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UNDERLYING FACTORS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN BELONGING TO MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES (A CASE STUDY OF TALUKA HALA, DISTRICT MATIARI, SINDH)

Abstract

The survey is conducted focusing marginalized and deprived communities including scheduled castes of the area and giving significant space to attain the opinions of the parents belonging to these communities. The study also compares the educational and economic status of both marginalized Hindu communities and Muslims living in the area. This study is conducted to analyse the school enrolment status on the basis of religious diversity of the rural areas of taluka Hala, district Matiari, providing facts and figures about socio-economic conditions of the population living in the area, number of school going and Out-Of-School children in the area. The study also provides perception of teachers belonging to the local schools about high number of Out-Of-School children in the area. The study reveals the most common underlying factors for low school enrolment of children belonged to marginalized communities in the area.

Keywords: Out-of-school children, school dropout, marginalized community, never enrolled children, literacy rate.

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Introduction

Education was declared basic human right in 1948, just one year after the independent of Pakistan. It was reaffirmed in 1966 in the international covenant on cultural, social and economic rights. Following that a convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against woman was also signed in 1979. In 1989, Pakistan signed another convention on child rights. Pakistan agreed to the World Declaration on "Education for all" at *Jomtien*, Thailand, in 1990 (UNESCO, 1990). In April 2000, after ten years of *Jomtien* declaration, it was again reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal. The Dakar Conference re-assured all signatories to pledge their commitment in terms of time and resources. In the Dakar Framework, United Nation bodies and all countries were called to set 2015 dead line to achieve six goals as per set targets (UNESCO, 2000). Though Pakistan is a signatory of above declaration and despite numerous efforts were made by the international community, many reports indicate that the country is still far-flung to achieve the Dakar Framework goals.

Pakistan is country with a population of over 180 million people, almost half of which is less than 18 years of age. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, very small percentage ~ 3% of the population belongs to minority religious groups from which a negligible percentage of population belongs to the scheduled castes which are considered as a marginalized communities. This portion of the community is most vulnerable and denied to basic right of education in the country. Country's progress can be greatly accelerated by adopting the equity-based approach to education where the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children including of deprived and marginalized communities are provided with access to quality education. On the constitutional side, government have added an article 25-A in the 18th Amendment. The article called "The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2012". It stated that "the state shall

provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law." However, since the devolution of education ministry recently, all provinces have been responsible for education-related policies and their implementation. But the ground situation is very alarming in the country where about 49 % of the poorest children aged seven to 16 were out-of-school in 2007, compared with five % of children from the wealthiest households. By looking at distressing scenario around the country, it has been assumed by The UNDP Millennium Development Goals, Pakistan will not be able to achieve its education goals until 2015 (UNDP, 2012).

School dropout is a very common in Pakistan but the research on causes of dropout and the solutions to the issue are not much available. Many factors involving school dropout, are inter-related to social and personal lives of students and their families. School-based factors are recently studied which include teacher training, curriculum, textbooks and examination improvements (Hoodbhoy, n.d.). Out-of-school factors associated to financial conditions and employment conditions are also studied by Rajan Roy (Roy, 2000). Role of parental education in school dropout studied by Behrman et al (Behrman, 1999) in a research conducted in India. Fear factor of parents regarding to girls' safety and security is also considered a main reason of lower literacy rate in girls according to Ashique Hussain et al. (Ashiq Hussain, 2011).

Though the some of the factors related to school dropout are highlighted in various studies and reports, but still it remains one of the biggest challenges as the dropout is a commonly observed phenomenon in the national educational system. There is a need to explore the underlying circumstances and factors causing lower enrolment trends in Sindh especially in rural areas. Accessibility factor is multi-dimensional issue. It is considered as school is available but not accessible to part of community due to

different reasons. Or, the conditions prevailing in the schools are not satisfactory for the children or worrying their parents. Like Teacher-child relation, this is also important to keep the children at school. If this delegate relation worsens at any stage in general and at primary level in particular also adds up school dropout.

