

Rights of Dalit Children in Bihar

A study report from ten districts



Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti
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Rights of Dalit Children in Bihar

**A Study Report Based on Field Survey
Conducted in ten Districts of Bihar**

Research Conducted by

Sunil Kumar Jha

MA in Social Work (TISS), Mumbai LL.B (Calcutta University)

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PREFACE

During the 42 years of its existence, Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS) has consistently adhered to the goals of strengthening democratic values, promoting Dalits and Tribals, women and children and other weaker sections of the society through action - reflection strategies and programs, to achieve its vision of a just and egalitarian society.

This book consists of the study entitled, "Violation of the Rights of dalit children and its multi dimensionality : a report based on the field survey conducted in 10 districts of Bihar," is an important contribution towards understanding our dalit community, particularly children, can give an impetus to our approach regarding the Rights of dalit children. Rights of children are in-alienable and inter-connected to a gamut of socio-political factors which we need to grasp better to be effective.

Bihar has always been at the domain of heated discussions in the country for its least growth rates especially for the under-development of its children, in the aspects of education, health and the degradation of moral values.

The study has made some significant revelations. Illiteracy was found to be very high in the Dalit community with 62.47% parents saying that they never studied. The study also showed that 79.9% people have no land and thus make them depend on agricultural labour. 75% of the Dalit children shared their strong feelings of being discriminated by the upper caste children and teachers in their schools. There are many such things in the study which can open our eyes better.

On this occasion, I want to thank Mr. Sunil Jha and his team for undertaking this difficult study creatively and bringing out the final reports on time.

I express my sincere gratitude to all others, too, who have helped to materialize this study, especially Mr. Santosh Kumar who really took lots of pain and interests and coordinated the programme on behalf of BDVS.

I hope and believe that the study will be a real booster shot for all those who are involved in the upliftment works of Dalit children.

Fr. Jose Kariakkattil, S.J

BDVS, Patna

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am deeply grateful to all the people whose invaluable association has facilitated the completion of this study titled 'Violation of the Rights of Dalit Children and its Multidimensionality: A Report Based on the Field Survey Conducted in ten Districts of Bihar'. First and foremost, my gratitude goes to the participants who gave their consent to respond to our survey and participate in the Focus Group Discussions and the Key Informant Interviews-women, men, girls and boys, and community members from Dalit community and school teachers. Their life experiences are the foundation for this study. We fully understand that reliving some of the painful experiences is not easy.

Next, my heartfelt gratitude goes to the volunteers of the Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS) for facilitating the field survey in ten districts of Bihar- Darbhanga, Jamui, Khagaria, Madhepura, Munger, Muzaffarpur, Nawada, Patna, Samastipur, and Sheikhpura, by coordinating with the respondents for the meetings and also for arranging logistics wherever needed. I am thankful for their valuable time, cooperation and support during the field work for this study, without which this study could not have been completed.

My sincere gratitude goes to Mr. Santosh Kumar, Programme Coordinator, BDVS, for coordinating with the volunteers from BDVS and overseeing that the survey work goes on in a smooth manner. His constant pursuit has made this work possible. I am also thankful to the team of field investigators namely Bittu Kumar for Darbhanga, Rahul Kumar for Madhepura, Prem Kumar for Muzaffarpur, Rama Kumar for Samastipur and Munger, Sujit Mishra for Sheikhpura and Patna, Baidyanath Kumar for Nawada, Sikandar for Jamui, and Ranjeet Kumar for Khagaria, who undertook this rigorous data collection exercise. I am sure it must have been a great learning for them as it has been for me.

Special thanks goes to Ms Pratima Paswan of Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikas Manch, Patna, Mr. Satyendra Kumar, Founder Director, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion, New Delhi and Mr. Vijay Prakash of Praxis for providing their expertise on the subject from inception till finalisation of the report. I am indebted for their valuable and in-depth comments and suggestions from time to time.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to Fr. Jose Kariakatil Director, Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti, Patna for trusting me to have the perspective and the skill to conduct this study and for contributing with his reflective comments and relevant queries on the overall research design, development of tools for data collection, field plan etc. from time to time. His valuable inputs on the drafts of the report have further enriched the analytical presentation of the data. I thank Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti for the financial support which made this study possible.

Sunil Kumar Jha

Chapter One

Executive Summary

This study is an inquiry into violation of the rights of Dalit children in Bihar in the context of the multidimensionality of the problem. There are many aspects which are already known through the work of activists, academicians, researchers, and by Dalit people themselves through their narratives. However, understanding the violation of the rights of Dalit children have been mostly through an issue-centric approach. For instance, a majority of the studies have been conducted with specific boundaries of education, health, agriculture, livelihood, disease pattern, violence, forced labour, bonded labour, social and economic status etc. This small study tried to look into the issue of violation of rights by Dalit children systematically adopting a broad contour rather than being issue-centric. Since the rights of children are inalienable and issues are interconnected with each other in the context of family, surroundings, social and economic status, structural issues, government policies and cultural and normative practices, so this study had tried to look at it through a multi-dimensional approach.

Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti is an NGO which has been working with Dalit communities and their children since decades commissioned this survey to study the issue comprehensively taking into account most of the dimensions. The study was conducted in the month of October and November 2022 through a field survey of 400 households in twenty Gram Panchayats across ten districts of Bihar (Darbhanga, Jamui, Khagaria, Madhepura, Munger, Muzaffarpur, Nawada, Patna, Samastipur and Sheikhpura). The survey was supplemented with FGDs with groups of Dalit children and adult community members from Dalit communities and in-depth interviews with teachers from government schools in these Panchayats where Dalit children go to study. There are some important findings from the survey:

- The extent of illiteracy was found to be very high among Dalit families with 62.47% parents saying that they had never studied. From the rest who were literate, about 2% of them said that they could just sign their names.
- Not owning any agricultural land by an overwhelming majority of Dalits (79.9%) made them dependent upon farm labour (50%) which was seasonal in nature. This also made them dependent upon market and government schemes for food security. Price rise or a change in entitlement for government subsidies on low cost food grains would have a serious implication on nutritional aspect of Dalit children.
- The survey found a small proportion of Dalit women (8.30%) running small shops outside their house selling snacks and low-priced items of daily use.
- Quite a significant proportion of households (19.25%) reported of cases of miscarriage

and abortions indicating poor ante natal check-up and care of Dalit women.

- Cases of deaths of infants were reported by 21.25% of the Dalit households interviewed. Quite a significant percentage of infant mortality was recorded in Dalit families.
- Food availability and nutritional diversity were found to be satisfactory for Dalit children with 95.41% of the families being able to feed their children at least three times a day and 97.3% saying that they had green vegetables in their meal the previous day.
- The survey found that 12.8% of Dalit households did not possess a ration card, whereas out of those who had, 59.5% complained that some of their family members names were yet to be added in the ration card.
- The practise of open defecation in Dalit children is still very high with 74.75% saying that their children have to go out in open to relieve.
- Percentage of children dropping out from the school was quite high. Around twenty six per cent (26.02%) of Dalit children were found to have dropped out from the school. The drop-out rate of school-going children is highest in Musahar caste (37.06%) followed by Pasi caste (31.03%) and other numerically small castes (like Dom, Karori, Nat, Chaupal, Rajwar etc.), whereas the lowest drop-out rate has been recorded for children belonging to Dusadh (6.85%) followed by Dhobi (12.50%) and Ravidas/Chamar (17.78%) castes.
- The survey found that out of those who dropped out, 42.02% of children had started working and a majority of them (60.56%) migrating to other districts/states.
- Reasons cited as the cause behind drop out by Dalit families included the following: Loss of interest in study (39.3%), poor financial condition of the family (29.41%), discriminatory attitude of teachers (11.8%), abusive treatment by teachers (9.8%) and marriage or pregnancy (7.9%).
- Corporal punishment against students was quite common as confirmed by 68% of the respondents in this survey.
- The two most cited discriminatory practices committed against Dalit children in the schools were
 - Only Dalit children are asked to clean school premises (52.4%)
 - Only Dalit children are forced to sit behind in the classroom (47.1%)
- Around eleven percentage (10.7%) of the respondents complained about their children

facing caste-based taunts in their schools by teachers who made fun of their appearance, clothes and body colour.

- During the FGDs with Dalit children, some of them shared their experiences of facing rejection from their non-Dalit classmates who were from almost all non-Dalit castes including OBCs. This included practice like refusing to eat from the plates used by Dalit children, not sitting with them or near them and not including them in their play-group (21.75%). Among Dalit children, Musahar caste children faced the highest incidents of discrimination across all the districts where the study was conducted. Altogether twenty FGDs were conducted with children and such instances of discrimination between children were recorded in all the interactions across the ten districts, thus indicating how caste discrimination is deep embedded in the families of children from non-Dalit castes.
- During the household survey, only few respondents who were talked about their daughters or sons facing sexual harassment. But, in the FGDs with children, 45.68% of girls shared their experience of facing harassment. As most of the girls participating in the group interactions were school-going, they said that they faced harassment on way to or back from school. Though the survey did not come across the cases of harassment of Dalit boys, it does not imply that it does not happen.
- Half of the respondents said that their children had friends from non-Dalit castes as well. But 37.4% of Dalit children still did not have any friend who was a non-Dalit
- Within Dalit families, gender inequity and practices that perpetuate gender discrimination existed. Girls and boys were confined to the normative behaviour of gender.
- The survey found that some of the social and cultural practices that harmed children and girls were still in practice in Dalit communities. These included:
 - Menstruation is still a taboo for majority of Dalit households (76.25%)
 - Mother and new-born have to be confined into a closed room for a week (69.25%)
 - Taking a sick child first to a traditional healer (51.75%)
 - Girls should be married off at young age to prevent family dishonour (47.75%)

Chapter Two

Introduction and Methodology

Background

The Constitution of India guarantees every person in our country the right to equality which includes right to equal treatment and equal protection under the existing laws (Article 14). This is enshrined under Part III of our Constitution which spells out the fundamental rights. Further, our Constitution enjoins upon the State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15). Discrimination on the ground of caste is a bitter reality of our country and this social evil is still in practice in both visible and subtle ways.

Dalits or Scheduled Castes are a group that have faced discrimination since centuries from upper caste people and have been treated as social outcasts who have been kept deprived of even basic things. They are confined to the bottom most rung of the social hierarchy. The scenario is, however, changing due to affirmative policies and programmes initiated by the government and political assertion and mobilisation by Dalit groups or groups empathetic to the rights of Dalits. But, the progression is painfully very slow which impacts women and children the most. Dalit children, in particular are vulnerable because of their young age. The exclusion they experience right from the time they take birth leave a poor impression about the society to which they belong and leave a deeper impact on their psyche which remains with them for the rest of their lives. Our day to day experiences show that Dalit children face violation of their rights in the realm of their survival, development, protection and participation. Bihar being the state at the bottom of the human development index, the deprivation of Dalit children in the state is worse.

The total population of Scheduled Caste in Bihar as per Census 2011 is 1,65,67,325 which is 15.91 percentage of the total population of Bihar. According to an estimate, 46 percentage of the population comprises of children (0-18 years). Going by this, in the year 2011, SC children's population in 2011 was 76,20,970. If this big chunk of population remains left out and deprived with even basic rights like health, education and protection being violated, one can never think of the state and the country's economic growth and doing good on human development indicators.

Secondary data from studies and surveys conducted by the governments go on to show that a huge disparity still exists between Dalit and non-Dalit children when it comes to health, education and availability and access to basic services for them. An analysis of under-five mortality rate based on social background of the children reported in the NFHS IV (2015-16) found that Dalit children in Bihar suffer the highest rate of infant mortality among the poor performing states. Under-five mortality among SC children was reported

at 72.9 deaths, respectively, against 54 deaths in non-SC/ST families¹. Some other studies have found a higher prevalence of stunting in Dalit children than upper caste and OBC children. This has been attributed to caste discrimination practices against Dalits and poor access to health services by them (Deshpande and Ramchandran, 2021) and exposure to open defecation practices or prevalence of disease environment (Spears, 2018).

The data published by the Education Department, Government of Bihar about drop-out rate of Scheduled Caste (SC) children in the state shows a steady decline in drop-out rate of Dalit children at primary and upper-primary level in schools between 2015-16 and 2019-20, which is an encouraging indicator. But during the same period, the drop-out rate of Dalit children at secondary level has increased sharply from 59.05% to 65.01% showing an increase in drop-out rate by 5.96%. This also indicates a decrease in transition from secondary level to senior secondary level of education by Dalit children.

Drop-out rates in Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary Levels (2015-16 and 2019-20)

Year	Primary			Upper Primary			Secondary		
	Girls (G)	Boys (B)	G + B	Girls (G)	Boys (B)	G + B	Girls (G)	Boys (B)	G + B
2015-16	25.29	27.99	26.73	38.53	50.1	45.16	53.42	62.94	59.05
2019-20	21.69	21.62	21.65	39.66	44.33	42.10	62.40	67.15	65.01

(Source: Department of Education, Government of Bihar, reported in Bihar Economic Survey, 2021-22, Pg. 393)

The New Education Policy document (2019) recognises that 'a multiplicity of factors, including lack of access to quality schools, poverty, social mores and customs, and language have had a detrimental effect on rates of enrolment and retention among the Scheduled Caste children'.

Discrimination against Dalits is manifested in the form of violence- physical and sexual. Data on incidents of crime committed against Dalits help us understand the extent and severity of the situation. However, it is quite surprising that the Crime in India reports published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India does not report a single incident of crime for the year 2021, whereas in the report for 2020, there is a mention of only one incident of crime registered under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. Non-reporting of crimes committed against Dalit discourages an informed discourse on Dalit's right to be protected against crimes and practices that hurt the dignity and violate their rights. Therefore secondary data published by the governments do not tell the complete or the real

¹Bora JK, Raushan R, Lutz W (2019) 'The persistent influence of caste on under-five mortality: Factors that explain the caste-based gap in high focus Indian states'. PLoS ONE 14 (8): e0211086. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0211086>

story. For instance, a study² based on the primary survey of the socio-religious background of the trafficked victims by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), New Delhi found that almost a third of the victims, 32.3 per cent, were from the Scheduled Castes, 5.8 per cent were from the Scheduled Tribes, 21.9 per cent from the Other Backward Classes and 17.4 per cent from other castes. The rest were unable to state their caste.

Evidence suggests that exclusion of Dalit children starts right from the childhood or even when they are yet to take birth. Children, unknown to caste barriers and discriminatory practices, like to mingle and play with each other. This is natural among all children. But, when Dalit children are not allowed to sit on front benches, eat together or play with children from other castes, such practices start getting embedded in children and because of their impressionable age, these continue to shape their behaviour as they grow to become adult. This impacts children from both Dalits and other caste groups.

Therefore, a systematic study based on primary household survey and through focussed interactions with children and members from Dalit community along with other stakeholders like teachers was planned to understand the reason behind such deprivations to know its associations with structural inequities and the role of traditional and cultural practices in perpetuating this.

Objectives of the Study

The present study has been conducted with the following broad objectives:

1. To assess the major characteristics of the environment prevalent at home from the point of view of protection and promotion of the rights of the children.
2. To identify the major characteristics of the environment prevalent in rural villages from the point of view of protection and promotion of the rights of the children.
3. To understand the major characteristics of the environment prevalent in rural primary schools from the point of view of protection and promotion of the rights of the children.
4. To investigate how the existing environment at home, village, and school, either enhance or impair the protection and promotion of the rights of the children
5. To identify some common practices including use of certain words, idioms, phrases, symbiosis, prejudices, superstitions, practices that violate the rights of children.

²S Sankar, Nair P.M. (2002-2003) 'A report on trafficking in women and children in India', NHRC, New Delhi

Research Methodology

The research design for the study has used a mixed method research framework combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. The survey was planned to be conducted in ten districts which were selected purposively on the basis of the project areas of the Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS). One block in each of these ten districts where BDVS has its presence through its work was selected. For the purpose of this study, two Gram Panchayats with significant population of Scheduled Castes were selected. While selecting Panchayats, the care was taken that one Panchayat would be the one where BDVS is carrying out its work and another Panchayat would be without any intervention. This was done purposively to get a comprehensive picture of the violation of the rights of Dalit children. Hence, a total of twenty Panchayats across ten districts were selected for this study. The table given below summarises the plan:

Sl. No.	Name of the Districts	No. of Blocks	No. of Panchayats	No. of Dalit village/ Tolas
1	Darbhanga	1	2	4
2	Madhepura	1	2	4
3	Muzaffarpur	1	2	4
4	Samastipur	1	2	4
5	Patna	1	2	4
6	Nawada	1	2	4
7	Sheikhpura	1	2	4
8	Munger	1	2	4
9	Jamui	1	2	4
10	Khagadia	1	2	4
	TOTAL	10	20	40

Sample Size

The survey was conducted with 400 Dalit households. It covered forty households in every district. For this purpose, a listing of Dalit households was prepared with the help of volunteers of Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti. Out of these only those households were selected for random sampling that had children. A representative sample was prepared for every Panchayat on the basis of the number of Dalit households (HHs) there and then a proportionate number was taken from a denominator of 20 HHs in a Panchayat so that all caste groups within Dalit community get represented and no Dalit caste residing in that Panchayat gets left out. While preparing for the research design, we found that there were 14 caste groups within the Scheduled Caste list were residing in the 20 Panchayats/40 villages or tolas selected for the purpose of this study. Hence following the stratified random sampling technique, number of Households to be studied from every caste congregation was calculated on a proportionate basis using simple mathematical calculation.

