

RECOUP Working Paper No. 24

**“With education you can do anything;
without education there’s nothing you
can do”. Outcomes of schooling for
young people with disabilities.**

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Outcomes of schooling for young people with disabilities.

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Abstract

The last few years have seen an increase in the enrolment numbers of children with disabilities into the education system, however there are continuing concerns about the outcomes of these efforts, especially in terms of employment. This paper assembles data from a qualitative enquiry into how young people (aged 15-30) with three impairments (in hearing, seeing and walking) understand the role played by education in their lives. The research, carried out in urban and rural Madhya Pradesh, India, contrasts the poor outcomes for these young people in terms of employment (despite the reservations policy of the state government) with young people’s own sense of the value of schooling in enhancing their social skills and opportunities, and their cultural capital, particularly in terms of how they are able to confront stigmatizing attitudes. Whereas the ‘significant others’ (parents and elder siblings) see schooling as a failure if it does not lead to jobs, these young people with disabilities themselves focus on education’s enabling roles. The paper concludes with policy proposals with respect to the nature and content of schooling and improvements in how government benefits are accessed by these young people.

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I have benefited a lot from going to school. If I had not gone to school I would not have got so much fame. ... From fame I mean that I would not have got married and I would not have been able to see Dewas city ... I would not have been able to see the environment outside ... and if I had stayed at home I would have had to be dependent on my brother and his wife.If today they had said that I would have to sit here for the entire day then I would not have been able to move from here at all ... so sister I have benefited a lot by coming to school ... It is necessary to educate because otherwise she (a person with disabilities) will become dependent on someoneand this is definite that she can't become independentand today if she gets educated then she will not have to go anywhere ... she will be able to live in society with her head held high and will think that she will be able to do everything ... It is essential to educate all PWD ... everyone says that a PWD should be well educated ... and I would say that God forbid but if my children also are disabled then I will educate them myself first.

(Lajjo, young woman with visual impairment, 12 years of schooling.)

My wife did not allow me to send our son to school, though I wanted to. Now his life is spoilt and so is ours ... If his [life] was improved then ours would have been also.

(Father of a young man with hearing impairment.)

Introduction

People with disabilities represent a significant part of the population of marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged people in India. Since Independence, the Government of India has developed various policies to address their position, both as a matter of human rights and in recognition of the close links between disability and poverty. From the mid-1990s these efforts have taken a more fervent turn, with revised schemes and policies (such as the Scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children – IEDC); new legislation (such as the Persons with Disabilities Act) and indeed more generous (though still inadequate) monetary provisions (and various state level benefits). Many of these schemes

and benefits are particularly aimed at facilitating the participation of young people with disabilities in mainstream society.

As India moves towards meeting some of its Education for All (EFA) goals, there is increasing awareness of those who are still to gain access to schooling, as well as a concern with issues of schooling quality and a recognition of the need to improve the outcomes of schooling for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Now that education is established as a fundamental right, the education of children with disabilities has become more salient, even if it has yet to capture the imagination of more than a minority of the Indian population. Over the years the government has made various policy statements and introduced a few schemes to provide and improve educational provisions for those with disabilities. Both the Sargent Report produced in 1944 and written prior to independence (Central Advisory Board of Education, 1944), and the Kothari Commission (Education Commission, 1966) highlighted the need to educate children with disabilities. Subsequently the National Policy of Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1986), the Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act), 1995 (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1996) and the more recent *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA, Education for All movement), launched in 2004, have all highlighted the need for educating people with disabilities. Across all these policy documents a dual approach has been adopted to accommodate the education of children with disabilities, wherein the focus has been on expanding both special and integrated facilities. An example of this dual approach is clearly evident in the PWD Act which states that, “it [the Act] endeavours to promote the integration of students with disabilities in the normal schools” (p. 12) and also promotes the “establishment and availability of special schools across the nation” (p. 12) in both Government and private sectors.

Recent data gathered under the SSA suggest a marked increase in the enrolment of those with disabilities in the education system (see, for example, Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008). Enrolment numbers have increased, though the evidence for how substantial this increase is conflicting and confusing.¹ But the government’s rationale is limited by its circumscribed vision of the purposes of education for people with disabilities. The focus of the government is primarily on normalisation and rehabilitation (Singal, 2007). Nonetheless, the increased enrolment of children with disabilities is highly significant,

¹ See Singal (2006) for a detailed discussion on this issue.

especially with regard to their experiences in these settings and the outcomes of their participation.

The central questions we address in this paper are: how do young people with disabilities characterise their lives; and, in particular what are their perceptions of how their schooling experiences have impacted on their lives? In doing so we draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, because (drawing originally on research among educated un- or under-employed young people in 1960s France) he emphasises the importance of economic resources, social networks and cultural power in understanding young people's sense of personal agency (Calhoun, 1993).

Over the years, Bourdieu developed these insights by distinguishing different kinds of capital – economic, social and cultural – and with the opportunities for turning one into the others. Economic capital is the command over economic resources (cash, or other assets). Social capital – 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1983: 249) – represents instrumentally valuable social bonds, or resources based on relatively durable group membership, relationships, and networks of influence and support. Cultural capital involves the range of goods, titles and forms of demeanour that assist or hinder claims to status within arenas of power (Bourdieu, 1986). It 'includes such things as acquired knowledge (educational or otherwise), cultural codes, manner of speaking and consumption practices and so forth' (Bullen & Kenway, 2005: 52). Thus cultural capital can be embodied, as both inherited and acquired properties of one's self, and can include linguistic capital, defined as the mastery of and relation to language (Bourdieu, 1990: 114), or more broadly, ways of communicating.² Bourdieu argued that individuals' chances of success within any 'field' – for example, employment competition – depended crucially on the volume and form of their economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

Clearly, applying these ideas to understanding how young people in India with disabilities respond to situations and life experiences is not a straightforward process. After all,

² Bourdieu discusses both habitus (orientations to action 'written in' to a person's movements, reflexes and tastes, and which are both structured by people's experience while also structuring future action) and 'bodily hexis' ('a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking') as ways in which capital may be embodied (Bourdieu 1977, 72 & 93). We return briefly to these ideas later in the paper.

Bourdieu's ideas were originally generated in the context of understanding patterns of dominance in France, where the intellectual elite has particular characteristics. Some have indeed argued that his ideas of cultural capital are limited to the notion of elite or 'high' culture (e.g. De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000: 93; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). Others, however, have productively extended the term well beyond such a narrow understanding, and have looked (for example) at the uses of cultural capital in schools (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995: 121), or in street hostels (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005). As Mills has noted, Delpit has argued that schools *can* (but often do not) provide students with 'the discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society' (Delpit, 1997: 585); i.e. not to eliminate the cultural capital that students bring with them to school or use it to limit their potential, but rather to add other cultural capital to their repertoires (Delpit, 1992; Mills, 2008: 85).

Such approaches can be usefully applied in India, where elements of Brahmanic culture (in particular) have been used to exclude and denigrate those of lower castes or some religious minorities (Jeffrey, 2001; Lardinois & Thapan, 2006). In this paper we extend some of these analyses by considering how different aspects of capital impinge on the lives of young people with disabilities in urban and rural central India. On the one hand, the economic, social and cultural capital of groups and individuals could affect the ability of children with disabilities to access education of different kinds (different kinds of capital as inputs into the educational process). On the other hand, the education they receive will have different kinds of impacts on their economic, social and cultural capital (i.e. the outcomes of education can be understood as contributions to the different kinds of capital available as resources to young people as they negotiate different fields of social life).

Some of the Northern disability literature shows how these ideas can be used in analysing the situations of young people with disabilities. On the 'input' side and based on his research in the UK, Allen argues that how young people with disabilities respond to their situated impairments depends quite heavily on the economic, social and cultural capital they inherit from their parents, (Allen, 2004: 488). Children develop different orientations towards their bodies (a habitus) that involve forms of bodily comportment that depend on their social origins. Whereas children from middle-class backgrounds had relatively expansive spatial strategies, those from working-class backgrounds were less likely to

resist their impairment because they tacitly accepted the limited opportunities to which members of their social class were entitled (Allen, 2004: 488). We are not pursuing these ideas here, since we attempted to select a sample of young people with very similar social backgrounds, towards the bottom of the economic, social and political hierarchies operating in north India.

Amongst those who focus on the outcomes of education, but drawing on other traditions of social capital theory, Riddell et al argue that

a social capital version of the learning society would emphasize the importance of provision designed not so much to enhance an individual's employability but to promote quality of life, social networking and citizenship. Rather than assuming that individuals participate in education for instrumental reasons and to acquire marketable skills, the assumption would be made that an individual's motivation for engaging in education is complex and may be driven by a desire to enhance a sense of self-worth and to engage with the excitement of learning. Adult and continuing education classes, therefore ... would serve a range of functions including the promotion of leisure activities, and the strengthening of social, cultural and political groups. (Riddell, Baron, Stalker, & Wilkinson, 1997: 476)

The aim of this paper, then, by focussing on the outcomes side, is, to provide a wider understanding of the possible contributions of schooling to the lives of young people with different kinds and degrees of impairments, and then to use young people's own accounts of their lives to throw light on how far schooling currently contributes to these possible outcomes. In developing our understanding we consider a wider range of possible roles of schooling than just the narrow discourses that often dominate debates (such as the government of India's focus on normalisation and rehabilitation, or those who see success solely in terms of whether education leads to employment). Rather, we use the concepts of economic, social and cultural capital to distinguish different ways in which schooling can contribute to an individual's capabilities.³ Schooling can improve an individual's access to economic capital – to economic resources such as incomes, land or capital. But schooling

³ These terms are widely used, though for somewhat different purposes, in the literature on sustainable livelihoods, where 'capital' or, more broadly, assets and capabilities, have five aspects: Human, Social, Natural, Physical and Financial. Natural and physical capital relate to ownership of or access to land and power (understood as energy); we focus on the remaining three kinds of assets, though human capital is usually understood as basically being education, and writers in this tradition rarely extend their analysis to think through the implications of schooling for perceptions of the self.

can also provide opportunities for an extension of someone's social capital, by raising their ability to become part of a social group, to develop new relationships (including relationships with the state that provide access to public entitlements such as scholarships and pensions), or to develop new networks of influence and support. Participation in schooling can also develop attitudes and knowledge that give young people a more positive perception of their selves, or provide ways of thinking and acting that induce respect rather than disparagement in public spaces – which contribute to someone's self esteem, confidence, sense of worth and empowerment. These three types of capital are interlinked and can contribute to the achievement of a better quality of life. But equally, there is no necessary relationship between schooling and these positive outcomes, for young people with disabilities as for others. Some forms of schooling may offer one kind of benefit but not others; and schooling can (for example through breaking some kinds of social ties and not replacing them with others or through perpetuating a moralistic explanation for impairments) lead to a diminution of some aspects of young people's everyday lives. As Sarangapani has argued, the terms in which children gain cultural capital through schooling are terms that are dictated by outside forces, and not under the control of the children themselves, and in that sense, the empowerment they were seeking might well not provide a 'means for social transformation' (Sarangapani, 2003: 63, 66-68).

