

Impact of Rural - Urban Labour Migration on Education of Left Behind Children : Evidence from Rural India

** Mahendra P. Agasty*

Abstract

A number of studies have shown that adult male migration occurs from rural areas for harnessing better employment opportunities and assists in achieving financial stability for a migrant family, but research has showed that the absence of parents can be detrimental to a child's social and psychological development. Migration of adult household members can affect the education of children who are left behind in several ways. On the basis of a sample survey of 200 households spread over six villages in three blocks of Kendrapara district in Odisha, India, this paper analyzed the educational status of the children left behind. The results indicated that migration mattered for the education of children. It is evident from the study that enrolment-wise, children of migrant households were ahead of children of returned migrant and non-migrant households; however, in case of school attendance, continuation in education, and educational attainment, they lagged behind children in the latter two categories of households.

Keywords : migration, migrants, non-migrants, children's education

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Adult male rural out-migrants are an important labour group in all the urban areas in India. Many of them live in urban destinations as singles, leaving their wives, children, and parents in native places. They maintain links with their kith and kin left behind through visits, communications, and remittances. Such links are important threads, although they are not enough compensation for the emotional deficiency and care vacuum created by their absence for those left behind. Despite sincere endeavours by migrants to improve the quality of life of their children through remittances funded education, the learning outcomes and educational attainment may fall short of the expectations due to the absence of care and guidance of a father, and the children left behind may be left further behind.

Review of Literature

Education and educational attainment of the children who are left behind in the migrant households has become an important and emerging issue broadly because most of the migration is by adult males rather than their entire households, and in such cases, the school-aged children are left in the villages in the care of the mothers and grandparents when their fathers move to urban areas for work (Wu, Ding, & Tang, 2004). The literature on this issue is largely diverse, with some pointing to a positive relation between adult male migration and education of the left-behind children and others, indicating an inverse relationship. Looking at the relationship as a complex one, McKenzie and Rapoport (2006) argued that migration influences educational decisions through three

* Assistant Professor of Economics, Silicon Institute of Technology, Silicon Hills, Patia, Bhubaneswar - 751 024, Odisha. E-mail : mpagasty@gmail.com

distinct channels: the positive income effect brought about by remittances providing resources for education, the negative substitution effect in terms of demand for child labour, and a prospective effect indicated by the desire to invest in education to increase the prospects of migration of future adults. From their study in rural Mexico, they found that migration being a survival strategy, the migrants may not be able to send remittances. Children of migrant households are less likely to attend schools and complete few years of schooling than those of non-migrant households, the negative effect being very strong among 16-18 year old girls. They interpreted it as substitution of schooling by work. Hu (2013) found that remittances had a positive effect and parental migration had a negative impact on educational performance of left behind children in North-East China.

A study by Calderon, Fajnzylber, and Lopez (2007) revealed that remittances did not raise educational attainment of children in migrant households in the Dominican Republic. The studies by Lee (2011) and Meyerhoefer and Chen (2011) in respect of China also pointed to the negative impact of migration on children's schooling. Lee and Park (2010) found in the context of China that migration of father had a negative effect on enrollment rate of boys, while the performance of the girls improved. Khoudour-Casteras (2007) said in the context of Columbia that children of migrants may have to work and more so when remittances are invested in small family businesses that use child labour, thereby affecting their education.

Left-behind children are left in the care of the mother and grandparents who find it difficult to care for them. Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2010) found that lack of desired supervision, and the consequential psychological problems had a negative effect on the education of children in the Dominican Republic. Hanson and Woodruff (2003), from their study in Mexico, observed that migration of the father resulted in significantly less supervision and loss of positive influence through learning at home. Left-behind children are more likely to abandon schools, and this is truer in the case of girl children who take over domestic work to the detriment of their education. Bakker, Elings-Pels, and Reis (2009) found that children of migrant households, no matter whether they move with their parents or are left behind, are at increased risk of interruption of schooling and poor academic performance and are vulnerable to child labour.

