Minority Dropouts in Higher Education: The Influence of Family Factors

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A B S T R A C T

According to existing literature, familial support has been shown to be a significant predictor of students' success or failure in school. In this paper, we investigate family-related factors that contribute to minority students dropping out. A qualitative research approach was employed in this study, which involved 11 Hmong student-leavers as key interviewees. Participants were asked about their university education experiences and why they discontinued their studies. The data obtained from interviews were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. As the findings of the study indicate, four family-related factors were most prevalent in causing minority students to withdraw from their studies: family economic situation, parental attitudes, marriage/early parenthood, and home life situations. Future research in this area is strongly recommended.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1.   INTRODUCTION

According to the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, the world has set out several key actions as part of a comprehensive vision for education: "Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we, therefore, commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all." (UNESCO, 2015, p.7). However, a high dropout rate of minority students remains a serious issue in different contexts. Student dropout harms a country's social and economic aspects (Tidwell, 1989). Rumberger (2001) argues that dropouts are more likely to commit crimes, and therefore pose a threat to society. A country's economic development may also be stalled if the dropout issue is not resolved (Kyophilavong et al., 2018; Rumberger, 2001; Tidwell, 1989). Knowing why students drop out can offer a useful direction in improving quality education (Rumberger, 2001).

Addressing the issue of minority dropouts is not a new endeavor; several studies (e.g., Csereklye, 2008; Grubb, 1989; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Rodgers, 2013; Rumberger, 2001; Samora, 1963; Williams, 2019; Wong & Wong, 1980; etc.) have attempted to understand the reality behind this problem. Among a pool of scholarly discussions, it is suggested that minority students dropping out is caused by individual factors, such as poor learning, personal aspiration and motivation (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; O'Keeffe, 2013; Woodfield, 2017; etc.), family conditions, social class (Bidgood et al., 2006; Bourdieu, 1984; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; etc.), and institutional-related factors, including irrelevant policies and administrative systems (Gross et al., 2013; Radunzel, 2017; Williams, 2019; etc.).

A wide array of research on minority dropouts (Dennis et al., 2005; Jordan et al., 1994; Lofstrom, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975; Tran, 2013; Williamson, 2001; etc.) has posited a significant influence of family-related factors on minority students' outcomes and their persistence in education: especially for students at college level, parental support is a means for academic achievement (Sax & Wartman, 2010). According to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), however, a family can have both positive and negative impacts on minority students' educational engagement, meaning that while on the one hand the family could be of support in the student persisting; on the other hand, responsibilities at home can cause them to drop out. Despite a wide array of research that has identified many aspects of family that are influential to a student's educational progress. This perspective, however, tends to appear less in qualitative research papers. A qualitative-based study is an appropriate approach for understanding a specific issue in human behaviors (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Dawson, 2002). In Laotian higher education, the minority dropout issue seems to remain unsolved, especially since Hmong minority students have a relatively low rate of graduation at bachelor-degree level. A recent study has proposed that the family factor is one of the key predictors of Hmong students' further education (Xiong, 2020). How family influences Hmong minority students' educational process is of interest to this current study. In order to contribute to the existing knowledge on the relationship between family and children's education, this present study,

therefore, aims to look into what aspects of family play a role in Hmong students dropping out. This paper is guided by the research question "What family aspects play a role in minority dropout?" The findings of this paper are of significance to the existing literature on the influences of family-related factors on minority students dropping out.

This research is structured in different sections: in section 1, readers are introduced to the theoretical perspectives on family-related aspects that have a relationship with students' academic achievement, in which ten key aspects of family are used as the conceptual framework for the study. Section 2 focuses on the methodological components, including sample selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. In section 3, key findings of the study are reported, followed by the discussion section, in which some interesting results are linked with previous theoretical perspectives and related studies; and the last section presents a conclusion, together with some recommendations for future studies in this area.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, readers are introduced to an overview of past literature on family-related factors that have an impact on student dropout from education. According to the review, ten potential attributes as familial factors have been identified. That means existing literature has pointed out that there are certain circumstances contributing to students withdrawing from their studies, including family economic situation (Aina et al., 2018; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; etc.), parents' low occupation status (Aina et al., 2018; Behr et al., 2020; etc.), family's low educational background (Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975; etc.), first-generation of higher education students (Dennis et al., 2005; Terenzini et al., 1995; etc.), lack of family resources (Tsolou & Babalis, 2020; Williamson, 2001; etc.), large family size (Chávez et al., 1991; Effiong & Edet, 2020; etc.), parents' negative attitudes to education (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975; etc.), family emergencies (Jordan et al., 1994; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; etc.), single-parent households (Bull et al., 1994; Chávez et al., 1991; etc.), and marriage and early parenthood (Tidwell, 1989; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017; etc.). A detailed discussion of the above-mentioned dimensions here follows:

