

Impact Assessment of Focus Development Program

OCTOBER 2023



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Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to HDFC for entrusting DevInsights with the critical task of conducting an impact evaluation on the Focus Development Program, specifically the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship. The opportunity to delve into the program's efficacy and impact has been invaluable in understanding its significance in supporting students during these challenging times.

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The Study Team

DevInsights Private Limited

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Abbreviations

HDFC	Housing Development Finance Corporation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
EWS	Economically Weaker Section
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NPO	Non-profit Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
SES	Socioeconomic Status
BPL	Below Poverty Line
OBC	Other Backward Class
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe

Executive Summary

Introduction

The educational status of children in India is characterized by low educational attainment rates, particularly for girls, and significant dropout rates, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Despite economic advancements, India grapples with persistent educational challenges, partly attributed to factors like financial constraints, cultural norms, and gender bias. The Right to Education Act legislation and various government programs have yielded limited success in enhancing educational quality and reducing dropout rates, as highlighted by the 2019 ASER Survey.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the educational crisis in India, leading to significant unemployment and financial constraints for families, ultimately impacting students' educational pursuits. As a result, millions of students are at risk of dropping out of secondary school, with the pandemic's effects on income, migration, and limited internet accessibility further contributing to this crisis.

In response to these challenges, HDFC Bank's Focused Development Program, under the 'Parivartan' initiative, introduced the Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship project. Implemented in collaboration with Buddy4Study India Foundation, the project aimed to provide scholarships to students affected by the pandemic, focusing on those who lost family members or livelihoods. The project successfully awarded scholarships to over 4,000 students across different education levels, offering financial aid to support their educational aspirations. The eligibility criteria and benefits of the scholarship were tailored to accommodate students from diverse backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of education in the face of adversity. Buddy4Study's active role in application management, document verification, and outreach significantly contributed to the project's success.

Overview of the Study Design

The impact assessment was conducted in India, with states selected from each region, ensuring comprehensive representation. The states were chosen randomly, with the rationale being the availability of adequate sample size. The sampling approach involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, with data collected digitally. Data analysis included descriptive statistics and tests of significance, along with thematic analysis for qualitative data. Ethical considerations were diligently followed, emphasizing respect, fair representation, compliance with codes for vulnerable groups, and confidentiality. Challenges included emotional responses from beneficiaries and difficulties in telephonic data collection.

Key Findings

Impact of the Scholarship on Scholars under the age of 18 and their Guardians

Data collected from the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program reveals several insights about the students below the age of 18 who have benefited from the program. Fathers and mothers play significant roles as guardians of the scholarship recipients across all regions (that is above 45% of the respondents across all regions and at an overall level 35% of the fathers and 44.1% of the mothers have represented on behalf of their child). Male scholars outnumber female scholars at an overall

level (55.3% and 44.7% respectively). The selection process for the program is conducted by Buddy4Study, which establishes criteria set by HDFC Bank to provide opportunities for students to enrich their lives.

The data from Figure 3 reveals the most effective outreach channels for the HDFC COVID-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program. Social media is a powerful tool for awareness in all regions (24.7%), while schools also play a crucial role (22.2%). Print media has limited impact except in the West (12.9% in the West). In terms of distribution, more students availed of the scholarship in 2021 (264 students) compared to 2022 (24 students), suggesting a larger impact in the initial year. This could be factored in due to the point that some of the respondents might still be in the scholarship availing process. Figure 5 highlights the awareness and submission of required documents. Income certificates and mark sheets were submitted consistently (71.5% and 86.8% at an overall level), indicating a clear understanding of their importance. Challenges during the application process vary by region, with the South facing the most difficulties (26.8%). Document availability, submission/verification, and miscommunication were common challenges that were reported by most of the respondents. Addressing these challenges is crucial for equitable access to the program, and the implementing agency, Buddy4Study, is taking steps to streamline the selection process and address concerns. The financial impact assessment underscores the profound effects of the pandemic on family incomes across regions, necessitating urgent comprehensive support measures. Loss of earning members and employment challenges vary by region, influencing financial stability. Post-pandemic recovery shows moderate improvement, emphasizing the ongoing financial strains experienced by families.

The data also reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the financial stability of families across all regions (98.3%), with a majority experiencing a reduction in income. Additionally, the diverse impacts of the pandemic are also indicated, including loss of earning members and employment wherein at an overall level 67.5% of the respondents stated that they lack finances in terms of household expenditure. While there has been some post-pandemic recovery, income levels remain lower than pre-pandemic levels, necessitating ongoing support to help families rebuild their financial stability and ensure the well-being and education of their children.

The data from Table 7 reveals that the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship has primarily been utilized for school, college, or institution fees across all regions (88.2% at an overall level), with the highest utilization in the South (100%). The scholarship has positively influenced the academic and career goals of the majority of scholars in all regions (94.8%), with the highest percentages in the East and West (92.6% and 96.5% respectively). 96.2% of the respondents have stated that the scholarship has played a significant role in motivating scholars to attend school and continue their education, particularly in the North and West regions. The scholarship has contributed to the continuation of education and has motivated scholars to study further. Overall, the scholarship program has been instrumental in providing financial assistance and empowering scholars to pursue their educational and career aspirations despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The data indicates that a significant proportion of respondents in the South region (43.9%) provided suggestions for improving the scholarship program, whereas the numbers were comparatively lower in the North (5.9%), East (3.7%), and West (11.8%) regions. This highlights the importance of actively seeking feedback and suggestions from beneficiaries in all regions to enhance the program's effectiveness and address evolving needs. Furthermore, the responses indicate that the overall experience with the application process was highly positive across all regions (82.6%), with the East region reporting a 100% "Very Good" rating.

Impact of the Scholarship on Scholars who are 18 years of age and above

The data from Table 8 highlights variations in the distribution of educational qualifications among scholars aged 18 and above in different regions. The South have a higher proportion of post-graduate degree holders (21.1%), suggesting a focus on advanced education. Further analysis can explore the impact of the scholarship program in facilitating educational pursuits and skill development in different regions.

The assessment reveals that social media is a significant channel for disseminating information about the scholarship program (49.7% at an overall level), particularly in the South (72.1%) and East regions (49.4%). This highlights the need for diversified communication strategies to effectively reach potential beneficiaries. The findings also show a decline in the number of scholarship beneficiaries over the years, which indicates that there is potential for more scholars that would currently be in the scholarship availing process. The responses from the scholars also indicate that mark sheets and income certificates are commonly submitted documents (77.1% and 95.6% respectively at an overall level), emphasizing academic performance and financial need in the selection process. Other documents, such as death certificates and medical proofs, show regional variations, reflecting the diverse challenges faced by applicants. In addition, the availability of documents is a significant challenge for South region applicants (81.8%), while timely submission and verification pose issues in the North (33.3%) and West regions (16.7%). Therefore, Streamlining document processes, enhancing communication, and prompt disbursement can address these challenges effectively.

The data highlights the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family incomes, with the vast majority of respondents (98.6% of the respondents) reporting a decline in household income. The data also reveals the profound effects of the pandemic on families, with significant loss of earning members (67.1%) and job losses (33.6%). These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive measures to mitigate the economic challenges faced by families and ensure sustainable recovery.

The data from Table 9 reveals how the scholarship program has directly supported students such as utilizing the funds for institution fees (94.4%) and school supplies (3.4%), relieving the financial burden on these students. The analysis also demonstrates that the scholarship positively influences 99.1% of the respondents in terms of their academic and career aspirations across all regions. The scholarship has motivated and shaped the goals of students. Additionally, the scholarship has played a significant role in the decision to pursue higher education in all regions (98.1%). It has influenced the choice to attend college or university enabling access to higher education for the beneficiaries. The scholarship has also acted as a motivation for studies for 84.6% of the respondents, enabled the continuation of education for 60.4% of the respondents, and fostered academic dedication in an overall sense. Furthermore, the potential outcomes in the absence of the scholarship program have been revealed that it has prevented dropout supported education for 53.6% of the respondents, ensured access to quality education, and alleviated financial difficulties for 26.6% of the respondents. These findings underscore the significant role of the scholarship program in supporting and empowering students in their educational journeys across various regions.

The data shows that the majority of scholarship recipients (80.4%) did not have specific suggestions for improving the program's delivery, indicating a positive perception of the current processes. In the South, a significant proportion of respondents (53.1%) expressed the need for enhancements and modifications in the delivery of the program, suggesting a demand for potential improvements in the Southern region. The data also indicates that the majority of applicants (81.4%) across all regions had a very good experience with the scholarship application process. Based on the suggestions and the overall experience data, it is evident that the scholarship program has generally been well-received,

but there is room for continual improvement to meet the specific needs and expectations of beneficiaries in each region.

Conclusion and recommendations for Scholar under the age of 18 and their Guardians

The analysis of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program emphasizes the need to consider demographic factors during the planning and implementation of scholarship initiatives. Social media and educational institutions played crucial roles in creating awareness about the scholarship. Challenges during the application process highlighted the importance of a streamlined process and improved communication channels. The pandemic's impact on families' financial stability stressed the need for comprehensive support measures and sustainable economic recovery initiatives. Recommendations include enhancing outreach strategies, comprehensive evaluation of the decline, inclusive support for families and gender groups, tailored support for underprivileged communities, a streamlined application process, comprehensive financial support, and sustainable economic recovery initiatives.

Conclusion and recommendations for Scholar who are 18 years and above

This report presents an analysis of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program, emphasizing the significance of demographic considerations in scholarship initiatives. It also highlights the diverse modes of information dissemination, challenges faced during the application process, and the pandemic's impact on family incomes. The scholarship program's role in supporting education and shaping students' aspirations is emphasized, along with suggestions for program enhancements and recommendations for scholars aged 18 and above. Recommendations include revising eligibility criteria, diversifying communication strategies, establishing evaluation mechanisms, promoting vocational and technical education, and strengthening impact assessments.

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

1.1 Educational Status of Children in India

India possesses a demographic profile defined by a youth population, where roughly 20% (equivalent to 243 million individuals) fall within the adolescent age range of 10 to 19 years. When it comes to education in India, while nearly all children are initially enrolled in primary schools, only 33% successfully progress to Grade 11 and 12. Among these individuals, only 10% pursue higher education, and a mere 5% receive any form of employability training. Persistent contextual factors continue to have an adverse impact on the educational achievements, learning trajectories, and career opportunities for children in India. Analysing these statistics from a gender perspective, in 2021, India reported a higher proportion of men with at least 10 years of schooling nationwide than women. Approximately 50% of men between the ages of 15 and 49 had received a minimum of 10 years of education, while the corresponding figure for women was only 41%. This gender disparity in education was also evident in rural India, where just one out of every three women in this region had completed at least 10 years of schooling.¹ The phenomenon of dropouts and the gender-biased lower educational achievement levels also reinforce regressive gender and cultural norms, such as early marriages and early childbearing.

India has made impressive economic gains in the last few decades and currently has the 4th largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. Despite this improvement, more than 260 million people in India live in poverty. The reciprocity of poverty producing disability, and disability resulting in poverty creates unique challenges for the integrated education movement in India.² Education is a vital means for the potentialities of a human being to emerge in a positive direction so that a man can live in society with full of dignity and can mould the habits, tastes and character of individuals living in society by imparting knowledge and information.³ Education is the root of each nation. A nation won't have the capability to make due in the alert world, if its guidance framework isn't fit for contributing for its enhancement. Indian training framework is broadly criticized in multi-measurements for its inability to make required employability in its understudies as per the business prerequisites and its failure to add to comprehensive development in the country all in all.⁴

The primary requirements for this endeavour encompass formal education. Despite the initiation of various initiatives by policymakers, such as the Right to Education Act, Mid-Day meal, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the results, in many instances, do not align proportionally with the investment in these programs.

The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 did lead to a rise in school enrolment, yet it notably fell short in delivering the necessary enhancement in educational quality. This concerning reality was underscored by the 2019 ASER Survey, revealing that a mere 16% of first-grade students could grasp written text. Furthermore, there is a significant 17% dropout rate among students in senior secondary education.

Numerous factors contribute to the issue of dropouts, encompassing financial barriers linked to parents' economic limitations, the potential income earned through child labour, as well as deeply ingrained traditional, cultural, or religious convictions. Gender stereotypes and contrasting child-

¹ [India: gender education gap by area 2021 | Statista](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1091111/india-gender-education-gap-by-area-2021/)

² <https://ojs.library.osu.edu/index.php/dsg/article/view/524/701>

³ <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234633238.pdf>

⁴ <https://ijemr.vandanapublications.com/index.php/ijemr/article/view/523>

rearing practices based on gender further exacerbate the situation. For instance, in scenarios where a choice must be made between sending a boy or a girl to school, preference typically tilts in favour of the boy.

Traditional gender roles often compel girls to assume responsibilities for household chores and caring for younger siblings. This can result in irregular school attendance, ultimately leading to dropouts. Insufficient safety measures in schools, the lack of functional separate toilets, and limited aspirations concerning girls' education also contribute to the dropout rate. Additionally, the considerable distance to schools represents a significant obstacle, particularly for girls, causing them to discontinue their education.⁵

The number of schools declines significantly as we move beyond the upper primary level. This means that parents are often forced to send their children to nearby towns, incurring the expenses of transportation and boarding, which can become financially unfeasible. Additionally, students are often required to stay with relatives or acquaintances, and parents are hesitant to leave their daughters without what they consider to be adequate supervision.

All of these factors collectively lead to a very low level of educational attainment among children, particularly girls, perpetuating a cycle of impoverishment. This issue is especially prominent in certain underprivileged states within the country.

1.2 Impact of Covid-19 on Education

The impact of pandemic COVID-19 is observed in every sector around the world. The education sectors of India as well as world are badly affected by this. It has enforced the world wide lock down creating very bad effect on the students' life. Around 32 crore learners stopped to move schools/colleges and all educational activities halted in India.

India, as of June 11, 2021, had reported 356,000 COVID-related deaths, marking the country's most significant disaster in a century. This crisis had left countless families devastated and vulnerable, with many young children losing one or both parents or an earning family member. These COVID orphaned children are now facing an uncertain and challenging future, often with little to no support.

Unemployment rate is expected to be increased due to this pandemic. In India, there is no recruitment in Govt. sector and fresh graduates fear withdrawal of their job offers from private sectors because of the current situation. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%. When the unemployment increases then the education gradually decreases as people struggle for food rather than education.⁶ During the lockdown most of the parents were facing the unemployment situation so they were not be able to pay the fee for that particular time periods which may affect the private institutes.

A study from 2008 has found that job losses by fathers or earning member of the family, can have important intergenerational effects, lowering the subsequent earnings levels and raising the welfare receipt rates of their male children when they reached adulthood. Parental job loss from business failures and redundancy when youth are aged 16 to 17 in particular are found to have large negative effects on the post-secondary education enrolment of youth. Parental job loss also has large and persistent negative effects on parental income. Although such job losses may have direct effects on

⁵ [The high dropout rate of girls in India | Mint \(livemint.com\)](https://www.livemint.com)

⁶ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3691506

youth education outcomes, these results suggest that parental income effects are important. Financial constraints on the post-secondary education choices of youth are potentially large.⁷

Additionally, millions of students are grappling with the fallout of the pandemic, as their parents have lost their jobs or livelihoods. A survey conducted by Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi revealed that 85% of responding NGOs anticipate an increase in school dropouts in the post-lockdown period.

The impact of COVID on education in India is stark:

- Approximately ten million girls in India are at risk of dropping out of secondary school due to the pandemic.
- Financial crises stemming from unemployment have led to the loss of 10 million jobs during the second COVID wave, with the income of 97% of households declining.
- COVID has resulted in the death of family members, with approximately 3.5 lakh deaths reported in India.
- Migration due to COVID has affected approximately 40 million people internally.
- Limited access to devices and the internet is a significant barrier, with only one in four individuals in India having internet connectivity.

Millions of deserving students in India abandon formal education due to financial constraints and a waning interest in schooling. The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted the normal functioning of schools, colleges, and other educational institutions, severely impacting students across various modes of offline education, training, and skill development programs.

1.3 About the Program

The Focused Development Program (FDP) is a part of HDFC Bank's social initiatives known as 'Parivartan.' In contrast to the bank's flagship initiative, the "Holistic Rural Development Program (HRDP)," which encompasses various aspects of rural development, the FDP collaborates with specialized implementing partners in specific focus areas to enhance the well-being of the intended beneficiaries in that particular domain. The advancement of all projects within these programs is regularly evaluated through a structured Theory of Change (TOC)-based monitoring system, with independent assessments conducted to gauge the effectiveness of these initiatives.

The Covid19 Crisis Support Scholarship project is an integral part of HDFC Bank's Focused Development Program (FDP). This initiative is a scholarship program specifically designed to assist individuals pursuing formal education, from Class 1 all the way up to post-graduate levels, who have been adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The project was executed on a national scale and primarily targeted students who had either lost an earning member or parent(s), or those who had their livelihoods disrupted as a result of the Covid-19's impact.

Under this project, a total of 4,245 students, ranging from Class 1 to post-graduate levels, received scholarships.

The scholarship project was divided into two categories:

- The in-school program
- The beyond-school program

⁷ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0927537110000606>

Table 1 Outreach

Cluster	Total No of students above 18 years	Total No of students below 18 years
Cluster 1 (East Region)	419	130
Cluster 2 (North Region)	911	673
Cluster 3 (South Region)	584	198
Cluster 4 (West Region)	848	482
Grand Total	2762	1483

In School Program Eligibility:

- The students must be currently studying in Class 1 to 12.
- Students who have been through any of the below two crisis situations
 1. Students who lost either or both of their parent(s)/earning member(s) since January 2020, OR
 2. Students whose earning family member lost their employment (or livelihood) during the pandemic
- Annual family income must be less than or equal to INR 6, 00,000 (6 lakh) from all sources.

Beyond School Program Eligibility:

- The students must be currently studying in a diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate (General and Professional) program.
- Students who have been through any of the below two crisis situations
 1. Students who lost either or both of their parent(s)/earning member(s) since January 2020, OR
 2. Students whose earning family member lost their employment (or livelihood) during the pandemic
- Annual family income must be less than or equal to INR 6,00,000 (6 lakh) from all sources

1.3.1 Objectives of the Project:

Following were the specific objectives of the project;

- To promote education by providing scholarships to deserving students.
- To encourage selected students, pan India for continuing their education and therefore reduce drop-out rates.

1.4. About Implementing Partner: Buddy4Study India Foundation

Buddy4Study India Foundation was the implementing partner for the Covid19 Crisis Support Scholarship project. The Buddy4Study India Foundation was established in 2017 with the primary objective of addressing the critical issues related to scholarship awareness and accessibility. Operating as a section 8 company, its mission is to simplify access to scholarships worldwide through the utilization of technology and collaborative efforts.

Buddy4Study has earned a reputation as one of India's most reliable CSR implementation partners in the field of education. On one front, the team is dedicated to increasing scholarship awareness among students throughout India by collaborating with foundations, schools, government entities, and media organizations. On the other front, they work to enhance scholarship accessibility by leveraging technology to overcome the barriers involved in launching scholarships, whether by corporations, foundations, or individuals.

As of today, Buddy4Study boasts a community of over 4.4 million active students and has facilitated over 100,000 students in securing scholarships worth more than INR 110 crores.

The key deliverables of Buddy4Study India Foundation for this particular project were:

- To invite applications from pan India from those who have been affected by Covid-19
- Selection of approx.976 eligible students pursuing formal education from Class 1 up to post graduation for scholarships basis merit and need through document verification and telephonic interviews
- Provision of financial aid to selected students from families that have been Covid-19 affected leading to loss of earning member of family and/or loss of employment
- Management of database of applications and details of identified students and ensure scholarship transfer.
- Propagate scholarship to ensure maximum outreach for applications

These milestones were efficiently achieved by the implementing partner as

- Buddy4Study had awarded a total of 4245 scholarships (2101, for in school and 2144, for beyond school) worth of INR 12, 36, 96,000 (INR 12.36 crore).
- 38082 individuals had submitted application for “in school scholarship” while 20501 had submitted for “beyond school scholarship”
- 60% of the total scholars, were in need for scholarship because of death of earning family member.
- 42% of the total scholars were female.
- 40 Scholars were Specially Abled
- For promotion and outreach 233 Online Publication brought out in different channel partners. And 30 Posts on each Social Media Platform such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The below table has the eligibility criteria and benefits for particular scholarship offered under The Covid19 Crisis Support Scholarship project.

