
A Case Study of Child Labour

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Abstract

Child labour is a serious challenge facing the world today. The problem is particularly acute in the poor and developing economies. India has one of the highest numbers of child labourers in the world and the numbers have paradoxically increased. This is quite intriguing given that the government has launched several programmes such as the National Child Labour Project, Mid-day Meals Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan to name a few.

Our study is based on two slum areas of South-West Delhi where the primary occupation of the surveyed household was rag-sorting. We attempt to do a study of the two slum areas and present the similarities and differences in the patterns and incidence of child labour. Though the set of surveyed households in both the slums are similar in terms of average income and nature of occupation, there is a considerable difference in the incidence of child labour. Such difference could be attributed to other qualitative and area-specific factors which tend to get ignored in empirical modelling. We find that voter identity cards, female labour force participation rates, demonstration effects, education and economic status as reflected by ownership of dwellings turn out to be important factors affecting child labour.

Introduction

Child labour is a grave developmental problem and a potential impediment to the overall socio-economic progress of a country. It is a violation of child as well as human rights. Child labor also creates a vicious cycle of illiteracy and low income, while also depriving the adults of better employment opportunities and higher wages. The ILO and other such agencies in their studies found that India has one of the largest number of child laborers in the world. The census found an increase in the number of child labourers from 11.28 million in 1991 to 12.59 million in 2001. Official statistics specific to Delhi suggest that there has been a sharp increase in the number of working children (5-14 years) from 27351 to 41899 during 1991-2001. Though these are the official figures, the actual numbers are bound to be higher due to greater likelihood of under-reporting by the parents and the employers.

This is quite intriguing given that the government has launched several programmes such as the National Child Labour Project, Mid-day Meals Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan to name a few.

Delhi is not included in the areas covered by the National Child Labour Project (introduced in 1988) which is a major scheme for the rehabilitation of child labour and opening up of special schools for such children. The special schools/Rehabilitation Centres provide non-formal education, vocational training, supplementary nutrition, monthly stipend of Rs.100 per child per month, health care facilities to children withdrawn from employment. Delhi NCT is included in the INDUS project, (Indo-US Child Labour Project, launched in 2000) which is aimed at withdrawing children in the age group of 8-14 from hazardous occupations and providing them meaningful transitional education. However, no funds were allocated to Delhi NCT in 2006-07 as per the information from Ministry of Labour.

Defining Child Labour

The term 'child labour' does not have a precise definition. Researchers and social scientists have defined and re-defined it based on their objective of study. The ambiguities associated with the definition of child labour are mainly on two issues:

- (i) Who should be called a child labour and what should be the target age group,
- (ii) The inclusion or exclusion of activities that are linked/not linked to child labour,
- (iii) Hours worked and the working conditions

It is clear that not all work done by children should be classified as child labour that is to be targeted for elimination. As per the ILO website,

“The term 'child labour' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and
- interferes with their schooling by:
 - a.) depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
 - b.) obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
 - c.) requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. “

For the purpose of our study, we have defined child labour in the wider context of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). So, we include all working children in the age group of 5-18 (completed) years as “child laborers”.

This is also in conformity with the recent proposals of amending the existing child labour laws by the Indian government. The earlier law on Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation Act) 1986 permits employment of children of up to 14 years of age in industries that are not considered to be hazardous. However, according to the newly proposed Child and Adolescent Labour Prohibition Act, 2012 all forms of child labour under the age of 14 years will be banned(hazardous or non-hazardous), the employment of children in the 14-18 age group in hazardous occupations prohibited and child labour a cognisable offence. Children between 14 and 18 years can be employed, but only in non-hazardous industries with property safety mechanism.

In our study most of the children who said that they work were involved in garbage sorting and rag-picking which is potentially hazardous and exposes them to health hazards. According to the ILO, *'Labour that jeopardises the physical, mental or moral well-being of a child, either because of its nature or because of the conditions in which it is carried out, is known as "hazardous work"'*.

Another justification for taking the age group as 5-18 years is that it is very likely that children may have dropped out at early ages and started working. Such people if excluded could underestimate child labour. Also, respondents are very likely to be hesitant in admitting that they started working in the early ages (Jensen and Nielsen, 1997).

Research Methodology

We try to find the answer to our research problem through semi-structured interviews with a sample of households in the localities of Rangpuri Kabadi Basti (Mahipalpur) and Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti (Vasant Vihar). As our study is concerned with the incidence of child labour, we adopted purposive sampling.

For our comparative study on the incidence and pattern of child labour, we visited the rag-picking families of Rangpuri Kabadi Basti (near Mahipalpur) and Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti (Vasant Vihar). We selected these slums because the local NGO whom we approached worked in these areas and so that helped us seek an entry into the slums.

We used purposive sampling for our survey. A priori, it was expected that the parents will not be willing to reveal information about whether their children were working or not. We found so in our pilot survey also. Given, the greater likelihood of under-reporting in extracting information on child labour, we used purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews for our survey. We spoke to some children whom we spotted working in small shops and those involved in rag-picking. The interaction with some children brought some interesting findings.

We took a sample of 44 households from Rangpuri and 20 households from Kusumpur slums. In Kusumpur we took help of some children who took us to their own houses and several others whom they knew would participate in our survey.

Introduction to Study Areas

Rangpuri Kabadi Basti

The Delhi Government website lists Rangpuri as one of Delhi's 275 revenue villages.¹ However, with proximity to the Indira Gandhi International Airport, and the posh areas of South Delhi like Vasant Kunj, the area has seen huge development over recent years. Schools in the area include one MCD school apiece for girls and boys in Rangpuri as well as in Mahipalpur. Mahipalpur also has two Government schools while Rangpuri has a Kendriya Vidyalaya. The Kabadi Basti also has smaller private schools, with the authors finding at least three of them during the survey.

The Kabadi Basti, as evident from the name, is primarily home to rag pickers, though other professions like small shopkeepers, safai karamcharis and rickshaw pullers also find representation. Our sample too reflects this with 27 of the 44 sampled households (61 per cent) being engaged in rag-picking. The 44 families have a total of 127 children with every family having almost 3 children on average. Overall family size is 5 on average.

