OUT –OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN INDIA: THE STORY IN NUMBERS

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Abstract: This paper is deliberate to give a clear understanding of situation of out-of-school children in India in the light of national goal of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) i.e. MDG-2 and goal of elimination of gender disparity. Statistics used in this paper is of survey conducted by SRI-IMBR, NSSO, and census of India in year 2014. The basic theme of the paper is based on the critical analysis of the statistical estimation of Out-of-school children done by the different institutions which engaged in gathering data of out-of-school children from all over the country. A clears disparity can be seen in the data of different institutions. This paper also highlights the cause of disparities among the data.

Key Words: out-of-school children, Universalisation , disparity, mainstreaming ,MDG.

Introduction

In India in the last few years the rate of enrollment at primary and secondary level is increasing yet the different available evidences indicates that the large number of children are still out of-school. According to the census 2011 report approx 18.3 % children of 6-13 years age group was out-of-school, while the Social and Rural Research Institute –India Market Research Bureau (SRI-IMRB), 2014 survey data shows 3 % out-of-school children. Other data sources like National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), 2014 and Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE) showed 9.4 % and 8.61 % out-of-school children (OOSC) respectively. The available statistical data on OOSC obtained from the different National and International agencies are not very much reliable because it reflecting the different number of OOSC. It varies from country to country, states to states and varied even official Institution to institution engaged in estimation of OOSC statistics. Before start discussion on the cause of variation in estimation of OOSC by different data source it is important to define Out-of-school Children (OOSC).

Concept and definition of Out-Of-School Children (OOSC)-

A report on out –of-school children in South Asia Regional Study (Bangladesh , India Pakistan and Sri Lanka)conducted by UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF in year 2014 entitled " All Children in School by 2015 : Global Initiative on Out-of- School Children" used five dimension exclusion (5DE) model for conceptualizing OOSC.

Fig .1 Five dimensions of exclusion model (5 DE) –
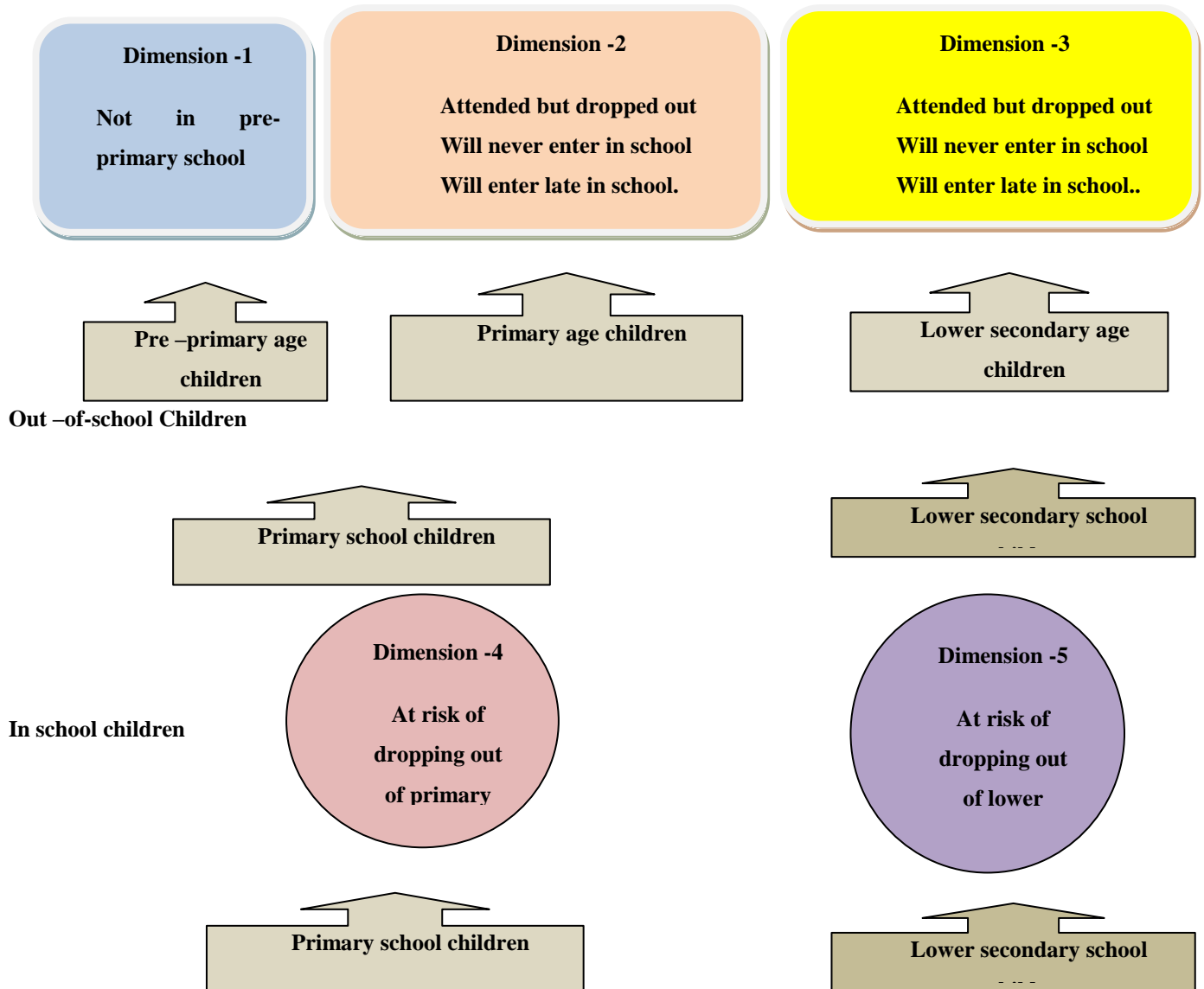
Source: Global initiative on Out –of School Children: South Asia Regional Study, UIS & UNICEF p.6

