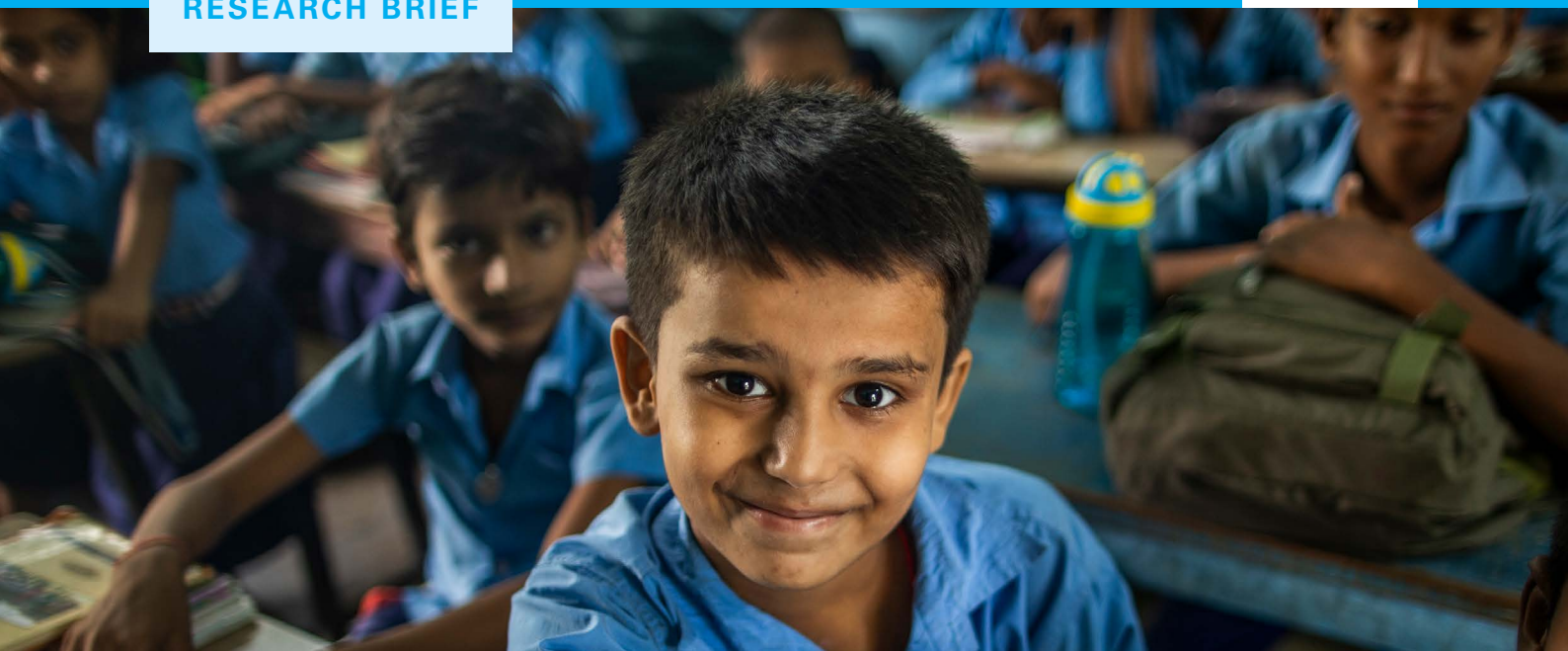


RESEARCH BRIEF



What Drives Changes in Child Labour and Schooling?

Summary of findings from an exploratory study among children of
the Musahar community in Vaishali, Bihar, India

Introduction

Improving access to and supply of quality schooling is widely recognized as a key part of an effective strategy to address child labour.¹ Child labour and schooling are indeed closely linked; out-of-school children are more likely to be engaged in child labour.²

India has made significant progress in reducing child labour and improving access to and completion of schooling. Various legislative and policy measures have contributed to addressing child labour and improving schooling, including the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016; the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009; and integration of the Midday Meal Scheme into the National Food Security Act, 2013.

Despite this progress, child labour persists in India and gaps remain in school attendance, completion and learning. These issues particularly affect children in rural areas, in the poorest households, and in Scheduled Tribe (Adivasi) and Scheduled Caste (Dalit) communities.³ It is, therefore, crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the factors driving changes in child labour and schooling, as well as to better assess the causal pathways linking schooling and child labour outcomes. This entails identifying which specific aspects of education policies and programmes are most relevant in addressing child labour.

This research brief summarizes findings from a study in Bihar, India, which explored the perspectives of children and caregivers on the factors that they associate with change in child labour and schooling outcomes for some of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in India.⁴ The study focused on children from a Musahar community in Vaishali, Bihar and was designed to respond to the following six research questions:⁵

- Compared with previous years, what have been the changes (both positive and negative) in schooling and child labour outcomes among children aged 10 to 13 years?
- What are the main 'drivers of change' or 'influencing factors' that determine the observed changes?
- What are the key 'mechanisms' or 'pathways' through which change is realized?
- Are there any observable differences in the reported causal pathway by gender and schooling status for children who are in school versus those who are out of school?
- What is the role of schooling and school-related factors as drivers of change for child labour outcomes?
- What other factors have supported the reduction of child labour (or blocked it)?

The study followed a conceptual framework outlining the pathways of change from educational policies and programmes to schooling and child labour outcomes.⁶ The framework posits that education and child labour outcomes are determined by a complex set of factors operating across five main levels: (i) child level, including, for instance child's health, or a child's awareness on the importance of education and the hazards from child labour; (ii) household level, such as income or caregiver awareness on the relevance of education; (iii) school level, including, among others, adoption of specific teaching modalities or availability of schooling infrastructure; (iv) community level, such as prevalent social and gender norms related to children's time use in the community; and (v) systems level, such as national policies to support education and address child labour.

This study contributes to a growing body of evidence exploring the role of schooling in eliminating child labour. A recently published rapid evidence assessment of studies undertaken in low- and middle-income countries summarizes that “rigorous evidence on child labour impacts of educational policies and programmes is limited”.⁷ In the context of India, another recent review notes that “there is far too little evidence to draw any lessons from the effects of educational and related strategies on reductions in children’s work”⁸ while another study further acknowledges that evidence around the effectiveness of education-related strategies and schemes in influencing the practice of child labour is at best “sketchy and therefore full of gaps”.