In assessing the in-depth accounts from young people with disabilities, who tried to navigate their path through the education system, we begin by examining their experiences of schooling, and their reasons for opting-out and/or being excluded as well as how those with more years of schooling managed to continue. Their educational journeys provide a backdrop to the remaining three sections, which attempt to answer the question whether schooling, as currently experienced by young people with disabilities in India, enhances their ability

- to find employment or other income-generating opportunities (economic capital);
- to expand their social networks to provide more support in their everyday lives or to access available support services (whether from the government or from NGOs) (social capital);
- to enhance aspects of their self, including the mastery of and relation to particular forms of language, and embodied self-presentations (cultural capital).

Overview of the research design:

The findings presented in this paper draw on the data gathered under the Disability Education and Poverty Project (DEPP). DEPP is part of the larger Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP), which is operating in four countries (Ghana, Kenya and Pakistan, in addition to India).⁴ RECOUP is collecting data on disability through questions in a large scale quantitative household survey, as well as through community based qualitative research projects in each partner country. This paper reports on data from only the India qualitative project.

Like the other qualitative RECOUP projects, DEPP began sample selection in two communities, one urban and one rural, in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh. Dewas was chosen as a district that was accessible to the national and State capitals, but was not atypically wealthy or well-provided for in educational terms. Within Dewas district we selected communities that were, in local terms, poor. In the absence of local-level community economic data, we used expert judgements and observation to exclude relatively well-off areas. In urban Dewas we selected a new settlement which came up in the early 1980s as an unauthorised colony near the Nagdaman River and was later regularized. In rural Dewas, where villages typically include a mix of social classes, we chose a village without very wealthy landlords and without households whose incomes were based on remittances. Each selected community was relatively easily accessible to Dewas town, had a population between about 1500 and 3500, included a variety of schooling levels among young people, and had some access to secondary schooling within the previous 10 years or so.

Early activities within each community included a household census, designed to develop a better understanding of the community in terms of its caste and community distribution, household assets, the role and extent of migration, as well as educational indicators for its members. The household census also facilitated the selection of people who met the sampling criteria for DEPP. The focus of this project was on exploring the lives of young people aged 15-30 years with disabilities, and developing a better understanding of the role of education in their lives. Singal (2007) provides the conceptual framework for the

⁴ Qualitative research projects on social and human outcomes of education are being conducted in the same geographical areas, allowing a deeper knowledge of the local context than can be provided by each separately. Details of the various projects can be found on the RECOUP website: <http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/>,

disability, education and poverty project (DEPP). Here we draw attention to two features of that paper, which are central to the research discussed in this paper.

The first is that it proposed a reconceptualisation of disability. The approach adopted in DEPP focuses not only on bodily impairments but also on the impact that these have on activity and participation. The questions used to identify people with disabilities were therefore anchored not in an impairment based approach but rather suggested an activity limitation approach. Since an individual's functioning and disability occurs in a context, it is useful to regard this in terms of impairments of body structures and functions, limitations of activities and restrictions of participation. Thus, in the household census we asked questions about whether there were in the household any members with difficulty in walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, learning or taking personal care. We then asked for these difficulties to be classified by the degree of problems posed for their everyday lives. Although there were some difficulties in operationalising these questions, they were more powerful and less stigmatising than simply asking the commonly used question “is there a disabled member in your household?” We are confident that we identified all those with significant impairments in the selected communities. However, when snow-balling and searching for additional young people to join the sample through official channels or through NGOs, we had no choice but to accept their working definitions of disability and then to make a rapid assessment of the individuals proposed to be interviewed as to the nature of their impairment. This became a significant issue when following up those listed with the Department of Social Welfare, Madhya Pradesh, since some of those listed as disabled turned out to have minor (or even no) impairments.

Secondly, Singal (2007) laid out a series of themes around ‘outcomes’ to be explored through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The central concern was to listen to the predominantly marginalised voices of young people with disabilities, but also to locate them within their larger milieu. The four broad dimensions of: the self, the learning self, participation and purposeful activities, were central to the framework in which themes were developed for the interview schedule. The intention was to gather rich accounts of the lives of these young people, and also to contextualise them within their family and community settings.

Sampling criteria

Even though national data sets, such as NSS (2002) and Census (2001) provide an indication of the prevalence rates of disability in India, these datasets produce radically different estimates of the overall numbers and distribution by impairment of young people (Jeffery & Singal, 2008; Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2006). For example, according to the NSS data, in a population of 2000 (all ages) one would expect to find 8 people with disabilities in the 15-29 years age group, of whom 4-5 would have some impairment in movement (physical), 1 to have a mental impairment (learning difficulty), 1 would have multiple impairments, and 0.5 would have seeing, speaking or hearing impairments. According to the Census data, however, we would expect to find 10 young people with disabilities in the same age group, of whom 4-5 would have a visual impairment, 3 would have a physical impairment, 1-2 would have a mental impairment, 1 a speech impairment and 0.5 a hearing impairment. Identification of people with disabilities is fraught with complexities caused by contrasting definitions of impairments, and other socio-cultural variables (see, for example, Erb & Harriss-White, 2002; Kuruvilla & Joseph, 1999). Therefore, at the outset of our research we did not know how many young people with disabilities we might identify through our community household censuses, but we suspected (correctly, as it turned out) that these populations would not be big enough to generate even the small numbers we were looking for. We were therefore prepared to go beyond the selected communities to find our sample.

We deliberately chose to restrict the impairments sampled to those where there has been a history of special provisions in India, and thus we selected people with hearing impairments, visual impairments and physical (mobility) impairments. We expected that the situation (in terms of the availability of provisions, and their accessibility for poor children) would be better for people with these impairments than would be true for young people with other types of impairments, especially learning difficulties. We wanted roughly equal numbers with each impairment, to be equally distributed between urban and rural settings, and equal numbers of males and females. We also wanted some young people with many years of schooling (higher levels of class completion) and others with none, or very few years. Another important sampling criterion was the age of onset of impairments. We restricted the sample to those whose onset of impairment preceded the age of 5 years (when schooling usually starts), or where onset was during the school years.

Our rationale was that onset of impairment during school years is likely to have a very different impact on her/his schooling and subsequent opportunities when compared to someone who acquires an impairment later in life. The desired final sample was 30 young people with disabilities, along with one 'significant other' for each young person with disabilities. The final number was a compromise between the desire to interview a substantial number, balanced by the need to ensure adequate time to identify members of the sample and to ensure the greatest possible rapport between interviewer and interviewee. We felt that five young people with each kind of impairment in each setting (urban and rural) would provide a wide enough range of experiences for us to explore the variability in processes and meanings attached to these young people's lives.

Table 1 shows the final pattern of young people interviewed. We were able to locate five young people with physical impairments in the rural and four from the urban community, and one young person with hearing impairment from the rural site. We needed to go beyond these communities, however, to find the remaining sample numbers of young people with hearing and with visual impairments. These were identified by a combination of snowballing, enquiries to the NGOs running specialist facilities, and consulting the listings held by the Department of Social Welfare, Madhya Pradesh officials in Dewas town. It was very difficult to find the sample of young people with hearing impairments, because they seemed not to be easily identified from the existing lists, nor did they seem to have wide networks that allowed us to use snowballing techniques. We found most of our sample of young people with visual impairments through snow-balling and visits to the special school for the blind in Dewas. At the end of these processes we had very little choice in our sample, and little information to judge whether or not a household was 'poor'. This could have led to some biases in our sampling. For instance, according to the survey and census data available nationally, young people with disabilities have fewer years of schooling than do the rest of the population. Thus we have an unexpectedly large number having reached 10, 12 or more years of schooling in our sample of people with visual impairments. It may be, however, that most of those with visual impairments who reach Class 8 are able to go on to Class 10 or 12 as in our sample. Alternatively it could be the case that educational provisions in the area, in terms of special schools and other support structures are much more widespread for this group. Without further investigation we cannot make any strong claims for the typicality of our samples.

Table 1: Distribution of sample population by impairment, residence, schooling level and gender, Dewas District, Madhya Pradesh, India

<i>Impairment</i>	<i>Schooling 0-5</i>		<i>Schooling 6-9</i>		<i>Schooling 10+</i>		<i>Total</i>
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
HI: Urban	1	2	1	2	0	0	6
HI: Rural	2	0	2	0	0	0	4
PI: Urban	1	2	0	1	1	0	5
PI: Rural	1	0	2	2	0	0	5
VI: Urban	0	1	0	0	2	2	5
VI: Rural	2	0	0	0	2	1	5
Totals	7	5	5	5	5	3	30

Note: HI = Hearing Impaired, PI = Physically Impaired, VI = Visually Impaired.

