



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Factors Causing School Dropout in Way Pengubuan District, Central Lampung Regency

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## ABSTRACT

This descriptive quantitative study examines the factors contributing to high school dropout rates in Way Pengubuan District, Central Lampung Regency, Indonesia. Employing questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 54 high school dropouts, the study identifies a critical structural interaction between two dominant factor clusters: accessibility as a “daily burden” and socioeconomic conditions as a “fragile foundation.” Accessibility barriers arise primarily from the absence of public transportation (76%) and insufficient local educational facilities (40%), compelling students to incur substantial commuting costs and endure long travel times that generate chronic tardiness in 82% of respondents. Economically, 93% of families subsist in structural poverty with monthly incomes below IDR 2,000,000, compounded by low parental educational attainment and large household dependency burdens. These vulnerabilities are further intensified by a systemic failure of support structures: 74% of respondents receive no stable social assistance. In the absence of institutional support, early marriage (57%) and negative peer influence (61%) emerge as primary exit pathways from the education system. The study concludes that school dropout in this context is an inevitable consequence of accumulated structural vulnerabilities rather than individual failure, and calls for integrated spatial and socioeconomic policy interventions to address root causes.

**Keywords:** School Dropout; Educational Accessibility; Socioeconomic Factors; Rural Education; Educational Inequality



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a principal driver of individual capability and national development (UNESCO, 2015; Sen, 1999). The Indonesian Constitution of 1945 and Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System explicitly mandate that the state guarantee affordable, accessible education for all citizens, with special attention to geographical accessibility (Ahmad, 2013; Fartini, 2018). Despite this legislative framework, a persistent gap exists between policy intent and lived reality, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas where structural barriers continue to constrain educational participation. Indonesia, as one of Southeast Asia’s largest developing economies, continues to face a disproportionately high school dropout rate relative to comparable middle-income countries, with rural communities bearing the heaviest burden (Pandu et al., 2022; World Bank, 2018).

School dropout — defined as the premature and permanent withdrawal from formal education prior to completing the designated level — is a multidimensional phenomenon with far-reaching consequences. At the individual level, dropout constrains future earning potential, perpetuates intergenerational poverty cycles, and limits social mobility (Rumberger, 2011; Levin, 2009). At the national level, high dropout rates undermine human capital accumulation, reduce labor market productivity, and compromise long-term economic competitiveness (Heckman et al., 2006; Mujiati et al., 2018). Awareness of education’s long-term value does not, however, translate automatically into school retention when structural barriers such as cost and distance remain prohibitive (Hidayati, 2019; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

The school dropout phenomenon in Indonesia demands systematic attention. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), the national dropout rate reached 1,209 students across all educational levels (elementary to senior high school) in Lampung Province alone as of the 2023/2024 academic year. This figure has serious macroeconomic implications: graduates who lack adequate competencies face profound challenges in a labor market increasingly characterized by demands for specialized and technology-enabled skills, directly undermining Indonesia’s human resource competitiveness on the global stage (Mujiati et al., 2018; OECD, 2019). Table 1 presents the spatial distribution of dropout cases across districts in Lampung Province.

**Table 1.** School Dropout Distribution by District in Lampung Province, 2023/2024

Regency	Elementary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Total
Lampung Selatan	149	14	31	194
Lampung Tengah	64	37	23	124
Lampung Utara	52	11	23	86
Lampung Barat	27	10	28	65
Lampung Timur	79	28	4	111
Tulang Bawang	72	7	12	91
Tulang Bawang Barat	30	9	1	40
Tanggamus	79	18	9	106
Way Kanan	68	41	7	116
Pesawaran	61	24	5	89
Pringsewu	26	5	9	40
Mesuji	47	4	4	55
Pesisir Barat	10	1	2	13
Bandar Lampung	56	32	12	100
Kota Metro	13	10	1	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>1,209</b>

Source: Kemendikbud.go.id, 2023/2024.

The imperative for fundamental improvements in education delivery strategy by regional governments is therefore urgent, particularly to ensure equitable access to and quality of the mandated 12-year compulsory education program (Iis Margiyanti & Siti Tiara Maulia, 2023). This challenge is especially acute in Way Pengubuan District, Central Lampung Regency, where the dropout phenomenon reflects the complex interaction of geographical barriers, economic constraints, and social factors (Rohmah et al., 2022). Table 2 provides a disaggregated view of dropout cases at the sub-district level.

**Table 2.** School Dropout Distribution by Village in Way Pengubuan District, 2023/2024

Village	Elementary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Total
Banjar Ratu	14	8	9	31
Tanjung Ratu Ilir	64	37	23	124
Candi Rejo	4	2	0	6
Banjar Kertarahayu	0	6	3	9
Purnama Tunggal	0	0	0	0
Lempuyang Bandar	41	28	10	79

Village	Elementary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Total
Banjar Rejo	0	1	0	1
Putra Lempuyang	11	12	9	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>282</b>

Source: Way Pengubuan District Office, 2023/2024.