Another systematic review has noted that evidence on the effects of supply-side education interventions (like better access to schools or improved quality of education) on child labour is “limited”.⁹ This view is also held by other researchers, who have noted that evidence of a causal relationship between child labour and education is “mixed”, with causality being difficult to establish.¹⁰

While reviewing the relationship between child labour and education, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have similarly highlighted the difficulty in establishing causality, pointing out the problem of accurately measuring both variables (i.e., child labour and education).¹¹ It is vital to highlight that education is difficult to define and measure because it is multi-faceted. Variables can take the form of school attendance, achievement levels and skills learnt by students. Child labour is equally difficult to measure because of its fluidity and often invisibility, as well as its differing definitions adopted across countries.

Given the above complexities and limited evidence, this study aimed to understand the perspectives of children and caregivers directly and to amplify their voices, while providing relevant findings and policy implications on overall drivers of change in child labour and schooling, with a focus on the role of the education sector.

Methodology

In Bihar, the study focused on a historically excluded and deprived community, the Musahars. Caste hierarchies place Dalits in extreme situations of disadvantage in India. The Musahars represent a particularly vulnerable group within the Mahadalit castes, who have remained the most socially and economically disadvantaged group of Dalits, largely excluded from economic and social progress. Focusing on their realities and experiences provided insights into the multiplicity of factors that shape the relationship between time spent on schooling, child work and child labour.

Multiple outcomes were considered in the design of the study, including schooling (attendance, time spent doing homework, academic performance, school dropout), child work (time spent on domestic chores, economic activities within the family enterprise and outside the household) and child labour, defined as exposure to hazardous working conditions (including carrying heavy loads; working with dangerous tools or operating heavy machinery; exposure to dust, fumes or gases; exposure to extreme heat or humidity; exposure to loud noise or vibrations; working at heights; working with chemicals, such as pesticides, glues or similar; working for long hours, such as for the whole day).¹²

The study included two background surveys and Qualitative Impact Protocol (QulP) interviews, which are described below.

Background surveys

First, a household survey was designed to obtain the sampling frame and thus identify the sample of children under 14 years and their parents for the QulP. The household survey covered two blocks, Goraul and Jandaha in Vaishali district of Bihar, for a total of 309 Musahar households. For sampling purposes, households with at least one child aged below 14 years were selected. Child-related questions were asked to the oldest child (below 14 years) in the household. Of the 309 children identified, the gender distribution was evenly split, with 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female. The age distribution showed that 31 per cent of the children were aged between 6 and 9 years, while the remaining 69 per cent were aged between 10 and 13 years. Notably, 54 per cent of the Musahar children had either never been enrolled in school or had dropped out.

After the completion of the household survey, a school and classroom observation exercise was undertaken with the support of the Department of Education, Bihar. Two upgraded middle schools were selected for this study component, one in each block: Goraul (School 1) and Jandaha (School 2). The objective of the exercise was to understand patterns of exclusion and inclusion of Musahar children within the schools, as well as to examine school characteristics and teacher availability to help contextualize study findings.

QulP methodology

The study used the QulP methodology,¹³ employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather information directly from children and their caregivers on perceived changes in selected 'domains' of their lives, and what they perceived to be the main reasons or drivers of those changes over a predefined period.

This evaluation methodology is particularly useful in complex contexts, where a variety of tangled factors may influence the outcomes of an intervention. The method enables the

identifying of both anticipated and unexpected drivers of change. Participants are asked to reflect on what might have changed in areas of interest to the research, and whether, why and how this change has happened (or not), without any prompting about specific interventions or known drivers.¹⁴

While QulP is generally used to evaluate the impact of a specific intervention, in this study the method was used with an exploratory approach. The study identified broader narratives about change rather than looking for attributable links to a specific set of interventions. The interview questions were formulated to gain an understanding of participants' (children and their caregivers) views of changes experienced regarding schooling outcomes, child work and child labour (as defined above), compared with previous years.

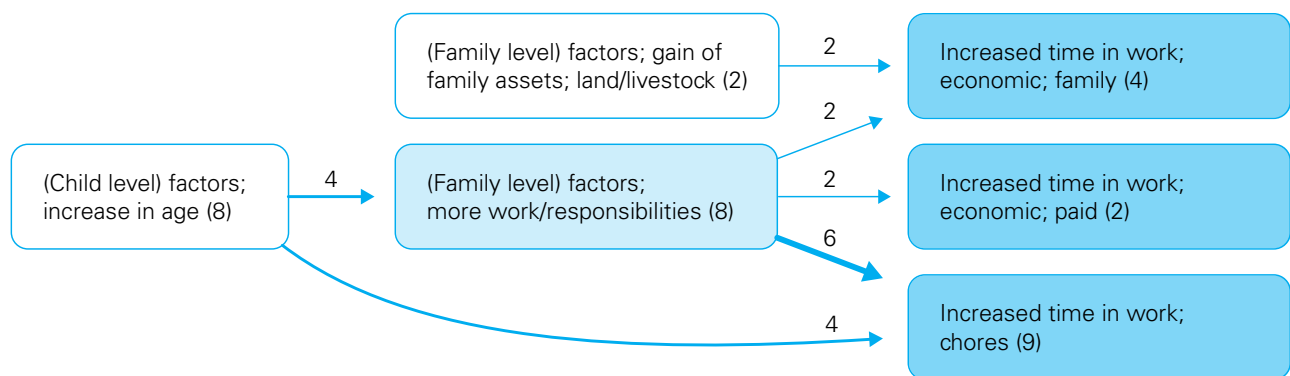
The QulP methodology used a combination of purposive sampling to select the district, followed by random sampling to select respondents among the children identified through the previously described household survey. From the 309 identified children, 26 children (13 in school and 13 out of school; 13 girls and 13 boys) aged between 10 and 13 years and their respective parents (26) were randomly selected for the in-depth interviews. Eight focus group discussions were also conducted, with 64 children participating.

The in-depth interviews involved children and their caregivers answering both closed and open-ended questions (interview questions differed slightly between parents and children). Data from the closed questions were analysed through simple descriptive statistics, while responses to open-ended questions were analysed using causal qualitative data analysis.

