



Policies for Improving Status of Education among Migrant Construction Workers' children in Bengaluru city

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Urbanisation has become one of the prominent factors of economic development. In India also, there is increasing trend in the urban population and as per Census 2011, 31.2 per cent of the population lives in urban areas. In the case of Karnataka, urbanization in 2011 was 38.57 per cent, higher than the national average. As the areas rapidly urbanise, more people from the rural areas are migrating from villages to live and work on construction sites in the growing cities along with their young children. In the process of migration, the children are the worst affected as many remain out of school, many are forced to drop out and some become vulnerable to work as child labour due to the seasonal mobility of their parents. Thus, mainstreaming these children in the development process is a big challenge in attaining the goal of universal primary education and inclusive growth. Further, migrant construction workers' children are denied access to local Anganwadi services because they do not have Aadhaar and ration cards plus ancillary documents (Kadidal, 2019). In addition to the lack of documents, the transient nature of construction workers' jobs is the main cause for their being denied access to Anganwadi services. The NCEUS report (2007) highlights the fact that the migrant labourers have difficulty in accessing childcare and education services including food rations which are otherwise accessible in rural settings.

With this background, the study explores the situation of education among migrant construction workers' children in Bengaluru. The ISEC research team conducted a field survey (between August and November 2019) to explore situational analysis of the migrant construction workers in Bengaluru city, with special focus on the education of construction workers' children. The respondents of the study were

migrant (adult) construction workers (for collecting household profile, outline the kind of scheme availed by them and kind of issues encountered while availing such benefits). A total of 300 households were interviewed across 10 locations. There were 560 children between the age group of less than one year to 18 years surveyed for the study⁴ as there were various schemes from the government. Among the children surveyed 56 per cent were boys and 44 per cent were girls.

Education

Education empowers scientific and rational advancement, economic development and allows for individual enrichment with personal growth. The importance of giving education to children is also well realised by the construction workers. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other awareness schemes of the government, along with the aspiration of the parents to see their children move out of the poverty trap, have encouraged education among the children of migrant construction workers. In this backdrop, the educational status of children was examined. Children up to age of 18 were considered here as there are many schemes that cater to the education needs up to this category.

Table 1 reveals that around 18 per cent of the children are toddlers and 32 per cent are going to Anganwadi centres. Around 26 per cent are primary school going children followed by 7 per cent in middle school and around 9 per cent in high school. The college going children are less in number (4.3 per cent). There are also children who are drop-outs (4.3 per cent). These constitute 16 children dropped out of college, 7 children from high school and one child from middle school.

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⁴ This paper is part of larger study covering nutrition and health status of these children

Fig. 1. Spatial distribution of sampling locations in Bengaluru

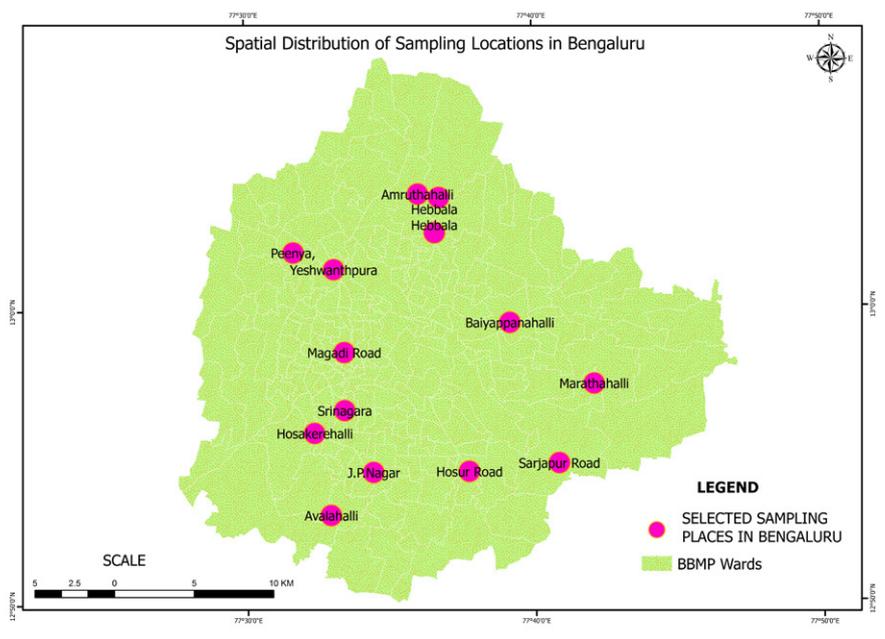


Table 1: Percentage distribution of education pattern among different age groups of children

Education	Age pattern	Male (N=314)	Female (N=246)	Percentage (N=560)
No schooling yet	below 3 years of age	8.8	8.8	17.5
Anganwadi centres	3 to 5 years	18	13.6	31.6
Primary School (I to V Std)	6 to 11 years	14.1	12.3	26.4
Middle School (VI to VII Std)	12 to 13 years	4.3	2.5	6.8
High School (VIII to X Std)	14 to 16 years	4.8	3.9	9.1
Pre-university College	17 years	3	1.2	4.3
Dropouts	13-17 years of age	3	1.2	4.3
Total		56	44	100

Source: Based on Primary Survey, 2019

Though the education centres are close to their residences, the work place usually change frequently for the construction workers. They keep on moving from one project to another. When they go out for work, they get worried about leaving their children back in their house unattended. In the case of our sample, almost all of them (99 per cent) had this insecurity feeling. The city being a new and migrated place, with vehicles moving around, unknown people roaming around makes the parents worry about the safety of their children.