Way Pengubuan District comprises eight villages with heterogeneous social and economic profiles, which directly influence educational participation rates within each community. Tanjung Ratu Ilir Village recorded the highest absolute number of dropouts, while Purnama Tunggal Village achieved zero cases — indicating that community-level governance and awareness can function as protective factors even within the same structural environment. To precisely quantify the severity of the dropout problem across educational levels, the Dropout Rate was calculated in accordance with Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) standards, comparing the number of out-of-school children to the total school-age population. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Calculated School Dropout Rates by Education Level, Way Pengubuan District

Education Level	Dropout Count	School-Age Population	Dropout Rate (%)	Category
Elementary School	134	3,021	0.04%	Low
Junior High School	94	1,298	0.07%	Low
Senior High School	54	1,100	4.91%	High

Source: Researcher's calculations based on field data, 2025.

Table 3 reveals that the senior high school dropout rate reached 4.91% — a figure far exceeding the 2023 national average of 1.03% and categorized as “high” by BPS standards. This disproportionate concentration of dropout risk at the senior secondary level is consistent with international evidence showing that the transition to upper-secondary education represents a particularly vulnerable juncture, especially where financial costs increase and institutional proximity decreases (Rumberger, 2011; Okumu et al., 2009). In the Way Pengubuan context, the average distance to a public senior high school is 7.27 km, with only four school units serving the entire district (Asrori, 2013). This geographical scarcity, combined with structural socioeconomic vulnerabilities, creates compounding risk factors for educational disengagement.

This study addresses an important gap in the existing literature by integrating spatial accessibility analysis with socioeconomic vulnerability assessment to explain the dropout phenomenon. Unlike prior Indonesian studies that treat poverty as a unitary variable, this research explicitly examines how geographical barriers — specifically the absence of public transportation and the uneven distribution of educational facilities — translate into structural daily economic burdens that cumulatively erode students' academic resilience (Saepuloh & Suherman, 2019; Ibrahim Okumu Mike, 2009). The interaction between spatial failure and economic fragility, as conceptualized in this study, offers a new perspective on school dropout as a systemic failure of space and services rather than merely an individual financial problem. The study aims to empirically analyze the influence of accessibility and socioeconomic factors on the senior high school dropout rate in Way Pengubuan District, providing an evidence base for more targeted and inclusive education policies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesizes theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence relevant to understanding school dropout in rural and economically marginalized contexts. The review covers human capital theory, the geography of educational access, socioeconomic determinants of dropout, and the role of social and institutional support systems.

## 2.1 Human Capital Theory and the Economics of School Dropout

Human capital theory, originally formulated by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), posits that education is an investment in individual productive capacity whose returns accrue over the lifetime. Within this framework, school dropout can be understood as a rational — if constrained — decision made by households when the perceived immediate costs of schooling (direct costs, opportunity costs, and non-monetary burdens) outweigh the anticipated long-term returns (Rumberger, 2011; Levin, 2009). However, this calculus is systematically distorted for poor households by myopic discounting: families in structural poverty frequently prioritize immediate survival over long-term investment, particularly when returns to education are perceived as uncertain or distant (Heckman et al., 2006).

Empirical research consistently confirms that low household income is among the strongest predictors of school dropout across both developed and developing country contexts (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Okumu et al., 2009). In Indonesia specifically, studies in rural and peri-urban areas have documented that direct educational costs — including transportation, uniforms, and learning materials — can represent a prohibitively large share of household expenditure for low-income families (Saepuloh & Suherman, 2019; Pandu et al., 2022). The intergenerational dimension of this dynamic is particularly concerning: parents with low educational attainment are less likely to perceive schooling as valuable or to provide instrumental support for their children's academic engagement, reproducing the cycle of educational exclusion (Larasati, 2019; Mujiati et al., 2018).

## 2.2 Geography of Educational Access and Spatial Barriers

The spatial distribution of educational facilities is a critical determinant of access and participation, particularly at the secondary level where school networks are sparser and commuting distances greater (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015; World Bank, 2018). The concept of “effort distance” — the composite burden of physical distance, travel time, monetary cost, and physical exertion — provides a more comprehensive measure of accessibility than simple geographic proximity (Pokhrel & Sauerborn, 2004). Research has consistently demonstrated that effort distance is a stronger predictor of school non-attendance than raw distance, as it captures the cumulative daily burden imposed on students from underserved areas.

In the absence of adequate public transportation, students in rural areas are compelled to rely on private vehicles, effectively converting geographic remoteness into a direct economic cost (Asrori, 2013; Ibrahim Okumu Mike, 2009). Studies from sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia converge on the finding that providing free or subsidized student transportation substantially reduces dropout rates by eliminating this cost burden and the associated physical fatigue (Levin, 2009; UNESCO, 2015). In Morocco, Senegal, and several Indian states, long travel times have been empirically linked to increased absenteeism, chronic tardiness, and eventual withdrawal (Okumu et al., 2009). These international findings resonate strongly with the Way Pengubuan context, where 76% of respondents report the total absence of public transportation.