A software application called Causal Map was used to code the narrative data and generate visual representations of the connections between drivers and outcomes, as perceived by respondents.¹⁵ The maps also show how many times a specific causal link was reported. The final reporting used a source count of 'at least two respondents' when developing causal maps, which means causal links identified by only one respondent do not appear in the causal map. This approach facilitates focus on the main drivers of change and relatively simpler causal maps for interpretation.

Figure 1 shows an example of a causal map obtained based on responses from children when asked about whether they noted any increase in time spent on work and, if so, what were the main factors driving the change. The map shows that both child-level factors (increase in age) and family-level factors (higher demand for labour and responsibilities to children, as well as gains in livestock) are cited as drivers of an increase in the time children spend working.

Figure 1: Example of causal map from the Bihar study: Factors causing increased time spent working



Filename: younglives24updated.

Citation coverage 1.1%: 28 of 2494 total citations and 11 of 108 total coded sources are shown here. Numbers on factors show source count. Factor sizes show citation count. Darker factor colours show greater outcomeness. Numbers on links show source count.

Zooming in to level 3 of the hierarchy. Tracing threads: 4 steps from anywhere to 'Increased time in work.'

Auto clustering factors using label set new. Showing only links with at least 2 sources.

Limitations

While there are substantial advantages to using QuIP, a significant limitation is that – as with other qualitative research methods relying on a limited sample – findings from the QuIP study are not representative of the wider population. The aim of QuIP studies is to conduct an in-depth assessment with a purposively selected group of people to understand if and how different aspects or domains of their lives have changed in recent years; the research findings cannot be extrapolated across wider areas. The findings nevertheless offer valuable insight and information.

Findings from the background surveys

Findings from the household survey

The findings of the household survey provide insight into the lived realities of the members of the Musahar community, based on the previously described sample of 309 households in two blocks of the Vaishali district of Bihar (Goraul and Jandaha).

BOX 1: KEY HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

- Limited access to schooling: Almost one third of Musahar children below 14 years of age had never been enrolled in formal education, and almost half are currently out of school.
- Low incomes: The average income was INR 6,260 per month (about US\$75), much lower than the national average of INR 14,218 per month (roughly US\$170 per month).
- Persistent shocks and high burden of debt: At least one member from 42 per cent of surveyed households reported an outstanding loan.
- Poor housing conditions: Almost 70 per cent of the houses were “kutcha” (temporary structures), and 81 per cent lacked sanitation facilities. Open defecation was widespread.
- Limited reach of government services: Almost 35 per cent of the households reported not having a ration card, and 57 per cent of the children did not have a birth certificate.

About 72 per cent of the household heads were illiterate and only 12 per cent had educational qualifications above primary level. This is corroborated by analyses of Census 2011 data, which found that 78 per cent of the total Musahar population were illiterate and the Musahars had the lowest literacy rate in Bihar.¹⁶

The average income was reported to be INR 6,260 per month (roughly US\$75 per month) which highlights the economic vulnerability and limited opportunities available to members of the Musahar community.¹⁷ In the sample Musahar population, a significant majority (57 per cent) were engaged in daily wage employment. The proportion of self-employed individuals was relatively very low, with only 1.5 per cent working in the agricultural sector and 3 per cent in the non-agricultural sector. Additionally, only 3 per cent of the Musahar population held regular salaried occupations.

Persistent shocks and debt burdens were reported. At least one member from 42 per cent of the households surveyed reported an outstanding loan. As a result, Musahars continue to live in “chronic deficit” and the cycle of bondage repeats continuously.¹⁸

Compounding limited earnings and poor education status, the housing conditions were extremely poor. Almost 70 per cent of the houses were “kutcha” (temporary structures) and 81 per cent lacked sanitation facilities, with widespread open defecation being practised, posing serious health risks.

In addition, 33 per cent of Musahar children below 14 years of age in the sample (about 101 out of 309 children) had never been enrolled in formal education. Further, of the 67 per cent of enrolled children, 24 per cent had dropped out of school before completing Grade 1. Overall, when combined with children who had not been enrolled in formal education, this means that 49 per cent of Musahar children are currently out of school.

As regards government services, 35 per cent of households reported not having a ration card,¹⁹ and 57 per cent of the sample children below 14 years old did not have a birth certificate. This highlights significant gaps in access to essential services, which exacerbate the socioeconomic challenges faced by Musahar families.

Findings from the school and classroom observations

The issue of caste-based discrimination in schools has been observed by numerous researchers.²⁰ The school and classroom observation exercise aimed to assess this issue, alongside other aspects related to school quality and teaching practices.

BOX 2: KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS

- No exclusionary nor discriminatory practices: No such practices against Musahar children were noted, as students and teachers predominantly belonged to Scheduled Castes.
- Poor school quality: Multigrade teaching was practised, with limited student engagement. The number of teachers with required qualifications and the learning material were both perceived as inadequate.
- Varying attendance rates: School attendance was reported to vary both seasonally and daily, with attendance reducing drastically after the midday meal.

The research team did not note exclusionary or discriminatory practices against Musahar children. In the study context this is not surprising because both schools were located within Scheduled Caste colonies, with students and teachers predominantly belonging to Scheduled Caste communities. A Scheduled Caste teacher in one of the considered schools illustrated this as follows:

“Unlike other schools, Musahar children here do not face discrimination as we all belong to the same caste ... there is no exclusion.”

– Teacher, School 1

Despite no exclusion being witnessed, schooling quality was poor. Both schools practised multigrade teaching, with limited student engagement. Both schools had recently been upgraded from primary to upper primary schools (covering Grades 5 to 8) but were not supported by an adequate number of subject teachers with the required educational qualifications. The schools also did not have the adequate teacher learning materials, as prescribed by the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

Infrastructure was also found lacking in both schools. School 1 did not have a boundary wall, despite the existence of a pond adjoining the school. A teacher stated:

“The lack of a wall is a serious challenge which we have repeatedly spoken about ... the lack of action has translated to one student drowning in the past year.”

– Teacher, School 1

These findings are consistent with a recent survey covering 81 primary and upper primary government schools in two districts of Bihar, which highlighted that 90 per cent of schools had no proper boundary walls, playground or library.²¹

Attendance rates were observed to vary significantly throughout the school observation exercise. Changes in attendance were also noted during the day, with attendance reducing drastically after the midday meal. The headmaster of School 1 stated:

“One cannot consider a day in school to be defined as a set number of hours, with children entering the premises at a given hour and staying for the course of the school day ... In reality, children drift in and out of school like butterflies, depending on their mood and wishes. We as teachers are unable to ensure they attend a full day of schooling in spite of our efforts.”