Against this pessimistic outlook, Desghingkar and Akter (2009) in Uttar Pradesh showed that migration of the father enabled children to access better schooling. According to Byrant (2005), in Asia, migrant remittances are used to send children to private schools and such children have a higher probability of attaining better grades in comparison to children of non-migrant households. A study by Chen, Huang, Rozelle, Shi, and Zhang (2009) in respect of rural China revealed no significant negative effect of migration on school performance; rather, it found improvement in educational performance of left-behind children. The results of many studies pointed to the positive impact of migrants' remittances on school enrolment and attendance - Edwards and Ureta (2003) in the context of El Salvador ; Glewwe and Jacoby (2004) in the context of Vietnam ; and Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2006) in the context of Dominican Republic. Villavicencio (2005), from a study of Mexico, found that a 5% increase in the remittances improved school attendance by 3%, and for Yang (2008), a 10% increase in remittances in terms of initial income by the migrant Philippines increased school attendance by more than 10%.

The Research Problem

The above review points to a number of blind spots in existing research. First, the findings are mixed and diverse, obviously because they are context and area specific studies. Second, the literature survey exposes the limited attention of researchers to the vital dimensions of migration such as links with kith and kin and education of children. Third, these issues have been totally neglected by the scholars in whatever limited works they have done in respect of rural-urban migration in the context of Odisha. There is thus a need for filling these research gaps and hence, the present study was conducted.

Objectives, Database, Methodology, and Plan of the Study

Against this backdrop, the present paper sought to analyze the educational status of the children left behind on the basis of a sample survey of 200 rural households in a coastal district in Odisha, India. Data for this study were collected by canvassing a structured questionnaire in person among the migrant workers at their worksites and places of living at the destination and other respondents at their native village during June - October 2014. A five-stage simple random sampling procedure was adopted for the purpose. The district, the blocks, the grampanchayats, the villages, and the households constitute the five stages in the process. Respondents of 100 migrant households, 50 returned migrant households, and 150 non-migrant households from six villages in Patamundai, Rajnagar, and Marshaghai blocks of Kendrapara district in Odisha were interviewed to elicit the required information ; 139 migrant workers from 100 selected migrant households were contacted directly at the destination, and some of them were also interviewed at their native village on their visits during the Raja and Puja festivals of 2014. Simple statistical tools were used to summarize the information in quantitative forms and to discuss the findings of the survey.

Analysis and Results

Education of the Children Left Behind

The United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (1989) envisages a host of rights of children, including their right to care and protection, and to develop their full potential. Developments of children as human resources are conditioned by their access to education and learning outcomes. Enrolment and attendance in schools and supervision and addressing psychological problems of children are the keys in this regard. The financing and caring roles of parents are the vital aspects (Schapiro, 2009).

(1) Enrolment : In India, elementary education is free and mid-day meals are provided to children at schools for which enrolment at the preliminary level is high. Hence, no difference in enrolments between children in migrant households and non-migrant households may be expected. But the difference in enrolment arises at the higher level of education and at a relatively higher age-group, when children/adolescents can work for wages. The Table 1 shows the enrolment rate for various age groups of children in the households surveyed by us in the study area. The Table 1 shows that the primary and basic enrolment rate in the study area was very high. Within the age

Table 1. School Enrolment by Age and Category of Household

Age	Migrant Households		Returned Migrant Households		Non-Migrant Households		All Households	
	No. of Children	Children Enrolled	No. of Children	Children Enrolled	No. of Children	Children Enrolled	No. of Children	Children Enrolled
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4-8 years	74	71(95.94)	33	31(93.33)	111	105(94.59)	218	207(94.95)
9-13 years	66	59(89.39)	29	25(86.20)	100	86(86)	195	170(87.18)
14-17years	39	31(79.48)	20	15(75)	61	46(75.41)	120	92(76.67)
All age Groups	179	161(89.94)	82	71(86.58)	272	237(87.13)	533	469(87.99)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage to respective total no. of children in the age group.

Table 2. School Attendance by Age and Household Type

Age group	No of School Days	No of Days Attended by Children			
		Migrant Households	Returned Migrant Households	Non-Migrant Households	All Households
1	2	3	4	5	6
4-8 years	228	220(96.49)	220(96.49)	222(97.36)	220(96.78)
9-13 years	228	214(93.85)	215(94.29)	216(94.73)	215(94.28)
14-17years	228	145(63.59)	177(77.63)	183(80.26)	168(73.83)
All age Groups	228	193(84.65)	204(89.47)	207(90.78)	201(88.29)

Notes: The total number of school days was 228 days in the academic year 2013-14.

