


# School Dropout and Child Labour: A Study of Ragpicking Children in Malisahi, Bhubaneswar

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**Abstract:** Child labor and school dropout continue to pose significant difficulties to child development and social justice in India, especially for children residing in urban informal settlements. This study investigates the correlation between school dropout rates and child labor among ragpicking children in Malisahi, one of the oldest and most disadvantaged communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The research is based on a child rights framework and examines the interplay of poverty, social exclusion, educational deficit, and informal labor in influencing the lives of at-risk children. Despite considerable focus on child labor and educational exclusion in India, there is a paucity of empirical studies about ragpicking children in metropolitan Odisha, especially in populations grappling with severe poverty, migration, informal work, and social stigma. The research utilized a descriptive and exploratory design. Primary data were obtained from 40 child ragpickers via structured interviews, observations, and informal talks. Secondary information was sourced from government records, census publications, UNICEF and ILO reports, academic literature, and policy papers pertaining to child labor, education, and child rights. The analysis included basic statistical methods, including frequency and percentage distributions. The study illustrates that child labor among ragpicking youngsters is not just an economic concern but a reflection of systemic inequality, social isolation, and the infringement of fundamental rights. The study indicates that successful child protection necessitates a comprehensive strategy that integrates economic alleviation, educational assistance, social security, community awareness, family fortification, and child rights education. A transition from rescue-focused interventions to a rights-based and development-oriented paradigm is crucial to guarantee the educational engagement, dignity, and comprehensive development of at-risk urban children.

**Keywords:** Child labor; school dropout; ragpicking children; educational deprivation; child rights; social exclusion; urban poverty; informal settlements; educational marginalization

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Access Online



## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Child labor and school dropout rates persist as substantial obstacles to child care and educational advancement in India. Despite significant advancements in educational access since the implementation of the Right to Education Act (2009), a considerable proportion of children continue to be excluded from schools due to economic hardship, social disadvantage, migration, and participation in labor activities. Modern researchers contend that child labor is influenced not just by poverty but also by systemic inequities and restricted access to social protection. Edmonds and Shrestha (2014) characterize child labor as a household survival strategy employed during economic uncertainty, whereas Khan and Lyon (2015) highlight that children involved in labor frequently encounter diminished educational engagement and inferior learning results. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF (2023) indicate that children from economically disadvantaged homes are disproportionately engaged in informal and hazardous labor, negatively impacting their educational achievements and future prospects.

## 2 | MALISAH: A PRECARIOUS URBAN HABITAT

Malisahi, situated in the center of Bhubaneswar, exemplifies one of the city's oldest and most densely inhabited informal communities. The area evolved concurrently with the growth of Bhubaneswar, becoming a magnet for migrant families pursuing opportunities in the urban informal sector. Kundu (2003) asserts that informal settlements in Indian cities are marked by precarious livelihoods, substandard housing, congestion, and restricted access to vital services. Comparable circumstances are observable in Malisahi, where a significant portion of the populace relies on low-wage employment, including domestic work, construction labor, street selling, rubbish collection, and various informal enterprises.

Studies on urban poverty indicate that hardship in slum neighborhoods transcends economic disadvantage, incorporating social isolation, inadequate access to public services, and constrained prospects for upward mobility. Research undertaken in the slums of Bhubaneswar by Panigrahi and Das (2014) revealed that inadequate sanitation, dietary deficiencies, and limited parental education substantially influence children's health and developmental results. Such settings provide an environment in which youngsters are especially susceptible to school disruption and labor market involvement.

## 3 | CHILDREN IN COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY PROSTITUTION AND MARGINALIZATION

Specific areas of Malisahi have always been linked to the commercial sex trade and other marginalized informal professions. Research on children living in red-light and prostitution-impacted areas of India reveals that they encounter several disadvantages due to societal stigma, discrimination, familial instability, and economic uncertainty. Research conducted by Apne Aap Women Worldwide (2018) and the National Human Rights Commission (2022) indicates that children of sex workers often face exclusion from mainstream social institutions, such as schools, and are at heightened risk of exploitation, child labor, trafficking, and psychological distress. The social milieu in these areas frequently restricts children's access to beneficial educational opportunities and heightens their exposure to precarious economic activities from a young age.

## 4 | CHILD LABOR, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, AND EDUCATIONAL DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Child labor is not just an economic issue but a profound infringement of children's essential rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) affirms each child's entitlement to education, protection, growth, participation, and a life devoid of economic exploitation. Likewise, the Constitution of India ensures the right to education through Article 21A and safeguards against

dangerous labor by Article 24. Notwithstanding these legal protections, millions of youngsters persist in labor activities that jeopardize their scholastic prospects and general welfare.

