



Study of Education of marginalized and socially disadvantaged segments

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Introduction : Marginality is an experience that affects millions of people throughout the world. People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives, and the resources available to them. This results in making them handicapped in delving contribution to society. A vicious circle is set up whereby their lack of positive and supportive relationships means that they are prevented from participating in local life, which in turn leads to further isolation. This has a tremendous impact on development of human beings, as well as on society at large. As the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy a productive, healthy, and creative life, it is important to address the issue of marginalization. Development is always broadly conceived in terms of mass participation. Marginalization deprives a large majority of people across the globe from participating in the development. It is a complex problem, and there are many factors that cause marginalization. This complex and serious problem need to be addressed at the policy level. This project deals with the problems associated with the groups suffering from marginalization and the ways to reduce them.

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Meaning of marginalized groups and marginalization : In general, the term ‘marginalization’ describes the overt actions or tendencies of human societies, where people who they perceive to undesirable or without useful function, are excluded, i.e., marginalized. These people, who are marginalized, from a GROUP or COMMUNITY for their protection and integration and are known as ‘marginalized groups’. This limits their opportunities and means for survival. Peter Leonard defines marginality as, “. . . being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity”.



The Encyclopedia of Public Health defines marginalized groups as, ‘To be marginalized is to be placed in the margins, and thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center’. Latin observes that, “‘Marginality’ is so thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security. Marginal groups can always be identified by members of dominant society, and will face irrevocable discrimination.” These definitions are mentioned in different contexts, and show that marginalization is a slippery and multilayered concept. Marginalization has aspects in sociological, economic, and political debates. Marginalization may manifest itself in forms varying from genocide/ethnic-cleansing and other xenophobic acts/activities at one end of the spectrum, to more basic economic and social hardships at the unitary (individual/family) level. To further clarify the meaning and concept let us discuss certain characteristics of marginalized groups:

Usually a minority group has the following characteristics

- 1) It suffers from discrimination and subordination.
- 2) They have physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart, and which are disapproved of, by a dominant group.
- 3) They share a sense of collective identity and common burdens.
- 4) They have shared social rules about who belongs, and who does not.
- 5) They have a tendency to marry within the group.

Various marginalized groups and their problems

Most vulnerable marginalized groups in almost every society can be summarized as below:

1. Women – Under different economic conditions, and under the influence of specific historical, cultural, legal and religious factors, marginalization is one of the manifestations of gender inequality. In other words, women may be excluded from certain jobs and occupations, incorporated into certain others, and marginalized in others. In general they are always marginalized relative to men, in every country and culture. Women (or, men) don’t present a homogeneous category where members have common interests, abilities, or practices. Women belonging to lower classes, lower castes, illiterate, and the poorest region have different levels of marginalization than their better off counterparts.



2. People with disabilities – People with disabilities have had to battle against centuries of biased assumptions, harmful stereotypes, and irrational fears. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations with disabilities, and, like many other oppressed minorities, this has left people with disabilities in a severe state of impoverishment for centuries. The proportion of disabled population in India is about 21.9 million. The percentage of disabled population to the total population is about 2.13 per cent. There are interstate and interregional differences in the disabled population. The disabled face various types of barriers while seeking access to health and health services. Among those who are disabled women, children and aged are more vulnerable and need attention.

3. Schedule Castes(Dalits) – The caste system is a strict hierarchical social system based on underlying notions of purity and pollution. Brahmins are on the top of the hierarchy and Shudras or Dalits constitute the bottom of the hierarchy. The marginalization of Dalits influences all spheres of their life, violating basic human rights such as civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. A major proportion of the lower castes and Dalits are still dependent on others for their livelihood. Dalits does not refer to a caste, but suggests a group who are in a state of oppression, social disability and who are helpless and poor. Literacy rates among Dalits are very low. They have meager purchasing power and have poor housing conditions as well as have low access to resources and entitlements. Structural discrimination against these groups takes place in the form of physical, psychological, emotional and cultural abuse which receives legitimacy from the social structure and the social system. Physical segregation of their settlements is common in the villages forcing them to live in the most unhygienic and inhabitable conditions. All these factors affect their health status, access to healthcare and quality of life. There are high rates of malnutrition reported among the marginalized groups resulting in mortality, morbidity and anemia. Access to and utilization of healthcare among the marginalized groups is influenced by their socio-economic status within the society.

Caste based marginalization is one of the most serious human rights issues in the world today, adversely affecting more than 260 million people mostly reside in India. Caste-based discrimination entails social and economic exclusion, segregation in housing, denial and restrictions of access to public and private services and employment, and enforcement of certain



types of jobs on Dalits, resulting in a system of modern day slavery or bonded labour. However, in recent years due to affirmative action and legal protection, the intensity of caste based marginalization is reducing.

4. Scheduled Tribes – The Scheduled Tribes like the Scheduled Castes face structural discrimination within the Indian society. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. In India, the Scheduled Tribes population is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Their percentages in the population and numbers however vary from State to State. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems.

5. Elderly or Aged People – Ageing is an inevitable and inexorable process in life. In India, the population of the elderly is growing rapidly and is emerging as a serious area of concern for the government and the policy planners. According to data on the age of India's population, in Census 2001, there are a little over 76.6 million people above 60 years, constituting 7.2 per cent of the population. The number of people over 60 years in 1991 was 6.8 per cent of the country's population. The vulnerability among the elderly is not only due to an increased incidence of illness and disability, but also due to their economic dependency upon their spouses, children and other younger family members. According to the 2001 census, 33.1 per cent of the elderly in India live without their spouses. The widowers among older men form 14.9 per cent as against 50.1 per cent widows among elderly women. Among the elderly (80 years and above), 71.1 per cent of women were widows while widowers formed only 28.9 per cent of men. Lack of economic dependence has an impact on their access to food, clothing and healthcare. Among the basic needs of the elderly, medicine features as the highest unmet need. Healthcare of the elderly is a major concern for the society as ageing is often accompanied by multiple illnesses and physical ailments.



6. Children – Children Mortality and morbidity among children are caused and compounded by poverty, their sex and caste position in society.

All these have consequences on their nutrition intake, access to healthcare, environment and education. Poverty has a direct impact on the mortality and morbidity among children. In India, a girl child faces discrimination and differential access to nutritious food and gender based violence is evident from the falling sex ratio and the use of technologies to eliminate the girl child. The manifestations of these violations are various, ranging from child labor, child trafficking, to commercial sexual exploitation and many other forms of violence and abuse. With an estimated 12.6 million children engaged in hazardous occupations (2001 Census), for instance, India has the largest number of child laborers under the age of 14 in the world. Among children, there are some groups like street children and children of sex workers who face additional forms of discrimination. A large number of children are reportedly trafficked to the neighboring countries. Trafficking of children also continues to be a serious problem in India. While systematic data and information on child protection issues are still not always available, evidence suggests that children in need of special protection belong to communities suffering disadvantage and social exclusion such as scheduled casts and tribes, and the poor (UNICEF, India).

7. Sexual Minorities – Another group that faces stigma and discrimination are the sexual minorities. Those identified as gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, kothi and hijra; experience various forms of discrimination within the society and the health system. Due to the dominance of heteronomous sexual relations as the only form of normal acceptable relations within the society, individuals who are identified as having same-sex sexual preferences are ridiculed and ostracized by their own family and are left with very limited support structures and networks of community that provide them conditions of care and support. Their needs and concerns are excluded from the various health policies and programs.

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