– Headmaster, School 1

Seasonal variation in attendance was another concern raised by teachers, who stated that these variations in attendance were caused by a range of factors including seasonal work and family responsibilities. Teachers also highlighted that Musahar parents' attendance was low during parent-teacher meetings due to engagement in work and other family responsibilities. One teacher observed:

“Until such time that parents do not believe education has a value for their child, poor attendance and academic performance will be a constant ... we can only change these children's future if parents see school as more than a safe space to provide their children a meal.”

– Teacher, School 2

Findings from the QuIP study

Children's engagement in schooling and child work

This section summarizes findings from closed questions on children's engagement in schooling, child work and child labour, as part of the QuIP study component.

BOX 3: KEY FINDINGS ON CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLING AND WORK

- Many children combined schooling with domestic chores, economic activities within the family enterprise, or economic activities for pay outside the household.
- The schooling status of the child (i.e., being in school or out of school) was significantly associated with the nature of work and the time spent working.
 - Out-of-school children spent more time than in-school children on domestic chores and economic activities for pay outside the household.
 - In-school children spent more time than out-of-school children on economic activities within the family enterprise.
- Compared with boys, girls spent more time on domestic chores and less time on economic activities within the household, reflecting the unequal burden of domestic work – especially on adolescent girls.

Both in-school children and their caregivers reported children combining schooling with domestic chores, economic activities within the family enterprise or economic activities for pay outside the household. The following quotation from an in-school girl provides an example of a typical child engaged in both schooling and work:

“I am spending more time in doing household chores. When I come back from school, I need to prepare food for everyone and then wash utensils. I don't get enough time for homework ... Since I am spending more time on household chores and less on homework, my academic performance has been affected.”

– ID-Ch301; in-school girl, aged 13

Further, in the focus group discussions, a majority of children observed combining school and work as a common occurrence. These findings are consistent with literature showing that children combine school and work to varying degrees, so their engagement in these activities cannot be viewed in binary terms, nor as mutually exclusive (i.e., either children attend school, or they work). The relationship between children's schooling and work is complex because children do not see their choices only in either/or terms.²²

According to both parents and their children, the schooling status of the child (i.e., being in school or out of school) is significantly associated with the nature of work and the time spent working. Time-use data collected from children below 14 years of age reveal that out-of-school children reported spending more time than in-school children on domestic chores (averaging 2.9 hours per day compared with 2.2 hours) and economic activities for pay outside the household (average 2.2 hours per day compared with 0.3 hours). However, in-school children reported spending more time than out-of-school children on economic activities within the family enterprise (average 0.9 hours per day compared with 0.3 hours).²³

Both caregivers and children noted that girls spend more time on domestic chores and less time on economic activities within the household, compared with boys. Girls reported spending an average of 3.8 hours on household chores per day, compared with 1.2 hours reported by boys. Time spent on work within the family enterprise averaged, instead, 0.9 hours per day for boys and 0.3 hours per day for girls.²⁴ Time spent by children on economic activities for pay outside the household was reported as about 1.3 hours, for both boys and girls.

These findings were highlighted extensively in the focus group discussions, with the unequal burden on adolescent girls due to domestic chores being a common narrative. Many girls stated that their contribution in the home was unacknowledged compared with the recognition given to boys' engagement in paid work.

These differences in time use, especially the glaring differences regarding domestic chores, reflect how gendered roles and responsibilities assigned to boys and girls start during middle childhood itself.

Drivers of change in schooling and labour outcomes

A driver of change is an action, state or reason linked to an outcome. Reported drivers of change were coded based on inductive classification of responses provided to questions such as "Why do you think this has changed?" or "To whom/what do you attribute this change?" Following the study conceptual framework (presented earlier), drivers of change were categorized at the levels of child, family, school, system and community. The box below summarizes the main drivers of change in schooling and labour outcomes as reported by children and their caregivers (findings hold from both children's and parents' interviews, unless otherwise specified).

BOX 4: KEY FINDINGS ON THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN SCHOOLING AND LABOUR OUTCOMES

Improvements in schooling outcomes (in-school children):

- **A good teacher** (a school-level factor), followed by **own interest in education** (a child-level factor), were reported by children as the main drivers of improvements in child-level schooling outcomes.
- As reported by parents, **a good teacher** (a school-level factor) was also a driver of improvements in broader school characteristics, including school safety and infrastructure.

School dropout or never enrolment (out-of-school children):

- **Lower interest in education** (a child-level factor) was reported as the main cause of dropout.
- **Lower parental interest in education** (a family-level factor) and **non-issuance of required government identity card** such as an Aadhaar card (a system-level factor) were the most cited drivers for never enrolment in school.

Increased time spent by children working:

- **Increased age** (a child-level factor) and **higher responsibility** assigned to children by their families (a family-level factor) were reported as the most important factors driving increased time spent by children on household chores or economic activities outside the home.
- **Acquisition of assets** such as land or livestock (a family-level factor) was the main reported driver of increased time spent by children working in the family enterprise.

Reduced time spent by children working:

- **Higher parental interest in education** (a family-level factor) followed by **higher interest in education** (a child-level factor) were reported as the most important drivers of reduced time spent on domestic chores.
- A **decrease in job opportunities** for child labour (a community-level factor) was reported as largely responsible for the reduced time spent on paid work outside the household.
- Parents of in-school children also cited the role of a **good teacher** (a school-level factor) as a driver of reduction in time spent by children working.
- No cases were reported of reduced time spent on economic activities in the family enterprise or involving hazardous conditions.

Factors improving schooling outcomes (in-school children)

Considered schooling outcomes included child-level outcomes (attendance, performance and time spent studying) as well as school-level characteristics, such as school safety and infrastructure.

Most in-school children (11 out of 13) reported improvements in schooling outcomes compared with previous years. Both children and parents reported that a **good teacher** (a school-level factor) is an important driver of improvements in children's schooling outcomes. This is exemplified, for instance, in the two quotations below from a child and a parent:

"Teachers tell us that we can do very well in life if we study well. We can get good jobs in future, and this leads to a good life."

– ID-Ch601; in-school girl, aged 13

"Now, teachers are more regular in school. They sometimes go to students' houses when students remain absent and take them back to school. If parents have mobile phone, teachers call them and ask them to send children to school regularly."