The Census of India (2011) reported that over 11.8 million children aged 5 to 17 were involved in labor. In Odisha, official estimates suggest that over 378,000 children aged 5 to 14 engage in economic activities, notably in sectors like as ragpicking, domestic labor, roadside enterprises, construction, and other informal employment. Educational indicators indicate ongoing difficulty. UDISE+ (The Unified District Information System for Education Plus) (2024–25) indicated a secondary-level dropout rate of 9.8 percent in Odisha, although ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) (2024) revealed that around 6.5 percent of students aged 15–16 years were not enrolled in school. Recent research increasingly frames child labor as a child rights issue rather than only a poverty-related concern. The International Labour Organization and UNICEF (2023) assert that child work robs children of educational opportunities, healthy development, enjoyment, and social engagement, thus compromising several aspects of child well-being. Bourdillon, Levison, Myers, and White (2016) assert that children's participation in labor frequently hinders their access to educational resources and constrains their future potential, perpetuating intergenerational poverty. The infringement of children's rights is especially evident in areas impacted by prostitution. Research by the National Human Rights Commission (2022), UNICEF (2024), and Apne Aap Women Worldwide (2018) indicates that children of sex workers often face compounded vulnerabilities due to poverty, social stigma, housing instability, discrimination, and inadequate institutional support. Such circumstances frequently obstruct the fulfillment of fundamental rights, encompassing the right to education, protection from exploitation, access to healthcare, and social inclusion. These children are more prone to obstacles in school enrollment and retention, while concurrently experiencing heightened hazards of child labor, trafficking, maltreatment, and emotional distress. Recent studies have underscored the scholastic difficulties faced by children living in red-light districts and communities impacted by prostitution, economic hardship, and social isolation, which frequently force children in underprivileged urban populations to undertake income-generating roles at a young age, thereby diminishing school attendance and heightening dropout chances.

In communities like Malisahi, where poverty, informal work, migration, and social marginalization converge, children's participation in ragpicking and other survival-driven professions signifies deeper deficiencies in the fulfillment of child rights. Their participation in labor not only interrupts educational continuity but also limits prospects for healthy children's development, social mobility, and future economic stability. Thus, child labor among vulnerable urban youth should be perceived as both a reflection of systemic injustice and a violation of essential children's rights.

## 5 | RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Although the existing literature has thoroughly explored child labor, educational deprivation, urban poverty, and the vulnerability of children in communities affected by prostitution, there is a paucity of empirical research addressing the intersection of these issues in urban Odisha. Specifically, there is less information about the impact of ragpicking on school attendance and educational continuity among children living in socially deprived areas like Malisahi, Bhubaneswar. The importance of the current study resides in its child-rights viewpoint, which interprets school dropout and child labor not just as socio-economic consequences but as indications of unfulfilled rights pertaining to education, protection, development, and social inclusion. Children involved in ragpicking frequently lack access to opportunities vital for their physical, cognitive, and emotional development, therefore jeopardizing their future prospects.

This study investigates the correlation between ragpicking and school dropout rates among children in Malisahi, aiming to enhance the knowledge of how poverty, social stigma, informal labor, and urban

marginalization influence children's educational experiences. The results may offer significant insights for policymakers, educators, child protection agencies, and civil society organizations aiming to enhance child rights, mitigate school dropout rates, and foster inclusive educational opportunities for at-risk urban children.

## 6 | OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The Objective of the study is as follows:

- To assess the educational status of child ragpickers.
- To examine the extent and causes of school dropout among child ragpickers.
- To analyze the socio-economic factors associated with children's engagement in ragpicking.
- To assess awareness of child rights among child ragpickers.
- To examine the implications of child labour on educational participation and child well-being.

## 7 | RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the educational condition of child ragpickers?
- What factors contribute to school dropout rates among young ragpickers?
- What is the impact of ragpicking on children's educational engagement and persistence?
- What is the extent of understanding among child ragpickers regarding their rights?
- What is the perception of schooling and future possibilities among child ragpickers?

## 8 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**8.1. Research Design:** The research employed a descriptive and exploratory approach to investigate the educational status, school dropout trends, and knowledge of child rights among ragpicking children in Malisahi, Bhubaneswar. The concept was deemed suitable since it enabled a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic situations and educational experiences of youngsters involved in ragpicking activities.

**8.2. Study area:** The research was carried out at Malisahi, one of the oldest informal communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The settlement is marked by destitution, migration, informal work, substandard housing, and restricted access to essential services. Specific areas of the settlement are linked to socially disadvantaged and stigmatized professions, rendering children especially susceptible to school exclusion and child labor.

**8.3. Universe and Sample:** The study's universe consisted of juvenile ragpickers living in Malisahi. The sample for the study comprised 40 child ragpickers.

**8.4. Sampling Methodology:** Purposive sampling was utilized to locate and choose youngsters actively participating in ragpicking activities. The respondents were chosen based on their participation in garbage collection and recycling activities, as well as their availability during the field survey.

**8.5. Data Sources:** Both primary and secondary data were employed. Primary data were obtained directly from child ragpickers via organized interviews and personal interactions. Secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles, government papers, census publications, UDISE+ reports, UNICEF reports, ILO publications, and other pertinent materials concerning child labor, education, and child rights.

**8.6. Data Collection Methods:** Data were gathered via: Organized interview framework, Observation technique, Casual dialogues with children and community constituents. The interview schedule comprised inquiries on socio-economic background, educational achievement, school attendance, dropout reasons, knowledge of child rights, work experiences, and future aspirations.

**8.7. Data Analysis:** The gathered data were categorized, organized, and examined utilizing basic statistical methods, including frequency and percentage distributions. The results were analyzed within the whole context of children's rights, educational disenfranchisement, and social marginalization.

**8.8. Ethical Considerations:** Informed permission was gained from parents, guardians, or responsible adults wherever feasible, given that the study involved minors. The confidentiality and identity of responders were preserved throughout the investigation. Participation was optional, and the data gathered was utilized exclusively for scholarly reasons.

**8.9. Limitation of the Research:**

- The study was limited to Malisahi, Bhubaneswar; hence, the results cannot be extrapolated to all child ragpickers in Odisha.
- The sample size was constrained to 40 respondents.
- Responses were predominantly derived from self-reported data, potentially affected by memory constraints and subjective interpretations.
- Owing to the delicate nature of child labor and familial situations, several respondents exhibited hesitance in disclosing comprehensive information.