Assessment Tools

The research methodology was developed keeping in view the objectives of this study. The study aims to assess different structural and thematic aspects concerning children and their rights- Survival (Health and antenatal/postnatal care of mother and child), Development (Education, Health, Nutrition, Water and Sanitation), Protection (from abuse, violence, exploitation, and discrimination), and Participation (Gender, Inclusion, Inter-caste interactions). The other objectives of this study were concerned with understanding the prevailing environment and services/mechanism with regard to Dalit children and also to analyse the linkage between the traditional and cultural practices of Dalits and violation of the rights of Dalit children.

The assessment tools were designed in alignment with the objectives of this study and to bring out both quantitative data and qualitative data. The following tools were developed:

- (a) Household Schedule- to be conducted with ten Dalit families from each village/Tola from every Panchayat in a block/district being covered in the study. With two Panchayats to be covered in every district, a total of 2 X 2 village/tolas =40 families from different Dalit castes in a district would be administered the HH schedule, ultimately covering 400 Dalit Households in ten districts.
- (b) Focus Group Discussions (FGD) or Interactions with community members- Two FGDs were planned for every Panchayat in 10 districts (Total 20 FGDs). A checklist of questions in alignment with objectives were prepared. The initial questions were to initiate the conversation and build rapport gradually moving to open ended questions concerning issues related to the rights of Dalit children. The community FGDs were conducted with the stakeholders/ village influencers who are the residents of the same habitat from a village/tola.
- (c) Focus Group Discussions (FGD) or Interactions with adolescent children - Two FGDs with adolescents (12-18 years of age) were planned for every Panchayat in 10 districts (Total 20 FGDs). The questions were prepared in a simple and easy to understand language to facilitate free flow discussion. The adolescent children shall be in mixed groups, i.e. comprising a mix of children associated with the Ambedkar Prerna Dal (APD) formed by the organisation and other, i.e. non-APD children from the community. Children who are participating in the FGD shall be from the same village/tolas of the panchayat which has been identified for this survey.
- (d) Interviews with teachers-Twenty interviews with one teacher being interviewed in every Panchayat were planned for this study. As per the plan, in ten districts, the

total number of teachers to be interviewed were 20 with two Panchayats being covered in every district. The respondents would be either the Principal or a senior teacher, preferably from Dalit community. The school should be the one where children from the village/ panchayat being covered in the study are attending.

Gender sensitive questions - for inclusion in Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) / Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Household Schedule

To ensure that gender equity issues were addressed in the study, certain specific questions were included to understand the status of girls within Dalit caste and the violation of their rights within and outside the family/community. Wherever it was possible, efforts have been made to collect disaggregated data on gender composition.

Data collection plan: The household survey was done in the month of October 2022 while the FGDs and KIIs were conducted in the month of November 2022. The survey, FGDs and KIIs were conducted according to the plan given below:

S. N.	Districts	No. and name of Blocks	No. of GPs to be covered	No. of Dalit village/ Tolas	No. of HH Schedules to be filled	FGD with adolescents (GP level)	FGD with Community members (GP level)	KII with teachers (GP level)
1	Darbhanga	Darbhanga Sadar	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
2	Madhepura	Guwalpada	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
3	Muzaffarpur	Turki	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
4	Samastipur	Patori	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
5	Patna	Danapur	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
6	Nawada	Kosi	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
7	Sheikhpura	Barbigha	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
8	Munger	Kharagpur	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
9	Jamui	Jhajha	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
10	Khagadia	Khagadia	2	4	10X4	1 X 2	1 X 2	1 X 2
	TOTAL	10	20	40	400	20	20	20

Analysis of Data: Data from the household schedule was analysed using advanced MS Excel and simple statistical calculations. Wherever required, data has been presented in the form of table, chart and graphs. Qualitative data has been analysed based on the coding of key words.

Chapter Three

Profile of the Study Area and Population Surveyed

The present study has been conducted in the following ten districts as mentioned above:

1. Darbhanga
2. Jamui
3. Khagaria
4. Madhepura
5. Munger
6. Muzaffarpur
7. Nawada
8. Patna
9. Samastipur
10. Sheikhpura



Bihar is a state with a total population of 10.41 Crore (approx.). Scheduled Castes form 15.91% of the total population of the state. The ten districts where this study has been conducted comprises of 27.37 percentage of the total SC population in the state. District-wise SC population for the ten districts is given in the Table below:

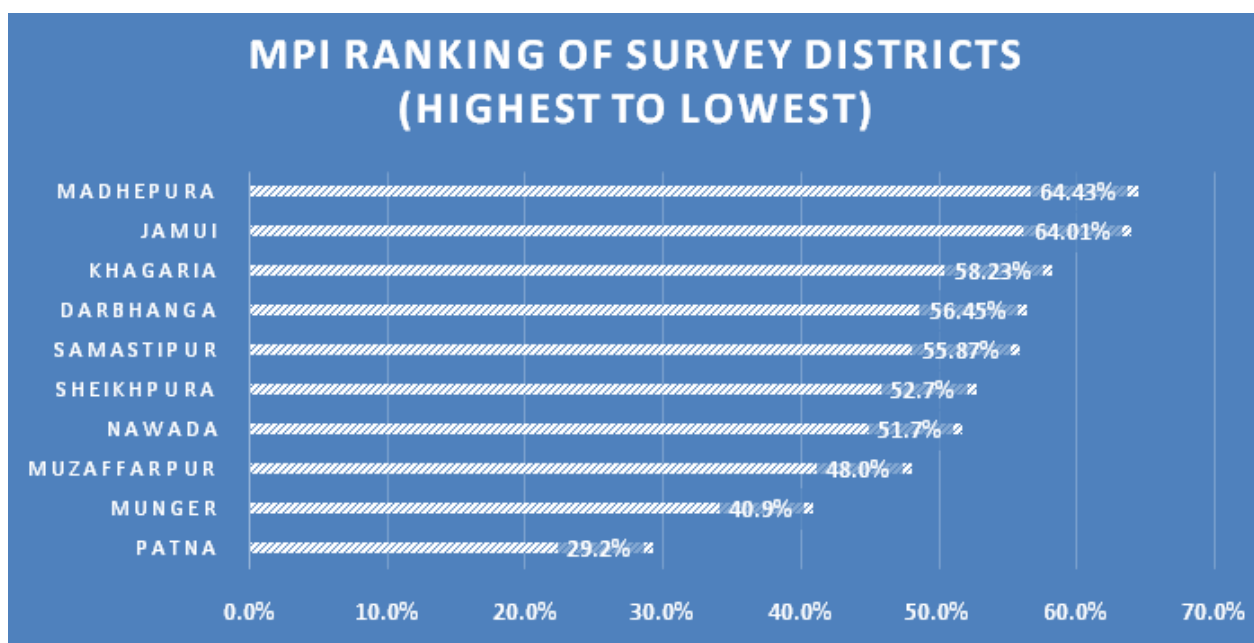
Sl. No.	District	Total population	SC Population	% SC Population to total population
1	Darbhanga	39,37,385	6,15,688	15.64
2	Jamui	17,60,405	3,02,649	17.19
3	Khagaria	16,66,886	2,47,161	14.83
4	Madhepura	20,01,762	3,46,275	17.30
5	Munger	13,67,765	1,83,846	13.44
6	Muzaffarpur	48,01,062	7,51,975	15.66
7	Nawada	22,19,146	5,65,112	25.47
8	Patna	58,38,465	9,20,918	15.77
9	Samastipur	42,61,566	8,03,128	18.85
10	Sheikhpura	6,36,342	1,31,115	20.60
	Total (Bihar)	10,40,99,452	16567325	15.91

Percentage of people identified as multi-dimensionally poor in the study area

Of all the states, Bihar is the poorest state in the country scoring lowest multidimensional poverty index (MPI)³. According to this multidimensional ranking of states, Bihar's 51.91 percentage population is poor as against Kerala's 0.71 percentage. Out of the ten districts,

³National Multidimensional Poverty Index: Baseline Report, NITI Aayog, Government of India, 2021

where this survey has been conducted, six districts (from top: Madhepura, Jamui, Khagaria, Darbhanga, Samastipur, and Sheikhpura) have MPI even higher than the state average. Rest four districts Patna, Munger, Muzaffarpur, and Nawada have an MPI lower than the state's average of 51.91% indicating overall better conditions in these districts.



(Source: National Multidimensional Poverty Index Baseline Report, NITI Aayog, 2021)

The survey could cover 14 different Dalit caste groups. A caste-wise presentation of the 400 HHs surveyed is given below:

Sl. No.	Scheduled Caste	No. of Households where survey was conducted
1	Musahar	143
2	Chamar/Ravidas	90
3	Dusadh	73
4	Pasi	29
5	Dhobi	16
6	Chaupal	10
7	Rajwar	8
8	Turi	8
9	Dom	5
10	Nat	5
11	Lalbegi	4
12	Karori	4
13	Tatma	3
14	Bhangi	2
	Total	400

As we see in the Table above, some of the castes like Musahar, Chamar/Ravidas and Dusadh within the broad umbrella of term Dalit are demographically strong whereas other castes are numerically in minority. In recent years, the literacy rate has gone up across Dalit castes with a strong push by the government for enrolment of all children in the school. However, we find that the parents of Dalit children are illiterate or semi-literate. The following figure quoted from a report⁴ of the SC & ST Welfare Department, Government of Bihar (2012) gives an overview of the rate of literacy in the castes that were surveyed:

S. No.	Scheduled Castes	Literacy rate in percentage		
		Female	Male	Total
1	Musahar	1.3	7.7	4.6
2	Chamar/Ravidas	7.1	35.3	21.8
3	Dusadh	8.4	35.7	22.9
4	Pasi	12.9	44.5	29.6
5	Dhobi	14.2	48.2	32.3
6	Chaupal	6.4	29.0	18.8
7	Rajwar	5.2	29.6	18.0
8	Turi	6.5	28.6	17.9
9	Dom	7.4	26.3	17.4
10	Nat	6.2	20.6	13.8
11	Lalbegi	12.2	30.6	21.7
12	Karori	8.8	30.2	19.5
13	Tatma	6.5	28.6	17.9
14	Bhangi	1.4	38.7	26.9

(Source: SC & ST Welfare Department, Government of Bihar, 2012), quoted in S Gaurang (2019): 'Substantially Present but Invisible, Excluded and Marginalised: A Study of Musahars in Bihar')

Demographic profile of the districts where study was conducted

This study has been conducted in ten districts. Five of the districts are in North Bihar, whereas the rest five are in South Bihar. North and South Bihar have regional variations and the same is reflected in the profile of these districts as well. The geographical locations of these districts, their topography, availability of natural resources, vulnerability to disasters, demographic composition etc. are some of the important factors that also impact human development and socio-economic profile of the population living here. One can see a regional variation between North and South Bihar specially in economic growth and infrastructural development where South Bihar districts are comparatively better placed than their Northern counterparts. But so far as the social and economic status of Dalits are concerned, this variation gets ironed out and Dalits from both North and South Bihar find themselves on an even field where the level of deprivation is almost same.

⁴(2012). Report on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Bihar. SC & ST Welfare Department. <http://scstwelfare.bih.nic.in/docs/scst%20report%20of%2016th%20August%20Copy.pdf>

The following profile gives us a fair amount of idea about the situation of the districts where the study was conducted.

S. No.	Districts	Total Population (in lakh)	Sex Ratio (Overall)	Sex Ratio (Child)	Density
1	Darbhanga	39.4 (3.8)	911	931	1442
2	Jamui	17.6 (1.7)	922	956	567
3	Khagaria	16.7 (1.6)	886	926	1115
4	Madhepura	20.0 (1.9)	911	930	1116
5	Munger	13.7 (1.3)	876	922	958
6	Muzaffarpur	48.0 (4.6)	900	915	1506
7	Nawada	22.2 (2.1)	939	945	889
8	Patna	58.4 (5.6)	897	909	1803
9	Samastipur	42.6 (4.1)	911	923	1465
10	Sheikhpura	6.4 (0.6)	911	930	1116
	Bihar	830 (100.00)	918	935	1106

(Source: Census of India, 2011)

The child sex ratio is found to be better than the overall sex ratio. This might be the result of the survival of daughters and mothers due to improved health services which has reduced maternal mortality rate (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in the state.

Bihar is a state with high population density which results into an enormous pressure on land. This data should be seen in the context of landlessness of Dalits who comprise of 15.91 percentage of the total population of Bihar. An overwhelming majority of Dalits are without any land. The landlessness put them at a higher risk of exploitation by the castes who own land. In rural Bihar, landholding is mainly with the caste Hindus followed by middle castes (OBCs) who are into farming.

Workforce participation and livelihood choices in the districts

Labour force participation in Bihar is among the lowest in the country. Participation of female in labour force is even worse. Most of the SC females in rural areas find work in agricultural labour, but with a push to mechanise the agriculture sector, the work participation still stands poor, as is evident from the successive Periodical Labour Force Survey (PLFS) rounds.

Labour Force Participation Rate⁵ (LFPR) for age-group 15 years and above

PLFS Surveys	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2017-18	68.8	3.9	66.5	6.4	68.6	4.1
2018-19	73.5	4.0	69.7	6.5	73.1	4.3
2019-20	73.5	9.7	69.2	8.4	73.0	9.5

(Source: Annual Reports, Periodic Labour Force Survey, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India)

⁵Labour force participation rate (LFPR) is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force (both employed and unemployed) in the population

Worker Population Ratio⁶ (WPR) for age-group 15 years and above

PLFS Surveys	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2017-18	64.0	3.8	60.3	6.0	63.7	4.0
2018-19	66.0	4.0	62.6	5.7	65.7	4.2
2019-20	69.7	9.6	63.5	7.4	69.0	9.4

(Source: Annual Reports, Periodic Labour Force Survey, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India)

Women's participation in paid workforce is dismal. It also shows that the unpaid household work where women are engaged is not counted as 'work'. The data also indicates the poor status of women in the state.

District-wise Workers Population Ratio (Main Workers) 2011

S. No.	District	WPR	WPR (Male)	WPR (Female)	WPR Gap (Male - Female)
1	Darbhanga	18.57	30.06	5.97	24.09
2	Jamui	25.30	33.65	16.24	17.42
3	Khagaria	18.37	28.53	6.91	21.62
4	Madhepura	22.16	31.98	11.37	20.62
5	Munger	17.06	27.29	5.39	21.90
6	Muzaffarpur	18.96	30.00	6.69	23.30
7	Nawada	22.91	32.84	12.34	20.51
8	Patna	23.49	36.43	9.05	27.37
9	Samastipur	21.29	34.60	6.69	27.91
10	Sheikhpura	23.26	53.33	12.43	20.90
	Bihar (Total)	33.7	47.4	18.8	28.6

(Source: Compiled by Pandey, Aviral (2020) in his work 'Inequality in Bihar: A District-Level Analysis, ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, Kiel, Hamburg')

The above data indicates the economic status of the working age population in these districts. Overall, the WPR is low in the state at just 33.7 per cent. The highest gap between Male and Female WPR is observed in Samastipur. By using factor analysis method, Pandey (2020) has further shown that literacy has strongest association to the WPR followed by multidimensional poverty situation, household size, children per women population, percentage of agriculture workers in total workers, and percentage of Scheduled Castes households in total households. Factors like literacy, household size, no. of children per women and percentage of agriculture workers in total workers go against SC households. This indicates a strong relationship between the caste of a worker and the probability of him/her getting work in the area.

⁶Worker Population Ratio (WPR) is defined as the percentage of employed persons in the population.

The agricultural labour is seasonal in nature which lays off a large number of rural workforce in non-cropping seasons. In order to prevent distress migration and to ensure availability of work during the lay-off seasons, one hundred days of employment is guaranteed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS). However, the percentage of Scheduled Caste Households among the Households with job cards in Bihar is quite low at only 20.7 per cent. Proportion of SCs should have been more because for the type of work available under MNREGS, it is mostly Dalit men and women and also OBCs who are engaged in rural areas by others for their private work. Out of the ten districts surveyed, seven districts namely, Munger (13.7), Darbhanga (17.5), Khagaria (18.0), Muzaffarpur (18.5), Madhepura (19.1), Samastipur (20.1), and Jamui (20.2) have lower percentage share of SC Households among Households with job-cards. Only three districts- Sheikhpura (32.5), Nawada (28.5) and Patna (22.4) are higher than the state average of 20.7 per cent.

