



IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN: DEVELOPING A CHILD PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT MODEL FOR DROUGHT-PRONE DISTRICTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ANANTAPUR DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Talari Yugandhar* **Prof. Muninarayanappa****

** Research Scholar Dept. of Rural Development & Social Work SK University, Anantapur.*

*** Professor Dept. of Rural Development & Social Work SK University, Anantapur.*

Abstract

Migration is an important livelihood strategy for households experiencing drought, agricultural distress, and employment insecurity. However, when parents migrate for work and children remain in their villages, the resulting changes in caregiving arrangements may affect children's education, health, nutrition, emotional well-being, and protection. This article examines the potential effects of parental migration on left-behind children in drought-prone areas, with particular reference to Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

The article uses secondary demographic data, national child migration research, district census statistics, and child protection policy documents to establish the context for analysing migration-related vulnerability. Census 2011 data for the then undivided Anantapur district recorded a population of 4,081,148, including 445,956 children aged 0–6 years. The district's overall literacy rate was 63.57%, compared with 59.21% in rural areas, while rural female literacy was 48.77%. These historical indicators provide important demographic and educational context, but they do not directly measure the number of left-behind children or establish the effects of parental migration. Based on this evidence, the article proposes a Drought-Responsive Child Protection and Empowerment Model integrating family-based care, educational continuity, psychosocial support, nutrition, safeguarding, child participation, and livelihood resilience. It also presents a framework for collecting primary data, evaluating programme outcomes, and developing district-specific interventions. The article concludes that effective responses require migration-sensitive planning, strengthened family and community support, and coordinated child protection services.

Keywords: *Parental Migration, Left-Behind Children, Drought, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, Child Protection, Educational Outcomes, Psychosocial Well-Being, Rural Livelihoods, Child Empowerment.*

1. Introduction

Migration has become an important livelihood response for rural households facing agricultural uncertainty, irregular rainfall, inadequate irrigation, and limited local employment. In drought-prone parts of Andhra Pradesh, households dependent on rain-fed agriculture and agricultural labour may experience income fluctuations that encourage temporary or seasonal migration to other districts or states.

Migration can improve household income and help families meet expenses related to food, education, healthcare, housing, and debt repayment. Nevertheless, when one or both parents migrate while their children remain in the village, the family experiences a change in its caregiving structure. Children may stay with the remaining parent, grandparents, relatives, or other trusted adults.

These children are referred to in this article as left-behind children. The term describes their family circumstances rather than implying that all such children experience neglect or disadvantage.



The national report Understanding Child Migration in India, published by Young Lives India and UNICEF India in March 2010, demonstrates the importance of considering children's circumstances when examining migration. Using national datasets, including the Census of India, the National Sample Survey, the National Family Health Survey, and the India Human Development Survey, the report examines migration patterns and their relationship with children's education, health, and well-being.

Anantapur is an important geographical setting for this investigation because of its association with rainfall variability, agricultural risk, and rural livelihood insecurity. However, establishing the actual impact of parental migration requires more than district-level demographic statistics. It requires information on which parents migrate, how long they remain away, who cares for their children, and how children's outcomes compare across different household circumstances.

This article therefore combines available secondary data with a proposed empirical research framework and a locally adaptable child protection model. It distinguishes established statistical findings from issues that require field investigation.

2. Statement of the Problem

Drought-related economic insecurity can compel parents to migrate for employment, leaving children dependent on alternative caregiving arrangements. Although migration may improve a household's financial resources, its implications for children depend on the stability of care, the use of remittances, family relationships, and access to essential services.

Children may experience difficulties when caregivers have limited time or resources to support schooling, monitor health, provide emotional reassurance, or protect them from exploitation. Some children may also assume additional domestic responsibilities or care for younger siblings.

These possible difficulties may overlap with poverty, inadequate transport, limited educational support, and pre-existing inequalities between rural and urban communities.

The main research problem is the lack of sufficiently detailed, locally validated evidence on the number, circumstances, needs, and outcomes of left-behind children in drought-prone parts of Anantapur district.

National migration statistics provide a broad context, while district census figures describe the population and socioeconomic environment. Neither source alone establishes how many children have migrating parents or the proportion experiencing particular difficulties.

A systematic district-level study is therefore needed to identify migration-related risks, measure protective factors, and develop interventions suited to the circumstances of affected families.

3. Objectives of the Study:- The study has six principal objectives:

- To examine the relationship between drought-related livelihood insecurity and parental migration in Anantapur district.
- To investigate the educational, emotional, health-related, social, and protection-related experiences of left-behind children.
- To identify the roles of caregivers, schools, Anganwadi centres, community institutions, and child protection authorities.



- To develop a data-informed Child Protection and Empowerment Model for migration-affected children.
- To propose measurable indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of child protection interventions.
- To recommend policies that strengthen family resilience, educational continuity, children's participation, and access to social protection.

