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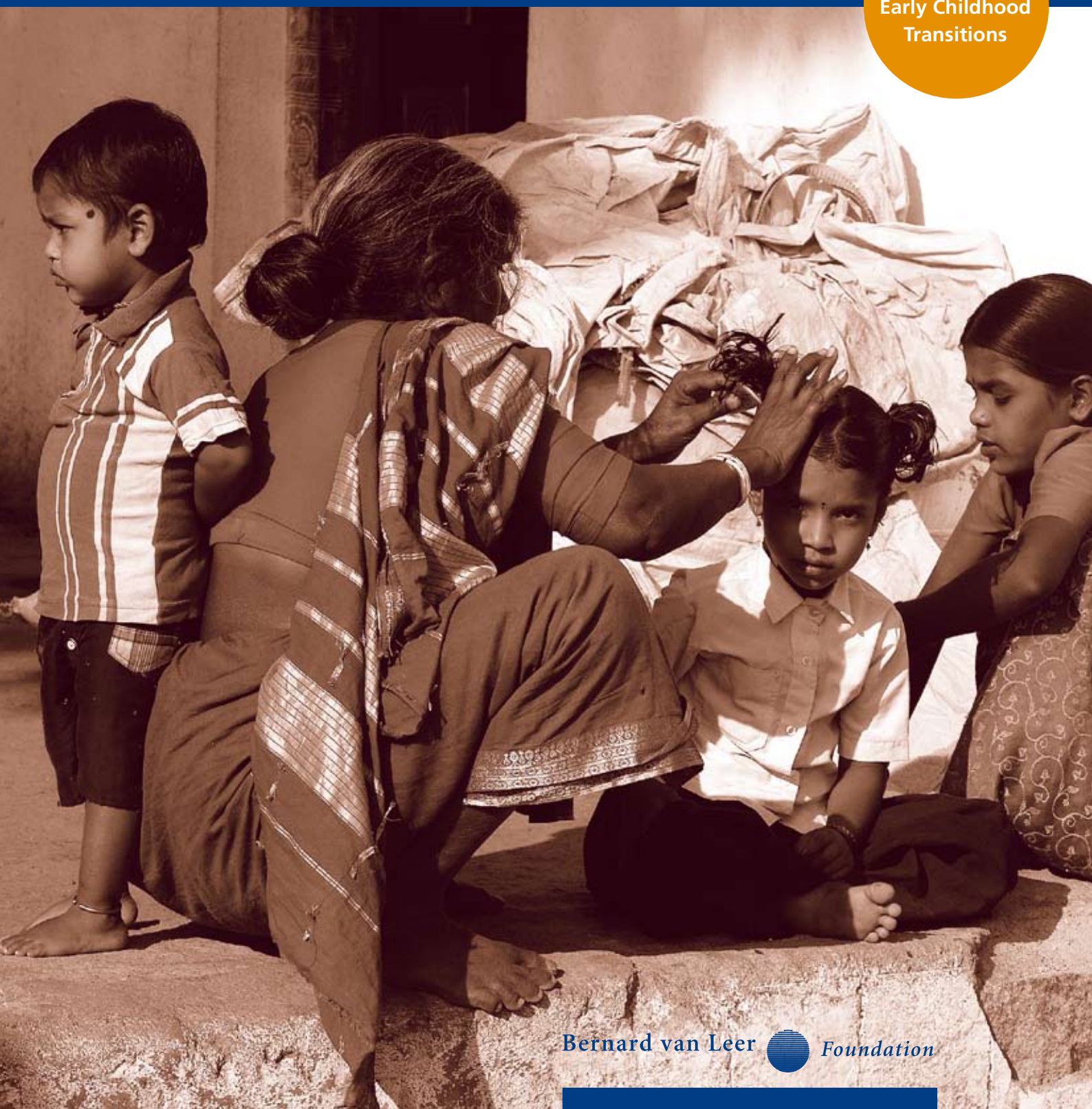
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## Increasing choice or inequality?

Pathways through early education in Andhra Pradesh, India

By Natalia Streuli, Uma Vennam and Martin Woodhead

STUDIES IN  
Early Childhood  
Transitions



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This working paper is part of a series on early transitions from *Young Lives*, a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Further information about *Young Lives* research is available on the website: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

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#### **About the authors**

**Natalia Streuli** is a researcher in the *Young Lives* Qualitative team at the University of Oxford. She completed her PhD at the University of London focusing on children's experiences of well-being and poverty in Peru, and the implications of social protection measures. Her interests include childhood poverty and inequalities, children's access to and perceptions of basic services and related policy issues.

**Uma Vennam** is a Professor of Social Work at Sri Padmavathi Women's University, Tirupati, India. She was trained at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. The focus of her research has been rural poverty, NGOs and rural development, and children in difficult situations (including trafficking). Uma is currently the Lead Qualitative Researcher (LQR) for *Young Lives* in Andhra Pradesh, India.

**Martin Woodhead** is Professor of Childhood Studies at The Open University. He has been directing the *Young Lives*/Bernard van Leer Foundation funded sub-study on early childhood transitions. His thirty-year research career has included a focus on early childhood development, education and care – including policy studies, extensive international work and numerous publications.

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## Acronyms

ASER	<i>Annual Status of Education Report</i>
BC	<i>Backward Caste</i>
CIRCUS	<i>Citizen's Initiative for the Rights of Children Under Six</i>
CREATE	<i>Consortium for Research on Educational Access</i>
ECCE	<i>Early Childhood Care and Education</i>
EFA	<i>Education for All</i>
FC	<i>Forward Caste</i>
ICDS	<i>Integrated Child Development Services</i>
ITDA	<i>Integrated Tribal Development Agency</i>
LKG	<i>Lower Kindergarten</i>
MDG	<i>Millennium Development Goals</i>
NCAER	<i>National Council of Applied Economic Research</i>
NCERT	<i>National Council of Educational Research and Training</i>
NPC	<i>National Policy for Children</i>
NEP	<i>National Education Policy</i>
NIPCCD	<i>National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development</i>
NPEGEL	<i>National Programme of Education for Girls at Primary Level</i>
NUEPA	<i>National University of Education Planning and Administration</i>
PPP	<i>Public Private Partnership</i>
RTE	<i>Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act</i>
SC	<i>Scheduled Caste</i>
SSA	<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>
ST	<i>Scheduled Tribe</i>
SUCCESS	<i>Strengthening and Universalisation of Quality and Access to Secondary Schools</i>
UNESCO	<i>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>
UKG	<i>Upper Kindergarten</i>
UNICEF	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>
YL	<i>Young Lives</i>





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Further information about *Young Lives* is available at: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)



## Executive summary

Awareness of the importance of early childhood care and education (ECCE), including the first years of primary school, has increased in recent decades. Quality ECCE can help children get better equipped for school, and can lower costs in primary school due to lower repetition rates and increased school achievement, among other things – especially when targeting marginalized and vulnerable children. More recently, ECCE has been recognised as “the bedrock of Education for All” (UNESCO 2010, p.5) because of its potential role in offsetting social, economic and language-based disadvantages. Five out of the eight ‘Millennium Development Goals’ relate to the health, nutrition and education of young children and, for this reason, quality ECCE is also seen as a crucial step towards achieving those goals.

Strengthening ECCE and primary education has long been a policy priority in India. The 1950 Constitution made a commitment to provision of “free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years” (Government of India 2007a p.11). While that goal has remained elusive, India has seen a four percent increase in primary school enrolment during the past decade, which brings the country closer to achieving universal primary education by 2015. India also has a relatively long history of policy and programming for ECCE at a national level. Through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS, launched in 1975), India became one of the first developing

countries to provide ECCE to the most vulnerable sectors of the population in an integrated way – that is, by combining nutritional services, immunization, health check-ups and pre-school education for children aged 0-6 years old.

Despite these longstanding traditions of innovation and reform at both pre-school and primary education levels, India still faces important challenges, including a relatively high number of children without access to pre-school services, out of school or dropping out of school; large regional differences in access to quality education; weaknesses in delivering consistent quality through the ICDS programme and the lack of a structured and coordinated educational system, among other things. These problems, along with changes in the global and national economy, have increased the demand for private education among Indian families. The past decade has witnessed a massive growth in private sector provision of both pre-school and primary education, not just among better-off urban families, but also increasingly in poorer rural areas.

These challenges raise issues about the governance and financing of education, including curriculum, pedagogy and language of instruction, effective regulation of the private sector, monitoring and quality assurance etc. At a more immediate and concrete level, recent trends are also impacting strongly on individual families as they make choices about their children’s edu-

cation, and as young children negotiate multiple transition pathways through early education. Many new opportunities are now available to individual children, but inequities related to gender, poverty and location risk being reinforced in an increasingly market driven early childhood education system.

This paper explores recent trends for children growing up in the State of Andhra Pradesh, one of India's most populous states – approximately 76,000,000 according to the 2001 Census of India (Government of India 2001). The particular focus is on experiences of pre-school and transitions to primary school. The paper is based on analysis of *Young Lives* survey data collected for a sample of 1950 young children born in 2001, and drawn from 20 sites across Andhra Pradesh, plus two rounds of in-depth qualitative research carried out with a sub-sample of 24 children in four *Young Lives* sites.

Superficially, the evidence from *Young Lives* research is quite positive, suggesting equitable access to early childhood provision as well as high levels of primary school attendance. In Andhra Pradesh, 87 percent of the *Young Lives* sample of children born in 2000/01 were reported by their caregivers as having attended a pre-school of some kind, at some point, since the age of three. Attendance rates were similar for urban and rural children (90 percent and 86 percent), as well as for boys and girls (87 percent versus 86.9 percent).

However, these overall percentages are misleading, and disguise major differences in children's

early transition experiences. Many of these differences are shaped by the co-existence of a long established network of government *anganwadis* (early childhood centres under the ICDS programme), alongside a rapidly growing (relatively unregulated) private sector at both pre-school and primary levels. Poverty levels and location are strongly predictive of whether children attend government or private pre-school/primary school. For most children in rural areas attending an ICDS *anganwadi* and then the local government primary school is the most accessible option, although increasing numbers of rural families are seeking out private primary schools, for example, using boarding hostels in nearby towns. Urban families have greater choice of schools, and very high proportions enrol their children in private sector pre-school and primary schools, including significant numbers of the poorest families. Parental decision-making around private versus government education has been fuelled by the possibility of improved life opportunities in a rapidly changing economy. The promise of private school providers that children will be rapidly initiated into English medium learning and teaching even at kindergarten level has been especially attractive to aspiring parents, although not always delivered in practice once they have enrolled their children.

We identify three major pathways through early and primary education in Andhra Pradesh:

- Government school pathway: children move from home to government pre-school and then on to government primary school.

- Private school pathway: children move from home to private pre-school and private primary school.
- Government to private pathway: children begin in government pre-school but soon transfer into private primary school.

Children may make several transitions within these pathways, as parents seek out what they consider better or more affordable schools. *Young Lives* is following up these children through primary education, and beyond. Most recent findings suggest these trends continue through the early school grades, with 44 percent of children enrolled in private schools by the age of eight.

Access to these pathways is not equitable. It depends on where children live, their families' circumstances and ability to pay fees, and their priorities for educating their boy and girl children. Parental aspirations for individual children combine with beliefs about relative quality of government and private schools, to shape children's educational trajectories in ways that seem likely to reproduce or even reinforce inequalities related to wealth, location, caste, and gender. As a consequence many children have to cope with multiple and fragmented transitions during their early years, including changing schools in an effort to 'up-grade' in perceived quality (e.g. from a government to private school), moving into distant hostels or living with relatives in order to attend better schools or to access grades unavailable locally. Other issues discussed in this report include the impact on children of struggling to learn in a

language different to their mother tongue (in the case of tribal children and those in English medium schools); children experiencing premature exposure to academic content by starting school at an age younger than the official age of entry; and children having to cope with everyday violence in the classroom, perpetrated by their peers and teachers.

In summary, *Young Lives* research highlights numerous policy challenges for early education and the transition to primary school in Andhra Pradesh, notably challenges stemming from a weakly governed pre-school sector and a primary sector that risks amplifying educational inequalities. On the one hand, the relatively under-resourced government ICDS programme continues to deliver basic health and nutrition goals. It co-exists and increasingly competes with the diverse, relatively unregulated and rapidly growing private sector, which offers to initiate children into formal learning, in English, and from a much earlier age than normally considered to be developmentally appropriate.

Addressing these issues will require a major reform of early childhood services, specifically strengthening and universalising quality ECCE in Andhra Pradesh to smoothen children's transitions to, and through, primary school. The ICDS programme offers a real opportunity for strengthening ECCE as long as it is carefully reviewed and better resourced, especially through improving the training, skills and remuneration of *anganwadi* workers. In particular, the programme needs to improve its educational module. Secondly, there is urgent

need for more effective regulation of both government and private pre-school and primary schools in order to build an ethical and effective partnership between different providers of education. The recent Right to Education Act offers some positive steps in this direction, but implementation challenges are considerable and will require strong governance at State and national levels. Current policy initiatives fall far short of the requirements for effective public-private partnership, (Srivastava 2010). Thirdly, our findings call for a more comprehensive child-centred vision for early childhood and primary education; a vision that looks beyond the current structural, systemic and resourcing issues that pre-occupy the policy agenda. A

holistic approach to ECCE and the early primary years is required – integrating care, health, education and nutrition for children aged 0-8 years, and closely linked to improving children’s experience of primary school, and its long term outcomes.

This report is based on research within the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh and our specific findings cannot be assumed to apply throughout India, or further afield. Nonetheless, we believe many of the issues we have discussed for Andhra Pradesh resonate much more widely, especially within rapidly growing economies and education systems.

## Introduction

Early childhood is globally acknowledged as a crucial phase in human development. Below the age of eight years, children experience great sensitivity to environmental conditions and quality of care. This stage involves a succession of crucial developmental changes, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional capacities (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). According to UNICEF “what happens – or doesn’t happen – to children in the earliest years of their lives is of critical importance, both to their immediate well-being and to their future” ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)).<sup>1</sup>

Accumulating scientific research over the last two decades convincingly demonstrates the impacts of early childhood programmes upon long-term outcomes, especially for disadvantaged groups (Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009; Engle et al. 2007; and Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). The last decade has seen significant policy attention on access to ECCE, especially in majority world contexts. For example, Goal 1 of the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA) calls for expanding and improving “comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” (UNESCO 2000, p.8); while Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) sets out to achieve universal primary education by the year 2015 as a means for poverty reduction. ECCE was not specifically

included in the MDGs. However, in his 2010 progress report on the UNCRC, The UN Secretary General noted:

The Millennium Development Goals are closely interconnected in their impact on the rights of the young child. Poverty, maternal and child survival, nutrition, health, protection from violence, abuse and exploitation, gender equality and human development have short- and long-term consequences for the rights of young children, with implications for future generations, as poverty cycles are reproduced.

In similar vein, the latest UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report recognises ECCE as “the bedrock of Education for All” (UNESCO 2010, p.5). In particular, the report highlights that ECCE programmes “can play an important role in offsetting social, economic and language-based disadvantages” (UNESCO 2010, p.49). As a result of all this, progress has been made in enhancing ECCE coverage. UNESCO (2006) estimated a 300 percent increase globally in enrolment in pre-primary education since 1970. By 2005, the World Bank had financed loans to 52 developing countries for child development programmes, for a total of US\$1680 million (Engle et al. 2007). Over 30 governments now have national policies for Early Childhood

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<sup>1</sup> Following the working definition of General Comment 7 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘early childhood’ is understood as the period below the age of 8 (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005, p.2).

Development and dozens more are being developed, while over 35 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers now feature Early Childhood programmes, either through pre-school services, parenting programmes, child care facilities, or other interventions (UNICEF 2007). However, despite all this, the EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2009, notes worldwide discrepancies in access and quality:

While coverage rates are increasing worldwide, early childhood services of good quality remain inaccessible to the majority of the world's children. This is especially true for children in the poorest countries – and for the most disadvantaged among them. The upshot is a perverse outcome for equity: those with the most to gain from ECCE are least likely to participate (UNESCO 2008, p.42).