– ID-Ca100; parent of in-school boy)

Interest in education (a child-level factor) appears to be another relevant driver of improvements in schooling outcomes. Analysis by gender of the child shows that for girls, their own interest in education is the most cited driver of improvements in schooling outcomes, followed by good teachers; for boys, this hierarchy is reversed, with good teachers being the most important factor followed by their own interest in education.

Considering each schooling outcome separately, the primary driver of improvements in both *academic performance* and *attendance* has been attributed by children to their own individual interest in education, while the role of teachers comes second. For *time spent doing homework*, the role of a good teacher was the only cited factor. The findings suggest that the role of the teacher at the school level and ensuring the child's own interest in education are crucial to improve child schooling outcomes.

A critical finding emerging from parents of in-school children is that a good teacher not only directly improves children's schooling outcomes,²⁵ but also leads to overall improvements of *broader school-level characteristics*, including overall teaching quality, school infrastructure and school safety. Improved school-level characteristics, in turn, further strengthen child schooling outcomes, especially attendance.

A minority of children reported worsening schooling outcomes, driven by lower interest in school or increased engagement in work (both child-level factors).

Drivers of school dropout and never enrolment (out-of-school children)

According to both parents and children, **lower interest in education** (a child-level factor) is the principal driver for children discontinuing school:

“I dropped out, because I was not enjoying studies and I wanted to earn money and help my family.”

– ID-Ch802; out-of-school boy, aged 13

“I was never interested in studying; I liked staying at home and cooking.”

– ID-Ch104; out-of-school girl, aged 13

Moreover, according to never enrolled children, **lower parental interest in education** (a family-level factor) and, according to parents of never enrolled children, **non-issuance of an Aadhaar card** (government ID)²⁶ (a system-level factor) are the principal drivers for never enrolment in school. The latter was also cited by children:

“My mother does not want me to go to school. [Probe: Why?] I do not know; she just shows no interest in sending me to school. [Probe: Have you tried to convince your parents to send you to school?] Yes, but my mother does not want to send me.”

– ID-Ch604; never enrolled boy, aged 12

“My mother says that I don’t have an Aadhaar card and so I cannot go to school.”

– ID-Ch503; never enrolled girl, aged 10

Increased time spent on work and the drivers of change

Most interviewed children reported increased time spent on work (domestic chores, economic activities within the family enterprise, economic activities outside the home and/or economic activities under hazardous conditions) compared with previous years.

Considering interviewed children as whole, an **increase in age** (a child-level factor) and **increased responsibilities**, meaning responsibilities assigned to the child by the family (a family-level factor) were reported as the most important drivers of increased time spent by children working. These responsibilities are often related to negative events affecting the family, such as health or economic losses:

“My grandfather passed away. After which my mother was burdened with lots of work. So, she asked me to help her in looking after the animals.”

– ID-Ch301; in-school girl, aged 13

In contrast with the global model of childhood, where the adult (parent or caregiver) is seen as the dominant provider in a protectionist adult–child relationship and the child (under 18 years) is a “passive consumer”,²⁷ in poor families in low- and middle-income countries, financial shocks and hardships are borne by children as well.

For *economic activities within the family enterprise*, however, **gain in family assets** such as land or livestock (a family-level factor) was equally cited as a driver of change.

Parental perspectives indicated **increased age** (a child-level factor) as the most common driver of increased time spent by children working, followed by **increased responsibilities** (a family-level factor), parental skill transfer and school dropout.

Reduced time spent on work and the drivers of change

Of the 26 children interviewed in Bihar, seven children recorded reduced time spent working compared with previous years. Reductions were reported in reference to time spent on *household chores* or *economic activities outside the home*. None of the interviewed children reported reduced time spent working on the *family enterprise* or on *economic activities involving hazardous conditions*.

Children reported **higher parental interest in education** (a family-level factor) followed by **higher interest in education** (a child-level factor) as the most important drivers of change for reduced time spent on *domestic chores*:

“My parents ... they have encouraged and given me enough time to spend on my studies.”

– ID-Ch501; in-school girl, aged 13

“My parents support me and tell me that I can take as much time as I want in doing homework.”

– ID-Ch601; in-school girl, aged 13

The main driver of change for reduced time spent on *economic activities for pay outside the household* was a **community-level factor**, specifically **fewer job opportunities**.

Disaggregated analysis showed that in-school children reported reduced time spent on chores (mostly driven by higher parental interest in education) while out-of-school children reported reduced time spent on economic activities for pay outside the home (mostly driven by fewer job opportunities in the community).

Causal maps, developed based on testimonies from caregivers, revealed that **higher interest in education** (a child-level factor) was perceived as the most important driver for reduced time spent on work, followed by **good teachers** (a school-level factor). This reiterates the role of a good teacher as a critical driver of change. Disaggregated analysis by children's schooling status showed that these drivers hold for in-school children. However, for out-of-school children, reduction in working time was mainly driven by fewer job opportunities available in the community, as reported above for children.

Other drivers of change in schooling and labour outcomes

The study also explored the role of other specific factors in determining changes in schooling and labour outcomes, including the role of gender norms, perceptions on the value of education, and changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards education, child labour and child marriage.

BOX 5: KEY FINDINGS ON OTHER DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN SCHOOLING AND LABOUR OUTCOMES

Gender differences in child work and child labour:

- An overwhelming majority of children and parents acknowledged gender differences in the allocation of child work, primarily attributing these to **societal rules and expectations**.
- **Physical strength** (of boys versus girls) followed by **security concerns** were also reported as drivers of gender differences in the allocation of work.

Perceptions on the value of education:

- Most children found education useful, especially in-school children, associating its value primarily with **better job opportunities**.
- Both boys and girls linked education to better job opportunities, but girls expressed a broader range of benefits, including higher earnings and greater societal respect.
- Regarding parental perspectives, only a minority of parents of out-of-school children viewed education as useful, often linking its value to their children's literacy and improved future prospects.

Changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards education, child labour and child marriage:

- Among parents, the greatest positive change in community knowledge, attitudes and behaviour was noted towards child marriage, followed by education, with changes regarding child labour featuring last.
- The principal drivers of positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour regarding *child marriage* were increased awareness of child marriage (a community-level factor) and related laws, policies and schemes (a system-level factor).
- The principal drivers of positive changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding *child education* were greater awareness of child education (a community-level factor), followed by government initiatives (a system-level factor).
- The principal drivers of positive changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding *child labour* were heightened awareness of child labour and education (community-level factors).

