

## HIGH SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Whether true or not, it is a widely held belief that high school drop-outs are the 'hard-core' trouble-makers in town. Instead of going back to their home islands, they tend to stay in the district center and cause all kinds of trouble. When asked what they meant by this, many people used the term 'Juvenile Delinquency' and mentioned drunkenness, fighting, stealing, damaging property, disregarding authority, and misbehaving in the community. One person said in an interview:

"I firmly believe that most people who cause trouble in town are school drop-outs. To be specific, high school drop-outs comprise a large number of these people. These miserable people resort to juvenile things because they find nothing worthwhile and interesting to occupy themselves with. They do these things to attract attention and thus be recognized by the people in the community in which they live in. Frustration and boredom have compelled these people to do foolish things. They have lost confidence in themselves and think that they are 'failures'."

Even though some of the people we interviewed expressed positive comments on these drop-outs, most of them readily agreed that something was wrong with the high school drop-outs.

The common view of the high school drop-outs and the social difficulties he faces could be put like this:

The problems of the high school drop-outs themselves originated from the confusion and difficulty in finding a role in a rapidly changing society. The

typical Drop-out in Micronesia today, especially those in or near the district centers where changes are rapidly taking place; is estranged from the traditional way of life, valuing the appealing aspects of other cultures more than his own, but ill-equipped to assume a position in the emerging pattern of the society. Western education has revealed to him a fleeting glimpse of a life-style where money is the key to a better standard of living. Yet, because he lacks the education necessary for qualifications to most salaried jobs, he finds himself alienated from both the traditional culture and this new life-style. He is in no position to establish a feasible life-style in the face of a rapidly changing society; he finds himself a misfit. Frustration and boredom, then, open the way to 'Juvenile Delinquency'.

Such is the theory, neatly wrapped and labeled 'DROP-OUTS'.

In this research paper, our primary objective was to test this theory that drop-outs are a group of frustrated and bored misfits who loiter around in the district center raising hell and making life miserable for decent folks. In testing this theory, we decided that the best approach for doing a comprehensive study of the drop-outs was to investigate closely the individual life-pattern of each of the drop-outs. We began by obtaining a list of Truk High School drop-outs -- a record of students who were either dismissed or chose to leave and did not return. We covered only those who left school during the school year, not those who left school during the summers. The range of our survey is limited to only Truk High School, covering a period of four and half school years -- from September 1970 to February 1975. It should be noted that Truk High School changed from a four-year high school to a two-year senior high school during this four-and-a-half year period. We were able to list a total of 144 drop-outs, 33 of whom left school in the first semester of the 1974-1975 school year. These 33 drop-outs were not included in our intensive survey because we fear it is too early yet to make a conclusive study of their life-patterns as high school drop-outs. They have just recently left school, so life-style is neither typical nor established enough for us to observe the emerging patterns we hoped to find in studying the drop-outs. By analyzing the remaining 111 drop-outs, however, we can make some reasonably accurate predictions regarding the future of these 33 recent drop-outs.

When we were compiling a list of drop-outs from Truk High School records, we also conducted a series of interviews with the Vice-Principal, Dean of Students, Counselor and the Student Body President as to what the major causes for students dropping out are. The major causes are disciplinary problems, (mostly drinking and

typical 'drop-out' in Micronesia today, especially those in or near the district centers where changes are rapidly taking place; is estranged from the traditional way of life, valuing the appealing aspects of other cultures more than his own, but ill-equipped to assume a position in the emerging pattern of the society. Western education has revealed to him a fleeting glimpse of a life-style where money is the key to a better standard of living. Yet, because he lacks the education necessary for qualifications to most salaried jobs, he finds himself alienated from both the traditional culture and this new life-style. He is in no position to establish a feasible life-style in the face of a rapidly changing society; he finds himself a misfit. Frustration and boredom, then, open the way to 'Juvenile Delinquency'.

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fighting) emerged as the major problem for males, while pregnancy and marriage stood out as the motive for most females quitting school for 'personal reasons'.

After obtaining the list of Truk High School drop-outs, we got down their names and began the long process of tracing them. In the limited time of our research project, we were able to cover 109 drop-outs out of 111. Through another series of interviews with teachers, friends, relatives, prominent members of the community, and some drop-outs themselves, we were able to find the whereabouts of the 109 drop-outs; whether they hang around on Ilon, go back to their home islands, or go back into some kinds of educational programs. Through these interviews, questionnaires, and visits to the Police Station, Adult Education Office, Social Security Office, Personnel Office, and Education Office, we were able to probe deeply into the life-activities of these 109 drop-outs and find the exact number of those who are: 1) full time wage employees 2) marginal employees 3) in school abroad 4) working on the land 5) married 6) unoccupied 7) jailed at least once.