For example, successive Global Monitoring Reports have cautioned that India, the country with the world's largest population of school going children, may not achieve most of the EFA goals. Even though the goal of universal primary education appears to be achievable, India still faces important challenges in terms of quality of education, gender disparity, keeping children in school and incorporating the most marginalised groups of children, including those living in poverty, working children,

children of migrant families, those with special needs, children from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), or from other Backward Castes (BC)<sup>2</sup>, and children from minority groups (mostly Muslims) (Govinda 2009). This working paper looks at the day-to-day experience of children and families in India (Andhra Pradesh in particular) as they access (or fail to access) ECCE services, with a particular focus on both government and private pre-schools and the transition to primary school. This working paper is one of a series on 'early transitions' from *Young Lives* ([www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)) published by Bernard van Leer Foundation in its 'Transitions in Early Childhood' series. *Young Lives* is a 15-year longitudinal study of children growing up in poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam (see Chapter 2). In each study country, *Young Lives* is tracking approximately 2000 children from infancy to the late teenage years, and 1000 children from childhood to early adulthood. The overall goal is to better understand the causes of childhood poverty and its consequences on children's present and future well-being, and to examine the role of policy in this area with a view to informing and shaping effective policy development and interventions.

Early childhood transitions are of particular interest to *Young Lives* because they offer the

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<sup>2</sup> These are broad categories of underprivileged groups recognised under The Indian constitution (1949) in order to provide them with special welfare treatment. These categories included Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Castes. Roughly, these are comprised respectively of (SC) Untouchables or Harijans; (ST) virtually all Adivasis or tribes; and (BC) other economically disadvantaged groups not included in the other two categories. SCs/STs together comprise over 24 percent of India's population, with SC at over 16 percent and ST over 8 percent as per the 2001 Census. BC is more difficult to enumerate. Forward castes (FC) refers to people from any religion who do not qualify for a Government of India Reservation benefits or set quotas for political representation.



chance to examine the various factors that shape children's use of basic education services, and analyse why some children have more opportunities for development than others in the context of poverty, as explained in the first paper in the series (Vogler et al. 2008). *Young Lives'* longitudinal research offers the opportunity to collect families' and children's life histories, which can help us understand how children in majority world countries do or do not access ECCE and primary school, progress (or fail to progress) through grades, make transitions between schools, or drop-out altogether. Most importantly, *Young Lives'* child-focussed design offers insights into children's individual experience of everyday schooling, in the context of their lives at home and in the community. Our longitudinal design also offers the possibility to explore children's inclusion and exclusion from ECCE as a process rather than a single event in their lives, and identify patterns of exclusion at an early stage in the education cycle.

Issues of access, equity and quality in Ethiopia, India and Peru have been explored in the second paper in this series (Woodhead et al 2009). Research and policy attention on ECCE in these three *Young Lives* countries coincide with a massive expansion of services during the last decade in particular, but the benefits are not always felt by the groups most in need. A third paper in the series (Ames et al 2010) looks at these issue in detail for Peru, with

particular emphasis on continuity and respect for diversity. Now, this fourth paper focuses on Andhra Pradesh, India, specifically asking how different social, cultural, and economic factors shape children's transitions through early education and into primary school. The paper draws on survey data collected from approximately 2,000 children in 2006/07, when they were all around 6 years old; and on in-depth interviews and observations of a sub-sample of 24 children and families, carried out in 2007 and 2008. Even though we cannot provide a regional or national level perspective on ECCE, *Young Lives'* wealth of longitudinal data provides a comprehensive picture of the various educational pathways followed by children in Andhra Pradesh and the many challenges they face in their search for good quality education.

The first chapter introduces the policy background on India's early childhood and primary education system with a special focus on the state of Andhra Pradesh. This is followed by an overview of *Young Lives* longitudinal research on transition themes in Andhra Pradesh, and a detailed analysis – produced using qualitative data from the two rounds of fieldwork in 2007 and 2008 – of children's and families' trajectories through ECCE. The final chapter discusses implications for strengthening ECCE and primary education in India, with a view to improving children's experiences of school transitions and ensuring basic equity in access and quality.



## Chapter 1: Early childhood and primary education in India

India has a relatively long history of policy and programming for ECCE at the national level, notably the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), which was initiated in 1974 and continues to be the major government funded service. During the 2001 Census, India had approximately 158 million children under six years old (Government of India 2001). Less than a quarter of these were covered by government ECCE programmes such as ICDS (which operate at a vast scale, nonetheless). A second feature of ECCE in India is the important role of private providers. More than a decade ago, it was already estimated that there were about 10 million children (6 percent) enrolled in private initiatives including daycare centres, nurseries, kindergartens, and pre-primary classes (Sharma 1998). Some suggest the number could be as high as that of children under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (Government of India 2004; National Focus Group 2006a). Evidence also suggests large disparities in provision of government and private ECCE between rural and urban areas, and between children from different social groups and castes (NUEPA 2008), as discussed later in this chapter.

In relation to primary education, India has seen a significant increase in enrolments between 2000 (113 million children) and 2007 (134 million), showing a net enrolment ratio of 89 percent in 2007 (UNESCO 2010). Improvements were particularly evident for the upper primary stage (Class 6 to 8). Despite significant increases

in the coverage of basic education, it remains to be seen whether India will achieve the goal it has set for itself, which is consistent with its commitments to the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO 2000) and the MDG goal of providing universal primary education (United Nations 2000). Some of the major challenges include paying adequate attention to regional imbalances and social inequity, and reaching the almost 10 percent of children who are still out of school (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay 2008). Other areas that need further attention are education quality and relevance, educational resources, and planning and management of educational programmes (see national report from NUEPA 2008).

Finally, India has seen rapid growth in private schools at primary level, which often extend down into ECCE, via kindergarten classes. While India has a tradition of high quality private schools serving the most able and affluent households, a more extensive entrepreneurial private sector, especially in urban areas, now offers parents a relatively low-fee alternative to government schools, with the additional attraction of 'English-medium' teaching in many cases. Comprehensive national statistics are unavailable, because so many private schools have been 'unrecognised', unaided and/or unregistered and therefore underestimated in official statistics. But the growth of the unaided private sector was already apparent between 1973-1993, with an increased share of total

enrolments at primary school level from 8 to 23 percent for girls and from 9 to 27 percent for boys (Mehrotra and Panchamukhi 2007).

*Young Lives* is able to offer some recent data on these trends in ECCE and in primary education, for the three thousand children we have been studying in the State of Andhra Pradesh. When the first cohort (born 1994/5) were around 8 years old, in 2002, 24 percent were reported by their caregivers to be attending a private school, compared with 74 percent in government schools, and around two percent not attending school at all. By 2009, when the second cohort (born 2001/2) were 8 years old, the percentage reported to be in private schools had increased to 44 percent compared with 55 percent in government schools, and less than one percent not attending school at all.

When we studied this younger cohort in 2006, we are also able to ask about children's attendance at ECCE programmes. 87 percent were reported to have attended a pre-school of some kind, at some time, since the age of three. While government ICDS programmes were the major service available to rural families (70 percent), 73 percent of urban children attended a private pre-school, compared with only 19 percent using the government sector. These statistics are only for a relatively small sample in one Indian state, but they do highlight the extent to which private providers are contributing to young children's education in India (see Chapter 2 for details).

The rest of this chapter expounds on the policy framework, and some of the available program-

mes for pre-school and primary education in India. Later in the chapter, we also present an overview of the current educational situation in Andhra Pradesh, which is the focus for *Young Lives* research.

### **The national policy context: Education for All**

India's Constitution (1945: Article 45) made a commitment to provision of "free and compulsory education for children up to fourteen years of age". Since there was no lower age limit, early childhood education was considered as part of this constitutional commitment. In 2002, through the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act (Article 21(A)), the span of 0-14 years was divided into two age groups: 3-6 and 6-14 years old. Almost eight years after the amendment was made, the Indian Parliament passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act also known as Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE). This act is seen as a milestone in education policy. It followed on from a 1993 Supreme Court ruling that Article 45 of the Constitution (which asserted the obligation of the state to provide free and compulsory education up to age of 14) should be read along with the fundamental right, which asserts that everyone has the right to live life with dignity. Arguing that no one can live with dignity without education, the Supreme Court judged that it followed that education should be treated as a fundamental right (Little 2010).

The RTE is clearly an important step towards Education for All. It emphasises that every child in the age group of 6 to 14 years should

be provided elementary education in an age-appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighbourhood. It also incorporates 'quality of education' as one of its objectives, and mentions the need for better physical infrastructure, appropriate teacher-pupil ratios and adequate qualification of teachers, among other things. The Act also states that private schools should admit at least 25 percent of children from vulnerable backgrounds or disadvantaged communities in their schools without any fee (Government of India 2009).

One of the main limitations of the RTE Act is that it pays insufficient attention to young children. Provision of education for the group of children between 0 and 6 years is still formally linked to Article 45 of the Constitution, which is not enforceable as part of every child's rights, and consequently the State is not required to ensure access to education at this level. The RTE Act mentions pre-school education (Chapter III) only "with a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education" and suggests that the appropriate Government "may take necessary arrangements for providing free pre-school education for such children" (Government of India 2009, p.5).

The exclusion of pre-school aged children in the RTE Act has been viewed in contradiction to India's own commitment at the Jomtien Conference (1990), which considered the expansion of ECCE to be an integral part of the EFA goals (UNESCO 2010). In 2007, the Working Group on Development of Children, set up by the Government in the context of the formulation

of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), strongly recommended the inclusion of ECCE as a fundamental right, and a holistic approach to ECCE that is based on the continuum of child development instead of arbitrarily dividing between pre-school and primary education (see Government of India 2007b). So far little change has been seen.

Other important policy initiatives for ECCE are the declaration of the National Policy for Children (NPC) in 1974, and the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was initiated in 1968, consolidated in 1986 and further updated in 1992. The NPE 1986 provided for a comprehensive policy framework for the development of education. It viewed ECCE as "an integral input in the human resource strategy, a feeder and support programme for primary education and a support service for working women" (Government of India 1986). Both the NPE and Programme of Action suggest that programmes of ECCE be child-oriented, focused around play and the individuality of children. Formal methods and content for reading, writing and arithmetic are discouraged at this stage.

More recently, the National Action Plan for Children, 2005, identified twelve key areas in terms of programme intervention and resource allocation, including "Universalization of early childhood care and development and quality education for all children achieving 100 percent access and retention in schools, including pre-schools" (Government of India 2005, p.3). It also specifies a set of goals on ECCE to be met by 2010, including universalization of early child-

hood services; ensuring that care, protection and development opportunities are available to all children below 3 years; making integrated care and development and pre-school learning opportunities available for all children aged 3 to 6 years; and providing daycare and crèche facilities to parents in rural and urban areas.

### ECCE through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

In the absence of a strong national policy encompassing ECCE, government services for young children are still mostly based on much earlier policy initiatives, notably ICDS. Established in 1974, ICDS was one of the earliest national comprehensive ECCE programmes, including supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups and referral, pre-school education for children aged three to six, and health and nutrition for mothers. Numerically, ICDS is still the largest early childcare programme in the world with over 1 million *anganwadi* centres providing ECCE services across the country (MWCD 2009), and nearly 80,000 centres in the State of Andhra Pradesh alone.

The development of early childhood services in India has long been conceptualised as an investment in human resource development and ICDS has been innovative in attempting to provide ECCE in an integrated way (Mohite and Bhatt 2008). *Anganwadi* literally means a courtyard garden, but is used to denote a

simple childcare centre, inferring that it could be run in the courtyard of any village home (Mohite and Bhatt 2008). The ICDS scheme and more recently the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA)<sup>3</sup> (Hindi for The EFA Movement), recognise pre-primary learning as a significant component of a sound foundation for cumulative lifelong learning and development. More recently, the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was created as a gender-specific component of the SSA, aiming to provide additional support for education of underprivileged and disadvantaged girls. Among other things, the NPEGEL aims to provide additional early childhood care centres to meet gaps in the ICDS, and extra *anganwadi* centres to help free girls from sibling care and allow them to attend schools.

A national evaluation of ICDS centres across 25 states and one Union Territory (NIPCCD 1992) as well as a longitudinal assessment of ECCE centres in the states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Goa (NCERT 1993) reveal better rates of enrolment and greater retention in later school years among children with ECCE experience of some kind as compared to those who directly enter Class 1. Interestingly, the impact of ECCE experience on retention in primary grades appeared to be greater for girls than boys, as noted for the study group. Other research confirming the impact of ECCE on

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<sup>3</sup> The SSA is considered the main programmatic vehicle for the achievement of the universalisation of elementary education, now by 2010, [www.ssa.nic.in/](http://www.ssa.nic.in/)

primary school enrolment, school adjustment and readiness of children include a series of studies carried out by the National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD 1985, 1987, 2003), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT 2003), and the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER 2001). These studies also suggest that ECCE, across different programmes, benefits not only the younger children, but also older siblings, particularly girls, who are freed from sibling care responsibility and enabled to join regular schools.

Despite this positive evidence, educational objectives continue to be limited within *anganwadis* and the main emphasis is still on health and nutrition components (CIRCUS 2006; National Focus Group 2006a). The *anganwadi* is usually staffed by two local women, one who is the worker/teacher in the *anganwadi* with minimum formal training in ECCE and earns a small honorarium for her work, and another helper responsible for gathering or fetching children from their homes, earning her the title of *teragar/ayamma* (the one who fetches).

A recent study (IMRB, 2007 cited in Kaul and Sankar, 2009) that examined the early childhood education component of the ICDS in three states, reports that, on average, the *anganwadis* function between two and two-and-a-half hours; in 66 percent of them the worker and children were observed to be involved in only routine activities like taking attendance, feeding the children, and getting children to sing rhymes and songs. Moreover, the activities were conducted with

minimal play and learning material, largely in inadequate outdoor and indoor spaces, and with an already overloaded *anganwadi* worker who needed to carry out at least five other functions in addition to pre-school education.

In a Situational Analysis of ECCE in India carried out by Save the Children, the authors claim that education and development of the young child was not so much on the radar of ICDS; instead the program embraced a more 'biological' approach focusing on child nutrition and health. They also suggest part of the problem stems from lack of coordination and integration within the various ministries and departments involved in the care and education of young children, including the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, among others (Save the Children, 2009).

Nonetheless the number of children (in the age group 3-6 years) attending pre-school activities under ICDS have been continuously increasing, from about 17 million in 2002 to 34 million by 2009 (MWCD 2009). There is, however, an evident rural/urban divide in the provision of ECCE services under the ICDS, as the majority of projects are located in rural areas. As a result, the provision of early childhood education facilities in urban areas, particularly in urban slums, is insufficient (MWCD 2007).

### **Early education in the private sector**

While ICDS has been the main government programme over more than three decades, the

responsibility of providing ECCE services in India is currently shared by the government and not-for-profit providers, alongside a large and rapidly growing private sector. What is on offer within each of these sectors differs greatly in terms of availability, cost and quality (Woodhead et al. 2009). While the government-sponsored ICDS are the major providers for children from disadvantaged communities, especially in rural areas, private initiatives target children of socio-economically better-off families, especially in urban areas. Private sector initiatives are usually commercial ventures operating in the form of pre-schools, play schools, nurseries, kindergartens and daycare centres.

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, India has witnessed a proliferation of private sector pre-schools and primary schools, not only in large urban cities, but also in smaller towns, reflecting that these are constantly reaching out to newer segments of the population (Grag-nolati 2006). Studies in different parts of India also show that private schooling is being used even by poor families (see Pradhan and Subramanian 2000; Probe Team 1999; and Tooley and Dixon 2003). According to 2009 estimates, around 9 percent of children living in rural areas are receiving pre-primary education within the private sector, while 22 percent of 6-14 year olds are also attending private schools (Pratham 2010). There is a marked tendency among parents to shift their children from government schools to private sector schools as soon as it becomes economically possible to do so, and often at great cost and sacrifice (National Focus Group 2006a). The true size of

the private schooling sector is greatly underestimated in official data due to enumerating only the officially registered schools (see Kingdon 1996a, 2005; Kingdon and Drèze 1998).

