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Policy and Governance in Palestinian Refugee Camps

November 2011

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A Qualitative Study

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Research Report

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The Program on Policy and Governance in Palestinian Refugee Camps in the Middle East brings together academic and policy-related research on Palestinian refugee camps from around the world. The program aims to be an open and non-partisan coordinating mechanism for researchers, civil society, government officials, and international organizations, in order to generate accurate analysis and policy recommendations on Palestinian refugee camps throughout the Middle East.

This research project is co-funded by Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in Lebanon

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Abstract

This report presents the findings of the second stage of a multi-stage study on the phenomenon of early school dropouts in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Building on the first stage that was a quantitative study, and with an eye towards the third stage, which will propose an empirically based intervention plan, this second stage of the research project is a qualitative study of the phenomenon. Its methodology is grounded in three forms of data collection: one-on-one interviews with eleven dropout students; six focus group discussion interviews with students, parents, teachers, and school administrators; and the tracing of the dropout trajectory of five students. These stakeholders were drawn from four carefully selected UNRWA schools in Lebanon. The qualitative study provides ethnographic accounts of the factors underlying and motivations behind students dropping out of school in these communities. More specifically, attention is paid to important issues, including socio-economic status, school curriculum and services, family involvement, and domestic laws governing the participation of Palestinian refugees in various professions. Beyond simply listing these factors, this study amplifies the voices of students, parents, teachers, and school administrators to highlight the different and detailed ways in which such issues interact with the decision to drop out of school. The conclusion of this report looks toward developing an intervention plan to address the rate of early school dropout in Palestinian refugee camps by providing a preliminary action plan based on the findings of this report.

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

Dropping out of school has become a major concern in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) manages the primary education system in these Palestinian refugee camps. Palestinian families and civil society have raised concerns over the quality of education received by most Palestinian children, especially with the rising percentage of early school dropouts. This study is part of a research program launched by UNRWA-Lebanon and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) within the framework of the EU-funded project "Support to Improving Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon." This report presents the findings of the second stage of a multi-stage study on the phenomenon of early school dropouts in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Building on the first stage that was a quantitative study, and with an eye towards the third stage, which will propose an empirically based intervention plan, this second stage of the research project is a qualitative study of the phenomenon.

Sample and Method

The methodology used in producing this report is grounded in three forms of data collection: one-on-one interviews with eleven dropout students; six focus group discussion interviews with students, parents, teachers, and school administrators; and the tracing of the dropout trajectory of five students. These stakeholders were drawn from four carefully selected UNRWA schools in Lebanon. The qualitative method provides ethnographic accounts of the factors underlying and motivations behind students dropping out of school in these communities. Studies which exclusively rely on statistical data to portray a picture of dropouts do not provide the researcher with the motivations and experiences of those choosing to drop out. Alternatively, this study has adopted a qualitative approach so as to attend to the micro-experiences of individual dropouts, while at the same time enabling the construction of a macro-level understanding of the phenomenon. Hence, the research agenda of this study identifies and engages three areas of inquiry at UNRWA schools in different locations with varying enrollment and dropouts rates: (1) parent-teacher associations, (2) student tracing and tracking, and (3) student-teacher interaction.

Key Findings

The results of this report are thematically presented, with each section combining inputs from face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions. More specifically, attention is paid to important issues, including socio-economic status, school curriculum and services, family involvement, and domestic laws governing the participation of Palestinian refugees in various professions. Beyond simply listing these factors, this study amplifies the voices of students, parents, teachers, and school administrators to highlight the different and detailed ways in which such issues interact with the decision to dropout of school.

The root causes of dropping out are varied and interrelated, and it is difficult to identify direct causality in any general sense. Palestinian students in Lebanon do not tend to dropout for one single reason. Multiple factors are at play, and no single risk factor can accurately predict who will dropout. However, these factors can broadly be grouped into the following categories: child labor; Lebanese labor laws; early marriage; and school infrastructure, resources, and educational policies.

The action plan, found towards the end of the report, is based on several findings of the research conducted for this report. First, although many Palestinian families seem to be willing to sacrifice a lot for their children's education, the daily struggle for survival in the Palestinian camps still appears to be their first priority in Lebanon. Second, dropouts and parents perceive that the UNRWA teachers and administrators are generally not caring when students start to fade out of the system. Third, the UNRWA schools are fragmented; some parts of the school system are either not working or do not exist. Fourth, corporal punishment and lack of extra-curricular

activities (e.g., school trips, festivals, talent shows, etc.) were repeatedly cited as the most unpleasant experiences of schooling. Fifth, all teachers and administrators acknowledged that there is not much parental participation in the school system. Sixth, students and parents were unable to find relevance to their lives in the Lebanese curriculum, and find it difficult to connect with their educational experience. Seventh, educational policies and practices regarding automatic promotion and grade repetition are creating countervailing forces with regards to students' integration into the school system. Finally, Palestinian students attending UNRWA schools in refugee camps are exposed to a variety of factors that negatively affect their overall psychological well-being, such as overcrowded living conditions and limited recreational opportunities. Therefore, schools should provide different conditions and propose a long-term plan to build or rent buildings outside of the camps if necessary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion of this report looks toward developing an intervention plan to address the rate of early school dropout in Palestinian refugee camps by providing a preliminary action plan based on the findings of this report. Dropping out can be prevented through a focused action plan. Through a dropout prevention and intervention plan, UNRWA can advance strategies from preschool through secondary schools in the following ways:

1. Intervene prior to kindergarten: UNRWA should act early by providing high quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten.

2. Involve community and families in students' learning: UNRWA schools should collaborate with Palestinian community organizations and NGOs in an effort to engage students and families in activities such as service learning, mentoring, after-school tutoring, and volunteering, as well as better involve parents in the academic lives of their children.

3. Improving the school environment: Many students who drop out express an extreme form of unattractiveness towards and disengagement from UNRWA schools (e.g., poor attendance, academic difficulties, and a poor sense of belonging combined with a general dislike for school). Therefore, effective prevention strategies must include improved counseling services, quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning, class size reduction, and rigorous and (Palestinian student) relevant school curricula.

4. Serving students who are in poverty: UNRWA cannot eradicate poverty, but it can advocate for changes outside of school that would improve the lives of low-income students and their families.

5. Attending to English language learners: Palestinian students need to be better prepared for the English language curriculum when entering middle school so as to better perform in classes as well as compete with Lebanese students.

6. Serving at-risk students and others with special educational needs: UNRWA should better equip its administrators and teachers with the ability to identify at-risk and exceptional students early on in their educational trajectories through such methods as teacher training modules, regular student monitoring, and parent-teacher meetings.

Introduction

Dropping out of school has become a major concern in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. A review of available data on student dropouts in the Palestinian community reveals several inconsistencies in the calculations of school dropout rates. UNRWA figures indicate that the dropout rate for the elementary and preparatory levels are 2.1% and 3.9%, respectively (UNRWA, 2008). However, UNRWA calculations are confined to the number of students who register and leave within the annual academic year (October – June). Other reports indicate that the dropout rate is much higher when one considers students who did not register at all during an academic year or have yet to register for school. For example, according to a 2003 FAFO study, 18% of Palestinian refugees aged ten years or older in the Palestinian camps and gatherings are no longer in school and have not completed any education, 13% of the population have never attended school, and another 18% dropped out of school before completing elementary education. A 1998 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) survey revealed that the dropout rate among Palestinian children in Lebanon reached 29.2% at the preparatory level and 18.9% at the elementary level. According to recent estimates, school dropout for Palestinian refugee children ten years and older is 39%, ten times that of Lebanese children (CSUCS, 2007). In a more recent UNRWA-funded study by Abdunnur, Abdunnur and Madi (2008) the dropout rate among Palestinian refugee children aged 6-18 years reaches 18.3% (21.7% male, 14.8% female).

The primary education system in the Palestinian refugee camps is managed by UNRWA. Palestinian families and civil society have raised concerns over the quality of education received by most Palestinian children, especially with the rising percentage of early school dropouts. Structural and institutional factors have led to this. On the one hand, structural issues include the legal restrictions faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon such as the limited opportunities of attending university (primarily because of lack of resources to pay for it and because, as noted, most jobs for university graduates are effectively denied to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon). On the other hand, institutional issues include UNRWA's management of its educational programs. The scarcity of extracurricular activities such as physical education and arts classes provided in UNRWA schools, as well as the limited sports and leisure facilities due to a lack of space and resources, also contribute to high dropout levels, which probably apply equally to many public sector schools. This situation is intensified by poor sanitary conditions in the camps, which affects the morale and motivation of students, as well as undermining their performance (CSUCS, 2007; Demirdjian, 2007). UNRWA operates in an extremely difficult environment, but there is much that can be improved awaiting a just solution to the legal restrictions faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Much of the research on the UNRWA school dropouts in Lebanon has been rooted in a desire to identify the causes, related factors, or motivations underlying the act of the dropping out. Most existing research takes as its starting point an examination of the characteristics of those students who dropout. The questions—Who drops out of the UNRWA schools in Lebanon, and more importantly why?—guiding the current research are directed at finding those characteristics or qualities of dropouts that make them different than those who complete secondary school. Although much is known about the individual attributes of dropouts in the UNRWA schools in Lebanon, most research has not gone beyond a statistical account of the dropout phenomenon. Studies which exclusively rely on statistical data to portray a picture of dropouts do not provide the researcher with the motivations and experiences of those choosing to drop out. Alternatively, this study has adopted a qualitative approach so as to attend to the micro-experiences of individual dropouts, while at the same time enabling the construction of a macro-level understanding of the phenomenon. Hence, the research agenda of this study identifies and engages three areas of inquiry at UNRWA schools in different locations with varying enrollment and dropouts rates: (1) parent-teacher associations, (2) student tracing and tracking, and (3) student-teacher interaction. Consequently, this report both reviews existing literature, including statistical data and published recommendations, as well as conducts original qualitative research. Such a combination is necessary to design an action-oriented strategy to address the dropout issue in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

Definitions

There is no universal consensus on the exact definition of a "school dropout." However, most researchers have adopted the definition used by the federal government of the United States of America:

A dropout is a student who leaves school for any reason, except death, before completing school with a regular diploma and does not transfer to another school. A student is considered a dropout regardless of when dropping out occurs (i.e., during or between regular school terms). A student who leaves during the year but returns during the reporting period (including summer program) is not a dropout (Bylsma & Ireland, 2005).

