

Perception of child ragpickers towards their education

■ MANOTI BARKI AND SARIKA MANHAS

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See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

Correspondence to :

MANOTI BARKI
P.G. Department of Home
Science, University of Jammu,
JAMMU (J&K) INDIA
Email: manotibarki@
gmail.com

■ **ABSTRACT** : The present study was conducted with an objective to assess child ragpicker's perception towards education. A sample of 200 child ragpickers was selected from various areas of Jammu city through snowball and purposive sampling. Results showed that majority (50%) of child ragpickers had positive attitude towards education as they regarded education a necessity for all. 72 per cent of them showed their liking for attending school. In spite of having positive perception towards education, most (66%) of these children were found to be school dropout. Only 20 per cent of total respondents were found to be attending school at the time of investigation. These children also expressed their views about their choice of profession they would like to opt in future. Majority of them (17.5%) admitted that they would join their parents in labouring because of poor financial condition.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Ragpickers, Children, Perception, Education

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Childhood', for a multitude of children in India, lacks its characteristics, carefree happiness. In many parts of urban India children are seen picking waste items from the city dumps and rubbish bins. Children belonging to ragpicking community have no choice but to begin working at a young age in order to fend for them, and to merely survive (Kumar *et al.*, 2001). Poverty plays a role in the ineffectiveness of the education of these children. High illiteracy and dropout rates are quite common. The main reason for not going to school is the lack of mental, emotional and economic support and the fact that these children have to work full-time to survive (Lieten, 2010). The attitude of parents also contributes to the lack of enrolment as parents feel that work develops skills that can be used to earn an income, while education does not help in this matter. Compulsory education may help in regard to these attitudes. Their parents are unlikely to value education and are less able to support their children in their educational progress.

If school is fully abandoned this negatively affects future prospects of the child: the child will spend more time working or hanging on the streets and therefore runs a bigger risk of landing on the streets permanently and becoming more excluded from society and the formal labour market. In keeping

with above facts, the present study has been designed to assess child ragpicker's perception towards education. Data gathered from the study will be useful in understanding their future aspirations and probably help to enrol these children back to school system.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The methodological framework used for the study is as under:

Sample description :

Sample:

The sample for the study comprised of children below 14 years of age working as ragpickers for at least past six months.

Sample size :

200 ragpickers were selected from different areas of Jammu city.

Sampling procedure :

The sample children were selected through purposive and snowball sampling technique.

Tools for the study :

Interview schedule was prepared to elicit requisite information from the sample respondents.

Data analysis :

Both qualitative as well as quantitative techniques were used. Data were coded and percentages were calculated in order to analyze the data.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the present study as well as relevant discussions have been presented under following sub heads:

Age of ragpickers :

Majority of child ragpickers were in the age group of 12-14 years while 36 per cent children were in the age group of 8-10 years. The remaining respondent's age ranged between 10-12 years, indicating that children are initiated into this work at a young age (Table 1).

Table 1 : Age of ragpickers

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Age	104	96	200
8 ⁺ - 10 yrs	32(30.77)	40 (41.66)	72(36)
10 ⁺ - 12 yrs	24(23.08)	28(29.17)	52(26)
12 ⁺ - 14 yrs	48(46.15)	28(29.17)	76(38)

Percentages are given in parentheses

Educational qualification of ragpickers :

During the course of investigation, literacy level among child ragpickers was found to be very low (Table 2). In fact, 23 per cent children were recorded to be completely illiterate. Illiteracy among male and female ragpickers was rated as 15.3 per cent and 31.25 per cent, respectively. Out of total sample, majority (36%) stated that they had completed their pre-nursery classes from local pre-schools (Anganwadis). A substantial portion (33.5%) of children reported that they had passed 1st or 2nd class while the other 7 per cent had reported completing 3rd or 4th standard from formal schools. Only, 2 per cent managed to study up to 5th or 6th class in schools. Therefore, from the above findings it was found that literacy

Table 2 : Educational qualification of ragpickers

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Qualifications	104	96	200
Illiterate	16(15.3)	30(31.25)	46(23)
Pre-nursery	28(26.92)	45(46.88)	73(36.5)
1 st - 2 nd	49(47.11)	18(18.75)	67(33.5)
3 rd - 4 th	07(6.73)	03(3.13)	10(5)
2 nd - 6 th	04(3.85)	-	04(2)

Percentages are given in parenthesis

level of girl ragpickers was lower than that of boys. The reason behind this may be the hope that boys after study could help in bringing financial security of the family.

