**A STUDY ON EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON RURAL CHILDREN IN TAMILNADU, SOUTH INDIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Poverty has always been one of the main causes and a block for the development of a country. Poverty has been a negative influence on children’s health and development since time immemorial. The standpoint of children due to poverty is very abominable. This study explores the relationship between poverty and children, and the outcomes in depth. Children who live in extreme poverty or who live below the poverty line for multiple years appear, all other things being equal, to suffer the worst outcomes. The paramount of this study is to find the crucial issues faced by the children due to poverty. It is also to identify the refinement of the children who are below poverty and to find out the impinge of poverty on the outcomes of children’s education. The required primary data for the present study are collected through direct interview method, participatory method and observation method. The percentage analysis revealed that the majority of the children are anaemic due to improper intake of food and are prone to skin allergy due to discordant sanitation facilities. Majority of the children below poverty are first generation learners. so, they lack in proper guidance when it comes to education. Poverty does not affect children physically alone, but mentally too. Poverty also causes an inferiority complex among children and the society they face. Children below poverty line also lack in appreciating the uniqueness they have within them.*

Keywords: *effects of poverty, children’s education, children’s health and development*.

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**1. Introduction**

Poverty is a multifaceted concept, which includes social, economic and political elements. Poverty may be defined as either absolute or relative. Absolute poverty or destitution refers to the lack of means necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Poverty damages one’s childhood, it damages life’s chances, it damages each of us in the society. Poverty is also defined as an unacceptably low standard of living. A family is considered under poverty line if its annual before-tax money income is less than its poverty threshold. Poverty threshold varies according to the family size i.e., the number of members in the family. Poverty is considered as a main problem faced by many countries in the world especially India because poverty acts as barrier to the development of many countries and the rationale for a relative poverty line arises from considering the socially-based nature of consumption.

Poverty is an important issue in India. One third of the total population in India lives below the poverty line and majority of the poor people live in villages or rural India. The incidence of rural poverty has declined to some extent over the past three decades as a result of rural to urban migration. In reality, the life of the people living in rural areas is marked with severe poverty. In spite of all the efforts, the condition of these poor villagers is far from satisfactory.

As per the results of several researchers, it is found that millions of children of the rural areas particularly living under the poverty line are vulnerable to the effects of poverty because of the environment in which they live. In India, many of the poor children are struggling to survive in their communities that often exacerbate rather than mitigate the disadvantages of poverty; communities where there is a lack of public resources, economic investments, and political power sometimes serve to separate and isolate children from the mainstream society.

**2 Overview of Literature**

A summary of many researches reveal that children born into and growing up in poverty are more likely to be in poor health, have learning and behavior difficulties, show lower level of achievement in school, become pregnant at an early age, have lower skills and aspirations, be under paid, unemployed and welfare dependent as adults. It also says that one of the effects of poverty on children’s development is that it leads them to build an antisocial behavior that acts as a psychological protection against their hostile environment. It also says that these children’s education is largely affected by poverty. Many people living in poverty are unable to attend school from an early age. Families may not be able to afford the necessary clothing or school supplies. Yet some others may not even have a way for their children to get to school. Whatever the reason may be, there is a clear correlation between families living in poverty and their lack of education. As attending school is not their privilege, many people are turning into illiterates. Thus, it is evident that poor children living in India face significant challenges than their urban counterparts do. Rural parents tend to have less education and are more likely to be underemployed than urban parents, putting their children at a higher risk of becoming poor. Rural poverty can be persistent because of the lack of awareness and accessibility to the available government schemes among the rural residents, in addition to a scarcity of jobs and physical and social isolation in rural areas.

Kavanoor is an emblematic village which is situated near Madurai district, Tamil Nadu, India. Just like the other villages in India, people in Kavanoor village too face many poverty-related problems. The concept of this study is to find out the issues the children in this village face due to extreme poverty.

**Objectives**

1. To find out the children below poverty line in Kavanoor.
2. To find out the crucial issues faced by the children due to poverty.
3. To find out the role of education in shaping the children.

**3. Methodology**

This study is carried out in Kavanoor village of Madurai district, Tamil Nadu, India, during the period 2015-2016. This study includes the children of the age group 6-12. The children in the target group were identified with the help of the village community, the village panchayat and the village primary school.

The data that was used for the study is primary data. As there were only 38 children in the targeted age group, census method was adopted to collect the data. The required primary data were collected through Direct Interview method, Participatory method and Observation method. As the main focus of the study was to find out the issues due to poverty, discussions were conducted with the village community. To find out the issues faced by the children in Kavanoor due to poverty and to analyse the factors that determine their growth, percentage analysis was used.

