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# Is Rural Child Labour Declining in India?

by  
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### **Abstract**

This paper will look at the patterns of child work, schooling and 'idleness' across the major states of India and over two years - 1993 and 2004. We analyse two rounds of the NSS dataset to see whether the patterns of schooling and child work have changed over this period or not. The analysis concentrates on the rural sector and finds that the proportion of children in work has increased between 1993 and 2004. While current attendance at school has increased, the proportion of children whose primary activity is schooling has decreased. We hypothesise that this may be because, in a growing economy, there are more opportunities for employment and therefore a larger number of children are likely to combine work and schooling.

## **Is Rural Child Labour Declining in India?**

The 1990s have been a period of considerable growth in India, with the overall economy growing at a rate of 7.25% per annum in the mid-1990s and at 6.5% at the end of the 1990s (Callen et al, 2001). There is a large literature relating to the pro-poorness or otherwise of this growth (Ferro et al, 2002; Datt and Ravallion, 1999). Much of the India-Shining rhetoric that occupied centre-stage in the 2004 elections related at least partly to this growth performance. Having said this, the defeat of the Bharatiya Janata Party at these elections is also said to be related to the economic and social inequities that this growth failed to address and that the slogan glossed over. While certain parts of India may have been 'shining', there were significant sections that were not.

In the context of such growth, it would be useful to consider what has been happening to child labour and schooling in India. As has often been argued, schooling is central to the inter-generational transmission (or otherwise) of poverty and child labour that might detract from such schooling would create long term problems for poverty and equity targets. In this paper, therefore, we consider whether child work in India has decreased as one might expect, given the growth.

### **Background**

The Indian Government has long hoped that as employment and incomes increase, the poor would no longer need to send their children to work. Alternatively, changes in technology would decrease the demand for unskilled workers and therefore increase incentives for parents to send children to school (Weiner, 1991, p.13). This view was confirmed by theoretical models like that of Hazan and Berdugo (2002), which show that in the early stages of development, the economy is in a 'development trap' in which child labour is abundant, fertility is high and output per capita is low. With technological progress, adult wages increase relative to child wages and the resultant income and substitution effects would induce parents to send children to school instead of work and therefore also to decrease the number of children they have. This leads to further economic growth and further decreases in child work. Child labour figures for India (Chaudhri, 1998) between 1961 to 1991, confirm this expectation:

male child workers decreased from 14.6% of boys in 1961 to 5.7% in 1991, while for girls, the decline was from 10.6% to 5.1%.

However, recent studies on child work in India (Kambhampati and Rajan, 2006; Swaminathan, 1998) have found that, contrary to expectations, growth has actually increased rather than decreased child labour. Clearly if the impact of growth on both the demand for and supply of child workers is taken into account, then there is no reason to assume that child work will decrease with growth. While growth may increase incomes and therefore decrease the supply of child workers, it is also likely to increase employment and therefore the demand for child workers at least in the short run. Over time, sustained growth could alter the pattern of employment in favour of more skilled workers but this could take time.

The historical literature, particularly relating to the Industrial Revolution in the UK, reflects this. It is accepted that 'the early phase of industrialisation, during the 18th and 19th centuries, brought an increased reliance on child labour' (Heywood, 1988; p.132). Of course, history has also revealed that this trend was later reversed. However, the exact timing and causes of this reversal are hotly debated. Horrell and Humphries (1995) suggest that since children worked in those families where the father's wages were increasing, they must have been working where there were opportunities for such employment. Opportunities to employ children increased, at least initially, because 'women and children are rendered more useful, and the latter more early useful, by manufacturing establishments, than they otherwise would be,' (Alexander Hamilton quoted in Heywood, 1988: p.129). In fact, Horrell and Humphries (1995) argue that in the initial stages of growth, families were often constrained to supply less child labour than they considered optimal. Growth loosened such constraints. Over time, however, an increase in adult wages and living standards, the success of regulation (e.g. the Factory Acts), compulsory schooling, income growth and other factors all helped to decrease child labour in Britain.