## 9 | ANALYSIS

### 9.1. Education Attainment of Ragpicking Children

Education is commonly acknowledged as a fundamental human right and an essential tool for social, economic, and personal advancement. It empowers children to attain information, skills, values, and opportunities essential for leading a decent life and disrupting the cycle of poverty. Child ragpickers represent one of the most neglected categories of working children. Their involvement in rubbish collecting frequently starts at a young age as a result of poverty, familial turmoil, migration, and social marginalization. Consequently, education is relegated to a subordinate status in favor of urgent economic survival. As a result, numerous juvenile ragpickers either forgo schooling or terminate their education prematurely, so limiting their future prospects and prolonging intergenerational poverty.

**Table-1**  
**Education Attainment of Ragpicking Children**

Education attainment	No. of child Ragpickers	Percentage
Literate	13	32.5
Illiterate	27	67.5
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

Table no- 1 displays the educational attainment of the respondents. The results indicate that of 40 surveyed child ragpickers, 27 children (67.5%) were illiterate, and 13 children (32.5%) were literate. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that almost two-thirds of the respondents lack fundamental reading skills. A limited percentage of pupils had attained fundamental educational competencies. The data indicate that educational exclusion is significantly common among youngsters involved in ragpicking activities

The significant illiteracy rate among child ragpickers illustrates the strong correlation between poverty, child labor, and educational disadvantage. Families experiencing extreme poverty frequently rely on children's income to augment household finances, resulting in early entry of youngsters into the labor market. In these conditions, education is sometimes regarded as a subordinate priority relative to economic survival.

The results demonstrate that educational exclusion among ragpicking children is not only a consequence of individual or familial decisions, but rather a reflection of wider systemic disparities. Parental illiteracy, precarious livelihoods, migration, insufficient social safety, and restricted educational assistance greatly contribute to children's disengagement from education. The prevalence of illiteracy among these youngsters illustrates how child labor perpetuates the erosion of human capital and limits prospects for social advancement.

The findings illustrate the perpetuation of social inequality, wherein children from disadvantaged populations inherit circumstances of adversity that restrict their access to school and future prospects. Consequently, ragpicking serves as both a result and a sustainer of poverty

The findings indicate a significant infringement of the Right to Education and the Right to Development as articulated in the UNCRC (1989). Education is not only a service but a basic right crucial for the comprehensive development of a child's character, talents, and capabilities. That 67.5 percent of respondents are illiterate signifies that these youngsters cannot exercise a right assured by both international and national legal systems.

The educational deprivation faced by child ragpickers also compromises numerous interrelated rights, including the Right to Protection, Right to Participation, and Right to an Adequate Standard of Living. Children who are excluded from the school system are more susceptible to exploitation, hazardous labor, substance misuse, trafficking, and social marginalization. Their absence from education constrains their ability to engage meaningfully in decisions impacting their life and diminishes their future prospects for dignified work and social engagement.

## 9.2. Literacy level between Male and Female Child Ragpickers

Gender-wise analysis of literacy among child ragpickers reveals significant educational deprivation among both boys and girls. Table 4.20 indicates that, of the 40 respondents, 14 children were literate and 26 were illiterate. Among the male responders, 9 children were literate, and 19 were illiterate, totaling 28 male child ragpickers. Among female responders, 5 children were literate, and 7 were illiterate, from a total of 12 female child ragpickers.

**Table-2**  
**Literacy Level between Male and Female Child Ragpickers**

Gender	Literate	Illiterate	Total
Male	9	19	28
Female	5	7	12
Total	14	26	40

Source: Field data

The results demonstrate that illiteracy is widespread among both male and female child ragpickers. A greater percentage of male children were identified as illiterate in comparison to female youngsters. The prevalence of illiteracy among male child ragpickers may be associated with their increased participation in income-generating activities beyond the household. In several low-income metropolitan families, boys are frequently expected to provide economic support for family sustenance from a young age. As a result, they allocate more time to ragpicking, rubbish collecting, and other informal labor activities, thereby diminishing their chances for consistent school attendance and education.

The educational circumstances of female child ragpickers are similarly troubling. The decreased absolute number of illiterate girls mostly indicates their reduced representation in the sample. Girls from underprivileged groups may have supplementary obstacles, including household duties,

caregiving for siblings, early marriage, gender discrimination, and restricted educational resources. Consequently, educational exclusion among child ragpickers impacts both sexes, albeit via distinct avenues.

The results indicate that poverty and labor engagement are more significant factors influencing educational deficiency than gender alone. The prevalent illiteracy among both genders illustrates the extensive influence of socio-economic deprivation on children's educational prospects. The findings indicate that both male and female child ragpickers are denied their Right to Education and Right to Development, as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the Constitution of India. The prevalence of illiteracy among working children signifies that educational opportunities are inequitably accessible to vulnerable populations.

The findings also highlight concerns about the concept of non-discrimination established in Article 2 of the UNCRC, which mandates that all children, regardless of gender, social background, or economic condition, have equal access to their rights. Educational exclusion for both genders signifies the disappointment of contemporary arrangements to safeguard youngsters against conditions that force them into labor instead of pursuing education.

Moreover, the participation of children in ragpicking infringes against their entitlement to a childhood devoid of economic exploitation and perilous labor. When children are forced to put labor above education, their future potential, life opportunities, and social mobility are significantly constrained. The gender-specific literacy trends among child ragpickers underscore the pressing necessity for focused educational initiatives, child labor prevention strategies, and comprehensive support frameworks that cater to the distinct vulnerabilities encountered by both boys and girls in disadvantaged urban areas.

