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Research Article

What happens after you drop out? Transition to adulthood among early school- leavers in urban Indonesia

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What happens after you drop out? Transition to adulthood among early school-leavers in urban Indonesia

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

The high incidence of young people dropping out of school prior to completing secondary schooling remains a nationwide problem in Indonesia. While it is commonly assumed that early school-leavers will become child workers, in fact little is known about their transition to adulthood.

OBJECTIVE

Using retrospective data from a sample of 799 young adults (ages 20–34) in Greater Jakarta who dropped out of school by age 16, this paper investigates their patterns of activity and employment in the adolescent years following their exit from the school system, the timing and patterns of reaching various markers of adulthood, and their current life situations.

RESULTS

Less than a quarter of early school-leavers worked in the immediate year following school exit. Instead about 30% neither worked nor studied between the ages of 12–18. The likelihood of experiencing idleness was highest at age 13 and was relatively higher for females than males. Among those with early work experience the majority worked in the manufacturing industry, as domestic servants, or as informal traders. Early school-leavers left their parental home, married, and became parents at a younger age compared to those who left school at ages 17–19.

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CONCLUSION

Female early school-leavers are likely to spend a longer time economically and educationally inactive during their formative years, progress faster to their markers of adulthood, and are less likely to return to school, relative to their male counterparts. Qualitative insights suggest that adolescent dropouts who enter employment early are better off in their young adulthood than those who experience inactivity prior to adulthood.

1. Introduction

Although there is a clear trend of educational expansion shaping a protracted pattern of transition to adulthood in East and Southeast Asia (Furstenberg 2013; Yeung and Alipio 2013), large inequalities in youth education attainment persist in many parts of the region. In Indonesia, a country of 250 million people hosting the world's largest Muslim population, the majority of young people never complete secondary schooling, even though the modern economy demands workers who are skilled and flexible to ensure rising incomes.

Indonesia is both the fourth largest national population and the third largest developing country in the world, and as such poses an important case for consideration of contemporary social change. The political history of over six decades of post-colonial development has been notable for the successful consolidation of national identity in a country with over one thousand specific ethnic and linguistic groups. While technically a democratic form of government since formal recognition of independence in 1950, successive regimes have constituted forms of autocracy, authoritarianism, military rule, and, most recently, reformist multi-party democracy, with younger generations being the key to social and political change at each stage. For this reason a population perspective on the transition to adulthood has more than an individual maturational dimension; it also points to likely trends in macroeconomic structure and macropolitical transformation. In 2010 over half of the total Indonesian workforce and about 30% of the young adult workforce (age 25–34) had only primary school education or less (Suryadarma and Jones 2013). While younger cohorts will have higher levels of education as they will have benefited from the expansion of secondary education in recent decades, data from the National Socio-Economic Survey suggest that about 12% of junior secondary school-age children (ages 13–15) were not attending school in 2010 (Statistics Indonesia 2010a).

Premature exits from schooling are most common during the transition from primary to junior high school at around age 13 (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto

2006), and appear to be largely propelled by economic-related factors. In the 2009 National Socio-Economic Survey the vast majority of 13–15 year olds who had left school did so for economic reasons: in 57% of cases the lack of affordability was cited as the main reason, whereas in just 6% of cases a need to work and earn a living was mentioned as the key factor for leaving school (Suharti 2013). Although the context and the timing at which premature exit from schooling occurs are different in developed and developing countries, its consequences are shared by many young people across the globe. Early school exit tends to derail young people's socio-economic trajectories in their early adulthood, and perpetuates a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

This paper addresses the recent calls for further research on the transition to adulthood in the non-Western context (Yeung and Alipio 2013), and the need to map its variations in the context of socio-economic inequalities in Asian societies (Furstenberg 2013). We examine the school-to-work transition, other markers of transition to adulthood, and the current life situations of early school-leavers currently residing in Greater Jakarta. We use retrospective data from a sample of young adults aged 20–34 (N=799) and in-depth interviews with 25 respondents who dropped out of school at age 16 or below.

The paper is organised around four key objectives: (1) To identify the patterns of activities and correlates of idleness of early school-leavers during their formative years (ages 12–18); (2) To identify the patterns in the work experience of early school-leavers; (3) To map the transition to adulthood among early school-leavers using leaving home, work, marriage, and child birth as life markers; and (4) To examine the current life situations and aspirations of early school-leavers and contrast these to their peers who left school at later ages (17 to 19). To begin, we revisit the theoretical framework on schooling and transition to adulthood through first, a review of recent literature from the broader Southeast Asian context, and second, through recent works on the causes and consequences of early school exits in Indonesia.

2. Literature review

The positive relationship between years of schooling and successful transition to adulthood is well established (Arnett, Robins, and Rehm 2001; Grant and Furstenberg 2007; Lloyd et al. 2005). In developing countries school attendance plays a particularly strong role in successful transition to adulthood through the delay of marriage and childbearing (see e.g., Lloyd and Mensch 1999). For women in particular, research suggests that an increase in the years of schooling is positively associated with an increase in age at marriage and age at first birth (see Basu 2002 for a seminal review; e.g., Bledsoe et al. 1998; Caldwell 1980; Rindfuss, Bumpass, and St. John 1980).

Accordingly, women with higher levels of education are observed as having fewer children and investing more in each of their children. Lloyd and Mensch defined successful transition to adulthood not only in terms of delayed entry into marriage and parenthood. Their concept of a successful transition embodies the critical importance of human capital development through schooling, where men and women are allowed to develop their “full potential, physically, intellectually, and emotionally before taking on adult responsibilities such as child bearing and child rearing or providing their material support (or the support of other family members)” (Lloyd and Mensch 1999:81). Beyond its influence on the timing of entry into marriage and childbearing, working with this definition implies that premature exit from schooling affects other inter-related markers in transition to adulthood, namely early entry into employment and early departure from the family home.