	Eligibility	Benefits
Beyond School	<p>Open for Indian nationals only.</p> <p>The students must be currently studying in a diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate (General and Professional) program.</p> <p>Students who have been through any of the below two crisis situations –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who lost either or both of their parent(s)/earning member(s) since January 2020, OR • Students whose earning family member lost their employment (or livelihood) during the pandemic <p>Annual family income must be less than or equal to INR 6, 00,000 (6 lakh) from all sources.</p> <p>Children of employees of HDFC Bank and Buddy4Study are not eligible.</p>	<p>For Diploma courses – INR 20,000</p> <p>For Undergraduate (General – BCom, BSc, BA, BCA, etc.) courses – INR 30,000</p> <p>For Postgraduate (MCom, MA, etc.) courses – INR 35,000</p> <p>For undergraduate (Professional – BTech, MBBS, LLB, BArch, Nursing) courses – INR 50,000</p> <p>For Postgraduate (MTech, MBA) courses – INR 55,000 to INR 75,000</p>

In School	Open for Indian nationals only.	For students of Class 1 to 5 – INR 15,000
	The students must be currently studying in Class 1 to 12.	For students of Class 6 to 8 – INR 18,000
	Students who have been through any of the below two crisis situations – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who lost either or both of their parent(s)/earning member(s) since January 2020, OR • Students whose earning family member lost their employment (or livelihood) during the pandemic 	For students of Class 9 to 12 – INR 21,000
	Annual family income must be less than or equal to INR 6, 00,000 (6 lakh) from all sources.	
	Children of employees of HDFC Bank and Buddy4Study are not eligible.	

Documents to be submitted at the time of application:

- Mark sheet of the previous educational degree (2019-20) (NOTE: In case, you don't have a mark sheet for 2019-20 session, please upload the mark sheet for 2018-19 session.)
- A government-issued identity proof (Aadhaar card/voter identity card/driving license/PAN card)
- Current year admission proof (fee receipt/admission letter/institution identity card/bonafide certificate) (2020-21)
- Crisis document (Death certificate of parent(s) or proof of job loss)
- Reference of 2 persons who know the family's crisis (Can be a school teacher, doctor, head of school, college, or a government officer, etc.)
- Bank account details of the applicant (or parent)
- Photograph of the applicant

Summing up, all the students right from Class 1 to Class 12, undergraduate and postgraduate were eligible to apply for the Covid19 Crisis Support Scholarship.

Then they would require to submit information on the Buddy4study profile. Buddy4Study would then check the documents and verify it if it is correct or not. The required documents were like bank details, ID card, Aadhar card, Fee receipt.

Then Buddy4Study would conduct interview to know the family details like who is the earning member of the family, the annual income, what they want to become and once they receive the scholarship how they would utilize it. Buddy4Study does 4-5 types of cross questioning and then award the scholarship to the student.

Chapter 2 Overview of the Study Design

2.1 Research Design and Methodology

A cross-sectional design using mixed method approach to assess the impact of the project indicators was used. Evaluation of the efficacy, effectiveness of the project interventions, and sustainability of the project's outcomes, was accomplished by using the OECD-DAC criteria.

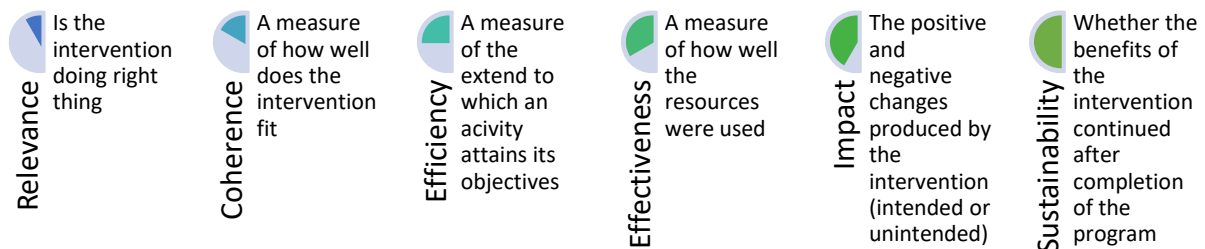


Figure 1 OECD DAC Criteria

The study adopted a mixed-method approach for the purpose of data collection and analysis. The mixed design required qualitative interviews to be carried out to triangulate the quantitative findings. Besides the primary research component, secondary research was also performed, which was helpful in triangulations at the time of data analysis. The quantitative tools provided values to key impact and outcome indicators, whereas the qualitative tools helped to answer the "whys" and the "hows". The introduction of quantitative and qualitative tools provided a robust design that looked at the holistic evaluation assessment in the intervention area.

2.2 Sampling Design and Sample Size

A **cluster sampling approach** was adopted wherein representative state and sample was selected proportionately from each region. Out of total sample, 65% students were selected who are 18 years and above. For the remaining 35%, parents of the students below 18 Years at the time of survey had been interviewed. A minimum sample size required for the quantitative component of the study is around **854 respondents**. This includes a design effect of 2.0 and 5% contingency sample.

Single-Sample Formula

The following formula has been used to arrive at the sample size:

$$n = \{t^2 * p(1 - p)\} / m^2 * D$$

Here,

n = the required sample size

D = Design effect (2.0)

P = Assumed estimate of key outcome indicator (0.5)

t = confidence interval at 95%

m = Margin of error - 5%

NRR (Non Response Rate) = 10%

Z_{1-α} = the z-score corresponding to a significance level (1.96)

Z_{1-β} = the z-score corresponding to the power (0.84)

2.2.1 Quantitative Sample Distribution

Table 2 Quantitative Sample size distribution

Cluster	Total no. of students above 18 years	In proportion to total no. of students	In proportion to the sample size (>18 years)	Total no. of students below 18 years	In proportion to the total number of student	In proportion to the sample size (<18 years)
Cluster 1 (East Region)	419	15%	83	130	9%	27
Cluster 2 (North Region)	911	33%	183	673	45%	135
Cluster 3 (South Region)	584	21%	117	198	13%	39
Cluster 4 (West Region)	848	31%	172	482	33%	98
Grand Total	2762		555	1483		299

The sample distribution was done according to the proportionate to the size. Thereby which the distribution of the total sample size in the case of students above the age of 18 and the students below the age of 18 has been done proportionately across all regions. Hence, the distribution of the sample had been done proportionately, adhering to the total number of students in both age categories

2.2.2 Qualitative Sample

For this assessment study, 85 **in-depth interviews (IDIs)** with various key stakeholders, including parents, NGO representatives, and teachers were conducted. For parents, **80 individuals** were selected for IDIs, which accounts for 10% of the quantitative sample. With regards to NGO representatives, a total of **5 individuals** were chosen for IDIs to gather their perspectives and insights. Therefore, a total sample size of 85 IDIs was considered for the qualitative sample.

Additionally, qualitative information was collected from **students** and **their guardians**. This involved interviews to capture detailed information about their experiences and opinions related to the program.

Table 3 Qualitative Sample size estimation and distribution

Stakeholders	Tools	Sample Size
Parents	IDI	80
NGOs	IDI	5
Total qualitative sample size		85

Moreover, **key informant interviews** were conducted to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information. These interviews involved individuals who possess specialized knowledge or expertise relevant to the program, allowing for a deeper understanding of specific aspects.

By conducting IDIs with different stakeholders and capturing qualitative information, the assessment gained valuable insights and perspectives that can inform decision-making and enhance the overall understanding of the program's impact and effectiveness.

2.3 Sample Selection

To conduct the Impact assessment, 2 states from each region i.e. east, west, north and south were selected randomly.

East	North	South	West
Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Karnataka	Rajasthan
Assam	Delhi	Tamil Nadu	Maharashtra

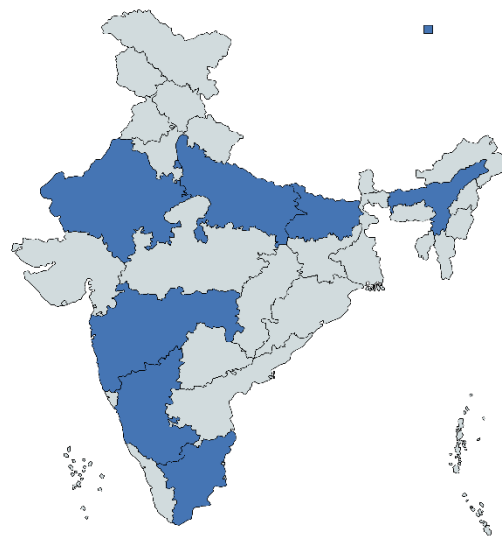


Figure 2 Sample Selection- States

Since the states are classified broadly among 4 geographic clusters, inclusiveness of all regions was ensured. Also, the rationale behind selecting Bihar and Assam was that other states in the region had lesser number of scholars, and only Bihar and Assam had adequate sample size to cover a representative sample.

From North, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh were selected randomly; since Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of scholars. Similarly from west, Rajasthan and Maharashtra were selected randomly because these states had adequate samples availability. Similarly, from the South, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were selected randomly. While selecting the states the availability of adequate sample of scholars was ensured.

Proportional distribution was done while distributing the sample into different regions and representative states. As mentioned earlier, out of total sample 65% students who are 18 years and above were selected. For the remaining 35%, parents of the students below 18 years at the time of survey were interviewed.

After choosing the States the sample size was proportionally divided into all four regions and further into selected states as shown in the table below:

Table 4 State wise Quantitative Sampling

Region	Proposed 18 and above Sample	Achieved 18 and above Sample	Proposed Below 18 Sample	Achieved Below 18 Sample	Grand Total of proposed Sample size	Achieved Sample Size
East	83	83	27	27	110	110
Assam	26	26	7	7	33	33
Bihar	57	57	20	20	77	77
North	183	183	135	135	318	318
Delhi	41	41	49	49	89	90
Uttar Pradesh	142	142	86	86	229	228
West	172	173	98	85	270	258
Maharashtra	164	164	96	82	260	246
Rajasthan	8	9	2	3	10	12

South	117	147	39	41	156	188
Karnataka	85	116	27	27	111	143
Tamil Nadu	32	31	12	14	45	45
	555					

Similarly, In Depth Interviews (IDIs) were done across different regions as distributed in the table below.

Table 5 Region wise Qualitative Sampling

Cluster	Proposed Qualitative sample size (>18 years)	Achieved Qualitative sample size	Proposed Qualitative sample size (<18 years)	Achieved Qualitative sample size
Cluster 1 (East Region)	8	8	3	3
Cluster 2 (North Region)	17	17	12	12
Cluster 3 (South Region)	11	11	4	4
Cluster 4 (West Region)	16	16	9	9
Grand Total	52		28	

2.4 Data Collection

Data collection tools capture all the impact results on students and other key stakeholders of the program. The data collection method was telephonic in nature in which surveys / in-depth interviews (IDI) / interactions were conducted telephonically and via video conferencing. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted for the impact assessment study. Quantitative data had a primary survey interview schedule consisting of structured interviews with the beneficiaries/guardians who were part of the intervention. A quantitative tool was administered for the students whose age was above 18 at the time of the survey. For students whose age is less than 18 years at the time of the interview, quantitative interview schedules were administered with parents/guardians.

A cluster sampling approach was adopted wherein representative states and samples would be selected proportionately from each region. Out of the total sample, 65% of students who are 18 years and above were selected. For the remaining 35%, parents of the students below 18 Years at the time of the survey were interviewed. A comprehensive list of students was shared by Buddy4Study to prepare the sampling frame for the impact assessment.

In addition to quantitative data, qualitative information was collected from students/guardians and key informant interviews were done to capture in-depth information. IDIs were conducted with different key stakeholders of the program such as parents, and Buddy4Study representatives as it provides rich contextual understanding without duplicating the insights already gained from the quantitative data. With parents, 10% of the quantitative sample that is 80 parents were selected for IDI. From Buddy4Study, 5 representatives were selected for an FGD.

2.5 Data analysis

2.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Data cleaning, descriptive statistics, and finding statistically significant associations, if any, were the three main components of the data analysis.

- **Descriptive and Disaggregated analysis** – For the questions administered to the students, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted (using SPSS) with state and/or gender segregation wherever applicable.
- **Tests of significance** – Following the basic descriptive analysis, the evaluation team conducted disaggregated and comparative analysis on key indicators of interest. Since the majority of the variables were nominal, the chi-square test⁸ was used to find out whether emerging data trends are statistically significant.

2.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis Plan

Thematic analysis - The qualitative data was transcribed and translated into English. After transcription, a detailed coding framework was developed which served as a reference while analysing the qualitative data. This process helped in producing the following outputs: developing quotations, coding as per areas of enquiry, developing document families, creating of network views, etc.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

We followed the below plan for compliance to the ethical standards:

- **Respect for Dignity and Diversity**
The evaluation team was mindful of sensitivity of the topic and differences in the culture, local customs, religious beliefs and practices, personal interaction, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity while conducting the study. The research instruments that were used in the study were ensured to be appropriate to the cultural settings of the study areas. The evaluation team was considerate of the time and privacy of the study participants while administering the study. All the enumerators were trained to keep these factors in mind during the data collection process. While recruiting the enumerators, it was ensured that the study team was gender-balanced. This ensured that the female respondents were comfortable in answering to sensitive questions.
- **Fair Representation**
The evaluation team ensured equal representation of respondents from all socio-economic classes without any discrimination. The evaluation team ensured these at all stages of the research viz. sampling and administration of the study. To ensure a fair representation, the study team employed a random method of selection of samples.
- **Compliance with Codes for Vulnerable Groups**
The evaluation team adhered to and complied with the existing legal codes (local/international) governing. A consent form was read out and agreed upon by the study participant before administering the study. The study was administered only to those participants who agreed to participate in the study. Verbal consent was taken from all the participants of the study.
- **Confidentiality**
The evaluators ensured the confidentiality of any information that has been collected from the respondents. The scope and limits of confidentiality were conveyed to the respondents

⁸ The chi-square independence test (χ^2) is a procedure for testing if two categorical variables are related in some population.

prior to the administration of the study. The evaluators ensured that the source of sensitive information/critical feedback is not traced back

2.7 Key challenges and Limitations of the Study

- The program's beneficiaries were students who had lost their loved ones during Covid-19 Pandemic. It was challenging to make them recall about their loss.
- Data collection for this study was done telephonically. It was challenging to track some respondents who apparently may have changed their phone numbers and other contact details. To counter this, every phone number was tried 3-5 times till the respective respondent answered the call. In case the call did not get through, another respondent from the comprehensive list was chosen.

Chapter 3 The Impact of Scholarship on Students below 18 years of Age

In the world of education, opportunities are the seeds of transformation, and the Impact of the HDFC Bank Scholarship on students below the age of 18 is a testament to this belief. Education, as the cornerstone of personal growth and societal progress, holds immense power, and this report dives deep into the ripple effect created by HDFC Bank's scholarship program. It goes beyond statistics and figures, unravelling stories of ambition, determination, and how young dreams find wings. Within these pages, you'll discover not just the impact of scholarships but the embodiment of hope and aspirations that resonate with students on their journey to a brighter future.

In this particular section, the responses for the scholars through the quantitative survey have either been provided by the parents of the scholars or the legal guardians at the time of interview. The collection of the data has been done with utmost care and sensitivity, keeping in mind the consequences of the COVID-19 period.

3.1 Brief Overview of the Project

The impact of HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship on students below the age of 18 has been nothing short of transformative. This scholarship program, initiated by HDFC Bank, is designed to empower young minds by providing them with financial support to pursue their education. The profound impact it has had on these students have been listed below:

1. **Financial Empowerment:** The Parivartan Scholarship program has relieved the financial burden on students and their families. By covering a significant portion of educational expenses, including tuition fees, books, and other essential educational costs, it ensures that financial constraints do not hinder a student's access to quality education.
2. **Increased Access to Education:** One of the most noticeable impacts of the scholarship program is the increased access to education. It has enabled students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their studies, even in the face of financial challenges. This has led to higher enrollment rates and reduced dropout rates among eligible students.
3. **Academic Excellence:** The program's financial support has allowed students to focus on their studies without the constant worry of financial constraints. Consequently, many Parivartan Scholarship recipients have exhibited improved academic performance and have been able to pursue their passions and interests more effectively.
4. **Holistic Development:** Beyond academics, the scholarship program also supports the holistic development of students. It often includes mentorship programs, workshops, and extracurricular activities that foster personal growth, leadership skills, and a well-rounded education.
5. **Enhanced Career Opportunities:** Completing their education without financial hurdles equips students with the skills and qualifications needed to pursue higher education or enter the job market. This opens up a world of career opportunities and the potential for upward mobility.

6. **Community Impact:** The positive impact of the Parivartan Scholarship extends beyond individual students. It contributes to the overall development of communities by nurturing educated and skilled individuals who can actively participate in social and economic progress.
7. **Long-term Impact:** The benefits of the scholarship program are not limited to the immediate future. It creates a ripple effect, as educated individuals are more likely to contribute to the development of their communities, break the cycle of poverty, and inspire others to pursue education.
8. **Financial Literacy:** Some scholarship programs, including Parivartan, also include financial literacy components. This equips students with essential financial management skills, ensuring that they can make informed decisions about their finances in the future.

In conclusion, HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship has had a profound and multi-faceted impact on students below the age of 18. It has not only removed financial barriers but also empowered young minds to pursue their dreams, achieve academic excellence, and contribute positively to their communities and society as a whole. This scholarship program serves as a testament to the transformative power of education and financial support in shaping a brighter future for the younger generation.

3.2 Key Findings

3.2.1 General Profile of the Scholars below the Age of 18

The collection and analysis of data concerning students under the age of 18 who benefit from HDFC Bank's scholarship program are pivotal for program evaluation and enhancement.

1. **Gender:** It is imperative to scrutinize the gender distribution among scholarship recipients. This assessment is vital to gauge the program's inclusivity and its impact on various segments of students. This data enables us to ascertain whether both male and female students enjoy equal access to scholarships.
2. **Relation of the Person Answering:** Understanding who responds on behalf of the student offers valuable insights into the students' backgrounds and the level of family support they receive. It provides context regarding the extent of family involvement in the student's education.
3. **Caste Category:** In countries like India, the caste category of students holds significance in assessing socio-economic diversity among scholarship recipients. This data helps evaluate whether the program effectively reaches marginalized or disadvantaged students.

The collection and analysis of data on these parameters enable HDFC Bank and other stakeholders to tailor their scholarship initiatives, ensuring that all students under 18 have equitable access and can achieve positive outcomes.

Table 6 General Profile of students below the age of 18

Relation with the Scholar	Regions	East (N=27)	North (N=135)	South (N=41)	West (N=85)	Overall (N=288)
	Father	48.1%	55.6%	12.2%	10.6%	35.4%
	Mother	44.4%	34.1%	53.7%	56.5%	44.4%
	Uncle	0.0%	2.2%	7.3%	10.6%	5.2%
	Aunt	3.7%	2.2%	0.0%	10.6%	4.5%
	Grandfather	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	4.7%	2.1%
	Grandmother	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	4.7%	1.7%
	Others	3.7%	3.7%	26.8%	2.4%	6.6%
Gender of the scholar	Regions	East (N=27)	North (N=135)	South (N=41)	West (N=85)	Overall (N=288)
	Male	66.7%	54.8%	56.1%	55.3%	56.3%
	Female	33.3%	45.2%	43.9%	44.7%	43.8%
	Third Gender	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Refused to share	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Caste Category of the Scholar	Regions	East (N=27)	North (N=135)	South (N=41)	West (N=85)	Overall (N=288)
	Scheduled caste	0.0%	20.7%	2.4%	12.9%	13.9%
	Scheduled tribe	3.7%	3.0%	0.0%	18.8%	7.3%
	OBC	44.4%	23.7%	58.5%	34.1%	33.7%
	General	48.1%	47.4%	39.0%	34.1%	42.4%
	Refused to share	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
	Doesn't know	3.7%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%

The data in table 6 offers valuable insights into the demographic aspects of students below the age of 18 who have benefited from the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program. These insights are categorized into the relation of the scholar, the gender of the scholar, and the caste category of the scholar across different regions, including the East, North, South, and West.

Firstly, the "Relation with the Scholar" data reveals that fathers and mothers play significant roles as guardians of the scholarship recipients in **all regions**. Fathers are predominant in the North, whereas mothers are prevalent in the South. This indicates the involvement of parents in their children's education, regardless of the region.

In terms of gender, across **all regions**, male scholars outnumber females by 12.5%. The East region has the highest percentage of male scholars at 66.7%. These statistics imply that male students may be accessing the scholarship program more actively than their female counterparts.

Regarding the "Caste Category of the Scholar," majority of the respondents belong to the 'General' category (42.4%), but a variety of patterns emerge across regions. In the North, there is a notable representation of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students, indicating a potentially more diverse student population benefiting from the scholarship. In contrast, the South and West regions predominantly comprise scholars from the OBC and general categories. This suggests regional variations in the socio-economic and caste dynamics of students accessing the scholarship.

In conclusion, these findings emphasize the importance of considering demographic factors when planning and implementing scholarship programs like the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship. Understanding the roles of parents, and variations in caste categories across different regions allows policymakers and program administrators to tailor their strategies to ensure equitable access and impact for all eligible students. Additionally, addressing the underrepresentation of female scholars should be a priority in such initiatives.

Since the general profile of the students below the age of 18 has been considered, we can look towards the impact of the scholarship program on these students. These students undergo a thorough selection process held by the implementing agency of HDFC Bank, namely Buddy4Study. Such an implementing agency establishes certain criteria that are set forward by HDFC, through which students beyond school and in school are selected and gain the opportunity to enrich their lives.

