

Evidence on Educational Strategies to Address Child Labour in India and Bangladesh

Scoping Paper Summaries



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Introduction

The ILO estimates that India and Bangladesh are home to the majority of child labourers in South Asia. A new research initiative led by the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, 'Evidence on Educational Strategies to Address Child Labour in South Asia', aims to identify effective educational strategies to address child labour in these two countries. Funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), this research, is part of the broader FCDO 'Asia Regional Child Labour Programme', which will run through 2023.

To kick-start the project, an inception workshop was held in New Delhi in November 2019, in order to explore current evidence and inform future direction for research on educational strategies with the potential for reducing child labour in India and Bangladesh.

Papers submitted by workshop presenters addressed a variety of topics related to the child labour and education landscape in both countries. Taken together, these pieces represent a valuable contribution to take stock of the knowledge base on child labour and education patterns, as well as on educational strategies with the potential to address child labour in India and Bangladesh. The papers also represent an important starting point for practitioners and researchers looking to identify knowledge gaps and future research opportunities, on this topic. While specific to India and Bangladesh, the papers can provide useful linkages to the broader South Asian or global contexts.

The following Compendium presents a curated selection of these workshop papers, updated to include the potential implications of COVID-19 for schooling and child labour.

Each paper has been summarised as a brief, with full text available in an accompanying paper collection:

[Ellina Samantroy](#) provides an overview of the most recent national data on prevalence and

trends in child work, schooling, and their intersections in India and Bangladesh.

Samantroy is Fellow (Faculty) at the [VV Giri National Labour Institute](#), where she coordinates the Research Centre for Gender and Labour.

With more than 15 years of professional experience in teaching, training and research in sociology with focus on gender statistics and child labour, she counts several projects both with international organizations (UNICEF, World Bank, the ILO, ITC-ILO, Turin) and at the institute. She has a Doctorate in Sociology from the Centre for Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Some of the major studies that she has undertaken include: 'State of Child Workers in India: Mapping Trends' (VV Giri and UNICEF, 2017), 'Prospects of Youth Employment in Agriculture: Issues and Challenges' (2018), 'Unpaid Work and Time Use Patterns of Women Workers in North East India: Special reference to Tripura' (2018). Presently, she is engaged in an evaluation of the National Child Labour Project Scheme (2020) commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.

AKM Masud Ali reviews recent child labour trends in Bangladesh, with a focus on the worst forms of child labour, including discussion of the legal and policy framework. Masud Ali is Executive Director of the Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiative ([INCIDIN Bangladesh](#)). The organization engages in advocacy and research using innovative and unconventional approaches to address complex issues in the area of child labour, including some of the worst forms of child labour. For instance, INCIDIN undertook Participatory Action Research with Dhaka's street-connected children subject to sexual exploitation, as well as with migrant children. Masud Ali is also co-chair of the Counter Trafficking in Persons Technical Working Group established under the Bangladesh United Nations Network on Migration, to support the Government of Bangladesh in implementing the Global Compact

for Migration and other priority initiatives in the migration area. Some of the major studies that he has undertaken include: 'Treading along a Treacherous Trail: Research on Trafficking in Persons in South Asia' (2005), 'The boys and the bullies: a situational analysis report on prostitution of boys in Bangladesh' (2006).

Davuluri Venkateswarlu reviews the evidence on worst forms of child labour, such as slavery and trafficking, with a focus on rural India.

Venkateswarlu is Director of Glocal Research in India and member of the Advisory Board of Human Resources Without Borders (RHBF), a non-governmental organization (NGO) active in piloting solutions to prevent child labour, forced labour and indecent work in supply chains. Since more than two decades, Venkateswarlu is working on the areas of child labour and minimum wages, including as General Secretary of the Enabling Child and Human Rights with Seed Organisations (ECHO), a forum of representatives from the Indian seed industry and NGOs to protect human rights in this industry. Some of the recent reports of Davuluri and Glocal Research include: 'The Dark Sites of Granite. Modern slavery, child labour and unsafe work in Indian granite quarries. What should companies do?' (2017), 'Sowing Hope: Child labour and non-payment of minimum wages in hybrid cottonseed and vegetable seed production' (2020).

[Sajeda Amin](#) scoped conceptual perspectives and empirical evidence on the linkages between child labour, schooling, and marriage in Bangladesh. Amin is Senior Associate at the [Population Council](#), where she leads research on empowerment programmes for girls and women. She is a senior sociologist and demographer, with expertise in micro-finance, financial literacy, prevention of child marriage, girls' and women's work and time-use, and the provision of incentives for education. Before joining the Population Council, Amin was a research fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, working on Bangladesh,

Egypt, India, Nepal, Uganda, and Vietnam. Amin has served in advisory capacity to NGOs and international organizations, such as BRAC Uganda, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the World Bank. She is a member of BRAC-USA's advisory board, the Population Association of America (PAA) and the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP). She holds a master's in public affairs and a PhD in sociology and demography from Princeton University. Some of her recent research includes 'The effects of adolescent childbearing on literacy and numeracy in Bangladesh, Malawi, and Zambia' (2019), 'Skills-building programs to reduce child marriage in Bangladesh: a randomized controlled trial' (2018), 'Support for gender stereotypes: does madrasah education matter?' (2019).

[Renu Singh](#) presented the current evidence on the interlinkages between child work, schooling and marriage in India. Singh is Country Director of [Young Lives India](#), where she leads research on early childhood development, gender, equity and inclusion. She has over twenty-six years of teaching experience in general and special education, teacher education, early childhood development, both in India and abroad. Before joining Young Lives, she was Director of the School of Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Delhi and Director of Save the Children India. She is a governing body member of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), as well as a member of the Working Group for formulating the National Policy on Early Childhood Care & Education, the Joint Review Missions, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), and of Expert Committees in Government Institutions, such as the Rehabilitation Council of India. Some of her major research and policy work include 'Comparison of the effects of government and private preschool education on the developmental outcomes of children: Evidence from young lives India' (2017), "Whatever she may study, she can't escape from washing

dishes”’: gender inequity in secondary education—evidence from a longitudinal study in India’ (2018), ‘COVID-19 could reverse 20 years of progress: emerging policy recommendations for young people in developing countries’ (2021).

[Jyotsna Jha](#) presents the evidence on how educational strategies, including vocational training and broader skills development, can address child labour and equip youth with the necessary skills for a safe and productive transition to adulthood. Jha is Director of India’s [Centre for Budget and Policy Studies](#), a research institute active in India as an independent, not-for-profit society, with a focus on budget analysis at state level and various levels of local governments. The Centre has undertaken studies

in many states of India including Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. Before joining CBPS, Jha worked as an advisor of Education at the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, for five years. She has actively worked with educational policy planners, administrators, teachers and professionals at various levels both nationally and internationally. She has a PhD in Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Jha’s research has a focus on education and gender. Some of her recent contributions includes: ‘Residential Schooling Strategies: Impact on Girls’ (2016), ‘Open and Distance Learning in Secondary School Education in India: Potentials and Limitations’ (2019), and ‘Mapping the Profession of Teaching in South Asia’ (2020).