The curriculum is not designed to meet with local cultural and social context and needs. Teachers' incompetence and discriminatory and discouraging attitude are important also important factors influencing interest of students towards the education. In this scenario, the existing drop out ratio would keep rising, even children want to pursue education out of pure interest, would be forced out of it not just due to economic reasons and family pressures but owing to the alienating school environment. Corporal punishment in the schools is also considered as one of major factor for school dropout and also needs to be analysed according to demographic basis (Naz, 2011). The causes of dropout were mention was lake of corporal punishment's legislation and policy execution, untrained teachers. School dropout is also economics driven issue in most developing countries where the majority of children work for survival and support their families. From very early age, mostly in villages, many children contribute to the monthly income by helping their families. Job conditions are very poor in Pakistan; therefore, the families consider that sending the child to school means less household income coupled with rising expenses. Dropout for girls is also high for many reasons. According to Cynthia Lloyd, Cem Mete, and Monica Grant (CB Lloyd, 2009), in Pakistan, not all young women face the same educational weaknesses of the country. Urban class young women whose families belong to high salary appropriation are fortunate to have gone to class or finished the five evaluations of essential educating.

Objectives of the study

The major objective of the study is to pin point the issues facing by the marginalized communities, in order to get basic education for their children. It is always demanded to identify those factors that cause the low enrollment of marginalized communities belonging to especially rural areas of Sindh. More to the point solutions and strategies can be developed to ensure children in general and children belonging to deprived communities in particular to be enrolled to attain an approved basic level in literacy and curtain the out-of-school children number at large.

Research Questions

- What percentage of school age children belonging to marginalized communities is Out-Of-School in the area under study?
- What are the major causes of low enrolment and school dropout ratio of marginalized communities of in the area under study?
- What challenges and problems are being faced by the marginalized communities to send their children school?
- What are the perception and the problems raised by parents (specially belonging to marginalised), teachers and school heads about the out-of-school children in the area?

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the Out-Of-School children issue through key factors which are assumed to be the major determinants for school enrolment.

Significance of the study

This study is designed to focus on the rural areas of district Matiari and focuses marginalized communities of the area. In order to make policies to increase school enrolment of the children belonging to marginalized communities, the findings of the study can be generalized to the rural areas of Sindh province overall.

Research Method

To analyze the underlying factors for the Out-Of-School children phenomena, a mixed model approach is adopted. This method allows the researcher to analyse the problem by combining both quantitative and qualitative research. In order to implement the method, a door to door survey is conducted over the population belonging to Muslim and marginalized communities. Households were asked to fill a set of questionnaire. Parents' and teachers' perception was also conducted using a separate set of questionnaire. The questionnaire were translated into local language. The obtained data is then analyzed using SPSS software package.

Sample size design

The sample population is taken from twelve villages of taluka Hala district Matiari. The estimated population in the selected villages is approximately 26000. Fifty-fifty percent based on religion, a total number of 220 households were interviewed in the survey. Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondent's religion and the caste among Hindu communities. This distribution is necessary to understand when we study the characteristics of children who remain out-of-schooling system. One member of school management committee (SMC) other than teacher and two teachers from each government primary school

situated at the villages under study are also interviewed, in order to get perception of society about the enrolment status of the children.

