

Disadvantaged Adolescents and Educational Delay in South Africa: Impacts of Personal, Family, and School Characteristics

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Abstract : Educational delay and non-completion are major policy concerns in South Africa. However, little research has focused on predictors for educational delay amongst adolescents in disadvantaged areas. This study has two aims: first, to use data integration approaches to compare the educational delay of 599 adolescents aged 16 to 18 from disadvantaged communities to national and provincial representative estimates in South Africa. Second, the paper also explores predictors for educational delay by comparing adolescents out of school (n=64) and at least one year behind (n=380), with adolescents in the age-appropriate grade or higher (n=155). Multinomial logistic regression models using self-report and administrative data were applied to look for significant associations of risk and protective factors. Significant risk factors for being behind (rather than in age-appropriate grade) were: male gender, past grade repetition, rural location and larger school size. Risk factors for being out of school (rather than in the age-appropriate grade) were: past grade repetition, having experienced problems concentrating at school, household poverty, and food insecurity. Significant protective factors for being in the age-appropriate grade (rather than out of school) were: living with biological parents or grandparents and access to school counselling. Attending school in wealthier communities was a significant protective factor for being in the age-appropriate grade (rather than behind). Our results suggest that both personal and contextual factors –family and school- predicted educational delay. This study provides new evidence to the significant effects of personal, family, and school characteristics on the educational outcomes of adolescents from disadvantaged communities in South Africa. This is the first longitudinal and quantitative study to systematically investigate risk and protective factors for post-compulsory educational outcomes amongst South African adolescents living in disadvantaged communities.

Keywords : disadvantaged communities, quantitative analysis, school delay, South Africa

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