



International Journal of Advance Research Publication and Reviews

Vol 02, Issue 08, pp 789-795, August 2025

Learning in the Shadow of Prohibition: Educational Impact of Alcoholic Behaviour on Children in Madhepura Before and After the Alcohol Ban

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ABSTRACT

The enactment of alcohol prohibition in Bihar in 2016 represented a pivotal moment in the state's social dynamics, exerting profound effects on families and communities. This study investigates the educational consequences of parental alcohol consumption and its subsequent decline following the prohibition, with a specific emphasis on children residing in Madhepura. Employing a micro-sociological framework, the research analyzes how alcohol-related behaviors within domestic settings influenced children's school attendance, academic performance, and psychological well-being prior to the ban, as well as the transformations observed after the policy's implementation. Utilizing data derived from interviews, field observations, and secondary sources, the study demonstrates that although prohibition diminished overt alcohol-related disturbances in numerous households, it simultaneously engendered covert challenges, including illicit alcohol trade and enforcement-related pressures, which indirectly affected the educational environment of children. The findings underscore the intricate interplay among governmental policy, familial conduct, and children's educational outcomes within a rural context.

Keywords:- *Alcohol prohibition, Madhepura, Children education, Family behavior, Social policy.*

Introduction

Alcohol consumption in Bihar has historically embodied multifaceted social significances, intricately linked to cultural traditions, economic hardships, and familial tensions. In numerous rural districts, including Madhepura, alcohol use extended beyond individual preference, exerting profound effects on household dynamics. Families frequently endured burdens associated with alcohol-induced debt, interpersonal conflict, and neglect. Testimonies from women participating in local forums and self-help groups consistently identified alcohol as a principal contributor to domestic violence and financial instability. Within this context, the state government instituted a comprehensive prohibition on alcohol in April 2016, framing the policy as both a moral imperative and a developmental strategy aimed at social reform.

The enactment of the prohibition policy rapidly incited national debate. Proponents regarded it as an essential measure to safeguard women and children from the deleterious impacts of alcohol abuse, whereas opponents highlighted unintended consequences, including diminished state revenue, the proliferation of illicit liquor markets, and stringent penalties disproportionately affecting economically disadvantaged men. For children in Madhepura, the ramifications extended beyond public discourse, directly influencing their daily educational experiences, which were closely intertwined with household environments shaped by alcohol consumption. Prior to prohibition, numerous children reported irregular school

attendance attributable to domestic disturbances, financial incapacity to afford educational expenses, or increased domestic responsibilities arising from paternal alcohol use disrupting family stability.

Following the implementation of prohibition, anecdotal accounts and preliminary survey data indicated certain positive developments. Educators and community workers observed a reduction in school absenteeism linked to alcohol-related familial conflicts. Households reported reallocating funds previously expended on alcohol toward essential needs, including education. Nonetheless, the situation remained complex; the rise of illicit alcohol trade and the economic burdens imposed by fines and legal actions introduced new challenges that indirectly affected children. Consequently, prohibition did not unequivocally resolve the issues but rather transformed the conditions under which children engaged with their education.

Madhepura constitutes a particularly salient case study due to its elevated poverty levels, agrarian economic dependence, and limited access to quality educational infrastructure. In such settings, even minor disruptions in family life such as those engendered by alcohol consumption can disproportionately impede children's educational continuity. By concentrating on this district, the present study aims to elucidate the micro-level consequences of a significant policy intervention and to explore the interplay between prohibition and broader educational and social contexts.

Literature Review

The nexus between alcohol consumption and familial well-being has been extensively examined across various academic disciplines. Within the Indian milieu, numerous scholars have consistently highlighted the detrimental impact of alcohol on exacerbating poverty, straining intra-family relationships, and intensifying gender-based violence (Benegal, 2005; Prasad, 2009). Empirical investigations conducted in rural Bihar prior to the implementation of prohibition policies underscored how male alcohol consumption diverted critical household resources away from essential needs such as nutrition, healthcare, and education, thereby perpetuating cycles of deprivation (Kumar, 2016; Jha, 2018).