Studies of the relative effectiveness of government and private schools, carried out in different parts of India (Kingdon 1994, 1996b; Tooley and Dixon 2003), conclude that private school students outperform their government school counterparts, at least in terms of narrow academic goals, as measured by achievement test performance (see also 2009 ASER Report by Pratham 2010). Compared to government schools, private initiatives have lower pupil-teacher ratios, less multigrade teaching, and higher attendance rates for both children and teachers. However, at the same time, private schools are less likely to have teachers with formal teacher training certificates and therefore tend to pay much lower salaries (Muralidharan and Kremer 2006). A similar situation has been found in relation to ECCE services. In the 2009 Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment private pre-schools in India were considered “largely a downward extension of primary education curriculum” (Kaul and Sankar 2009, p.38), with teachers often having no ECCE training. According to the authors, these pre-schools tend to adopt a primary curriculum at a stage when children are not developmentally ready, imposing a range of academic pressures on young children, as also discussed in the findings section of this paper.

These developments have prompted an important debate about how far low-fee private pre-



schools and schools can contribute to the MDG goal of universal primary education in a way that achieves equity and quality for all (Tooley et al 2007; Sarangapani and Winch 2010). This debate is taking place against the background of increased global interest in the potential for “public-private partnerships” (PPP) to reduce the burden of management and costs on governments, while improving choice and quality for parents and children (Patrinos and Sosale 2007). However, current government initiatives fall far short of the requirements for PPPs (Srivastava 2010). In short, the principles of EFA are enshrined in the Constitution, education policies, economic and development plans, and the majority of people can now access educational resources, but the extent and quality of education that children in India receive varies widely according to their socio-economic means, and cultural and ethnic background (Lall 2005). Overall, the education system in the country seems to favour those who are better off, although specific programmes do target disadvantaged children including girls, children from SC or ST. Other children, including

children in rural areas, some ethnic minority groups and other Backward Caste (BC) groups have more restricted access and may be offered poorer quality education (CREATE 2009).

In the absence of adequate government regulation, especially for unregistered private schools, the quality of education is highly variable – ranging from a few prestigious private schools of good quality, to poorly managed, overcrowded and under-equipped schools, which at worst squeeze children into inadequate spaces and introduce a formal curriculum at an unsuitably early age (National Focus Group 2006; NIPCCD 2006). As a result of this, there is no common school system in India. Instead individual children attend private, government-aided and government schools on the basis of their parents’ aspirations for boys and girls, their ability to pay fees and hidden extras (including by taking out loans), their location and social caste/class, among other things. Some of these differences in school provision and their impacts on children’s everyday lives are discussed in the following chapters.



## Chapter 2: Studying early childhood transitions in Andhra Pradesh

The present paper focuses on *Young Lives*' longitudinal research being carried out in the State of Andhra Pradesh: India's fifth largest state. In this chapter we begin by discussing the situation of early childhood and primary education in Andhra Pradesh. Next, we introduce *Young Lives*, which has provided the research for this paper, and summarise survey-based evidence about the pre-school opportunities available to the *Young Lives* younger cohort, comprising 2,000 children living in diverse communities throughout Andhra Pradesh. Finally, in this chapter we explore parents', teachers' and children's views on the opportunities for early education and how these shape the educational choices made for children.

### Early childhood and primary education in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh has a population of about 76.2 million and an area of 276,754 sq. km., making it sizably larger in population than France and in area larger than the United Kingdom. It accounts for over 7 percent of India's total population. While Andhra Pradesh continues to be largely rural with only 27 percent of the population living in urban areas, the state capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the information technology revolution. Consequently, the state is witnessing a shift away from agriculture (which remains important, at 30 percent of state domestic product) towards the service sector, which is expanding rapidly.

There is much diversity in terms of language, religion and caste among the people of Andhra Pradesh. About 85 percent of the population identifies Telugu as the mother tongue (the second most commonly spoken language in India), another 7.5 percent speak Urdu, and about three percent speak Hindi. A number of other languages including Tamil, Kannada, Marathi and Oriya, among others, are spoken by the remaining population. The dominant religion in Andhra Pradesh is Hinduism (75 percent) followed by Islam (11 percent) and Christianity (3.5 percent).

At state level, government figures for 2006-07 indicate that 73 percent of all primary school aged children in Andhra Pradesh were enrolled in primary schools, which suggests a still relatively high number of children out of school. According to 2009 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for rural Andhra Pradesh, the number of girls aged 11-14 years who are out of school has increased the most: the percentage of girls within this age group who were not in school increased from around 7 percent in 2008 to 11 percent in 2009 (Pratham 2010).

Government figures from 2007-08 also show variation in the kinds of schools in which children are enrolled (see Table 1). The two main categories of schools considered here are government and private with variations within these categories based on who manages them.

*Table 1: Primary school enrolment by management type, Andhra Pradesh, 2007-08*

	% total	#
<b>Government</b>	60.3	3,240,634
State government	5.1	273,999
Municipalities in urban areas	2.7	143,158
Local governments in rural areas (M.P.P./Z.P.P)	52.5	2,818,934
Central Government	08	4543
<b>Private</b>	39.6	2,126,315
Private aided	6.1	332,011
Private unaided	33.4	1,794,304
<b>Total</b>		5,366,949

Source: Government departmental data 2007-08, <http://ssa.ap.nic.in/>

According to the figures below around 40 percent of children are enrolled in private primary schools, representing an increase of nearly five percent since 2005-06. Note that official statistics underestimate the numbers of children attending private schools.

A similar phenomenon is observed in rural Andhra Pradesh where 33 percent of children aged 7 to 10 years attend private school and 63 percent attend government school (see Table 2). These findings show an important presence of private schools even in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh, and highlight important age and gender differences in access to private and government education. Enrolment in private schools seems to be lower as children get older, and for boys more than for girls (26 percent of boys against 19 percent of girls). This suggests

that parents may be giving priority to the early years of primary education by sending their children to private schools and then switching them to government schools, something that came out of the qualitative research. Parents are also making gender-based decisions around the type of school they want their child to attend. This is discussed in the findings chapter.

As we will discuss later on, most private schools in the state use English as the medium of instruction. Indeed this has been one of the major factors attracting parents to these private schools, and their pre-school or kindergarten classes, in anticipation that their children will have better prospects for later education and employment in India's growing economy. Less than two percent of the government schools in Andhra Pradesh are English medium, reflecting

*Table 2: Children in different types of schools 2009 – Andhra Pradesh (rural)*

	7 to 10 years old (%)			11 to 14 years old (%)		
	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls
<b>Government</b>	63	59	67	68	66	70
<b>Private</b>	33	38	29	22	26	19
<b>Other</b>	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1
<b>Out of school</b>	4	4	4	9	8	11

Source: ASER 2009 Report (Pratham 2010)

the State's traditional policy favouring Telugu as the medium of instruction in the early grades.<sup>4</sup> However, under the pressure of parental aspirations for early initiation into English, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has recently rolled out the programme 'Strengthening and Universalisation of Quality and Access to Secondary Schools' (SUCCESS 2008-09), which saw an initial 6500 government schools transition to English medium instruction, in addition to the already available Telugu medium of instruction. The teaching of English in government primary schools has been questioned (National Focus Group 2006b) and the SUCCESS programme is currently being reviewed.

The growth of the private sector, and the use of English versus Telugu as the medium of instruction have important impacts on children's education trajectories and transition experiences, as will be discussed later in this paper (see also Pinnock 2009). The growth of residential hostels

is another feature of the education system in Andhra Pradesh, as in the rest of India. These boarding hostels provide an opportunity for children to live away from home in order to pursue their education, including young children entering primary schools. The government provides hostels for specific disadvantaged groups of children, such as for children from the SCs, STs and BCs. Admission to government hostels is limited to children from those particular castes and is competitive – long waiting lists for admission are not uncommon. There are also separate hostels for girls and boys. The entire expenditure for children admitted into these hostels is borne by the government.<sup>4</sup> Children staying in a government hostel need not necessarily go to the same school, but they attend a government school. Private schools with hostel facilities generally locate their hostels within the school premises, and these hostels are an increasingly common part of children's early education transition experiences.

<sup>4</sup> Statement by Principal Secretary, School Education in Eenadu Newspaper, June 2008.

This overview of the school system in Andhra Pradesh draws attention to some of the key factors shaping children's transition experiences, notably the high (but not universal) attendance rates at pre-school and primary education, the co-existence of a very large private sector alongside the government schools, the trends in medium of instruction, and the function of boarding hostels. The consequence for children is that transitions can involve negotiating a series of diverging educational trajectories, with various key choice points encountered by families along the way. Identifying and tracking these trajectories became a major research focus for the *Young Lives* qualitative research team in Andhra Pradesh. The methods and initial findings are elaborated in the next chapter.

### **Young Lives in Andhra Pradesh**

As mentioned in the Introduction, *Young Lives* investigates the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries over 15 years, India being one of those countries (more specifically, the state of Andhra Pradesh). In order to do this, *Young Lives* is collecting longitudinal survey data on two cohorts of children: approximately 2000 children in each country born in 2000/1 (younger cohort) and 1000 children in each country born in 1994/5 (older cohort). The main focus of this paper is on the younger cohort children, who were first studied as babies in 2002 and again in 2006/7, around the

time they had been attending pre-school and were making the transition to primary school. Data on young children's experiences of early childhood services, their transition to school and associated views on quality and expectations for the future were gathered by using questionnaires completed by caregivers.<sup>5</sup> Data is also now available from surveys carried out in 2009, when these children were around 8 years old, and in most cases attending a government or private primary school.

*Young Lives'* large sample surveys have been complemented by in-depth qualitative studies in selected *Young Lives* sites, with the first and second rounds of qualitative research carried out in late 2007 and late 2008, respectively. The qualitative research in Andhra Pradesh is based on a sub-sample of 24 children from the younger cohort living in four communities: one urban (Polur), two rural (Katur and Poompuhar) and one tribal (Patna) (see Appendix 1 for further details).<sup>6</sup> This group of children were between the ages of 6 and 7 in 2007, and 7 and 8 years in 2008. The selection of communities and children for the qualitative study was based on criteria such as diversity of region (urban, rural, tribal) and caste (including SC/ST, BC), family situation (e.g. whether children were orphans or living with both or one parent, or other caregivers), whether children were attending school or not (for the older cohorts), whether children had

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<sup>5</sup> All questionnaires were verbally administered to caregivers in their native language by trained local interviewers and interpreters.

<sup>6</sup> All names of villages, children and caregivers have been changed to ensure anonymity of research participants.

attended pre-school or not, and type of school children attended (government or private).

The methods used in all of the four sites selected for qualitative research included: individual interviews and participatory group exercises with children (both older and younger cohorts); individual interviews and focus groups with caregivers and other key stakeholders such as teachers of pre-schools, primary schools and high schools, health workers and village heads (*sarpanch*); and semi-structured observations in home, school and community settings. In particular, this paper draws on data collected with children, caregivers and teachers, and observations made of *anganwadis* and primary schools in the sub-sample communities in Andhra Pradesh.

The next section summarises survey data for the full sample of 1950 *Young Lives*' younger cohort children in Andhra Pradesh. These findings relate to caregivers' reports on children's experiences of pre-school since age three, based on survey work carried out in 2006. We draw attention to major differences in use of government versus private pre-schools, especially associated with household poverty levels, and rural versus urban location. In the final section of the chapter we draw on the qualitative research to explore the factors shaping parents' decisions regarding their children's education.

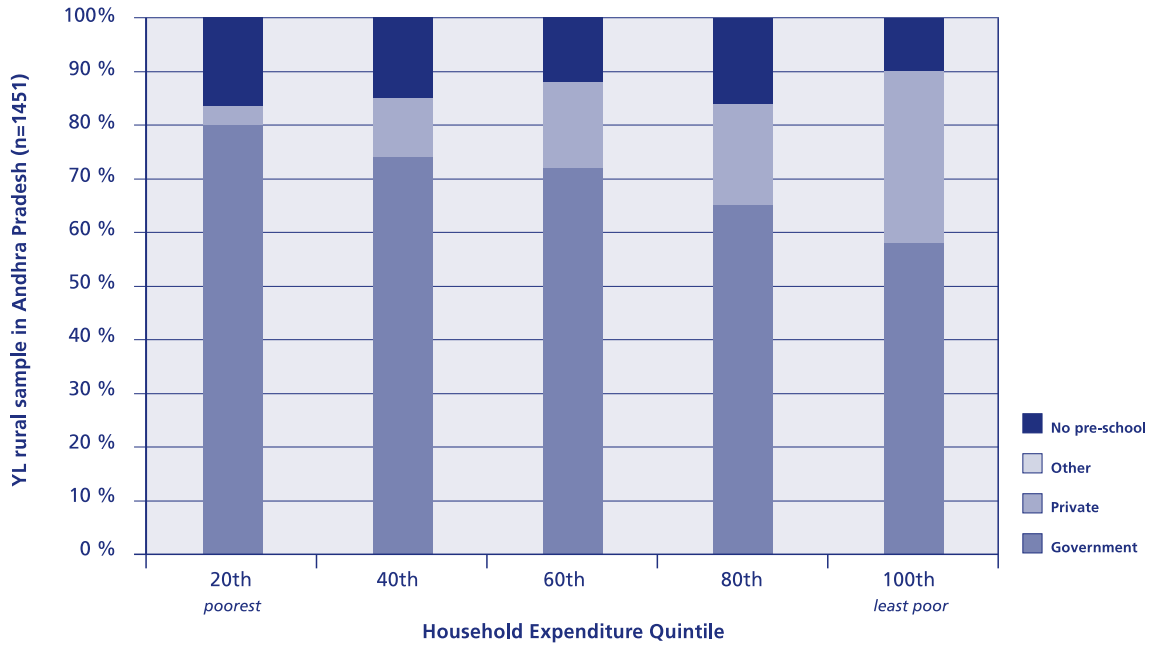
## Opportunities and inequities in early education

In Andhra Pradesh, 87 percent of the younger cohort children were reported by their caregivers as having attended a pre-school of some kind, at some time since the age of three. Attendance rates are equally high for boys and girls (87.7 percent and 87 percent, respectively), and for rural and urban samples (86 percent and 90 percent, respectively). Sixty-six percent of the younger cohort attended government pre-school, while around 34 percent opted for the private sector, showing a similar trend to state level data presented earlier. Although these results suggest high pre-school attendance rates in Andhra Pradesh, a more detailed analysis of patterns of access carried out by Woodhead et al 2009, and presented in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, shows important links between poverty levels (measured by per capita household expenditure data) and type of pre-school attended, in both urban and rural sites.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 2.1 highlights the dominance of government provision (mainly ICDS *anganwadis*) for children in rural communities, especially for the poorest households. It is only for certain more advantaged groups that private pre-schools are a significant option, accounting for 31 percent of the children in the 'least poor' group. Parents have many more choices of pre-school in urban

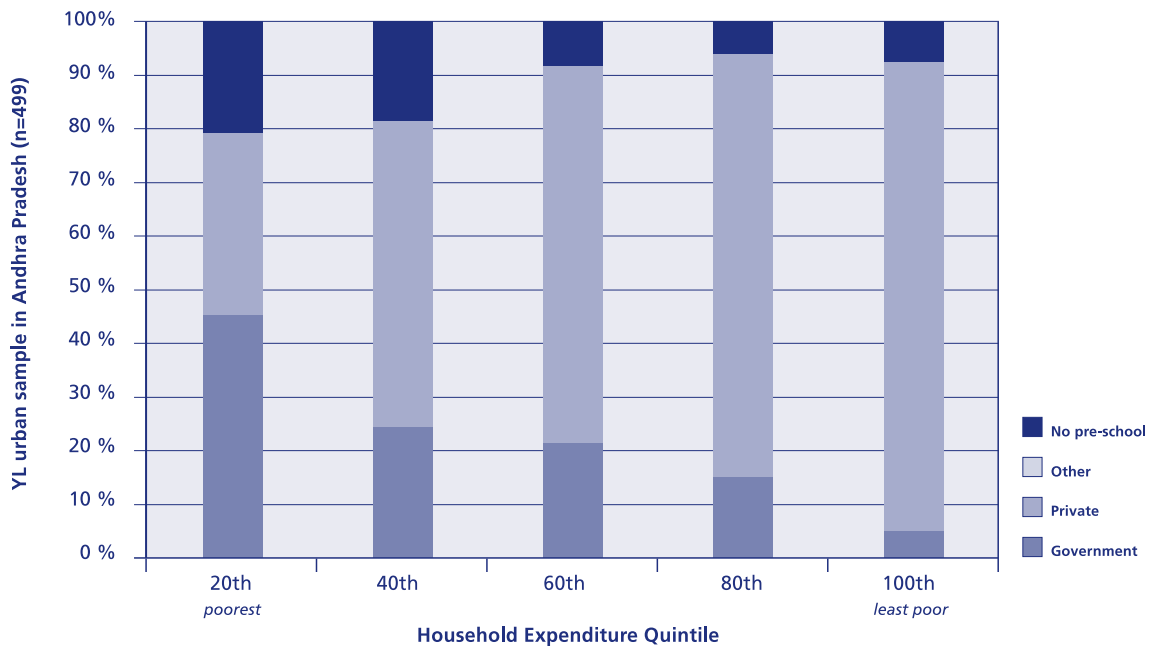
<sup>7</sup> The 'Expenditure Index' is based on data from *Young Lives* surveys of individual households and calculated as the sum of the estimated value (approximated to the past 30 days i.e., a month), of food (bought + home grown + gifts/transfers) and non-food (excluding durables such as furniture, gold jewellery and one-off expenditures). The sample is then divided into five quintiles (groups of equal size) according to per capita household expenditure.

