DALIT EXPERIENCE OF EXCLUSION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EDUCATION IN BIHAR

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Social exclusion is a process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and prevented from participating fully in social activities by virtue of their poverty, low education or by default of their origin. An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in the key activities of the society in which he or she lives. This article aims to understand the extent of exclusion in education experienced by Dalit children in Bihar. Apart from analysing data from various secondary sources, this article is based on primary data collected from the major Dalit communities in five districts of the state. The findings show that Dalit children experience discriminatory treatment by teachers in schools, lack support mechanisms and congenial environment for study, and are subjected to stigmatisation, stereotyping, shame and humiliation all of which negatively affect their psychology and career development.

Keywords: *Dalits, Social Exclusion, Education, Marginalisation, Bihar*

Introduction

Social exclusion is a process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and prevented from participating fully in the social activities by virtue of their poverty, low education or by default of their origin. It is a continuous and gradual process in which persons or groups are denied full participation in the social, material and symbolic resources produced, supplied and exploited in a society for making a living, organising one's life and taking part in the development of a better future. In other words, an individual is considered socially excluded if he or she does not participate in the key activities of the society in which he or she lives. This implies that the opposite of social exclusion is not inclusion or integration; rather it is participation, which can be defined as positive belonging.

This article attempts to understand the extent of exclusion in education experienced by Dalit children in Bihar. It begins by reviewing the literature on social exclusion, and on Dalit exclusion in schools. It then gives an overview of Dalits in Bihar, before providing an overview of the study's methodology and sample. The findings, divided into multiple sub-sections, show that Dalit children experience discriminatory treatment by teachers in schools, lack support factors and congenial environment for study, and are

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subjected to stigmatisation, stereotyping, shame and humiliation all of which negatively affect their psychology.

Understanding Social Exclusion

The term 'social exclusion' originated in France and was first used to replace terms associated with poverty and the underclass. There are many definitions of social exclusion found in the social policy literature. Room (1995), in his studies on social exclusion, argues that social exclusion implies a major discontinuity in relationships with the rest of the society and points to five key factors which he suggests are central to the definition of social exclusion: multidimensional, dynamic, collective, relational, and catastrophic. According to Atkinson (1998), social exclusion has three main elements: relativity, agency, and dynamics.

According to Kabeer (2006, p. 3), "social exclusion reflects the multiple and overlapping nature of the disadvantages experienced by certain groups and categories of the population, with social identity as the central axis of their exclusion". Scholars have defined social exclusion in different ways. There is a common understanding in their definitions that social exclusion is not only about material poverty and lack of material resources, but also about the processes by which some individuals and groups become marginalised in society. They are excluded from not only the goods and standards of living available to the majority, but also from their opportunities, choices and life chances. These definitions relate social exclusion to the inability of people to participate in the society in which they live. They show that exclusion applies across several dimensions, not only the material but also the social and political.

First and foremost economic resources matter (Cooper & Stewart, 2013). Despite the introduction of universal free and compulsory schooling, financial resources still give an advantage in pursuing educational attainment. This is all the more so in India, where government schools are notoriously poor in quality, and where in recent decades private schooling has mushroomed. Secondly, social capital is required to excel well in life. According to Pierre Bourdieu, who developed the concept of cultural capital, social capital refers to social practices and social reproduction of symbols and meanings (Moore, 2012). In other words, it refers to experiences, dispositions and resources present in a class that influence their achievements in different spheres. The upper castes have a tradition of acquiring education to succeed in life. Even if they are poor, their relatives and community are educated and have jobs in government and

private sectors. Thus they have access to a support system from early childhood. This socio-cultural capital gives them greater confidence (Poras, 2011).

