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Socio- Economic and Academic Profile of Teenagers: A Study of A Chandigarh Slum

Abstract

The present paper discusses the socio- economic and academic profile of teenagers living in a slum of Chandigarh. It was assumed that Chandigarh being a small city, hub of education and the provision of neighbourhood schools must be boosting the motivation of children of slum dwellers to study. But our findings revealed the opposite. It came to light that teenagers living in slums are not motivated to study as the motivating factors do not come from the family and their community. So it does not matter that their slum is a part of beautiful city. The paper concluded with Oscar Lewis's proposition that Culture of Poverty prevails in the slums which forms the habit of teenagers to drop the study and absent themselves from the school.

Keywords: Culture of Poverty, Slums.

Introduction

Slums are the best emblems and representatives of poverty in urban areas. The concept of slums and their definitions vary considerably across the States depending on the socio-economic conditions or local perceptions prevailing in the society. There are regional differences in the names by which these slums are known in India. In Delhi, slums are commonly called "*jhuggijhompari*", whereas in Mumbai "*jhpadpatti*" or "*chawls*" are the names for slums, "*bustees*" in Kolkata, "*cheris*" in Chennai and "*keris*" in Bengaluru. But the physical characteristics in most of these slums are the same. They are usually a cluster of hutments with dilapidated and infirm structures and common toilet facilities, suffering from lack of basic amenities, inadequate arrangements for drainage, and the disposal of solid wastes and garbage. These inadequacies smudge living conditions and result in usual higher incidences of air and water borne diseases for the dwellers. The slum is not simply a housing problem but a complex socio-economic problem. (D'Souza, 1978). In Indian cities too, slums are characterized by an overwhelming majority of people belonging to low castes, who are economically very poor, with a little education political power. (Mazumdar, 1983; D'Souza, 1979). Therefore, slum dwellers come from the lowest end of not only economic but also social hierarchy and they share 'culture of poverty'. According to Oscar Lewis, "Culture of poverty is an integrated set of values, norms and behavior characteristics of some of those who live in poverty conditions." Lewis found that conditions for the culture of poverty emerge through cash economy, persistent high rate of unemployment, low wages, failure to provide social, political and economic organization either on voluntary basis or by government imposition for the low income population. (Edwin Eames, 1977). Hence, slums for Lewis was not only an ecological but a psychological peculiarity. Lewis has been attributed to develop 'culture of poverty' assumed that poverty tended to be a feature of a highly stratified, competitive economic system that included high rates of unemployment and underemployment for unskilled labour, low wages, and a failure to provide for social, political, and economic integration. Even if opportunities improved around them, the poor would not be able to take advantage of them because poverty had become a way of life. It would be a way of life for their children as well, because by the time children were six or seven years old, they would have internalized the philosophies of the permanently poor. Thus, poverty was a vicious behavioural cycle, based on subcultural adaptations and passed on from parents to children, that is, each generation was socialized to be poor by the previous one.

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Under **Section 3** of the **Slum Area Improvement and Clearance Act, 1956**, slums have been defined as mainly those residential areas where dwellings are in any respect unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and designs of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to safety, health and morals. Thus, conceptually slums are compact overcrowded residential areas (and not isolated or scattered dwellings) unfit for habitation due to lack of one or more of the basic infrastructure like drinking water, sanitation, electricity, sewerage, streets etc. Three common points emerge from various attempts of defining a slum. First, slum refers to an area or a situation and does not constitute an isolated building. Secondly, it can be identified by a combination of physical attributes and not with reference to a single attribute. Third, there is a considerable range of variation in regard to the manifestation of each one of the physical attributes (Sehgal, 1998).

