

# Vocational Education for Adolescent Workers: Some Policy Options

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## ABSTRACT

*We find in this paper that the option of providing vocational education to adolescent labour, an important step in reducing their economic exploitation, is constrained by a number of factors. First, the low educational status of adolescent labourers implies that formal vocational facilities (requiring high school pass certificate as the eligibility) available in the area are not suitable. Second, those formal institutions which are managed by private agencies, charge high tuition fees and collect high amounts of capitation. Third, the fact that adolescent labourers have been mostly working in agriculture, livestock rearing, hotels, quarrying, etc., implies that they will have no inclination towards motor mechanism and/or electronics (offered by formal training institutions). Fourth, there are no informal trainers in the selected villages to provide vocational training to less educated adolescent labourers. Fifth, a majority of the adolescent labourers belonged households primarily dependent on wage-labour as the source of livelihood. This would make it difficult for them to afford sending their children to the existing institutions where the expenses were on the higher side. They also incur higher opportunity cost of labour, given that the adolescent labourers made a significant contribution to the household income. Finally, parents of adolescent labourers did not have any particular aspirations mainly on account of limited exposure outside of their own domains of work. If at all they had any, these confirmed the phenomenon of frozen parental expectations.*

## INTRODUCTION

“To vocationalise or not to vocationalise” (Psacharopolous 1987) was a dilemma about a decade ago in several countries. Vocational education,

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which creates 'specific human capital' (Becker 1964), has not been widely preferred because of the following. First, the return to investment on vocational education has been found to be low as compared to that on general education. Psacharopolous (1987: 201) writes that "nearly every valuation of the performance of vocational education to meet ... needs (of a modernising economy), whether in developing or industrialised countries, has been negative". Second, the ability of vocational education to prepare children for different occupations and reduce mismatch between education and the labour market seems to be limited. Third, vocational education leads to the creation of a lower or lesser value stream among both teachers and students in the educational system (Foster 1965; Blaug 1973). The Rajaji experiment of providing vocational training along with general education at the school level to develop and sharpen skills among children in Tamil Nadu during the early 1950s was criticised on the grounds that it perpetuates the existing caste system in India, and that the experiment would keep the poor children from rural areas away from the prestigious academic education. Because of these and other factors, India's progress in vocational education has not been substantial in comparison to the other countries. By the 1990s, the proportion of children enrolled in vocational education to total enrolment in secondary education in India was 1.1 per cent as against 28 per cent in Turkey, 20.4 per cent in South Korea, 18 per cent in Thailand and 15 per cent in China (Tilak 2002).

With the Indian government firmly committing itself to the spread of vocational education to tap the potential demographic dividend during the period of liberalisation and globalisation, 'to vocationalise or not to vocationalise' does not appear to be a dilemma anymore in India. Balogh (1969), who has been one of the early supporters of the vocational education, argued that vocational training should be introduced from the very beginning of educational systems. In general, the following are noted to be the advantages of vocational education. First, vocational education produces skilled personnel required for modern technology. Second, it creates employment opportunities for the unemployed and reduces the problem of unemployment. Third, vocational training leads to improved productivity of labour and higher earnings to workers. Fourth, it would make the transition from the school to work smoother since the children will already have the required skills and become more employable (Rajasekhar 2007).

It is also mentioned in the literature that as against the urban-biased elitist education, vocational education tends to become more popular in rural areas and among the poor. This implies that vocational education,

by providing a more interesting and job-relevant curriculum, can be one of the answers to the problem of low enrolment rates (Grubb 1985), child labour (Rajasekhar et al 2007) and rural-urban migration (Lillis and Hogan 1983).

It is in this context that there is need to examine the status of adolescent workers because they typically take up work without sufficient skills and get economically exploited on account of low wage rates, poor working conditions and lack of social security. Provision of vocational education is widely considered as an important step in reducing the economic exploitation among adolescent workers. But, the main question is what constraints are faced by adolescent workers in accessing the vocation education. In this paper<sup>1</sup>, we argue that the provision of vocational education depends on a number of factors such as educational status of adolescent labour, availability of facilities for obtaining vocational education, access to these facilities, aspirations of adolescent labourers in vocational education and so on. We examine these with the help of data collected (in 2006) from a large number of working children in the age groups of both 5-14 and 15-17, their parents, and also formal and informal vocational training institutions in Bidar and Chamarajanagar districts of Karnataka.