This report adopts Bilagher's (2006) definition of the UNRWA dropout, which states that "an UNRWA dropout is a refugee–not necessarily a registered refugee—who meets all of the following criteria:

1. The refugee student was at one stage registered with the school that registered him as a school leaver, and has taken part in education or was intending to take part in education.
2. The student has:
   a. Been absent from school for more than twenty school days without a valid or any justification, OR
   b. Left school formally.
3. The student has not completed his/her education at the school of enrolment or elsewhere (that is, he/she is not in possession of a certificate proving that he/she has successfully completed the basic education cycle). [1]

4. The student has, to the best knowledge of the principal, not:
   a. Emigrated;
   b. Enrolled in a similar school elsewhere;
   c. Transferred;
   d. Been absent due to illness;
   e. Been incarcerated." (p. 9)

Factors related to dropping out

General research on the phenomenon of school dropouts has shown that multiple factors are associated with dropping out and that such a phenomenon is a long-term process of disengagement that occurs over time and begins in the earliest grades. In the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1996, 2010) and private research organizations have identified two types of factors related to dropping out: those associated with families and those related to an individual's experience in school.

A number of family background factors, such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, single-parent families, siblings' educational attainment, and family mobility are correlated with the likelihood of dropping out (Abdunnur et al., 2008; Bilagher, 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Doud & Dgheim, 2009; Nicaise, Tonguthai & Fripont, 2000). Of these factors, socioeconomic status, most commonly measured by parental income and education levels, shows the strongest correlation with dropping out. A number of studies have also found that dropping out is more likely to occur among students coming from single-parent families and students with an older sibling who has already dropped out, than among counterparts not possessing these characteristics (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008; Bridgeland et al., 2006). Other aspects of a student's home life such as the level of parental involvement and support, parent's educational expectations, parent's attitudes about school, and stability of the family environment can also influence a youth's decision to stay in school.

1 In Lebanon, the basic education composes of elementary and intermediate levels (Grade 1-9), which it is in the French educational system and the 'certificate' is therefore known as the Brevet. However, some students do complete Grade 9 and sit the exam but do not pass. They can, however, get a certificate of attendance from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) which then enables them to enter vocational education.

Students' past school performance is also related to the likelihood of dropping out. For example, some research shows that students with a history of poor academic achievement, evidenced by low grades and poor test scores, are more likely to drop out than students who have a history of academic success (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Nicaise, Tonguthai & Fripont; 2000). In addition, students who are over age for their grade level or have repeated a grade are more likely to drop out. Other school factors related to dropping out include students having a history of behavioral problems and higher rates of chronic truancy and tardiness. Research also indicates that dropout rates are associated with various characteristics of the schools themselves, such as size of the school, level of resources, and degree of support for students with academic or behavioral problems.

In Lebanon, research has shown several reasons for Palestinian students dropping out from UNRWA schools (Fafo, 2003; Side & Madi, 1993 cited in Sirhan, 1996; Sirhan, 1996). Bilagher (2006) found three main reasons for dropping out from school, which were confirmed by Ghosn (2007). Both findings revealed that the most common reason is the need to seek employment. Low achievement is the second most common whereas engagement or marriage, combined, is the third most common. The findings also identified secondary factors that were correlated with high dropout rates, including the average age of teachers, average teacher seniority, average class size, and student-teacher ratios. Alternatively, pass rates at the Brevet Examination, school size and shift type (single or double) did not show a statistically significant covariance. Furthermore, the following were found: (a) low scholastic achievement seems to be consistently part of the equation (it could lead to failure, social isolation and ultimately shame); (b) not all dropouts are interested in returning to school; (c) not all dropouts are characterized by problematic behavior, several are typified as "cute", well-behaved and even "wonderful"; (d) poverty seems to be a consistent characteristic of those defined as early school dropouts. Most dropouts live in adverse housing conditions (two rooms for up to ten persons); (e) fathers often seem absent in situations where students dropout; (f) the cultural environment seems conducive to early marriage.

The Current Study

This study is part of a research program launched by UNRWA-Lebanon and Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) within the framework of the EU-funded project "Support to Improving Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon." The first stage of the program was a quantitative study based on a sample survey conducted by Abdunnur et al. (2008), which identified the incidence and distribution of school dropout, as well as its main causes. The current study forms the second stage of the research program, which is an in-depth qualitative analysis of the causes of, and possible remedies for, dropping out of school. It is based on one-on-one interviews with dropout students as well as a series of focus group discussion (FGDs) with teachers, school administrators, and parents. The third stage of the research program will build on the results of the first two stages to develop an empirically-based intervention program that addresses early school leaving.

Methodology

Research design: Why qualitative research?

One of the primary objectives of this project is to bring the voices of Palestinian dropouts to the center of research on the topic, and thus go further than producing a statistical account of the dropout phenomenon. We view student dropouts, parents, teachers and other concerned parties as stakeholders in this issue, and their thoughts, feelings, and ideas as crucial to developing both a responsible research agenda and an effective intervention program.

We adopted a qualitative research methodology because of the "openness" of this type of inquiry and how "it allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity, to respect it in its own right" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 7). In addition, the qualitative method recognizes that reality is a social construct in which the complexity and context of the emerging data must be considered; the subject, not the method, should be the primary focus. We also believe that qualitative research can be an effective strategy for rendering subordinated groups in society visible. The statistical significance of Palestinian refugee dropouts in Lebanon seems to carry more weight with educational administrators than personalized narratives of struggle. Studies that rely on statistical data alone to portray the phenomenon of dropouts do not provide—and are not meant to provide—either the researcher or the reader with a window into the experiences of those involved and the rationales that guide their actions. As opposed to placing statistics at the center of our research and working to contextualize the data with pre-existing narratives and conclusions, we first listen to stories of students, parents, and teachers, and relate these stories to larger Palestinian issues behind the decision to leave school early. Therefore, our ethnographic research gives a stronger voice to the collective struggles of our subjects, and brings to the fore the intersections of many complex issues. We believe that qualitative research is the most appropriate method for this endeavor.

Qualitative research allows us to highlight how the dropout problem cannot be conceptualized in a simplistic manner. Instead, we needed to consider the existing socio-economic structures of Lebanese domination in Palestinian society in Lebanon. Further, we cannot simply look at how the dominant society affects dropping out, but have to examine also the strategies of survival employed by students, dropouts, their families, and communities in their various interactions with the dominant power structures within which the act of dropping out occurs. We begin with the students' own views and accounts, approaching the issues from their perspective. By connecting student narratives to each other and to wider social issues, we aim to make sense of the complexity of Palestinian school students' experiences. The qualitative method enables the voices of the participants to significantly inform the resultant interpretations. By centering the students' narratives in our analysis and working from these experiences to develop a theoretical understanding, we ensure that the students themselves play an integral role in the creation of this knowledge. At all times, we attempt to portray the student's experiences in UNRWA schools in a manner that respects their views of their own situations.

Method

The specific qualitative methods that we adopt are as follows: semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions (FGDs); and tracking the trajectories of five dropout cases. We believe that in speaking directly to the stakeholders (e.g., teachers/administrators and parents/guardians) involved in the daily experience of school, we will most effectively portray the issues involved in the decision to dropout of school. This method involved gaining access to four school settings, as well as enlisting participants. Because of the young age of many of the participants in our research, and in educational research in general, we had to prioritize several ethical concerns, including but not limited to issues of consent and confidentiality, vulnerability of our subjects, questions of exploitation, and the responsibility of the researcher to disseminate the research findings. We have therefore chosen to identify schools by numbers/location and students by pseudonyms (along with gender, age, and refugee camp).

The selection of the four UNRWA schools used as case studies was based on three criteria: (1) location; (2) enrolment rates; and (3) dropout rates. After securing the consent of the respective school boards, we began to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected dropout students, and to run FGDs with parents, teachers, and school administrators. We have listed the schools, as well as the number of each type of stakeholder drawn from them, in the table below. In addition, we traced the trajectory of five dropout students who left the intermediate school more than five years ago. This included interviews with the students, their parents, and school officials. Some of these tracing data were obtained at the school board level in order to gain a general understanding of official perceptions of students dropping out.

We personally interviewed a total of eleven Palestinian students, all of whom dropped out from one of the seventh through the ninth grades, in the four selected UNRWA camps in Lebanon. We also conducted six focus group discussions (FGDs) with students, teachers/administrators, and parents. In each school, students were selected to provide representation of both sexes. The criteria for selecting students that participated in the focus groups was primarily that of being at a high risk of dropping out, defined by several characteristics, including below-average marks or poor attendance. Teachers were also selected to provide a representation of both sexes. We intentionally included both young staff members and those with extensive working experience. The sample of parents was chosen to reflect the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of Palestinian families.

Selection of localities and participants

Identification of target groups for the dropout interviews and FGDs covered the two main groups of stakeholders (parents and teachers/administrators) and two regions (Beirut and the south [Sidon and Tyr]), excluding the north with two major Palestinian refugee camps, Naher el Bared and Beddawi. The researchers and UNRWA officers have agreed that with the complicated situation in the north since 2007, the results would be distorted due to problems in the selection of a representative sample.

