

Research Article

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (SSA) IN RESPECT OF ACCESS TO AND RETENTION IN FORMAL EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN AGRO-OCCUPATIONAL AND NON-AGRO-OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS IN TRADITIONAL RURAL COMMUNITIES OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken in three purposively selected South Bengal districts namely Burdwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad to assess the general educational impact of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) in traditional rural communities of West Bengal. The specific objective was to compare between the agricultural occupational and other occupational societies in respect of involvement of their children in parental occupation (sex-wise too), their rate of enrolment and retention in school and explore the causes of dropout. The study found that the enrolment of children emerged from agricultural occupational background were less than the children coming out from other occupational background. The dropout was also more in agricultural societies. The study also found that the retention of girl child was more than the male child in agricultural communities which may due to the fact that male children are more engaged in parental occupation viz. farming than the female children. The main reason for drop out were poor economic condition, children unwilling to go to school, occasional and regular engagement in household works and parental occupation; and so parents' unwillingness to send wards to school etc. From the present study, it is recommended that the rural traditional societies especially the agricultural communities should be provided supplementary occupation along with strengthening agricultural vocation to extract more benefit from *Sarva Siksha Abhijan* (SSA).

Keywords: *Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA), Educational Impact, Female Child, Rural Community*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental component of individual emancipation and achievement. It enables individuals to earn decent wages, to live without fear of destitution, and to build healthy and fulfilling lives. In his work, *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) places education as a core part of 'social opportunity' alongside health facilities at a societal level. Yet, education also underpins political freedom and economic growth and may support transparency and security. Moreover, education supports delivery of other development targets, including the MDGs; if universal primary education is not achieved, delivery of the other goals will also be in jeopardy (McGinnis, 2006). Universal Elementary Education or Education for All means providing universal enrollment, universal retention, equity and universal achievement of children. India's goal of universal elementary education of quality points to three main challenges: expanding access, raising learning achievement and reducing gaps in education outcomes.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of the Government of India (GoI), to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the country in a mission mode. Launched in partnership with the State Governments, SSA aims to provide useful and relevant education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years manifested through enrolment and retention of all children in school, bridging of gender and social category gaps in enrolment, retention and learning and enhancement in the learning achievement levels of children at the primary and upper primary stages.

Parents in rural areas in India are mostly engaged in agricultural occupation more likely to struggle to choose between schooling their child and use of the child's labor on the farm or in the household

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(Pritchett, 2004). Rural areas tend to be poorly supplied by schools and the quality of education provided typically low – both could further raise the costs and diminish the perceived return from schooling. Incentives to schooling may be lacking. For example, marginalized individuals are more likely to find it challenging to find a job requiring an education, although the availability of job opportunities is a critical determinant of household decisions about investment in schooling (Clemens, 2004).

In this backdrop, the present study was undertaken in South Bengal districts with the following objectives:

1. To understand the extent involvement of children in household activities and parental occupation in traditional rural communities.
2. To determine the access and rate of retention and drop-out of the children of traditional rural communities in primary and elementary stages in school.
3. To explore the reasons for non-enrolment/dropout from school.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is empirical and based on primary data survey. It was conducted in three purposively selected South Bengal districts namely Birbhum, Burdwan and Murshidabad according to the convenience of the researchers. From each district 3 villages were selected purposively and 20 families from each village having children of age group 6-14 years were selected randomly. Thus, altogether 180 families were selected for the study. Simple statistical procedures like frequency distribution, t-test and χ^2 -test were used to infer the findings for generalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Background of the Respondent Families

It is imperative to know the socio-economic background of the respondent families to perceive the perspectives of any study. Table-1 depicted the socio-economic background of the respondent families. The average age of the household head is 41.34 and 39.87 years respectively for agro-occupational and non-agro-occupational families which is statistically at par with each other. So, in general, the age of the household head of families having 6-14 years aged children is around 40 years.

In all other socio-economic characters, non-agro-occupational families are significantly higher in status. In case of both, fathers and mothers from agricultural families attained education upto primary level (Education score is 1.65 and 1.77 respectively), whereas in non-agricultural families, the same is upto elementary level (Education score is 4.08 and 3.69 respectively).