a. Family economic situation

It is widely claimed in the existing literature that low socio-economic families are in strong association with students dropping out of their schooling (Astin & Cross, 1979; Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen & DesJardins, 2010; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Hammond et al., 2007; De Janvry et al., 2006; Lofstrom, 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; Rumberger, 2001; Sohn, 2018; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001; Woodfield, 2017; York et al., 1993). For instance, Lofstrom (2007) tested and confirmed there is a significant influence of poverty on dropout probability. This tendency is also found among others. Students from poorer families are more likely to abandon their studies, compared to students who come from families of better socioeconomic backgrounds (Rumberger, 2001; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001). Students who are poor must earn money to stay in school. Some authors explained that students whose

parents are economically disadvantaged are likely to seek or take employment to get extra money (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; Tidwell, 1989), and they are required to work or help their families in the farming (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996). Families of student-leavers are often facing a crisis of economic instability (Yokozeki, 1996), and this may lead the families to borrow (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; De Janvry et al., 2006). This is a condition that forces students to discontinue their education. The financial support of the family can be provided by various family members, according to Yokozeki (1996). Most persistent students receive financial assistance from their parents. However, a few students who persist, as well as dropouts, obtain money for their education from grandparents and other cousins, especially from uncles and aunts.

b.   Parents' low occupational status

In the literature, it is also indicated that parental occupation has a significant relationship with students' educational failure or achievement. For instance, a study by Johnes and McNabb (2004) revealed that parents' occupation is a factor influencing student dropout, stating that students whose parents work an unskilled job are more likely to drop out (cited in Aina et al., 2018). In addition, a review study by Aina and colleagues (2018) also found a consistent tendency, that the educational level of parents has a negative correlation with dropout probability. Seemingly, Behr et al. 2020 provide evidence that, in comparison to two groups of graduates and dropouts, the parents of graduates are more likely to hold a higher occupational status than dropouts' parents. Notwithstanding, a recent study by Contini & Zotti (2022) tested a hypothesis and indicated that the influence of parental jobs had no significant effect on student dropout.

c.   Family's low educational background

Several past studies (Aina et al., 2018; Behr et al., 2020; Casanova et al., 2018; Chávez et al., 1991; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Grubb, 1989; Radunzel, 2017; Reisel & Brekke, 2010; Rasmy et al., 2017; Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975) have agreed that the influence of parental education on student dropout is a factor. For instance, Tinto (1975) proposed that students whose parents have a higher level of education are likely to remain in education. Similarly, Tidwell (1989) noted that parents who possess a higher level of education tend to have a positive impact on children's persistence as they can act as positive role models, and increase their children's learning abilities and aspirations. This assumption seems to be accurate, as Casanova et al. (2018) noted that students from families with better educational backgrounds have better learning conditions. Likewise, students who left schooling are more likely to come from families whose parents are less educated (Aina et al., 2018; Behr et al., 2020; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Rasmy et al., 2017). Reisel and Brekke (2010) added to this issue that parents, who lack experience in higher education, are often not familiar with their children's education system and are consequently less inclined to encourage their children's academic efforts. Moreover, the family's educational background also covers a family member's failure/unsuccessful experience in education. There is a case in which students whose siblings left their studies shows it is more

likely they themselves will drop out as well (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In contrast, Contini & Zotti (2022) found parental education had a weaker effect on student dropout.

d. First generation

Another family attribute contributing to student dropout is the matter of first generation. Existing literature (Dennis et al., 2005; Radunzel, 2017; Terenzini et al., 1995) has proposed that a student who is the first generation in his/her family to reach higher education is more likely to drop out of studies. According to Terenzini et al. (1995), first-generation students, in comparison to their traditional counterparts, are more likely to encounter difficulties, such as receiving less parental support and encouragement for further education, and therefore become anxious and stressed about academic situations, have less academic integration, and work more hours. Moreover, first-generation students tend to possess lower cognitive skills, with poorer reading, math, and critical thinking skills. Dennis et al. (2005) found a similar tendency that minority first-generation students typically perform less well academically. One who is a first-generation student must be self-resilient and navigate learning alone since they have no positive role models in the family, or receive only minimal motivation from home (Csereklye, 2008).