The sampling design and sample size are explained below. As a first step in the sampling design, we have listed all the children in the age group of 5-17 in 80 randomly selected villages and wards in the two districts of Bidar and Chamarajanagar. From 80 villages and urban wards in both the districts, we covered 32,048 households – 16,202 in Bidar and 15,846 in Chamarajanagar. In 39.1 per cent of the households in both the districts, there were no children in the age group of 5 to 17 years. Only in 59.5 per cent of the households did we find children in the age group of 5 to 17 years. The total number of households with children in the age group of 5-17 years was 19,083 - 10,774 in Bidar and 8,309 in Chamarajanagar.

The total number of children covered through this enumeration was 40,206 from the 19,083 households. This number was 25,284 in Bidar, and 14,922 in Chamarajanagar. The second stage of sampling was the random selection of child workers for detailed interviews from all the children listed. The parents of these child workers were also interviewed through a detailed questionnaire. In all, we have collected data from 699 children

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1 This paper is based on the data collected for a larger study undertaken by D Rajasekhar, R Manjula, Suchitra J Y and Sanjiv Kumar (2007) Child Labour in Bidar and Chamarajanagar districts: A Status Report and Ways Forward undertaken for the ILO.

(344 from Bidar and 355 from Chamarajanagar) and 709 parents (346 in Bidar and 363 in Chamarajanagar) through a structured questionnaire. In addition to this, we also built community profiles in all the localities, and interviewed representatives of village level organisations. Through the community profiling using a village level questionnaire and some key interviews in the sample areas, we have collected data on the presence of opportunities for formal and informal vocational education. In this paper, we have used the information collected through these interviews and discussions.

### **INCIDENCE OF WORK AMONG ADOLESCENT AND CHILD WORKERS**

An analysis of the data collected from 40,206 children from the 19,083 households showed that the incidence of work<sup>2</sup> was relatively higher among adolescents (15 – 17 age group) as compared to children (5 – 14 age group). The proportion of workers to the total in the age group of 15-17 years was 56.79 per cent in Bidar district, while it was only 18.34 per cent in the 5 – 14 age group. Similarly, while the proportion of workers to the total in the adolescent age group was 73.51 per cent in Chamarajanagar, the corresponding proportion for the age group of 5-14 years was only 27.98 per cent.

The higher work participation rates among adolescents were due to the following. First, in most of the villages, the educational facilities available were only up to either upper primary or high school. In the absence of higher educational facilities located closer to the homes, children (especially girls) dropped out from schools. Second, the dropped out adolescents as well as children participated in the work either at home or for wages elsewhere. Only those children belonging to economically better-off households continued with college education. This suggests that vocational education as an option has not been taken up by most of the children who really needed it.

Adolescents who take up work often do so without any appreciable skills. This is especially the case with those children who belong to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) households, and those depending on wage labour for their livelihood. Undertaking unskilled work

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2 We define work in a broader sense in this paper. Work includes (a) children working for wages, (b) children working for their own household economic activities, and (c) children assisting parents in domestic chores.

implies lower wages, longer working hours and economic exploitation. Provision of vocational education to adolescent workers is, thus, an important step in reducing the economic exploitation of these workers.

In this context, the following questions arise. What is the educational status of adolescent workers? Does this become a barrier to pursue vocational education? What facilities (formal and informal) are available for the children to pursue vocational training? Who has access to them? Do the adolescent workers and their parents aspire for vocational education? In the ensuing paragraphs, an attempt is made to answer these questions.

## SITUATION OF ADOLESCENT WORKERS

The number of adolescents working in Bidar and Chamarajanagar was 2,780 and 2,667, respectively. A little over 50 per cent of them in Bidar were boys. The proportion of boys in Chamarajanagar was 52.31 per cent.

### Caste Background of Adolescent Workers

Table 1 shows that a significant proportion of adolescents in both the districts belonged to the SC and ST groups. In Bidar, the proportion of adolescents belonging to these castes was over 42 per cent. Nearly 18 per cent of the workers belonged to the Muslim religion. In Chamarajanagar, over 46 per cent of the adolescents belonged to the SC and ST. Thus, a significant proportion of adolescents belonged to the traditionally disempowered and vulnerable castes and communities in both the districts. This is important for the discussion on aspirations of the adolescent worker because if a significant proportion of them belonged to the SC and ST categories, they may not have had role models in so far as vocational education is concerned. This may hinder their capacity to aspire for vocational education.