Perception towards education :

Education plays a pivotal role in the life of people. Different people have different views regarding the importance of education in one's life. Table 3 indicates the perception of child ragpickers towards the necessity of education in the life of children. Findings illustrate that 52 per cent of children held positive perception towards education. Various reasons were attributed behind their perception of education as a necessity. Out of the total sample, half of them (50%) believed that education is necessary for everyone as it helps in learning basic reading and writing skills while 48 per cent were of the opinion that it (education) helps in securing a good job. Another 5.5 per cent viewed that it helps to lead a respectable life. 10 per cent of them favoured it because they believed that it helps an individual to sharp his/her intellect. 5.21 per cent respondents believed that education helps a person to get a good life partner. A substantial portion (10%) of respondents however, didn't give any reason for their positive perception towards education and simply said that it is good to be educated.

Table 3 : Child ragpicker's perceptions towards education

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Perception towards education	104	96	200
Positive	60 (57.69)	44 (45.83)	104 (52)
Negative	44 (42.31)	52 (54.17)	96 (48)
Reasons for positive perception *			
Learn to read and write	56 (53.85)	44 (45.83)	100(50)
Helps in getting good job	56 (53.85)	60 (62.5)	116 (48)
To get mid-day meal	04 (3.85)	12 (12.5)	16 (08)
To get good life partner	-	05 (5.21)	05 (5.21)
To lead respectable life	04 (3.85)	07 (7.29)	11 (5.5)
To get knowledge	16 (15.38)	04 (4.17)	20 (10)
Don't know	12 (11.54)	08 (8.33)	20 (10)

Percentages are given in parentheses, * multiple responses

Perception towards attending school :

The child ragpickers perception towards attending/non attending the school was analysed (Table 4). In the total sample, majority (72%) of the children mentioned that they would like to attend school. Out of these respondents, 57 per cent stated that they wanted to acquire reading and writing skills for which they liked to attend the school whereas 16.5 per cent respondents considered school as a big play ground where they would meet new friends and thus enjoy peer companionship. As far as dislike for attending school is concerned a substantial portion (28%) of children viewed that

studies bored them so they didn't like it while, these children found the course taught at school difficult. Some (7.5%) of them believed that in school teachers were very strict and act like rulers. According to them scolding and beating by teachers distract them from the education for this reason they didn't like attending school. Since most of the sample ragpickers were non local who had migrated from other places at search of work. 8.5 per cent of them reported that in schools, they faced discrimination by local students who used to tease them for their caste and ethnicity.

Table 4 : Ragpicker's perception towards attending school

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Perception towards attending school	104	96	200
Like	84 (80.77)	60 (62.5)	144 (72)
Reasons for liking school*			
Acquire reading and writing skills	66 (60.58)	48 (50)	114 (57)
Peer companionship	21 (20.19)	12 (12.5)	33 (16.5)
Disliking	20 (19.23)	36 (37.5)	56 (28)
Reasons for disliking school			
Difficult course content	07 (6.73)	17(17.71)	24 (12)
Verbal/physical abuse by teachers	08 (7.69)	07 (7.29)	15 (7.5)
<u>Discrimination by local students</u>	<u>05 (4.81)</u>	<u>12 (12.5)</u>	<u>17 (8.5)</u>

Percentages are given in parentheses, * multiple responses

Children currently attending school :

During the field work, some child ragpickers were reported to be currently attending school. So, these children seemed to adjust their working hours with the school timings. Only 20 per cent of child ragpickers were found to be currently attending school. Among 20 per cent ragpickers, 7.5 per cent reported that they used to work (waste picking) after school hours while 4.5 per cent mentioned that they worked before school hours. However, (2.5%) reported of not having any fixed timing for this profession and whenever they were free they would do their work of ragpicking. 5.5 per cent of them stated that they performed this work only during their vacations (Table 5).

Table 5 : Child ragpickers currently attending school

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Children currently attending school	104	96	200
No. of children	28 (26.92)	12 (12.5)	40 (20)
Adjustment of working with school hours			
Working in pre-school hours	06 (5.77)	03 (3.15)	09 (4.5)
Working in post school hours	10 (9.62)	05 (5.21)	15 (7.5)
No fixed time	05 (4.81)	-	05 (2.5)
<u>Working during holidays</u>	<u>07 (6.73)</u>	<u>04 (4.17)</u>	<u>11(5.5)</u>

Percentages are given in brackets

School dropout children :

Information from Table 6 gives further insight into the compatibility of education and ragpicking. During the course of investigation, more than half of the children (66%) were found to be school dropouts. In the investigation, different reasons were found for school dropout. Of the total sample, 20 per cent reported that they didn't attend schools due to their parent's inability to afford school expenses. Poverty and financial crises at home had kept them away from school. Some children (18%) studied at schools in their home towns however, migration of parents in search of work lead them to dropout from school. According to them, schools at their place of origin were better than those of their present residing site. Along the similar line, some (6%) reported that they were not sent to school, but rather were required to work to help sustain the family. For them earning money was more important than to continue their schooling as they (children) believed that performing work and attending school could not go hand in hand while for another (4%) respondents, the reason was their friends. They reported that their friends didn't attend schools for unknown reasons and they didn't like attending their own schools without them and therefore they also left school. Somehow, 2 per cent (female respondents only) stated that they had dropped from schools as they have to look after young siblings at home. Overall, 28.5 per cent of these children showed desire for attending school again in future if given a chance. They viewed that their earnings may not cover all expenses required for them to go to school and reported that they would go to school only if expenses for schooling, food, lodging and clothing were paid.

