

and a reduction in general demand for agricultural labour.

Adult research participants argued that the conditions of work for children on commercial farms have improved.

Six recommendations, mostly in line with the CLPA, followed from the study:

- **More effective poverty reduction and alleviation measures:** These are most important. The study flags options to explore.
- **Better law enforcement measures:** More resources are required to enforce the law preventing children under the legal age from working in commercial agriculture and to ensure payment of the minimum wage. The former must be linked to more effective poverty measures. If it isn't, children will simply trade the right to a minimum income for the right not to work.
- **Awareness raising measures:** These are required to educate caregivers of children working in subsistence agriculture as well as legal employers of children working in commercial agriculture about the common hazards and negative impact on well-being and how to avoid them.
- **Measures to reduce the risk of exposure to negative influences and anti-social behaviour:** Programmes and facilities are urgently required to occupy children in poorly resourced communities when they are not in school.
- **Measures to address alcohol dependence amongst child caregivers.**
- **Measures to link children to local income-earning opportunities:** For example, adjustments to school curricula in rural areas should be explored to better link learners leaving school with local development needs and employment opportunities. ●

Last words: A child's view about what is required

'If the government would give support grants...or open job opportunities for our parents... we would not need to work'

(Girl, Mpumalanga site).

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Why students leave: The problem of high university drop-out rates

The socio-economic status of families of students who do not complete their university qualifications played a significant role in the students' ability to persevere in their studies, concludes MOEKETSI LETSEKA, project leader of a groundbreaking new study on the question of why students leave prematurely.

In the study we avoided using the term 'dropouts' to describe students who leave the universities without completing their qualifications. Our assumption is that university students do not drop out. They withdraw from their studies for numerous reasons: personal, social, economic, cultural, political and others. They take up jobs, join the army, get married, take a year off, but they often either return to their studies via contact-mode institutions or via distance education, and transfer their accumulated credits to the institution where they re-register.

THE HSRC'S STUDENT PATHWAYS STUDY traces a 2000–2002 cohort of students who left ('non-completers') the institution without completing their studies, as well as those students who graduated in seven selected public higher education institutions (HEIs), namely, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Stellenbosch (US), the University of Port Hare (UFH), the University of Limpopo (UL), the University of the Western Cape

Figure 1: Total number of leavers included in the study (7 universities)

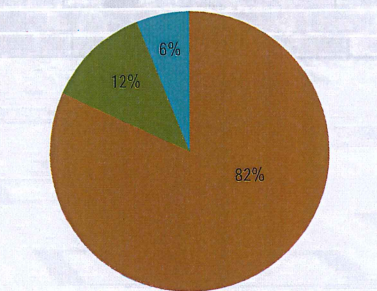
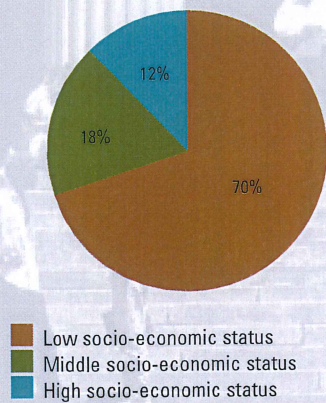


Figure 2: Distribution of leavers, University of Fort Hare

(UWC), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), and Pentech, now part of the merged Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). Seven case-study reports outlining the situation at each of these institutions have been completed. Report-backs have been done at four universities, namely Wits, UFH, UWC, and CPUT.

The study draws on: the analysis of the institutions' raw unit data from the Department of Education's (DoE) Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS); survey data derived from a postal survey of 34 000 respondents, of whom 20 000 dropped out of their studies during this period and 14 000 graduated, with a return rate of just over 16%; qualitative data derived from interviews of senior academics and members of management; and a broad spectrum of institutional reports. The study seeks to understand factors influencing transitions and pathways of students through the higher education sector into the labour market.

Data from the study found that the socio-economic status of the families played a significant role in the students' ability to persevere in their studies. The study drew on

Table 1: Re-categorisation of SES variables

Education	Monthly income	Ordinal variable	Value (score)
No formal education Some primary schooling Grade 7 Some secondary schooling	No income R1–R 400 R401–R 800 R801–R 1 600	Low	1
Matric / Grade 12 Technical college certificate	R1 601–R 3 200 R3 201–R 6 400 R6 401–R 12 800	Middle	2
Technikon certificate or diploma University certificate or diploma Technikon degree University degree	R12 801–R 25 600 R25 601–R 51 200 R51 201–R 102 400 R102 400–204 800 R204 801 or more	High	3

the survey database to calculate the socio-economic status (SES) variable as follows:

- Education level of the father/male guardian;
- Education level of the mother/female guardian;
- Monthly income level of the father/male guardian; and
- Monthly income level of the mother/female guardian.

Based on the average score of the four ordinal variables above, the SES is calculated using the following formula:

$$SES = \frac{\left(\frac{\sum \text{Education}}{\text{Father-Mother}} \right) + \left(\frac{\sum \text{Income}}{\text{Father-Mother}} \right)}{4}$$

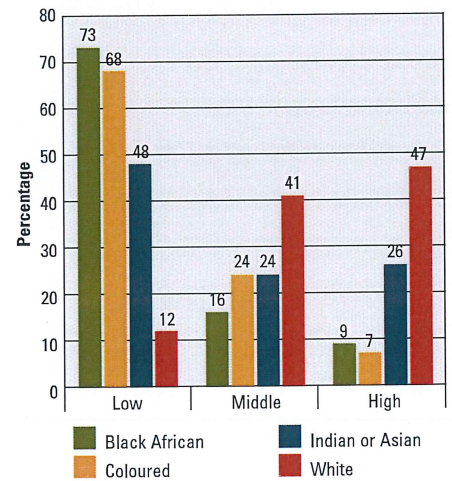
The four categories were then re-categorised to form ordinal variables with categories of 'low', 'middle' and 'high'. Table 1 shows how the education and income variables were re-categorised to describe an ordinal variable.

