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Children of India: Rights and Opportunities

# Demographic Transition, Employment Structure and MDG Goals:

## Focus on Child Population in Urban India

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United Nations Children's Fund, India

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# Foreword

Children below the age of 18 years account for nearly 40 per cent of India's population. It goes without saying that enabling all children to realize their full creative potential is critical for sustaining India's economic growth and accelerating human development. Not all children have benefited equitably from the remarkable progress and transformation that the country has witnessed in recent years. Tens of millions still face basic challenges of survival and healthy development.

Children are first and foremost individuals, born with indivisible and inalienable human rights. They also belong to families and communities that need to have access to resources and services, as well as capacities to ensure realization of their rights. Policy approaches are needed that address both the income and non-income dimensions of children's deprivations. Continued neglect of material, human and psycho-social dimensions of child well-being can prevent children from living a full life and from making informed decisions later on in their life. India too would miss out on the dividends that can accrue from a full expansion of children's capabilities.

The Institute for Human Development (IHD) and UNICEF are partnering to offer a platform for examining different dimensions of child rights. Experts and commentators were invited to explore the impact of development policies on children and women and suggest alternative approaches to the elimination of children's deprivations. They have explored how best to ensure that all children benefit from equal and non-discriminatory access to basic social services. They have looked at ways of capitalizing on the demographic dividend, creating fiscal policy space for investing in children and strengthening the legislative and institutional framework for protecting children.

These contributions are being brought out as IHD - UNICEF Working Paper Series *Children of India: Rights and Opportunities*. We hope that the series will contribute to enriching public discourse and strengthening public action to promote the rights of children.

**Alakh N. Sharma**
Director, Institute for Human Development

**Karin Hulshof**
India Country Representative, UNICEF

# Demographic Transition, Employment Structure and MDG Goals:

Focus on Child Population in Urban India

Amitabh Kundu and P.C. Mohanan*

## Summary

This paper analyses the activity profiles of children and young adults in urban areas, including their attendance in the education system and exit from it at different ages and their socio-economic implications, using the data from the NSS. As far as attendance in pre-primary and primary schools is concerned, it is noted that there is not much gender-related difference. However, for children currently in the age group of above 15 years, the gender disparity in school attendance works out to be very high. This is due to the discrimination that has existed in the past. Understandably, the incidence of child employment has gone down in recent years. The incidence of employment of children above the age of 10 years, however, is largely due to the emerging employment opportunities within the household sector and various informal activities. Boys, after dropping out from schools, gravitate towards employment-related activities while the girls get absorbed in different non-economic vocations, mostly within the household.

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The lowest attendance in educational institutions is reported in casual labour households, for both boys and girls below the age of 14 years. The employment rate, however, is the highest among the self-employed households as a large majority of children work as unpaid family helpers. It is the lowest in regular salaried households as these are economically better off. Male children, in general, are noted to be moving away from family work and taking up either regular jobs or becoming self-employed, beyond the age of 14 years. Further, they withdraw from casual work in favour of regular employment at the age of 22 years. This is understandable as adults prefer and are able to shift from less organized to more organized and better-defined activities.

The high rates of employment for males, mostly in the form of unpaid family work and self-employment in the age groups of 14 to 24 years, should be a matter of serious concern. This reflects an inadequate level of skill formation, which prevents the country from reaping the benefits of globalization through the creation of decent jobs. Also, very high levels of unemployment for these people suggest the need for generating decent work through wage and self-employment programmes. There is tremendous pressure on these young adults to enter the labour force as part of the strategy of the family for survival. It would, therefore, be important to make provisions for appropriate economic support for the individual and his/her family, if they have to be covered under the skill formation programme. Till the time this becomes feasible, they need to be offered assistance in finding employment in the productive sectors with reasonable wages.

The benefits of the demographic dividend would be less than anticipated as the increased demand for skills may not be met through expansion in university and technical education. The percentage of persons with secondary and tertiary levels of education in India is less than that in many other developing countries. This is because of the high dropout rates among children, for both boys and girls. More significantly, the proportion of children opting for higher studies has not increased in relation to the increased enrolment in primary and middle schools, over the years. There is thus a great need for filling up the gap between the demand and supply of skills through the introduction of appropriate policy measures.

# Demographic Transition, Employment Structure and MDG Goals:

Focus on Child Population in Urban India

## 1. Introduction

India has come to enjoy a distinct advantage in the labour market as compared to most developed as also less developed countries due to the fast-changing age distribution of its population. India is a late entrant into the process of demographic transition. Its population growth, which was maintained at a rate ranging between 2.1 and 2.2 per cent per annum during the first four decades since Independence in 1947, came down to below 2 per cent during the 1990s. As a consequence, the country has witnessed a rapid decline in its percentage of population in the age group 0-14 years, which is likely to go down further during the next two to three decades. Also, the worker population ratio in the adult age groups has recorded a rising trend, especially for women. Consequently, India will have a low dependency ratio with a larger segment of the population being engaged productively in the labour force. The country would, thus, enjoy a significant demographic dividend during the next few decades. This is because the process of fertility decline has begun only recently, which would affect and alter the age structure favourably during the next two decades. Many individual researchers and institutions have predicted a two-digit level sustained growth in national income during the next few years, resulting in India becoming the second largest economy in the world, next only to China.'

Several researchers as also international organizations have argued that the country would perform well in terms of achieving not only higher rates of economic growth but also reduction of poverty, measured through monetary measures like per capita income or consumption expenditure. One of the reasons for this is said to be the rapid decrease in the percentage of children (aged less than 15 years), which is likely to continue during the next few decades, much more than in the case of other Asian and African countries.

The figure for people in this economically active age group (15-59 years) has been predicted to touch 68 per cent in 2030 while that for China would go down from its current level of 70 per cent to 67 per cent (Graph 2). India is likely to overtake most of the East Asian countries including Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia, whose figures would be around 66 per cent only [European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS), Brussels, 2006][1]. The decline in the natural rate of growth and the sluggish growth in the number of the aged in India would imply that it will have a relatively low dependency burden. All these predictions are being viewed as positive factors from the developmental perspective of the country[2].

Unfortunately, however, many of the targets under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have a bearing on equity and social upliftment would remain unfulfilled, the high economic growth and decline in poverty levels notwithstanding (Himanshu, 2007). Of particular concern is the well-being of children wherein the direct and indirect impact of the present growth dynamics has been predicted to be detrimental. Understandably, the shortfalls in meeting the MDG targets of universal primary education, reduction of gender inequality in schools, and reduction of infant and child mortality rates have been predicted to be alarmingly high.

Given the conflicting visions of India's future development and the serious apprehension with regard to the well-being of children, it is important to analyse the changing age composition of the population, enrolment in schools at different levels, dropouts and incidence of child labour in the context of the goal of poverty reduction and elimination of other forms of deprivation. It would also be important to assess their implications in the context of policy initiatives and judicial interventions that can be proposed to ameliorate the conditions of children in and outside labour market.

Keeping the above objectives in view, the analysis in this paper has been divided into five sections. The second section, which follows the present introductory section, assesses the process of demographic transition in India and analyses its implications for future growth. The third section examines the usual disposition of the population for the ages ranging from 5 to 24 years for boys and girls, while focusing on urban areas. The changes in the percentage

1. This may be attributed to the fact that while the percentage of children in India would go down significantly, that of the aged population would not go up steeply.
2. By 2050, the percentage of the economically active population in India would be much above that of all European and Asian countries. The three other countries that would have similar figures are Bangladesh, Nepal and Cambodia.

of children in educational institutions and in various work and non-work categories have also been assessed to determine the impact of demographic and economic growth on the well-being of children and young adults. The phenomenon of children dropping out of schools, assessed through alternate approaches, their engagement in work or non-work activities, and discrimination against girls in terms of sending them to schools or in the labour market, has been analysed in the next section. The fifth section presents an overview of the trends and patterns of employment and unemployment among children and young adults since the 1980s, analysing the process of their withdrawal from educational institutions and absorption in different kinds of work. The final section presents the major findings, discussing the implications of the changing demographic structure, and absorption of children and young adults in various activities in the context of their social well-being.

## 2. Demographic transition in India: A spatial analysis

If the twentieth century was characterized by the 'population explosion', the twenty-first century would be noted for its stabilization at the global level and for many developing countries. Indeed, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Luxembourg, Austria, has predicted an 'end of world population growth' by the end of the present century. Understandably, the patterns and time phasing of demographic transition in Asian countries would be determined by their diverse socio-economic conditions. The population in China is likely to peak around 2045, while for India, it would happen only by 2075[3]. The decline in population growth has been seen in India only during the 1990s, though a few of the states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu reported this a couple of decades ago. Most of the states in the country are moving towards population transition at a slow and steady pace.