e. Lack of family resources

Family resources are a means to students' academic development. However, according to the literature reviewed, only limited research has examined distinctive aspects of family resources and how they have an impact on students' learning progress. Rumberger & Lim (2008), after reviewing a number of research papers, proposed that there may be a variety of types of family resources. The authors of the present paper, based on the work of Rumberger & Lim (2008), view resources given by families as two major types: monetary and non-monetary resources. The monetary resource refers to the family's support for attendance costs, such as tuition fees, daily living allowance, related materials, etc., and this monetary resource can also be used to fund additional academic opportunities (e.g., extra classes/tutorials, more books, computers, etc.). Rumberger & Lim further noted that the lack of monetary resources is a severe barrier causing a dropout crisis. This tendency is also consistent with other works, positing that students who drop out are more likely to be from families with few possessions and a lack of reading materials at home (Chávez et al., 1991; Tidwell, 1989). Parents' non-monetary resources include paying attention, monitoring, providing emotional support, and fostering close relationships with their children. These aspects are referred to as "parental human resources" and "social resources" in Rumberger & Lim (2008).

More past authors (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Casanova et al., 2018; Csereklye, 2008; Dennis et al., 2005; Hammond et al., 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Sütő, 2020; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tinto, 1975; Tsolou & Babalis, 2020; Williamson, 2001) have also suggested that parental support and encouragement could predict student dropout. According to Tinto (1975), students who persist are more likely to have received advice, praise, and attention from families. Based on Tinto's perspective, family encouragement

seems to be a very significant factor in children's educational accomplishments. Parental encouragement can be in the form of monitoring children's academic conditions (Hammond et al., 2007) and nurturing relationships within the family (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001). According to Sax & Wartman (2010), a strong relationship between parents and students can have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. More importantly, conflict may take place if there is a lack of positive relationships in the family (Tinto, 1975) and such a conflict may bring about stress or tension between children and parents, resulting in students skipping classes and eventually abandoning their education (Hammond et al., 2007; Sohn, 2018; Williamson, 2001). Other authors (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Samora, 1963; Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019) have also confirmed the importance of parental encouragement. For instance, students lacking emotional support from their families are likely to feel lonely and have lowered self-efficacy (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019) and decreased motivation for learning (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018).

f.   Large family size

According to the literature reviewed, a family with a larger size of family members has a significant link to children's educational failure (Chávez et al., 1991; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989; Yokozeki, 1996). Family size is measured by how many siblings or family members are within the household (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). According to Chávez et al. (1991), among African-American students, family size appeared to be a strong contributor to whether these minority students abandoned or continue their studies. Other research has found that students whose parents have many children are more likely to leave school before completing a program as compared to students from smaller families (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989). Consistently, Farah & Upadhyay (2017) found a similar result: a household with more than three children is likely to lead to a higher probability of dropout. To this tendency, Rumberger & Lim (2008) further noted that larger families may not be able to provide sufficient resources for learning to each of their children. This may be due to larger families' economic fragility or income instability meaning they cannot provide their children with a supportive learning environment (Effiong & Edet, 2020).

g.   Parents' negative attitudes to education

Yet another family aspect that has a significant relationship with student dropout is parental attitudes, values and expectations (Csereklye, 2008; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975; Tran, 2013; Yokozeki, 1996). Yokozeki (1996) noted that there is a case in which students are encouraged by their families to focus on earning rather than school work and this familial attitude causes a student to discontinue their schooling. According to Tinto (1975), students who can persist in education are more likely to have heightened expectations from parents. A review study by Rumberger & Lim (2008) also finds that greater parental expectations are linked to a decreased risk of dropping out and a much higher rate of graduation. More recent studies (Csereklye, 2008; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017) have also found that parents'

perceived value of education is a major predictor of children's educational attainment, as parents' attitudes and values affect students' educational expectations (Hammond et al., 2007), students become highly motivated by their studies if parents demonstrate interest, high value, and attention to education (Tran, 2013). Furthermore, parental attitudes can be predicted by parents' educational background, meaning that more educated parents tend to place a higher value on education than do less educated ones (Yokozeki, 1996).