Recent work on transition to adulthood in East and Southeast Asia has further highlighted the key role of schooling in shaping the transition to adulthood (Furstenberg 2013; Yeung and Alipio 2013). Using census data from five Southeast Asian countries, Nahar, Xenos, and Abalos (2013) examined between- and within-country heterogeneity in transitions to adulthood. In particular they investigated the contribution of marriage, school attendance, and labour force participation in explaining the diversity of transition to adulthood for males and females at every age group in each of the countries. Their results suggest that school attendance had a strong influence in explaining the diversity of the life course in all of the countries studied. In contrast, marriage had relatively little effect, and the contribution of labour force participation varied across sex and countries (Nahar, Xenos, and Abalos 2013:57). In line with Nahar, Xenos, and Abalos, Furstenberg asserts that “just as in the West, educational attainment differences are becoming more pronounced and consequential for the pattern of adult transitions” in Southeast Asia (Furstenberg 2013:37). Further, Furstenberg predicts that the growing socio-economic inequalities generated from diverse educational outcomes will translate to diverse patterns of transition to adulthood in the region. For the highly educated young people in the region it is likely that the transition to adulthood will be protracted but orderly. In contrast, among the less advantaged youth it remains to be seen how early exit from schooling will affect other transitions. For example, unlike the situation in the past, early exit from schooling may no longer be associated with early marriage due to the difficult labour market conditions being uncondusive to family formation (Furstenberg 2013:37).

A number of key studies on school dropouts in Indonesia highlight the dynamic relationship between intergenerational poverty, low education, and poor life outcomes. Centring their discussion on the impact of the economic crisis in the late 1990s, Jones and Hagul (2001) explored the contextual issues related to students failing to complete primary and secondary schooling. Despite the government’s initiatives to achieve nine

years of basic and universal education in the country, they found that at the onset of the crisis in 1997 30% of children were failing to complete primary schooling. Also focusing on the impact of the crisis, Priyambada, Suryahadi and Sumarto (2005) utilised the 1998 and 1999 100 Village Survey to map the incidence of school dropouts and subsequently examined the determinants of child labour. As highlighted in the study by Jones and Hagul (2001), they also stressed that low-income parents are sensitive to both the financial and opportunity costs of keeping and urging their children to stay in primary and junior high schooling.

While schooling at primary and junior high levels is provided free of charge in Indonesia, parents still face substantial costs in sending their children to school. Many schools still charge informal levies or fees, such as registration fees (Maulia 2008; Rosser and Joshi 2013), and there are also substantial costs associated with transport, purchase of books and stationery, uniforms, and other school requirements (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto 2006). Apart from these direct costs of schooling, opportunity costs have also been cited as a reason for dropping out of school (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto 2006). If the child could be earning money in paid labour instead of being enrolled in school, then continuing in school presents a potential loss of income for the family.

More recently Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto (2006) examined the predictors of children failing to continue into junior high school from a panel sample of the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS) in 1993 and 1997. Their results outlined that the primary cause of relatively low secondary school enrolment in the country was attrition from primary schooling. The dropout rate during the transition from primary to junior high school was estimated to be 8.5%. Further, they found that being a girl, being Muslim, living in an area with better youth employment prospects, and coming from a worse-off/less wealthy household reduce the likelihood of continuing into junior high school.

To date, the literature on the consequences of early school dropouts in Indonesia largely centres on the premise that they will go on to become child workers. The Ministry of Education estimated that 1 million children had dropped out of the school system in 2011, and 85% of them went on to become child workers (Ismainy 2012). However, empirical inquiries suggest that the direction of causality between early school exits and child labour is less clear-cut. On one hand, being engaged in family or paid work may intrude upon children's ability to stay in school. On the other hand, it has been suggested that employment opportunities may attract students to drop out of school to support their family (Ha and Mendoza 2010). Interestingly, a recent study using two waves of the Indonesian Family Life Survey found that there are no significant differences in the educational attainment in 2007 between child workers and non-workers in 2000 (Sim, Suryadarma, and Suryahadi 2012). While in that study the

effect of child labour on educational attainment is purported to be ambiguous, the authors argued that its effect on the long-term growth of three measures of human capital is detrimental. Their estimation suggests strong and negative effects of child labour on the growth of numeracy and cognitive skills, as well as on the pulmonary functions as measured through lung capacity in their sample.³

In 2006 the International Labour Organization (ILO) conducted a survey on youth employment among a representative national sample of 2,500 young people from lower socio-economic groups in Indonesia. The majority of respondents (79%) cited that they did not pursue higher levels of education because they “could no longer afford it” (ILO 2006: 27). The study further suggested that 33% of the respondents dropped out of school and 20% began working prior to completing junior high school. While the ILO study found that early school drop out was associated to some extent with child labour, it highlighted a more pressing issue of high unemployment among early school dropouts. The unemployment rate among early school dropouts aged 15–17 years old was estimated to be 71%.

While the above studies have made important contributions to our knowledge of the incidence, causes, and employment consequences of school dropouts in Indonesia, there has been relatively little discussion in the literature about what actually happens in the formative years after young people prematurely leave school. While it is commonly assumed that early school-leavers spend the rest of their formative years working as child labourers, the ILO study cited above suggests that a substantial percentage of early school-leavers are faced with joblessness and inactivity. This inactivity or ‘idleness problem’ has been noted in many developing countries and is gaining increasing attention from researchers (Biggeri et al. 2003, Bacolod and Ranjan 2008, Webbink, Smits and de Jong 2012).

Webbink, Smits and de Jong (2012) suggest that while many out-of-school children in developing countries are not working in gainful employment, they are often engaged in other forms of ‘hidden labour’: doing household chores and working in family farms and family businesses. However, while some of the apparent idleness of children who are neither working nor attending school can be accounted for by their involvement in such ‘hidden labour’, by unemployment and job searching, or by ill-health, a large proportion of the reason behind idleness appears to remain unexplained

³ Given that male child workers in particular have lower growth in pulmonary function, the authors speculate that male child workers may be working under worse environmental conditions, such as areas with higher air pollution, than female child workers. However the relationship between child labour and health is complex. On the one hand, another study on child labour in Indonesia suggests that there may be a selection effect in that healthier children may be more likely to be working (Understanding Children’s Work (UCW) 2012:31). But on the other hand the selection effect may go the other way, with child workers being more likely to engage in risky behaviours, such as smoking (Nuwayhid et al. 2005), that would adversely affect their pulmonary function.

(Biggeri et al. 2003). From the household efficiency perspective, Biggeri et al. (2003) theorized that such unaccounted idleness may be explained by the financial costs of schooling, parents' perceptions of low schooling returns, and low returns of child labour given the sizeable travel costs involved in sending a child to work. As a hypothetical example where this may be the case they referred to the case of a landless family without a small family business living in a relatively remote area with low labour demand.