Dalit Exclusion in Schools

Historically Dalits have been placed at the lowest rung in the hierarchical social structure of Hindu society. Considered as 'Untouchables', they were excluded not only from acquiring education in traditional schools, but also from livelihood resources. According to Michael (2007, p. 16), "to be an Untouchable in the Indian caste system is to be very low in, and partially excluded from, an elaborate hierarchical social order. Untouchables are persons of a discrete set of low castes, excluded on account of their extreme collective impurity from particular relations with higher beings (both human and divine). They make up about 16 per cent of the Indian population and number about 138 million." Centuries of deprivation has kept Dalits marginalised: earlier they were known as 'Exterior Castes' (a term used by J. H. Hutton), 'Depressed Classes' (a term used by British officials), 'Outcastes', 'Pariahs', and later as 'Harijans', a glorified term coined by Narasimha Mehta and adopted and popularised by Mahatma Gandhi (ibid.).

Schools matter only so much. The real problem rests with the social context in which schools operate; namely, the family, neighbourhood, and peer environments that make it difficult for Dalit children to take advantage of educational opportunities. Poverty and inequality negatively affect Dalits' prospects in education. Worse still is the notion of untouchability and caste discrimination in schools which not only discourage Dalit children's participation in education but also keep them excluded from schools.

Several studies have tried to capture exclusion and discriminatory practices against Dalit children in schools (Borooah, Sabharwal, Diwakar, Mishra, & Naik, 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2013; Rama Krishna and Ramana Murty, 2013). These studies have highlighted how Dalit children are not allowed to use school facilities like water taps etc., are called by derogatory caste names, given polluted tasks to perform, not allowed to participate in class and so on. Children of communities engaged in scavenging, disposal of dead animals and other such 'impure' occupations are shunned by other children in schools. The teachers are also not sympathetic to their predicament. Studying the Musahar Dalits, Nambissan (2006) notes that teachers and school administrations are indifferent towards the learning capabilities and achievements of Dalits.

She writes, "Teachers in the elementary school in Gaya where Musahar children are being educated attribute their underachievement to their "impure" culture in which parents indulge in practices like rearing pigs and eating pork. They are considered to lack "sanskara" – the sociability to be eligible to learn. Although caste is not directly referred to by teachers during their interactions with the students, it is the apparent lack of "sanskara" which dominates their perception and attitudes towards the Musahar children" (ibid, p. 226).

Soni and Rahman (2013, p. 3) claim that "teachers perceive dalit and adivasi children in a negative light and see them as unclean, dishonest, lazy, ill-mannered etc. The children could be criticized for their clothes, the dialect they speak, the abhorrent of uncouth habits of meat eating and alcohol consumption, the ignorance of their parents and even the colour of their skin." Dalit children are punished and get shouted at. They are assigned a range of menial tasks – from cleaning and sweeping the school to fetching *paan* and cigarettes for the teacher. Children from upper castes would generally succeed in excusing themselves from such tasks.

Teachers' expectations of students also affect the performance of students. Termed 'the Pygmalion effect', the higher the expectations of a person, the better the person performs. In summary, the framework for implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), or Total Education Campaign, has broadly categorised examples of exclusion of SC children as follows: a) exclusion by teachers, b) exclusion by peer group, and c) exclusion by the system (Mangubhai, 2013, p. 4).

Dalits in Bihar: An Overview

There are 23 castes falling in the category of Scheduled Caste (SC) in Bihar (GOI, 2001, p. 1). The most populous castes are Chamar, Dusadh, Musahar, Pasi, Dhobi and Bhuiya, together constituting 93.2 percent of the total SC population of the state (ibid.). The overall sex ratio of the SC population in Bihar is 923 females per 1000 males, which is lower than the national average of all SCs, i.e. 936 (ibid.).

The literacy rate among Bihar's Scheduled Castes is pathetically low. The overall literacy rate stood at 28.5 percent in the 2001 census: nearly half that for all SCs at the national level, i.e. 54.7 percent (GOI, 2001, p. 2). Male literates constituted 40.2 percent and females 15.6 percent: significantly lower than the rates for the national level, 66.6 percent and 41.9 percent respectively. Table 1 provides statistics for overall and female literacy of the numerically larger SC groups, showing that Dhobis and Pasis had the highest

registered literacy rates whereas, Dusadh and Chamar averaged just above the state literacy rates, while Bhuiya and Musahar had the lowest literacy rates (ibid.).