In media exposure and asset possession, agricultural families are significantly low (score value=3.81 and 7.95 respectively) in status in comparison to non-agricultural families (score value=6.31 and 10.44 respectively).

Values of Student's t-test for both the cases (7.78 and 4.23 respectively) are significant at $p < 0.001$ level. Because the average yearly income of the non-agricultural families is significantly higher (Rs. 109.529 thousand against 41.842 thousand; t-value=7.38 which is significant at $p < 0.001$), the money spent for child education is also significantly higher (Rs. 4.397 thousand against 1.290 thousand per annum; t-value=5.35 which is significant at $p < 0.001$) in comparison to agricultural families.

Extent Involvement of Children in Household Activities and Parental Occupation

Primary occupation of the traditional rural communities of West Bengal are mostly farming including agricultural labouring, but there are some other occupations also like service, small business, carpentry, weaving, labouring other than agriculture, fishing etc.

The present study as per the objectives divided respondents into two categories such as Agricultural and Other occupation in the state of West Bengal.

Socio-economic status of the guardians influence the elementary education of the children and socio-economic status depends on the parental occupation.

Table-2 shown below presents the extent of involvement of children in household activities and parental occupation.

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Table 1: Socio-Economic Background of Respondent Families

Socio-Economic Variables	Unit	Mean Scores/Values		T-Value	P-Value
		Agricultural Occupation (N=96)	Non-Agricultural Occupation (N=84)		
Age of the Household Head	Years	41.34	39.87	1.65	0.101
Educational Status of the Father	Score ^a	1.65	4.08	8.68	0.000
Educational Status of the Mother	Score ^a	1.77	3.69	7.63	0.000
Yearly Income	Rs. In thousand	41.842	109.529	7.38	0.000
Media Exposure	Score ^b	3.81	6.31	7.78	0.000
Asset Possession	Score ^c	7.95	10.44	4.23	0.000
Money Spent for Education	Rs. In thousand	1.290	4.397	5.35	0.000

^aScore is based on educational scale: 0=Illiterate; 1=Can read and write; 3=Primary; 4=Elementary; 5=Secondary; 6=Higher Secondary; 7=Graduate & Above

^bScore is the sum of extent of exposure to different media: 0=Never; 1=Sometimes; 2=Always

^cScore is the sum of values of different assets

The children who do not do household work are 8.22 per cent in agricultural occupational groups, but in other parental occupational group, the children who do not work are 33.90 per cent. In the Agricultural-occupational families the children who do petty household work belong to 16.44 per cent, but the children of other occupational families the wards doing petty household work belong to 33.05 per cent. Again the wards doing household works are more than 17 per cent in the Agro-occupational group whereas nearly 13 per cent go to the wards of other occupational group.

Furthermore 38.36 per cent children remain involved in their parental occupation seasonally in Agro-occupational communities while 12.71 per cent children help their parents of the other occupational communities.

Apart from that, children having own job or working on other's field bear 12.33 percent in the Argo-occupational communities whereas the children doing the same from the other occupational communities are 0.85 per cent.

Table-2: Extent of Involvement in Parental Occupation

Extent of Involvement	Agril. Occupation (N=146)	Other Occupation (N=118)	Statistical Implication
Non-Involvement (NW)	12 (8.22)	40 (33.90)	χ^2 -test value=236.08 p<0.001 signifies that there is significant difference in extent of involvement in parental occupation between Agricultural and Other occupation
Petty Household Work (PHW)	24 (16.44)	39 33.05	
Regular Household Work (RHW)	26 (17.81)	16 (13.56)	
Parental Occupation Occasionally (OPW)	56 (38.36)	15 (12.71)	
Parental Occupation Round the Year (RPW)	10 (6.85)	7 (5.93)	
Having Own Job (OJ)	18 (12.33)	1 (0.85)	

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It is observed from the Table 2 that the children in the Agro-occupational rural communities are more involved in their parental occupation than the children in other occupational rural communities where the percentage of the wards is higher in petty household work than that in Agro-occupational groups; and can be concluded that the Agro-occupational rural communities find less time in going to school and they are generally deprived of the facilities of *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* (Education For All) in West Bengal.