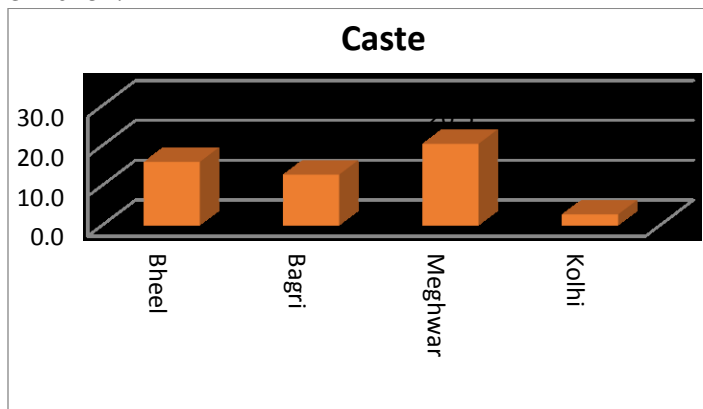


Figure 1. Caste base distribution of the sample

Data Analysis and research findings

The main area of concern is the educational coverage for all. The research focus is concerned to the inclusion factor of the all communities. We also test the hypothesis that marginalized communities including the scheduled cast communities living in rural area are not included in educational system provided by the public sector, however, due to lower paying capacity, these community cannot enroll their children in private schools. The major aim was to find out and work out underlying factors effecting overall school enrolment and drop out ratio in the villages under study. For this to resolve, two sets of surveys were conducted. In order to determine parents' consciousness, attitude and perceptions of education for their children, one survey was directly conducted amongst the households. The second survey conducted at schools, in order to understand opinions and perspectives of head teachers, teachers and SMC members as well as assessing school facilities. This section analyzes and reveals the

outcomes of the surveys and interviews, addressing key questions put forth in the terms of reference of the study.

Religion-wise enrolment status of children

In this section, comparison of the overall status of the school going and out-of-school children, both boys and girls, according to religion of their family is given. In table and graph shown in Figure 2, we can clearly observe the difference of enrolment status between Muslims and Hindu children at primary and secondary level of school education. Further to this number of out-of-school children is also higher in Hindu communities. 63% of out-of-schoolboys and 73% of out-of-school girls belongs to Hindu community in under study area. Primary school going children are also very low in percentage compare to Muslim community. At the secondary level enrolment, Hindu girls are in almost negligible portion. Only 7% of secondary school going girls, which is already very low at overall 9% as discussed above, comprises of Hindu girls. Number of secondary school going Hindu boys is also very low at 19% of overall enrolment percentage of 37%. This indicates very sharp decline in enrolment at secondary school level, though the situation is not good for Muslim community but for Hindus its worst. These indications suggest that the reason behind low enrolment of children also related to religious status of the children. The perception of Hindu community about the reasons of out-of-school children and low enrolment will be discussed later. Here it can be concluded that, being rural inhabitant a child has low chances of schooling, belonging to a minority community the schooling chances are further reduced, on top of that if child happened to be girl there is a an increased vulnerability to miss the school enrolment.

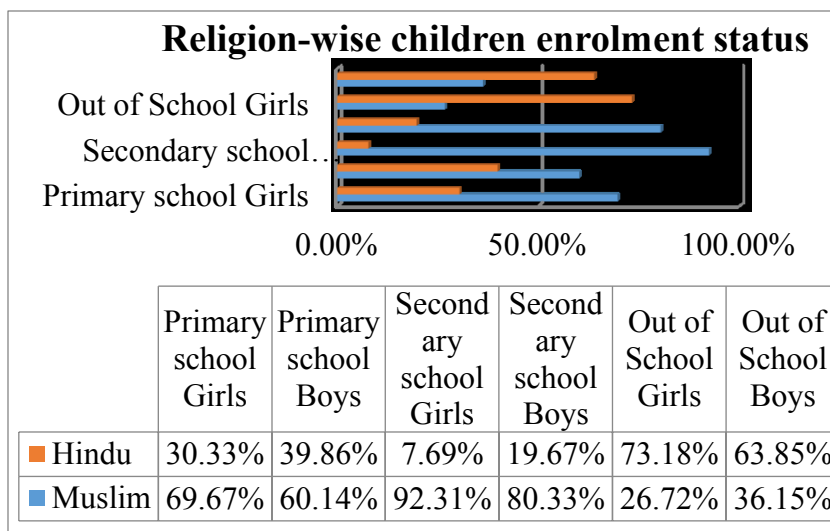


Figure 2 Religion-wise comparison of total school going children (boys and girls) and out-of-school children.

Underlying Factors for out-of-school children

In this section and following sections, we discuss the findings describing the reasons of low enrolment of children in the schools in the area under study. Here perception of parents will be presented regarding to not sending their children to school according to pre-set parameters as discussed.