4. Research Questions: The study seeks to answer the following questions:

What household and environmental factors influence parental migration in drought-prone villages?

How does parental migration relate to children's school attendance, learning, emotional well-being, and caregiving arrangements?.

Do children's experiences differ according to their age, gender, duration of parental absence, and type of caregiver?

What protective resources are available through families, schools, local government, and child protection institutions?

How can exist services be integrated into a coordinated district-level intervention model?

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research design

A mixed-methods research design is proposed, combining quantitative household surveys with qualitative interviews and institutional assessments.

The article's existing statistical analysis is based on secondary sources. The proposed field study would generate the primary data required to establish the prevalence of parental migration, assess children's experiences, and test the proposed intervention model.

5.2 Sources of secondary data

The article draws on the following sources:

Census of India 2011 and the District Census Handbook for Anantapur.

UNICEF India and Young Lives India's national research on child migration.

UNICEF research on the portability of social protection and services for migration-affected children.

Government of India's child protection policy framework.

District statistical publications and administrative data, subject to availability and verification.

The official Census of India catalogue provides the District Census Handbook and village-level Primary Census Abstract for the historical Anantapur district. These sources are suitable for examining population, literacy, household, and other demographic characteristics.

5.3 Proposed primary data collection

The following is an illustrative research design, not a description of completed fieldwork.

Proposed field study

Study area: Selected drought-prone villages in the current Ananthapuramu district, with village selection guided by migration patterns and local drought exposure.

Illustrative sample

300 households: 150 households with at least one parent who migrates for work and 150 comparison households without parental labour migration during the defined reference period.



Data Collection

Household questionnaires, school attendance records with appropriate permissions, caregiver interviews, key-informant interviews, and age-appropriate child consultations.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics, comparisons between household groups, multivariable analysis where justified, and thematic analysis of interviews. The proposed sample size is provisional. Final sampling should follow a power calculation, expected prevalence, clustering, non-response, and ethical feasibility.

5.4 Ethical considerations

Research involving children must include appropriate ethics approval, informed parental or guardian consent and child assent, confidentiality, secure data handling, and clear procedures for responding to disclosures of harm. Children should not be exposed to risks or pressured to discuss sensitive family experiences.

5.5 Limitations of the available data

The available sources do not establish the current number of left-behind children in Anantapur. Furthermore, Census 2011 district boundaries predate the subsequent administrative reorganization of the district. Historical district statistics must therefore not be directly compared with current district data unless the geographical boundaries are harmonised.

6. Statistical Profile of Anantapur District and Child Migration in India

This section presents the available statistical evidence relevant to the study. The figures come from different years and geographical units; they should be interpreted as contextual indicators rather than as a single, directly comparable dataset.

6.1 National Data on Child Migration

India · Census 2011 data reported by UNICEF India 92.95 million Internal child migrants Children counted as internal migrants in the national analysis. This is not a count of children left behind by migrating parents. Nearly 20 million Child migrants under age 14 engaged in work The report highlights this as a national concern. The figure refers to child migrants, not specifically left-behind children or children in Anantapur.

These figures demonstrate the scale and complexity of child migration in India. They do not establish the prevalence of parental migration or the number of left-behind children in Anantapur. The distinction is essential because children who migrate themselves and children who remain behind experience different circumstances and may require different interventions.

6.2 Demographic profile of the historical Anantapur district

Census 2011 provides a baseline for understanding the population and educational context of the then undivided district.

Indicator	Census 2011 figure
Total population	4,081,148
Children aged 0–6 years	445,956



Overall literacy rate	63.57%
Rural literacy rate	59.21%
Urban literacy rate	74.69%
Rural male literacy rate	69.41%
Rural female literacy rate	48.77%
Rural–urban literacy gap	15.48 percentage points

Sources: Census 2011 district statistics and the District Census Handbook for Anantapur.

The rural–urban literacy gap above is calculated by subtracting the rural literacy rate from the urban literacy rate: $74.69 - 59.21 = 15.48$ percentage points. Literacy rates in the historical Anantapur district. Census 2011 figures, in percent. These describe the general population, not left-behind children specifically.

Literacy rate	
Overall	63.6%
Rural	59.2%
Urban	74.7%
Rural males	69.4%
Rural females	48.8%

The data indicate an important educational disadvantage in rural areas, especially among females. This is relevant to the proposed study because children affected by parental migration may depend on local schools and caregivers for educational support.

However, these statistics cannot establish that migration caused low literacy or that left-behind children have lower literacy than other children. Such conclusions require individual-level data that account for household poverty, parental education, school access, and other influencing factors.

Geographical qualification: The 2011 population figures refer to the historical, undivided Anantapur district. The district was subsequently reorganised, with Sri Sathya Sai district separated from Ananthapuramu. Current administrative data must be used for a contemporary field study, and historical comparisons must account for this boundary change. The official district portal provides census documents and a Hand Book of Statistics for further verification.