**Table 1: Distribution of adolescent workers (%) by their caste**

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
SC	28.10	24.07	26.12	32.33	34.28	33.26
ST	16.14	16.39	16.26	12.83	13.60	13.20
Muslim	17.91	17.26	17.59	2.65	3.62	3.11
Other minorities	4.32	2.49	3.42	0.65	0.94	0.79
Others	32.70	38.19	35.40	51.47	47.41	49.53
No information	0.85	1.61	1.22	0.07	0.16	0.11
Total (nos.)	1,413	1,367	2,780	1,395	1,272	2,667

This is further supported by field level observations. Most of the SC and ST households did not have a clue on what was meant by vocational education. The field team had to explain vocational education both in generic terms and by taking an example from the village. For instance, in one of the villages, a woman respondent (parent of adolescent worker) was not able to understand vocational education even after explaining the same in generic terms. A young man present at that time noted that we were referring to the course that was obtained by the son of one of the affluent men from the village. Then she immediately reacted; “how can we (being SC) aspire for a course that involves so much of expenditure”<sup>3</sup>.

### **Educational Status of Adolescent Workers**

An important consideration in the provision of vocational education to adolescent workers is the educational status. This is because of the following. If the educational status of most of the adolescent workers is not even school completion, the vocational educational facilities requiring high school pass certificate as the minimum eligibility are of little use to them. We have, therefore, examined the educational status of adolescent workers in the following paragraphs.

Tables 2 and 3 provide the distribution of adolescent workers by current schooling status and educational levels in Bidar and Chamarajanagar districts, respectively. About 23 per cent of the adolescent workers in Bidar and 7 per cent in Chamarajanagar had never attended the school. This implies that a larger number of adolescent workers could not read and write. In all, nearly 77 per cent of the adolescent workers in Bidar either never attended the school or dropped out from education. In Chamarajanagar district, this proportion was about 58 per cent. It needs to be noted that most of the children dropping out from the school, did so even before reaching the high school stage. In so far as the current schooling status is concerned, 54 per cent of the adolescent workers did not even have high school education in Bidar district. In contrast, over one-third of adolescent workers did not complete high school in Chamarajanagar district. This implies that a large number of adolescents did not complete high school education.

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3 Such examples, in some cases, also influenced the responses on aspiration for a particular type of course. The reason why most of the parents preferred mechanical and electrical courses is that live examples in front of them opted for these courses.

**Table 2: Distribution of adolescent workers (%) by current schooling status and educational levels in Bidar district**

<i>Current schooling status</i>	<i>Educational level of adolescent workers in Bidar district</i>							
	<i>Illiterate</i>	<i>Primary school</i>	<i>Upper primary school</i>	<i>High school</i>	<i>Upper-secondary school</i>	<i>Technical education &amp; vocational training</i>	<i>No infor-mation</i>	<i>Total</i>
Never attended	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	647 (23.27)
Dropout	0.00	28.16	29.78	35.45	6.41	0.14	0.07	1,481 (53.27)
Attending the school	0.00	0.00	0.00	64.48	34.40	1.12	0.00	626 (22.52)
No information	0.00	0.00	3.85	3.85	0.00	0.00	92.31	26 (0.94)
Total	23.31	15.00	16.19	33.13	11.15	0.32	0.90	2,780

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

**Table 3: Distribution of adolescent workers by current schooling status and educational levels in Chamarajanagar district**

<i>Current schooling status</i>	<i>Education level of adolescents worker in Chamarajanagar district</i>							
	<i>Illiterate</i>	<i>Primary school</i>	<i>Upper primary school</i>	<i>High school</i>	<i>Upper-secondary school</i>	<i>Technical education &amp; vocational training</i>	<i>No infor-mation</i>	<i>Total</i>
Never attended	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	189 (7.09)
Dropout	0.00	25.84	26.20	45.55	1.97	0.22	0.22	1,370 (51.37)
Attending the school	0.00	0.00	0.00	68.30	31.14	0.56	0.00	1,063 (39.86)
No information	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	45 (1.69)
Total	7.09	13.27	13.46	50.62	13.42	0.34	1.80	2,667

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

The foregoing discussion implies that vocational educational facilities should be in a position to offer courses for adolescents who have not completed high school and who have been largely illiterate<sup>4</sup>. If the vocational courses are of the formal type and insist on high school pass as the minimum qualification, such courses will not be of much use for over 50 per cent of the adolescent workers in the sample localities.

### Principal Occupation of the Parents of Adolescent Workers

Table 4 makes it clear that parents of most of the adolescent workers eked their livelihood from wage labour either in agriculture or in non-agricultural activities. This implies that these households could not aspire for vocational education if the cost of vocational education was high. Another implication is that since the wage contribution of adolescent workers to their households was quite high, parents might not be willing to send their children to join the vocational education courses (Box 1).