It is observed during the survey that in many cases, a whole family and their extended families like that of siblings and their families had migrated to Bengaluru and they were working in the construction sector. When one family was away on work, the members of the extended families would assume the responsibility of taking care of the child – like sending the child to school and take care of them

after they return from school in the evening till their parents return from work. It was also observed that the elder sisters also helped in taking care of the younger siblings in a few families. There were also instances of parents carrying the toddlers to the construction sites as there was no one to take care of them (6 percent) at home. There was no crèche in the construction site either. During focus group discussions, parents revealed that the Anganwadi was not conducive for them when both parents work. The timings of the Anganwadi are from 9.30 AM to 3.30 PM. This timing does not match with their timings. Hence, in order to avail the services of Anganwadi centres, a household member had to remain at home. Hence for nearly 86 per cent of the respondents in our survey other members of the family or extended family members took care of the children. Taking children along with them made the children vulnerable to various diseases related to construction work, exposure to dust causing respiratory ailments, access to poor quality water and sanitation causing malaria, skin infections etc.

Almost all children, both boys and girls, were enrolled in schools. Most of the respondents sent their children to government schools (67 per cent); however, a few (11 per cent) sent their children to private schools. While a majority (48.5 per cent) studied in Kannada medium schools, a smaller percentage of children (10 per cent) studied in English medium schools. Around 18 per cent studied in Urdu and Tamil medium as well. A majority of the children, that is 74 per cent, were attending school on a regular basis. Around 2.3 per cent were dropouts who were mainly from college, high school and middle school, as they were not interested in studies.. They were either working in construction sites or elsewhere or not doing anything. Other reasons were frequent changing of locations, distance, financial constraints and difficulty to get admission. However, school going children were not engaged in any income-earning job after school hours.

Table 2: School details and regularity of school attendance among the children

Type of school	Male (N=314)	Female (N=246)	Percentage (N=560)
Government	68.7	65.2	66.5
Private	10.6	11.2	10.5
Not applicable*	20.7	23.6	22
Medium of instruction			
Kannada	39.7	48.4	48.5
English	8	11.2	10
Others (Tamil, Urdu)	19.7	13.2	18.4
Not applicable*	20.7	23.6	22.5
No response	11.7	4.2	0.7
Regularity to school			
Regular	75.5	72	74
Irregular to School	2.2	1.6	2
Drop Out	1.6	2.4	2
Not applicable	20.7	23.6	22
Total	100	100	100

Source: Based on Primary Survey, 2019

*They are children mainly below 3 years of age and in some cases more than 3, but the parents were yet to enrol them in the school.

The migrant construction workers in the survey are basically long-term migrants who are staying in Bengaluru since 5 to more than 40 years. If they are working in a larger project, the duration will be from 3 years to 5 years. During this time, their children will be enrolled in either government or private schools nearby. Even if the project was completed, children did not have to discontinue their schools when their parents shifted from one place to another in mid-academic year as government schools allow enrolling children in mid-academic year also. Even if the parents are working in individual residential buildings after the completion of one building, they tend to go to another construction work in the same areas and the education of the children is not disturbed as they would be enrolled in a government school nearby. Also, there are instances where a migrant family is appointed as the security guard of the building once the construction is over. The women of the household work as domestic help in that building. The parents are aware that child labour is an offence and are also aware of compulsory education for children. These factors does not deprive migrant construction workers' children of their school and childhood.

Education Schemes

Many schemes for education initiated by the government, particularly for the benefit of the construction workers' children, are unknown to these workers. Similarly, the schemes from Building Construction and Other Workers (BOCW) also remain untapped by these workers as a majority of them do not have its membership. Children are getting food under the mid-day meal programme and at Anganwadis and the mid-day meal in schools, which they enjoy. Those going to government schools did not have to pay the fees whereas those in private school did by default. They were asked if education schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyana, Strengthening for Providing Quality Education in Madrassas (SPQEM), Rashtriya

Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which help the poor students etc. were availed. Though the awareness levels about particular programmes were low it was found that many of the children got uniforms and books from the school. There was some awareness about scholarship schemes prevalent for children from economically backward backgrounds. Around 80 per cent knew about the scholarships for children in class 1 to 5; 60 per cent about scholarship from class 6 to 10; around 49 per cent knew about scholarship for children from class 11 to 12; 47 per cent about graduation course scholarship; 46 per cent knew about scholarship for ITI/vocational or professional course. Close to 75 per cent also knew about the student bus pass facility. This awareness was created by the teachers of the government schools where the children studied. It was reported that the school teachers would fill up the application forms for the schemes relevant to these children. Many of them have benefitted by these schemes. However, around 98 per cent of them did not know about the name Sarva Shiksha Abhiyana even though they are aware that every child of the age of six to fourteen years are eligible to free and compulsory education till the completion of elementary education.