Swaminathan (1998) found that growth was associated with an increase in child labour in Gujarat. Torres (2003) found that while per capita GDP was negatively correlated with child labour there was no correlation between growth performance and changes in child labour. Kambhampati and Rajan (2005) found evidence of a

quadratic relationship between the child labour and regional economic growth in India in 1993. They found, for example, that while Bihar and Kerala had similarly low levels of child work, in Kerala this was accompanied by much higher levels of child schooling. Kak (2004) tried to explain the 'persistence of child labour in a period when unemployment levels for adult workers are increasing' through labour market segmentation. He argued that the demand for children in the labour market occurs not because of labour shortages but because the labour market is segmented by caste, gender and class divisions 'which provide distinct spheres for participation of children in the labour force' (Kak, 2004, p.46). Edmonds and Pavcnik (2002) considering the impact of trade liberalisation on child labour in Vietnam, found large reductions in child labour associated with increases in the relative price of rice, the major component of Vietnam's exports.

Further evidence is provided by Cigno and Rosati (2002) analysing the NCAER data for 1994. They found that while about 10% of children were working and 61% were in school, 4% both worked and studied. Analysing the impact of income on child work, they found that increases in income over the first three income quintiles had very little impact on child work figures, which hovered around 12%. It required an increase in income to the 4th quintile for child work to decrease. Thus, this study seems to indicate that growth would only have an impact on the supply of child workers if it increased incomes significantly. Commensurate with this result, they find that in the 1st three quintiles, the proportion of children who both work and study increases for the first three quintiles and only decreases after the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile.

In this paper, we analyse the impact that changing economic conditions may have had on child time allocation in India. We consider the number of children who are working as also the numbers of children who are going to school, doing domestic chores and doing nothing across Indian states. The trends between 1993 and 2004 will be considered using the NSS data.

## **The Data and Variables**

The data used in this paper is from the National Sample Survey of India (NSS) and relies on two rounds - 1993 and 2004. This provides us with a period of about 10 years across which to consider the impact that changes in economic conditions might have had on child work. The data for 1993 are from the 50<sup>th</sup> Round of the survey and the data for 2004 are from the 61<sup>st</sup> Round. The dataset is large and complex and includes socio-economic information for individuals and households across all the states and Union Territories in India. Since these rounds of the survey were focussed on employment issues, we have detailed information on the economic activity of members of each of the households in the survey. The dataset thus provides us with exhaustive information on the work and schooling status of children in these households.

We restrict our analysis to the rural sector. In 1993, the data covered 356,352 individuals belonging to 69,231 rural households across all the states and Union Territories in India. The 2004 data has information on 461,065 individuals in the rural sector. We used this data to calculate within-sample average levels of child work, schooling and idleness in each state in the two time periods. For this purpose, we restrict our sample to children between 5 and 15 years of age. Since it is possible that the trends vary for boys and girls, we analyse them separately.

To identify the activities being undertaken by each child, we consider two variables in the dataset. These are *Usual Principal Activity Status* which indicates the main activity that the person is engaged in. According to the NSS, the usual activity status relates to the activity status of a person during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. The activity status in which a person spent more time during the year preceding the date of survey is the one that is considered to be the primary activity status of the person<sup>1</sup>. We also consider the *Usual Subsidiary Activity*

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<sup>1</sup> The process by which activity status is determined is sequential. Thus, persons are first judged as belonging to the labour force or not, and then those persons adjudged as belonging to the labour force are classified as either 'working' or 'not working but seeking and/or available for work'. Again, within the broad activity status so determined, the detailed activity status category of a person pursuing more than one activity is determined on the basis of the time spent on that activity.

*Status* of the child. This variable indicates whether children are doing more than one activity. A person whose principal usual status is determined on the basis of the major time criterion may also have pursued some other economic activity for 30 days or more during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. This is identified as the secondary activity of the person. In case of multiple subsidiary economic activities, the major activity and status based on the time spent criterion are considered.

### Trends in Activity Status

**Table 1: Activity Status Codes in 1993 and 2004**

Status Code		1993		2004	
		Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
11	worked in household enterprise as own account worker	746	0.54	19,815	11.86
12	worked in household enterprise as employer	1	0	608	0.36
21	unpaid family worker	2,947	2.14	10,584	6.34
31	regular salaried/wage employee	343	0.25	8,737	5.23
41	casual labour in public works	13	0.01	141	0.08
51	Casual labour in other work	1,976	1.43	11,953	7.16
81	did not work but looking for work	95	0.07	1,269	0.76
91	attending education institutions	63,461	46	65,022	38.93
92	domestic duties	2,596	1.88	14,696	8.8
93	domestic duties + free collection of firewood, roots, vegetables etc.	2,489	1.8	11,498	6.88
94	rentiers, pensioners etc.	11	0.01	876	0.52
95	disabled	229	0.17	1,005	0.6
96		10	0.01		
97	others	25,548	18.52	9,185	5.5
99	(not defined)	37,503	27.18	11,631	6.96
Total		137,968	100	167,020	100

Source: Calculated from National Sample Survey, 1993 and 2004.