Gender differences in the allocation of work

Social norms strongly affect decisions regarding child work. Accordingly, understanding these norms is essential for devising strategies to address child labour issues. An overwhelming majority of both children and parents interviewed acknowledged the existence of gender differences in the allocation of work. The most important causal factors for these were **societal rules and expectations**:

“If I was a boy, I would just play and not do any household chores. I have a brother who never does household work; instead, he asks me to do his work. I wash his plates and wash his clothes as well ... My brother just goes to school and does not do any household work. If I were a boy, I would also focus only on school. Girls have to do both.”

– ID-Ch301; in-school girl, aged 13

“It is a tradition that girls are responsible for all household chores, while boys are not expected to participate in such work. Rather boys are supposed to do paid work for earning money.”

– ID-Ca102; parent of in-school boy

“Girls have no way out. When they go to their husband’s home, they have to cook and feed the husband. However, boys will get married and their wives will do this work for them.”

– ID-Ca103; parent of out-of-school boy

Assumptions about **physical strength** (boys versus girls), followed by **security concerns**, were also reported as key drivers of gender differences in work allocation.

Perceptions on the value of education

Most children perceived education as being useful, with in-school children more likely to do so. The value of education was mostly linked with better **job opportunities**:

“Teachers tell us that we can do very well in life, if we study well. We can get good jobs in future.”

– ID-Ch601; in-school girl, aged 13

“I have realised that when you are educated, you can do any kind of work and earn more money.”

– ID-Ch104; out-of-school girl, aged 13

Unsurprisingly, out-of-school children were more likely than in-school children to link the value of education to being able to **read and write**:

“I need to learn how to read and write, so if I go out of town, I should be able to read the nameplates on the buses. If I don’t learn, I won’t be able to catch the right bus.”

– ID-Ch100; in-school boy, aged 13

While both boys and girls associated education with better job opportunities, girls articulated a more diverse set of consequences of education than boys, including better earnings and gaining societal respect.

In terms of parental perspectives, only a minority of parents of out-of-school children perceived education as useful. When they perceived education as useful, its value was mostly linked to allowing their children becoming literate and having a better future.²⁸

Positive changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards children's education, child labour and child marriage

Parents were asked whether there have been changes in community knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards child education child labour, and child marriage. If they reported changes, follow up questions were asked about how community views have changed and what the causes of these changes were.

The most common positive change in community knowledge, attitudes and behaviour was noted towards *child marriage*, followed by children's *education*, with changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards *child labour* featuring last.

A deep dive into the perceived causes of these changes revealed that the principal driver for positive changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards *child marriage* was **increased awareness regarding child marriage** (a community-level factor) followed by **laws, policies and schemes related to child marriage** (a system-level factor).

"Nowadays, people are more aware that they should allow their children to mature before marrying them off."

– ID-Ca304; parent of out-of-school boy

"Nowadays, people have become more aware of the laws regarding child marriage. Police are also very strict."

– ID-Ca302; parent of out-of-school girl

The principal driver of positive changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviours toward child *education* was **increased awareness regarding child education** (a community-level factor):

"People have become more aware of the importance of education. People are able to link better jobs with completion of schooling and that is why parents now want to send their children to school."

– ID-Ca302; parent of out-of-school girl

Other factors driving changes in attitudes towards schooling were broader **government initiatives** (a system-level factor) and a **shift towards more progressive norms regarding child education over time** (a community-level factor).

“It is because of the government officers. [Probe: What have they done?] They have made people more aware.”

– ID-Ca602; parent of in-school boy

“People in my community think that children should be educated, they should be sent to school.

[Probe: Do all think that way in your community?] Yes, majority of the people think this way and send their children to school.”

– ID-Ca702; parent of in-school boy

The principal drivers for positive change in knowledge, attitude and behaviours toward *child labour* were **more awareness regarding child labour** followed by **more awareness regarding child education** (both community-level factors):

“Yes, there is a change in the thinking of people. They now believe that children should not be sent to work until a certain age. Over time, people are becoming more aware.”

– ID-Ca201; parent of in-school girl

Implications for policies, programmes and research

Mere enrolment in school does not address child labour

Findings from this study reveal that children’s participation in schooling and work cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive. This, in turn, translates to various combinations of school and work trajectories, influenced by family circumstances, prevailing social norms, and the gender and age of the child.

Accordingly, given evidence of child work being undertaken by both in-school and out-of-school children, education alone cannot be viewed as preventing a child from working and so eliminating the risk of child labour, especially if this is seen exclusively through the lens of enrolment.

Moreover, time-use data collected from parents as part of the study reveal that out-of-school children from the Musahar community are engaged in domestic chores for 23 hours per week, and in paid work for 16 hours per week, on average, thus crossing the threshold of long hours as prescribed by the ILO and UNICEF.²⁹ While not crossing the long-hours threshold, in-school children spent an average of 15 hours per week on domestic chores and two hours per week on paid work. By gender, girls were also found to cross the threshold of long hours, undertaking 28 hours per week of domestic chores.

These findings show that out-of-school children engage in long hours of work, and even once a child is in school, she/he typically spends significant time working. Thus, in the context of Musahar communities, all groups of children considered in this study were found to be vulnerable to child labour, including both in-school and out-of-school children and both boys and girls. This means focused attention on all these vulnerable groups must be included in all child labour and related interventions.

Implications

- The view that only out-of-school children are engaged in child labour needs to be challenged and shifted across policymaking, research and civil society advocacy with immediate effect.
- There is an urgent need to broaden ongoing programmes by government agencies and civil society organizations to include both out-of-school and in-school children within their scope.

Invest in teachers and create responsive education systems

While education alone cannot be seen as a panacea for child labour, findings show that availability of good-quality education is perceived as a key factor in offering alternative trajectories for girls and boys. The causal maps developed – based on responses provided by both in-school children and their caregivers – reveal that teachers play a critical role. This holds not only for improvement in the child's school participation and academic performance, but also for overall school improvements at the school or system level (e.g., safety, infrastructure and teaching quality).