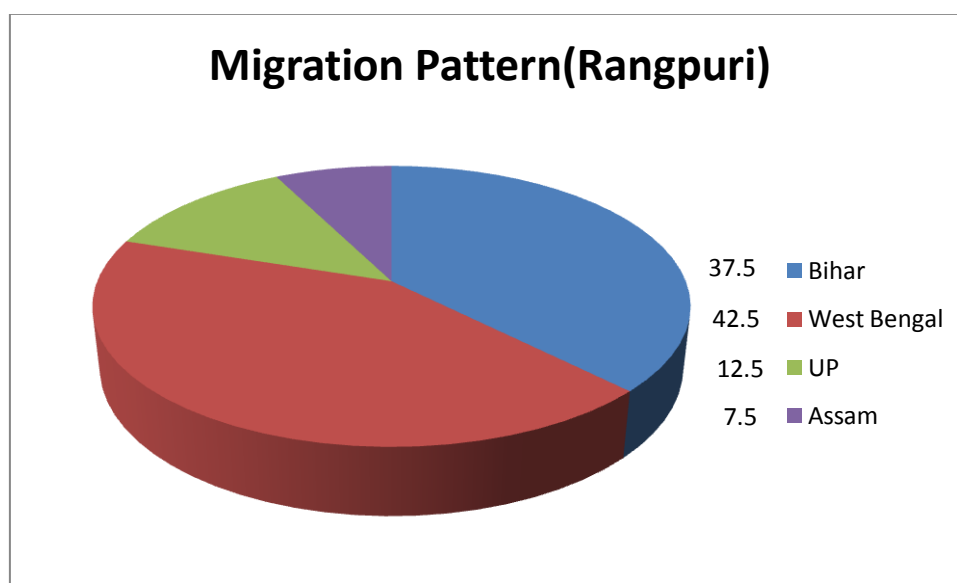


Figure 1: Source of Migrants, (in per cent)

Most of the families are migrants from different states, with Bengal being the source of migration for 17 of the 44 households. Bihar follows with 15 families (Fig 1). All of the families agreed that incomes in their source states were inadequate, and the migration was mainly for purposes of temporary income augmentation. They try to send some of their earnings home each month, and eventually plan to return.

¹ Revenue Village: Smallest area of rural habitation, recognized as a administrative division by district administrative department. Source: Website of Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India

A lot of these people come through erstwhile neighbours, friends and relatives who already reside in Delhi. Their living patterns reflect this, with plots of lands devoted to jhuggis of people from the same village or district. Community ties are strong, and this helps people gain employment quickly, though the type of employment is limited to rag picking.

The banking habits of these households show that 18 per cent of the households have bank account have home. 42 per cent of the households have back accounts in Delhi. When asked about bank accounts, people responded with a 'yes' referring to their bank accounts at home(see fig 2).

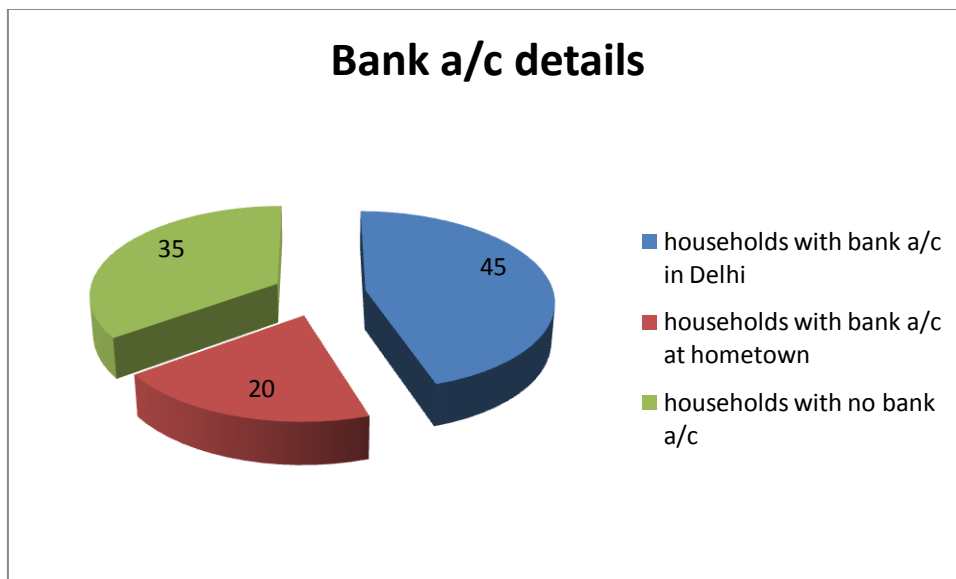


Figure 2: Banking habits in Rangpuri (figures in percentages)

We asked the respondents if they have been the beneficiaries of any government schemes. The unanimous response was a 'no'. This is not surprising, given the lack of ID proof like voter cards and ration card for example which are necessary pre-requisites to avail the benefits of government schemes.

From our survey we found that 7(20 per cent) families had voter identity cards for their current place of residence. 14(40 per cent) families had voter identity cards of their respective states. This seems to imply that people's participation in local politics is limited. Moreover, conversations with respondents revealed that most people were accumulating savings to enable them to re-settle in their respective villages with better standard of living. This could be another plausible explanation for the lack of interest in enrolling for the voter ID cards. But most people we interviewed were living here for long periods (more than 5 years). This reflects the paradox that though they want to go back to their native place permanently, they have to come back again due to economic compulsions.

An abysmally low proportion of the population had birth certificates for their children. This could be because most children were born at home/villages and not in government hospitals or health care centres. Another revelation was the prevalence of corruption that people faced in the process of obtaining the same. Two households reported that the local NGO workers had asked for Rs.200-500 for the birth-certificate. This is in stark contrast to the Rs. 20-30 actually required.