Figure 2.1 Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – rural sample in Andhra Pradesh



Source: Young Lives 2006 Survey Data for the Younger Cohort

Figure 2.2 Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels – urban sample in Andhra Pradesh



Source: Young Lives 2006 Survey Data for the Younger Cohort



communities (Figure 2.2), and the private sector plays a very significant role. Not surprisingly, poverty levels are strongly predictive of whether children attend a government pre-school or opt for private education. Private pre-schools account for 78 percent of children in the 4<sup>th</sup> expenditure quintile and 88 percent of children in the 5<sup>th</sup> expenditure quintile (the least poor groups), with only 16 percent and five percent of children from these groups, respectively, attending government pre-school. By contrast, only 34 percent of the ‘poorest’ urban group attend a private pre-school, while more than 46 percent of ‘poorest’ children attend government pre-schools (Woodhead et al. 2009). Overall, the urban-rural contrast is quite striking. While private pre-schools have become the dominant ECCE choice in urban areas, for all except the poorest 20 percent of households, government services are still dominant in rural areas, across all poverty levels.

*Young Lives* survey data has also identified a trend for parents to move their children into private sector kindergartens and away from government *anganwadis* under the ICDS programme. In Andhra Pradesh, 123 caregivers (out of the 2011 interviewed) reported that their child had attended more than one pre-school since the age of three. In the great majority (101) of these cases the caregiver reported the child had been moved from a government *anganwadi* to a private kindergarten. While gender did not appear to be a significant factor shaping access at this early stage in children’s school careers, analysis of choices for private versus government pre-schools reveals more subtle

differentiation. Overall, girls are more likely to be educated within the government sector and expected to leave school earlier than their brothers, as further discussed in Chapter 4.

Another interesting finding is that *Young Lives* parents in Andhra Pradesh were generally keen to enrol their child into school from a young age. A surprising 44 percent of children were reported to have started school in 2006, even though only 20 percent of the sample had, at the time, reached five years of age – the age at which children in Andhra Pradesh formally become eligible to enrol in primary education. The poorest households were most likely to have enrolled their children early into primary school – with 54 percent already attending primary school compared to only 33 percent of the less poor households (Galab et al. 2008). In part this reflects the practice of earlier admission to government schools, whereas children in the private sector would still be in kindergarten at this age. As discussed in the next chapter the attraction, for the poorest families, is likely to be shaped by the lack of suitable childcare for young children and by the provision of free midday meals in government schools, among other things (See Drèze and Goyal 2003).

### **Perspectives on early childhood care and education**

A more detailed insight into the educational choices being made by *Young Lives* parents, as well as the constraints on these choices, comes from qualitative research carried with a smaller sub-sample of households, as described earlier in this chapter. Our research confirms that in

many rural and tribal areas, *anganwadis* are the only local pre-school option available. Interviews with rural parents revealed that they were satisfied with *anganwadis* as a place where their children can go to when they are away in the fields, and that the children's readiness for starting school is enhanced. As one caregiver explained, "... if the children are in the home, they will become dull, so by joining them in the pre-school [*anganwadi*], they will develop intelligence ....yes, it would become a habit."

A minority of parents in rural areas were less satisfied with the *anganwadi* option, especially when comparisons were made with the quality of formal teaching and learning offered in the kindergartens of private schools, which were more available in urban areas. Particularly, caregivers were concerned about the irregularity in the functioning of the *anganwadis*, the frequent staff absence, delay in supply of the nutrition supplement and lack of an academic/formal teaching focus – all of which were seen to contribute to the poor quality of the *anganwadis*. As a result, rural and tribal children had a less satisfactory experience of early education and care than their urban counterparts, although as mentioned earlier, the quality of provision within urban government *anganwadis* is also very limited in many cases. It is important to mention here that one of the main (or sole) benefits of *anganwadis* perceived by most poor families is that they offer children a free meal. Indeed, *anganwadis* are often referred to as 'Khitchdi Centres' (*pindi badi*) or 'broth centres' and many children only come to the centres to collect their daily meal, with no provision

for early learning. This is due to the fact that a large majority of *anganwadi* workers receive little or no formal training on developmentally appropriate activities for pre-schoolers, and also because *anganwadis* function with low resources and minimal government supervision.

These quality concerns were expressed by parents and children, and are reported in greater detail in the next chapter. Additionally as part of the 2007 fieldwork, semi-structured observations were carried out in eight *anganwadis*. These confirmed poor quality physical structures as *anganwadis* were variously located in small rented rooms, old government buildings and private homes. In six of the eight *anganwadis* observed, play and learning materials were either absent altogether, or kept locked up by *anganwadi* workers at the centre or in their private homes because they were considered too precious to allow the children to use. Moreover, the quality of *anganwadis* was found to be highly dependent on the skills and commitment of the individual *anganwadi* worker who, along with the designated *anganwadi* helper (or *ayah/ayamma*), is responsible for most aspects of service enrolment and delivery. Most *anganwadi* workers covered in this study received little formal training on child development and early education, and about half of them were engaged in a second job in order to supplement their meagre income, which reduced their time and commitment to their *anganwadis*' children. All these data suggest that in practice many *anganwadis* do not meet the minimum standards set out in The Minimum Specifications for Pre School (a suggestive guide, developed by

the National Council for Educational Research and Training NCERT 1996, and which serves as a guideline for policy-makers for laying down basic norms and specifications for ECCE).

In response to some of these issues, as we have seen, most parents with resources to do so, choose to enrol their children in private schools, which accept children as young as three years into lower kindergarten classes from which they progress to upper kindergarten classes (LKG/UKG). Even some of the poorest families interviewed did manage to make the shift from *anganwadi* to private pre-school, as Figures 2.1 and 2.2 make clear.

By contrast with parents' and children's views, primary school teachers working in the government school system were mostly more positive about the potential contribution of *anganwadis* in facilitating children's transitions to primary schools. Several primary school teachers observed that children who attended any kind of pre-school, including *anganwadis*, adjusted better to their new primary school environments and

were also quick to perform well, including reading and writing, and numerical skills.

The overall findings from *Young Lives* research, however, offer a less optimistic picture of the current state of the ICDS programme, at least in the communities we studied, within the state of Andhra Pradesh. We caution against assuming that these findings can be applied more generally within the state, much less to the whole country. Having said that, our in-depth research does appear to confirm the trends observed from the large sample survey data. The ICDS programme continues to play an important role in providing nutritional supplements and promoting general health and development amongst young children, and as general preparation for school. Many parents and teachers valued their child's attendance at *anganwadi* for these reasons, but it is also clear that expectations for early childhood are shifting towards much stronger emphasis on educational goals. Accordingly, the ICDS programme needs to be improved in many ways, especially its educational component, a conclusion also drawn by larger scale studies within India (CIRCUS 2006).



## Chapter 3: Pathways into primary education

In earlier chapters we have outlined the historical development of ECCE and primary education, with traditional government services increasingly competing for students with private sector schools and kindergarten classes, especially in urban areas. On the face of it, the consequence for parents is greater choice of pre-school and primary school, dependent on their ability to pay even the low fees demanded by many private education providers. Sometimes this can be a very hard choice, especially for families on low income and with several children to consider.

This chapter looks at issues of diversity, choice and inequity in ECCE and primary education from the children's point of view. We look at the diverse trajectories (or 'transition pathways') into school followed by a sub-sample of 24 young children, who were the focus of in-depth

qualitative research carried out during 2007 and 2008 (as outlined in Chapter 2). When fieldwork began with this sub-sample in 2007, all but one child was already enrolled in primary school. By 2008, 17 out of the 24 had progressed to Class 2, while six children were still in Class 1. The only child not in primary school was attending the kindergarten class at a private school.

Three major educational pathways were identified. Fourteen of the children in the sub-sample had made the conventional transition, from home to government pre-school, *anganwadi*, and then into local government primary school (Trajectory 1). The other ten children were attending private primary school, and they had arrived via two routes: from home direct to kindergarten class in private primary school (Trajectory 2); or from home to government pre-school (*anganwadi*), and then to private

*Table 3: Transition pathways for Young Lives children*

School Trajectory	Sub-sample(n=24)			Full sample (n=1950)		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
1. Government pre-school to government primary school	8	6	14	490 63.6 %	460 52.6%	950 57.7%
2. Private kindergarten to private primary school	2	4	6	273 35.4%	400 45.7%	673 40.9%
3. Government pre-school to private primary school	2	2	4	8 1.0%	15 1.7%	23 1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>1646</b>

Source: Data from in-depth qualitative study, 2007/08; and 2009 Survey Data for the Younger Cohort

primary school (Trajectory 3). Table 3 shows the distribution of children across these three pathways, including those participating in the in-depth qualitative study and the full younger cohort sample.

The next section describes these pathways into school in more detail.

### Trajectory 1: Government pre-school and primary school

Fourteen out of 24 children in our sub-sample experienced this pathway into school. They commonly attended *anganwadi* for a period of one to two years before being admitted into the local government primary school. But some families, rural families in particular, did not send their children to *anganwadi*. Rather, they sent their children straight to Class 1 in the local government school even before they reached official entry age, that is, five years old. Government schools do not normally admit children below the age of five years, but parents find creative solutions to obtaining education for their children as early as possible. In part, parents' actions are shaped by their perception that *anganwadis* are of low quality and do not provide adequate preparation for children's entry to primary school. For these reasons, many rural parents preferred to send their younger children along with their older siblings to primary school while they work in the fields, even if their child is not officially enrolled, and thus receives no formal education. For example **Manoj** from rural **Poompuhar** attended the *anganwadi* for about six months before being sent to the local government primary school

when he was just three or four years old. His caregivers preferred this arrangement to leaving him in the *anganwadi* because they believed he would learn more in the primary school. He was then formally enrolled into Class 1 when he was 5 years old.

A slightly higher number of girls than boys in our sub-sample fell into this trajectory, confirming the larger sample survey data reported earlier. Trajectory 1 was followed by more children (half or more from each community) from the rural and tribal sites when compared to the one urban site (two of the six children). In the latter, as we have seen, there are more ECCE options available to children and caregivers, within the vicinity and at a reasonable cost. Nine of the fourteen children within Trajectory 1 were from the poorest households in the sub-sample, that is, from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quintiles according to the monthly per capita household expenditure. These families reported carrying out daily wage labour, either in agriculture or construction work, as their main source of income. This concentration of children from the poorest rural families in Trajectory 1 confirms the survey data reported in Chapter 2 and suggests that government *anganwadis* and primary schools are seen as the only option for many of the poorest households, in view of their inability to meet the costs of private education.

Some children from less poor households also followed this Trajectory 1: three from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile and two from the 4<sup>th</sup> quintile (although none from the least poor quintile). In such

cases it seems it is the convenience provided by the local availability of the school that influences parents' decisions, rather than cost. As the children are still young, parents say they prefer their children to attend a local school that is considered 'good enough', rather than having children travel long distances to attend a private school. But some parents do try to move their children into private schools, although the costs can very quickly become prohibitive for some families, as the case of Shanmukha Priya in Box 3.1 highlights.

Shanmukha Priya's story highlights the important limitations that many parents from less resourced households face in their attempt to access quality education for their children. The

first challenge is managing the many contrasts between government *anganwadis* and formal primary schools when there is very little integration and coordination between the two sectors. This is a very widely recognised challenge for early childhood education, even within government systems (OECD 2001; Woodhead and Moss 2007), and is also a feature of *Young Lives* research in Peru (Ames et al. 2010). It is one of the reasons why more primary schools are now starting to provide pre-school services within their premises. A second challenge is the variable quality of government schools. We explain each of these challenges in turn.

### ***Bridging pre-school and primary education***

One of the biggest changes between pre-school

#### **Box 3.1: Poor-quality education for girls?**

When we first met **Shanmukha Priya** from rural Poompuhar in 2007 she was already in Class 1 at the local government primary school. She attended the government *anganwadi* located in her community for a year before starting school. On this first visit, Shanmukha Priya told us she liked being in school because she was learning to read and write the Telugu alphabets. However, she complained about teachers' use of corporal punishment and her mother was unhappy about the overall teaching quality at the school. In 2008, Shanmukha Priya's parents decided to enrol her in a private English medium school located in the nearest town, about 15kms from the village and considered to provide better education. However, after just five days in the private school Shanmukha Priya's parents had to move her back to the local government school, because they were not able to afford the tuition fees – which had been increased in the time since they decided to enrol their daughter at the private school. When we visited Shanmukha Priya again in 2008 she was already in Class 2 but not much had changed since the previous year: teaching quality was still perceived as low by her mother, and children still complained about physical maltreatment. As a way of dealing with their daughter's disappointment about the change of school, Shanmukha Priya's parents keep telling her that the private school wasn't a safe place for her. They even made up stories about children being mugged or molested on their way to the school, because they wanted their daughter to be happy in the local school and to be convinced that that was the best option for her.

and primary school education reported by children is the sudden change from a play-based to an instruction-based routine. Children and their caregivers in our sample reported children experiencing significant adjustments to the new and longer primary school schedules, physical discipline and punishment, including beating by teachers, and having to read and write a lot. Parents and children expressed mixed feelings about these changes and about their new schools in general. For example, in an interview with Shanmukha Priya's mother, she describes the difficulties her daughter experienced in her transition from *anganwadi* to primary school:

SHANMUKHA PRIYA'S MOTHER – It was difficult for her, she experienced problems. She used to say that, “sirs beat” and she felt troubled. We used to tell her some comforting stories and send her to school. She used to go crying and never happily because she did not like to go.

YL – Why did she feel like that?

SHANMUKHA PRIYA'S MOTHER – I think it's because she had a joyful learning in *anganwadi*, but all of a sudden she was in a regular school. It is for longer period in the school. The teachers make her sit in the school. It was relaxed there in the *anganwadi*, but here it is studying and writing. She can't sit at one place for long as she is so used to moving around. They make her sit here, in the classroom...

Source: Caregivers' interview, Poompuhar, 2007

Similar experiences were reported by Rahul, a boy from rural Katur. According to his mother, he used to cry a lot because he did not want to

go to school. It was difficult for her son to adapt to the new routine and academic demands of primary school, especially when compared to his time in the local *anganwadi*.

RAHUL'S MOTHER – He was scared of Sirs [teachers] so he used to write whatever he learned. In *anganwadi* he used to eat and play and at that he was fine. Now he has become a little weak [meaning not being very healthy/strong]

YL – Really, how come?