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage to col.2

group of 4-8 years, the enrolment was found to be about 95%. In the case of migrant households, it was 95.94% as against 93.33% for the returned migrant households, and 94.59% for the non-migrant households. Even though the migrant households had slightly higher enrolment in comparison to the other two, it will not be right to say that migrant households have advantages over the latter two. In the age group of 9-13 years, the enrolment was little lower than that at the preliminary level. The enrolment in this age group was 87.18%. The enrolment rate of the children of migrant households (89.39%) is higher than that of the non-migrant households (86%) and returned migrant households (86.20%). Within the age group of 14-17 years, the enrolment was relatively lower. The enrolment at this stage was 76.67% with migrant households sending more children to school (79.48%) followed by non-migrant households (75.41%) and returned migrant households (75%). There was lower enrolment in this age group because some of the children helped their family members in different domestic works, and some migrated with their families/fathers to different urban destinations for work. It may be summarized that migration status does not affect enrolment significantly for the reasons already stated. Motivational schemes like mid day meals, free reading materials, free dresses, and other popular benefits helped in increasing enrolment in schools. Motivational factors are the key forces determining enrolment in basic and upper primary level, rather than migration status.

(2) School Attendance : Education is multidimensional. It encompasses enrolments, school attendance, and learning outcome or educational attainment. School attendance is a fundamental pre-condition for effective learning. The Table 2 shows the overall school attendance by students in the study area over one year. The Table shows school attendance of children of different age groups across the three categories of households over a year. The number of school days in the 2011-12 academic year were 228 in the study area. As can be seen from the Table 2 that the overall attendance was 96.78% within the age group of 4 - 8 years as against 94.28% for the age group of 9-13 years and 73.83 % for the 13-17 years age group. The average attendance was estimated at 88.29% .

If we analyze the school attendance by household types in the sample, we find it to be high and more or less similar for the age groups of 4-8 years and 9-13 years for all the households. Even though the children of non-migrant households had little higher attendance, the percentage value was very close to that for the other two categories. However, school attendance has been observed to have declined after 13 years, and here, the influence of migration may be more evident.

The household wise comparison reveals that children of migrant households missed school mostly within the age group of 14-17 years, with very low school attendance at 63.59%. On the other hand, within the same age group, the children from non-migrant households attended 80.26%, and those from the returned migrant households attended 77.63% of the total school days. It can be seen from the Table that the overall attendance of migrant households was 84.65% as against 88.29% and 90.78% , respectively in the case of children of non-

Table 3. Reasons for Missing School by Household Type

Reasons	No of Responses			
	Migrant Households	Returned Migrant Households	Non-Migrant Households	All Households
1	2	3	4	5
Illness	30(13.95)	16(19.54)	65(18.30)	111(17.02)
Paid Work	81(37.67)	30(36.58)	131(36.90)	242(37.12)
Household Work	97(45.12)	34(41.46)	150(42.25)	281(43.09)
Stress at Home	07(3.25)	02(2.43)	09(2.53)	18(2.76)
Total	215(100)	82(100)	355(100)	652(100)

Notes: As there are multiple responses, total number of responses is greater than the number of respondents. Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

Table 4. School Dropout by Age and Household Types

Age	Migrant Households		Returned Migrant Households		Non-Migrant Households		All Households	
	Children Enrolled	No. of drop outs	Children Enrolled	No. of drop outs	Children Enrolled	No. of drop outs	Children Enrolled	No. of drop outs
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4-8 years	71	8(11.27)	31	3(9.68)	105	11(10.47)	207	22(10.63)
9-13 years	59	11(18.64)	25	5(16.00)	86	14(16.27)	170	30(17.64)
13-17years	31	16(51.61)	15	5(30.33)	46	17(36.95)	92	38(41.30)
All age Groups	161	35(21.73)	71	11(15.49)	237	42(17.72)	469	90(19.19)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to no. enrolled.

migrant and returned migrant households. Thus, the children from non-migrant and returned migrant households attended more number of school days in comparison to those of migrant households. Most children from non-migrant and returned migrants households reported that they tried not to miss school, and that their parents enforced school attendance. However, this did not take place in the case of migrant households. Due to the absence of the father, the mother and grandparents failed to give required importance to school attendance. It is evident from the Table that within the age group of 14-17 years, more students missed classes across all categories of households, and it was severe in case of children of migrant households.