The above data sourced from secondary sources introduces us to a broad overview about the profile of population including Dalits and of the districts where the study was conducted.



A Child in Brick kiln :
Shaping bricks doesn't shape the future

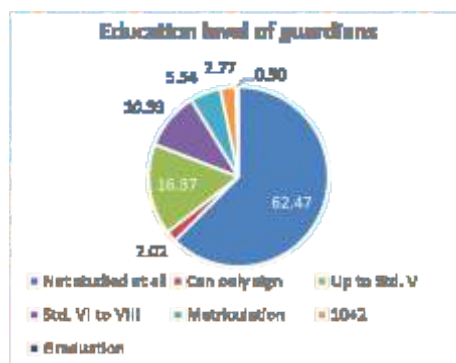
Chapter Four

Findings from the Study

A. Findings on the Socio-Economic Profile of Dalit Households surveyed

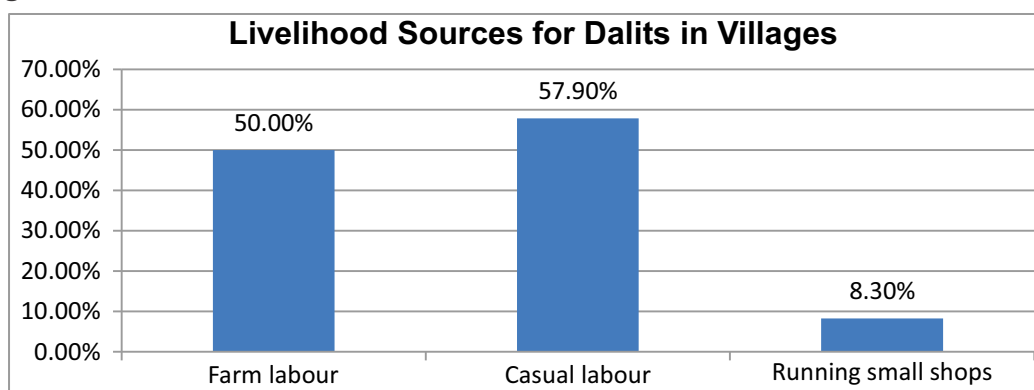
Education level of respondents (parents and guardians)

A majority of the respondents (62.47%) were found to be completely illiterate. Out of the rest who were literate, 2.02 per cent of the respondents could some how sign their names. This indicates that more than sixty per cent (60%) of Dalit adults have never studied. This partly explains the low performance of Dalit children in schools and high drop-out rate from schools, as we will find in the sections below.



Sources of livelihood of the households surveyed

It was found during the survey that most of the households depend on multiple sources of livelihood and income generation for survival. In spite of the prevailing low wage rate in rural areas of Bihar, most of the families depend on farm labour (50%) and casual labour in and around their villages (57.9%). A small portion of Dalits (8.3%) have also started small businesses like running small shops to sell daily use items which require small capital. No definite caste pattern is observed in those families among Dalits which have mentioned small businesses as their source of livelihood or income. Almost all castes were represented in doing small businesses.

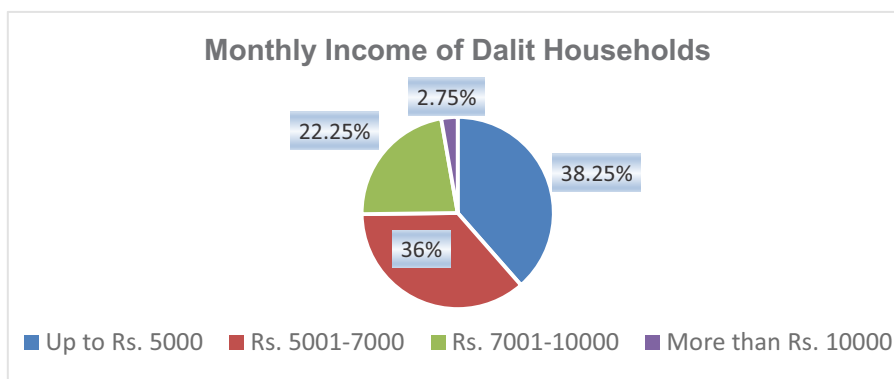


(NOTE: Figures represent Percentage Households among Respondents and it may add up to more than one hundred percentage because of diverse livelihood options that Dalits are engaged into)

Agricultural labour engages half of the Dalits surveyed whereas more than half of the (57.9%) respondents said that they were into non-farm labour or casual labour which mostly includes wage-based construction work and petty jobs. Running small businesses like small shops with snacks and goods of small value is a new trend seen recently. This is

mostly managed by females or elders in the family. The diversification of the income sources has supplemented the household income specially during non-farming season.

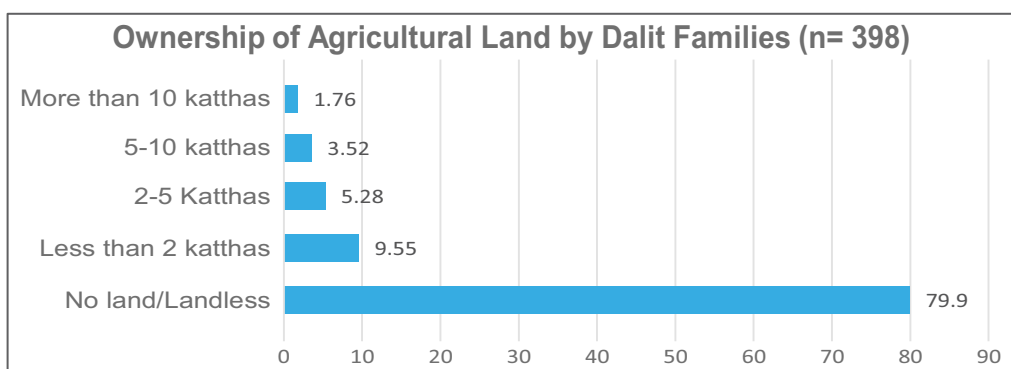
Monthly Income



A little less than three-fourth (74.25%) of Dalit Households earn less than Rs. 7,000 a month. Of these, 38.25% are those whose monthly income is only Rs. 5000 or less. Lesser household income means lesser availability of resources for children. Unlike others, Dalit families are mostly landless and therefore depend upon market for buying food grains like rice, wheat, pulses and vegetables for their family. This survey found 80% of the households without any agricultural land.

Landlessness and Dalits are almost synonymous with each other. Having no agricultural land to grow crops on one hand and an increase in food price costs on the other hand have a serious impact on children's nutrition. The lower income also pushes children to engage into work for supplementing household income thus causing them to drop out from school and becoming a child labour.

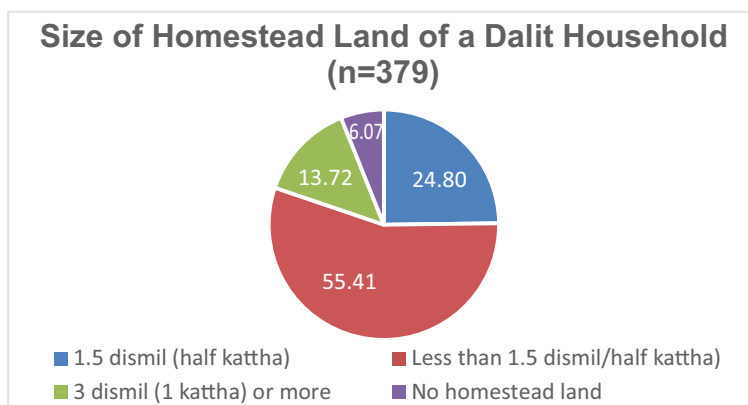
Ownership of agricultural land by Dalit Families (No. of respondents- 398)



It would be seen below that most Dalit families (67.5%) rear cattles and other animals like cows, buffaloes, goats, pigs etc. which, apart from their sources for protein for children's growth, also supplement the household income of the family. However, data shows that most of the Dalits (79.9%) are landless, which forces them to depend on the lands of others for grazing their cattles. These lands generally belong to non-Dalits from upper and middle caste ranks. During discussions with children, it was observed that the work of cattle grazing is mainly done by children- both boys and girls and they narrated how they faced verbal and physical abuses by the landowners or land-tenants.

Ownership of Homestead Land by Dalits

The landlessness among Dalits has always been an acute problem. The findings of this survey further supplement this observation. Out of 400 respondents, 379 answered the question related to availability of homestead land. Out of these, twenty three families (6.07%) denied of having any land. They were residing on either government land or settled there by the big landholders in the past as bonded labour. It was found that 80.21% of the respondents lived on a piece of land that was just half kattha (1.5 dismil) or even less than this.



Not having a homestead land or having it of as little a size as just half *kattha* (1.5dismil) creates other problems within the family that also affects children. Children who go to school do not find adequate space at home to focus on their studies. This was shared by 40.26 and 57.38 percentage of children and community members respectively during group discussions.

The average size of Dalit families covered in this study is more than five. The large family size further complicates the problem, as space for children which they need for study, playing games and interacting with their peer group members gets compromised to the disadvantage of these children. Children said that the problem becomes more acute during

rainy season, when all members have no option but to sleep in the same room. With arrival of guests or married daughter returning to live with her parents for some time further complicates the situation as far as space availability is concerned.

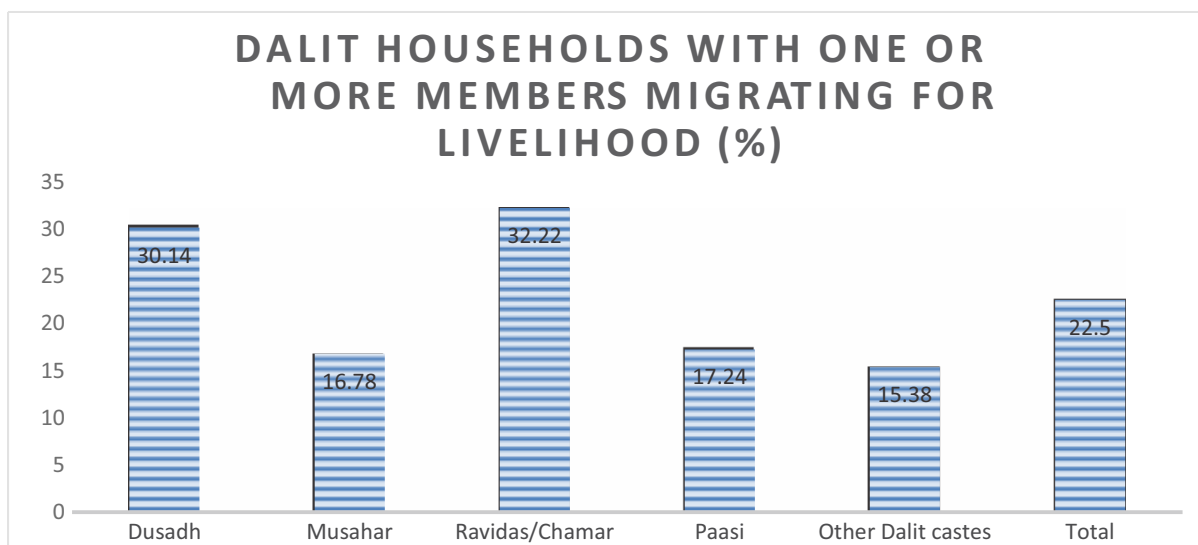
Extent of migration

The survey data indicates that ninety households (22.5%) had either a spouse (in this case husbands) or their son/daughter migrating to other district or state for livelihood. Most of these migrations are distress migrations undertaken because of poor livelihood choices in the villages and prevailing low wage rates. Although livelihood migration takes care of the household expenses and the family from which a member has migrated, however, it has also a negative impact on the children and women folk left behind. Such migrations which are necessarily male migration have an implication on the safety and security of women and children who are left behind. This is specially in situations where the risks to safety and protection are high. The absence of a father or a male member for longer duration from the family also means children getting deprived of father's guidance and protection.

Overall Migration Pattern of Adults from Dalit Households (Caste-wise)

Caste	No. of households defined by caste	No. of households with migrants for livelihood	Percentage rate of migration
Dusadh	73	22	30.14
Musahar	143	24	16.78
Ravidas/Chamar	90	29	32.22
Paasi	29	5	17.24
Others	65	10	15.38
Total	400	90	22.5

It is observed that the Ravidas households have the highest propensity to migrate. Out of ninety Ravidas households, twenty-nine households (32.22%) had at least one male member who had migrated to another district within the state or other state for unorganised labour. A similar pattern is observed in Dusadh families as well with 30.14% of families witnessing migration of a male member from it. Musahar and Paasi families have relatively low rate of migration (16% to 17%). The above data indicates that compared to other castes, Ravidas and Dusadhs have a better network which helps in out-migration.

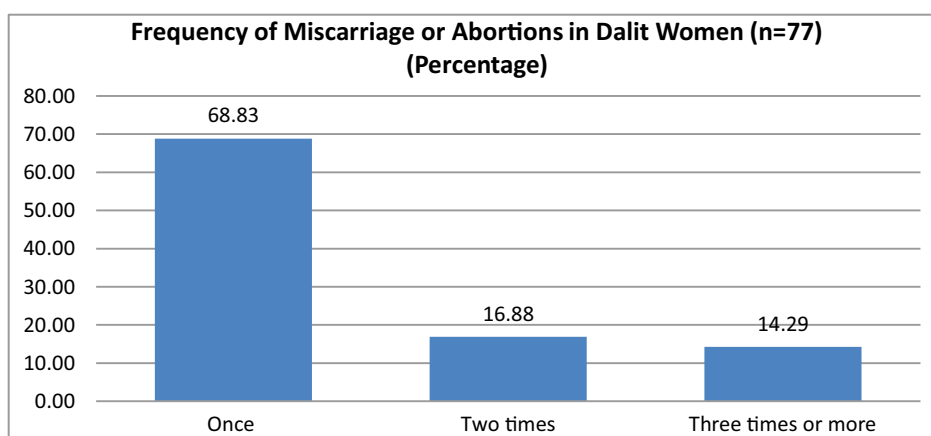


But when this is compared with labour migration by adolescents (see section below), we find altogether a different picture. As we will see in section below where we have discussed migration/trafficking of Dalit children for labour, we find that it is highest among Musahar caste followed by Ravidas, whereas children from Dusadh caste show least propensity to migrate for labour.

B. Findings on Dalit Child Rights Violation

B.1 Miscarriage or Forced Abortion

Every child has a right to be born as a healthy child and the right to protection extends even before they take birth. Miscarriages and forced abortions are therefore violation to a child's right to be born. Miscarriage happens when the woman who is pregnant is anaemic, does not get nutritious food, has no or little access to regular and mandatory ante-natal health check-ups. Miscarriages and forced abortions are also a result of spousal violence. This survey found that out of 400 respondents, cases of miscarriages/forced abortions in their life time were narrated by 77 respondents (19.25%) who were all female below 45 years of age. Out of a sample of 400 families, 19.25% narrating incidents of miscarriage or forced abortion is quite an alarming proportion. This is an indication of multiple vulnerabilities and risks faced by pregnant Dalit women. The respondents were also asked about the frequency of such miscarriages/forced abortions. Fifty-three respondents said that they themselves or a woman in their family had a miscarriage once, whereas those who faced it two times were thirteen and eleven respondents said that it happened for three times or more.



B.2 Infant Mortality

Discrimination against Dalits manifests itself in multiple ways and forms, one of them being health. The survey found an overwhelming number of respondents recounting deaths of infants in their families. The extent of infant mortality in Dalit families was found to be very alarming. Out of the total households (400) surveyed, eighty-five respondents (21.25%) said that there were cases of death of infants in their families in their life time. Some of the families further narrated instances of more than one infant deaths in their families. If we count the total frequencies together, the cumulative infantile deaths reported by the respondents during the survey came out to be 134. The respondents were women below the age of 45 years. The data is a grave pointer to the acute survival risks being faced by Dalit children.

When we dig deeper to find which caste groups among Dalits face the highest risk of infant mortality, it was found that this affects all Dalit caste groups without any variance. The three caste groups of Musahar, Dusadh and Ravidas/Chamar were most represented in the survey, and the survey finds these caste groups showing a proportionate rate in infant mortality as well. The data breaks the myth of few castes doing far better than the other castes within the umbrella of Dalit castes. It shows that the problem of infants and new-born babies dying early in Dalit families is faced by all Dalit caste groups without much variation. A caste-wise break-up of 134 infant deaths found during the survey is presented below for further explanation-

Dalit castes	No. of infant mortality reported during the survey	Percentage (%)
Musahar	35	26.12
Dusadh	30	22.39
Ravidas/Chamar	32	23.88
Other Dalit castes	37	27.61
Total	134	100.00

B.3 Breastfeeding and Post birth care practices for the new born and mothers

In order to understand Dalit children's right to healthy and nutritious food which is essential for their survival and development- both physical and cognitive, some of the questions were designed adopting a life cycle approach model. The questions ranged from understanding breastfeeding practices in the community to the kind of food that children of different age-groups eat on a daily basis. Through this survey, we have also tried to understand household's access to food security rights and entitlements and the challenges there.

