

University of Belize  
Belize City, Belize



RESEARCH PROPOSAL:  
IMPACT OF POVERTY ON PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN BELIZE

Submitted to: Ms. Nicole Haylock  
Introduction to Research Methods  
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By:  
Abner Gonzalez

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## ABSTRACT

Education is a powerful instrument necessary for both an individual and a country to become prosperous. It is a very essential element as it allows for knowledge in a nation to be created and adapted. Moreover, there are implications being made that poverty on children may be increasing over development and may, in part, be attributable initially to the reason that many children are born into socioeconomically disadvantaged families. This on the longer run may have effects on, for instance, their educational outcomes which ultimately determine what type of living they will provide for themselves and their family. Consequently, there is a need to carry out an investigation on poverty and primary school education and to determine what impact poverty had on a child's educational development. From the onset it had been determined that education is the key to emerging out of poverty. However, the same poverty from which most try to escape is the same poverty which prevents us from getting a proper education. In order to gather the necessary information needed to complete this report a survey was conducted.

Background?

## INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of Problem**

⇒ The major topic of concern today is the impact of poverty on primary school education in Belize. Poverty in primary school education in the Belize District is being explored but poverty is also an abundant issue across the entire country. The difference in performance among children that rank from different classes or groups is called an achievement gap. Slavin (1998) stated that impoverished children achieve less than children of middle and upper classes. This researcher pointed out that there are many reasons why children perform in this manner. Two of these reasons were the social environment in which they live and the education which they receive at school. Education is not only a basic human right but having an education entitles us to a better future and it is the only way of breaking this cycle of poverty for the less fortunate. At school some teachers don't engage themselves in fair treatment among all children. Some provide more attention to the wealthy students and leave those that are slow, less smart and poor to a side. This creates an emotional environment that is very stressful and emotionally depriving. Poverty has great impacts on school education whereby there is a lack of emotional nurturing and this leads them to have a sense of alienation, depression, inadequacy and anxiety (Ciaccio, , 2000; Brophy 2000). These poor children crave for attention and a need to belong. They don't want to be shunned out. Unfortunately, this is what takes place many at times, emotional draining and negative self status which literally leads a

child not to have that motivation to want to be someone important and respected in the future hence not performing academically (Hixson and Tinsmann, 1990; Ciaccio , 2000).

Indeed, education is the key to poverty alleviation and sustainable human development, if one doesn't have education he/she can't get away from poverty (Bowman, 1994)

Purpose of the Study: -

Significance of the Study: -

**Purpose of Study**

This study on poverty and primary school education <sup>is/will be</sup> ~~was to~~ determine what impact poverty had on a child's educational development. When browsing through the files of this booklet the importance of education can readily be noted and the ~~o~~ impact of poverty is immense. It is adverse to be in and deprived condition like many of these children. It is not their choice where they live. It is not their choice that ~~they~~ parent may be unemployed or disable and it was simply not their choice to be born in poverty. They often have that feeling of wanting to escape from that misery, wanting to make a change in their lives but they feel that they have no control over the nature and quality of their lives (Brophy, 1998; Bandura, 2001).

### Significance of Study

Children who live in poverty start out in life at a great disadvantage. The significance of this study is to bring about an awareness of the terrible impacts of poverty in a person's life. To show how poverty has a direct impact on education and how education can be that stepping stone in the lives of many. The importance is to show that when impoverished, it is difficult to have a life with all the basic needs. For instance, there are many experiences that these poor children may not be exposed to as compared to other children of better social classes. Many at times these experiences contribute to their academic skills and achievements. Some of these experiences may include the use of home computers, the opportunity to attend preschool, visits to zoos and museums, being read to by a parent, interaction with literate, educated and well spoken adults (Benson, 1995; Bowman, 1994; Guerra and Shutz, 2001). It is of utmost importance to inform the public about children who suffer because of poverty so as to receive as much assistance as possible so as to lessen the effects of this poor quality of living. Nonetheless, as Kraiser stated in 1996, parents play an essential role in the lives of their children. This is so because a research carried out in 1996 by Kraiser and Delaney, proved that certain conditions that are necessary for families to be successful are most of the time not practiced. These include stability, security, emotionally positive time spent together, and lack basic resources. Therefore, by stating these issues in due time and with the proper strategies may be dealt with appropriately.

