

ASER 2018 'Young Children' – An overview

For well over a decade, ASER has been well known for reporting data annually on reading and arithmetic levels for boys and girls in the elementary school age group. What is less known is that there is also rich data about the schooling status of children below the age of 6 for each year as well as over time.

In 2005, the first year we did ASER, we focussed on 6 to 14 year olds and on those who were or should have been in Std I till Std VIII. This is the age group that is supposed to be in elementary school. Several years later, the Right to Education Act 2009 also referred to this age group when free and compulsory education became the law. However, even in the first year of ASER, going from household to household and talking to thousands of families, we could see that there were children in Std I who were not as yet 6 years old. In addition, there were students currently enrolled in Std VIII who were more than 14 years old. Therefore, from 2006 onwards we expanded the focus of the ASER exercise to include 5 year olds to 16 year olds. Any child who was enrolled in Std I was asked to do reading and arithmetic tasks; this child could be younger than 6. We also asked about the enrollment status of younger children – age 3 and 4.

For the younger children (age 3 and 4) between 2006 and 2008 we only recorded data on whether the child was enrolled in an anganwadi or if she or he was still at home (not started pre-school/school yet). From 2009 onwards we included the possibility of the child attending LKG/UKG (which implied private pre-school). It was only for children age 5 that we asked if the child was enrolled in school (private or government). Therefore, for all the years from 2006 to 2016, if a child younger than 5 was going to school, the ASER survey did not capture it.

For the period 2006 to 2014, we have continuous annual data for young children's (age 3 and 4) enrollment in anganwadis and pre-school; as well as pre-school and primary school status for children age 5 and 6.¹ Similar data is available in ASER 2016.²

In ASER 2018, in addition to recording the pre-school and school status of children age 5 and above, we decided to do the same for those who were 3 and 4 years old.³ To highlight the availability of this detailed information about young children, we decided to bring out a separate volume on this age group extracted from ASER 2018.

This volume provides estimates for All India (rural) and for each state (rural) for the following indicators:

- By age: Pre-school and school status for all children age 3 to 8
- By grade: For children in Std I:
 - o Enrollment by school type: Government schools and private schools
 - o Age distribution in Std I by school type
 - o Learning levels in Std I by school type and age

Wherever possible, this data is presented separately for boys and girls.

¹The only exception was ASER 2011 which had a slightly different data recording sheet for young children. Hence, the data for children age 3 and 4 is not comparable to the other years in this series.

²ASER was done in practically every rural district of India for the period 2006 to 2014. On the 10th year of the ASER exercise, a decision was taken to do the nationwide ASER every alternate year.

³Due to a change in the way data was collected, ASER 2018 data for enrolment of children age 3 and 4 is not comparable with previous ASERs.