

## REASONS FOR NON-ENROLLMENT AND SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN TRADITIONAL RURAL COMMUNITIES OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

It is a fact in India that although the percentage of literacy is rising but the number of illiterate children in the age group of 6-14 years is also increasing. This may be due to school dropout and non-participation of children in primary and elementary level of education especially from the agro-occupational communities. The present study was undertaken in the district of Burdwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad with 180 families and tried to capture the picture of school dropout and non-participation in agro-occupational groups of respondents. It is found from the study that school dropout is higher in agro-occupational groups and the main reasons were the parents' negative attitude towards their children's education. The parents from poor families mainly compare between the direct monetary gains from laboring activity of the children and indirect benefits from investments for children's education. Due to poverty and present scenario of rural labour market due to introduction of MGNREGA, the decision to engage them in laboring activities wins. The authors strongly recommend for arranging campaigns regarding benefits (direct and indirect) from education.

**KEYWORDS:** Reasons, Non-Enrollment, School Dropout, Agro-Occupation, Socio-Economic

### INTRODUCTION

Education is a critical input in human resource development and is essential for the country's economic growth (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2010). The literacy rate has been the major determinant of the rise or fall in the indicators like birth rate, death rate, infant mortality rate (IMR) etc. There is enough evidence even in India to show that a high literacy rate, especially in the case of women, correlates with low birth rate, low IMR and increase in the rate of life expectancy (Messias, 2003). The recognition of this fact has created awareness of the need to focus upon literacy and elementary education programmes, not simply as a matter of social justice but to foster economic growth, social well-being and social stability (Ratnesh et al., 2008). In India, although the percentage of literacy is rising, what is alarming is that the number of illiterate children in the age group of 6 to 14 years is also increasing (Sharma et al., 2007). Borooah (2003) examined a large Indian database and observed that while only 11 per cent of children lived in villages without a primary school, 30 per cent lived in villages without a middle school.

As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2012), 96.5% of all rural children between the ages of 6-14 were enrolled in school. This is the fourth annual survey to report enrolment above 96%. 83% of all rural 15-16 year olds were enrolled in school. However, going forward, India will need to focus more on quality of education. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at the primary and upper primary levels improved significantly between 1950-51 and 1999-2000, from 42.6 to 94.9 in case of primary levels and from 12.7 to 58.79 at upper primary levels. The gap between boys and girls

in GER at the primary and upper primary levels has declined significantly from 28.5 and 29.6 percent respectively in 1990-91 to 19 and 18 in 1999-2000 (Ratnesh et al., 2008).

Traditional rural communities are heavily dependent on agro-based occupations as their primary livelihood and there are numerous factors which influence the school participation of children from this occupational sector. The aspects of child labour and educational access include the relationships between child labour and poverty (Rao, 2000). The types of work children carrying out are paid, household-unpaid, agricultural works etc. The child work hinders schooling. There are some studies which look specifically at the relationships between schooling dropout and child labour. The research indicates poverty, gender, location, household education levels, household income levels, and season often interact with child labour to influence a child's access to education (Admassie, 2003; Andvig et al, 2007; Blunch and Verner, 2000; Ersado, 2005). In many cases, girls have more duties than boys (Kane, 2004). The number of siblings and increase in family size (Choudhury, 2006) or father's level of education (Sengupta and Guha, 2002) is significantly related to dropout behavior. Husain (2005) in his study found that the low level of literacy and conservative values within the Muslim community enhance the level of dropout whereas a cost-benefits analysis between uncertainties in the labour market and investment in education determines the dropout percentage among slum dwellers in selected areas of Kolkata.

While the government has been making concerted efforts aimed at expanding the reach of education, the phenomenon of school dropouts remains a blot on the progress of education in India. What is cause for particular concern is the enormity of the problem in most states of India and at all stages of school education where unacceptably high dropout rates have been reported (Choudhury, 2006).

In this backdrop, the present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- To understand the socio-personal characteristics of families of school going children in the age-group of 6-14 years.
- To study the dropout and school-participation picture of the children with reference to Agro-based and other occupational groups in the age-group of 6-14 years.
- To identify the reasons for school dropouts and non-participation of primary and elementary stage of education in the age-group of 6-14 years.