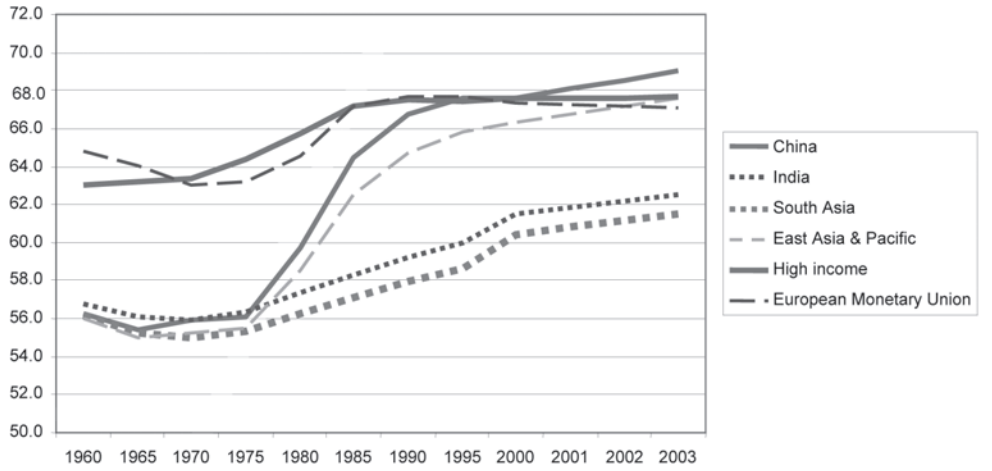
The smooth age pyramid of India bears no distinct trace of past demographic trauma or major policy intervention. Its age structure and the changes since Independence reflect a slow fertility decline at the national level. Its age pyramid has the typical shape of a country

3. One of the dominant population discourses during the twenty-first century will be about population ageing, and this will not be limited to the 'developed' or 'advanced' countries including the EU-27, but will also include the Asia-26 countries covered in this study. The Asian population will be nearly ten times as large as that of the European Union by 2050.

with a young and fast growing population. Currently, about 63 per cent of its population is in the 15-64 year age group. With the decline in the natural growth of the population, the population in this age group is likely to go up significantly during the next couple of decades.

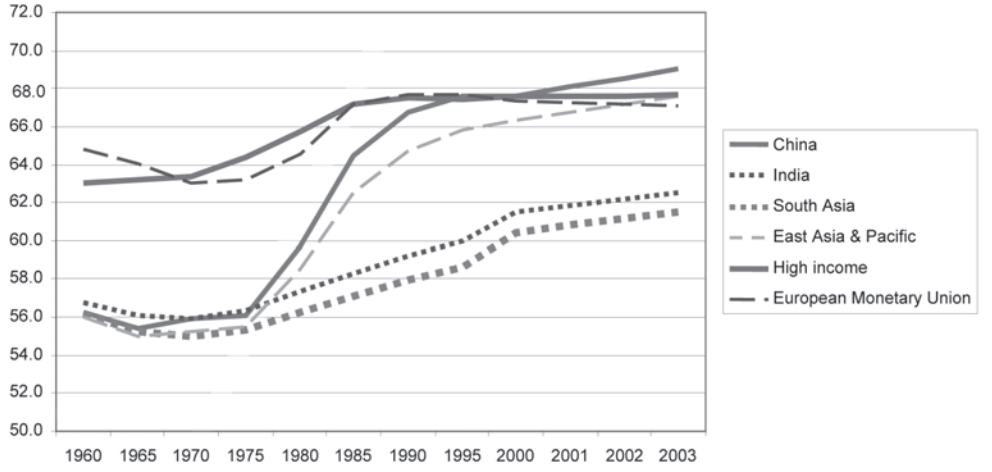
During the 1950s, India's average dependency ratio (non-workers to workers) was as high as 150 per cent, meaning that there was almost one-and-a-half dependent for every worker. But

Graph 1: Percentage of Population in the Age Group 15-64 Years to Total Population




*Source:* World Development Indicators (WDI).

Graph 2: Projection of Percentage of Population in the Age Group of 15-64 Years to Total Population




*Note:* Computed on the basis of the data obtained from World Population Prospects, 2004.

sustained fertility reduction, whose impact was, to a certain extent, offset by reduction in the death rate and increased longevity, has resulted in a complete turnaround. The dependency ratio has been decreasing over the last four decades. Recent data from the National Sample Survey for 2004-05 indicate that there has been an increase in work participation rates, which will provide a further boost to labour supply. India is, thus, likely to enjoy an unprecedented period of demographic bonus since the 1990s, which will extend beyond 2050. Furthermore, the health expenditures for the aged, which are noted to be growing exponentially in many developed countries, may not shoot up in India, as the life expectancy in the high age groups is not growing rapidly. This should make it possible for the government to make investments in water supply, sanitation, health and other infrastructure facilities, thereby addressing various MDGs wherein the shortfalls are predicted to be high[4].

The advantages of the demographic dividend in India should not be over-estimated. The nature of economic growth does not guarantee that the growth in job opportunities will be equal to that of the working-age population or higher than that, to wipe out the backlog of unemployment. If the 'jobless growth', witnessed in India during a part of the 1990s, recurs, it may have adverse consequences on employment conditions and may reinforce social unrest.

The potential for further growth of human capital resources in India is estimated to be very high. There has been a significant increase not only in levels of literacy but also in technological skills among the youth population, which has grown tremendously in recent years. The rapid advance in education among younger generations is likely to improve the quality of labour and strengthen the country's position as a source of demand for international quality education. Researchers have predicted that this potential supply for the human-capital-intensive services sectors, which have been growing rapidly in recent decades, will enhance India's demographic dividend. The actual benefit may, however, turn out to be less than projected or anticipated, as it may not be possible to meet the country's intensified demand for human capital formation through expansion in university and technical education. The following section attempts to answer these questions and concerns by analysing the work and non-work disposition of the population at young ages.

4. Europe has long enjoyed advantageous population structures as the child population there never exceeded one quarter of the entire population and the impact of increased longevity on age distributions was almost marginal. Unfortunately, this would no longer be so in the coming decades, as the share of the elderly would rise steeply.

## 3. Enrolment and work/non-work disposition of children and young adults

Single-year age-specific data, classifying the population by their nature of work and non-work engagements, are available from various rounds of NSS[5]. Tables 1 and 2 show the percentage of children and youth aged between 5 and 24 years in different usual activity statuses in urban areas for boys and girls, as obtained from the latest Round (61st) of the NSS for the reference period 2004-05.

In the context of the usual status disposition of children, the important activity status that needs to be seen in the two tables is attendance in educational institutions (91). It may be mentioned that those in category 91 are not necessarily in formal recognized schools. A large number of them, particularly at the age of five years, would be in nursery schools and other informal institutions. Information on own account workers (11), employers (12), unpaid family workers (21), regular/salaried workers (31), casual workers in public works (41), and other casual workers (51) are presented in these tables and are discussed in some detail in a subsequent section. Two non-work categories included in the tables are: those attending domestic duties only (92), and those attending domestic duties besides being engaged in free collection of goods (vegetables, roots, fire-wood, cattle feed, etc.), sewing, tailoring, etc. (93). As expected, these two categories do not report many male children engaged in these activities. Finally, for rentiers/retired persons (94), those not working due to disability (95), beggars/prostitutes (96), and others (97), small values have been reported, which is why they have been excluded from the tables.

About three quarter of the urban male children aged 5 years are noted to have been in educational institutions in 2004-05 (Table 1). This should roughly correspond to the actual number of persons who enrol, as there would be no dropouts for this age. The percentage figure increases to 90.5 at the age of 6 years and reaches 95 per cent at 9 years of age. The indicator attains the peak and stays at that, with the figure being about 95 per cent for both ages 10 and 11 years[6]. After the age of 11 years, however, a sharp and monotonous decrease

5. The definition of usual status encompasses the concept of enduring status and, therefore, temporary absence from an activity would not matter. These categories are mutually exclusive, making simultaneous comparisons possible, with the sum total of the percentage figures across these being one hundred.
6. In the case of rural areas, the peak value of 94 per cent is reached in the age group of 9 to 11 years. The drop in the value for the age group of 10 years could be due to digit reporting preference (for age 10 years), which is likely to be higher among illiterate parents.

is seen in the figure, coming down to around 70 per cent at the age of 16 years. This is the age when one generally completes secondary school. About 22 per cent of the boys aged 16 years are in employment and, more importantly, one third of those working, report regular wage employment. At the age of 18 years, only 45 per cent of the men are in educational institutions while an equal number of persons are reported in employment. For women at this age, the share of persons in educational institutions is the same, with only the number entering the labour market being much less, at approximately 15 per cent. The distribution of workers across categories has been analysed in detail in the fifth section.