## 2.3 Socioeconomic Vulnerability and Structural Poverty

Structural poverty — defined as poverty rooted in systemic economic and social arrangements rather than individual circumstances — creates conditions of chronic resource deprivation that fundamentally undermine educational participation (Sen, 1999; UNICEF, 2021). Key dimensions of structural poverty that have been empirically linked to school dropout include: extremely low household income, large dependency ratios, precarious housing tenure, and limited access to social protection programs (Aurellia et al., 2025; Supriatna, 2023). The combined effect of these dimensions is to leave households chronically exposed to economic shocks with minimal buffering capacity, rendering educational expenditure one of the first items to be cut when household finances are stressed.

The role of social protection in mitigating dropout risk is well-documented in the literature. Conditional cash transfer programs, educational vouchers, and school feeding initiatives have demonstrated effectiveness in maintaining school enrollment among economically vulnerable populations across multiple country contexts (UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2018). The failure of social

assistance to reach target populations — whether through administrative exclusion, irregular disbursement, or inadequate benefit levels — therefore represents a significant gap in the social safety net that directly elevates dropout risk (Supriatna, 2023; Rustiningrum, n.d.).

#### **2.4 Social and Institutional Factors: Family, Community, and Peers**

Beyond economic and geographic factors, school dropout is shaped by a constellation of social and institutional dynamics at the family, community, and peer levels. Parental support — encompassing both instrumental assistance (financial resources, provision of study materials, logistical support) and expressive support (encouragement, educational monitoring, and communication about academic progress) — is a robust predictor of educational persistence (Larasati, 2019; Zilvana Zetta, 2021). Research has demonstrated that even well-intentioned parental support can be ineffective when it is purely verbal and lacks accompanying resources, leaving children cognitively aware of parental encouragement but practically without means to overcome structural obstacles (Rumberger, 2011).

Community norms regarding education exert powerful influence on individual dropout decisions, particularly in contexts where peer and community reference groups normalized non-enrollment (Kholifah et al., 2025; Suparsi, 2025). Where local occupational structures provide immediate income opportunities — such as agricultural or informal sector work — the perceived opportunity cost of continuing school may appear prohibitive to adolescents, especially males, whose peers have already transitioned to work (Pandu et al., 2022). Child marriage represents a particularly severe manifestation of community norm-driven dropout, constituting both a consequence of cumulative structural vulnerability and a direct cause of permanent educational interruption (Basmawati, n.d.; UNICEF, 2021).

#### **2.5 Conceptual Framework: Structural Vulnerability and Dropout**

Synthesizing the reviewed literature, this study adopts a structural vulnerability framework that conceptualizes school dropout as the product of accumulated, interacting risk factors rather than a single cause. Accessibility and socioeconomic conditions operate as the two primary structural dimensions of vulnerability, each capable of generating dropout independently but far more powerful in their interaction. The theoretical model posits that: (1) spatial barriers (absence of transport, distant schools) generate daily financial and physical burdens that cumulatively exhaust students' resources and motivation; (2) structural poverty limits households' capacity to absorb these burdens and provides neither financial buffers nor aspirational support for educational persistence; and (3) in the absence of adequate institutional support (government assistance, school-based interventions) and positive social capital (active family involvement, supportive community norms), vulnerable children are channeled toward dropout-facilitating exits such as early marriage, premature employment, or peer group disengagement.

This framework extends prior Indonesian research, which has tended to examine these factors independently, by explicitly modeling their interaction as a “structural vulnerability cascade” — a sequence in which spatial disadvantage activates economic strain, which in turn depletes social capital, ultimately rendering dropout an outcome of structural inevitability rather than individual agency (Rohmah et al., 2022; Saepuloh & Suherman, 2019). The Way Pengubuan context provides an empirical test case for this framework, given the convergence of multiple structural risk factors in a geographically discrete and socioeconomically homogeneous setting.

### **3. METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach with an ex post facto design. The quantitative approach was selected because the research data are numerical and were analyzed using statistical procedures to describe the magnitude and distribution of the factors under investigation. An ex post facto design was adopted because the variables had already occurred and could not be

experimentally manipulated; the researcher examined causal relationships by tracing past events through available data (Akbar & Barni, 2022).

### 3.1 Study Location and Population

The study was conducted in Way Pengubuan District, Central Lampung Regency, Lampung Province (area: 214.65 km<sup>2</sup>). This location was selected purposively based on the senior high school dropout rate of 4.91%, substantially exceeding the national average of 1.03%, thereby constituting a priority area for empirical investigation. The study population comprised all senior high school dropouts across the eight villages of Way Pengubuan District for the 2023/2024 academic year, totaling 54 individuals. Total sampling was employed, meaning the entire population served as the research sample, thereby eliminating sampling error and maximizing data completeness (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire instrument was developed to measure two main groups of causal factors: (1) Accessibility Factors, assessed through indicators of distance from home to school, availability and cost of transportation, travel time, road conditions, and sense of safety during travel; and (2) Socioeconomic Factors, assessed through indicators of family income, parental educational background, number of household dependents, residential tenure status, ownership of educational social assistance, and family relationship dynamics. Variable measurements employed nominal and ordinal scales.

