CHAPTER - IV

MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS OF THE RESPONDENTS

A total of 446 school dropout children were interviewed from the Thirukovilur taluk, Villupuram district and Thandarampettaluk, Tiruvannamalai. Around 62% were male respondents and 38% were female respondents. The representation of the gender was not equal; comparatively, the representation of female was lower than the male. This was mainly due to two reasons, the place of employment and marital status. As the girls were mostly employed in places where accommodation was offered, their return to the native village was not frequent, and so accessibility to the respondents was limited. The other reason was marital status; those who got married were either not easy to be tracked due to the sensitive nature of the issue of child marriage, or were not willing to participate in the study.

The social group representation in both the districts were almost the same, with a little more than three-fifths (60%) of the respondents belonging to SC community, and close to two-fifths (40%) of the respondents belonging to MBC community.

In both the districts, close to half of the total interviewed participants said they were currently working. The major occupation was non-agriculture wage labour. The female respondents were engaged in salaried occupation, whereas most of the male respondents were engaged in non-agriculture wage labour. The key reason for this was that the girl children were mostly employed in the mills and handlooms for salaried work, and the males were engaged in the locally available jobs or had migrated to cities. Male respondents had predominantly migrated to cities such as Bangalore and Chennai, and were involved in non-agriculture wage labour. The place of migration was determined by the precedence of
migration either by the family or friends and neighbours. With their support, these male respondents migrated. This shows the restriction of mobility for females compared to males. Due to safety concerns, the females were allowed to take employment only either in their native place or in a place where accommodation was offered by the employer.

4.2 ROLE OF HOUSEHOLD FACTORS

Migration of Parents

Nearly half of the respondents’ parents had migrated to other cities for livelihood due to a lack of livelihood options in their native places. They are mostly engaged as daily wage labourers. This indicates that the livelihood options in the native places are scarce.

One key observation to be made about the dropout children who belonged to migrated families is regarding the living place of the children. Nearly 63% of the children from migrated families were staying along with elders or relatives and, sometimes, on their own with the help of siblings. In such cases, the female siblings or the elder siblings would mostly take care of the other family members. Hence, whoever takes the responsibility of household had no time for school work due to high household work. This led to low academic performance and eventually to dropping out.

In the families where the parents had migrated for livelihood, around 18% of the respondents said that their parents’ migration was one of the key causes for their dropout. Some of the key reasons children stated during the interviews were the absence of parents at home leading to a lack of fulfilment of basic needs on a day to day basis. Then, if there was any abuse at school, the children had no one at home who could help them to seek redressal. Sometimes, when the teacher requests a meeting with the parents regarding any issue, and if the child fails to bring his/her parent, the child is punished and told not to come to school
without his/her parents. This led to a higher proportion of dropouts among migrated families. This indicates that migration of parents has a substantial effect on the education of children.

**Prevalence of Dropout and Child Labour in the Social Circle**

A little more than two-fifths of all respondents had at least one male sibling who dropped out in their family, and around two-fifths of all respondents also had a male sibling who had started to work before completing 18 years of age. If we analyse the prevalence of becoming a child labourer among the dropped out male siblings, a little more than four-fifths of dropped out male siblings became child labourers. This implies that dropping out and becoming child labourers were a common phenomenon in the community, and neither was considered shameful in the family or community. This indicates that the probability of turning towards child labour was high among the drop out children.

A little less than two-fifths of the SC respondents had a female sibling who dropped out, whereas it was a little less than one-third for the MBC respondents. A difference of nearly 18 percentage points was noticed for female sibling dropout rates between SC and MBC community respondents. Likewise, for female sibling starting work below 18 years, about 18 percentage point difference was noticed between SC and MBC respondents. In the SC families, the percentage of female children dropping out as well as becoming child labourers was comparatively high. This could be interpreted as being because of the overall economic deprivation of the SC families being relatively high. Hence, female children belonging to SC community were highly vulnerable to dropping out and becoming child labourers than female children of MBC community.
Among the SC respondents, 34% were engaged in productive work while studying, whereas among the MBC respondents, it was 26%. Hence, prevalence of engaging in work while studying was marginally higher among SC respondents. A study which examined the effect of being a child labourer during the schooling period found that the impact of being a child labourer lowered the school attendance and academic performance of the children (Beegle, Dehejia and Gatti, 2004).