Given the limited and contradictory evidence available to date, this paper investigates early school-leavers' work and education histories to examine what happens in the years immediately after leaving school. We question the view that early school dropouts enter the labour market directly after leaving school and suggest that the paths in which early school-leavers negotiate their transition to adulthood may be more diverse than the literature suggests. Some early school-leavers may spend a number of years neither studying nor working, while others may actually manage to go back to school after spending years not studying. Examining the pattern of activity after leaving school among early school-leavers can give us some insights into the possible reasons for leaving school in the first place. For example, a high incidence of idleness may signal that the financial costs of schooling play a more detrimental role in causing early exits from schooling, relative to the opportunity costs associated with the promise of paid employment. Further, following the empirical framework that in the past poor educational outcomes were associated with early marriage and early childbearing, we examine to what extent this still applies in the context of high youth unemployment in urban Indonesia today. Further, we test whether sex plays a role in differentiating the trajectories of young people in our sample. Our next section outlines the data collection process, sample characteristics, and strategy of analysis.

3. Data and methods

We utilise data from the survey and from in-depth interview components of the 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood study. This study was conducted in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta and the two contiguous cities of Bekasi and Tangerang. The latter two cities were included because they are centres of the manufacturing industry in Indonesia, an industry in which many young adults are employed. Greater Jakarta is the vanguard of Indonesian development. As such, development success through extension of education should be evident in Jakarta, and lessons learned from Jakarta can provide models for the rest of Indonesia.

The study targets young adults aged 20–34 in 2010. The 20–34 year-old age group is part of Indonesia's 'demographic bulge' numbering 61 million at the 2010 Census. A

population concentration in these ages represents a major opportunity for a surge in economic development in a developing country, provided young people have relatively high levels of education and employment opportunities. In Greater Jakarta the relative concentration in these ages is even greater because of in-migration to the city at young ages from across the country (McDonald et al. 2012). While, under the compulsory education regime, all persons aged 20–34 in 2010 should have completed their education to Year 9, 9% of men and 17% of the women in the Greater Jakarta survey had not completed Year 9. On the other hand, 70% of 20–34 year olds in Greater Jakarta had at least senior high school education and 28% had some form of tertiary qualification, levels that are not all that much lower than those in developed countries (McDonald 2011a). These relatively high levels of education have enabled the research team to address similar issues to those that are addressed in transition-to-adulthood studies in developed countries and to use a questionnaire that was similar to those used in developed country studies.

The sampling process for the survey involved a two-stage cluster sample using the probability proportional to size (PPS) method in order to achieve a representative sample. The survey collected detailed information regarding demographic characteristics of the respondents, including their current education and work situation, their health and well-being, attitudes and values, as well as reproductive and sexual health behaviour. In addition, detailed retrospective information was also collected, including the education and occupation history for all respondents by single years of age from age 12 until their current age. The survey has a sample of 3,006 young adults aged 20–34.

After the data collection for the survey was completed, in-depth interviews were successfully carried out with 80 out of the targeted sample size of 126 survey respondents. The initial target sample size of 126 in-depth interviewees consisted of 7 randomly selected survey respondents in three different age groups (20–24, 25–29, and 30–34) and three highest education categories (less than or equal to high school, senior high school, and tertiary qualified) from each sex.

It should be noted that the Indonesian formal schooling system consists of 6 years of primary schooling (formally from age 7 through 12), 3 years of junior high school (from ages 13 to 15), and 3 years of senior high school (from ages 16 to 18). Formal schools are run by both the public and private sectors and are divided into two streams: general stream and Islamic/Madrasah stream. Apart from the formal schooling track, non-formal or equivalency education schooling is also available (International Labour Organization 2011). The equivalence education system offers three ‘packages’ (packages A, B, and C), which correspond to primary, junior high school, and senior high school, respectively. Informal schooling is provided mainly by community

learning centres, and is particularly aimed at early school dropouts who would like to enrol in or complete a particular level of schooling outside the formal schooling age.

In this particular paper we examine a sub-sample of 799 young adults who ever dropped out of school at age 16 or below from the 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Survey (27% of the original sample). Defining dropouts in such a way allows us to examine both people who are permanent dropouts as well as those who ever dropped out but managed to return to school or complete the equivalent qualification packages at some point later on. We chose age 16 as a benchmark because, going by the national schooling age definition, young people should have completed the 9 years of compulsory education in Indonesia by age 16 (graduated from junior high school). To complement our survey findings we analysed qualitative insights from 15 females and 10 male respondents. Table 1 depicts the characteristics of the survey sub-sample and in-depth interview respondents.

Women made up almost two-thirds of our sample of early school-leavers. In this case their over-representation is partly a reflection of our original sample, which had disproportionately more women (59%) than men (41%). One study on dropouts in Indonesia quoted earlier in the introduction suggested that girls are less likely to continue to junior high school (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto 2006). However, other studies in the recent past have indicated that in Indonesia girls had a lower likelihood of dropping out than boys (e.g., ILO 2006:12). For children between the ages of 7–14 there are relatively more girls who are exclusively studying in school, and, conversely, there is a higher proportion of boys than girls who are either combining school and employment or solely working (Understanding Children's Work (UCW) Programme 2012).

Defining age 16 as the benchmark for our sample selection, we arrived at a relatively equal proportion of young adults with primary and junior high school qualifications. A small proportion of respondents in our sample managed to attain senior high school certificates. These respondents are those who had dropped out at any ages between 12 and 16, but managed to return to school at some point after that through completing either formal schooling or taking up the informal schooling packages.