Instrument validity was established through content validity via expert judgment (university lecturers and district education officers) and item validity using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient above 0.60, which confirms adequate internal consistency for field data collection (Field, 2018). Secondary data, including population statistics, school enrollment figures, and official dropout records, were obtained from the Way Pengubuan District Office and the Kemendikbudristek national database.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through two main procedures. First, the Senior High School Dropout Rate was calculated using the BPS formula: Dropout Rate = (Number of Dropouts / Total School-Age Population) × 100%. Second, quantitative descriptive analysis was conducted to calculate frequency distributions and percentage values for each accessibility and socioeconomic indicator from the questionnaire responses. Results are reported as percentages and interpreted against established BPS category thresholds. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews were used to contextualize and triangulate the quantitative findings, providing explanatory depth regarding the mechanisms through which structural factors translate into dropout decisions.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

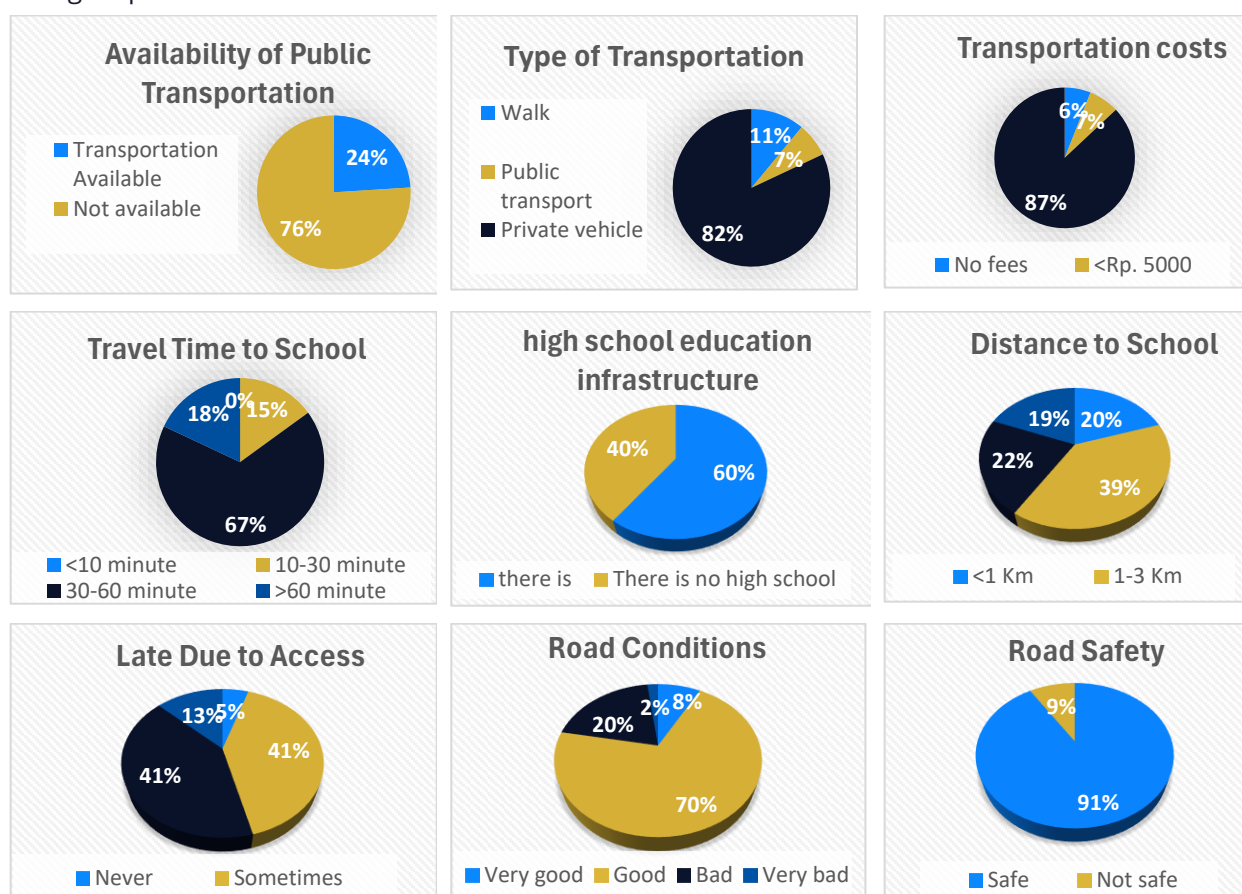
### 4.1 Study Area and Respondent Profile

Way Pengubuan District, situated in the northern part of Central Lampung Regency, covers an area of 214.65 km<sup>2</sup> and is characterized by predominantly agricultural and plantation land uses. The population is ethnically heterogeneous — comprising Javanese, Lampungese, and Sundanese communities — but generally cohesive, with a strong tradition of mutual cooperation (gotong royong). The majority of the population belongs to the lower-middle economic stratum, with livelihoods centered on smallholder agriculture, rubber and oil palm plantations, and informal sector activities. Educational infrastructure is limited at the senior secondary level, with only four senior high school units (including the main reference school, SMA Negeri 1 Way Pengubuan) serving the entire district, creating structural accessibility challenges for many students.