**Employment Status of Educated Family Member**

Out of family members who attained above higher secondary education (9%), a little less than three-fourths (72%) were either underemployed or unemployed; the scenario is almost same for those who completed till higher secondary. Higher the education, lesser the employability; and it is statistically significant (p<0.001). When educated persons get better employment, it reinforces and positively motivates the community towards education; on the other side, when the educated youth are not able find right employment with right wage, it could negatively reinforce the community’s perception of education.

**Role of Gender in Education Attainment**

The time required for academic work was not fulfilled for 46% of the female respondents. It was statistically significant (p<0.001) that there was a high discrepancy on the time spent for housework between male and female children, as well as fulfilment of time for school work. Overall, the burden of household work was high for female respondents, which affected the time spent for school work. Not having enough time for school work had a profound effect on academic performance.

The female children who performed well at the academics reported less parental support to continue higher education compared to males. An average of only 10% of male
respondents who passed in first class dropped out, whereas an average of 57% of female respondents who passed in first class and in all subjects dropped out due to lack of parental support. Among genders, across all age groups, the proportion of girls who were pulled out of school by the parents was high, and it was statistically significant (p<0.001) (Umarani, 2011). With this, it can be stated that the gender preference was highly prevalent among parents. There was partiality in the support given to male children among the parents.

Economic constraint was affecting both the gender education. But the frequency of dropping out due to economic constraints was marginally higher for female children, and it was statistically significant (p < 0.001). A difference of nearly 14 percentage points was observed between male and female respondents.

**Factor Analysis for Girl Child Education**

In order to find the interlink between the variables and also to know which ones are more significant in terms of education of each gender, the identified variables were analysed with the help of factor analysis. Principal component method was used for factor analysis to find the significant interlinks between variables for gender education. From the rotated matrix, it was found that lack of parents’ support (.718) got the highest value; next to it was the time spent for school work (.626), and next came economic constraint followed by household chores. So, from this, it can be said that lack of parental support was highly felt when there was lack of time for school work and high assignment of household work.

In the second factor, the variables which emerged as significant were time spent for household chores, fulfilment of school amenities, and parents’ migration. So, it can be said that when the parents migrate, the children are burdened with household chores, and also find it difficult to fulfil the required school amenities on a day to day basis. Another key
observation from the factors set is that in both the sets, the time spent for household chores was significant; this shows that irrespective of migration of parents, household work was high.

Figure 4.1: Inter Link of Key Variables in Gender Education

4.3 ROLE OF SCHOOL RELATED FACTORS

Distance and Location of the School

Key observations from the field and FGD regarding the travel mode was that public transport buses to interior villages were not frequent, and mostly, it was restricted to a single trip per day; also, the bus timing was not in line with the school time. Either the bus comes very early or late. So, accessing the school via public transport was hard for school children. As an alternate to this, local private buses were available but the government-sanctioned free
bus passes were not accepted. So, only those who could afford to pay for bus tickets used the bus services (private).

Transportation was an important factor behind the girls’ dropout. The dynamics was different for girls; the buses were mostly overcrowded and the girl children reported getting abused during their travel. If they opted to travel by bicycle as an alternative, the problem was that, unlike cities, in the rural areas, residences were not uniformly spread across, but was only in pockets. The path between one village to another was mostly surrounded either by fields or filled with bushes and shrubs; in both the cases, that portion was mostly secluded from human activity. So, the parents feared for two key reasons: one was related to safety concerns, and the other was a fear that the girl might indulge in love affairs. Distance was one of the major factors for girls to drop out.

