

# WHY WE NEED TO STUDY SCHOOL PROCESSES TO UNDERSTAND DROPOUT AMONG SCHEDULED CASTE CHILDREN?

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## ABSTRACT

*This note argues that school-related factors are important to understand dropout among Scheduled Caste children. In recent past India achieved near-universal enrolment in schools, however, studies that examined the progress also found that historically marginalized groups including Scheduled Castes dropped out in large numbers. This note tries to understand from secondary data sources the reasons for dropout among Scheduled Caste persons and suggests that it's important we study the process of schooling to understand dropout among Scheduled Castes.*

**Key words :** *Schedule Caste enrolling Dropouts, MHRD, NSSO*

## Background

Education plays an important role in improving opportunities for individuals to move out of poverty and enable them to lead dignified life of choice by enhancing individuals' abilities to fight and overcome difficulties in life. However, Scheduled Castes in India for centuries were denied access to formal education due to the rigid caste system. Historically members of upper caste groups considered Scheduled Castes as untouchable and maintained a distance from them in almost every aspect of social life. This division of society into different caste groups is hierarchical in nature based on the religious notion of purity and pollution. Caste is hereditary in nature, therefore mobility from one group to another is restricted. Further, each caste group has certain predefined duties and rights which are assigned according to the position of the caste group. The upper castes do the most desirable work, whereas the Scheduled Castes are expected to do the most menial jobs like cleaning toilets and disposing of dead bodies. The institution of caste thus restricted access to education and occupational choices for members of Scheduled Castes resulting in the denial of equal opportunities in educational opportunities, particularly for Scheduled Castes. Though researchers in social science have studied school education of Scheduled Castes, there is very little literature on how caste as an institution within a school affects educational outcomes. This article argues for studying school-related factors to understand the educational outcomes among Scheduled Caste children.

## Significance of the study

For centuries the sphere of formal learning was monopolized by upper castes. Though the constitution of India promised equal access to education to all, socially marginalized groups like women, Scheduled Tribes, and Scheduled Castes often were left behind. However, in the recent past, with the expansion of school infrastructure in remote and rural areas members of historically marginalized groups, in general, have been able to attend school. However, researchers who examined the progress of education among Scheduled Castes, in particular, have pointed out that though there is near universal enrolment many Scheduled Caste children drop out and are not able to graduate to secondary and post-secondary education. Though the Scheduled Caste population is spread across India, for the analysis here the State of Odisha is selected which has a sizable proportion of the marginalized population. As per the 2011 census, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe together constitute around 40 percent of the state's population of which Scheduled Caste constitutes 17.1 percent.

## Analysis and findings

Official statistics (MHRD) in India show that about half of the students enrolled in the first standard are not

**SUBHADARSHEENAYAK**

*Independent researcher.*

*Email: sdnpintu@gmail.com*

able to complete 10 years of education (see annexure 1). A high rate of dropout is one of the major areas of concern in school education in India. School completion has remained a cause of concern as large numbers of children drop out of school. A child is considered a dropout when one does not complete the level for which one is enrolled.

A major source of data on the dropout rate in India is the report published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), however dropout rates reported by MHRD lack reliability because of over-reporting of enrolment (Rawal, 2011). Hence, data from National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) which collects data through household surveys are analyzed here. NSSO 64th and 71st rounds collect information on the enrolment and attendance status of individuals in the 5 to 29 age group. Those who were ever enrolled and currently not attending are considered drop-out. The estimated figure gives what percentage of children in the official school-age population have dropped out.

**Table 1**  
**Drop-out percentage in 6 to 16 age group by social groups, and sector, Odisha, 2007-8, and 2014, in percent**

Social group	6 <sup>th</sup> round (2007-8)			7 <sup>th</sup> round (2014)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
ST	140	113	139	11.0	8.6	10.9
SC	153	201	158	11.0	11.1	11.0
OBC	133	103	130	7.8	3.0	7.2
Others	138	86	124	4.1	1.2	2.9
All	140	11.4	13.7	9.1	3.7	8.3

Notes:

1. Ever enrolled but currently not attending are considered as drop-out
2. Calculated from NSSO unit level data

Table 1 shows social group-wise dropout percentages in rural and urban Odisha for children in the 6 to 16 age group between 2007-8 and 2014. The table shows that around 14 percent of children in Odisha in the 6 to 16 age group had dropped out in 2007-8 which declined by about 40 percent to 8 percent in 2014. Among the various social groups, Scheduled Caste students continue to drop out at higher percentages compared to other social categories. Among Scheduled Caste students in the 6 to 16 age group around 16 percent in 2007-8 had dropped

out which declined to 11 percent in 2014. The percentage decline between 2007-8 and 2014 is 30 percent which is less than the state average.

One can also see the rural-urban divide in the percentage of drop-out. In 2007-8 except for Scheduled Caste for all other social groups children in rural Odisha dropped out in higher percentages than in urban Odisha. In 2014 the same is true; however, the urban-rural percentage gap for Scheduled Caste declined to 0.1 which was around 5 percent in 2007-8. It's important to note here that in both periods around 90 percent of the drop out is from rural Odisha and in rural Odisha Scheduled Caste students continue to drop in higher percentages than other communities.