Table 1: R Composition of Focus Group by Schools

Stakeholder	Beirut School 1	Sidon School 2	Sidon School 3	Tyr School 4
Teachers/Administrators	9	4	8	6
Parents and students*	4	-	-	-
Parents	-	-	-	5
Total	13	4	8	21

* 2 parents and 2 students

Data Collection

Designing the interview and focus group questions

In designing the research, we identified particular issues which we wanted to address, and this prioritization guided our interview and focus group questions. For example, the results of the Abdunnur et al. (2008) and UNICEF (2009) surveys suggest that economic, social and cultural factors all contribute to dropping out of school. Poverty, child labor, lack of appropriate educational programs, lack of planning for the future (i.e., career and family planning), and the Lebanese law preventing Palestinian refugees from practicing most professions or owning property are common challenges faced by all Palestinian refugee students in Lebanon. These factors are the root cause of several critical phenomena. Also important is the early marriage of girls, as well as the breakup of families due to divorce, separation, or death. These insights were the starting point for the interviews and focus group questions, which eventually covered a broader set of questions, including the valuation of education from the participants' perspectives.

Dropping out of school can actually be considered a rational choice, depending on (1) the value/utility of school as perceived by the individual, family, and community, and (2) the obstacles and sacrifices involved in attending school. The discussion was aimed at exploring all possible reasons for dropping out of school. The topics that

were brought up for discussion revolved around the framework prepared by the researchers. Participants were encouraged not only to discuss existing problems and their possible causes but also to offer suggestions for remedies and necessary policy measures.

Although the interviews were semi-structured around a common matrix in order not to overlook any key issues, they were kept sufficiently "open" to leave room for additional inputs from the participants. The aspects that were explored include: the education system and the aspirations of young people and their parents; the quality of schools and curriculum; teachers' workload; special education and counseling services; social barriers and perceptions; child labor; Lebanese legal exclusions of Palestinian refugees from many professions or property ownership. The main researcher conducted the focus groups with the assistance of a local coordinator who lives at Ein el Helweh camp, and works in the field of education (see Appendices A & B).

When examining the outcomes of the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, we must acknowledge a quantitative imbalance between the number of "useful" quotations from teachers and school administrators on the one hand, and from parents and dropout students on the other. This bias is the obvious consequence of the imbalance in social capital between the two sets of interviewees. Teachers and administrators have a large comparative advantage in verbal communication capabilities, while the parents and children came mostly from deprived backgrounds, and tended to feel uneasy in these sessions—particularly in view of the subject of dropping out of school, which inevitably is associated with a stigma of "failure." Note that the views of the three groups (teachers/administrators, parents/guardians and students) are not necessarily contradictory. Teachers sometimes appear to have a remarkable understanding of the living conditions and obstacles to education in disadvantaged households. However, the reader should be aware of a blind spot in some of the teachers and administrators, who tend to blame the actors (i.e., student/parents) when they lack background information about the factors triggering a particular "deviant" behavior (i.e., dropping out).

Results and Discussion

The results of this report are thematically presented, with each section combining inputs from face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions. Furthermore, the thematic discussions contain within them both the causes of dropping out as well as possible ways to address the issue. The root causes are varied and interrelated, and it is difficult to identify direct causality in any general sense. Palestinian students in Lebanon do not tend to dropout for one single reason. Multiple factors are at play, and no single risk factor can accurately predict who will dropout. In fact, one factor (e.g., lack of motivation) may be the cause or consequence of another factor (e.g., grade repetition), and both factors may be related to a third factor (e.g., poverty, early marriage, etc.).

Child labor

There are various forms of child labor, ranging from household chores (e.g., caring for siblings) to paid employment (e.g., building painter, carpenter, working in a factory or a political party, etc.). The relationship between Palestinian child labor and education is not, however, a simple one. Child labor may be the cause of a child ceasing to go to school, or it may be a consequence of dropping out of school.

Child labor as a cause of school dropout. In some households, male dropouts felt they were expected and encouraged to contribute to family subsistence by providing manual labor for their parents and other relatives. Rami, a boy in Ein el Helweh camp, said, "My father encouraged me to work with him as a building painter, and after a time I became more attracted to this job than studying at school." He added, "My father [sometimes] asked me whether I had homework or not, but when he did not have enough laborers in Sidon, he asked me to help him anyway." Mazen, also a boy from Ein el Helweh camp, was encouraged by his uncles to leave school to learn the family trade, which is making oriental sweets, and to work with them in Germany. Amjad, a boy in Shatila camp,

is another dropout who was working daily with his father as a building painter. Amjad said, "I was working with my father for three to four hours every day . . . many of my friends [also] left school because they had to generate income for their families."

For the poorest families, the cost of private tutoring or caring for siblings can be a reason to keep their children at home. For example, Mayce, a girl in Al-Tawari neighborhood/camp (next to Ein el Helweh camp), repeated the seventh grade and stopped going to school because she has severe learning problems and her parents are "unable to pay for a private tutor." Suzan, a girl in Shatila camp, said, "When my grandmother entered El Hamshari hospital in Sidon for ten days for a leg operation, my mother stayed with her, and during this period I stopped going to school to take care of my younger brothers who are five and seven years old." Added to this cause of Suzan's school absences, she had difficulty in understanding her physics and chemistry classes—which were conducted in English—and her father was unemployed and could not pay for private tutoring.

Lina, a girl in Ein el Helweh camp, dropped out of the UNRWA school because she wanted to study Islamic Shari'ah at an Islamic center, where she could also work as a preacher and later on teach in the camp. Lina did not disclose which Islamic center she was planning to attend; however, her deceased father had been a member of one of the Islamist factions.

During the FGDs, several teachers mentioned that poverty is the cause of child labor. One teacher said,

Last year, I was surprised to learn that a seventh grade student is working as a security guard for one of the political organizations for 300,000 Lebanese pounds. How can he study? How can he be working and still underage? How can he be working and still a student at the same time? Does he have any affinity for studying? So, his father wants him to work to earn LL300, 00 and he is around thirteen years old. Is this acceptable?

All teachers stressed that the main cause of child labor is the deplorable socio-economic status of those in the camps. Household poverty was often cited as a factor contributing to dropout. Many students are recruited by political parties because they and their families do not have enough money to cover their expenses.

Child labor as a result of school dropout. During the FGDs, parents rarely admitted that they force their children to leave school to help them; the children are presented to have decided on their own. Jamal, a father in Rashidieh camp, insisted that it was his son's decision to leave school. He stated,

My eldest son left school as a consequence of the head teacher's decision to punish and transfer him with other troublesome students to Burj el Shemali School. I really believe it was a harsh decision and this made him [my son] refuse to transfer and challenge this decision . . . this [also] put financial burden on me because I had to pay for his transportation from Rashidieh [camp] to Burj el Shemali [camp]. The students made a mistake; however, the penalty was very harsh, and the director of education [in Tyr] punished [in his decision both] students and parents . . . [therefore] I preferred to teach my son photography, which is my career. This is better than leaving him in the street!

Some parents confirmed that it is the students' own choice to sacrifice their education for their family. However, they seem to legitimize their children's non-attendance at school in order to support the household or for their own economic survival. Khalid, a father of six children in Rashidieh camp, spoke to the causes of dropout. He said,

Perhaps the community [conditions] we are living in . . . for example, lack of jobs and income are to blame. How can farmers earning [around] 7-10 [American] dollars a day cover the children's expenses at school? Life at the camps is very difficult.

His daughter dropped out of school because she was "embarrassed to repeat grade six with younger girls, and she is now working as a hairdresser." Khalid highlighted how "some boys when reaching the age of ten to eleven years old leave their schools to work and help their parents . . . even children show empathy with their families." Some parents did not prevent their children from dropping out of school. Munir, for example, claimed, "I dropped

out of school because I do not like it and I'd rather work." However, neither of his parents nor any of his relatives actively objected to his intention to leave school. He mentioned that "some of [his] friends dropped out of school for family reasons . . . they felt compelled to work, either because the father fell ill or was deceased."

The impact of Lebanese labor laws

Most teachers and parents agreed that the Lebanese law preventing Palestinian refugees from practicing in most skilled professions is one of the main causes of the UNRWA schools dropout phenomena, especially after the intermediate level of education. Despite the recent change in legislation and the ministerial decree signed in February 2011, there is still no remedy to the fact that Palestinians are still banned from practicing most professions. These changes need to be made by the heads of the professional registration bodies. The inability of Palestinian students to choose their occupations freely has led to general depression and lack of motivation among students with respect to education. A Palestinian teacher in Beirut explained,

This [dynamic] has a strong negative impact on people's [i.e., Palestinians'] psychological well-being. There is no hope . . . we are living as refugees with no rights, and there are no jobs if one considers pursuing an education . . . this all affects education.

Another teacher added,

[Students feel that] there is no hope . . . there is no hope of achieving the qualifications to become [for example] a medical doctor or engineer. In Lebanon, you are not allowed to work, thus you will not reach your goals, so why work [i.e., study] for them?

A female teacher in Ein el Helweh camp said,

Palestinian[s] are prohibited from the right to work, hence, some [students] prefer to shorten the road and leave school . . . this is more prevalent among boys, but some families also oblige their girls to work in order to contribute to family subsistence [especially] when the father is unable to meet the [family's] financial needs.

One male teacher in Rashidieh camp pessimistically commented on the Lebanese restrictions on Palestinians working: "There is no light at the end of the tunnel for students . . . and it seems to me to be a never-ending story."

Several dropouts and parents recounted stories of siblings and friends who had pursued their university degrees but were prevented from practicing their professions in Lebanon as a result of their Palestinian status. Many young Palestinian students in the camps do not see the purpose of attending school when all around them they see that having an education does not lead to improved employment opportunities. A mother in Shatila camp said,

My son's school achievement was good, but he was not convinced of [the value of] pursuing his education . . . he kept saying to himself: why spend my life at school, then become a laborer…it is better to shorten the road and work as a blacksmith to help my father.

One parent recounted a story about a Palestinian student who holds a university degree, but is working now as a blacksmith.

Sadly, dropout students and parents viewed most high achieving students as "failures," in terms of the latter's lack of working in a skilled profession upon graduation. Numerous examples were cited of educated students who are currently either unemployed or working in unskilled jobs. A mother in Beirut said,

Abdullah and his brothers [i.e., all of her sons] keep asking their father: why should we pursue our [post-secondary] education when [we see] the educated students in the camps are unable to find jobs.