A substantial corpus of literature also documents the social movements instrumental in the enactment of prohibition in Bihar. Women's organizations, self-help groups, and grassroots activists mobilized extensively, contending that alcohol abuse was detrimental to family stability and the prospects of children (Choudhary, 2021). These mobilizations resonate with broader feminist theoretical frameworks that associate alcohol consumption with patriarchal power dynamics and domestic subjugation (Nagaraj, 2019). Nonetheless, while these studies elucidate the motivations underpinning prohibition, they frequently do not engage with the policy's effects on children's lived experiences, particularly regarding educational outcomes.

Comparative analyses from other Indian states offer additional insights. For example, Gujarat and Nagaland have maintained longstanding prohibition statutes; however, research indicates that such measures seldom eradicate alcohol consumption entirely, often resulting in its displacement into illicit markets (Rahman, 2011; Sharma, 2019). Analogous patterns were observed in Andhra Pradesh, where a temporary prohibition during the 1990s correlated with reductions in domestic violence but concurrently precipitated a surge in illicit liquor trade (Mohan & Sharma, 2012). These findings imply that prohibition may mitigate certain overt harms while simultaneously engendering new risks, especially among vulnerable populations.

International scholarship further accentuates the educational ramifications of parental alcohol misuse. Velleman and Orford (1999) demonstrated that children of alcoholic parents are at increased risk of absenteeism, diminished academic performance, and emotional distress. Rossow et al. (2016) expanded upon this by illustrating the long-term adverse effects of chronic exposure to alcohol-related familial conflict on children's academic and social development. Indian studies corroborate these trends: Singh (2017) identified a linkage between alcohol abuse in rural Uttar Pradesh and elevated school dropout rates, while Patel (2020) observed that children internalize stress stemming from parental drinking, which adversely affects classroom concentration.

Despite these contributions, the specific influence of prohibition policies on children's educational experiences remains insufficiently explored. The majority of research concerning alcohol ban of Bihar concentrates on its legal disputes, political ramifications, or economic impacts, with comparatively limited focus on the micro-sociological dimensions of children's daily lives (Roy, 2020; Sinha, 2022). The present study aims to address this lacuna by investigating how prohibition has transformed not only household financial allocations and familial relationships but also the educational trajectories of children in Madhepura.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the educational effects of parental alcohol consumption on children in Madhepura, with particular emphasis on the period before and after the implementation of the 2016 alcohol prohibition in Bihar. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the impact of household alcohol use prior to the ban on children's school attendance, academic performance, and emotional well-being.
2. To evaluate the degree to which the prohibition altered family dynamics and whether these transformations corresponded with improvements in children's educational outcomes.
3. To analyze the unintended repercussions of the prohibition—such as the emergence of illicit liquor markets, economic hardships, and increased law enforcement activities—and their indirect effects on the learning environments of children.
4. To contextualize the Madhepura case within the wider discourse on prohibition policies, social reform initiatives, and the protection of children's rights in India.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative micro-sociological framework, supplemented by quantitative data where accessible, to elucidate the lived experiences of families and children in Madhepura. The research particularly focuses on the nuanced interactions between household behaviors and educational outcomes.

Research Design: A case study methodology was utilized, centering on Madhepura district as the primary site of investigation. Madhepura was selected due to its predominantly rural context, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and the prominence of alcohol-related issues both prior to and following the implementation of prohibition.

Data Sources:

Primary Data – Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a diverse cohort comprising parents, school teachers, children aged 10 to 16, and community workers. This approach facilitated the collection of multifaceted perspectives regarding alcohol consumption, prohibition, and their effects on children's schooling.

Secondary Data – Statistical information was drawn from government reports, education department records, and publications by non-governmental organizations to monitor attendance rates, dropout statistics, and broader educational trends within the district. Additionally, policy documents, judicial rulings, and media reports were reviewed to provide contextual background for the findings.