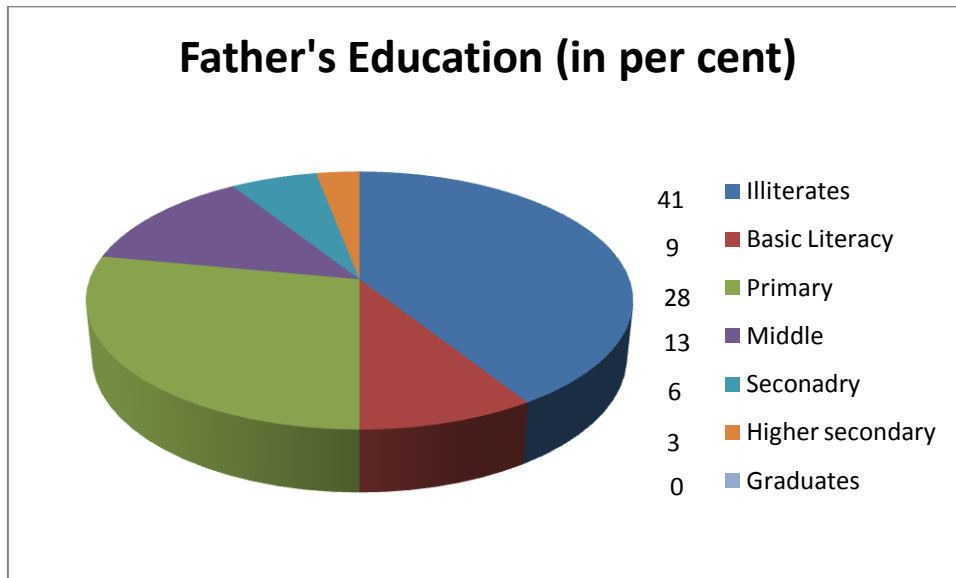


Figure 3: Percentage of Fathers with Stated Levels of Education

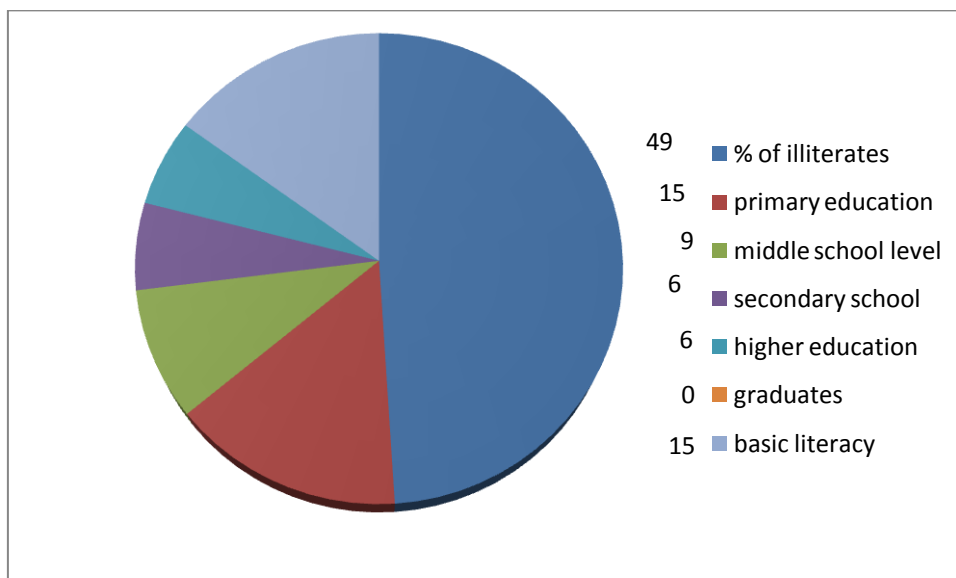


Figure 4: Percentage of Mothers with Stated Levels of Education

With respect to adult literacy rates and levels of education of the respondents, we find that, 41 per cent of the fathers and 49 per cent of mothers are illiterate. 9 per cent of fathers and 15 per cent of mothers have basic literacy that is they can write their names. None of the

fathers or mothers were graduates in our sample. A greater per cent of fathers than mothers have been to primary school, while only about 6 per cent in both cases have been to secondary school.

These high illiteracy rates among parents also translate into lower school going rates for their children. As such, we find that only 53% children from our survey are enrolled in school.

It is also important here, to discuss the occupational structure of the sample. We find that in Rangpuri Kabadi Basti, about 67% of the fathers were rag pickers and 14 % of the fathers were shop-keepers. Among mothers, 20% were shopkeepers, 10 % were domestic helps, 45% were kabadi pickers, rest were housewives.

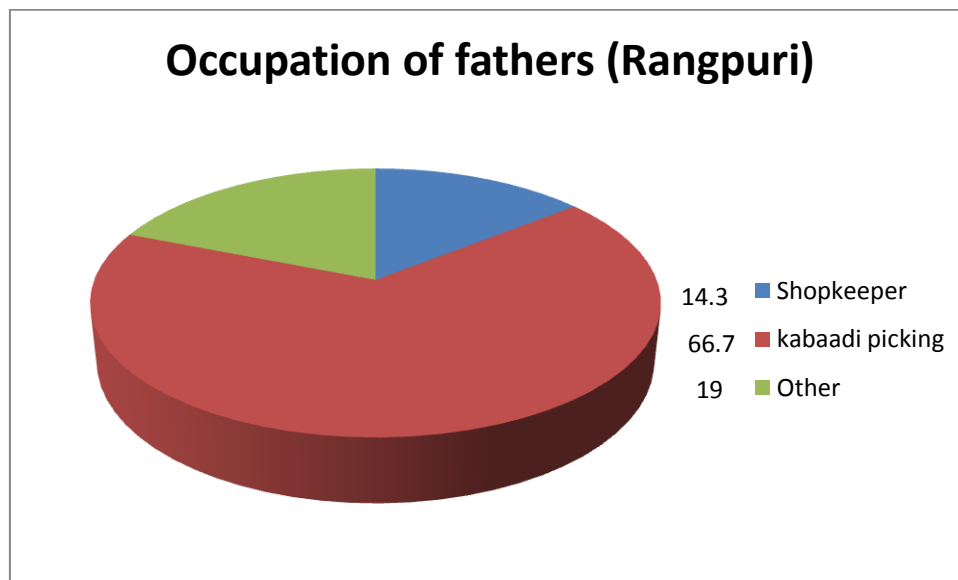


Figure 5: Occupation of fathers (in per cent)

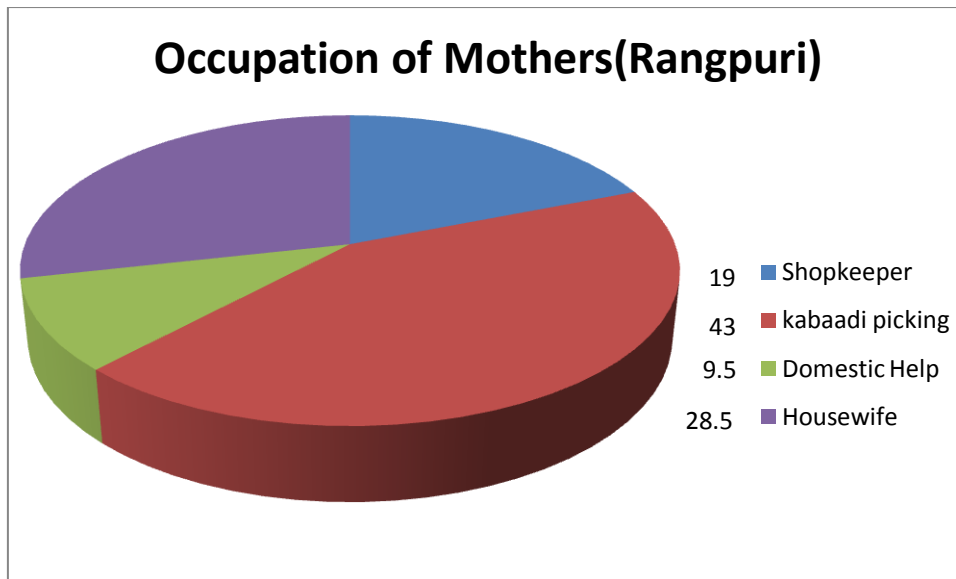


Figure 6: Occupation of mothers (in per cent)²

All the households paid rent to the owners with a few better off ones residing in pucca houses and nearly all the rag-pickers were living in jhuggis or kuchha houses. Not even a single household reported to have owned the house. More than 50% of the households owned a TV set; more than 40% owned a cooler and a similar percentage had mobile phones.