Table 1: Distribution of Urban Males by Activity Status—NSS 61st Round

| Age | Activity Status | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 11 | 12 | 21 | 31 | 41 | 51 | 81 | 91 | 92 | 93 |
| 5 | | | | | | | | 74.04 | 0.11 | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | 90.55 | 0.00 | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | 93.97 | 0.08 | |
| 8 | 0.03 | | 0.08 | 0.07 | | 0.04 | | 93.43 | 0.16 | |
| 9 | 0.16 | 0.01 | 0.33 | 0.08 | | 0.13 | 0.40 | 94.94 | | |
| 10 | 0.04 | | 0.15 | 0.04 | | 0.50 | 0.32 | 94.34 | 0.20 | 0.11 |
| 11 | 0.32 | | 0.20 | 1.29 | | 0.40 | 0.19 | 93.60 | 0.35 | 0.00 |
| 12 | 0.12 | | 1.12 | 1.78 | | 0.99 | 0.38 | 89.63 | 0.37 | 0.14 |
| 13 | 0.48 | | 1.47 | 2.54 | | 1.37 | 0.62 | 88.98 | 0.10 | 0.20 |
| 14 | 1.15 | | 2.57 | 2.81 | | 2.50 | 1.14 | 84.69 | 0.27 | 0.05 |
| 15 | 1.14 | | 5.70 | 5.57 | | 6.87 | 2.05 | 73.55 | 0.32 | 0.12 |
| 16 | 3.34 | | 4.92 | 7.26 | | 6.55 | 4.77 | 69.53 | 0.32 | |
| 17 | 2.60 | 0.01 | 6.21 | 10.85 | 0.03 | 7.92 | 4.44 | 64.52 | 0.61 | |
| 18 | 5.82 | 0.24 | 10.90 | 16.44 | 0.08 | 11.88 | 7.05 | 45.12 | 0.55 | 0.14 |
| 19 | 6.36 | 0.09 | 8.70 | 15.02 | | 10.16 | 7.15 | 50.80 | 0.31 | 0.01 |
| 20 | 9.82 | 0.29 | 10.62 | 21.25 | 0.02 | 15.57 | 8.67 | 31.67 | 0.39 | |
| 21 | 10.84 | 0.60 | 11.45 | 24.22 | | 9.73 | 8.52 | 32.85 | 0.11 | |
| 22 | 13.13 | 0.30 | 13.21 | 28.73 | 0.05 | 14.63 | 9.40 | 18.97 | 0.11 | 0.16 |
| 23 | 13.83 | 0.37 | 12.62 | 30.29 | 0.04 | 13.18 | 11.82 | 16.39 | 0.20 | 0.38 |
| 24 | 16.66 | 0.71 | 14.15 | 31.55 | 0.08 | 15.24 | 9.84 | 10.74 | 0.18 | 0.15 |

*Note:* This and other tables were generated from the unit level data of NSS employment surveys.

For urban girls of five years of age, the percentage in educational institutions is 72. At the age of nine years, almost 94 per cent of these girls are in the schools (Table 2). These figures are similar to what was noted in the case of males. One would, therefore, argue that the gender difference in urban areas is not very prominent as far as the starting age for school attendance is concerned. (This is true for rural areas as well). There are, however, large gender differences at the state levels that have been analysed elsewhere.

Among urban girls of 16 years of age, only 64 per cent are in schools and only 8 per cent are in employment. This is in contrast to the figure of 22 per cent of the boys being in employment at this age, as noted above. As against that figure, 25 per cent of the girls are

Table 2: Distribution of Urban Female by Activity Status—NSS 61st Round

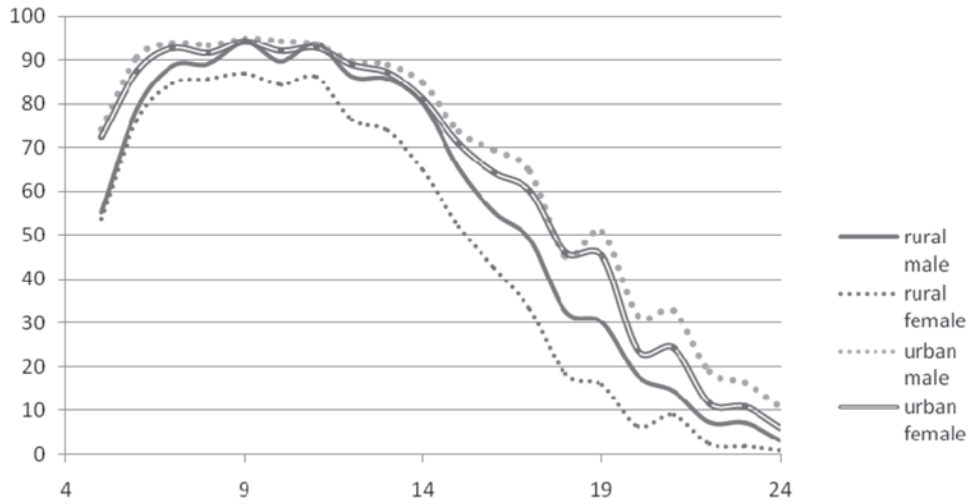
| Age | Activity Status | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 11 | 12 | 21 | 31 | 41 | 51 | 81 | 91 | 92 | 93 |
| 5 | | | | 0.13 | | | | 72.35 | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | 87.43 | 0.13 | |
| 7 | | | | | | | | 92.78 | 0.12 | |
| 8 | | | 0.21 | 0.01 | | | | 91.64 | 0.31 | 0.20 |
| 9 | | | 0.20 | 0.05 | | 0.03 | | 94.37 | 1.15 | |
| 10 | 0.13 | | 0.37 | 0.06 | | 0.10 | | 92.13 | 1.71 | 0.29 |
| 11 | 0.30 | | 0.41 | 0.11 | | 0.05 | 0.01 | 92.84 | 1.32 | 0.12 |
| 12 | 0.08 | | 1.16 | 0.89 | | 0.28 | 0.01 | 88.97 | 3.83 | 1.18 |
| 13 | 0.53 | | 1.24 | 0.73 | | 0.43 | | 87.10 | 5.97 | 2.11 |
| 14 | 0.63 | | 2.22 | 1.23 | | 0.73 | 0.75 | 81.11 | 7.91 | 2.78 |
| 15 | 0.91 | | 1.74 | 2.57 | | 1.31 | 0.45 | 70.87 | 16.35 | 3.82 |
| 16 | 0.86 | | 2.67 | 2.46 | | 1.98 | 1.52 | 64.18 | 20.13 | 4.03 |
| 17 | 1.40 | | 2.73 | 2.17 | | 3.27 | 1.59 | 60.04 | 22.06 | 5.61 |
| 18 | 2.65 | 0.01 | 2.83 | 4.81 | | 1.87 | 2.26 | 46.08 | 28.96 | 9.45 |
| 19 | 1.23 | | 3.23 | 4.29 | | 1.13 | 2.93 | 45.23 | 31.74 | 8.11 |
| 20 | 2.15 | | 3.58 | 5.52 | 0.01 | 2.37 | 4.08 | 23.76 | 44.13 | 13.39 |
| 21 | 1.68 | 0.35 | 4.15 | 8.41 | | 1.75 | 6.79 | 24.37 | 37.31 | 14.49 |
| 22 | 2.06 | | 2.91 | 6.89 | | 1.65 | 5.02 | 11.64 | 55.97 | 13.05 |
| 23 | 2.30 | | 3.84 | 8.01 | | 2.33 | 7.42 | 10.90 | 49.86 | 14.82 |
| 24 | 3.33 | 0.08 | 3.23 | 9.81 | | 2.68 | 5.16 | 6.12 | 51.40 | 17.22 |

engaged in household chores and collection of free goods, and hence do not get counted as being in the labour force. At the age of 18 years, their school attendance comes down to 46 per cent while the employment rate goes up to 12 per cent. As high as 29 per cent of them are engaged in household chores and another 9 per cent in the collection of free goods.