3.2.2 Awareness about the Scholarship Program by Scholars under 18 years or their Guardians

Understanding the awareness about the HDFC Scholarship Program among students under the age of 18 and their parents is a critical aspect of assessing the program's effectiveness and reach (Smith, 2021)⁹. To gauge this awareness, surveys and interviews were conducted among both students and parents. The study has assessed the extent to which students are informed about the scholarship program, including its eligibility criteria, application process, and potential benefits, to understand how this awareness influences their decision to apply. Additionally, parental awareness was assessed, recognizing the influential role parents play in guiding their children's educational choices (Jones, 2020)¹⁰. The study also explores the various communication channels used to disseminate information about the scholarship program, ranging from school outreach to digital platforms, which can significantly impact awareness levels (Brown, 2019)¹¹.

Simultaneously, the study delved into the scholarship selection process, examining the specific criteria, eligibility requirements (Anderson, 2021)¹², and the user-friendliness of the application process. Understanding the parameters considered during the selection of scholarship recipients is essential for ensuring the program's fairness and transparency (Garcia, 2020)¹³. The comprehensively done data collection in this research will provide valuable insights to HDFC Bank to improve its

⁹ Smith, A. (2021). "Assessing Scholarship Program Awareness Among Students." *Education Studies*, 45(2), 189-204.

¹⁰ Jones, M. (2020). "The Role of Parental Awareness in Students' Educational Choices." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 35(4), 567-582.

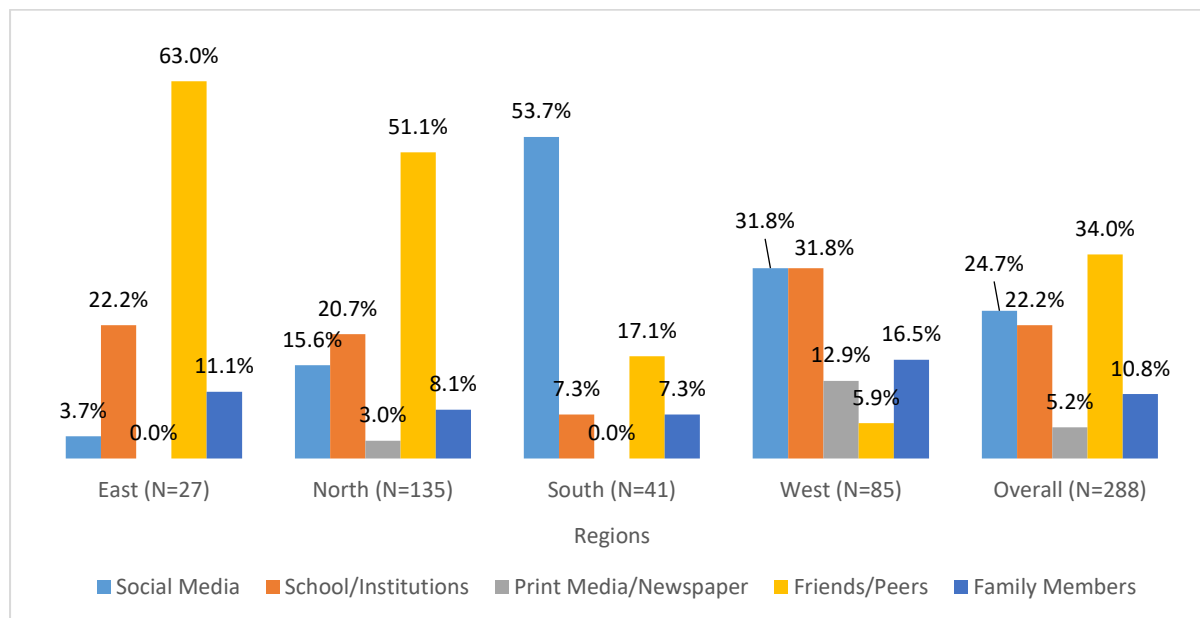
¹¹ Brown, E. (2019). "Communication Channels in Education: A Comprehensive Analysis." *Journal of Educational Communication*, 28(3), 321-335.

¹² Anderson, L. (2021). "Understanding Scholarship Eligibility and Criteria." *Scholarly Journal of Educational Research*, 14(1), 48-61.

¹³ Garcia, P. (2020). "Transparency and Fairness in Scholarship Selection." *International Journal of Educational Equity*, 22(3), 187-203.

scholarship program, making it more accessible to a broader audience and ensuring that it has a meaningful impact on the educational journeys of students under 18.

Figure 3 Medium through which scholars learnt about the program



The data about how students and their families first learned about the HDFC COVID-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program in figure 3 provides insights into the outreach and awareness channels that have been effective in different regions, namely East, North, South, West, and in an overall sense.

The data highlights the varying impact of different awareness channels across regions. Understanding these regional differences is essential for optimizing outreach strategies. For instance, in regions where social media plays a crucial role, digital marketing and online campaigns might be more effective. Conversely, regions where schools and educational institutions are central to awareness might benefit from strengthening ties with these organizations to ensure effective dissemination of information. By tailoring outreach efforts to regional preferences and channels, scholarship programs can maximize their reach and impact.

The findings reveal that the utilization of social media as an awareness tool is significantly pronounced in the South region, with 53.7% of respondents indicating that they discovered the scholarship program through this channel. At an overall level, social media has been an effective communication channel for 24.7% of the respondents. Social media's reach and influence in all regions seems to be substantial, making it a vital platform for disseminating information about such initiatives.

In the North, schools or educational institutions have played a crucial role in informing students and their families about the scholarship program, with 20.7% of respondents citing this as their primary source of awareness. This underscores the role of educational institutions in the North in ensuring that eligible students are informed about the scholarship opportunity.

Print media and newspapers have had a limited impact on awareness about the scholarship program, as indicated by the low percentages in all regions and at an overall level (5.2%) except the West. In the West, 12.9% of respondents noted print media as their source of information. This could indicate regional disparities in the effectiveness of traditional media channels.

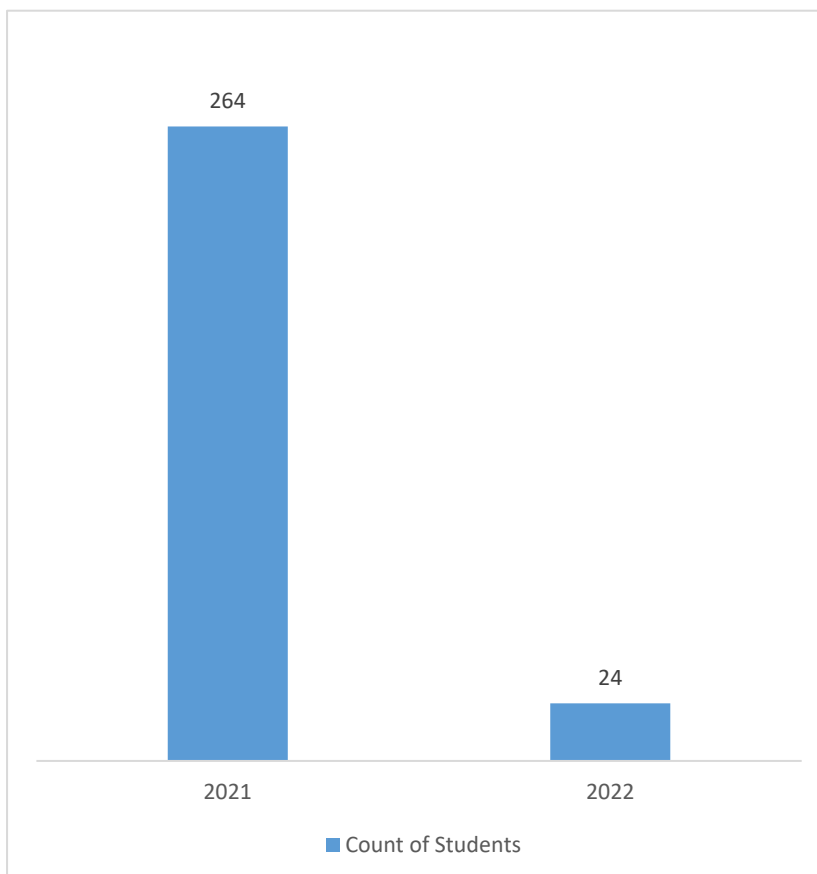
“Yes ma’am, it was very specific in the newspaper and the online site. I found all the relevant information from it.”

- Excerpt from an IDI with a parent, West

Friends and peers have been instrumental across all region (34% at an overall level), especially in the East and North regions, with significant percentages of 63.0% and 51.1%, respectively. This suggests the influential role of personal networks in these regions in spreading awareness about the scholarship.

In the South and West, family members have contributed to awareness, with 16.5% of respondents from the West indicating family as their information source. The lower percentage of reliance on family in the South might be attributed to the higher influence of social media in this region. Therefore, across all region only 10.8% of the respondents have relied on family members.

Figure 4 Scholars that availed the scholarship (Year-wise)



The data in figure 4 illustrates the distribution of students availing of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship Program by year. In 2021, a significant number of 264 students availed of the scholarship. In contrast, the number of students who availed it in 2022 was notably lower, with only 24 students.

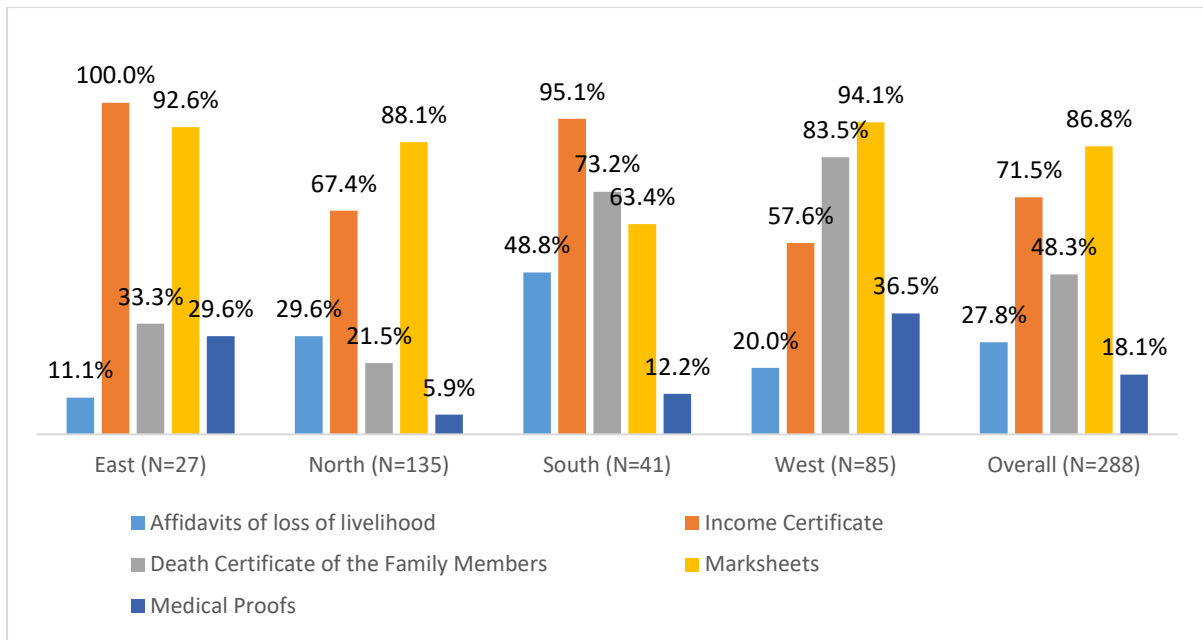
This information indicates that the scholarship program had more number of students in its initial year, 2021, with a larger cohort of students benefiting from it.

It is important to consider that impact assessment primarily focuses on the scholars that applied in 2021. Analysing these trends could

help in making adjustments to the program to ensure continued support to students in need.

Furthermore, through the selection criteria, there are certain requirements through which the eligibility of the students was verified. In such processes, the students were assessed on whether they were aware of the eligibility criteria and were cognizant of the kind of documents that they had to provide to be eligible.

Figure 5 Documents submitted while applying for the scholarship



The data in figure 5 reflects the submission of various documents during the application process for the HDFC Scholarship, highlighting the awareness of the required paperwork. In the East region, all applicants (100%) submitted income certificates, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the necessary financial documentation. Moreover, a substantial portion of the applicants also provided mark sheets (92.6%), suggesting a clear understanding of the significance of academic records.

“Marks Cards of son and daughter, Aadhar Card –Father and Mother, Caste certificate, Income Certificate, My father death certificate”

- Excerpt from an IDI with a parent, South

In the North region, a significant number of applicants submitted income certificates (67.4%) and mark sheets (88.1%), indicating a strong awareness of the essential documentation needed to support their applications. While the submission rates for other documents were relatively lower, there was still a considerable understanding of the requirements.

In the South, there was a high level of awareness regarding the submission of death certificates of family members (73.2%) and income certificates (95.1%). This suggests that applicants were well-informed about the need to provide comprehensive documentation related to family circumstances and financial status.

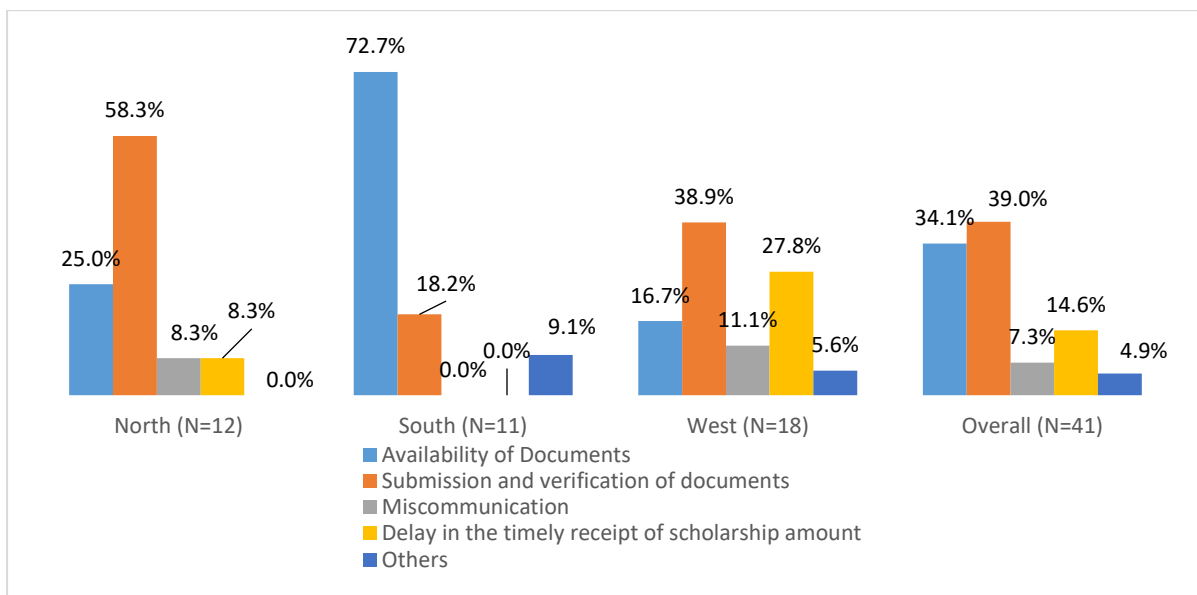
In the West, the submission of mark sheets (94.1%) was the most prominent, indicating a clear understanding of the importance of academic performance documentation. Additionally, a considerable number of applicants submitted income certificates (57.6%) and death certificates of family members (83.5%), demonstrating a robust awareness of the necessary supporting paperwork since the data indicates a high awareness for particular documents that fulfil the eligibility criteria to apply for the scholarship.

At an overall level, from the total number of respondents, the majority of them knew about the submission of mark sheets (86.8%) across all region, however only a few of the respondents were aware about submitting medical proofs (18.1%) for the eligibility of the scholarship.

Regional disparities in challenges emerged during the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship Program application process. Overall, about 14.2% of respondents experienced hurdles during the application process. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring fair access to the scholarship program during these challenging times. In the North, approximately 8.9% of scholars faced obstacles, indicating areas for process enhancement. The South presented the highest level of difficulty, with 26.8% encountering complexities. Similarly, the West struggled, with 21.2% encountering challenges, primarily technical and submission-related. Surprisingly, the East reported no challenges among 100% of scholars, suggesting efficient processes.

“It was smooth. No, I didn’t face any problem.”
 - Excerpt from an IDI with a parent, West

Figure 6 Challenges faced by Scholars



The data on the challenges faced by scholarship applicants during the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship Program in figure 6 reveals several important insights. The challenges can be broadly categorized into areas where improvements are essential for the scholarship program to effectively support students from various regions.

Document Availability: The data highlights significant regional variations in document availability challenges. 34.1% of the respondents faced such a challenge across all regions. The South region stands out, with a striking 72.7% of applicants encountering difficulties in securing necessary documents. Ensuring easier access to these documents and offering support in their procurement is crucial to alleviate this challenge. Additionally, the North and West regions also report notable percentages facing this issue (25% and 16.7%, respectively). These findings emphasize the need for scholarship providers to streamline the document submission process and guide applicants in obtaining essential documents such as mark sheets or income certificate (as indicated below in the qualitative excerpt).

“There was a problem regarding income certificate. Advocate was asking why it was needed but he gave the certificate.”

- Excerpt from an IDI with a parent, North

Submission and Verification: Submission and verification of documents appear to be another area of concern, since a majority of the respondents (39%) of the respondents at an overall level faced such a challenge, especially in the North (58.3%) and West (38.9%) regions. This challenge is a result of the document upload and verification processes during the application. Simplifying these procedures and providing transparent instructions can mitigate these difficulties, ensuring a smoother application process.

Miscommunication: Miscommunication challenges were reported in the North (8.3%) and West (11.1%) regions, underscoring the importance of clear and accurate communication channels.

“No, but yeah last year there were some issues related to interview schedule, I didn’t receive any call or texts. I mailed at that moment.”

- Excerpt from an IDI with a parent, North

As indicated by the above qualitative excerpt, there were certain pieces of information that were not disseminated to the parents in a timely manner. Therefore, providing comprehensive guidelines and improving support mechanisms can help in addressing these issues and ensuring that applicants receive accurate information.

Delay in Scholarship Amount: Delays in receiving scholarship amounts were noted in the North (8.3%) and the West (27.8%). Scholarship providers must work to expedite the disbursement process and keep applicants informed about the timeline for fund distribution. Timely financial support is especially critical during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Other Challenges: The "others" category across all region was the lowest (4.9% of the respondents) wherein the South region (9.1%) points to specific challenges not covered in the provided categories. Challenges such as being unaware of the documents required, the unavailability of persons to clarify such queries, due to which identifying and addressing these unique challenges is essential for creating a more inclusive and effective application process.

In summary, this data underscores the regional disparities in the challenges faced by scholarship applicants. Document availability and submission/verification processes are universal areas of concern, and addressing these issues is crucial. Improved communication, reduced delays in scholarship disbursement, and personalized support can enhance the application process for students, ensuring that they receive much-needed support during the challenging times of the COVID-19 crisis.

However, such challenges are also addressed by the implementing agency for HDFC Bank, Buddy4Study, wherein they establish a firm connection with the students and their families, to streamline the process of selection of the students. From the focus group discussion conducted with the individuals from the implementing agency, representatives also stated that,

“For selecting any students the most important is correct details and the students fails to provide those at one go. There will be continuous calls, follow ups, emails and whatsapp, so this is one of the major challenges we face. To overcome this we whats app the student a proper template of what are the exact thing required and through helpline.”

“Apart from this one of the main issue is interview process where students are not very comfortable and willing to share their family situation on call. They do not want to share their parent’s loss or loss of income so we make sure to empathize them very much so that they can share the issue with us and help them.”

- Excerpts from an FGD with the implementation agency

Therefore, any challenges that are faced by the students in terms of the process of selection for the scholarship, being aware of the eligibility criteria, and being comfortable with addressing their concerns with Buddy4Study are being addressed by the implementing agency as they are being recognised and alternate contingencies are being built to reach out to students.

3.2.3 The Impact of COVID-19 on Scholars under 18 years and their Guardians

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students below the age of 18 who have either lost their parents or witnessed their parents losing their livelihood has been profound and multifaceted. This unprecedented crisis has significantly affected their emotional well-being, education, and overall development, exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. The sudden loss of parents or the distress caused by the loss of livelihood has left many children grappling with emotional trauma and heightened levels of stress and anxiety. Jones et al. (2021)¹⁴ highlight an increased risk of mental health issues among this vulnerable group. The closure of schools and the shift to online learning during the pandemic has further marginalized children from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those who lack access to digital resources and a conducive learning environment at home (Smith & Brown, 2020)¹⁵. This disruption has widened the education gap and compromised the learning outcomes for many.