The Government of India explicitly included “teacher training” as part of the action plan to implement its National Policy on Child Labour, 1987.³⁰ However, despite this and other policy initiatives and legislative measures relating to free and compulsory primary education in India, the household survey conducted as part of this study revealed that more than half of Musahar children (under 14 years of age) in the sample are being deprived of their fundamental right to education.

Quality education that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of children is required. This is crucial to support both out-of-school children rejoining school and in-school children who are at risk of dropout.

Implications

- The critical role played by teachers needs to be leveraged to raise community awareness about the importance of education and the negative impacts of child labour, and to encourage families, especially Musahar families, to support their children in returning to and completing schooling.

- The training of teachers is essential to identify and support children at risk of being 'pushed' or 'pulled' out of school. Both in-service and pre-service teacher training should focus on building capacities of teachers to be able to fulfil this critical role. This includes increasing teachers' awareness of prevailing child protection schemes and encouraging teachers to engage with households and communities to ensure Musahar children and their parents are aware of the importance of education and available support mechanisms.
- The school curriculum should include a focus on transforming patriarchal gender norms that place unequal responsibilities for household work on girls.

Invest in awareness-building interventions for children and caregivers, with a focus on gender norms

Findings from the QulP study highlighted that the child's own interest in education plays a critical role in improving her/his schooling outcomes. Family-level factors, such as parental interest in education and acquisition of productive assets, also play an important role in reducing or increasing the time spent by children working.

Further, both children and their parents stated their perceptions of gender roles, demonstrating clear gender differences in familial expectations regarding the kind of work done by boys and girls within the family, with girls relatively more involved in household chores and boys more involved in economic activities. Societal norms and expectations were identified as key drivers of these patterns.

These findings underscore the need for improving parental and child awareness about the importance of education and the hazards related to child labour, including through the school curriculum, as well as for addressing the role societal norms and expectations about time use for boys and girls.

Implications

- Targeted household-level social and behaviour change interventions should be implemented to sensitize caregivers and children.³¹ Such initiatives should also focus on addressing unequal gender norms around work.

Facilitate issuance of national identity cards (Aadhaar) for children in government schools

An important finding from the causal maps relates to parents noting the absence of an Aadhaar card, resulting in their children (under 14 years) not being enrolled in a government school.

Aadhaar enrolment is widely considered by the public to be mandatory and a precondition for facilitating school enrolment.³² However, this is not the reality. Government of India

regulations note that no child should be denied admission to school or other facilities due to the lack of an Aadhaar card.³³ Where children do not have an Aadhaar card, it is the responsibility of the schools – under Regulation 12A of Aadhaar (Enrolment and Update) Regulations, 2016 – to provide them with Aadhaar enrolments and biometric updates. This position was reiterated by the Supreme Court of India when making Aadhaar cards non-compulsory for school admissions.³⁴

Implications

- It is critical that government functionaries, including school administration, facilitate Aadhaar issuance for children in Musahar communities and not deprive these children under 14 years of age of their right to education.
- The Department of Education, Bihar should ensure camps for Aadhaar cards are organized within government schools, especially those located with Schedule Caste colonies.

Expand social protection measures for Musahar households

The household survey results revealed the adverse circumstances in which members of the Musahar community live.

The average salary of the head of a Musahar household was noted to be \$75, and 42 per cent of sample households (130 out of 309 households) had an outstanding loan. About 35 per cent of the households did not have ration cards, while 57 per cent of their children did not have a birth certificate. Further, 54 per cent of the households noted that their children (under 14 years) were not currently part of the school system, with 37 per cent never having been enrolled in school. Children also reported that a higher level of responsibility (a family-level factor) is an important driver for increased time spent on work.

Implications

- Given the poverty and discrimination experienced by Musahar households, including children, it is vital that Musahar households are provided with safety nets in the form of social protection schemes.
- Together with the other recommended policy and programmatic actions, this will ensure that child labour is not used as a coping strategy to make ends meet, so that children from the most vulnerable households can realize their fundamental right to education without being deprived of opportunities.

Revisit the Child Labour Act, including strengthening its interpretation and application

As previously mentioned, the results from this study show that out-of-school children engage in long hours of work, and that even once a child is in school, she/he typically spends significant time working. This contrasts with children's right to protection and education.

As part of the National Policy on Child Labour, a parliamentary committee, comprising of members of the *Lok Sabha* and *Rajya Sabha*, engaged with the Ministry of Education (Department of School Education and Literacy, DoSEL) and Ministry of Labour, among others. When asked how the Right to Education Act, 2009 and the child labour laws work in tandem and whether there was a need for legislative amendment, DoSEL stated:³⁵

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, provides for rights of every child of the age of 6 to 14 years to obtain free and compulsory elementary education. The Act further provides the pathways for education of the child, including out-of-school children.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 provides that no child shall be employed or permitted to work in any occupation or process that has an effect on the school education of the child. The Act further provides the pathways for education and rehabilitation of the child so engaged as child labour. Thus, both the Acts strive to provide universal access of education to every child

The authors note that based on the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and its Amendment Rules, 2017, children are allowed to help their family or family enterprise (apart from any hazardous occupation or processes) after school hours or during vacations. An express provision states that children under 14 years working in a family enterprise "should not perform any task during school hours and between 7 p.m. and 8 a.m.".

A clear reading reveals that the regulatory framework leaves enough room for ambiguity (after school hours and before 7 p.m., and after 8 a.m. but before school) to allow children under 14 years of age to combine schooling with work, which can affect children's educational trajectories.

This is especially true for children belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, such as Musahars, who are more likely to be engaged in family enterprises.³⁶

The implications of domestic chores work done by children under 14 years of age must be considered urgently. In data collected for this study, children out of school and girls crossed the stipulated threshold of 21 hours per week specified in ILO measurements to qualify as child labour in domestic chores.

Implications

- It is critical for policymakers to draw upon the spirit of international labour standards and revise laws and policies to reflect child labour as “work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and/or interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work”.³⁷ Laws and policies should be revised, particularly to capture work done within the family enterprise. This type of work, if conducted for long hours or under hazardous conditions, should be considered as ‘child labour’.
- Attention should be given to adequately capturing the hazards children face, including within the family enterprise.
- There is an urgent need to consider the implications of work in domestic chores done by children under 14 years of age. Time-use data gathered from parents corroborate the point that children out of school and girls often exceed the ILO-UNICEF age threshold of 21 hours per week to establish child labour in domestic chores.