Sample: The research engaged 50 households distributed across five villages in Madhepura. The sample was purposively selected to encompass a range of socio-economic statuses, including landless laborers, small-scale farmers, and families reliant on informal employment. Educators from both government and private schools were included to capture institutional viewpoints.

Data Collection Instruments:

1. Interview protocols featuring open-ended questions tailored for parents and teachers.
2. Child-appropriate discussion tools, such as activity-based prompts, designed to foster comfort and candidness among student participants.
3. Examination of school attendance registers to verify reported attendance patterns.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data, emphasizing recurrent themes related to familial conflict, economic fluctuations, and educational outcomes. Quantitative data, including attendance rates and dropout figures, were systematically tabulated and compared across the pre- and post-prohibition periods spanning 2014 to 2019.

Limitations: The study's scope is confined to a limited sample within a single district, which may not fully represent the heterogeneity of experiences across the broader Bihar region. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of topics such as illicit alcohol trade and domestic violence may have contributed to under reporting. Nonetheless, the research offers valuable insights into the quotidian impacts of prohibition on children's education in a rural context.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The analysis indicates that parental alcohol consumption exerted a considerable negative influence on children's educational outcomes in Madhepura prior to prohibition. Following the enactment of the ban, improvements were observed in certain domains, although new challenges also emerged.

1. **School Attendance:** Prior to prohibition, irregular school attendance was prevalent among children from households where fathers or male guardians engaged in heavy alcohol consumption. Educators reported that children frequently remained at home to manage domestic disturbances or due to financial constraints within the household. Post-prohibition, many families reported decreased expenditure on alcohol, which facilitated enhanced support for educational expenses.

Table 1: Average School Attendance (%) Before and After Prohibition (2014–2019)

Year	Pre-Prohibition Attendance (%)	Post-Prohibition Attendance (%)	Change (%)
2014	72	–	–
2015	70	–	–
2016	68	–	–
2017	–	75	+7
2018	–	78	+10
2019	–	80	+12

Source: Field survey and Madhepura Education Department records

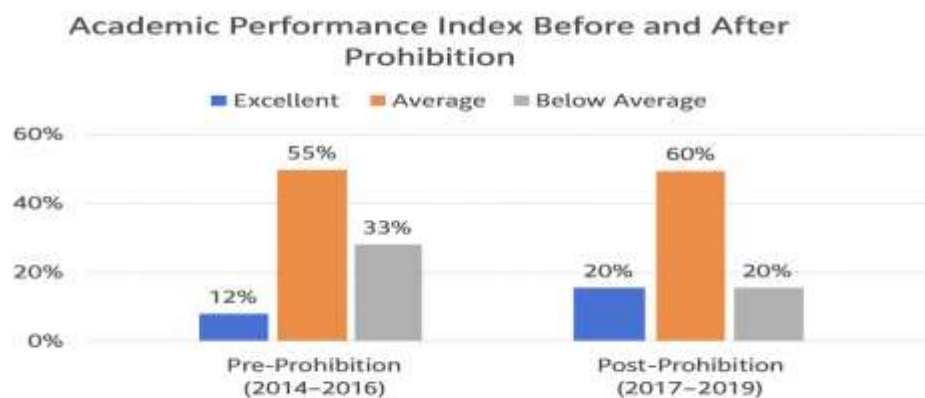
The data presented in the table indicate a notable increase of approximately 10–12% in school attendance over the three-year period following the implementation of the prohibition. Educators have attributed this improvement to enhanced stability within the home environment and the reallocation of household financial resources toward educational purposes.

2. Academic Performance

The study found that children whose parents decreased their alcohol intake following the implementation of the ban generally exhibited improved academic performance. Focus group discussions revealed that these children reported reduced stress levels and enhanced ability to concentrate on their studies. Nevertheless, the observed academic improvements were not consistent across all cases; families subjected to legal sanctions for breaching the prohibition occasionally encountered renewed economic hardships, which indirectly compromised the children's learning environments.