Slums in Chandigarh

Chandigarh, the dream city of India's first Prime Minister, Sh. Jawaharlal Nehru, was planned by the famous French architect Le Corbusier. Picturesquely located at the foothills of Shivaliks, it is known as one of the best experiments in urban planning and modern architecture in the twentieth century in India. However, large in-migration and rapid growth of urbanization have resulted in the growth of slums in Chandigarh. The expansion of the industrial and the commercial activities made a significant contribution to the haphazard growth of the city. The growth demanded cheap labor, since the workers were not in a position to purchase or hire accommodation in the city; they had no choice but to live in slums. Thus, dozens of such colonies grew in and around Chandigarh. The mushrooming of slums occurred due to shortage of land for housing and the high price of land which was beyond the paying capacity of the urban poor. Growth of population put extra pressure on the existing basic amenities and infrastructure. The planners, while framing the Master Plan of Chandigarh did envisage construction of huge buildings for official, commercial and residential purposes along the green belts, yet they overlooked the provision of habitat for the migrant population whose services in different forms such as labor etc. were required in the execution of the Master Plan. They might have thought that the labor force would return, after the construction work was over, but this did not materialize and thus started the process of migrant labor settling on land wherever available.

The increase in the number of these hovels was actually tracked by the administration as early as 1970. According to the official statistics provided by the UT Administration, the survey conducted during 1970 listed 4,454 *jhuggis* and in the 1974 official survey, the number of *jhuggis* rose to 8,003. In 1990, the number rose to 19,185. According to the comprehensive survey conducted in the colonies of

the UT of Chandigarh by CRRID in 1998-99, there were 45 colonies, of which 19 were in the authorized category and 26 in the unauthorized segment. In 2001, Census of India data enumerated slum population of 1,07,125 (13.2 percent) living in Chandigarh. The latest data as per the bio-metric survey (enumerating each and every household in slums for rehabilitation purposes) carried out by the Estate Office, estimated about 23,841 families indicating a population of around 1,20,000 spread over 18 notified slum colonies of Chandigarh. In fact in Chandigarh, more than 1/5th of the population resides in slums and other rehabilitated areas. (Duggal, 2010)

Teenagers in Slums

Teenage is a crucial stage of a person's life. A child goes through various physical, psychological and emotional changes during this age. A lot of literature has appeared on the problems faced by the teenagers and their parents.

Paul Goodman (1960) regards teenagers as a slandered group, separated from dignity and discriminated against in response to the tensions and frustrations and adult community members. A number of writers, considering the teenager from the psychological stand point see him as a ping pong ball tossed back and forth until he can find a proper resting place (Smith, 1962). Laxminarayan (1985), states that all over the world, youth today have become the nucleus in altering the established social order. They are said to be dissatisfied with the world they live in, and are increasingly alienated from the larger community, thus paving the way for the emergence of 'youth culture'.

The Report of National Commission on Urbanization (1988) highlighted that women and children constitute a sizeable proportion of urban poor in India. Sociologically however, we could go even a step further, i.e. the youth in urban slums; following Lewis thesis of 'Culture of Poverty' would be characterized by habits or life style, appearing to be asocial or abnormal according to our social norms. Especially in view of the rise in teenage related crime in cities all over the globe, this particular age group in the low income strata of urban dwellers needs to be systematically examined. It is at this age, i.e. adolescence, that the economic and social disparities start hitting the most vulnerable age group of the teenagers. How do they react placed in acute state of poverty, filth and deprivation while being exposed to the growing materialism and consumerism all around?

Various studies have been done on the teenager's problems but most of these are of upper income group and middle income group. There is one study by Divya Sharma in the year 1997 in which she highlighted a number of issues confronting the teenage groups as also their parents in Chandigarh. It also brought out the varying patterns among the Upper and Middle Income groups. But this is just the one side which emphasizes on the Upper and Middle Income group. A large proportion of the population in our country is below the poverty line, how can such an important class be ignored?

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Aim of the Study

The above mentioned unanswered questions are the reasons behind conducting this study in the most difficult area i.e. SLUM and the most crucial age i.e. 13-19 years. In the present paper the focus has been on the social and educational status of the teenagers. The reason why emphasis has been laid on the educational status of the student is to understand whether the teenagers in slums are getting adequate opportunities for a healthy development of their personalities, and also to point out the difficulties that are faced by the respondents in attaining education.