## METHODS

The present study has been conducted in the three districts of West Bengal, namely Burdwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad which are dominated by the traditional rural people with common understanding built on rural tradition, shared values and ideas and common culture (Gallant et al., 2008). 60 families from each district were selected on a stratified random sampling procedure from agro-occupational and non-agro-occupational (viz. business, service, rural artisan, and non-agril. Labourers etc. as primary occupation) clusters of the villages have been selected for interview; totaling 180 respondents altogether. A pre-tested interview questionnaire was employed to collect the data.

Reasons for non-participation or dropout were collected through pilot survey in non-sample area and validated by the experts. Validated causal statements were classified into five broad categories and measured against three levels of agreement viz. 'somewhat', 'moderate', 'extreme' with 1, 2, 3 scores respectively. The sum total of scores for each

individual or each causal statement was taken as the value for analysis.

## RESULTS

Socio-personal characters are the important determinants of human behaviour towards some action. These characteristics can explain the inherent causes of diversity in action and decision making between different groups of people. It is imperative to study these characters in any social science research to understand the overall as well as area-specific features of different variables under investigation. The present section presents these characteristics of the traditional rural communities according to occupational classes.

From the table-1 it is depicted that most of the agro-occupational class of guardians of West Bengal are from middle age group with a mean value of 41.34 years. The two occupational groups differ significantly from each other. There is a huge difference in between agricultural and non-agricultural occupation regarding fathers' educational status (1.65 and 4.08 respectively). The same picture is found also in mothers' educational status (3.69 for non-agricultural and 1.77 for agricultural occupation class). In both the cases, these two classes significantly differ between each other in  $p < 0.001$  level. Table-1 further reveals that the 'mean media contact' score of non-agro-occupational class is 6.31 and that of the agro-occupational class is only 3.81; which again are statistically differs at  $p < 0.001$  level.

**Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Guardians of 6-14 Yrs. Children**

Socio-Economic Characters	Unit of Analysis	Mean $\pm$ Standard Deviation		t-value (p-Level)
		Agro-Occupation	Other Occupation	
Age of guardian/father	Year	41.34 $\pm$ 6.20	39.87 $\pm$ 5.76	1.65 (p>0.10)
Educational status of the father	Score	1.65 $\pm$ 1.75	4.08 $\pm$ 2.01	8.68 (p<0.001)
Educational status of the mother	Score	1.77 $\pm$ 1.63	3.69 $\pm$ 1.74	7.63 (p<0.001)
Media contact level of guardian	Score	3.81 $\pm$ 1.83	6.31 $\pm$ 2.48	7.74 (p<0.001)
Yearly income of the family	INR	41,842.71 $\pm$ 34,746.70	109,529.76 $\pm$ 81,891.47	7.38 (p<0.001)
Housing and sanitation level	Score	12.40 $\pm$ 3.75	17.26 $\pm$ 3.85	8.59 (p<0.001)
Asset possession of the family	Score	7.95 $\pm$ 3.68	10.44 $\pm$ 4.20	4.23 (p<0.001)
Money spent for child education	INR	1,290.10 $\pm$ 4,128.52	4,396.83 $\pm$ 3,598.34	5.35 (p<0.001)

N= 96 (Agro-occupation) 84 (Other occupation)