In this research paper, we came upon a lot of interesting conclusions which you will find as you read along. We may have been unable to report all our findings and all that we plan to find, because our memories fail us and we are imperfect recorders. For these shortcomings, we are sorry. We hope we can offer, if nothing else, at least a glimpse of what a typical high school drop-out is and what he does. Our society may have been too harsh in its judgment on high school drop-outs.

### II. EXTENT OF THE DROP-OUT PROBLEM

TABLE I

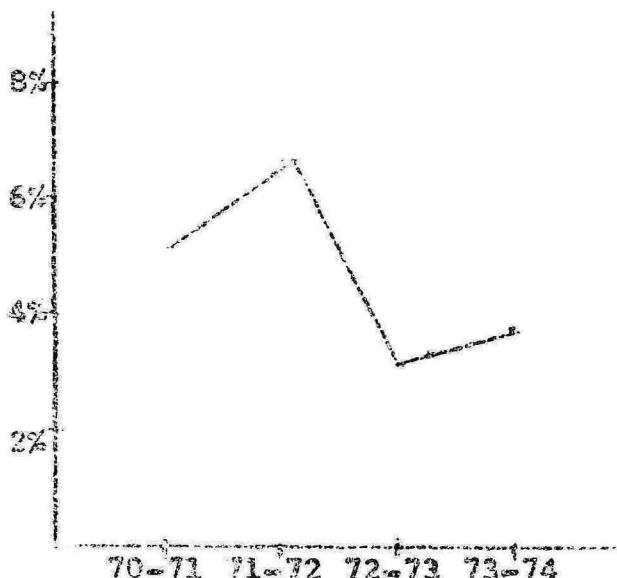
Number of drop-outs in percentage and total enrollment from 1970 - 1975.

YEAR	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	TOTAL DROP-OUTS	PERCENTAGE
1970-1971	565	29	5.1%
1971-1972	608	41	6.7%
1972-1973	621	19*	3.1%
1973-1974	577	22**	3.9%
1974-1975	742	33	4.4%

Note: \* Data for the school year 1972-1973 does not record the names of drop-outs from February to March.

\*\* Data for the school year 1973-1974 does not record the names of drop-outs from March to May.

Figure I: Graph showing percentage of drop-outs.



Before we move on to the heart of this paper, let us take a look at the extent of the drop-out problem itself. You will notice that in the two consecutive years 1970-71 and 1971-72, a relatively large number of Truk High School students dropped out of school (see Table I.). The main reason for this big increase was discipline, as mentioned by one of the staff members we interviewed. Drinking and fighting were the two most common causes of discipline problems.

According to some of the persons we interviewed, the students resorted to drinking for various reasons. One of them was the idea that they were mature people and are no longer children. To prove themselves, they drink to show that they are big shots. Others drank to show other students how tough they were. Still others drank in order to gain courage to approach girls. This practice of drinking a little alcohol before approaching girls is common among high school students. It is a common belief that if one does not have a little in him while approaching, he is very proud and considers girls as low people.

Fighting was another major cause of the discipline problems resulting in students being expelled from school. Although some of the fightings were caused by drunkenness, most of them were stimulated by rivalry between islands, according to the Truk High School Counselor. This was due to the poor relationship especially between the lagoon Trukese and the Mortlockese. Fighting and drinking resulted in the big increase of percentage of the drop-outs in these two consecutive years (see Figure I.).

Although a large number of students had dropped out of school in the preceding years, in 1972-1973 there was a big decrease (see Table I.). The main reason for this was the change made by Truk High School administration on its drinking policy. A member of the Truk High staff explained the change in policy: If a student is caught drinking on campus or drunk, he will be given a second chance. If he is drinking outside the campus, the administration will not take any action because he is out of its jurisdiction. Another reason for the decline of the percentage of drop-outs was due to students' competition with each other. After graduation many students saw their friends leaving to attend schools abroad, and so many started to use their energy to work toward their ultimate college education goal. Thus, instead of causing trouble and giving little attention to schooling, most of them started to concentrate on their studies in anticipation of graduation. Besides the various reasons given above, it should be noted that the number of drop-outs for 1972-1973 mentioned in this paper is not complete (see note on Table I.).