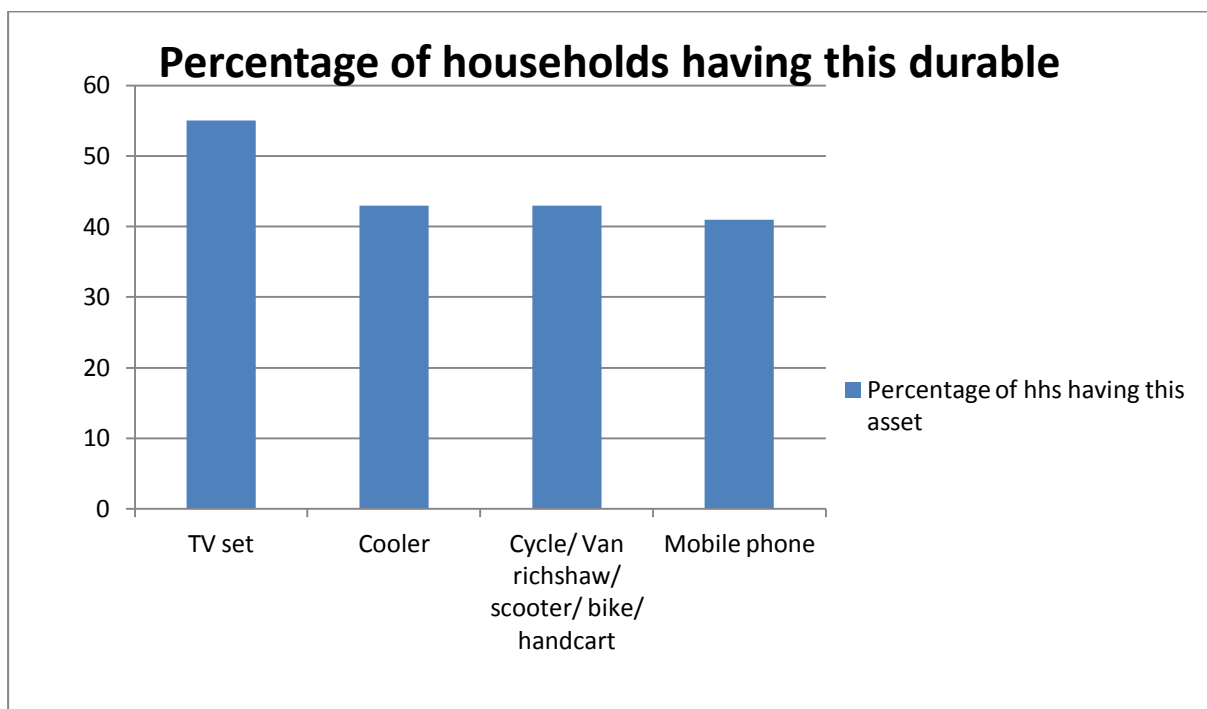


Figure 7: Durable holding profile of households

² 2 mothers were separated/ expired.

Average income turned out to be Rs.9000 approximately. Since the monthly income was not adequate to meet their daily expenses, nearly all the households felt the need for taking short-term credit from kirana shops, or advance from employers, etc. 73 per cent of the households admitted to have taken the short-term credit while 27 per cent claimed that they did not require any short-term credit. But the picture completely changed when we asked about the long-term credit. Only 35 per cent took long-term credit, where we define long-term credit as the loan taken for one year or more.

INCIDENCE OF CHILD LABOUR

With reference to our primary research interest, we find that 15 of the 44 households (roughly one-third of the sampled households) send at least one child to work. In terms of children in the age group of 5-18 years, roughly 30 per cent reported that they were engaged in labour in some form or the other. The actual figure is expectedly higher than this due to under-reporting due to obvious reasons. Not surprisingly, the maximum numbers of working children were rag pickers, followed by those who sat in their parent's shops. Only 1 child washed utensils in a hotel. These numbers do not account for the children whose parents reported them as helping out at home.

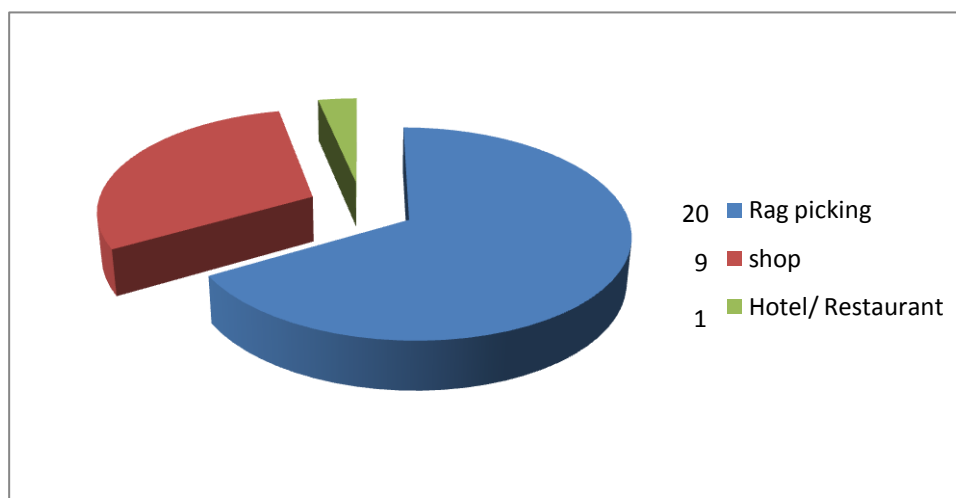


Figure 8: Occupation of Working Children

However, quite a few working children (33 per cent of the child workers) are also enrolled in schools. NGO activist in the area affirms to this phenomenon. Anecdotal evidence further backs this. For instance, an 11-year-old child told us that he was enrolled in the nearby Government school, but often bunks class to collect garbage. This allowed him to earn Rs. 50 in a day. Notably, the child could not write his name in Hindi, the medium of instruction

at his school. This is also possibly tied in with the poor quality of government schooling even in the national capital. Again, a number of parents testify to this. Disinterested teachers, student discouragement due to teacher absenteeism, lack of parent- teacher engagement are some of the complaints. Many children who were in primary classes also took private tuitions which further indicate the poor quality of teaching in the schools. Thus, poor parents had to spend as much as Rs.200-500 a month out of their meagre incomes on their child's education. Tuition facilities were mainly provided by the local NGO member to primary school students. The distance of the school from home, coupled with crime-induced insecurity also causes parents to let their children drop out, or be less regular in attendance.

With respect to the sex distribution of child labourers, we find that 14.55 per cent of girls in the 5-18 years age group are working while 47.8 per cent boys are working. This may be indicative of the girls being more likely to be working at home, rather than a higher likelihood of being regular school-goers. Rajsekhar et al (2007) point out how those engaged in even non-hazardous forms of child labour (for example domestic chores) are also at risk of moving towards the more hazardous forms, especially if they are school drop-outs or have never been enrolled. The same holds true for dropouts. It is also notable that interactions with some children revealed that girls received lower wages than boys. Boys reported that they got around Rs. 100 per day after selling the sorted out rag while the girls reported that they got Rs.50-75 per day from the same task. This might be explanatory factor for the lower proportion of girls being sent to work.