RAHUL'S MOTHER – He is much worried about how to write. He cannot play. He has to spend all his time in school and writing. He is always worried about that.

YL – Did it start now? [...] Since he started first class?

RAHUL'S MOTHER – Yes [...] He was healthy before. For him going to school makes him worried. Now he turned 'lean'. That time he was good, that is, while going to *anganwadi* school [...]

Source: Caregiver's interview, Katur, 2007

In response to a lack of coordination between school systems, some parents and children in our sample developed strategies to make a smoother transition to school. For example, Rahul's mother stayed with him at school until he got used to the new setting and routine. She also talked to his teachers and asked them not to use physical punishment with him. Despite his mother's efforts, Rahul could not achieve the expected level of performance when he completed Class 1, and his teachers recommended that he stay for another year to improve his



reading and writing skills before being promoted to Class 2.

Shanmukha Priya also had an interesting way of managing her transition from pre-school to primary school. Even while attending primary school she used to go and visit her previous *anganwadi* every afternoon. There, she collected the nutritional supplement and played with other children. Interviews with the *anganwadi* workers suggest that several children admitted into primary school within the community often visit the *anganwadi* during the first few months of their admission into Class 1.

As the above cases demonstrate, children's transitions from a local pre-school to a local primary school can imply significant adjustments, resulting in mixed feelings toward the new school and various coping mechanisms. This transition is not experienced as merely a physical move from one institution to another, even if these are both familiar settings located in the same community. Rather, the different approaches to, and content of, education in pre-schools and primary schools are important factors affecting children's transitions. In particular, coping with a strict teaching regime and the threat of physical punishment, the classroom routine and longer days of formal schooling, as well as learning new skills such as reading and writing are experienced by children as major challenges, in particular by children who are first generation learners in their families.

### ***Variable quality of education***

A second challenge faced by most children

within Trajectory 1 is in relation to the quality of education provided in both government *anganwadis* and primary schools. Parents in our sample complained about schools' poor infrastructure including leaking roofs, shortage of classrooms and lack of chairs or space for children to sit on. Children also pointed out the shortage of learning materials such as exercise books, slates and blackboards, and play materials inside and outside the classroom. More importantly, parents within this trajectory complained about the quality of teaching in government primary schools as well as in *anganwadis*. Teachers are neither well trained nor well paid, according to children's parents, and as a result they do not show enough interest in children's needs and progress in learning. An interview with Shanmukha Priya's mother in 2007 reinforces the fact that parents may enrol their children in the local government school despite being dissatisfied with the quality, because they have no other alternative:

YL – What do you think about Shanmukha Priya's education? Is she regularly going to school?

SHANMUKHA PRIYA'S MOTHER – She goes regularly, the day she goes to school they don't teach on that day. We go to school and drop her there, after lunch they play as they wish in the school. Sirs [teachers] don't teach well, hence they play the whole day, but this is the only school in this village.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2007*

When re-interviewed in 2008, Shanmukha Priya's mother's views on the quality of the local

school had not changed at all. In the following quote she explains what she feels about the local school and why some parents, who have the opportunity to do so, decide to enrol their children in a private school instead.

SHANMUKHA PRIYA'S MOTHER – [children] won't become smart and clever because they are not taught properly here. So [parents] enrol them there [private school], not bothering about money. It's just for the sake of children. They want them to grow [...]

YL – You say that they don't teach properly in school?

SHANMUKHA PRIYA'S MOTHER – In school they teach half of it only [she means half the content in the books]. How will children become quick in school? They don't care about children. What can we do? We have a lot of work at home. Where is the time to teach them? They come to school for the purpose of providing education; they don't do their job properly.

YL – Is the school not functioning properly?

SHANMUKHA PRIYA'S MOTHER – No, if the school is doing well, our children would become clever [...] and teachers would come. But they always chitchat with their colleagues. Children don't have respect for teachers, and teachers will hit them and ask them to read and write. They never ask children if they miss school.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2008*

Manoj is also from rural Poompuhar and was attending Class 2 along with Shanmukha Priya

when they and their parents were interviewed in 2008. Manoj and his mother also pointed out the low quality education provided at their local government school.

YL – What do they teach at school?

MANOJ – Nothing [...] I had food. [...] They don't teach us anything, they ask us to write [...]

YL – Are there chairs where you can sit? Do you sit on chairs or..?

MANOJ – We sit on the floor.

YL – Don't you have chairs?

MANOJ – No [...] Sirs [teachers] have them.

*Source: Child's Interview, Poompuhar, 2008*

YL – How are things at school related to studies?

MANOJ'S MOTHER – There is nothing at all in the school except for the board.

YL – What about sitting arrangements?

MANOJ'S MOTHER – They sit down, on the floor [...] There, they don't teach at all, he simply goes, sits there and comes back home.

*Source: Caregiver's Interview, Poompuhar, 2008*

The cases presented in this section confirmed that even though most parents have high expectations for their children's education (see also Woodhead et al. 2009), the challenge facing poor, rural families is that their children cannot access appropriate and meaningful education if government schools are low quality and private schools are unaffordable. Consequently, their hopes for their children to use education as a springboard out of poverty are frustrated.

In short, many of the children within this trajectory seem to already be experiencing what Lewin (2007) defined as a ‘silent exclusion’, in which children can access school but cannot take full advantage of their right to quality education. These children may be formally enrolled in school but may be silently excluded when their attendance is irregular, their achievement low or when they experience discrimination of any kind.

### **Trajectory 2: Private pre-school and primary school**

When we first visited the qualitative sub-sample in 2007, the six children in this trajectory had already begun private school, enrolled into kindergarten class before the age of five. Most private schools offer early entry, where children attend half day LKG before transferring to UKG and later transferring into Class 1. Technically speaking, these children were in pre-school during their LKG and UKG years, as they were attending a school between 3 and 5 years of age. However, experientially, these children have already been incorporated into the 12-year formal school system, rather than having a separate pre-school experience, and they are exposed to formal instruction from the beginning in a larger school environment, which is in marked contrast to the experience in *anganwadis*.

Four out of the six children going straight from home into a private school are from Polur, the urban community. One child from rural Katur and another from tribal Patna also entered private primary school straight from

home. Not surprisingly, children attending fee-paying private schools generally come from the relatively better-off households in the sample, although there are exceptions, where even the very poorest make sacrifices to send at least one of their children to private school as in the case of Dilshad, described in Box 3.2 (see also Figs 2.1 and 2.2). As noted earlier, twice as many boys (four) than girls (two) fall into this trajectory, which highlights the significance of gender in shaping school choices (see also Chapter 4).

Dilshad’s case is one of an increasing number of poor and lower middle-class families in India who are turning to ‘budget’ private schools to educate their children. The enormous variations in private school fees are enabling even the poorest households to send their children to such schools, especially in urban communities where these choices are increasingly being offered. This challenges the idea of poor people inevitably being passive subjects of education. In fact, many parents in *Young Lives*’ sub-sample are making strategic choices for their children’s educational trajectory, in which a number of different factors play a part. Most parents within Trajectory 2 have sufficient resources to pay private school fees, are able to take out loans, or rely on other relatives who can give them financial support to cover schooling costs. These parents are also influenced by factors such as the opportunities private schools offer for earlier introduction to formal learning, perceived better quality of education and English as the medium of instruction. Each of these influences is discussed below.

### Box 3.2: Strategic choices for children's education

Dilshad lives in 'Polur', a Muslim community in the state capital Hyderabad. She is the only daughter and the youngest in the family, with seven older brothers who have all finished school. Her family is one of the poorest in the *Young Lives* sample. They live in a one room rented house with few utilities. Dilshad's father is a rickshaw puller and her mother works as a maid. None of her parents had formal education, but they are keen to support their child's education. Dilshad did not go to *anganwadi* but did briefly attend government primary school before her parents moved her to a private English medium school. According to her mother, "In government school they do not teach properly like in private school. Children are enrolled there in government school because of the food [supplementary nutrition programme]". Financing Dilshad's private school is very challenging. The school fees are around 110 rupees per month (equivalent to around £1.6) excluding other related costs such as books, school bag, uniform and pencils, etc. Her father only earns around 50 rupees per day, therefore the family relies on Dilshad's older brothers to cover her school fees. When Dilshad's mother was asked if they were comfortable paying the school fees, she responded:

**DILSHAD'S MOTHER** – That way, I feel that even if we have to forgo food for one time, we will do that in order to ensure that the children are educated. These days, education is very important.

YL – Why did you admit your child in this school?

**DILSHAD'S MOTHER** – See, she has four brothers who are working. If each pays some money, it will enable her to get good education. Afterwards, we will anyway shift her to the government school.

Dilshad's family has found a way of making all their children complete their education cycle despite their financial hardships. They believe that attending the best possible school in the first years is crucial to develop the foundations needed for the rest of their children's education. For this reason, they made all their children, including Dilshad, attend private school until Class 5. However, as the fees tend to increase as the child progresses in school, they transfer their children to government school for later stages of education.

**DILSHAD'S MOTHER** – Yes it will increase. Anyway, I will make her study in that school till Class 5 after which I will put her in the government school.

YL – Why?

**DILSHAD'S MOTHER** – Because I followed the same procedure for my other children also. In the government school, they will give the books and other things supplied by the government. This way my children were able to study till 10<sup>th</sup> standard.

Source: Caregiver's interview, Polur, 2008

**(i) Early Teaching**

Some parents in our sample expressed high expectations that obtaining an education would contribute to their children having a better quality of life than their own. To realise this, the parents favour sending children to private schools, and they expect formal teaching of basic skills to begin early, so that children are well prepared for their entry into primary classes. The mother of Aziz, a Muslim child from urban Polur, for example, considers it important to send her son to school as early as possible so that he learns well. The private school became the preferred option as there are no other ECCE alternatives available. Aziz's mother had enrolled him into school at the age of two-and-a-half years and at the time of the first round of data collection (2007) Aziz was already in Class 1. In response to being asked if it was necessary for children to start school that early, his mother said, "Yes. They will learn fast. Otherwise they will be at home." She also said that attending nursery, LKG and UKG before starting Class 1 helps children to "study properly in the first class".

In 2008, most children within Trajectory 2 were enrolled in Class 2. Interestingly, Aziz was the exception. He was required to repeat Class 1 because he had fallen behind in his schoolwork. His mother explained that Aziz studied with difficulty because he used to "sleep a lot in school", his mind "was very childish", was "only interested in playing" and therefore, could not "understand things quickly". This could be an indication of the risks involved in starting school too early as some children may not be

mentally, emotionally and physically ready for structured, academic learning. After spending another year in Class 1, Aziz is doing much better.

**(ii) English as Medium of Instruction**

English medium is another important factor influencing parents' decisions about the school they would like their child to attend. Most parents prefer their children to learn in English, because this is seen as a route to self-improvement and social mobility. Examples of the importance of English in children's lives are provided by Sahiti, the only child in our subsample in rural Katur attending private school, and Anitha, a 7 year-old girl from tribal Patna, who in 2008 was attending Class 1 in a private school after spending some time in the local government school.

Sahiti's mother not only talks of the importance of studying in English, but also takes pride in Sahiti's ability to speak in English, unlike many other children in the community. For her, the difference between government and private schools is that teachers in the latter "teach everything in English... They speak only in English". As discussed in the above sections, government schools have not traditionally offered English as the medium of instruction (less than 2 percent of government schools in Andhra Pradesh do so, as discussed in Chapter 1). In response to the growing demand for English language instruction, as evidenced by the above statements, the Government of Andhra Pradesh decided to introduce English medium in government schools via the SUCCESS pro-

gramme, although discussions are now being held as to whether or not to continue with the programme (see Chapter 1).

Even though English medium teaching is perceived by most parents as a positive opportunity, professional opinion generally favours mother-tongue teaching, especially during the early years (Pinnock, 2009). Anitha's mother appreciates that her daughter is learning English in school, and points out that Anitha's older sister always says that "[she] should learn English, otherwise [she] can't *shine* anywhere", but she also recognises her daughter's difficulties in learning English, which have necessitated after-school tuition, imposing an extra economic burden on the family. In contrast to Sahiti's and Anitha's families, other parents felt claims to teaching in English were a marketing ploy by private schools and did not reflect in children's learning. The mother of Srikanth, a boy from Patna explained:

SRIKANTH'S MOTHER – We are not finding any big difference between children in these schools [government] and those studying in English medium school. Only in the school name it is English medium but there is no use. After they come out of the school they forget everything and come back to the local language.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Patna, 2008*

It is important to bear in mind that many children in India have to learn different languages by the time they complete school. These could include: the regional language (Telugu in

Andhra Pradesh), Hindi and English, although this may differ depending on the type of school that the child is attending. This could be difficult for some children. For example, Srikanth's mother mentioned that due to the rapidly increasing number of children joining her son's private school, they are now learning in Telugu instead of English. The shift (as he moved from class one to two) has not been entirely positive for Srikanth as he found learning in Telugu even more difficult than Hindi and English.

SRIKANTH'S MOTHER – I don't know why he is poor in Telugu, but in English, Hindi, Maths he is okay and this time in Telugu he scored 19. In others he is okay. He scored good marks.

YL – How did he score in first standard?

SRIKANTH'S MOTHER – He got more good marks in first standard.

YL – Why this change?

SRIKANTH'S MOTHER – Don't know what happened, whether he is facing difficulty in understanding Telugu or he is not able to write. But anyhow, as he is going further in his classes he is not picking in Telugu, but is good in other subjects.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Patna, 2008*

The teaching and learning of English today depends very much on the diversity of schools, the teacher's English language proficiency and the exposure of pupils to English outside school, among other things (see National Focus Group 2006b). All of this will have important implications for children's transitions.

### (iii) *Better Quality Education*

Both children and parents generally consider private schools to be of better quality in terms of the attention paid to the children, regularity of the teachers' attendance, teaching methods and learning outcomes. Children described the better quality of private schools over that of government schools in terms of: better infrastructure, teaching methods and learning material, new and different resources like computers, and playgrounds with a variety of play equipment. Aziz, attending a private English medium school in urban Polur, talks of the "small chairs and long, long benches, carom board to play and the computer", which are available in his school. Likewise, Dilshad mentioned that her school has latrines, coloured charts hanging on the walls, blackboards and colour pencils. Such facilities were rarely observed in any government schools. Children who had been moved from school to school had a basis for comparison, and spoke of varying quality amongst private schools, and between private and government schools.

Another aspect of school quality that was highlighted in this research was the value caregivers associate with schools' monitoring of children's attendance. Likhitha is a girl enrolled in a private English medium school 30 kilometres from her rural home community, Poompuhar. She stays with her grandmother while attending this school. In explaining the factors for choosing this school, Likhitha's mother discusses the better quality of her current school when compared to the government school that she attended for a short period. Ensuring children's

attendance at school is an important factor that was valued by Likhitha's mother, and by many other caregivers. This is particularly true in rural communities where children often manage on their own while parents are at work.

YL – Why did you join her in a school which is so far off?

LIKHITHA'S MOTHER – She was not going to school regularly when she was here. We go for work and we do not know if she is going to the school or not. She keeps playing with the other children in the village. That's why we joined her there. Here, she did not go to the school. If we forced her she used to go one day, and be absent on the other day. The teachers also did not bother about this. She is not going regularly, so we sent there. This year only we enrolled her there.

YL – Here in this school how do they teach? Do you have any idea about how they teach in your village school?

LIKHITHA'S MOTHER – We don't know. At that time they did not teach properly. Sir does not come regularly. That's why we sent her there.

*Source: Caregiver's interview Poompuhar, 2007*

Being able to rely on teachers to turn up for school was also identified by Dilshad's mother as one of the benefits of private school.

YL – How is the teaching in the school?

DILSHAD'S MOTHER – Fine.

YL – Do teachers come regularly or irregularly?

DILSHAD'S MOTHER – They come regularly.

YL – Do they teach properly? Are the children able to understand?

DILSHAD'S MOTHER – They teach properly, they will not allow the children to go out. The children have to be in their respective classes.

*Source: Caregiver's interview Polur, 2007*

According to our observations (see Box 3.3), most government schools have relatively better physical structures and sufficient space for playgrounds, as compared to private schools.