6.3 What the available data can and cannot establish

Research question	Available evidence	Additional data required
How large is child migration nationally?	National Census-based estimate	More recent comparable national estimates
What is the demographic context of Anantapur?	Census 2011 population and literacy indicators	Updated statistics using current boundaries



How many children are left behind in Anantapur?	No verified district-specific count established by the sources reviewed	Household survey and administrative mapping
Does parental migration affect school attendance?	National research provides context on migration and child well-being	Attendance and migration histories linked at household level
Does parental absence affect emotional well-being?	A plausible research question supported by broader child-well-being concerns	Validated child assessments and caregiver interviews
Does the proposed protection model work?	Policy frameworks provide a basis for intervention design	Pilot implementation and outcome evaluation

The evidence gap is itself an important research finding: a reliable district-specific estimate of left-behind children is needed before the scale of the problem in Anantapur can be quantified.

7. Impact of Parental Migration on Left-Behind Children

7.1 Educational impact

The historical district literacy figures show that rural educational disadvantage is an important contextual concern. They do not, however, directly measure school participation among children whose parents migrate.

Parental absence may affect children's access to homework assistance, educational supervision, and communication between families and schools. Where children assume substantial domestic responsibilities, their study time may also be reduced.

At the same time, remittances can help families purchase school supplies, pay transport costs, and meet other educational expenses. Migration may therefore have both positive and negative consequences.

The proposed field study should compare attendance, grade progression, learning support, and school retention among children in migrant and non-migrant households. It should also examine whether outcomes vary according to the duration of parental absence and the identity of the caregiver.

7.2 Emotional and Psychosocial Impact

Children may experience sadness, loneliness, worry, or uncertainty when a parent is away for extended periods. These experiences may be more difficult when communication is infrequent or caregiving arrangements are unstable.

However, parental absence does not inevitably result in psychological distress. A supportive caregiver, regular communication, and strong school relationships may protect children's emotional well-being.

The study should therefore measure both risk factors and protective factors, including children's perceived emotional support, communication with parents, sense of safety, and access to trusted adults.

7.3 Health and Nutrition

Children may face difficulties accessing healthcare or maintaining healthy routines when caregivers have limited time, resources, or knowledge of available services.



Drought-related economic insecurity may also affect food availability and dietary diversity. These risks can overlap with pre-existing household deprivation, making it important to distinguish the effects of migration from the effects of poverty and food insecurity.

Relevant indicators include access to nutrition services, missed health appointments, reported food insecurity, and the timeliness of referrals for health concerns.

7.4 Child Protection Risks

Inadequate supervision may increase exposure to neglect, unsafe work, exploitation, bullying, or abuse. These are risks requiring assessment, not outcomes that should automatically be attributed to every migrant family.

A protection-oriented study should identify whether children have a reliable caregiver, know whom to approach for assistance, and can access appropriate reporting and referral mechanisms.

7.5 Gender Differences

Girls and boys may experience different expectations and responsibilities when a parent migrates. Girls may undertake additional domestic work or sibling care, while boys may face pressure to contribute to paid work or agricultural activities.

These possibilities must be tested using disaggregated data rather than assumed to apply uniformly. The analysis should compare responsibilities, school attendance, recreation, safety, and access to support by gender and age.

7.6 Household Economic Outcomes

Migration may increase household income and help families meet essential needs. Its benefits may be reduced by irregular wages, high travel costs, debt repayment, or employment insecurity.

A balanced assessment should therefore examine both remittances and child well-being. Increased income alone is insufficient evidence that children's protection and developmental needs are being met.

8. Proposed Drought-Responsive Child Protection and Empowerment Model

Based on the available statistical context and the identified evidence gaps, this article proposes the Drought-Responsive Child Protection and Empowerment Model (DR-CPEM) for left-behind children in Anantapur district.

The model integrates eight intervention components and is designed to work through existing public institutions rather than establish a parallel child protection system.

Underlying Conditions

Drought exposure · Livelihood insecurity · Poverty · Parental migration.

- Identification and Assessment
- Household mapping · Caregiver assessment · School monitoring · Child consultation
- Family-based care Care plans and caregiver support
- Educational continuity Attendance and learning support
- Psychosocial well-being Emotional support and counselling



- Health and nutrition Essential services and referrals
- Child safeguarding Risk assessment and protection
- Child empowerment Rights, voice and life skills
- Social protection Access to eligible entitlements
- Drought resilience Livelihood and employment support

8.1 Family-based care

Before a parent migrates, the family should identify a trusted adult who can provide daily supervision and respond to emergencies. A care plan should specify arrangements for school participation, healthcare, communication, and financial support.