## HYPOTHESIS

Children living in poverty at primary school have difficulty learning and in some cases are not able to attend primary school.

1. Poverty- (noun) the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; condition of being poor; indigence. (cite)
2. Education- (noun) the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. (cite)

From the above definitions of poverty and education it can be concluded that there is some type of relationship between both. This is so because if one lives in an environment where there is little or no money, then it makes it difficult to be able to invest in a child's education. If there is not this opportunity to attend school then this will ultimately lead these children to be unable to acquire "general knowledge, powers of reasoning" or prepare one to face the real world and overcome all obstacles. This only comes to show us the many effects that poverty can have on education and life on a whole in the longer run.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of education in poverty eradication, in close co-operation with other social sectors, is crucial. No country has succeeded if it has not educated its people. Not only is education important in reducing poverty, it is also a key to wealth creation (World Education Forum, 2000). Achieving universal primary education is one of the means that assist in breaking the cycle of poverty. Poor children have numerous disadvantages in relation to their better-off counterparts. They are usually less healthy, their language skills less developed (a factor that has negative influence on school achievement), and they are generally less well equipped - socially, emotionally and physically - to undertake a school program (World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995). It goes on to further say that in extreme cases of poverty young female children are stripped off their basic human rights. They are abused in all types of possible ways and it is as if they keep up traditions as the people who have come before them because they withstand almost anything thing that is done to them (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, 1998).

When the report had been conducted it was concluded that 39% of our children between ages 0-17 years were living in poverty. Of the children living in poverty under the age 14, 71.7% were living with both parents, while only 4.5% were living with neither parent. Poor children living with a single parent were more likely to live with their mother than their father, 22.1% and 1.8% respectively. According to the high poverty rate for children, two out of every five children do not have their basic food and non-food needs

met. This has led to serious implication such as malnutrition, school absenteeism, school dropouts and child labour. The results portray that poor children living with their mother have the highest rate of poverty since most of the time the mother is unemployed and has more than two children and this is when survival becomes more difficult to attain. The second highest are the children living with both parents mainly because the parents lack skills that can assist them in providing income for their families. According to the Families and Children Act Chapter 173 of the Laws of Belize, it is the duty of the parents to maintain a child. The value of education is seen as a "Liberating Tool" from poverty. It was recognized during the research that two of the main causes of poverty are poor education and lack of a skill.

In September 2000, 191 member countries of the United Nations General Assembly, of which Belize is a member, adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Declaration outlines the main challenges facing the world at the start of the new millennium. Government agreed to a specific set of goals and related targets, the combination of goals and targets now known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have been integrated and designed to measure countries performance, in relation to the challenges of the global development agenda and establish a deadline which is in 2015. According to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2005 the first two goals are to Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and to Achieve Universal primary education. Hunger and malnutrition is believed to be one of the main causes why children have difficulty retaining and comprehending school material. Poor people know that education is the best escape route from a life of poverty. Education brings with it improved health, the chance of prosperity, and hope for the future (Julius Nyerere, former

President of the United Republic of Tanzania). It opens the door to a life of dignity and independence, for people and for countries. In the data that was collected through the use of questionnaires, there were several indicators that a child in school comes from a poverty stricken home. These indicators included tardiness, unable to function, inability to pay school fees, constant vomiting, drowsiness, health hygiene, continuous fighting, and bad behavior as if they weren't disciplined at home, no uniform, no food and lack of basic school materials. It is more than likely that children who attend primary school and portray these traits come from a poverty stricken home.

Moreover, according to the Education Act 36 of the Laws of Belize, the compulsory age of a child to attend primary school level is between five years and fourteen years of age.

Based on 1996 and 1998 surveys, it is estimated that about 33% of the Belizean population are poor, most of who live in the rural Southern district of Toledo and Stann Creek and the Central District of Cayo bordering Guatemala. The poor are mainly the indigenous Mayans about 11% of the population and 20% of the population who migrated from the neighboring Central American countries. (CSO Report 2002.)

