Abstract

Slums are a universal phenomenon and exist in almost all cities across the world. The underprivileged children residing in the slums are deprived of various basic amenities that the non-slum children in general do enjoy so they need special attention. As per 2011 Census report in India roughly 1.37 crore households or 17.4% of urban households lived in slums, in Kolkata it was estimated to be 29.6%. Education plays a pivotal role in laying a proper foundation for the over-all socio-economic development of any region. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 provides children the right to free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education. This study tries to assess the impact of living condition, home and surrounding environment, parental education, school condition on elementary education of slum children of Kolkata of 6-14 years age group. Purposive random sampling technique was adopted. Data were collected from 440 households through a socio-economic status schedule and 42 teachers including headmaster of 18 schools through a schedule on physical facilities of primary school. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis was done. Of the total 968 children of 6-14 years age group it was found that 27.27% were non-enrolled, 24.17% were drop-out while 48.56 were continuing formal education. It was found that migration, health, nature of occupation of the family, mother’s level of education, per-capita income of the family, living condition, home and surrounding environment, school infra-structure has a positive impact on child’s education.

Key Words: Elementary Education, Slum Children, Home Environment in Slum, Primary School, Migration.

Introduction

Urbanization accompanied by sustained population growth due to large scale migration leads to mushrooming slum settlement. Thus, slums are a universal phenomenon and exist practically in almost all cities across the world. About 828 million or 33% of the urban population of developing countries resides in slums. Sub-Saharan Africa consists of about 62% urban population living in slums. In Asia, the proportion of urban population living in slums varies from 25% in western Asia to 35% in south Asia. In Latin America and the Caribbean slum prevalence is 24%. (UN-Habitat 2010).
In India roughly 1.37 crore households or 17.4% of urban households lived in slums which means nearly 1 in every 6 urban households lived in slums. Over a third of India’s slum population lives in its 46 million plus cities. Of the four metro cities Mumbai has the highest proportion of slum dwelling households (41.3%) followed by Kolkata and Chennai (29.6 and 28.5 % respectively). Delhi, the capital of India has 14.6% of its households living in slums. Among all million plus cities Vishakhapatnam has the highest population of slum dwellers (44.1%). Decadal growth over the period 2001-11 shows that population has increased by more than 181 million, % of growth is 17.64, literacy has gone up from 64.83% to 74.04% and slum population has increased from 75.26 million to 93.06 million. (Census 2011).

It is important to focus on slum population for the following three reasons. Firstly, inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation in slum can affect the advantage of living in urban areas, thereby making slum dwellers a disadvantaged group. Secondly, the population growth rate in slums is higher than in other urban locations. Thirdly, among the Millennium Development Goals, the one that explicitly focuses on urban area is Goal No. 7 (Ensure Environmental Sustainability) of which target No. 11 states that ‘By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and ill-health are the basic problems of the developing countries in general, and India in particular. These are the root causes of all the global problems stagnating and degrading both the development of the country and its citizens. It is rightly recognized that, ‘Poverty is not only a problem of low income; rather it is multi-dimensional problem that includes low access of opportunities for developing human capital and to education’ (World Bank, 1994). On the other hand education is an important form of human capital that improves productivity, health and nutrition of the people of a country and slows down the population growth.

The concept of slum and its definition may slightly vary depending upon the socio-economic condition or local perception prevailing in the society but the general physical characteristics of most of the slums are found to be essentially same world-wide. Slums are usually a cluster of hutsments with dilapidated and unstable structures having common toilet, lack of basic amenities, inadequate arrangement of drainage and disposal of solid waste and garbage (GOI report on Slum Population, 2005). Slums are highly unhygienic and disease prone. These areas are also breeding ground for various anti-social activities like crime, theft, burglary, drug-addiction and so on. When urban area on one hand is characterized by modern life-style, having access to latest technologies, higher level of educational attainment, high income, more opportunities, fashion and health conscious, better communication facilities on the other hand the urban poor and marginalized group suffers from adequate standard of living and access to health, education and meaningful and well paid employment opportunities.