She elaborated, "My husband is still in shock because his son [Adam] left the school." However, when asked what she thinks would be the right decision for Adam, whether to stay in school or to help his father at work, she exclaimed, "To help his father . . . this is better. And anyways, there are no job opportunities."

A headmaster [i.e., principal] of an UNRWA school summarized the issue by saying,

With regard to the [Lebanese] state and the absence of job opportunities, when a child sees his engineer brother jobless, this child starts to say to him/herself: why learn if there is no work, it is better to find a job from the beginning of the road. For this reason, parents have begun nowadays to think that it best not to let their child face the same destiny as his/her elder brother, and so it is better for him to work. This is how parents accept [the fact] that their son drops out of school and is an early entrant into the labor market. This will help them to overcome their hard economic situation.

A mother of a highly able student who graduated from the Department of Economics at the American University of Beirut (AUB) stated,

My daughter's economics professor at AUB nominated her to work in a Lebanese company because she was the top-ranking student in his class with a [course] grade of ninety-five out of a one-hundred. The professor publicly declared that this was the highest grade that a student had obtained in his courses during his teaching career at AUB. However, the company's manager rejected her application…sadly; the student overheard the manager telling the professor: I asked you to bring me an outstanding candidate but not a Palestinian!

A mother in Shatila camp gave a similar example regarding her son, who holds a qualification degree in Computer Sciences. She said that "Ismail has applied to several companies, but was rejected because he is Palestinian . . . he is now working in a pesticides company but in an unskilled job . . . with no social security and a lower salary than Lebanese workers."

The impact of early marriage

Early marriage before reaching secondary level schooling is a reality for many young Palestinian girls in Lebanon. Boys are also affected by child marriage but the issue impacts girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity. This is partly because the groom's family traditionally assumes the cost of marriage. In Palestinian camps, many parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still students in hopes that the marriage will benefit them financially and socially, while others hope to relieve financial burdens on the family.

One female teacher in Ein el Helweh camp described how girls are mostly keen to get married, and if one girl happens to be engaged, the other girls get jealous and will then accept any [potential] groom knocking on their doors. In our school, we have five to six engaged girls in each section of [the twelfth grade]. We even have some engaged girls in [the seventh grade]. There is, of course, another reason for early marriage. You find some families, especially the ones in the camp, who suffer from hard economic situations [because] they have five to six girls, where the father will try to relieve the financial burdens by accepting any potential groom.

The social factor also influences girls' decisions regarding early marriage and consequently dropping out of school. A female civic education teacher in Ein el Helweh explained,

Any girl in the intermediate level of schooling sees herself a bride. At the age of fourteen to fifteen years, girls start to prepare themselves to wear the rings. As teacher, it drives me crazy to hear that a fifteen year-old girl has got engaged. I try to talk to her and ask the reason . . . is there a financial reason? Can't your family feed you? Is there another reason? The typical answer would be: no Miss . . . I am only worried that I'll become a spinster if I don't accept.

The girls at Ein el Helweh camp are a particular troubling case of this phenomenon. All teachers agreed that numerous parents, especially those who are affiliated with "Islamic groups," force the early marriage of their daughters regardless of their achievement. The teachers recounted a story about a female student with strong intellectual abilities in the eighth grade who was forced to leave school and get married. Her father is a well-known leader of one of the Islamist groups. Another teacher said,

Her sister was another gifted student, and was forced [into] to marriage after completion of [the ninth grade]. I met her once in a cab . . . I did not know her at first until she spoke and said her name. She was face veiled and

was accompanying her mother to have a picture taken [in a studio] with full make-up in order to send her picture to a potential groom abroad.

Characteristics of dropouts

Dropouts are not a homogeneous group, but early warning can help to identify those most at risk. During the FGDs, there was no consensus among teachers and administrators regarding the personality characteristics of potential and actual dropout students. However, three teachers in Ein el Helweh camp described dropouts as "withdrawn, troublesome or aggressive [students] who exhibit extreme personality traits . . . in general, they have limited intellectual abilities. Some have satisfactory abilities, but their troublesome personalities and lack of desire to learn cause them to drop out." Teachers in Rashidieh camp stated that the dropout group includes students with widely different personality traits and behaviors. However, teachers in general agreed that most dropouts share a similar family background with respect to certain aspects such as socio-economic profile, large family size, and parents' divorce.

The attractiveness of schools, personnel problems, and UNRWA educational policy

A school will be attractive to students and thus prevent dropping out to the extent that it both responds to their immediate needs and aspirations by offering social and academic services of sufficient quality, as well as provides an education that improves their future prospects. School practices that lead to student alienation, disengagement, and loss of commitment contribute to the dropout problem. Below is a description of the dropout problems as it relates to the UNRWA schools' own resources and quality of education as perceived by different stakeholders. Corporal punishment, overcrowded schools, double shifting in schools, teachers' workload, curriculum and extra-curricular activities, and counseling and special education services are each highlighted.

Corporal Punishment. Corporal punishment is a contentious issue in UNRWA schools in Lebanon. Although it is entirely prohibited by UNRWA school policy, and serious measures are taken when corporal punishment is reported, dropouts and parents alike reported it often. UNRWA officials are aware of this problem, and have been addressing it as part of their educational reform process, including in the recent human rights curriculum. Dropouts cited corporal punishment as the most disliked aspect of their school experience. One student explained,

I hate it when my teachers punish us physically . . . it's not true that there is no punishment . . . [this year] a teacher hit a third grader student's head against the wall and desk because he did not do his homework!

One mother from Shatila camp said,

My son refused to attend school because of punishment . . . he used to give me several excuses every morning [e.g., illness or nausea] in order not to have to attend the [UNRWA] school. Now he is attending a private school and very happy because there is no punishment. He wakes up early every morning and goes with no problems to this [private] school.

A parent from Rashidieh camp said,

There was a problem between my son and a classmate at school, and when he didn't listen to his teacher's orders, the teacher hit him on a potentially fatal spot [pointing to the back of his neck]. My son started to bleed and now he doesn't hear well.

On another occasion,

The teacher hit him with a stick and broke one of his finger . . . my son has limited abilities, and the teacher may really want him to learn . . . but Yazan [his son] has [a] phobia about attending the teacher's classroom.

A mother in Rashidieh camp considers corporal punishment the main factor that caused her daughter's low performance in school. She said,

When my daughter was in kindergarten, the teachers told me that she is an extremely able and intellectual girl . . . in Year 1, her composite performance was 280 out of 300, however, in Year 2 it declined to 165. She leaves half

of the exam questions [blank] with no answers? Why? It's because her teacher hit her on the back of her neck and [consequently] her head bumped her desk and caused her a broken tooth . . . and this is all because she did not complete the answers.

One male teacher in Rashidieh camp said,

After the issuance of the regulations regarding the prohibition of corporal punishment [at UNRWA schools], which I am supportive to, it was exploited [by students] in the wrong way. When asking a student to [pay attention] and look at the board, he responds: it's none of your business! I don't want to . . .

Some teachers accept corporal punishment as a normal procedure of behavioral modification at school and home. A female teacher in Rashidieh camp justified corporal punishment arguing that students "won't be physically punished if not misbehaving, and there are students who are already accustomed to physical punishment at their homes." Another teacher said,

It is hard to apply behavioral modification strategies at schools. Let's suppose that I am prohibited from hitting or even yelling at a troublesome student with low achievement. [Alternatively] I can suspend this student for two to three days from school, [but then] perhaps the mother might come [to the school] criticizing me of this suspension, although I used all strategies including counseling and guidance.

A teacher in Ein el Helweh camp described what she called "teacher dropouts because of workload," and prohibition of punishment. She stated,

At present, there are few teachers at our [UNRWA] schools who use [corporal] punishment. Perhaps there is one teacher in each school who use[s] punishment . . . Generally speaking, there is no punishment, [there are] only exceptional [cases]. This has affected [classroom] education [management] because when a teacher, in the past, [used] to enter a classroom holding a stick, the [classroom] control used to be stricter . . . At present, teachers do not dare to use physical punishment. Students are the ones who punish teachers nowadays, by goading and irritating them, with the intention of [getting them] sacked [from school] as a consequence of their using physical punishment [with students].

Curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Many teachers believe a lack of curriculum content devoted to Palestinian history and experiences is an important issue. They argue that the absence of an educational curriculum tailored to Palestinians has contributed to students' apathy towards the education system. As one female teacher in Ein el Helweh camp noted,

Students ask me sometimes: why do we learn about the Lebanese president, ministers, and parliament members? I respond: because we live in Lebanon and we are influenced by them . . . [W]e notice that when teaching them about the history and geography of Palestine, they become much more interested, especially when we ask them to conduct research about their villages in Palestine and to ask their parents and grandparents about them.

Some teachers were clearly frustrated with the exclusion of Palestinian history from textbooks.

In general, teachers, parents, and students find the curriculum, to be dense and difficult, especially because the math and scientific subjects (e.g., physics, chemistry, etc.) are taught in English. Suzan in Shatila camp asserted that she does not understand anything in her physics and chemistry classes because she cannot read in English. She can understand the subject matter if it is taught in Arabic. Lina, in Ein el Helweh camp, and Samar, in Rashidieh camp, feel that the use of the English language is their main academic obstacle at school. All stakeholders agreed that the current curriculum is centered on academic needs and interests rather than on social and emotional needs.