Since the attendance keeps increasing till the age of 9 years, both for boys and girls, it must be accepted that many of the children enrol at a much later age than the generally accepted age of 6 years for admission to Class I. Further, since the attendance drops after the age of 15 years, which roughly corresponds to the completion of secondary level, if one joins the first standard at the age of 6 years, it may be surmised that a large number of children do not go beyond the secondary stage. As many children join school at a later age, it can be argued that the rate of dropouts before the completion of secondary level education is much higher.

Graph 3 shows the plotting of age and attendance for persons in the age group of 5 to 24 years. The innermost curve is for rural females, which is significantly below that for rural males at all ages, with the difference becoming low at the two ends. The urban female curve is also below that for urban males but the gap is not very high at least up to 19 years of age. A steep fall in attendance is noticed around the age of 14 years for both the genders, with the fall being quite sharp in urban areas. A similar fall is observable for rural males as well. For rural females, the fall starts at an even earlier age but seems to be less steep after 15 years of age.

Graph 3: Percentage of Children Attending Educational Institutions—NSS 61st Round



If urban are compared with rural areas, it is interesting to observe that the children in the former category move out of the educational institutions to take up employment at a higher age as compared to those in rural areas (the tables for rural areas are not given in this paper). While for urban males and females, the attendance comes down to 65 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively at the age of 17 years, in rural areas, this happens at the age of 15 years.

The percentage of boys and girls reporting attendance in educational institutions for the ages of 18 years and above for the last four rounds starting from 1987-88 are presented in Table 3. There is some increase in the figures that should be attributed to their pursuing higher education or a vocational stream. The increase, however, is not spectacular for any of the four categories which, in turn, can be attributed to the growth of employment opportunities in the urban informal sector, responsible for an increase in the worker participation rate (WPR) during 1999-2004. Table 4 shows that the WPR or the percentage of workers among illiterates has declined but that for persons with primary and middle school education, this has gone up, with the increase being significantly high for women. Unfortunately, however, no increase has been reported in the real wages for both casual as well as regular workers[7]. Indeed, if the country wants to take advantage of globalization and create decent jobs for the youth, it must go in for capacity creation of a much higher order that would invariably push up the real wages for different categories of workers.

Attendance rates in educational institutions for boys and girls are about the same for 18 years of age. The figures for women are slightly less than those of men at higher ages. The gender disparity in the figures is not very high in urban areas, with the male percentage figure for the age group of 18 to 20 years being higher than the corresponding figure for females by only about 10 per cent. In the case of rural areas, however, the figure for men is more than twice that of the women.

7. Kundu and Sarangi (2007).

Table 3: Percentage of Children Aged 18, 19 and 20 Years Reporting Usual Status as Attending Educational Institutions

| Round/Period | Rural Boys | Rural Girls | Urban Boys | Urban Girls |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aged 18 years | | | | |
| 1987-88 | 21.43 | 6.09 | 42.74 | 27.93 |
| 1993-94 | 25.57 | 9.50 | 46.12 | 38.09 |
| 1999-2000 | 29.03 | 14.05 | 46.38 | 39.47 |
| 2004-05 | 32.68 | 18.35 | 45.12 | 46.08 |
| Aged 19 years | | | | |
| 1987-88 | 17.86 | 5.65 | 41.49 | 27.55 |
| 1993-94 | 23.03 | 8.94 | 45.41 | 35.58 |
| 1999-2000 | 27.42 | 11.28 | 46.78 | 36.04 |
| 2004-05 | 30.17 | 15.88 | 50.80 | 45.23 |
| Aged 20 years | | | | |
| 1987-88 | 9.40 | 1.91 | 28.46 | 14.38 |
| 1993-94 | 11.59 | 2.85 | 31.39 | 19.87 |
| 1999-2000 | 14.95 | 4.78 | 32.30 | 24.21 |
| 2004-05 | 17.88 | 6.40 | 31.67 | 23.76 |

Table 4: Education Level Specific Usual Status WPR for Persons of Age 15 Years and Above in Urban Areas

| | **Males** | | | | | | **Females** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1993-94 | | 1999-2000 | | 2004-05 | | 1993-94 | | 1999-2000 | | 2004-05 | |
| | PS | PS+ SS | PS | PS+ SS | PS | PS+ SS | PS | PS+ SS | PS | PS+ SS | PS | PS+ SS |
| Illiterates | 86.6 | 87.0 | 83.6 | 83.9 | 82.4 | 83.1 | 23.3 | 30.0 | 22.9 | 27.1 | 25.0 | 30.4 |
| Literate up to primary | 84.4 | 85.0 | 82.4 | 83.0 | 85.1 | 85.5 | 15.0 | 20.3 | 14.6 | 17.7 | 18.6 | 23.4 |
| Middle | 71.3 | 72.3 | 72.5 | 73.2 | 75.0 | 76.0 | 9.1 | 13.1 | 9.9 | 12.9 | 11.7 | 16.1 |
| Secondary | 66.3 | 67.7 | 66.1 | 66.8 | 66.2 | 67.3 | 10.8 | 13.4 | 10.4 | 12.4 | 9.5 | 12.3 |
| Higher secondary | 58.9 | 60.7 | 59.9 | 60.8 | 59.1 | 60.8 | 12.6 | 14.7 | 11.1 | 12.4 | 10.3 | 12.9 |
| Diploma | | | | | 77.2 | 79.8 | | | | | 42.3 | 48.6 |
| Graduate and above | 80.7 | 81.8 | 79.7 | 80.6 | 78.5 | 79.5 | 28.2 | 30.1 | 25.2 | 27.3 | 26.5 | 29.0 |
| **All** | **75.8** | **76.8** | **74.5** | **75.2** | **75.2** | **76.3** | **17.5** | **22.3** | **16.6** | **19.7** | **18.5** | **22.7** |

# 4. School dropouts, 'nowhere' children and gender discrimination

## 4.1 Withdrawal from schooling

One can compare the school attendance of children aged 10 years in 1999-2000 and those aged 15 years in 2004-05 to obtain an idea of children dropping out of schools during the five-year period, assuming that there was no fresh enrolment for children of 10 years and above. In urban areas, 90.6 per cent of the male children aged 10 years were attending all types of educational institutions in 1999-2000, while only 71.9 per cent of those aged 15 years were in these categories in 2004-05 (Tables 5 and 6). This implies that about 18.7 per cent of the children have dropped out of studies. Making similar calculations, we would obtain the figure 15.5 per cent as the decline in school attendance for women during the same period. One would argue that there is not much gender differential in this age group and, in fact, the dropout rate for women works out to be less than that for men. The same is the case in rural areas but here the dropout rate for men is slightly less (16.6 per cent) than that for women (17.3 per cent).

The percentage of children below the age of 15 years reporting 'attended [school] in the past' is also a measure of dropping out of school. These children are unlikely to have completed secondary school, which is the basic level expected to have been completed. The percentage of children reporting 'attended in the past' is 1.1 for urban boys aged 10 years, and is 5.6 for boys aged 12 years in 2004-05. This steadily climbs to 8.1 for boys aged 13 years old, and is as high as 21.5 per cent for those aged 15 years old. The corresponding percentage figures for urban girls for the above mentioned ages are strikingly similar. The figure for girls aged 15 years is 20.3 per cent, just 1.2 percentage points less than that of boys.

One can conclude that the shares of boys and girls not completing the secondary schools are similar, which confirms the proposition that currently, there is not much gender bias in urban areas[8].

8. The chance that 15-year olds would have completed matriculation is, however, somewhat higher in urban as compared to rural areas due to the early start of school attendance in the former.

