

Original Research Article

Rural adolescents schooling, skills learning-economic development for their own and community health and development

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescents should be studying, have socio-cultural development, economic sufficiency is essential. But in remote, rural regions, there are many school drop-outs because of various reasons with possibilities of sequelae which affect health, development and wellbeing.

Methods: After Institute's Ethics Committees' approval descriptive study was conducted in 100 villages to collect information from adolescents/young, 14-25, years neither studying nor working, as per objectives, 1046 study subjects. divided into, 14-17 years, 18-21 years, and 22-25 years.

Results: Of 1046 study subjects, 717 (68.54%) were girls/ women 29.72% of 14-17 years, 32.35% of 18-21 years 37.93% of 22-25 years, 45 (6.27%) illiterates, 28.17% dropped at primary school. Reasons for dropouts included care of siblings, work in farms, household work. Total 693 of 1046 wanted to learn stitching. The 329 (31.46) boys/men, 30.30% 14-17 years old, 32.21%, 18-21 years, 37.99% 22-25 years 21 (6.38%) males were illiterate, 37.38% dropouts at primary level due to poverty, lack of interest, failure in examinations. Reasons for dropouts included work in farms; work at other places, household work. When asked about desires for skills learning, 1st choice of most of girls/women boys/ men was stitching second choice beauty parlour.

Conclusions: Some adolescents/young were illiterate, many school dropout at primary level, more females married. Lack of support from family, poverty, care of sibling, infrastructure, lack of interest in education, repeated failure in exams, were reasons for drop outs. Most were interested in tailor's job/beautician. They lacked vision of many possibilities.

Keywords: Adolescents, Young, School drop outs, Reasons, Desired skills

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents should be studying and have socio-cultural development. Both are affected by economic status of families. So, in the rural remote, region with poverty and access problems, ground reality is very different. In villages with tribal population, number of school drop-outs remains high. Earlier Engle et al did a study in America about Postsecondary access and success for first-generation college students and reported reasons for college dropouts, some complex and others not so, with possibilities of interventions.¹ In rural areas of developing countries, it may, be lack of schools in villages, no school beyond 5th or 8th or 10th standard or adolescents needs at

home for siblings, lack of interest, extreme poverty and so on. Grantham-McGregor opined that malnutrition which was common in such regions also, affected not only school attendance but school performance also.² This is very true in villages of developing countries. In addition, problems of lack of infrastructure, roads, electricity and water supply, also affected schooling of adolescents and young.

Objectives

Objectives were to know the magnitude of school dropouts, the reasons for drop outs and skills learning of rural tribal adolescents and young of remote region.

METHODS

After taking approval of the ethics committee of the institute. Attempts were made to have cooperation of communities; best use of resources and desired information to plan further action. Research assistant was briefed about the mission. Information from the study subjects was collected with the help of predesigned tool, with some questions having closed ended answers (yes or no), and others for short answers. During mother and child care services it was observed that many adolescents/young were neither regularly going to schools, nor fields nor doing any regular job. They were seen sitting in front of huts or under the trees or around ponds. So, it was decided to look into the problem and try to do something for them, doable and sustainable for income generation, as there is a direct link of resources with family health and community health which was being attempted by community-based services.

It was decided to include such school dropouts, adolescents/young girls and boys between the age of 14-25 years. Attempts were made to talk to everyone as per the inclusion criteria, but all those who could have been the study subjects were not available because of various reasons. All the study subjects were interviewed, one-to-one by field assistant with the help of a pretested questionnaire over a year after informed consent. Information about the level at school dropouts, reasons for the dropout and skills they desired to learn were, recorded on the tool. They were asked and were allowed to talk about the skills they desired to learn, hoping they would talk about doable, useful and sustainable skills so that they could be provided training as per the need. Information was recorded on the hard tool then and there. No one was given tool to fill.

Study subjects

All those who could be approached to be part of the study, total 1046 became study subjects, though the real numbers were higher, but no one available refused. For study subjects, less than 18 years, consent of parents/guardians were taken. Study subjects were divided into 3 age groups, 14-17 years, 18-21 years, and 22-25 years.

Study setting

Study was conducted in 100 villages where mother and child services were started.

Study design

The study design was of descriptive study.

Study period

The study conducted from July 2021 to June 2022.

Inclusion, exclusion criteria and sample

It was decided to include all school dropout, adolescents/young girls, boys between the age of 14-25 years in 100 villages and talk to everyone as per the inclusion criteria but all those who could have been the study subjects were not available because of various reasons. All those who could be approached to be part of the study total, 1046 became study subjects, though real numbers were higher. However, no one available refused. For those less than 18 years, consent of parents/guardians was taken. Study subjects were divided into 3 age groups, 14-17 years, 18-21 years, and 22-25 years.