### 9.3. Literacy Level Across the School Attendance Children

To comprehend the educational advancement of youngster ragpickers, respondents were inquired about the greatest grade they had completed. The data in Table 3 indicate differing degrees of educational achievement among the youngsters. Among the 40 respondents, 6 children (15%) had completed education from Classes I to II, another 6 children (15%) had progressed to Classes III and IV, 7 children (17.5%) had studied from Classes V to VI, and 8 children (20%) had advanced to Classes VII and VIII. A somewhat greater percentage, 13 children (32.5%), indicated enrollment in Class IX or higher.

**Table-3**  
**Literacy Level Across the School Attendance Children**

Literary levels	No. of child Ragpickers	Percentage
1st standard to 2nd std.	6	15
3rd std. to 4th std.	6	15
5th std. to 6th std.	7	17.5
7th std. to 8th std.	8	20
9th std. and above	13	32.5
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

The findings reveal that although some students are advancing to higher grades, educational achievement is inconsistent and disjointed. A significant percentage of responders are situated in the lower and medium tiers of education, indicating fragmented educational pathways. The results indicate that school involvement among children ragpickers is frequently marked by inconsistent attendance, disrupted education, and postponed academic advancement. Although 32.5 percent of

respondents indicated they attained Class IX or above, this does not inherently signify sustained or effective educational involvement. Numerous working children encounter frequent disruptions in their education owing to economic duties, familial commitments, relocation, or unfavorable living circumstances.

The allocation of respondents across various educational tiers suggests that academic progression becomes progressively more challenging for youngsters involved in labor. The presence of children in lower classes, although being of school age, may suggest late enrollment, grade repetition, or extended absence from school. Such trends are frequently found among youngsters from underprivileged urban settings, when educational engagement contends with survival necessities. From a social standpoint, these data illustrate the aggregate disadvantages encountered by children in impoverished conditions. Educational advancement is determined not just by personal aptitude but also by the availability of nurturing familial settings, sufficient educational resources, and stable socio-economic circumstances. The lack of these facilitating characteristics frequently leads to disrupted educational trajectories and constrained academic success.

The findings underscore problems related to the fulfillment of the Right to Education and the Right to Development from a child rights viewpoint. While several children have attained access to formal education, their inconsistent academic advancement indicates that just access is inadequate; retention, continuity, and substantive learning are equally vital elements of educational rights.

Articles 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) underscore the importance of school enrollment and the child's entitlement to a comprehensive education within an environment conducive to holistic development. The disjointed educational achievement shown among child ragpickers suggests that numerous youngsters cannot completely capitalize on educational possibilities owing to labor engagement and socio-economic difficulties.

The results indicate that educational systems have failed to sufficiently assist disadvantaged working children. Upholding children's rights necessitates more than mere school enrollment; it requires ongoing initiatives to combat child labor, alleviate economic obstacles to education, offer remedial assistance, and establish inclusive educational settings that empower marginalized children to persist in and complete their studies. The scholastic profile of young children ragpickers illustrates not just individual educational results but also wider issues in fulfilling children's fundamental rights and developmental prospects.

#### 9.4. School Dropout among Ragpicking Children:

School dropout is a critical indicator of educational marginalization among young ragpickers. Table 4 indicates that among 40 respondents, 29 children (72.5%) had discontinued their schooling, whilst 11 children (27.5%) persisted in their studies.

**Table-4**  
**Drop out from School of Ragpicking Children**

Drop out from school	No. of child Ragpickers	Percentage
Yes	29	72.5
No	11	27.5
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

The statistics unequivocally indicate that a significant majority of juvenile ragpickers have ceased their formal schooling. The dropout rate of 72.5 percent signifies that school discontinuation is prevalent among youngsters involved in ragpicking activities.

The remarkably elevated dropout rate signifies the intricate interplay of poverty, child labor, familial instability, and educational inequity. For several families residing in underprivileged metropolitan areas, urgent economic survival sometimes supersedes long-term educational aspirations. As a result, children are forced to engage in cash-generating activities like ragpicking to augment household income.

The results indicate that school dropout is not only an educational concern but a reflection of wider socio-economic disadvantage. Children who discontinue their education frequently encounter unstable familial conditions, parental health issues, financial burdens, relocation, and insufficient educational assistance. The shift from education to employment transpires progressively as economic demands intensify and sustaining educational engagement becomes challenging.

From a sociological standpoint, the elevated dropout rate signifies mechanisms of social exclusion and the perpetuation of inequality. Educational institutions, intended to serve as instruments of social mobility, do not succeed in retaining children from the most impoverished homes. Consequently, many children stay ensnared in cycles of poverty and informal labor, with restricted prospects for upward mobility.

The elevated rate of school dropout represents a significant infringement of the Right to Education and the Right to Development, as enshrined in Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and Article 21A of the Constitution of India. Although enrollment is significant, the full realization of children's rights occurs only when they can persist in school, finish their education, and access substantial learning opportunities.

The 72.5 percent dropout rate signifies that a substantial number of youngsters are being deprived of chances for academic, social, emotional, and personal growth. The cessation of education heightens children's susceptibility to hazardous labor, exploitation, substance misuse, trafficking, and enduring social exclusion. Children who prematurely exit the educational system frequently have restricted work prospects in adulthood and are more inclined to persist in low-wage and unstable jobs.

