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A Study on Barrier to School Inclusion

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the study on barriers to school inclusion. The paper discusses the possible barrier for children out of school. The study deals with child, family and school related barriers responsible for the out of school children.

Keywords: School Inclusion, study barrier, primary education.

1. Introduction

Access and enrollment at the primary stage of education have reached near universal levels. The number of out-of-school children has reduced significantly. The gender gap in elementary education has narrowed and the percentage of children belonging to scheduled castes and tribes enrolled is proportionate to their population. Yet, the goal of Universal Elementary Education continues to elude us. There remains an unfinished agenda of universal education at the upper primary stage. The number of children, particularly children from disadvantaged groups and weaker sections, who drop out of school before completing upper primary education, remains high. The quality of learning achievement is not always entirely satisfactory even in the case of children who complete elementary education. The problem of dropout has been continually troubling the primary education system not only in India but in other developing countries also. Dropout does not mean mere rejection of school by children. It leads to wastage of the funds invested in school buildings, teachers' salaries, equipment, textbooks and so on. It also means the existence of some deficiencies in the organization of the primary education system. The subject of 'dropout' or 'wastage' has been studied in India and other countries over the past 65 years and many of the reasons for this educational malady are now known.

In 2009, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act was passed. The Act goes one step further and puts the compulsion on the government to ensure the right for every child in the age group 6 to 14 years to receive at least eight years of child-friendly education in a neighbourhood school. Yet available evidence indicates that while the proportion of children out of school in this age group is declining, a significant number have never been enrolled or have dropped out. Availability of data on children in different dimensions of exclusion helps to understand and develop appropriate strategies to bring them all into school, and to monitor their progress. Hence the present study was taken up to understand the barriers to school inclusion

Some of Barrier to School Inclusion

Gender: Gender can be a key determinant of who does what, who has what, who decides, who has power, and even who gets an education or not. In many societies, boys are seen as the ones who should be educated, while girls are not. If a choice has to be made between sending a boy or a girl to school, the boy will usually be given precedence.

Female roles and responsibilities: The overarching norms of a patriarchal society define roles and responsibilities for the male and female. Schooling decisions, as noted in a host of research studies, are biased in favour of the male child – which stem from the belief that it is he who will be entrusted with earning responsibilities for the household and taking care of the parents in their old age. The male role acts as a powerful incentive for substantial family investment in adequate education attainment. The girl, on the other hand, is believed to be destined for marriage and care of her husband's household and family.

This is seen to contribute to under-investment in girls' education, as is the view that women's labour is important only in the domestic sphere, which does not require much schooling. From an early age, girls are given household duties like cooking and sibling care – tasks that also prepare them for their future roles. A very significant percentage of out of school girls are the eldest female children in their families. Often their schooling is sacrificed, so that the hard-pressed mother has adequate support and other children, especially boys, can go to school. A study conducted in 2005 across 9 states reported how currently enrolled girls experienced barriers to completing the schooling cycle as reflected in irregular school attendance: one-third of those enrolled were reported to only attend occasionally (i.e. can be taken as dropouts), another third attended irregularly and were therefore at risk of dropping out, and only a third attended regularly. In 2007-08, nearly 10 per cent of women in the 5-29 age group in both rural and urban areas cited 'attending to domestic chores' as a reason for dropping out of school. These perceptions of the female role act as a major barrier both for girls' enrolment and for the provision of continued support to them to enable them to complete their education. Studies have noted that weaker parental demand for girls' education, cuts across class, caste, religion, and location (urban and rural areas, and across states).

Child marriage for the older age group (11-13 years): Child marriage is often a factor leading to drop out, especially in rural areas. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 fixed the minimum age of marriage for a male as 21 years, and for a female as 18 years. However, while any male over 18 who married a child was punishable under this Act, it did not render the marriage invalid. This Act has been replaced by The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 which gives the option to the concerned child to make a petition and get the marriage annulled. This may lead to an increase in the age of marriage in future. The NFHS survey in 2005-06 found more than half the women in India are married before the legal minimum age of 18 years. The states with the highest incidence of child marriage in the country are Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

Socio-cultural factors

Socially and economically disadvantaged communities: Social and economic factors together drive the education deprivation for certain groups in India: the SCs, the STs, and Muslims. As noted earlier, enrolment rates for these groups have risen, followed by a sharp reduction in the gap with more privileged groups, especially at the primary stage. The dropout rates are still high though the gaps between children of SC groups and others have declined substantially. Poverty levels are very high in these three groups. As per the IHDS survey conducted in 2005, the incidence of poverty is highest among the STs (49.6 per cent), followed by the SCs (32.3 per cent), and then the Muslims (30.6 per cent). It has also been observed that in areas with a concentration of SC, ST or Muslim communities, civic services like electricity supply, water supply, etc. are poor. The provision of schooling facilities is also deficient. The barriers that children from these communities are thus interlinked.