Landscaping Prevalence and Trends in Child Work and Schooling and their Intersection in India |

Ellina Samantroy

This paper provides a broad overview of the trends and patterns of child work in India, and how these link to education.

Data from the 2011 Census of India highlight that, while child work rates are dropping overall, there has been an increase in 'marginal work' – i.e. part-time or seasonal work, alongside schooling.

Child work rates declined in rural areas but increased in urban areas. Reasons for children working rather than continuing education include the timing of the school day conflicting with other activities, the distance to school, and low perceived returns from education.

Data from Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) suggest that the burden of domestic duties – although not fully accounted for in child labour surveys – is a major reason why girls do not remain in education.

There is a lack of vocational training opportunities for adolescents.

The risk of child labour and school dropout highly increases with COVID-19 and related school closures, calling for analysis of impacts and design of appropriate mitigation strategies.

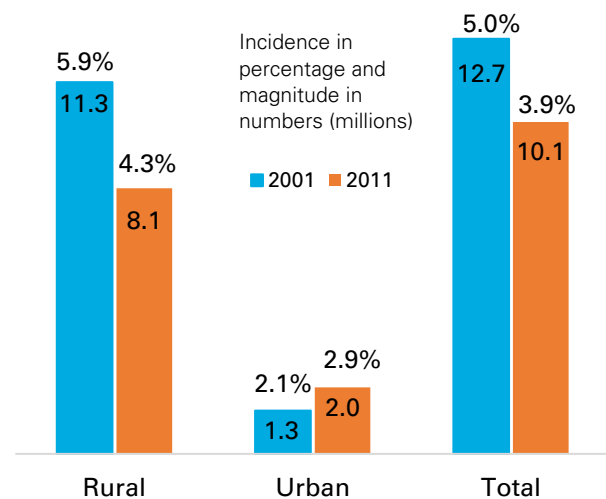
Context and approach

[Census data](#) show that, between 2001 and 2011, child work in India decreased, both in terms of magnitude (numbers) and incidence (percentage). While this is a positive trend, more than 10 million children were still working, and although there was a significant drop in child work rates in rural areas, over the same period

numbers of child workers actually increased in urban areas.

In rural areas, over 70 per cent of child workers were engaged in agriculture. However, low incomes and the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas continue to push families out of their rural homes. This **internal migration** and the related growth of new census towns may account for some of the increased incidence of child work in urban areas.

Figure 1: Child workers in India, 2001–11



Children who work often leave school early. The reasons for both include poverty, lack of access to education and gender-related social pressures: girls face special difficulties in entering and remaining in school, owing to factors such as **early marriage and the demands of domestic responsibilities** within their own homes. In many regions, girls also have fewer opportunities in the labour market and are confined to a narrower range of occupations than boys.

The Census categorizes child workers as either *main* workers – meaning they are working all year round – or *marginal*, meaning they work for

3–6 months of the year. In 2011, there were 4.4 million main child workers and 5.8 million marginal child workers. This represented significant growth in the number of marginal child workers, with the difference between marginal and main child workers being greater in rural areas. This is likely to reflect agricultural activities that are seasonal in nature.

The 2011 Census estimated that 65.3 per cent of the main child workers between the ages of 5 and 14 were literate – up from 47.6 per cent in 2001. However, just 4 per cent had received education until matriculation and beyond.

Based on available labour surveys and literature, the paper describes some of the main reasons why children go into work and why they do not continue in education.

Key findings

- Socio-economic factors, such as female literacy, family size, adult wages, female work participation rates and diversification of economy, have all been identified as determinants of child labour.
- Based on various studies, the [reasons for children leaving school](#) include:
 - distance to school;
 - dilapidated school buildings;
 - absence of drinking water/toilet facilities (particularly of separate toilets for girls);
 - insufficient teachers or teachers being absent;
 - timings of the school day conflicting with other activities; and
 - no incentive to continue schooling, as there is no added value in terms of employment from having higher-level qualifications.
- The decision to leave school is mostly taken by parents, rather than the children themselves.
- According to the PLFS, a common factor for girls in rural areas leaving school was that education was not considered necessary.
- The PLFS also found that, among boys, non-attendance was most commonly caused by having to supplement household income. Among girls, it was having to do domestic chores.
- This was then reflected in **uneven rates of unpaid work by gender**. Among children aged 5 to 17 years, over half of working girls undertake unpaid work, compared with 42 per cent of boys. Rates of unpaid work were higher in rural areas for girls, even in the 5–14 age group. In urban areas, only 23.9 per cent of working boys were unpaid, while 47.1 per cent of girls were engaged in unpaid work.
- **The participation of girls in domestic duties** is often a key factor contributing to them dropping out of school after primary education. This then restricts them to low-paying jobs in the adult workforce. Domestic duties as adults then remain a major constraint for women to engage in paid employment.
- For children who drop out of school, there is a **lack of readily available vocational education**. Just 1 per cent of 5–17-year-olds had any vocational training. The majority of vocational training provided is informal; there is marginally greater access to formal training in urban areas.
- There are concerns that the impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic may reverse the progress made** to reduce child labour. There has been an increase in economic insecurity due to loss of livelihoods, and households may resort to child labour to cope with the crisis. The closure of schools may also lead to increasing participation of children in domestic duties and sibling care often interfering with their education, especially for girls.

Implications for policy and practice

Starting from the 1980s, India progressively expanded its legal and policy framework addressing child labour and supporting

education. Recent changes raised the age of a child who has protection under child labour law to 18 years. These developments are likely to have contributed to the observed decline in child work and illiteracy rates, thus pointing to **the value of legislation in reducing child labour and supporting education.**

Although poverty and domestic responsibilities remain major reasons why children drop out of school to work, **access to schools is a crucial factor** in children remaining in education. Indeed, schools being too far away was found to be the single most common reason for children never having attended an educational institution.

Over the period analysed, there has been a notable shift in the patterns of child work, with a decline in rural areas partially offset by an increase in urban areas. **Different initiatives and programmes may be needed to address child labour in urban areas.**

There has also been an increase in the number of marginal workers, where children combine schooling with other activities – such as domestic responsibilities, and with seasonal work. This may reduce their attendance, but also their attainment and overall well-being. Many programmes to date have focused on getting children into school, rather than working: **a different approach may be needed to provide more relevant educational support to those children who are marginal workers and juggling multiple tasks and responsibilities.**

There continue to be notable **differences in child labour by gender**, with girls more likely to be involved in unpaid work and domestic duties. This in turn affects their educational outcomes and longer-term economic opportunities.

For children who leave education, the absence of vocational training means there are few opportunities to acquire additional skills and so improve earning potential. **Consideration should be given to how vocational and technical training could be made more accessible**, particularly for those who left education early. This could include initiatives like expanding apprenticeship opportunities and encouraging youth entrepreneurship.