The survey finds that breastfeeding practice in lactating mothers is quite healthy. More than ninety eight percent (98.2%) Dalit women were found to be breastfeeding their children for more than six months. There are 39.1% of children who take mother's milk for more than two years. However, 41.6% of respondents said that they believe that mother's milk immediately after child-birth is bad and should be thrown away. This misconception makes a serious deficit in child's growth and development trajectory. UNICEF and WHO recommend putting new-borns to the breast within the first hour after birth as it gives them the best chance to survive, thrive and develop to their full potential. The agencies further say that if the child is continued to be breastfed exclusively - without any other food - for the first six months, it contributes to child's sensory and cognitive development, and protects babies against infectious and chronic diseases.

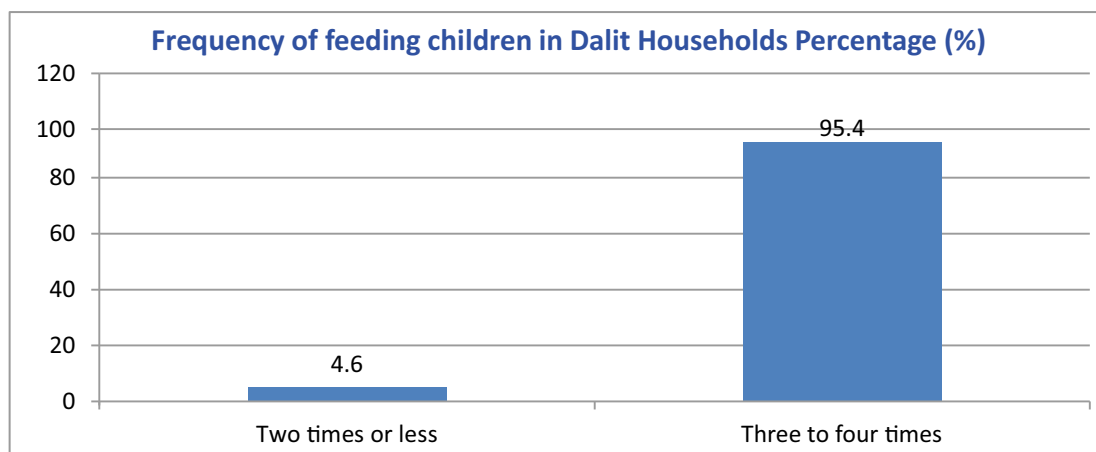
There is another traditional practice of keeping the mother and her new born baby confined in closed room. This was found to be widely practiced among Dalit families. The survey found that out of every ten households, seven families (70%) followed or believed in this practice considering it right not to allow both the mother and her new born baby to come out of a room which generally remains dingy, dark and unhygienic with risks of infection to both the baby and mother. These practices are partly responsible for an alarming infant mortality rate or miscarriage and still-births reported in Dalit families, as mentioned above.

B.4 Food security (food availability and nutritional diversity)

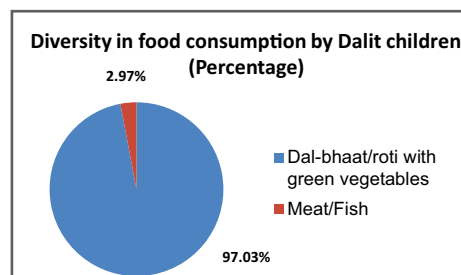
Respondents were asked questions to understand the frequency of feeding children in Dalit households to assess the extent of hunger among children in families. Questions related to food diversity and access to PDS (ration) shops

An overwhelming majority of households (95.4%) said that children in their families are fed three times or more in a day. However, there were 4.6% of such families which could hardly

get a square meal for their children. The percentage of such families may look small, but if it is considered as a representative sample and estimated for a bigger population, the sheer number of families facing food crisis or hunger expressed in absolute numbers would be quite significant.



On questions related to food diversity, it was found that 96.2 percentage of the households consumed green vegetables. Most of the families had in their menu at least one food item prepared with green vegetables. Dal-bhaat (rice-pulses) and roti-sabji (wheat cakes and cooked vegetables) is the staple food item which got mentioned by 64.77% of households having consumed a day before. Only 2.97 percentage of the households said their children had non-vegetarian food like chicken, fish, mutton or eggs a day before.



None of the 400 households interviewed said that their children had not eaten anything last night. It indicates that children do not sleep hungry. This can be linked with the free ration being made available to ration card holders belonging to poor families under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).

Impact of land-holding on food security

The survey has found that 79.9% of the Dalit households do not own any agricultural land. This makes Dalit families dependent upon market for the supply of vegetables and PDS shops and market for rice, wheat, pulses etc. Data shows that 86.7% of Dalit households purchase vegetables from market, whereas a little more than 94.2% of the

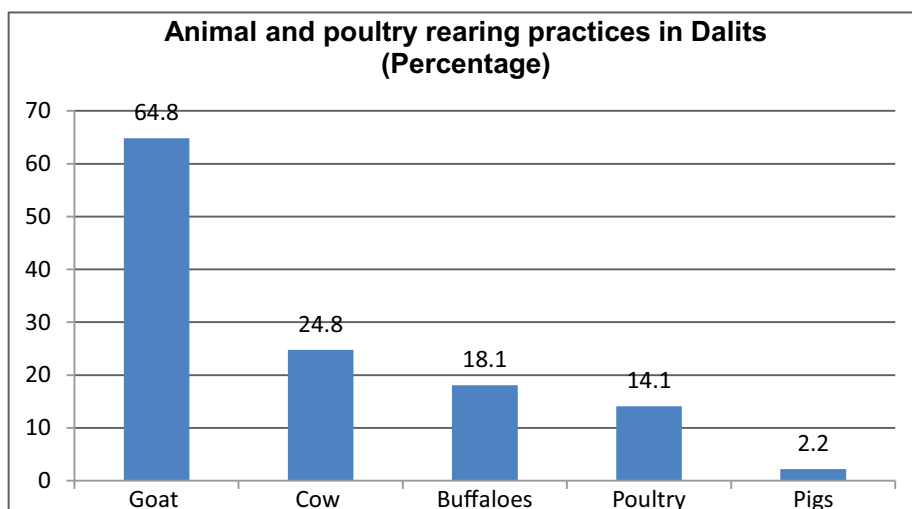
households either go to market to buy food grains and other items like rice, wheat, pulses, sugar, edible oil etc. or get it from the PDS shops on subsidised rates. Most of the households depend upon both the market and PDS shops for supply of essential food items.

The above data is important to understand the vulnerability of Dalit families to food insecurity. This vulnerability is caused by the fact that eight out of every ten Dalit households is landless which has forced them to be fully dependent upon market. A heavy dependency on market exposes them to the risk of increase in prices of vegetables and other food products which have a direct impact on the food security of a Dalit household. Although, the survey did not probe the impact of price rise on food security, the data about landlessness and market dependency present their vulnerability. One can understand the gravity of the risk if the situation worsens further with joblessness and low wage rate.



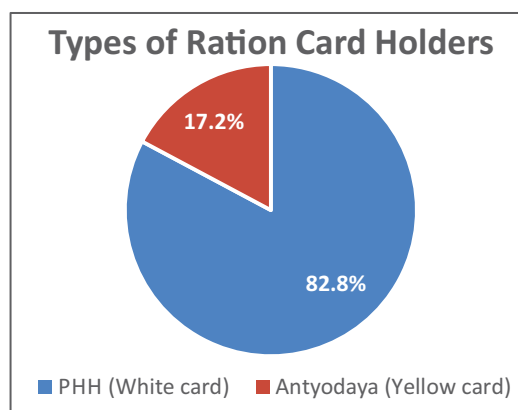
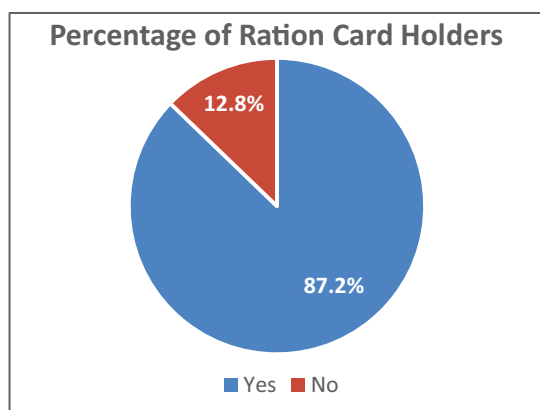
B.5 Animal and poultry rearing practices in Dalits

During field visits for the survey, it was observed that the Dalit tolas (settlements) had the highest concentration of cattles, poultry and domestic animals like goats, pigs etc. The survey found animal rearing practices in 270 Dalit households. Many Dalit families were found to have kept more than one type of animals or poultry. As per the findings of the survey, 175 (64.8%) households reared goat, followed by sixty-seven (24.8%) households who had cows whereas forty-nine (18.1%) kept buffaloes. Hens and ducks were reared by thirty-eight(14.1%)households, while only six (2.2%) households were found to have pigs. These animals and birds provide Dalit families a rich source of nutrients through milk, egg, chicken, mutton etc. But at the same time, they are an important source of income generation as well. This was confirmed during discussions with adolescents and community members as well. Community members in Patna and Muzaffarpur, Nawada and Sheikhpura said that the pigs had caught some mysterious disease and those who reared them suffered heavy losses. This has made them to turn to goatery now.



(NOTE: The percentage may add up to more than a hundred per cent, as the respondents rear more than one type of animal/bird)

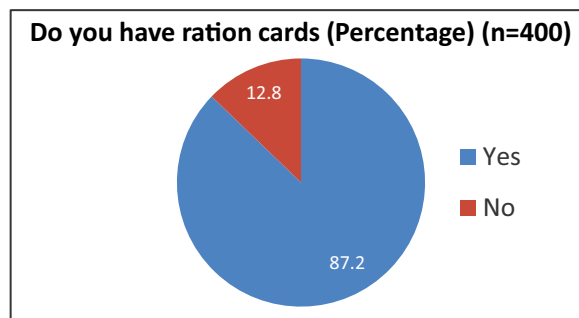
B.6 Access to free or subsidised ration



The survey found a majority of Dalit families (87.2%) had ration cards for accessing subsidised ration from PDS shops. However, 59.5 percentage of ration card holders complained that names of many family members were still missing and they had not been included. So, even if they had ration cards, they were not getting rice, wheat and other grains and items for which their family is fully entitled for. Further, 82.8% of the respondents said that they had white cards indicating their beneficiary status as Priority Household (PHH) under Targeted Public Distribution Scheme (TPDS). The rest 17.2% had yellow or Antyodaya Ration Cards.

- Every person belonging to priority households (PHH), shall be entitled to receive five (5) kg of food-grains per person per month at subsidized prices from the ration shops not exceeding Rupees 3 (Three) per kg of rice, Rupees 2 (Two) per kg of wheat and Rupee One (01) per kg for coarse grains for a period fixed by the Central Government and thereafter, at such price as may be fixed by the Central Government from time to time.
- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) household's entitlement is at 35 kg of food grain per household per month. Wheat and rice are being issued at the scale of 15 kg and 20 kg per family per month at the rate of Rs. 2 and Rs. 3 per kg respectively.

The survey found that 12.8% of the households did not have a ration card. The households deprived of ration cards belonged to almost all Dalit caste-groups covered in the survey, which indicates it being a systemic problem rather than a community specific one.



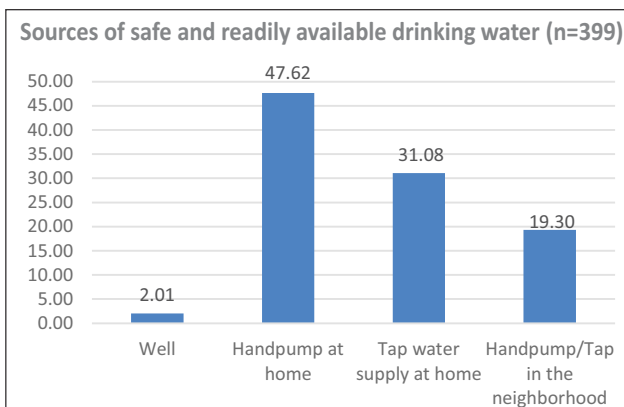
However, the survey found that having a ration card does not mean it has all the names of the members of a household on it. A large number of respondents complained that their family members' names were not registered on it and therefore the ration supply that they were getting was less than their actual entitlement. Again, six percent (6%) of the ration-card holders said that they did not get ration every month from the PDS shop. Some of the respondents (12.08%) also complained of humiliating and discriminatory behaviour from the PDS dealers, but largely the respondents from Dalit households appeared satisfied with the behaviour of the PDS dealers. This may be because of the policy of the state government to allot PDS shops to the members of scheduled castes in Dalit tolas and villages with higher Dalit population. In the year 2021, scheduled caste accounted for 15.8 percentage among the PDS dealers⁷.

⁷Department of Food and Consumer Protection, Government of Bihar, Bihar Economic Survey,

B.7 Access to safe and readily available drinking water

For a child to have healthy body and to remain protected from water-borne diseases like diarrhoea and other gastro-enteritis diseases, it is necessary that the family has access to the supply of safe and readily available drinking water. Out of 399 households whose responses were recorded, only seven families depended upon wells for drinking water. The data shows that the state government's scheme of 'har ghar nal ka jal' (tap water in every household) has benefitted 31.08% of Dalit

households surveyed who can be said to have access to safe and readily available drinking water. The survey further found that 47.62% of Dalit households accessing water from handpumps installed in their homes. The rest 19.30% are depending upon handpumps or tap water installed in the houses of others. During FGD interactions with community members, women and others shared that they feel it insulting when they go to collect water from handpumps or taps from other people's houses in the neighbourhood. Children also complained of getting scolded and sometime subjected to taunts and verbal abuses by the owners of those handpumps or taps.



The scarcity of drinking water supply in Dalit tolas can be understood from one observation during field survey in a tola in Patna district. This tola had around 50 families and they had to depend upon only a single handpump that was in running condition. The girls from this tola said in the discussion that they had to stand in long queue which affected their studies.



The only functional handpump at Manjhitola in Patna

Community members in two districts Nawada and Jamui complained of water scarcity during summer season. Thirty per cent of children during the FGDs held in these two districts also complained of facing acute problem of water supply in schools. Teachers of these districts also said that the toilets in their schools faced water supply issues during peak summer season.

B.8 Right to hygiene and sanitation

Almost three-fourth of the children (74.75%) from Dalit families are still going for open defecation, the survey has found. This is quite a big percentage and poses serious risks to the health of children apart from other risks associated with open defecation. The achievement of government in

providing access to safe and readily available drinking water to 31.08% of Dalit families as found in this survey is neutralised by 74.75% of children from Dalit families going for open defecation. Twenty-three percent (23%) of Dalit children use household toilets whereas those who use community toilets are very few (2.25%). Although the survey did not capture the reasons behind low percentage of children using household toilets and community toilets, the

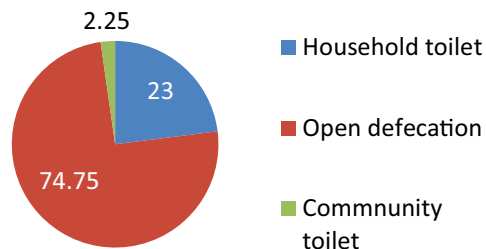
data on possession of homestead land by Dalit families may provide an indication. Among Dalits surveyed for this study, 80.21% lived on a piece of land that was just half kattha (1.5 dismil) or even less than this and 6.07% did not have any homestead land of their own. Building a latrine in the household would mean parting away with a small piece of land which is already too scarce. The large family size makes the availability of land even further scarce. In this situation toilet is considered a burden or a liability rather than a facility, which even if constructed, gets used for other purposes. The problem is also associated with behavioural aspects and awareness about the issues of hygiene and sanitation.

Going out in open for defecation exposes them to different risks as 87.93% of respondents said that they faced problems. The various risks or problems faced by them and their children are:

- They are verbally abused by the landowners if it belongs to persons from dominant castes- 131 (43.4%)
- Our girls face harassment- 78 (25.8%)
- Risks of drowning. There have been incidents where children have fallen and hurt themselves into water filled pits and ponds- 135 (44.7%)
- Snake biting incidents have happened- 120 (39.7%)
- A lot of trouble during rainy season- 243 (80.5%)
- Other risks faced- 13 (4.3%)

Note: Since children faced more than one problem or risk when they go out in open for defecation, so the total percentage would not add up to 100 percent.