Data from the surveyed students who dropped out shows that on average 70% of respondents across the seven universities came from low socio-economic status families (see Figure 1).

The low socio-economic status family background was more pronounced among leavers in previously disadvantaged universities such as UFH (82%) (see Figure 2), the University of the North (Limpopo) (82%), UWC (79%) and CPUT (74%).

The survey data showed that black Africans comprised the largest proportion of the low socio-economic status demographics, followed by coloureds and Indians, while whites comprised the largest proportion of the high socio-economic status demographics, followed by Indians and black Africans (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: SES distribution by race



Most leavers indicated they left at the end of their first year or midway through their second year, at which point they still had between one and six outstanding courses. Lack of finance emerged from the data as the major impediment for the completion of studies, which is to be expected considering that on average their parents/guardians' monthly income is in the bracket R 400–R1 600. Around 70% indicated that they had no siblings with university experience, which suggests that they are first-generation university students in their families.

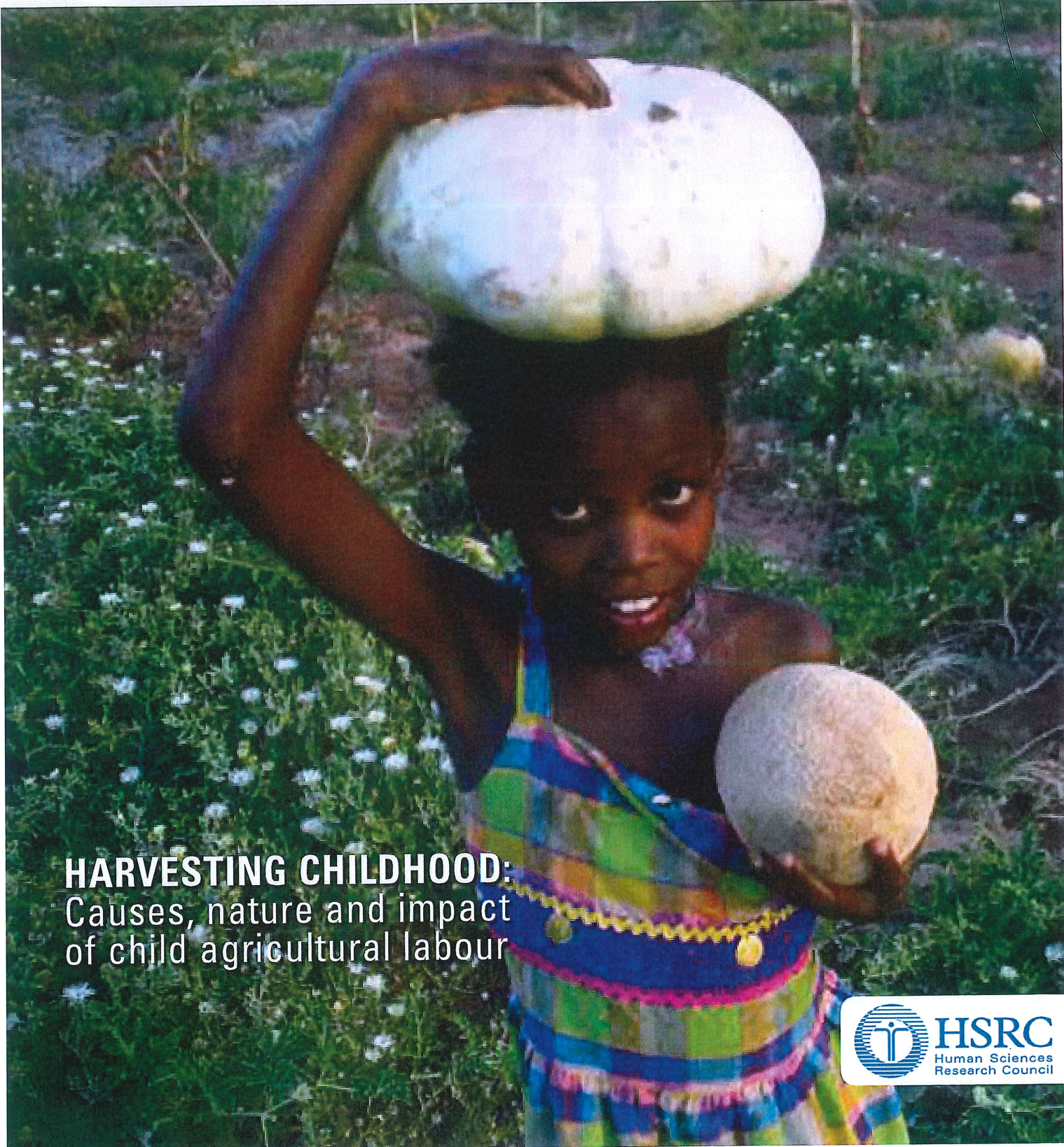
Financial difficulties compelled most of the leavers to take up full-time, part-time or odd jobs, earning between R1 601–R3 200 a month. While this was necessary in order to augment their meagre financial resources, there is no doubt that juggling study and work proved to be another reason for not focusing on studies. ●

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