Socio Economic Characteristics of respondent Household

We try to understand the characteristics of those households whose children remain out-of-school system. As all the respondents were male, the pattern shows that very thin portion of female are heading family, this supports the idea that female have lower voice in decision making compared to their male family members. Female in rural set up household is major factor in managing household socio economic affairs. Not only she

contributes to the family income but indirectly pays a portion of unpaid amount of services in home management like cooking, cleaning and other jobs on her own without physical help from male members of family. Thus a greater level of household ownership is dedicated by her. In considering out school children we must know the gender balance of a family in decision making process. House hold head makes all decisions regarding engagement in labour and family resources endowment is the pre conceptualized by the family with a greater influence by the father or male elders in charge of family. The data shows that only 1 % of total population had a female household head. This shows that almost entire population of household is pre dominantly male household heads. This may reflect in decision making or resources allocation of family most importantly the resources endowment on education of child.

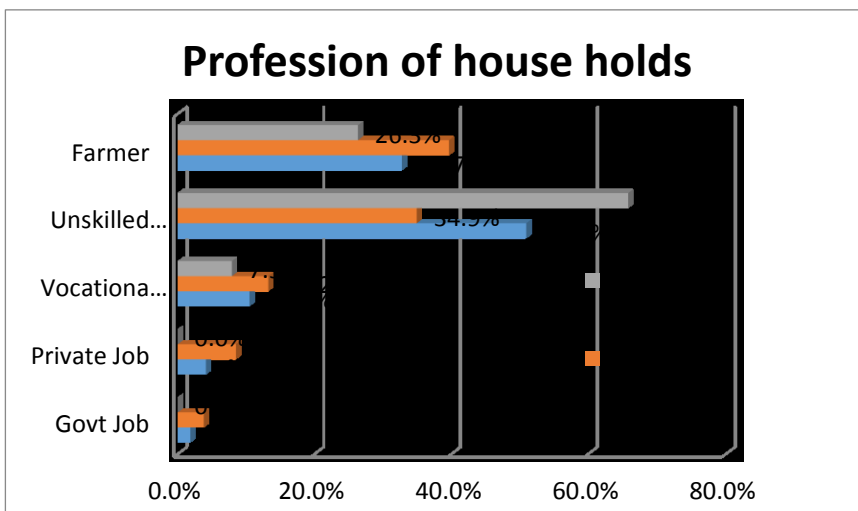


Figure 3 Profession of respondent family head.

Figure 3 shows the professional status of the respondent families both Hindus and Muslims. Over all approximately 60% respondent's family business is unskilled labour, which means

that these families do not have regular sources of income with stable income flow over a year. In this category, the ratio of Hindus is higher than the Muslims. The second category of family profession is farming at 32.7%. In fact agriculture is marginal return activity and the sector is vulnerable to natural disasters. This may affect family income. Any decision to allocate resources is linked to the stable sources of income of a family. Only 10.5 % families are engaged in vocational works, while only 4.1 % respondents do private job. Very thin portion of households in engaged in government sector jobs. Interestingly from the figure it is very clear that the marginalized communities in the area of study are completely out of government and private sector jobs. This instable economic condition poses adverse effect on the education of deprived community children.

Further to this, it can be seen in Figure 4 that the major portion of households is engaged in low paid unstable job market. It can also be seen clearly that the higher percentage of Hindu community belongs to very low income category. Whilst higher percentage of Muslims fall in high income category as compared to Hindus. This monthly income chart supports the data given in Figure 3. The income is the major factor in deciding to send a child to school. It is assumed that a family may decide positively if the income flow is stable and may decide negatively if the same is other way around. However, income cannot be the only the factor but one of the major factors. Our analysis will unfold to other factors which may have effect on family decision making regarding sending their children in school.

Monthly income of household

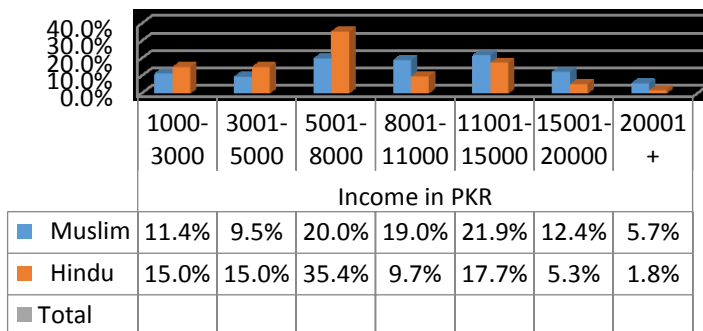


Figure 4 Monthly income of the household's families.