**4. Findings and Discussion**

Poverty line or poverty level as defined by Merriam Webster is a level of personal or family income, below which one is classified as poor according to governmental standards. In Indian society from time immemorial, some people in the society have had a dominant access to resources while some are deprived of them; hence there is a need for effective redistribution. Here, poverty line comes handy as it acts as a benchmark used to identify the poor of the nation. Using this, the annual income of the families in Kavanoor was determined and then classified into two categories viz., above poverty line and below poverty line. Majority of the people (adults and in some cases their older children) fell in the latter category as they were dependent on agricultural work that only provided for certain seasons of a year. Obviously then these people worked as daily wage Slaborers during the other part of the year. Summing up their total annual income without taking into account any other expenditures, the villagers were categorized.

**General characteristics of the Respondents**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S. No | Variables | Groups | Percentage |
| 1. | Sex | Male  Female | 69  31 |
| 2. | Religion | Hindus  Muslims  Christians | 84  5  11 |
| 3. | Community | SC  Non-SC | 79  21 |
| 4. | Type of the Family | Nuclear  Joint | 31  69 |
| 5. | Family Size | Small (3-5 members)  Large (6 and above) | 90  10 |
| 6. | Age | 6-7  8-10  11-12 | 39  34  27 |
| 7. | Education (Class studying) | Std I-II  Std III-V  Std VI-VII | 39  34  27 |
| 8. | Educational institution | Government schools  Private Schools | 89  11 |
| 9. | Academic Performance  (Average marks) | Below 50%  Above 50% | 61  39 |
| 10. | Annual family income | Less than 50,000  50,000 to 1,00,000  More than 1,00,000 | 61  29  10 |
| 11. | Physical Health | Malnourished  Healthy | 69  31 |
| 12. | Status of Poverty | Below Poverty line  Above Poverty line | 69  31 |

**Source: Primary Data, 2016**

**Explanation of the Variables**

* **Community (SC and Non-SC)**

Poverty is deepest among members of scheduled castes in the country’s rural areas. These groups account for 80per cent of poor rural people, although their share in the total rural population is much smaller. This is true with the study area too. The study reveals that 79per cent of the children in the village belong to scheduled caste and 21per cent of the children in the village belong to nonscheduled caste. Just like in the other villages, there is an estrangement between people on the basis of caste. It is also found that the marginal caste children are treated like retainers by the dominant caste people. They are made to do works for the elderly people of the dominant caste.

* **Annual family income**

Earlier, India used to define the poverty line based on a method defined by the task force in 1979. It was based on the expenditure for buying food worth 2,400 calories in rural areas. In 2011, the Suresh Tendulkar committee defined the poverty line on the basis of monthly spending on food, education, health, electricity and transport. According to this estimates a person who spends Rs. 27.2 in rural areas and Rs. 33.3 in urban areas a day are defined as living below the poverty line. For a family of five that spends less than Rs. 4,080 and Rs. 5000 in rural and urban areas respectively is considered below poverty line. This proposal was criticized as it fixed the poverty line too low. According to a committee headed by former Reserve Bank governor Rangarajan C, there were 363 million people, or 29.5% of India’s 1.2 billion people, who lived in poverty in 2011-12. The Rangarajan panel considered people living on less than Rs. 32 a day in rural areas and Rs. 47 a day in urban areas as poor.

Thus, considering the definitions for poverty line, it is found that 69% of the respondents live below poverty line.

* **Education**

The percentage analysis reveals that all the respondents attend school. Children in the Kavanoor village are sent only to the government schools and to the private schools which have the government affiliation because only from these schools they get free schemes from the government like free notebooks, free uniforms (4 uniforms per academic year), free occasional medical check-ups, free slippers, free scholarships, free schoolbags, even free meals.

Due to poverty, parents who are under poverty line are unable to send their children to a private English school. Because of the inadequate income they earn, they always depend on the freebies offered by the government. But they are unaware that this kind of dependency will make their poverty level worse. Most parents who are under poverty are daily wage laborers as a result, the quality time they spend with their children is very less. This means that children are not receiving enough attention and proper care, which leads to the lack of motivational sources. Children who are under poverty are also mentally affected. With the help of Observation method, it is found that children are starving for a parental care. The care that every child gets during its childhood is absent in the lives of these poverty-stricken children in Kavanoor village.

According to the observation it is found even though all the children in the village are getting free schemes from the government, there is an improper utilization of freebies. For example, schools are provided with many kinds of funds from the government and only a very few reach the rightful one.