Table 5: Level of School Attendance for Children of Ages 5 to 29 Years—NSS 55th Round

| Age | Never Attended | Attended in the Past | Attending Non-formal | Pre-primary | Primary | Middle | Secondary and Higher Secondary | Graduate and Above | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Urban Male | | | | | |
| 5 | 35.0 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 36.6 | 26.5 | 0.4 | 0.0 | | 100.0 |
| 6 | 16.4 | 1.3 | 0.6 | 28.6 | 51.6 | 1.4 | 0.1 | | 100.0 |
| 7 | 9.7 | 1.2 | 0.2 | 23.5 | 63.7 | 1.6 | 0.0 | | 100.0 |
| 8 | 6.9 | 1.1 | 0.1 | 20.3 | 67.8 | 3.6 | 0.2 | | 100.0 |
| 9 | 5.0 | 1.6 | 0.2 | 14.9 | 70.7 | 7.6 | 0.0 | | 100.0 |
| 10 | 7.4 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 9.4 | 53.5 | 27.3 | 0.4 | | 100.0 |
| 11 | 4.5 | 3.2 | 0.1 | 5.4 | 33.6 | 52.8 | 0.5 | | 100.0 |
| 12 | 8.6 | 6.6 | 0.1 | 2.7 | 20.5 | 58.2 | 3.4 | | 100.0 |
| 13 | 6.4 | 7.4 | 0.2 | 1.3 | 10.0 | 62.1 | 12.5 | | 100.0 |
| 14 | 7.9 | 9.7 | 0.1 | 0.7 | 5.0 | 31.7 | 44.9 | | 100.0 |
| 15 | 9.3 | 18.5 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 2.9 | 18.1 | 50.8 | | 100.0 |
| 16 | 10.1 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 1.2 | 9.3 | 54.0 | | 100.0 |
| 17 | 8.7 | 28.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 2.9 | 49.7 | 10.1 | 100.0 |
| 18 | 13.7 | 40.3 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 2.1 | 26.9 | 16.4 | 100.0 |
| 19 | 9.6 | 42.5 | 0.0 | | 0.1 | 0.5 | 17.4 | 29.8 | 100.0 |
| 20 | 13.7 | 53.9 | 0.1 | 0.1 | | 0.7 | 9.2 | 22.5 | 100.0 |
| 21 | 11.8 | 57.4 | | 0.0 | | 0.2 | 5.3 | 25.2 | 100.0 |
| 22 | 16.2 | 64.1 | | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 3.0 | 16.1 | 100.0 |
| 23 | 12.9 | 70.0 | | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 1.7 | 15.0 | 100.0 |
| 24 | 13.5 | 73.6 | | | 0.2 | 0.2 | 1.3 | 11.2 | 100.0 |
| 25 | 18.2 | 75.4 | | | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.6 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| | | | | Urban Female | | | | | |
| 5 | 35.1 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 36.1 | 27.0 | 0.8 | | | 100.0 |
| 6 | 21.7 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 26.6 | 49.9 | 0.7 | 0.2 | | 100.0 |
| 7 | 14.8 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 21.4 | 61.6 | 1.0 | 0.1 | | 100.0 |
| 8 | 10.6 | .9 | 0.4 | 25.1 | 59.4 | 3.6 | | | 100.0 |
| 9 | 7.2 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 14.2 | 68.3 | 9.1 | | | 100.0 |
| 10 | 10.6 | 2.8 | 0.1 | 7.8 | 49.1 | 29.0 | 0.5 | | 100.0 |
| 11 | 8.1 | 4.2 | 0.1 | 5.9 | 29.4 | 51.8 | 0.5 | | 100.0 |
| 12 | 10.8 | 6.0 | 0.2 | 5.2 | 19.8 | 53.7 | 4.3 | | 100.0 |
| 13 | 9.3 | 11.2 | 0.1 | 1.2 | 11.9 | 51.7 | 14.6 | | 100.0 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | 12.2 | 14.0 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 4.3 | 29.5 | 39.6 | | 100.0 |
| 15 | 11.3 | 19.7 | 00 | 0.4 | 1.9 | 14.9 | 51.8 | | 100.0 |
| 16 | 13.3 | 27.4 | 0.1 | 2.4 | 0.7 | 7.1 | 49.1 | | 100.0 |
| 17 | 10.0 | 35.3 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 3.4 | 38.1 | 12.9 | 100.0 |
| 18 | 14.9 | 45.1 | 0.0 | | 0.1 | 1.0 | 19.2 | 19.7 | 100.0 |
| 19 | 13.2 | 49.7 | | | 0.1 | 0.8 | 11.2 | 25.0 | 100.0 |
| 20 | 23.6 | 51.4 | 0.1 | | 0.2 | 0.2 | 5.0 | 19.6 | 100.0 |
| 21 | 15.4 | 57.6 | | | 0.4 | 0.2 | 3.2 | 23.2 | 100.0 |
| 22 | 25.9 | 59.7 | 0.0 | | 0.2 | 0.3 | 1.9 | 12.0 | 100.0 |
| 23 | 23.3 | 68.6 | | | 0 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 7.2 | 100.0 |
| 24 | 24.8 | 68.7 | 0.2 | | | 0.3 | 0.7 | 5.2 | 100.0 |

*Note:* Some of the improbable entries in the cells are due to wrong coding or can be attributed to number preferences or specific situations like children attending special schools, etc.

Table 6: Level of School Attendance for Children of Ages 5 to 29—NSS 61st Round

| Age | Never Attended | Attended in the Past | Attending Non-formal | Pre-primary | Primary | Middle | Secondary and Higher Secondary | Graduate and Above | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Urban Male | | | | | |
| 5 | 25.3 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 29.4 | 43.9 | 0.3 | | | 100.0 |
| 6 | 9.1 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 11.9 | 77.9 | 0.4 | | | 100.0 |
| 7 | 4.9 | 1.2 | 0.4 | 4.6 | 87.5 | 1.4 | | | 100.0 |
| 8 | 6.7 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 3.3 | 87.6 | 1.5 | | | 100.0 |
| 9 | 4.2 | 0.8 | 0.2 | 1.0 | 85.1 | 8.7 | | | 100.0 |
| 10 | 4.6 | 1.1 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 61.6 | 31.7 | 0.1 | | 100.0 |
| 11 | 2.4 | 3.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 26.8 | 66.8 | 0.5 | | 100.0 |
| 12 | 4.9 | 5.6 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 18.5 | 62.1 | 8.3 | | 100.0 |
| 13 | 3.5 | 8.1 | 0.1 | | 6.3 | 50.6 | 31.3 | | 100.0 |
| 14 | 5.1 | 11.2 | | | 3.5 | 27.2 | 53.0 | | 100.0 |
| 15 | 6.5 | 21.5 | 0.1 | | 2.2 | 12.0 | 56.9 | 0.8 | 100.0 |
| 16 | 5.6 | 25.1 | | | 0.8 | 6.7 | 59.5 | 2.3 | 100.0 |
| 17 | 5.7 | 31.1 | 0.0 | | 1.2 | 2.1 | 48.4 | 11.5 | 100.0 |
| 18 | 7.2 | 47.8 | | | 0.1 | 0.8 | 23.9 | 20.2 | 100.0 |
| 19 | 4.5 | 45.4 | 0.1 | | | 0.1 | 14.3 | 35.5 | 100.0 |
| 20 | 9.1 | 58.3 | | | | 0.4 | 5.6 | 26.5 | 100.0 |
| 21 | 5.4 | 62.4 | | | | 0.2 | 2.1 | 29.8 | 100.0 |
| 22 | 8.8 | 71.1 | | | | | 1.1 | 18.9 | 100.0 |
| 23 | 9.1 | 74.2 | | | | 0.0 | 1.5 | 15.2 | 100.0 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | 7.3 | 80.8 | | | | 0.3 | 0.6 | 10.9 | 100.0 |
| | | | | Urban Female | | | | | |
| 5 | 26.0 | 0.9 | 0.6 | 30.8 | 41.6 | 0.1 | | | 100.0 |
| 6 | 11.0 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 11.0 | 76.6 | 0.5 | | | 100.0 |
| 7 | 6.6 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 4.6 | 86.2 | 1.6 | | | 100.0 |
| 8 | 6.9 | 1.8 | 0.4 | 1.1 | 87.1 | 2.6 | | | 100.0 |
| 9 | 4.2 | 0.8 | 0.2 | 2.8 | 81.2 | 10.8 | | | 100.0 |
| 10 | 6.2 | 1.7 | 0.1 | 1.4 | 56.0 | 34.6 | 0.1 | | 100.0 |
| 11 | 5.2 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 28.8 | 63.3 | 0.6 | | 100.0 |
| 12 | 4.8 | 6.1 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 14.4 | 62.5 | 11.9 | | 100.0 |
| 13 | 5.9 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 6.9 | 44.6 | 34.5 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| 14 | 6.4 | 12.7 | 0.0 | | 3.5 | 24.9 | 52.5 | | 100.0 |
| 15 | 8.7 | 20.3 | | | 0.6 | 10.6 | 58.6 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| 16 | 10.4 | 25.5 | 0.1 | | 0.3 | 4.5 | 55.2 | 4.0 | 100.0 |
| 17 | 7.3 | 33.8 | | | 0.4 | 2.7 | 43.6 | 12.2 | 100.0 |
| 18 | 11.5 | 43.1 | | | 0.7 | 0.7 | 17.5 | 26.5 | 100.0 |
| 19 | 11.6 | 43.6 | | | 0.0 | 0.7 | 9.3 | 34.7 | 100.0 |
| 20 | 17.0 | 58.4 | | | 0.2 | 0.5 | 3.4 | 20.6 | 100.0 |
| 21 | 10.9 | 63.5 | | | 0.2 | 0.0 | 3.1 | 22.3 | 100.0 |
| 22 | 16.7 | 71.3 | | | | 0.0 | 0.3 | 11.5 | 100.0 |
| 23 | 11.9 | 76.9 | | | | 0.0 | 0.4 | 10.8 | 100.0 |
| 24 | 12.1 | 79.8 | | | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 7.8 | 100.0 |

*Note:* Some of the improbable entries in the cells are due to wrong coding or can be attributed to number preferences or specific situations like children attending special schools, etc.