RESULTS

Out of the total 1046 study subjects interviewed, 717 (68.54%) were girls/ women and 329 (31.46) were boys/ men. Of the 329 males, 98 (30.30%) were 14-17 years old, 106 (32.21%) 18-21 years and 125 (37.99%) of 22-25 years. Of the 329 male dropouts 21 (6.38%) were illiterate, 123 (37.38%) had dropout at primary school, 109 (33.13%) at secondary school, 72 (21.88%) at higher secondary and 4 (1.22%) were graduates but neither on regular job nor trying further studies. Reasons for dropouts at primary level included, need for care of siblings, required for household work and for work on farms but were not interested. Total 109 (33.13%) had drop out at secondary school because of repeated failure in examination, continuation of education not felt necessary and school far away from home.

The 72 (21.88%) study subjects who had drop out at higher secondary, reasons were married required for work outside on cash payment, required for family business and also continuation of education not felt necessary. Details of desires of skills learning in relation to variables is depicted in Table 1 and Table 2.

Of the total 1046 adolescents / young interviewed, 717 (68.55%) were girls / women, 213 (29.72%) of 14-17 years, 232 (32.35%) of 18-21 years and 272 (37.93) of 22-25 years. Of the 717 girls/women, 45 (6.27%) were illiterate, numbers similar to males. Overall, 202 (28.17%) were primary school drop outs, 387 (53.97%) secondary school drop outs, 82 (11.43%) higher secondary school dropouts and only one (0.014%) was a graduate. Of 717 girls/young women, 247 (34.44%) were married, significantly more than males ($p < 0.1$) and 470 (65.55%) were unmarried.

The 247 married study subjects, 59 (23.89%) did labourer's job occasionally, 66 (26.72%) sometimes worked in family farms, 53 (21.46%) did other jobs occasionally and 69 (27.93%) sometimes worked in other villages also. Of 717 girls/women, 229 (31.93%) from middle economic class and 488 (68.06%) from lower economic class, 717 study subjects, 116 (16.17%) belonged to nuclear families and 601 (83.82%) joint families.

Table 1: Choices of skill learning by school drop outs.

Variables	Total	Stitching	%	Beauty parlour	%	Incense stick/ candle making	%	Electrician	%	Waste recycling	%	Others	%
Age (In years)													
14-17	311	196	63.0	98	31.5	7	2.3	4	1.3	2	0.6	4	1.3
18-21	338	229	67.8	93	27.5	4	1.2	3	0.9	1	0.3	8	2.4
22-25	397	268	67.5	103	25.9	11	2.8	7	1.8	1	0.3	7	1.8
Total	1046	693	66.3	294	28.1	22	2.1	14	1.3	4	0.4	19	1.8
Education													
Illiterate	66	17	25.8	39	59.1	6	9.1	4	6.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Primary	325	201	61.9	103	31.7	6	1.9	5	1.5	1	0.3	9	2.8
Secondary	496	382	77.0	95	19.2	5	1.0	2	0.4	2	0.4	10	2.0
Higher secondary	154	90	58.4	55	35.7	5	3.3	3	2.0	1	0.7	0	0.0
Graduate	5	3	60.0	2	40.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	1046	693	66.3	294	28.1	22	2.1	14	1.3	4	0.4	19	1.8
Marital status													
Married	329	247	75.1	74	22.5	2	0.6	4	1.2	1	0.3	1	0.3
Unmarried	717	446	62.2	220	30.7	20	2.8	10	1.4	3	0.4	18	2.5
Total	1046	693	66.3	294	28.1	22	2.1	14	1.3	4	0.4	19	1.8
Type of family													
Nuclear	191	97	50.8	80	41.9	8	4.2	3	1.6	1	0.5	2	1.1
Joint	855	596	69.7	214	25.0	14	1.6	11	1.3	3	0.4	17	2.0
Total	1046	693	66.3	294	28.1	22	2.1	14	1.3	4	0.4	19	1.8
Economic status													
High	2	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Middle	451	258	57.2	169	37.5	10	2.2	5	1.1	1	0.2	8	1.8
Lower	593	434	73.2	124	20.9	12	2.0	9	1.5	3	0.5	11	1.9
Total	1046	693	66.3	294	28.1	22	2.1	14	1.3	4	0.4	19	1.8

Table 2: Choices of skill learning by school drop outs boys/men.

