

Gender Dynamics of Adulthood Transitions for Early School Leavers: A case of Indian Youths

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

India has witnessed an improved enrolment in schools due to the right to education (RTE) act in place, however, a large number of students stop schooling right after the guaranteed education under this act ends at the age of 14. The recent data reveal that while only 4.7% males and 5.7% females at age 14 were not enrolled in a school, at age 18 the percentage of male students out of school shoots up to 27.8% and for female students, the figure is 32.1%. While it is commonly assumed that early school-leavers will become child workers, in fact little is known about the gender dynamics of transitions to adulthood.

OBJECTIVE

Using the retrospective data from a survey "Youth in India: Situation and Needs 2006-2007" from six Indian states, the present study examines gender differences in adulthood transitions following their exit from the school system, the timing and patterns of reaching various markers of adulthood, and their current life situations among the youths aged 15-29 years.

RESULTS

A significant differential in adulthood transitions patterns by gender and by place of residence is evident. Male and female early school leavers have significantly different likelihood of transitions to early entry into work vis-a-vis marriage in terms of timing and sequence. Compare to their male counterparts, female early school leavers are seen to be more likely to enter into marriage before joining into work or remain unemployed. Likelihood of work participation among female early school leavers is more in rural areas than their urban counterparts. Likelihood of entering into marriage before work among urban female early school leavers is higher than their rural counterparts.

CONCLUSION

Female early school-leavers are likely to spend a longer time without work and unmarried and potentially at high risk of social exclusion, relative to their male counterparts. Qualitative insights suggest that adolescent dropouts who enter employment early are better off in their young adulthood than those who experience inactivity prior to adulthood.

1 Introduction

The right to education(RTE)act, 2009 in India has provided free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years old. This has facilitated a significant improvement in school enrollments at primary(class I-V), upper-primary(class VI-VIII) and secondary(class IX-X)levels. During the period 2000-01 to 2015-16, there have been increase of 13.3 million (13.4 %), 24.8 million (60%) and 20.1 million (105%) enrollments at primary, upper-primary and secondary levels respectively ([Bhattacharya et al., 2018](#)). Government educational statistics suggest that beyond the age of 14 years, children not covered under RTE of compulsory education, there has been a significant increase in the drop-out rate in school education. The average annual drop-out rate at secondary level has gone up from 14.54% to 17.06% over a period of just 2 years between 2012-13 to 2014-15. Whereas these figures are up from 3.13% to 4.03% for upper-primary and down from 4.67% to 4.13% for primary level between the same period.

At a time of growing expectations about improved school enrollments, young people who fail to achieve the minimal level of education can easily be 'left behind' to face the risk of social exclusion ([Furlong et al., 2012](#); [Struffolino and Borgna, 2021](#)). Young people with no qualification or with only basic ones experience difficulties in entering into labour market ([Furlong et al., 2012](#); [Hannan et al., 1995](#); [MacDonald, 1998](#)). Early school leavers who have not completed secondary schooling due to nonenrollment or due to drop-out are often found to be in 'NEET' category (neither in employment nor in education or training)or in low-quality, unprotected or poorly remunerated jobs. To what extent and how soon the early school leavers are able to make transition into a credible job is a pertinent issue for their long term labour market attachment and consequently their societal integration.

Although there has been a broad understanding on the centrality of smooth school-to-work transitions for employment opportunity, one can always seek the disaggregated early school leavers in terms of their transitions to work or marriage or to be in the state of 'NEET'. While studying the the adulthood transitions of the young early school leavers, it may be very crucial to incorporate a gender perspective. This is particularly important in Indian context, as historically the country has seen a high school drop-out rate for young girls and early entry into marriage, particularly in rural regions.