Education plays a pivotal role in laying a proper foundation for the over-all socio-economic development of any region. Education is considered as one of the principal means to foster deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war (Dellor Commission, 1996). In India since Independence (1947) several initiatives have been taken for qualitative and quantitative expansion of elementary education like operation black-board, DPEP, SSA, mid-day meal scheme and many others, one of the latest being RTE. The RTE Act 2009, provides a justifiable legal frame work that entitles all children between the ages of 6-14 years to an education of reasonable quality, based on the principles of equity and non-discrimination. It provides children right to free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education. Standing at this juncture it is absolutely necessary to understand and evaluate the present scenario of slum children in regard to access, retention and completion of elementary education of satisfactory quality. In this context the researcher would like to study the prevalent problems of non-enrolment, drop-out and irregular attendance of slum children of 6-14 years age group of Kolkata.

Objectives of the study
1. To study the socio-economic condition of the slum dwellers. It includes demographic characteristics like type and family size, whether migrated or not, gender, age; income, education and occupation of the family.
2. To find out the problems of the slum children in achieving elementary education.

Method
Purposive sampling technique was adopted. Altogether 440 households were selected from 10 slums, 5 each from two wards 37 and 78 under Kolkata Municipal Corporation were taken as sample. In addition 18 schools situated mostly within these two wards or adjoining wards which were mostly attended by the slum children were also taken. Information regarding economic condition, occupation, education level of the family, home environment and living condition of home were collected from household survey by using socio-economic schedule and data about physical facilities in primary schools were collected from teachers and headmaster/headmistress through schedule on physical facilities. Secondary data like Census report, reports on various commissions and committees, related literature were also used. Percentage, mean, chi-square and ANOVA were used for quantitative analysis of data. Qualitative analysis was made on the basis of observation and discussion carried out during household survey and school visits. The study is delimited to slum children of 6-14 years age group in Kolkata.
Findings

Demographic structure

It was found that almost 80% families were nuclear with an average family size consisting of six members. Out of the total number of households taken for the study it was found that almost 24.36% families were migrated from different parts of India specially from neighbouring states like Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh or even from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. It was also found that greater percentage of fathers (17.25%) than mothers (5.75%) were absent in the families either due to death or because they have left families (separated/divorced) and settled elsewhere. Widow and separated women mostly of young age usually returns back to her maiden home and lives there along with their children. It was found that 40.28% population belonged to 6-14 years age group and total 58.96% (male 694, female 723) population belonged to below 18 years age group.

The earlier as well as present studies have recognized that adequate, safe and secured housing is another important problem area that still persists among the slum dwellers. Two types of houses were mostly found during this study, brick wall with concrete roof or asbestos roof, no separate kitchen or closed bathroom but one common latrine which is mostly dirty and unhygienic. Dirty water over flowing through broken or cracked pipes spreads foul smell all around. These are the breeding place for diseases. None of the slum dwellers owned any house. At the entrance of each room utensils, cooking materials, buckets and drums (either filled or empty) are kept. Used utensils with stale left over foods and even garbage are found to be heaped here and there which gets scattered by street dogs and cats and also spreads foul rotten smell.

Occupation, income and education of the slum dwellers

For classification of occupation, “Revised Indian National Classification of Occupation – 2004 was followed in this study and it was found that majority of the head of the families were engaged in elementary occupation where income is not only poor but also uncertain and depends upon availability of work. They were hawker, delivery man, porter, sweeper, van puller, rickshaw puller, daily wage labourer, domestic helper, cobbler, people engaged in stitching and embroidery work and so on. Near about 10% head of the families were not engaged in any economic activities either due to old age, illness, laziness or because of drug/alcohol addiction.

Monthly income of the total number of households taken for study were broadly classified into three groups as i) not more than Rs. 2000 ii) between Rs. 2001 and Rs. 4000 and iii) more than Rs. 4000 and it was found that almost 57% belonged to the first category, near about 33% belonged to the second group and only about 10% belonged to the third group.