Caregivers should receive appropriate guidance and support, particularly when they are older adults or are already managing substantial responsibilities.

8.2 Educational Continuity

Schools should identify children affected by parental migration confidentially and provide support where needed. Attendance monitoring, remedial teaching, teacher mentoring, and communication with caregivers can help address emerging difficulties.

The model should measure changes in school attendance and retention rather than assume that all children in migrant households experience educational disadvantage.

8.3 Psychosocial Support

Children should have opportunities to communicate with trusted adults, participate in recreational activities, and maintain regular contact with migrating parents when feasible.

Teachers and frontline workers should be able to recognise signs of distress and refer children for professional assistance when appropriate.

8.4 Health and Nutrition

Anganwadi centres, schools, health workers, and primary health facilities should coordinate to support children's nutrition, routine health needs, and access to applicable services.

The model should pay particular attention to children whose caregivers face barriers to transport, information, or healthcare access.

8.5 Safeguarding and Referral

Children facing serious protection concerns should be referred through established child protection mechanisms. The model should provide clear procedures for responding to suspected abuse, exploitation, hazardous child labour, or unsafe caregiving. Mission Vatsalya and the relevant district child protection structures provide an existing policy foundation for coordinated care and protection.

8.6 Empowerment and Child Participation

Children should receive age-appropriate information about their rights, available services, and ways to seek help. Child clubs, school activities, life-skills programmes, and opportunities to provide feedback can strengthen their confidence and participation.



Children should be treated as participants in decisions affecting them, with appropriate safeguards for privacy and emotional well-being.

8.7 Social Protection and Livelihood Resilience

Eligible households should be assisted in accessing appropriate employment, food security, health, education, and social welfare programmes.

Drought-resilience initiatives, water conservation, livelihood diversification, and rural employment opportunities may also help families manage economic insecurity. Such interventions should be adapted to local needs and should not presume that migration can or should be eliminated.

9. Data Analysis Plan

To transform this conceptual article into a fully empirical research paper, the following statistical analyses are recommended.

9.1 Descriptive Analysis

Calculate the proportion of surveyed households reporting parental migration, the proportion of children living with different caregivers, and the distribution of migration duration, remittances, school attendance, and service access.

For each indicator, report the numerator, denominator, percentage, and relevant confidence interval.

9.2 Comparison between Migrant and Non-Migrant Households

Compare outcomes between the two household groups, including:

- School attendance and grade progression.
- Time spent on household responsibilities.
- Access to nutrition and health services.
- Reported emotional support and perceived safety.
- Household income, remittances, and access to welfare schemes.
- Statistical tests should be selected according to the type and distribution of each variable. Multivariable models should account for relevant confounders, such as household wealth, parental education, child age, gender, and drought exposure.

9.3 Measuring the effects of the Proposed Model

Where feasible, a pilot evaluation could collect baseline and follow-up data and compare outcomes with those in similar villages not yet receiving the intervention.

A difference-in-differences analysis could be considered if the design and assumptions are appropriate. Any causal conclusions would depend on the quality of the comparison group, the consistency of measurement, and the handling of confounding factors.

9.4 Recommended Primary Data Indicators

Variable	Suggested measurement
Parental migration	Whether one or both parents migrated during a defined reference period
Migration duration	Total days or months away from the village



Caregiving arrangement	Identity and availability of the child's primary caregiver
Educational participation	Attendance rate, retention, and grade progression
Household responsibilities	Hours per day spent on domestic and caregiving activities
Economic support	Remittances received and household expenditure patterns
Psychosocial well-being	Validated, age-appropriate assessment
Child protection	Documented safeguarding concerns and appropriate referrals
Service access	Receipt of applicable health, nutrition, and welfare services
Child empowerment	Awareness of rights, trusted adults, and help-seeking options

10. Conclusion

Available data establish that child migration is a major national phenomenon and that the historical Anantapur district experienced significant rural–urban and gender disparities in literacy. These indicators provide an important foundation for understanding the social and educational context in which parental migration may occur.

However, the available statistics do not establish the number of left-behind children in Anantapur or prove that parental migration causes particular educational, emotional, or protection-related outcomes. District-specific primary research is necessary to establish those relationships.

The proposed Drought-Responsive Child Protection and Empowerment Model offers a framework for responding to this evidence gap. It connects family-based care, educational continuity, psychosocial support, health and nutrition, safeguarding, empowerment, social protection, and drought resilience.

Its central principle is that children's rights and developmental needs should remain protected when parents migrate for work. A coordinated approach involving families, schools, local government, health services, and child protection institutions can help ensure that migration-related livelihood strategies do not come at the expense of children's safety, education, or well-being.

Future research should test the model using reliable household-level data, clearly defined indicators, and ethically conducted fieldwork. Such evidence would support the development of more effective and locally appropriate interventions for left-behind children in Anantapur and other drought-prone districts.

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