Table 1: Characteristics of survey and in-depth interview respondents

	Survey respondents (N=799)	In-depth interview (N=25)
Sex	%	%
Male	32	40
Female	68	60
Age		
20-24	21	28
25-29	33	32
30-34	46	40
Highest education		
Primary school or below	49	48
Junior high school	49	52
Senior high school	2	0
Certificate	0	0
Age at leaving school		
12 or below	9	12
13	32	36
14	7	0
15	16	8
16	37	32
Father's education level		
Primary school and below/unknown	86	84
Junior high school	8	12
Senior high school	6	4
Marital status		
Ever married	78	76
Never married	22	24
Migration status		
Non-migrant (from Greater Jakarta)	40	44
Arrived in Greater Jakarta between ages 0-10	3	0
Arrived in Greater Jakarta between ages 10-17	20	32
Arrived in Greater Jakarta after age 17	32	24
Other (e.g circular migrants)	5	0
Employment		
Employed	51	44
Unemployed	5	8
Not in the labour force	43	48

Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

In Table 1 the variable “Age at leaving school” is defined as the age at which a respondent left school for the first time (between ages 12 through 16). This variable is constructed from the work and schooling history of respondents from age 12 up to their current age (maximum 35). Due to the nature of how the retrospective questions were

asked, it is not possible to identify respondents who had temporarily dropped out of school below age 12. For example, a respondent who dropped out for two years between ages 8–10 but then returned to school at age 12 and finished senior high school is not included in the sample of early school-leavers, since they studied continuously from age 12 to 18. However, since previous studies (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto 2006) indicate that dropouts tend to occur during the transition from primary school to junior high school and not during primary school, and that 6 years of education is almost universal in the country, we believe that the number of people in this category is negligible. If the individual had temporarily dropped out at age 8, resumed schooling at age 11 through to 13, and indicated that he/she was not in school at age 14, we would code his or her “Age at leaving school” as 14. Half of our early school-leavers sample left school at age 14 or below. The largest incidence of dropping out occurred at ages 13 (32%) and 16 (37%). This pattern corresponds with earlier studies (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, and Sumarto 2006), indicating that school dropouts in Indonesia are largely associated with attrition to the next level of schooling. In our survey sample girls tended to drop out at an earlier age. For women the peak in drop out occurs at age 13 (36%). For males the peak in drop out occurs at age 16 (43%). For as far as we could observe them, leaving school was a permanent transition for 97% of the respondents.

We use sequence plots to identify the patterns of four alternate activities at ages 12–18: only studying, only working, studying and working, neither studying nor working. Although we have data on the work and schooling history of the respondents from age 12 until their current age, we focus on the formative years of formal schooling for the sequence analysis. In addition we run a logistic regression with robust standard errors to account for clustering of observations across time within individuals, to explore the factors associated with being ‘idle’. For every early school-leaver in our sample we include person-year observations starting from the year after leaving school up until age 18, and define the outcome variable as 1 if the person was neither working nor studying in that year, and 0 otherwise. Our control variables include sex, time-varying age, location at age 10, father’s education level, and current age group (as a measure of cohort). In the next set of results descriptive statistics are used to map the different kinds of occupation held by those early school-leavers who did work after leaving school. We then compare and contrast early school-leavers with their peers who left school at ages 17–19 in terms of the speed at which they experience transition to adulthood. We present our results by comparing the proportion of these two groups who had experienced four adulthood markers by age 20: leaving school, working, getting married, and having a child/children.

We conclude our results section by examining the current life situations of early school-leavers, outlining their employment outcomes, income levels, subjective

poverty, and their satisfaction with their education levels, and comparing these to their peers who left school at ages 17 to 19. Qualitative insights are interspersed throughout the discussion of our results.

4. Results

4.1 Activities at ages 12–18

Figure 1 depicts the sequence of activities between the ages 12–18 for every individual in our analytical sample. Against our initial expectations that most early school-leavers would immediately work after they dropped out of school, our analysis suggests that less than a quarter actually worked in the year after they left school. Instead, we can see that a substantial proportion of early school-leavers reported that they spent years neither studying nor working after dropping out (30% - the block coloured white). This is the most common sequence for early school-leavers. The next most common pattern is ‘Studying – Neither work/study - Working’ (25%). Only a minority appeared to combine both working and studying at any time (the block coloured black).

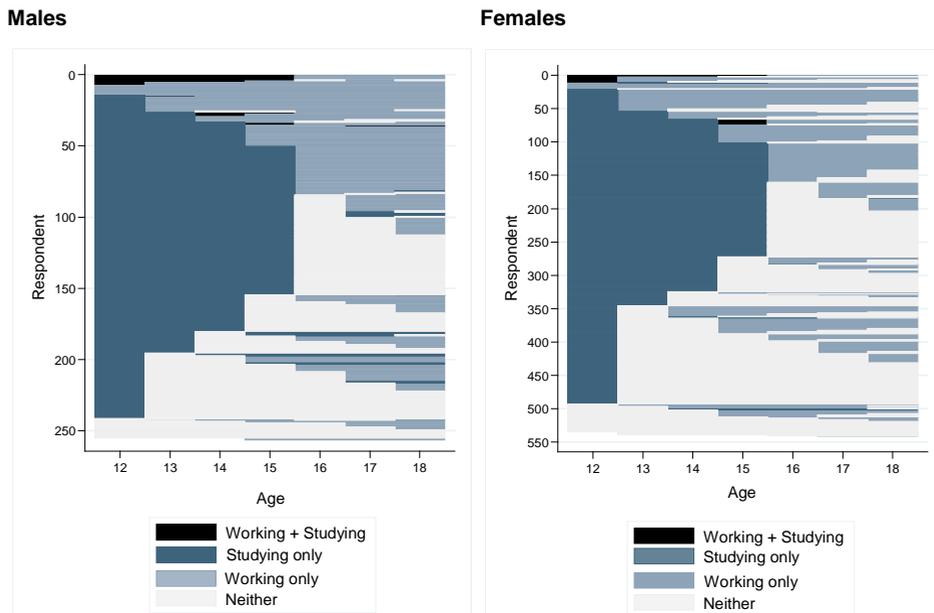
It is interesting to observe that a large number of respondents had gone through a long period of neither working nor studying. The proportion of women who had neither worked nor studied in the years between leaving school and age 18 is about 65%. The corresponding proportion for men is similar at 67%. Although the likelihood of experiencing these years of ‘inactivity’ are similar for both sexes it is notable that the duration for young women in this state is relatively longer, since they tend to leave school earlier than the men in our sample. These so-called ‘idle’ children, while not employed in the market economy, may work long hours in ‘hidden child labour’: doing housework or helping out in a family business (Webbink, Smits and de Jong 2012). From the sequence plot our results seem to resonate with the ILO study that suggests girls are less likely to be employed after dropping out, and that this is largely due to their engagement in housework (International Labour Organization 2006).