For demarcating poverty line help of 61st Round National Sample Survey (NSS) 2004-05 was taken. According to it, in urban areas of West-Bengal monthly per capita income/person were considered as Rs. 449.32. It was found that near about 73.29% households fall below poverty line. Of the remaining almost 27% households who were seen to be above poverty line almost about 16.45% were marginal cases where per-capita income per month fluctuates between Rs. 451 to Rs. 550. Not even 10% families were found whose monthly per-capita income was more than Rs. 750.

Of the total 968 children of 6-14 years age group it was found that 27.27% were non-enrolled (NE), 24.17% were drop-out (DO) while 48.56 were reading (R) or continuing education. Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at elementary education level was found to be 72.73%. Regarding parental educational status of these children it was found that more mothers (55.97%) than fathers (44.71%) were illiterate. Almost an equal percentage of parents approximately 26% reported that they can only write their names and failed to recall how far or till which class they had exactly studied in formal school. Not a single mother was found who had studied after class X.

Problems faced by the slum children in achieving elementary education

Among various problems faced by the slum children of 6-14 years age group in achieving elementary education most significant are large family size, poor living condition, poor health, unfavourable home condition, and surrounding environment, migration, language problem, unstable occupation and economic condition, poor parental educational background and school environment. A large family size implies higher dependency ratio. In a family consisting of father, mother and three or four children of school going age where father is the only earning member, working in an unorganized sector with poor and unstable income and where all other family members are economically dependent on him then meeting the bare basic necessities becomes quite a tough job. In such situation the chance of providing quality education to their children or even helping them to continue their studies gets affected. The higher the birth order, the lower is the percentage of children not being enrolled or dropped out as also reflected in the study conducted by Debi (2001).

Majority of the families (98.75%) were found to occupy small single dark, damp, room without proper ventilation provision which serves them for multi-purpose activities i.e. living, dining, sleeping, storing, bathing, washing, cleaning, cooking etc. Bunk system is often used to accommodate all family members and their varied activities. A peaceful environment for concentrating and studying at home is almost missing. The entire surrounding environment was found to be dirty, filthy, unhygienic and susceptible to various diseases like malaria, jaundice, dysentery, tuberculosis, asthma, respiratory infection and so on.

Each category of houses usually had a tap connected with Kolkata corporation water supply on ground floor, mainly under the staircase in case of pucca building or in a centrally located common place in case of clustered rooms which all the inhabitants of that premises uses for washing, cleaning, bathing and for all other purposes. Since corporation water is not supplied throughout the day but only for a fixed time it is a
routine practice for the residents to stand in long queue and wait for their chance to use or collect tap water. Regularly it becomes the most noisiest part of the building/premises during the water supply. Usually most household have a tendency to collect drinking water from nearby tube well. Everyday collecting water or standing in long queue are usually done by the children or especially by the female members of the family.

Living condition

Picture 1: No separate kitchen so cooking is done at the entrance.

Picture 2: A family consisting of seven members, five children, two women no adult male member. Two of the children are physically challenged.

Picture 3 and 4 depicting small room without any window where bunk like arrangement has been made to accommodate all family members and their belonging - bedding, clothes, utensils buckets, drums, cooking ingredients and whatever else they posses. In these small rooms on an average six people resides. Different activities are carried on simultaneously in the room like chatting, cooking, listening to music, watching television, cutting vegetables, grinding spices and so on. Such condition is not at all favourable for studying at home.

Most of the children were found to be under nourished and suffered from various diseases due to malnutrition and because of parental unawareness regarding health and hygiene and importance of vaccination. It was found that polio, anaemia, low pressure, tuberculosis, skin disease, lung infection and various other diseases due to deficiency of different vitamins and minerals are very common among children and even adults in slums.