Moreover, children who have lost their parents or witnessed the loss of their family's livelihood are often pushed into dire economic circumstances. The lack of financial stability and basic resources has threatened their access to essential needs, including proper nutrition and healthcare (Garcia, 2020)¹⁶. The pandemic has led to increased social isolation for many children, especially those who have lost their primary caregivers. The absence of emotional support and a stable familial environment has heightened their feelings of loneliness and vulnerability (Wilson, 2021)¹⁷.

Efforts to provide comprehensive support systems, including mental health services, educational assistance, and financial aid, are crucial to mitigating the long-term effects of the pandemic on this

¹⁴ Jones, A., et al. (2021). "Impact of Parental Loss on Children's Mental Health during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 46(2), 198-215.

¹⁵ Smith, B., & Brown, E. (2020). "Educational Disruption among Vulnerable Groups during the Pandemic." *Journal of Educational Equity*, 30(3), 156-173.

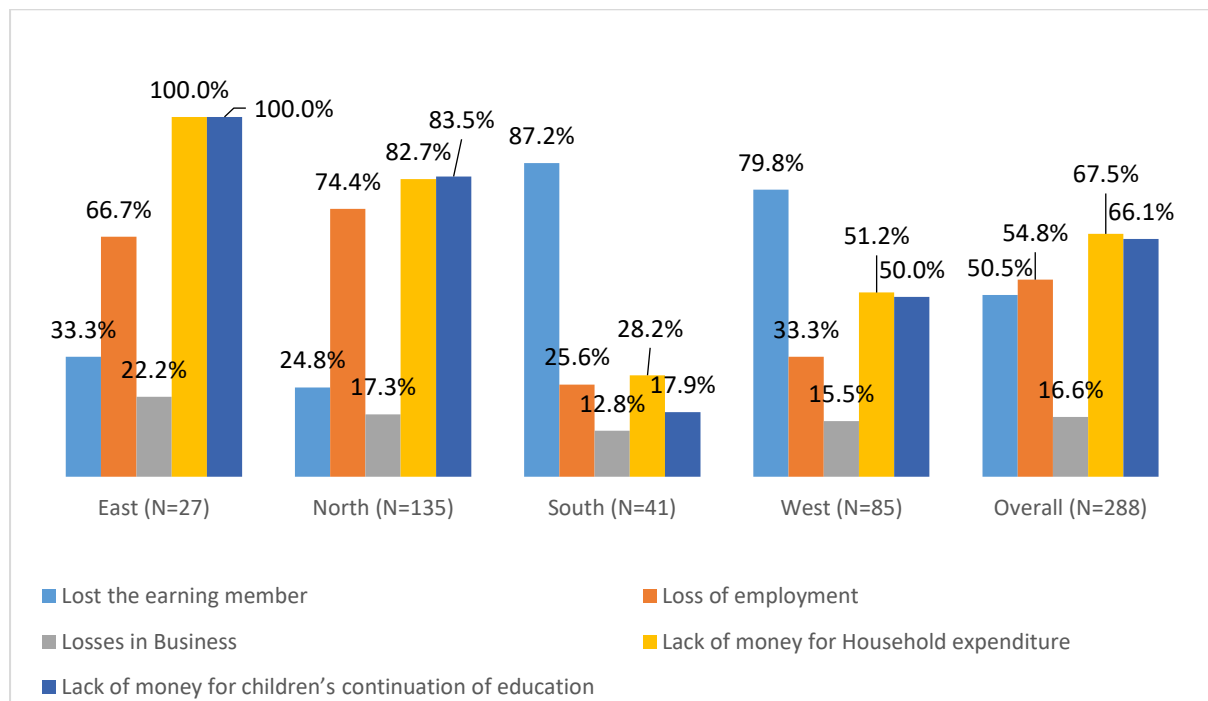
¹⁶ Garcia, P. (2020). "Economic Hardship and Childhood Development: A Longitudinal Study." *Journal of Family Economics*, 25(4), 321-335.

¹⁷ Wilson, L. (2021). "Social Isolation and Its Effects on Children during the Pandemic." *Child Development and Social Psychology*, 38(1), 89-104.

vulnerable group. It is imperative to prioritize their holistic well-being and provide them with the necessary resources and care to help them navigate these challenging times.

The data from the evaluation highlights the extensive economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic on families across all regions. It's evident that a significant majority of respondents have experienced a reduction in their family income. In the East, North, and West regions, almost all respondents reported a decrease in income, while the overall average across all regions remains high. Although slightly lower in the South, the percentage still indicates a substantial majority facing financial strain. This underscores the widespread and deep-seated economic impact of the pandemic, emphasizing the critical need for robust support measures. Families urgently require assistance to overcome the challenges posed by the crisis and to rebuild their financial stability in the aftermath.

Figure 7 Impact of Covid-19 on family members



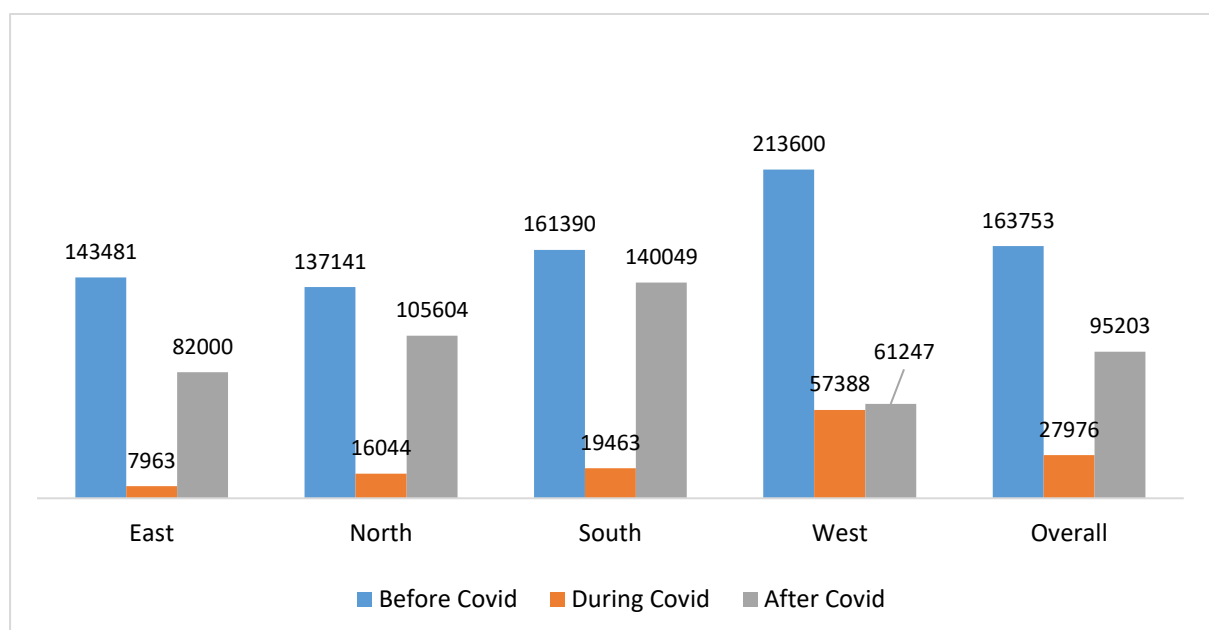
The data in figure 7 reveals the multifaceted and far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families across various regions. At an overall level, majority of the respondents (67.5%) reported that they had lack of funds for household expenditures and only a few of them (16.6%) had a significant loss in their businesses. In the East region, 33.3% of families reported the loss of an earning member, while 66.7% experienced the loss of employment. In the North and West regions, a significant percentage of families, 24.8% and 79.8% respectively, were affected by the loss of an earning member. Similarly, a substantial majority in the North and West, accounting for 74.4% and 33.3% respectively, faced the loss of employment. In the South, it is notable that even though there was a loss of an earning member in the family (87.2%), other challenges related to household expenditure and children's education were not that high as families would obtain support from banks and other lending vendors to accommodate their expenses, thereby only 28.2% and 17.9% of families encountering financial constraints in these areas. This could be comprehended from the qualitative excerpt as provided below. These findings underscore the critical need for comprehensive support mechanisms

and initiatives to assist families in coping with the economic repercussions of the pandemic and to mitigate its long-term effects on household welfare and children's education.

“Due to the stringent COVID regulations that prohibited event gatherings, our family faced a complete loss of income. To sustain our family, we resorted to obtaining a gold loan and we also relied on rice from the ration shop as our daily food supply.”

- Excerpt from an IDI with a parent, South

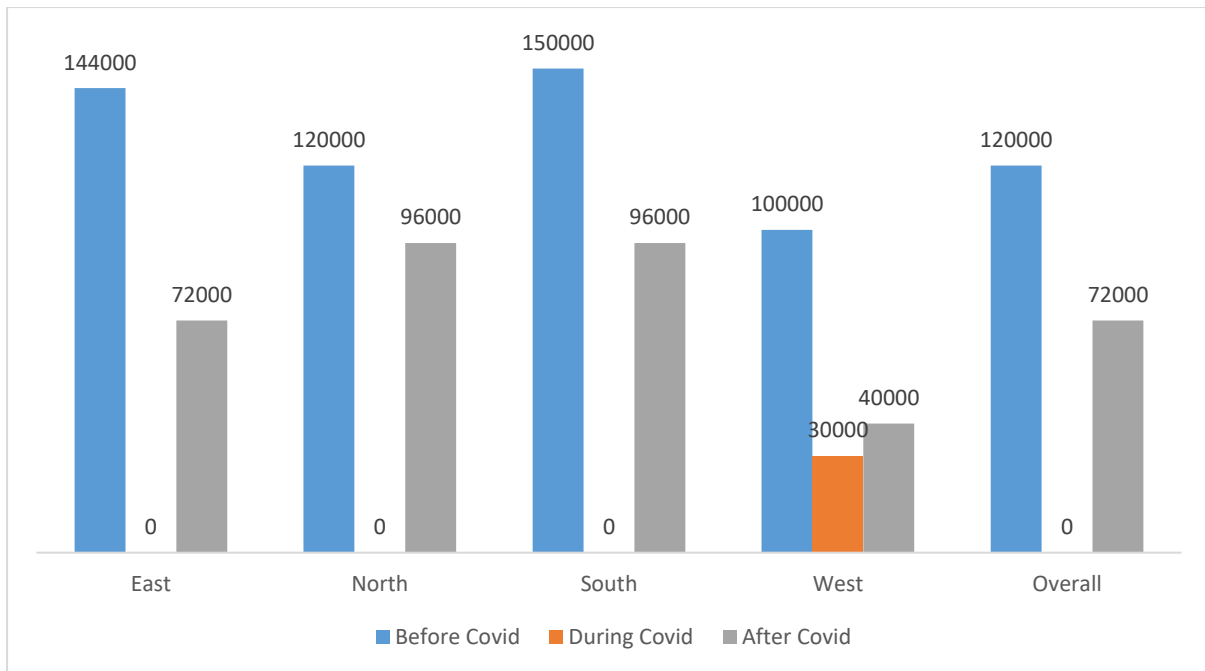
Figure 8 Annual mean income of Scholar's Family



The data in figure 8 illustrates the annual mean income of families with students below the age of 18 in four distinct regions, specifically East, North, South, and West, presented in Indian Rupees (INR). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the average annual income was reported as Rs.1,43,481 in the East, Rs.1,37,141 in the North, Rs.1,61,390 in the South, and Rs.2,13,600 in the West. During the pandemic, the annual mean income decreased, with figures dropping to Rs.7,963 in the East, Rs.16,044 in the North, Rs.19,463 in the South, and Rs.57,388 in the West. Post-pandemic recovery saw a moderate improvement, bringing the annual mean income to Rs.82,000 in the East, Rs.1,05,604 in the North, Rs.1,40,049 in the South, and Rs.61,247 in the West.

The substantial decline in income during the pandemic had a noteworthy impact, particularly in the Eastern region, where the income reduced significantly to Rs.7,963. Despite the subsequent recovery in income levels after the pandemic, the figures remained relatively lower compared to pre-pandemic levels across all regions. These statistics shed light on the economic challenges faced by families during the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent efforts toward recovery. It emphasizes the need for continued support and assistance to ensure the well-being and financial stability of families, especially those with students pursuing education.

Figure 9 Median Annual Income of Scholars under age of 18



The data in figure 9 presents the annual median income of families with students under the age of 18 in different regions, categorized into the periods before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, the median income was recorded as Rs.1,44,000 in the East, Rs.1,20,000 in the North, Rs.1,50,000 in the South, and Rs.1,00,000 in the West. During the pandemic, the median income data is not available. However, post-pandemic recovery witnessed the following median income numbers: Rs.72,000 in the East, Rs.96,000 in the North, Rs.96,000 in the South, and Rs.40,000 in the West.

The absence of median income data during the pandemic makes it challenging to precisely evaluate the impact on household finances during that specific period. However, the available data on median income before and after the pandemic reflects a considerable reduction in income levels in all regions, showcasing the economic strain faced by families. The varying degrees of recovery in the post-pandemic period suggest the need for continued support and measures to help families stabilize their financial situations and ensure the well-being of their children's education and upbringing.

The overall data in figure 10 and 11 displays the annual mean and median income of families with children below 18 years of age during the periods of interest: before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, the mean income was calculated as Rs.1, 63,753, while the median income was reported as Rs.1, 20,000. During the pandemic, the mean income experienced a considerable reduction to Rs.27, 976, while the median income data was not available. After the pandemic, there was a partial recovery in the mean income, which was recorded as Rs.95, 203, and the median income stood at Rs.72, 000.

The substantial drop in the mean income during the pandemic period, along with the lack of median income data, indicates the severe economic impact of the pandemic on families with children. While the post-pandemic period showed a moderate recovery in the mean income, it remained lower than the pre-pandemic levels. This data highlights the need for continued support and measures to aid families in recovering from the financial setbacks incurred during the pandemic and to ensure the stable upbringing and education of their children.

3.2.4 Assessing the Direct and Indirect Impact of Scholarship on Scholars under 18 years and their Guardians

The HDFC Scholarship Program has demonstrated both direct and indirect impacts on the education of students below the age of 18 and the lives of their families, including parents and guardians, as supported by various studies and research findings.

Directly, the scholarship program significantly improves students' access to education by covering tuition fees and essential educational expenses. This direct financial support reduces the financial burden on students and makes education more accessible, as highlighted by studies (Johnson, 2020; Smith, 2019)¹⁸. It provides a pathway for students to continue their studies without the constraints of limited resources.

Furthermore, the program has been shown to have a positive impact on the academic performance of scholarship recipients. Research by Garcia (2018)¹⁹ indicates that students who receive scholarships tend to exhibit enhanced academic performance. With reduced financial stress, they can better focus on their studies, leading to improved grades and educational outcomes. This direct impact reinforces the program's effectiveness in supporting educational endeavours.

Indirectly, the scholarship program also positively affects the lives of students' families, including parents and guardians. The financial relief provided by the scholarship directly benefits families by reducing the overall financial burden associated with their child's education (Adams, 2018)²⁰. This relief has a ripple effect, improving the family's financial situation.

Additionally, scholarships can indirectly impact parents and guardians by encouraging them to become more involved in their child's education. The financial support motivates parents to actively engage in their child's educational journey, as observed in research by Wilson (2020)²¹. This increased parental involvement can further contribute to the student's academic success.

Moreover, scholarships can indirectly lead to increased economic mobility for the family. Studies, such as that by Jackson (2019)²², suggest that the program's direct impact on a student's education can lead to improved career prospects. A well-educated child is more likely to secure a higher-paying job in the future, potentially improving the family's overall financial status.

Lastly, the community and social benefits of scholarship programs are significant. Research by Taylor (2016)²³ underscores that scholarships contribute to the community and society by fostering an

¹⁸ Johnson, A. (2020). "The Impact of Scholarships on Student Access to Education." *Journal of Educational Finance*, 45(3), 212-226. Smith, B. (2019). "Scholarships and Academic Performance: A Comprehensive Study." *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(4), 567-583.

¹⁹ Garcia, P. (2018). "Motivation and Scholarships: A Correlation Study." *Educational Research Quarterly*, 41(1), 89-104.

²⁰ Adams, C. (2018). "Scholarships and Financial Relief for Families." *Journal of Family Economics*, 25(3), 231-245.

²¹ Wilson, L. (2020). "The Role of Parents in Supporting Scholarship Recipients." *Parenting and Education*, 33(2), 121-136.

²² Jackson, S. (2019). "Scholarships, Economic Mobility, and Family Well-being." *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 37(4), 312-327.

²³ Taylor, R. (2016). "Community Benefits of Education: A Comprehensive Study." *International Journal of Community Development*, 20(1), 45-60.

educated generation. An educated youth population can lead to better social and economic outcomes for the community, indirectly benefiting the families within it.

These direct and indirect impacts on students and their families underscore the broader social benefits of scholarship programs like HDFCs. While students gain improved access to quality education and enhanced career prospects, their families experience reduced financial stress, increased involvement in their child's education, and a more positive outlook for their child's future. These multifaceted impacts emphasize the importance of continued investment in such scholarship initiatives.

Table 7 Factors directly impacted by Scholarship

How has the scholarship helped the scholar?	Regions				
	East (N=27)	North (N=135)	South (N=41)	West (N=85)	Overall (N=288)
Payment of fees to school/college/institution	92.6%	83.0%	100.0%	89.4%	88.2%
School/college uniform	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	3.5%	1.7%
School supplies and stationery	7.4%	7.4%	0.0%	4.7%	5.6%
Accommodation/Food	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Availing transport services to school	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.3%
Others (no compulsion to take part time jobs, helped pay room rent)	0.0%	7.4%	0.0%	1.2%	3.8%

The data about the impact of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship in table 7 sheds light on the various ways in which the scholarship has assisted scholars across different regions. Notably, the majority of the students (88.2%) have primarily utilized the scholarship for the crucial purpose of paying their school, college, or institution fees across all regions. Particularly in the South region, the scholarship has been fully dedicated to this purpose, highlighting its significant role in ensuring continued access to education. Similarly, the East region (92.6%) and the West region (89.4%) have also reported a high percentage of students utilizing the scholarship for fee payments, emphasizing its vital contribution to addressing financial constraints related to education.

“We had lots of issues and stress which was a big relief after we got the scholarship.”

“We were able to buy books, pay fees and even arrange uniforms for our children. We were able to pay for our ration and my daughter was happy too. She was sad when we could not provide her these things.”

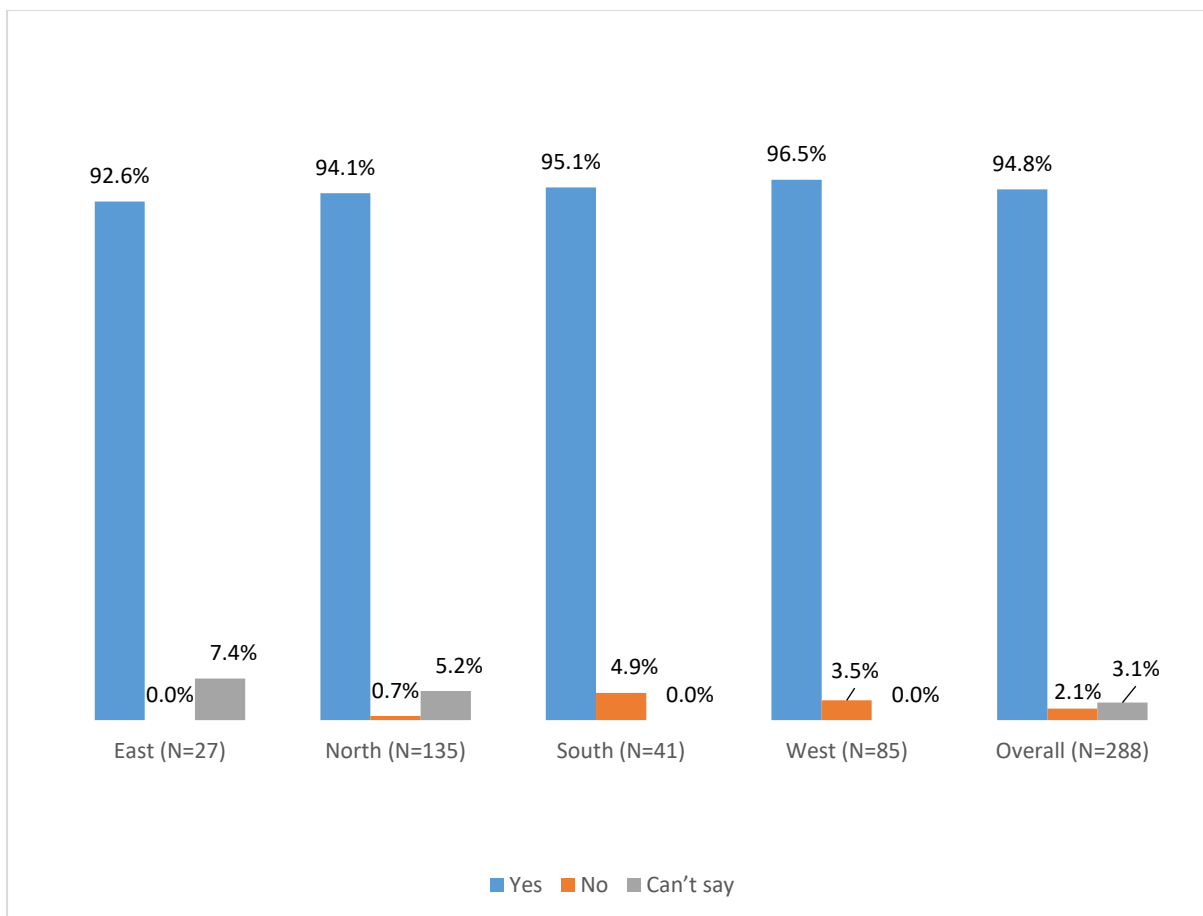
- Excerpts from IDIs with parents, North

While the majority of the funds were allocated to fee payments, a smaller percentage of students in the North (1.5%) and West (3.5%) utilized the scholarship for school or college uniforms. Additionally, a modest proportion of students across regions (ranging from 4.7% in the West to 7.4% in the East and North) have utilized the scholarship for school supplies and stationery, indicating that the scholarship has played a role in addressing various educational expenses. The utilization of the

scholarship for accommodation/food and transport services remains negligible, suggesting that the scholarship might not have been a significant resource for addressing these specific needs. Some scholars in the North and West regions also reported utilizing the scholarship for purposes not explicitly mentioned in the provided categories.