Table 1 provides details regarding the number and proportion of children in each activity status code in 1993 and 2004. The table classifies children based on their

Usual Principal Activity Status into 12 separate status codes: status codes 11, 12, 21, 31, 41 and 51 are included as child work codes; status code 91 identified children who were primarily going to school and status codes 92 and 93 identified children primarily engaged in household chores. Codes 81, 94, 95 and 97 were included as children doing 'nothing'.

Turning to consider changes between 1993 and 2004, we find that while less than 1% of children worked in household enterprises as own account workers in 1993, this figure increased to almost 12% by 2004. Similarly, whereas 2% of children worked as unpaid family labour in 1993, the figure had increased to 6% by 2004; less than 0.5% of children were regular, salaried workers in 1993 whereas more than 5% were in this category by 2004. Finally, while 1.5% was in casual work in 1993, this had increased to 7.2% by 2004. Thus, the figures indicate that child work across all activity types had increased between 1993 and 2004. The table also reveals that, according to this variable, there is a significant decline in the proportion of children attending educational institutions (from 46% to 29%) and an increase in the number of children doing domestic duties in this period.

**Table 2: Activities undertaken by girls in rural India: 1993 and 2004.**

	1993					2004				
	Work	School	Chores	None	Schwrk*	Work	school	chores	none	Schwrk
Andhra	8.85	57.79	11.46	21.90	0.34	34.20	49.87	9.94	6.00	16.29
Arunachal	4.92	58.37	6.76	29.95	0.61	39.16	40.96	9.49	10.39	2.20
Assam	0.95	73.59	5.04	20.42	0.60	23.81	50.09	19.40	6.70	21.07
Bihar	1.04	43.56	14.82	40.59	0.02	19.74	38.55	23.37	18.35	14.32
Gujarat	1.80	60.98	15.19	22.03	0.50	27.92	43.65	20.57	7.87	20.83
Haryana	0.50	67.63	10.83	21.03	0.38	22.52	45.32	21.53	10.63	23.61
Himachal	5.37	82.04	2.99	9.59	12.74	33.56	51.20	8.95	6.28	29.00
J&K	4.30	67.88	11.09	16.72	0.99	24.46	46.23	22.00	7.31	29.23
Karnataka	5.90	67.30	11.81	14.99	1.18	33.54	46.24	13.25	6.97	13.87
Kerala	0.52	94.33	1.57	3.58	0.15	18.09	51.43	19.07	11.41	16.87
Madhya	4.18	47.35	12.56	35.91	0.71	30.66	44.32	14.73	10.29	14.90
Maharastra	3.39	76.56	6.47	13.58	0.55	29.86	49.94	12.29	7.92	17.52



Manipur	1.09	85.99	1.90	11.02	0.95	31.90	46.01	16.13	5.96	20.07
Meghalaya	3.99	69.32	7.63	19.06	1.56	42.47	48.10	4.04	5.39	13.34
Mizoram	3.81	87.54	0.00	8.65	0.69	41.57	45.93	10.67	1.83	5.62
Nagaland	0.97	91.73	1.70	5.60	0.00	36.08	53.09	7.41	3.43	38.41
Orissa	3.31	58.79	12.05	25.85	0.30	27.84	41.11	19.78	11.27	18.03
Punjab	0.24	72.25	12.70	14.81	0.08	19.00	42.49	29.82	8.68	25.34
Rajasthan	15.88	35.30	14.63	34.20	0.67	33.74	40.16	16.26	9.84	22.06
Sikkim	2.03	85.77	5.69	6.50	0.00	36.46	49.56	10.44	3.54	19.29
T Nadu	6.36	79.15	7.58	6.91	0.67	29.70	54.29	11.48	4.54	13.32
Tripura	1.31	81.36	4.54	12.78	0.00	22.07	47.60	22.32	8.01	5.43
Uttar	2.28	48.96	17.49	31.28	0.44	25.13	41.65	22.46	10.76	22.08
W Bengal	1.85	63.83	10.39	23.93	0.35	22.41	41.33	26.34	9.92	16.38

\*Schwrk includes children who were primarily going to school but whose subsidiary activity was work.