2 Data and Research Questions

The unit-level data on multistate adulthood transitions from the study “The Youth in India: Situation and Needs 2006-2007” (for [Population Sciences](#) , [IIPS](#)) have been used in this article. Being implemented by the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai and the Population Council, New Delhi (for [Population Sciences](#) , [IIPS](#)),it is the first-ever sub nationally representative study that provides data on young people’s transition to various adulthood events. Survey has been conducted in a total of six states of India namely: Rajasthan(RJ), Bihar(BH), Jharkhand(JH), Maharashtra(MH), Andhra Pradesh(AP) and Tamil Nadu(TN) and these six states were purposively selected to represent the different geographic and socio-cultural regions within the country and together they represent two-fifths of the country’s population. It provides a wealth of evidence on married and unmarried young women and men aged 15-24 and 15-29 respectively, from both the rural and urban settings of each state. The survey was undertaken in a phased manner and took place between January 2006 and April 2008. In all, 58,728 young people were contacted, of which a total of 50,848 married and unmarried young women and men were successfully interviewed.

2.1 Profile of Sampled Youths for the Present Study

For the present study we have considered sampled youths from the above survey only those who left their schools early on or before completing their high school. Early school leavers are categorised into three levels; Not Enrolled: those who have not enrolled in schools at all, Pre-High School: those respondents for whom the highest level of education was 1 to 8, High School: respondents with highest level of education 9 and 10 and did not pursue further studies. Altogether we have taken 21,384 respondents for the present analysis, of which 13,331 (62.3%) are females and 8,053 (37.7%) are males. A detailed information on the educational attainments of the selected youths by their gender and type of residence is provided in the Table 1. The distribution of the early school leavers over the three categories of educational levels are 14.9%, 56.5%, and 28.6% respectively. A large proportion of rural female (about 23%) are seen in the not-enrolled category against only a 12% of their urban counterpart. Female early school leavers in the rural areas is seen to have 5 median years of schooling which is 2 years less than that of the male respondents of rural areas.

2.2 Research Questions

Using the information on adulthood transitions from Youth Study survey, the present article aims to address the following research questions.

- (a) Whether male and female early school leavers have different likelihood of transitions to early entry into work vis-a-vis marriage in terms of timing and sequence.
- (b) Compare to their male counterparts, will female early school leavers be more

likely to enter into marriage before joining into work?

(c) Is likelihood of work participation among female early school leavers more in rural areas than their urban counterparts?

(d) Is likelihood of entering into marriage before work among urban female early school leavers higher than their rural counterparts?

Table 1: Percent Distribution of Youth by Level of Education and Median Years of Schooling.

Combined			
	Male	Female	Total
Level of Enrolment			
Not Enrolled	9.1	18.4	14.9
Pre-High School	59.0	55.0	56.5
High School	31.9	26.6	28.6
Median Years of Schooling	7	6	7
Urban			
	Male	Female	Total
Level of Enrolment			
Not Enrolled	6.3	12.1	9.6
Pre-High School	57.7	54.5	55.9
High School	36.0	33.4	34.5
Median Years of Schooling	8	7	7
Rural			
	Male	Female	Total
Level of Enrolment			
Not Enrolled	11.6	22.6	18.8
Pre-High School	60.2	55.3	57.0
High School	28.2	22.1	24.2
Median Years of Schooling	7	5	6

3 Preliminary Results

The percentage distribution of the young early school leavers considered for this study according to their type of first transition to work/marriage/neither in job nor in marriage by gender and by their type of residence is presented in Table 2.

Overall, among the not-enrolled youths, 65% join labour market first and 27% enter into marriage first before joining the labour force. Moreover, in this category, more females (about 35%) are found to be entering into marriage before

Table 2: Number and Percentage Distribution of Selected Respondents by Type of First Transition (1:entry into job; 2: entry into marriage; 3: neither in job nor married)