We expected that the working children would help in augmenting the income of their families. However our interactions with some children in Rangpuri revealed some peculiarities which are worth mentioning:

We found some children who spent their daily earnings from rag-sorting on playing video games, buying sweets and cold drinks for themselves. On this specification, it is worth mentioning that the authors found a single-room "clubhouse" (we use this terminology as this is what the boys there called them) where 4 boys from age range 8-13 years were seen playing video games on two old gaming machines. On being asked questions about their schooling, they seemed disinterested and were unable to respond properly. The authors suspect that these children were under the influence of drugs. When asked what they want to do when they grow up, one responded with "whatever we are doing now".

There was only one family (kirana shop owners) admitting to sending their boy to work in a nearby hotel for repaying back a loan taken for daughter's wedding.

On another day we found a boy who said that some parents asked their children to beg on the streets and traffic lights. When we asked the boy to tell us more about it, he hesitated and went away.

Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti

Situated in Vasant Vihar, Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti has five blocks of homes and good schools right outside in close vicinity. There are two government schools, four private schools, one special school for mentally challenged, two MCD schools in Vasant Vihar and one MCD school in Munirka. Many households testified to the availability of tuition classes for kids. We also went to a sewing-training centre being run by an NGO in the area. The centre provides IGNOU-approved vocational training to girls in the area, and a private course (priced lower) is simultaneously run. According to the local NGO, the area had started developing nearly 50 years back and hence most of the homes in the area are 'pucca houses' and inhabitants in general report no major problem other than the lack of water. We witnessed the same, with long queues forming quickly with the appearance of a tanker. Some also complained of misappropriation of water by strong groups in the slum.

Awareness of laws and rights is strong here. At a street corner, a man told us that he had recently got his kids admitted to the privately run Chinmaya Vidyalaya. We asked if the school had been welcoming. He replied that since it was his right, they had to be so. The greater confidence was possibly because of the higher incomes that people seemed to earn here (when comparing general living conditions with those in Rangpuri). One block in the slum is particularly well endowed where an elderly gentleman invited us into his home, which reportedly had air conditioning system.

However, to make the comparison with Rangpuri fair, we chose specific pockets of Kusumpur, where the mainstay of the residents was rag picking, same as in Rangpuri. Our sample size from this slum is 20 as the total numbers of households involved in rag-picking were roughly 200-250.

In our sample, 61 per cent of the fathers were rag pickers. A few had contractual engagements as peons in the nearby University, while others were employed in dhabas or as small-time shopkeepers. About 11 per cent were unemployed. Some women complained about alcoholism among these men. A few also talked about the prevalence of domestic violence.

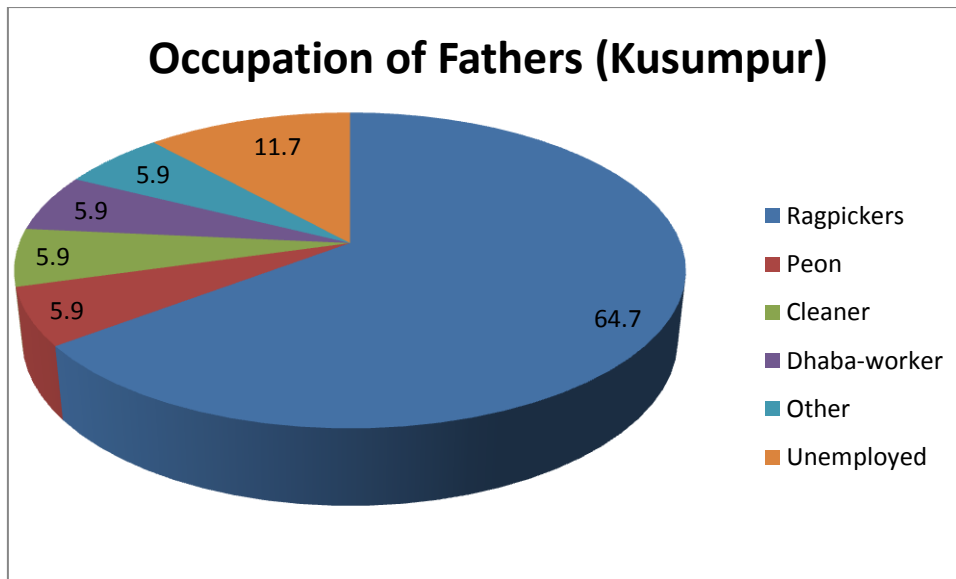


Figure 9: Occupational Structure of Fathers: Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti (in per cent)

According to our sample, 40 per cent of the mothers were housewives, 35 per cent were kabadi pickers while only 15 per cent worked as domestic help in nearby housing societies. While conducting our survey, we spotted small girls (10-12 years) accompanying their mothers (who work as domestic helps) to work. The authors were unable to find any family reporting their children helping their mothers as domestic helps. But the neighbours pointed out these children to the authors.

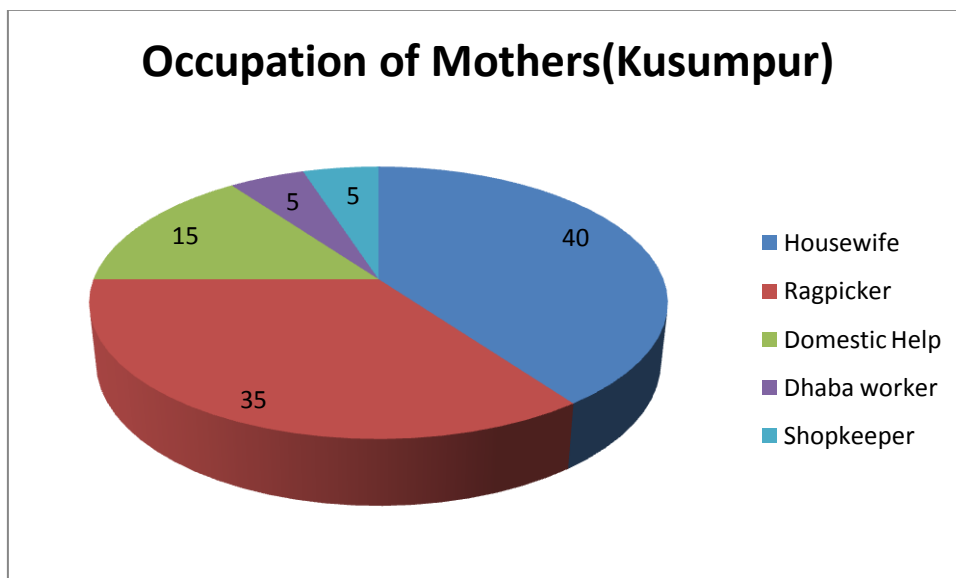


Figure 10: Occupational Structure of Mothers: (in per cent)

Similar to Rangpuri, the respondents were migrants in Kusumpur. U.P and Bengal account for the maximum proportion. However, unlike Rangpuri, about 40 per cent had voter identity cards (more on this, later).