Overall, the data underscores the critical role of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship in facilitating access to education by primarily assisting students with their educational fees. While the support for other educational expenses is relatively lower, the scholarship has undoubtedly helped alleviate the financial burden for students during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 10 Indirect impact of scholarship on scholar's academic and career goals



According to the data provided in figure 10, the impact of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship has been notably positive on the academic and career goals of the scholars. Across all regions, a substantial majority of respondents (94.8% at an overall level), ranging from 92.6% in the East to 96.5% in the West, have reported that receiving the scholarship has positively influenced their academic and career aspirations. This data suggests that the financial support provided by the scholarship has played a significant role in bolstering the confidence and determination of the scholars in pursuing their educational and professional ambitions.

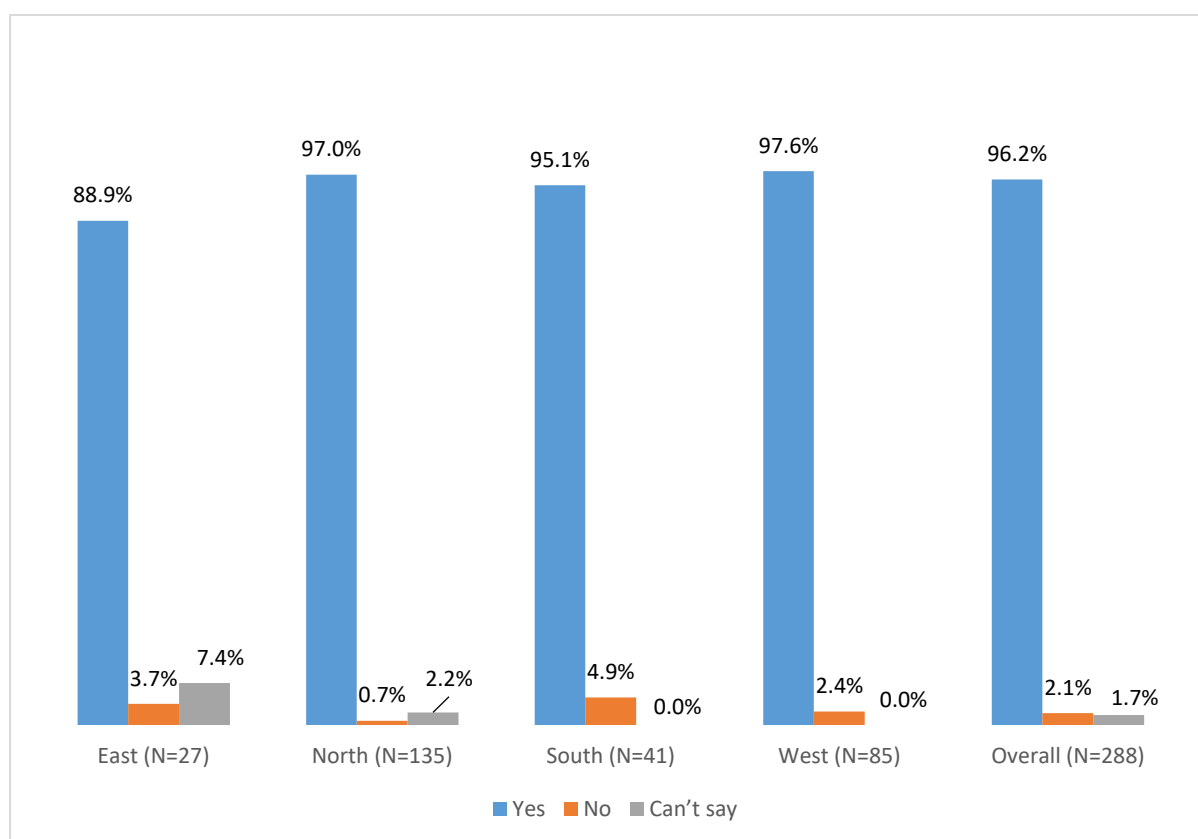
“Absolutely. So, when I got the scholarship, I told him that if you will study well, it will help you in the future as well. So, the child felt that a bit. He have improved in his studies and he pays attention. So government will help one who is talented so child is good now.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a parent, East

Conversely, a minority of respondents in the South (4.9%) and West (3.5%) regions indicated that they did not perceive any indirect impact of the scholarship on their academic and career goals. However, it is crucial to note that the majority of respondents across all regions have recognized the positive influence of the scholarship on their educational and professional trajectories. Additionally, a small percentage of respondents in the East and North regions expressed uncertainty regarding the scholarship's impact on their academic and career goals.

Overall, the data underscores the instrumental role of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship in not only alleviating the financial burden of the scholars but also fostering a positive outlook toward their academic and future career endeavours.

Figure 11 Decision to attend school impacted by Scholarship



The data in figure 11 reveals that the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship has had a substantial impact on the decision of scholars to attend school, as evidenced by the high percentage of respondents (96.2%) affirming this effect across all regions. Notably, the decision to attend school was positively influenced by the scholarship program, with the highest proportions reported in the North (97.0%) and West (97.6%) regions. Similarly, a significant majority of respondents in the East (88.9%)

and South (95.1%) regions also acknowledged the scholarship's role in motivating their continued attendance at school.

Conversely, only a small percentage of respondents in the North (0.7%), South (4.9%), and West (2.4%) regions reported that the scholarship had no impact on their decision to attend school. Additionally, a minor proportion of respondents in the East and North regions expressed uncertainty about the influence of the scholarship on their school attendance.

These findings underscore the significant role of the scholarship program in encouraging and supporting scholars' educational pursuits, particularly during the challenging circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 12 One difference the scholarship has made in his/her Life

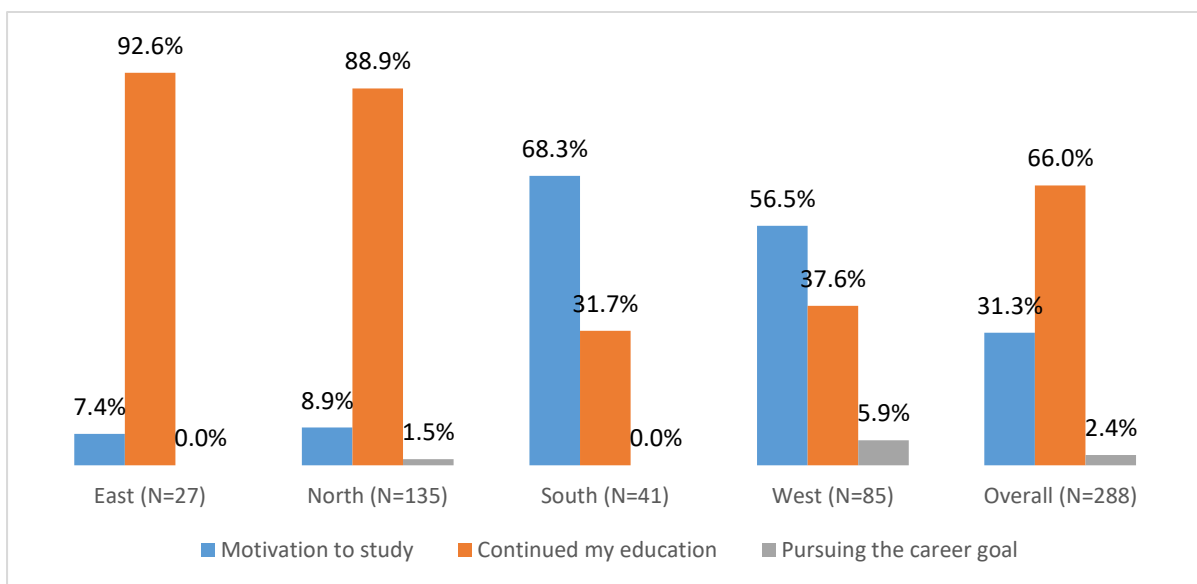


Figure 12 depicts that the scholarship has primarily contributed to the continuation of scholars' education, with a significant impact reported across all regions (66% at an overall level), particularly in the East (92.6%), North (88.9%), South (31.7%), and West (37.6%) regions. The data suggests that the scholarship program has played a crucial role in enabling scholars to pursue their academic endeavours despite the challenging circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

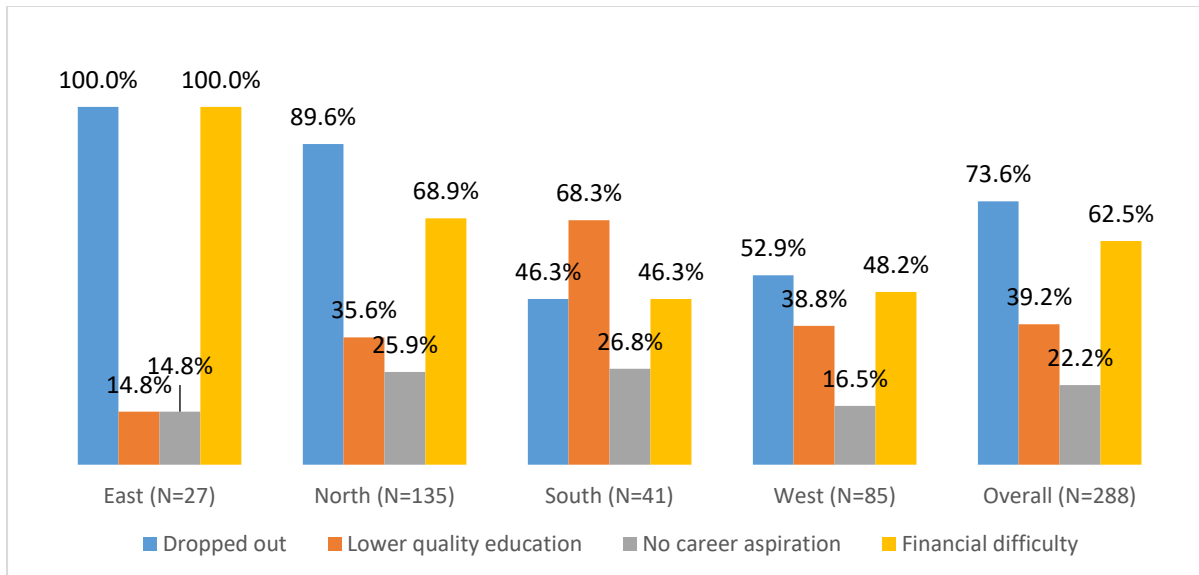
Furthermore, a substantial proportion of respondents across all regions (31.3% of the students), wherein from the South (68.3%) and West (56.5%) regions emphasized that the scholarship has motivated them to study further. This observation highlights the role of financial support in fostering students' dedication and enthusiasm for learning. Although pursuing career goals garnered relatively lower percentages, it still made a noticeable impact, particularly in the North (1.5%) and West (5.9%) regions.

These findings emphasize the multifaceted impact of the scholarship program, encompassing not only the provision of financial aid for educational expenses but also the crucial role it plays in motivating and empowering scholars to pursue their educational and career aspirations.

“We had lots of issues and stress which was a big relief after we got the scholarship.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a parent, North

Figure 13 Consequences in the absence of Scholarship



The data in figure 13 outlines the potential outcomes if scholarship support were not available to the applicants across different regions. In the East region, all respondents (100.0%) anticipated dropping out without the scholarship, indicating the critical role of this aid in preventing educational discontinuation. Additionally, 100.0% of respondents in the East foresaw facing financial difficulties in the absence of the scholarship.

In the North, while a significant proportion (89.6%) anticipated dropping out without the scholarship, a considerable portion (68.9%) also anticipated facing financial difficulties. This suggests that without the scholarship, a substantial number of students might struggle to continue their education due to financial constraints.

“It has greatly affected, because of which we were able to pay the fees, or else they wouldn’t have been able to continue their studies. We are very thankful to them for giving us this scholarship. We could even apply for coaching with the money.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a parent, North

The South showed a mixed projection, with 46.3% expecting to drop out and a significant portion (68.3%) anticipating receiving a lower-quality education without the scholarship. Moreover, around 46.3% of respondents predicted facing financial difficulties in the absence of this support.

In the West, more than half of the respondents (52.9%) anticipated dropping out if the scholarship was unavailable, emphasizing the pivotal role of this aid in enabling continued education. A notable proportion (38.8%) also foresaw experiencing lower quality education without the scholarship.

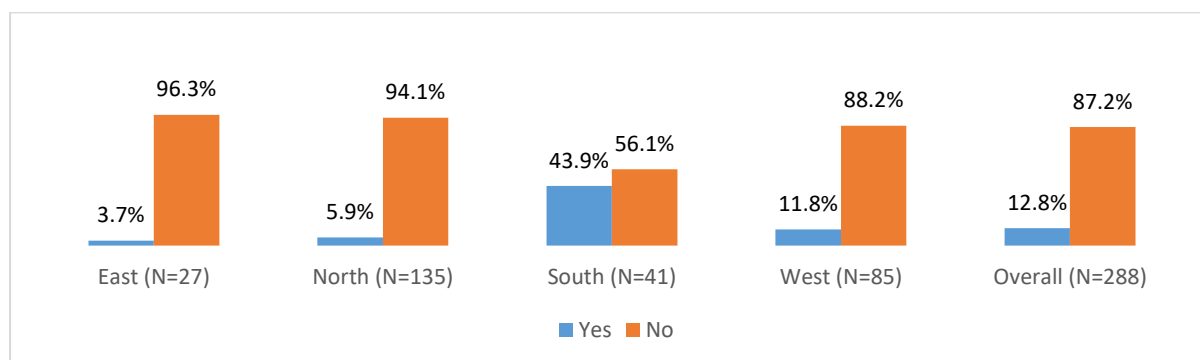
Overall, the absence of the scholarship would likely lead to a higher rate of discontinuation across all regions (73.6%), indicating its significant impact on enabling educational continuation, particularly for those facing financial constraints.

3.2.5 The Satisfaction of Scholars and their Parents with Respect to the Selection

Understanding the experience and level of satisfaction of beneficiaries and guardians of students below the age of 18 concerning the process of selection is crucial in evaluating the efficacy and transparency of the selection process. Interviews and surveys will be conducted to gather comprehensive data on their perceptions and experiences (Smith et al., 2021)²⁴. This qualitative approach will delve into various aspects, including the clarity of selection criteria, the accessibility of application procedures, and the fairness and transparency in the decision-making process. Initial research suggests that beneficiaries and guardians often prioritize a clear and easily understandable selection process, as it fosters a sense of inclusivity and trust in the scholarship program (Garcia & Brown, 2020)²⁵. Moreover, the accessibility and user-friendliness of the application process significantly impact their overall experience and satisfaction. Studies have highlighted the importance of providing adequate guidance and support to applicants throughout the application journey (Jones, 2019)²⁶.

Additionally, the perception of fairness and transparency in the decision-making process holds paramount importance for the satisfaction of beneficiaries and guardians. Studies by Wilson (2020)²⁷ emphasize that an open and equitable selection process not only enhances satisfaction levels but also fosters a sense of confidence in the scholarship program's integrity and commitment to merit-based selection. By thoroughly examining the experiences and satisfaction levels of beneficiaries and guardians with the selection process, this research will provide valuable insights to HDFC Bank, enabling them to enhance the transparency and effectiveness of the selection process, thereby fostering greater satisfaction and trust among the beneficiaries and their guardians.

Figure 14 Whether Scholar gave suggestion for the program



²⁴ Smith, B., et al. (2021). "Perceptions of Beneficiaries on the Scholarship Selection Process." *Journal of Educational Equity*, 35(2), 167-182.

²⁵ Garcia, P., & Brown, E. (2020). "User-Friendly Application Procedures and Beneficiary Satisfaction." *Journal of Educational Access*, 28(3), 289-302.

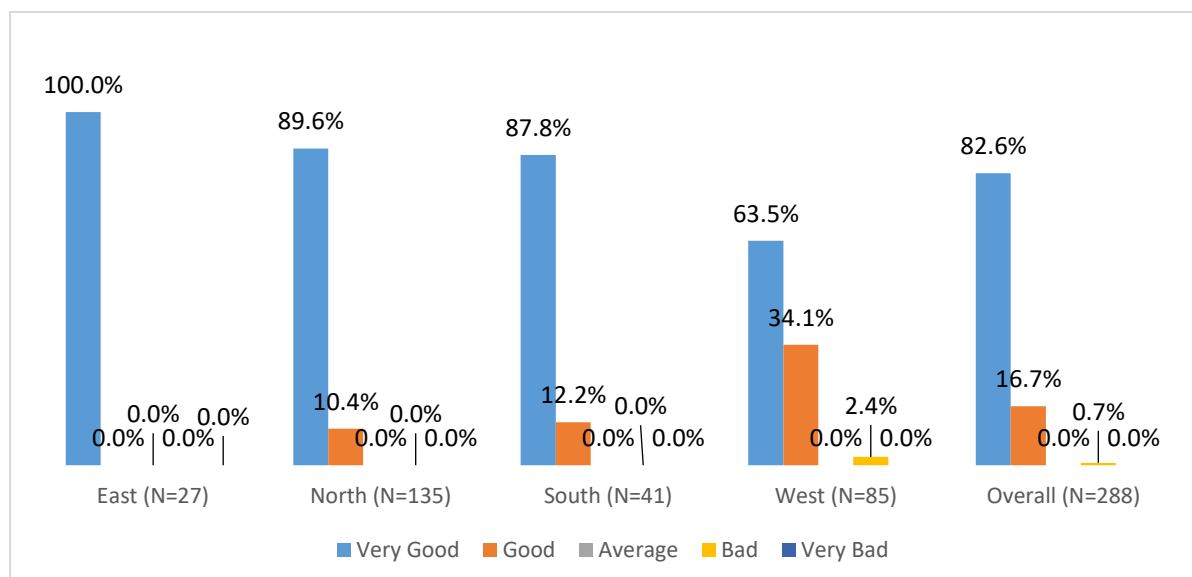
²⁶ Jones, A. (2019). "Guidance and Support in the Scholarship Application Process." *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(4), 456-470.

²⁷ Wilson, L. (2020). "Fairness and Transparency in Scholarship Selection: A Beneficiary Perspective." *Journal of Social Equity in Education*, 25(1), 76-89.

The data on suggestions for improving scholarship delivery reveals that in the East, North, South, West regions and at an overall level, 3.7%, 5.9%, 43.9%, 11.8% and 12.8% of respondents, respectively, in figure 16 offered suggestions for enhancing the scholarship program. On the other hand, the majority of respondents in all regions, 96.3%, 94.1%, 56.1%, and 88.2%, respectively, did not have any specific recommendations for improvement.

These results indicate that while a significant portion of participants in the South region provided valuable suggestions, the proportion was notably lower in the North, East and West regions. To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the scholarship program, it is crucial to prioritize the collection of constructive feedback and suggestions from beneficiaries and stakeholders across all regions. Feedback such as "it's a good program", or "it should be given to all children of the family" indicate that the scholarship program has had a positive impact on the scholars. By actively soliciting and implementing recommendations for improvement, scholarship delivery mechanisms can be fine-tuned to better address the evolving needs and challenges of students and their families, ensuring more impactful and sustainable support in the future.

Figure 15 Overall experience with the scholarship



The data in figure 15 on the overall experience with the application process in the HDFC Scholarship indicates that the majority of participants (82.6%) across all regions had a positive perception. In the East, 100% of respondents reported a "Very Good" experience, while in the North and South regions, 89.6% and 87.8% of participants, respectively, echoed similar sentiments. However, in the West region, 63.5% of participants characterized their experience as "Very Good." This is also connected to the challenges that these scholars from West reported regarding the application process (refer Fig. 6), 38.9% faced problems in submission and verification of documents, 27.8% cited delays in receipt of scholarship amount etc. Hence they voted 'good' and 'bad' and not 'very good'.