This is true with regard to physical space and buildings, but furniture (tables, chairs and benches) and teaching and learning materials were observed to be better in private schools. Physical infrastructure appears to be traded for better teacher attendance and a more desirable curriculum and pedagogy in parents' minds. For better learning outcomes, parents and children are willing to make a compromise on the aspect of space and buildings and rate private schools better in terms of quality.

### **Box 3.3: Quality in government and private primary schools**

In 2008, as part of the second round of qualitative research, six primary schools were visited: three run by the government and three privately owned. The observational data revealed a substantial diversity in terms of location, infrastructure, teachers' training, language of instruction, provision of basic services such as water and electricity, and the availability of learning and playing materials for children. For example, in tribal Patna the Telugu medium government aided school is run under the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) scheme. It is located in a spacious venue and offers medium-sized classrooms where children can sit and work comfortably. Children sit on benches and have access to learning materials such as blackboards, notebooks and text books. The school also offers a library, a computer room, a large outdoor playground and the opportunity to take extra-curricular activities such as yoga, music, dance and arts.

In contrast, the government school located in rural Poempuhar has poorer infrastructure, inadequately equipped classrooms and a less conducive learning environment. It only has three classrooms for around 250 primary school children, who are under the supervision of just one government teacher and three volunteers. Due to lack of space and shortage of teachers, children from different classes are taught together in the 'veranda' instead of in a proper classroom. Children normally sit on the stone floor and there is no electricity in the classrooms. The predominant teaching style observed during fieldwork was that of the teacher giving instructions and children following them, without much interaction between the two. For example, teachers asked children to read specific passages of their text books while they continued working on their own activities. A similar situation was observed in Polur's government pri-



mary school where children were observed unattended while their teachers were outside the classroom chatting to each other. Overall, the classroom's environment was unstructured and noisy.

The evidence also showed a wide diversity in private schools' facilities, teaching approaches and management styles. Differences were particularly evident between private schools in rural areas and those in urban areas. For example, the school in urban Polur was the best resourced school observed during field-work. It is located in a pleasant spacious environment surrounded by green areas with trees and flowers. All classrooms were equipped with enough benches and desks for all children, and were adequately illuminated and ventilated. The school had adequate teaching and learning materials for all children, along with a range of indoor and outdoor play materials. In contrast, the linked hostel showed several shortcomings. It consisted of a single room where all 34 boys and girls ate and slept together. It did not have safe drinking water facilities, clothes were not properly washed, and the entire building, including kitchen and toilets, looked old, dusty and dirty.

The private school near rural Katur has spacious classrooms with proper ventilation and lighting, and offers computer lessons and English as the language of instruction. The school also provides local transport for children. However, during classroom observations teachers were seen carrying a stick in their hands so as to keep their students quiet. Similar to some government schools, the private school observed in Patna had no electricity, toilets, library or drinking water facility. Children had no chairs to sit on and there was no playground. Classrooms lacked good ventilation and lighting, and were extremely hot during the summer. Teachers were observed shouting to silence noisy children and have their lessons heard.

As discussed above, not all government schools are bad and not all private ones are good. In fact, a wide diversity exists not only between government and private schools but also within each of these groups. Children in *Young Lives* sub-samples gain entry into schools of varying types and standards, and by doing so, access very different educational opportunities based on their geographical location, ability to pay for schooling and other family factors, which are discussed in the following chapters.

### **Trajectory 3: Government pre-school to private primary school**

Children in Trajectory 3 face one of the most challenging trajectories, involving moving between government pre-schools and private primary schools in a different language medium (Telugu to English). In several cases transition to school also required them to leave their families and attend a hostel (boarding school), as early as just 6 or 7 years old, as illustrated by Vishnu's case (Box 3.4).

**Box 3.4: Negotiating multiple educational transitions**

Vishnu is a 7 year-old boy from rural Poompuhar who in 2008 was attending Class 1 in a private school. Despite his young age and short educational experience, Vishnu has already changed school three times. He first joined the government primary school in the village but his attendance was irregular. His parents, as well as others in the village, found it difficult to check their children's attendance in school because they spend all day working in the fields; they said that local teachers do not look after children properly and let them leave school and hang around the village by themselves. When asked about the quality of education in the local *anganwadi* and primary school their response was: "Ah, mediocre, not much is taught there [...] very little, few simple things like singing. Sometimes they play. Only to the extent that they can write something on the slate, nothing much [...] They don't teach well here, that is the reason we have to enrol him in that private school".

When we visited Vishnu in 2007 he was already attending a private boarding school in Yaravalli, along with ten other children from the same village. But when we came back in 2008, Vishnu had been shifted to a different private English medium school in the nearby town, about 30kms from his home village. His parents changed his school because the fees increased from Rs. 8500 to Rs. 12,500 (from around £125 to £184) while at the same time the food, accommodation and teaching quality diminished considerably. Now Vishnu stays in the hostel attached to the school and comes home only during school holidays. Initially Vishnu was not happy about the change. According to his mother he used to cry because he liked the previous school and did not want to leave his friends behind. But after some time, Vishnu started to like the new place and is making new friends.

Source: Caregivers' interviews, Poompuhar, 2007 and 2008

Three of the four children in this trajectory are from the same rural site Poompuhar. These children initially attended a government pre-school (*anganwadi*) in their home communities or went straight to the local government primary school for a couple of months before shifting into English language private schools. The criteria for parents' educational decision-making are similar to those discussed for Trajectory 2 namely English-medium instruction and overall perceived quality. Indeed, it

has been a recent practice in Poompuhar for parents to carefully manage children's early childhood transitions by first sending them to the local pre-school, which is easily accessible within the community, and once the children are considered familiar with going to school and therefore prepared for 'real' school, they are enrolled in private schools. As one parent described, "In our village the teachers are not good. We just send them [to *anganwadi*] so that they get used to the routine of going to school"

(Mother, rural Poompuhar). Revanth's mother talks of her decision to enrol him in a private school, which would require him to move to a hostel:

YL – Did you send the boy from *anganwadi* to primary school in the village?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – Yes, he went there. He went for a year then we sent him to a private school in Yerravalli.

YL – Why are you sending him there?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – Here they just teach normal. If he goes there (private school) and studies further he will become very wise. That is why we are sending him there. The teachers here are not teaching well.

YL – There you will have to spend more money, is that right?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – We are ready to spend. We want him to study well [...]

Source: Caregiver's interview Poompuhar, 2007

Interestingly, the children who first attend *anganwadis* and later private primary schools lose a year or two in their educational progress because the private schools require their initial enrolment in kindergarten, irrespective of their age. As these children have been through the Telugu medium government pre-school, private schools consider it necessary for these children to repeat LKG and UKG, which are taught in English. It is said that this prepares them for Class 1, as this class will be conducted in a new language, with a new syllabus and a new schedule, at a new place. As a result of this management of children's early education trajectories, children in this category experience multiple

transitions into primary education, arguably more so than children discussed in the previous two categories. They also lag behind by a class or two, when compared to their counterparts in Trajectory 1. In 2008 three children in Trajectory 3 were in Class 1 and one was just promoted to UKG. In contrast, most children in Trajectories 1 and 2 were already in Class 2. For example, even though Vishnu was almost five years old, he had to start at LKG in the private school which is generally meant for children aged 3 years. Similarly, in 2008 Revanth was 7 years old and was just being promoted to UKG. But these delays are seen as an acceptable trade-off as far as parents are concerned, as long as the children are in private English medium primary schools and, therefore, on (what they see as) the 'right' track.

While children in Trajectory 2 (home to private primary school) have gotten accustomed to the academic schedule at private schools right from the start of their school experience, those in Trajectory 3 face the situation for the first time after having experienced a relatively free schedule at the *anganwadi*. The long hours at their new private schools, with extra tuition provided as early as six in the morning and finishing as late as eight in the evening, with only small intermittent breaks for food and play, makes the first few months at the new school a potentially difficult period for young children. This heavy schedule, including hours of extra tuition, is one of the aspects of private schools most highly valued by children's caregivers, despite being contrary to accepted principles of what is developmentally appropriate for the age group.

Another challenge often experienced by children in this trajectory is frequent changes of school. Most – but by no means all – parents in this trajectory are in a relatively better economic situation than those in Trajectory 1 but they still face economic constraints. Given that private schools are profit-making and linked to changes in the local economy, they generally increase their fees every year, and also require higher fees as children progress through school. Increasing fees can force some parents to switch their child's schooling, either returning them to a government school or to a less expensive private option. The case of Vishnu (in Box 3.4) illustrates the impact on children's education, and his early friendships, as his mother explained:

VISHNU'S MOTHER – He felt bad madam, he cried saying I want to be with Harish (his friend from the local government primary school Vishnu briefly attended). But now he says this school is better (referring to the private English medium school he's currently enrolled].

YL – Now?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – He cried then because the school was new to him, he wanted to go back to the old school.

YL – Did he cry?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – He cried saying he cannot leave Harish and other friends. He wanted to be with them here. But we kept him there because we felt it is a better place for him. He too says this place is good for him.

Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2008

The cases presented above reveal the multiple transitions experienced by most children within Trajectory 3. Some of them have changed schools two or three times already, and others are likely to do so in the future. A similar pattern was found in the survey data from the older cohort of *Young Lives* children born in 1994/95 where nearly 40 percent reported that they had changed schools more than once, 22 percent at least twice and around 17 percent more than three times.

The younger group of children in the qualitative sample highlighted how they may lose learning continuity and lag behind other children of the same age when switching schools. Where children switch between government and private schools, and vice-versa, they have to cope with a switch in medium of instruction as well as differences in teaching and school ethos. They also emphasise how they have to leave old friends behind and make new ones, which was for some a daunting and stressful situation.

In the next chapter we discuss other issues experienced by children from the three trajectories. These issues include the significance of gender in shaping school choices, living away from home in order to attend school, balancing school with other everyday demands, and insights into children's experiences of violence in schools.

## Chapter 4: Choices and challenges in children's transitions to school

Previous chapters have explored the diversity in children's experiences of early transitions in Andhra Pradesh. While parents may find different solutions to the challenges of getting the best for their children, many of the choices and challenges are common across each of the trajectories described in Chapter 3. In this final chapter we highlight four themes:

- (i) *School choices and gender inequalities*: we explore parents' and caregivers' decision-making about the type of school and length of studies they can afford for their children, and how they distribute their resources, especially amongst boys and girls.
- (ii) *Living away from home*: we explore the experiences of children who have had to move away from their families to attend school.
- (iii) *Making the most of educational opportunities*: to what extent do children get the support they need (at home) to take advantage of school, and find the right balance between their education and other everyday demands?
- (iv) *Coping with violence in schools*: we discuss the use of corporal punishment and other types of harsh discipline used by teachers, as well as bullying by peers – one of the main challenges faced by children making transitions through school.

### School choices and gender inequalities

Earlier in this paper we discussed how parents face increasing choices of schools for their children, especially in urban centres. More and more children, both from urban and rural towns, are drawn to private education. This trend is confirmed when comparing the most recent (2009) school attendance data for *Young Lives*' younger and older cohorts. While around 24 percent of older cohort children attended private school when they were 8-9 years old (2002/03), the percentage of younger cohort children of the same age studying in the private sector increased by almost 20 percent in 2009 (see Table 4).

The case studies presented earlier suggest that the need to pay fees for their children to access what it is considered to be a better education (at private schools) is forcing some families to make hard choices about how much to invest in each of their children. Gender has been identified as one influential factor affecting children's school trajectories, with many families prepared to invest more in their sons' education and training than their daughters' (see Woodhead et al. 2009), and 2009 survey data confirm this. This evidence also suggests that gender differences have increased as private education has become more widespread (see Table 4). Nearly 50 percent of boys from the younger cohort were

attending private schools, compared with only 36 percent of girls. Conversely, girls were over-represented in government schools (62 percent) compared with 48 percent of boys. This gender difference was most marked amongst rural children, with a difference of around 16 percent in private school intake between boys and girls (39.2 percent versus 23.2 percent, respectively).

These gender differences were also found across the sub-sample of 24 children who took part in *Young Lives*' in-depth longitudinal study. For example, Revanth (case study boy in Trajectory 3) has two older sisters who are attending government school in his home village while

he is enrolled in a private school with hostel in a different city. Similarly, Shanmukha Priya's parents (Trajectory 1, Box 3.1) want to send her younger brother to private school even though they recently moved her back from private to government school due to an increase in the tuition fees. Spending on boys seems to be seen as an investment because it stays within the family, whereas girls get married and go to another family. According to a mother in Patna, in her community "...they treat sons to be high [...] because if girls marry they go away, but sons will look after [them], so they treat boys specially". This preference for sending boys to a private school is also shown in the following quotes:

*Table 4: Attendance data by type of school – younger and older cohorts*

<i>Younger cohort at the age of 8 (%)</i>							
		Urban			Rural		
	Full sample (n=1920)	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls
Government	54.6	18.1	16.5	20.0	66.9	59.3	75.5
Private	43.7	79.3	81.3	76.8	31.7	39.2	23.2
Other	0.9	2.5	2.3	2.7	0.3	0.4	0.3
Out of school	0.9	0.2	0.0	0.5	1.1	1.2	1.0
<i>Older cohort at the age of 8 (%)</i>							
		Urban			Rural		
	Full sample (n=976)	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls
Government	73.7	32.9	31.5	34.5	87.4	86.9	87.8
Private	23.7	63.8	64.6	63.0	10.1	11.1	9.3
Other	0.9	2.0	3.1	0.8	0.5	1.1	0.0
Out of school	1.7	1.2	0.8	1.7	1.9	0.9	2.9

Source: 2009 Survey Data for Younger and Older Cohort

YL – Will you get both of them educated equally? Or, are girls given less priority when it comes to education?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – We get them educated.

YL – Are the girls not sent for higher studies?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – When the girls grow up we need to cut down their studies madam.

YL – Why?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – In remote villages there are not many colleges madam.

YL – Do you send the boys anywhere? To any college?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – Boys can get on anywhere, isn't it madam?

YL – Is it the same with everyone in the village?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – Yes it is the same. Here the girls are not allowed to go to other villages. There are classes up to 10<sup>th</sup> here.

YL – What is the reason?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – There is no particular reason. Everyone feels that. Getting the girls educated in other villages is of less importance.

YL – What about boys?

VISHNU'S MOTHER – Boys get better education.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2008*

YL – Why, but you are making boys to study far away in a boys hostel, then why not for girls?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – We are making girls study here, we cannot arrange for money for all of them [...]

YL – Why are you making the boys to stay in hostel and educating them?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – Everyone does that; boys are given more education than girls.

YL – Why so?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – If boys are given education, we get something in future. But what can we get from girls? In villages girls are given limited study only. Girls are given education up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard and then stop them.

YL – How long will you give education to Revanth?

REVANTH'S MOTHER – It's his wish, if he wants to continue, we will further help him in studying.

YL – How about girls then? [...]

REVANTH'S MOTHER – No never, no girl is sent [...] They are just allowed to study up to 10<sup>th</sup> because we have school up to 10<sup>th</sup> in our village only. And later girls are not sent anywhere else. Everybody has done the same.

YL – So girls are not sent for this reason [...]

REVANTH'S MOTHER – Yes, we know that this is gross injustice. It is, but, what can we do? It will be difficult for money if it has to happen for all.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2008*

Another factor that may influence parental decisions about schooling is the child's own performance and the expectations that parents have for him or her. Throughout the interviews most parents made it evident that they make comparisons between their children and form ideas about their present and future performance in school. The level of investment depends on these expectations. As explained by Dilshad's mother (Trajectory 2, Box 3.2), some parents

may decide to invest more at a given point of their children's lives than at another. They may value the first years of education more and therefore invest in private education, or they may feel that later stages of education are the most important part and save money for that time. Also, interviews with parents revealed that the financial burden is higher as children progress in school, because tuition fees increase year on year, as well as grade by grade.

Child's birth order within the family is also an important factor. The more young children and school-going siblings a family has, the more difficult it is for parents to send all their children to school and provide them with the best opportunities. For example, if the child is the only one attending school and has older siblings already in the labour market, his or her chances of attending a better school and completing the education cycle may be higher, as the case of Dilshad whose older brothers help with school costs.