The study involved 54 respondents who had dropped out of senior high school. Demographically, the sample was slightly male-dominated (51.85% male; 48.15% female), with the largest age cohort being 18 years (50.00%), indicating that the majority of dropouts were in the latter phase of adolescence and should, under normal circumstances, have been in the final year of senior secondary education. Strikingly, 85.18% of dropouts had withdrawn in their first year of senior high school, identifying Grade 10 as the most critical vulnerability point — consistent with international evidence on the elevated dropout risk during educational transitions (Rumberger, 2011).

#### 4.2 Accessibility Factors as a Daily Burden

Accessibility, in the context of this study, is defined comprehensively as the holistic ease with which students can reach school and commence learning activities. In Way Pengubuan District, accessibility emerged not simply as a matter of road quality — which has generally improved — but rather as a destructive accumulation of spatial failures (uneven school distribution) and public service failures (absence of public transportation infrastructure) that impose compounding financial, temporal, and physical costs on students. Figure 1 presents the quantitative distribution of key accessibility indicators among respondents.



**Figure 1.** Percentage Distribution of Accessibility Factor Indicators Among School Dropout Respondents  
 Source: Primary Data Analysis, 2025.

The most foundational accessibility barrier identified was the near-total absence of public transportation: 76% of respondents reported that no public transportation service was available in their area. This compelled 82% of respondents to rely entirely on private vehicles, predominantly motorcycles, to commute to school. This dependency fundamentally transforms geographic remoteness into a direct and recurring economic cost: 87% of respondents reported spending more than IDR 5,000 per day on transportation — a sum that, while modest in absolute terms, constitutes a significant financial burden for households predominantly earning below IDR 1,000,000 per month. These findings are consistent

with international evidence from India and sub-Saharan Africa, where the absence of school transportation has been identified as a primary driver of dropout (UNESCO, 2015; Okumu et al., 2009).

The temporal dimension of accessibility compounds its financial impact: 85% of respondents spent more than 30 minutes commuting to school daily (67% spending 30–60 minutes; 18% spending over 60 minutes). Prolonged daily travel generates chronic physical fatigue, reduces available time for rest and study, and contributes to chronic tardiness — reported by 82% of respondents (41% “sometimes late”; 41% “often late”). This pattern of chronic tardiness is not merely a disciplinary issue; it constitutes a mechanism through which geographic barriers are translated into academic barriers, as missed instructional time accumulates into knowledge gaps, declining grades, and ultimately disengagement (Pokhrel & Sauerborn, 2004). A comparable dynamic was documented in Morocco and Senegal, where long travel times were significantly associated with absenteeism, falling academic performance, and eventual withdrawal (Levin, 2009).

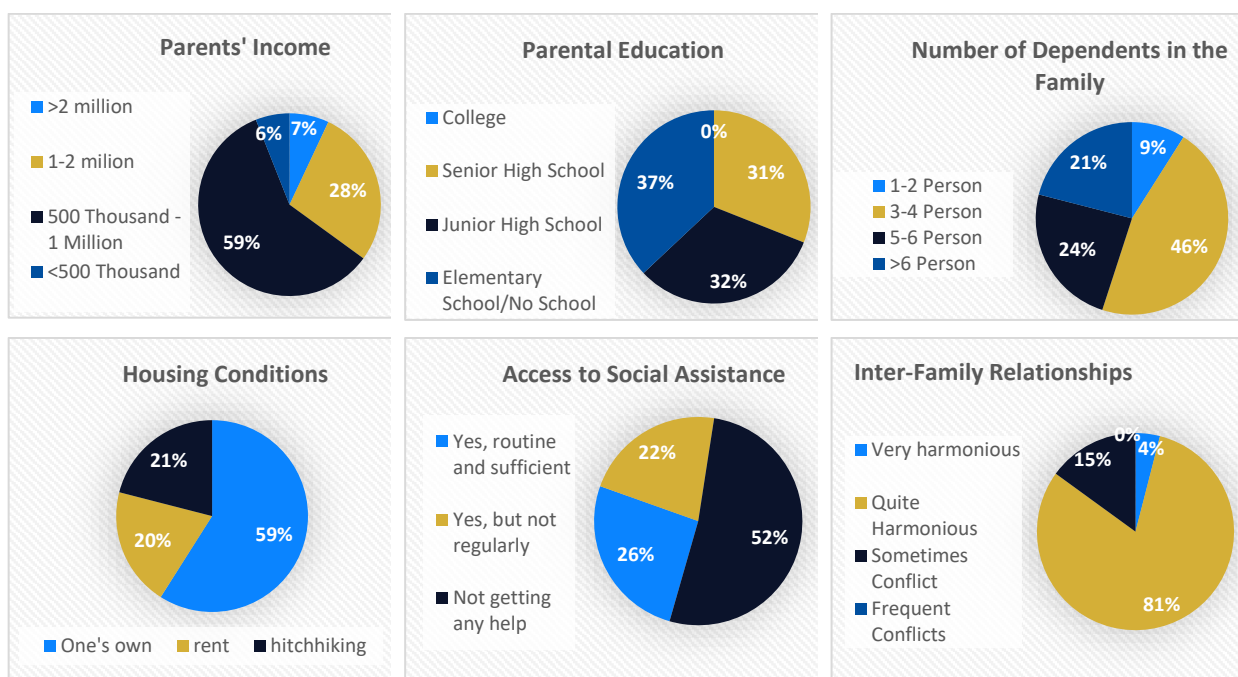
Spatial inequality in the provision of senior high school facilities further compounds accessibility challenges: 40% of respondents reported no senior high school in their immediate neighborhood, forcing students to seek educational options outside their villages. Notably, although 39% of respondents lived within 1–3 km of a school, 85% still required more than 30 minutes to reach it — reflecting the insufficiency of physical proximity as a measure of accessibility when transportation infrastructure is absent. This finding supports the “effort distance” conceptualization, which argues that the functional distance experienced by students is determined more by the availability and affordability of transportation than by geographic proximity per se (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