Education access at the Primary level has increased significantly over the last decades and net primary enrollment stands now at 95% of the relevant age group. Still many especially from the poorest households and district, repeat too often and drop out as soon as they reach 14 years when compulsory education ends. Statistics show that there were 8,244 children who entered Infant 1 in the 1995/96. By 2002/03 there were only 5,726 children who were in Std. VI. (Millennium Development Goals Report). This indicates that there was a significant number of student's dropout of a total 2,518. According to our surveys conducted it shows that majority of these children who left

school between 1995/96 to 2002/03 were children who were living in poverty. Some had to left school because they were faced with home problems no parental guidance, could not afford to pay for text book, school fees and uniforms. Some of these children left school to join the work force so as to help in supporting their family. Some are on the streets of Belize begging for a \$0.25 to buy food to eat. Moreover, as quoted in the Central Statistical Office, even as the poor struggle, the withdrawal from the school is not used as an adaptive strategy. Parents try their best to send children to school. Some parents start saving some money as soon as school closes to buy books and uniforms, while others use uniforms for more than one year or they send their children to the same school to reuse uniforms and books. Parents on a whole see it as a way to free themselves if they struggle to educate their children.

However, getting enrolled in school is one thing, but attending school on a regular basis is a challenge that many primary school children in Belize face. Attendance is critical for great performance as this is an important factor in a child's rate of learning. The data that the Central Statitital Office quoted are based on household responses and not on school records. They found that one in every five students (19.6%) was absent for at least one day during the four-week reference period tested. This rate was higher for Corozal (29.5%), Stann Creek (28%) and Cayo (25.6%) districts, and lower for Belize (17.1%), Toledo (14.8%) and Orange Walk (7.45%) districts. Those in urban areas (22%) were more likely to have been absent compared to those in rural areas (16.7%).

In addition, attendance whether it is excellent or poor is not the only factor that plays an important role in the education of a child. This is so because the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports provides financial assistance to needy students, nonetheless

access remains a large challenge. Some parents travel long distances and wait in long lines to request assistance from Ministry of Education. A high percentage of students, 83.3%, do not receive any financial assistance. Of the remaining sixteen percent who had some source of financial assistance, the vast majority, 70%, received assistance from family or friends and the remaining 30% received assistance from some other source. The students from the Orange Walk, 3.3%, ~~Corozal~~, 7.3%, and Toledo District, 27.8%, of students received financial assistance, in Stann Creek and Cayo Districts, the result of those who received financial assistance showed 17.9% and 14.8% respectively (CSO Report 2002).

In the conclusion of the report from the Central Statistical Office in 2002, Toledo district stands out as the district with the highest level of poor and indigent population, followed by Orange Walk and Stann Creek districts. It was cited that overall Belize has the lowest rate of poverty. Furthermore, it was stated that although poverty was higher in rural compared to urban areas, it is ~~suspected~~ that pockets of urban poverty could be higher than some rural areas. Bearing this in mind, the research covered the urban and rural areas of Belize District and proved, with everything mentioned in this literature review, that indeed children living in poverty at primary school have difficulty learning and in some cases are not able to attend primary school.

## METHODOLOGY

This investigative study will consist of both quantitative and qualitative research as means to determining the on poverty impact on primary school education. More specifically, the research will entail two forms of data collection: interviewing and survey questions.

### **In depth Interviewing**

An in-depth interview is a qualitative method for gathering data that involves open-ended, relatively unstructured questions in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewee's feelings, experiences and perceptions. It can also be defined as an open-ended, discovery-oriented method that is well suited for describing both program processes and outcomes from the perspective of the target audience or key stakeholder. The goal of the interview is to deeply explore the respondent's point of view, feelings and perspectives. Therefore it is said that in-depth interviews yield information. In addition, there are key characteristics that differentiate an in-depth, qualitative research interview from a regular interview. Some of these characteristics include open-ended questions whereby questions should be worded so that respondents cannot simply answer yes or no, but must expand on the topic, Semi-structured Format which although there are pre-planned questions, there must always be an allowance for questions to flow naturally, Seek understanding and interpretation so that when something is unclear the interviewer must always tend to clarify, interpret and find a deeper understanding from the

respondent, Conversational in which there should be smooth transitions from one topic to the next but one should never forget that he/she plays the role of a listener, Recording responses is done with the use of an audiotape or through writing notes, Record observations for instance the non verbal behaviors and record reflections.