In this study, the primary focus was on young people aged 16 to 30 with disabilities and belonging to poor families (see Table 2). Therefore researchers tried not to interview people from very ‘well-off families’. However, these assessments were based mainly on researchers’ observations of assets in the family, and the number of earning and non-earning members in the family. In some cases, the lack of much choice in sampling meant the inclusion of families who were considered relatively ‘well-off’ when described by young middle class urban researchers.

Table 2: Distribution of sample population by age and schooling level, Dewas District, Madhya Pradesh, India

<i>Age</i>	<i>Schooling 0-5</i>	<i>Schooling 6-9</i>	<i>Schooling 10+</i>	<i>Total</i>
16-20	4	6	2	12
21-25	3	3	1	7
26-30	5	1	5	11
Totals	12	10	8	30

Fieldwork process

The interviews were conducted by a team from CORD who had been trained in qualitative research methods, some of whom already had experience of conducting semi-structured interviews in the selected communities. They had also gone through a further training on how to conduct research with people with disabilities. Most of the interviewers were

women aged between 22 and 26 years; some interviews were conducted by an older man and an older woman. In most cases researchers had an initial interaction with the young person with a disability and/or their significant others to seek consent for the interviews. However, some areas were remote and it would have been difficult to visit them a second time, so, if the respondents agreed, researchers interviewed them immediately rather than lose the opportunity.

In each case, two people conducted the interviews, with one asking most of the questions and the other taking notes, even though in all cases we had a complete digital recording available to us. All the interviews were written up in detail with the help of the notes taken at the time of the interview. Selected extracts – in total sometimes as much as 80 per cent of the interview – were transcribed and translated. All the quotes in this paper have been taken from the transcribed extracts and checked for consistency of meaning by at least two of the authors of this paper. Not only were interviews transcribed but we also documented the person's surrounding, attire, how people communicated with the person with disability (especially those with visual and hearing impairments), and how people with disability were treated by their family and neighbours, to give a fuller picture of the context and the research experience. Researchers' comments at the end of interviews gave their personal reflections on the research process. Photographs were taken in some cases with the permission of the respondents and these were attached to the documents.

Most of the significant others of the persons with disabilities who we interviewed were parents. Only in cases where parents were not available were other significant others interviewed. Thus, in two instances we interviewed the siblings and, in one case, the spouse of the young person with disabilities (because her parents and family lived too far away for us to be able to visit them). Some households were visited more than once to complete the interviews: wherever possible, the young person with disability was interviewed first, to highlight their sense of centrality in the research process, followed by an interview with that person's significant other. In some cases, interviews with young people required a visit to Indore⁵ where they were currently studying.

In addition, some of the key people affecting education and disability policy and practice in the locality (such as head teachers in special and mainstream schools) were also

⁵ The largest city in MP, which is 30 kms away from Dewas and easily accessible by public transport.

interviewed. Most of the schools that were accessed by our sample population were visited to ask about their attitudes towards the admission of children with disabilities. Additional schools were visited in the district and a nearby city, Indore. Special schools in Indore were visited as many sampled people and their significant others were aware of these schools and mentioned them as good for children with specific impairments. These interviews provided background information of the educational environment in and around the district for the young person with disability. In one instance, the visit to the school acted as a snowballing mechanism to find youths with visual impairment who could meet our sample criteria. We collected information on the infrastructure and facilities available in these schools and also interviewed the principals and some of the teachers.

Table 3: Distribution of sample population by impairment, residence, age of onset of impairment and gender, Dewas District, Madhya Pradesh, India

<i>Impairment</i>	<i>Onset at or near birth</i>		<i>Onset 2- 5 years</i>		<i>Onset above age 5</i>		<i>Total</i>
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
HI: Urban	1	4	1	0	0	0	6
HI: Rural	1	0	3	0	0	0	4
PI: Urban	0	1	2	1	0	1	5
PI: Rural	1	0	2	2	0	0	5
VI: Urban	1	0	1	1	0	2	5
VI: Rural	1	1	2	0	1	0	5
Totals	5	6	11	4	1	3	30

Note: HI = hearing impaired, PI = physically impaired, VI = visually impaired.

The focus of the research effort was to gain access to the voices, views, feelings and experiences of the young person with disability her/himself, Although the research design envisaged that the interviewers would be able to ask most, if not all, of the questions in a personal and confidential way, in practice it was often impossible to find a ‘private’ space for the interview. In many cases, the families or neighbours of the sampled young people felt entitled to be involved in and contribute to the answers to questions posed, and it was

sometimes hard to ensure that we recorded the views of the young person her/himself. Sometimes these problems were exacerbated by lack of space: most of these households were poor, and the young person had no space they could regard as their own. But in addition, in these communities, the very notion of ‘privacy’ was unfamiliar and the request for an individual response, from a self-aware young person, seemed to be disregarded almost casually. This was common to the experiences of other young people (and thus not necessarily attributable solely to young people with disabilities). It might, however, have been exacerbated for these young people because of assumptions being made about their impairments, though we found similar problems while carrying out other qualitative research in the same communities.

Sometimes these problems made it very hard to conduct the interview at all:

There was a lot of noise in the house. Naveen, Manish’s nephew, was being called inside to take bath by his mother but he was roaming around in the courtyard. Everybody was asking him to go inside the house to his mother. There was noise all around. Manish’s wife was calling Naveen. Naveen’s father was calling him, his grandmother, everybody was doing so. There was so much noise that in the end Manish almost shouted and asked everybody to keep quiet and reminded everybody that the recording is taking place. (Fieldnotes, Father of Manish a young man with 15 years of education in rural Dewas.)

There were particular problems in interviewing young people with hearing impairments. We were unable to locate sign language interpreters, and indeed only one of the hearing impaired in the sample had been trained in a shared sign language. Even the parents of these young people did not necessarily understand the more complex gestures used by the young people, and some of the interviews included periods when the young person became very frustrated by their inability to communicate effectively with the interviewers.

In an effort to see how her mother interacts with Hema and also to involve Hema in conversation, AJ asked her mother to ask Hema what we had asked her about her likings. Hema’s mother did some actions of putting *mehndi* on her hand clumsily. Hema did not understand. Hema did a few actions which we could not understand and neither did her mother when asked to interpret. It was from here that AJ began interaction with Hema by writing and AB continued with the

interview. (Fieldnotes, Mother of Hema, a young woman who had completed Class 8.)

There were also times when the presence of too many people around inhibited the young person, making him/her too self-conscious to reply, especially to questions about marriage. There were also times when others replied instead of the young person and his/her voice was submerged, but in most cases the young person took control when given the opportunity:

Ruchi, a visually impaired girl, did not participate actively in the interview when others were around. It was only after everyone had left that she opened up to the researcher and said, “*ab poocho mujhe kuchh sawaal.*” (Now ask me some questions.) (Fieldnotes, Ruchi who had completed Class 12.)

Nonetheless the accounts gathered from the young people were rich in description. In many cases, as in our other on-going research experience in these sites, respondents showed initial reluctance to answer questions if they would not benefit directly (by which they meant, financially). However, at the end of the interviews almost all of those interviewed – especially the young people – said they appreciated the experience. It provided some of them a welcome and infrequent opportunity to share their feelings and experiences. Lajjo (a young woman with visual impairment, 12 years of schooling) told us ‘this was the best Sunday she had had in a long time’ after her interview was completed.

The data we gathered from our interviews (including researcher accounts) were coded using the three-step coding proposed by Neuman (2000). To begin with, ‘open coding’ (p. 421) was carried out, which primarily involved giving descriptive codes, and a low level of abstraction to help flag themes from the data. However, as the analysis process continued, the codes became more analytical in nature. This ‘second pass’ through the data involved the organisation of ideas or themes in a coherent manner. The final step was that of ‘selective coding’, which involved scanning the data and previous codes to organise the overall analysis around several core generalizations or ideas. A combination of both manual and computer-assisted methods helped achieve best results and allowed for cross-coder triangulation.⁶

⁶ We used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program, Atlas.ti to help manage the data.

In the following sections we present the findings from the analysis of our data, beginning with a description of the educational experiences of the young people in the sample.

Educational profile of young people with disabilities

When discussing the educational profile of these young people with disabilities one cannot afford to make broad assertions as there are significant differences according to the type of impairments (other variables, such as gender and/or urban-rural settings, do not come across as being too dominant). Of all the impairments types, young people with visual impairments had completed the highest numbers of years of education. 6 of them had completed class 12 and beyond, 1 of them had completed class 10, while another had completed only class 4 schooling. It is interesting to note that all of the visually impaired – except the two young men living in the rural area who had never attended any school – had attended a special school for a considerable number of years at some point in their educational journey.

Of the ten young people with hearing impairments, three had not received any school education (including one who had attended school for 2 years and then dropped out), while the 7 other young men and women with hearing impairments had attended school. However the highest class completed was only class 8. Their school journeys, unlike those of people with visual impairments, seemed more anchored in one system or the other, rather than shifts from special to mainstream or vice versa. While most of these young people had attended a mainstream school, two of them had studied in special schools, of whom one was currently in Class 5.

All our sample young men and women with physical impairments had received some school education. While 6 of them had been schooled till Class 5, three of them had made it to Class 8 or 9, and one of them was currently pursuing his graduation (B.A., II year) through correspondence. All these young people had studied only in the mainstream setting.

In some cases, not surprisingly, these young people had started their school journey much later in age than their peer group, due to the onset of impairment. For instance, three of our sample group had joined school aged 10 or more. However, this was not the norm. Moreover, and not unusually in this socio-cultural context, most parents and the young people themselves were able to provide only approximate ages and dates for key life-cycle events.