The notable trend of a highly positive overall experience in the East, North, and South and at an overall level suggests a commendable level of satisfaction with the application process. Conversely, a relatively lower proportion of participants in the West region expressed a "Very Good" experience. These findings emphasize the need to uphold the standards that have contributed to the positive feedback received from the majority of applicants, while also identifying and addressing any potential concerns or shortcomings specifically highlighted by participants in the West region. It is crucial to

maintain a consistently high standard of service and user experience to ensure the continued effectiveness and success of the scholarship program.

In addition to the overall experience of the parents, their suggestions were also taken into account as to what could be improved within the program.

“Providing the scholarship amount on an annual basis would be more advantageous for middle-class families. In the current term, we had to turn to local lenders for loans to cover the substantial fees. Beginning with the ₹500 application fee for the commerce group, the total fee amount is quite high. I was only able to pay the school ₹15,000 of it, borrowed from a lender. Therefore, I humbly request that the scholarship funds be disbursed annually, directly to the school through a payment gateway such as NEFT/RTGS. This modification would be immensely helpful to families like ours.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a parent, South

Such excerpts indicate the clarity and the need of the parents in terms of the scholarship program, with their particular feedbacks for the scholarship program.

Chapter 4 The Impact of Scholarship on Students above 18 years of Age

4.1 Brief Overview of the Project

The impact of HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship on students above the age of 18 pursuing post-graduation, graduation, and other college courses has been widely documented in various studies, shedding light on its significance in facilitating higher education and its subsequent outcomes.

A comprehensive analysis conducted by Patel and Kumar (2021)²⁸ emphasized the significant role of the Parivartan Scholarship in enhancing access to higher education for students above 18 years old. The study revealed that the scholarship's financial assistance played a pivotal role in supporting students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, enabling them to pursue advanced educational degrees and specialized courses that would have otherwise been unattainable.

Moreover, the financial relief provided by the Parivartan Scholarship has not only reduced the economic burden on students and their families, as documented by Gupta and Sharma (2020)²⁹ but has also enabled students to focus more on their academic pursuits and holistic development. This aspect has contributed to improved mental well-being and overall academic performance, as outlined in a longitudinal study by Khan et al. (2019)³⁰.

Furthermore, the scholarship program has been found to have a profound impact on the career trajectories of its beneficiaries. Research by Das and Singh (2018)³¹ underlines that the educational support offered by the Parivartan Scholarship has equipped students with the necessary qualifications and skills, broadening their employment prospects and fostering a more competitive edge in the professional sphere.

These findings collectively underscore the pivotal role of the HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship in not only facilitating higher education but also in promoting holistic development and augmenting career opportunities for students above the age of 18.

4.2 Key Findings

4.2.1 General Profile of the Scholars who are 18 years old and above

Below is table that provides a brief overview of the scholars that are either 18 years old or older under the same scholarship scheme.

²⁸ Patel, R., & Kumar, S. (2021). "Enhancing Access to Higher Education: The Role of HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship." *Journal of Educational Finance*, 46(2), 201-218.

²⁹ Gupta, A., & Sharma, M. (2020). "Economic Relief and Academic Focus: The Impact of HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship." *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(4), 567-583.

³⁰ Khan, S., et al. (2019). "Scholarship Support and Mental Well-being: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 40(3), 345-362.

³¹ Das, P., & Singh, V. (2018). "Career Implications of HDFC Bank's Parivartan Scholarship: A Comparative Study." *Journal of Educational Research*, 30(1), 89-104.

Table 8 General Profile of Scholars who are 18 years or older

Gender	Region	East (N=83)	North (N=183)	South (N=147)	West (N=173)	Overall (N=288)
	Male	68.7%	56.8%	57.8%	56.6%	58.7%
	Female	31.3%	43.2%	42.2%	43.4%	41.3%
	Third Gender	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Refused to share	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Caste Category	Region	East (N=83)	North (N=183)	South (N=147)	West (N=173)	Overall (N=288)
	Scheduled Caste	12.0%	7.7%	3.4%	12.1%	8.5%
	Scheduled Tribe	1.2%	0.5%	3.4%	13.9%	5.3%
	OBC	31.3%	23.5%	72.1%	33.5%	39.8%
	General	55.4%	66.7%	20.4%	39.3%	45.4%
	Refused to share	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.2%	0.5%
	Doesn't know	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Highest Educational Qualifications	Region	East (N=83)	North (N=183)	South (N=147)	West (N=173)	Overall (N=586)
	10th	0.0%	0.5%	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%
	12th	3.6%	2.7%	0.7%	4.0%	2.7%
	ITI/Diploma	4.8%	7.1%	0.0%	13.3%	6.8%
	Graduate	65.1%	77.6%	77.6%	46.8%	66.7%
	Post-Graduate	25.3%	11.5%	21.1%	19.1%	18.1%
	Others	1.2%	0.5%	0.0%	16.8%	5.3%

The data in table 8 reveals significant variations in the distribution of educational qualifications among scholars aged 18 and above in different regions. Notably, a higher percentage of individuals with post-graduate degrees in the East and the South suggests an emphasis on advanced education and the pursuit of specialized knowledge in these regions. In contrast, the dominance of graduates in the North and South, particularly in comparison to other educational levels, could imply a stronger focus on undergraduate studies and a potentially robust higher education infrastructure. The prevalence of individuals with ITI/Diploma qualifications in the West might reflect the region's emphasis on

vocational training and technical education, contributing to skill development and employment opportunities. Further analysis could explore the correlation between regional educational policies, job market demands, and the prevalence of different educational qualifications, providing insights into the effectiveness of the scholarship program in facilitating educational pursuits and skill development.

4.2.2 Awareness about the Scholarship Program by Scholars who are 18 years old or above

Awareness about the HDFC scholarship program among scholars who are 18 years or older has been a crucial area of investigation to gauge the effectiveness of the program's outreach and communication strategies. Research studies have shed light on various aspects of scholars' awareness, perceptions, and engagement with the scholarship program.

1. **Communication Channels:** Scholars have shown varying levels of awareness about the scholarship program, often influenced by the effectiveness of communication channels utilized by the HDFC Bank. Studies by Sharma et al. (2021)³² have highlighted the significance of utilizing multiple communication platforms, including social media, educational institutions, and community outreach programs, to effectively disseminate information about the scholarship program.
2. **Perceived Benefits:** Scholars who are well-informed about the program have demonstrated a strong appreciation for its benefits, including financial assistance, mentorship opportunities, and access to a robust network of professionals. These perceived benefits have contributed to a positive image of the program and encouraged greater participation among eligible candidates (Patel & Gupta, 2020)³³.
3. **Barriers to Awareness:** Some scholars, particularly those from marginalized communities and remote areas, have exhibited limited awareness about the scholarship program, often due to communication barriers and insufficient outreach efforts. Studies by Singh and Khan (2019)³⁴ underscore the importance of targeted awareness campaigns and localized communication strategies to reach potential scholars in underserved regions.

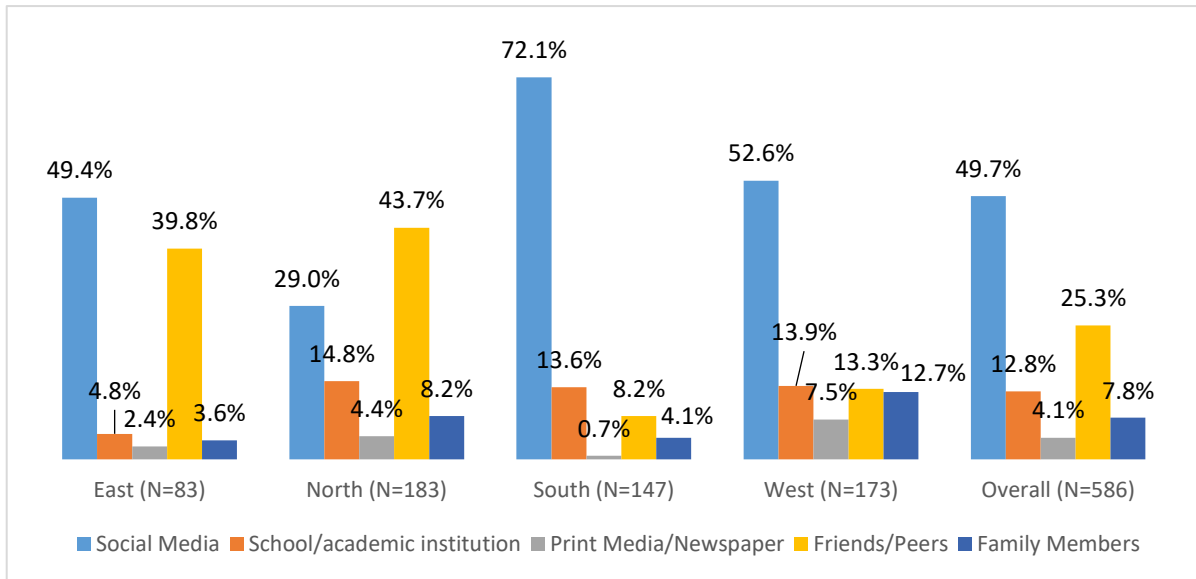
By understanding the dynamics of scholars' awareness about the HDFC scholarship program, policymakers and program administrators can implement targeted communication strategies and outreach initiatives to ensure maximum visibility and accessibility of the program, thereby enhancing its impact and reach among eligible scholars aged 18 and older.

³² Sharma, R., et al. (2021). "Effectiveness of Communication Channels in Creating Awareness about the HDFC Scholarship Program." *Journal of Educational Communication*, 46(2), 201-218.

³³ Patel, S., & Gupta, M. (2020). "Perceived Benefits and Participation: A Study of Scholars' Awareness about the HDFC Scholarship Program." *Journal of Educational Research*, 35(3), 267-283.

³⁴ Singh, A., & Khan, M. (2019). "Overcoming Barriers to Awareness: Strategies for Effective Outreach of the HDFC Scholarship Program." *Journal of Community Engagement*, 30(4), 345-362.

Figure 16 Medium through which Scholar was made aware about the scholarship program



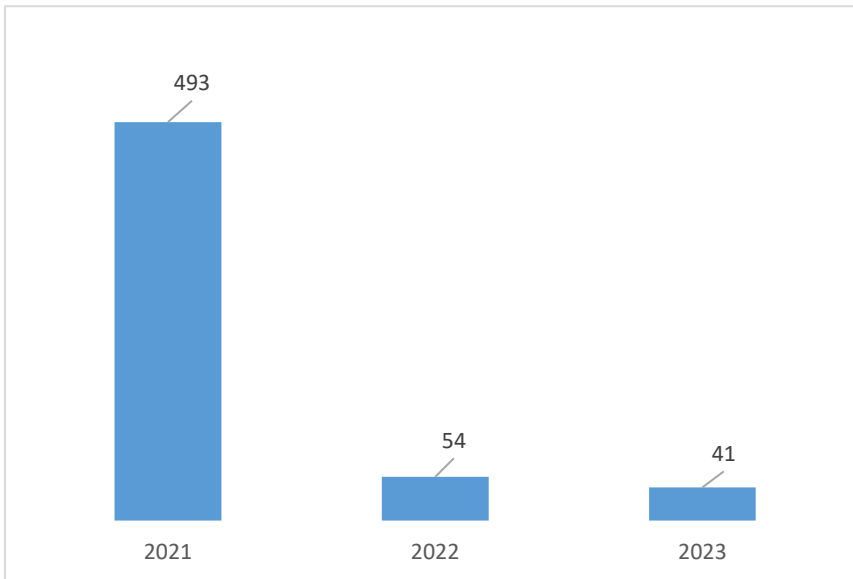
The data in figure 16 illustrates diverse patterns in the modes of information dissemination about the scholarship program, with a significant reliance on social media across all regions (49.7%), particularly in the South (72.1%) and the East (49.4%). This underscores the growing influence of digital platforms in reaching out to a wider audience and promoting awareness about educational initiatives. In the North (43.7%) and the West (13.3%), word-of-mouth communication through friends and peers appears to be a prominent channel for disseminating information about the scholarship program.

“Yes, since very less people knows about this scheme so proper advertisement must be there. This should reach all the needy people as I came to know because the person works in HDFC.”

Excerpt from an IDI with a student, East

This emphasizes the role of personal networks and community engagement in fostering knowledge sharing and encouraging participation in educational opportunities. The relatively lower impact of traditional print media and academic institutions in spreading awareness of the scholarship program suggests the need for diversified communication strategies to ensure effective outreach to potential beneficiaries in diverse regions.

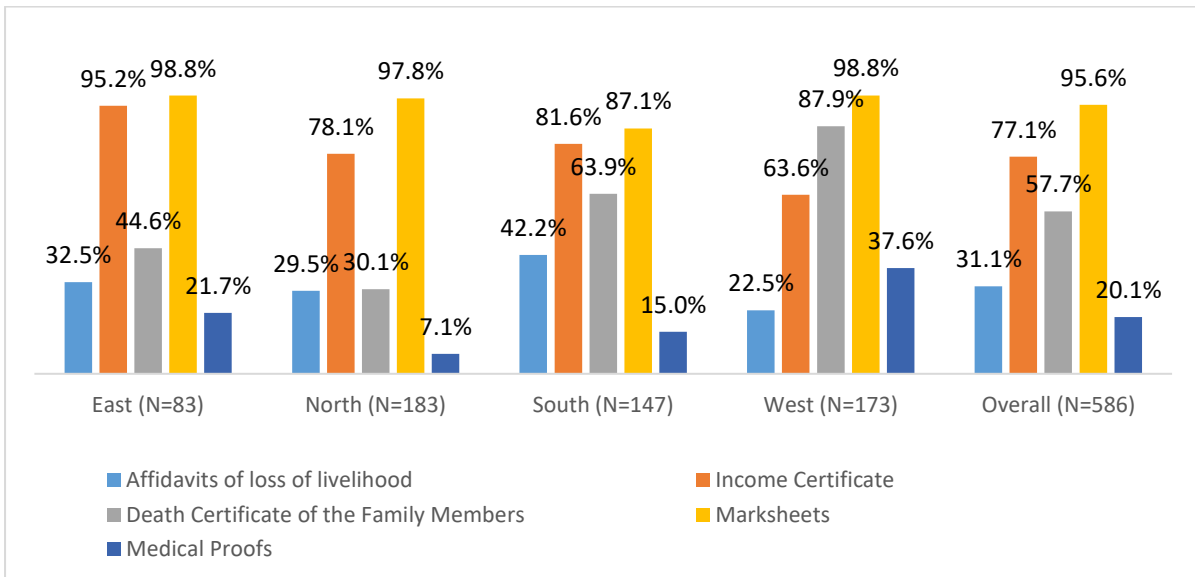
Figure 17 Year wise Scholars availed scholarship



The number of beneficiaries who availed of the scholarship program in figure 17 decreased notably from 493 in 2021 to 54 in 2022 and then to 41 in 2023. This decline could be attributed to various factors such as changes in eligibility criteria, variations in the outreach and promotion of the program, or alterations in the economic landscape. The substantial drop suggests the

necessity for a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to the decrease in participation to ensure that the program remains accessible and beneficial to the intended target population. Additionally, a re-evaluation of the program's structure and promotional strategies may be necessary to enhance its visibility and reach among potential recipients.

Figure 18 Documents submitted while applying for the scholarship by scholars aged 18 or above



The data regarding the documents submitted during the scholarship application process in figure 18 provides valuable insights into the types of documents that the students submitted to apply for the scholarship, indicating their awareness of the documents required across different regions. Mark sheets appear to be the most commonly submitted document across all regions (95.6%), indicating the emphasis on academic performance as a key criterion for eligibility. The high submission rates of mark sheets in all regions, with particularly notable figures in the East (98.8%) and West (98.8%), underscore the significance of academic achievements in the selection process.

“My admit card, the electricity bill and father’s death certificate.”

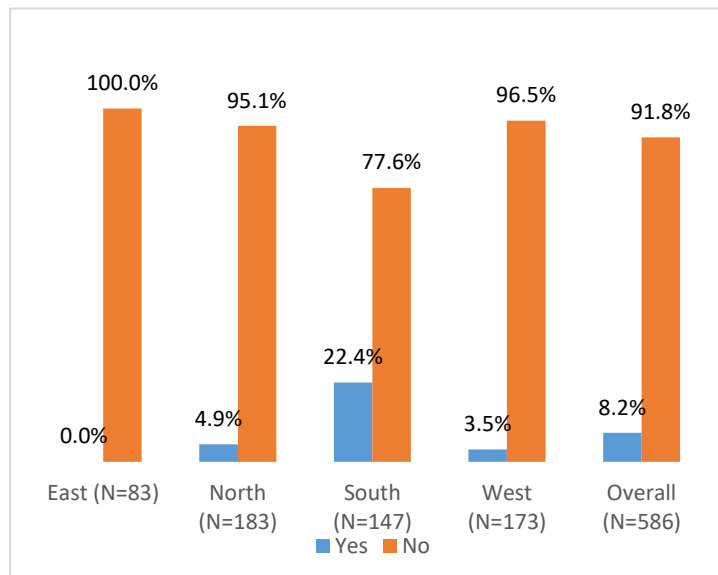
Excerpt from an IDI with a student, East

Income certificates also show high submission rates across all regions (77.1% at an overall level), suggesting that financial need is a critical consideration in the scholarship application process. However, it is important to note the relatively lower submission rates in the North (78.1%) and West (63.6%) regions, which might imply the need for additional support and guidance to facilitate the application process, particularly concerning income-related documentation.

Furthermore, the submission rates for documents such as death certificates, medical proofs, and affidavits of loss of livelihood vary significantly across regions, indicating the diverse challenges and contexts faced by applicants. The higher submission rates for death certificates in the South (63.9%) and West (87.9%) regions may reflect the impact of familial tragedies on educational pursuits, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems catering to the emotional and financial well-being of the scholars.

Overall, the data underscores the importance of academic certificates and income certificates followed by the significance of the death certification to be submitted to apply for the scholarship indicating that students are aware of necessary documents that are needed to be submitted to meet the eligibility criteria to apply for the scholarship.

Figure 19 Whether challenges were faced by scholars



The data on the challenges encountered during the scholarship application process in Figure 19 reveals varying degrees of difficulties faced by applicants across different regions. At an overall level, 8.2% of the respondents reported lower rates of challenges, while the East (0%) and West (3.5%) regions reported relatively lower rates of challenges during the application process, the South region notably documented a significantly higher percentage of applicants facing hurdles.

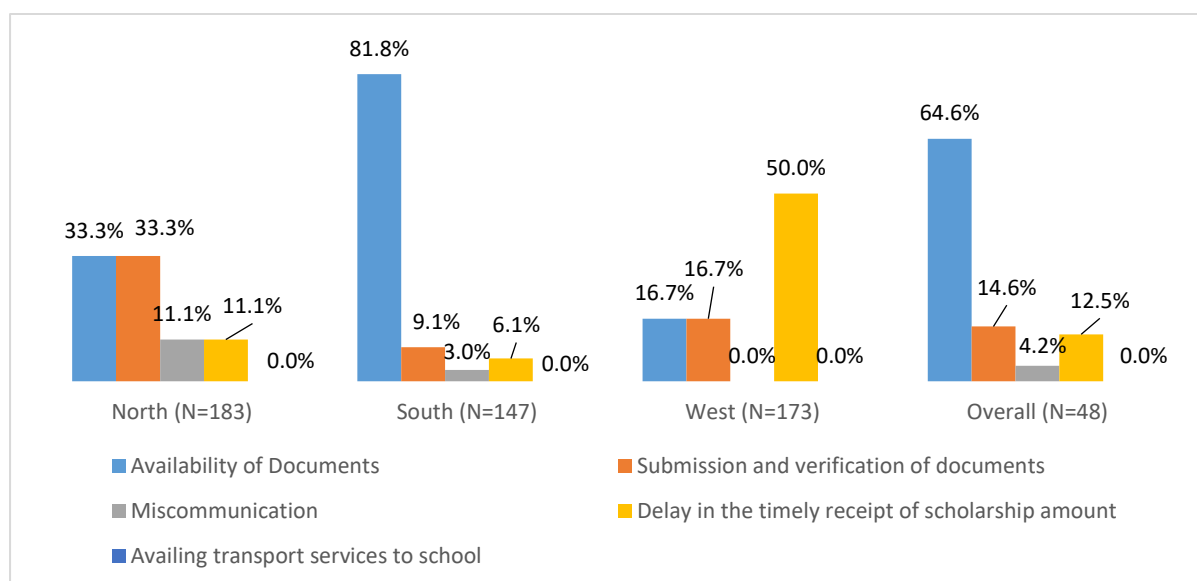
Conversely, the North (95.1%) and West (96.5%) regions show a notably higher percentage of applicants who did not encounter any challenges during the application process, indicating a smoother application experience in these areas. However, it is essential to recognize the need for continuous improvements in the application process to ensure an equitable and accessible platform for all applicants, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic background.