Where do your children go for toilet? (n=400)

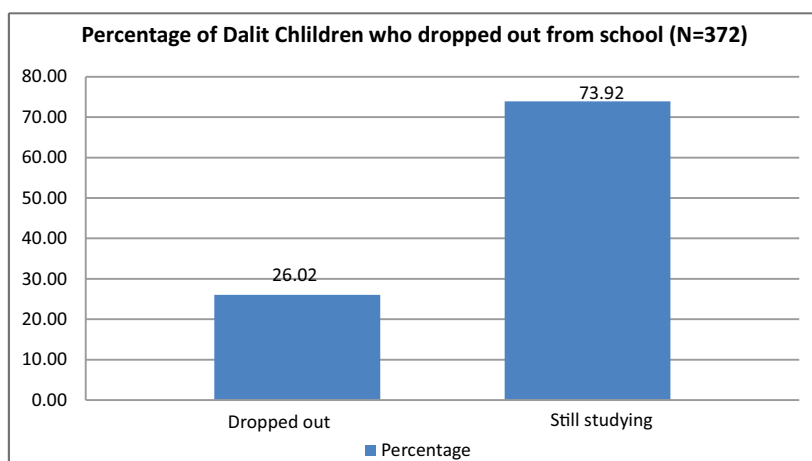




A Childhood in Dust :
Little Children of migrant families in a brick kiln.

B.9 Dalit Children's Right to Education

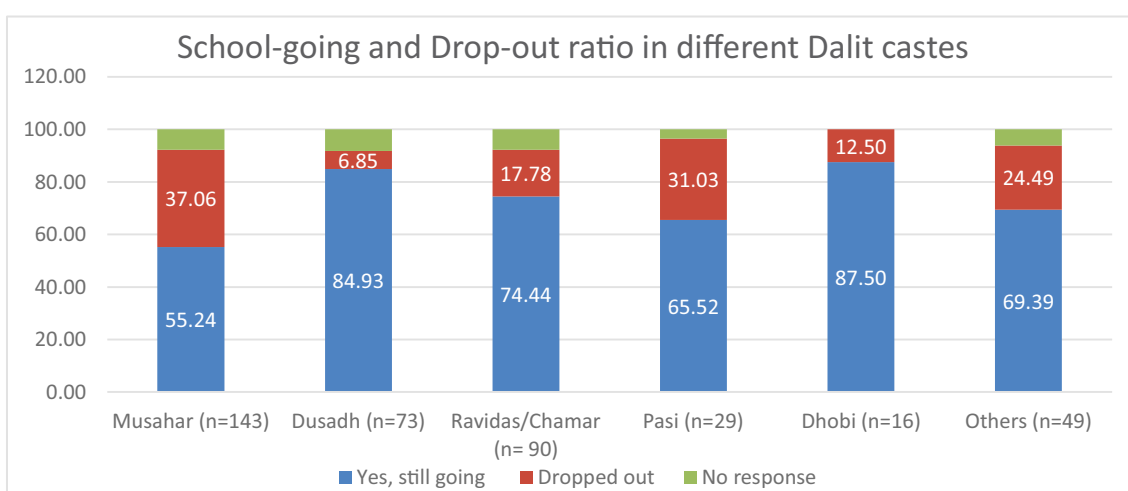
B.9.1 School drop-out by Dalit children



Out of 400 households which were surveyed, respondents from 372 households replied to the question about cases of school drop-out from their family. It was found that such cases were reported by 96 households (26.08%), whereas 73.92% of households reported that their children were going to school. The data indicates a significant percentage of Dalit children getting deprived of school education. Right to education is a fundamental right for children up to the age of 14 years or Class VIII. But the data points out that Dalit children's right to education stands violated for a large number of children for several reasons.

We can see from the above table and graph that the drop-out rate of school-going children (represented by brick-red colour) is highest in Musahar caste (37.06%) followed by Pasi caste (31.03%) and other numerically small castes (like Dom, Karori, Nat, Chaupal, Rajwar etc.), whereas the lowest drop-out rate has been recorded for children belonging to Dusadh (6.85%) followed by Dhobi (12.50%) and Ravidas/Chamar (17.78%) castes. This shows that there are clear variations in the level of awareness among parents about the importance of education for their children. It also indicates that children from certain castes like Musahar and Pasi are more prone to deprivation of their educational rights than children from other castes due to which their drop-out rate is also higher than others. So, when it comes to Musahar caste children, they are five times more susceptible to the risk of drop-out than children from Dusadh caste and two times more vulnerable than Ravidas/Chamar caste children. Drop out percentage is also quite high in other numerically small Dalit castes (24.49%).

Dalit Castes	Yes, still going (%)	Dropped out (%)	No response (%)	Total (%)
Musahar (n=143)	55.24	37.06	7.69	100
Dusadh (n=73)	84.93	6.85	8.22	100
Ravidas/Chamar (n= 90)	74.44	17.78	7.78	100
Pasi (n=29)	65.52	31.03	3.45	100
Dhobi (n=16)	87.50	12.50	0.00	100
Others (n=49)	69.39	24.49	6.12	100

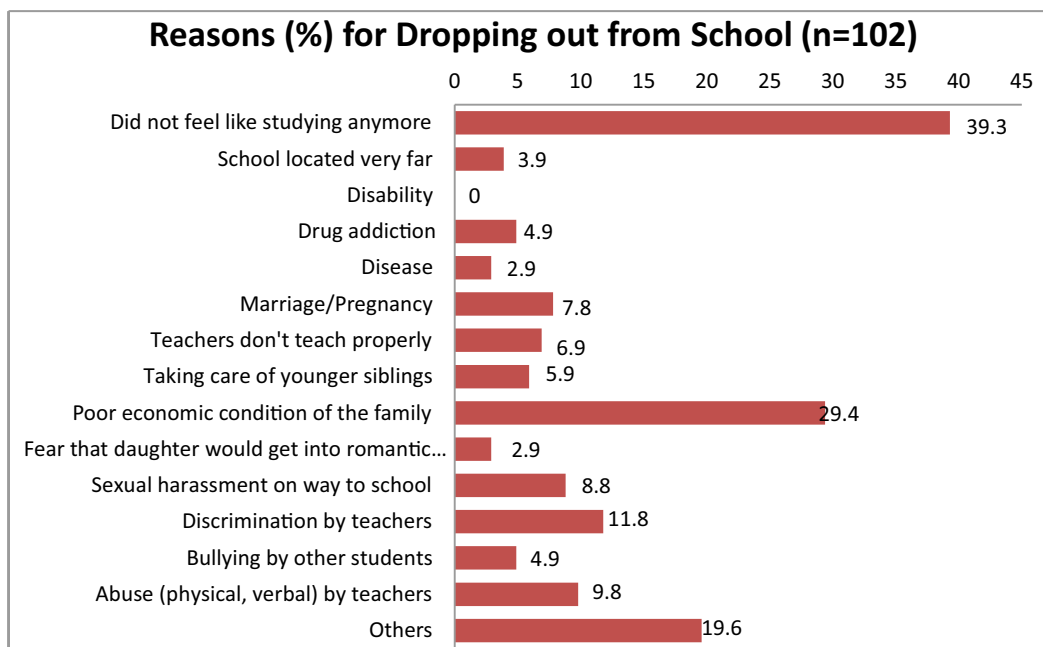


Reasons behind drop-out

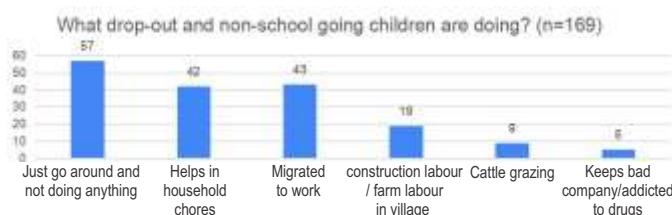
Parents and guardians of children stated multiple reasons behind their children dropping out from the school. As some of them gave more than one reason for their children being forced to drop-out, therefore total number of responses may be more than ninety-seven, i.e. the number of respondents who stated that their children dropped out from school.

It was observed that most of the children dropped out citing the reason that they did not feel like studying anymore as they were weak in studies. Since, most of the children from Dalit families are first generation learners as the data on their parents educational status indicate that 62.47% of the parents being illiterate/never been to school, it becomes very challenging for the children to complete their home-work or understand what is being taught, unless the child gets some supplementary educational support in the form of private tuitions or remedial classes in their schools. The second most frequently quoted reason for dropping out from school was poor financial condition of parents due to which they could not pay their fee or bear expenses for their education. Poor financial status of the family was mentioned by 29.4% of the respondents. Discrimination by teachers was

also significantly mentioned (11.8%) followed by abusive treatment of Dalit children by their school teachers (9.8%)



However, the survey also found that although some of the children had not dropped out from school, they were not attending classes and had stopped going school. Out of 400 households, 131 households reported that their children were no longer going to school. This included 97 households which reported drop out of children from school. School drop-out or not going to school pushes children to the risk of further deprivation and makes them vulnerable. This is understood from the responses of their parents or guardians who shared what their children did if they did not go to school anymore. The respondents chose multiple options from the list of the activities that drop out children or who are not going to school for quite some time. Therefore, the analysis is based on total number of responses (169).



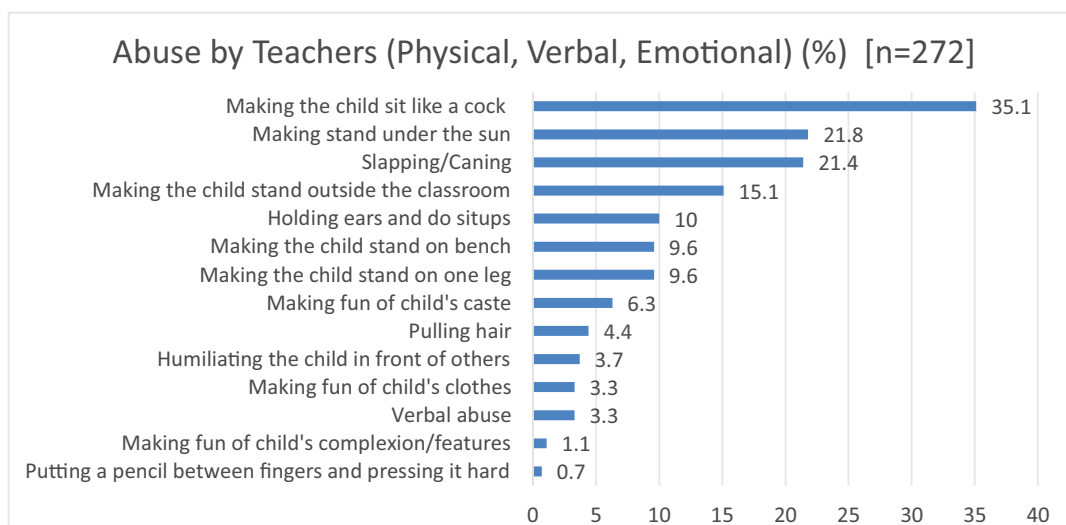
B.10 Child's Right to Protection from

Discrimination, Harm, Abuse and Violence- Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion

B.10.1 Corporal Punishment and Verbal and Emotional Abuse of Dalit Children in Schools

The survey found that corporal punishment against students was quite common by teachers. Children also faced verbal and emotional abuse by their teachers. The three most

common form of punishment was making a child sit like a cock (35.1%), making them stand under the sun (21.8%), hitting with slaps and/or sticks (21.4%). There were 28.8 percentage of respondents who said that their children did not receive any punishment so far. But, this might just be partially true, because during group interactions with adolescents, almost all the children said that they had suffered beatings from their teachers or some other physical punishment.

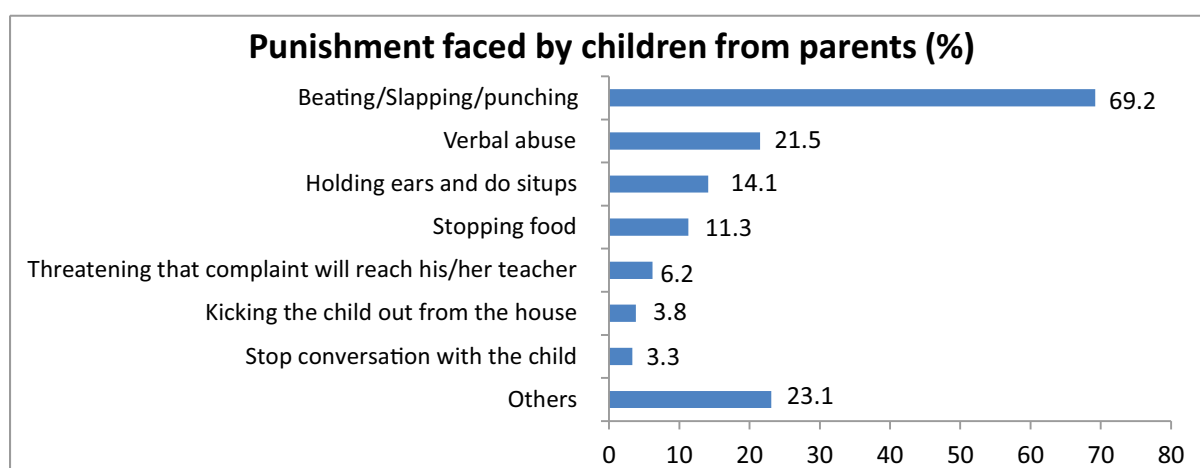


Dalit children were subjected to emotional abuse as well by humiliation for their clothes or the way they dressed (3.3%), physical features or body colour (1.1%). Teachers making fun of Dalit children's caste was complained by 6.3% of the respondents. Even making fun of Dalit children's clothes and their facial features or body colour were also instances of caste-based discrimination and if we add all the three, we find 10.7% of respondents alleging direct caste-based discrimination against Dalit children in schools. The qualitative data received through group discussions with Dalit students indicate even much higher proportion of children facing issues of caste discrimination in schools, although in a subtle manner. Children told that although teachers did not say anything by their caste names, but took the name of their tolas, while scolding them. Statements like, '**Manjhi tola ka bachcha sab kabhi nahi sudhrega!**' (Children of Manjhi Tola will never improve!) by the teachers for a student exposes the caste stereotypes and prejudices against Dalit students.

During interactions held with adolescents, community members and teachers, few more instances of abuse, neglect and discrimination were shared. These were:

- Teachers scold Dalit children much more if Home Work is not completed.

- If a Dalit child absents for few weeks, his/her name gets struck off from school, but this does not happen with students from non-Dalit castes.
- Dalit children are made to sit on the last benches.
- Non-Dalit caste children ask Dalit students not to sit closer to them as they say their clothes are dirty and they smell.
- Some students from non-Dalit castes including OBCs refuse to eat mid-day meal in the school because Dalit students use those plates.
- Non-Dalit students also refuse to take MDMs if the cook happens to be a Dalit woman.
- Teachers do not pay much attention to Dalit children compared to children from other castes.
- Dalit children are not allowed to enter classroom if they reach late for the school.
- Use of words like '*ganwar*', '*chhuthar*', '*chuhaar*' etc. against Dalit children denigrate them and let them down in front of others.
- Some parents are so poor that they do not come to school to even receive Transfer Certificates for their children because they cannot afford to take two copies of photographs required by school authorities for releasing TC.
- Some parents do not go to complain about the discriminatory behaviour of a teacher or corporal punishment for the fear of retribution and further ill-treatment from the teacher.



B.10.2 Abuse faced within the family

As presented in the chart above, Dalit children face physical, verbal and emotional abuse and also neglect from their parents. This was confirmed by the children when group interactions were organised with them. Many children said that their fathers beat them up and their mothers as well under the influence of alcohol. Children said that being shouted at and slapped for mistakes was quite common for them. Such incidents became more frequent when the father came home drunk.