Place of Residence		Rural								
Respondent Type		Male			Female			Total		
Type of Transition		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Level of Enrolment										
Not Enrolled	Number of Respondents	474	11	2	1119	544	139	1593	555	141
	Percentage	97.33	2.26	0.41	62.10	30.19	7.71	69.59	24.25	6.16
Pre-High School	Number of Respondents	2418	37	69	2416	1135	849	4834	1172	918
	Percentage	95.80	1.47	2.73	54.91	25.80	19.30	69.82	16.93	13.26
High School	Number of Respondents	1096	28	56	673	576	508	1769	604	564
	Percentage	92.88	2.37	4.75	38.30	32.78	28.91	60.23	20.57	19.20
Place of Residence		Urban								
Respondent Type		Male			Female			Total		
Type of Transition		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Level of Enrolment										
Not Enrolled	Number of Respondents	232	5	8	255	307	87	487	312	95
	Percentage	94.69	2.04	3.27	39.29	47.30	13.41	54.47	34.90	10.63
Pre-High School	Number of Respondents	2128	28	74	907	1300	721	3035	1328	795
	Percentage	95.43	1.26	3.32	30.98	44.40	24.62	58.84	25.75	15.41
High School	Number of Respondents	1276	37	74	384	829	582	1660	866	656
	Percentage	92.00	2.67	5.34	21.39	46.18	32.42	52.17	27.22	20.62
Place of Residence		Combined								
Respondent Type		Male			Female			Total		
Type of Transition		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Level of Enrolment										
Not Enrolled	Number of Respondents	706	16	10	1374	851	226	2080	867	236
	Percentage	96.45	2.19	1.37	56.06	34.72	9.22	65.35	27.24	7.41
Pre-High School	Number of Respondents	4546	65	143	3323	2435	1570	7869	2500	1713
	Percentage	95.62	1.37	3.01	45.35	33.23	21.42	65.13	20.69	14.18
High School	Number of Respondents	2372	65	130	1057	1405	1090	3429	1470	1220
	Percentage	92.40	2.53	5.07	29.76	39.56	30.68	56.04	24.02	19.94

joining work against only a 56% who are joining jobs first. Most of the male not-enrolled youths (97%), on the contrary, are seen to enter into jobs first. Figure 1 portrays the percentage plot of the young early school leavers by their type of first transitions (to job/marriage/neither in job nor in marriage) classified by gender and place of residence. This figure unfolds some interesting gender and place of residence dynamics of adulthood transitions by the young early school leavers. A significant differential in adulthood transitions patterns by gender and by place of residence is evident. Although the pattern remains more or less similar among rural and urban males, visible gaps appear to persist among rural and urban females in their respective adulthood trajectories.

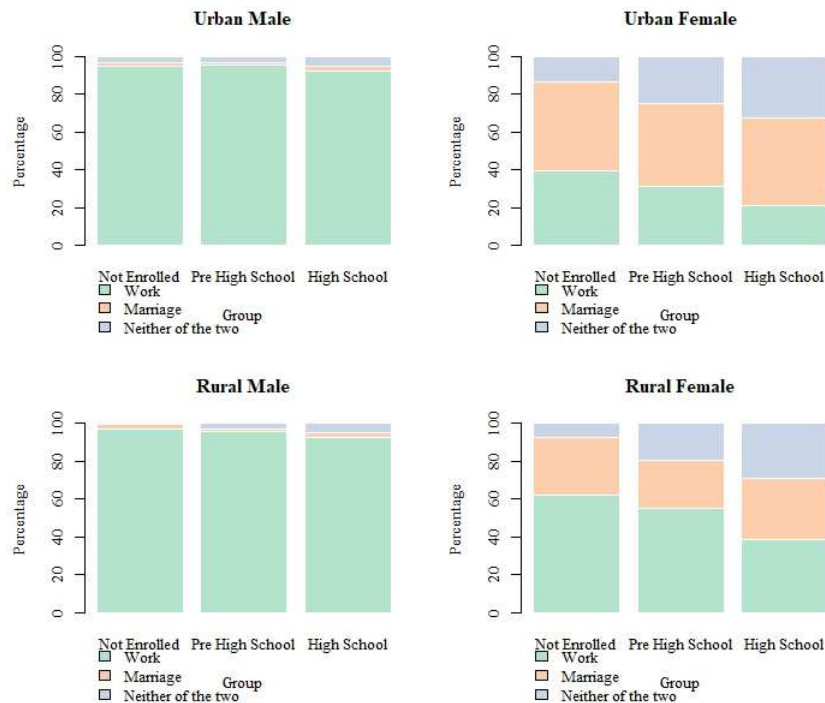


Figure 1: Percentage Plot of Youths taking first transition by gender and by residence