The results underscore a failure to adhere to the premise of the child's best interests, a fundamental tenet of the UNCRC. When youngsters are compelled to forsake school and enter the labor market, their current welfare and future opportunities are jeopardized. The elevated dropout rate among ragpicking children must be regarded not only as an educational issue but as a significant child rights concern that necessitates immediate policy intervention, effective enforcement of child protection legislation, and focused initiatives to guarantee educational retention and rehabilitation for working children.

#### **9.5. Reason for Dropout from the School:**

Comprehending the causes of school dropout is crucial for recognizing the elements that lead to educational exclusion among child ragpickers. Table 5 illustrates that many socio-economic and familial variables affect children's cessation of schooling. Among the respondents, parents residing below the poverty line constituted the primary factor for dropout, representing 27.5 percent of the instances. This was succeeded by parental death or sickness (20%), disinterest in education (15%), parental illiteracy (12.5%), and parental reluctance towards education (10%). A minority of respondents identified insufficient school facilities (7.5%) and academic failure (7.5%) as reasons for discontinuing their education.

**Table No-5**  
**Reasons for Dropping Out of School**

Reasons for drop out	No. of child Ragpickers	Percentage
Parents illiteracy	5	12.5
Parents living below the poverty line	11	27.5
Parents unwillingness	4	10
Parents' death, illness	8	20
Lack of school	3	7.5
Not interested	6	15
Failed	3	7.5
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

The results indicate that economic difficulties connected to family and household crises are the primary causes of school dropout among child ragpickers.

The results indicate that school dropout among ragpicking youngsters is predominantly attributable to structural and socio-economic difficulties rather than personal decision-making. Poverty appeared as the predominant issue, signifying that several families cannot afford even the indirect expenses of education, including transportation, uniforms, learning materials, and the opportunity cost of children's labor. In economically disadvantaged homes, children's financial contributions frequently become essential, leading to their removal from educational institutions.

The loss or sickness of a parent is a key factor leading to educational cessation. The death of a parent or a lengthy sickness frequently results in financial instability and increased caregiving duties within the home, necessitating that children adopt adult responsibilities prematurely. Parental illiteracy and reluctance towards education indicate the restricted educational awareness common in underprivileged areas, where urgent economic issues frequently take precedence over long-term educational goals.

The results indicate that educational disengagement is affected by institutional variables. Academic failure, insufficient educational assistance, and poor school accessibility can undermine children's motivation and elevate the risk of dropout. Consequently, the phenomenon of school dropout among child ragpickers must be perceived as the result of several interrelated disadvantages functioning at the family, community, and institutional tiers.

The study identifies major challenges to the implementation of children's fundamental rights from a child rights viewpoint regarding school dropout reasons. Poverty-induced dropout is a breach of the Right to Education and the Right to Development, since children are forced to forgo learning to ensure household survival. The ongoing educational exclusion of economically disadvantaged children undermines the goals of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, which aims to provide universal access to education. Parental sickness, death, and economic instability further compromise the child's Right to Survival and Development, as acknowledged by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Children in such situations require enhanced social protection and institutional assistance to avert educational interruption. The results demonstrate that current welfare and child protection systems have insufficiently met the requirements of these at-risk households. Furthermore, dropout rates attributable to parental illiteracy and insufficient educational awareness signify wider concerns of social exclusion and intergenerational poverty. When children are deprived of uninterrupted access to school owing to uncontrollable conditions, they become increasingly susceptible to child labor, exploitation, hazardous employment, and enduring poverty. This study highlights the necessity for comprehensive interventions that merge poverty

reduction, educational support, family aid, and child safety measures to guarantee that every child may access their right to education and development.

#### 9.6. Distance Travelled for Attending School by Ragpicking Children:

Proximity to educational institutions is a crucial determinant affecting school attendance and retention, especially among children from impoverished groups. Table 6 illustrates the distance traversed by child ragpickers to reach school. Among the 40 respondents, 16 children (40%) commuted between 1 and 2 kilometers to school, and 14 children (35%) went up to 0.5 km. Of the remaining 10 students, 25% said that they traveled over 3 kilometers to reach school.

**Table 6**  
**Distance Travelled for Attending School by Ragpicking Children**

Distance travelled in K.M.	No.	Percentage
½ K.M.	14	35
1 to 2 K.M.	16	40
More than 3 K.M.	10	25
Total	40	100.00

Source: Field data

The results reveal that a substantial percentage of youngsters must go extensive distances to reach educational institutions, with one-fourth of the participants traveling over three kilometers. The distance that exists children travel in order to attend school signifies a crucial aspect of educational accessibility. Although the majority of respondents attended schools within an acceptable proximity, a significant proportion were compelled to go rather extensive distances. For youngsters already encumbered with domestic duties and ragpicking tasks, extended travel lengths might lead to tiredness, inconsistent attendance, tardiness, and ultimately, school dropout.

The results indicate that physical access to schools continues to pose a difficulty for certain children from vulnerable urban populations. Distance is especially critical when coupled with poverty, inadequate transportation, deficient infrastructure, hazardous routes, and the exigencies of child labor. Children involved in ragpicking frequently start employment before dawn and may possess insufficient time and energy to traverse considerable distances for education. As a result, sustaining educational involvement may become progressively challenging.