B.10.3 Discrimination faced by Dalit children in schools

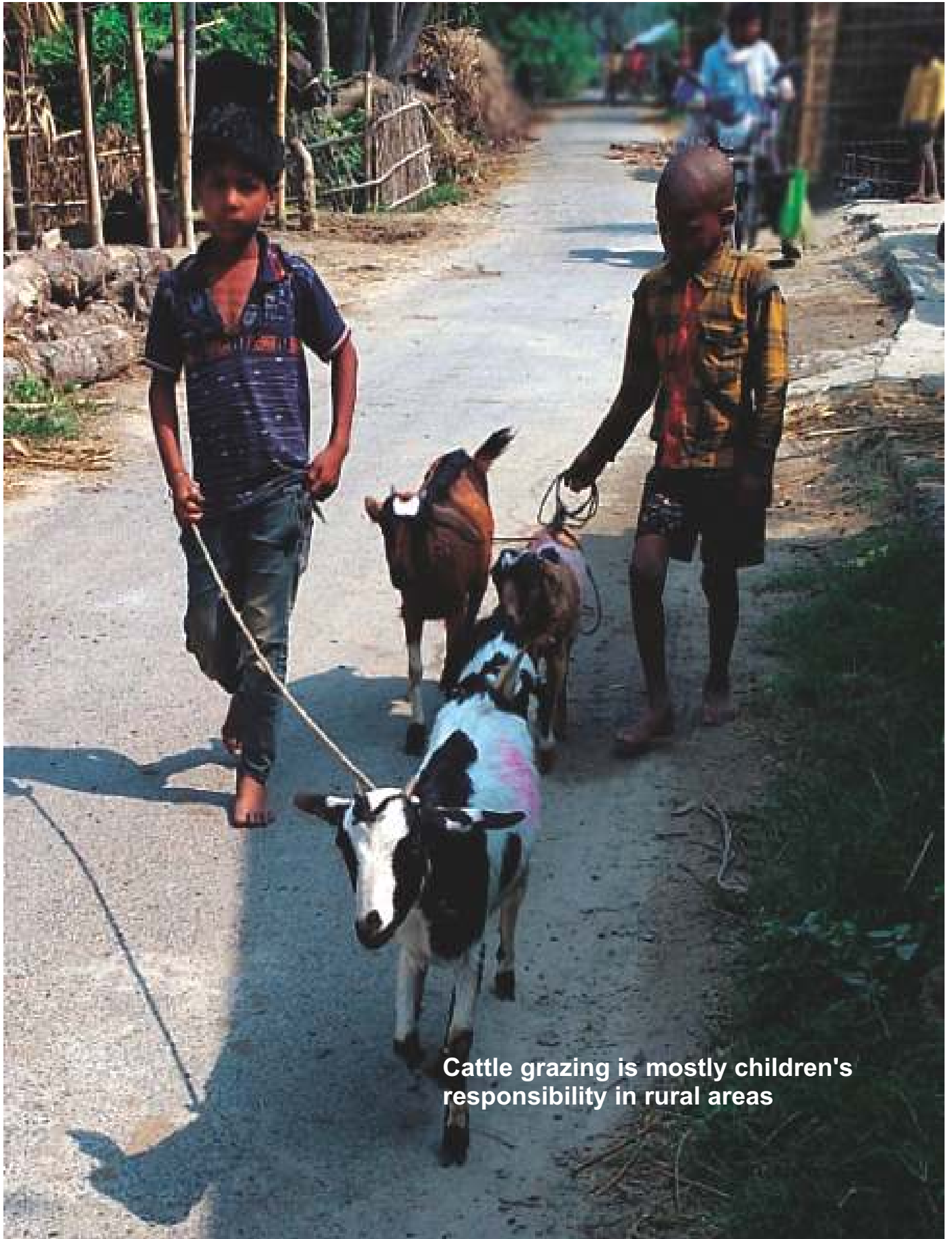
The survey found 189 respondents (47.25%) narrating one or multiple forms of discrimination faced by their children in the schools where they study. This survey also found that 97.6% of Dalit Households sent their children to study in government schools while only 2.4% of them preferred private schools. The extent of discrimination that Dalit children faced in schools indicates that the goal of inclusive and equitable education is still far. Respondents narrated one or multiple forms of discriminatory practices that their children are subjected to in the schools. The two most cited discriminatory practices committed against Dalit children in the schools are:

1. Only Dalit children are asked to clean school premises (52.4%)
2. Only Dalit children are forced to sit behind in the classroom (47.1%)

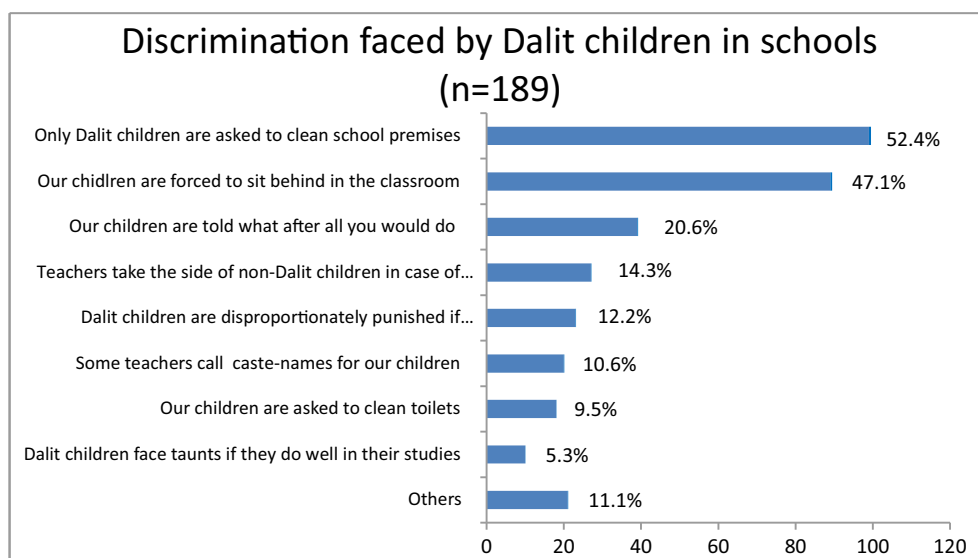
The other forms of discrimination as cited by the parents in the household survey are-

1. Our children are told what after all you would do by studying (20.6%)
2. Teachers quite often take the side of non-Dalit children when there is any dispute between non-Dalit and Dalit students (14.3%)
3. Dalit children are disproportionately punished if homework not done (12.2%)
4. Some teachers call our children by their caste-names (10.6%)
5. Our children are asked to clean school toilets (9.5%)
6. Dalit children face taunts if they do good in schools (5.3%)

The chart given below explains it further:



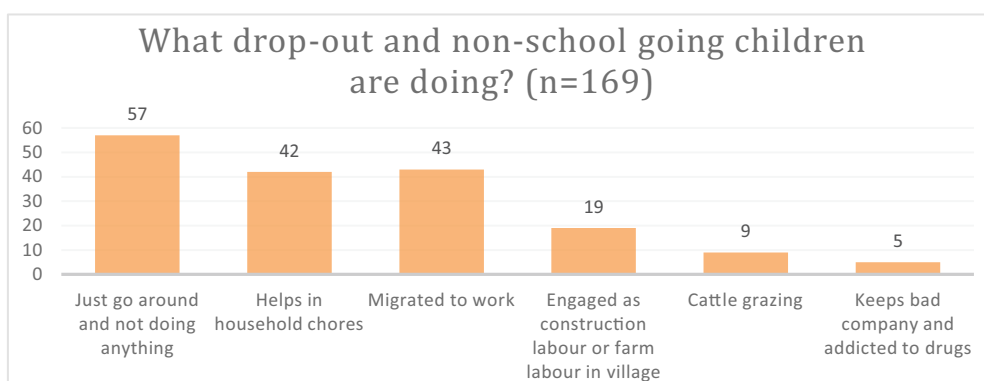
Cattle grazing is mostly children's responsibility in rural areas



During the interviews conducted with school teachers, it was found that since Dalit children take mid-day meal in the plates, children from non-Dalit castes refuse to take mid-day meals in the school. In fifteen FGDs out of the twenty FGDs held with children, they narrated a particular instance of feeling discriminated when their classmates from higher castes like Bhoomihar, Rajput, Brahmin, Yadav, Kurmi etc. refuse to take MDMs along with them on the ground that Dalit children also eat from those plates. Out of the twenty key-informant interviews held with school teachers, four of them admitted that if the cook or her assistant is a Dalit woman, children from non-Dalit castes specially those who are in the upper hierarchy of the caste ladder refuse to eat MDM in the school.

B.10.4 Children not going to school are at a higher risk to child labour

Children who drop out from school or who stop going to school for quite some time are exposed to higher risks and become vulnerable. Dalit children in particular become vulnerable to multiple risks as the data from the survey indicates below as presented in the chart:

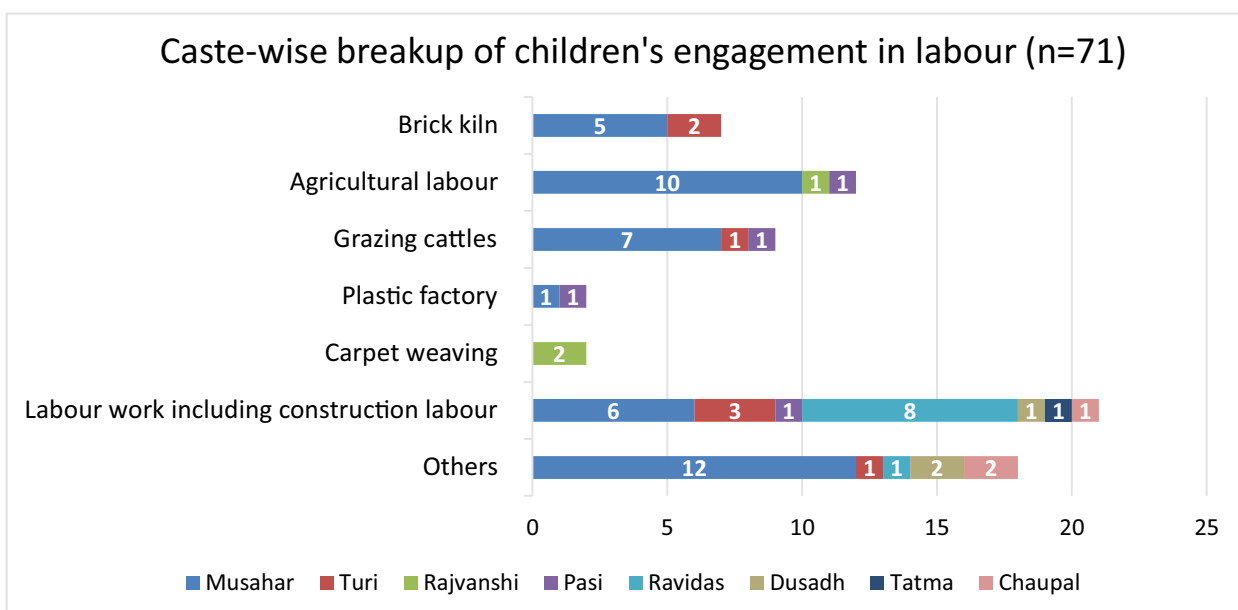


The data indicates that child labour was reported by 42.02% (n = 71)⁸ out of those who dropped out from schools. These children were engaged into different occupations ranging from agricultural labour to construction labour and going out to work and engage into unskilled wage-based labour. A caste-wise break-up of the occupations or labour that children were reported to be engaged in throw up a picture that is similar to the caste-wise vulnerability in dropping out from school. In both the categories, it is children from Musahar caste who are figuring the highest. This proves a strong association between school drop-out rate and child labour incidences. The association is best reflected in the following statement that the investigators came across quite often during field visits for survey:

"Bachwa sab na padhtai, ta kaaje ne kartai!"

(If a child does not study, what else would he do, if not work!)"

The caste-composition of the respondent households whose children have been reported into labour work is presented below along different occupations/work:

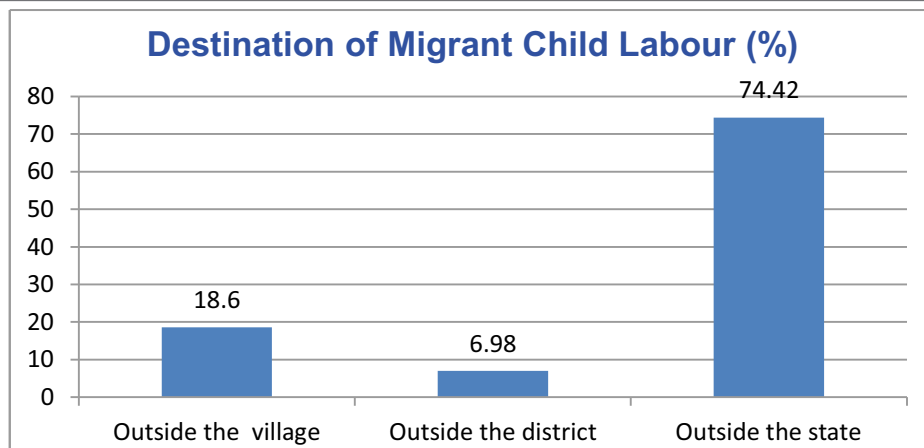


⁸By adding the number of responses reported on drop-out children's engagements into work from three broad categories, i.e. migrant labour, construction work or farm labour, and cattle grazing, during the survey.

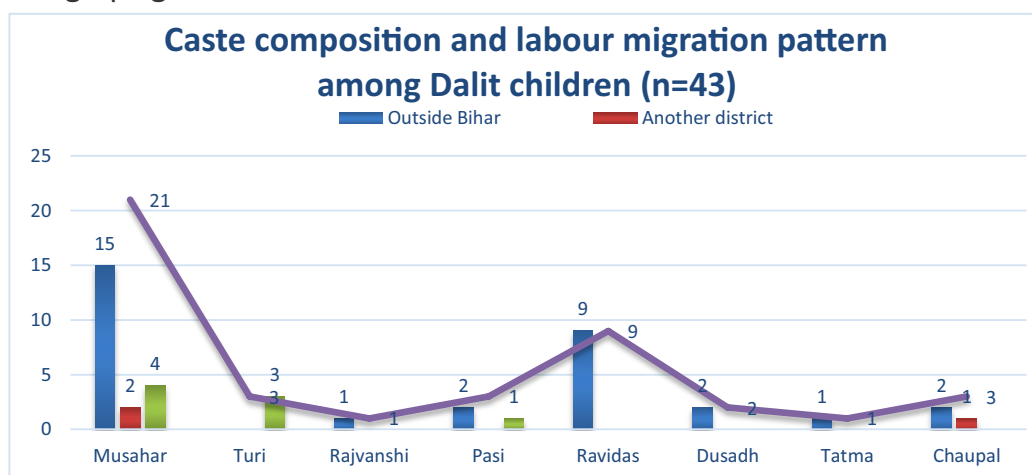
Labour/Occupation	Number of responses	Caste composition of households interviewed
Brick kiln	07	Musahar- 5 Turi- 02
Agricultural labour	12	Musahar- 10 Rajvanshi- 01 Pasi- 01
Grazing cattles	09	Musahar- 07 Turi- 01 Pasi- 01
Plastic factory	02	Musahar- 01 Pasi- 01
Carpet making	02	Rajvanshi- 02
Labour work including construction labour	21	Ravidas- 08 Musahar- 06 Turi- 03 Dusadh- 01 Tatma- 01 Chaupal- 01 Pasi- 01
Other	18	Musahar- 12 Dusadh- 02 Chaupal- 02 Turi- 01 Ravidas- 01
Total (n)	71	

If we add to this figure to those responses where children are sitting at home and help in household chores (n=57), the percentage of households engaged in paid and unpaid work reaches to 63.31%. The data also indicates that the incidents of labour migration by adolescent children (14-18 years) is quite high. From a total of seventy one responses that reported child labour, 60.56% of responses reported about their child migrating for work to other districts or states/cities. The data shows that the extent of inter-state migration by Dalit children for labour is as high as 74.42%. The breakup of child migration is given below:

Pattern of labour migration by children depending upon destination	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Outside their village but within their district	08	18.60
Migrated to other districts within Bihar	03	6.98
Migrated to other state	32	74.42
Total	43	100



The graph below explains migration pattern in different Dalit caste groups. The survey finds that children from Musahar caste are at the highest risk of migrating or being trafficked for labour, followed by Ravidas caste. Out of all those who are migrating, 48.84% belonged to Musahar caste. Ravidas caste children (20.93%) stood second at risk of migration. It is also observed that both these caste groups are vulnerable to inter-state migration. Another thing that has been observed from the data analysis is that although Dusadh caste comprised of seventy-three households of the total 400 households covered in this survey (See Table on pg. 13), however, only two households reported migration for labour. Children from Dusadh caste are also least prone to school drop-out. This is just opposite to adult migration percentage, where 30.14% of Dusadh households reported out-migration for livelihood. The data, therefore, indicates that members of Dusadh households undertake informed migration by adults whereas children from Musahar households undertake unsafe migration or are at the highest risk of trafficking. Hence, within Dalits also, we find that children are placed differently and they are exposed to different levels of risks, as the graph given below tries to demonstrate:



Destination of Migrant Child Labour	Musahar	Turi	Rajvanshi	Pasi	Ravidas	Dusadh	Tatma	Chaupal
Outside Bihar	15		1	2	9	2	1	2
Another district	2							1
Within district	4	3		1				
Total	21	3	1	3	9	2	1	3

Respondents were asked about cities or states where children migrate for work. The responses indicate that children are going in all directions in the country in search of work. A break-up of their destination place where they migrate or taken away to work is presented below in this table:

States/Cities	No. of responses	Percentage
Delhi	7	21.88
Kerala	4	12.50
Tamil Nadu/Chennai	3	9.38
Jharkhand	3	9.38
Telangana/Hyderabad	3	9.38
Gujarat	3	9.38
Ludhiana/Punjab	2	6.25
Bengaluru	2	6.25
Mumbai	2	6.25
Rajasthan	2	6.25
Kolkata	1	3.13
Total	32	100%

The pattern of migration and destination follows the same pattern like that of adult out-migration for labour from Bihar⁹. Although, Delhi is the most preferred destination among both children and adults, South Indian states like Kerala and Telangana have also emerged as a favourite destination for migrant adolescent labour and their recruiters or traffickers. This was confirmed during group discussion with adolescent and community members as well.