Areas for further research

The paper identifies a number of areas where further research would be of value. These include:

- gathering more detailed data about the amount of **time spent in domestic duties**, to enhance our understanding of the socio-cultural realities of girls, provide full visibility of the paid and unpaid work done by females and help identify the constraints these activities place on access to education;
- disaggregating and examining data for different age groups, particularly **adolescents (15–17)**, to gain deeper insights into the labour and education situation, as a foundation of more targeted policy intervention; and
- rapid assessment surveys to understand the **impact of COVID-19** on education and on child work; initial indications are that child protection programmes need to be strengthened with adequate budgetary provision to deal with the impact of the pandemic on child workers and their families.

Access the full paper [here](#).

The Forbidden Terrain of the Worst Forms of Child Labour: A critical look at the implications of legal tools and definitions used by national surveys in Bangladesh | Masud Ali

This paper presents an overview of recent child labour trends in Bangladesh and critically discusses the way that child labour – and in particular, the WFCL – are defined in law, policy, and national surveys.

While overall child labour rates in Bangladesh are declining, the number of children involved in hazardous labour has barely changed.

Based on the latest National Child Labour Survey, the most common form of hazardous child labour in Bangladesh relates to long hours of work – rather than undertaking tasks that are officially designated as hazardous.

Official data do not cover the so called unconditional WFCL, such as child trafficking and the use of children for illicit activities.

There remain gaps in the legal and policy framework around WFCL, for example in terms of the scope of activities that are classified as hazardous.

A more holistic framework is needed in law and policy, with increased collaboration across national agencies working on child labour and child trafficking.

Context and approach

This paper has three broad objectives:

- to present and analyse the existing survey data (and related gaps) on hidden child labour and the WFCL;
- to analyse the limitations of policy and legal definitions in setting the scope and parameters of knowledge-building and planning processes around WFCL;

- to introduce an alternative conceptual framework to improve understanding of WFCL and to enable a more appropriate and robust approach to addressing it.

Data from the last two National Child Labour Surveys ([2003](#) and [2013](#)) show that, over the last decade, there has been a significant drop in child labour levels in Bangladesh. However, the number of children engaged in hazardous labour decreased by just 0.01 million, from 1.29 million to 1.28 million.

WFCL are defined under [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Convention 182](#), which prohibits children from being engaged in these forms of labour. The convention has been ratified by Bangladesh. One of the four categories of WFCL is “[hazardous labour](#)”. Broadly, hazardous child labour includes either work in hazardous types of activities, work below the minimum age or carried out for long hours.

The ILO provides guidance and recommendations on which types of activities and circumstances should be considered hazardous, but it is left to individual countries to develop their own list of hazardous activities.

In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has adopted a list of 38 sectors and tasks that are deemed ‘hazardous for children’ – meaning any child working in these sectors/tasks is considered to be engaging in hazardous child labour. Bangladesh has not ratified [ILO Convention 138](#), which requires countries to set a general minimum age for (non-hazardous) work and prohibited hazardous work, based on the legal age for the end of compulsory education. [Bangladesh’s Labour Act 2006](#) (amended 2013) sets the minimum age of employment at 14 years. It allows children

between 12 and 13 years to engage in light work, as long as they have a health certificate from the appropriate authority and various other specific conditions are met.

Of the 1.28 million children engaged in hazardous labour in 2013, only 0.26 million are involved in the listed hazardous sectors. The most part (approximately 1.1 million) are found to work more than 42 hours a week, and thus considered hazardous labourers because of excessive hours of work.

The 2013 National Child Labour Survey also finds that:

- Over half a million children engaged in hazardous labour in offices, workshops, factories, and shops (42.8 per cent of the total), while 18.2 per cent of the total worked in agriculture.
- While the number of boys employed in hazardous work decreased over the decade, the number of girls markedly increased.
- In *city corporation* (i.e. metropolitan) areas, 77 per cent of children involved in hazardous labour were considered as such because of engagement for long hours, compared to 64.1 per cent in rural areas and 57.7 per cent in other urban areas.
- The overwhelming majority of children involved in hazardous labour are in the 14-17 age group (1.21 million), but 38,766 are aged 12-13 and 32,808 are aged 6-11.
- Of those in the 14-17 age group, 88.7 per cent work for long hours (at least 42 hours each week). Just 4.2 per cent of child labourers in the youngest age group work long hours – meaning the vast majority are involved in hazardous tasks.

Key findings

- The fact that only a small proportion of those involved in hazardous child labour are engaged in registered hazardous sectors as classified by the national legal framework signals a major limitation of current policy

and child protection law. Effectively, over a million of children identified as hazardous child labourers in the National Child Labour Survey are invisible to the formal authorities.

- The definitions used in Bangladesh's National Child Labour Survey come from the Labour Act 2006 (amended 2013). The Labour Act prohibits employment for 'children' – below the age of 14 – and prohibits hazardous work (i.e. participating in activities/sectors designated as hazardous) for 'adolescents', defined as under the age of 18. These definitions are different from those used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Bangladesh's own Children Act 2013 and National Children Policy 2011, which define "children" as all those under 18.
- The Labour Act is focused primarily on the formal sector of the economy. However, most children engaged in hazardous work are employed in the informal sectors. As such, the Labour Act offers no protection to these children. This is even more worrying considering that the proportion of children in the informal sector is higher within younger age groups.
- The Labour Act does not include any provisions for addressing the so called '*unconditional* worst forms of child labour' – commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, illicit production and trafficking of drugs, bonded labour and forced marriage. These issues are also not covered in the National Child Labour Survey, meaning that there is no statistical visibility around children in these situations.
- The domestic sector is currently excluded from the official list of hazardous sectors/activities, so children working outside their household in the domestic sector lack legal protection.
- This is not a problem unique to Bangladesh. The ILO has previously highlighted that hazardous child labour is often hidden – which in turn makes it harder to address.

- While MoLE is responsible for the Labour Act and related policy in Bangladesh, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) is responsible for child protection, including the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012. This means there is a split of legal mandates in relation to WFCL.
- Poverty is not the only factor leading to engagement in WFCL. Studies have revealed that child labour can be high even in areas where poverty is low; other relevant factors include: a culture of acceptance of child labour; rural/urban migration; technological choices; the inability of formal structures to monitor informal employment; global demand of cheap labour; and insufficient access to quality education.
- The existence and status of criminal networks (such as human trafficking chains) also influence WFCL rates. However, studies have not adequately explained how/why individuals are differently impacted by the same set of conditions.
- There are also geographical and ethnographic pockets which are not appropriately considered in national surveys. For example, the National Child Labour Survey did not mention the use of child labour in tea gardens (in the Sylhet Division of Bangladesh).

Implications for policy and practice

While efforts to reduce child labour in Bangladesh overall appear to be having some success, there has been little impact on hazardous child labour levels. Hence, **tackling hazardous child labour should become a priority.** The most common ‘hazard’ appears to be long working hours, particularly among 14–17-year-olds.

Research agencies, development actors and universities should consider engaging with business and trade union networks, to gather more information about hazardous child labour, overcome the barriers put in place by employers,

and seek to drive change in employment practices.