Location of the school had a significant influence in peer socialization. Among the respondents who said that they had many peers from other social groups, nearly 61% were studied in schools located in common places. When the school was located near an upper caste village, only 29% had many peers from other social groups; and only 10% had peers from other social groups when the school was located near a colony. So, in both the cases, when the school was located either near a colony or an upper caste village, peer socialization across different social categories was less. Basically, when the child goes to a school which is located near their residence, their identity is well known; thus, the prevailing social distance between the different communities reflects on peer socialization. Whereas in a common place, they had more freedom of choices with regard to socialization, and the relevance of their social category may have been reduced because of being farther away from their village.
Perceived Peer Friendliness

Close to half of the respondents said that they did not have friendship with peers of other social groups (46%). Moreover, around one-fourth of them reported that they did not share a high level of friendship with peers from their community; they also rejected them. Peer socialization with other social groups was limited in the rural areas due to the prevailing social status differences among the communities. In such cases, if peers from the same group also reject the child, then the atmosphere in the school becomes unwelcoming. Keeping this in view, perceived peer friendliness among the same social group was cross tabulated with felt discomfort. Out of the respondents, about 50% said that they felt discomfort in going to school, who shared medium level and low level friendliness with the peers.

Chi square test was administered to find the relationship between the “Punishing attitude of the teacher and the caste of the respondent”. The $\chi^2$ value was highly significant ($p < 0.01$), therefore belongingness to a particular social group had a significant association with the punishing attitude of the teacher. Among all, respondents belonging to SC said that they were punished to a great extent at school. Thus, it can be said lower the caste, higher the punishment experienced.

Differences in the elevation to higher classes

It can be said that among the respondents who said they either failed in all subjects or were struggling to pass in two subjects, an average of 55% of them dropped out in middle school, and none were enrolled in the higher secondary level. In contrast, among the respondents who could either pass in first class or in all subjects, only an average of 23% dropped out in middle school, and an average of 24% reached higher secondary. So, academic performance was directly proportionate to the elevation to higher classes. Lower
the academic performances lower the chances of moving to higher classes. The low academic
performers dropped out by the time they reached secondary level of education.

A difference of nearly 18 percentage points was recorded between the SC and MBC
respondents under the category failed in all subjects. It is statistically significant that the
academic performance of the respondent was associated with the social group. Thus, it can be
said the elevation of classes among the SC was limited due to low academic performance.

4.4 ROLE OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PERCEIVED SCHOOL
ENVIRONMENT

Discomfort at School

Nearly 51% of the total respondents said that they felt discomfort in going to school.
Of all the reasons mentioned for discomfort at school, corporal punishment was stated as the
key reason with 90 responses, and next to that was unfriendly peers (65 responses) and
unsupportive teacher (35 responses). Another important reason mentioned was location,
distance, and mode of travel, which got 34 responses.

Perceived Teacher and Peer Support

73% of the respondents who failed said that they had been severely punished. During
the interviews, the children said that, for the same mistake, the punishment they received was
higher than what their peers received. Among the respondents who felt discomfort in school,
nearly 53% said that they were highly punished at school. Punishment received was linked
with academic performance; whoever performed less in academics reported high punishment,
and high punishment made it less desirable to go to school. The respondents who faced high
punishment at school had greater discomfort in going to school.
An average of 32% respondents who failed in all subjects and struggled to pass in two subjects said that they were frequently assigned tasks such as cleaning whereas, among those who passed in all and in first class, it was only 11%. The lower performing students were assigned heavy physical work compared to high performers.

The respondents who passed in first class said that the teachers were biased in the classroom, but personally did not experience any kind of discrimination. Close to two-fifths of the respondents said that they were not treated fairly by the teachers, and did not receive adequate help in the classroom process. Thus, it can be said that teachers were not showing equal support to all students.