According to this model children of pre – primary, primary and lower secondary school age who are not in any formal school, come under dimension 1, 2 and 3 respectively and dimension 4 and 5 includes those children who are attending primary and lower secondary school respectively but are at the risk of dropping out . According to UNICEF all five dimension of children are excluded from the education system so come under the category of Out-of –School Children (OOSC).

A joint draft report of Social and Rural Research Institute (SRI) and Educational Consultant India LTD. (EdCIL), in September, 2014 entitled "National sample Survey of Estimation of Out-Of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India" defines Out-of-School Children (OOSC) as follows-

1. Those children who are either not enrolled or has been absent for more than **45 working days** or has discontinued studies from the schools (government schools, private school, Maktab and Madarsas -both recognized and unrecognized, Sanskrit Pathshala, Nursery and Kindergarten, schools run by Tribal and Social Welfare Department, and other schools which come under Education Guarantee scheme /Bridge Course /Alternative schools etc) is considered as Out-of-School Children (OOSC).

Out -of -school children (OOSC) includes three categories -

A) Dropouts-

If a child discontinues his/her studies in past or was absent for more than 45 working days (absentees) from school is categorized as dropout child.

B) Enrolled but Never Attended –

If a child is enrolled in the school (as mentioned above) but never attended the same is grouped under this category.

Never Enrolled –

If a child never enrolled in any type of school (as mention above) describe under the category of never enrolled.

Note – Long absent of child from school (45 working days) due to self /family member's illness, engagement in seasonal activities, temporary migration is not considered under out –of-School category, if the probability of child's rejoining the school is strong.

2. 'Out-of -school' refers mainly to those children aged 6–14years who are marginal to the school system; they do not regularly attend school: they may have never been enrolled or they may have 'dropped out'. (Laura Day Ashley, 2005 in study From Margin to Mainstream: Private School Outreach Inclusion Processes for Out-of-School Children in India).

Profiles of Out-of-School children in India-

In India there are two main sources of data collection of Out-of-school children one is administrative data sources and other is household surveys.