Also an issue is the lack of extra-curricular activities during school hours, as well as the absence of vocational clubs. For example, many students stated that they hardly remember their schools organizing any school trips. Lina in Ein el Helweh camp believes that her school should provide more social, vocational, and recreational activities than is offered by the currently existing committees: discipline and cleaning. She stated that if she were

a teacher, she would provide "more activities in art, handicrafts, and other areas of interest to students." Mazen of Ein el Helweh camp complained, "Teachers [in his school] used to assign students to [school] committees. No one was asked if they were willing to participate [or not]." Several students stated that they find school to be boring, but they would be encouraged to stay if it had more social, recreational, and extra-curricular activities. For those students, physical education and art classes were the most interesting. However, physical education used to be the last period in their school schedule when students prefer to go home, and not all art teachers are qualified to teach art. Mazen stated that the first thing he would change if he were a headmaster would be to focus on teaching art and physical education. According to him, many of his friends like school only when they are taking art classes. A particularly positive view was found in relation to the introduction of new resource-intensive subjects such as computer education. Mazen, for example, stated that he likes lessons that teach computer skills. However, he does not have a computer at home to allow him to practice these skills.

Teachers corroborated these views. One teacher stated, "We have an art teacher, but the teacher is not qualified to teach art . . . For physical education, there is only one teacher who attended one training course in the subject." A teacher from Ein el Helweh camp stated,

We provide extra-curricular activities but they are very limited. Perhaps one [extra-curricular activity] per year . . . In the present year, we have organized an open day and it was good . . . [Furthermore,] fifteen girls participated in the summer activity that was [organized] in Siblin [vocational school] . . . We chose who should go!

While UNRWA is organizing summer activities, students, teachers and parents alike have emphasized the need to have extracurricular classes within the school day, like physical education, arts or computer classes.

Automatic promotion versus grade repetition policy. During FGDs, two educational policies were discussed which are at opposite ends of the policy spectrum: automatic promotion and grade repetition. At the time of writing, the present Minister of Education had recently passed a decree terminating the system of automatic promotion in schools, which was expected to be applied beginning in the 2010-2011 academic year. The policy of automatic promotion was applied to students in the elementary level of education and meant that irrespective of their achievement they would advance to the next grade. Consequently, even failing students would be automatically advanced to the first year of middle school. Alternatively, at the secondary level of education, there is a strict policy of grade repetition for those students who perform poorly in their classes. After summarizing the discussions, it was clear that all teachers and headmasters agreed that both policies are among the main causes of UNRWA school dropout in Lebanon. On the one hand, teachers indicated that early school dropout is in part a consequence of high repetition rates. Middle school grade repetition has a negative effect on socio-emotional adjustment. For example, one parent from Rashidieh camp said, "My daughter refused to attend school after she failed in [the sixth grade] . . . her body size is large and she was embarrassed to have to repeat her grade with younger students." Hence, one can expect grade repetition to be discouraging and cause those students to drop out. On the other hand, teachers criticized the automatic promotion policy that let a student come to school with the attitude that "I will be promoted anyway, so why bother to study?" One female teacher in Shatila camp said, "This even discourages highly achieving students, because those who study succeed, but someone who doesn't study or make an effort also succeeds." An assistant headmaster explained,

We should start from cycle one; the [Lebanese] state prohibits repetition at this [elementary] stage. Unfortunately, the UNRWA has no kindergartens [schools] . . . although kindergarten has become an integral part of the curriculum . . . some children do not attend kindergarten schools at all and fail [the first grade]. However, they are promoted to [the second grade] because of the automatic promotion policy.

A teacher in Ein el Helweh camp summarized the problem:

[In order to reform UNRWA education,] first [we] should cease to apply the automatic promotion [policy]. When a girl knows in advance that she will be promoted regardless of whether she studies or not, this leads to apathy, and weakens [her] incentives to study. I was obliged this year to give a one-hundred points raise to one of the students in order to ensure that she was promoted.

The teacher explained why this policy is not as successful in UNRWA schools as it is in Lebanese schools:

We should focus on the first cycle [elementary school]. There is no accountability in this cycle, and so it is important that we appoint the most qualified teachers at this [elementary school] level and not the lousy and lazy [teachers] . . . Many students are good at pre-schools but their [academic] performance tends to decline when they attend UNRWA [elementary] schools.

There are some students who go through the whole elementary education system without learning the basic skills of reading and writing. A teacher in Ein el Helweh camp explained, "I have a sixteen year-old boy [in my class] who is unable to distinguish between [the letters] "d" and "b," whilst the curriculum requires him to analyze passages [in English language/literature]." This is also supported by a parent in Rashidieh camp who said, "my son is in [the sixth grade], but he cannot read or write. I have no idea how he reached [the sixth grade] . . . perhaps because of automatic promotion!"

Overcrowding, double shifting and teachers' load. Increased enrollment and the concomitant need to accommodate a growing number of students has led to serious overcrowding in UNRWA schools, negatively affecting the quality of learning and limiting student-teacher interaction. Teachers have expressed their concerns regarding the class sizes at UNRWA schools. Some teachers admitted that they "cannot even remember all their students' names in their class, or have time to listen to all of them." One teacher in Rashidieh camp stated,

We have a learning resource center [at school] and we try our best to take students to it, but we cannot because we have a very large class size . . . more than forty students [in each class] . . . [Also,] the playground area is small for this large number of students.

Double shift schooling also hinders the organization of extra-curricular activities and severely limits the time available to teachers to undertake preparatory and administrative work within the school's premises. However, teachers stated that some parents prefer double shift schooling "because it helps in distributing domestic work among sibling girls," and also allows "boys to go to work with their fathers after or before school." Overcrowding and the resulting double shifting place considerable strain on teachers and other school staff. This is exacerbated by a lack of pedagogical resources (e.g., laboratories, computer centers, visual aides, etc.), and administrative and clerical support. Furthermore, teachers in UNRWA schools are often called upon to perform multiple tasks for which they have not received training. A teacher in Rashidieh camp explained, "Teachers[s] are exhausted [because] they do everything."

Special education and counseling services. Students with special education needs are exposed to the same challenges in Palestinian communities as children with similar conditions in other communities. However, the existence of exceptional learning problems, combined with significant stresses in the family, school and camps, makes the students a greater risk for school dropout. All teachers complained about the lack of services provided for students with special educational needs. A teacher in Ein el Helweh camp stated, regarding the lack of specialized teachers, "We have two or three specialized teachers in this field [of special education] and they are responsible for inclusive schooling in all [UNRWA] schools in Ein el Hilweh [camp]!" A teacher in Rashidieh camp stated, "We know nothing in UNRWA about students with intellectual disabilities . . . we don't have specialized [diagnosticians]."

An assistant headmaster in Rashidieh camp stated,

There is a remedial program at UNRWA [schools]. However, it has been unsuccessful because of the large size of remedial classes for [special education] students . . . thirty to forty students, and [UNRWA] did not take into consideration the differences by ability . . . [also] they were given the same final examination papers that were given to other non-exceptional students.

The teacher added that remedial classes should be smaller and "in some private schools [for example] they classify students based on their [ability] levels, and use an ability-grouping teaching [style]." Some teachers

mentioned that the remedial classes are taught by regular classroom teachers who use the same conventional non-specialized teaching approaches with slow and exceptional learners. An administrator in Rashidieh camp stated that "the EU project has failed [to prevent UNRWA school dropout], because although they have persuaded some students to return to school, they did not provide a plan for how to work with those students." Several dropout students expressed their concern regarding the academic assistance that they received at their schools. While many students have received satisfactory special education services from their teachers, others have been unable to receive such services as their teachers have been overburdened with teaching duties.

There are similar shortages when it comes to counselors. All teachers and administrators complained about the limited psychological support provided by the UNRWA school to students. They have identified a lack of adequate guidance and counseling in UNRWA schools as a potential cause of dropping out among Palestinian students. They see guidance and counseling as a safety-net for students at-risk of dropping out.

Teachers have described the typical process of hiring counselors at UNRWA schools. First, teachers interested in counseling or teachers who have a lower-than-average teaching load are assigned counseling duties. Second, the teaching load would be reduced for an interested teacher. The teacher then attends one training workshop on counseling. However, there is still a shortage of teacher-counselors and qualified counselors, given the large number of students attending UNRWA schools. For example, a teacher in Rashidieh camp stated that schools hardly offered any effective counseling services for students; "There is one specialized counselor for all schools here [in Rashidieh camp]. She does not have enough time to offer counseling services to students . . . She attends school on only a few occasions."

The lack of adequate counseling services is further highlighted as a problem when one considers the refugee camp environment. Palestinian refugee students residing in Lebanon are exposed to a variety of factors and events that negatively affect their overall psychosocial well-being. Significant factors range from poverty, exposure to discrimination and overcrowded living conditions to limited access to higher education and recreational services. UNRWA currently does not provide psychosocial support to refugee children in these areas of operation. A teacher in Rashidieh camp noted, "We cannot exclude the camp environment [from the school dropout discussion]. Our community is going from bad to worse…the teacher is part of this environment and suffers as much as others."

Parent-teacher relationships

There is strong evidence indicating that children whose parents are meaningfully involved in their schooling achieve higher grades and test scores, graduate from school at higher rates, and are more likely to go on to higher education. Parent-teacher associations and meetings were seen as one way to discuss and resolve students' academic and behavioral problems. However, both parties admitted that they failed to build a cooperative relationship. On the one hand, several teachers and administrators admitted that they invite parents to individual meetings when they want to complain about their children's behavior or performance rather than to praise their children and/or emphasize their academic and social strengths. A teacher in Rashidieh camp said, "We feel that parents are not interested [in attending school meetings]." She admitted that the school organized annual meetings for parents whose children are in the Brevet grade level.

On the other hand, many parents complained about these meetings. One parent stated, "Every time I was invited for a meeting, the teachers wanted to talk about my son's problems. I stopped attending meetings because of this . . . I wish they would recall something good about him." Two mothers in Beirut stated that they had never been invited by the school to attend a parents' meeting.

Tracking Dropout Students

Information about the familial, psychological, and educational histories of five cases of dropout students is presented below to assist in analyzing and interpreting the findings of this research.