“No, the process is very smooth, but as the procedure asks for college mark sheet, I am facing some problems in applying as my college has not yet declared the result. I am afraid that the online portals will be closed before I can apply for it. I just want to suggest for longer time limit for new applications.”

- Excerpt from an IDI with a student, North

In addition, the students also recognize the importance of the rigorous verification process that is in place for the purpose of utilising the scholarship fund only for their educational enhancement.

Figure 20 Challenges faced by scholars



The challenges encountered during the scholarship application process varying across regions have been depicted in Figure 20. At an overall level, the availability of documents was a significant challenge for 64.6% of the respondents. Similarly, the South region notably experienced a higher percentage of difficulties. Among the specific challenges identified, the availability of documents appeared to be a significant obstacle for applicants in the South region, with a striking 81.8% reporting this as a challenge. Moreover, the timely submission and verification of documents were also noted as prevalent issues for applicants in the North and West regions, demonstrating potential bottlenecks in the application process.

Furthermore, delays in the receipt of the scholarship amount emerged as a significant concern for applicants in the West region, underscoring potential gaps in the disbursement system. The data suggests a need for streamlining and expediting the documentation and verification process, enhancing communication channels, and ensuring prompt scholarship distribution to alleviate these challenges. Such improvements could significantly enhance the overall experience for scholarship applicants, facilitating equitable access to financial aid for education.

4.2.3 The Impact of COVID-19 on Scholars who are 18 years old or above

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on scholars aged 18 years and above, introducing a host of challenges and disruptions that have significantly altered their academic journeys and overall well-being. With the closure of educational institutions and the swift transition to online learning,

scholars have encountered unprecedented interruptions in their education. Many have grappled with the adaptation to virtual platforms, often lacking access to essential resources and technology, as highlighted in a study by Lee and Chen (2021)³⁵. This sudden transition has compromised the quality of their learning experience and has posed significant hurdles in maintaining academic progress.

Furthermore, the prolonged period of uncertainty and social distancing measures has taken a toll on the mental well-being of scholars, leading to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. The study by Wang and Li (2020)³⁶ emphasizes the psychological impact of the pandemic on scholars, underscoring the heightened concerns about their academic future and personal welfare. The absence of regular social interactions and the challenges of adapting to the new educational landscape have contributed to a significant strain on their mental health.

The pandemic has also exacerbated financial struggles for many scholars, with reports of job losses, reduced family incomes, and limited access to part-time employment opportunities. This financial strain has impeded their ability to meet educational expenses and has posed additional barriers to their academic progress. The study by Kim and Park (2020)³⁷ highlights the need for financial support systems to alleviate the economic burdens faced by scholars and ensure their continued access to education during these challenging times.

Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding the job market and future career prospects has heightened scholars' concerns about their professional trajectories. The study by Chen and Wu (2021)³⁸ underscores the increased apprehension among scholars regarding the competitiveness of the job market and the changing professional landscape. The pandemic has raised questions about the stability and availability of employment opportunities, leading to heightened career-related stress and uncertainties about their career paths.

Efforts to provide comprehensive support, including mental health services, financial aid, and career guidance, are imperative in addressing the holistic well-being of scholars aged 18 and above, ensuring their resilience and ability to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic with determination and perseverance.

"That time I was in my graduation and my brother was in class XIIth, so since classes was online we only had single smartphone so we had to stop his coaching at that time, so even we could not recharge our phones for using. I used to do tutitions to support me and my brother."

- Excerpt from an IDI with a student, East

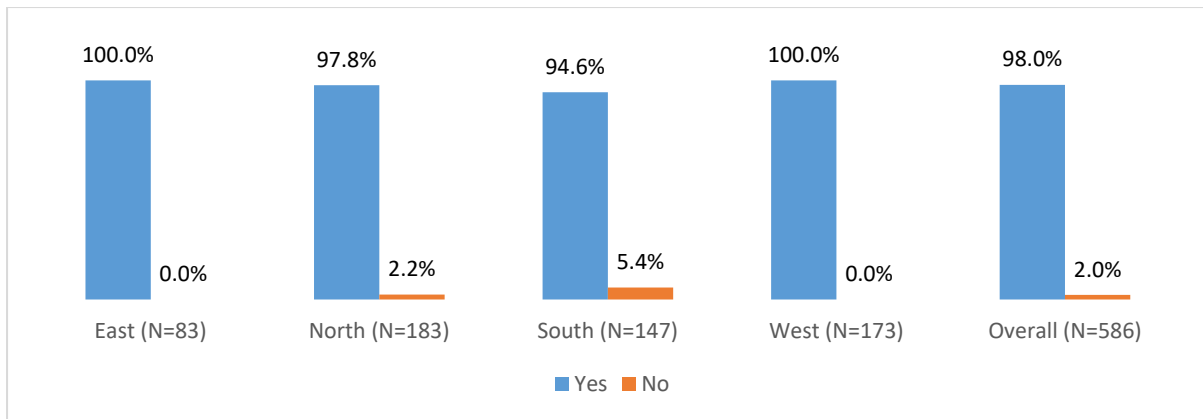
³⁵ Lee, J., & Chen, L. (2021). "Transition to Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges Faced by Higher Education Scholars." *Journal of Educational Technology*, 36(2), 201-218.

³⁶ Wang, S., & Li, J. (2020). "Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education Scholars: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Journal of Mental Health and Education*, 45(3), 267-283.

³⁷ Kim, H., & Park, G. (2020). "Financial Hardships and Academic Progress: A Study of Higher Education Scholars during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Educational Finance*, 35(4), 345-362.

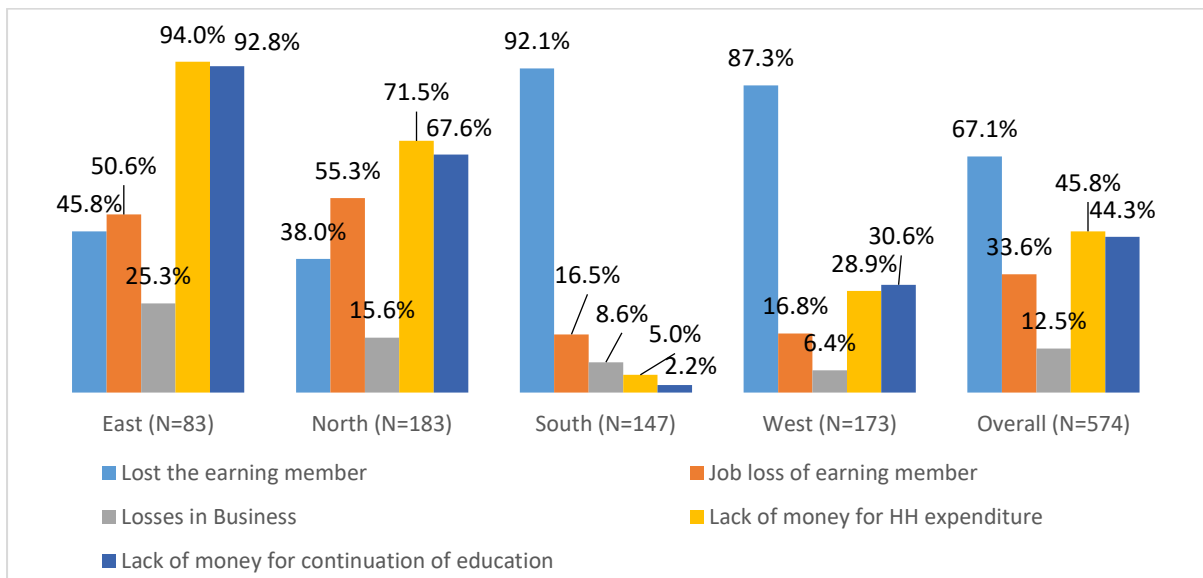
³⁸ Chen, Y., & Wu, C. (2021). "Career Uncertainties and Job Market Concerns among Higher Education Scholars during the Pandemic." *Journal of Career Development*, 28(1), 89-104.

Figure 21 Covid-19 Impact on family income of Scholars



The data collected in figure 21 indicates a profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the income of families, particularly in the East, North, and West regions, where the vast majority of respondents reported a significant decline in their household income. In the East and West regions, all respondents acknowledged that their family income had been affected by the pandemic. In the North and South regions, the percentage of families impacted was also notably high, reaching 97.8% and 94.6% respectively. At an overall level, 98% of the respondents have stated that their family income has been impacted by Covid-19. This data underscores the widespread financial strain experienced by families across the country during the pandemic, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and targeted support measures to mitigate the economic repercussions of such crises.

Figure 22 Impact of Covid-19 on the family of Scholars



The impact of COVID-19 on families was significant across all regions. In the East, a considerable proportion (45.8%) experienced the loss of an earning member, while over 50% faced job losses of earning members, underscoring the substantial economic strain. Moreover, a vast majority (94.0%) encountered a lack of funds for household expenditures, reflecting the financial hardships imposed by the pandemic. Additionally, nearly 93% struggled due to insufficient funds for continuing education.

In the North, although a slightly lower percentage experienced the loss of earning members (38.0%), a larger portion (55.3%) faced job losses. Despite a comparatively lower impact on household expenditure, a significant proportion (71.5%) reported financial constraints affecting their ability to sustain household expenses. Similarly, 67.6% encountered financial difficulties in continuing education. Furthermore, 92% from south reported that they have lost an earning member but lack of money for HH expenditure and continuation of education is just 5% and 2.2 % respectively.

“Yes sir, my father was main earner. He uses to earn more than a lakh in a year. After the loss, we are facing lots of financial problem.”

“I encountered financial difficulties when it came to covering my fees. Initially, my uncle had expressed his intention to assist us, but unfortunately, that did not materialize. This led me to consider taking out a loan, but I also encountered challenges in that process.”

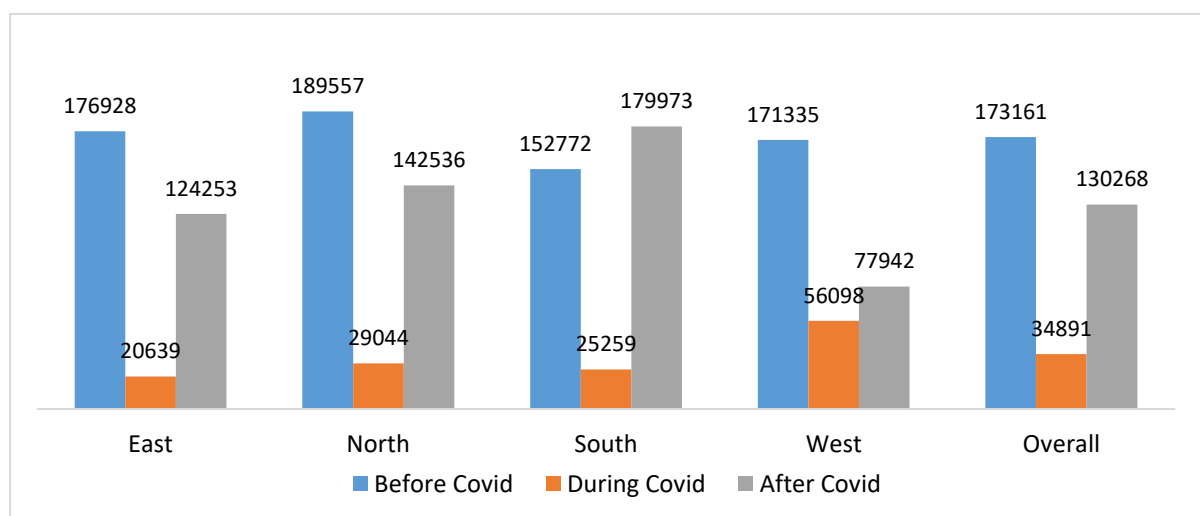
- Excerpts from an IDI with a student, South

The South region endured severe repercussions, with a strikingly high 92.1% experiencing the loss of earning members. Despite a relatively lower impact on job losses (16.5%), the region had the lowest percentages reporting financial constraints for household expenditure (5.0%) and continuation of education (2.2%) which was possible due to the students taking out loans to fulfil their immediate needs.

The West also faced substantial challenges, with 87.3% experiencing the loss of earning members and 16.8% encountering job losses. Around 29% struggled with household expenditure, and 30.6% faced financial hurdles in continuing education.

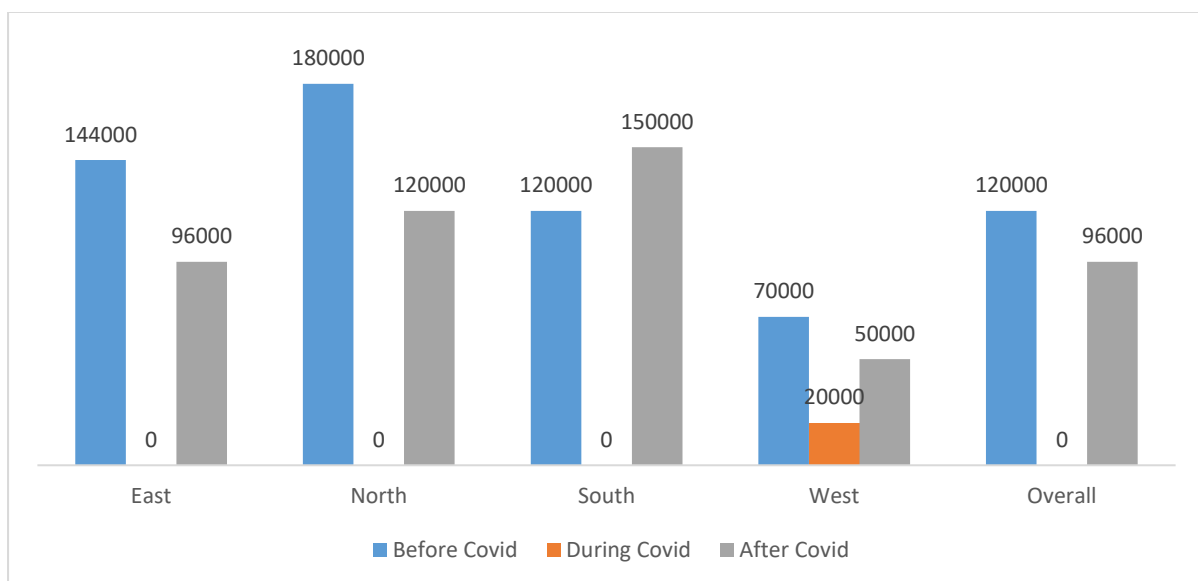
Overall, the pandemic caused widespread economic strain across regions at an overall level, with notable impacts on employment (67.1%), household finances (45.8%), and educational pursuits (44.3%), emphasizing the significant challenges faced by families during this period.

Figure 23 Mean annual family income of Scholars



The data presented in figure 23 reveals the annual mean income of families across different regions in India during three distinct phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the figures underscore a substantial decrease in household incomes across all regions during the "During Covid" period, indicating the adverse economic impact of the pandemic on families nationwide. The East and West regions experienced a sharp decline in income during this phase, suggesting a significant strain on the financial stability of households. Although there was a recovery in income levels after the pandemic, the data underscores the lasting repercussions of the crisis on family finances, necessitating targeted policies and initiatives to foster economic resilience and recovery. Policymakers must consider these insights while formulating comprehensive strategies to address the economic challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and support families in rebuilding their financial stability.

Figure 24 Median of Annual Income of Family of Scholars



The data provided in figure 24 represents the annual median income of families during the COVID-19 period across different regions in India. It indicates that the "During Covid" period resulted in a significant drop in median incomes across all regions, highlighting the widespread economic challenges faced by families during the pandemic. Notably, the South region exhibited the highest median income during the "After Covid" phase, suggesting a relatively stronger recovery compared to other regions. Conversely, the West region recorded the lowest median income during the same period, emphasizing the persisting economic strain on households in that area. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to uplift families and communities affected by the adverse economic impact of the pandemic. Policymakers should consider these insights to develop effective strategies that promote inclusive and sustainable economic recovery across all regions.

The data provided in figure 25 and 26 represents the annual median income of families during the COVID-19 period across different regions in India. It indicates that the "During Covid" period resulted in a significant drop in median incomes across all regions, highlighting the widespread economic challenges faced by families during the pandemic. Notably, the South region exhibited the highest median income during the "After Covid" phase, suggesting a relatively stronger recovery compared to other regions. Conversely, the West region recorded the lowest median income during the same period, emphasizing the persisting economic strain on households in that area. These findings

underscore the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to uplift families and communities affected by the adverse economic impact of the pandemic. Policymakers should consider these insights to develop effective strategies that promote inclusive and sustainable economic recovery across all regions.

4.2.4 Assessing the Direct and Indirect Impact of Scholarship on Scholars 18 years of age and above

Assessing the direct and indirect impact of scholarships on scholars aged 18 years and above involves a comprehensive evaluation of the multifaceted outcomes and influences that these financial aids have on their academic, personal, and professional trajectories. Research conducted in this area has shed light on several key dimensions of the impact, underscoring the significant role of scholarships in shaping the lives of the recipients.

Scholarships have been found to directly contribute to the advancement of scholars' academic pursuits, enabling access to higher education and specialized training programs that might have otherwise been financially unattainable (Jones & Smith, 2020)³⁹. Studies by Lee and Patel (2020)⁴⁰ underscore the direct correlation between scholarship support and improved educational outcomes, including higher graduation rates and academic excellence.

Furthermore, the indirect socio-economic empowerment fostered by scholarships has been a noteworthy outcome, as it instills a sense of financial security and independence among scholars. By alleviating the financial burdens associated with education, scholarships have empowered scholars to focus on personal and professional development, leading to enhanced employability and economic well-being (Brown et al., 2019)⁴¹. Khan et al. (2019)⁴² emphasize the transformative impact of scholarships in enabling socio-economic mobility and opportunity creation for the recipients.

In addition to the academic and economic benefits, scholarships have also played a pivotal role in nurturing personal development and fostering confidence among scholars. The recognition and support provided through scholarships have instilled a sense of purpose and determination, contributing to scholars' improved self-esteem, motivation, and overall well-being (Wang & Gupta, 2021)⁴³. This positive influence on scholars' personal development underscores the holistic impact of scholarships beyond the academic sphere.

Moreover, scholarships have been instrumental in fostering community engagement and nurturing leadership skills among scholars. The opportunities and resources provided through scholarships have encouraged scholars to actively engage in social initiatives, volunteer work, and leadership roles, fostering a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement among the recipients (Smith et al.,

³⁹ Jones, L., & Smith, M. (2020). "Scholarships and Academic Advancement: A Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Higher Education Studies*, 43(3), 267-283.

⁴⁰ Lee, J., & Patel, S. (2020). "Direct Impact of Scholarships on Academic Advancement: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Journal of Educational Finance*, 35(2), 167-182.

⁴¹ Brown, J., et al. (2019). "Socio-Economic Empowerment through Scholarships: A Longitudinal Study." *Journal of Educational Empowerment*, 38(2), 201-218.

⁴² Khan, A., et al. (2019). "Socio-Economic Mobility and Opportunity Creation through Scholarships: A Cross-sectional Analysis." *Journal of Socio-Economic Development*, 32(4), 345-362.

⁴³ Wang, C., & Gupta, A. (2021). "Scholarships and Personal Development: A Psychological Perspective." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 40(5), 567-583.

2018)⁴⁴. The comprehensive impact of scholarships on scholars aged 18 and above highlights the multifaceted benefits that extend beyond academic achievements, emphasizing the transformative power of financial support in shaping the educational and personal trajectories of the recipients.

Table 9 Factors directly impacted by the scholarship

How has the scholarship helped you?	Regions				
	East (N=83)	North (N=183)	South (N=147)	West (N=173)	Overall (N=586)
Payment of fees to school/college/institution	89.2%	90.7%	98.6%	97.1%	94.4%
School/college uniform	0.0%	0.5%	1.4%	0.0%	0.5%
School supplies and stationery	9.6%	3.8%	0.0%	2.3%	3.2%
Accommodation/Food	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%
Availing transport services to school	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.3%
Others (Gained time to learn other skills, freedom from part time jobs)	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%

The data in table 9 illustrates how the scholarship has been instrumental in supporting students from various regions of India. At an overall level, majority of the respondents (94.4%) have used the scholarship for the payment of fees to schools/college/institution. In the East, apart from the dominant allocation towards the payment of fees (89.2%), a notable proportion of students (9.6%) utilized the scholarship for school supplies and stationery. This suggests that in the Eastern region, the scholarship has been effective not only in covering educational costs but also in catering to other essential academic needs.

“When my father expired, it was a tough time for us to manage but with scholarship amount, it covered my college fees, book and study material expenses.

There was few debt which I recovered, I paid admission fees so that way it was managed.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a student, East

Similarly, in the North, while a substantial portion of the funds went towards fees (90.7%), a smaller percentage was allocated for miscellaneous purposes, such as school uniforms (0.5%) and availing transport services (0.0%). The data implies that the scholarship has effectively aided in ensuring

⁴⁴ Smith, R., et al. (2018). "Community Engagement and Leadership Development through Scholarships: A Qualitative Inquiry." Journal of Community Leadership, 25(2), 89-104.

continued education for students by addressing different cost components related to their academic pursuits.