Table-1. Literacy rate among the major Dalit communities

Major Dalit sub-castes	Literacy rate	Female literacy rate
All SCs in Bihar	28.5	15.6
Dhobi	43.9	27.9
Pasi	40.6	25.3
Dusadh	33.0	18.5
Chamar	32.1	16.8
Bhuiya	13.3	6.5
Musahar	9.0	3.9

Source: GOI, 2001, p. 2

While two-fifths of SC literates did not even complete primary schooling, 28.4 percent and 13.1 percent of literate SCs attained education up to primary and middle levels respectively (Table 2). Less than one-fifth of SC literates were educated up to matriculation or beyond: with just 3.6 percent graduating or going on to get a post-graduate qualification and a meagre 0.1 percent gaining a non-technical or technical diploma certificate (GOI, 2001). Among the major SCs, Dhobis had the highest proportion of matriculates (19.7 percent) whereas Musahars had the lowest proportion of matriculates (5.5 percent) (ibid.).

Table-2. Levels of education among the major Scheduled Castes

Names of SCs	Literate without education	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Educational levels attained Matriculate/ secondary/ higher secondary/ intermediate, etc.	Technical and non-technical diploma, etc.	Graduate and above
All SC	6.6	33.1	28.4	13.1	15.1	0.1	3.6
Bhuiya	15.3	44.1	26.5	7.4	6	nil	0.6
Chamar	5.9	33.6	28.5	13.4	15	0.1	3.5
Dhobi	4.5	28.3	27	14.9	19.7	0.2	5.4
Dusadh	6	32	28.5	13.7	16.1	0.1	3.5
Musahar	15.3	44	27.8	6.7	5.5	nil	0.8
Pasi	5.7	30	27.1	13.4	17.9	0.2	5.6

Source: GOI, 2001, p. 3

In Bihar, out of a total of 38,80,000 SC children in the age group 5–14 years, 11,40,000 (29.4 percent) attended school, whereas a shocking 27,40,000 (70.6 percent) children were not going to school at the time of the 2001 census (GOI, 2001). See Table 3 for the caste-wise breakdown.

Table-3. Percentage of school going population in the age group 5-14 yrs

Age Group	All SCs	Chamar	Dusadh	Musahar	Pasi	Dhobi	Bhuiya
5-14 years	29.4	33.7	34.1	9.8	39.4	45.6	15.1

Source: GOI, 2001, p. 3

According to an NCERT survey, the National Achievement Study, conducted to evaluate the learning of class V students, a large majority of SC/ST students consistently underperformed compared to other caste students when tested in reading comprehension, mathematics and environmental sciences (Mohanty, 2012). Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in overall literacy rate across the country since early 2000s. Bihar too witnessed a steady increase in the enrolment ratio. A number of enabling schemes and material support provided by the government seem to have contributed to the rising enrolment rate in the state, which included opening new schools, appointment of new teachers, provision of midday meals, supply of text books, school uniform, stipends and scholarship, etc. While enrolment of students in schools has seen a steep increase, the quality of education remains a major concern. Secondly, disparities in enrolment can be seen between different castes. It is a matter of serious concern that Dalits have been largely deprived of the educational initiatives of the government as our study's findings show.

Methodology

This study tries to portray the actual situation of a few Dalit communities in Bihar with regard to their exclusion in the field of education, and shows how empowerment is blocked because of lack of adequate structures for participation. A survey was conducted in 2013-14 in five districts, namely Patna, Rohtas, Begusarai, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts, based on a random selection method which allowed districts with higher percentage of Dalit population to be selected; but also taking into consideration representativeness of the state's different linguistic regions. In each district one block was selected for the study, namely Maner, Sasaram, Bakari, Meenapur and Bahadurpur respectively, and in each of these blocks two gram panchayats were selected according to accessibility. Within the gram panchayats, random selection of samples was undertaken. Focused group discussions were also conducted among key stakeholders and community leaders.