It is seen that most young male early school leavers (92% or more) irrespective of their levels of schooling and place of residence enter into work. However, this pattern is remarkably different for female. About 45% to 47% urban female early school leavers across the levels of schooling enter into marriage first against a value of about only 30% in rural areas. More (about 42% to 62%) female early school leavers enter into work first after finishing their schooling in rural areas than their urban counterparts. A significant proportion of female early school leavers with high school and pre-high school level of education are found to be

neither in work nor in marriage both in rural and urban areas. Hence these subgroups are at higher risks of social exclusion.

3.1 Median Years of Transitions

Figure 2 displays the median years of transitions from school to work (left panel) and from school to marriage (right panel). Male early school leavers join work immediately after leaving school, whereas the median age of non-enrolled male is 13. Urban females with high school and pre-high school education take a longer time of 4 years on the average to join work after leaving school, whereas their rural counterparts take only 1 year on the average to join work.

Median years of transition to marriage for female early school leavers is seen to be generally less than that of the males both in urban and rural areas across all the educational categories. Although there is no difference in median years of transition to marriage for rural and urban female early school leavers, a difference of about 1 to 3 years is seen between urban and rural males. Data suggest that urban males postpone their marriage by about 1 to 3 years on the average after completing school than their rural counterparts.

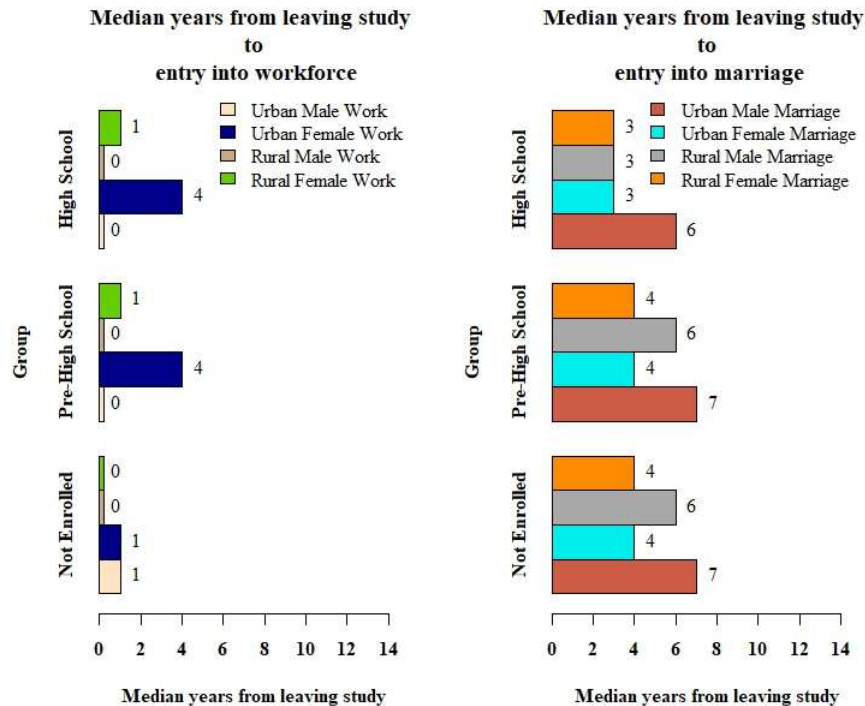


Figure 2: Median Years to First Transition from Leaving School

3.2 Survival Analysis

We have carried out survival analysis to estimate the risk of transitions to work and transitions to marriage from leaving school and then testing statistically whether patterns of survival curves are significantly different between subgroups of selected respondents. Figure 3 presents the survival curve of transition to work from leaving school. It is evident that survival experience of urban and rural female early school leavers are significantly different across all the educational levels and for male early school leavers the experience is not the same. Interestingly, it is also found that about 24% to 42% of urban females do not enter into work after even after 8 to 10 years of leaving their schools.