Figure 1 depicted a male-female comparison regarding involvement in parental job. It is found that the female involvement is highest in regular household work; whereas they had very less involvement in comparison to male child in parental works. In rural communities, males are more involved in regular job than female and so, male children are also involved to help their father in their regular jobs.

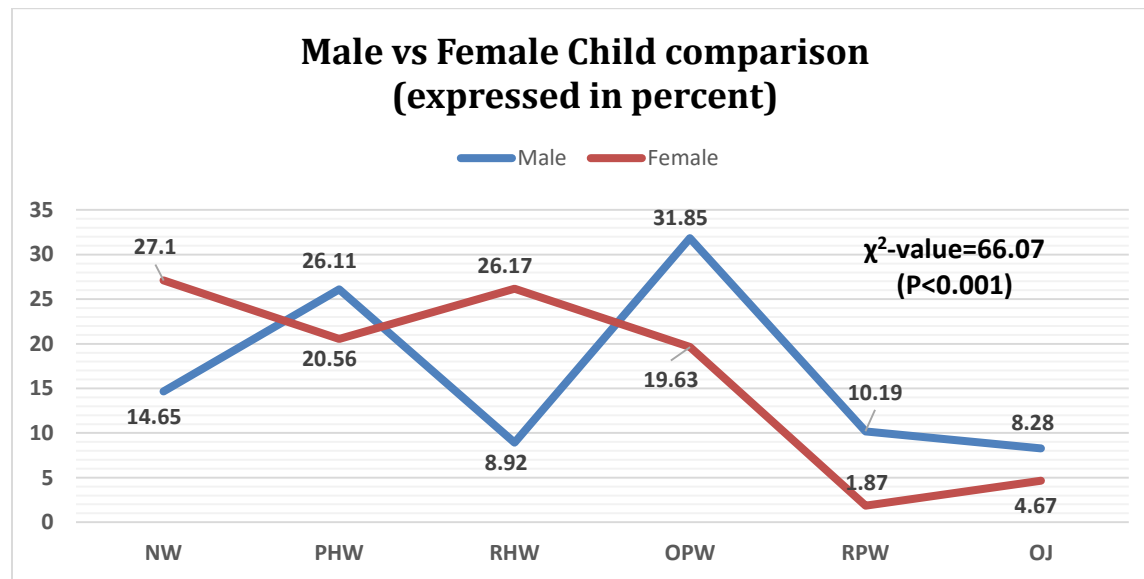


Figure 1: Male and Female Child Comparison Regarding Involvement in Parental Occupation

Access and Rate of Retention in School and Drop-Out from Elementary Stages

In agro-economic perspective it is imperative to study the nature and extent of school participation of the children from agro-occupational communities. On the contrary, in the Socio-economic back ground the children of non- agro-occupational communities are advanced so far school participation is concerned as shown in Table 3. It is evident from the Table 3 that the children from agro-occupational communities the enrollment percent (access to SSA) is around 85 percent as against almost 99 percent from non-agro-occupational communities.

Table 3: Extent of School Participation by the Children from Agricultural and other Occupation

School Participation	Agril. Occupation (No. of Children=146)	Other Occupation (No. of Children=118)
School Going	68 (46.57)	116 (98.31)
Drop Out	56 (38.36)	0 (0.00)
Not Admitted at all	22 (15.07)	2 (1.69)

It is also a disheartening fact that among this 85 percent enrolled from agro-occupational communities 38.36 percent (45 percent of total enrolled) had dropped out from the elemental or lower level of

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schooling. On the other hand, from non-agro-occupational societies drop out percentage is nil. It may be due to the fact that children from agro-occupational communities are more involved in parental occupational than other communities (refer Table 2).