* **Physical health**

Diseases of poverty is a term sometimes used to collectively describe diseases, disabilities and health conditions that are more prevalent among the poor than among wealthier people. In many cases poverty is considered the leading risk factor or determinant for such diseases, and in some cases the diseases themselves are identified as barriers to economic development that would end poverty. Diseases of poverty are often co-morbid and ubiquitous with malnutrition. These diseases triggered in part by poverty are in contrast to so-called ‘Diseases of affluence’, which are diseases thought to be a result of increasing wealth in a society. Comparatively it is found that girls are affected more than boys on the basis of health. One of main issue that children face due to poverty is health. Due to improper intake of food and improper sanitation facilities, children are affected with skin allergies and are anemic.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Diseases** | **Boys**  **(In percentage)** | **Girls**  **(In percentage)** | **Total**  **(In percentage)** |
| **Anemic** | 69 | 73 | 71 |
| **Skin Allergy** | 9 | 20 | 13 |
| **Total** | 78 | 93 | 82 |

**Source: Primary data,2016**

Due to the lack of money, they are unable to afford nutritious food, as a result 71per cent of children are anemic. Skin allergies are due to lack of proper use of sanitation facilities provided by the government; unawareness could be the reason behind this ignorance. Just like in the other villages, people in Kavanoor following traditional practices do not utilize the available sanitary facilities properly; even today open defecation is quite common. Villagers are not aware of the incurable diseases this practice could give rise to.

**Role of Education**

As George Bernard Shaw once said, poverty is the greatest of evils and the worst of crimes. This social issue exists due to various reasons starting with low level of economic development under the colonial administration followed by low level of growth till the nineteen eighties resulting in less job opportunities. This was accompanied by a high growth rate of population. The two combined to make growth rate of per capita income very low. The other reasons are caste discrimination, social customs, unequal distribution of land and other assets, ignorance and so on.

Looking back at rural India three decades ago, one can definitely say that at present much has changed and rural India has come a long way ever since. Many factors have contributed to this progress but one factor that has played a crucial role is education.

There is a famous Tibetan proverb which says, “A child without education, is like a bird without wings.”

Over these years, much efforts have been put in the field of education to provide our children, the nation’s future with wings. Many government schools have been setup, education has been made free and compulsory for all children of the age of six to fourteen years according to the Education Act (2009), free mid-day meals are provided along all basic school necessities, rural people migrating to urban areas or bigger cities, frequently, practicing medical students having been visiting the rural areas to provide free medical check-ups, advancement in science and technology also meant that agricultural practices took on a new face which ensured higher productivity and hence higher income; many such initiatives taken over these years have shown their results- India’s literacy rate has jumped from mere 43.5% to 74%.

Yet, in spite of these endeavors, certain regions of India still remain untouched by education and in places where educational institutions are prevalent, one cannot fully guarantee that these provide quality education. Though, on the whole, one may feel that our nation is striding to progress, it is mandatory to understand that there are still several loopholes in our system of education. Even today, India has the highest number of laborers under 14 years of age, many students still dropout from schools in spite of the freebies, in cases where students are willing to study, government schools with its drawbacks prove to be a bane, children are forced to take up work to keep their body and soul together, most of the children lack emotional support and motivation etc.

Children must be continuously encouraged throughout their academic life, more awareness must be spread among the parents, government must take strict measures to ensure quality education is being provided in the schools, firms employing child laborers should be brought under punishable laws, NGO’s can put in their efforts to train rural children so as to develop their skills, more opportunities should be given to these children to find their caliber, and much more can be done to develop our children, the future of the nation holistically.

Educating a person enlightens one’s mind and this enlightened mind will uplift everyone else in the prison of poverty; as Victor Hugo once said, “He who opens a school door, closes a prison”

**5. Conclusion**

Poverty has ever remained as an evil disease in the heart of developing countries like India. Many people were affected by its severity and in many cases, they have taken extreme steps to end their lives. But what is encouraging to know is that we have chosen not to remain in its clutches. It is evident that most of the citizens are now taking time and contributing to the welfare of the society. It is strongly believed that in another decade, India will stand tall as a poverty free nation if each and every one do their part to push the nation forward. There are a number of programmes in the country to reduce poverty. The successful implementation of these programmes in the country to reduce poverty. The successful implementation of these programmes require good governance with four basic principles of accountability, transparency, participation and predictability in which case it would not only ensure that government is people oriented but would also perform its essential role as a guarantor of social justice.

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