### 4.2 Whereabouts of the 'nowhere' children

Many of the children are noted to be neither in employment nor attending any kind of educational institutions (Tables 1 and 2). These children have sometimes been described as 'nowhere' children. The term may, however, give an erroneous perception if it is understood as suggesting uncertainty regarding the location of the person or his/her work force disposition in the official statistical system. It is noted that a large number of boys and girls in the ages of 5 and 6 years, particularly girls, are included in this category due to late enrolment in school. This definitely could not be a matter of serious concern and they need not be included in the definition of 'nowhere' children as many of them are simply preparing for admission into the formal schooling system. At higher ages, many among the children,

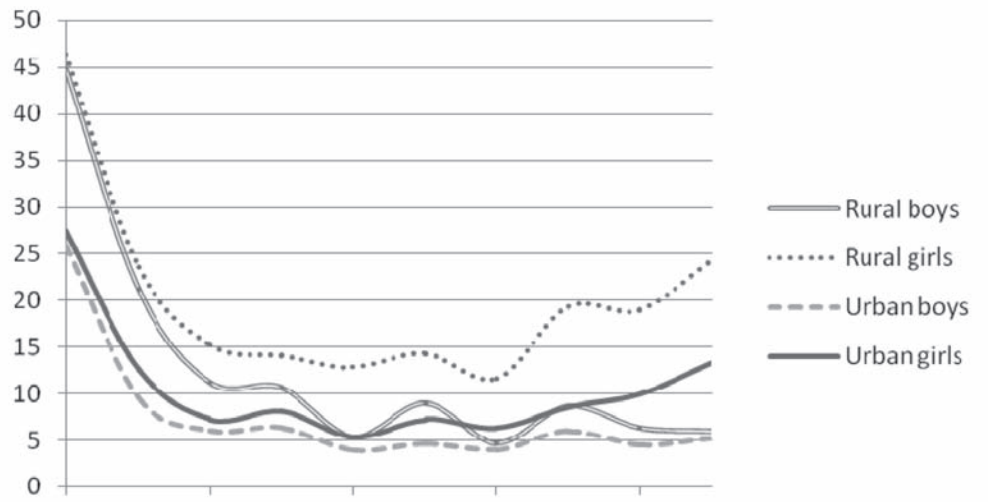
especially girls, are engaged in domestic work at their homes. A large percentage of these children fall in the categories like attending domestic duties (codes 92 and 93)[9]. Many would argue that these children are placed in the nowhere category due to the inadequacy of the definition of workers in NSS. However, the fact that 9 per cent of the male children and 14 per cent of the female children are not going to school, despite their not being a part of the labour force at the age of 14 years in urban areas in 2004-05, should be a matter of detailed investigation. Importantly, while the figures for such male children in urban areas are about the same or marginally less than those in rural areas, the corresponding urban figures for girls come to less than half. The highest figures are reported in the case of rural girls, as may be seen in Graph 4. The possibility that a section of these children are street urchins, engaged in some unclassified work that compromises their safety and physical health or are being exploited in some other manner cannot be ruled out. However, it must be noted that over 79 per cent of the so-called 'nowhere' urban girls at the age of 14 years are fully engaged in household duties, with another 21 per cent taking up the collection of free goods, sewing, tailoring, etc. in 2004-05. Describing them as 'nowhere' children sends out a wrong message to policy-makers, civil society organizations and researchers.

Table 7: Percentage of Children Who Are Neither in Schools Nor in Economic Activities

| Age | Rural Boys | Rural Girls | Urban Boys | Urban Girls |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 44.88 | 46.38 | 25.96 | 27.52 |
| 6 | 21.14 | 23.53 | 9.45 | 12.57 |
| 7 | 11.22 | 15.19 | 6.03 | 7.22 |
| 8 | 10.66 | 14.07 | 6.34 | 8.14 |
| 9 | 5.27 | 12.80 | 3.94 | 5.36 |
| 10 | 8.97 | 14.26 | 4.62 | 7.21 |
| 11 | 4.68 | 11.63 | 3.99 | 6.27 |
| 12 | 8.64 | 19.34 | 5.98 | 8.60 |
| 13 | 6.33 | 18.93 | 4.54 | 9.97 |
| 14 | 5.97 | 24.30 | 5.14 | 13.33 |

9. Only a small fraction would be placed in the category of 'beggars, etc.' (code 96) or 'others' (code 97).

Graph 4: Percentage of Children Neither Attending Educational Institutions Nor in Employment—NSS 61st Round




### 4.3 Gender discrimination in the education system

It has been noted above that there is no gender difference in children attending educational institutions up to the age of 14 years. The discrimination process begins only after that age, and is reflected in a much sharper drop in the attendance rate for girls and, more significantly, their shifting towards non-work rather than work. The proposition is further confirmed from the information on age-wise school (primary, secondary and higher) attendance rates for the 55th and 61 st Rounds, which are given in Tables 5 and 6. The percentage of male children not going to educational institutions in urban areas at the age of 5 years was as high as 35 in 1999-2000, which went down to 25 in 2004-05. Similarly, the percentage figure for children not going to school at the pre-primary level has also gone down from 37 to 29. Correspondingly, the enrolment in primary school has gone up from 26 per cent to 44 per cent. The figures for female children are strikingly similar. This provides additional evidence that gender discrimination in sending the children to pre- primary and primary schools is low and has not got accentuated over time in urban areas.

Among the six-year old urban boys and girls, about half were attending primary classes in 1999-2000, reflecting little gender bias. The figures went up to over 75 per cent in 2004-05, and here again, the gender gap can be noted to be marginal. Further, the percentages of boys and girls in pre-primary classes were 28.6 and 26.6, which came down to 11.9 and 11.0 per

cent, respectively. This decline may reflect not the trend of urban children (boys and girls) skipping the pre-primary stage of education but that they are going to pre-primary schools at an earlier age than in the past. Importantly, the decline in non-enrolment in schools and the shift from the pre-primary to the primary stage is similar for boys and girls at this age, once again confirming the absence of gender bias.

The percentage of boys and girls attending pre-primary, primary and middle school at the age of 9 years was about 91.5 per cent in 1999-2000. By 2004-05, but the rate for both went up to around 93.5 per cent. For the ages of 17 and 18 years, the enrolment rate in secondary and graduation programmes for urban men during 1999-2004 remained the same, while for women, this went up marginally. As a result, the gender disparity can be noted to have gone down and become insignificant. The gender gaps are, however, very high for the ages of 19 years and above. This can be attributed to the fact that many of the women not being sent to primary and middle schools before the age of 8 to 10 years. The present deficit of women in secondary and graduation programmes is, thus, largely due to historical factors.

The percentages of male and female children who had never attended school were very high and came down significantly during the period 1999-04 for almost all ages between 6 and 24 years, in urban areas. The male–female gap was very high except for a few specific ages like 5, 8, 12 and 15 years but this too has declined over the given period (Column 2 in Tables 5 and 6). The decline is, however, more evident in the age groups between 5 and 14 years, pertaining to the child population. This is because the decline in gender discrimination manifested in girls being sent to schools is a recent phenomenon. This is manifested in the rates of children who 'never attended school', with there being little difference between the figures of boys and girls up to the age of 14 years. For the age groups ranging from 15 to 24 years, however, the gender disparity continues to be high, largely due to the discrimination that existed in the past, resulting in female children not being sent to school. The gender disparity for urban areas in the ages ranging from 15 to 24 years in the year 2004-05 happens to be similar to the corresponding disparity for the year 1999-2000, or even higher. Another important point is that the percentage of children who have attended and eventually dropped out of educational institutions in the past are similar or slightly lower than the corresponding figures in 2004-05 as compared to those in 1999-2000 in all ages up to 10 years. After that age, the figures are higher in the later years, as the enrolment in earlier years has gone up. However, the male/female differentials in the percentage figures is not very high at both the time points, as may seen in column 3 in Tables 5 and 6. One can thus infer that the dropout rates for males and females were not and are not very different.