Academic performance was one of the key determinants of the practice of discrimination at school. The association between academic performance and discrimination was statistically significant (p< 0.001). Hence, it can be inferred that lower the performance, higher the felt discrimination. Peer support was related to the academic performance. The respondents who performed well in academics enjoyed positive peer relationship than the others, and the association was statistically significant (p< 0.001).

When the academic performance was better, the dropout reason mentioned was not majorly due to unfriendly peers or teachers ;instead, parents were one of the important reasons for dropout. In contrast, among the low academic performers, it was the peers and teachers had greater influence compared to parents in dropping out. The association between teacher’s academic help and felt support were statistically significant (p< 0.001).

**Factor Analysis for Influence of Felt Comfortness in going to School**

In order to find the interlink between the variables and also to know which ones are more significant in felt discomfort in going to school, the identified variables were analysed with the help of factor analysis. From the rotated matrix, four factors emerged as significant.
In the first factor, opinion of teaching, teacher initiation to mingle with all, teachers’ approachability for clarifying doubts, and encouragement in classroom activities showed significant value. From this, it can be said that teachers’ felt academic support variables emerged as the important components in the felt comfort level of the respondents. In the next factor, unsupportive teacher, punishing attitude, and ridicule in class showed significant values. This means that unsupportiveness of the teacher was linked with abusive attitudes such as punishing and ridiculing by the teacher. Third factor has only two variables, in which discrimination and unfriendly peers emerged as significant. So, whoever among the respondents reported discrimination as the reason for felt discomfort in going to school, were mainly influenced by the behaviour of peers. To conclude, it can be said that teacher’s academic support was considered as a key component among the respondents for their perceived desire to go to school.

**Figure 4.2: Interlink of variables for reasons related to school factors**
4.5 SELF-ESTEEM OF THE RESPONDENTS

Both the districts exhibited almost similar trends of self-esteem level. Close to one-third of respondents in both the districts expressed a high level of self-esteem and an average of 46% of the respondents expressed a low level of self-esteem. Male respondents showed relatively better self-esteem than the female respondents. 35% of male respondents and 28% of female respondents felt high self-esteem. SC respondents expressed comparatively lower self-esteem than the MBC respondents. Among the SC respondents, nearly 53% had low self-esteem whereas among MBC, only 37% had low self-esteem.

Higher the discrimination felt at school, lower the self-esteem reported by the respondents. Among the respondents who were discriminated, 56% had low self-esteem and only 28% had high self-esteem. Among those who were not discriminated at school, only 34% had low self-esteem.

4.6 INFLUENCE OF FACTORS ON SOCIAL RELATEDNESS

Reason for Dropout

The key reasons stated by the respondents of both the districts did not have many differences, except for a few. Only the factors related to academic efficiency and peers have shown a noticeable difference. In both the districts, reasons related to household factors (35%) were the highest among all the reasons, and the next main reasons stated were school related (25%).

Differences in the Level of School Membership among the Respondents

A difference of close to 38% was reported in the low sense of membership among the members of SC and MBC communities. Therefore, it could be stated that respondents
belonging to SC community formed a higher percentage of those who reported a low sense of school membership.

Among the respondents who experienced unsupportive and abusive teachers, none had a high sense of school membership. This indicates that the felt supportiveness of the teacher had a great influence on the sense of school membership of the respondents.

**Effect of Discrimination Experienced on Sense of School Membership**

Highest responses given under areas of discrimination by SC respondents were caste name and connotations (77), treated with less respect (54), peers never mingle (46), discrimination in sharing and combining for lunch (45), and teasing and ridiculing (41).

The respondents belonging to the SC community reported high discrimination (62%), and little more than two-fifths of the respondents belonging to MBC community also reported discrimination at school. Though the respondents of both the communities expressed having experienced discrimination at school, SC respondents recorded relatively higher experiences of discrimination than MBC respondents.