Significantly, these young people with disabilities had completed many more years of schooling than their parents and siblings. In the majority of cases, they were first generation learners: their parents had no or very little schooling and were not familiar with the school system. Additionally, in those cases where information about the level of schooling completed for each and every child in the household is available, in most cases these young people had attained higher levels of schooling than their siblings.⁷

All but one of the young people with visual impairments had completed at least as many years of schooling as their siblings. For instance, while Manish was pursuing his college education, his elder brother had only studied till class 4. In the case of Kewal who was also in his first year of College, his elder brother had stopped studies after class 3, and his younger brothers had only completed Class 10 and 6 respectively. In two cases where the young person had not received any schooling, the siblings and the parents had not attended school either.

Somewhat similar trends were evident when examining the levels of schooling achieved by young people with physical impairments in contrast to their siblings. In such cases the young person had equal or more years of education than their siblings. However, these trends did not emerge when examining the data for young people with hearing impairments. While there are greater gaps in the household information for this group, from the information available it is evident that young people with hearing impairments had fewer years of schooling than their siblings.

Educational journeys of the young people with disabilities

The advancement through the school system for these young people with disabilities were not necessarily smooth journeys, marked by seamless shifts from one school setting to another. Rather, these journeys were, in some cases, marked by large gaps or decisions were imposed on the young person and/or the family, rather than being taken as a matter of choice. The availability of educational facilities in the village and the neighbouring areas seemed to be an important variable.

The availability of special schools around our sample site seemed to have played an important role. To understand the educational provisions for people with disability our

⁷ Not all parents were able to remember the full details, and in one or two cases the researchers did not ask sufficiently detailed questions.

research team visited 4 special schools (one each for visually impaired boys, visually impaired girls, children with hearing impairment and a special school for children with hearing impairment and intellectual impairment) and 11 mainstream schools in Dewas and in the neighbouring city, Indore.

District Dewas itself has two special schools, a government-aided school and hostel for girls and young women with visual impairment (this is till Class 8), and another NGO-run special school for children with hearing and intellectual impairments (this is till class 5). A government-aided school for boys and young men with visual impairment was situated in Indore, which also boasts of several special schools, government-aided and private, for children and young people with hearing impairments.

The special school for girls with visual impairment in Dewas had managed to form a good link with a senior secondary school in the district and there seemed to be opportunities for young women to progress through the education system. Mainstream government schools (primary, secondary and higher secondary), in district Dewas, both in urban and the rural sites, stated that they admitted children with disabilities. During interviews head teachers talked about the SSA and the impact it was having on enrolments of children with disabilities. However, interviews and observations suggested that these schools were not adequately resourced, in terms of trained personnel and/or facilities. Here the enrolment of children and young people with physical impairments was more of a norm as compared to other types of impairments. Support for this is evident in the educational journeys of our sample group, where all the young people with physical impairments had attended mainstream government schools in their area. This was regarded as a convenient arrangement because of the proximity of the school. Those who had attended higher secondary school travelled to the nearby town. In some cases this distance became a problem and resulted in the child dropping out of school.

While most of the young people with hearing impairment had attended a mainstream government school, two of those living in the urban area had attended a special school.

During the interviews, some young people and/or their significant others recounted the experiences of the child not being able to cope in the mainstream school because of absence of adequate and appropriate resources (this seemed to be more evident in the accounts provided by those with visual impairments). Kewal, a young man with visual

impairment who studied till B.A. (I year), recounted some dismal experiences in the mainstream school, which resulted in his shift to a special school. Later on in college he noted the lack of Braille facilities, resulting in his inability to access the curriculum and he finally dropped out of the system. Sangeeta, who had completed her graduation and experienced both special and mainstream settings, stated her strong preference for the former setting. She said that in special schools children were allowed to work without 'too much noise' and had all the support available in terms of additional resources. Many in the sample seemed to favour their experiences in the special school setting. For instance, Raj Singh, a visually impaired man who had completed two years of a Bachelors degree and had experienced both mainstream and special settings, was asked to state the difference between his experiences in these schools. He said:

the difference is that in the special school everyone was like us ... everything was taught according to our levels ... there was no problem of blackboards and so on ... there everything used to be explained orally and practically ... there were teachers ... they were all in touch with us ... they knew Braille also ... and whatever could not be understood through Braille, they used to touch and hold with their hands and explain ... like, made one stand up ... when explaining some map, the teacher also stood up ... then turned him this side, that side ... said that this looks like this, looks like that ... but in a normal school what happens is that the teacher explains on the board ... but that I used to be able to understand because I had already studied in a special school till class 10 ...

However, even though some of these young people tended to support special schools, on being probed further they highlighted the need for more mainstream participation for people with disabilities. Their support for special schools seemed to be based on their negative experiences in mainstream settings. Raj Singh and his friend thought that in the early years special schools were beneficial whereas mainstream schools were more useful for further studies. They noted the usefulness of mainstream settings in terms of opportunities to make friends and the opportunities to carry on with further education.

special school is good for the visually impaired till a point till when he becomes sensible ... after that a general school is much better for him ... because in the special school one can only get the knowledge as much as would be provided by the teachers ... and in a general school along with

studies, outside knowledge, outside environment, living style, meeting different kinds of boys and having different experiences ... then one can deal with the difficulties that one faces after coming outside very easily ... how to talk to whom, how to do what ... one would have ease to understand that ... and one would find it beneficial to make his own friend circle that how to deal with normal people ... one would find it beneficial to make this planning also

(Raj Singh, a young man with visual impairment, B.A., II year.)

Nonetheless, inaccessibility of the mainstream in terms of the pedagogy adopted and curriculum followed resulted in the child dropping out and/or shifting to a special school. The lack of suitable facilities and trained teachers seemed to be the biggest challenge in making this feasible. These factors were highlighted in the interviews with heads of schools and indeed some of the young people themselves. In our interviews with heads of school, some clearly noted that at times they encouraged parents to send their child to a special school, because they felt the child's needs would be better met in the special school.

Significant others narrated accounts of how teachers asked them to take their child away, due to the teachers inability to teach the child, or due to their inability to handle the negative response of the peer group. The mother of Kamlesh, a young man with visual impairment who had not attended school, explained why: We made him sit for a few days [in the class], but the teacher said, *'take him away, he fights ... everyone used to say "the blind has come, the blind has come"'*.

Another recurring theme was the issue of school fees. This issue was particularly pertinent for young people with hearing impairments, and their inability to access special schools. Hema was the only one who began going to school early at the age of four. She was enrolled in a special school in Indore but was then withdrawn as the expenses were too high. In most of the cases parents were aware of the special schools (both private and government aided) available in Indore but factors such as the financial condition of the family and its concerns about the child's safety were inhibiting factors.

Additionally, Sabina's experience also highlights the monetary demands being made by private schools on the limited resources of these families. Even though Sabina preferred to

study in a private school, as she felt that the facilities provided in a private school were better than the government school, and she was critical of their largely monetary focus. She complained that if she was late in paying her fees, teachers used to come to her house to collect it. However, she said:

Everything was good here [in the private school] ... in studies, in food, teachers, in every activity ... I got interested in studies here ... did not get [interested] in any other school ... this was also near ... and education was also good.

(Sabina, a young woman with physical impairments, Class 6.)

The pull factor of government schools was thus primarily in terms of absence of school fees and indeed the disability benefits that students were likely to access through various schemes. The parent of another young person with physical impairments was advised by the private school teacher to shift his child to the government school so that he could get some scholarship and other benefits.

Personal finances also became an issue when attempting to access higher levels of education. Lajjo, who had studied till class 12 also wanted to complete her college education but she could not do so because she was currently working as a teacher in the blind girls' school. Attending lectures in college would mean her leaving her job, which was not feasible for her.

Perceptions of family members and wider social beliefs also seemed to be important factors which influenced the educational journeys of many of these young people with disabilities. Especially pertinent in the interviews with young people with hearing impairments was an over-protectiveness, irrespective of gender, amongst their significant others. Some young people with hearing impairments complained that they had not been allowed to continue studying by their families. Parents defended their decisions not only in terms of the lack of resources to fund the child's schooling and the lack of social acceptance in school, but also in terms of the decision taken by a mother or grandmother about not letting the child out of their sight.

All of the young people with physical impairments had failed at one point in their schooling. Interestingly, their parents often associated their physical impairment with a

weak 'brain' and therefore seemed reluctant to invest in them, by paying for their education etc:

Yes, education is essential ... for disabled ... but what can we do about someone who doesn't have any brain only ... there is this tea ... we have now drunk this tea ... she doesn't even have the brain to wash the utensils.

(Kunta's Brother. Kunta is a young woman with physical impairment, has studied till Class 5.)

Additionally, the physical inaccessibility of the school and a fear of how people will react to one's impairment acted as a barrier for some. Sabina's mother noted that one of the major reasons why Sabina did not continue schooling after Class 6 was because:

Girls who used to go together on the cycle, used to take her by pushing [the tricycle]. They all got married; they have gone to their affinal home so she is left alone so she does not go. So she felt shy. She felt so shy.

Here, because Sabina no longer had friends living in the same area, as they had got married and moved away, no one would accompany her to school and push her tricycle along the way. Therefore it was difficult for her to attend the middle school in the nearby slum. Her mother also highlighted her daughter's own reluctance to undertake this journey.

Perceived economic benefits of schooling

We now turn to the first of the three sets of possible outcomes of schooling that are the focus of this paper: the economic benefits. Although half of those we interviewed came from a rural setting, where access to land is the key economic resource, our sample was drawn from households who owned very little land, and for whom acquiring marketable skill or getting some kind of paid work was seen as important for the majority. During the interviews, considerable attention was focused on exploring and reflecting with the young people and their significant others on the value and purpose of school education and discussing how it was perceived to have (or have not) shaped their current lives. The main differences that emerged were between young people and their significant others, and not the differences in perceptions amongst the young people according to their type of impairments, their gender or indeed, where they lived. In their perceptions, significant

others very strongly equated the purpose and value of education with future employment. Parents of these young people stated that there was no benefit of education if their wards were not in steady employment, or at least in a job of some kind. There was great disillusionment amongst some parents who pointed out that even though their child had completed so many years of education they were unable to get a job.