Education is the core sector for achieving the objectives of employment, human resource development and bringing about the much needed change in the social environment, leading to overall progress through efficient use of resources. An appropriate education system cultivates knowledge, skill, positive attitude, awareness and a sense of responsibility towards rights and duties, and imparts inner strength to face oppression, humiliation and inequality. (Ninth Five Year Plan, 1997-2002). It is the pathway to promote development in social, political and economic spheres. In this era of rapid social transformation and technological revolution, education has become an article of faith. Educational progress provides an individual with the necessary skill and technique in improving productivity and achieving economic independence. In the same way it paves the way for the individuals to achieve self-sufficiency and self-actualization. (Chugh, 2004)

Chandigarh, hub of education and ample opportunities of service in the IT sector is well connected with the neighbouring towns Mohali and Panchkula. The opening of malls and beautification of Chandigarh and upgradation of tourism facilities by the Chandigarh administration raises a few questions for the teenagers living in slums in Chandigarh. Every sector of Chandigarh is having a government school and there are many prestigious private schools where the admission is a dream. Government and Private hospitals, research institutes, institutes of higher education are well received by the people across the globe. But where do the children living in slums stand? What kind of educational background they have? What is their leisure time? Etc. are the questions worth probing and have been dealt with in the present paper.

Research Objectives

The present study was designed to analyze the problems faced by teenage boys and girls in the slums. The specific objectives of the study are given below:-

1. To study the family background of the teenagers (sex, religion, state of origin, age, family income (per month)) and information about members of their family.
2. To study the academic profile of teenagers covering the years of schooling they have had, class in which they were studying, how often they absented themselves from school and the reasons for the same and whether their parents

were aware of their missing school, In case of drop outs, to find out the reasons for dropping out and whether the respondent repent dropping out and if given a chance would like to continue studies or not.

Research Methodology

In order to meet the above objectives, the present study was conducted in slum Colony of Sector-25, Chandigarh. Sector 25 housed three colonies initially, janta colony and kumhaar colony, Bhaskar colony. Janta colony and kumhaar colonies have been demolished and the slum dwellers have been rehabilitated by the Chandigarh administration in the nearby villages. It was told by the senior members of the bhaskar colony that the slum dwellers of both the colonies who could not get any rehabilitation have found a place in sector 25 colony. Now some residents call it a bhaskar colony (old) and some call it as sector 25 (new) colony. Both the colonies are existing in Sector 25. For the purpose of the present research sector 25 colony has been selected and systematic random sampling method was used. The information was collected with an interview schedule. Schedule was filled by an interviewer in a face to face situation with the respondents. Interview schedule contained questions regarding social, economic and demographic background of respondents, their school background, incidence of dropouts, reasons for dropping out, etc.

Any field work has its peculiar problems and difficulties; it also has its moments of excitement and pleasure. Most of the people who were interviewed by me were very cordial and shared their problems in detail. But some respondents were full of suspicion, but by making them aware that this information would be kept secret for the academic purposes only, a rapport with the respondents as well as parents was made.

One of the respondents had lost her father about a month back and as a result her mother was very protective of her and her sister and made all the necessary inquiries from me and only after she had satisfied herself did she allow me to conduct the interview.

Apart from an interview schedule, method of observation was also used for making inferences about the interaction of respondents, physical aspects of slum community and other behavioral dimensions of the respondents and their family members.

Data Discussion/ Findings

Introduction of Respondents

In the present study, 135 teenagers were interviewed. Out of these, 84 were males and 51 were females. All the respondents belonged to scheduled castes. In the sample taken for the study, 49.6 per cent of the respondents were of the age group 13-14 years, 40 per cent were of the age group 15-16 years, 6 per cent were of the age group 17-18 years and 4.4 per cent were 19 year olds. Thus data showed a predominance of respondents in the age group of 13-16 years. Further, data regarding their native place, revealed that 32.5 per cent of the respondents were from Uttar Pradesh. The Field Survey of CRRID,

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Chandigarh in 2006 revealed that a majority of the migrants are from the BIMARU states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). Our study also shows a staggering 44.4 per cent of respondents falling in this category. About 14.07 per cent are from Haryana and Punjab and only 8.8 per cent of the respondents were native. However, a large proportion of the respondents expressed a lack of knowledge about their place of origin. This means that our sample had a fair share of diverse ethnic groups co-existing in Chandigarh Slums.

Size of household is an important variable as all other variables like education, occupation, income are linked with it. The most prominent household size in the Colony was found to be the households consisting of 5-7 members i.e. 59.25 per cent. Only 6.66 per cent of respondents had up to or more than 8 members in their households. In slums, poverty and illiteracy go hand-in-hand. This is a vicious circle in which the poor are often trapped. Thus, before analyzing the academic profile of the teenage respondents it will be necessary to know the educational background of the parents of the respondents.