The drop-out level remained steady for awhile, but then there came a little increase again in the percentage of drop-outs (see Figure I.). The increase came about when the students heard a rumor that Truk High School had no more funds to help students

continue their education. This resulted in laziness and carelessness, because there was very little chance for them to further their education abroad -- many felt they had already lost their anticipated goal.

Although there were other reasons (such as academic; excessive absences, etc.) for students dropping out of school, discipline and pregnancy/marriage emerged as the two main motives for students leaving school. According to our information on the 109 drop-outs, 20 of them were females and 89 of them were males. Of the 20 females, 14 of them left school because of pregnancy/marriage problem. Of the 89 males, 67 of them were dismissed because of discipline entanglements. The rest of the students dropped out of school for other reasons.

As you can see, the drop-out problem is growing; not rapidly, but it is growing (see Figure I). The rest of this paper is not an attempt to find reasonable solutions to solve the problem, but it is an attempt to show what possible effects drop-outs may have on the community.

### III. DROP-OUTS: WHERE THEY GO AND WHAT THEY DO

In the two Tables on the following page, you will notice a breakdown of the total number of drop-outs under various categories: those who remained on Moen, those who returned to their home islands, and those who resumed their education, either by going abroad or by somehow making their way back to Truk High School again. The last Table (Table III) is a much more detailed breakdown of the activities and occupations of the young men and women who have left school.

TABLE II

A breakdown of those who either remained on Moen, or returned to their home islands, or went to school abroad.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>MOEN</u>	<u>HOME ISLANDS</u>	<u>IN SCHOOL ABROAD</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1970-1971	10	14	3	27
1971-1972	14	22	5	41
1972-1973	8	9	2	19
1973-1974	<u>11</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>22</u>
	43	56	10	109

TABLE III

A breakdown of the activities and occupations of drop-outs.

<u>MOEN</u>	<u>HOME ISLANDS</u>	<u>IN SCHOOL ABROAD</u>
Full time wage employed 12	Full time wage employed 2	Voc. Training 6
Marginally employed 6	Marginally employed 5	College 2
Housewives 14	Working on land 38	High school 2
Back in school 7	Back in school 0	
Unoccupied 4	Unoccupied 11	

If has become a common assumption that high school drop-outs flock to the town, the head-quarters of 'boozey' and all related excitements, and just hang around unoccupied instead of returning to their home islands or finding something worthwhile to do. Many also assume that while the drop-outs hang around in Moen, and because they are unoccupied, they inevitably get involved in misdemeanors which gradually give way to more serious

crimes until finally before they realize it, they are in the catboose. Because boys are more energetic and mischievous than girls usually are, this pattern of behavior is tagged on the male drop-outs.

It is because of such theories, common beliefs and many other assumptions, all so neatly wrapped and labeled 'DROP-OUTS' that we determined a comprehensive study on those who left high school. This is an analysis to determine the truth, the fallacy and the exaggerations in the notion people have regarding high school drop-outs. The heart of this research project, then, is in this part of the paper because it is here that all our findings and conclusions are reported. In Tables II and III, our findings served as the foundation for categorizing drop-outs into three headings, according to the whereabouts and activities for occupations of: A) Those on Moen, B) Those who returned to their home islands, C) Those in school abroad. A fourth and separate category is an analysis of those high school drop-outs who have been in jail at least once.

#### A. Those who remained on Moen

According to the common belief, most people would expect a large percentage of the 109 drop-outs we surveyed to remain on Moen. Many would assume that these people would be unoccupied meaning they just simply drift around doing nothing.

From the data gathered in our study, we find that only 43 out of the 109 drop-outs remain on Moen. Out of the 43, 12 are full time wage earners - working 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Next comes the marginal employees, a total of 6 individuals. These people are not full time wage earners, but working part-time for money. Examples of these types of occupation would be such work as taxi-driving and yard cleaning. 14 out of the 43 people residing on Moen have a slightly different occupation - housewives. None of these 14 married girls is either a full-time or marginal employee, obviously because family responsibilities tie them down. Out of these 43 drop-outs, 7 are currently enrolled in school, either in Adult Education or back in Truk High School. By what means some of these drop-outs 'dropped in' again remains unclear. Last in our grouping of the drop-outs who remained on Moen are the "Unoccupied" who, surprisingly enough, amounted to only 4 people.