The mother of Sangeeta, a young woman with visual impairment who had completed her graduation but could not find work noted,

The benefit of education is when one gets a job. For now there is no benefit. For now educated or uneducated, it is same ... no I do not feel any benefit. If she gets a job then I can say that my girl had studied and that is why she got a job.

The father of Ruchi, another young woman with visual impairment who had completed Class 12, highlighted the value of steady employment:

She only should get a job ... government should provide the facility that she should be able to work and earn ... now if they give her Rs 5000-2000 then it will not do. If the government gives a salary and she does a job then her stomach will remain full.

Others expressed the hope that education at least had the potential to deliver the promise of employment (and a better life) at some point in the future:

... [if she is educated then] ... she can do some work, if she is educated then she will have more brain, she can also get a job somewhere. Otherwise she will have to do manual labour like us: if you will not study then you will have to do manual labour.

(Jyotsana's Mother. Jyotsana had studied till class 8 and was not employed.)

Similarly, the father of Bhawri, a young woman with physical impairment, who had studied till Class 6 but was unemployed, noted that “ ... *What is it, sir, that if they study then some benefit will come ... they can get a loan ... can get a job*”. This view was also supported by the family of Sunny, a young man with hearing impairment who had studied

till Class 7. They felt that he should have studied further as this would have enabled him to get a job and take care of his family, without being dependent on his parents.

An interesting issue raised by two parents was the perceived relationship between education, leading to employment and hence better marriage prospects for their daughter. For instance, Sangeeta's mother was quick to dismiss the importance of education (as quoted earlier). But on being probed further she noted that it was more important for a woman with impairment to get educated because,

if she will study then only people will ask for her; otherwise not. If she studies and gets a job then good people will take her, otherwise no one will take her. She does not even have eyes – so who will take her? But if she studies and gets a job then she will have value and she can marry. Otherwise who will bother?

When discussing the value and purpose of education, then, significant others focused exclusively on issues related to employment, which were seen to lead to a better quality of life, and reduced dependency on family members. Their responses were very limited in scope when compared to the rich narratives provided by the young people themselves, which are discussed in the sections on social and cultural capital.

Schooling and employment (or lack of it)

Of the 30 young people with disabilities in the sample, only four were in steady paid employment (out of which only one had a permanent government job). Nine of them were self-employed, though the frequency of their engagement in work varied. Three of those in steady employment had completed a minimum of 8 years of schooling; one of them had never been to school. This raises some interesting questions about the role of education in accessing employment for those with disabilities. This picture is somewhat similar to those who were self employed. In most cases these individuals had completed at least Class 5, but in two other cases, one had only completed class 2 and the other had never been to school. However, the contrast amongst those who had most schooling and those with little or no schooling was in terms of the nature of the work undertaken. While the former were teachers, the latter were involved in menial tasks, such as loading and unloading trucks etc.

Of the ten people with visual impairment in our sample, three were in employment. Two of these were teachers and one was self employed. Lajjo (the only woman in the entire sample

to be working outside the house) had studied till class 12 in a special school and was now employed as a teacher in the same school. While Manish completed his bachelor's degree and worked as a teacher in a government primary school, Kamlesh (who had never been to school) was self-employed in tasks which were located within the family business. None of the other seven young people – irrespective of their educational status and gender – were working and all stayed at home.

In the case of young people with hearing and physical impairments only the men were in some kind of employment and the level of education had no impact on the nature of their employment. In rural Dewas, both Sunny and Rajesh, who had completed Classes 7 and 2 respectively, were employed in family businesses, namely working on the fields, harvesting and loading. Sunny, however, at times took care of the family's grocery store, but this was only when his father needed some help. Even though the family noted that Sunny was able to take care of the accounts and conduct good transactions, his engagement in the business was considered as ad hoc in nature. The two young men with hearing impairments who were employed and living in the urban setting had a similar profile to their rural counterparts. One of them, Shan Singh, had completed class 7, and the other, Mahesh had never attended school. Shan Singh was self-employed with his own shop for undertaking small bicycle repairs, such as fixing punctures etc. His elder brother had played a central role in teaching him these skills and setting up the shop. Mahesh, on the other hand, had been employed in a big motor factory for over 10 years and was engaged in manual labour, tasks such as loading and unloading supplies from trucks. He had procured this job on the recommendation of his elder brother who was already employed at this factory. Thus, none of these young men were necessarily doing work that could be directly attributed to their level of schooling.

This profile of engagement in self-generated work tasks was common to the 5 young men with physical impairments who were employed. Again, not only is the gender dimension significant, because no women were employed, but also the range of schooling levels did not seem to determine the nature of the work undertaken. Lal Singh, a young man who had completed Class 9, was engaged in selling tamarinds (which he presumably picked from trees) and did not earn much. He did not contribute to the family income but managed to take care of some of his own expenses. Lekhraj, who had studied till Class 9, was the most stable in his job and spoke very passionately about it. He was employed at a dairy and kept

regular hours and had a range of responsibilities, from keeping accounts to separating fat from the milk. Mahipal, like Lal Singh and Lekhraj, lived in the rural setting and even though he had completed Class 5, did *dadki* (casual labour, mostly in the fields. on a daily basis). He was also enterprising enough to engage in preparing fresh sweets in the evening on a daily basis. Dhanwan (again having completed class 5) made flower garlands and sold them in the open market. However, Pramod's work seemed more in congruence with his level of schooling. Having passed B.A. (I year), he had set up a small tuition group and coached children from the nearby slum.

In two cases, young people made direct connections between the skills they had learnt at school and their utility in their current employment. One of them noted:

YM: has education helped you in getting job?

Lekhraj: [inaudible] it is due to education that my maths is good ... calculations and accounts ...

YM: do you think it is easier for you to handle this job since you went to school and took education?

Lekhraj: school benefited me in writing skills ... I knew mathematics.

Dharmen [his friend and colleague who was sitting there at that time]: he is the one who counts the money ...

Lekhraj: For this work, maths should be good ... [inaudible] quickly take out the fat and fill it in a bottle ... one should be able to write quickly otherwise there will be a crowd standing.

However, as a whole across the sample, it was evident that family networks, immediate and extended, seemed to be the strongest factor on which these young people, irrespective of the types of impairments, relied on to get paid employment. Some described how their elder sibling had helped them get a job, others talked about how friends and family were actively seeking employment for them. We discuss the role of networks and family support further in the next section and in the section on social capital.

However, it is important to note that individuals with more years of schooling spoke in terms of government reservations and benefits. Pramod a young person with physical impairments and Raj Singh a young person with visual impairment spoke in terms of applying for loans to banks and other NGOs to set up their small businesses; Manish talked about reservations in government schools for teachers with disabilities, and Ruchi, a young woman with visual impairments, talked about getting herself registered at the employment exchange. All of them spoke with great knowledge about the various loans and schemes that were available and their ability to access these. We return to some these discussions in the section illustrating links between schooling and an individual's enhanced social capital. Thus, it is plausible that education made them more aware of their rights and availability of benefits, but barriers remained in their getting employment.

Barriers to employment

When discussing their inability to get employment, young people with disabilities who had little or no schooling focused primarily on issues such as other people's lack of faith in their abilities. When we asked Anandi (a young woman with visual impairment, who had completed class 4) whether she had ever worked she responded in the negative, saying that she had not learnt any skills through out her life, and did not have any opportunities to do so:

Madam, here there is nothing. There is nothing worth learning. There is nobody who can teach anything. I asked them to teach me how to do my signature but these people [her brothers] say 'how can you people learn?' They say 'you cannot do it'. That's what they say.

In such cases, people's perceptions of what these young people were capable of doing became an important factor. As noted earlier, even though Sunny's family felt that he could do the job of working in the family's grocery store, his engagement was ad hoc in nature as his parents felt that customers were likely to fool him easily and not pay money for the goods purchased. Similarly, Aslam wanted to become a mechanic but both his parents felt that it would impossible for him as he cannot hear. In the case of those with physical impairment concerns with health became important. As most of the people were involved in manual labour, it was felt that those with physical impairments are too weak

and hence cannot participate in active employment. Nonetheless, some differences emerged between those with more and those with less schooling.

Those with most schooling

Raj Singh talked about the barriers to getting employment in terms of institutional barriers, marked by corruption and wrong doing. On being asked about the difficulties in getting a job, he noted:

The problem is that nowadays there are few job vacancies ... the government provides jobs in one field only ... education ... in the field of education ... and that too only low grade ones ... Talking about vacancies for them, Raj Singh said that vacancies come out once in 3-4 years. He mentioned that if there are 25,000 vacancies then for the disabled there would be 700-800 posts vacant. At this point his friend Shivkumar complained that there is a lot of duplication happening. On probing they explained that 'normal' people with comparatively much higher vision are taking the benefits by making false disability certificates while those who really have no vision are not being able to get the facilities. They also added that marks obtained in exams can also be purchased by money.

(Raj Singh, young man with visual impairment, B.A.II year.)

Kewal recounted incidents of corruption and wrong doing in various settings. During the interview, he spoke at length about the difficulties he faced in getting a bank loan because of the account officers lack of faith in the abilities of a person with disabilities. Subsequently, he recounted his unsuccessful experience of trying to get a job after finishing a telephone operator's course,

The first time when I went they said the manager had gone to Bhopal. Next time when I went they said that the manager had gone to Karnataka. Like this time passed. Then I said that I had also done a telephone operator's course. Then he said that you will not be able to do anything ... you can't see. The man at the gate was like a barking dog. Why should I have anything to do with such people? So I said to myself, 'leave it, Kewal'.