From a sociological standpoint, educational access encompasses more than the simple presence of schools. It includes children's capacity to access educational institutions securely, consistently, and without excessive difficulty. Consequently, the distance element must be comprehended within the wider framework of social and economic adversity faced by child ragpickers. The findings raise concerns about the successful achievement of the Right to Education from a child rights perspective. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 assert that education must be universally accessible to all children without discrimination. When children must go extensive distances under challenging socio-economic situations, their capacity to exercise this right is negatively impacted.

Child ragpickers frequently face the additional challenges of traversing extensive distances due to poverty, labor obligations, insufficient nourishment, and hazardous living circumstances. These elements may deter consistent attendance and elevate the probability of educational cessation. In these conditions, obstacles to accessibility indirectly impede children's Right to Development, rendering educational options less accessible.

The findings indicate a necessity for child-centric educational planning, encompassing enhanced access to local schools, transportation assistance for at-risk children, and focused educational interventions in underserved regions. Ensuring physical accessibility in schools is crucial for upholding children's educational rights and fostering their entire development and well-being.

### 9.7. Mainstreaming of Education among Child Ragpickers:

The reinstatement of out-of-school children into formal education is an essential aspect of child care and educational inclusion. To comprehend the educational ambitions of young ragpickers, participants were inquired about their desire to integrate into formal education. The data in Table 7 indicate that approximately 47.5% of respondents were ambivalent about returning to school, selecting "Don't Know." Additionally, 35% exhibited disinterest in re-enrollment, while merely 17.5% demonstrated a willingness to re-enter the educational system.

**Table - 7**  
**Percentage distribution of sample respondents by mainstreaming of education**

Variable	No. of child ragpickers	Percent
Not interested	14	35
Interested	7	17.5
Don't know	19	47.5
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

The data reveal that most child ragpickers either exhibit disinterest in education or are doubtful about the feasibility of returning to school, whilst just a minor percentage show a favorable attitude towards educational integration.

The results indicate a profound degree of educational disengagement among child ragpickers. The significant percentage of respondents uncertain about reentering school indicates the extended absence of these youngsters from formal educational settings. A significant number of youngsters involved in ragpicking have been outside the educational system for extended durations and may no longer regard schooling as essential to their daily existence or future goals.

The observation that over one-third of respondents showed no inclination to return to school suggests that educational deprivation has been accepted in their daily experiences. Prolonged exposure to poverty, labor obligations, familial difficulties, and social marginalization frequently diminishes children's motivation for school. Moreover, persistent academic underachievement, prejudice, subpar educational experiences, and insufficient institutional support may foster adverse opinions of education.

The diminished interest in conventional schooling also signifies the cumulative effects of prolonged social marginalization. Children that engage in labor markets throughout their early years often cultivate survival-oriented mindsets, prioritizing immediate revenue generating above long-term educational investment. As a result, educational expectations decline, hence prolonging cycles of poverty and workforce involvement.

The findings indicate a significant worry over the fulfillment of the Right to Education, Right to Development, and Right to Participation as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The mere 17.5 percent of respondents indicating a desire to return to school signifies that numerous children have grown estranged from a fundamental right essential for their intellectual, emotional, and social development.

The significant proportion of youngsters unclear about educational mainstreaming indicates not only a deficiency in awareness but also an institutional failure to establish supportive and child-centric educational settings. When children become so disengaged from education that they cannot foresee a return, it indicates a profound process of social exclusion and denial of rights.

The results also underscore apprehensions pertaining to the Right to Participation. Children subjected to extended marginalization frequently lack avenues to articulate their ambitions, make educated judgments, and engage in choices that influence their future. Their apprehension over schooling signifies restricted exposure to diverse life choices and insufficient advice from familial, educational, and social welfare agencies.

Consequently, integrating child ragpickers into education necessitates more than just school enrollment programs. It requires extensive rehabilitation initiatives, educational bridging programs, counseling services, family support interventions, and community awareness initiatives that can restore children's trust in school and reinstate their faith in a brighter future. From a rights-based approach, educational mainstreaming is crucial for guaranteeing that every child receives their entitlement to learning, growth, dignity, and social inclusion.

### 9.8. Opinion on continuation of this job:

Comprehending children's conceptions of their prospective engagement in ragpicking yields significant insights into their goals, livelihood anticipations, and degree of social integration. Table 8 reveals that 13 respondents (32.5%) indicated their readiness to persist in ragpicking for as long as feasible. Seven additional respondents (17.5%) indicated that they would persist in the work to a certain degree. Conversely, 5 respondents (12.5%) expressed a desire to terminate the profession, and 6 respondents (15%) stated they would cease it after a period of time. A significant percentage of youngsters (22.5%) expressed uncertainty over their future, indicating that they were unsure about the continuation of their career.

**Table - 8**  
**Percentage distribution of sample respondents by opinion on continue of this job**

Variable	No. of child ragpickers	Percent
Continue	13	32.5
Continue some extent	7	17.5
Discontinue	5	12.5
Discontinue after some extent	6	15
Don't know	9	22.5
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

The results indicate that 50% of respondents were predisposed to persist in ragpicking either indefinitely or for an extended duration, while just 27.5% indicated a want to abandon the profession. Approximately twenty-five percent of the youngsters expressed uncertainty regarding their future.

The data indicate that ragpicking has evolved into a fundamental aspect of many respondents' life, not only as a transient hobby but as a viable economic alternative. The considerable percentage of youngsters inclined to persist in the career indicates the restricted chances they face regarding education, skill enhancement, and alternative work options. For youngsters enduring persistent poverty, ragpicking frequently serves as an immediate and attainable source of cash, complicating the prospect of envisioning alternate futures.