Paradoxically, 70% of respondents rated the physical condition of roads in their area as “good” and 91% reported feeling safe during travel. This finding underscores a critical policy implication: the improvement of road infrastructure alone is insufficient to address the accessibility dimension of dropout risk. Physical road quality becomes functionally irrelevant when no public transportation utilizes those roads. The study therefore advocates for structural policy interventions that address the transportation service gap directly — including student transportation subsidies, school bus programs modeled on international examples, and the strategic placement of new school units in underserved locations — rather than focusing exclusively on physical infrastructure improvements.

### 4.3 Socioeconomic Factors as a Fragile Foundation

The socioeconomic profile of dropout respondents in Way Pengubuan reveals a pattern of multidimensional, interconnected vulnerability that aligns closely with the structural poverty framework outlined in the literature review. Figure 2 presents the key socioeconomic indicators. The most striking economic finding is the extreme concentration of poverty: 93% of respondents’ families earned below IDR 2,000,000 per month, with 59% earning below IDR 1,000,000 — well below Indonesia’s national poverty line. This “survival mode” condition, as described by Aurellia et al. (2025) in a comparable study in Sumbang District, creates conditions in which even small, recurring costs — such as daily transportation expenses of IDR 5,000 — become economically unmanageable. The finding directly corroborates human capital theory’s prediction that low-income households will treat education as a discretionary expense subject to elimination under financial stress, rather than as a protected investment (Becker, 1964; Levin, 2009).

Parental educational attainment further deepens this vulnerability through two reinforcing pathways. First, low parental education is strongly correlated with low income, directly constraining the household’s economic capacity to fund education. Second, and more perniciously, it limits parental insight into the long-term returns to secondary and tertiary education, diminishing aspirational support for children’s schooling. The data reveal that 69% of respondents’ parents had only junior high school education or lower (37% elementary/no schooling; 32% junior high school), and critically, 0% had any tertiary education. Qualitative interviews confirmed that many parents perceived primary literacy and numeracy as sufficient for rural livelihoods, preferring their children to contribute to agricultural work — a finding consistent with Larasati (2019) and with the broader literature on the intergenerational transmission of low educational aspirations.



**Figure 2.** Percentage Distribution of Socioeconomic Factor Indicators Among School Dropout Respondents  
*Source: Primary Data Analysis, 2025.*

Household dependency burdens amplify financial constraints considerably. The majority of respondents' families had moderate to large dependency ratios: 46% had 3–4 dependents and 45% had more than 5 dependents. Combined with incomes below IDR 1,000,000, this creates severe per capita resource constraints that leave no disposable income for educational expenditure. This finding is consistent with Aurellia et al. (2025), who identified the number of dependents as an independent risk factor for dropout, as large families under income stress invariably prioritize basic consumption over schooling costs and may actively recruit older children into income-generating activities.

Housing tenure insecurity provides additional evidence of structural vulnerability: 41% of respondents did not own their residence (20% renting; 21% sharing accommodation with extended family). For renting households, regular rental payments directly compete with educational expenditure allocations, while families in shared accommodation arrangements — typically indicating more severe poverty and housing instability — experience living environments less conducive to academic focus (Rustiningrum, n.d.). These housing indicators, while typically overlooked in dropout studies, function as proxies for broader socioeconomic instability that heightens dropout risk.