Sample

Primary data for the study were collected through a well-designed interview schedule consisting of both open-ended and closed questions. The sample size was 1488 households, of which 299 (20.3 percent) were from Patna, 293 (19.7 percent) from Rohtas, 295 (19.8 percent) from Begusarai, 306 (20.6 percent) from Muzaffarpur and 295 (19.8 percent) from Darbhanga (Table 4). The caste-wise breakup of the households was 532 (35.8 percent) Chamar, 398 (26.7 percent) Musahar, 280 (18.8 percent) Dusadh, 81 (5.4 percent) Dhobi, 59 (4 percent) Turi and 55 (3.7 percent) Pasi, with the remaining 5.6 percent from other groups. Males (727) constituted 48.9 percent of the total respondents and females (761) 51.1 percent.

Table-4. Details of sampled households

District	Block	Number of households	Percentage of sample
Patna Maner	299	20.3	
Begusarai	Bakari	295	19.8
Muzaffarpur	Meenapur	306	20.6
Darbhanga	Bahadurpur	295	19.8
Rohtas	Sasaram	293	19.7
Total	5	1488	100

Of the overall sample size of 1,488 households, 1,010 school-going children (students) were interviewed. Of these, 184 were from Patna, 199 from Rohtas, 197 from Begusarai, 234 from Muzaffarpur and 196 from Darbhanga. In the sample set 57.3 percent were male and 42.7 percent female. The caste-wise breakdown was 396 (39.2 percent) Chamar, 288 (28.5 percent) Dusadh, 166 (16.4 percent) Musahar, 49 (4.9 percent) Dhobi, 50 (5 percent) Pasi and 23 (2.3 percent) Turi. The representatives of other castes were less: 19 Nat, 6 Dom, 5 Rajwar, 5 Bhuiya and 3 Mehtar. This is representative of the caste configuration among the Bihar Dalits. Chamar are numerically predominant in Bihar, followed by Dusadh, Musahar, Dhobi and Pasi. Dusadh, Dhobi and Pasi have better literacy levels as compared to other castes. Musahar and others have very low literacy levels. Gender disparity is common but is greater among the Musahar and other castes.

The age group of parents was mostly in between 26 to 45 years: 37.1 percent belonged to the 26-35 years age group, and 32.6 percent to the 36-45 years age group, while 12.4 percent and 10.1 percent belonged to the 46-55 years and 18-25 years age groups respectively. The age group-wise break up of students was: 10 (1 percent) up to

eight years; 84 (8.3 percent) 9-10 years, 238 (23.6 percent) 11-12 years, 400 (39.6 percent) 13-14 years, and 199 (19.7 percent) 15-16 years. 65 students (6.4 percent) were between 17-18 years and 14 (1.4 percent) 19 years and above. Among the student sample, 980 (97.8 percent) were Hindus, 23 (2.3 percent) were Muslims, 6 (0.6 percent) were Christians, and 1 (0.1 percent) were Buddhists. A total of 154 (15.2 percent) children were in primary schools; 569 (56.3 percent) in middle school, 244 (24.2 percent) in high school and 43 (4.3 percent) in higher secondary schools.

Findings and analysis: Dalit exclusion in education

Educational status of Dalit households

Most of the sampled parents were illiterate: 1011 (67.9 percent) of the males and 1215 (81.7 percent) of the females. In our sample, 1,421 (96 percent) of males and 1,465 (99 percent) of females had not completed education up to high school; 234 (15.7 percent) were literate but did not have formal education; and only 22 (1.5 percent) and 12 (0.8 percent) males had been to senior secondary school and were graduates, respectively. The educational level of female parents was much lower: 184 (12.4 percent) knew how to read and write but had not received formal schooling.