Education of Parents

51.1 per cent of the fathers and 79.2 per cent of the mothers of the respondents were illiterate. Only 14.07 per cent of the fathers of respondents were educated up to the matric level and a mere 5.9 per cent were educated up to intermediate level or higher. Only 2 of the respondents replied that their mothers were educated up to Matric level. This dismal situation is bound to have an adverse effect on the children. One of the respondents shared that she feels that her friends have better parents than her because her parents are not educated and she feels 'embarrassed' of this fact. Although, some parents who themselves are uneducated want that their children should get education so that none should call them '*angootha chhaap*'. Whether such aspirations get transformed into reality or not is a different question.

Occupational Status of Parents

Next we move on to the occupational status of the parents of the respondents. Data collected on the fathers of respondents in shows that 36.29 per cent of them are engaged in unskilled work like rag-picking and sweeping. This shows that majority of our respondents come from quite poor households, their fathers working as unskilled workers or rag pickers. This finding substantiates that most of the poor rural migrants who enter the cities have bleak occupational future mainly because they lack any skill, training etc. In today's time, it is difficult to fulfill the needs and basic necessities specially when there is only one earning hand. As a result, the tendency for both the spouses to earn, both in lower and middle class urban households has increased manifold. Even otherwise, literature shows that women in lower social strata have mostly been adding to family income.

Family Income

Education and occupation are the factors having a direct influence on the household income. Data point out that a majority of the households, i.e.

51.11 per cent have a monthly income between Rs. 1001 and Rs. 5000. This income includes the income of father, mother and other earning members of the household. About 5.1 per cent of the families earn less than Rs. 1000 per month. It is difficult to contemplate how they survive on such small incomes and that too in a city like Chandigarh. One of the parents said, "*Petha-kaddu lagata ek hai, khata sara gaon hai. Yahan par toh gobae bhi chahiye toh paisa chahiye.*" Despite of such bitter experiences in the City, these people chose to live here. One reason is that there are no jobs in their villages and secondly, Chandigarh is a very clean and beautiful city and they like living here. Shockingly, the areas in which they are staying are full of garbage, mud structures and small ponds are seen everywhere, where it is difficult to enter on a rainy day or immediately after the rains. In most of the cases the whole family is living in one room with no separate kitchen and bathroom facilities. During the field survey, some of the children were very enthusiastic to show their "houses" to us which comprised nothing but a tent mounted on bamboo sticks. The clothes and utensils were being washed at a common corner. There was garbage littered around and open sewage disposal system. Some of the people have been rehabilitated and given *pucca* houses by the ground but many still remain in dilapidated conditions. Although the people of Chandigarh city might feel that these slums are 'scars on the City Beautiful'. But it is hard to believe how they would be able to enjoy the beauty of the city without the hard work of the poor slum dwellers.

Academic Profile of the Respondents

From the above discussion under the socio-economic profile of the respondents one thing is highlighted that with such a low income parents feel most concerned about the education of their children and have a strong motivation to send their children to schools, wanting to keep their children away from the labor market. However, as much as the parents may want their children to get educated, there are various problems that hinder their aspirations.

Table - 1
School Attendance of the Respondents

School Attendance	Male	Female	Total
Never been to school	5	5	10
Still Attending	58	35	93
Drop out	21	11	32
Total	84	51	135

Source: Primary Data

According to the Table 1 68.9 per cent of the respondents were attending school. Only 7.4 per cent have never been to school, whereas 23.7 per cent were drop outs. Interestingly, a higher percentage of boys i.e. 15.5 per cent have dropped out of schools as compared to the percentage of girl drop outs i.e. 8.1 per cent. Here the study conducted by CRIDD is also imperative to be mentioned wherein it was found that 65 per cent of the slum children were still attending school, 18 per cent was drop outs and 17 per cent have never been to school (CRIDD, 2006).