Case 1: Marwa

Marwa is twenty-three years old. Her father is married to two women. Marwa has twelve siblings (six brothers and six sisters). In contrast to her full-siblings, all of her half-siblings left their schools due to poor school performance. At first, Marwa left school during the eighth grade due to her parents' problems. Her father does not believe in education, especially for girls because "they cannot be controlled unless they stay at home." Marwa had frequent absences from school. As her parents' problems became more severe, her father forced her to leave school permanently. As a result, she left her father's house to stay with her mother. Despite this, Marwa did not attend school for two months fearing that her father would come to the school and pull her out. Marwa refused to return to school even when her parents were reunited. This is because she had a previous painful experience when her father burned her books and school uniform as a punishment for her attempting to attend the school.

The headmaster made every effort to talk to Marwa's father but he was always unresponsive to the former's calls. Finally, the headmaster was able to see Marwa with her mother when the former was coincidentally notified that they had an appointment with a medical doctor in the infirmary. The headmaster discussed the problem with both of them, promising to facilitate her return to school. She provided Marwa with new books and a school uniform.

Marwa stated,

I am a special case that differs from all other cases you are studying [in your research]. School was my getaway from home problems. I was a bright [student] and teachers recognized my home conditions. They know that I like education and they loved me. I felt that the headmasters and teachers treated me in a special way, and this is what encouraged me because I had found people who appreciated what I have to offer . . . when I returned home, I became convinced that if I were to stay at home, I might end up like my mother, [who is illiterate]. Therefore, I said to myself, I must study to have a more secure future. Despite my father's aggravation from time to time, I was determined to pursue my higher education after I finished my Baccalaureate, [though] my father would not accept that I should attend the university. He did not pay any of my education[al] expenses, and in the meanwhile, he left our house. I registered in the university, and applied to some support foundations to pay my [university] fees. I left the university in the second year for one semester because I had no money to pay the fees. After that, the Norwegian People's Aid paid the fees and I returned to the university. I am a graduate now but I did not take my certificate because I would have to pay one thousand [U.S.] dollars to obtain it.

Despite her high level of motivation and positive attitudes towards education, Marwa complained about several issues related to the UNRWA school system. She stated that she felt that

UNRWA does not encourage [students] to study . . . When you enter school, you become under control . . . forbidden to breathe, forbidden to run, and forbidden to play. In the classroom, you are forbidden to talk . . . scorned if you laugh.

Marwa also criticized the curriculum and lack of extra-curricular activities. She stated,

The old curriculum is much nicer . . . I didn't like the [new] curriculum when I reached secondary school. I feel that the old curriculum is more gradual and interrelated . . . When we started the new curriculum in [the eighth grade], we met many topics that we were not ready for. I feel that teachers were not sufficiently trained to [teach] the new curriculum.

According to Marwa,

[The school became unattractive for many students] when physical education and art lessons were more often than not replaced by academic subjects . . . When students are forbidden from these subjects, which are part of the curriculum and are [within] students' rights, they retaliate by rejecting and interrupting classes on the academic subject matter.

She added,

My sisters complain about the way their teachers treat them . . . swearing and hitting [them]. Even my little brother suffers. He is in [the fourth grade], and despite the prohibition of corporal punishment, he comes home with bruises on his body. I have another brother who had to repeat his grade twice because of poor progress because he hates school and teachers . . . He left [his] school to go to a vocational institute.

Marwa suggests that UNRWA schools should be attractive to students. Additional extra-curricular and non-academic activities should be provided for students. School walls should be clean and painted to entertain their students. With regard to school-parent relationships, she believes that there is a lack of communication, mainly because of what she views as the authoritarian school administration who do not listen or meet parents' requests. Marwa urges teachers when meeting parents "not only to complain about their children." She also proposed that schools organize "trips for both families and children . . . [Such activities] resolve the problems of children who do not like school."

According to Marwa, the main factor that causes school dropout among girls is early engagement or marriage. She elaborated,

We have around three to four girls [who are engaged] in each classroom . . . There are also other psychological reasons. For example, I felt down when I experienced a [financial] hardship to cover the university fees. I felt that I was unable to take on this responsibility, and began to think like other [girls] of tomorrow's groom. I said to myself, they are right, why should I study . . . the [hard] conditions force a person to make wrong decisions. When one sees some university graduates jobless for two years or more, then everyone starts to question: what is the point of education?

Case 2: Salman

Salman is twenty-three years old. He lives with his parents and four siblings (two brothers and two sisters). He left school when he was fourteen years old. The main reason for his leaving school was his poor academic performance (final grade: 77/240). Salman stated, "I wasn't a bright [child] and when I failed [the eighth grade] I decided to leave school." He mentioned that his school never offered remedial classes or counseling for students with learning problems. They had no cultural and social committees, or school trips. The school used to celebrate "teacher's day," rather than student-related event.

Salman's favorite hobby is playing football. He admitted that he would stay at school if the school allowed more time for sporting and artistic activities. He recalls many occasions when the teachers and headmaster allowed him to leave school with his troublesome friend. They had the complete freedom to leave school whenever they liked. Although teachers used to physically punish some students, Salman recalled, "I didn't allow them to punish me. My personality was stronger than theirs. Teachers were happy and relieved when my friend and I left their classes." Salman was pleased that his teachers allowed him to leave school whenever he liked. He was given the freedom to choose any front or back seat in their classes, and his classmates were always scared of confronting him. He admitted that he would return to school if his close friend, who had also left school, would agree to return with him. Salman mentioned, "My friend keeps saying to me: if you return to school, I will return also." Salman does not regret leaving school, and he would make the same decision if he could turn the clock back five years. He claims that his father asked him to return to school, but Salman responded, "If I return to school then I will be wasting a whole year doing nothing . . . I want to learn carpentry and accounting! That is better than making trouble at school. . . . then he [father] accepted his decision."

Salman's family never attended any school party or festival. Salman suggested that the teachers and administrators should focus more on social activities, and invite parents for folk dancing festivals, or organize a weekly art exhibition for artistic students. In his view, this would attract parents and students to attend school.

Case 3: Nuha

Nuha is twenty-five years old. She lives with her parents and siblings. Her father used to work as a cab driver, but is currently unemployed because of his diabetes. Her mother is a housewife. Nuha has three brothers and four sisters. Her elder sister completed her university higher education; while the others reached the brevet school (grades 7-9) level only. Nuha dropped out of her school nine years ago. The main cause of which was other students' attrition. She stated,

[I left school] because of my friends who began to leave school one after another at that time. Before [the eighth grade], I always succeeded. But when I failed in the last year, I told my family that I wanted to leave school and work as a hairdresser . . . They left the decision to me . . . My eldest sister was the only one who urged me to return to school because she likes education, but I did not want to.

Nuha does not regret leaving school because she is "working now and can read and write . . . There are a lot of other girls who cannot read and write."

Nuha's parents never visited her school or any parents' school meeting because she "had no trouble [with teachers]." She stated that parents were mainly called to attend school meetings before exams and when their children misbehaved or made trouble. Occasionally, the parents were made happy when they were shown their able children's names inscribed on the honors board.

During her school years, Nuha never participated in school committees because there were no ongoing sporting, social, or cultural activities in her school. She recalled, "We had no [extra-curricular] activities . . . only PE . . . I was the best player . . . My teachers used to say 'we wish you were as good in your [academic] lessons as you are in sport.' . . . I hear nowadays that they organize such [social or extra-curricular] activities." Nuha added, "If I were a teacher, I would ask my students about their areas of interest . . . 'what do you like to do?' I would then try to meet their needs."

Nuha left her school in 2001 and during the past ten years she has worked for intermittent periods as a hairdresser, accountant, and a nursery teacher. Nuha summarized her experiences saying,

I attended training workshops for eight months at the UNRWA Women's Activity Center and then worked in a hairdressing salon for only three months. I then stayed at home [unemployed] for around one year. Afterwards, I learned accounting for two weeks only, and stayed at home [unemployed] for around five months. Next, I volunteered to [work at] The Children of the Future Center for three months, and I am currently working there.

Cases 4 and 5: Nadine and Huda

Nadine, aged twenty-one, and Huda, aged twenty, are the eldest sisters in a family of eight. The mother had a baccalaureate diploma and the father completed the tenth grade. They live with their father, aged forty-two, and four other siblings (three sisters and one brother). The mother died fifteen months prior to her interview, and the father works as a cab driver. His relationship with Nadine and Huda worsened after the death of his wife. Nadine and Huda dropped out of their school during the eighth grade due to familial and school problems. Their younger sisters, Muna and Nour, also dropped out of their schools in the sixth and seventh grades, respectively. Nadine explained that the teachers' approach was the cause:

They didn't encourage us to remain at school . . . I was not good at biology and science [and] one teacher encouraged me to leave school. She said 'nothing [good] will come out of you.' In the meantime, my mother was sick, which made it impossible for me to do my homework . . . She [the teacher] knew that but never considered my condition.

Huda added, "Because of my mom's health condition, I did not have the courage to ask for money as I knew in advance what the answer would be! The priority was for my mother's [medical] treatment." Still though, Huda stated,

The sickness of my mother wasn't the only cause. We had familial problems between my mother's and father's relatives. There was more than one cause. This made me dislike studying . . . familial problems made me lose interest in going to school. We experienced [severe] psychological conditions.

Unlike the father, their mother did not accept their decision. However, she was understanding and knew that family problems were the main factor affecting their dropping out of school.

Nadine and Huda explained that they live with their grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins in the same building. Their relatives are too religious and do not allow their daughters to attend school after fifth or sixth grade. They teach them Islamic law and do not allow them to attend non-family functions. Nadine and Huda stated that their grandmother inflames their father against them. Nadine said,

The problem of the family is that they put pressure on my father. Generally, when I ask for my father's permission to go out, he doesn't object. But when his mother or sister talks to him, his answer to us would be: 'sit at home and don't go out.' This is what used to happen when we wanted to go on a school trip. He changes his mind when my grandmother talks to him and prevents us from going out.

According to Nadine and Huda, none of the school administrators bothered to ask about their reasons for leaving school. They received one call only asking them to "return the books to school." However, the school unexpectedly became interested in knowing their reasons for leaving school. Nadine explained, "They called us and we went there [to school] . . . that [call] was [initiated] by a foreigner." She added, "Now they have become more concerned . . . perhaps because of this foreigner, otherwise, nobody would call." She elaborated, "Probably, I would return to school if the school [staff] talked to me and tried to persuade me to go back. But the school was not bothered, and neither were [my] parents."