**Table 4: Distribution of adolescent workers (%) by their HH principal occupation**

<i>Principal occupation of the households</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Agricultural labour	47.70	44.26	46.01	50.32	47.17	48.82
Non-agricultural labour	14.72	13.24	13.99	14.41	13.44	13.95
Cultivator	23.28	23.04	23.17	25.30	26.18	25.72
Small business	7.29	8.85	8.06	4.16	5.50	4.80
Salaried job	3.33	6.66	4.96	3.15	4.17	3.64
Others	2.76	2.34	2.55	2.58	3.30	2.92
No information	0.92	1.61	1.26	0.07	0.24	0.15
Total (nos.)	1,413	1,367	2,780	1,395	1,272	2,667

4 In Bidar, even children and adolescents who had completed primary education were stating that they were illiterate because of poor quality of education that they had obtained from schools. This implies that a significant proportion of the adolescents would basically consider themselves as incapable of reading and writing. Second, the medium of instruction is both Kannada and Hindi. As a result, the sample households complained their children neither learn Kannada nor Hindi perfectly. Further, the children had to struggle when they reach higher classes. This is another reason why the dropout rates are high in Bidar. There have been district-wise variations in this. Whereas in Chamarajanagar, learning Kannada is not a problem; on the contrary, not knowing English has been the concern!

**Box 1: Importance of wages earned by adolescent workers in the household income**

A Lingayat boy from Nizampur village in Bidar district has been working in a chemical factory. He joined this factory as a child labourer due to financial difficulties faced by the household. His father, who was running a petty hotel in the village, died of heart attack leaving his wife and two young sons behind. At the time of his death, he was steeped in debt due to heavy borrowings for running the business. In order to repay the loans, the land was mortgaged and his mother started to work as an agricultural labourer. Since the income was insufficient, she could not afford his education although her brother supported his education for some time. He then gave up education and started working in the factory as unskilled worker. But, soon he learnt the trade of a fitter, and was earning Rs. 1,200 per month at the time of the survey. The work was hazardous. There were several acid burns on the body of the boy. Further, once he fell off from a height, and sustained a fracture. He was not paid during the hospitalisation period.

The boy is keen to join a vocational course that would add value to his skills as a fitter hoping that this will improve his wage earnings and working conditions. When asked whether he would join such a vocational course if it were free, the first question from his mother was that whether there would be a stipend. According to her, his income was very important for the livelihood of the household as she had stopped working due to poor health. Without a stipend, it would be impossible for the household to pull through their living.

### Number of Working Hours

The distribution of adolescent workers by number of working hours has been presented in Table 5. The three size classes considered are less than 4 hours, 4 to 8 hours and more than 8 hours. The first category, in general, applied to those workers assisting their parents either in domestic chores or household economic activities. The other two size classes, in general, apply to those where the adolescents were working.

Table 5 shows that about 10 per cent of adolescents in Bidar and over 26 per cent of those in Chamarajanagar were working for less than four hours. This implies that most of these were assisting their parents (Table 6). The larger proportion of girls in this size-class in both the districts

corroborates this further.

Nearly 91 per cent of the adolescents in Bidar were working for more than four hours. The corresponding proportion in Chamarajanagar was about 74 per cent. In the field it was observed that the boys working in hotels, garages, etc., tended to have long working hours. On the other hand, girls working as agricultural labourers tended to work for less than 8 hours.

**Table 5: Distribution of adolescent workers (%) by number of working hours**

<i>Number of working hours</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
< 4 hrs	7.43	12.00	9.68	23.44	28.85	26.02
4 - 8 hrs	49.68	63.72	56.58	56.49	61.56	58.91
9+ hrs	42.89	24.29	33.74	20.07	9.59	15.07
Total (nos.)	1,413	1,367	2,780	1,395	1,272	2,667

**Table 6: Distribution of adolescent workers (%) by economic activities and number of working hours**

	<i>Bidar</i>				<i>Chamarajanagar</i>			
	<i>&lt; 4 hrs</i>	<i>4 - 8 hrs</i>	<i>9+ hrs</i>	<i>Total (nos.)</i>	<i>&lt; 4 hrs</i>	<i>4 - 8 hrs</i>	<i>9+ hrs</i>	<i>Total (nos.)</i>
Economic activity for wage	1.07	48.86	50.08	1,312	1.69	64.07	34.24	885
Household economic activity	10.30	63.11	26.59	534	18.30	70.06	11.64	481
Assisting parents in domestic chores	21.41	63.70	14.88	934	45.43	51.27	3.31	1,301
Total	9.68	56.58	33.74	2,780	26.02	58.91	15.07	2,667

This pattern would have a few implications for the provision of vocational training. First, a large proportion of adolescents are earning income by engaging themselves in economic activities. This implies that the opportunity cost of leaving their employment in favour of vocational education is high for these workers. This is especially because the rates of return to investment are not very high in the case of vocational education as compared to secondary education (Tilak 1988). Second, provision of

vocational education for those who work for less than 4 hours may be difficult because most of these adolescents are girls. In general, girls and their parents do not aspire for vocational education.

