

Early Childhood Education Trajectories and Transitions: A Study of the Experiences and Perspectives of Parents and Children from Andhra Pradesh, India

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For many children, starting pre-school and school involves momentous changes in their lives. Children simultaneously experience changes in their physical and social environments, use of language, activities and learning, and expectations for their behaviour. Their experiences during these early moments are understood to significantly affect how well they respond to education and learning at later stages of their lives. Research over the last two decades shows that early childhood programmes can produce long-term benefits for children's development. As a result, researchers and policymakers are increasingly looking at access to and quality of early childhood care and education. In India, however, the question of transitions to school is still under-researched.

This paper examines how children and families experience transitions within early education and primary school in Andhra Pradesh, India. The paper is divided into four sections. The first provides a background description of India's early childhood education system, with a special focus on the state of Andhra Pradesh. India started a scheme for early childhood care and education in 1974. The responsibility for providing these services is shared between government, private and not-for-profit sectors, which greatly differ in terms of access, outreach, location and quality. In Andhra Pradesh, the growth of the private sector is having important impacts on children's educational trajectories and transition experiences. The second section of the paper gives an overview of Young Lives research on transitions into education in Andhra Pradesh.

The research shows that most children living in rural areas, particularly in poorer households, attend government schools. Private pre-schools are only a significant option for more advantaged groups although parents and caregivers reported a preference for private schooling as the best option for young children. The findings also show that girls are more likely than boys to be educated within the government sector, and that they tend to leave school earlier than their brothers. The research looked in

more detail at eight *anganwadis*, or government pre-schools and the paper presents the findings from interviews with children and caregivers, and collective interviews with teachers.

In the third section, the authors analyse children's different pathways through early childhood care and education. The research is based on a sub-sample of 24 children, all but one of whom was already enrolled in primary school in 2007. This group represents a variety of different trajectories involving home, residential hostels, government and private pre-schools, and government and private primary schools. The authors present case-studies of individual children, including interviews with their parents and caregivers, to show differences in experiences depending on the trajectory the child has followed. Issues discussed here include parents' expectations, English as the language of instruction, quality of education, and reports of corporal punishment in schools.

Finally the paper discusses questions for further consideration on early childhood care and children's transitions in India. While Young Lives findings in Andhra Pradesh indicate some successes in the provision of early childhood care and education, a number of challenges exist. A very high percentage of 5- to 6-year-old children have attended some form of pre-school. Important differences exist, however, between those who attend private versus government schools and pre-schools. One question for further consideration is whether this difference exacerbates inequalities between urban and rural, and poor and less poor children. Further research is needed to understand the long-term outcomes of children's early experiences at school. A final question the authors explore is whether schools themselves are ready for children. Findings so far suggest that they are not, but research shows that with investment and effective policies, pre-school education can help make children 'ready for school'.