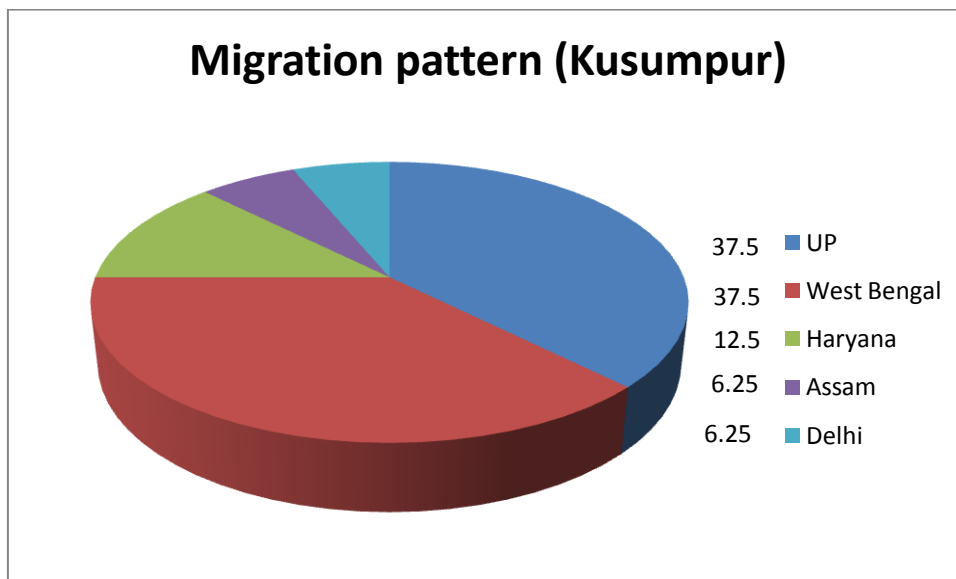


Figure 11: Source of Migration, Kusumpur

However, as opposed to the Rangpuri Kabadi Basti where not even a single household owned the house, in Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti nearly 31 per cent lived in their own houses while the others paid rent. Out of them nearly 3/4th households have been residing there for more than five years. But the average income, unsurprisingly, turned out to be same (Rs.9000), since both the localities were similar in nature.

Average number of members per household turned out to be 6-7. Head of the household was found to be male in all the cases, with the exception of two households where the mother was a widow. Number of working members in a household was 3-4, including the children who working.

45 per cent of the households have bank accounts, but all of them took loans only from non-institutional sources like kirana shops, neighbours, advance from employers, etc. 80 per cent households took short-term loans. 17 per cent took long-term loans, with average amount of the long-term loan being 15,000. Purposes cited for long-term loans were business expenses, wedding, medical treatment, etc.

Only 20 per cent of the households had bank accounts in Delhi. This could indicate that they ultimately want to go back to their hometown but have to come back year after year because of unemployment and poverty at their hometown and lack of employment opportunities.

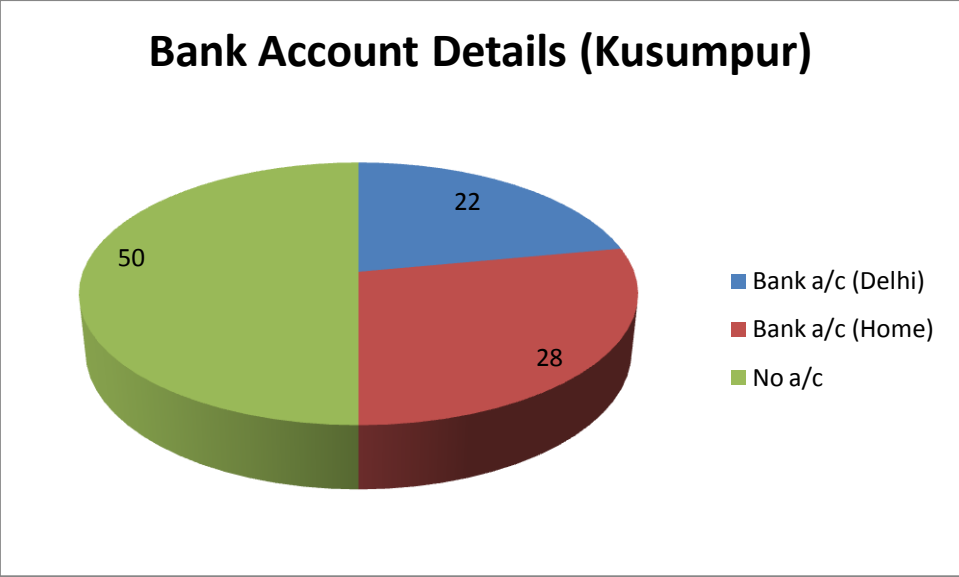


Figure 12: Banking habits at Kusumpuri pahaadi basti(in per cent)

A large chunk of the households, 40 per cent, had Voter Ids and ration cards. 60 per cent of the households surveyed had either got their Aadhar cards or had been enrolled for them. But very few, 10-15 per cent knew about the Ladli Yojana. Out of those who knew no one could avail its benefit due to prevalence of corruption. One family said that Pradhan asks for Rs.500 to sign on the form and hence it's better not to avail the scheme rather than arrange money for bribes.

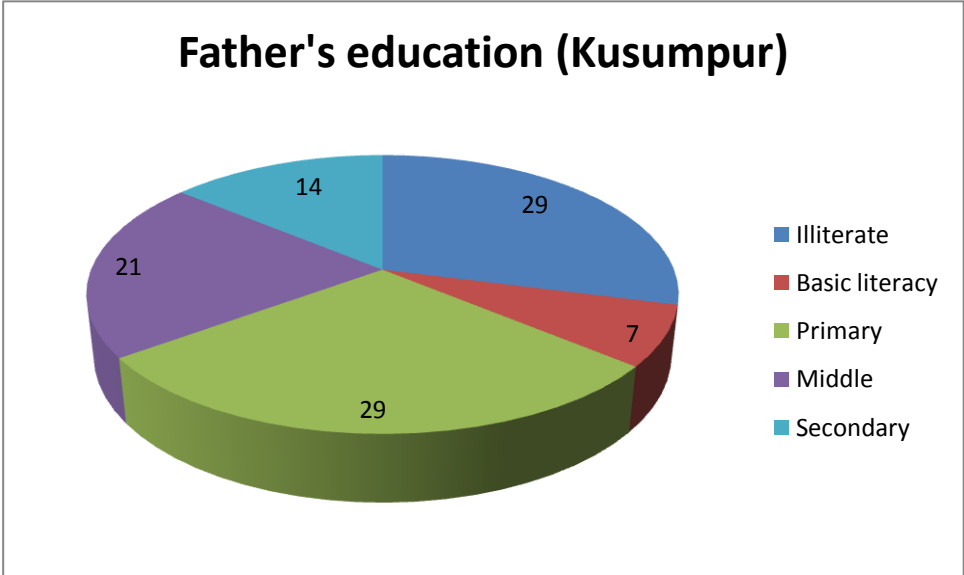


Figure 13: Literacy Rates and Levels of Education attained by Fathers in Kusumpur (in per cent)

As can be seen from figure 11, 29 per cent of the fathers were illiterates. The same percentage had acquired primary education. 7 per cent of the fathers could only write their names and 12 per cent had studied till middle school.