Source: Calculated from National Sample Survey, 1993 and 2004.

Table 2 analyses child work and schooling patterns for girls across states in India. Between 1993 and 2004, the proportion of girls working had increased significantly across almost all states. Thus, whereas 2.28% of girls worked in UP in 1993, the figure had increased to 25.13% by 2004. Similar increases are seen in West Bengal, Andhra and many other states. By 2004, the North Eastern states had more than 30% of girls in work and in some states (like Meghalaya and Mizoram), the proportion was above 40%. Kerala, Bihar and Punjab had the smallest proportions of girls working in 2004, while in 1993, it was the states of Haryana, Punjab and Kerala that had the smallest proportion of girls in work.

The figures in the table also indicate that the proportion of girls going to school has decreased. In Andhra, the decline was from 58% to 50%, whereas in Bihar it decreased from 44% to 39% and in Tamil Nadu from 79% to 54%. Overall, these figures indicate a decline in schooling amongst girls across India. Having said this, the table does indicate that there is an increase in the proportion of girls involved both in schooling and in work. Thus, whereas in most states (except Himachal Pradesh), the

proportion of girls working and going to school was below 1% in 1993, it had increased to above 10% (and in many cases above 20%) by 2004.

Another significant change is the decline in the proportion of children ‘doing nothing’ between 1993 and 2004. In general, the proportion of girls doing nothing was lowest in the North Eastern states and in Kerala and Tamil Nadu in 1993. By 2004, the proportion of children doing nothing was generally lower. This might indicate that there is greater precision in the way in which data is being collected.

**Table 3: Activities undertaken by boys: 1993 and 2004.**

State_name	1993					2004				
	Work	School	chores	none	Schwrk*	Work	School	Chores	None	Schwrk*
Andhra	11.95	73.69	0.41	13.96	1.35	34.20	49.57	10.05	6.18	14.95
Arunachal	3.81	66.57	5.64	23.98	0.42	36.75	43.87	9.35	10.02	2.48
Assam	2.87	78.28	0.39	18.46	1.30	27.52	46.89	19.60	5.99	18.55
Bihar	3.40	64.35	1.82	30.43	0.31	21.34	41.32	22.50	14.85	14.85
Gujarat	4.06	77.20	0.33	18.41	0.52	28.97	47.04	18.36	5.63	17.19
Haryana	2.19	83.17	0.11	14.54	0.33	25.18	44.42	21.22	9.18	22.17
Himachal	2.29	91.31	0.24	6.16	15.48	37.94	48.26	8.46	5.35	26.95
J&K	5.12	82.68	0.30	11.90	2.71	24.89	45.93	23.45	5.73	29.19
Karnataka	8.16	78.39	0.63	12.82	2.82	31.93	47.66	13.03	7.38	14.48
Kerala	0.44	94.04	0.15	5.37	0.07	19.07	49.38	19.14	12.42	20.31
M P	7.88	66.07	0.93	25.12	2.08	30.44	43.21	15.41	10.93	13.09
Maharastra	3.66	86.18	0.11	10.06	1.16	34.13	49.28	9.96	6.63	17.43
Manipur	0.69	88.38	0.14	10.79	1.24	29.98	48.85	16.72	4.45	22.09
Meghalaya	5.43	72.50	2.72	19.35	1.02	45.39	47.47	3.23	3.92	15.21
Mizoram	4.50	81.68	0.60	13.21	0.90	43.78	41.57	10.50	4.14	3.04
Nagaland	1.17	92.31	0.00	6.53	0.47	38.69	51.75	6.41	3.15	35.31
Orissa	7.46	71.22	0.79	20.53	0.60	29.03	39.00	21.95	10.02	16.01
Punjab	4.36	83.04	0.14	12.46	0.21	21.29	46.32	26.10	6.29	28.99
Rajasthan	8.14	74.25	0.43	17.18	2.26	33.13	42.67	15.89	8.31	23.24
Sikkim	2.11	90.49	0.70	6.69	0.35	38.64	50.16	7.14	4.06	18.02

T Nadu	5.24	86.87	0.28	7.62	0.88	28.89	55.31	11.54	4.26	11.48
Tripura	2.10	83.80	0.30	13.80	0.20	22.32	45.37	23.79	8.53	5.47
U P	4.98	72.10	0.68	22.25	1.91	25.42	43.75	20.98	9.85	23.15
W Bengal	4.87	72.10	0.58	22.45	1.16	22.69	41.11	26.29	9.92	16.47

\*Schwrk includes children who were primarily going to school but whose subsidiary activity was work.