⁹As per Census 2011, migration destinations from rural Bihar is in the following order: Delhi, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Punjab, Jharkhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Rest of India (Sarkar, Pinak, '2011 Census Snapshot: Out-migration from Bihar; Major Reasons and Destinations', Journal of Migration Affairs, TISS (2019)

Data from group discussions conducted in different districts indicate that children are engaged in diverse kinds of occupations that involve largely physical and unskilled labour including agriculture and construction industry.

When the respondents, who said that their children had migrated to work, were asked about the person(s) who helped them in the process of migration and finding work, thirty seven (37) chose to answer this. A majority of the respondents (75.67%) said that they did so with the help of their friends and relatives, whereas 18.92% said that they were helped by *dalal/thekeedar* (labour agents/contractors). The rest said that their children went on their own.

The extent of migration and the existence of labour contractors and agents in the area to facilitate this migration indicates an active network of traffickers in these areas. Dalit children who have dropped out or who have left going to school are easy targets for these agents. Children are lured away in the name of a promising future outside their village in a big city and easy money. The dreams of young adolescents and youths from Dalit families are exploited by these traffickers who deceive their parents and guardians and push them into hazardous occupations and processes at a low wage and for longer working hours without decent working conditions. Although, this study did not get to talk to those children who have gone out for work and record their experience, however, there are enough studies around human trafficking and child labour which suggest this¹⁰.

¹⁰Report of the Advisory Committee constituted by the orders of Supreme Court in *Gaurav Jain v. Union of India and Ors.* AIR 1997 SC 3034; NHRC Study, 2005: 85

Map: Destination places for labour migration/trafficking of children for labour



The data also indicates that migrating out for labour becomes a part of survival strategy for many families who are landless, have large family to support and have no or very little resource to take care of their daily expenses. Among Dalit caste groups, Musahars are the most backward in all aspects and this is reflected through both quantitative and qualitative data collected during field survey.

B.10.5 Instances of drug addiction and substance abuse and its impact on children

During the survey, only five respondents shared that their children had got into drugs and alcohol after dropping out from school. This was confirmed during discussions with adolescents and community members as well. A significant percentage of boys and girls who participated in the FGDs (33.33%) shared that they knew about some students studying in their schools who consumed tobacco, gutkha, and cigarette. This was truly a menace for families which was impacting the health of the children concerned who were into it, was very much evident from the discussions held with adolescents, community members and teachers. All the twenty teachers who were interviewed said that substance abuse and drug addiction was on rise in young adolescents and youths in and around the villages where they were teaching.

B.10.6 Problem of Alcoholism and Domestic Violence

Twenty five per cent (25%) of children participating in the FGDs said that they found it difficult to concentrate on their studies because of the problem of alcoholism within their home and in the tola, whereas 24.63 per cent children participating in the FGDs said that they faced verbal or physical violence from their fathers when they are drunk. This was also corroborated by one third of teachers during interviews with them and a few community members. A few children also said that they get troubled by police who raid their tolas on suspicion of brewing of country made liquor or storage or sale of it. When the raids happen, they alleged that, the policemen use filthy words against their family members and thrash people mercilessly and sometimes they break their *chulhas*, utensils and other items kept in the house.

B.10.7 Harassment faced by Dalit girls

Data compiled from the household survey does not fully indicate the extent of this problem being faced by Dalit girls. The survey finds only sixteen respondents sharing incidents of harassment of girls from their family. The reason for low response is largely because the respondents usually do not open up about these in a survey. Hence, this particular issue was also discussed with adolescent children and community members during group interactions with them. A large number of girls (45.68%) shared their experience of facing harassment. As most of the girls participating in the group interactions were school-going, they said that they faced harassment on way to or while coming back from school. The girls narrated that while going to school, they found strangers making obscene signs or singing lewd songs, or being stared at by older boys and men staring at them. They also complained that *nukkads* and *chowks* (street corners or road-crossings which are a kind of gathering

place for people to meet and interact) were the places where they faced maximum harassment, the girls said. The break-up of these 16 cases of harassment is given below (There are multiple options as the harassment was faced by girls on more than one occasion, therefore total response adds up to more than sixteen):

Occasion when they faced harassment	No. of Responses	Caste to which the girls belonged
On way to school	9	Musahar- 03 Dusadh- 02 Ravidas-02 Tatma- 01 Pasi- 01
While going for open defecation in the field	5	Musahar- 05
On way to market/shop	4	Musahar- 03 Ravidas- 1
While going to another tola	2	Musahar- 01 Turi- 01
Grazing cattles	1	Musahar-01

Although, it is a very small sample and the findings cannot be generalised, it is still a strong indicator about the vulnerability of Musahars in Dalit castes about the harassments they face. This data also suggests that women and girls from those households become highly vulnerable to the risk of harassment when they go out for defecation. The qualitative responses further indicate that it is not about the place, but people who harass girls because of their mindset that treats girls as an object to satiate their perverted desires. If the girls belong to a weaker and vulnerable section with lesser power and resources, their vulnerability is higher compared to girls from other castes. Some of the experiences narrated by girls reflect the magnitude of the problem:

"hamlog jab vidyalay jaate hain to kuchh ladke sab seeti bajate hain aur comment pass karate hain."

("When we go to school, older boys harass us with whistling and passing lewd comments.")

"Tractor se aise sab jaate rahega, par hamlog ko dekhte hi tej awaz me ganda-ganda gaana bajane lagega"

("People would keep going on tractor, but no sooner some of them see us, they would start playing lewd songs on high volume")

"Meri didi ko school jaate hue kuchh ladka log comment pass karta tha. Ek bada aadmi to

pichha bhi karta tha. Uske baad mere pitaji ne didi ka school chhudwa ke uska shaadi karwa diya. U samay meri didi sirf 15 saal ki hi thi."

("My older sister had to leave school because of lewd comments from some boys. One man used to follow my sister. Then parents decided to make her sit at home. Within a year, she was married off. My sister was just 15 years at the time of marriage.")

"Hamlog jab andhera hone par jaate hain baahar maidan k liye to doosra tola ka aadmi log jaan bujhkar torch baar dega."

("When we go out during late evening for relieving ourselves in the field, men from other tolas light torch on us.")

B.11 Right to play and participation-Issues of inclusion

Out of 400 households that were visited during the survey, respondents from fifty-eight households (14.5%) said that there was no playground in the village, whereas those from thirty-four households (8.5%) alleged that their children do not go to play in the village playground because of the following reasons that were associated with their caste identity:

- (i) Discrimination by children or persons from other castes against their children (16)
- (ii) Intimidation or threat of physical harm and assault from dominant caste people when children go to play in the playground (15)
- (iii) Security concerns for their children and their daughters (03)

"Bolta hai tum chhota jaat ka hai, alag raho"
("They tell our children that you all belong to low caste, so you should not mix with us")

"Doosre log dabangai karte hain"
("Other people try to show their dominance on us")

"Caste ko lekar dosti nahi karta hai hamlog ka bachcha se"
("Other caste children do not make friends with our children")

"Bachcha chori ka dar se hamlog nahi bhejta hain"
("We don't send our children due to the fear of child theft")

"Musahar ka bachcha bol k chidhata hai"
(They taunt us by calling us Musahar kids")

Right to play is a basic human right of every child, as it allows the child to mingle with others, make friends and participate in group. This has a life-long impact on the development of children as participating in sports and games not only helps them to attain physical and cognitive growth, but also help them learn important things like essential life-skills, values

of co-existence and sharing of resources with others. However, when children are excluded from participating in group activities, it has a serious harm on child's overall development. During the survey, 14.5% of Dalit households alleged caste-based discrimination, fear of assault and intimidating practices towards their children from persons belonging to dominant castes or so-called upper castes. The above responses are a small reflection of these fear and discrimination.

During FGDs with adolescents from Dalit community, most of them shared that their play groups had members from Dalit castes only, as children from other castes did not want to play with them. The responses show how children get conditioned into caste-based behaviour and how caste controls the nature and scope of their interactions with children from other caste groups or community.

However, during interactions, the field investigators came across statements which reflected assertions and resilience in children that indicates that they had grown in consciousness to identify a conduct that hurts their dignity and are no longer ready to accept it as their fate the way their parents and grandparents did.

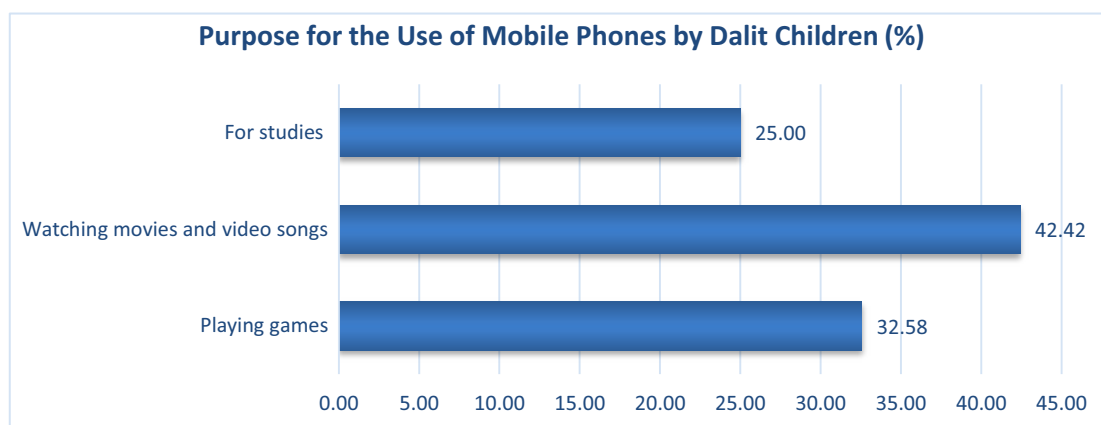
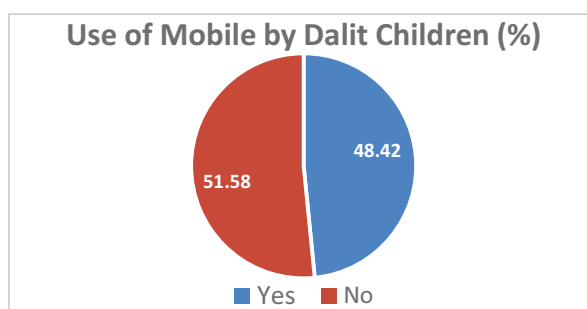
B.11.1 Friendship across castes

The respondents were asked whether their children made friends with boys and girls from other caste or not. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents said that their children had friends from non-Dalit castes as well. From the remaining half of the respondents, 37.4% said that their children did not have any friend from non-Dalit castes, whereas 12.6% had most of the friends from Dalit castes and only few from non-Dalit castes.

Caste diversity in friendship or peer group formation is a strong indicator of social inclusion and cohesiveness. Children get conditioned about caste differences and about discriminatory conducts right from the very beginning which goes into their psyche. They repeat the same behaviour- subdued or supremacist, as they become adult. But having a friend from another caste should not simply be taken on its surface as an indicator of participation and inclusion. One needs to analyse and see how this inter-caste friendship between children from Dalit and non-Dalit castes operate in their lives and how much caste-influenced discriminatory behaviour is practised by non-Dalit children with their friends from Dalit community. The qualitative data collected from the group interactions with children and community members and interviews with teachers help us understand this.

Information Access by Dalit Children and Use of Mobiles

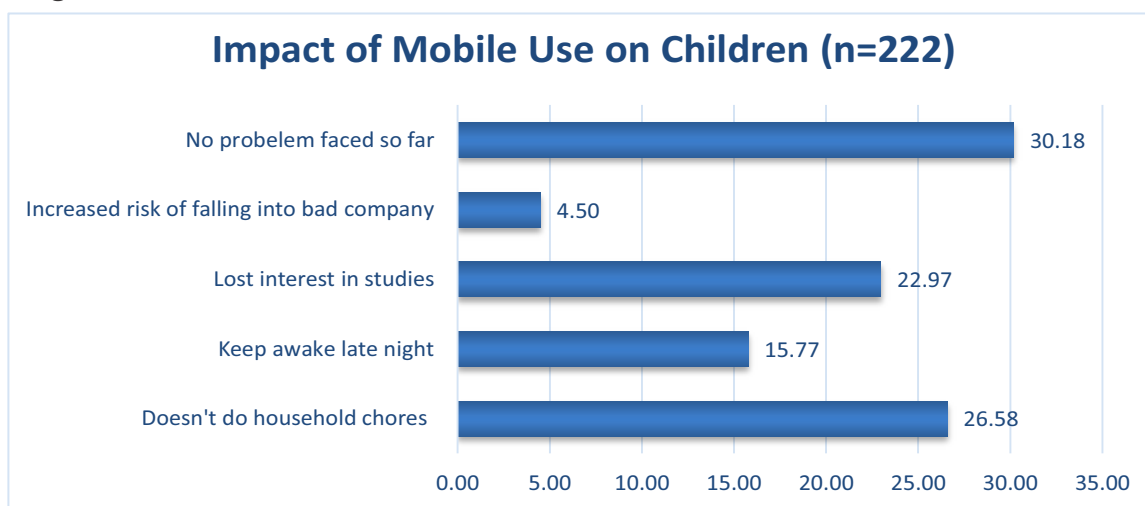
Every child has a right to access age-appropriate information to help him or her understand the environment and issues concerning him/her and participate in the interactions. There are different platforms that promote a child's right to participation. However, we find that Dalit children's participation is very much limited. Dalit households, in general, have poor access to different media like newspapers, electronic media and digital media. Easy and affordable access to internet has made communication of messages a much easier task than before. Teledensity in the country has also increased. In Bihar, It was 30.07 per 100 inhabitants in 2010 which has increased to 59.04 in 2020¹¹. This is against the teledensity of 88.66 per 100 inhabitants at all India level in 2020. During our survey, we asked the head of the households who were our respondents about accessibility to mobile phones by their children. Out of a total 349 households who answered in YES or NO to this question, 51.58% of the respondents said that their children had access mobile phones, whereas 48.42% said that they did not have any mobile phone.



But when the respondents were asked the question, "What do the children do with mobile?", the responses painted a disappointing picture. The survey data indicates that three children (mostly of adolescent age) out of every four children who have access to smart phones have been spending a lot of screen-time on mobile for watching videos and

¹¹Telecom Statistics- 2020, Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications, Government of India, New Delhi

playing online games. Only one out of four children (25%) was said to be using the mobile phone for educational purpose. How children and adolescents are using mobile is a matter of great concern as they are slowly getting addicted to online games and online content available on internet. Children who are impressionable are highly vulnerable to online stalking and online sexual abuse.



Parents and guardians have started realising the ill-effects of unregulated mobile use by children and adolescents. As represented in the chart above, around 70% of the parents felt that the mobile phones are interfering into the daily and normal routine of their children. They shared the following concerns as a direct impact of the way children are using smartphones:

1. Children are engaging with mobile phones so much that they are no longer helping their parents in doing the household chores (26.58%).
2. Children have lost interest in studies as they are spending a lot of time watching online content like movies, songs, reels and playing online games (22.97%).
3. They remain awake till late in the night while using mobile. Due to this they get up late in the morning which impacts their daily routine by eating into the time which they could have utilised in studying and playing outdoor games (15.77%).
4. Increased risk of falling into bad company (4.50%)- Some of the parents were also concerned about their children, especially daughters, engaged in conversations with boys. During discussions in groups, this concern was more to do with controlling the girls, than about her safety, so that she does not get involved into any romantic relationship.

The above data shows that mobile phones, on one hand, are surely an effective medium for providing information and accessing public services, but if not regulated and left unmonitored, it can lure children and impressionable adolescents into a world of unexplored fantasies through online games, movies and videos full with sexual content. When children use social media and other internet platforms, they are at higher risk of becoming a victim of cyber fraud, online abuse and digital stalking. During discussions with adolescents, they appeared to be highly unaware of these challenges, although many of them admitted about the negative impact that the mobile phones was causing on them.

C. Findings on harmful traditional and cultural practices and social norms

There are certain socio-cultural norms that are considered harmful and act as barrier in children's attainment of rights according to their full potential. These practices emerge from the belief system that a community holds in general. However, these beliefs are not static and they keep changing with the change in contexts and over a period of time. This is also true that changing one's belief is quite tough even if one is aware that a particular belief is harmful to the family, children and the community as a whole.

To test such common practices and norms and the level of belief in them. For this, the respondents of the household survey were given some statements which represented a particular belief and they were asked to tick the appropriate option from the following to show what they feel about it in general:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Can't say

This was done to test the degree of their concurrence or difference to a particular belief system. The respondents were given the following statements:

1. When a child falls sick, s(he) is taken first to an *ojha/guni* (traditional healers).
2. Mother's milk immediately after birth is bad for a child and should be thrown away.
3. Mother and her new-born baby should not be allowed to go out or take bath at least for a week after child's birth.
4. During periods, a girl's body become dirty and therefore she should not be allowed to enter kitchen, cook food or participate in daily prayers.
5. Girls should not be educated more as it creates a barrier in their marriage prospects

by making it difficult for parents to find a suitable match for their daughters.