Nadine and Huda complained about certain issues related to the educational policies at UNRWA schools. For example, their school had no remedial classes for slow learners and students with learning problems. The school also lacked counseling services and adequate resources, such as laboratories and computers. Nadine stated, "We had a library, but we never used it. They even refused to give us books when we ordered them . . . We never had a reading lesson in the library." Regarding sports and art lessons, Nadine said,

We had two periods of physical education but we had no physical education teacher. We used to go to the playground and do whatever we liked . . . it used to be the last period and we preferred to go home [rather than play sports] . . . Also, we had two periods for art . . . but just like PE . . . we never studied art.

One of the negative experiences that Nadine and Huda recalled was students being forced to clean the school. When it was their turn, Nadine and Huda used that to wake up early at six o'clock in the morning, and if not, they were punished by being forbidden to attend the first lesson.

Conclusions and Implications for Intervention

There are several conclusions and implications of the current study. First, although many Palestinian families seem to be willing to sacrifice a lot for their children's education, the daily struggle for survival in the Palestinian camps still appears to be their first priority in Lebanon. Child labor in Palestinian camps and the high incidence of poverty were usually the main reason for dropping out for several cases in the current study. There is a general understanding among parents that eradicating child labor would have negative effects on the poorest families. To resolve this problem, UNRWA schools may create opportunities for decent work, perhaps with their NGO affiliates.

Second, dropouts and parents perceive that the UNRWA teachers and administrators are generally not caring when students start to fade out of the system. Many students perceived the educational system as a little too relieved to throw them out because of their academic or behavioral problems. The stories told by the dropouts have revealed a lack of care towards these children by some schools and teachers and how this has contributed to dropping out. Not surprisingly, some of the poorest student-teacher relationships have been found among those students who eventually dropout of UNRWA schools. Therefore, teachers should devote more energy to learning as much as possible about their students' personal interests and backgrounds, and to connect their personal interests with classroom work, where possible through weekly student-teacher meetings as well as and in-class discussions. This requires a reduction of teachers' teaching load and duties in order to enable students to voice their concerns and teachers to address them.

Third, the UNRWA schools are fragmented; some parts of the school system are either not working or do not exist. For example, there was no indication in some students' responses that they recognize their school counselors or their roles at school. There had been little, if any, interaction between dropouts and guidance counselors. Most students saw teachers, counselors, and administrators in a mostly-negative light. They were seen as symbols of authority and discipline rather than educators who were a source of support. There were few special services provided to identify and address low achievers and slow learners. Of the few remedial classes that had been provided, it was observed that students were attending large classes of thirty-five to forty-five students, and receiving conventional teaching by untrained general classroom teachers. Teachers in all schools suggested a systematic approach to identifying potential dropouts long before their entry into primary and intermediate school. Teachers, educational specialists, and policy-makers are encouraged to design and implement appropriate assessments during children's early development, preferably during the first five years. Trained and specialized teachers should teach students in special education and remedial classes in small groups. In addition, it is suggested that more specialized guidance and counseling services should be made available to these students prior to their entry into intermediate school, at the time of entry, and throughout their intermediate schooling years.

Fourth, corporal punishment and lack of extra-curricular activities (e.g., school trips, festivals, talent shows, etc.) were repeatedly cited as the most unpleasant experiences of schooling. Making school a safe and pleasant place for children is important to produce a lower risk of dropouts. Although corporal punishment is officially banned in UNRWA schools, with severe consequences for reported teachers/students, it is still widely practiced. It is believed that the lack of implementation of the UNRWA legislation for banning corporal punishment, inadequate teacher and counselor training for using appropriate behavioral modification strategies and teachers' perceptions that it must be used to teach students as it is already used at home, are all factors behind the widespread use of corporal punishment. On the other hand, the UNRWA school environment is not conducive to participation in science fairs or trips, cultural or sport competition, school festivals or parties. The nature of any extra-curricular activity should be drawn from the students' practical life in order to reinforce the significance of knowledge acquired at school.

Fifth, all teachers and administrators acknowledged that there is not much parental participation in the school system. Several teachers admitted that schools need to make more of an effort to reach out to parents in order to form a strong partnership. Developing positive relationships between families and schools can contribute to a student's sense of support and encouragement. Teacher-parent conferences and meetings should be scheduled

to coordinate with parents' work schedules. Also, schools should provide parenting classes, or support groups and put more effort into communicating the benefits of education to parents.

Sixth, students and parents were unable to find relevance to their lives in the Lebanese curriculum, and find it difficult to connect with their educational experience. Dropouts seek other sources (e.g., media, camp community leaders, etc.) outside the school for a personal curriculum, which has more relevance to them. Teachers also had strong feelings about how the inclusion of Palestinian history in the mainstream curriculum would enrich their educational experiences. This will mitigate the detachment experienced by some students. Parents, students, and teachers were frustrated with the difficulty and length of the new curriculum, especially as it is taught in English. Therefore, strengthening teaching English as a second language (TESL) in these schools is a major practical issue that we should not be skirting around. Teachers should be trained in how to teach the new curriculum and it should be introduced gradually to all students. Also, there is a need to broaden the scope of the current curriculum to include the contributions of Palestinians in Lebanon.

Seventh, in comparing educational policies and practices regarding automatic promotion and grade repetition, several issues should be taken into consideration: (1) if the goal is to give as many children as possible the opportunity to participate in the full program of basic and elementary education, then automatic promotion opens doors where grade repetition closes them; (2) if parents are not provided with information on students' progress, which leaves them unable to judge their children's progress, then automatic promotion should not be implemented; and (3) in order to ensure the successful implementation of this policy, UNRWA should assign qualified and trained teachers to instruct students in elementary education.

Eighth, Palestinian students attending UNRWA schools in refugee camps are exposed to a variety of factors that negatively affect their overall psychological well-being, such as overcrowded living conditions and limited recreational opportunities. Therefore, schools should provide different conditions and propose a long-term plan to build or rent buildings outside of the camps if necessary.

Dropout Prevention Action Plan

Dropping out can be prevented through a focused action plan. Through a dropout prevention and intervention plan, UNRWA can advance strategies from preschool through secondary schools in the following ways:

1. Intervene prior to kindergarten
2. Involve community and families in students' learning
3. Improving the school environment
4. Serving students who are in poverty
5. Attending to English language learners
6. Serving at-risk students and others with special educational needs

First: Early intervention, pre-kindergarten through grade 12

Dropout prevention and intervention begins in preschool, extends beyond age seventeen, and involves families and communities. UNRWA should act early by providing high quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; strong elementary programs that ensure students are doing grade-level work when they enter middle school; and middle school programs that address causes of dropping out in these grades and ensure that students have access to training in the English language, math, science, and other courses that serve as the foundation for success in high school and beyond.

Second: Community and family involvement in dropout prevention

UNRWA schools should collaborate with Palestinian community organizations and NGOs in an effort to engage students and families in activities such as service learning, mentoring, after-school tutoring, and volunteering. The entire community in Palestinian camps should be involved in dropout prevention through family-friendly policies that provide release time to attend parent-teacher conferences; work schedules for secondary school students that enable them to attend classes on time and be ready to learn; adopt school programs that encourage volunteerism and camp-led projects in school; and community-based, real-world learning experiences for students. UNRWA is encouraged to fund these services.

Third: Improving the school environment

Many students who drop out express an extreme form of unattractiveness towards and disengagement from UNRWA schools (e.g., poor attendance, academic difficulties, and a poor sense of belonging combined with a general dislike for school). Therefore, effective prevention strategies supporting students' engagements help them develop their learning environment.

- Counseling services and adult advocacy for students are key elements of any particular dropout prevention initiative. All UNRWA schools should have school-based counselors for all elementary, middle, and secondary levels. At the elementary level, providing after-school tutoring and enrichment that are directly related to in-class assignments and having in-class adult friends (e.g., trained volunteers or helpers) appear to be effective approaches. At the middle level, team-teaching strategies, flexible scheduling, heterogeneous grouping of students, and provision of as-needed counseling assistance are especially useful strategies. At the secondary level, paid-work, embedded in activities that prepare and monitor students' on-the-job experiences, appears to be a critical component of keeping students in school.
- Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning: These conditions include smaller class sizes and smaller learning communities in large schools; safe, healthy, modern, and orderly schools; technology, media centers, and materials; policies that encourage collaboration and shared decision-making among staff; and the providing of data in a timely manner with staff training in the use of data for decision making.
- Class size reduction: Four years of schooling (KG level to third grade) with class sizes reduced from forty to twenty-five student. Thirty years of research has documented the positive effects of reducing class sizes to eighteen or fewer students, particularly from kindergarten through the third grade. Given budget restrictions and the great difficult of reducing classroom sizes to eighteen, UNRWA should support a class size of at most twenty-five students in regular programs and smaller class sizes in programs for students with special needs.
- UNRWA Schools should offer rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction to the Palestinian students: High academic expectations; curricula that connects to Palestinian students' lives, cultures, history, camps and communities; partnerships with higher education; interdisciplinary courses; and project- and community-based learning should be implemented in UNRWA schools. UNRWA needs to collaborate with the Lebanese Ministry of Education to offer curricula and instruction that connects to Palestinian culture and history. Palestinians will remain, of course, to sit the Brevet and Baccalaureate examinations in that case.

Fourth: Students who live poverty

Poverty, and all the conditions it creates, is the single most powerful demographic factor that increases Palestinian students' chances of dropping out of UNRWA schools. It affects students' well-being, their school readiness, and their performance in school. UNRWA cannot eradicate poverty, but it can advocate for changes outside of school that would improve the lives of low-income students and their families.

- Advocate with all NGOs and community organizations for changes in Lebanon's labor laws, thus enabling workers to seek and obtain collective bargaining rights and thereby earn higher wages.