### Sectoral Dimension of Adolescent Work

Sectoral dimension of adolescent work plays an important role in shaping the aspirations for vocational education. If a majority of the adolescents are employed in factories, they consider vocational education offered by the formal institutions as important because of the possibility of new skills improving their wage income (as has been shown in Box 1).

Table 7, however, shows that a large proportion of adolescent workers were involved in agriculture, construction, small hotels, shops, livestock rearing, etc. The proportion of workers involved in these activities was over 77 per cent in Bidar, while it was 65.76 in Chamarajanagar district. This implies that these adolescent workers were unlikely to aspire for formal vocational education. This also implies that the training should be more in the nature of enabling them to undertake income generating activities in non-farm and non-traditional activities.

**Table 7: Distribution of adolescents by work sectors**

<i>Work Sectors</i>	<i>Bidar</i>	<i>Chamarajanagar</i>
Reeling	0.08	2.37
Twisting	0.00	0.23
Bidi	0.08	1.92
Bricks	0.61	0.90
Agarbhathi	0.15	0.23
Stone quarrying	1.07	4.97
Garage	4.95	1.47
Small hotel/ restaurant	8.61	4.63
Shops/ small establishments	8.38	7.80
Rag picking	0.08	0.00
Livestock rearing	5.95	1.02
Plantation	0.91	7.80
Floriculture	0.08	0.00
Agricultural labour	47.79	42.37
Domestic labour	1.30	1.81
Construction worker	6.48	9.94
Small/ big factory	3.73	3.62
Others	9.76	8.93
Total (nos.)	1,312	885

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES IN SELECTED DISTRICTS AND VILLAGES

The data presented on educational status of the adolescent worker makes one point clear. The type of vocational educational facilities that were available in these two districts should match the situation of adolescent worker in terms of educational status. Let us now examine the facilities available in the study districts.

### Formal Vocational Educational Facilities in the Selected Districts

We have made a detailed survey of vocational educational facilities both in the public and private sectors in Bidar district. Based on these data and a few discussions in Chamarajanagar districts, it can be concluded that there are three types of vocational training courses available for the aspirants. These are polytechnic colleges, Industrial Training institutes (ITIs), Job-Oriented Courses (JOCs) and Job-Linked Courses (JLCs).

In terms of the number, ITIs seem to be the dominant institutions. Although a few government-initiated and aided institutions exist, a majority were started by private agencies. Although the fee was almost the same in the government and private colleges, the imposition of capitation fees makes the education in the private colleges particularly expensive. Almost all the ITIs offer courses largely in engineering related trades and not courses such as accountancy or secretarial services or hardware and software related service sector trades. The minimum eligibility criterion in ITIs is high school pass certificate.

A large number of private institutions provide job-oriented and job-linked courses. Both the courses are of two-year duration. The eligibility criterion for both the courses is high-school pass certificate. Unlike ITIs, the maximum age limit tends to be higher at 22 years for boys and 26 years for girls in the case of these courses.

It was learnt that, when it came to recruitment, the companies preferred those who had obtained vocational education from ITIs rather than JOCs or JLCs, perhaps, because of the national test conducted in the case of the former. As a result, there was considerable demand for ITI courses as compared to the other vocational courses.

### Access to Formal Vocational Education in the Study Villages

From 36 villages, the number of institutions in which vocational training obtained was 40 in Bidar and 34 in Chamarajanagar. Out of 40 institutions accessed by the adolescents in Bidar, nearly 73 per cent belonged to private sector. Similarly, out of 34 institutions accessed by adolescents in the sample villages of Chamarajanagar, over 38 per cent belonged to the private sector, while close to 59 per cent belonged to the government. Thus, adolescents from a larger proportion of villages in Chamarajanagar accessed government vocational educational facilities.

The data with regard to courses preferred show the following. Adolescents from 30 out of 40 cases preferred mechanical, electrical and electronics courses in Bidar district. In most of these cases, the institutions happened to be in the private sector. In five out of 40 cases, the course preferred was computer training; in all these cases, the vocational training institution was private college. A similar pattern emerged from Chamarajanagar district. In nearly 68 per cent of the cases, the courses opted for belonged to the fields of mechanical, electrical and electronics. Only in a few cases the courses preferred was computer training and tailoring and embroidery.

The number of adolescents obtaining vocational education was typically less than 10 in most of the villages in both the districts. The number of adolescents accessing vocational education exceeded ten only in those villages, which were larger and/or closer to an urban centre. The reason why the number of adolescents accessing vocational education tended to be high in the villages closer to the urban centres was the following. The vocational education tended to be expensive if the students had to reside in the town or commute long distances. If the town where the vocational education centre was located was close by and well connected, the students could easily commute and did not have to spend more money on transportation.