### Sample

- (i) So as to assist in the collection of accurate information interviews were held with a representative of the Belize District Education center and the Education Department (feeding program) and the Truancy Unit. This interview was held with these persons because they have much experience in coping with the children living in poverty. They have been encountered with many unbelievable incidents and are very knowledgeable in this field of research. Therefore, the revelation of their knowledge, experience and information will be of utmost importance in putting together this data on the impact of poverty on education as it will help in the analysis and interpretation of information collected.
- (ii) The purposive sample of individuals chosen for this in depth interview included Mrs. Arnold and Mr. Yah to represent the Belize District Education Center, Ms. Shirleen Tablada to represent the School Feeding Program Unit and Ms. Celia Pollard from the Truancy Unit.
- (iii) The interviews were held in person by the interviewer and took place at the said persons above offices. This was done so as to assure as much confidentiality about any information that is revealed and to cooperation in

the sense that the interviewees feel as comfortable to share their knowledge and free to contribute to any area of information as desired.

- (iv) The aim of these interviews were to gather as much available information as possible in an effort to get a better understanding of the present situation of poverty, to have a better and more accurate interpretation and understanding of data collected through the form of questionnaires and to assist in coming up with recommendations and policies in relation to the research.

### Surveys

A survey is a data collection technique that is designed to collect standard information from a large number of subjects. Surveys may include polls, mailed questionnaires, telephone interviews, or face-to-face interviews. It is very useful for gathering data from a large sample, about a wide range of topics in a fast and reliable manner. Survey questionnaires present a set of questions to a subject who with his/her responses will provide data to a researcher. There are two types of questions that need to be formulated in a survey. These are called structured or fixed response question and the second is called non-structured or open question. The survey was designed by the researcher and with the assistance of the Belize District Education Center they were distributed to the different principals of the primary schools in the district of Belize. This sample population was selected using the stratified method of random selection.



- (i) The District of Belize was divided into Urban Belize District and Rural Belize District. The Urban Belize area was broken down into Southside Belize City and North side Belize City. Rural Belize area was broken down into Old Northern Road, Northern Highway, Western Highway, River Valley Schools and the Cayes (Caye Caulker and San Pedro). From among these divisions schools were selected according to religious denominations in an effort to get a more diversified cross section of the sample population. In total the questionnaire distributed were 65 of them to different primary schools. From among these sixty five schools, the largest areas were the Urban Southside Belize City and the Urban North Side Belize City, from which five schools were chosen from the Southside and five schools from the North Side. From among the smaller sections, three samples were chosen from the Northern Highway , two samples were chosen from the Western Highway, and three samples from among the Cayes.
- (ii) The aim of this survey was to gather information based on the lives of these children that come from a poor household or family. To get an insight as to the possible factors that may lead them to live in poverty. Be able to gather data on their behavior and academic performance, get to find out different indicators that may lead one to know whether a child comes from a deprived family, to be informed about the level of education they are able to complete and how successful they are academically.

o Future Tense

(8)

## DATA ANALYSIS

In this segment the key component will be to give an explanation of the data that was collected. The first section will include the responses gotten from the in depth interviewing. The opinions and knowledge shared about the children who live in poverty will be elaborated on. All the booklets and leaflets of information provided at the Education Unit, the school feeding program and the Truancy Unit will be used so as to be able to present facts about education. The second section will include the interpretation of the information gathered through the use of the survey questionnaires. The results will be studied carefully and interpreted accurately then a detail summary of all the gathered data will be provided. This will allow for there to be a clearer spectrum about the different behaviors and performances of the impact of primary school children living under poverty. The third section will be the quantitative part of the data analysis whereby the data collected will be compiled and tabulated. Each question will be dealt with one at a time, and the results analyzed. The tabulation will be done on the close-ended questions in the form of percentages and the results analyzed. The open-ended questions were dealt with a bit differently. All the common thoughts were compiled and then an analysis was drawn up. The results are to serve as primary data. The interviews held gave secondary information needed for a better understanding of the current policies and procedures in place.