Monitor child labour prevalence and patterns through child labour surveys

While it is encouraging that DoSEL under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan has to identify all out-of-school children, more needs to be done to monitor child labour in India.³⁸ This is especially important in contexts where the risk of child labour is higher and where there is significant fluidity between children’s participation in work and schooling.

It may be prudent to identify hotspots of child labour, collecting real-time data at the *panchayat* (village) level on a monthly basis through the Panchayat Child Protection Committee set up under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme.

Given the challenges of relying on available national surveys (e.g., Census of India, Periodic Labour Force Survey, National Sample Survey) to measure child labour (owing to definitional inconsistencies and use of proxy indicators to determine child work and child labour), there is an urgent need for a focused national child labour survey that uses standardized definitions and measurement frameworks to estimate rates of child work and child labour, including capturing work within the family enterprise.

Time-use data with detailed reporting on adolescents' activities are also important to inform programmatic and policy responses.³⁹

Implications

- Definitions and measurement frameworks to estimate children's engagement in work and labour should be standardized in alignment with international labour standards.
- Regular (e.g., monthly) collection and use of data at the *panchayat* level is recommended to identify hotspots of child labour, representing areas where the issue must be addressed with priority. The Panchayat Child Protection Committees set up under the Integrated Child Protection schemes could be leveraged for these data collection efforts.
- To overcome the inconsistencies in current national survey data sets, a national child labour survey should be conducted to capture accurately children's engagement in household chores and economic activities, including hours worked and exposure to work-related hazards.
- Time-use data, with detailed reporting on children's activities, should be also collected and combined with school attendance data.

Improve programme monitoring and evaluate programme impact

India has a wide array of innovative non-governmental organization and government initiatives which have demonstrated the value of multi-component strategies to address the vulnerabilities of adolescent children to work, labour and school dropout or poor schooling outcomes.⁴⁰ Yet learning from these initiatives remains a challenge. At present, many civil society organizations do not have robust information management systems, fully developed theories of change for ongoing programmes or validated tools to track change and the effectiveness of their interventions.

Implications

- It is critical to develop robust programme monitoring systems and tools to be able to document best practices and conduct rigorous evaluation, so that effective programmes can be scaled up and replicated based on documented evidence.
- Understanding the mechanisms of impact, and the specific role of education, remains an area where evidence is limited and thus needs to be expanded.

Conclusion

Child labour is a multidimensional problem which results from multiple factors – including social and economic inequity, poverty, norms, returns to work and education – that influence a family's decision to engage a child in work.

Education plays a critical role in fostering and enabling aspirations and opportunities, but it alone cannot resolve child labour when children are found to be combining schooling with work. Instead, reducing child labour requires a multi-sectoral approach which leverages the role of schools – and teachers in particular – while also covering other critical factors, including awareness of child rights (including the right to education), social and gender norms, and household poverty.

As SDG 8 requires elimination of all forms of child labour by 2025, convergence across government departments, researchers and civil society organizations is imperative. The time to act is now.

ENDNOTES

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- 4 For the full report, see Singh, Renu, et al., *What Drives Changes in Child Labour and Schooling? Evidence from an exploratory study among children of the Musahar community in Vaishali, Bihar, India*, Young Lives India and UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, New Delhi and Florence, May 2025. The study is part of the broader research project Evidence on Educational Strategies to Address Child Labour in South Asia, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The project includes a first evidence stream describing trends and patterns in child labour in India and reviewing the literature on the effect of educational policies and programmes on child labour. The study presented in this brief is part of a second evidence stream which aims to understand in more detail the mechanisms through which improvements in the education domain can contribute to progress in the elimination of child labour. All project outputs are available at: <www.unicef.org/innocenti/projects/ending-child-labour>.
- 5 The four *varna* (social class) hierarchical system has Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudras, with notions of purity and pollution governing the relationship between these classes. Dalits are excluded from the four *varnas* of the caste hierarchy and face the maximum stigmatization and exclusion (see Dumont, Louis, *Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980). The Constitution of India list Dalits as a Scheduled Caste group and per the 2011 Census, Scheduled Castes constitute 24.4 per cent of India's total population. The Musahars belong to the Mahadalit community. *Musa* means 'rat' in Hindi, and *Musahar* means 'rat-eater'. Upper caste Hindus refer to lower castes negatively, in accordance with Brahmanical ideas of purity, and the Musahar community is seen as impure due to the latter's dietary practices. The Musahar community accepts this name, even though it was originally intended to be a derogatory term (see Kunnath, George, 'Compliance or Defiance? The case of Dalits and Mahadalits', *Journal of Anthropological Society of Oxford*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2013, pp. 36–59).
- 6 The conceptual framework was adapted from Emezue, Chuka, et al., 'Child Work and Child Labour: The impact of educational policies and programmes in low- and middle-income countries', UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, Florence, July 2023, <www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/3901/file/UNICEF-Child-Work-Child-Labour-2023.pdf>.
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- 13 Refer to Bath Social & Development Research, 'About QulP', Bath SDR, Bath, 2025, <<https://bathsdrr.org/about-the-quip>> accessed 13 May 2025. See also Copestake, James, Marlies Morsink and Fiona Remnant, *Attributing Development Impact: The Qualitative Impact Protocol case book*, Practical Action Publishing, Rugby, 2019, <<https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/files/212210067/9781780447469.pdf>>.
- 14 The QulP methodology typically employs blindfolding when setting up interviews, so that neither the interviewers nor the interviewees know the specific objective of the study and whether this is supposed to evaluate a specific intervention. This reduces confirmation bias and enhances credibility of the evaluation.
- 15 See <www.causalmap.app>.
- 16 See Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, *Census of India, 2011*, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 2011; Singh, Dharmendra Pratap, 'Socio-demographic Condition of One of the Most Marginalised Caste in Northern India', *Demography India*, vol. 45, no. 1–2, 2016, pp. 117–130; Government of Bihar, *Report on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Bihar*, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Welfare Department, n.p., 2012.
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- 24 Time spent on household chores and economic activities within the household show a similar pattern based on data reported by parents.
- 25 Questions on changes in schooling outcomes were only asked to parents of in-school children.
- 26 Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique identity number that can be obtained voluntarily by all residents of India, based on their biometrics and demographic data. It serves as a national Indian identity proof, facilitating access to various government and private services.
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