Figure 4 displays the survival curve of transition to marriage from leaving school for all the subgroups. In this case, most of these curves cut across each other. However, it is fairly clear that no significant difference in the transition experience to marriage from school for urban and rural females is observed. However, male early school leavers do have visible difference in their transition experience across the educational levels.

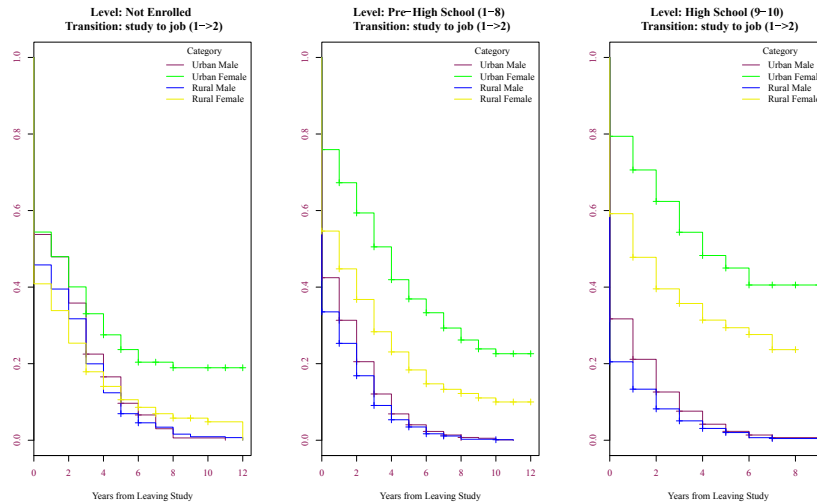


Figure 3: Survival curve of transition to work

4 Discussion

Female early school-leavers are likely to spend a longer time in the state of without work and unmarried and potentially at high risk of social exclusion, relative to their male counterparts. Qualitative insights suggest that adolescent dropouts who enter employment early are better off in their young adulthood than those who experience inactivity prior to adulthood.

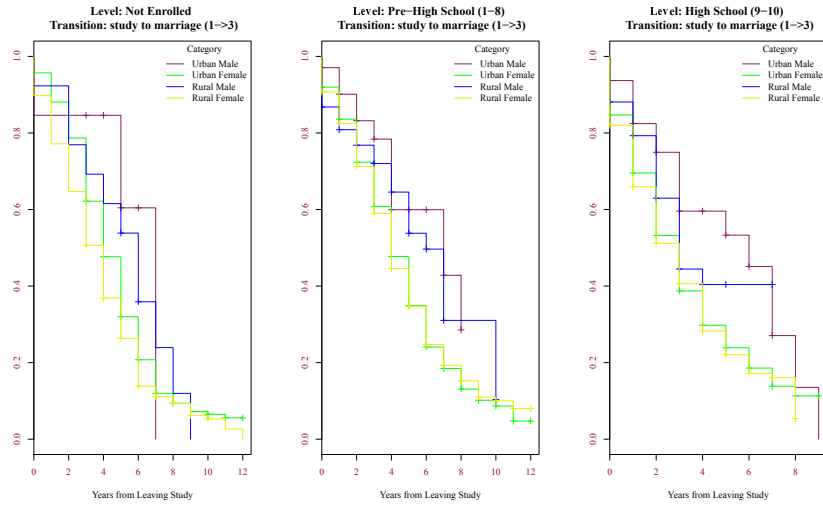


Figure 4: Survival curve of transition to marriage

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