### Living away from home

One of the most distinctive features of children's early transition experiences in Andhra Pradesh is that it can involve moving away from family. The accounts in Chapter 3 of children experiencing Trajectories 2 and 3 drew attention to the choices faced by parents when preferred school options are located a long distance from their home communities, making daily commuting impractical. As a result, children are placed in

boarding hostels linked to the schools, or sent to live with relatives in villages close to the chosen school. The impact on children is that in addition to adjusting to a new school, including a demanding curriculum, most often in a different language medium, children in these trajectories also have to cope with new living arrangements.

In 2008, five children in our sub-sample were by the age of 7 years already living away from their family's home in order to attend school: Revanth, Vishnu and Likhitha from rural Poompuhar (Trajectory 3); Sahiti from rural Katur (Trajectory 2); and Chandani from tribal Patna (Trajectory 1). Most were attending private schools and staying in hostels linked to the schools. The exceptions were Likhitha who stayed with her grandmother in a town close to her private school, and Chandani who was attending a school cum hostel run by the ITDA.<sup>8</sup>

All five children were attending what they and their parents considered a better school than the ones available in their villages. Most children and parents were content with the schools' infrastructure as well as with the quality of education and general care of their children. However, parents and children were also aware of the challenges involved in living away from home. For example, Vishnu's father describes how difficult it was for his child to stay in the hostel and live apart from his family even when Vishnu liked the school very much:

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<sup>8</sup> *The Integrated Tribal Development Agency is a government body, established especially for the development of the tribal population and functions in areas populated by tribal groups. The body assumes responsibility for the overall development of the tribal population.*



YL – Did he cry after going there (hostel) from here?

VISHNU'S FATHER – He did cry.

YL – Did he get adjusted there?

VISHNU'S FATHER – It took one week for him to adjust. Whenever I go, he would cry always, on every visit of mine.

YL – Does he say that he would come back?

VISHNU'S FATHER – He would cry, but he likes it (the hostel). He cries when I go there.

*Source: Caregivers' interview, Poompuhar, 2007*

Similarly, Likhitha's mother explained how her daughter felt about leaving the family home to live in a different town with her grandmother:

YL – How did she feel? Did she feel nervous?

LIKHITHA'S MOTHER – Yes she felt nervous. She cried for 3 to 4 days. Daily my mother used to go with her and leave her in the school. Now she is habituated.

YL – Did she cry for you? For staying without you?

LIKHITHA'S MOTHER – She cried but we did not go for one month.

YL – She cried to come with you?

LIKHITHA'S MOTHER – Yes.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2007*

Sometimes, it is the hostel/school itself that discourages parents from visiting their children very often. Such visits are viewed as distractions to school work and thought to increase their wish to go back home. For example, according to Chandani's father the headmaster of her daughter's school told him, "If you come each hour, they will concentrate on you, so don't

come, we will take care". Consequently, he decided not to come to the hostel to see his seven year old daughter for almost 5 months! In other cases, parents do not visit their children because it is difficult for them to take a day off work, pay the costs for transportation or due to other reasons, as explained by Vishnu's mother. According to her, it is the father who visits the child in the hostel while she stays in the village. She does not come to visit Vishnu because she needs to work in the village and take care of the family and the house. Also, she said, "A lady alone cannot go there. We are not going because both of us cannot go on the same day and leave work here. The men can go all by themselves, so they go. Fathers of the children go there that's why." (Source: caregivers' interview, 2007). In the case of Revanth, his mother explained how they did not visit the child for almost a year because his father could not leave work.

As well as coping with long term separation from families at a relatively young age, children's new living arrangements often require them to learn to look after themselves, (e.g. personal grooming, looking after clothes, keeping track of books), although staff are on hand to help them with the grooming process and getting ready for school. Often children in hostels or staying with other relatives are introduced to new food habits as well. This might incur negative or positive responses. Vishnu, for example, talked of the variety of foods that he enjoys at the hostel, which are not generally prepared at his home. His mother mentioned that Vishnu asks for similar food when he comes home during school holiday. In contrast, some fami-

lies and children complain about the care provided for their children. For example, Chandani and her parents reported that she experienced serious problems with her hair and scalp due to inadequate hygiene and grooming. In Chandani's father own words "She cannot comb, if she asks anyone they will say *we have no time*". (Source: Caregiver's interview, 2008). As a result, Chandani had her hair shaved in the school.

Another downside of living away from the family home is children's eventual disconnection from their communities and environment. At least two out of the five children found it difficult to renew friendships with other children in their villages when they visit their families during vacations, although they had played together before moving away. These children were described by their parents as staying at home, playing only with their siblings and avoiding contact with other children in the neighbourhood. Further research into this area could be valuable so as to explore the extent to which living apart from their families, communities and environments, and learning a new foreign language, impacts on the development of children's identities.

Two of the five children who were living away from home described how after the first few weeks at the new school and hostel, they started liking the school because of the quality of care and education that the teachers provide them, the facilities that are available and the variety of food that is provided. Children described being fascinated by access to various facilities that are not available in their home environments,

like having a bed of their own and using flush toilets. It is worthwhile to recognise that it is not just children but also their caregivers who must learn to live apart from each other.

This account underscores that children's educational transitions are not experienced in a 'vacuum'; they are shared experiences that involve - and impact on - a host of actors, including children, their families, friends and teachers (Vogler et al. 2008). The account above also illustrates transitions as *processes* of change, in that children who experience difficulties initially may eventually adapt and adjust to their new learning environments.

### **Making the most of educational opportunities**

Talking with children and their caregivers, it became clear that having access to school is not enough. Children's circumstances at home, and their expected roles and responsibilities are also crucial to their ability to take advantage of educational opportunities. Two main factors were identified amongst children in our sub-sample: the levels of support they get at home, and the type, amount and duration of other activities and responsibilities they undertake.

### **Support at home**

There appear to be a number of factors affecting the choice of a child's school; these include parental education, the child's household's economic status, and the availability of and access to education services. Based on information collected in the *Young Lives* household survey on literacy levels, we see that for caregivers par-

ticipating in the qualitative sub-study, mother's educational level may be a factor influencing decisions around school choice.

In most cases, children in our sample in Andhra Pradesh were the first generation in their families to attend school. Concerning Trajectory 1, it was found that ten of the fourteen mothers of children in this category were illiterate, while the most education any of the mothers had had was up to Class 10. Educational levels of fathers of children in this category are also relatively low with seven of the fourteen fathers reporting being illiterate. Only one father graduated secondary school while the others have studied up to Classes 6-9. The findings from our study are consistent with previous studies (Woodhead et al. 2009), which suggest that mothers' education (measured in years completed) is strongly predictive of preference for private versus government services, especially in urban areas.

Even though the majority of parents have high expectations about their children's education, most of them reported having difficulties in supporting their studies, and few felt able to become involved in their children's schooling. For example, we asked Manoj's mother the most basic question, "Which class is your son attending?". She replied:

MANOJ'S MOTHER – We don't know madam; we have never gone there nor made any enquiry. [...] He might be in second now. They don't teach them properly, make them sit idle, when we ask them they say, "you cannot take care of your children properly

where as we are completely looking after them here".

Similarly when we asked her about the quality of teaching, Manoj's mother said that she did not know what they teach because "they (the parents) are not educated". We also asked her about her son's homework:

YL – Does he study after he comes back home?

MANOJ'S MOTHER – No he doesn't study, madam. There is no one at home who can make him read and write [...] They don't study at home, we are not educated so what can we teach them?

YL – Do you feel that educated parents are better than illiterate parents as they can help their children in studies?

MANOJ'S MOTHER – Educated parents are better than uneducated ones like us, they help their children study well; we are quiet as we cannot do anything else.

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Poompuhar, 2008*

In these respects, children living in boarding hostels are in a stronger position because they have the support of their teachers and they spend more time doing schoolwork. Most of these children attend extra tuition before and after school, and have specific times for doing homework. Indeed, this is one of the reasons parents are happy to send their children to hostels. They feel their children are taken care of and can be supervised while doing their schoolwork.

However, the children themselves may feel overwhelmed by the pressure of such intensive school activities. For example, Likhitha (Trajectory 2) goes for one hour tuition at six o'clock in the morning, then she attends school until 4:30pm, and after finishing classes she goes for another tuition session until 8pm. In 2008, Likhitha said that she liked her school because she was learning a lot of new things, but she also made it clear that she did not like extra tuition because it was “too tiring”.

### Competing responsibilities

Another factor shaping children's progress within school is the extent to which they are required to balance their studies with other everyday demands, such as looking after their younger siblings, undertaking household chores or helping their parents in the fields or in the family-run business. Increasing responsibilities often coincide with starting school, as children become more capable and responsible, despite their young age (for the situation in Peru, see Ames et al. 2010).

Balancing school with other responsibilities was particularly challenging for children in Trajectory 1, who were attending government schools and also tend to be among the poorest in *Young Lives*' sample. For example, both Rahul and Manoj from Katur and Poompohar have to take their younger siblings to school with them because their parents do not want to leave them in the local *anganwadi*, nor take them to the fields. Likewise, Shanmukha Priya, from the same village, has to look after her baby brother

after school until her parents come back from the fields, which reduces her time for homework.

Apart from household chores, some children also help their parents in the fields. Tejaswini is from rural Poompohar. In 2008 Tejaswini was 7 years old and attending Class 2 in the local government primary school, but she also occasionally works with her parents. Her older sister (13 years old) hardly went to school at all and now works for wages in the cotton fields, so it will be interesting to follow on Tejaswini's educational path in order to find out if she managed to combine work and school.

In summary, children do not start school on an equal footing; far from it. Children living in rural areas and coming from the poorest households will most likely find it difficult to take full advantage of school because of the demands being made on them, and because their parents are least able to support their studies. Children attending private schools generally (though not exclusively) come from families with parents who are better educated, better able to support their studies and less likely to make other demands on their children's time. The priority attached to schooling is most strongly illustrated by children staying in boarding hostels where the greater part of their waking lives are dominated by school.

### Coping with violence in schools

Other factors affecting children's transitions to and through primary education are the different forms of violence experienced in school. Cor-

poral punishment was frequently reported as being part of daily life in private schools, as it is in government schools. The use of strong discipline in schools generates contrasting responses from parents and caregivers. On the one hand, lack of discipline in the classrooms was rated near the top of the list of problems in government schools, and was often referred to by parents as a positive reason for choosing private schools. Some parents approve of the use of corporal punishment in their children's schools as long as it is not too 'severe' and improves the learning environment of the classroom. For example, when asked about their expectations of a Class 1 teacher, Sahithi's mother responded: "Has to teach well, discipline children; she should teach well. Tell how to be good, treat all children equally, teach in such a way that they will answer spontaneously." Asked about the most important quality in a Class 1 teacher, Sahithi's mother continued: "Should teach well, she should make them disciplined, by beating them if they don't listen." (Source: Interview with Sahithi's mother, Katur).

On the other hand, some parents did complain about the use of physical punishment and considered it ineffective, as pointed out by Dilshad's mother: "They should teach good behaviour and should not talk in a bad way. They should treat children like their own and teach them in that way. Only then children will study and like the teacher. If they threaten the children, they will not learn" (Source: Caregiver's interview, 2007). Anwar's mother (Trajectory 2) also reported the use of physical punishment as a

major concern for her son in relation to the private school he is attending:

YL – What do children complain about the teachers?

ANWAR'S MOTHER – Teachers will beat. They beat with cane and scars will be there.

YL – Where do they beat, here?

ANWAR'S MOTHER – They beat them randomly. There are two teachers like that [...]

YL – And because of those teachers he is scared?

ANWAR'S MOTHER – Yes. Sometimes he gets fever. If he does not go then that teacher will beat. Even when he has fever he will be cautious to complete the home work, otherwise that teacher will beat...

*Source: Caregiver's interview, Polur, 2007*

Not surprisingly, children who were physically beaten by teachers described not liking it and for some it created fear towards their schools and their teachers. Aziz and Vishnu, mentioned above, for example, talked of their experiences in their private school where teachers use corporal punishment to discipline the children:

AZIZ – If being mischievous, they beat. While eating sitting down, if the food falls (in low tone). If the food falls, they tell us to pick up. 'It will fall on you, pick up,' they say. They say and beat badly. Again they beat.

*Source: Child's interview, Polur, 2007*

YL – What will she do if you answered wrong?

VISHNU – She hits us...if we shout and don't tell (the answer). If we answer then she won't hit.

YL – Is it good to hit or not?

VISHNU – No, they should not hit. We do learn; should not beat us.

YL – What happens if you are beaten?

VISHNU – It hurts us. We feel like crying.

*Source: Child's interview, Poompohar, 2008*

Chandani also reported that her teachers in the government school/hostel use corporal punishment as a way of disciplining children. When asked whether she has ever told her parents about being hit by her teachers she said no “because they beat me only when I don't study well”. Chandani also pointed to a different type of violence in school, that is, bullying and physical aggression by other students.

YL – Does anyone beat you here? I mean the children in school.

CHANDANI – Yes ma'am they beat.

YL – Who is that? [...]

CHANDANI – All of them ma'am.

YL – Do all of them beat you?

CHANDANI – Yes ma'am [...]

YL – Do they hit you hard?

CHANDANI – Yes ma'am.

YL – Where do they beat you?

CHANDANI – At school ma'am.

YL – Where do they hit you? On your feet, your back...? [...]

CHANDANI – On my legs, and they spank my back [...]

YL – Then why do they beat you my dear?

Do they beat you just like that?

CHANDANI – Yes ma'am [...]

They beat me when I am silent.

*Source: Child's interview, Patna, 2007*

What is clear from the cases above is that children are dealing with different types of violence within the school setting, no matter whether they are attending private or government school. These everyday experiences of violence have important implications on children's educational pathways and transitions. As stated by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, former independent expert for the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children: “Wherever it occurs, violence in schools has damaging consequences for both children and wider society. Children have to bear the pain and humiliation; it affects their learning, their personalities and their future prospects” (Plan 2008, p. 6).

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Earlier chapters reveal what might be regarded as both successes and challenges in early childhood education and transitions to primary school in Andhra Pradesh. On the positive side, 87 percent of the *Young Lives* cohort of children born in 2001/2 had attended some form of pre-school or kindergarten class before the start of formal primary school. Rates of pre-school participation are relatively similar among urban and rural children as well as among boys and girls, and even quite similar among children from the poorest and the more advantaged households. This appears to show basic equity of access to pre-school across the state of Andhra Pradesh. However, the variations in type and quality of the pre-schools and primary schools attended by children in rural and urban areas, and children from households of different economic statuses, are a cause for concern. For instance, the finding that 83 percent of children from the ‘least poor’ households in urban areas attended private pre-schools stands in stark contrast to the figure of 20 percent of children from the ‘poorest’ households (Chapter 2, Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Children of the poorest households mainly attend government pre-schools, and overwhelmingly so in the rural areas: about 80 percent of the poorest rural children attended government pre-schools as did 64 percent of the poorest urban children (Woodhead et al. 2009). This could be interpreted as a challenge if we consider that most children attending private school outperform children

from government schools (Kingdon 1994, 1996b; Tooley and Dixon 2003).

### **Diverse education pathways, unequal futures?**

There are multiple reasons for the different patterns of access discussed in this paper, related to what is available to parents and what is affordable, but also to parents’ priorities for children’s learning. We have emphasised that parents are ambitious and creative in their efforts to secure their children’s early education, even under the hardest of circumstances. Aspirations for educational success were shown to be generated early on for children, with decisions made in the first decade of children’s lives often envisioned as part of a longer educational trajectory. While some – and especially poor rural families – are putting their children in whatever local institutions they can afford, other caregivers are making enormous sacrifices in order to provide them with what they consider the best option available. Some families are sending pre-school-age children to stay with relatives where they can access better quality services; while others are making strategic – and often difficult – choices regarding which child attends which school (private or government) and for how long.