Variables	Total	Stitching	%	Beauty parlour	%	Incense stick/ candle making	%	Electrician	%	Waste recycling	%	Others	%
Age (In years)													
14-17	98	61	62.2	31	31.6	2	2.0	4	4.1	0	0	0	0
18-21	106	71	67.0	29	27.4	2	1.9	3	2.8	0	0	1	0.9
22-25	125	83	66.4	29	23.2	4	3.2	7	5.6	0	0	2	1.6
Total	329	215	65.4	89	27.1	8	2.4	14	4.3	0	0	3	0.9
Education													
Illiterate	21	7	33.3	8	38.1	2	9.5	4	19.1	0	0	0	0.0
Primary	123	63	51.2	52	42.3	2	1.6	5	4.1	0	0	1	0.8
Secondary	109	84	77.1	19	17.4	2	1.8	2	1.8	0	0	2	1.8
Higher secondary	72	59	81.9	8	11.1	2	2.8	3	4.2	0	0	0	0.0
Graduate	4	2	50.0	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	329	215	65.4	89	27.1	8	2.4	14	4.3	0	0	3	0.9

Continued.

Variables	Total	Stitching	%	Beauty parlour	%	Incense stick/ candle making	%	Electrician	%	Waste recycling	%	Others	%
Marital status													
Married	82	52	63.4	25	30.5	1	1.2	4	4.9	0	0	0	0.0
Unmarried	247	163	66.0	64	25.9	7	2.8	10	4.1	0	0	3	1.2
Total	329	215	65.4	89	27.1	8	2.4	14	4.3	0	0	3	0.9
Type of family													
Nuclear	75	53	70.7	15	20.0	4	5.3	3	4.0	0	0	0	0.0
Joint	254	162	63.8	74	29.1	4	1.6	11	4.3	0	0	3	1.2
Total	329	215	65.4	89	27.1	8	2.4	14	4.3	0	0	3	0.9
Economic status													
High	2	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Middle	222	152	68.5	59	26.6	5	2.3	5	2.3	0	0	1	0.5
Lower	105	62	59.1	29	27.6	3	2.9	9	8.6	0	0	2	1.9
Total	329	215	65.4	89	27.1	8	2.4	14	4.3	0	0	3	0.9

Table 3: Choices of skill learning by school drop outs girls/women.

Variables	Total	Stitching	%	Beauty parlour	%	Incense stick/ candle making	%	Electrician	%	Waste recycling	%	Others	%
Age (In years)													
14-17	213	135	63.4	67	31.5	5	2.4	0	0	2	0.9	4	1.9
18-21	232	158	68.1	64	27.6	2	0.9	0	0	1	0.4	7	3.0
22-25	272	185	68.0	74	27.2	7	2.6	0	0	1	0.4	5	1.8
Total	717	478	66.7	205	28.6	14	2.0	0	0	4	0.6	16	2.2
Education													
Illiterate	45	10	22.2	31	68.9	4	8.9	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Primary	202	138	68.3	51	25.3	4	2.0	0	0	1	0.5	8	4.0
Secondary	387	298	77.0	76	19.6	3	0.8	0	0	2	0.5	8	2.1
Higher secondary	82	31	37.8	47	57.3	3	3.7	0	0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Graduate	1	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	717	478	66.7	205	28.6	14	2.0	0	0	4	0.6	16	2.2
Marital status													
Married	247	195	79.0	49	19.8	1	0.4	0	0	1	0.4	1	0.4
Unmarried	470	283	60.2	156	33.2	13	2.8	0	0	3	0.6	15	3.2
Total	717	478	66.7	205	28.6	14	2.0	0	0	4	0.6	16	2.2
Type of Family													
Nuclear	116	44	37.9	65	56.0	4	3.5	0	0	1	0.9	2	1.7
Joint	601	434	72.2	140	23.3	10	1.7	0	0	3	0.5	14	2.3
Total	717	478	66.7	205	28.6	14	2.0	0	0	4	0.6	16	2.2
Economic status													
High	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Middle	229	106	46.3	110	48.0	5	2.2	0	0	1	0.4	7	3.1
Lower	488	372	76.2	95	19.5	9	1.8	0	0	3	0.6	9	1.8
Total	717	478	66.7	205	28.6	14	2.0	0	0	4	0.6	16	2.2