From the evidence laid bare before us, we can safely conclude that the concept of the general public concerning high school drop-outs may have been too harsh. The assumption that high school drop-outs loiter around town unoccupied is a misconception. For one thing, only a minority of the drop-outs remain on Moen, while only 4 out of the 43 are unoccupied. The small percentage of fully employed drop-outs is expected. After

all, most jobs are open to those most qualified, and high school drop-outs are admittedly, not the most qualified individuals for high paying jobs.

#### B. Those who returned to their home islands

Contrary to what many people may expect, more than half or approximately 51.5% out of the total 109 drop-outs, returned to their home islands instead of hanging around the district center. (see Table III) And again, the majority of these 56 who returned to their home islands do not remain unoccupied. From what we found in our research, only a handful (11 drop-outs) are now unoccupied - neither employed for wages, nor marginally employed, nor working on the land.

Out of the total 56 drop-outs, only two were able to find full time jobs. Those two individuals are working as full time elementary school teachers on their home islands. Out of the 56 drop-outs who returned to their home islands, only 5 are marginal employees. Our definition for marginal employment here is slightly different from what we meant by marginal employment when we were discussing the drop-outs who remained in the district center. Instead of taxi-drivers and yard-cleaners, the people we refer to here as marginal employees are small retail store-keepers and proprietors.

A large number of the drop-outs in this classification (home islands) - 38 people in all - we categorize as 'Working on lands'. We cannot truthfully say that these people are unoccupied because they spend much of their time making copra, farming, or fishing. Who are we to say that full time employment or even marginal employment is better than producing copra, farming, or fishing?

None of the drop-outs in this 'home islands' group is attending school or involved in any kind of educational programs. This is very understandable indeed. If any of those people wished to go on to school, they would have remained on Moen where such opportunities exist in programs such as the Adult Education.

In the 'home islands' group, it is not unexpected that the percentage of employment is quite low, compared to the drop-outs in Moen. Job opportunities are rare in the outlying islands.

Although the number of the 'unoccupied' is significant (11, or 20% of those who returned to their home islands), it does not support the commonly held belief that high school drop-outs just 'drift around'. Life in the outer islands is more carefree, so it would not come as a surprise to see some of the drop-outs taking it easy and enjoying life under the supervision of their community.

### C. Those in school abroad

The theory has it that high school drop-outs are a group of frustrated individuals who have labeled themselves 'failures' when they come to realize too late the importance of formal education.

What we have found out does not exactly support this belief. 10 of the drop-outs have successfully made their way back to school and are presently abroad furthering their education. 2 of those drop-outs are now in college, 6 are in vocational training schools, and 2 are in high school. (see Table III) From the impression of the people we interviewed, these drop-outs are back in school and doing very well, and the 'prospect' of their dropping out of school again is very slim.

### IV. ARRESTEES

In the light of the common belief that high school drop-outs are the potential trouble-makers in town, the major concentration in this part of our research paper is on those few high school drop-outs who have gotten into trouble with the law, were arrested and put into jail. Out of the 109 we covered, only 11 of them were ever jailed. This piece of information by itself is inconclusive, taking into consideration the possibility that other high school drop-outs may cause trouble and manage to get away with it without being arrested.

Confidentiality prevented us from learning the nature of the crimes committed by the 11 drop-outs who were in the calchoose, so again we cannot readily judge whether or not they were 'hard core' trouble makers. However, by analyzing the pattern of life they led after they were released from prison, we can tell with some degree of accuracy if they were really the kind of trouble-makers that many people believe high school drop-outs are. The Table on the following page is a breakdown of the type of life the 11 drop-outs led after they got out of prison.

TABLE IV

A breakdown of the kind of occupations of arrestees after they left prison.

<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>MOEN</u>	<u>HOME ISLANDS</u>	<u>IN SCHOOL AERO.</u>
Full time wage earners	2	1	
Marginally employed	2		
Working on land		1	
In school (THS)	1		3
Unoccupied	1		

The first thing you may have noticed is that, with the exception of 1, all the ex-prisoners seem to be rehabilitated after their release from the calaboose. The majority of them remain in Moen; most of them managed to either get married and settle down, work as full time wage earners, or re-enter high school. Of all those who remained on Moen, only 1 is unoccupied. Those who go back to their home islands are also able to find some kind of occupation - even to the extent of full time employment.

What seems very interesting, though, is that some of them even managed to attend school abroad - something which is very rare among people who have been in jail once or twice.

From the factual information above, we can say that high school drop-outs are not potential trouble-makers. Occasionally some of them 'mess up with the law' and sometimes they get caught and jailed. An important thing to keep in mind is that those who were jailed seem to have been rehabilitated after they were out of prison. In any case, these people are not at all the 'failures' that most people think they are.