The Scheduled Castes: The Scheduled Castes are economically vulnerable because they have limited or no access to land and depend mainly on wage labour. Thus, their

livelihoods are very insecure. In urban areas too, the livelihoods of most continue to come from low-paid, low-status and low-skilled jobs. SCs have traditionally been physically as well as socially segregated from the privileged "general castes" and OBCs, especially in the rural areas, and marginalized as a consequence. This group experiences all the demand-side barriers associated with uncertain livelihoods – migration, residence in slums, etc. In addition, many children from this community are first-generation learners, with the associated problems like lack of home support, and low educational aspirations.

The Scheduled Tribes: The Scheduled Tribes, over 600 in number, mostly live in remote areas and in hilly and/or forested terrains, in what used to be largely self-sustaining societies. Today their rights to forest produce have been eroded and they have lost the food security and life patterns which went with it. In integrating with mainstream society they are pushed into casual work, construction, urban domestic work, etc. Traditionally, tribal families work together as a family unit in cultivation and collection of forest produce. This in itself works against regularity in schooling. Since livelihoods are becoming increasingly scarce, families migrate, for some part of the year, to benefit from work opportunities elsewhere. This leads to temporary discontinuation of the children's schooling, and subsequently their leaving school altogether. Adult males also migrate on their own, which may lead to physical and financial hardship on the family left behind. The language and cultural practices of ST communities are distinct from that of the mainstream society in the area, so the content of learning in mainstream schools may not be relevant to their context. For schooling, an important alienating factor for the young child is the gap between his home language or dialect and language used in school. In addition, parents, immersed in a struggle for survival, may see little benefit from schooling.

Economic factors: The negative association between poverty and educational achievement is fairly well-established, i.e. households belonging to the lowest income quintiles are usually the ones with least educational attainment. States with high poverty have the largest proportion of out-of-school children: UP, Rajasthan, Bihar and Odisha and West Bengal. Again, locations associated with high poverty also have high incidence of out-of-school children – rural areas for example, and to some extent urban slums. Social groups disadvantaged by tradition, history or politics also tend to dominate among the poor as well as in having large numbers of children out of school and this is due to the cumulative disadvantages that they face

Child labour: Regular school attendance is a major problem for children who have to work for long hours.

Disadvantaged Groups in Urban Areas: While the proportion of out-of-school children is in general lower in urban areas, these children are concentrated in the lowest expenditure quintile. This quintile includes especially vulnerable groups like working children, children in red light areas (those who belong to families of commercial sex workers), migrant children, and those in families with major illnesses. School participation among street children is very low and in household surveys, homeless populations including street children are not included. Another group where high proportions of children are likely to be out of school are

migrants. When parents migrate for several months at a time for work, their children who accompany them may or may not be working with them, but are likely to find it difficult to attend school regularly.

School related barriers

School infrastructure: In quantitative terms, along with access to schooling, infrastructural facilities in schools have also improved substantially. SSA, from 2000-01 onwards, and other initiatives to meet MDGs in education, provided a boost to the provision of elementary education. They translated into the opening of new schools to reach more and more children, as well as committing resources for improvements in infrastructure so that children were retained in the education process. But still in some rural backward areas infrastructural facilities like electricity, drinking water, and compound wall are below average. In many areas toilet facilities are absent even if present they are not functional. Girl toilets are either absent or not functional in many areas.

Teachers: Teachers play a critical role in determining the quality of the child's experience in school, which includes how and what the child learns. The contribution of teachers may be inadequate for various reasons. There may be a shortage of teachers, or the teachers may lack necessary qualifications and/or professional teacher education, or they may need more academic support to teach the children in their charge. Inadequate teaching input (including on account of teacher absenteeism) has also been pointed out as a crucial gap in this area.