The 717 girls/ women-45 (6.27%), similar to boys/men, had never gone to school, 202 (28.17%) were drop out at primary school, 387 (53.97%) at secondary school and 82 (11.43%) at higher secondary and only one (0.13%) was a graduate. For primary school dropouts, reasons were care of siblings, for work on their own farms but were not interested and required for household work. Of 202 (28.17%) drop outs at secondary school, main reasons for dropouts were repeated failures and continuation of education not felt necessary, school far away from home and required for care of siblings. Around 387 girls/ young women had dropout at secondary school. Main reasons for drop out were marriage, required for care of siblings and no proper facility of schools for girls and lack of resources. Total 82 (11.43%) girls/ women, had drop outs at higher secondary. Main reasons for dropouts at this stage were marriage, required for work outside, required for family business, education not felt necessary and also it was not felt safe for girls as they wanted special facilities for girls, including female teachers too.

DISCUSSION

Whatever be the reasons, the mere fact that a child is not completing her/his school education is not virtuous. No reason can be big enough and act as a replacement for school education. Still poverty, accessibility and availability are the major reasons of school dropouts in India. Abuya³ reported that school dropout is a universal fact. Some girls and boys drop out of schools on their own, others are forced to do under the circumstances of their lives. Friedman et al reported that while close to 95% children of 6-11 years were enrolled in primary schools, there were nearly 30% drop outs at primary stage.³ Between 6-14 years of age 2.50 crore children remained out of school in India as on Rose et al.⁴ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in India was for continuity of education, specially, for rural population.⁵ However, many challenges and barriers persist as is visible with so many young still illiterate and primary school dropouts in one of the best doing states of India. Almost all children in villages are being sent to schools, except for a few who do not go to school, but some leave within a year, others study upto fourth standard or eighth and those living in little bigger villages or those who could go to nearby Taluka places, study upto 10th or 12th standard (cut off for higher education). In another study done, more than 6% girls never went to schools.⁶ EdCil's national household sample survey revealed that in India, percentage of out-of-school boys and girls between 6-10 years was 5.51% and 6.87%, respectively.⁸ For 11-13 years, it was much higher among girls (10.03%) than boys (6.46%). Fifth standard onwards drop out is common, though it starts from first standard. Those who do manage to reach 10th or 12th standard, also take a "U" turn if they fail or if they pass but fail to plan future, or lack of resources for higher education or not essential. So, there may be quite a few youths in villages (20-24 years) who are, not studying and are unemployed. They are not interested in farming;

start smoking, consuming alcohol and so on. Global youth tobacco survey in Maharashtra revealed that 12.9% adolescents (13-15 years) were consuming some tobacco product. Most of them (89%) started chewing tobacco between 5-15 years of age.⁷ Some problems are more in girls because of gender inequalities, restrictions on mobility imposed by parents, because of fear about girls' sexual exploitation and assaults.⁸ Another major issue in adolescent girls who drop outs during schooling is that girls are more likely to get married at an early age with sequelae of early marriage with very well-known complications during pregnancy and birth. Significant dropouts among the study population were girls/women 717 (68.54%) compared to males (31.46%) and many more girls/women's 247 (34.44%) were married compared to men/boys 52 (15.51%). So, schooling in the rural remote areas was also affected by marriage of women at a younger age. In the regions with resource constrains, the situation is responsible for many public health problems and poor economy also. As of 2015, the average dropout rate in India was 17.06% with higher numbers for rural areas Pandey et al did a community based study about adolescent girls health, nutrition and wellbeing in rural Eastern India in which, it was revealed that girls dropped out of school because they were required for household work (37%) or work on the family farm or business (22%).^{9,10} If given proper guidance, adolescents/young can be encouraged to grow into healthy adulthood and productive segment of society. In the present study of 1046 study subjects, 325 (31.07%) were dropouts at the primary level. Reasons for dropouts included care of siblings, work in farms or household work in which they were not interested. Of 496 (47.41%) secondary school dropouts, reasons were repeated failure in education, continuation of education not felt necessary or school far away from home. Of the 154 (14.72%) dropouts at higher secondary, reasons for dropout were marriage, required for outside work for payment in cash on every day basis or required for work in family business and continuation of education not thought necessary. Such studies help in knowing difficulties faced by young population and find ways of helping them learn skills, possible at low cost, sustainable in villages, so that they could have communities with clean environment. It can prevent violence, early marriage, pregnancy, birth, under-nutrition, substance abuse and bring positive motivation, behaviour change and mobilization for their own development and their communities too. There are many ways adolescents/young could grow into healthy adulthood which is productive for themselves, their families, communities and nations they belong. They can learn various skills to generate income and become self-sufficient of 1046 study subjects interviewed, 717 were girls/young women and 329 were boys/ young men, significantly more females, 123 (37.38%) out of 329 males were dropouts at the primary level, 109 (33.13%) secondary level and 72 (21.88%) at higher secondary. Of the total 717 females, 45 (6.27%) girls never went to school even in modern era. Overall, 202 (28.17%) girls

were primary school drop outs, 387 (53.97%) secondary school drop outs, 82 (11.43%) higher secondary school and only one (0.014 %) was a graduate.