Treatment of Dalit students in school

Our survey indicates that Dalits and other caste students, by and large, sit together in the classroom and during midday meals. Out of our sample of 1010 students, 981 (97.1 percent) said that they sit together with students from other castes and only 29 (2.9 percent) said that they sit separately. During the serving of midday meals, just 113 (11.2 percent) students confirmed that they do not eat together with other caste children. Though this percentage is less, there is a notable gap between the percentage of students sitting together in the classroom and the percentage sitting together while dining. On participation in extracurricular activities, 82.7 percent of children (835) said that they were given opportunities at par with students from other castes; whereas 147 (14.6 percent) said they were not given equal opportunities and 28 (2.8 percent) couldn't answer the question.

Of the 1010 students surveyed, 741 children (73.4 percent) felt that Dalit children are treated equally by others while 180 (17.8 percent) felt that Dalit children were not treated at par with others. On peer relationships, 826 students (81.8 percent) said that they got

equal respect from other caste students, but 100 (9.9 percent) denied this. 323 students (32 percent) said that they faced caste based discrimination. 673 students (66.6 percent) said that they were able to do activities they liked in schools; whereas 197 (19.5 percent) said they could not. Overall, the school environment cannot be considered to be free from caste prejudices.

Bullying is a phenomenon which was reported. The elder students or dominant caste groups indulged in bullying children of poor and Dalit castes. Playtime is a time when bullying takes place. It happens in school and even in the classroom when the teacher is not looking. Children often do not report bullying, partly because they do not have much faith that the authorities will do anything about it and partly because of the loss of self-esteem which being bullied entails. There is also the fear that reporting will result in further attacks. Teachers may therefore be unaware of the extent to which bullying takes place. Parents may also be unaware of the problems their child is facing, while perhaps sensing that not all is well. Schools therefore, need to be proactive in seeking out those occasions when bullying takes place, to take preventive measures to minimise the opportunities utilised by bullies.

Teacher-student relationship

Teachers have their own caste backgrounds and carry some prejudices. Studies have shown that teachers do not encourage Dalit children; they may refer to them by their caste names and pass derogatory remarks (NCDHR, 2007; Navarsarjan Trust and RFK Centre for Justice and Human Rights, 2010). Dalit students are told to do jobs like sweeping, disposing of dead animals and birds, and are given corporal punishments, some of which could be tabled under atrocity norms. In one study, it was observed that children of the Balmiki caste (scavengers) were made to sit on their own mats outside the schoolroom/at the door (Dreze & Gazdar, 1997).

Dalit children face a certain extent of discrimination and exclusion in school: 107 (10.7 percent) noted that they were not treated well by teachers, though 828 (82 percent) stated they were treated well; 75 (7.4 percent) did not respond to this question. When asked whether they are respected by their teachers, a majority (80.7 percent) of the sampled Dalit students said that they were respected, 125 (12.4 percent) said that their teachers do not respect them, while 70 (6.9 percent) couldn't answer. On the topic of encouragement by teachers, 754 (74.7 percent) said that their teachers encouraged them to study, while 171 (16.9 percent) said they did not get encouragement, and 85 (8.4 percent) couldn't answer.

Comparison with other caste students

The present educational situation in Bihar and its impact on Dalits can be understood better when comparing the condition of Dalit students with that of other castes. How do Dalit children perceive themselves in comparison to others? When asked to rate themselves on attendance, class participation, involvement in sports and extracurricular activities, the Dalit respondents generally felt that they did equally well as their counterparts from other castes.

- Many respondents felt that the school attendance of Dalit children is good: 348 (34.5 percent) felt it is better than other students, 509 (50.4 percent) said it is equal to other caste children, and 153 (15.1 percent) said it was weaker.

- Discipline among Dalit children is better than other children, according to 330 (32.7 percent) of the student respondents, whereas 508 (50.3 percent) said it is equal to other castes, and 172 (17 percent) said it was weaker.

- On Dalit vs. non-Dalit participation, 261 (25.8 percent) said that it was better/good, 564 (55.8 percent) said that Dalit children participated at par with non-Dalits, while 185 (18.3 percent) said it was weaker.

- On academic performance, 349 (34.6 percent) said that Dalit children perform better than Non-Dalits, and 173 (17.1 percent) said they performed weaker, but 488 (48.3 percent) said both groups were equal in their studies, i.e. they did not consider caste a factor.