In almost all the cases, the duration of training was for more than 12 months. Secondly, the age profile of those accessing vocational education was between 15 and 18 years in most of the cases. Thirdly, boys outnumbered girls in so far as the access was concerned. The most preferred course in the case of girls was, predictably, tailoring and embroidery.

The information obtained on the cost of vocational training is as follows. In Bidar, the cost of training was stated to be between Rs. 12,000

and Rs. 20,000 in 25 per cent of the cases, while it was more than Rs. 20,000 in over 53 per cent of the cases. In Chamarajanagar, on the other hand, the cost tended to be low. In just over 50 per cent of the cases, the cost was stated to be between Rs. 12,000 and Rs. 20,000. In no village was the cost stated to be more than Rs. 20,000. In 20 per cent of the cases, the cost was stated to be less than Rs. 3,000.

### **Are Formal Vocational Training Institutions Suitable for Adolescent Workers?**

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the formal vocational training institutions are not suitable for adolescent workers found in the sample localities for the following reasons.

- A significant proportion of adolescent workers was either illiterate or had not completed high school. But, the basic educational qualification requirement in all the formal institutions was high school pass certificate.
- The distribution of adolescent workers by sector showed that a majority of them (who were involved in wage labour) were in sectors such as agriculture, livestock rearing, hotels, quarrying, etc. It is possible that they may have low confidence to take up courses in motor mechanism and/or electronics, even if they had a qualifying degree.
- We noted that a majority of the adolescent workers hailed from households whose primary means of livelihood was wage labour. This implies that they could not afford to send the children to the existing institutions where the expenses were on the higher side.

Thus, there is mismatch between the situation of adolescent workers and their needs, and the type of facilities that exist in the formal vocational training sector. Are there informal trainers in the villages who can fill in the gap? This question has been taken up for discussion in the ensuing paragraphs.

### **Informal Trainers in the Selected Villages**

The focus group discussions in the sample villages revealed that, surprisingly, there were no informal trainers in most of the villages. In some villages, it was brought to our notice that some amount of informal training to boys and girls in basic sewing existed. An interesting aspect

was that if the training was provided by men, no girls attended the training, and vice versa. Similarly, if the training was provided by traditional upper caste person, the access to boys and girls from traditionally vulnerable castes was restricted. This indicates that even the training in tailoring was not available to persons from different socio-economic background.

Why is it that there are no informal trainers in the sample villages? The following responses emerged from the focus group discussions. First, the decline of traditional artisan activities was cited as an important reason why a master trainer was absent in several villages. Second, the discussions with carpenters in a few villages revealed that they only passed on the trade to their children, and that the village children and adolescents were not interested in carpentry that was useful only for making or repairing of agricultural implements. Third, the adolescent children (especially from Muslim religion) were going to towns to work in the sectors of garage, carpentry, bar bending, plumbing, etc., not so much to earn for livelihood but to obtain the skills and earn better income.

## PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS

What are the parental perceptions on what their adolescent children should do in the future? It was to answer this question, inter alia, that interviews were conducted with 709 parents of both child labourers and adolescent workers. Table 8 shows that between 68 and 73 per cent of the parents of adolescent workers did not want to send them to school. This was true even in the case of working children.

**Table 8: Proportion of parents' perceptions on whether they would like to send the child to school**

<i>Would you like to send the child to school</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>5 - 14 yrs</i>	<i>15 - 17 yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>5 - 14 yrs</i>	<i>15 - 17 yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes	33.77	32.29	32.95	38.03	27.05	29.20
No	66.23	67.71	67.05	61.97	72.95	70.80
Total (nos.)	154	192	346	71	292	363

What are the reasons why parents do not want to send the adolescent workers to school? The reasons have been tabulated in Table 9. Three

important reasons stand out. These are: i) family needs more income; ii) child has reached the working age; and iii) child does not want to go school. Let us examine these in some detail.