The uncertainty articulated by 22.5 percent of respondents signifies a deficiency in direction, guidance, and future planning. Numerous juvenile ragpickers are raised in contexts marked by economic instability, social exclusion, and lack of educational opportunities. Consequently, they frequently possess a restricted understanding of prospects beyond the informal labor market. Their comments demonstrate a survival-oriented mentality influenced by their socio-economic conditions. The results further illustrate how child labor may become institutionalized within underprivileged communities. When children begin work at a young age and devote substantial sections of their youth to labor, employment transforms into a normative feature of life rather than an anomaly. This normalization diminishes ambitions for education and upward social mobility, hence perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and marginalization. The findings are particularly alarming from a child rights standpoint, since they reveal the degree to which child labor has been internalized and accepted by the respondents. The eagerness of numerous youngsters to persist in ragpicking indicates a failure to sufficiently uphold the Right to Development, Right to Education, and Right to Protection from Economic Exploitation.

Article 32 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) affirms the right of children to be safeguarded against economic exploitation and from engaging in employment that is perilous or disrupts their education and development. Ragpicking subjects children to hazardous trash, health risks, injuries, environmental degradation, and social humiliation. The prevalence of youngsters perceiving such employment as their prospective profession underscores the enduring ramifications of educational exclusion and insufficient rehabilitation initiatives.

Moreover, the findings elicit apprehensions about children's Right to Development, which includes access to education, skill acquisition, personal growth, and future advancement. When youngsters view hazardous labor as their principal life choice, their developmental potential is significantly constrained. A considerable percentage of respondents' doubts indicates a lack of sufficient counselling, career advice, and support systems essential for informed decision-making.

Consequently, from a child rights standpoint, the results highlight the pressing necessity for extensive rehabilitation programs, educational integration initiatives, vocational training, family support services, and community-based interventions. Such steps are crucial to guarantee that children are offered viable alternatives to labor and are enabled to pursue possibilities aligned with their rights, dignity, and long-term welfare.

### **9.9. Awareness of Child Rights among Ragpicking Children:**

Understanding child rights is crucial for enabling children to identify, assert, and safeguard their claims. To evaluate the respondents' understanding of child rights, child ragpickers were inquired about their awareness of the four essential rights established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989): the Right to Survival, Right to Protection, Right to Development, and Right to Participation.

The results in Table 9 indicate a total lack of awareness of child rights among the respondents. None of the 40 child ragpickers had any awareness of these essential rights. As a result, the understanding of all four areas of child rights was documented at zero percent.

**Table - 9**  
**Awareness of Child Rights**

Variable	No. of child ragpickers	Percent
The Right to Survival	0	0
The Right to Protection	0	0
The Right to Development	0	0
The Right to Participation	0	0
Total	40	100.00

**Source:** Field data

The findings unequivocally demonstrate that none of the respondents had even a fundamental understanding of their legal and human rights as youngsters.

The total lack of understanding of child rights among the respondents indicates the profound social and educational marginalization faced by child ragpickers. Knowledge of rights is frequently obtained through formal education, familial supervision, community involvement, media exposure, and encounters with social welfare organizations. Nevertheless, youngsters involved in ragpicking typically stay estranged from these vital sources of information.

The data indicate that the respondents are maturing in contexts where survival supersedes education, legal consciousness, and personal growth. Their involvement in labor, coupled with poverty, school dropout, and social marginalization, constrains possibilities to get awareness regarding their rights and accessible protective mechanisms.

The absence of awareness signifies insufficient outreach by governmental bodies, educational institutions, child protection agencies, and non-governmental groups. Despite India's implementation of several laws and programs for child welfare and protection, the findings indicate that these measures have not properly reached certain highly vulnerable youngsters. Consequently, young ragpickers remain oblivious to their rights and are less inclined to seek help when confronted with exploitation, abuse, neglect, or educational exclusion. From a sociological standpoint, the findings illustrate a wider phenomenon of social exclusion whereby underprivileged children are deprived of both material resources and access to information, empowerment, and participation in social organizations. The findings are profoundly troubling from a child rights viewpoint, as knowledge is essential for the implementation and safeguarding of rights. Children without awareness of their rights are less equipped to recognize abuses, pursue assistance, or engage in decisions that impact their lives. The total lack of awareness among the respondents constitutes a substantial obstacle to the effective implementation of child rights.

The results demonstrate that the Right to Participation has been significantly compromised. Article 12 of the UNCRC acknowledges the right of children to articulate their opinions and engage in issues that impact them. Nonetheless, substantial engagement is challenging when youngsters are uninformed about their rights and entitlements.

The absence of knowledge undermines the acknowledgment of the Right to Protection, since children may fail to identify instances of exploitation, abuse, hazardous labor, or neglect as infringements of their rights. This is particularly important for ragpicking youngsters who face hazardous working conditions, health risks, social shame, and economic exploitation. The findings also bear significance for the Right to Development, since knowledge fosters self-confidence, empowerment, education, and informed decision-making. In the absence of awareness regarding their rights, children rely on other entities for protection and assistance, so constraining their capacity for self-advocacy.

The report underscores the pressing necessity for child rights education, awareness campaigns, school-based sensitization programs, community outreach activities, and focused interventions by child welfare organizations. Targeted initiatives are necessary to engage working children and individuals in marginalized groups, enabling them to recognize their rights and get the safeguards afforded by national and international legal frameworks. Promoting knowledge of child rights is not only an educational endeavor but a crucial measure for guaranteeing dignity, protection, participation, and social justice for at-risk children.