Source: Calculated from National Sample Survey, 1993 and 2004.

A similar pattern of activities is visible for boys in Table 3, with child work having increased during this decade, child schooling figures (by this measure) having decreased and the proportion of children doing nothing having decreased. As with girls, the proportion of boys who are both working and going to school has increased during this period.

Comparing figures across Tables 2 and 3, we find that in 1993, more boys went to school and worked than girls: 74% of boys went to school in 1993 in the state of Andhra Pradesh and only about 58% of girls. This was true in all the states in this year. By 2004, the difference had narrowed, so that about 50% of both boys and girls were seen to be primarily engaged in school in Andhra Pradesh, for instance. In fact, in many states, especially the North Eastern states (Assam, HP, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura) more girls went to school in 2004.

Looking across states, the tables indicate that the highest proportion (between 36% and 46%) of working children in 2004 was in the North East states of Arunachal, Meghalaya and Mizoram. This region also has the highest proportion of children (52% of boys and 53% of girls) in school. The highest proportion of boys and girls doing chores is in Punjab (26% for boys and 29% for girls), Bihar (22% for boys and 23% for girls), Bengal, UP and Tripura. The largest proportion of children doing nothing is in Bihar with 15% of boys and 18% of girls doing nothing in this state. Nagaland has the highest proportion of children (38% of girls and 35% of boys) going to school and also working (SCHWORK). Thus, the North East seems to be the region where there is more work and more schooling. The state of Bihar continues to lag behind in having a very high proportion of children doing nothing.

These results are surprising and possibly worrying. The decade of the 1990s has been associated with significant growth in the Indian economy. However, our tables seem to indicate that this decade has also seen an increase in child work and a decrease in child schooling – contrary to expectations. It would be useful to consider whether this is a problem and if so, to consider the nature of the problem.

Before we draw any policy conclusions from these patterns, however, we need to consider whether these patterns are reliable. First, it is possible that the patterns might arise because there is something wrong in the data either for 1993 or for 2004. This seems unlikely because as already indicated the trends identified in the 1993 data (Kambhampati and Rajan, 2006) also indicated that faster growing states would (at least up to a point) experience an increase in child work. Second, it is possible that the definition of the variables has changed over these years within the data. Again, this does not seem to be the case. Table 1 indicates the breakdown of the Usual Principal Activity Status variable for both 1993 and 2004. There does not seem to be a significant difference in the way each sub-category within activity status is defined. Within this, chores for instance (possibly the most nebulous category) continue to include both those who (a) attended domestic duties only and (b) attended domestic duties and were also engaged in the free collection of goods, tailoring, weaving etc. for household use. Third, it is possible that with experience, responses are more precise. Our finding that the proportion of children ‘doing nothing’ has decreased significantly, for instance, may well arise from the fact that there is greater precision in the way in which data is being collected. Thus, by 2004 parents are better able to distinguish between children working and those who are idle or possibly the NSS itself is better able to categorise children in the working and looking for work categories than it was able to do in 1993. We need to keep this in mind in interpreting our findings. Finally, it is possible that these figures reveal real trends and if this is accepted then clearly the policy scenario with regard to child work has changed considerably in the last decade or so.

### **Implications of Increased Child Work**

We began by arguing that one of the major problems (both static and inter-generational) that child work poses is that children who work miss out on schooling. Given this, it would be useful to consider what the above results imply for child schooling. The Principal Activity Status trends indicate that a smaller proportion of children go primarily to school in 2004 than in 1993. Whether we worry about this or not will depend upon two factors. First, it will depend upon whether this implies that fewer children are being educated in 2004 than in 1993. Second, it will depend upon whether we think child work is intrinsically bad, either because of occupational hazards or because it reduces child leisure or because it worsens performance in school. For the present, we will ignore the second issue and will concentrate on the first.