The finding that females are more likely to be neither working nor studying after leaving school is also confirmed by the logistic regression predicting inactivity shown in Table A1 (Appendix).⁴ We also find that the odds of being inactive are significantly higher at the younger ages, and decrease with age. Controlling for other factors, compared with young school-leavers who lived in Greater Jakarta at age 10, those who

⁴ Webbink, Smits and de Jong (2012) hypothesized and found that in their developing world sample girls were more likely to engage in housework and in Asia boys were more likely to engage in a family business. Here, we cannot tease out such differences in the nature of hidden labour because we do not have the information in our dataset.

lived in Central Java were significantly less likely to be idle after leaving school. Young migrants from Central Java, a larger and less urbanized province than Greater Jakarta, were more likely to come from a poor background and could not afford to be idle. There also seems to be a selection process, in that it is usual for young migrants who came to Jakarta after leaving school to have a job waiting for them upon arrival, secured through their familial migrant networks (McDonald et al. 2013, Utomo et al. 2013).

Figure 1: Sequence of working and studying between ages 12–18 for early school-leavers



Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

It is also likely that a proportion of the idleness observed is a consequence of misreporting errors. As noted by Biggeri et al. (2003), it is common that retrospective data on activity history collected in surveys may suffer from misreporting. In particular, in the employment history calendar young people may under-report their early working history as their recollection of work is conditional on their understanding of ‘work’. For example, a child working on a family farm, or a child assisting his/her parent to run a food stall in the informal sector (*warung*), may not consider this to be work as they do not get direct monetary benefits from performing the labour.

4.2 Patterns in early occupations

Among those who worked after leaving school, we examined the jobs they were engaged in at every age from age 12 to 18 (Table 2). We found that slightly fewer female early school-leavers were employed at age 12 (3.9%) than male early school-leavers (4.7%). However, at ages 13 through to 17 the proportion of girls employed was always slightly higher than that for boys. At age 18 the trend is reversed because the women have begun their family formation. This age seems to be a turning point in the gendered pattern of proportion employed over the life course of early school-leavers.

Table 2: Early school-leavers: Proportion employed and distribution of job types by age

		Males						
		Age 12	Age 13	Age 14	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18
Processing and manufacturing worker		-	12	16	15	27	28	23
Domestic worker		-	-	-	-	2	1	1
Shop/stall keeper or street vendor		25	20	26	33	20	18	20
<i>Buruh</i> (elementary worker)		25	24	26	16	13	10	9
Family worker		-	4	3	4	3	5	5
Sales		-	-	-	-	2	4	5
Other		50	40	29	33	33	34	37
Total %		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N working		12	25	31	55	96	114	142
% working at age		5	11	14	23	41	51	61
		Females						
		Age 12	Age 13	Age 14	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18
Processing and manufacturing worker		43	42	45	40	45	45	48
Domestic worker		29	31	29	29	26	24	21
Shop/stall keeper or street vendor		10	7	9	8	6	7	8
<i>Buruh</i> (elementary worker)		10	4	3	3	3	3	4
Family worker		0	9	5	5	3	2	1
Sales		0	2	4	5	7	8	7
Other		10	5	6	9	10	12	11
Total %		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N		21	55	80	143	211	242	245
% working at age		4	10	16	28	40	47	47

Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

Previous research on child labour has found that the agriculture sector accounts for the largest share of child employment in Indonesia, with 58% of children aged 7–14 working in this sector (UCW 2012). The next most common sector is services (27%), followed by manufacturing. This distribution of child labourers across the different industrial sectors is similar to the distribution in the general labour force (UCW 2012). Given that our sample was based on Greater Jakarta, our findings on early occupation reflect the youth labour market structure more typical of urban areas. We find that the

range in the types of jobs held increased with age. We also find strong gender differences in the types of jobs held. In general, boys had a more varied range of jobs than girls. For example, occupations in the “other” category in Table 1 include bus conductor, parking attendant, busker, agriculture and farming labourer, and construction worker. Among males, working in the informal trade sector is the most common experience. At older ages, however, working as a processing or manufacturing worker becomes more common. In comparison, for women we see a much more limited range of occupations, with the majority of girls at every age working in the processing or manufacturing industries. The second most common experience for girls was working as a domestic. For both sexes we observe a gradual move towards working in the formal sector as sales workers as age increases. In addition to looking at the distribution of occupations at every age we also examined the transitions in and out of different occupations among the respondents, since job drifting is a common experience for early school-leavers (Siu-kau 1995). We found negligible sex differences in occupational stability. Among the 164 respondents who worked for at least 4 years between the ages of 12 and 18, 64% of girls held the same job throughout that period, compared to 61% of boys.

Our analysis of the in-depth interviews suggests a positive contribution of youth migration to early work experience. Similar to findings in a previous study on migration and transition to adulthood (McDonald, et al. 2013), in our limited sample of dropouts who had migrated to Jakarta respondents recollected their act of migration as a response to, rather than cause of, early school exits. Chain migration featured prominently in their narratives. Their migration followed an invitation to work or to stay in the established homes of siblings/relatives or acquaintances in Jakarta. Here, either work had been lined up for them or they relied heavily on the insider recommendation of acquaintances to channel them into employment. The role of chain migration in securing early work experience for dropouts from outside Greater Jakarta conforms to the stereotype that migrants are dominating the supply of labour in certain industries and areas. For example, Ida migrated to Jakarta at age 13 in search of work, a year after she graduated from primary school. Her first job was working at a screen-printing shop located near her older siblings’ house in North Jakarta. Similarly, Tuti migrated to Jakarta at age 13 to live with her older sister and found work in a garment factory nearby. For these young migrants, their existing family connections meant that they were able to find work relatively quickly, while for those without such connections the search for a job can be more difficult.

One male respondent, Daryo (aged 20), a native of Tangerang (outskirt of Jakarta) who had graduated from primary school, expressed his lament relating to his years of unemployment, which he attributed to the fact that he did not possess these informal networks, in contrast to rural-urban migrants:

“I wanted to finish high school, but my parents could not afford to send me. It was hard to get a job because I didn’t have any certificate. I didn’t even make it to Junior High school. I wanted to attend the Package B [equivalent to junior high school] and then C [equivalent to senior high school], but I need money to enrol, and I have no concrete plans as yet when to start ... I had been unemployed for over a year. I quit my first job after working for two weeks only...(because) my superior was unpleasant to me. I had never worked since I left school, I just stayed home... I actually would like to apply (for a job), but have no money to pay to get police clearance and health checks...It is hard (to get a job), because you know, no one had asked (or introduced) me (to apply). If I had an insider recommending me it should be quick, but I don’t”.