(Kewal, young man with visual impairment who had completed his graduation.)

Similarly Pramod, the most educated young person with physical impairment (he was pursuing a bachelor's degree through correspondence) noted,

See I have studied till now ... I have not even got a service till now ... I applied in many places, went to give the exam as well, I had got a service at one place, of an accountant, but they were asking Rs 80,000 bribe for it ... I could not give that much so could not take it up.

While the desire for employment and the need to be financially independent were significant in the accounts of young people with disabilities, these concerns were more paramount in the narratives provided by their significant others. Most of these young people were first generation learners, and grew up in households where they had been 'privileged' to attend school, for a range of reasons. In such instances, the pursuit of education was driven by a belief that it would lead to job opportunities and better life conditions (marked by less dependency on their families). While the level of schooling had an impact in the nature of employment pursued by some young people, for others, schooling – even high levels of class completion – had not resulted in a transition into work. Young people and their significant others talked about barriers to employment in terms of other people's perceptions about these (in)abilities, and significant failings in the social structure which was offered limited opportunities and was corrupt. In a context where education was becoming more accessible, but was unable to deliver on its promises with respect to employment, frustration was indeed evident in many young voices. But for young people with disabilities, the outcomes of their schooling extended beyond realms of economic productivity.

Schooling and social capital

Social capital, in the sense of an individual's membership of social groups, enduring social relationships and networks, is crucial to many spheres of social life (often, as we noted above, including access to employment and other economic opportunities). Here we focus on how far young people with disabilities see two specific aspects of social capital – instrumentally valuable social bonds provided by their social groups and networks; and the ability to build relationships with official agencies and to access government-provided

benefits such as disability certificates – and how schooling seems to make a difference in these fields.

Friends and other Social Networks

Most of the young people with disabilities described themselves, or were described by their significant others, as having many friends in the community. When we asked the significant others of two young men with hearing impairments who had no schooling, Rajesh's father noted that, "*Everyone is his friend*", and Shan Singh's mother stated that he has many friends. When we probed further about the nature of these friendships, however, some of them seemed to be somewhat casual acquaintances who would greet them in the street and be friendly, rather than close contacts.

Some young people with no schooling – especially those with hearing impairments – seem to have few close friends with whom they move around. For example, Mahesh (who had a hearing impairment, and had never attended school) noted, "*I have no friends ... there was one but he gambled ... so I left him ... I do not sit with him*". Even though Shan Singh's mother said he had friends, she clarified that Shan Singh (with a hearing impairment and no schooling) never visits other people's houses, and, "*If he gets angry then he does not go to anybody's house nor does he speak to anybody*". Dinkar (a young man with visual impairment and no schooling) said, "*Yes, they all are friends in the village*", but he went on to describe how his impairment limits the things he can do with them:

AJ: Do you go out of the village with your friends?

Dinkar: No ... not with the friends ... I don't like going with anyone ...

AJ: why?

Dinkar: Because I am blind. Why give them trouble? ... These days that's what happens ... This is sensible ... Who likes giving attention to such people? ... I think that I should not give trouble to anyone ... So I don't go with anyone ... There's no-one who can take me with them ... I can't find anyone able to understand me ... There is no one who can talk properly.

It could be argued that the notion of 'friendship' here was being confused with mere social

acceptance of the person with disability and nothing more enduring or meaningful. By contrast, those young people who had been to school -- especially those who had been schooled till Class 6 or beyond – spoke more confidently about the role of friends in their lives. But there are strong gendered differences in the ability to make enduring friendships. Young women with disabilities mentioned having fewer friends, and more difficulties in maintaining relationships with them. Often friends made in childhood had moved away on marriage, or they themselves moved, disrupting friendship links. This experience is shared by other young women in north India who often talk about how hard it is to keep friends from their childhood or to make new friends after marriage (see, for example, Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996). While the special school for the visually impaired had obviously been a very powerful positive opportunity for those who attended it to make friends outside the family, it was seemingly hard to sustain these friendships. Similarly, Poonam, (a young woman with hearing impairment with 5 years of schooling) described a close friend from across the street who had moved away, in addition to the four others she described as friends. When we asked whether Bhawri (a young woman with physical impairments, 6 years of schooling) had any friends nearby, she replied softly “*They’ve gone to their in-laws*”, and Sabina (another young woman with a physical impairment) used almost exactly the same words. For these young women, friendships would mostly be made within the family: thus Lekha (a physically impaired young woman educated to class 7) mentioned two relatives who were like friends to her.

Some young women, even with considerable schooling, said that there was no-one to whom they could tell their troubles:

I can have a problem with anyone, I can have a problem with my brother’s wife also, but I do not tell what is in my heart to anyone, I keep it in my heart only. What should I say about what is in my heart?

(Ruchi, a young woman with visual impairment, Class 12 completed.)

It seemed that young men with more than primary schooling were more outward-going than those with primary schooling or less, particularly among those with physical and visual impairments. Lekhraj (a young man with physical impairment, class 9) made a direct link between respect from being educated and the opportunity to make friends,

There are benefits of going to school ... everyone respects you if you are educated otherwise no one bothers ... it is good ... I was benefited by making friends.

Lal Singh (with physical impairment and class 9) agreed that going to school offered the opportunity to make new friends. But the strongest evidence of networking came from the young men with visual impairments. By the time our researchers reached Raj Singh, he knew all about them because his friend Kewal had already been interviewed, and he passed the news on to Shivshankar, who joined in Raj Singh's interview. Recounting this incident, the note-taker remarked:

At this point, to our next great surprise, Raj Singh mentioned that he also knew Kewal whom we had interviewed. When the interviewer probed about other names, they laughed and said that they had very good networking and knew about all of whom we had interviewed.

Schooling also provided links to teachers, who emerged as major influences in the lives of some of these young people, men and women alike. They were remembered long after schooling was over, whether negatively (because of their role in discouraging children from continuing) or positively, especially by those young people who attended special schools. The young women in a focus group discussion at a hostel for blind girls' noted:

our teachers co-operate a lot with us and when we go out somewhere then they behave in a very friendly way with us. As we go out our teachers become our friends. We do not feel that they are our teachers. We feel very good.

Kewal, a young man with visual impairment, B.A. (I year) narrated an incident about his teacher:

He was a Maths teacher and whatever I said he would provide me the facility. Like today if I said that I have money problem he would do that also. But because he was a Maths teacher he could not teach me. The other thing is that when I told him that there is some problem in my result ... I have never given a Maths exam so why have I got the marks for a maths exam? ... So once he went to Bhopal also to get my result changed.

For two young people with visual impairments, the most educated in the sample, one living in urban Dewas and one in rural Dewas, their head teachers were the special people in their lives. This positive role played by teachers was especially evident for young men and women who were visually impaired. Their teachers had often been key links to the world of benefits and rights, and were often crucial elements in how these young people were brought into more general social networks.

Awareness of rights and benefits

Education could also play a role in informing young disabled people about their rights and give them access to advice on how to claim the various benefits available to them, whether from the Government or from NGOs.⁸ Our sample of young people had different degrees of knowledge about disability certificates (and not all those who knew about them were able to get one for themselves); and were differently aware of (or had) aids and appliances supplied by Government or NGOs. Not all of those who attended school received a scholarship; and not all were currently receiving a disability pension of some kind. Knowledge of additional benefits – for example, the right to loans and to help to set up a small business, as well as the job reservations for people with disabilities, which depends on holding a disability certificate – was also unevenly spread among the sample. The general picture that emerges is that, although the more educated have a clearer understanding of what is available and how to access it, even so many young people and their principal advisers are very unclear about what is available and how to ensure that they get their rights.

Some of those across the different types of impairments and with very little schooling were well aware of disability certificates. Anandi, (a young woman with visual impairments) had attended a camp where her problems had been assessed and she had received a cane for walking, as had Kunti, (a young woman with physical impairments, completed class 5). Several others with physical impairments had been provided with a cycle, often on a regular replacement basis as they grew up. The experiences of young men and women with hearing impairments were less positive: several had been given hearing aids, but none were

⁸ The State Government of Madhya Pradesh also seems to be using this medium for imparting information through the Utthan Project. Under this project camps are organised to provide people with cards, aids and information about other concessions. These camps are held mostly in schools.

in use, either because they had broken, the batteries had run down and they had not been replaced, or because they were uncomfortable to use.

But by no means all the young people were aware of or accessing the benefits to which they were entitled, even if they had received secondary schooling. Thus neither Kunti nor Simmi, both with physical impairments, living in urban Dewas and schooled to class 5, had a disability certificate. Some of the slightly more educated, such as Lal Singh and Lekha, both with physical impairments, and Hema and Shan Singh, both with hearing impairments, all of whom had more than 6 years of schooling, were also not holders of disability cards.

Overall, for many of these young people, the benefits and entitlements available to people with disabilities remained very unclear:

SK: Did you get any aid or facility from the school while you were studying?

Kunti: No, I only got Rs150 and did not get anything else ... I got this money only while I was in school and did not get it afterwards.

SK: Do you have a disability card?

Kunti: No, I get a pension of Rs150, but only because of the *Sarpanch* [Council Chairman].

(Kunti, a young woman with physical impairment, urban Dewas, class 5)

NS: Do you get support from government?

Simmi: None.

NS: Do you have a disability card?

Simmi: None, people from upper caste don't get it. I had my photo taken etc but I did not get anything. I did everything from childhood but they said, 'you won't get anything'.

NS: Due to caste?

Simmi: Because of caste.

NS: Many people from BPL [Below Poverty Line] families get disability pensions.

Simmi: I know about it but I never got any pension. I never got any help from government.