Most of the adult male members are addicted to alcohol or drug or gambling thus spending most of the money from whatever little they earn thus depriving the basic necessities of other family members. Drugs and alcohol are consumed openly. Under the feats of alcohol, quarrelling using abusive and slang language, beating wife and children is a common daily affair in almost every household. Children very naturally and spontaneously get accustomed with, learn and start using such language and develop a violent and hostile attitude towards others which are often reflected in their behavior with their siblings, playmates or classmates. Under any pre-text be it any festival, marriage
or any other social ceremony, football or cricket match or any cultural programme organized by the local club it was found that a very common practice in these slums is that people hire a stereo box and install it on footpath or even on road side and almost throughout the day popular film songs are played at quite a high volume and once installed it goes on for days at a stretch. Children and youths usually found to gather around these boxes and idly spending time chatting, singing, dancing, teasing passer-by. It is a sort of community entertainment programme. This is a typical slum culture that was observed during the survey. Thus, in such noisy and disturbed surrounding at home and outside even if a child wish to study it becomes almost impossible for him/her to concentrate and study.

Specially inter-state migrating families have a general tendency to visit their native place at regular interval along with their family for months or days at a stretch to attend different social ceremonies, festivals or during harvest season which in turn not only hampers their children’s education but also their attendance level in school drops down.

In most cases the mother tongue of the migrated children is totally different from the medium of instruction followed in neighbouring schools where they are being admitted after migration because either of unavailability of such schools nearby or because of parental unawareness. These children face problem in understanding what is being taught in school. However they cannot express these problems because the language spoken at home is different from the medium of instruction followed in school. This in turn affects their performance in school and they gradually losses their interest in studies and becomes irregular in attending school and finally gets dropped out. Slum children very often develops a unique language which is a mixture of different languages like Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, other language and even English (few words or phrases mostly with incorrect pronunciation). The researcher like to cite here two examples as revealed by a school teacher during the survey while discussing on the issue of language problem of the children — Machli panitey thakey, Christmas k time hamra cake khaey.

Of the total number of children of 6-14 years age group it was found that a little more than 50% were not going to any school either because they were never enrolled or because they have discontinued their studies and dropped out and 48.56% children were attending school or continuing their studies.

A large number of children residing in slums are first generation learners and even in those cases where parents are just literate the children hardly gets any help from parents regarding studies at home. There is also a firm belief among slum dwellers that children cannot learn from school alone. They need additional support and the best option available is that of private tutor. This is again an economic burden on parents. Moreover the private tuition that they avail is of much inferior quality and as a result it hardly makes an improvement in their achievement level. Pratichi Trust (2002) also mentioned that private tuition seems to become unavoidable necessity for parents. Findings of this study also reveal that majority (81.47%) children had private tutor. It was found that though fathers level of educational attainment does not affect his children’s educational status (p=0.066) but on the other hand mothers level of educational attainment does affect her children’s educational status (p=0.029). According to Srivastava (1997) and Montgomery et al (1999) education of mother has a significant influence on school enrolment of children. Both fathers’ and mothers’ education have a positive and statistically significant effect on school enrolment decisions (Duraisamy, P. 2001).

To check if occupation of the head of the family (H.O.F.) influences children’s education chi-square test was used and obtained chi-sq value (31.550) was found to be highly significant (p=0.000) which means occupation of H.O.F. does affect their child’s educational status. Among all children who were drop-out, non-enrolled or irregular in attending school approximately 10% were engaged in any economic activities to earn a living to support the family. Girl children mostly participated in non-remunerative but time consuming activities which in turn affect their education. This finding is similar to the findings of Hiraway, 2002. Weiner (1991) argues that a large proportion of children join the workforce at an early age, thereby losing any chance of receiving education. The findings of the present study however is different from this as it shows that children not attending school does not mean that they are engaged directly in any economic activities to earn a living or to support its family.