4.3 Transition to adulthood

In Table 3 we use the chi-square test to investigate two aspects that differentiate the progression to adulthood markers. First, we test whether there was any difference in the speed of progression towards four adulthood markers between early school-leavers and those who left school at ages 17–19. Our findings suggest educational disadvantage clearly shapes the patterns in their post school-to-work transition to adulthood. While there is only a small difference in the timing of entry into work between the two groups, early school-leavers progressed significantly faster into leaving the parental home, marriage, and parenthood (Table 3). Although the differences in the speed of family formation between the two educational groups apply to men and women, the magnitude of the differences are considerably larger for women. For example, among the women in the two educational groups the difference in the proportion that had married by age 20 is approximately 34 percentage points. The corresponding number among the men is only 8 percentage points.

Table 3: Percentage of males and females who experienced selected life course markers by age 20, by age at leaving school

	Males			Females		
	Left school <=16	Left between 17-19	Significance	Left school <= 16	Left between 17-19	Significance
	%	%		%	%	
Started work by age 20	79	75		73	78	*
Left home by age 20	48	31	***	65	34	***
Married by age 20	13	5	***	55	21	***
Has had a child by age 20	7	2	***	46	15	***

Stars denote the significant difference between those who left school before age 16, and those who left between 17-19, using a chi-square test. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

Second, we examine the sex differences of the progression pattern (test statistics not shown). In the previous section we saw that women had a slight lead in employment during their early teens relative to men. By and large this trend was reversed around age 18, and so we find that a slightly higher proportion of male early school-leavers had started worked by age 20. Our results indicate a marked difference in the timing of leaving the parental home, entry into marriage, and childbearing between male and female early school-leavers. For example, although only 13% of the male early school-leavers had married by age 20, more than half of the women had done so. It is clear these young women in our sample of early school-leavers progressed significantly faster into marriage and childbearing than their male counterparts. The higher proportion of women who had left the parental home by age 20 can be partly attributed to earlier marriage.

4.4 Current life situations

In developed societies premature exit from school is associated with increased risks of adversity in the life course. These include increased risks of delinquency (Weerman 2010), increased likelihood to work in low-paid jobs, increased difficulties in securing and retaining employment (Rumberger and Lamb 2003), and increased vulnerability to economic shocks (Raymond 2008). This is also likely to be the case in developing countries. However, publicly funded social safety net programs are much more limited in scope and accessibility in countries like Indonesia. Relative to the experience of the West, educational disadvantage in the early life course is likely to amplify poor life

outcomes and exacerbate social inequalities on a larger scale for young adults in Indonesia.

We examine the current life situation of early school-leavers, using selected economic and social wellbeing indicators, and contrast these to their peers who left school at ages 17–19, which coincides with graduation from senior secondary school. The results shown in Table 4 are limited to young adults aged 25–34. The reason for looking at this age group is that by these ages young adults are likely to be more established in the labour market and their transition to adulthood.

We begin by looking at the distribution of employment status and find significant differences in the employment status between women in the “Age at leaving school” categories. The percentage of female early school-leavers who were employed was significantly lower (at 35%) relative to those who left school between ages 17 to 19 (43%). These figures are slightly lower than the national figure. The 2010 Population Census reported that about 48% of females aged 25 to 34 were employed (Statistics Indonesia 2010b). The low level of female employment in our sample may reflect a lack of job opportunities or labour supply constraints due to household responsibilities, and the fact that we are looking at early school-leavers and those that left school at ages 17 to 19.

Table 4: Current life situations of early school-leavers: selected indicators (ages 25–34)

	Males		Females		
	Left school at 16 or below	Left school at 17-19	Left school at 16 or below	Left school at 17-19	
Current employment					
Employed	87	86	35	43	***
Unemployed	7	7	3	5	
Not in the labour force	6	7	63	52	
Total %	100	100	100	100	
Average monthly income if employed (\$USD)	134	148	79	141	***

Table 4: (Continued)

	Males		Females	
	Left school at 16 or below	Left school at 17-19	Left school at 16 or below	Left school at 17-19
Percent experiencing economic difficulties in the last 12 months				
Unable to pay phone or utilities bills in time	30	20 **	27	18 ***
Unable to pay loan/rent/mortgage repayment for house/cars/motorcycles in time	25	14 ***	22	12 ***
Unable to pay children's school fees	9	8	18	4 ***
Pawn or sell belonging to raise funds	26	18 **	21	15 **
Sometimes could not eat	8	4 **	5	2 **
Cannot buy new clothes	20	11 ***	19	9 ***
Requesting financial assistance from friends or family	34	31	29	22 **
Ask social/community organisations for help	2	2	3	0 ***
Receive government's cash transfers (BLT)	7	3 **	5	1 ***
Percentage who say it would be very difficult or impossible to raise 5 million rupiah in a week				
	85	71 ***	92	72 ***
Percent dissatisfied or very dissatisfied				
With current educational attainment	51	31 ***	54	28 ***
With future job prospects	42	33 ***	52	33 ***
With current economic situations	36	36	43	27 ***
Total %	100	100	100	100
N	186	341	441	454

Note: Stars denote the significant difference between those who left school before age 16, and those who left between 17-19, using a chi-square test. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. We test the significance in the difference of the distribution of employment status between the two sexes in each age group. For the rest of the variables, we test the difference in the proportion or average (monthly income) between males and females in each age group using a chi-square test or a t-test respectively.

Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

Insights from our in-depth interview respondents suggest that low labour force participation is driven more by labour supply constraints than by labour market conditions. Most of the women interviewed stopped working once they had children as they did not have adequate support for childrearing. This was especially the case for

women who worked as factory workers in their teens. Given that the women in the sample are in their peak childbearing years, the high percentage of women who are not in the labour force is therefore strongly linked to their household and childbearing responsibilities (McDonald 2011b). For males the differences in employment status are negligible.

Our second variable of interest is monthly income for employed individuals in our sample. For men the difference in average monthly income between early school dropouts and those that left at ages 17 to 19 is very small. However, for women leaving school early significantly lowers monthly income.