The area of discrimination was distinct for both the social groups. For the MBC respondents, among the mentioned areas, teasing and ridiculing at school was highest (29 responses), and the next was treated with less respect (20 responses), whereas for SC respondents, it was caste name and connotations (77), followed by treated with less respect (54). The MBC respondents said that discrimination they faced was mainly related to their academic performance, whereas SC respondents said that the discrimination was mainly due to their caste. The person who was involved in discrimination was a significant factor in the sense of school membership. When the discrimination was from teachers and peers, the sense of school membership was low and it is statistically significant (p< 0.01).
Factor Analysis for Variables Linked with Sense of School Membership

Three factors emerged from the rotated matrix. The first factor gave a crucial understanding of the variables which played central roles in the sense of school membership. As an interesting factor, the academic competence and peer friendliness were not significant whereas the discrimination experienced and the person involved in the discrimination (.936) emerged as key variables of sense of school membership. In the second factor, it becomes evident that the punishing behaviour (.831) of the teacher is related to the academic competence (.642). This means that the discrimination experienced was not related to the academic competence of the respondents, and a more important aspect is the person who was involved in discrimination. Hence, it can be said that discrimination experienced at school has great influence on the felt sense of school membership of the respondents.

4.7 CORROBORATION OF THE THEORY AND FINDINGS OF STUDY

In the social identity theory, it is mentioned that ‘social identity’ is primarily derived from group membership. So, the status of the group decides the kind of social identity enjoyed by the individual. Being a member of any group influences the subsequent behaviour and attitudes of the person (Rivenburgh, 2000). The findings of the study corroborate the predictions of the theory. It became clear from the data analysis and inferences that the respondents from both the social groups of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Most Backward Communities (MBC) expressed difficulties faced in the school in relation to teacher and peer support, discrimination experienced, and sense of school membership, but the SC respondents faced significantly higher difficulties.

From the statistical inference, it was proved that the teacher’s punishing attitude has significant association with caste of the respondent (p < 0.01), and SC respondents faced
higher punishment than the MBC respondents. From the factor analysis, teachers’ felt academic support variables emerged as the important components in the felt comfort level of respondents. In the next factor, unsupportive teacher, punishing attitude, and ridicule in class have shown significant values. This means that the unsupportiveness of the teacher was linked with an abusive attitude, such as punishing and ridiculing of the student. There is a notable difference between the academic performances of SC and MBC groups, especially in the number of students to have passed in four subjects, and those who failed in all subjects, and it is statistically significant (p < 0.01). The academic competence has shown significant association with teacher’s academic support and peer support. Therefore, it can be said that the SC respondents felt higher discomfort in going to school.

A difference of close to 38% was reported between the low sense of memberships among SC and MBC communities. The kinds of persons who were involved in discrimination have significant association with the category of the social group of the respondents (p < 0.01). Among the SC respondents, around 28% said that they perceived discrimination from both the peers and teachers, whereas among the MBC respondents, it is only 13%. Further, more SC respondents (23%) have identified peers engaging in discrimination than MBC respondents. The MBC respondents said that the discrimination they faced was mainly due to academic performance, whereas SC respondents said that the discrimination was mainly due to caste. The person who was involved in the discrimination was significant in the sense of school membership. When the discrimination was from teachers and peers, then the sense of school membership was low, and it is statistically significant (p < 0.01).

In the sense of school membership, it was found that, more than academic competence, the discrimination experienced played a major role in the felt sense of school membership.
Among the respondents who said that they didn’t drop out because of low competence, nearly 62% had a low sense of school membership. This attracts attention on to the data, which shows that though they didn’t dropout due to low competence, they still had a low sense of school membership. The relationship between the sense of school membership and dropping out due to low competence was insignificant. Therefore, sense of school membership was independent of low academic performance. The same was reiterated by factor analysis.