**Table 4: The Schooling of Children in India: Comparing the status and attendance variables**

State_name	1993		2004		1993		2004	
	Boys	Boys	Boys	Boys	Girls	Girls	Girls	Girls
	school	attendance	school	attendance	school	attendance	school	Attendance
Andhra	73.69	67.95	49.57	98.58	57.79	52.75	49.87	98.73
Ar.P.	66.57	64.74	43.87	93.34	58.37	57.67	40.96	94.53
Assam	78.28	76.82	46.89	96.53	73.59	72.95	50.09	96.09
Bihar	64.35	61.49	41.32	92.37	43.56	42.21	38.55	91.75
Gujarat	77.20	73.18	47.04	96.51	60.98	59.16	43.65	96.77
Haryana	83.17	81.70	44.42	97.44	67.63	67.00	45.32	97.28
HP	91.31	90.72	48.26	98.17	82.04	81.73	51.20	97.70
J&K	82.68	82.63	45.93	97.21	67.88	67.88	46.23	95.04
Karnataka	78.39	73.01	47.66	96.31	67.30	63.27	46.24	97.60
Kerala	94.04	89.90	49.38	99.09	94.33	90.71	51.43	98.46
Madhya P	66.07	63.26	43.21	94.17	47.35	46.19	44.32	93.40
Maharastra	86.18	82.90	49.28	96.42	76.56	73.69	49.94	97.56
Manipur	88.38	88.40	48.85	96.83	85.99	85.03	46.01	97.34
Meghalaya	72.50	71.62	47.47	96.86	69.32	68.86	48.10	96.61
Mizoram	81.68	79.88	41.57	97.60	87.54	85.47	45.93	98.39
Nagaland	92.31	93.01	51.75	97.36	91.73	90.27	53.09	97.69

Orissa	71.22	67.81	39.00	95.55	58.79	56.02	41.11	96.42
Punjab	83.04	79.73	46.32	98.47	72.25	71.52	42.49	98.33
Rajasthan	74.25	69.69	42.67	96.03	35.30	33.81	40.16	94.42
Sikkim	90.49	89.79	50.16	98.33	85.77	86.18	49.56	99.34
T Nadu	86.87	81.68	55.31	99.71	79.15	72.73	54.29	99.30
Tripura	83.80	84.16	45.37	96.10	81.36	81.57	47.60	96.10
U P	72.10	69.93	43.75	95.02	48.96	48.40	41.65	94.15
W Bengal	72.10	69.34	41.11	96.62	63.83	62.41	41.33	96.50

\* School indicates schooling obtained from the Principal Usual Activity Status variable and attendance indicates schooling from the current attendance variable.

Source: Calculated from National Sample Survey, 1993 and 2004.

To consider the first issue, we compare figures on the schooling status of children (as obtained from the Principal Activity Status of children) and child school attendance (a separate variable within the NSS). Table 4 indicates that in 1993, the proportion of children who attended school according to the two indicators was very similar. Thus, whereas 72% of boys were engaged in schooling in West Bengal (according to the activity status variable), 69% of boys attended school (according to the current attendance variable) in 1993. There were similarly small differences in these two figures for most of the other states. By 2004, however, the two variables had diverged quite significantly with the activity status variable indicating lower levels of schooling than the current attendance variable. The difference for both boys and girls was between 40-50% in West Bengal, UP and Tamil Nadu, for instance.

Further, while between 61-90% (across different states) attended school in 1993, this increased to above 92% in *all* states by 2004, according to the current attendance variable. This happened at the same time as the proportion of children whose primary activity was schooling declined. It is hard to understand what might have caused this divergence.

One possible explanation might be that while more children are attending school, fewer amongst them are concentrating on school alone. Thus, more children might be studying part-time or through postal tuition, for instance. This implies that though

fewer children are occupied full-time in school, most children are managing to be educated in some way, because in a growing economy, employment opportunities increase. Poorer children cannot afford to ignore these opportunities but they are also aware of the benefits of education and so multi-tasking increases. Table 5 on the intensity of activity of children analyses this issue further.

The table indicates the time spent by children in the primary activity that they are engaged in. We note that 77.5% of children who attended educational institutions in 2004 did so full-time. This leaves approximately 22% of children who did less than the full week in school. In fact, about 14% of children went to school for less than half the week (less than 3.5), so that they could be spending an equal amount of time doing some other activity. Between 70 - 75% of working children (own account workers, salaried workers or casual workers) worked full-time. However, this still leaves about 25% of children who do not work the full week and who may therefore also be attending school or doing some other activities. Thus, the gap between the number of children who seem to be going to school according to the Usual Activity Status variable and the current attendance variable may well be caused by this.