Table 6 : Child ragpickers dropout from schools

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Dropout children	104	96	200
No. of drop-out children	72 (69.23)	60 (62.5)	132 (66)
Reasons for dropout			
Because of work	-	12 (12.5)	12 (06)
Parents didn't send	20(19.23)	20 (20.83)	40 (20)
To look after younger ones	-	04 (4.17)	04 (02)
Don't like to go to school	24 (23.08)	08 (8.33)	32 (16)
Migration	20(19.23)	16 (16.67)	36 (18)
Friends don't go	08(7.70)	-	08 (04)
Desire for attend school if arranged			
Yes	29 (27.88)	28(29.17)	57(28.5)
No	43(41.35)	32(33.33)	75(37.5)

Percentages are given in brackets

Future aspiration :

The child ragpickers were found to be ambitious in nature (Table 7). A significant variation was observed in the selection of profession by male and female respondents. Male

respondents showed more interest in opting for skill oriented jobs than female respondents. Of the total sample, 17.5 per cent reported that they would prefer their parent's profession (labouring), while 12.5 per cent (only male respondents) showed their interest in becoming mason as they believed that it was more respectable job than labourers. However, 10 per cent male respondents showed their interest in being employed at shops while 8 per cent female respondents showed their interest in working as a domestic helper. On the other hand, 8.5 per cent believed that factories proved to be best option for their employment. In the sample, some children (1.5%) were found to be artistic in nature as they preferred to work as painter. Few of them (5.5%) (only male respondents) wished to work as mechanic. Somehow, farming was found to be the least attracted profession for child ragpickers while 3.5 per cent were in the dilemma of which profession was most suitable for them. However, 30 per cent believed in their destiny for the kind of employment they would land up in future.

Table 7 : Future aspiration of child ragpickers

No. of individuals	Male	Female	Total
Aim	104	96	200
Mason	25 (24.03)	-	25 (12.5)
Labourer	03 (2.88)	32 (33.33)	35 (17.5)
Farmer	05 (4.81)	-	05 (2.5)
Painter	03 (2.88)	-	03 (1.5)
Mechanic	11 (10.58)	-	11(5.5)
Factory worker	17 (16)	-	17 (8.5)
Work on shops	21 (20.19)	-	21 (10.5)
Domestic helper	-	16 (16.67)	16 (08)
To do any job	07 (6.73)	-	07 (3.5)
Don't know	12 (11.54)	48 (50)	60(30)

Percentages are given in parentheses

Conclusion :

The results showed that majority (38%) of child ragpickers were in the age group of 12-14 years. Literacy level among child ragpickers was found to be very low. Most of these children (36%) had attended only pre-nursery classes and later on had left the educational system. A study conducted by Sexena (2006) recorded illiteracy among 90 per cent of child ragpickers in Jaipur while Sekar (2005) in his study reported 71.68 per cent ragpicker children were illiterate in Noida, New Delhi. In the current study, most (72%) of ragpickers showed their liking for attending school as they felt education is necessary to all for learning reading and writing

skills. The sample children were fairly aware of the benefits of education. Though most of the children did not attend any type of schooling but still they have positive attitude towards education. Perceptions about the education by child ragpickers included that the education would improve their insights and that the knowledge and skills would make a person become more appreciated. Mukherjee (2003) in her study reported that 41 per cent child ragpickers could read and write in Kathmandu and were well aware of the benefits of education. In the present study, majority (66%) of child ragpickers were found to be school drop-out. Similar results were noted by Lieten (2010) who also reported that 18 per cent drop out children ended up being ragpickers in Cusco (Peru). At the time of investigation, 20 per cent children were found to be attending schools. These children used to work during pre-school hours or post school hours. As far as their future aspiration is concerned majority (17.5%) of them would like to join their parent's profession that is, labouring. In the sample children the vision for their future extended only up to semi-skilled work. Perhaps the reasons were a high level of illiteracy and experience of life's hardships at a tender age which put constraint on the extent of aspiration for their future. A study (Tiwari, 2006) in Delhi too, concluded the same.

Authors' affiliations:

SARIKA MANHAS, P.G. Department of Home Science, University of Jammu, JAMMU (J&K) INDIA

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