h. Home life situations/emergencies

Another family attribute predicting whether a student will give up or continue his/her education relates to home-life situations or so-called family emergencies. Several previous research papers (Bull et al., 1994; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Hammond et al., 2007; De Janvry et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 1994; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Phan & Vu, 2019; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Yokozeki, 1996) have maintained that family unexpected events have a negative influence on student's educational life. This factor includes parent's unemployment (Bull et al., 1994), income decrease or economic crisis (De Janvry et al., 2006; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002), parents' job change (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018), illness and/or death of family members or relatives (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; De Janvry et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 1994), and parental divorce (Bull et al., 1994). Furthermore, change in living location seems to be another key predictor. There is a significant correlation between a family's residential move and dropout probability (Hammond et al., 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The aforementioned problems are considered emergencies or stressful situations in households in which children suffer and can find it difficult to persist in their studies (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Possibly, one explanation for this problem is that some emergencies (e.g., income crisis, illness) result in high costs and that one solution in such a situation is to reduce the family's expenses by withdrawing the children from school (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996).

i. Single-parent

According to past literature (Bull et al., 1994; Chávez et al., 1991; Hammond et al., 2007; Rumberger, 2001; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989; Yokozeki, 1996), single parenting seems to be a block hindering students' persistence in schooling. Yokozeki (1996) compared persistent students and leavers and found that some leavers had divorced parents. Research from previous studies (Rumberger, 2001; Tidwell, 1989) also showed that students from single-parent families are more likely to leave their studies than those who have both a father and a mother. This issue seems to apply to students whose parents get remarried as well. Students living in stepfamilies are also associated with a higher probability of dropping out (Rumberger, 2001). Bull et al. (1994) posited that it is more typical for minority students to experience the problem of residing in single-parent families than it is for their non-minority counterparts. A concern for living with a stepmother or a stepfather or in single-parent families is that familial support (monitoring and advice giving/encouragement) for education

is less, as compared with traditional families (Astone & McLanahan, 1991, cited in Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

j.   Marriage and early parenthood

An overwhelming array of literature (Bull et al., 1994; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Chávez et al., 1991; Jordan et al., 1994; Tidwell, 1989; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017) has proposed that young marriage and/or early parenthood is another familial factor contributing to students dropping out of education. In their review of past literature, Bull and colleagues (1991) reported that pregnancy is a frequently cited cause for leaving school, especially among female students. In addition, in their empirical research, Bull and colleagues found that pregnancy was among the top four reasons for dropping out. A reason given for such a problem is that a student's pregnancy is an embarrassing event for herself and her family. It is also claimed to break school rules (Bull et al., 1991). Another study by Jordan et al. (1994) seems to support this tendency as well, providing evidence that minority female students are more likely to cite pregnancy and young parenthood as a reason for dropping out than do their non-minority counterparts. This is also confirmed in a recent study in which Videnovic and Lazarevic (2017) found teenage marriage and pregnancy to be direct factors causing students to drop out of their studies. Videnovic and Lazarevic noted that these dropouts, however, expected to return to study once their babies grew older.

In summary, the existing literature has identified ten key aspects of family. These ten familial factors are applied as a conceptual framework for the present study, probing into which family-related factors are likely to play a role in Hmong minority dropout.

3.   METHODS

This study employed an interview research method. Hmong minority students who had dropped out were contacted and invited to a semi-structured interview. The participants were asked to share their experiences of living on a university campus and the possible family-related reasons that had caused them to leave their studies before completing a degree. According to Boyce & Neale (2006), and Dawson (2002), the interview method is very commonly used in sociology research and is useful when a researcher expects to obtain detailed information about an individual's thoughts, behaviors and reflections on a specific issue. The current paper employed a snowball sampling method to select 11 Hmong student participants (2 females) who had dropped out of a faculty program at a Laotian university. By using this method, the authors were assisted by people close to the leaver students, such as their home-class instructors, peers, and teachers who had previously taught them (Laerd Dissertation, 2012). Research on the dropout issue is considered a sensitive topic and the target sample related to this issue is difficult to reach. Snowball sampling is an appropriate technique to get access to such hard-to-reach cases (Laerd Dissertation, 2012).