- Advocate for early childhood education for all low-income children. High-quality early childhood education has been shown to demonstrably increase graduation rates. Positive effects include significant reductions in special education placement and grade retention.
- Advocate for adequate health care for low-income Palestinian children and their families. These could be school-based health clinics that serve children and their parents through elementary, middle, and secondary schools, but also community-based clinics that serve children as well as adults, or cooperative arrangements between schools and health agencies.

Fifth: Students who are English language learners

Many Palestinian students enrolled in the UNRWA schools often encounter two challenges: (1) acquiring academic proficiency in English; and consequently (2) catching up academically. Some are over-aged for their grade levels because they were retained in school, and as a result, are particularly at risk of being overlooked and underserved and, as a group, are more likely to dropout. Therefore, Palestinian students, who enter the middle school with limited English proficiency, must master the English language skills that are necessary to compete successfully with Lebanese students.

Sixth: At-risk students and others with special educational needs

Some of the Palestinian students in special education who drop out have been misidentified as needing special education services. This is particularly true of low-income Palestinian students. Their disproportionate representation in special education has been a concern for many years. Therefore, several actions are needed as follows:

- Individual attention for each at-risk student: UNRWA should make sure students receive individual attention in their schools, in smaller learning communities within large schools, in small classes (fifteen or fewer students), and in programs during the summer, weekends, and before and after-school that provide tutoring and build on what students learn during the school day. These small classes (sometimes called resource rooms) offer an educational service to at-risk students and others with special educational needs (e.g., learning difficulties, behavioural problems, slow learning, etc.) and should be distributed in the various UNRWA schools. Resource rooms are for students who qualify for either a special class or regular class placement but needs some special instruction in an individualized or small group setting for a portion of the day. Individual needs are supported in resource rooms as defined by the student's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Sometimes these forms of support are called Resource and Withdrawal (or pull out). The student getting this type of support will receive some time in the resource room, which refers to the withdrawal portion of the day, and sometime in the regular classroom with modifications and or accommodations, which is the resource support in the regular classroom.
- Early identification of at-risk and exceptional learners: Many Palestinian students fail to meet the eligibility requirements for at-risk students and others with special educational needs (e.g., learning difficulties, slow learning, behavioural and emotional problem, etc.) because the identification protocols fail to consider the special characteristics of this population. These special characteristics were addressed above as well as other recent studies, and it provides good practice in the identification of gifted children with learning difficulties, which requires:
- Institution of training program that enables all regular-classroom teachers, over time, to develop their educational expertise in terms of identifying at-risk and exceptional students.
- Monitoring of academic progress: Monitor at-risk students' academic progress during the school year through a variety of measures that provide a full picture of students' learning and help teachers ensure students do not fall behind academically. Also important is ensuring that identification is a continuous, school-wide process. This requires collecting two types of information:

a. Qualitative data, including the schools documentary records and evidence, parents and teachers' nominations and assessments, students' observations, and the examination of students' work.
b. Quantitative data, including the results of the national Lebanese curriculum assessments, public examination, and other available test data such as standardized cognitive ability tests, dyslexia and literacy tests, in addition to the behavioural checklists.

- Assessment procedures: A variety of assessment tools and strategies could be used to gather relevant information about at-risk students. The multiple criteria of assessment instruments should include the following:

a. School-based assessments that will be carried out by the entire school community, community members, particularly, regular-class teachers, special education teacher, counsellor, and administrator.
b. Psycho-educational assessment in order to give a more complete picture about the student's cognitive abilities and difficulties. The school or parents might request an external psychological assessment of the student by using IQ tests, self-esteem tests, and psycho-linguistic tests in the native or Arabic language. UNRWA needs to fund these services.

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APPENDIX A:

Student Interview Protocol

Interview with school dropouts

Part I: The following questions illustrate and underline the causes and challenges as identified by previous quantitative studies conducted at UNRWA schools in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

1. Let us first talk about the dates on which you dropped out of school. How many times did you drop out of school and then return? Which grades (classes) did you drop out of?
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** You may discuss the last day the student showed up at school before s/he dropped out. The student should also be asked if s/he regrets dropping out and if s/he is happy with her/his new situation.

2. Why did you drop out of school? Why do you think other students drop out of school?
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** Discuss in detail several possible reasons, such as low achievement, behavioral problems, boredom, failure to integrate into school life, old age, the need to look after family and brothers and sisters, work, marriage, living hardship, etc.
   - The researcher will delve into the main and perplexing reasons through a qualitative analysis.

3. Why did you decide to return to school?
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** Discuss the intervention and remedy program used by the school, specialists, or anyone who might have helped the student return to school. The student might have returned upon her/his own decision and without help from anyone. Discuss this thoroughly.
   - The researcher should also discuss in detail the main and perplexing reasons for the student's return to school through a qualitative research and analysis.

Part II: The following questions focus on the reenrollment policy and on administrative and educational issues

4. What did you do in order to be accepted back in school?
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** Discuss the extent of parents' engagement with the school, the reenrollment forms that were completed, whether the student was accepted in another school under certain conditions -- such as joining a remedial program, the period the student spent at school after s/he was reenrolled, and the behavioral and academic remedial intervention programs offered to the student.

5. Can you describe how you were reenrolled? What were the major difficulties you faced while trying to return to school, and what was the easy part?
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** Discuss the methods that the school (and UNRWA) used to encourage or discourage the dropout students to return to school.
   - Discuss how reenrollment can be more effective (from the viewpoint of the students)

Part III: This part discusses the relationship between the dropout student and the school, teachers, and peers.

6. Were the students in your class and the school in general nice to you? Yes…. No…. Comments……
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** Describe the student's relationship with her/his peers and whether s/he saw any of them as a model for her/him and wished to be like her/him. Discuss the reasons: Why did s/he like that peer? Why does s/he think s/he is different from her/him?

7. Did you join any school committee in your class or in other classes? Yes….. No….. Why yes? Why no?

8. How was your relationship with your teachers? What did you like in that relationship and what did you not like?

9. Did anyone encourage you to leave school? Did anyone try to convince you not to leave school?
   - **Guidance for the researcher:** The researcher discusses in depth who tried to convince the student to leave school or return to it and whether it was possible for a dropout to return to school if s/he was offered certain services, such as the possibility of joining a class while still accommodating the reason that drove her/him to drop out, such as work, marriage, etc.

10. Did you work while you were at school? Yes…. No…. How many hours did you work per day? Was it a full-time or a part-time job? Did you work during the school year or only during the summer holiday?
    - **Guidance for the researcher:** The researcher discusses the student's daily financial allowance during school years and who gave her/him the allowance. If s/he had a job, what were the work hours?
    - The student should also be asked if anyone helped her/him with her/his daily homework and if s/he faced educational difficulties. Who helped you?

Part IV: This part discusses issues related to the dropout student, her/his future plans, personal interests, and other things.

11. Now let us put the dream aside and ask you about your future plans? What is the profession you chose for yourself or are thinking of choosing?

12. Imagine yourself a father: Would you encourage your children to continue their education until they finish high school, or would you prefer that they start working at an early age?

13. Imagine yourself a school headmaster: What would you do to improve education and prevent school dropout?

14. What are your hobbies, both the ones that you practice and the ones you don't? What prevents you from practicing your hobbies?

15. Let us go back to the time when you left school: Would you do it again? Yes…. No…. Explain in detail…..
    - **Guidance for the researcher:** This part contains hypothetical questions. Be careful to link them to reality and not leave them hanging in the air. Answers, therefore, need to be realistic, not ideal.

APPENDIX B

Teachers and Administrators Focus Group Guide

Location: _____Date:_____ Time: _____

Number of teachers: _____ Number of counselors: _____

Number of Administrators_____

1. Let's begin by having you describe the dropout problem in your school district. (General opening statement)
   A. Really, is it a problem in your school district? Yes? No? How so?
   B. How does the dropout issue affect your school, other students, families, the community, and other?
   C. Who or what else is affected by the dropout problem?
   D. Is the problem complex or simple? If so, explain how, either way.

2. What are the characteristics of the dropout student? (Probe attendance, self-esteem, family issues, substance abuse, parental involvement, poverty, delinquency, class room misconduct.)

3. What is the stereotype? Is the description fair?

4. At what age or grade do you think students begin to consider dropping out of school?
   A. Are you able to recognize at-risk students?
   B. What have you observed about them?
   C. Do the at-risk students seek your assistance or guidance?
   D. Do students who have dropped out come to you for assistance or guidance?
   E. Do you offer assistance or guidance to them? Explain.
   F. Have you been successful or unsuccessful? Explain.
   G. What, if anything, either promotes or hampers your efforts to deal with the issue?
   H. What, if anything, affects your efforts to deal with the dropout students?
   I. Who or what encourages and supports your efforts?
   J. Who should be involved in a day-to-day monitoring of potential dropout students?

5. Do you believe the number of dropouts in your school has increased, stayed the same, or decreased in the past 5-8 years? Camp-wide? Nationwide?
   A. Explain.

6. Does your school district have a dropout prevention program? Is so, describe it/them?
   A. If no, why not?

7. Based on your experience, how effective are current dropout programs: are they making a difference? Why or why not?
   A. What are their strengths?
   B. What are their weaknesses?
   C. Are the programs okay the way they are? If not, what could be done to strengthen them?
8. What are the realities associated with the dropout issue? Can we do better?

9. If you were given the opportunity to create a model dropout prevention program, what would it look like?
   A. What would be the most important factors to consider and components to include? (Probe role of students; student, family; and community awareness programs; timelines; role of administration, teachers, and counselors, etc.).
   B. What pitfalls and barriers would you need to be aware of and prepare for?
   C. Who/what would need to be a part of the effort? What would be the role of each?

10. Let's now summarize. What do you believe are the most important points that emerged from our discussion?

11. And finally, what are the final recommendations that you would like to make to policymakers or individuals who design dropout programs? What would you like to recommend they do to address the dropout problem?

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