Teaching methods and curriculum: Effective teaching and interesting classroom transactions are essential for retaining students in school. However, the Bhattacharjea *et al.* (2011) [4] study found student absenteeism was as high as 35 percent in primary schools. What is even more alarming is that disinterest in studies has been mentioned in large surveys as the single most important reason for dropping out of school. Around 36 per cent of boys and 21 per cent of girls in the 6-17 age group cited it as the most important reason in the NFHS 3 survey (2007), while 79 per cent (for both boys and girls) cited it as the main reason in the SRI-IMRB 2009 survey. It was also found to be the second most important reason for dropping out of school by NSSO (2004). These findings seem to indicate that teaching quality, pedagogy and curriculum need improvement to retain children in school. Just over half of the schools surveyed in the Bhattacharjea *et al.* (2011) [4] study had a timetable displayed in the school. Use of TLM was observed in only around 10 per cent of the classrooms, and only three or more of the six identified 'child friendly' practices were seen in less than 20 per cent of the 1706 classrooms observed. The study found significant gaps in the ability of teachers to explain mistakes, and provide correct answers, and inadequate competence in devising problems on their own. Other teaching practices that have come under scrutiny are: emphasis on rote learning and failure to view learning as relevant and useful for daily life, complete reliance on textbooks with no examples from day to day life used for teaching. Even though teachers may assess the weaknesses of students correctly, they may be unable or unwilling to use teaching methods which could help these students.

Violence and discrimination in schools: Corporal punishment is now prohibited in schools as per Section 17 of the RTE. There are case studies which have found evidence of

corporal punishment in schools and even of children dropping out as a result. Students are punished by teachers for bunking, for not doing homework, etc. A study by Plan India (2006) regarding impact of corporal punishment on school children was conducted in 41 schools across the four states of UP, Bihar, Rajasthan and United AP. Corporal punishment was found to be common in all the schools despite a ban by the Supreme Court of India. The surveyors found sticks kept within the classroom or in the teachers' hands for beating the children. The common forms of punishment included hitting with hands or stick, pulling hair and ears, and making the children stand for a long time in various positions. Some severe forms that punishment took were kicking, tying children with ropes to a chair or pole after beating them, etc. No gender discrimination was found in giving out punishment. Most of the teachers interviewed for the study, barring some younger ones, felt such punishment was an indispensable part of disciplining students. They blamed large class-size and non-teaching duties for inadequate interaction with students within the classroom.

In 2015, Human Unity Movement (HUM) surveyed 200 parents and 200 students of Lucknow city schools and found that despite a ban 55% of children age 12-17 said corporal punishment is practised in their school on a daily basis. Of these, 55% said they are subjected to emotional punishment, 36% physical punishment. As many as 79% said that corporal punishment had a serious effect on their ability to learn and concentrate in class. More than 63% of parents believing corporal punishment does not have a positive impact on children, 58% do not consider it important to report regular corporal punishment to the principal. (*The Times of India*, 6 May 2015)

Retaining children who are likely to dropout from school is a highly difficult and challenging task as the dropout is a very complex phenomenon receiving different approaches and methods for different kind of problems becoming the dropout situation. Though dropout of a child from school looks it in either problem or an issue of the child per se or its family not eventually it becomes the problem of community and larger society. Keeping this in view, what the child or family fail in doing, need for to be done by the government as finally it becomes the problem of the larger society and government becoming and being responsible for that it has taken it as itself to do something to alleviate the situation.

Conclusion

An essential first step is creating and implementing a system to monitor and track all children from the time they are enrolled to the time they graduate grade VIII, and a uniform protocol for identifying children who are out of school, have dropped out, or are at risk of dropping out. The government should develop clear standards for monitoring children at risk of dropping out, and develop mechanisms to ensure relevant authorities undertake social mapping, especially in marginalized communities, engage with minority communities, and intervene to ensure that children who have left school can return. It is evident that intensity of poverty is an important factor responsible for out of school children. Lack of local earning opportunities for adults affect the children schooling through migration. To tackle this problem immediate measure should be taken. An effective monitoring agency that performs the role of enforcing law to curb child labour and creating awareness in parents and children on education. A continuing process of evaluating goals and objectives related to school policies, practices, and

organizational structures as they impact a diverse group of learners. When all groups in a community provide collective support to the school, a strong infrastructure sustains a caring supportive environment.

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