Each acknowledged participant was scheduled for an interview, at the convenience of the participants. In this regard, out of the 11 cases in total, 2 were in a face-to-face interview,

1 through a WhatsApp voice message, and the other 8 were on WhatsApp calls. Lao was the language of the interviews and all the interviews were conducted by the same authors. The interview protocol was characterized by a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. This interview instrument was checked for its content validity by an expert in a related field. Additionally, a trial interview was conducted with a participant to determine whether the questions were clear to him, and the results verified the clarity of the questions. Each interview lasted between 12-20 minutes. The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, including the interviewer's probes (Schreier, 2014). In this process, all the data processing and the analysis were conducted in Lao; the English translation was made for the purpose of publication.

Qualitative content analysis was employed in this current study; the data analysis was based on a deductive category assignment (Mayring, 2014). Qualitative content analysis refers to a systematic procedure for analyzing large amounts of interview data and it is useful for researchers to quantify categories of data systematically (Schreier, 2014). The transcribed data were analyzed with free software, the so-called "QCAmap," developed by Mayring (2014). In preparation for this, a categorization guide was established, in which there were category definitions, anchor examples, and coding rules. This coding guide is considered the most significant part of qualitative content analysis, as it functions as a conceptual framework for the analysis and interpretation (Schreier, 2014). The developed coding framework was tested by doing trial coding to ensure the high quality of the categories (Mayring, 2014), and some revisions were made in this conduct. The final categories included ten headings, namely, (1) family economic situation, (2) parental education, (3) parental occupations, (4) first-generation, (5) family resources, (6) parental attitudes, (7) family size, (8) home life situations, (9) single-parent, and (10) marriage/early parenthood

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Result

As stated earlier, the current paper aims to look into aspects of family that play a role in minority students dropping out. The paper, based on interview data obtained from 11 minority students who had dropped out, finds different family aspects that participants seem to consider as the most influential factors for their academic engagement and dropping out. When analyzing further in-depth, among a list of family aspects, this paper finds all the ten listed family aspects to be influential to minority students. Some aspects, such as family occupation, parental education, being a first-generation student to reach higher education, family size, lack of family resources, and single-parent families may be of significance but are less dominant. Nevertheless, four of these appear to be the most dominant aspects. These are family economic status, marriage and early parenthood, the family's attitudes to education, and home life situations. The details of such findings are outlined as follows.

1) Family economic situation

According to interview data, a family's financial weakness seems to be the most dominant aspect that caused student participants to leave their studies. Many of them come from poor families, so money is a huge barrier for them in obtaining an education. 10 out of 11 participants in total reported that they wanted to continue, but student life was very costly. Their parents could not afford to pay for their education. They also noticed how poor their families were, which made them feel distracted, so they eventually chose to abandon their studies. A sample statement is reflected in the following quote.

> I wanted to continue my studies but my mother said she
> had no money anymore. She kept informing me about the poverty
> and that made me upset, so I finally left, said Case 4.

Such financial restrictions caused a participant to try his best to get a part-time job while studying. By taking employment, he became less engaged in school work and started to skip classes more often, and finally dropped out. This tendency is revealed in the quote below.

> Due to my parents being unable to support me in my studies,
> I had to find a part-time job to get extra money to support
> myself and my parents, said Case 1.

Also, due to poverty, two participants asked for help and/or received some support from other relatives. For instance, one participant got some reading materials from an uncle and another one got some financial support from a brother while studying. Although this assistance was helpful only for a period of time as their relatives were unable to continue to assist with their studies. A sample quote is provided below.

> I had an uncle who was studying at a university at that time.
> I was happy as he promised to offer me some help with my studies.
> He, at first, bought some books for me. Later on, I was in a difficult time
> due to my parents being unable to financially support me, he (the uncle) was
> not able to do anything to help me, either, said Case 1.

2) Marriage and early parenthood

In the current study, marriage and young parenthood were also dominant factors, causing participants to drop out of school. According to 4 participants, having a spouse resulted in people having more difficulties and additional family responsibilities, such as pregnancy or intending to become a parent, lack of funds for a couple's life, the need to spend more time caring for a partner, the need to earn a living, and the need to start a family, etc. These participants also shared that due to such a busy life, they became less motivated to continue their studies and therefore dropped out. This situation is revealed in the following quote.

> Because of many difficulties, such as the lack of money,
> not being able to afford to pay the tuition fees, having a baby,
> the need to take care of a spouse, and the need to leave
> my parents' house to start our family life, I thought it was better
> to leave schooling, said Case 8.