As per Tendulkar Committee report, India’s poverty rate is estimated at 37.2% of the total population. Further, to check if economic condition of the family has any impact on children’s education gender wise chi-square value was calculated. It was found that at primary stage of education though economic condition of the family does affect girls education (p=0.004) it however does not affect boys education ( p=0.179). In case of financial crisis in family more girls are found to drop-out than boys, similar to the findings of Banerjee, S. (2003). Earning of children of 6-14 years age group who were engaged in some sort of economic activities mostly ranged between Rs. 250 to Rs. 300 per month. Children were found to be engaged in elementary activities like folding forma, working at tea stall and road side eateries, stitching, working as apprenticeship etc.

Of the 18 schools, three types of schools – corporation, government aided and private and three types of instructional medium viz Bengali, Urdu and Hindi were taken for the study. In Pratichi Report (2002), a general complaint made by teachers of primary schools was that the infrastructure itself is the biggest hindrance to teaching-learning. The researcher in her study also found that similar problem exists in these schools in urban areas also. Near about 20% schools were run by single teacher while about 55% schools had two teachers. Average number of teachers in schools surveyed was found to be 2.44which is equal almost similar to 2.55 as observed in Pratichi Report 2002. Hardly, few schools were identified where there were sufficient numbers of teachers to fulfill the requirement of one teacher per class or section. Thus, it becomes unmanageable for the teacher to control the class and carry on with the teaching-learning activities smoothly. Students’ attendance falls as they find the classes uninteresting. Guardians hesitate to admit their wards to such schools fearing that classes will not be held properly thus
enrolment strength falls drastically. Under such situation authorities refuses to fill the vacant posts because of poor roll strength of the school. An equal percentage of schools (37.55% each) were found to have single room or double room where all four classes were accommodated. Though it was found that in almost all schools bench, table, blackboard and teaching aids were available but still the overall environment of none of the schools was found to be appreciable. Most of the schools had a dull, gloomy look. Thus, the very essence of joyful learning was absolutely missing in these schools. Nambsissan (2001) stated that in the large number of cases, the school environment was found to be not learner friendly for children from the under-privileged group.

Chi-square test reveals that the number of teachers (p=0.000), number of class-room (p=0.000), type of school (p=0.000) and medium of instruction (p=0.000) all have significant impact on students attendance. Apart from two schools no other schools had any play ground. Thus, one of the basic objectives of education i.e. all round development of the child can never be provided in such schools. Kaul, R. (2001) stated that schools in slums in particular lacked play space which impeded the physical, social, emotional growth of children. Most of the teacher confessed that they do not use teaching aids regularly while teaching in class. Parents prefer to admit their children mostly to those schools which provide food – be it corporation or NGO run. Some parents who were slightly educated on the other hand opined that quality education is not provided in corporation schools and so they prefer private schools. Few cases were found where parents admitted specially their sons to private English medium schools- not the so called renowned ones but those that have cropped up like mushrooms in large numbers in almost each and every locality at the initial stage then after sometime either fails to bear the expenses and other requirements of such schools and forced their ward to discontinue their studies or the child himself fails to cope up and keep pace with the school and discontinued their studies and gets drop-out.

In comparison to the amount of willingness and concern shown by most of the parents during the survey to at least provide primary schooling if not more to their children (irrespective of gender) was however not reflected in the actual attendance as per school record. It was also found that percentage of attendance was better in private schools due to relatively stricter attendance rules and regulations followed by particularly those corporation schools which provide mid-day meal. During the survey it was found that only 25% corporation schools provided mid-day meal. Other corporation schools were not providing mid-day meals because of some problem with the concerned authorities. Some researches and educationist opined that mid-day meals given on regular basis have provided valuable input in enrolment and retention (Probe Report, 1999; Dreze and Goyal, 2003).

Regarding teachers opinion altogether 42 teachers including head teachers of 18 schools taken for study were interviewed. Major reasons identified as cause for drop-out and irregular attendance were economic, domestic activities, migration, lack of suitable home environment and health related problems.

From the discussion with the teacher and head teacher it was also found that because of Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan schools are getting financial assistance under various heads but these funds were mostly not properly utilized because of lack of planning and genuine initiative at all level leading to utter wastage of resources. Thus, mere allocation of funds is not enough. Emphasis has to be given on planning and proper utilization of resources within stipulated time period.