INCIDENCE OF CHILD LABOUR

Prevalence of child labour, (calculated as proportion of working children in the age group of 5-18 to the total number of children in this age-group) is 14 per cent. The maximum proportion (37.5 per cent) of children is engaged in rag picking.

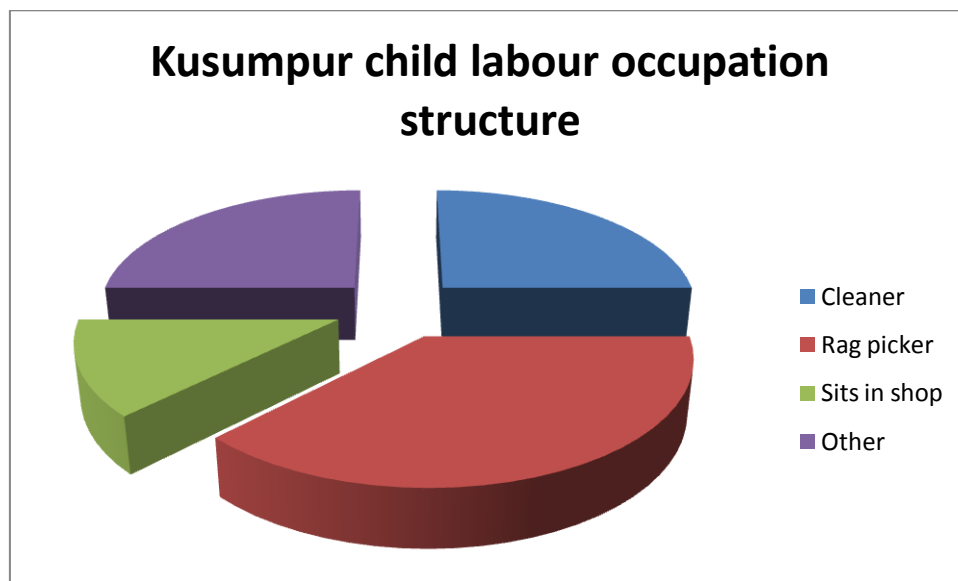


Fig.14 Occupation of child labourers in Kusumpur

Interestingly, the number of child labourers in Kusumpur Pahadi would fall to half of its present number if only the strictly legal definition of child labourers (that is those up to the age of 14 years) were applied. This may be in line with the generally perceived higher levels of awareness that we found in Kusumpur-that is parents do not send their children to work at least till the time that it is illegal to do so. We found a reflection of this in a conversation with a fourteen year old school going boy. When we asked him what he wanted to study in future, he replied that he would not study beyond his tenth standard. He mentioned his alcoholic father, and the need to get to work as soon as possible given that the latter was mostly incapacitated to earn a decent living.

Moreover, in spite of the close proximity to quality schools, the proportion of children who have dropped out of the schooling system was higher (than the prevalence of child labour) at 18 per cent. This indicates the presence of "no-where children" in the sample- that is those neither involved in school work nor in income augmenting activities of the household.

Results from pooling the dataset:

When we pool the data collected from the two slum areas, there were a total of 64 households with 155 children in the relevant age group of 5-18 years. We found 24 per cent of the children were child labourers. Comparing between the two groups- one where children were working (24%) and in the other where children weren't working (76%) we find that :

- Fathers' literacy was 19 per cent in the first group while it was 35 per cent in the second group.
- Mothers' literacy show a similar pattern as fathers' literacy but the percentage difference was much lower, unlike that for fathers' literacy.
- 30 per cent of the households had Voter ID card in the first group while it was 47 per cent in the second group.

The results from the pooled dataset cannot explain the other qualitative differences in the incidence of child labour between the two areas. Such differences tend to get ignored when the data is pooled.

In the next section we elaborate on the inferences from the comparative study of the two survey areas.

Inferences from Comparisons

The prevalence of child labour is more in Rangpuri Kabadi Basti than in Kusumpur Pahaadi, in spite of the incomes of Kabadi workers in the two areas being comparable (average being around Rs.9000). Here we look at the other reasons that may explain the same.

Voter Id

20 per cent of the respondents in Rangpuri had a voter I card while the proportion was a higher 40 per cent in Kusumpur. This is possibly linked to the services available in the respective areas, as politicians are unlikely to campaign, or fulfil promises in areas where there are no electoral gains to be made. Awareness about laws, government policies and schemes again, is more likely to be higher where politicians campaign more actively.

Indeed, only one respondent in Rangpuri, had any idea about the Right to Education Act, which guarantees 25 per cent seats for Economically Weaker Sections even in private

schools free of cost (since the opinion among parents for government schools was unanimously low). In Kusumpur on the other hand, 28.5 per cent (6 people) were aware of the Act.

Similarly in the case for Aadhar for instance, 60 per cent in Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti had enrolled for Aadhar and were in the process of getting a UID number. In comparison, the corresponding number in Rangpuri was one-third (33.33 per cent) only.

This may be due to the fact that Kusumpur Kabadi Basti had a highly developed slum nearby namely, Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti where most people were aware of govt schemes and were also beneficiaries of those schemes.

Demonstration Effect

Wikipedia defines demonstration effects as “those effects on the behaviour of individuals caused by observation of the actions of others and their consequences” .Cox and Star (1994) use demonstration effect to explain intergenerational transfers- for example parents may choose to provide for their elderly parents in order to effect similar desirable behaviour towards themselves from their children in future. It has also been used to explain the impact of tourist behaviour on host populations as well as adoption of consumption patterns in developing countries, in emulation of those practised in the West.

We think that the afore-mentioned higher awareness among the Kabadi workers of Kusumpur may also stem from this. As outlined above, Kusumpur has relatively well-to do populations who enjoy a superior standard of living to those living in the pockets mainly dedicated to the Kabadis. Not only are they more aware of government schemes and policy, they also pro-actively try and benefit from these. For example, the first time we went, a young man sought the NGO- worker accompanying us to tell him the procedure for getting the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) card made. Such attitudes and behaviours may be observed by the rag picking community, and adopted, given that these behaviours entail mainly positive consequences (more educated children, better and higher wage netting jobs, leading further to an improved lifestyle).