## 10 | CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHILD LABOUR PROTECTION SYSTEM: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The results of this study indicate that child ragpicking in Malisahi, Bhubaneswar, is not just an economic endeavor by children but a reflection of profound structural inequities ingrained in urban culture. The research indicates that a substantial percentage of child ragpickers are illiterate (67.5%), have discontinued their schooling (72.5%), have no interest in educational integration, and are unaware of fundamental child rights. Poverty, parental sickness, familial instability, educational disadvantage, and social isolation appeared as the primary causes driving youngsters into ragpicking. The data demonstrate that child labor and educational exclusion are mutually reinforcing phenomena that sustain intergenerational poverty and marginalization.

The experiences of juvenile ragpickers may be analyzed through the lens of social exclusion from a sociological standpoint. Silver (1994) posits that social exclusion functions via economic, institutional, and cultural processes that consistently impede specific groups from accessing opportunities and resources available to mainstream society. The children of Malisahi face exclusion from school, social protection, healthcare, child welfare services, and meaningful community involvement. Their involvement in ragpicking signifies systemic disadvantages rather than personal decisions.

Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital elucidates the ongoing educational marginalization experienced by ragpicking youngsters. Families experiencing extreme poverty frequently lack educational resources, social networks, and institutional support essential for fostering children's academic achievement. As a result, youngsters prematurely enter labor markets and progressively disengage from official educational institutions. The results of this study corroborate Bourdieu's assertion that educational disparities are frequently perpetuated by overarching social and economic inequities.

The study also aligns with the assertions made by Amartya Sen (1999) in his capability perspective, which underscores that progress should be perceived as the enhancement of human capacities and freedoms. Child labor impedes children's access to education, health, skills, and social mobility, thereby restricting their potential to attain a decent existence. In Malisahi, child ragpickers are denied both educational possibilities and essential freedoms vital for human growth.

## 11 | CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON CHILD LABOUR

India has a thorough legislative framework for the protection of children and the prohibition of child labor. Article 24 of the Constitution of India outlaws child labor by forbidding the employment of anyone under the age of 14 in dangerous activities. Article 21A ensures free and obligatory education for children from 6 to 14 years, but Articles 39(e) and 39(f) mandate the State to safeguard children from abuse and exploitation.

The implementation of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 marked a crucial legal advancement by forbidding the employment of individuals under 14 years in all sectors, with the exception of family businesses and entertainment pursuits under certain

conditions. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, enhance the legal framework for child protection.

Notwithstanding these legal protections, the results of the current investigation indicate a significant disparity between legislation and execution. The persistent existence of child ragpickers in Bhubaneswar demonstrates that legal prohibitions alone have been inadequate in eradicating child labor. Bhat and Rather (2021) contend that child labour endures due to the inadequacy of enforcement tools in tackling the underlying structural reasons of poverty, migration, familial hardship, and educational marginalization. In other instances, rescued children are temporarily removed from labor but subsequently return owing to ongoing economic hardship.

The legislative system predominantly focuses on prohibition and rescue operations, while allocating relatively insufficient attention to rehabilitation, family building, and long-term educational integration. As a result, numerous working children stay beyond the effective scope of social programs.

## 12 | OVERSIGHT SYSTEMS IN ODISHA AND BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has instituted several organizational frameworks to oversee child labor and child safety. These encompass:

- The Department of Labour and Employees' State Insurance, Government of Odisha.
- District Task Forces on Child Labor.
- The Odisha State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (OSCPCR).
- District Child Protection Units (DCPUs).
- Child Welfare Committees (CWCs).
- Specialized Juvenile Police Units.
- Structures of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).
- Services of CHILDLINE 1098.
- School Management Committees within the Right to Education framework.

Child labour monitoring in Bhubaneswar is conducted via collaborative efforts by the Labour Department, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation, District Administration, Police Department, Childline services, and non-governmental organizations. Regular rescue operations are executed at commercial premises, train stations, marketplaces, construction sites, and informal labor sectors.

Nonetheless, the results of this study indicate that these monitoring systems possess restricted visibility inside severely underprivileged groups like Malisahi. None of the respondents possessed knowledge of child rights, and a significant percentage remained excluded from educational systems. This signifies that monitoring efforts remain reactive instead of proactive.

UNICEF India (2023) emphasized that urban informal settlements need community-based monitoring methods to detect at-risk children prior to their entry into labor markets.

The difficulty is especially pronounced in regions marked by migration, informal work, and societal stigma. In these circumstances, child labor frequently remains concealed inside informal economic networks, complicating identification and intervention efforts. Therefore, monitoring systems must progress beyond intermittent inspections and implement continuous community participation strategies.

### 13 | CONCLUSION

The analysis determines that child ragpicking in Malisahi is mostly an issue of structural inequality rather than just a breach of labor law. The continued existence of child labor, despite constitutional assurances, child protection laws, and oversight systems, illustrates that legal measures alone are unable to eradicate the issue. Effective child protection necessitates the amalgamation of economic alleviation, educational inclusion, social security, community awareness, and familial support networks. From a sociological standpoint, child labor constitutes a manifestation of social exclusion that robs children of educational prospects, human dignity, and future potential. Without policy initiatives that tackle the interrelated issues of poverty, urban marginalization, migration, and educational disadvantage, child labor is likely to endure notwithstanding legislative prohibitions. Consequently, forthcoming child protection initiatives in Odisha and Bhubaneswar should transition from rescue-centric methodologies to a rights-based and development-focused framework that prioritizes children's education, welfare, and social participation within public policy.

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