- As discussed in Box 1, the income earned by adolescent workers tends to be a significant component of the total household income. In some of the cases, the household would have recruited the adolescents for work keeping certain imminent expenditure in mind, such as marriage, etc. Under these circumstances, they cannot afford to send the worker back to school.
- The second important reason is that the person has reached the working age. In several villages, the response to the question on what was the working age was 15 years. This response came not only from parents (many of whom were illiterate) but also from representatives of village level organisations such as SHGs, GPs, anganawadi centres, etc. The focus group discussion in the village of Kodiugne revealed that the age of 15 years was considered to be the ideal of entering the labour market from both the supply and demand side. The employers of agricultural labourers considered that workers with more than 15 years of age were suitable to undertake certain agricultural tasks and would be eligible for the payment of adult wages. From the supply side, the parents found resistance from employers in so far as recruitment of children less than 15 years and in the payment of adult wages. Since the wages for children were lower than or equivalent to that for women, many parents were of the opinion that it was not worthwhile to send the children to work. The fact that emerged from this discussion was that once a person crossed the age of 15 years, this was considered as working age.
- The response that adolescent workers did not want to go to school came from those cases where the child had dropped from the school at an early age. In such cases, the child would not have had even basics of education (such as reading, writing, simple mathematics, etc.). Such adolescent workers were, therefore, extremely reluctant to go back to the school system. Another reason was the widespread perception that nothing good happened with additional schooling.

**Table 9: Proportion of parents' perceptions on why they don't want the child to go to school**

<i>Parents' perceptions</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>5 - 14 yrs</i>	<i>15 - 17 yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>5 - 14 yrs</i>	<i>15 - 17 yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>
Family needs more income	40.20	30.00	34.48	34.09	28.17	29.18
Child has reached working age	16.67	29.23	23.71	20.45	13.15	14.40
Cannot pay for child's education	22.55	14.62	18.10	13.64	17.84	17.12
Child does not want to go to school	16.67	21.54	19.40	29.55	35.68	34.63
Child should look after the younger siblings from their earning	1.96	0.77	1.29	0.00	0.94	0.78
Child has reached marriageable age	1.96	3.08	2.59	2.27	2.82	2.72
School is too far, so better off to work	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.47	0.39
Others	0.00	0.77	0.43	0.00	0.94	0.78
Total (nos.)	102	130	232	44	213	257

The foregoing discussion shows that the importance assigned to education differed on the basis of age, context and type of work. In Bidar, the proportion of parents priority to education was considerably less among the adolescent workers as compared to working children (Table 10). This was because, as stated earlier, once a child reached the working age, it was considered that there was no need to educate the child. But, the situation in Chamarajanagar was somewhat different. Here, a larger proportion of the parents tended to feel that the education was important for their children.

But, the parental perception on the importance of education also differed on the basis of sex of the child. Table 11 shows that a larger proportion of the parents stated that education was not so important for girls.

**Table 10: Proportion of Parental Perceptions on Importance of Education by age Groups**

<i>Importance on education</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>5 - 14 yrs</i>	<i>15 - 17 yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>5 - 14 yrs</i>	<i>15 - 17 yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>
Not so important	14.94	18.23	16.76	19.72	11.30	12.95
Somewhat important	50.00	57.81	54.34	53.52	46.23	47.66
Very important	35.06	23.96	28.90	26.76	42.47	39.39
Total (nos.)	154	192	346	71	292	363

**Table 11: Proportion of Parental Perceptions on Importance of Education by Gender**

<i>Importance on education</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Not so important	17.65	14.29	16.76	9.78	22.99	12.95
Somewhat important	54.12	54.95	54.34	48.91	43.68	47.66
Very important	28.24	30.77	28.90	41.30	33.33	39.39
Total (nos.)	255	91	346	276	87	363

### Parental Perceptions on Vocational Education

What vocational education do parents prefer? Table 12 tabulates parental preferences by sex of the child. The key findings emerging from the table pointed out to the phenomenon of frozen parental expectations (Rajasekhar 2007). First, parents in the case of boys preferred training on repairs. Second, parents of girl adolescent workers preferred sewing.

But, most of the parents did not have any wider aspirations for their children for the following reasons. First, the adolescents were working as agricultural workers and in livestock rearing. Second, the concern with regard to girls who had reached marriageable age was more to do with getting them married rather than providing any vocational education.

Given the above, it was found necessary to counsel the adolescent workers and their parents on the need for vocation education, which was different as compared to that provided by formal institutions and

which was suited to the condition of the adolescent workers. Secondly, the activities that had the potential for providing decent work should be identified. Third, institutional mechanism linking the aspirations of the adolescents with training, promotional agencies and banks needed to be thought of.