The Table 3 shows the reasons for missing school by children in the study area. Children reported missing school largely because of illness, paid work, and household work. Illness accounted for 17.02% of non-attendance of classes. Paid work, household work, and stress at home have shares of 37.12 %, 43.09 %, and 2.76%, respectively in non-attendance. A more or less similar pattern is observed across the three categories of households. If we compare the three household types, we find that the children of returned migrant households missed more classes than those of non-migrant and migrant households. Illness was the major reason for missing classes within the age group of 4-8 years, and for the other age groups, household work and paid work were the important reasons. Children of migrant households suffered from more emotional stress, and this is where migration seems to play a role.

(3) Dropouts : Even though we have achieved almost 100% access to schools for children at the primary level, the dropout rate is very high. Students are found to have dropped out of school at a little higher age for various reasons. The Table 4 shows the school dropouts at various age groups. The Table shows that about 19.19% of the

children discontinued their studies after enrolment. The dropout rate is lower in the age group of 4-8 years and increased with an increase in age ; 17.64 % of the children discontinued their study in the age group of 9-13 years as against 41.30% in the 14-17 years age group. The school dropout rate is the highest in the case of children of migrant households followed by those of non-migrant and returned migrant households in that order. School dropout rate is more or less the same in all the three category households in the age group of 4- 8 years. Even though it is a little higher in the case of children of migrant households, the difference is negligible. In the age group of 9-13 years, 18.64% of the children of migrant households dropped out of school ; while, 16.27% of the children of non-migrant households discontinued and in the case of returned migrants, the dropout rate was 16%. However, there is a greater deviation in the age group of 14-17 years. As far as the children of migrant households are concerned, the dropout rate was 51.61%. The dropout rates were 36.95% and 30.33% in the case of the non-migrant and returned migrant households, respectively.

The dropout rate was less in the lower age groups because education is free. The second reason is that parents wanted that their children should get some basic education. Once they are grown up and had their basic education, many of the children moved with their fathers to different urban destination areas for the sake of employment. In some cases, because of the low academic performance, they were not able to complete secondary level of education, and hence, dropped out to search for some jobs. These are the two most important reasons for which the dropout rate is the highest among the children of migrant households. The relatively higher dropout rate of migrant household children is basically due to lack of supervision & care and the lure of paid work in urban areas.

(4) Educational Attainment : Educational attainment is the most vital aspect of education. It reflects not only whether children are enrolled, attended, and continued school, but also how they performed. The Table 5 shows the educational achievement of children in the study area. I have taken here the final results of the students for the 2011-12 academic year.

The overall pass-fail percentages are estimated at 77.69% and 22.31%, respectively. The pass percentage of children of non-migrant households was higher (85.53%) than those of migrant (65.12%) and returned migrants (72.72%) households. Percentage score wise, the performance of the children of non-migrant households was also far better than those of migrant and returned migrant households. It was observed that from the 28 children belonging to migrant households who cleared the examinations, 7.14% passed with 60% and above, nine children passed (32.14%) with 50% - 60%, 20 children (30.76%) scored between 40% - 50%, and 4 children (6.15%) scored between 30% - 40% . Similarly, out of the eight returned children of migrants, 12.5% passed with 60% and above marks, 50% with 50%-60%, and 37.5% with 40%-50%. From this, it can be concluded that performance of the children of non-migrant households was better than those of returned migrant households.