Of 329 boys/young men, 98 were 14-17 years old and major reasons for school dropouts included no interest in studies, repeated failures and care of siblings. Among 106 of 18-21 years old, major reasons for dropouts were school too far, did not get admission at higher school for away from the village and transport not available. Reasons for the dropouts in 125 of age 22-25 years old included, required for work away from their own villages for cash payment, and lack of funds for further education or business. Also, continuation of education was not considered necessary.

Over all young were not interested in studies. Repeated failures were also reasons with lack of resources for education, help required for household work, required for work on family farm or business, for care of siblings and for outside work for payment in cash. School related reasons included school far off, not safe for girls, back of facilities for girls in schools and also no female teachers in the schools. When they were asked about their wish to learn skills of day-to-day life to become self-sufficient, they showed interest in learning some skills, mostly stitching. However, many did not think of doable and useful. With concept of resource generation, a lot is possible, like use of waste water and kitchen waste for growing fruits/vegetables in their courtyard for their own use or for income generation. Waste paper and linen could be recycled which otherwise is usually thrown around and burnt, creating problem of pollution in environment. Waste paper could be used for making containers, bowls, bags etc. However old clothes are recycled by villagers for making rugs, wrappers for newborns but they could not think of other ways of recycling cloths. Tree leaves scattered, mud, wood, old foot-wears are scattered all around in villages which can be used for many things. Flowers can be used for making Incense sticks or perfume. Same is possible with many other things. Those late-stage dropouts did not talk of continuation of education. Adolescents' as well as young had not given a thought of such ideas. So there seems to be lack of vision too. Only 4% said that they were interested in waste recycling. They did talk of skills like tailoring, beauty parlour and cheaper grinding system used in households. The reasons given were less resources required and better independent gains. Those adolescents who went to forests with herds for few hrs to earn livelihood, could utilize waiting time to continue to learn by reading/writing. But they did not want continuation of education. Major reasons seemed basic needs of everyone not fulfilled in the villages. Though small numbers, some did talk about skills of mechanic, car painting, Mason's job, candle making, but nobody talked about making mud pots or Diya, water pot, glasses needed in their own villages. There is a need to evolve comprehensive system for continuation of informal education and learning skills in the field of choice at low cost, feasible in the villages

and sustainable. There is need of positive behaviour change, community mobilization with ultimate aim of, development of adolescents and young and better, pollution free future for the rural communities. After identifying their problems and interests, possibilities of training are possible. Actually, some villages have been provided books with emergency lights and play items for outdoor games. Stitching training is being provided. The activities help in keeping adolescents healthy, self-reliant by bringing positive behaviour change, motivation, mobilization and development of communities by encouraging education, income generation and keeping environment clean. Bergstrom et al worked-on interventions that might plausibly (a) increase educational attainment, (b) delay childbearing, and/or (c) delay marriage for adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).¹¹ No category of intervention was found to be categorically effective in delaying pregnancies and reducing child marriages among adolescent girls. Researchers opined while targeted provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including vouchers and subsidies for family planning, and increasing job opportunities for women seemed promising, more research was needed to evaluate the longer-term effects of such interventions. Amin et al did a study to examine whether addressing gender-awareness skills was effective in encouraging girls' paid-work participation in Bangladesh as compared with strengthening knowledge learned in schools or livelihood skills obtained in vocational training.¹² There was strong evidence that addressing gender awareness encourages girls' paid-work participation while tutoring support or livelihood skills training does not. In the context of a strong patriarchal society, gender-awareness skill may be the key to enhancing girls' labour force participation and enhancing education and providing technical skills training may not translate to enhance productivity in the labour market in the absence of agency to utilise them. However, limitation of the study was that it was a random subject study as it was conducted in remote rural area.

Limitation

Article is based on whatever the study subjects told.

CONCLUSION

Some adolescents/young had never gone to school, many dropped out at primary level and many females were married at very young age. Lack of support from family, poverty, care of sibling, peer pressure, infrastructure, lack of interest in education, repeated failure in examinations, were reasons for drop outs. Most were interested in tailor's job. They lacked vision of many possibilities.

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