Administrative data sources –Many government organizations are engaged in gathering data related to out-of-school children. In administrative data sources unit of data collection is school. It collects data related to enrollment, infrastructural facilities, teacher related information etc. some of the administrative data sources are as follows:

- Statistics of School Education (SSE), earlier Selected Educational Statistics (SES)
- All India Education Survey (AIES)
- District Information System for Education (DISE)
- Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE)

Household surveys data sources– Household surveys are another source of data of out-of-school children in India. In the household surveys the unit of data collection is the households. Households' surveys are conducted by both the government and non government organizations .It gathers data related to school participation of children. Few household surveys conducted in India for estimation of Out-of –school children are as follows:

Population census

- National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) surveys
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS)
- Survey of out-of-school children conducted by Social and Rural Research Institute, a specialist unit of IMRB International ((SRI-IMBR)
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) household surveys and Child Tracking Surveys (CTS)
- India Human Development Survey (IHDS)
- Annual Status of Educational Report (ASER)

Statistical estimates of out-of-school children discussed in this paper is mainly based on household surveys conducted by , SRI-IMBR (2005-06,2009-10 & 2014-15) and NSSO 2014 and the administrative data of U-DISE (2014).

SRI-IMRB was conducted three surveys for estimation of OOSC in 2005, 2009 and 2014. These surveys were commissioned by the Educational consultants India Limited (EdCIL) and MHRD , Government of India .This is the only survey which estimates the number and profile of OOSC including analysis of school participation of slum children , children of BPL families and children with special needs

Table 1 Percentage OOSC by sex, age and location in three consecutive surveys of SRI-IMBR
Source: National Survey on Estimation of Out Of School children, 2014, SRI-IMRB

Year	Total OOSC 6-13 years	Gender		Age		Location	
		Boys	Girls	6-10 years	11-13 years	Rural	Urban
2005-06	6.94	6.18	7.92	6.12	8.56	7.8	4.34
2009-10	4.28	3.92	4.71	3.69	5.23	4.53	3.18
2014-15	2.97	2.77	3.23	2.77	3.28	3.13	2.54

Graph 1: Distribution of OOSC by SRI-IMBR surveys
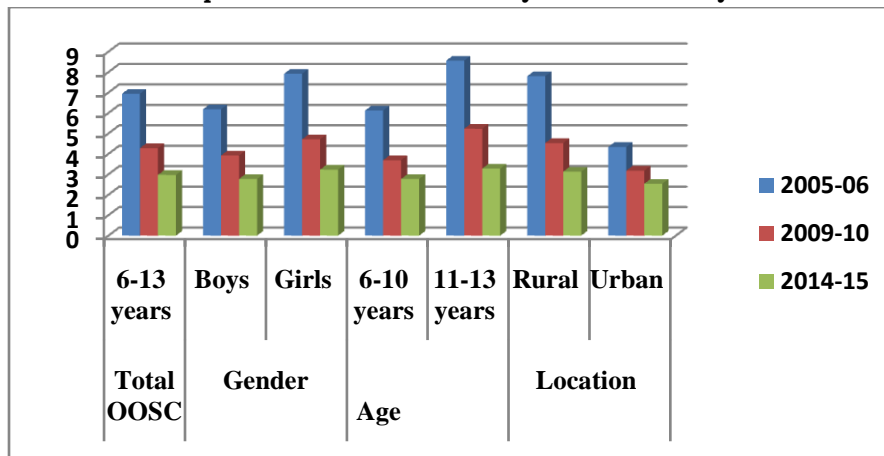
When compared with the previous rounds of the study we find that the decline in the rural areas is slightly higher than in the urban areas of the country i.e. from 7.8% to 4.53 % in year 2009

and 3.13% in year 2014. , but the decline in year from 2005 to 2009 is sharper than the year2009 to 2014, in both the rural as well as urban areas.