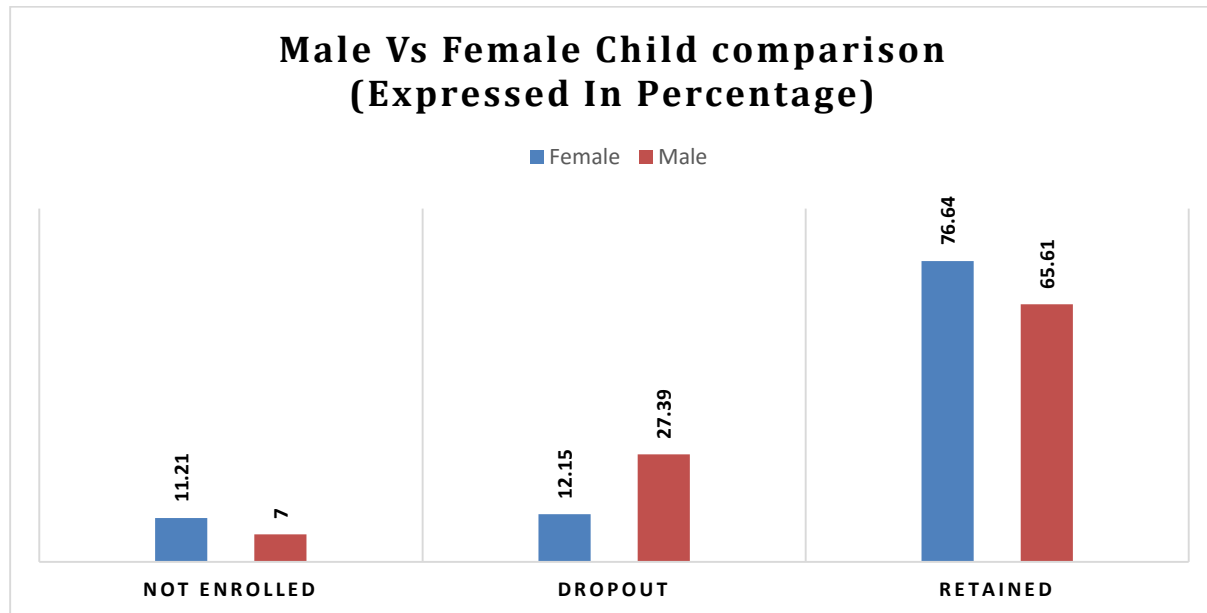


Figure 2: Male and Female Child Comparison Regarding Enrolment, Retention and Dropout

A comparative picture in Figure 2 clearly shows the disappointing picture of school dropout of male children. Male children drop more than the female in rural communities and it is due to the fact that they have to help their parents regularly in farming activities; and in rural communities more than 70 percent families are engaged with farming.

Reasons for Non-Enrolment/Dropout

The present section shows the reasons for discontinuation of schooling (Table 4). A three point scale (1 to 3 representing agreement from the extent of somewhat to extreme) was used to assess the strength of reasons. It is revealed from the table that the main reason for discontinuation of schooling are poor-economic condition of rural communities (mean score=2.75). It has been shown that the economic condition of the families is directly related to the elementary education of the wards in traditional rural communities.

The second reason was children's unwillingness to go to school with mean value of 2.39. The study reveals the fact that there is a trend of not-going to school to be generally found among the children of the traditional rural communities.

So many factors are acting behind such a bent of their mentality. As such those children who are involved in work for earning are gradually keeping away from their schools and later they lose interest in going to school and so they cannot adopt the facilities of *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*.

The third reason for discontinuation was their need in household work (Mean value=2.30). Table-2 revealed that in the traditional rural communities a large number of children are engaged in household work which makes the children disinterested in study.

Parents unwillingness to send wards to school (mean value of 2.19) was another vital reason for discontinuation of schooling and non-participation of wards in SSA. Low socio economic status can adversely affect the attitude towards schooling and education. However, the study throws light on the fact that the lack of awareness of literacy and education round the country is still evident in all sections of the rural traditional communities including tribal population.