**Table 5: Intensity of Activity of Children in Different Activities: 2004**

No. of Days in activity	Own Account Worker	Employer	Unpaid Family Worker	Regular Wage Employee	Casual Labour: public works	Casual labour: other work	Looking for Work	Education	Domestic Duties	Domestic Duties + other	Rentiers etc.	Disabled	Others	undefined	Total
Activity	11	12	21	31	41	51	81	91	92	93	94	95	97	99	
0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0.5	0.10	0.00	0.09	0.03	1.01	0.11	0.14	0.08	0.06	0.20	0.21	0.00	0.08	0.07	0.09
1.0	1.98	1.53	2.32	1.43	2.02	3.14	2.22	1.88	1.49	1.26	1.06	1.18	1.40	1.54	1.88
1.5	0.64	0.76	1.04	0.34	1.01	0.38	0.42	0.57	0.31	0.62	0.00	0.59	0.54	0.47	0.57
2.0	3.61	3.56	4.32	2.51	7.07	6.60	2.91	3.25	2.51	3.31	2.33	3.38	3.11	2.97	3.55
2.5	0.71	1.27	0.89	0.26	0.00	0.43	0.28	0.56	0.37	0.77	0.00	0.74	0.56	0.56	0.59
3.0	2.88	2.54	4.09	1.94	4.04	7.52	3.88	2.90	2.30	2.76	1.69	3.24	2.96	3.07	3.30
3.5	6.56	6.87	7.01	4.28	6.06	3.57	5.96	5.72	4.29	9.18	4.23	5.59	4.74	4.83	5.75
4.0	2.74	2.04	3.48	1.61	1.01	6.76	3.74	2.72	2.11	2.37	1.06	2.65	3.04	3.04	3.04
4.5	0.55	0.51	0.74	0.39	0.00	0.35	0.14	0.40	0.43	0.44	0.63	0.00	0.39	0.46	0.45
5.0	2.61	2.54	3.24	2.00	3.03	5.20	2.35	2.68	2.10	2.28	1.06	2.21	2.39	2.42	2.78
5.5	0.41	0.51	0.61	0.23	0.00	0.19	0.14	0.33	0.36	0.33	0.42	0.15	0.26	0.44	0.35
6.0	1.54	2.04	1.65	1.71	3.03	2.11	1.52	1.36	1.14	1.08	0.85	0.74	0.92	1.19	1.40
6.5	0.07	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.05	0.05
7.0	75.60	75.83	70.48	83.28	71.72	63.59	76.32	77.51	82.47	75.33	86.47	79.56	79.49	78.88	76.21
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Calculated from National Sample Survey, 2004.



It is also possible that while children claim to be attending school (to benefit from free school meals and other subsidies), their attendance is sporadic and irregular and they are primarily working. With schools not being properly staffed (Dreze and Gazdar, 1996), the gap between those enrolled and those actually attending school is less obvious.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has looked at the patterns of child work, schooling and 'idleness' across all the states of India between 1993 and 2004. We analysed two rounds of NSS data to see whether patterns of schooling and child work have changed over this decade. The analysis concentrates on the rural sector and finds that the proportion of children in work has increased between 1993 and 2004. While current attendance at school has also increased, the proportion of children whose primary activity is schooling has decreased. We hypothesise that this may be because, in a growing economy, there are more opportunities for employment and therefore a larger number of children are likely to combine work and schooling.

It is hard to ignore the possibility that some at least of these trends might be caused by variations in the way in which the data is collected by the NSS. There is however nothing in the documentation that provides any clues regarding this. It is unlikely however, for reasons discussed above, that the trends are entirely an artefact of this. If the trends indicated in this paper are even partially genuine, then policy makers would have to reconsider their stance with regard to child work. Clearly, child work would still be a problem as far as the child's performance in school is concerned. Child work would also be problematic from a health and safety point of view and from the point of view of children's leisure time. However, the primary problem that has generally been identified against child work - the child's inability to attend school - may no longer hold. It has long been thought that in the context of poverty, preventing children from working may not be feasible. Instead, new ways of allowing families to access schooling while children work are required. The current results may well indicate that this is beginning to happen in India.

Finally, it is possible that the results arise because poor parents are behaving rationally – accessing school-related benefits while also allowing their children to work. If this is the case, then a stronger regulatory mechanism to keep track of children while in school and also to incentivise attendance rather than enrolment might well become necessary.

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