## Conclusions

It is a faulty, yet common belief that high school drop-outs flock to the town, and unoccupied, they become 'hard-core' trouble-makers.

From what we were able to find out in this study project, majority of these people returned to their home islands and instead of just 'drifting', many worked on their lands, or work both as full time and/or marginal employees.

While a few have gotten arrested and jailed, high school drop-outs are not potential trouble-makers in the district center. Even these few who had been in prison seem to have rehabilitated after they were released.

A good number of these high school drop-outs have gone on to school. Many are in vocational training schools, some in high school and a few have gone as far as college.

In the Appendix to our paper are two case studies - short biographies of two of the drop-outs surveyed in the study project. One of them is a 'typical' high school drop-out; the type that fits the people's concept and description of what a high school drop-out is. The other one is a good representation of what our concept of a high school drop-out is. To protect these two people, we find it necessary to change their names and names of places.

We hope this paper will arouse your interest in finding more about what happens to high school drop-outs. But as you can see, we cannot afford to give you more than what we actually have in this paper, for we have studied the life-pattern of high school drop-outs in only one district. What you can do, though, is conduct your own study on high school drop-outs in your district. In this way, we all can have a wider and broader knowledge of what actually happens to high school drop-outs throughout Micronesia today.

## Appendix: Two Case Studies

### Case Study 1

This is a brief biography of a high school drop-out from an outlying island in the Truk Lagoon. For our purposes, we will call him Jimmy.

Jimmy attended grade school on his home island until he reached sixth grade when he was kicked-out due to some discipline problems. He left his island to go to an elementary school on another island and there completed school through eighth grade. He then took the entrance examination for Truk High School and passed it.

In the fall of 1971, he entered Truk High School but not long after school started he was expelled because he fought with one of the staff members.

Since he dropped out of Truk High School he has been involved in many problems with the police. During one incident he slashed another boy with a knife and was jailed for a year and a half. After his release he became involved in many fights and any other disturbances. In one case, Jimmy and his friends stabbed a person who was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. This time Jimmy and his friends were able to evade the police, but not long after the killing he and one of his friends were arrested as suspects. Jimmy was eventually found innocent by the judge, but his friend was found guilty of manslaughter. This did not end his law-breaking career, though. Many times after the killing, Jimmy was continually taken into custody for getting drunk and causing trouble.

Jimmy's activities do not fall into any kind of pattern or regular schedule. The usual time for a person to see Jimmy around the town is during the mid afternoon to midnight. Jimmy usually sleeps with one of his friends from Moen and would get up around 9 to 10 AM when he starts his search for a way to get some liquor. Around lunch time he might run into some of his friends and together they might donate two or three dollars for their drinks. Since they do not have any I.D. card for drinking, they often look for an older friend who has a drinking permit and ask him to buy their drinks. After finishing their drinks they might either split up or go together 'bumming around' town in search of more drinks. In the search they might encounter some difficulties like a run-in with the police or 'excitement', as they term it when they fight somebody, get his money or steal his drink. About 4 to 5 PM, the group will again donate money and buy more drinks. After their drinking party is over, they split up and go

their separate ways. Since Jimmy does not have a home on Moen, he usually spends the night with a friend.

### Case Study II

Mino is a Trukese. He first started at a secondary school in the Western islands in the Truk district. He is one of those who has gone to many schools because of disciplinary problems he encountered in each school he has tried. So far, Mino has gone to three different high schools.

Like some other students, Mino faced many social problems. One evening he decided to sneak inside the girls dorm to meet his girlfriend. Of course, sneaking inside the girls' dorm is not encouraged by the school administration. Mino was unfortunate enough to be found during this action and, as a result, he was sent back to his home island.

Mino came back to his home island but was unable to re-enter high school. He was not accepted at Truk High School, but later on he applied to MOC and was admitted. He did very well at MOC, perhaps because he was a hard-working individual. Mino stayed at MOC for two years. Two days before his graduation, however, he got drunk and because of this, he was officially expelled. When Mino arrived on Moen, his intention was to find a job and settle down. He applied for work in road construction but for some reason or other, his application was not filed until the beginning of the school year 1974. Until then he decided to go back to school again. And so after getting through the long process of re-entering high school, Mino was finally accepted as a senior at Truk High School. At present, Mino is doing very well, both academically and socially.

As you can see from the above story, Mino confronted many problems in school. He was forced out of school (expelled) twice during the course of his study, but because of his determination he may soon be a college freshmen.