## CONCLUSION

This research served as a purpose to remind the public of the harsh reality that many of our children face out in the real world and the many obstacles that hinder them from attaining an education and practicing their rights as children. While some of them are unlucky to get an education, others are fortunate to be given that opportunity but the emotional stress, discrimination, loneliness and unfairness that they are exposed to immediately zaps that motivation to want to make a change in their lives. They become discouraged and don't fulfill their studies causing them to go back at the very place where they started out- poverty. It is a reality that not everyone is born into a wealthy family, some of us are less opportune because everyone is their own individual and has their own fate but regardless of this, if we can at any point in time extend a helping hand to those that ask of us and need of us we should be willing to assist. We are all brothers and sisters all battling out some type of obstacle in life and in our human lives, everyone needs some type of guidance or help to make it through. We need to remain optimistic, willing to face whatever challenge so as to accomplish our goal and be better, educated persons. We not only need someone that will point a problem but also someone that will help to find a solution to it. Everyone needs to chip in so as to help eradicate this poverty that is increasing every day. We should be the example and the leaders that inspire the younger generation to want to become important and respected people in the society in the years to come. As Claire Aumonier once said, "Education comes from living life, following passions, accessing information, observing, reflecting and being inspired by wise and courageous elders in the community",

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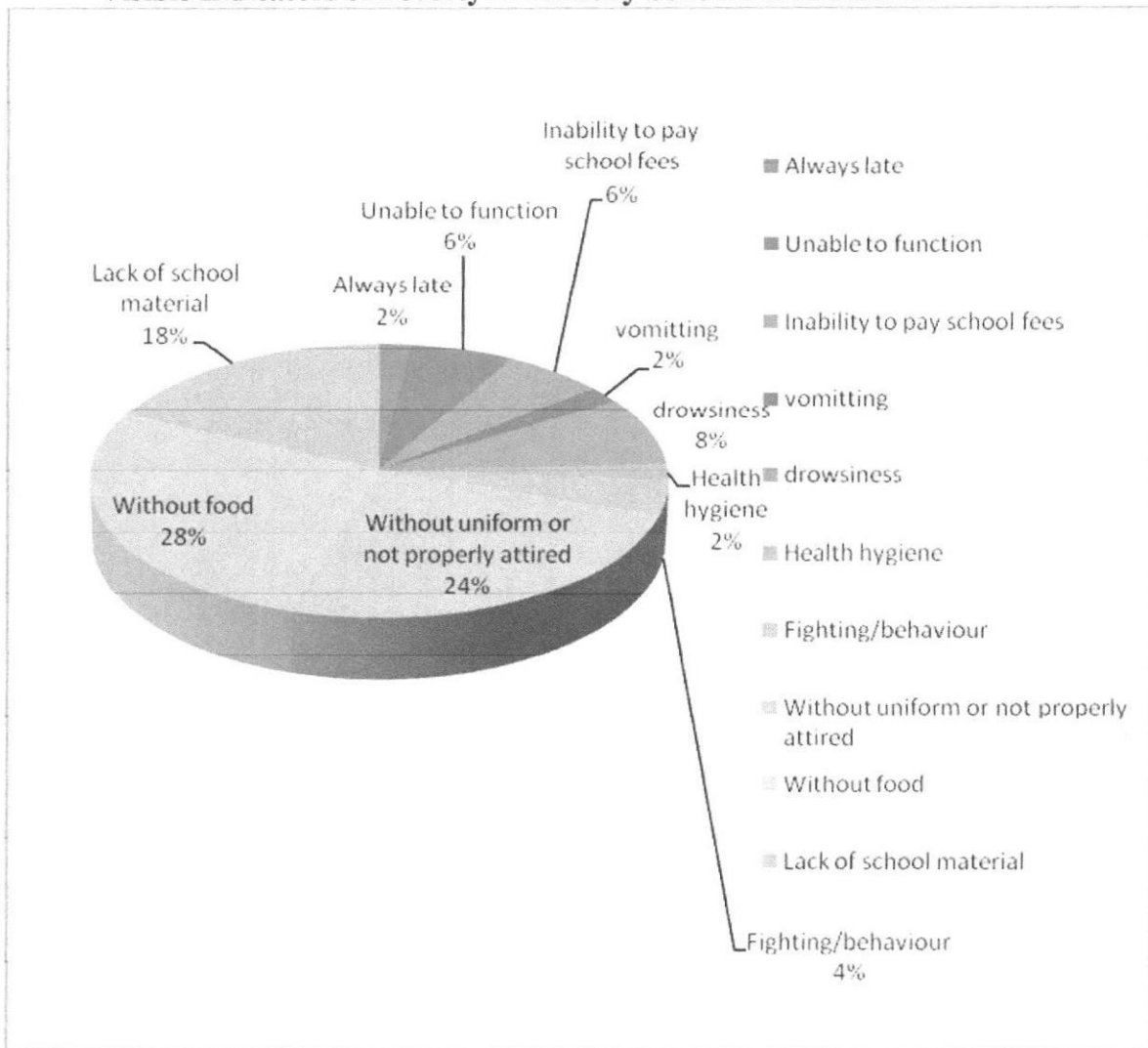
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## APPENDIX A