Next, departing from the conventional measures of schooling outcomes like employment status and earnings, we use two alternative indicators to measure subjective economic adversity. First, to capture the complex dimensions of economic adversity, we asked respondents if they had experienced nine types of financial problems in the past 12 months. Not being able to afford enough food to eat and to purchase new clothing items still afflicted a significant proportion of our respondents, indicating that their basic needs were not met. In the vast majority of cases early school-leavers were more likely to experience difficulties with paying their utilities bills on time, not being able to afford to eat, and so on. Respondents were asked how easy it would be to raise Rp 5 million (500 USD) in a week for an emergency. Among the men, 85% of early school-leavers indicated that they would find it “very difficult” or “impossible” to do so, compared to 71% of their peers who left school at ages 17 to 19. For women the difference was even starker, at 92% for early school-leavers and 72% for those that left school later.

Lastly, we found that half of the respondents were dissatisfied with the amount of education that they have. Dissatisfaction with the level of educational attainment and with future job prospects was significantly higher among men and women that left school at age 16 or below. Although around half of the early school-leavers were dissatisfied with the amount of education they had received, out of all 25 early school-leavers who participated in the in-depth interviews only 2 male respondents specifically expressed their wish to enrol in informal catch-up school.⁵ One of them was Adi (aged 25), a security guard for a primary school:

⁵ In Indonesia there is both publicly funded and private provision of informal schooling packages targeted at early school-leavers who wish to attain educational qualifications. Using the Indonesian National Socio-Economic Survey (Survei sosial ekonomi nasional/SUSENAS) 2010 data, our cross-tabulation of the population over 18 who are currently enrolled or have completed non-formal qualifications by sex revealed interesting patterns (Statistics Indonesia. 2010a). At the lowest level (Package A), which is equivalent to Primary School, there are more females (56%) relative to males (44%). However, at the higher level of informal schooling the gender gap emerges. For Package B, the male to female ratio is 62:38. At the highest level, Package C, the gender ratio is 63:37. In contrast to the informal/catch-up stream, the female-male ratio for population over 18 with general (formal) senior high school enrolment/attainment is 55:45.

“I finished junior high school. I went to a technical high school but I quit just before going on to year 12. I was involved in a school fight (Ind: *tawuran*). Someone went into a coma. So I didn't go to school for a week, and somehow I just didn't end up returning. The truth is this is not what I had wanted. I wanted to continue (going to school). At the moment, I am thinking of taking Package C [equivalent to senior high school], it is run once a week. (Finishing) Junior High School means nothing. I wanted to change my destiny, and I am not satisfied. Package C is actually also not enough. I wanted to go to university. But now I have dependents, if I had no dependents I would go on to university, I wanted to be a civil servant, maybe study education to become a sports teacher.”

A number of underlying themes in school dropout and re-entry are noteworthy from what Adi says. First, although the most common reason for dropping out of school is lack of affordability, incidents such as school fights and behaviour-related problems in school can also be a trigger for premature school exit. Presumably, young people, who because of their socio-economic circumstances are already marginally attached to education, are more at risk of permanently dropping out of the system than those who come from better-off families. For example, moving school after a fight or being expelled or relocating the family altogether (e.g., as found in cases of teenage pregnancy) are rarely options for students from poor families. Second, we also noted that the environment in which dropouts are consequently employed should be considered in future studies on school re-entry. The two male respondents who explicitly outlined their plan to take up the catch-up certification were both employed at educational institutions when interviewed. One was working as a security guard for a primary school and the other was working as a live-in guard and driver for a kindergarten. These respondents stated that they had received positive encouragement from teachers and principals to resume their education.

Third, in-depth interviews underlined the detrimental role of early family formation in attaining further educational qualifications among both male and female early school-leavers. As expressed by Nurzaenab, a recently married 23-year-old woman:

“I finished junior high school... I wanted to go on but we could not afford it. ..I wanted to go to university... and become a stewardess, but now I am a housewife. I am happy (with my education level), what is important is that I had been at school. (Now I do not want to return to school because) now I have a child. My child is 3 months old.”

Although women tend to cite family commitments and housework responsibilities as among the main reasons for their reluctance to go back to informal schooling, for men, as Adi expressed above, their role as primary earner in the family undoubtedly affects their decision to pursue higher level/formal schooling. Interestingly, apart from explicitly expressing that they cannot afford it both financially and time-wise, female

respondents often said that they could not cope mentally and no longer had the intellectual capacity for further study. The phrase “*Otak saya sudah nggak mampu*” (lit: “my brain could no longer cope with it” [i.e.: school]) surfaced a number of times during interviews with women, but none of the men interviewed expressed such hesitations.

These sentiments found in our in-depth interviews echoed our survey findings. We find that after controlling for a number of factors including place of residence at age 10 and current age, the only significant predictors of returning to school were sex and father’s education (Appendix Table A2). The likelihood of returning to school was significantly higher for males, and, as expected, for those whose fathers had higher levels of education. While there is no comparable study on likelihood of returning to school, our findings are in line with that of the International Labour Organization (2006), which indicated that the desire to return to school is higher for males relative to females.

5. Conclusion

The complexity of life faced by teenage dropouts makes any search for simple policy interventions problematic. The story of one of our respondents shows just how difficult life can be after walking out of the elementary school gate.

“I had been to school, but only up to primary school. I didn’t get the certificate though. I didn’t graduate. For me, it doesn’t matter much. I just dropped out, and I was tired of studying anyway, it gave me headaches... I wanted to go on until senior high school, but I didn’t graduate so I just dropped out. I had tried to go to the informal schooling package, but I really did not want to go back, I just felt lazy. The teacher was also unmotivated, so it did not work out... Many of my friends are doing it though, *Paket B, Paket A*... I had worked before, as a maid in Bekasi. I was not married then. I got 300,000 per month [approximately US\$30]... What holidays? I lived in my workplace, so there were no holidays. I got about one week off around *Ied*. .. I am a trader now, I don’t want to work (for people), it is tiring. It is hard to work nowadays, like doing the laundry and ironing for others. It is better for me to sell stuff [Ind: *Dagang*]... (I started working) from age 13. I worked for a relative, taking and picking up my niece/nephew to school, but then they moved away so I looked for another job. Yes, I got paid 150 [Rp150,000/month ~US\$15]... I had been financially independent since I was 13... Now, every month I give about Rp200,000 to my parents. That is how much they had asked... My husband works at the mosque, he looks after it. I was working for his neighbour and that was how we met... My boss was the matchmaker...I wanted to have children, but God has not given us one, and we have

only been married for only a year anyway. Some people got married at 25, but those in the *kampongs* [village] got married around 14. You mostly will get divorced if you got married at 14 though. I think 20 is a good age (to get married)” (Dewi, 22 years old, female, married).