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Enrolment by itself is no panacea if children do not continue their education beyond a few years. (Duggal, 2010) In today's competitive world to establish oneself, education is of prime importance. The people in slums do tend to understand this fact as a large proportion of the respondents were enrolled in schools but due to various reasons they did not or were not able to continue their education. The parents of the respondents could only afford to admit their children in government schools as private schools charge heavy fees. Most of the children of the Colony, Sector-25 go to Government Model School, Sector-25 and other government schools nearby. A visit to the Govt. Model School, Sector- 25 made it evident that there are two shifts, a morning shift and an evening shift. The principal of the school also told that almost all the students were the children of slum dwellers. She showed a lot of confidence in her students and said that her students are very intelligent and would confidently answer any question put to them. Despite all this, students drop out of schools for numerous reasons. Table 2 gives a list of such reasons

Table 2
Reasons for Dropping Out of School

Reasons for Drop Out	Male	Female	Total
Not interested in studies	6	2	8
Illness of father/mother	1	3	4
Illness of the respondent	1	-	1
Financial problem	5	3	8
Name struck off from school	-	1	1
Fighting with friends in school	1	-	1
Failed	2	1	3
Scolded by teacher	1	1	2
Migration	2	-	2
Other family problems	2	-	2
Never been to school	5	5	10
Attending school	58	35	93
Total	84	51	135

Source: Primary Data

Six boys and two girls when asked simply said that they were not interested in studies. Relating this finding to the previous discussion where the parents showed a strong desire to send their children to schools, the lack of interest of the respondents is definitely a big hindrance. This just makes it evident that the respondents do not consider education as something of prime importance for their future. Other reasons for school dropout quoted by respondents were financial problems, illness of any family member, failure in exams, a negative attitude of the teachers and so on

Table 3
Do the Respondents Repent having Dropped out?

Repentance	Male	Female	Total
Yes	15	8	23
No	3	3	6
Sometimes	2	-	2
No response	1	-	1
Total	21	11	32

Source: Primary Data; Drop Outs 32.

Table 3 highlights that 71.8 per cent of the respondents repent having dropped out whereas 18.7 per cent do not repent. During the field study one of the female dropouts shared that she left school because she could not concentrate on her studies (*padhai mein dimag nahi lagta*). She also made it clear that she did not wish to continue her studies even if given a chance. This brings us to the next question that if given a chance would the respondents like to continue their studies or not.

Table 4
If Given a Chance Would the Respondents Like to Continue their Studies?

Want to Continue	Male	Female	Total
Yes	13	6	19
No	8	5	13
Total	21	11	32

Source: Primary Data; Number of drop outs= 32

Table 4 gives the data that 59.4 per cent of the respondents said that if given a chance they would like to continue their studies as they were conscious of their mistake and wanted to restart their studies whereas 40.6 per cent of the respondents said that they do not want to continue their education because they would be much junior to their friends and earlier contemporaries and hence felt ashamed. Focus of the present study was not only limited on the drop outs but also on those respondents who are currently enrolled in schools and how seriously they take their schools. Thus, the next question pertained to whether the respondents were regularly attending school or not. This was done by asking how often do the respondents absent themselves from school?

Table 5
How often do the Respondents absent themselves from School?

Absenteeism	Male	Female	Total
Frequently	4	3	7
Sometimes	29	6	35
Rarely	16	11	27
Never	9	15	24
Total	58	35	93

Source: Primary Data; Number of Respondents going to School= 93

6.89 per cent boys and 8.57 per cent girls frequently missed their school. 50 per cent of the boys said that they missed their school sometimes, whereas only 17.1 per cent of the girls gave the same response. 42.8 per cent of the girls on the other hand never bunked their school as opposed to 15.5 per cent of the boys who gave the same response. When asked why they not missed their classes, majority of them revealed that if someone from the family or the neighborhood saw them elsewhere during school hours, they would be in trouble (*Phir toh khair nahi*). These data show the difference between the boys and girls as far as the attendance at school is concerned. Bunking from school is more common among the boys.

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Table 6
Do Parents Know about Absenteeism of Respondents from School?

Knowledge	Male	Female	Total
Yes	31	17	48
No	18	3	21
Do not Bunk	9	15	24
Total	58	35	93

Source: Primary Data; Number of Respondents going to School= 93

The next question posed to the respondents was whether their parents knew when they missed their school. Table 6 presents the data that 51.6 per cent of the respondents mentioned that their parents had knowledge of missing their school whereas 22.58 per cent of the respondents said that their parents had no idea of the same. 31 per cent of the males responded that their parents were not aware when they bunked school and 8.5 per cent of the females responded that their parents were not aware.

