

Uganda: Factors Leading Children with a Disability to Never Go to School or Drop Out

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A disability may lead some children to never be enrolled in school or drop out prematurely (on disability gaps in education, see for example Malé and Wodon, 2017, and Wodon et al., 2018). But even for children with a disability, other factors may also play a role in curtailing educational attainment. This brief uses the 2019-20 Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) to analyze the reasons leading children to never be enrolled in school or to drop out of school at various stages of their education. This is done for children with and without disabilities, and by type of disability. The focus is on primary and secondary education. On measuring the prevalence of various types of disabilities using various datasets including the UNHS, this is discussed in a separate brief in this series (see Brief 2023-30 on data sources).

A disability clearly affects enrollment in primary school, but other factors matter too

Table 1 provides estimates of the reasons leading some children to never enroll in school. The analysis is based on children ages 7 to 13. All estimates have standard errors which are not shown in the Table for space reasons. For small samples (which includes children with less common disabilities), these standard errors may be large, so that differences in estimates between groups may not be statistically significant. The first column in the Table lists the



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Key findings: Using data from the 2019/20 Uganda National Household Survey, this brief analyzes the reasons leading children to never be enrolled in school or drop out of school.

- For children with no disability, age and cost are the main reasons leading some children not to have enrolled in school. For children with a disability, the disability is often the reason for never enrolling, especially for children with mobility difficulties or multiple disabilities. Yet for children with other disabilities, factors such as the cost of schooling and the distance to the school also play an important role.
- Once a child has enrolled, the main factor leading to dropout at all levels is cost. Other factors matter also, such as the perception that the child has completed the desired level of schooling at the lower secondary level or pregnancies for girls at the upper secondary level. In addition, at all levels, a sickness or calamity in a family (which could in some cases refer to the child's disability) is a larger factor leading to drop out for children with disabilities than for children without a disability.
- Overall, many of the factors leading some children to drop out after they enrolled are similar for children with and without disabilities, at least in comparison to the larger differences observed for the factors leading to never enrolling.
- The analysis suggests that policies should promote initial enrollment of children with disabilities in primary school apart from ensuring that children remain in school, including through reductions in the out-of-pocket or opportunity costs of schooling. It should however be noted that perceptions of cost may be related to low quality in the education received. Poor performance in school may contribute to dropouts directly or indirectly if the investment is perceived as not being worth the cost.

reasons that parents indicate in the survey as to why their child was never enrolled in school. The columns in the Table provide estimates for various groups of children, namely those with (i) no disability; (ii) seeing difficulties; (iii) hearing difficulties; (iv) communications difficulties; (v) mental or intellectual difficulties; (vi) mobility difficulties (walking or climbing); (vii) washing difficulties; (viii) multiple difficulties; and (ix) any disability. Note that when categorizing children, children with some difficulties are included in the group of children with a disability together with children with a lot of difficulties or who cannot perform a task at all. Results would be different if children with some difficulties were not included.

For children with no disability, the fact that a child is considered too young to school and the fact that going to school is considered too expensive are the main reasons for never enrolling. The cost of schooling may be an out-of-pocket cost, but it may also be an opportunity cost. Indeed,

the third reason for a child not to have been enrolled in school relates to the fact that the child must help at home. Note that a small share of parents (1.6 percent) indicate a disability as the reason for children with no declared disability to never enroll in school.

For children with a disability (last column in the Table), the main reason for never enrolling is by far the fact that the child has a disability. This accounts for more than half (55.2 percent) of all cases of non-enrollment. For children with multiple disabilities, the disability is almost the only reason for non-enrollment (81.8 percent of cases). The disability is also seen as a major obstacle to enrollment for children with mobility difficulties (52.9 percent of cases). But other factors may lead to non-enrollment of children with a single disability, including the cost of schooling as well as the distance to the school, especially for children with seeing or hearing difficulties. Again, sample sizes are limited, but most results seem intuitive.

Table 1: Reasons for Never Enrolling in School by Type of Disability (%)

Age 7-12	None	Seeing	Hearing	Comms	Mental	Mobility	Washing	Multiple	Any
Too expensive	26.5	-	-	34.6	6.1	21.6	-	1.2	5.1
Too far away	9.0	31.3	37.3	-	-	-	-	1.7	4.9
Poor quality	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Help at home	10.4	-	19.8	-	-	13.4	67.5	0.7	3.1
Farm work	0.5	-	-	-	3.2	-	-	-	0.5
Family business	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
School not useful	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents not willing	4.3	-	-	2.9	-	-	-	-	0.1
Child not willing	8.6	14.7	-	-	-	12.1	32.5	2.1	3.2
Too young	27.4	-	7.9	29.9	24.3	-	-	1.5	6.9
Orphaned	3.1	-	14.0	-	34.3	-	-	-	6.6
Displaced	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.7	0.4
Disability	1.6	19.0	11.6	16.6	3.1	52.9	-	81.8	55.2
Other	8.0	35.0	9.4	16.1	29.0	-	-	10.4	14.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' estimation using 2019/20 UNHS. Estimates rounding to 0.0 percent are not shown.

Once a child has enrolled, differences in factors leading to dropouts are smaller between children with and without disabilities

Tables 2 to 4 provide the reasons leading some children to drop out of school after they enrolled. The analysis is conducted for individuals ages 18 to 27 at the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. Unfortunately, the reasons for dropping out that parents can indicate for each child do not include a disability. In comparison to Table 1, a few additional reasons can be chosen, including completion of the desired level of schooling, no option for further schooling, poor academic performance in school, and a sickness or calamity in the family. The set of reasons that can be chosen is the same whether a dropout takes place in primary or secondary school, but some Tables have fewer reasons when a specific reason is not chosen at all in the sample.