**Table 12: Distribution of Parents by Their Expectations on Vocational Education**

<i>Kind of training</i>	<i>Bidar</i>			<i>Chamarajanagar</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bicycle repairing	8.24	0.00	6.07	10.14	0.00	7.71
Machine (engine, TV, radio, etc) repairing	47.84	2.20	35.84	49.64	1.15	38.02
Carpentry	1.18	0.00	0.87	1.09	0.00	0.83
Sewing	10.98	87.91	31.21	7.61	80.46	25.07
Animal rearing	12.94	2.20	10.12	15.94	0.00	12.12
Agriculture training	2.35	1.10	2.02	4.71	0.00	3.58
Others	0.39	0.00	0.29	0.00	1.15	0.28
No specific aspirations	14.12	5.49	11.85	7.61	11.49	8.54
No information	1.96	1.10	1.73	3.26	5.75	3.86
Total (nos.)	255	91	346	276	87	363

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this paper on vocational training to adolescent workers in Bidar and Chamarajanagar districts of Karnataka, we find that the provision of vocational education to adolescent labour, which is an important step in reducing the economic exploitation of these labourers, is constrained by a number of factors. These are educational status of adolescent labour, availability of facilities for obtaining vocational education, access to these facilities, aspirations of adolescent labour in vocational education, etc.

As far as the educational status is concerned, about 23 per cent of the adolescent workers in Bidar and 7.1 per cent in Chamarajanagar never attended the school. These proportions would be higher if one considers adolescent labour involved only in wage work (i.e., strict definition of child labour). In Bidar, nearly 40 per cent of adolescents working for wage had never gone to school, and the corresponding proportion in

Chamarajanagar was 15.1 per cent. This means that a larger number of adolescent labourers could not even read and write. This raises the issue of the type of vocational educational facilities available in these two districts and whether this matched the situation of adolescent labour obtained from the survey.

The formal vocational training institutions in the selected districts were managed by private bodies, offered engineering related courses, located in urban centres, expensive (in terms of capitation charges, fees, etc.) and insisted on minimum eligibility criterion of a high school pass certificate. This suggests that formal vocational training institutions were not useful to child and adolescent labour. The focus group discussions in the study villages also corroborated this. In a larger number of cases, the adolescents preferred electrical and electronics courses in Bidar. On the other hand, the preference was more for mechanical courses in Chamarajanagar. It was found that more adolescents from larger villages and those close to towns accessed vocational training as compared to those from remote villages. Private training institutions were accessed in relatively larger numbers in Bidar district. This stepped up the cost of training. In a significant proportion of the institutions, the cost per annum was high largely because of capitation fees, boarding and lodging charges, college fees, etc. This came in the way of adolescents from poorer households accessing vocational education.

Formal vocational training institutions were, therefore, not suitable for adolescent labour found in the sample villages and wards for the following reasons. First, a significant proportion of adolescent labourers was either illiterate or had not completed high school. But, the basic educational qualification in all the formal institutions was high school pass certificate. Second, the distribution of adolescent labour by sectors showed that a majority (involved in wage labour) were in sectors such as agriculture, livestock rearing, hotels, quarrying, etc., and could not be easily encouraged to take up courses in motor mechanism and/or electronics, even if they had qualifying degrees. Third, a majority of adolescent labourers came from households whose primary source of livelihood was wage- labour implying that it would be extremely difficult for them to afford to send their children to the existing institutions where the expenses were on the higher side.

The study also found that there were no informal trainers in the villages. This could be attributed to the following reasons. First, the decline of traditional artisan activities was cited as an important reason why master

trainers were absent in several villages. Second, the discussions with carpenters in a few villages revealed that they only passed on the trade to their children. They also said that children and adolescents in the village were not interested in carpentry that was useful only for the making and repairing of agricultural implements. They were rather keen to acquire more broad based carpentry skills. Third, the adolescents (especially from the Muslim religion) typically went to towns to work in sectors such as garages, carpentry, bar bending, plumbing, etc., not so much to earn for livelihood but to obtain the skills and earn better incomes.

Interviews with the 709 parents of child and adolescent labourers show that most of them did not have any particular aspirations for their children for the following reasons. First, most adolescents were working as agricultural labourers and livestock rearers. Second, the concern with regard to girls who had reached marriageable age was more to do with getting them married rather than providing them any vocational education. These imply that parental expectations on employment of youth have become frozen and that they have not drastically changed with changing times.

Given that there is mismatch between the situation of adolescent labourers and their needs, and the type of facilities that exist in the formal vocational training sector, and also due to the absence of informal trainers, there is first a need to undertake needs assessment analysis in areas where vocational training programmes are planned. However, not many adolescents and parents themselves are aware of the concept of vocational education and its merits. Therefore, it is first necessary to counsel the adolescent labourers and their parents on the need for vocational education, which is different as compared to that provided by formal institutions and which is suited to the conditions of the adolescent workers. Secondly, the activities that have potential for providing decent work should be identified. Third, institutional mechanism linking the aspirations of adolescents with training, promotional agencies and banks need to be thought of along the lines suggested by Rajasekhar and Sreedhar (2002) and Rajasekhar (2007).

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