The other factor may be the educational status of the parents. It is considered that the out-of-schoolchildren mostly belong to illiterate parents. In Figure 5 it is clear that the approximately 26 % of Muslim parents were illiterate, and this number is much higher in the non-Muslim community. Rest of the parents are mostly primary pass. Very low percentage of the parents has higher degrees. Due to lower education level, many of the parents do not belong to government or private job sector, as disused earlier, and that is the reason they belong to low income families. This figure also reflects the discontinuation of education of the parents, which is very much high in both communities.

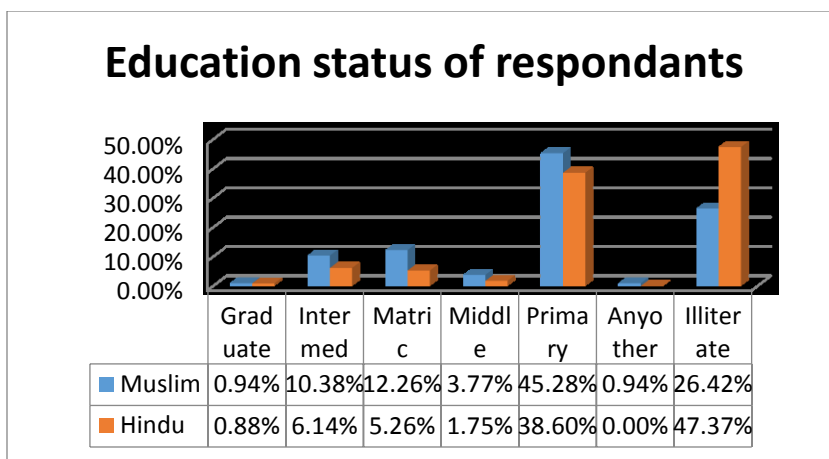


Figure 5 Education level of the households. The graph shows the Muslim and Hindu parent's educational level.

Financial conditions of households are also having significant impact on children enrolment. As discussed above most of the Hindu community parents in the area belongs to low or below low income category, therefore very high percentage of Hindu community children are out-of-school. Low enrolment of the children is also related to literacy rate of the community to some extent. Same is true in case of Hindu community where literacy rate is poor; hence the parents are unaware of the importance of education. This is reflected in Hindu community under study as their out-of-school children number is higher. Though the education is free of cost and books are also available free of cost at primary and secondary school level in Sindh, but even this doesn't help apparently in increasing school enrolment. There are many reasons behind this critical situation which is discussed in following sections, but financial and educational status of parents cannot be ignored. Usually school going or out-of-school children, both help their parents in agricultural fields

and daily life matters and many support their parents in financial matters too.

Parent's perception

In comparison to those parents who reported that their children have never attended school, a small percentage of parents, approximately less than 8%, have reported that their children have dropped out-of-school many of them belongs to Hindu community. In Figure 6, parent's perception is given about school drop-out. From this data, it can be judged that both Hindu and Muslim communities have different reasoning about their children's drop-out. For example Muslims are more worried about overall quality of education, school facilities and teachers' absenteeism while Hindu community is more worried about discrimination, corporal punishment and school distance because many marginalised communities live in far fields and isolated. Despite very low education level of the parents, above 50% of parents are aware of education quality provided in government schools and think that, it is also a one of reason not to send their children to school.