Definitional ambiguities, especially over the minimum age of employment and the administrative listing of hazardous child labour, contribute to the statistical invisibility of a substantial number of the children engaged in hazardous child labour. Only a small proportion of the children engaged in hazardous work are working in the listed hazardous sectors/activities.

This weakens the policy efforts and limits the scope of legal enforcement.

The invisibility affects some demographic groups more than others – notably girls and some minority ethnic groups. **Targeted studies may be required to gain a clearer picture of the prevalence of child labour, and specifically WFCL, among these groups.**

Within current institutional arrangements, data on hazardous child labour is gathered through the National Child Labour Survey, delivered by MoLE, while data on child trafficking is expected to be provided by MoHA. “Child sexual exploitation” is not viewed by MoLE as child-labour related issue. **There is a need for inter-ministerial coordination to address the issue of WFCL holistically.**

While there are challenges at the national level, it also appears that the **global guidance on child labour (in terms of United Nations instruments) could be strengthened** thus allowing a clearer interpretation of definitions and recommendations, as well as a more effective implementation. **Work should be undertaken on definitions of children, child labour and WFCL – and the implications of those definitions – to help build a more inclusive framework on WFCL.** In particular, the segregation of hazardous child labour and the unconditional WFCL in legislative and administrative arrangements need to be questioned.

It may be beneficial to secure **institutional alliances between researchers on child**

labour/WFCL and related national authorities

(such as MoLE, MoHA, National Child Labour Welfare Council etc.), so that findings from research can inform and influence political and legal reforms.

Areas for further research

The main areas identified by the paper for further research are:

- holistically studying all the four categories of WFCL (currently grouped in hazardous and unconditional WFCL) within an inclusive conceptual framework; and
- conducting national surveys and micro (qualitative) studies to ensure statistical visibility of WFCL.

Access the full paper [here](#).

The Worst Forms of Child Labour, with a Focus on Rural Settings in India | Davuluri Venkateswarlu

This paper describes child involvement in the WFCL (as defined by the International Labour Organization), with a focus on rural settings in India.

Cotton and vegetable seed production, beedi rolling, stone quarrying, and mica mining are among the sectors known to employ the larger numbers of children.

The overwhelming majority of children involved in hazardous work are from poor families in socially backward communities.

There is evidence of a decrease in the involvement of children in the WFCL labour since 2000, but a lack of official data on the subject;

Among children in WFCL, the proportion of those working in family labor or small-scale farming is increasing, so child labour is becoming more hidden.

With COVID-19, the number of children involved in the WFCL will likely increase.

Context and approach

India's [Child Labour \(Prohibition and Regulation\) Act 1986](#) prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 years in all occupations, and the employment of adolescents (14–17 years) in numerous hazardous occupations, which are listed in the Act.

Despite the existence of this Act, and many other laws and programmes for their protection, large numbers of children in India continue to be engaged in the WFCL, as defined in the International Labour Organization Convention 182.

The paper brings together existing evidence around the involvement of children in the WFCL in India, with a focus on rural settings. It looks at issues such as:

- the age, gender, and social groups of those involved;
- the industries and sectors where children are employed;
- the locations and regional variation; and
- the main determinants.

There are no clear estimates of the number of children involved in the WFCL in India. This topic is not covered by the Census. The National Sample Survey for 2011–12 reported that more than [2.5 million 15–17-year-olds are engaged in hazardous labour](#). Nearly 68 per cent of these are in rural areas, mostly in agriculture.

Various studies and surveys have been conducted by individuals, private institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into the issue. These typically focus on a specific sector. For example:

- A study commissioned by the US Department of Labor in 2009–10 estimated that just over 13,000 children were employed in India's [carpet industry](#) – equating to 4.8 per cent of the total workforce.
- Terre des Hommes reported in 2018 that there were 22,000 children below age 7 working in the [mica mining](#) areas of Jharkhand and Bihar.
- In 2017, a study by the India Committee of Netherlands on the [granite industry](#) reported that, within the six visited locations, children under 14 made up 3 per cent of the workforce processing the residual stone into gravel cobblestones. A further 5 per cent of the workers were between 15 and 18 years.
- According to a 2017 report by Anti-Slavery International, 65–80 per cent of the children of

families working in [brick kilns](#) in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Chhattisgarh were also engaged in this type of work.

- A 2013 study by the [National Commission for Protection of Child Rights](#) estimated that over 250,000 children are engaged in [beedi making](#).
- In 2018–19, a total of around 150,000 children under 14 years were employed in cottonseed farms in different states in India. This represents a decline of 36 per cent, in absolute numbers, compared with 2006–07.
- In 2018–19, nearly 23,000 (10 per cent of the total workforce) children under 14 years were employed in vegetable seed production in Maharashtra and Karnataka. This represents a decline of 49 per cent, in absolute numbers, compared with 2009–10.

The paper draws on these various studies to provide some broader findings about the involvement of children in the most hazardous forms of child labour. However, it also highlights the complexity of gathering evidence around the issue. As the scrutiny of child labour has intensified, with more robust law enforcement and greater awareness among consumers, employment practices appear to have changed. Instead of working in factories, children are more likely to work at home, or on family farms instead of commercial ones.

Key findings

- While child labour is observed in many sectors in India, the WFCL are largely reported in specific sectors and occupations, as shown in the table below.

Sector	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including hybrid seed production, commercial cotton, chilli sugarcane harvesting
Industry	Carpet weaving, beedi rolling, brick making, leather goods, cotton ginning and spinning, garment production, agarbatti,

	match and fireworks, bangles, diamond polishing, natural stone quarrying and polishing, mining
Service	Domestic work, working in hotels, food service and tourism

- Children mostly undertake activities that are highly labour intensive, repetitive in nature and require delicate handling. They typically work long hours and are paid low wages.
- Overall, more boys are involved in hazardous activities than girls. However, girls account for most of the workforce in the south Indian [garment industry](#); more than 65 per cent of the child workforce in hybrid cotton and vegetable seed production are girls, as are nearly 90 per cent of the children involved in beedi rolling.
- More than 90 per cent of child labourers involved in hazardous work are in the 12–17 age group.
- More than 80 per cent of the children involved in hazardous work are from Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Dalits, Scheduled Tribes (STs) or Adivasi, and Backward Castes (BCs). SCs and STs account for more than 40 per cent of the child labour in hybrid cottonseed, beedi rolling, garment production and spinning. In carpet weaving and stone quarries, a large portion of the workers are from BC communities.
- Cumulatively, the evidence from different studies indicates that since 2000 there has been a **clear decline** in the involvement of children in the WFCL.
- The decline appears to be most significant in sectors linked to export markets and global supply chains.
- Recent data show that the proportion of **children working in home-based production** units and family farms is increasing, with production moving from factories and commercial farms. This has been clearly observed in carpet making, beedi rolling, hybrid seed production and sandstone cobble

making. The concern is that this shift to home-based units and family farming may make child labour less visible. This shift is likely to be exacerbated by the impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, with many schools closing and parents becoming unemployed. Economic necessity appears to be forcing many children into the workforce, with seed production already reported to have seen a significant increase in the number of children employed.