Table 3: Awareness of Government Welfare Schemes among the respondents (in percentage) (N=300)

Awareness of Government Welfare Scheme	Yes	No
Scholarship for Class 1 to 5 at the rate of Rs. 1800 p.a	80.3	16.7
Scholarship for Class 6 to 10 at the rate of Rs 2400 p.a	60	37
Scholarship for Class 11 to 12 at the rate of Rs 3,000 p.a	48.7	48.3
Scholarship for Graduation courses at the rate of Rs 10,000 p.a	46.7	50.3
ITI/Vocational course/Professional Course at the rate equivalent to annual fee of Govt institutes/colleges	46.3	50.7
Are you aware of (Sarva Shikshana Abhiyana)	2.3	97.7
Do you know about free Student Bus Pass assistance for travelling KSRTC buses to and from the place of residence	74.3	25.7

Source: Based on Primary Survey, 2019

The above are the schemes available to government school going children and are general in nature and are not from BOCW. The workers are aware of the schemes that are general. However, when workers were asked which scheme was availed by them, they were unable to reply. The study reveals that the 2009 Right to Education Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, ICDS, Anganwadis have ensured that no child is out of school. One student in Hosakerehalli has enrolled in the school through RTE.

Policy Suggestions

Engage children beyond school hours productively

The children in the areas surveyed were mostly enrolled in school except for around 2 per cent in the age group between 13 to 17 years. They were simply not interested in studies. There were also children who were irregular to the school. And if their issues were not addressed at the early stage, they might eventually drop out

from the school as well. This is certainly a loss to the children. Because when the children were spoken to during the survey, it was noticed that they are smart as well as good in studies, as they could relate what they had learnt in school to practical life. However, these children need to be engaged in after school like studies so that they are productively engaged and retain their interest in studies. NGOs can play a greater role in these to help them retain interest in studies. Through mobile library, the NGOs can engage the evenings of the children by assisting them to do home work, engage in fun activities etc. By doing so, the potential of these children can be harnessed for a better future.

Ease the process to avail benefits

There are many administrative hassles to obtain the benefits given by the government to the construction workers which consume time. This is also one of the reasons for workers' lack of interest in registering under BOCW. Due to these processes, the children are also not given scholarships on time. To enable them to get scholarships on time, the government should ease the processing time and make the whole exercise swift and simple.

Provide adequate funding for NGOs

The role of NGOs in helping migrant construction workers' children has been commendable. There are instances where child abuse and problem of drugs were reduced drastically since the NGOs began their work among the construction workers' colonies. Since the operation of day care centres here, these have disappeared as the children are in day care centres under the supervision of a teacher. NGO intervention was found to be useful in registering construction workers in BOCW. Hence patronising NGOs for these services will be useful for the migrant construction workers.

Encourage vocational training centres

The vocational training centres run by NGOs have proved to be beneficial to the children of migrant construction workers. However, they have been suspended due to lack of funds. Reviving these centres and training the children in skills can benefit them to attain better jobs and escape from the clutches of poverty.

Enhance education levels through tailor-made programmes

There should be resources provided focusing on migrant construction workers' children which is the first step towards planning target programmes for these children. These programmes can be a tie-up with the builders as their CSR initiative. Besides, there could be improvement in interventions through selective hiring of teachers who have backgrounds with social work, for instance. Socio economic contexts are different; hence, innovative and creative ways of learning to match varied circumstances matter. Tying up with NGOs like Agastya International Foundation who are doing extensive work in education to come up with tailor-

made interventions for migrant construction workers' children is essential. AksharaFoundation has a programme on library to improve reading habits, which can also be structured to enable education levels among these children.

Increase construction companies' collaboration with NGOs

It is to be noted that there is provision to extend ICDS services to children of migrant labourers and temporary residents through setting up of Mini-Anganwadis even at scattered habitats of migrant workers. As per the circular of Ministry of Women and Child Development has issued a circular (on 13th April 2011). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also has provisions for setting up of tent schools, mobile schools, residential and non-residential bridge courses, induction of language tutors, special admission drives and community mobilization programmes to enable them to pursue education, worksites schools at the location where migrant families are engaged and bridge courses/remedial courses focusing on mainstreaming of children. However, these were not found in any site. Instead, in the JMC labour shed led by JMC Projects (India) Limited NGOs are engaged in most of these activities and are successful in their endeavours. Hence, the construction companies should encourage NGOs to work in their labour settlements to ensure no child is deprived of education.

Speed up starting of mobile crèche services by Labour Department

In instances where women carry their children to the worksites, there has to be a provision for mobile crèches. The Labour Department of the Karnataka government had announced of starting mobile crèche services in Bengaluru for the children of migrant construction workers at the construction sites. But none of them were visible in the survey areas. The government has to speed up the setting up of mobile crèches for the benefit of the migrant construction workers' children.

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