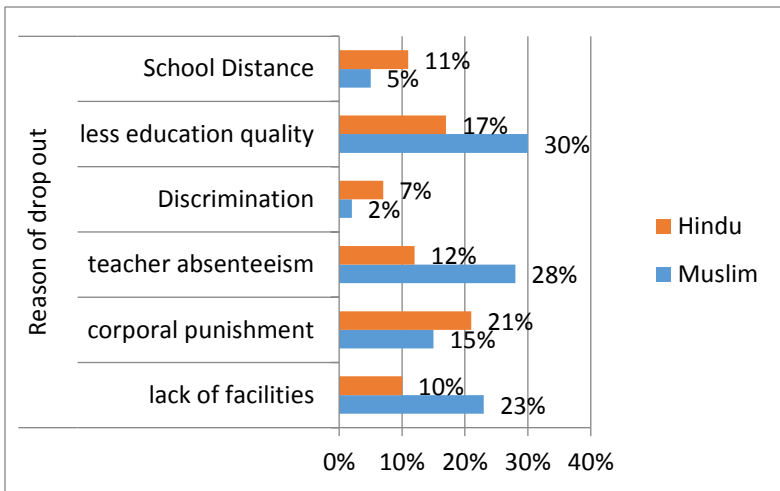


Figure 6 School dropout factors according to parents.

Teachers' and SMC members' perception

School teachers and SMC members in the community recognized affordability is a major reason for non-enrolment of boys and girls in schools. Around 65% of the teachers believe or strongly believe that children assisting parents at work or in domestic work was indeed a barrier in allowing children to go schools and involved in to generate income and support their families. The trend is shown in Figure 7. Further to this; around 50% of the teachers also suppose that the unemployment or joblessness after completing education is also a predominant or underlying disappointing factor for parents to not sending their children to get education. Teachers do not believe discrimination is major issue for low enrolment in the schools, though most parents belonging to marginalized community showed concerns about discrimination. Teachers blamed parent's unawareness about the education. The results are shown in Figure 8.

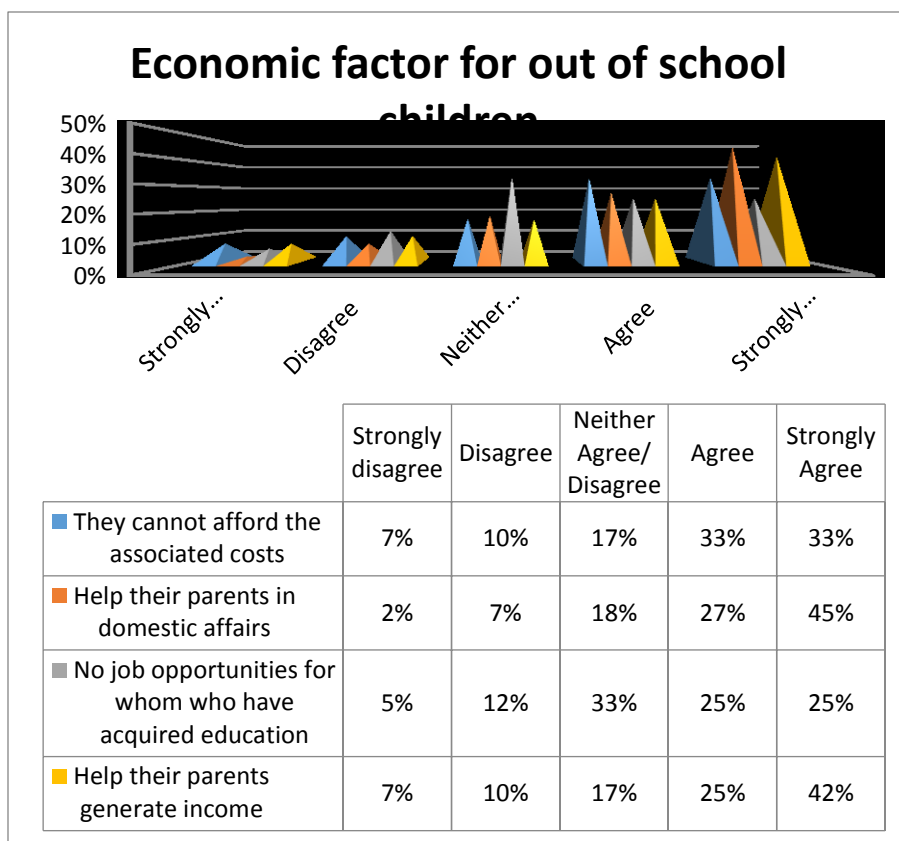


Figure 7 Perception of teachers in concerned schools about out-of-school children. The data covers economic factors.