Our research has also identified the growing practice of sending very young children away from home, to boarding hostels linked to both



government and private schools. The reasons may be partly practical, because of the distance between children's homes and the school of choice. But for some parents, the opportunity for their children to move out of their community full time, into a residential situation with new and, they hope, positive influences, is seen as a first step towards a better (more highly educated) future than would be possible if they stayed within their village. Whatever the motives of parents, there is significant impact on children, from separation from familiar surroundings and coping with the demands of living in a hostel. While perceptions of relative quality between government and private schools certainly play a big part in parental decision-making, it would be a mistake to assume one provision is of overall higher quality in any objective sense. As discussed in earlier chapters, children and caregivers participating in this study have pointed to important variations in terms of education quality not only between private and government schools, but more importantly, within each of these categories. In general terms, government *anganwadis* and primary schools are considered by parents and children as low quality, or in the best of circumstances have been described as 'good enough' as a transition from or to private schools.

In drawing these conclusions, we also recognise that the 'private kindergarten' or 'private school' is an inadequate category for analytic and policy purposes, because of the diversity within the private sector. In the absence of an effective regulatory system, the way private schools function and the education they provide vary

according to location and the market they serve (in terms of parents' ability to pay fees).

What is clear is that the availability of choice to some parents (especially urban and better resourced parents) means that children embark on very diverging educational trajectories, right from the beginning of their schooling. At the very least, this should stimulate debate about what is lost and gained by children who attend these different private and government pre-schools, and their transition experiences within and between government and private sector schools. For example, how far does early education play a role in combating inter-generational transmission of poverty? To what extent do current arrangements for early childhood and primary school education exacerbate later-life inequities between boys and girls, rural and urban children, and the poorest and less poor children? The new Right to Education Act (2009) is intended in part to address these disparities. It remains to be seen whether local implementation will ensure genuine quality education for all.

### **Disparities in children's readiness for school**

It is widely recognised that children's experiences of their first transitions into schools significantly affect how they will navigate their future experiences of learning (Burrell and Bub 2000; Fabian and Dunlop 2002; Dunlop and Fabian 2003). *Young Lives* research has uncovered some relatively smooth transitions, whereby children and their parents do not report any difficulties in adjusting to their new



primary school environments; also uncovered are some difficult transitions in which children experienced shock, fear, unhappiness and confusion as a result of experiencing very different educational conditions in their new schools (and in some cases hostels) – including the requirement for long hours of concentration and receiving physical punishment from teachers. In particular our findings indicate important discrepancies in opinions concerning the quality of pre-schools and their relative efficacy in supporting children's readiness for primary schools.

*Anganwadis* have historically played a major role in supporting the health and development of millions of children through the ICDS programme. The programme still serves a valuable function in offering nutritional supplement for the poorest families. However, our research suggests that for most parents priorities have shifted, and the traditional functions of *anganwadis* are no longer seen as sufficient. In a competitive economic climate, and a fast growing economy, parents see the failure to specifically prepare children for school as a significant shortcoming of *anganwadis*. There is also the evidence that *anganwadi* workers and their helpers receive minimal support to carry out their jobs, often working without appropriate training and supervision, in inadequate spaces and for little pay. As a result there were mixed feelings from children and their families about their *anganwadi* experiences and the extent to which they help with transitions to school. This is no small matter with an estimated 10.2 million children (aged 3-6 years) in India under-

going their pre-school stage in *anganwadis* (Mohite and Bhatt 2008).

The *Young Lives* 2006/7 survey found that 44 percent of the study's younger cohort was already in primary school even though only 20 percent of this sample had reached the minimum entrance age of five. 51 percent of children from the poorest households were enrolled in primary school as compared to 31 percent of children from the richest households in the sample. This could indicate that families who cannot afford private schools employ this strategy to maximise their children's early exposure to formal schooling, which has the added attraction of the free midday meal. The trend among poorer households to send their children to primary school at an early age could also be interpreted as a need for these families to have access to more suitable daycare services for their young children while they go to work. This need among poor families – especially in rural areas – for daycare services, in addition to pre-school, has been already acknowledged by some authors who see it as a way to contribute to poverty alleviation in developing countries (see Penn 2004). Relatively better resourced families are also dispensing with *anganwadis* and directly enrolling their children in private primary schools at 5 years or earlier.

The choices made about pre-school placements by some caregivers reflect a concern with how children's early education experiences will ready them, or not, for their primary education. The few cases captured in the qualitative sub-study, of caregivers enrolling children in *anganwadis*

until they are deemed 'ready' for primary school, and then enrolling these children in private primary schools at a significant cost to their families, seem to demonstrate a deliberate attempt to manage children's transitions into primary education. However, the fact that a child is attending a private pre-school or primary school does not necessarily mean he or she would have a smoother transition through the early years of schooling.

As discussed through various case studies, the way in which private schools are being managed at the present time may also impose important challenges to children's early transitions. Some of these challenges include the early start in structured learning and a stronger emphasis on the development of reading, writing and numerical skills, over other important aspects of children's lives such as their social and emotional development. Most private kindergarten programmes are merely a downward extension of formal primary school teaching and expect children to display academic competencies, often in a second language, from a very early age. Due to the high demand for private education, private schools may teach in overcrowded classrooms. Also, most teachers in private schools have not received formal teacher training and therefore may lack knowledge and practice about best ways to work with young children. Finally, as private schools tend to increase their fees on a regular basis, children in our sample have shown how they may experience multiple – and sometimes fragmented – transitions during their young lives as they move between government and private schools, and sometimes between several private schools

as parents try to secure the best schooling for their child at fees that they can afford.

Responsibility for children's transition experiences are shared not only by the pre-school but also the primary school environments that children attend, and the variously weak and/or rigid regulative and governance structures that aggravate the challenges for children and families. Our research indicates that the challenge of early transitions is exacerbated in some primary schools by unfamiliar language of instruction, strict disciplinary measures and in some cases harsh repercussions for transgressions. Some issues are experienced by children no matter what type of school they are in, including strict school regimes, lack of age appropriate learning activities, and exposure to different levels of violence within the school setting.

The fact that it is usually poor rural children who are more prone to experiencing unsettling transitions into primary school seems to bode ill for early education serving its main purpose of encouraging future positive orientations to schooling. As the EFA Global Monitoring Report warns, while early childhood service coverage is certainly expanding, good quality services remain inaccessible to the most disadvantaged children of the poorest countries. Such inaccessibility of good quality early education services and experiences may perpetuate inequities further along children's educational trajectories (UNESCO 2008).

*Young Lives* cannot yet provide evidence on whether these early education and school transition experiences will affect long-term out-

comes, such as staying in school, performance, cognitive development, sociability, self-esteem and so on, but the study will continue to monitor and measure these outcomes, and be able to compare back to the early education experiences. But one thing is already clear: Children's transition into the early years of schooling is a dynamic process shaped by a number of factors including the child's and family's background as well as broader social structures such as gender, ethnicity, class, geography and socioeconomic status, among others. Even poor children and families have shown that they are active decision-makers in relation to education, trying to get access to the best options available. Even in the most constraining scenarios, families are constantly negotiating their children's present and future educational opportunities. As discussed in Chapter 4, some parents may have different expectations and therefore make different investments for different children, at different times in their lifespan, which may be the only way they have to provide them with better chances to attend and enjoy school.

If we ask "Are schools ready for children?" the answer is "not particularly well prepared for children"...on the contrary, they expect children to fit into the system and in some cases multiple school systems, requiring adjustment to different languages of instruction. School systems, whether from private or government sectors do little to make sure schools are ready for children. In the absence of reforms to school structures, governance, teacher training, curriculum, pedagogy and relationships with parents, many children will still face "interrupted"/ "discon-

tinuous" transitions, which may affect their performance and progression in school later on. If we turn the question around, and ask how far pre-school education helps make children "ready for school", the answer would appear to be – to some degree in general developmental terms, but much less in terms of activity based learning, cognitive skills or familiarity with basic school expectations. To conclude, pre-schools potentially play an important role in preparing children (and their families) for the transition to primary school, and primary schools play an important role in receiving them. In view of the complex, diverse and potentially divisive experiences of children and their families discussed in this paper, we suggest that policies and programmes be revisited and investments for early childhood education enhanced in such a way that is more equitable, taking into account children's and adult's perspectives and experiences of transitions to primary school, as well as targeting the most disadvantaged groups of children.

### **Smoothing transitions to and through school**

*Young Lives* findings highlight the urgent need for rejuvenating ICDS *anganwadis*, strengthening the quality in government schools, improving regulation of private primary schools, and developing a more integrated approach to ECCE and primary education as a sector serving children aged 0-8 years. It is important to emphasise that this report is based on research within the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh and our specific findings cannot be assumed to apply throughout India, or further afield. None-

theless, we believe many of the issues we have discussed for Andhra Pradesh resonate much more widely, especially within rapidly growing economies and education systems. We single out three major messages from the research.

### ***Strengthening and universalising ECCE programmes***

ICDS *anganwadis* have a proven positive impact on the survival, growth and development of young children. They are already reaching the most remote and impoverished areas of the country and, therefore, carry the potential of supporting the poorest children in their transitions to and through formal education. In order to achieve all this, however, the programme needs a lot of improvement. It should continue providing nutritional and health benefits, but also an improved and more solid early education programme.

The educational component within *anganwadis* should not become a downward extension of formal school, as is happening with many private pre-schools and kindergartens. *Anganwadis* should provide children with opportunities for developmentally appropriate social, cognitive and physical activities within an environment that is sensitive and responsive to children's different cultural, religious and language needs.

### ***Developing effective governance of the private sector, including through government-private partnerships***

A number of governments around the world, in developing countries in particular, are responding to the challenges of providing education

for all through creating opportunities for PPPs (Patrinos and Sosale 2007). While private education is becoming important for families in India as a way of providing their children with better opportunities in the future, a permissive 'free market' approach will not achieve equitable EFA goals. Specific government interventions are required to provide children and their families with equal and quality opportunities for education, beginning with effective registration, licensing and monitoring of all private providers, in tandem with quality development throughout the government sector, and significant levels of targeted funding. Careful policy design and implementation are needed for specific standards for school premises, training requirements for teachers, continuous monitoring of learning opportunities and progress, and the development of a joint curriculum framework, among other things. The RTE Act (2010) is a key first step towards this, but more needs to be done in order to build up ethical and sustainable PPPs (Srivastava 2010).

### ***Developing a holistic and integrated approach to children's early transition experiences***

ECCE needs to be acknowledged as a fundamental right, alongside basic education for children aged 6-14 years old as set out in the UN Committee on Rights of the Child General Comment 7. A more integrated approach to the full age range is required, extending into and working closely with the primary education sector in ways that ensure continuity in the curriculum, learning strategies and settings. ECCE demands multiple actions towards children in relation to their nutrition, health and educational welfare,

and for this reason requires the involvement of multiple sectors, programmes and actors. This calls for the development of an ECCE policy framework that provides continuity across different government bodies in the services provided to young children, and that is capable of capturing the complexities of these early years.

ECCE should be recognised as a solid foundation for children's future education. It needs to be seen as a worthwhile investment for public spending. For this reason, ECCE policy should not be an isolated initiative but part of major development projects and plans, as well as poverty alleviation strategies.



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## Appendix 1: *Young Lives* communities description

### **POLUR**

This is the only urban community amongst the four qualitative fieldwork sites and is located in the capital city of Hyderabad. It is an informal settlement with a majority Muslim population – approximately 2000 inhabitants living in 400 houses. An overcrowded locality with narrow lanes and stagnant water, Polur's houses have poor ventilation and sanitation facilities. Residents are employed as auto drivers, shopkeepers, domestic staff, shop workers, construction workers, etc. Being an urban slum in the heart of the state capital, residents have access to all basic services. There are five private schools and three government schools. Being a Muslim locality, there are more than three mosques in the area, and studying Arabic and the Quran are major pursuits amongst local children.

### **KATUR**

This rural community is situated in Anantapur district. Accessible by black top (tarmacked) road it lies 40 kilometres from Guntakal, one of the state's major railway junctions. In 2000/1 Katur was divided into two villages separated by about half a kilometre as a result of caste conflicts in the area. Now there is 'New Katur' and 'Old Katur' with 200 households in each. The major castes in the village are Boya Caste and SC. There are also five households belonging to the Forward Caste (FC), and these families dominate the village due to their caste and land-holdings. Agriculture and agricultural labour are the main source of livelihood in this community. Livestock rearing is also a major occupation. A drought-prone area, all crops are dependent on rainfall. During the non-agricultural season, most inhabitants engage in labour work under the government's employment guarantee scheme and some families migrate to nearby villages, towns and cities in search of food and work.

In old Katur, there is a government upper primary school that runs classes up to Standard 7. Midday meals are provided to the school children. Children continue their high school education at the nearby high school, which is approximately three kilometres away from the village. Since this school is located at a distance from the village along quite a deserted route, many of the village girls discontinue their education after primary school. There is also a pre-school in the village.

### **POOMPUHAR**

This rural community situated in Mahbubnagar district comprises 463 families with a total population of 2040. The majority speak Telugu and the dominant group are BC Hindus. There are also a sizeable number of SC households, located in a specific area at the entrance of the community. The community is accessible by black top roads and is well connected by bus and other private transportation services. The major occupations are agriculture, livestock rearing and daily wage labour.

During harvesting season, children (mostly girls) are out of school for 2-3 months each year to work in the cotton fields. Seasonal migration (February/May until June/July) is common with adults moving to distant places for labour, leaving their children and aged parents behind in the village. The village has access to most of the basic services including electricity, drinking water, drainage, a health centre, religious institutions, etc. It is also covered under different government programmes including food assistance, educational assistance, health services, natural resource management and other social security programmes. The community has two *anganwadis* and a government-run high school.

### **PATNA**

Patna is a tribal community in the Srikakulam district. It is home to 1056 families and has a population of 4455. The dominant group are FC Hindus who speak Telugu, though they are fewer in number than the combined STs in the area (the *Savara* and *Jathapu*). The *Jathapu* people generally have higher social status than the *Savara* people who also have a different language and script.

Patna is a hilly area. Agriculture, horticulture and non-timber forest products (NTFP) are the primary sources of income. This area is suitable for growing cashew, mango, pineapple, pulses, cereals and commercial crops like turmeric. The ITDA is an important source of employment to the youth, large numbers of whom work as community teachers. Most habitations are accessible but only through internal approach roads, which are difficult to travel on. Road connectivity is limited to scheduled bus trips and so people walk long distances to reach their destinations. The community is often affected by cyclones and roads can be blocked by water flowing from the hills.

The community has access to basic services such as drinking water and electricity, religious institutions, public internet, government and private schools and pre-schools. *Anganwadis* are accessible to almost all the communities in the area, though they may not be located in every village. *Savara* children often find it difficult to cope in school as they are taught in Telugu. The government has, therefore, made a special provision of books in the *Savara* language and teachers trained in the language.



#### About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The Foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the sale of Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer N.V., bequeathed to the Foundation by Dutch industrialist and philanthropist Bernard van Leer (1883 to 1958).

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equal opportunities and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by local partners. These include public, private and community-based organisations. Working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We also aim to leverage our impact by working with influential allies to advocate for young children. Our free publications share lessons we have learned from our own grantmaking activities and feature agenda-setting contributions from outside experts. Through our publications and advocacy, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice not only in the countries where we operate, but globally.

In our current strategic plan, we are pursuing three programme goals: reducing violence in young children's lives, taking quality early education to scale, and improving young children's physical environments. We are pursuing these goals in eight countries – Brazil, India, Israel, Tanzania, the Netherlands, Turkey, Peru and Uganda – as well as undertaking a regional approach within the European Union.

In addition, until 2012 we will continue to work in Mexico, the Caribbean and South Africa on strengthening the care environment, transitions from home to school and respect for diversity.

#### Information on the series

*Working Papers in Early Childhood Development* is a 'work in progress' series that presents relevant findings and reflection on issues relating to early childhood care and development. This working paper is part of a series of 'Studies in Early Childhood Transitions' from *Young Lives*, a 15-year longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Further information about *Young Lives* is available on the website: [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

The findings, interpretations, conclusions and opinions expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

