

Why do pupils dropout when education is ‘free’? Explaining school dropout among the urban poor in Nairobi

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Abstract

Education Research Program, African Population and Health Center, Kenya The introduction of universal primary education in sub-Saharan African countries in the 1990s increased enrolment rates and provided opportunities to children who were previously not in school. Research demonstrates that eliminating fees is not the magic bullet that delivers universal access. This study seeks to determine risk factors associated with dropout among primary school children in the low-income areas of Nairobi. Qualitative data is from the Education Research Program, collected between June and July 2008. The study found that: dumpsites in the two slum sites of Korogocho and Viwandani lure children out of school; school levies still charged in schools keep children out of school; and chronic poverty within families lure girls aged 14–16 into transactional sex. In conclusion, the declaration of free primary education is not sufficient to realize improved educational attainment as dropout after initial entry negates the purpose for which it was introduced.

Keywords: Equity and access; Gender issues; Primary Education

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