- On extracurricular activities, 486 (48.1 percent) said that both Dalit and other caste students participated equally, 283 (28 percent) said that Dalit children participated less than others, and 241 (23.9 percent) said Dalits participated more. 268 (26.5 percent) noted that Dalits perform better in sports activities in school, while 466 (46.1 percent) said both are equal, and 276 (27.3 percent) reckoned Dalits performed less well.

Lack of support factors

There is a strong association between poverty and low educational attainment: yet inequalities in educational outcomes are not simply due to income poverty. Sociologists explain social class differences in educational attainment in terms of three forms of capital: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital.

Dalit students lack social and cultural capital which makes them feel lonely and inferior to others. The class and caste factors affect their personality. 175 (17.3 percent) always feel inferior to children from other castes, 350 (34.7 percent) felt this some of the time, while almost half the students (485, or 48 percent) denied that this is the case. 161 students (15.9 percent) said that they always feel that they cannot do well in their studies, whereas 390 (38.6 percent) feel this some of the time and 459 (45.4 percent) said they never feel this way.

For Dalits, lack of economic resources is a major obstacle. The children do not have influential friend circles, or support and encouragement from relatives and family. The social peer support system is alien to them, which makes them vulnerable. In our survey, 336 (33.3 percent) of Dalit children stated that their social status affects their education in significant ways, 467 (46.2 percent) of children said that it affects their studies to some extent, while 207 (20.5 percent) felt that this makes no difference. 278 (27.5 percent) of students said that their economic status impacts upon their education to a large extent; 542 (53.7 percent) said it impacts upon it to some extent, but 190 (18.8 percent) said it doesn't have any effect. 284 (28.1 percent) said that lack of education of parents affects their education to a large extent, whereas 408 (40.4 percent) though this has an effect only to some extent, while 318 (31.5 percent) felt this didn't have any effect.

On literacy capital, 285 (28.2 percent) believed that illiteracy of parents and the community has a crucial impact upon their education, while 472 (46.7 percent) believed it affects their learning only to some extent, and 253 (25 percent) felt it had no effect. 242 (24 percent) believe that lack of guidance also affects their educational chances to a large extent; 436 (43.2 percent) believe it affects them to some extent and 332 (32.9 percent) said 'not at all'. 324 (32.1 percent) stated that the village environment also plays an adverse role in their educational development, 454 (45 percent) thought that it affects the education severely, but 232 (23 percent) said 'not at all'.

Surprisingly, some Dalit children do not perceive these disadvantages as crippling them: despite acknowledging economic and other hurdles, they expressed confidence that they had the ability to perform as good as the non-Dalits in school. In a way, these hardships seem to make them bolder to face the world.

Stigmatisation and stereotyping

Stigma and prejudices play a serious role in making Dalit children less confident. 136 (13.5 percent) of the child students always felt that they were 'not good', whereas 364 (36 percent) felt this some of the time, and 510 (50.5 percent) did not feel this at all. 145 (14.4 percent) always felt that they were not intelligent, while 368 (36.4 percent) had this feeling for some of the time and 497 (49.2 percent) did not feel this way. 199 (19.7 percent) said they always felt that their classmates didn't respect them, whereas 420 (41.6 percent) felt this some of the time and 391 (38.7 percent) did not feel this. Half of the children interviewed lacked self-confidence.

Alarmingly, our survey found that a significant amount of Dalit children dislike themselves. 115 (11.4 percent) said they always have this feeling while 289 (28.6 percent) felt it some of the time and 606 (60 percent) said did not feel at all. 132 (13.1 percent) children felt that they are always shy, whereas 363 (35.9 percent) have this feeling some of time and 515 (51 percent) did not have such feelings. 12.8 percent always felt that they have a problem in expressing themselves, whereas 452 (44.8 percent) felt this some of the time and 429 (42.5 percent) did not feel that way. 159 (15.7 percent) children always felt that they couldn't get along with other peer groups, 407 (40.4 percent) felt this some of the time and 444 (44 percent) did not feel that way at all.