#### 4.4 Failure of Support Systems

Access to government social assistance (bansos) should, in principle, function as a primary safety net protecting vulnerable families from the educational consequences of poverty. The data from Way Pengubuan reveal a systemic failure in this protective function: 74% of respondents reported being without stable social assistance (52% receiving none at all; 22% receiving assistance only irregularly). This finding is particularly alarming given the high proportion of respondents already categorized as structurally poor. The absence or irregularity of government support compels families to bear the full burden of educational and living costs without external mitigation, directly elevating dropout risk by making secondary education economically unaffordable. These findings strongly support Supriatna's (2023) argument that inadequate financial support from government constitutes a fundamental obstacle to the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs.

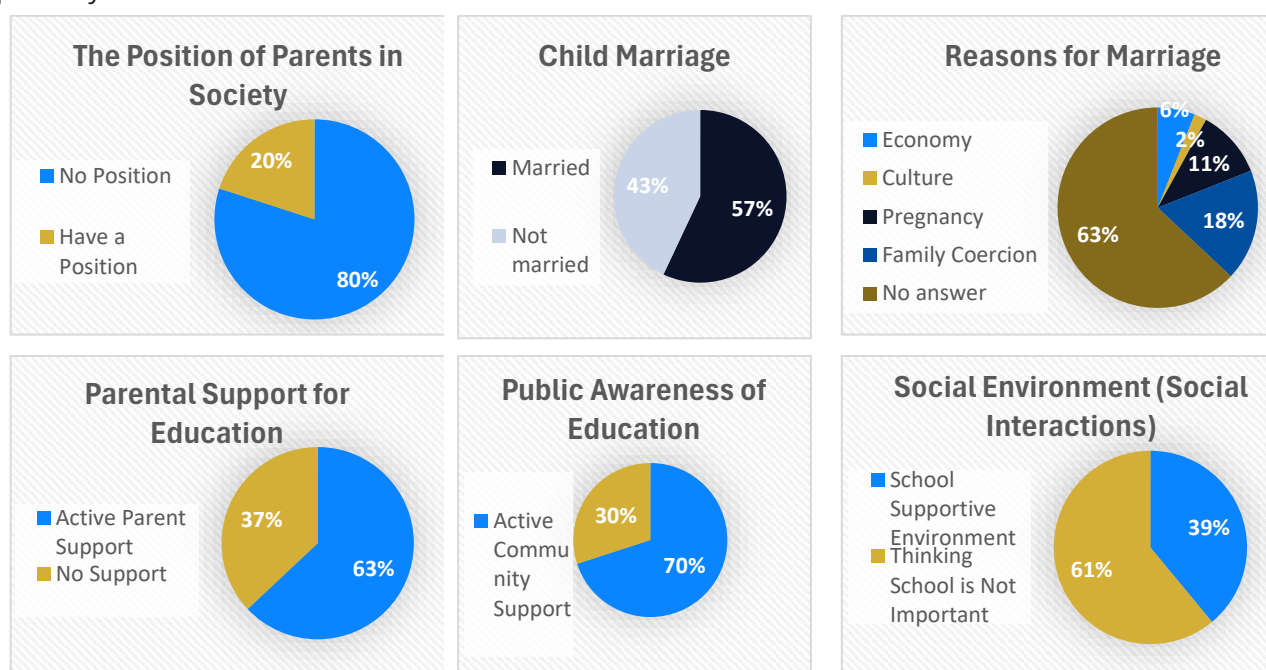
Family support presents a paradoxical picture. While 63% of respondents reported that their parents were "actively supportive," qualitative interviews revealed that this support was predominantly passive, verbal, and fragile — offering encouragement without accompanying resources or practical problem-solving when children encountered academic or financial difficulties. This "illusory support" leaves

children exposed to the full weight of structural obstacles while believing themselves to have family backing. Conversely, 37% of respondents explicitly reported parental indifference or apathy toward their education. The 15% reporting family conflict identified economic disputes as the primary source of tension, generating psychological stress that compounds dropout motivation. These findings align with Zilvana Zetta (2021) and Larasati (2019), who both emphasize that it is the quality and resourcefulness of family support — not merely its expressed intent — that determines its protective effect against dropout.

Community-level support was similarly characterized by illusory positivity. Although 70% of respondents described their community as “actively supportive,” interviews revealed that this support was normatively passive: communities viewed dropout as “normal and natural” rather than as a social problem requiring intervention. More concerning, 30% of respondents came from environments where work and income were actively valorized over schooling, creating negative social pressure against educational persistence. Social capital analysis further revealed that 80% of dropout respondents’ families held no formal position or role in their community, indicating low social network integration and correspondingly limited access to information, advocacy, or assistance networks (Kholifah et al., 2025).

#### 4.5 Dropout-Facilitating Exits: Early Marriage and Peer Influence

Figure 3 presents additional socioeconomic and social indicators related to dropout-facilitating pathways.