As an interesting factor, the academic competence and peer friendliness were not significant whereas the discrimination experienced and the person involved in the discrimination (.936) emerged as key variables of sense of relatedness in the factor analysis. This means that discrimination experienced was not related to the academic competence of the respondents. Hence, it can be said that discrimination experienced at school has significant influence on the felt sense of school membership of the respondents.

Thus, it can be concluded that the person’s belongingness to a particular social group, irrespective of their academic competence, influenced teacher and peer support and friendliness. The school climate was more unwelcoming to the SC children compared to the others.

Felt or perceived teacher support and peer friendliness influenced the felt desire and comfortness to go to school. The kind of support given was determined by the social group. Therefore, the social group influences the perceived discrimination and support of the teachers and peers.
Figure 4.3: Factors Influences the Sense of School Membership

Figure 4.3 outlines the levels of influence of the various factors on sense of school membership. From the statistical inference, it can be said that the perceived discrimination and the person involved in the discrimination (.936) emerged as one of the key influential factors in the sense of school membership. It was clear from the analysis that the persons who were involved in discrimination have significant association with the category of social group of the respondents (p < 0.01). This indicates that the category of the social group has significant association with the perceived discrimination. Therefore, it can be concluded that sense of school membership was determined by the perceived discrimination at school, and the discrimination was determined by the category of social group. Thus, category of social group emerges as an influential factor in determining the discrimination and the support of teachers and peers.
Conclusion

Girl’s education attainment was highly dependent on the interests of parents. From the analysis, it was clear that of all the reasons mentioned for dropout, lack of parental support emerged as key and significant for the dropout of the girl children.

In the household factors, other key reasons for drop out which emerged were parents’ migration, employability of the educated youth, and prevalence of dropping out in the respective social circle. It was clearly visible from the data that overall agriculture landholding and irrigation was less in the research area. This led to a high level of migration for livelihood among the respondents’ parents. Among the respondents from migrated families, the key issues listed by the children were the place in which they lived, lack of fulfilment of daily needs, and extensive household work; these contributed to high dropout rates among children in these families. From interviews as well as from FGDs, one key issue which emerged pertaining to opinion on education was the lack of appropriate employability of the educated persons. It was expressed that the existing education system was not offering relevant employable skills. Another prominent factor observed from the data was the culture of dropping out in the families. Overall, across all social groups, around two-fifths of the families had a sibling who dropped out, and the phenomenon is relatively higher among female SC respondents.

In the school factors, key reasons which contributed to dropout were corporal punishment, and unsupportive teacher and unfriendly peers. The results of factor analysis explained that teachers’ felt academic support variable was one of the important components in the felt comfort level of respondents. Further, it exemplified that the unsupportiveness of the teacher was linked with abusive attitudes such as punishing and ridiculing of the student. Therefore, it can be said that teacher’s academic support and punishing attitude were key components for the respondent’s perceived desire to go to school.
An important understanding was developed from factor analysis about the variables related to the sense of school membership. Throughout the analysis, academic competence was one of key factors which influenced the teacher and peer supportiveness and predicted the felt comfortness in going to school; whereas, with regard to perceived school membership, academic competence and peer friendliness were not significant. Instead, the discrimination experienced and the person involved in the discrimination (.936) emerged as key variables of sense of school membership. This means that discrimination experienced was not related to the academic competence of the respondents, and a more important factor was who was involved in the discrimination.

Higher the discrimination, lesser the perceived sense of school membership; likewise, when both the teachers and the peers are involved in discrimination, the perceived school membership was low. Hence, it can be said that discrimination experienced at school has significant influence on the felt sense of school membership of the respondents. Though both the social groups had said that they faced discrimination at school, there was clear demarcation between them on the areas of discrimination. For SC respondents, the highest response was recorded for discrimination related to caste, and for MBC respondents, it was academic performance. The respondents belonging to SC community formed a higher percentage of those who reported a low sense of school membership; this can be otherwise stated as a high level of discrimination being experienced by the SC respondents.

Among the factors which influenced sense of school membership, category of social group emerged as a single main contributing factor.