## 5. Employment and its structure for boys and girls during their childhood and adulthood

Urban child employment is noticeable from the age of 9 years onwards, for both boys and girls. This is the case in rural areas as well. At the age of 11 years, roughly two out of 100 male children (as against one for female) were working in urban areas in the year 2004-05, with the figure in rural areas being the same for boys and slightly higher for girls. The work participation rate goes up to 9 per cent for boys and 5 per cent for girls, at the age of 14 years. The corresponding figures for rural areas are only marginally higher.

It is, however, heartening to note that there has been a decline in the incidence of child employment over the years. The percentages of children reporting employment in 1987-88 at different ages (Table 8) were significantly higher than those for 2004-05. Understandably, the figures are significantly higher in rural as compared to urban areas in all ages. About 1.5 per cent of rural children were reported to be in employment even at the age of 5 years as compared to 0.15 per cent in urban areas in 1987-88. At 14 years of age, the percentages of boys and girls reporting employment were noted to be as high as 12.7 and 7.1, respectively. In rural areas, the figures are much higher—32.6 per cent for boys and 29.4 per cent for girls. There has been a substantial decline in the WPR of children over the past few years. The increase in attendance in educational institutions is the key factor in this.

Table 8: Percentage of Children in Employment during 1987-88

| Age | Rural Boys | Rural Girls | Urban Boys | Urban Girls |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 1.38 | 1.60 | 0.22 | 0.08 |
| 6 | 1.78 | 2.19 | 0.03 | 0.16 |
| 7 | 1.84 | 1.97 | 0.34 | 0.16 |
| 8 | 2.90 | 2.78 | 0.80 | 0.34 |
| 9 | 4.19 | 3.91 | 1.28 | 1.04 |
| 10 | 10.08 | 9.72 | 3.38 | 2.36 |
| 11 | 12.23 | 13.68 | 3.41 | 2.97 |
| 12 | 20.53 | 19.34 | 8.46 | 4.82 |
| 13 | 23.43 | 24.05 | 8.91 | 5.38 |
| 14 | 32.57 | 29.44 | 12.72 | 7.10 |

The uniform decline in WPR among children (in the age group of 5-14 years) during 1993-2004 in urban areas (Table 9) confirms the proposition that more and more children are attending schools. This pattern is observed in rural areas as well (table not given). The decline in WPR is, however, sharper in rural as compared to urban areas, for both for boys and girls. This is possibly because of the high levels of WPR in rural areas in the late 1980s, which were about three times the figure for boys and four times that for girls, reported in urban areas. Besides, employment opportunities are rapidly opening up in urban areas within the household sector and various informal activities, which is not so in rural areas.

Table 9: Age-specific Work Participation Rates (WPRs) by Usual (Principal) Status in Urban Areas from Various NSS Rounds

| Age Group (years) | Men | | | Women | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1993-94 | 1999-2000 | 2004-05 | 1993-94 | 1999-2000 | 2004-05 |
| 5-9 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 10-14 | 59 | 46 | 44 | 35 | 28 | 24 |
| 15-19 | 337 | 303 | 314 | 94 | 87 | 92 |
| 20-24 | 654 | 644 | 662 | 136 | 130 | 155 |
| 25-29 | 892 | 878 | 900 | 175 | 161 | 186 |
| 30-34 | 961 | 958 | 965 | 208 | 198 | 236 |
| 35-39 | 982 | 973 | 975 | 233 | 235 | 265 |
| 40-44 | 980 | 973 | 977 | 257 | 242 | 262 |
| 45-49 | 971 | 968 | 965 | 253 | 234 | 227 |
| 50-54 | 941 | 933 | 925 | 240 | 225 | 224 |
| 55-59 | 845 | 803 | 819 | 185 | 181 | 192 |
| 60+ | 429 | 386 | 355 | 91 | 82 | 86 |
| All | 513 | 513 | 541 | 121 | 117 | 135 |

While analysing the structure of employment (Table 10), one notices that as high a figure as one third of the urban boys reporting employment at the age 16 years are in regular jobs, with the share of unpaid family workers and the self-employed being 22 and 15 per cent, respectively, only in 2004-05 (Table 1). The share of regular wage employment for boys goes up from 31 per cent at the age of 14 years to 36 per cent at the age of 18 years and then to 40 per cent at the age of 24 years. The percentage share of unpaid family workers goes down from 28.5 per cent at the age of 14 years to 18 per cent at the age of 24 years, which

is understandable. The figure of self-employed or own-account workers, however, goes up from 13 per cent at the age of 14 years to 21 per cent at the age of 24 years. One could argue that the male children, on attaining adulthood, move away from family work and take up regular jobs elsewhere or start working on their own. The other sector from which children withdraw with growing age is casual work though the withdrawal process in this case takes place only at the age of 22 years. This is understandable as adults prefer to shift from less organized to more organized and better-defined activities.

Among the employed girls aged 18 years in urban areas, 40 per cent are in regular jobs, with the incidence of unpaid family workers and self-employed being similar at around 22 per cent. The percentage of regular workers can be seen to be increasing continuously from a mere 25.5 per cent at the age of 14 years to 51 per cent at the age of 24 years. The share of self-employed persons also exhibits the similar trend of an increase with age, as —was observed for men. The higher share of women regular workers in urban areas—higher than not only that of other categories of work but also that for males—needs to be interpreted with caution. Many of the women are getting absorbed in various low productive service activities, including domestic work on a regular basis, wherein their earnings may not be much higher than that for casual workers. The most significant point from the gender perspective is that while the boys, after leaving schools, gravitate towards the left of Table 1—signifying a shift to employment-related activity status, the girls move to the right in Table 2—getting absorbed in different non-economic activities.

The unemployment rate, defined as the share of the unemployed in the labour force (Table 10), does not show any trend in the age group of 14 to 24 years for the urban boys. The rate is about 11 per cent at the age of 14 years, and goes up to 18 per cent at the age of 16 years, but subsequently falls to 13 per cent at the ages of 18– 20 years and then to 11 per cent at the ages of 22-24 years. The important point to be noted here is that the unemployment rates are much higher than that in the higher age groups, with the average figure for urban males being only 4 per cent (Kundu and Sarangi, 2007). The unemployment rate for women, however, shows a distinct increasing trend, going up from 13 per cent at the age of 14 years to 16 per cent at the age of 16 years, reaching the level of 27 per cent at the age of 22 years and then declining slightly to 21 per cent at 24 years of age. This would be considered alarmingly high, as the average figure for urban women is less than 7 per cent.

Table 10: Percentage Distribution of the Employed and Unemployment Rate for Selected Ages

| Age | Own-account Worker | Employer | Unpaid Worker | Regular Worker | Casual Worker | Unemployment Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | | | | | | |
| 14 | 12.74 | 0.00 | 28.46 | 31.12 | 27.69 | 11.21 |
| 16 | 15.13 | 0.00 | 22.29 | 32.90 | 29.68 | 17.77 |
| 18 | 12.83 | 0.53 | 24.03 | 36.24 | 26.37 | 13.45 |
| 20 | 17.06 | 0.50 | 18.45 | 36.91 | 27.08 | 13.09 |
| 22 | 18.74 | 0.43 | 18.86 | 41.01 | 20.96 | 11.83 |
| 24 | 21.25 | 0.91 | 18.05 | 40.25 | 19.54 | 11.15 |
| Female | | | | | | |
| 14 | 13.10 | 0.00 | 46.15 | 25.57 | 15.18 | 13.49 |
| 16 | 10.79 | 0.00 | 33.50 | 30.87 | 24.84 | 16.02 |
| 18 | 21.77 | 0.08 | 23.25 | 39.52 | 15.37 | 15.66 |
| 20 | 15.77 | 0.00 | 26.27 | 40.50 | 17.46 | 23.04 |
| 22 | 15.25 | 0.00 | 21.54 | 51.00 | 12.21 | 27.09 |
| 24 | 17.41 | 0.42 | 16.88 | 51.28 | 14.01 | 21.24 |

### 5.1 Household types and activity status

Instances of the lowest attendance in educational institutions, for both boys and girls, have been reported from casual labour households in urban areas in 2004-05 (Table 11). The employment rate, however, is the highest among the self-employed households, wherein a large majority of the children fall in the unpaid family helper category. The incidence of child employment is lowest in regular salaried households as these are economically better off. The pattern is similar in rural areas as well, as discussed elsewhere.