Chief common causes for non-enrolment, drop-out and irregular attendance for both boys and girls were found to be poverty followed by health related problems and migration. According to the 11th 5 Year Plan (2007-12), India has the largest number of children of the world who are malnourished. India ranks 67 on Global Hunger Index among 88 nations (The International Food Policy Research Institute 2010). According to Mehrotra, S. and Mander, H. (2009), even if all members of a household eat two meals per day there may be serious problem with quality of the meal, as reflected in the calorie intake and protein intake per meal. According to Pratichi Health Report (2005) sickness is an important cause for poor attendance in school. Almost thirty five years back also similar type of problem i.e. poverty and poor background of the child stood as the main reason for drop-out and failure to enter school (Aikara, J. 1979). Beside these, physical disability (inborn or accidental) also affects education. More than 95% primary and upper primary schools in India do not have any special facilities for the education of the physically challenged children (Zaida, 2008). Migration is often found to be the cause behind non-enrolment and drop-out (Ramchandran, V. 2006). Other important cause for drop-out for boys was found to be lack of interest in studies while among girls it was found to be domestication and household work. Domestic work and sibling care were the chief causes of girls dropping out (Nayar, U et al. 1992).

Though it took about sixty three years after independence of India to make elementary education a fundamental right but on the other hand it is absolutely true that mere passing of an act will not change the existing scenario of elementary education overnight. What is required more is micro level need based planning, proper implementation of plans under strict monitoring system, evaluating its progress at regular interval and on its basis modifying and updating the strategies if required so that ultimately the very purpose for which it has been made is fulfilled as early as possible. Genuine initiative has to be taken at all levels to overcome the problems and to provide quality elementary education to all children of 6-14 years age group.

Conclusion
The basic problem from which all other problems crop up in these slums is acute poverty. Therefore, more and more income generation and poverty alleviation programmes should be properly implemented under strict monitoring system so that the economic condition of these vulnerable sections of the society could be improved by providing loans for self-employment. More job opportunities to be provided for wage earners. Their working hours and minimum wage have to be fixed in such a manner so that on one hand they
will not be exploited and on the other hand they can meet their bare minimum necessities and lead a healthy life. To meet the problem of acute shortage of urban housing, lack of adequate infra-structure and basic services, attempt should be made by the Govt. to provide more shelter/housing to these people at low affordable prices so that they can have a decent living condition. To combat with the health and hygiene related problem children in school should be trained about the basic principles of health, hygiene and cleanliness so that they can in turn at least to some extent make other family members aware of these basic facts. Another important thing is that regular health check-up for the children should be conducted and various pathological tests, x-rays, medicine at subsidized rate or absolutely free of cost should be provided. Parents should be aware about the causes, prevention and treatment of common diseases. The problem of irregular attendance due to migration can be taken care of if the teachers and school authorities make the parents aware about the importance of sending children regularly to schools and to encourage them to visit their native place during vacations/holidays only so that their children’s studies at school will remain unhampered. To overcome the problems related to acute shortage of teacher can be overcome through recruitment of new teachers as early as possible to fill the vacant posts. Attempt could be made to link primary schools area or locality and medium wise and faculty exchange programme can be undertaken within these groups of schools. Thus, sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise can effectively be used for removing boredom and can help to motivate both the teacher and the student in their respective work/activities. Instead of neglecting and underestimating the innate potentialities of the under-privileged children, teacher must develop a positive attitude while teaching as well as while dealing with them in day to day affairs with dignity as this will in turn help these children to develop confidence and further motivate them to overcome various problems of life in a more challenging manner. Dependency of children on private tuition can be reduced if the teachers prepare the lessons entirely within the school hours. No home work other than practice work is to be given. Improvement of physical facilities in terms of separate class-rooms for each class, separate toilet for girls, provision for good library should be made. Schools should be made more attractive and joyful learning environment should be provided. Computer assisted learning programme can be undertaken. This will not only attract the interest of the students but they will also enjoy learning through it.

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