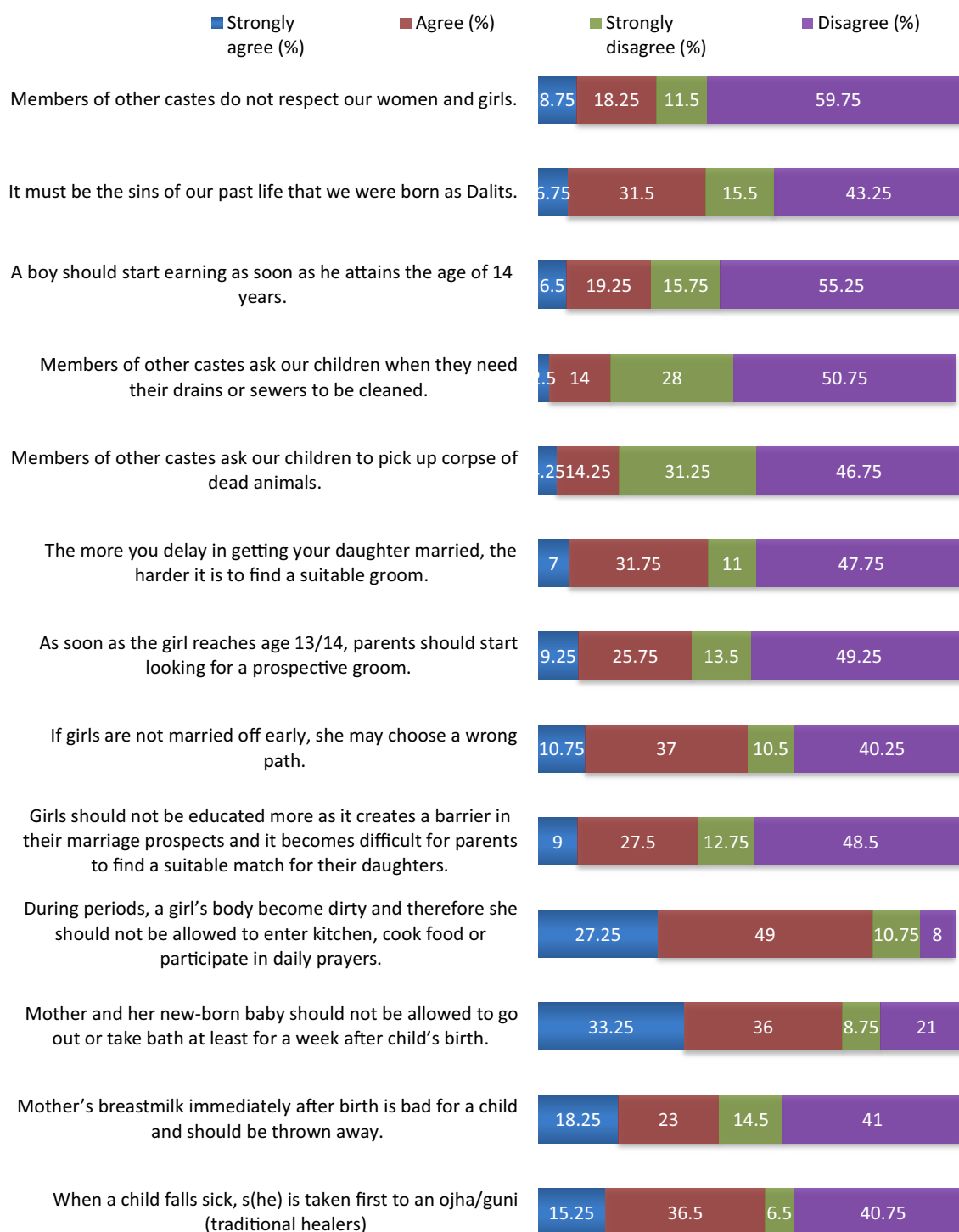
6. If girls are not married off early, she may choose a wrong path.
7. As soon as the girl reaches the age of 13/14, parents should start looking for a prospective groom for her.
8. The more you delay in getting your daughter married, the harder it is to find a suitable groom.
9. A boy should start earning as soon as he attains the age of 14 years.
10. Members of other castes ask our children to pick up corpse of dead animals.
11. Members of other castes ask our children when they need their drains or sewers to be cleaned.
12. It must be the sins of our past life that we were born as Dalits.
13. Members of other castes do not respect our women and girls.

The above statements from serial no. 1 to 9 represent the beliefs or norms held by a significant section of society in general and by Dalits as well. But, there are certain statements (e.g. from serial no. 10 to 13) which are concerned with Dalits only, e.g, the ones related to removing animal corpse, cleaning of toilets and sewers, considering birth as Dalit as a result of past life's sinful act and ill-treatment of Dalit women and girls because of their caste.

Agreement or disagreement to a particular statement and also the degree at which a respondent agrees or disagrees shows his/her perception. This also explains, in part, why Dalits in general as a community are comparatively much behind non-Dalit castes. The problems faced by Dalit castes are a result of the structural issues and the beliefs, norms and practices. Quite often the beliefs and norms are also a result of these structural issues like landlessness, resource deprivation, identity-based exclusion and discrimination etc.

The chart below presents these responses on the four parameters (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree). A very small percentage of respondents could not form any opinion or chose not to say anything. The first two sections in the bar represent respondent's agreement with the statement given on the left, whereas the last two sections represent disagreement.

DALIT PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION ABOUT CERTAIN SOCIAL BELIEFS AND NORMS



The highest level of agreement (after adding together percentage of both 'agree' and 'strongly agree') is observed in the following:

1. Considering that a girl's body becomes dirty, she should not be allowed to enter kitchen, cook food or participate in daily prayers (76.25%)
2. Not allowing mother and her new-born baby to move out of the room or take bath at least for a week after birth (69.25%)
3. Taking a child first to a traditional healer when s(he) falls sick (51.75%)
4. Girls should be married off at young age to prevent family dishonour (47.75%)
5. Mother's milk immediately after birth is not good for child's health and should be thrown away (41.25%)

Except the statement at sl. No. 4, all the four statements are closely related to health and personal hygiene of mother, child and adolescent girls. This explains the prevailing high level of infant mortality, child morbidity and malnourishment and urinary transmitted infection (UTI) among girls and women in Dalit households.

The analysis of disagreements show that the highest level of disagreements are observed in the following:

1. Members of other castes do not have respect for the women of the Dalit community (59.75%).
2. A boy should start earning as soon as he attains the age of 14 years (55.25%).
3. Members of other castes call upon children from Dalit community when they need their drains or sewers to be cleaned (50.75%).
4. Once the girl child reaches age 13/14, parents should start looking for a prospective groom (49.25%).
5. Girls should not be educated more as it creates a barrier in their marriage prospects and it becomes difficult for parents to find a suitable match for their daughters (48.5%).
6. The more one delays in getting his/her daughter married, the harder it is for him/her to find a suitable groom (47.75%).

A higher level of disagreements indicates a higher level of consciousness among Dalits with regard to the issues like dignity for their womenfolk, girls' education, child labour, child marriage and about undignified and caste-based occupations like manual scavenging and cleaning of drains and sewers etc. But, on one hand though the data indicates a higher level of awareness among Dalits about these issues, a significant number of respondents have

shown their conforming views to some of the above statements as well, which also explains the higher prevalence of early marriage of girls, child labour and school dropout among Dalit children.

For instance, to the statement: 'the more you delay in getting your daughter married, the harder it is to find a suitable groom', a majority of the respondents disagreed (47.75%). This shows that they do not believe that early marriage or marriage at an early age is a prerequisite for a good marital match. But 31.75% of the respondents in agreement also goes on to indicate a higher prevalence of early marriage of girls in Dalit community.

Similarly, to the statement that girls should be married off at an early age to stop them from making romantic relationships and thus save family honour, while 40.25% of the respondents disagreed, strikingly 37% of the respondents agreed to it. This indicates that if parents find out that their daughter has made friendship with a boy or she is into romantic relationship, there is a strong likelihood that she would be forced to sit at home than sending her to school. Often it results in her marriage before 'it is too late'. This was confirmed even in meetings with community members, which constituted mostly female members.

"galat sangat me padne par badlaami na hoga sir, isliye kya karenge jaldiye shaadi kar denge."

("A girl falling into romantic relationship shall bring dishonour to the family. What can we do if not marrying her off early!")

(A female in Samastipur during discussion with community members)

"Ladki ko bhi sochna na chahiye ki agar padhne gaye hain to padhai karen na ki ladka log se dosti. Agar dosti hi karna hai to fir ma-baap kya karega, naam katwa k ghar me baitha dega!"

("Girls should also think that if they are going to school, they should just focus on their studies. But, if they make friends with boys, parents will have no option but to make them sit at home and not allow them to go to school anymore.")

(A teacher during interview in Khagaria)

Sir, hamare school me du go bahan aati thi, wo dono hi ek ladke se khoob baat karti thi. Ek din uske pitaji dekhe to bahut maare aur naam katwa diye. Ladka lekin abhi bhi padhai kar hi raha hai."

("Sir, there were two sisters who were studying in our school. They were close friends with a boy. One day, their father found this and beat them a lot. Both the sisters were taken out

from the school. They don't come to school anymore. The boy, however, continues to come.")

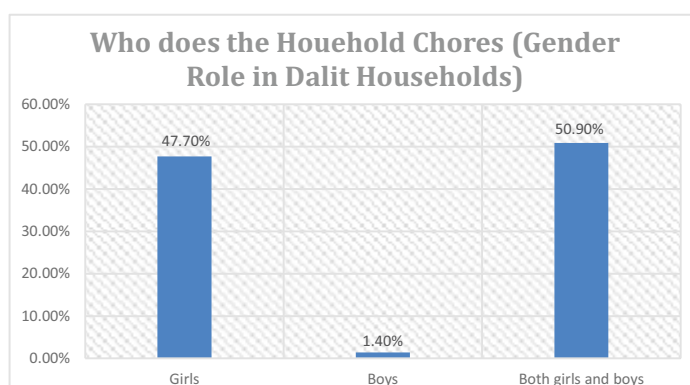
(An adolescent girl during group interactions in Patna)

Further, on questions concerning exploitative and undignified professions like cleaning the drain or sewers or removing the dead animal corpse, only around 14% of the respondents agreeing to the statements about their children being engaged by non-Dalit castes in such work, indicate a very high level of consciousness that they should no longer get associated with these occupations as it does not give them a dignified place in the society. It also shows a strong sense of resentment towards being asked to do these by non-Dalit caste persons. This is a welcome change as it marks a major shift in Dalit children who are now aspiring for decent work and dignified professions just like children from non-Dalit castes.

In addition to the above, the survey found the following as a part of the traditional, cultural or community practices of Dalits that harmed their children:

Gender role in domestic space

This survey found that Dalit girls were generally more interested in studies than boys. This was confirmed by the teachers as well during interviews with them in the field. But while the girls are focussing on their studies, they are still not as privileged as much as boys from their family are. The older girls in the family have to assist their mothers or female members in doing the household chores, for which they get up early in the morning at around 5 a.m. Washing utensils, cleaning household, cooking food or assisting in things like firing the hearth, getting wood for fuel and water for cooking, doughing flour, taking care of younger kids in the family, etc. are the essential parts of a Dalit girl's life. The respondents were asked to tell who among their son and daughter, was responsible, apart from adult members of the family, for household chores like washing utensils and clothes, cleaning house and taking care of young children. Only 1.40% respondents said this for a boy, whereas 47.7% said this for girls.



During discussions, the boys said that they also assisted their families in getting water and wood, but they were never asked to help in the kitchen.

"Ye sab kaam to didi log karti hai."

("These kitchen stuff are done by older girls".)

In addition to the above, girls also assist their parents in fields during sowing and harvesting season. When this survey was being done in the month of October-November, it was a time of paddy harvest and families needed extra hands to help. So girls of all ages and boys of younger age said that they were helping their parents in this. This also forced them to skip classes for around a week.

The work done by girls was not considered a work, as it did not earn them any money. It was always considered 'assistance' or 'help' performed to support the family or their parents even if it contributed to supplement the household income. However, this is different for boys. During discussions and also in household survey, it was found that many adolescent boys worked as labourer- agricultural labour, construction labour and as migrant labour and earned for the family. So, when they returned home, they did not work to help in the household chores. However, this stereotyped gender-normative behaviour is not just specific to Dalit castes; it cuts across every caste and community in varying degrees.

Alcohol consumption among Dalits

Alcohol consumption in certain caste groups within Dalits was still in practice. It also had a social acceptance. For instance, the women in a community meeting in one of the districts where this study was conducted said that they did not see anything wrong if their men drink a little wine after a day's back-breaking work. However, children complained of domestic violence in their families by their alcoholic fathers (24.63%). They said that this also disturbed them in their studies.

To a question, "What differences do you find between the status/condition of children from Dalit community and children from non-Dalit community and why", out of the twenty (20) group interactions with the community members which comprised mostly women, in twelve (12) such interactions, the members talked about the problem of alcohol as one of the chief markers that divided both the communities and which, according to them, was partly responsible for their children's poor status compared to non-Dalit caste children.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The report is based on the findings from a survey of 400 Dalit households in 20 Panchayats across ten districts of the state namely Darbhanga, Jamui, Khagaria, Madhepura, Munger, Muzaffarpur, Nawada, Patna, Samastipur, and Sheikhpura. The survey was supplemented with FGDs with groups of Dalit children and adult community members from Dalit community and in-depth interviews with teachers from government schools in these Panchayats where Dalit children go to study. The study has reinforced the fact that Dalit children with small variations between Dalit castes are still the most deprived in the state. The deprivations are multiple and therefore a multidimensional picture of the reality has been presented through data, figures and narratives. Access to government schemes and entitlements are deeply affected by discriminatory behaviour of the service providers, peer group and structural factors. The Study has identified some low hanging fruits along with areas that need long term intervention. In the 75th year of India's independence, if a majority of citizens continue to face such deprivation, then this needs a deeper introspection by all.

The study has generated meaningful evidence for government, civil society and community at large. Following are some concrete recommendations that are based upon the evidence generated in this study:

Recommendations

- The survey has highlighted landlessness (both agricultural and homestead land) as one of the biggest deprivations of Dalit community. During crisis situation, families in rural areas fall back on the land they hold. The government must act on making land available to Dalit families.
- Requirement of certificates for accessing government programmes should be done away with for certain Dalit communities like Musahar, Karori, Pasi etc. because the level of deprivation is felt by an overwhelming majority of families in these Dalit castes. The processes should be so designed that they enable these families to come forward and access the benefits of government schemes and should not become a barrier.
- The environment within schools is still not welcoming for children from Dalit castes specially Musahars. The attitude of teachers and non-teaching staff must change. As most of the children are first generation learners, special coaching classes should be organised for these children so that they do not lag behind in class performance.
- Parents and guardians should also be sensitised to maintain cleanliness and personal hygiene of their children. Children feel discriminated by their classmates if they remain unclean.
- The value of education for children and the family should be communicated to the parents through regular meetings and awareness campaigns.

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- Increased investment in Dalit children's education should be done to combat the menace of alcoholism in their community.
 - The need for a common and safe space for Dalit children to come and study in a peaceful environment has been felt during the course of this study. Many children complained of lack of space within their homes and disturbance in their studies due to violent environment because of alcohol related disputes.
 - Such platforms and opportunities need to be created which results in inter-caste mingling among children.
 - Training and sensitisation of key duty bearers working at grassroot level like Para-legal volunteers, Vikas Mitras, ANMs, ASHA workers, Aanganwadi Workers, PDS shop owners etc. need to be undertaken to address health and educational deprivation of Dalit children and women.
 - Government departments should prepare a convergent plan to identify left out communities and Dalit tolas and organise targeted camps to cover Dalit families and individuals under government schemes.
 - Multi-pronged strategies with a programme focussing on education, health, life skills, aspiration development need to be devised to discourage the practice of child marriage in Dalit communities. For instance, the education of both boys and girls should be in focus. Education for a girl becomes an incentive for the family only when both the boys and girls from Dalit families get education, otherwise many Dalit parents do not want their girls to study further as they would find it difficult to match a boy within their community who matches the educational attainment of their daughter.
 - Gender inequity within Dalit families also needs to be addressed through different programmes. Gender inequity and gender injustice cuts across caste and class and therefore any programme meant for Dalit community or children should have a strong element of gender transformative approach.
 - Children from Dalit families specially those who have dropped out or have stopped going to school are at a very high risk of human trafficking. The inter-district or inter-state migration should be discouraged for children even if they are adolescents and are capable to work under the existing labour laws. These children should be covered under the existing government schemes and programmes on skill enhancement.
 - The role of civil society and NGOs needs to be recognised in preventing discrimination and abuse against children and for creating an environment which respects the dignity of every child. The government should seek active partnership with such organisations to carry out sensitisation and awareness programmes with both Dalit and non-Dalit communities.

Chapter Six

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