(Simmi, a young woman with physical impairments, urban Dewas, class 5

In general, the more educated young people were more likely to be aware of the certificates and to be able to use them to some effect. Often, when faced with initial problems in getting a disability card, the intervention of one of the teachers was necessary before the application was filled up and a disability card issued.⁹ For example, all the educated young people with visual impairments had successfully applied for a disability card when they had been at school, or through a medical certificate that certified the degree of their disability. Even so, some of the more educated young people could not understand the procedures. We often found our researchers explaining what the young people were entitled to. Ruchi (a young woman with visual impairment, Class 12), for example, was aware of the possibility of cheap railway tickets but did not know how to get them, and her father did not know if she had a disability certificate or not:

Ruchi's F: The Council must be having the card. The Chairman got everyone's accounts opened in the bank by giving Rs100.

By contrast, those with less than 10 years of schooling, and especially young people with hearing and physical impairments, had more problems (and fewer advisors and supporters who understood the system). Khiman, a young man with hearing impairment who had completed Class 5, and the mother of Shan Singh, a young woman who had completed class 7, said that they had made many visits to the relevant officers but have yet to get the disability card. Similarly, Lal Singh, a young man with physical impairments who had completed class 9, expressed his helplessness:

The *sarpanch* and the minister they together can do something ... but the order has not come yet ... he had filled up the form also, deposited it also, but after that no order has come ...

⁹ This role of teachers is also discussed by Balagopalan & Subrahmanian (2003: 52)

The difficulties faced in getting a disability card were also narrated by Mahipal, a young man with physical impairment schooled till Class 5:

I did not get any other [benefit]. Just got this card made ... that I also got made. I gave bribes and have spent a lot. I had gone to the government hospital in Indore, I couldn't get it done in Dewas. That person from Binjana said that he would get it made for me. I spent Rs 1000 to get the card made.

In many respects, then, although education made a difference to the knowledge of and ability to access benefits for some of the young people, the barriers faced by most poor people in India in dealing with lower-level bureaucrats remained significant for many of them.

The kind of difference that education can make, however, in developing young people's capabilities, is provided by three final cases. Pramod, a young man with physical impairments, who passed B.A. (I year), had a wide knowledge of government and NGO operations on behalf of young people with disabilities. He is an active member of an NGO in his area, and had set up a forum and was an active member in taking part in all meetings and camps where people with disabilities congregated:

So I have formed a forum ... I am a representative ... we did this under the guidance of a NGO. They do not give us any payment as such, it is just about our awareness that we should know about our rights, and the way we go to some bank and no one listens to any of the disabled people, what all information is there for the disabled ... when one person knows about it then authoritative people just send him off like that ... there is no information. When 8-10 of us disabled people go together then there is some impact on the person and then the person listens to us.

Raj Singh, another highly educated young man with visual impairment who had completed B.A. (II year), was perhaps the best informed in our sample about the People with Disabilities Act and various schemes. However his major complaint was that these schemes were on paper only and were not being implemented. And finally Kewal, with a physical impairment and BA (I), a friend of Pramod, was ready with enough information

and self-confidence to visit the Chief Minister with his disabled friends if necessary to get a loan to set up a business,

The more education of the young people in our sample, then, the more likely they were to have enhanced social capital, in the sense of enduring social networks beyond those provided by kinship or by the neighbourhoods in which they lived. Through these networks – and especially with the assistance of their teachers and ex-teachers – they had established social relationships with government agencies of different kinds. Levels of schooling and types of impairments do seem to make a difference: those with visual impairments (who were also, in general, the most educated) in our sample also have more developed social networks and are most involved in organisations and collective action. Those with physical impairments – while not as organised as those with visual impairments – often have established friendships that are important in their everyday lives, whereas those with hearing impairments were least likely to establish such relationships. The most obvious difference, however, cutting across type and level of impairment, schooling level and urban or rural residence, is that of gender: young women were most dependent on their kin (and the limited social capital their kin could provide) and were less able to establish enduring relationships in their own right.

Schooling and Cultural Capital

Whatever the economic or social outcomes of schooling for young people with disabilities, schooling can also affect aspects of their cultural capital, in the sense we are using the term in this paper. In particular, following Delpit (1997: 585), we ask whether their schooling provided these students with ‘the discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that might allow them success in the larger society’. As indicators of this, we asked how young people understood the causes and consequences of their impairments, and whether those with more schooling understand these differently from those who have less schooling. Answers to these questions give us an insight into issues of stigma, and how these are handled by the young people in our sample. The underlying assumption we make here is that those who see their impairment as something that can be overcome, or its effects mitigated, or even as something that gives them rights, will conduct their social affairs differently from those who accept their impairment fatalistically, as something that their past misdeeds may have condemned them to. What part is played by schooling in conditioning their responses? More generally, do those with

schooling feel positive about the experience, and how do those without schooling compare their lives to those others who have managed to get to school?

Causes

In some discussions, people asserted that there were two main ways of understanding the causes of disability. On the one hand, it could be understood in a scientific framework, that the explanation for disability was an accident or chance that one individual caught a disease such as chickenpox (for example), which can lead to blindness. Sometimes this was expressed by saying that, contrary to some beliefs, it was necessary to look for an explanation for disability in this life, not in any unknown previous life. On the other hand, when young people or those around them tried to explain why this individual had become disabled at a particular time, and with particular consequences, the answers were of a different kind. At this point, issues of fate (*naseeb, kismet*) and the thoughtless acts of others (breaching rules of pollution or avoidance, for example) might be reported as the deeper reasons for their disability. There is no necessary conflict between the two approaches, and some of our respondents pointed this out.

Nonetheless, the general contexts in which these young people with disabilities are living are ones in which the primary explanation that was proffered, by those around the interview or by significant others, was in terms of past misdeeds. Such an explanation, is in line with the religious orientation of the larger socio-cultural milieu in India, and also enables people to have an external locus of control— where some conditions are seen as acts of an unknown force and not necessarily attributable to the deeds of the individual or her/his family. However, there is a danger that these ways of understanding may place barriers on the efforts that are made for constructing enabling environments for people with disabilities.

When we asked Dinkar, who had never been to school, how he understood the causes of his visual impairment, he was unable to give a reply because his mother and a neighbour intervened to explain that he must have caught the malign effect of a menstruating woman coming too close when he was ill with chickenpox. Raj Singh's father said that an explanation in terms of past misdeeds was common in the village, and he used to think that also, but now the doctors have explained to him the cause and he wants to put discussions about this behind him. There were more exceptions to this generalisation in the urban

Dewas sample, where some of the significant others denied that the explanation in terms of past misdeeds was used (such as by Sangeeta's father, or by Lajjo's husband) and answered only in terms of illness, accidents or bad luck. But uncertainty was perhaps the main characteristic of some of these accounts. Thus one of Anandi's sisters talked about a possible possession of Anandi (a young woman with visual impairment, schooled till Class 4) by a spirit and another sister was adamant that Anandi's problems were caused by illness, as this discussion shows:

AB: Do you remember the time when Anandi was studying in school and why she had to leave?

Asha: I cannot really tell about this time as I had been married off by then ... But Mother and Father tell us that something strange happened ... What I mean is that something from outside happened ... then she was very ill ... Someone used to enter her body ... They say a girl, ... some spirit. Then our father went to bring her home and got her treated by a *sadhu* (saint).

AB: What do you say, why does [one] have disability ... she has lost her eyes ... it is the same old thing ... that people say that it is the result of past sins luck was like that ...

Kalpana: All this is wrong. Whatever God has to do he can do ... It is not like this that if we sin first then now ... This is what we think.

Anandi: [sitting behind]:

When there is some deficiency then it happens.

Kalpana: Anandi was not blind when she was born. Her mother had twins and both were fine for about 2-2.5 years.

Anandi: The other twin passed away when he was 2 because he got diarrhoea.

Kalpana: The boy was weak from birth but she was fine till 2 years. It was only when ... she got an infection in the eye ... she was sleeping upside down [on her stomach] ... and then she got this infection.

In this kind of context, how far did those with more schooling differ in their accounts of the reasons for their own impairments, from the accounts that were circulating round them? In our sample, among those with little or no schooling, those with at least primary schooling, and those who had completed more than 10 years of schooling, both main responses could be found. Similarly, people with different kinds of impairment could be found expressing each kind of explanation.

Kunti, (a young woman with physical impairment who had completed Class 5) put the first explanation in a straightforward way: *“I do think that I must have done some bad deed, that is why I have got this problem”*. Kamlesh, who had no schooling, understood his visual impairment similarly:

Yes, I must have done some bad deeds so that’s why I got this punishment. Every person knows that if they have done some bad deeds in earlier life then now they can get punished ... Bad deeds have bad results. If I do good works today then I will be rewarded tomorrow. Now I cannot remember about my earlier life.

But some of the most educated expressed similar views, like Manish and Sangeeta, both of whom had completed their bachelor’s degree and had visual impairments:

AB: Many people think that disability is a result of the past sins ...

Manish: Yes, that’s what people say and they believe in it too ... I also believe in it. It can be that it is result of past sins.

Sangeeta: Yes, people do say that something must have been done to affect her next birth. Something must have been done.

AJ: Do you think that it is true?

Sangeeta: I feel it is true. I must have done something wrong with someone so that this has happened to me. But I also feel that not necessarily I had done something. But when it is said then I feel that I must have definitely done something so this is the result I have got. One gets the result of one’s Karma.

But Sangeeta also demonstrated a healthy scepticism about some versions of this kind of explanation: “One Astrologer came, and he said that you must have damaged the eyes of a cat, that’s why your eyes are damaged.” Sangeeta was laughing when she said this, and she could not stop herself for some time.

Approximately similar numbers of respondents, however, denied any role for fate or the results of a previous existence, but focused on what science and medicine say. Yet even they often brought in notions of ‘bad luck’. Mahendra and Anandi both replied quickly to deny the role of fate or a previous existence:

AJ: Some people think that disability is because of bad deeds in a previous life ...