**Reasons for never enrolling/discontinuing/dropout**

As a considerable number of children drop out of school researchers have also focussed a great deal on finding the reasons for the dropout of children in schools. NSSO collects data on the major reasons for never enrolling/discontinuing/ drop-out. The following table shows social group-wise major reasons for never enrolling/discontinuing/ dropping out for students in the 6 to 16 age group 2014 for Odisha from NSSO 71st round.

**Table 2**  
**Major reasons for never enrolling, discontinuing, dropping out for children in 6 to 16 age group social group wise, Odisha, 2014, in percent**

Major reasons for never enrolling / discontinuing / dropping out	ST	SC	OBC	Others	ALL
Not interested in education	37	27	23	75	34.7
Financial constraints	20	39	32	14	26.4
Engaged in domestic activities	20	17	7	0	13.7
Engaged in economic activities	6	3	6	0	4.7
School is far off	1	0	2	1	0.9
Ever enrolled - unable to cope up with studies or failure in studies	9	9	19	9	11.9
Ever-enrolled unfriendly atmosphere at school	0	0	1	0	0.3
Others	8	5	10	0	7.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Reasons which did not have any percentage have been omitted

Source: calculated from NSSO (2014)

Table 2 shows the percentage share of reasons for never enrolling, discontinuing and dropping out. The major reason is 'not interested in studies' across the entire social

group as overall 35 percent found this to be the main reason. It's important to note here that the first Public Report on Basic Education (Team, 1999) found the parental motivation to send children to school to be high. Therefore 'not interested in education' needs to be explored further. Moreover, the category 'not interested in education' is an ambiguous one as it does not reveal any reasons, rather it indicates the possibility of the presence of some other reason(s).

Tilak (2011) points out that the reasons can be broadly categorized into (1) household-related factors; (2) school related, and (3) social/traditional factors. Therefore, when school-related reasons (not being interested in education, school being far off, unable to cope with studies or failure, and unfriendly school atmosphere) are clubbed they account for almost half of the dropouts and never enrolled children who need to be further analyzed. The 71st round of NSSO shows that the major reason for Scheduled Caste children to drop out or never to have been enrolled is financial constraints. The second major reason is 'not interested in studies'. This reason needs to be explored further to understand the real reason for drop-out. School-related factors contribute to almost 40 percent of the drop-out among the Scheduled Caste.

### Discussion and Summary

Despite noticeable progress in enrolling school children, school completion has remained a cause of concern as large numbers of children drop out of school. Providing access to school has not resulted in a better school completion rate. Various surveys and studies have examined the different factors responsible for the higher dropout rates. Drèze & Kingdon (1999) found school-related factors like a trained teacher, the presence of a female teacher, the proximity of schools, and the provision of mid-day meals to be significant determinants for enrolment and grade attainment along with household factors. Their study points out that there is a need to study the causes of school dropout from multiple points of view. Reddy & Sinha, (2010) argues student dropout must be seen as a failure of the system and that 'not interested in studies' reflects the inability of the schooling system to inspire and include students to study. They argue that 'lack of interest' need to be further researched in detail to find the real reasons for the high rate

of school dropouts. Studies examining the causes of dropouts in India have used data from National Sample Survey. Jayachandran (2007) using NSS data from 52 rounds shows that 'child not interested in studies' is one of the major reasons for children of five to fourteen age to drop out of school. The 64 round of NSSO (2007-8) also reveals that school-related reasons like 'child not interested in studies' and 'unable to cope up or failure in studies' together were reported among 30 percent of the children who dropped out of school. The reason cited is very ambiguous and needs further clarification as they may represent symptoms of underlying causes of dropout. Moreover, in such reports and studies, the role of schools or how school-related factors contribute to the final decision to drop out has not been explored much. Scholars who studied school education (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011; Nambissan, 2009; Velaskar, 2005) in India have argued for studying processes of schooling and go beyond statistics to understand how caste affects the education of Scheduled Caste persons. Therefore, what happens inside classrooms is an important question given the caste-based stratification of Indian society and the belief system associated with it, particularly for members of caste groups located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

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### Annexure 1

Drop-out rates at all India levels by gender and level of education, from 2000-01 to 2013-14 in percentage

Year	Primary (I-V)			Elementary (I-VI)			Secondary (I-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
01	39.7	41.9	40.7	50.3	57.7	53.7	66.4	71.5	68.6
06	28.7	21.8	25.7	48.7	49	48.8	60.1	63.6	61.6
11	29	25.4	27.4	40.6	41.2	40.8	50.2	47.7	49.2
14	21.2	18.3	19.8	39.2	32.9	36.3	48.1	46.7	47.4

#### Notes:

1. Dropout rate is defined as the proportion of pupils from a cohort in a given grade at a given year who are no longer enrolled in the following year (UNESCO)
2. Figures for 2013-14 are provisional
3. Source (MHRD)

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