Disaggregating age wise reflects the decline in percentage of Out-of-school children in the 6-10 years age group from 6.1% in 2005 to 3.69% in 2009 and 2.77% in 2014 and a sharp decline from the previous two rounds of the study has been observed in the older age group of 11-13 years .the percentage of OOSC in this group has decreased from 5.23% in 2009 to 3.28 % in 2014.

In spite of greater effort by the government gender disparity still exist in India it can be clearly seen from the above data of all three round survey conducted by SRI-IMBR . Higher proportion of female children (3.23%) in the age group of 6-13 years is estimated to be out of school as compared to the male children (2.77%) in the latest survey of 2014. This is the trend similar to what has been observed in the last two rounds with 4.71% female and 3.92% male children out of school in 2009, and 7.92% female and 6.18% male children out of school in 2005.

The **National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO)** under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) has been conducting annual rounds of household surveys since 1950 primarily to provide data for planning and forming policies. Each round of the survey has a different subject of enquiry but information on education is collected in all the rounds. Based on rigorous sampling methods and estimation procedures, these datasets can be used to estimate school participation levels.

Table.2 Estimation of OOSC by NSSO (2007-08) and NSSO (2014) surveys

Age	NSSO 2007-08		NSSO 2014	
	Proportion (per cent)	**Number (in millions)**	**Proportion (per cent)**	**Number (in millions)**
6-10 years	11.8	14.86	10.7	13.97
11-13 years	13.4	9.84	7.1	5.28
6-13 years	12.4	24.70	9.4	19.25

Source: NSSO unit level data 2007-08(64th round) and 2014 (71st round)

Table .2 clearly indicates that the number of OOSC declined from 24.7 million in 2007-08 to 19.25 million in 2014. The decline was largely in children of 11-13 years age group i.e. from 9.84 million to 5.28 million .The number of OOSC in 6-10 years age group show a small decline.

U-DISE - A more recent initiative is the development of the Unified District Information System in Education (U-DISE) in 2012. This is a database for all schools with classes 1 to 12. Data from all schools under government and private management is collected under U-DISE. Private schools include all schools which receive financial support from the government (aided schools) and schools which do not receive any financial support. U-DISE is the primary source of information for education planning and monitoring for the two centrally sponsored programmes in school education –Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) or the National Campaign on Secondary Education From 2012-13.

Table.3 Estimates of OOSC by U-DISE survey, 2014

Age	Proportion of out-of-school children (per cent)	Number of out-of-school children (million)
6-10 years	7.84	10.24
11-13 years	9.95	7.40
6-13 year	8.61	17.64

Source: U-DISE, 2014 data

Graph 2: Distribution of OOSC by U-DISE, 2014
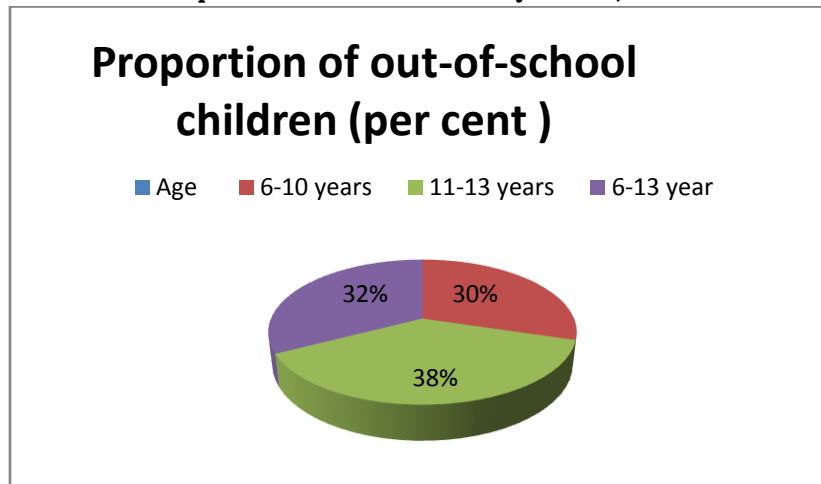
Estimate based on U-DISE data indicated 7.40 million children of 11-13 years age group and 10.24 million children of 6-10 years age group are out of school.