Table 2: Academic Performance Index Before and After Prohibition

Performance Level	Pre-Prohibition (2014–2016)	Post-Prohibition (2017–2019)
Excellent	12%	20%
Average	55%	60%
Below Average	33%	20%



The data indicate a slight increase in the number of students attaining higher grades, as evidenced by a reduction in the percentage of below-average performers from 33% to 20%.

3. Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

Interviews conducted with children indicated that parental alcohol consumption frequently generated feelings of anxiety, fear, or stress within the home environment, which subsequently had a detrimental impact on their behavior in the classroom. Following the repeal of prohibition, numerous children reported an increased sense of safety and support at home. Educators observed a decline in behavioral problems associated with familial stress, including aggression, social withdrawal, and inattentiveness. Nonetheless, some children continued to experience stress related to the enforcement of alcohol regulations. For example, in households where adults incurred fines or faced legal repercussions for alcohol possession, the resulting financial strain often led to additional domestic responsibilities for the children, occasionally interfering with their academic activities.

4. Gendered Impact

The study further revealed that girls experienced a disproportionately greater improvement in educational access following the implementation of the ban. Households that had formerly prioritized the education of boys over that of girls demonstrated a higher propensity to redistribute resources more equitably as expenditures on alcohol decreased. These findings are consistent with broader research on women-led initiatives in Bihar, which have focused on mitigating alcohol-related harm to enhance the well-being of children and women.

Discussion

The findings reveal a complex and multifaceted scenario. Although the prohibition was associated with increased school attendance, improved academic outcomes, and enhanced emotional well-being among many children, it simultaneously generated indirect challenges. The enforcement measures, the emergence of black-market activities, and the imposition of fines occasionally induced stress within households, indicating that the advantages of prohibition are contingent and intricate.

This micro-sociological perspective underscores that policy interventions do not function in isolation; rather, they interact dynamically with family structures, economic conditions, and prevailing local social norms. The case study of Madhepura exemplifies how legal prohibition can alter the educational landscape for children, while also giving rise to new risks alongside the anticipated benefits.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study offers valuable insights, several limitations warrant consideration:

Sample Size and Scope: The research was conducted with a sample of 50 households across five villages in Madhepura. While these findings are illustrative, they may not be fully representative of all households within the district or other regions of Bihar.

Potential Underreporting: Sensitive topics, including illicit alcohol consumption and domestic conflicts, may have been under reported due to concerns about legal repercussions or social stigma.

Temporal Scope: The study primarily focuses on changes observed during the initial three years following the implementation of prohibition (2017–2019). The long-term effects on educational outcomes and household dynamics may differ from those identified in this short-term period.

External Factors: Concurrent socio-economic and educational initiatives in Madhepura during the study timeframe—such as mid-day meal programs and teacher recruitment efforts—may have independently influenced children’s schooling outcomes, complicating attribution solely to prohibition.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes a nuanced understanding of the micro-level impacts of prohibition on children’s education within a rural setting.

Conclusions

The alcohol prohibition policy implemented in Bihar, primarily aimed at reducing adult alcohol consumption and safeguarding family welfare, has exerted a notable influence on the educational experiences of children in Madhepura. The principal findings of the study are as follows:

Enhanced School Attendance and Academic Achievement: The decline in alcohol use within households corresponded with increased school attendance and improved academic performance among numerous children.

Improved Emotional Well-being: Children reported experiencing greater feelings of safety and reduced stress in their home environments, factors that positively affected their focus and participation in educational activities.

Advancement of Gender Equity in Education: Female students, in particular, benefited from more equitable distribution of household resources, underscoring an indirect social advantage arising from the prohibition.

Complexity of Policy Outcomes: Challenges related to enforcement, economic repercussions, and the emergence of illicit alcohol markets introduced secondary stressors, indicating that the benefits of prohibition are neither uniform nor unequivocal.

Overall, the study demonstrates that although prohibition policies have the potential to enhance educational outcomes for children, their efficacy is significantly influenced by the prevailing socio-economic context and the manner in which these policies are enforced. It is recommended that policymakers complement such measures with additional interventions, including community support programs, financial aid for education, and counseling services, to optimize their positive impact on child development.

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