Mahendra: It is not like that at all. I do not believe that it is because of previous births. It is nature’s wish that this happened. It is all our own superstition that we believe this. (Mahendra, a young man with physical impairment, educated to Class 5)

Anandi: This is just the way people think. This is just a story ... Who has seen the last birth? ... Who can know what happened then?

(Anandi, a young woman with visual impairment, Class 4.)

Similarly, amongst the most educated, Raj Singh reacted strongly:

No. I suffered an injury ... That was bad luck ... Otherwise these things that people say that it is a result of past sins and so on, they are all wrong ... There are some elements inside our body ... the deficiency in which are the causes, I believe ... There are some problems in our body ... that is the reason ... suppose someone has got a fever ... and because of that he loses his vision ... some may have typhoid ... it happens because of that too ... This happens because of deficiencies within the body ... There is nothing in this of past deeds.

(Raj Singh, a young man with visual impairment who had completed B.A. (II year)).

Pramod gave a more nuanced response, recognising uncertainty in what role God might have played in his impairment, or whether it was a matter of nature (*prakriti*):

Pramod: No I do not understand this as a result of a deed in a previous life ... but if you have faith in God then it can happen, it may be so that it is because of past deeds. But about this [impairment] I understand that it is a thing of nature, meaning if there is problem, then what should I do? What I would like to say is, here is what happened. God only ... it might be because of some past deeds, it might not be so.

(Pramod, a young man with physical impairment and completed BA (I year))

What these accounts suggest, then, is that years of schooling *per se* do not seem to provide grounds for having a different understanding of the causes of disability; and there is little evidence in these interviews that young people with more schooling explain their disability in different terms from those with less schooling. The ‘change agents’ mentioned, if at all, are doctors, who have provided some of these young people with explanations that challenge accounts based on fate, God or past misdeeds.

Perceptions about the value of education in their lives

Even those who had no real experience of schooling were convinced that education would make a big difference to their lives, and they spoke about it not just in terms of the knowledge they would have gained, but also the difference it would make to how they saw themselves and were seen by others. Two young men with visual impairments who had never attended school expressed their views like this:

There is benefit. Their mind also works. The person who has a sharp brain and illiterate is still illiterate. Someone who is illiterate does not even have the experience of speaking. ... If a man is educated then he would say [politely] ‘come with me’ otherwise he would say [rudely] ‘you, come here’ (Kamlesh)

The benefit from education is this, that one becomes a little bit wise ... how to spend one’s life and how not ... how to meet ... what norms ... a person gets aware. (Dinkar)

Those with even as much as five years of schooling, however, felt ashamed that they could do so little with their learning now, being able to make out letters but not read words with understanding: as Mahipal, young man with physical impairment, very reluctantly put it:

I just can write my name and I can do some calculations. But I am unable to read anything else.

The educated young people with more than primary schooling were keener than those who had reached class 5 or less, and spoke up, often very confidently, about its benefits, even if (as in almost all cases) they were unable to get a job. Thus Sangeeta, a highly educated young woman with visual impairment, said that only through education can one be aware about one's surroundings, because education helps in the overall development of the person: it raises people's self confidence and they can also communicate in the '*right manner*'. Lajjo, another woman with visual impairment who had been schooled till Class 12, elaborated on its many benefits and provided a gendered perspective:

It is very necessary to educate someone because otherwise she will become dependent on someoneand this is definite that she can't become independent ... and today if she gets educated then she will not have to go anywhere ... she will be able to live in society with her head held high and will think that she will be able to do everything.

Pramod, the most educated of young people with physical impairments in our sample, who had passed BA (I year), stated

The benefit from school is that from education and studies one gets information. See, the one who is educated, he will know about history, about the past, the meaning of the present, he will get knowledge from schooling, and after getting knowledge one can give it to others ... Education is very important in life.

Anant (young man with visual impairment who had passed Class 10) also felt that education had provided him with discipline and routine in his life, and he saw general benefits: "*If you have education then you can do anything. Without education you can do nothing*".

For the young people with hearing impairment, amongst whom only two of them had been schooled till Class 7, a job was the most important benefit that education might provide. However they also considered schooling necessary for improved communication. But since they had been through so little schooling this argument was not based on much experience, but was rather shaped by the perceptions of their significant others, who had difficulty in

communicating with their wards.

In this section we have looked at the effects of schooling on the cultural capital of young people with disabilities, through two indicators: the kinds of explanations that they provide for their own impairments, and their own accounts of the effects of schooling on their self-confidence. Clearly, explanations of disability in terms of ‘fate’ and the role of past misdeeds are very strongly held in many of the settings that confront young people with disabilities. It is difficult to add to, or influence these views with explanations that allow more agency to mitigate the impairment or improve the social and physical circumstances barriers faced by some of these young people. While schooling may help in this process, it is by no means sufficient. What is more common – across different forms and extents of impairment, location and gender – is for schooling to provide young people with ways of acting and speaking that may command respect in others. But we should perhaps note here that, insofar as those with relatively little or no schooling see the effects of schooling in this way, their own cultural capital is further diminished by their perception of the benefits held by those who are able to draw on schooling to use ‘educated’ language or present themselves as educated people. Their own lack of schooling is, for these poor young people with impairments, likely to be a further means through which they are marginalised and excluded in adult life.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed the situations of a sample of young people with disabilities in terms of their economic, social and cultural capital, and their perceptions of the contributions schooling has (or has not) made to their lives. Not surprisingly, given India’s recent history of ‘jobless growth’ (Joshi, 2008), few of these young people had acquired a secure job. Despite the existence of job reservations for people with disabilities in Madhya Pradesh, there is a widespread perception that the government has not been serious in implementing these fully. It is also true that relatively few new government jobs have been created since 1991: rather, organised public sector employment declined from 19.0 million to 18.0 million between 1991 and 2005 (Government of India, 2008). Perceptions of the economic benefits of schooling, then, were often cast more in terms of potential than actual achievements. For the significant others of the young people, this gap between promise and achievement was a major problem, whereas the young people themselves, pointed to other – non-economic – benefits of schooling as of equal or even greater significance. Even

though differences between those with and without schooling are not always very marked, the perception that education provides many benefits over and above those related to employment was widely shared. Young people with disabilities were likely to provide much richer accounts about the role of education than their significant others. Their significant others were primarily focused on education leading to employment (often out of a sense of wanting to provide them with long-term security that would continue after parents and siblings were no longer able to do so) and in the absence of this they were frustrated with education and its perceived role. But the young people themselves were much more articulate about the many other benefits of education. Unlike their parents and some elder siblings, these young people had grown up in a context where (even if they themselves were unable to get much schooling), schooling had already become an expectation for them and their peers. The young people were positive in their accounts of schooling's actual and potential contribution to their personal development, to the openings it offers into the wider world through friends and access to benefits of various kinds, and to the contribution it can make to how they carry themselves in public and deal with the outside world.

Herein lie perhaps the most positive outcomes of schooling: the boost to young people's social capital – their ability to manage social relationships beyond the household, including with the state – and their cultural capital – their ability to counter negative stereotypes and hold their heads up with much more self-confidence than would otherwise be the case. And in some cases – such as that of Pramod and Raj Singh – these have been manifested in very substantial organisational and political skills that offer the potential for young people with disabilities to play much stronger roles in reshaping the policy context surrounding them than has been true so far.

This research, even though focused on a relatively small sample (when compared to the large data sets that tend to be used in disability research), has the strengths of being information rich and 'life full' (Kothari & Hulme, 2003:1). It provides a wealth of data about people, their experiences, aspirations and expectations. It therefore allows us to make claims that represent voices of some of these young people and provide reflections on future developments.

Implications for policy:

- 1) While progress has been made with regard to increased educational provisions for children and young people with disabilities, accessing education is only part of the picture.
 - a. Young people in our sample group had educational journeys marked by shifts from mainstream to special schools or vice versa, and in many cases eventual drop-out from the system. Even though some of them were unequivocal in their praise for special schools, they contrasted these in terms of their negative experiences in mainstream settings, which were marked by lack of resources- material and personnel. Heads of schools and teachers in many of the schools we visited had similar stories to share. However, the young people themselves did not discount the richness of social opportunities available in mainstream settings and the ability to progress into further education. At a time when the debate for adopting a more inclusive approach in our school system is at its peak, the voices of these young people cannot be disregarded. Their presence in the mainstream setting needs to be supported through better training of teachers and continuing to put in place the necessary resources. If the government's focus is on inclusion into mainstream, it needs to also incorporate a vision for greater participation of these children in the curriculum, culture and community of the school setting. A focus on schooling needs to move beyond entry towards greater engagement and empowerment of young people with disabilities.
 - b. Additionally, there is a need to focus on enhancing the relevance of the curriculum delivered in schools. The curriculum should take into account not merely issues of developing skills for economic capital (skilled labour force), but also ways of building an individual's social and cultural capital, both of which were highly valued in the accounts of the young people themselves. This is useful not just for people with disabilities but for a more holistic educational experience for all children.
 - c. Greater provisions are needed for young people with disabilities to be given opportunities to make transitions into work places. These provisions need to be more transparent and enabling. Economic independence is greatly valued

- 2) While the government has put into place a range of benefits and schemes to support people with disabilities, the processes involved in accessing these remain a mystery to most young people and their significant others. While education might have helped developed some young people's awareness of these benefits, the barriers faced in accessing them often remain insurmountable. There is a need to develop a much greater awareness of the rights and entitlements for people with disabilities. Collaboration between the state and the NGO sector would help achieve better results. Another useful link could be a better dissemination of this information to different stakeholders in the school. For example, in our research in some cases teachers seemed to have been the main proponents in helping young people access these benefits. Mechanisms of support, such as these need to be built especially for those who might not have the required support at home to navigate these processes.

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