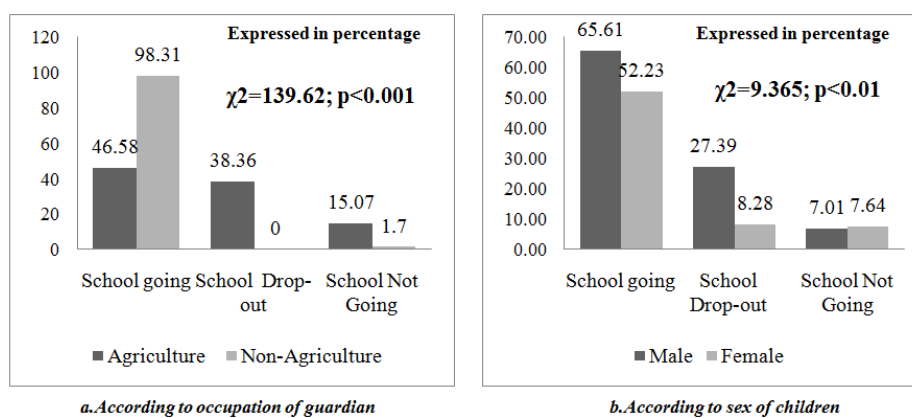
Mean yearly family income of non-agro-occupational class (Rs. 109529.76) is almost 2.5 times more than that of agricultural occupation class (Rs. 41842.71) and naturally are statistically different at  $p < 0.001$  level of significance. Similarly, housing and sanitation mean score is observed higher in the non-agro-occupational class (17.26) than that in agro-occupational class (12.40) of the respondents of the study areas in the state of West Bengal. On the other hand, asset possession score of agro-occupational respondents of the studied families is 7.95 and non-agro-occupational class's mean score is 10.44. In both housing-sanitation and asset possession levels, the two classes are statistically different at  $p < 0.001$  level with t-values of 8.59 and 4.23 respectively.

Further, in Agro-occupational class average money spent per child per year is only Rs. 1290.10 and on the other

hand, non-agro-occupational class spent Rs. 4396.83 per year which is also statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$  level. This may be due to the fact that the wards of non-agro-occupational class access private schools more than agro-occupation class.

### Nature and Extent of School-Participation and Dropout of the Children

Figure-1 depicted the school participation of children from both the groups. It is evident from the table that 46.58 percent of the children from the agro-occupational communities and 98.31 percent of the children from non-agro-occupational communities are going to school. So far the school drop-outs are concerned; as high as 38.36 percent of the children from the agro-occupational communities are dropped from the school; whereas none dropped from non-agro-occupational communities. Moreover, it is found that more than 15 percent of children of agro-occupational groups are not going to school at all; conversely, the case of non-participation to school is only 01.70 percent in the non-agro-occupational group.



**Figure 1: Nature and Extent of School-Participation of the Children**

From the analysis, it is concluded that children of the agro-occupational communities are more involved in parental occupation than those of the non-agro-occupational communities. So, the children of the former group find less time for school participation than those of the latter and their parents are also sometimes reluctant to send their wards to school.

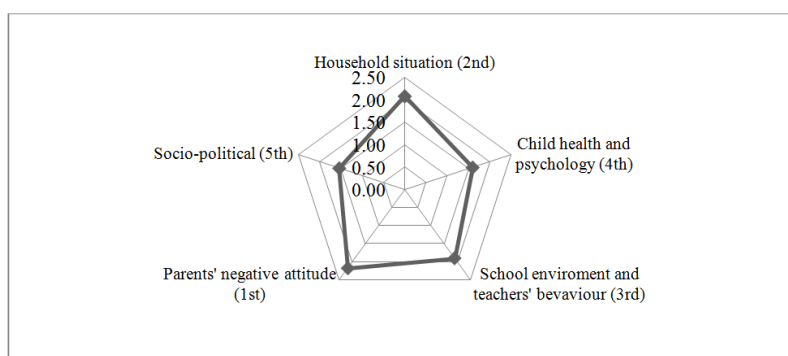
Chi-square value (139.62) at  $p < 0.001$  signifies that there is an association between extent of school participation and occupation of the parents.

School participation and drop out both are more in percentage in case of male child. However drop out is very high (27.39%) for male than that of female (8.28% only). It may be due to that the male children are engaged more in occupational activities.  $\chi^2$  value indicates significant association between sex of the child and school participation

### Reasons for Dropout or Non-Participation in Schooling

Figure-2 along with table-2 depicted the reasons for discontinuation of schooling or non-participation in schooling of children in the age-group of 6-14 years. Among the five broad causes viz. household situation, child health and psychology, school environment and teachers' behavior, parents' negative attitude and socio-political situation, **parents' negative attitude** is the most hindering causes for school participation of the children. **Parent's unwillingness to send wards to school** and their interest **to engage children in laboring than in education** were the two vital causes under this broad heads which ranked 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> individually among all other causes. The parents always compare between the direct

gains from laboring activities and investment for children education. Presently, due to the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty programme, an artificial crisis in labour market appears in peak season. So, in this profit-lose continuum the decision to engage wards in laboring wins. The result is also supported by Bhalotra and Heady (2003); Basu et al. (2003) etc.