Reasons of variation among the different data sources –Reasons of different estimation of out-of-school children are the lack of uniform definition, inter - state differences of age of admission, school session and others, different method of data collection and estimation adopted by different institutions (figure 2)

Figure -2 Diagrams showing the cause of variation between data of different sources
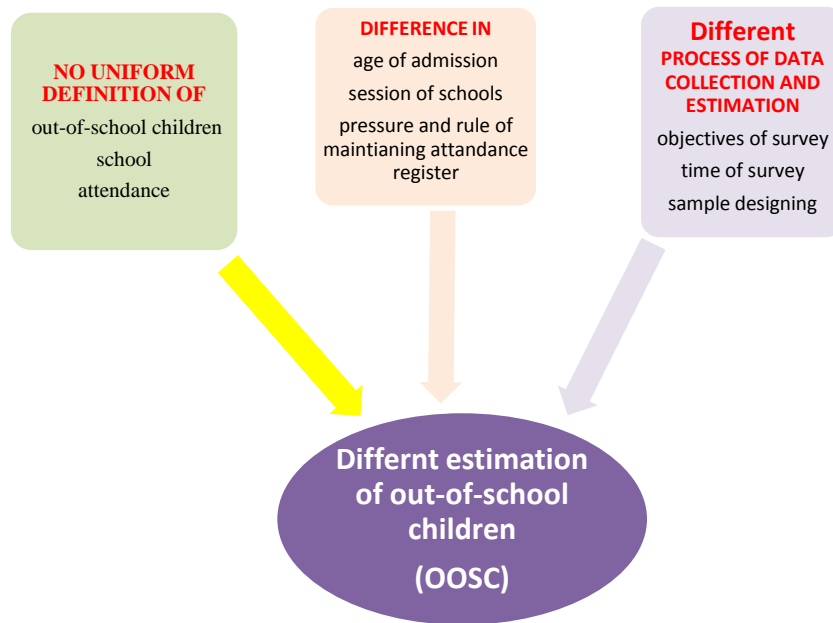
Lack of uniform definition- Different data sources adopted the different definition of out-of-school children; school and attendance (see the table 4 &5). Due to differences in the definition of out-of-school, school and attendance adopted administrative and households data sources may cause disparities in the estimated data of out-of-school children. For example : the table shows that administrative data sources not included unrecognized private school for estimation of out-of-school children so the data is underestimated in terms of unrecognized private schools in comparison to household survey data which included all the schools (government, private –recognized, unrecognized formal schools) in category of schools.

Table .4 Definition of attendance adopted by different data sources -

Data source	Definition of Attendance	Definition of school
DISE/UDISE	Children whose names are included in enrolment register as being 'in-school'.	All the formal recognized schools –government, private aided and private unaided comes under the category of school. U-DISE data does not include any non-formal schools, or schools imparting only religious education in enrolment data.
SRI-IMBR	All children who were enrolled and had attended school even once in the previous 45 days is considered as 'in-school'	The SRI-IMRB out-of-school surveys include non-formal education centers, centers conducting bridge courses (residential and non-residential), unrecognized madrasas providing general education in addition to religious education and Sanskrit pathshalas which primarily teach Sanskrit language (recognized by the state Sanskrit board and also teach environmental science or EVS and mathematics in addition to language) in their definition of a ' school'

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Other Household Surveys	In school children are those who identified by just asking yes / No during the survey. if answer is yes than children will be in 'in school' and vice a versa	All the household surveys include formal government schools, recognized and unrecognized formal private schools and madrasa centres which teach general school subjects in their definition of schools

