

C. Role of the Ministry of Education: The Ministry of Education has taken several steps to solve the problem of school dropouts, including:

- Raising awareness and alerting parents to the importance of school and the need for their children to attend school to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic.
- Following up and contacting parents to find out why they are not sending their children to school and addressing those reasons with the relevant parties in an appropriate manner.
- Taking measures to attract children to school and encourage many parents to enroll their children.
- Providing textbooks of various types and distributing them to students.
- Providing assistance to students in need.
- School meals.
- Health care for students.

Proposed solutions to school dropout:

Al-Amaira (2007) proposed a set of solutions to prevent school dropout, including:

- Teachers should recognize that there are individual differences among students and should work to help students at their own levels, accept weaker students, and provide emotional support and encouragement.
- Coordination between school and home to help academically weak students overcome the academic problems they face.
- Families should encourage their children to continue their education, regardless of their financial circumstances and cultural background.
- Schools should guide and assist students who are experiencing difficult economic circumstances that may cause them to drop out of school.

The relationship between early marriage and school dropout:

The relationship between early marriage and school dropout is a complex and controversial one, involving social, economic, and cultural dimensions that create a vicious cycle of exclusion and vulnerability. In rural areas, dropping out of school represents a decisive turning point in the lives of many girls, as it becomes a preliminary step towards early marriage in the absence of real educational, professional, or economic alternatives.

School dropout does not occur in isolation from the social context; it is the result of multiple factors, chief among them poverty, distance from educational institutions, poor quality of education, and lack of family and community motivation. When girls are denied the opportunity to continue their education, they become more vulnerable to early marriage, which is seen by their families as a "safe option" that guarantees social stability and protects them from "deviant behavior" or "spinsterhood,"

especially in societies that still measure a girl's value by her ability to marry rather than her level of education or independence.

On the other hand, early marriage itself is a factor that contributes to school dropout, as it leads to girls dropping out of school either before or after marriage. Taking on family responsibilities at an early age, giving birth at a young age, and the social restrictions imposed on married women all make returning to school almost impossible. Thus, early marriage becomes both a consequence and a cause of school dropout, in a vicious cycle that produces generations of women deprived of education and empowerment.

This relationship has a negative impact on social and economic development, as it contributes to the reproduction of poverty and dependency and limits women's participation in the labor market and public life. Girls who drop out of school to marry at an early age often remain trapped in traditional roles, depriving society of their energy and productive capacities. Therefore, addressing this relationship from a sociotechnical perspective requires a deep understanding of the structures that fuel both phenomena, by linking educational reform to social and economic empowerment and raising family awareness of the importance of education as a means of protection and advancement, rather than merely a temporary stage that ends at the threshold of marriage.

Conclusion:

The analysis shows that early marriage and school dropout are two sides of the same social phenomenon, reflecting the deep exclusion and marginalization experienced by large segments of the population, especially girls in rural areas. School dropout is not usually an individual decision or the result of poor academic performance, but rather the product of social, economic, and cultural factors that undermine the value of education in the face of poverty and tradition, making dropping out a natural precursor to early marriage. In turn, early marriage contributes to perpetuating this vicious cycle, as it deprives girls of completing their education and limits their opportunities for economic and social empowerment, thereby reproducing poverty, ignorance, and dependency within the family and society.

Thus, school and marriage become two areas that reflect the imbalance in educational and gender equality in society. To break this vicious cycle, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive socio-educational approach that addresses the root causes of the phenomenon, not just its symptoms, by improving schooling conditions in rural areas, providing support to vulnerable families, intensifying awareness campaigns on the dangers of early marriage and the importance of education, and enforcing laws that protect girls' right to education and childhood.

The fight against early marriage and school dropout is not the sole responsibility of schools. It is a societal and developmental issue that requires concerted efforts between families, educational institutions, the state, and civil society to build a society that places education at the heart of human dignity and progress.

Study recommendations: Based on the analysis in this study and its theoretical aspects, we have arrived at the following recommendations:

First: At the educational level:

- Improve the quality of education in rural areas by providing adequate infrastructure (boarding schools, school transportation, basic equipment).
- Strengthen social and educational support for learners at risk of dropping out through support lessons and psychological and educational support.

Integrate education on equality and empowerment into school curricula to reinforce values of self-respect and girls' right to education.

- Train teachers to enable them to understand the social factors that influence school dropout and early marriage.

Second: At the social level:

- Expand financial support programs for poor families and link them to children's school attendance.
- Raise awareness among rural families about the dangers of early marriage and the importance of education in improving family and social status.
- Involve local civil society in tracking school dropouts and reintegrating them into education or training.
- Create safe spaces for rural girls (educational and cultural clubs) to enable them to develop themselves and broaden their horizons.

Third: At the legal and institutional level:

- Enforce laws regulating the marriage of minors and tighten judicial approval for marriages below the legal age.
- Establish mechanisms to track girls who have dropped out of school and reintegrate them into alternative vocational training or literacy programs.
- Strengthen coordination between government sectors (education, family, solidarity, justice) to fight early marriage and dropout in a comprehensive way.

Fourth: At the development level:

- Investing in rural development as a prerequisite for reducing poverty and improving educational opportunities.
- Creating local economic opportunities for families and girls (income-generating projects, vocational training) to reduce the incentives for early marriage.
- Adopting gender mainstreaming policies in development and education to ensure equal opportunities for both sexes.

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