3) Family's attitudes to education

Family's perceived attitudes to education appear to be another influential aspect. In the interview data, it is indicated that 3 participants shared that some family members in their families exhibited little appreciation for education. They didn't seem to support their studies fully or expect them to continue. They did not even prevent their children from dropping out. This sort of negative attitude may be attributed to the current societal situation/trend. This is because parents fear their children's low chances of getting employed after graduation, their low socioeconomic background, and because of their low perception of education. They expect their children to be more involved in earning money than in their studies and therefore want them to return home and live with them. This tendency is reflected in the two quotes below.

> When discussing with my parents whether I should leave
> or continue my studies, my dad did not care for me to
> continue. Only my mom and my siblings did, though, said Case 7.
> My parents said if I wanted to discontinue my studies, I was
> allowed to do so because it is challenging to get recruited
> for a good job. They are now unhappy that one of my siblings
> is still unemployed after completing a degree, said Case 3.

4) Home life situations

In addition, home life situations, which relate to unexpected events or emergencies at home, appear to be a dominant aspect contributing to participants' dropout decisions. In this regard, as shared by 3 participants, they needed to withdraw from schooling because of some familial conditions, such as the head of the household being unable to earn money and/or a decrease in income, sickness of some family members, as well as having to take care of aging/old parents. Some statements below reflect this tendency.

> When I entered my fourth semester, I was informed by
> my parents that they had a lowered income at that moment,
> and asked if I wanted to continue my studies, said Case 6
> I dropped out when I was in my second semester because
> my sibling got sick, and that cost a lot of money, said Case 3

b. Discussion

The following qualitative study found several interesting results that can be related to previous theoretical assumptions and empirical studies. The current study analyzed interview data obtained from 11 students who had dropped out of higher education. Four family aspects were identified as the most significant. In these items, participants were more likely to mention the lack of these factors as a reason for dropping out. These aspects include, firstly, family economic situation, in which many participants claimed that the family's financial problems were a huge barrier; their parents could not afford to pay their educational expenses, such as the rent for an apartment room, living costs, learning materials, and so on. This tendency seems to be consistent with other past works (Bidgood et al., 2006; Chen &

DesJardins, 2010; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Lofstrom, 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rodgers, 2013; Rogers, 2009; Rumberger, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1995; Tidwell, 1989; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001; Woodfield, 2017; York et al., 1993). Most participants also claimed that they could feel how poor their families were and this made them feel disappointed, worried, distracted, and negative about remaining in school. Some participants expressed a need for employment. They struggled to find a way to get a job to earn some money for themselves and their families (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; Tidwell, 1989), and some of them had to help their parents on the farm which was the only way they could earn income for the family (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996). In this study, two participants received support from relatives at the time of their studies, because their parents were deemed to lack money. According to Yokozeki (1996), most dropouts coming from poor families may receive financial support from different people, such as grandparents, uncles or aunts.

Marriage and early parenthood appears to be another influential factor. Participants claimed that after having a spouse they became busy and took on more responsibilities in their own families. This finding was also the same as other studies (Bull et al., 1994; Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; Chávez et al., 1991; Jordan et al., 1994; Tidwell, 1989; Vergidis & Panagiotakopoulos, 2002; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017). Among many difficulties, participants raised an issue regarding pregnancy (Bull et al., 1991; Jordan et al., 1994; Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017). One participant explained that it was better for her to leave her studies because it was so problematic; she was afraid of getting low grades due to missing/skipping classes if she continued her studies while she was pregnant. She thought that she would return later on after giving birth (Videnovic & Lazarevic, 2017). Thirdly, some participants' dropout decisions were influenced by parental attitudes to education. This is also the same finding as found in past literature (Csereklye, 2008; Effiong & Edet, 2020; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tinto, 1975). According to participants, their family members exhibited little appreciation for education and were not even resistant to their children's dropping out. This condition causes participants to have lowered motivation and expectations to persist (Tran, 2013). According to some authors (Csereklye, 2008; Hammond et al., 2007; Rasmy et al., 2017), this factor is a key predictor; without parental support and parental value of children's education, it seems impossible for participants to succeed in their educational pursuit. The fourth important aspect seems to count in home life situations. This current paper seems to support past authors, stating that Hmong students consider family as an important factor: if their parents offer full support, they are likely to engage in their studies (Xiong, 2020), on the other hand, they become distracted and unmotivated if they have problems/difficulties at home. This tendency may contribute to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), who saw that a family can positively and negatively impact minority students' educational engagement. The study finds that participants are likely to cite their need to take care of a sick family member as a reason why they dropped out (Carvajal & Cervantes, 2018; De Janvry et al., 2006; Jordan et al., 1994), which also includes looking after aging/older parents. Participants reasoned that no one stayed at home

with their parents because other siblings had moved out for their jobs. This problem may confirm what past authors have proposed, that there is a significant correlation between a family's residential move and dropout probability (Hammond et al., 2007; Phan & Vu, 2019; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). That probably means a moving out by a family member can also be a problem. An additional condition in this aspect also relates to the family's economic changes. Some participants had to leave their studies because of parents' lowered income. An option to address this emergency and/or for reducing high costs in the household is to take children out of schooling (De Janvry et al., 2006; Yokozeki, 1996).