Source: compiled by Author after review

Table .5 Definitions of out-of-school children (OOSC)–

Source of data	Definition of out-of-school children
SRI-IMBR	The SRI-IMRB report has a very clear definition: a child is categorized as 'out-of-school' if he/she is either not enrolled in a pre-primary class or above or is enrolled but has been absent continuously for more than 2 months preceding the date of the survey, or has discontinued studies.
NSSO	NSSO considers children never enrolled in class 1 or above and dropout children as out-of-school but no definition of dropouts is provided. So it depends on how the parents perceive the schooling status of their child and there is no uniform definition. NSSO has an additional clarification that if a child has not been attending school for an extended period because of illness, vacation or in the interval after exams when the results are to be announced, the child should be considered 'attending' and not out-of-school

Source : compiled by Author

Different Age of admission in schools – In India, the schooling system is not uniform and there are inter-state variations in the classes included in primary and upper primary stages and in the school type and management. The age groups corresponding to these schooling stages are also different, as seen from the different norms of minimum age of entry. States have their own rules for removing names from enrolment registers when a student is absent for an extended period, but this period varies from state to state. According to Right to education RTE, the minimum age of admission in class 1 is 6 years , but it is not uniform in all the states even in few states it is less than 6 years like Uttar-Pradesh, Andhra-Pradesh, Uttarakhand and many more .(See table 6).

Table .6 Minimum age of admission in class I in different States-

Age of admission	States /Union Territories
5	Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Kerala, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal
5+	Assam, Chandigarh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Odisha, Tamil Nadu
6	Lakshadweep, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim
6+	Bihar, Tripura

Source: Estimating the Number of Out –Of- School children: Methodological Problems and Alternative Approaches, India Case Study (2016).UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF (p.28)

Difference in the beginning of the school session -Different data sources use different reference dates for calculating age. They are not uniform for all states and so do not match the state school calendar. Administrative data uses the beginning of the school year in the

respective states as the reference date. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) uses 1 April, SRI-IMRB uses 1 January, NSSO and Census note the age on the date of the survey (NSSO 2014 was conducted between January and June and Census 2011 in February and March).

Table .7 Beginning of school session in different states -

School Session start from	States /Union Territories
January	Assam , Mizoram, Nagaland , Tripura
February	Manipur, Sikkim ,Meghalaya, west Bengal
April	Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chandigarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Punjab, Odisha, Uttarakhand
May	Karnataka
June	Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry
July	Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh
November	Jammu and Kashmir

Source: Estimating the Number of Out –Of- School children: Methodological Problems and Alternative Approaches, India Case Study (2016).UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF.(p. 29)

Due to difference in age of admission and reference point used by the different surveys for the calculation of age of the child, a large proportion of the children, who were of school-going age at the time of the survey, may not have been at the right age at the beginning of the school year and so would not have been admitted in school. These children are identified as out-of-school by the survey data and may result into the over estimation of the out-of-school children. For example : a child who completes 6 years of age in May will be enrolled in class 1 in states where the school year begins in May, June or July, but not in states where the school year begins earlier in the year.

Methodological differences include the different sampling design, respondents' bias, different ability and training of data collector. For example: Surveys conducted by school teachers may introduce an upward bias in enrolment figures, when teacher postings and incentives depend on enrolments. The SSA household surveys are usually accompanied with an enrolment drive. So when the teachers or local education committees are involved in these surveys, the respondents (the households)

may tend to over-report their children's school participation. An important difference is the timing of the surveys, as school attendance depends on the agricultural calendar, the school calendar and festivals.

There may be an upward bias in enrolment data, as there is a tendency to inflate enrolments when crucial decisions like teacher postings and disbursement of incentives are based on enrolments. As Mehta (2003) points out, with the introduction of the mid-day meal (MDM) scheme, a huge jump in student enrolments and attendance was found. Enrolment data may also be over-estimated if many children are enrolled in more than one school at the same time. With stress on universalization of education, schools do not refuse admission to any child below 14 years. So children who have changed schools without informing the schools in which they were enrolled earlier and not taken transfer certificates figure in enrolment registers in both the schools. There are also cases where children enroll in a government school to take advantage of incentives and in a private school for

additional teaching, and they may also figure in the enrolment data for both schools.