The same effect may also be at work at Rangpuri, where we observed community ties to be strong. While these may facilitate migration and quick employment, it also means that people are influenced by the behaviours of their neighbours, when it comes to sending their children to work or to school. In the absence of any positive consequences to schooling (since the majority still end up pursuing rag picking as a profession), it is likely that parents are less motivated to send their children to school, especially since they can so easily contribute to family income.

(Female) Labour force Participation Rate

We found that the per cent of working women out of total women surveyed was 60 per cent in Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti while the same was 75 per cent for Rangpuri. Dev and Ravi (2002, cited in Lieten) find that with the exception of Maharashtra and Gujarat, all states show a positive relationship between female labour force participation rate and prevalence of child labour. This they infer, is because

Under conditions of a high demand for labour in the lower segments of the labour market, poor families will be tapped for additional labour power: after the adult male and adult female labour power also the child labour power will be pulled into employment (Lieten, 2002)

It's also true that in the absence of child care facilities (a functional aanganwadi) or a separate support system at home (for example an elderly person in the family) to take care of the child when parents go out to work, the working mothers might take their kids along to the workplace. Moreover, rag picking or sorting does not require any specific skill hence it is fathomable that the child starts contributing to the sorting to earn a little extra money.

Education

It has been documented in several related studies on child labour that father's education is a significant factor influencing the incidence of child labour (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997 & Emerson Souza, 2007). There is a strong negative correlation between the incidence of child labour and father's education.

It has also been documented that mother's education plays a significant role in reducing incidence of child labour (Das and Mukherjee, 2007). However, our findings show that female illiteracy is higher in Kusumpur Pahaadi, the area where the prevalence of child labour is lower. It is expected that literate mothers are more likely to send their children to school as compared to illiterate mothers. So, the fact that there is higher incidence of child labour in Rangpuri need not be a contradiction because children could be enrolled in school and working as well. It was found that 33 per cent children in Rangpuri were enrolled in school but also worked while there were no children who were working and going to school in Kusumpur.

Father's illiteracy rate is higher in Rangpuri where the prevalence of child labour is also higher. This is in conformity with the study cited above.

In Kusumpur, 29 per cent of fathers and 80 per cent of mothers were illiterate and could not even write their names. Rangpuri does better on this count with only about 49 per cent of mothers being completely illiterate though the figure for illiterate fathers is 41 per cent . The highest level of education achieved by fathers in Kusumpur was 10th standard and most of the others were 5th dropout. Besides, a closer look at the data shows that most children

who were involved in rag-picking and other economic activity had illiterate or at the most basic literate parents.

Ownership of Assets

Ownership of assets is generally taken as a proxy to capture the wealth and economic well-being of the household. Since, the income levels of the surveyed households in the two slums were similar; we use the ownership of assets as a proxy of the economic status of the households to derive some comparisons.

As our survey suggests, none of the households in Rangpuri Kabadi Basti were owned. Each family had to pay rent to the person who owned the whole area. However, 31 per cent of the houses in the Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti were owned. The fact that most of the people in Rangpuri Kabadi Basti did not own the houses suggests that their asset-holding is negligible and hence poverty after all is still the most important reason affecting the incidence of child labour. On the contrary, one-third people residing in their own houses in Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti suggests that even though the income and nature of work is similar in both the areas, the ownership of assets possibly affects the incidence of child labour.

Conclusion

Child labour is one of the major challenges that many developing countries are facing today and is a potential impediment to the overall socio-economic progress of a country. India has one of the largest numbers of child labourers in the world and there has been a sharp increase in the number of working children (5-14 years) from 27351 to 41899 during 1991-2001 in the national capital.

In our survey we have tried to do a comparative study of two slums of South Delhi which are quite close to each other, within a radius 7 Km. Though the main occupation was rag picking in both the areas, there was a great difference in the incidence of child labour in these two slums. We find a higher prevalence of child labour in Rangpuri. This may be due to higher level of awareness of laws and rights, more schools in the vicinity, tuition classes, political support, variation in ownership of assets etc.

In particular, Kusumpur has 40% of its residents with voter IDs whereas this percentage was just half in Rangpuri. This explains that politicians have less of an interest in ensuring that the people of Rangpuri are aware of their rights.

Kusumpur has 28.5% residents who are aware of Right to Education act while in Rangpuri it was just 8.3% and 60 per cent in Kusumpur Pahaadi Basti had enrolled for Aadhar and were in the process of getting a UID number. In comparison, the corresponding number in Rangpuri was one-third (33.33 per cent) only.

In terms of female work force participation rate, Kusumpur has 60% of the females working whereas it was 75% in Rangpuri. The inclination of women to take their children to work with them in the absence of child care facilities (a functional aanganwadi) or a separate support system at home (for example an elderly person in the family to take care of the child when parents go out to work) might contribute to higher child labour in Rangpuri.

While education in general, plays an important role and is one of the significant factors influencing the incidence of child labour our findings show that female illiteracy is higher in Kusumpur Pahaadi, the area where the prevalence of child labour is lower. Father's illiteracy rates are similar in both areas. Hence this does not seem to be a very important factor, at least in our sample, in determining child labour. However, this contradictory finding could be due to the differences in the survey method and sample size.

Besides this, a difference in the ownership of assets also seems to be responsible for variations in the incidence of child labour. That is, Rangpuri with greater prevalence of child labour has a lower proportion of respondents owning the houses they live in than Kusumpur.

Although a number of policies and programmes have been undertaken by the Indian government to eradicate child labour, the National Child Labour Project, Mid-day Meals

Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan to name a few, it still has largest number of child labourers. Delhi is not included in the areas covered by the National Child Labour Project (introduced in 1988) which is a major scheme for the rehabilitation of child labour, opening up of special schools/Rehabilitation Centres and this may be one another important factor contributing to sharp increase in child labour in the national capital in the past few decades.

On the whole, our study reinforces the fact that child labour is most prevalent in migrant families coming to Delhi for a higher standard of living and temporarily augmenting their short run incomes. Initially, the parents come alone. But gradually the children also come along. They do get enrolled in the schools but are either discouraged or find it more convenient to engage themselves in work (kabaadi picking) to support families and to earn their own pocket-money (which is mostly used for unproductive purposes). The incidence of child labour could thus be attributed to the lack of quality education in government and MCD schools and difficult accessibility to Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota in private schools. This indeed points to the ineffective implementation of the Right to Education Act to the children. It is not that the parents are unwilling to send their children to school but the above-mentioned factors discourage them to do so.

Besides this, the lack of employment opportunities for parents at home-town and the access to 'easy-money' for children by engaging in rag-picking activities are also important causes supporting the high incidence of child labour.

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