Implications for policy and practice

Getting accurate, detailed information about the involvement of children in the WFCL has always been difficult. These activities often involve violations of laws and regulations; information may be difficult to gather and suppressed intentionally. Much of the work is concentrated in informal sectors, such as agriculture and home-based production units in urban areas. These activities are difficult to monitor and hard for researchers to access. Children in these sectors are often not visible. This explains why this kind of family-based employment of children is often not included in the studies as child labour.

However, greater scrutiny and awareness among consumers are likely having a positive impact. Indeed, there is evidence of an overall

decline in child involvement in the WFCL over the last decade. Other factors, such as increased **access to education**, are also likely to be relevant and can be leveraged to accelerate progress.

Although this represents a positive trend, the paper sounds a clear warning that **the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could reverse recent progress in this area**, with children having to take on any work to support families in severe economic hardship.

Areas for further research

The paper identifies that much more is known about the nature, determinants and other **qualitative** dimensions of WFCL than its magnitude. While qualitative studies remain essential to collect data on WFCL, future research should also aim at obtaining **quantitative** estimates using time series and longitudinal data.

It is also clear that most attention to date has focused on export-oriented sectors involving global supply chains. The **agriculture** sector has been largely neglected, even though there is evidence to suggest that it is one of the largest employers of children and adolescents in hazardous activities. Future research should seek to address this gap.

Access the full paper [here](#).

Schooling, Child Marriage and Workforce Participation in Bangladesh: A scoping paper to identify gaps in evidence | Sajeda Amin

This paper explores broad patterns in girls' schooling, marriage and workforce participation rates in Bangladesh and how they are interlinked.

Demographic and Health Survey data show that, while girls' schooling rates have increased rapidly in the last couple of decades, child marriage remains very common.

Child marriage rates are substantially higher in Bangladesh than in other countries in the region, such as India, Nepal and Pakistan. The median number of years of education is comparably lower.

There is a U-shaped relationship between workforce participation and education levels, with the proportion of girls in the workforce declining as education levels increase, except at the highest levels of education, which relatively few girls attain.

Many young women leave the workforce after marriage.

Programmes focusing on building soft skills appear to have a positive impact on reducing child marriage rates.

Further mixed methods longitudinal research is needed to gain a better understanding of the causal links between schooling, child marriage and workforce participation.

Context and approach

Demographic and Health Survey data show that, over the last two decades, **schooling rates for girls in Bangladesh have increased rapidly.**

- Only 2.7 per cent of girls report never having attended school.
- Between 1993 and 2014, the proportion of women who completed at least secondary schooling rose from 18 per cent to nearly 70 per cent.
- The pronounced gender gap that existed in schooling as recently as the 1990s has all but disappeared.

Over the same period, **women's labour force participation rates have also risen, but the increase has been less pronounced.** In 2014, more than one in three women reported currently working for pay, up from 22 per cent in 2004. Younger women are less likely than older women to report working. Only 13.3 per cent of women in their early twenties are active in the workforce, compared with 72.6 per cent of men.

One key factor in this difference appears to be that, by their early twenties, 85 per cent of women are married, compared with less than a third of men. In 2014, **59 per cent of women aged 20–24 said that they were married before the age of 18.** This was a drop from the 1994 figure of 73.3 per cent but remains substantially higher than the child marriage rate in India, Nepal or Pakistan.

As well as appearing to restrict workforce participation, child marriage potentially undermines investments in human capital.

The paper explores the links between schooling, marriage and workforce participation and identifies initiatives and social changes that appear to have had an impact on these dimensions.

Key findings

Education

- There now appears to be **gender parity in education in Bangladesh**. Young men and women have similar levels of school completion rates and median years of schooling completed.
- A national [programme to incentivize girls' schooling in rural areas](#), which launched in 1994, has been credited with bringing about these changes. This conclusion is based on the fact that gender gaps persist in urban areas, where the programme is not offered. However, rapid economic growth and urbanization may also have played a role in increasing the demand for schooling.
- While just 2.7 per cent of girls in Bangladesh report never having attended school – compared with 3.6 per cent in India and 26.8 per cent in Pakistan – Bangladesh still has a **lower median number of years of schooling**.
- School dropout rates are highest for girls around the time of puberty and soon after. Surveys of adolescents and children routinely ask questions about factors precipitating school dropout; the results vary considerably by survey method.
- It appears that, despite the presence of considerable subsidies for girls' secondary education, success and achievement in school still depends in part on a household's **private investment in tutoring**.

Workforce participation

- With 22.3 per cent of women in the 15–24 age group working, Bangladesh has a higher labour force participation rate for young women than India (14.9 per cent) and Pakistan (11.1 per cent), but lower than Nepal (45.1 per cent).
- Workforce participation is highest for women with no education, but declines with increasing levels of schooling completed.

Participation rates climb again for women with higher than secondary schooling.

- The proportion of women working is growing fastest in skilled labour and the service sector. The [garment industry is a major growth area](#), particularly in urban areas, with studies estimating that 90 per cent of women working in the garment sector are between 16 and 30 years old.
- Several studies suggest most garment industry workers enter the workforce when they are still single; many then do not continue factory work after marriage.

Child marriage

- The **median age of marriage for women in Bangladesh is 16.1 years**, compared with 18.5 in Nepal, 19.6 in India and 21.3 in Pakistan.
- Child marriage is as common in some urban communities as in the rural districts with the highest child marriage rates.

Seeking links between the three

- There is little evidence available on the causal links between school attendance, child marriage and workforce participation. However, as school access has now improved, it seems likely that qualitative aspects of education – such as learning outcomes and skill acquisition – are likely to emerge as more important determinants of labour force participation and child marriage, than simply school attainment.
- A recent analysis of literacy and numeracy data found evidence of [skill loss in numeracy and English associated with adolescent childbearing](#). Skill loss is higher at lower levels of schooling and is not observed once 8th grade education or higher is achieved. There is no evidence of skill loss in local language literacy.

Strategies to reduce child marriage and support economic empowerment

- Evidence from the [BALIKA project](#) showed that creating **safe spaces by providing girls with opportunities to gather, to build social networks**, and to build relationships with trusted adults and mentors [can offer important life skills](#).
- Three different skills programmes all had a similarly positive impact in terms of reducing child marriage. The programmes had several common elements such as the reliance on locally recruited mentors, an emphasis on access to digital technology and remote learning and strong engagement of the community through intense community outreach. However, they placed different emphases on education, gender rights training and livelihoods training.
- It appears that what works is highly context dependent; the skills programmes mentioned above were all for rural areas and may not work in urban areas.
- Some evidence suggests that [cash transfers can reduce rates of child marriage and school dropout](#). However, it is not yet clear what the causal pathways are, i.e., whether delays in marriage resulted in better schooling, or whether improved schooling led to lower rates of child marriage.