With efforts to expand educational opportunities in Indonesia the expected years of schooling have increased from 8.3 years in 1980 to 12.9 in 2013 (UNDP 2013). Yet, as illustrated by the above quote, against a clear trend of educational expansion a significant proportion of Indonesia’s young people continue to experience premature exit from schooling. Our study suggests that 27% of young adults aged 20–34 residing in Greater Jakarta in 2010 had dropped out of school at age 16 or younger. We found that premature exit from schooling clearly limits the ability of these young Indonesians to navigate their transition to adulthood successfully.

From a household perspective children’s employment reflects the opportunity cost of sending children to school. Early school-leavers potentially become productive workers. By this logic the dropout both saves the family from paying school costs and potentially earns enough to contribute substantially to the family budget. Against this perception, our study found about 1 in 3 elementary school dropouts experienced extended periods of ‘inactivity’ during their formative years – the promised opportunity was never realized. It may be that their reason for dropping out was more the costs of education rather than the attraction of income.

While working at such young ages has been negatively perceived by policy makers, our qualitative insights indicate that the alternative scenario - a long period of ‘idleness’ after premature school exit - poses relatively higher risks of adversity in employment and life outcomes in young adulthood. The value attached to early work experience is supported by our occupation history data. Among early school-leavers who started working in their early teens there was a gradual movement to formal sector employment as they grew older. Analysis from in-depth interviews further supports the proposition that social networks are vital in facilitating employment and migration-for-work opportunities in both the informal and formal sectors in Greater Jakarta.

Our findings are in line with literature that suggests that inequality in education attainment is a central driver of differences in patterns of transition to adulthood in Southeast Asia (Furstenberg 2013). We found that early school-leavers progressed faster into leaving the parental home, marriage, and parenthood, relative to those who left school at ages 17–19. Upon identifying that a small number of respondents eventually managed to return to school, we found that father’s education and sex were the main predictors of school re-entry.

Despite the recent achievement of gender parity in basic education in Indonesia, our study suggests that female early school-leavers are especially disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts. Although women exhibited a similar level of occupational

stability to men during their years of early work experience, they are likely to spend a longer time neither working nor studying during their formative years and to progress faster to their markers of adulthood, and are less likely to return to school. Only about 30% of female early school-leavers were employed at the time of the survey, and in-depth interviews suggest the limited labour force participation of married women is largely attributed to their greater share of caring and domestic responsibilities, relative to their husbands.

Examining the current life situations of early school-leavers paints a picture of a cumulative disadvantage that continues beyond the premature transitions out of school for a sizeable group of young urban Indonesians. More than half of our sample is dissatisfied with their educational attainment. But a return to schooling is yet to be perceived by early school-leavers as a critical instrument for fostering upward social mobility. Informal return-to-school packages targeted at early school-leavers are already available. However, incentives, especially for married women, are needed to ensure that dropouts achieve the levels of education needed to give them a better position in the economic system. This paper shows what everyone knows: more education is beneficial both to individuals and to the nation.

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Appendix

Table A1: Logistic regression of being idle at any age from the first year after leaving school up to and including age 18 (odds ratios)

Variable	Odds ratio	P-value	
Sex			
Male (ref)	1.00		
Female	1.28	0.07	*
Age			
12	1.38	0.18	
13	2.04	<0.01	***
14	1.52	<0.01	***
15 (ref)	1.00		
16	0.92	0.27	
17	0.68	<0.01	***
18	0.58	<0.01	***
Current age group			
20-24 (ref)	1.00		
25-29	1.16	0.40	
30-34	1.07	0.69	
Location at age 10			
Greater Jakarta (ref)	1.00		
West Java	0.96	0.82	
Central Java	0.70	0.02	**
Other Provinces	0.78	0.21	
Father's education			
Primary school or below (ref)	1.00		
Junior high school	1.00	0.85	
Senior high school	1.28	0.53	
Unknown/not applicable	1.04	0.81	
Baseline			
Number of person years	3,634		
Number of respondents	799		
Wald χ^2 (15df)	109.18		
Prob> χ^2	<0.01		

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

Note: For each individual, observations are included from the year after school drop out occurred up to and including the year the person turned 18. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if the respondent was inactive in that year and zero otherwise (if they were working, working and studying, or studying). Robust sandwich estimation is used to take into account the fact that observations are clustered within individuals. A long file (consisting of multiple observations for each respondent organized in separate rows for each year the person was out of school) was used to run the command `logit idle indepvars, cluster(idrespondent)` in STATA 12.1

Table A2: Logistic regression of returning to study at any time after being out of school for at least one year

	Odds ratio	P-value	
Sex			
Male (ref)	1.00		
Female	0.18	0.00	***
Current age			
	1.04	0.45	
Age at leaving school			
12 or below	0.61	0.63	
13	0.50	0.37	
14 (reference)	1.00		
15	0.68	0.62	
16	0.40	0.22	
Where lived at age 10			
Greater Jakarta (ref)	1.00		
West Java	0.60	0.47	
Central Java	2.13	0.13	
Other provinces	0.28	0.24	
Married by age 18			
No (ref)	1.00		
Yes	1.27	0.70	
Number of siblings			
0-2 (ref)	1.00		
3-4	1.71	0.41	
5+	2.49	0.16	
Father's education level			
Primary school or below/Unknown (ref)	1.00		
Junior high school	3.83	0.03	***
Senior high school	13.00	0.00	***
Number of observations	794		
Log likelihood	-91.46		
Prob > χ^2	<0.001		

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Source: 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Study

Note: The sample consists of young adults aged 20-34 who had ever dropped out of school at age 16 or younger. We use the education history to identify whether they ever returned to study after dropping out. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if the respondent returned to study at any time after being out of school for at least one year, and zero otherwise. The analysis is limited to examining returns to study which occurred up until the respondent's current age (at the time of the interview). The command used was `logit return indepvars` in STATA 12.1