**What are the visible factors that a child in school comes from a poverty stricken home?**

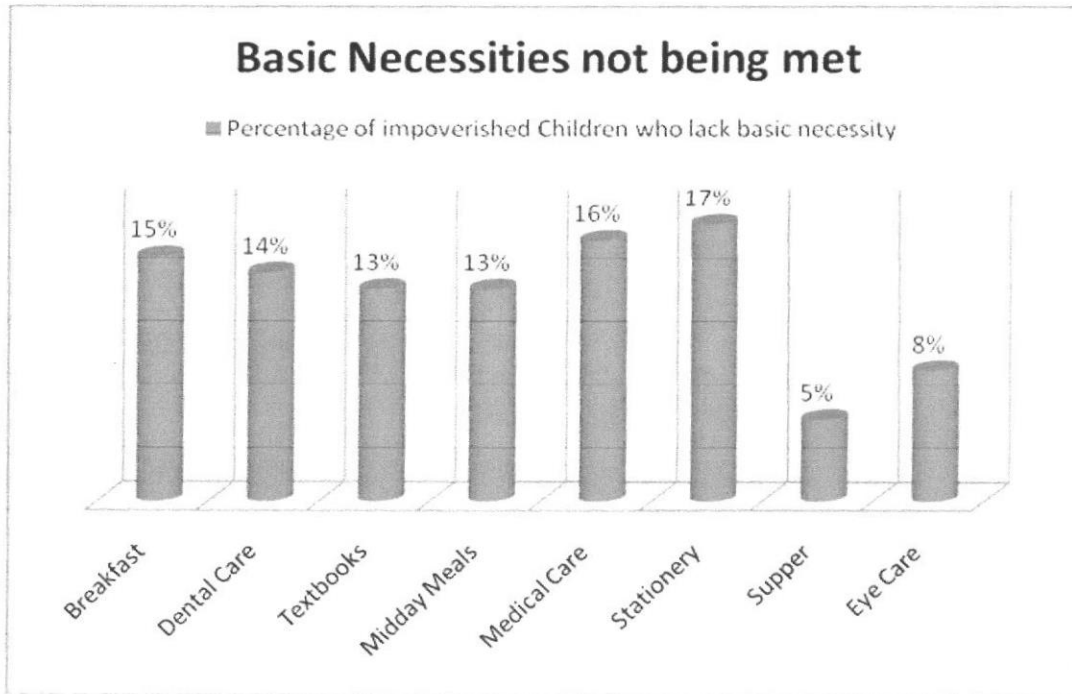
**Visible Indicators of Poverty in Primary School-Belize District**



The Pie chart above shows some of the characteristics of children who attend primary school and live in poverty. The most common characteristic was lack of food, school material and school attire. Other characteristics noted, but not as common as the above mentioned, in order of rank from high to low percentage were drowsiness, inability to pay school fees, inability to function, fighting behavior, bad health hygiene, vomiting and tardiness.

## APPENDIX B

### What do children in poverty lack?



The chart above shows that 15% of the children don't have breakfast, 14% don't have dental care, 13% didn't have textbooks, 13% don't have midday meals, 16% don't have medical care, 17% stationery, 5% don't have supper and 8% don't have eye care. The three basic necessities that are most commonly not being met are breakfast, medical care and stationery.