

COVID-19, Reverse Migration and Child Labour: Insights from a Primary Survey

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic imposed a need for unplanned reverse migration on workers working in the unorganized, informal sectors of the economy. The greatest exodus of the century left us thinking about our response to the pandemic and the inclusivity of living spaces that we have created. This study is an outcome of the feeling that though this reverse migration and the problems it caused are well documented there is a need to go beyond the process of migration and understand the process of settling down of workers in the rural economy. How the loss of jobs and income affected the individual and the families, what happened when these workers reached back their native village, what happened to various inequalities including the intergenerational inequalities and what have been the coping mechanisms of people. This paper is based on preliminary results from a primary survey of about 160 respondents who had migrated back to their village from various urban centers across the country. We try to look at various ways in which lives of these reverse migrants have changed and to understand their response to the pandemic. The study finds a sudden increase in incidence of child labour amongst the families of the respondents. We find that the pandemic and our response to it has disproportionately harmed vulnerable groups like women and the children. This paper is a call for the need to make more inclusive societies and an unambiguous call for higher public investments in health and education and Job creation.

Note: This paper was presented in the tenth annual conference of the Indian Health Economics and Policy Association on Sectoral Impacts of COVID 19 Pandemic in India, held in the online mode on 28th and 29th of January 2022.

Introduction

In March 2020, the government of India imposed a lock down on the entire country, which brought all economic activity and movement to a sudden halt. People who suffered

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