Implications for policy and practice

Findings from Bangladesh – and particularly the BALIKA project – appear to indicate that, as in other locations, **soft skills related to gender rights awareness and negotiation skills have the most impact** in terms of increasing workforce participation, reducing school dropout rates and improving earnings potential. Sector-specific training programmes appear to have less impact.

In areas where these skills programmes have been delivered, there has been a decline in child marriage both for girls who participated in the programme and those who did not. This

suggests **the community impact of such programmes goes beyond those who directly participate**.

The high rates of school dropouts around the age of puberty suggest that concerns about girls' sexuality may be driving child marriage. However, another factor may relate to cultural restrictions placed on girls' mobility at this age. The location and accessibility of education – and work opportunities – may be relevant here. Export processing zones outside Dhaka provide workers with transport services, which are believed to have been an important element of their success in recruiting workers. In this context, it may be useful to **consider the placement of schools and whether transport can be provided to girls**, to help them stay in education.

This can be particularly relevant in metropolitan areas, where commuting can absorb a significant portion of time. To date, most urban service provision efforts have focused on geo-spatial information identifying informal settlements and urban slums. However, **underprivileged groups are increasingly dispersed, and strategies other than spatial targeting are needed**.

This is of pivotal importance as, to date, most efforts in Bangladesh to address gender inequity in education have focused on rural areas, with demonstrable success. However, urban children and adolescents have not received the same support and attention and studies have found there continues to be a gender gap in educational attainment in urban areas even while rural gaps have closed. **With a rapidly growing urban population, it is essential to consider the needs of the urban poor**.

Areas for further research

The paper shows that, while there are useful data available about access to education, workforce participation and child marriage, there is a lack of evidence about the links between the

three. It recommends several areas where further research is essential:

- **There is a need to better understand why the proportion of women in the workforce declines with increasing levels of schooling completed.** (The exception to this is women who have completed higher than secondary education.) [Having had some education may offer an advantage in the marriage market](#) over no schooling, and marriage may be perceived as a better option than entering the workforce. Existing surveys could possibly shed light on this; however, such an area of work probably calls for mixed methods research related to both the supply and demand for labour.
- **There is a need to increase our understanding of the reasons why children drop out of school.** As noted above, this is something that is routinely asked about during surveys, but the results vary

considerably by survey method. It seems probable that answers to categorical survey questions often identify just the most proximate, but not necessarily the most important determinant. A longitudinal approach with a qualitative component should hold more promise. Important insights may come from studies aiming to understand positive deviants – i.e., those who do continue schooling.

- **Research is required to examine why soft skills interventions have a greater impact on the economic empowerment of women than sector-specific training.** The evidence base suggests that this is the case, but it is not clear which aspects of these interventions are most effective. Greater insight would potentially allow soft skills or life skills training to be better integrated into the core curriculum from an early age.

Access the full paper [here](#).

Scoping the Linkages between Child Work, Schooling and Marriage in India | Renu Singh

This paper re-examines existing data and research that may provide information on the links between child labour, schooling and marriage in India.

It shows that few available datasets allow to identify the relationship between the three factors.

One such exception is Young Lives, which shows a clear correlation between lower levels of education and higher risk of child labour/child marriage.

A range of factors together influence the education, marriage and work trajectories of girls, including local social norms and parental attitudes toward education.

Mixed-methods longitudinal research is needed to identify the causal pathways between the three dimensions of child work, schooling and marriage.

While educational interventions appear promising strategies, more research is needed to assess what works to address the challenges of child labour and child marriage and school dropout in the Indian context.

Context and approach

Child labour and child marriage are both declining in India, backed by legislation that expressly prohibits both. Nonetheless, the [2011 Census](#) found that, in that year alone, 6.9 million boys and 5.1 million girls were reported as being married before their respective legal age, and over 10.1 million children aged between 5 and 14 years were working.

This paper explores the available data and studies into these issues, with a view to

examining the links between education, child labour and child marriage. It looks at information contained in the Census, the National Sample Survey (NSS), and over 160 other studies examining one or more of child labour, schooling and marriage, to address three key research questions. These are used as the subheadings in the Key findings section below.

The majority of studies under review were quantitative, and 120 related to the prevalence, extent and overall issue of child labour. Fewer focused on the links between child labour and education, and no quantitative study was found that specifically examined the linkages between child labour and child marriage in the context of India. However, there were some papers based on longitudinal data (India Human Development Study – IHDS-2 – and Young Lives) that covered all of these areas, including studying the determinants of child marriage and including child labour and education as variables for this.

Key findings

What is the available evidence on the linkages between child labour, schooling and marriage? How does this vary across dimensions of age, gender, geography, employment sector and social group (caste, class, religion and disability)?

- There is little direct evidence on the linkages between child labour, schooling and marriage within most existing large data sets. Further, the findings around these issues across the large data sets is often contradictory.
- The 2011 Census treats each of these areas as separate. It includes marriage data for children in the age groups 5–9, 10–14 and 15–18 (for girls) and 15–21 (for boys), and separately looks at data around child work by age, location and few other dimensions

including disability status. This allows some very basic linking of data by age group but does not shed any light on whether the same children are working and married.

- The NSS allows some linking of child labour in the age group 5–14 cross-sectionally with educational level, literacy and marital status, albeit on a much smaller sample size. However, its analysis is based on the principal status of a child: employed, unemployed or not in the labour force. So, it does not necessarily show where children combine schooling with part-time or seasonal work.
- The absence of a retrospective question to, for example, 20–24-year-olds, along the lines of ‘Did you engage in paid work before the age of 14 years?’, makes analysis determining linkages between child labour, schooling and marriage very difficult using Census data.
- In addition to its finding that over 10.1 million children were working, the 2011 Census also identified a further 3.9 million children (5–14 years) who are non-workers but seeking work.
- The 2011 Census allows analysis by state or district, as well as by social categories, disability and gender.
- There is substantial inter-state variation in the proportion of working children. Based on the 2011 Census, Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland record the highest incidence of child work (10.1 and 13.2 per cent, respectively). According to the NSS, the state with the highest rate of child labour was Uttar Pradesh (21.3 per cent).
- The [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009](#), which made education a fundamental right for all children aged 6–14 years, may have contributed to reduce child labour. [Net enrolment rates in primary and upper primary](#) level education have reached 87.3 per cent and 74.7 per cent, respectively, and the number of [out-of-school children](#) in the 6–14 age group declined from 32 million

in 2001 to 6.04 million in 2013–14. However, the net enrolment rate at secondary level is just 51.3 per cent, indicating many children drop out of education at 14.

- The [Young Lives study](#) provides longitudinal data related to caste, location, wealth index of family, marital status, age at marriage, and highest level of education in two states: Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. It found that the proportion of children working for pay rose from 6 per cent when they were first asked (aged 7–8) to 22 per cent by the time they were aged 11–12. Many of these children were combining school and work.
- It also showed that, at the age of 12, 35 per cent of children belonging to the poorest households were working, compared with 27 per cent in the least poor households.

How do variations in schooling and work pathways determine later transitions into adulthood (employment, marriage, childbearing)?