**Figure 3. Distribution of Dropout-Facilitating Social Factor Indicators**

*Source: Primary Data Analysis, 2025.*

Child marriage emerged as the single most prevalent proximate cause of dropout, with 57% of respondents already married at the time of the study, all within the 16–18 age range. Critically, qualitative analysis revealed that marriage was rarely freely chosen but was instead triggered by external pressures: family coercion (18%), out-of-wedlock pregnancy (11%), and economic pressure (6%) were the primary precipitating factors. These findings confirm Basmawati’s (n.d.) analysis that early marriage functions simultaneously as a consequence of accumulated structural vulnerability — a coping strategy adopted by families under economic or social stigma pressure — and as a definitive cause of permanent educational interruption. The UNICEF (2021) global evidence on child marriage as an education barrier is directly applicable here: once married, adolescent girls in particular face near-insuperable social and domestic obstacles to re-enrollment.

Negative peer influence constituted the dominant social-environmental factor: 61% of respondents came from peer groups that regarded school attendance as unimportant, normalizing dropout through the allure of perceived financial independence and peer conformity. This finding is consistent with Suparsi (2025) and with the broader sociological literature on the power of peer reference groups in shaping educational aspirations, particularly during adolescence when identity formation makes individuals especially susceptible to peer norms (Rumberger, 2011). Notably, 39% of respondents who dropped out despite reporting supportive peer environments demonstrate that while positive peer influence provides a degree of protection, it cannot override more fundamental structural barriers — reinforcing the primacy of economic and accessibility factors in the dropout cascade.

#### 4.6 The Structural Vulnerability Cascade: Integrative Discussion

The findings collectively substantiate the structural vulnerability cascade framework proposed in the literature review. In Way Pengubuan District, school dropout is not primarily the product of individual attitudes, motivational deficits, or isolated family decisions, but rather an outcome of converging structural conditions that systematically make educational persistence economically and logistically untenable for vulnerable households. The interaction between the “daily accessibility burden” — rooted in transport absence and spatial inequality — and the “fragile socioeconomic foundation” — rooted in structural poverty, low parental education, and high dependency burdens — creates a condition in which each additional cost or obstacle accumulates beyond households’ absorptive capacity.

The complete failure of formal support systems to provide adequate buffering — evidenced by 74% of respondents lacking stable social assistance and the predominantly passive nature of both family and community support — removes the last potential mitigation mechanism. In this context, dropout-facilitating exits (early marriage, labor market entry, peer group normalization of non-attendance) do not represent active choices but rather the paths of least resistance made available by structural conditions. This interpretation aligns with Sen’s (1999) capabilities approach: dropout in Way Pengubuan represents a deprivation of real freedom — the substantive capability to choose continued education — rather than a freely made preference.

These findings have significant implications for educational policy design. Piecemeal interventions targeting individual factors — such as conditional cash transfers alone, or road improvement programs alone — are unlikely to be sufficient given the structural interdependence of the risk factors identified. Effective dropout prevention in contexts such as Way Pengubuan requires integrated, multi-sector policy packages that simultaneously address transport accessibility (school bus programs, transportation subsidies), economic vulnerability (expanded and reliable social assistance delivery), parental engagement (community education programs on the value of secondary schooling), institutional support (school-based social work and counseling services), and legal enforcement of compulsory education and child marriage prohibitions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the high school dropout rate in Way Pengubuan District — at 4.91%, nearly five times the national average — is the product of a structural vulnerability cascade driven by the destructive interaction of two fundamental factor clusters. The first is the Daily Accessibility Burden: the systemic absence of public transportation (76% of respondents) and the spatial scarcity of senior high school facilities generate compounding financial costs (over IDR 5,000 per day for 87% of respondents), prohibitive travel times (over 30 minutes for 85%), and chronic tardiness (82%), all of which cumulatively erode students’ capacity and motivation for school attendance. The second is the Fragile Socioeconomic Foundation: 93% of respondent families subsist in structural poverty (below IDR 2,000,000 per month), exacerbated by high household dependency burdens (91% with three or more dependents) and an intergenerational cycle of low educational attainment (69% of parents with junior high school education or lower; 0% with tertiary education).

These structural vulnerabilities are compounded by systemic failures across all levels of the support apparatus: 74% of respondents lack stable government social assistance; family support, while verbally expressed by 63% of parents, proves practically fragile under economic pressure; and community norms predominantly normalize rather than challenge dropout. In the absence of effective institutional and social buffering, vulnerable students are channeled toward premature exit pathways, most notably early marriage (57%, predominantly coercion-driven) and peer group normalization of non-attendance (61%). Dropout, in this structural context, represents not a failure of individual will but an inevitable outcome of accumulated, interconnected vulnerabilities that leave students without viable alternatives.

The policy implications are clear and urgent. Effective dropout prevention in Way Pengubuan requires integrated, multi-sector interventions addressing transportation access (subsidized student transport, strategic school construction), economic vulnerability (reliable and adequately funded social assistance delivery), parental and community engagement (education advocacy programs, community mobilization), and legal protection (enforcement of child marriage prohibitions, compulsory education legislation). Future research should examine the comparative effectiveness of specific intervention designs in the Way Pengubuan context, and should explore whether the structural vulnerability cascade identified here is generalizable to other rural districts in Lampung Province and beyond.

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