**Figure 2: Broad Reasons of School Dropout**

**Household situation**, the combined reason out of **poor economic condition** (the highest ranked individual factor), **the children are in need of household works**, they can **supplement in family income**, they **need to take care of siblings** and **their engagement in peak seasons** was the important household situations and ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> broad reasons (figure-2) that encourage dropout of the children of 6-14 years of old. This finding is also supported by Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1997).

**Table 2: Reasons for Discontinuation of Schooling and Non-Participation of Wards in the Age-Group of 6-14 Years**

Reasons for Dropout/Non-Participation	Mean Scores			Rank
	Agro-occupation	Others	Overall	
<b>Household Situation</b>				
Poor economic condition	2.7	3.0	2.71	I
Need to take care of sibling	1.6	2.0	1.61	XII
Needs help in household works	2.3	1.5	2.28	III
Supplement in family income by job	2.0	1.5	1.99	VII
Engagement in peak season	2.2	2.0	2.20	V
<b>Child Health and Psychology</b>				
Children unwilling to go to school	2.4	1.5	2.38	II
Child suffers from some disability or poor health	1.4	1.0	1.39	XIV
<b>School Environment and Teachers' Behaviour</b>				
Disinterested atmosphere	1.9	1.5	1.89	IX
School location not suitable	1.7	2.5	1.72	XI
Teachers' behaviour with student is not good	1.8	2.0	1.81	X
<b>Parents' Negative Attitude</b>				
Parents' unwillingness to send wards to school	2.2	2.5	2.21	IV
Interest to engage in laboring than in education	2.0	2.0	2.00	VI
<b>Socio-Political Situation</b>				
Insecurity of getting a job/ service	2.0	1.5	1.99	VII
Early Marriage, especially for Girls	1.6	1.0	1.59	XIII
<b>Wilcoxon (Z)=1.37 (p&gt;0.17)</b>				

N=80 (Agriculture=78; Non-Agricultural=2)

**Disinterested atmosphere in school, teachers' apathetic behavior** or **remote school location** were the important reasons with 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> ranks but combined altogether they form 3<sup>rd</sup> major cause of dropout. These findings are supported by Wong and Wong (2005). Children's unwillingness scored 2<sup>nd</sup> rank among all and combined with their disability formed the 4<sup>th</sup> general rank for school dropout and non-participation. Insecurity of getting a job after education or child early marriage especially girls had also impacted as socio-political situation on school dropout of the children.

Comparative picture between agriculture and non-agriculture communities although showing small differences between causes of drop-out, but Wilcoxon (Z) value (1.37;  $p > 0.17$ ) indicating that the causes are at par in both the communities regarding extent of strength of causes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study compared agro-occupational and other occupational groups regarding the school dropout pictures and its reasons in the traditional rural communities of West Bengal. It is seen from the study that in socio-economic characteristics the agro-occupational families have significantly low level of parents' education, yearly income, media exposure, asset possession housing and sanitation condition; and consequently they also spend less amount of money towards their children's education. In dropout and non-participation in primary and elementary level of education, the same picture as in case of socio-economic characters is found; although, unlike general trend of girl dropout, the traditional rural communities of West Bengal shows an encouraging picture that female students' dropout is less in comparison to male children. The most important reason behind such dropout was the parents' negative attitude. Household condition (poverty and children's need in household works etc.) was the second strongest reason followed by unattractive school environment and children's apathy for school education.

The authors strongly recommend making a concerted effort to make the parents feel about educational benefits. The government, NGOs and also the responsible citizens of the traditional communities should take initiatives regarding promotion of education among children of agro-occupational classes in the traditional rural communities of West Bengal.

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