Table 5. Educational Achievement

Household Category	No. Appeared	Number Passed					No. Failed
		60% +	50%-60%	40%-50%	30%-40%	All	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Migrants	43	2(7.14)	09(32.14)	12(42.85)	5(17.86)	28(65.12)	15(34.88)
Returned Migrants	11	1(12.5)	4(50.00)	3(37.5)	0(0.00)	8(72.72)	03(27.28)
No-Migrants	76	16(24.62)	25(38.46)	20(30.76)	04(6.15)	65(85.53)	11(14.47)
All	130	19(18.81)	38(37.62)	35(34.65)	9(8.91)	101(77.69)	29(22.31)

Note: Figures in parentheses at Col.3-6 indicate percentages to total at col.7 and those at col. 7 and 8 indicate percentages to col.2.

There are indications that children in migrant households lack support with regards to the education from their parents, and this is the most vital reason which affected their performance. So, migration of male members/head of the family affected the academic achievement negatively by reducing parental supervision and assistance because of which children became de-motivated or behaved badly and were distracted by other duties.

Migration seems to have no serious adverse effect on enrolments in schools at the lower level and lower ages. However, when it comes to school attendance, dropout and learning outcomes, particularly at higher levels and age-groups, the children of migrant households were found to be some steps back because of the lack of supervision and mentoring.

Summary and Policy Implications

It is thus clear that migration matters for the education of children. Even though enrolment-wise children of migrant households were ahead of those of returned migrant and non-migrant households, in the case of school attendance, continuation in education and educational attainment, they lagged behind the children in the latter two categories of households. In the case of children of migrant households, school attendance was lower and dropout rate was higher at higher age groups compared to the children of other household categories because girls are required to help their mothers at home, and boys do domestic and outside work in the absence of the father and sometimes, migrate with fathers to work in cities. The lower levels of their educational attainment is due to lack of supervision and mentoring.

The findings of this study are very much similar to that of Wu et al. (2004) as they also found that most of the migration was by adult males rather than their entire households, and in such cases, the school-aged children are left in the villages in the care of mothers and grandparents. The results of the present study differ from the study of McKenzie and Rapoport (2006) and Lee and Park (2010). They found that children of migrant households were less likely to attend schools and complete few years of schooling than those of non-migrant households. However, the results show that enrolment wise, children of migrant households were ahead in comparison to others. Edwards and Ureta (2003) argued that migrants' remittances had a positive impact on school attendance and enrolment. The present study also reveals that the children of migrant households had lower levels of educational attainment, and my findings are supported by the results obtained by Calderon et al. (2008), Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2010), and Bakker et al. (2009).

It is no gain saying that the education of innumerable children is affected by migration of their fathers because in many cases, they are pushed into labour than being sent to educational institutions. Innovative measures need to be devised to bring the left-behind children into the educational mainstream. The structural and social barriers to education need to be addressed so that the public funded education sector becomes a realistic and effective option for the migrant-sending households. The policy makers should adjust their approaches in implementing various programmes targeting left behind children in rural areas. Even though my study shows, in some cases, that the enrolment wise migrant households are ahead in comparison to the other two categories, but dropout rate at the later stages of schooling was higher in case of migrant households. Some policy measures to check school dropouts in this regard will be helpful for the children left behind.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The greatest limitation of the study is that I dealt with a small sample of 100 migrant-sending households with 139 out-migrants and another 50 non-migrants and 50 returned migrant households. It would, therefore, be of interest for complementary research covering large and diverse samples to support, strengthen, and confirm my findings or question and even invalidate them. This limitation of the thesis can be overcome by pursuing further research with respect to a spatially more dispersed sample and from households of different socioeconomic classes of

migrant origin as that would enable a more comprehensive picture of migration and its impact on the education of the left-behind children. The study is based on primary data collected from the respondents of selected sample households. Their capacity to memorize facts and willingness to furnish correct information have a direct bearing on the reliability of the conclusions. In spite of my best efforts to elicit reasonably accurate information from the respondents by convincing them to supply correct data and cross-questioning and suggesting them to apply their experience and my personal judgment, there must have remained some errors, which could have affected the correctness of the findings. Another limitation of the study is that impact of remittances on children's education is not properly examined in this paper. It needs future attention. The potential benefits from remittances and the potential costs from reduced parenting can be given more emphasis in future research. These are some of the bigger questions, which deserve express attention and exploratory research. More carefully designed econometric studies are required to examine the various aspects of rural-urban migration and its impact on education of left behind children.

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