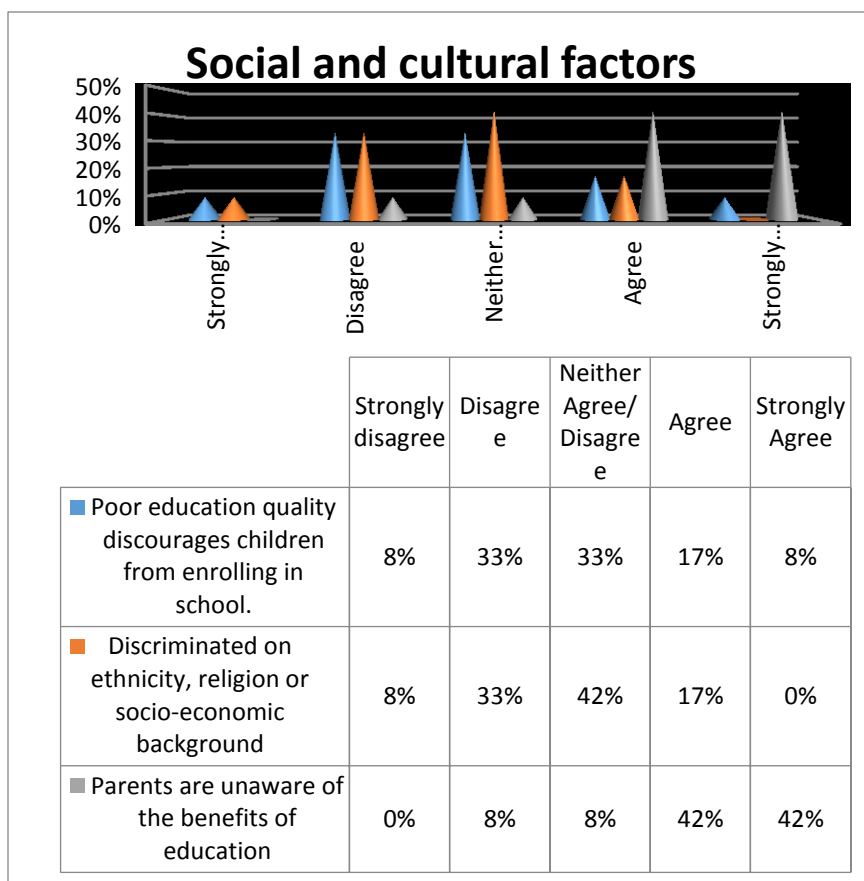


Figure 8 Perception of teachers about out-of-school children. The data covers social and cultural factors

Conclusion

The survey shed light on the socio-economical condition of those deprived communities living in relatively economical sound areas of district Matiari. Despite overall better conditions for Muslim communities in the area, the living standards are still very low for marginalised communities. Given that affordability was the key

reason for non-enrolment of children, marginalised Hindu community also fear discrimination prevails in schools.

Recommendations

- Special attention and incentives should be given to children belonging to marginalized communities.
- Separate scholarships and other economic benefits should be offered to them by government and non-government organizations.
- The findings demonstrated that parents' attitude towards education was a decisive factor in enrolling children.
- Given the prevailing poor parental attitude towards education for out-of-school children, a clever campaign needs to be initiated to directly engage parents specially from marginalized community in order to positively influence their attitude.
- There is a need to encourage parents' at the individual level - informing them of the benefits of education on their child's well-being.
- To hold the school *Open Days* in both public and private schools can help demonstrate what schools have to offer, encouraging parents' attitude and informing thereby, helping them make better informed decisions in relation to enrolment of their children.
- More Schools should be opened to marginalized communities.
- Special focus should be given to enhance the enrolment of the children belonging to these deprived communities and efforts must be taken to ensure the harmony should prevail in the school atmosphere for all the children irrespective of their back ground on the basis of religion, ethnicity and financial background.

- The parent-teacher committees (PTC or SMC) must have included representative from the marginalized communities.
- Awareness workshops with parents at town/village level need to be designed and organized.
- Last but not least, quality of education at primary level must be improved so that parents should feel that their children are really not wasting their time in the school but getting better knowledge to improve their living standard and become a well-informed, well behavior and useful citizen for the society.

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