As mentioned earlier, there are ten categories (aspects of the family), deductively developed, that are used as the conceptual framework for the present study. Through a qualitative content analysis, the findings suggest that all ten aspects play a role in minority students dropping out. When looking at the more and less significant aspects, however, these six aspects: family's occupation, parental education, first-generation status, family size, lack of family resources, and single parent seem less prominent among participants. For instance, being the first-generation for one participant, she had to rely more on herself and did not get advice from her family about the educational process (Bull et al., 1994; Csereklye, 2008; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tidwell, 1989;). Likewise, in another case, one participant lived with his brother without his parents. He became less confident and less motivated to continue his studies as his family was pushing him more into farming than schoolwork. This case indicates a lack of emotional support from parents. Parental relationships are a strong predictor of children's learning success (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Tinto, 1975; Williamson, 2001). This current study, however, has found these six aspects played a weaker role in minority dropouts. Future inquiries may investigate this tendency further. Last but not least, the authors of the present paper have observed that there might be some relationship among all the aspects of family. A family's economic situation, the first and most dominant factor, probably has a profound effect on home life, parental attitudes, etc. That means, if poverty were been a big deal for the sampled minority leaver students, or if their families had been economically strong, other familial factors/aspects in turn may have played a very small or no role in students dropping out. As an example, it is apparent that parents' attitudes, beliefs, and values toward children's education may change after a family's economic crisis/changes. Most participants in this paper dropped out when they were in their 4th or 5th semesters, and they did not seem to have serious academic problems. This tendency, however, should be further studied in future works.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present paper indicate that four aspects of the family: family economic situation, parental attitudes, marriage and early parenthood, and home life situations, appear to play the most significant roles in minority dropouts. Based on empirical data, most leaver students came from poor families in which parents could not afford to pay their children's educational-related expenses, and this led to parents wanting their children to drop out. Family difficulties, such as illness, no one taking care of aging parents, helping

family on a farm, and others, can also be influential. Moreover, marriage was found as a common trend for adult learners in different contexts. In this study, having a spouse and experiencing pregnancy were also legitimated as key factors causing the sampled minority students to abandon their studies. The findings of this study may be crucial for future quantitative research in testing the influence of family background and how family-related aspects play a role in minority dropouts. This study, however, suggests using the findings with caution due to the nature of the qualitative-method analysis, in which the tendency emerged from a small number of participants. Furthermore, future works should also consider integrating the perspectives of other persons, such as peers, instructors, and family members (e.g., guardians) of leaver students, to understand more in-depth the minority dropout issue and the relationship between family background and student dropout.

An issue of underrepresentation and inequality in minorities is prevalent in different contexts. In this current case study, Hmong minority students are considered to have positive learning habits and comparable cognitive skills to their non-minority counterparts. They seem to have a close relationship with their family. For them, taking care of their parents, helping and giving support to family members, as well as having trust in the family are their responsibilities. This study also finds that reaching out to minority students who drop out is very difficult; they become stressed and very shy about sharing their experiences of failure. Regarding this dropout issue, universities and/or related units cannot address this problem directly and immediately; however, a few key actions here are suggested: 1) it is a worthwhile idea for universities to consider recruiting faculty members of a minority background, as a minority faculty member has potential to better understand minority students and their home life situations, and that it is useful when giving mental support and making the students feel a sense of belonging and commitment struggling to survive; 2) universities should also provide a help desk and psychological-social support; this service should be administered in a system in which there are regular staff working and/or in charge of the service; most importantly, this service unit must have close contact or be conveniently accessible; and 3) it would be extremely helpful if universities could manage to settle a fund to attract students coming from very low economic families: this funding will not only offer financial support for students but the grant should also introduce part-time job opportunities for students in need

6.   REFERENCES

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