- Analysis of data from IHDS-2 showed a strong association between child labour, lower levels of education and child marriage.
 - Rates of female literacy are inversely associated with child marriage.
 - The completion of lower primary education decreases the likelihood of children becoming involved in child labour by 13 per cent, while the completion of upper primary education decreases the likelihood by 44 per cent.
 - In the 5–14 age group, married children are 5.4 times more likely to be engaged in paid work than unmarried children.
- The Young Lives study suggests that the reason children end up in work is based on a complex mix of factors, including poverty, gender, caste, ethnicity, parental ill health, and attitudes to work. The study also shows that reading skills are negatively associated with child work.

- Analysis of Young Lives quantitative and qualitative data indicates that the [trajectories of girls aged 19 years](#) are shaped by a range of factors, including location of residence, caste, socio-economic status, educational level and aspirations. Together, these appear to direct the trajectory of girls into **either** child labour and early marriage, **or** continued education.
 - 57 per cent of the girls who had not completed primary education got married by the age of 18, compared with 6 per cent of girls who had completed higher secondary or higher levels of education.
 - Girls' participation in paid work at the age of 12 was significantly associated with the age at which they got married.
 - Girls from the poorest wealth tercile were 2.4 times more likely to be married by 19 than girls from the least poor families.
 - Girls in rural areas were 2.3 times more likely to be married by the age of 19 than girls in urban areas. Every family was found to have paid a dowry; many families had to take out loans as a result.

What are the causal pathways or intersecting drivers of child labour and educational access/outcomes with marriage?

- Across diverse contexts, research shows that more education is associated with later marriage and later childbearing. However, it is difficult to identify causal pathways.
- Longitudinal studies such as Young Lives provide information on the trajectories of young people as they enter family formation and parenthood. [Round 5](#) of the Young Lives survey found that 56 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men were married by the age of 22. Of the married women, 28 per cent were not studying or working, compared with 12 per cent of the women unmarried at the same stage.
- There remains relatively limited comparative [research available](#) on the most cost-effective strategies for keeping girls in school and out

of marriage, as well as for improving educational outcomes for girls.

Implications for policy and practice

Official estimates often do not show the extent to which children combine education and work. **As a result, it is challenging to provide a comprehensive picture of the reality of child labour.**

The longer children stay in education, the lower their risk of child marriage and/or child labour. Children who do not complete primary education are at markedly greater risk. **Comprehensive implementation of children's educational rights is therefore likely to help tackle both child marriage and child labour.** These rights were introduced and extended relatively recently, so their impact may not be apparent in the 2011 Census data.

The relationships between child marriage, pregnancy and child labour are undoubtedly influenced by a host of underlying factors, including poverty, cultural and gender norms, and location. This is reflected in the fact that there are significant differences in levels of child labour and child marriage between states, and between urban and rural areas. Therefore, **programmes may need to be locally targeted, and to reflect local circumstances, in order to reach those most at risk of child marriage/child labour.**

Areas for further research

The paper identifies numerous gaps and opportunities for further research, highlighting groups that are currently overlooked by studies. These include children working in family enterprises or domestic work, children who are combining school and work, and children not currently working but seeking work.

Moreover, to improve our understanding of the links between child labour, schooling and early marriage, the following may be relevant:

- agreeing and using consistent definitions and indicators around these issues to allow for greater comparability across interventions and data sets;
- collecting information on the social, cultural, economic and contextual factors that shape gender norms and so influence timing of marriage;
- conducting more detailed analysis of regional variation in rates of child marriage and child labour;
- using longitudinal data to explore the outcomes and life course trajectories of women who entered paid work, married and left education early, compared with those who remained in education; and
- mixed methods surveys that examine the determinants of parental and child aspirations – simply put, so as to determine the most effective interventions, we need to know more about what drives parental efforts to keep their daughters in school delaying marriage or work.
- Finally, the paper calls for the identification and evaluation of current interventions that have the potential to address child labour, child marriage and school dropout together, to gather empirical evidence on what works in the face of these challenges.

Access the full paper [here](#).

Work and Schooling: Landscaping educational strategies to address child labour in India | Jyotsna Jha

This paper provides a comprehensive summary of educational strategies introduced in India over the last two decades that may contribute to reducing child labour.

Relevant initiatives include national and State Government policies and programmes, as well as projects led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

While there have been a wide range of approaches taken, most of these have not been specifically focused on child labour – instead on participation in education and/or gender inequality.

Few of the strategies adopted have been rigorously evaluated in reference to child labour, so it is hard to gain a clear picture of their impact on child labour and there is ample scope for widening the evidence base.

Some of the strategies implemented to date appear to be based on assumptions about the causes of child labour that may not fully reflect the reality of what children are involved or why they engage in child labour.

The role of social norms needs to be integrated in any intervention in the areas of child labour and education.

Context and approach

The paper is based on the principle that education can act as a major tool for preventing and eliminating child labour. The paper focuses on detailing the educational strategies, programmes and initiatives that have been introduced in India over the last two decades and where possible assessing their impact on child labour.

The [Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986](#) (as amended in 2016) prohibits the engagement of children under the age of 14 years in all occupations, and of adolescents (14-17 years) in hazardous occupations and processes.

However, this definition effectively excludes children who are working as family carers or in family enterprises. In agriculture and home-based industries, where payment is directly linked to output (e.g. the harvest, the number of beedis rolled or number of caps embroidered), it is likely that children's contribution is legally and statistically invisible, as their contribution is often included within that of the household adults. This in turn makes it harder to determine the true prevalence of child labour in India.

According to the [2011 Census](#):

- There were 10.1 million working children aged between 5 and 14 years. This represented a drop of more than 2 million since the 2001 Census.
- Over the same period, the number increased in urban areas while declining in rural areas.
- Agriculture is the main sector (60 per cent) where children work.
- The five states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh account for nearly 55 per cent of all working children in India.

[National Sample Survey](#) data for 2011-12 provides further insights about child work by age group, gender, caste, religion and economic quintiles:

- As might be expected, a higher proportion of 15–17-year-olds are working, compared with 5–14-year-olds.
- A higher proportion of male adolescents are working than female adolescents. However, this needs to be considered in the context of the fact that care work, sibling care and

household chores – tasks more likely to be undertaken by females – are excluded from this definition of child work.

- Unsurprisingly, child work is most prevalent in the lowest wealth quintiles, and least prevalent in the highest wealth quintile. However, even in the highest wealth quintile, about 8 per cent of 15–17-year-olds are reported to work, compared with 16 per cent in the lowest.

The paper provides a ‘landscaping’ summary of the educational strategies introduced that may, either directly or indirectly, have an impact on child labour. These are divided into three overarching categories, with numerous examples in each:

- **Household level** – these are programmes designed to incentivise households to send children to school, by reducing both the direct and indirect (or opportunity) cost of schooling. They can involve monetary or non-monetary transfers and include conditional incentives – i.e., where an incentive is provided for children attending and continuing in school – and unconditional incentives, such as free midday meals for all children. Some of these programmes specifically target groups that are deemed to be at higher risk of non-attendance/ more likely to be involved in child labour.
- **School level** – these are programmes focused on increasing access to schools, primarily by expanding the number of available places at primary and secondary levels. Other initiatives in this category include the introduction of residential schools, particularly for girls, and programmes focused on helping children who have never been to school – often because they have been involved in child labour – access mainstream schooling. Under this heading, the paper considers the National Child Labour Project (NCLP), started in 1988 by the Government of India.