There are many differences in collection processes followed by different household surveys as well. Census data which requires complete enumeration is not collected by regular trained staff, but by a large number of enumerators (school teachers and other government employees). They are given a few days of training and are expected to complete the data collection in a short time. Data quality may vary between areas depending on the rigor of the training provided and the level of monitoring. SSA household surveys are conducted annually, usually by government school teachers assisted by members of local bodies or school management committees. As school teachers survey households in the catchment area of a school, there is a tendency to inflate enrolments. Teachers are also under pressure to demonstrate that very few children are out-of-school and that the education for all (EFA) targets are being met, and so there is a tendency towards under-reporting children who are out-of- school. Other surveys such as the SRI-IMRB and NFHS survey are usually conducted by the staff of the survey organization and so their quality and ability cannot be assessed. While they are likely to have experience in conducting surveys, they are usually provided short training on using survey tools. There are several legislations and policies that relate to children less than 14 years which require them to be in school, for instance, the RTE Act and the Child Labour Act. So, households are likely to either misreport an out-of-school child as attending school, or to report a higher age for a child less than 14 years if he/she is out-of-school. This bias may be the reason why surveys which focus on schooling have higher rates of school attendance as compared to multi-purpose surveys. For example, the tools used by out-of-school surveys (SRI-IMRB and SSA household surveys) focus on the education of children up to 14 years. Households which are reluctant to admit that their children below 14 years are out-of-school may misreport the ages of these children. The tools used by NSSO, Census and NFHS are more general and focus on all household members and not solely on children's education. The other reason why data on the age of children may be incorrect is that respondents in a household may not have the knowledge or awareness to provide accurate information regarding the age of a child or schooling details of each child in the household. The respondent may not recall the child's date of birth, especially in rural areas where not all births are registered. And there may be errors in the process of calculating the age (in years) from the date of birth because of which approximations may take place. Age heaping, for example, is a common finding in most household surveys, which results from rounding of ages to the nearest 5 or 10; as a result, the number of children aged 5, 10, 15 gets inflated. Similar errors are likely in calculating the age and grade matrix from school data. The date of birth in school registers is not recorded on the basis of birth registration, but on vague memories of parents and teachers.

There may be other reasons why these estimates vary depending on sample characteristics. The proportion of out-of-school children is high among vulnerable population groups such as street children, children in unauthorized camps and differently able children hidden in homes. Sample surveys are likely to include these categories of the population to varying extents, depending on their sampling design. As Census surveys cover all population groups, this could be one of the reasons why their data shows the lowest attendance rates for all age groups.

Suggestions –

1. For estimating the number and proportion of children attending (or not attending) school, the types of schools, definition of school, the

school structure (in terms of classes and levels) and the concept of attendance need to be clearly defined

2. A more reliable method would be to revise the definitions of out-of-school children to match state schooling rules and estimates at state levels.
3. A data verification system should be in place.
4. Training of enumerators to identify children with special needs.
5. Multiple strategies for identifying out-of-school children among vulnerable population groups should be applied.

Conclusion

Such wide variation in different aspects of estimation of OOSC leads to difference in the profile of OOSC**,** this has major policy implication .Hence it is very urgent to scrutinize the differences in data in detail and talk about the ways in which data quality can be enhanced. To improving the quality of data it is very important to revise the definition of school, attendance, and relevant age group carefully and then develops a standard definition of Out-of-School Children (OSC). For the clear estimation of OOSC information of over –age and under –age is very essential so, the age data should be verify and full data on up to 18 year age group children should be collected.Methodological care should be taken for the estimation of OOSC both by Administrative data source and household surveys and care need to be taken that no children is double counted and even no children should be left behind. As we know the groups of OOSC are not homogenous so, the multiple strategies should be adapted by the properly trained enumerators to identify out-of-school children among the diverse group of vulnerable population. A numerator should be trained to identify all the categories and groups of out-of-school children. And above all a well- develops data verification system should be used.

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