The issue of out-of-pocket or opportunity cost (“no funding” as well as “too expensive”) plays a major role for dropouts at the primary level. At the lower secondary level, cost matters as well, although the perception that the child has completed the desired level of schooling also matters. At the upper secondary level too, cost is the main reason for dropping out, although there are differences by gender not apparent in the Table for space reasons (e.g., pregnancies are an important factor leading girls to drop out, but not boys). By-and-large, the factors leading some children to drop out are similar for children with and without disabilities, at least in comparison to the larger differences observed for the factors leading to never enrolling. But one difference observed across levels is the fact that for children with disabilities, a sickness or calamity within the family (which could potentially refer to the child’s disability) is a larger factor leading to dropping out than is the case for children without a disability.

Table 2: Reasons for Dropping out from Primary School (%)

	None	Seeing	Hearing	Comms	Mental	Mobility	Washing	Multiple	Any
Schooling completed	1.7	3.4	-	-	0.4	-	-	-	0.9
No further option	0.4	-	-	-	2.1	-	-	-	0.5
Too expensive	21.6	23.3	26.5	29.0	3.3	41.9	4.1	13.0	17.9
Too far away	0.3	-	-	-	0.6	-	-	-	0.2
Help at home	1.0	-	3.3	-	1.0	3.9	-	-	1.1
Farm work	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Family business	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poor quality	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents not willing	1.7	3.4	-	-	4.9	1.6	-	3.0	2.8
Child not willing	12.9	15.2	9.8	-	7.1	6.6	11.3	12.2	10.4
Poor performance	7.0	1.9	12.1	13.1	13.3	10.5	7.2	8.2	8.9
Sickness/calamity	4.3	13.9	15.5	34.9	14.3	10.6	-	34.9	18.7
Pregnancy	6.2	5.8	4.1	8.6	6.3	2.9	11.8	4.1	5.3
No funding	40.8	31.5	27.3	-	38.9	18.9	65.6	22.2	29.6
Other	1.2	1.5	1.4	14.3	7.9	3.1	-	2.4	3.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors’ estimation using 2019/20 UNHS. Estimates rounding to 0.0 percent are not shown.

Table 3: Reasons for Dropping out from Lower Secondary School (%)

	None	Seeing	Hearing	Comms	Mental	Mobility	Washing	Multiple	Any
Completed schooling	15.1	24.1	22.6	52.4	18.4	-	-	10.5	17.5
No further schooling	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Too expensive	21.7	27.7	9.4	-	10.9	6.5	56.7	8.3	17.7
Too far away	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Help at home	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents not willing	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Child not willing	6.8	-	-	-	-	9.8	-	-	1.0
Poor academics	1.3	3.5	-	-	5.7	-	-	-	2.1
Sickness/calamity	1.4	-	-	-	12.1	13.7	-	44.4	11.7
Pregnancy	11.8	3.8	-	-	24.6	27.4	43.3	-	12.0
No funding	38.9	41.0	68.1	47.6	28.2	42.6	-	36.8	38.0
Other	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' estimation using 2019/20 UNHS. Estimates rounding to 0.0 percent are not shown.

Table 4: Reasons for Dropping out from Upper Secondary School (%)

	None	Seeing	Hearing	Comms	Mental	Mobility	Washing	Multiple	Any
Completed schooling	4.5	7.2	30.7	-	6.4	-	-	-	7.1
No further schooling	1.5	-	8.6	-	-	-	-	15.2	2.1
Too expensive	28.1	31.0	31.3	20.0	-	17.3	13.8	22.1	20.5
Farm work	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Family business	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents not willing	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Child not willing	6.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poor academics	2.1	1.7	-	-	5.1	7.4	-	-	2.5
Sickness/calamity	1.9	7.6	-	-	34.5	15.5	-	23.8	14.0
Pregnancy	8.2	7.3	-	80.0	6.0	14.6	-	-	8.4
No funding	44.0	45.2	29.3	-	40.5	38.6	86.2	38.9	43.2
Other	1.8	-	-	-	7.5	6.7	-	-	2.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' estimation using 2019/20 UNHS. Estimates rounding to 0.0 percent are not shown.

Takeaways

Analysis of data from the 2019/20 UNHS suggests that for children with no disability, age and cost are the main reasons leading some children not to have yet (or ever) enrolled in school. For children with a disability, the disability is often the reason for never enrolling, especially for children with mobility difficulties or multiple disabilities. Yet for children with other disabilities, factors such as the cost of schooling and the distance to the school also play an important role. Once a child has enrolled, the main factor leading to dropout at all levels is cost. At the same time, other factors matter also, such as the perception that the child has completed the desired level of schooling at the lower secondary level or pregnancies for girls at the upper secondary level. In addition, at all levels, a sickness or calamity in a family (which could in some cases refer to the child's disability) is a larger factor leading to drop out for children with disabilities than for children without a disability.

Still, overall, the factors leading children to drop out after they enrolled tend to be similar for children with and without disabilities. The analysis suggests that policies should promote initial enrollment of children with

disabilities in primary school apart from ensuring that children remain in school, including through reductions in the cost of schooling. Finally, it should be kept in mind that perceptions of cost may be related to low quality in the education received. Poor performance in school may contribute to dropouts directly or indirectly if the investment is perceived as not being worth the cost.

References

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