Why Are Boys Dropping Out of School in Kiribati?

A Snap-shot Study | May 2018

The Ministry of Education and Kiribati Education Improvement Program noticed the disproportionate number of boys dropping out of school. They undertook a study to find out why[1]. This snapshot highlights key reasons why some boys drop out of school and others do not.

Push Factors

Embarrassment or shame due to poor performance; being older than the rest of the class; poor grades and/or falling behind; and, not having a uniform or clean clothes to wear to school.

Family issues including family pressure to work or do chores at home; pressure to learn traditional/survival skills from parents/grandparents instead of going to school; families being unable to afford school fees or the school uniform; a significant event in the family unit (new born, marriage break-up or death); and, a lack of support or encouragement from parents to go to school.

> **They (my parents) want me to continue my study but I don't want to go (to school) because I was ashamed of my age -that I am over age.**
>
> **Male Drop-Out, Abaiang**

School Punishment including children avoid school to avoid punishment (being smacked by teacher or principal); fear of teachers; and, students being sent home for missing school[2].

> **They (the teacher) beat us when we came late.**
>
> **Male Student, Abaiang**

Culture norms and practices that appear to promote boys over girls and facilitate male bravado. Respondents suggested that boys were raised differently to girls and are not taught to defer to elders and authorities the same way girls are, and that cultural activities require some to take time out of class. Some boys believe that in the future they would find a wife who had a good job and would earn good money. Some teachers believe the curriculum and approaches favors how girls learn.

Peer pressure and personal Issues including hunger (which can lead to poor attention in class); boredom and/or difficulty in class; being easily distracted (by games, dancing, playing outside); using drugs (including a locally made drug called 'kouben'), smoking and drinking alcohol; low self-esteem; not performing well on assessments; getting involved in gangs and crime; and, encouragement (especially from older friends) to work and/or drop-out of school.

> **Peer pressure was very high in the village.**
>
> **Teacher, Abaiang**

A desire by some boys to make money from selling coconuts, fishing, cutting toddy and cutting copra.

Limited accessibility to schools. Some teachers noted that there are few transport options for those on islets, that students often did not like staying with extended family or guardian, and that the cost of transport on larger islands (bus, bikes, etc) could be prohibitive for some families.

> **Some parents can't afford their kids school fee.**
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> **School Committee Member, Betio**

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[1] Data for this snap-shot was compiled from focus groups and interviews with 38 male students, 8 male drop-outs, 12 KIT students from Youth Learning Centre, 6 Head Teachers / Principals, 18 teachers, 12 community members, 37 parents, in Betio, Abaiang and Kirimati in late March and early April 2018 by KEIP and MoE staff.

[2] Acting out and trouble makers were noted as particularly problematic and the most likely to drop out by several teachers and head teachers, but there was little unpacking of why some boys were 'rule breakers' and others were not.

Pull Factors

Opportunities to participate in fun activities including sports days and the use of sports equipment; games in classrooms; activities in class such as dancing, drama and school-community events.

> *I enjoy going to school because there are so many games I can play with my friends like volley ball, football, athletics.*
>
> Male Student, Abaiang

Family support especially from parents and siblings to monitor and help with the completion of homework; to encourage regular attendance and finishing school (and be successful); by providing lunch, clean laundry and/or money for food, uniforms or equipment; and, by monitoring the school attendance and disciplining children for being late or not attending school.

Encouragement from friends to go to school; perform well; compete; encourage each other; study together; and, talk and play.

Positive teacher attitudes. The boys said they liked teachers who were friendly, helpful, supported them to understand difficult work and didn't get angry. Some teachers suggested that counselling children, telling them stories of other successful students and making class fun and interesting was important.

Proactive class room management by teachers. Teachers suggested several strategies including giving boys responsibilities (team captain, class leader, library corner, health corner) which earns respect by peers, putting children in teams, pairing students, rewarding good behavior (e.g. with candy), implementing a points system for good or bad behavior, providing feedback on students' work, and ensuring student-centered lessons (less chalk and talk).

Community outreach and follow up on non-attendees. Participants highlighted the need to document and report non-attendance to parents (sometimes they are unaware the child is not going to school) and the community; engaging the community more in the monitoring of attendance, as well as implementing interventions with parents whose children don't attend school; ensuring school committees are active and engaged; and providing special support for children falling behind.

> *Community leaders can talk with the parents to find the reasons why they do not send their children to school and respond to the problem.*
>
> Male Student, Betio

Nutrition interventions such as milk campaign and health corners to promote attendance.

Instilling long term visions to motivate attendance including highlighting the link between education and being able to get a good job, future earning potential, owning things (like a house), being a leader in the community, being able to take care of the family and being able to acquire success.

> *Boys love to take responsibilities inside and outside of the classroom. The appointed boy is considered as the strongest boy by the rest or the others.*
>
> Teacher, Abaiang

Implications

> Ensure a positive learning environment that should be reflected in School Discipline Policy and Procedures, Teacher Code of Conduct and effective classroom management strategies.

> Better enrollment and attendance data to identify where and when students are dropping out of school, and the degree to which boys are disproportionately dropping out, so that action can be taken at the community level.

> Learn and replicate successful strategies that have been utilized – nutrition interventions, school activities, positive teachers and support from families.

> Consider accessibility issues such as school uniforms and transport as well as remedial or accelerated programs for boys to be in age-appropriate classes.