The survey finds that the psychological development of Dalit children is significantly affected by caste and class factors. The feeling of inferiority and powerlessness affects these individuals throughout their lives. It causes underperformance and dropping out of school. Dalit children are often affected by stigmatisation and stereotyping, which negatively affects their performance in school. Stereotypes and evaluations are generally widely shared and well known among members of a culture (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998), and they become a basis for excluding or avoiding members of the stereotyped category (Major & Eccleston, 2004).

Negative effect of social exclusion on the psychology of children

Social exclusion has far-reaching consequences for individuals and groups and has been linked to a host of negative outcomes, including poor health and well-being, academic underachievement, antisocial and criminal behaviour, and reduced access to housing, employment and social justice. People with a lowered sense of belonging such as Dalits are more likely to experience a range of ill effects, including

depression, negative effects, and low self-esteem and psychological well-being. Early peer rejection reliably predicts aggressive behaviour in adolescence, such as anger, anxiety, hopelessness, sense of worthlessness, resentment and fear. Such people, in this case Dalits, become less social and exhibit more antisocial behaviours than those who are accepted.

Other children react more passively to social exclusion. Some people respond by distancing themselves from the groups from which they have been excluded. Others withdraw completely from situations and relationships where the potential for exclusion exists (Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006). Dalit children who feel excluded at school or who feel that they are treated differently because they belong to a stigmatized group may drop out of school.

Dalit children and youth face serious consequences due to the exclusion and stigmatization of their community. Occupying the lowest position in the caste structure and facing immense deprivation leads to negativity about their career, home and community. This survey found that Dalit children are facing psychological problems like anxiety, low esteem, and lack of confidence. The reason is directly linked to the generation of shame and humiliation which arises due to the caste system.

In our survey, 336 (33.3 percent) children stated that their social status affects their education in a significant way, whereas 467 (46.2 percent) children believed that it affects their studies to some extent and 207 (20.5 percent) said 'not at all'. 278 (27.5 percent) believed that their economic status impacts their education to a large extent, 542 (53.7 percent) believe it affects it only to some extent but 190 (18.8 percent) said 'not at all'. 284 (28.1 percent) believed that their parents' lack of education affects their education to a large extent, 408 (40.4 percent said 'to some extent' and 318 (31.5 percent) said 'not at all'.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, nationally, education among Dalits is comparatively lower than for non-Dalit groups. In Bihar, the situation is worse. However, enrolment rate at the primary level in recent years is high among Dalit girls and boys but the success rate in moving towards high school and higher secondary school is very disappointing. Though many schemes are run by the government, there is ample evidence which proves that budgetary allocations do not match with the stated intentions of policies. Implementation of these schemes in their true spirit is a major challenge.

Dalit children have to go through the painful experience of caste discrimination every day. Teachers do not have much respect and confidence in these children. No wonder well off families and dominant castes move towards good private schools, whereas government schools are the only refuge for low caste students. This has serious effects on the Dalits' educational performance, leading them to avoid classes, and to feel low about themselves and their community. This results in dropping out and its effect remains for life.

The following recommendations are drawn from this study:

- Making student well-being a high priority and developing programmes that contribute to positive peer relationships at school should be encouraged.

- An increased sense of community in a school can improve student's confidence and self-esteem.

- Teachers have to be trained about how to teach disadvantaged children, and about how to develop positive relationships with students and their parents.

- When students feel respected and do not fear being embarrassed or stigmatised, they are more likely to identify positively with the school, use cognitive strategies that contribute to academic success, and feel confident in their ability to learn.

- For creating an inclusive classroom environment for learners from multi-caste backgrounds, the existing physical arrangements should be modified. Flexible mixed seating should be encouraged as it has the potential of undoing gender, class, caste and regional divides.

- Above all, social acceptance and respect for marginalised children as persons of equal worth are ways to undo social exclusion in education.

Acknowledgements

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