### 5.2 Skill formation for employment beyond the years of schooling

The increase in WPR in the age group of 15-19 and 20-24 years (by usual principal status) for urban male and women should be a matter of concern. One would expect this figure to fall due to an increase in the number of young boys and girls going to colleges and technical institutions for learning and training. While the figure in the first age group has exceeded the level of 1999-2000, for the second age group, the increase is phenomenal and has gone above that of 1993-94.

Table 11: Distribution of Children in the Age Group of 5 to 14 Years by Activity Statuses for Different Household Types in 2004-05

| Household Type | 11 | 12 | 21 | 31 | 41 | 51 | 81 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 95 | 97 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural Male | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-employed in agriculture | 0.23 | - | 2.09 | 0.22 | - | 0.44 | 0.21 | 84.48 | 0.10 | 0.21 | - | 0.37 | 11.64 |
| Self-employed in non-agriculture | 0.26 | - | 0.69 | 0.22 | - | 2.79 | 0.18 | 76.43 | 0.22 | 0.37 | - | 0.32 | 18.51 |
| Agricultural labour | 0.22 | - | 0.89 | 0.33 | - | 1.35 | 0.30 | 81.23 | 0.09 | 0.40 | - | 0.48 | 14.71 |
| Other labour | 0.15 | - | 2.21 | 0.07 | - | 0.11 | 0.05 | 86.73 | 0.07 | 0.26 | - | 0.25 | 10.10 |
| Others | 0.03 | - | 0.09 | 0.06 | - | 0.07 | 0.04 | 91.78 | 0.01 | 0.21 | - | 0.26 | 7.45 |
| Rural Female | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-employed in agriculture | 0.31 | - | 1.24 | 0.03 | - | 0.30 | 0.09 | 78.63 | 2.72 | 2.16 | 0.01 | 0.15 | 14.37 |
| Self-employed in non-agriculture | 0.29 | - | 0.57 | 0.08 | - | 2.95 | 0.10 | 69.14 | 3.69 | 3.50 | - | 0.33 | 19.34 |
| Agricultural labour | 0.11 | - | 0.67 | 0.31 | 0.04 | 1.02 | 0.09 | 75.50 | 3.69 | 2.20 | - | 0.25 | 16.12 |
| Other labour | 0.17 | - | 2.05 | 0.03 | - | 0.06 | 0.05 | 79.42 | 2.58 | 2.64 | 0.01 | 0.11 | 12.89 |
| Others | 0.03 | - | 0.41 | 0.02 | - | 0.13 | 0.02 | 87.17 | 1.67 | 1.07 | - | 0.21 | 9.27 |
| Urban Male | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 0.25 | - | 1.30 | 0.39 | - | 0.42 | 0.32 | 89.19 | 0.17 | 0.07 | - | 0.16 | 7.73 |
| Regular salaried | 0.14 | - | 0.02 | 1.43 | - | 0.11 | 0.21 | 93.45 | 0.13 | 0.02 | - | 0.10 | 4.38 |
| Casual labour | 0.44 | - | 0.08 | 1.39 | - | 2.89 | 0.68 | 77.94 | 0.34 | 0.11 | - | 0.32 | 15.82 |
| Others | 0.02 | - | 0.09 | 0.05 | - | - | 0.01 | 94.74 | 0.05 | | 0.10 | 0.30 | 4.63 |
| Urban Female | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Self-employed | 0.08 | - | 1.18 | 0.21 | - | 0.05 | 0.02 | 87.92 | 2.48 | 0.64 | - | 0.24 | 7.17 |
| Regular salaried | 0.13 | - | 0.12 | 0.46 | - | 0.07 | 0.20 | 91.18 | 1.56 | 0.47 | - | 0.14 | 5.67 |
| Casual labour | 0.64 | - | 0.23 | 0.62 | - | 0.92 | 0.01 | 78.01 | 4.71 | 1.73 | - | 0.50 | 12.63 |
| Others | 0.03 | - | 0.20 | - | - | 0.03 | - | 93.01 | 1.04 | 0.63 | 0.18 | 0.14 | 4.73 |

## 6. Concluding observations

This paper analyses the data from various rounds of the NSS to understand the activity profiles of children and young adults in urban areas, including their attendance in the education system and exit from it at different ages, and the implications of the latter.

The process of demographic transition in India indicates that the country would enjoy demographic dividend over the next few decades. The actual benefit may, however, turn out to be less than the projected figure as it may not be possible to meet the increased demand for a skilled workforce through expansion in university and technical education. In order to take advantage of the process of globalization and create decent jobs for the youth, the country must opt for skill formation of a higher order, which would help in increasing the real wages for the rapidly growing unorganized workforce and reduce the difference with those in the organized sector..

The most disturbing conclusion emerging from the above analysis is that the dropout rates among children are alarmingly high, with the rate falling steeply after the age of 11 years. There is, therefore, a substantial dropout after five years of schooling. The rate becomes very high at the age of 15 years, for both boys and girls. Despite a sharp rise in the enrolment of children in regular primary schools at the age of six in recent years, it is unfortunate that many of them do not go beyond the secondary level. More significantly, over the years, the proportion of children going in for higher studies has not increased in comparison to the increase in enrolment in primary and middle schools.

As far as the percentage of children attending pre-primary and primary schools is concerned, there is not much gender difference. The shares of boys and girls who do not complete their secondary schooling, too, are similar, which confirms the proposition that presently, there is not much difference in their dropout rates. Indeed, there is not much gender bias in urban areas, as far as the primary education is concerned. The decline in gender discrimination is, however, a recent phenomenon. Understandably, the percentages of children, who have 'never attended school', among both boys and girls, up to the age of 14 years, are not very different. For the age groups ranging from 15 to 24 years, however, the gender disparity works out to be very high, in 2004-05. This is due to the discrimination that existed in the past, resulting in female children not being sent to primary and secondary school.

It is heartening to note that there has been a decline in the incidence of child employment over recent years. The percentages of children reporting employment in 1987-88 at different ages were significantly higher than those for 2004-05. There is practically no reporting of child labour till the age of 10 years. The smaller decline in the incidence of employment for urban children above the age of 10 years is partly due to emerging employment opportunities within the household sector and various informal activities. An important point from the gender perspective is that while the boys, after dropping out from schools, gravitate towards employment-related activities, the girls get absorbed in different non-economic activities, mostly within the household.

The share of regular wage employment for boys goes up from 31 per cent at the age of 14 years to 40 per cent at the age of 24 years. The percentage share of unpaid family workers, on the other hand, goes down from 28.5 per cent at the age of 14 years to 18 per cent at the age of 24 years, which is understandable. The figure of self-employed or own-account workers, however, goes up from 13 per cent at the age of 14 years to 21 per cent at the age of 24 years. One would argue that the male children, on attaining adulthood, move away from family work and take up regular jobs elsewhere or start working on their own. The other category from which children withdraw with growing age is casual work though the withdrawal process takes place only at the age of 22 years. This is understandable as adults prefer to shift from less organized to more organized and better-defined activities.

The lowest attendance in educational institutions, for both boys and girls, is reported from casual labour households. The employment rate is, however, the highest among the self-employed households and here, a large majority of children fall in the unpaid family helper category. The incidence of child employment is the lowest in regular salaried households as these are economically better off.

The high rates of employment for males in the age groups of 14 and from 15 to 24 years in urban areas should be a matter of serious concern. Most of the employment in these age groups occurs in the form of unpaid family work or self-employment in household enterprises. This reflects an inadequate level of skill formation, which prevents the country from reaping the benefits of globalization through the creation of decent jobs. Also, very high levels of unemployment for these age groups suggest the need for generating decent work through wage and self-employment programmes. There is tremendous pressure on these children and young adults to enter the labour force as a part of the strategy of the family for

survival. If these people have to be covered under any skill formation programme, it would be important to make provisions for appropriate economic support for the individual and his/her family. Till the time this becomes feasible, they must find employment in productive sectors of the economy with reasonable wages. This seems to be the only way to avoid the problems of growing frustration and resentment among the young adults, which can lead to major socio-political instability.

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