- **Community and employer level** – these are strategies that aim to reduce child labour by changing perceptions and attitudes within the community – not only about child labour, but also about the value of education and female empowerment. The paper identifies several government and NGO initiatives in this area, some aimed at parents, others at employers and others still involving the creation of adolescent collectives.

Overall, evaluation of the programmes is limited, especially in terms of their impact on child labour.

Key findings

Child labour rates are not driven by any one factor, but rather by the whole ‘ecology’ of a place: parental illiteracy, prevalent social norms, lack of functioning and accessible schools and economic circumstances.

Household-level strategies

- **Free midday meals** and textbooks are designed to be universal strategies. Midday meal programmes have been widely evaluated, but evaluations have concentrated on aspects such as nutrition or the delivery process and quality of food. While limited, available evidence indicates a [positive influence on school attendance](#). **Free textbooks** are usually perceived as an essential element of schooling rather than an incentive, so attendance impacts of interventions providing such materials as rarely assessed. Available feedback suggests there are frequent [delays in the delivery](#) of free textbooks, making them less effective as an incentive.
- Many household level programmes are targeted at groups considered educationally disadvantaged. For example, a number of States have introduced **bicycle distribution schemes** at secondary level to address the issue of mobility (non-availability of

affordable transport). In Tamil Nadu, the scheme is open to all students; in Bihar, it is only open to girls, and in Gujarat it is only for girls belonging to below-poverty-line households. Evaluation of the Bihar scheme found that it [increased girls' age-appropriate enrolment](#) in secondary school by 30 per cent. Another study observed [changes in girls' aspirations](#) relating to their desire to work outside agriculture and to postpone their age of marriage. By contrast, the feedback from the Gujarat scheme was less positive.

- Many states have introduced **conditional cash transfer (CCT)** schemes for girls, linking cash transfers to the continuation of education and not getting married before turning 18 years old. Evidence shows that in some instances these have [encouraged secondary school continuation](#), but not necessarily completion. The impact on child labour rates is not clear. Available evidence also suggests that these schemes have [no impact on social norms](#).
- Overall, there is limited rigorous evidence on the impact of household-level schemes on the decision to stay in school. Accessibility – both in terms of school places and transport – plus perceived quality and potential economic returns of education emerged as key factors moderating the impact of household-level interventions.

School-level strategies

- Access to schools has improved in the last two to three decades, especially at primary and upper primary levels. However, the spread of secondary schools is still uneven.
- The introduction of fully-funded **residential schools**, where all expenses on food, uniform, tuition and transport are covered, has been highly successful in terms of [keeping girls from marginalized and poor households in education](#). It may also have a longer-term

impact on social norms regarding labour, marriage and mobility.

- There are a number of government and NGO programmes targeted at helping children who have either never been to school or have dropped out to get back into formal education. However, it appears that many children who are admitted to mainstream education from one of these **bridge programmes** face subtle discrimination and isolation once in school.
- The [NCLP](#), which started in 1988, initially focused on running special schools for children aged 5-14 who had been engaged in labour in high incidence districts. Evaluation found that the project had succeeded in bringing large number of working children into schooling. However, it has been implemented inconsistently across locations. Since 2016, the NCLP has extended its focus to include work with adolescents employed in hazardous industries.
- India has the world's largest system of providing secondary and senior secondary education through **open and distance learning**. Although it covers less than 2 per cent of enrolled students at that level, it has been recognized as [especially relevant for working children](#) and for adults who missed schooling in early years. Access to technology remains a barrier.

Community and employer-based/-focused interventions

- Several NGOs have adopted an approach of working with diverse stakeholders in a local area to develop programmes that reflect the local context. By adopting the tools of social mobilisation, community awareness, and advocacy with employers, these have helped create public awareness about child labour and related issues and shifted local opinion against child labour as a result.
- NGOs also offer vocational training and bridge courses and engage with adolescents

to influence their participation in child labour. Some NGOs have found adolescent collectives to be an effective means of empowering young women. These programmes engage relatively less frequently with boys.

- Although these NGO schemes appear effective, they are generally small in scale. By contrast, government schemes are generally large in scale and therefore not necessarily responsive to local needs.
- An example of Government initiative is [MahilaSamakhya \(MS\)](#), a programme which also used adolescent collectives to increase women's empowerment.
- Another Government initiative is [Pencil](#) (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour), an online portal set up by the Ministry of Labour and Employment to register complaints regarding illegal employment of children in work from all over India. While there is some evidence of success, it has not been subject to rigorous evaluation.

Implications for policy and practice

The paper shows that, although there have been efforts from both Government and NGOs to eradicate and prevent child labour through educational strategies in India, it is not clear how effective these have been. **Evaluation and further research are vital.**

Even where programmes are superficially similar, results seem different. For example, in the case of the bicycle programmes, the success of Bihar's scheme was not replicated in Gujarat. One possible reason is that the Bihar scheme was available to all girls enrolling in Class IX whereas the Gujarat scheme was limited to girls from poorer households. As a result, in Bihar a larger number of girls cycled to school, creating a critical mass to influence the social norms around mobility, safety and schooling of girls. It therefore appears that **breaking the social norms**

around practices such as child marriage or child labour is important for the design and details of any strategy.

Though limited, available evidence suggests that CCTs do not have a significant influence on social norms. There are also concerns that cash provided under a CCT scheme will often not be used to support empowering outcomes for girls.

One important factor of the bicycle scheme is that it helps address access to education. **Access, in its widest definition, appears to be one of the most influential factors in school continuation – whether in terms of school places or transport.** The success of residential schools tends to support this, although it should be noted that these have a relatively high cost.

The available evidence indicates that the nature and causes of child labour may vary from state to state, and from district to district. While poverty is an important cause, that alone does not explain the variation: child labour is prevalent even among those belonging to the highest wealth quintile of households. A better understanding of the problem helps in identifying more suitable strategies; **where poverty is not the main reason, approaches other than cash nor non-cash transfers are needed.**

Areas for further research

The paper sets out a number of areas for further research. These include:

- mapping the prevalence of **child labour against the availability of accessible schools**, to provide greater evidence about whether access to education in itself reduces child labour;
- developing a deeper understanding of the nature and patterns of child labour in relation to **caste, class, gender, social norms** and economic opportunities;
- reviewing and refining the **definition of child labour** – backed by surveys that show the

- different numbers based on different definitions;
- conducting research into the needs of **adolescent boys**. Although there is clear evidence from across the globe that adolescent boys from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school and join work early, the research in India has not explored this issue enough; and
 - evaluating existing strategies more robustly in terms of their outcomes on child labour.

Access the full paper [here](#).