Table 7
Why do Respondents miss their school?

Reasons	Male	Female	Total
Illness	7	11	18
To go out with friends	11	2	13
To do household work	9	6	15
To earn money/ To work in the place of parents	2	1	3
Not interested in studies/ Do not enjoy school/ Get bored	20	3	23
Do not miss school	21	28	49
No response	2	-	2

Source: Primary Data; Sample Size= Number of Respondents going to School= 93; Categories are Mutually Exclusive

Table 7 highlights that Out of the 24.73 per cent of the respondents who answered that they were not interested in school 87 per cent were boys and only 13 per cent were girls. Lack of interest in studies was therefore seen as much more prominent in boys as compared to girls. Although it is a well known fact that in our country girls do not get equal opportunity to pursue education as boys. Equality between boys and girls is not there, during the field survey young girls were seen washing clothes, taking care of siblings, doing other household work. A woman retorted that generally only girls get scolded as boys stay outside. (*ladkiyo ko hi daant padti hai, ladke toh bahar bhag jate hain.*)

It was then important to see that if the respondents were not attending their school then what were they actually doing at that time? Table 8 presents the data of the same and it has come to the fore that 33.3 per cent of the boys reported that they spent their time with friends and 13.9 per cent of the boys just came home, watched T.V. or slept in the absence of their parents. Most of the girls reported that they did household work or studied if they did not go to school, thus showing that they indulge in more constructive work.

Table 8
What the Respondents do When they Miss Their School?

Activity when respondents miss their school	Male	Female	Total
Chat/ Loitering with friends	31	6	37
Rest/ Sleep/ Watch T.V.	13	4	17
Study	3	6	9
Household work	9	7	16
Have to go to work	11	3	14
No response	11	2	13

Source: Primary Data; Sample Size= Number of Respondents going to School= 93; Categories are Mutually Exclusive

Chandigarh is known to be a planned city but shockingly it carries along many unplanned settlements called slums. Our study was concerned with one such slum, located in Sector- 25, Chandigarh. This study aimed at examining the academic profile of teenagers in slums. The colony under study was a poor sight, ecologically which portrayed poverty, illiteracy, a place where it is hard to fulfill the basic needs of survival. Our respondents came from poor households, with illiterate parents, doing menial jobs and having very limited resources. We have seen in the above data that these factors invariably are playing on the academic profile of the children, but variations among boys and girls could also be clearly seen. The point of contention is whether they are responsible for their low participation in academics or their conditions which are beyond their control is responsible for their situation? If the social mechanism is favourable for getting an education and a good job then the attitudes and behavior of the poor are obstacle in their life. In this regard the empirical basis of Lewis's work was provided largely by the slums of Mexico and Puerto Rico. His conceptual argument, however has been traced to the Chicago tradition in urban sociology and the work of Robert Park. It is based on Park's argument that natural areas generate their own moral order, like that of the slum. Lewis identified some seventy interrelated psychological and social characteristics of the poor. These characteristics worked to perpetuate poverty. Among the most essential were a strong fatalistic belief, weak ego development, strong present time orientation, little ability to defer gratification or plan for the future, preoccupation with machismo, knowledge only of one's own neighbourhood and one's way of life, lack of self consciousness. In addition the poor failed to value childhood as a protected and prolonged stage of development. His focus was on the habits of the poor. He believed that these habits were primarily to blame for what he saw as their sadness and suffering, the emptiness of their lives, and their inability to understand or avail themselves of whatever opportunities exist. In his own words, "indeed, poverty of culture is one of the traits of culture of poverty" (Lewis 1966a, 25; Lewis 1966b, xliii-xliv).

In the present study teenage respondents have formed their habits of not going to school and their parents also have knowledge that their wards

were missing the school. There is hardly any motivation from the family or from the community to pursue studies. Even if the repentance by the respondents is there but the environment by which they are surrounded does not give them the boost to study. System of values and attitudes that poor people passed on to their children is a 'culture of poverty' and it holds truth in the present context too.

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