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Table-4: Reasons for Non-Enrolment/Discontinuance from School

N=69

Reasons for Discontinuance	Frequency of Responses				Mean Score	Rank
	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)		
Poor economic condition	0	3	11	55	2.75	I
Children Unwilling to go to school	0	7	28	34	2.39	II
Disinterested atmosphere	1	25	26	17	1.85	IX
School location not suitable	2	30	24	13	1.69	XI
Teachers' behaviour with student is not good.	4	20	30	15	1.81	X
Need to take care of sibling:	1	38	14	16	1.65	XII
Needs help in household works	0	13	22	34	2.30	III
Supplement in family income by job	0	22	27	20	1.97	VII
Parents' unwillingness to send wards to school	0	15	26	28	2.19	IV
Occasional engagement in parental occupation	1	16	23	29	2.16	V
Disinterest in wards' education for maintaining their traditional livelihood	1	20	28	20	1.97	VI
Insecurity of getting a job/service	1	20	29	19	1.96	VIII
Child suffers from some disability or poor health:	29	17	17	6	1.39	XIV
Early Marriage, especially for Girls	26	13	13	17	1.62	XIII

The next reason was occasional engagement in parental occupation which was considered as the fifth reason with mean value=2.16. This reason is seconded by Social and Rural Institution (2010), that in rural India more than 72% children were involved in Agricultural work seasonally to supplement their household income, and hence they gradually discontinue schooling and their non- participation in education occurs.

The sixth main reason for discontinuation was that the parents were disinterested in wards education, specifically the farmers for maintaining their traditional livelihood (mean value=1.97). Basu *et al.*, (2003) observed that fathers who are in salaried employment are more likely to be aware of the importance of education, and hence, they invest more in their children's education. The children themselves may also be more aware of the benefits of education. On the other hand, parents are less likely to invest in their children's education when direct occupational transmission or transference of capital is a viable option to obtain a good position in society for their children. Hence, farmers and business owners may feel less need to invest in their children's education than people of independent employment. Also, for small farmers the opportunity costs of sending their children to school may be high, since they are more likely to expect their children to help out tending the land and rearing livestock, especially during peak working times.

Supplement in Family income by job is vitally important seventh reason having same mean value of 1.97 as the previous reason. It is apparent from the Table that in the traditional rural communities, the family income is so low that the presents are willing to supplement their income by the wards only to get a relief from the miserable condition of their family. The parents in the rural communities are not sure of engagement of their wards in any job or service after completion of their studies at Elementary stages in school. So, they resist their wards to go to school in order that they can supplement the family income. Thus the wards tend to become child labourers as well as school dropouts. Insecurity of getting a job or service after completion of education was places in eighth position as a reason for discontinuation (mean score=1.96).

Disinterested atmosphere (mean value=1.85), Teachers' behavior, (mean value=1.81), School Location (mean value=1.69), Sibling caring (mean value=1.65), Early Marriage especially for Girls (mean value=1.62), Disability/Poor health of Child (mean value=1.39) were also some of the important factors that enhanced dropout from school. These findings were separately supported by different educational

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reports of Colclough and Lewin (1993); Chough (2004); Wong & Wong (2005); The Times of India (2013) etc.

Education not only enables individuals to earn decent wages but also builds the society healthy to live without fear. *Sarva Siksha Abhijan* (SSA) is the programme to fulfill this aim of the Nation. The present study assessed the educational impact of SSA in the traditional rural societies in respect of access and retention of children of age group of 6-14 years in school and found that the enrolment of children emerged from agricultural occupational back ground were less than the children coming out from other occupational back ground. Consequently the dropout is more in agricultural societies. A ray of hope found in the study that the retention of girl child is more than the male child in agricultural communities which may due to the fact that male children are more engaged in parental occupation viz. farming than the female children. The main reason for drop out were poor economic condition, children unwilling to go to school, occasional and regular engagement in household works and parental occupation; and so parents' unwillingness to send wards to school etc.

From the present study, the same universal recommendation is forwarded that the rural traditional societies especially the agricultural communities should be provided supplementary occupation along with strengthening agricultural vocation to extract more benefit from *Sarva Siksha Abhijan* (SSA).

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