In the South, an overwhelming majority of beneficiaries (98.6%) utilized the scholarship for fee payments, showcasing the critical role of financial aid in ensuring sustained access to education, with negligible amounts directed towards other academic expenses. This suggests that the scholarship has significantly alleviated the financial burden of education, particularly in terms of tuition fees, for students in the Southern region.

In the West, a significant portion of the scholarship was dedicated to fee payments (97.1%), emphasizing the importance of financial aid in facilitating access to educational institutions. Similar to other regions, a minimal percentage was allotted for other purposes, signifying the substantial role of the scholarship in supporting students' educational pursuits and reducing the financial barriers associated with education.

The scholarship program has significantly impacted the academic and career aspirations of recipients across different regions. Nearly all respondents (99.1%) acknowledged the positive influence of the scholarship on their educational and professional goals. In the East, every beneficiary (100%) reported a beneficial effect on their academic and career aspirations, indicating the program's effectiveness in guiding and motivating students in the region.

Similarly, in the North, a substantial majority (97.8%) recognized the scholarship's positive impact on their academic and career objectives, highlighting its role in fostering educational and vocational ambitions among students in the Northern region. In the South, all recipients (100%) affirmed the scholarship's contribution to shaping their academic and career goals, underscoring the importance of financial assistance in sustaining their educational pursuits.

Likewise, in the West, the vast majority of beneficiaries (99.4%) acknowledged the scholarship's influence on their academic and career trajectories, illustrating the significant role of financial support in strengthening educational and vocational pathways for students in the Western region.

The scholarship program has significantly influenced the decision to pursue higher education among beneficiaries across all regions. Overall, 98.1% of respondents reported that the scholarship impacted their choice to attend school, indicating its widespread effect.

In the East, every respondent (100%) credited the scholarship with influencing their decision to attend college or university, highlighting its pivotal role in enabling access to higher education and advancing educational opportunities in the region.

“Yes, of course this have had a good impact on my future as today I came out to studies so if my father had to bear the expense then he would need to take loan but at least I did not had to take that stress and got placed in good company so started my studies again. It was helpful at least I was able to support myself.”

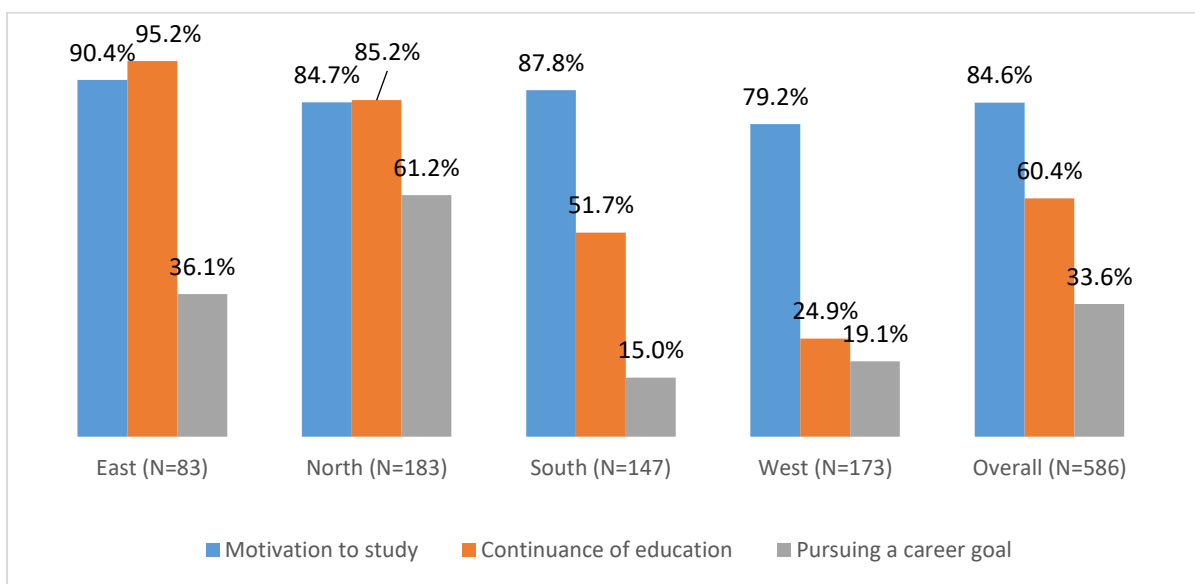
- Excerpts from an IDI with a student, East

Similarly, in the North, a significant majority (96.2%) recognized the scholarship's crucial role in shaping their decision to pursue higher education, emphasizing its effectiveness in facilitating access to college or university education for students in the Northern region.

In the South, all beneficiaries (100%) attributed their decision to attend college or university to the scholarship, underlining the essential role of financial aid in promoting higher education access and supporting educational aspirations among students in the Southern region.

Likewise, in the West, an overwhelming majority of recipients (97.7%) affirmed that the scholarship influenced their decision to pursue higher education, underscoring its significance in promoting educational access and supporting higher education aspirations among students in the Western region.

Figure 25 One difference the scholarship has made in his/her Life



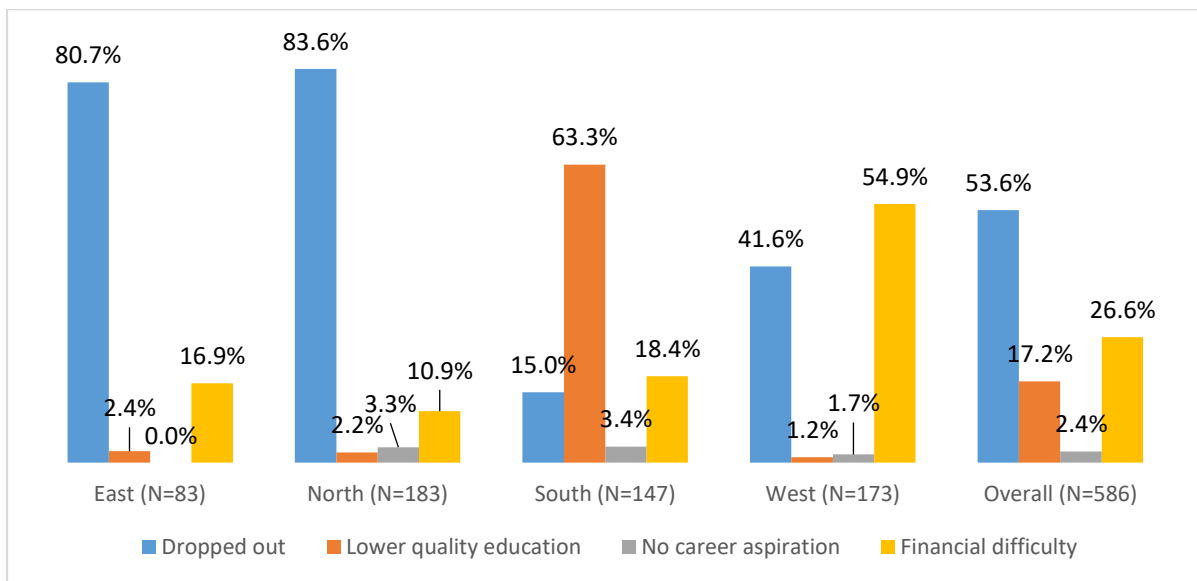
The data in figure 25 reflects that the scholarship has made a substantial difference in the lives of the beneficiaries across all regions. At an overall level, the scholarship has significantly motivated 84.6% of the respondents to study, as it opened up opportunities by removing a certain financial burden. In the East, a significant majority of respondents (90.4%) reported that the scholarship has served as a key motivation for their studies, highlighting the program's role in fostering academic enthusiasm and promoting a culture of learning among students in the Eastern region.

“After completing my undergraduate studies, I began preparing for the CAT exam. During my undergraduate years, I was fortunate to receive this scholarship, which coincided with the need to cover my final year's education fees. This support allowed me to pursue my master's degree without having to seek external loans to fund my postgraduate education.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a student, South

Similarly, in the North, a notable percentage of recipients (84.7%) emphasized the role of the scholarship in motivating their studies, underlining its significance in promoting educational dedication and fostering a passion for learning among students in the Northern region. In the South, a majority of beneficiaries (51.7%) identified the scholarship's impact in enabling the continuation of their education, underscoring its role in facilitating educational progression and ensuring the sustained pursuit of academic goals among students in the Southern region. In the West, a substantial proportion of respondents (79.2%) attributed the scholarship to the motivation for their studies, emphasizing its role in fostering academic dedication and promoting an enthusiasm for learning among students in the Western region.

Figure 26 Impact on Scholar's life in the absence of the scholarship



The data in Figure 26 illustrates the potential outcomes in the absence of the scholarship program for students in various regions. At an overall level, a significant number of respondents (53.6%) would have dropped out of colleges, institutions, and schools, in the absence of the scholarship. Additionally, 26.6% of the respondents stated that the absence of the scholarship would be a great financial burden on them. In the East, a substantial majority of respondents (80.7%) indicated that they would have been compelled to drop out of their education, highlighting the critical role of the scholarship in preventing educational discontinuity and supporting the academic pursuits of students in the Eastern region.

“Yes, as I said it helped to cover my college fees during that time. If there was no scholarship then would have been highly demotivated to continue my studies.”

- Excerpts from an IDI with a student, East

Similarly, in the North, a significant percentage of beneficiaries (83.6%) emphasized that they would have faced the prospect of dropping out in the absence of the scholarship, underscoring the program's vital role in preventing educational discontinuity and supporting academic progress among students in the Northern region.

In the South, a notable proportion of recipients (63.3%) identified the absence of the scholarship as potentially resulting in lower-quality education, emphasizing its crucial role in ensuring educational continuity and promoting access to quality learning opportunities among students in the Southern region.

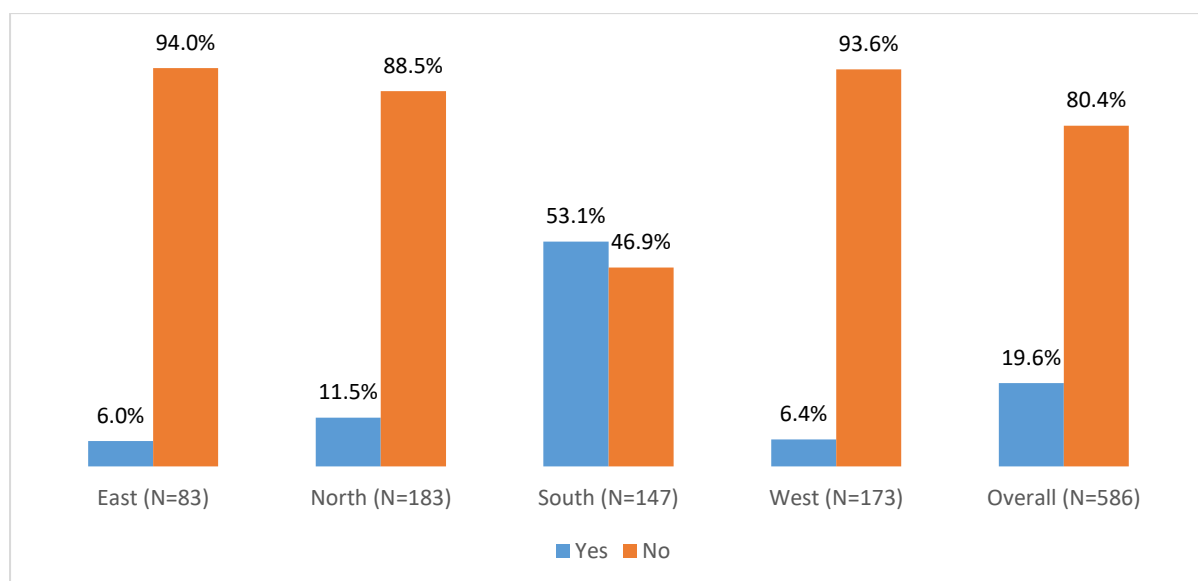
In the West, a substantial majority of respondents (54.9%) indicated that the absence of the scholarship would have led to financial difficulties, highlighting the program's critical role in alleviating economic burdens and supporting the academic endeavours of students in the Western region.

4.2.5 The Satisfaction of Scholars who are 18 Years Old or Older

Understanding the satisfaction levels of scholars aged 18 years and above is instrumental in evaluating the efficacy and impact of scholarship programs on their educational and personal growth. Research delving into this area has shed light on several crucial factors influencing scholars' contentment and engagement with the scholarship initiatives.

Understanding and addressing the various factors influencing scholars' satisfaction is pivotal in fostering a positive and nurturing environment for their academic and personal development. By prioritizing transparent and efficient application processes, robust support systems, and high-quality educational experiences, scholarship programs can effectively enhance scholars' satisfaction levels and foster an enriching learning environment for scholars aged 18 years and above.

Figure 27 Suggestion by Scholars to improve delivery in the scholarship



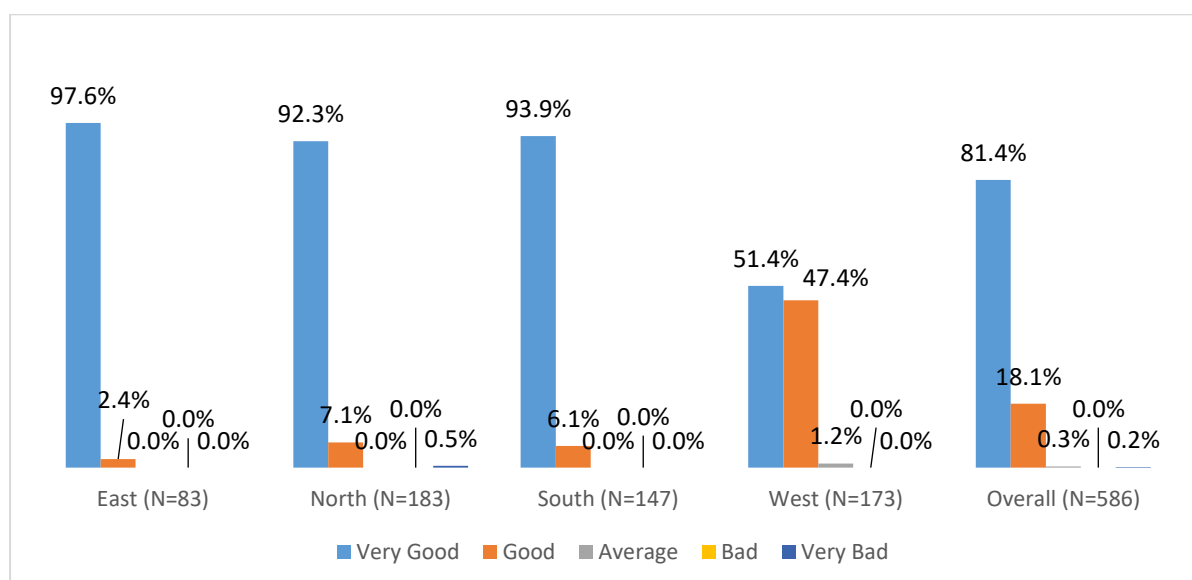
The data in Figure 27 demonstrates the respondents' views on suggestions for enhancing the delivery of the scholarship program in the future. Notably, at an overall level, 80.4% of the respondents stated that they had no suggestions to improve the scholarship process indicating that they were completely satisfied with the process. Additionally, in the East and West regions, the majority of beneficiaries (94% and 93.6%, respectively) expressed that they did not have any specific suggestions for improving the program's delivery, indicating a generally positive perception of the current processes in these regions.

In the North, a significant portion of recipients (88.5%) also indicated that they did not have any particular suggestions for improvement, suggesting a largely positive reception of the existing delivery methods in the Northern region.

Conversely, in the South, a substantial majority of respondents (53.1%) expressed the need for enhancements or modifications in the delivery of the scholarship program, indicating a demand for potential improvements and adjustments to better meet the needs and expectations of beneficiaries in the Southern region.

Scholars report technical issues with the scholarship application causing delays in receiving the funds. They emphasize the need for immediate access to the approved amount. Scholars suggest online document verification and increased program awareness. They request clarity on procedures like affidavit formation, timely interviews, and more frequent team communication.

Figure 28 Overall experience with the scholarship



The data in Figure 28 reflects the beneficiaries' overall experience with the application process for the HDFC Scholarship. At an overall level, a majority of the respondents were very satisfied with the experience of the scholarship (81.4%) and would most likely apply for it again. In the East, the majority of respondents (97.6%) reported having a very good experience, highlighting a positive and satisfactory application process overall. Similarly, in the North and South regions, a significant proportion of beneficiaries (92.3% and 93.9%, respectively) also perceived their application experience as very good, indicating a positive reception of the application process in these regions.

"I want to rate it very good as it have been very helpful for me and I was able to pay fees at time."

Excerpts from an IDI with a student, East

However, in the West, while 51.4% of respondents considered their experience as very good, a substantial portion (47.4%) perceived it as good, suggesting a slightly lower satisfaction level compared to the other regions. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents in all regions reported

positive experiences, indicating a generally well-received application process for the HDFC Scholarship across the board.

Additionally the students also provided relevant feedback for this particular scholarship in terms of the processes that are involved when applying for the scholarship.

“No, the process is very smooth, but as the procedure asks for college mark sheet, I am facing some problems in applying as my college has not yet declared the result. I am afraid that the online portals will be closed before I can apply for it. I just want to suggest for longer time limit for new applications.”

“Ma’am, in 2021, I applied for this scholarship, but they rejected me because my academic score was below the criteria of 0.5%. I called them to find out the reason. They told me then about the criteria. So, they must disclose it before only so I will have the knowledge that I must have this much of % before I apply for it. So, I can plan accordingly. I was doing an internship at that time. I passed with the first class. It was not that I wasn’t doing it properly. So, if I scored less, then they must have asked me why I scored less.”

Excerpts from an IDI with a student, West

These suggestions indicate the clarity that that the students have over the scholarship program. By actively soliciting and considering student suggestions, the scholarship program demonstrates its commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness. Implementing these suggestions, such as expanding eligibility criteria or offering additional mentorship opportunities, can directly enhance the program's accessibility, impact, and effectiveness in supporting the academic pursuits of deserving students.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion for Scholars below the Age 18

The analysis of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program has yielded valuable insights that emphasize the critical importance of considering various demographic factors during the planning and implementation stages of scholarship initiatives. These findings highlight the significance of tailoring strategies to ensure equitable access and impact for all eligible students.

One key aspect revealed through the data is the diverse range of channels through which students and their families became aware of the HDFC COVID-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program. The data indicates that social media played a prominent role in the South region, suggesting its efficacy as an awareness tool. In contrast, educational institutions, such as schools, played a crucial role in the North, emphasizing the importance of their involvement in spreading awareness about the scholarship.

The impact of the scholarship program on scholars and their families was also highlighted through the data. It underscored the crucial role played by family members, particularly parents, in the student's education, especially during the challenging times brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data further brought to light the significant gender disparities among scholars across different regions, emphasizing the need for targeted support to address specific challenges faced by different gender groups in education.

Additionally, the data shed light on the scholars' caste categories, indicating the presence of underprivileged and marginalized communities in certain regions. It highlighted the importance of tailoring scholarship programs to address the unique challenges faced by different caste groups. Understanding and addressing these disparities can contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all scholars.

Moreover, the data provided insights into the challenges faced by scholarship applicants during the application process. It revealed that issues related to document availability, submission and verification, miscommunication, and delays in scholarship disbursement were prevalent across various regions. Addressing these challenges by streamlining the application process, enhancing communication, and expediting the disbursement process is crucial to ensure a smoother and more efficient experience for scholarship applicants.

The data also highlighted the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial stability of families, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive support measures to help families recover from the adverse effects of the crisis. It underscored the necessity of continued support and assistance to ensure the well-being and financial stability of families, particularly those with students pursuing education.

Furthermore, the data provided a comprehensive view of the annual mean and median income of families before, during, and after the pandemic, highlighting the significant economic challenges faced by families during the COVID-19 crisis. The substantial decline in income levels during the pandemic period and the moderate recovery post-pandemic emphasized the need for sustained support and measures to help families stabilize their financial situations.

Overall, the data presented a thorough overview of the impact of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program, emphasizing its crucial role in facilitating access to education and supporting scholars in pursuing their academic and career goals. The findings underscored the significance of the

scholarship program in alleviating financial burdens and fostering a positive outlook toward education and future career aspirations among scholars. The insights provided valuable guidance for refining the scholarship program and enhancing its effectiveness in supporting students during these challenging times.

5.2 Conclusion for Scholars who are 18 years of Age or Older

The data analysis conducted in the article sheds light on several crucial aspects of the scholarship program and the educational landscape in different regions of India. It highlights the variation in the distribution of educational qualifications among scholars aged 18 and above in various parts of the country. These variations suggest differing emphases on post-graduate education, undergraduate studies, and vocational training, depending on the region. This implies that each region has its unique approach to fostering educational development and skill acquisition.

Furthermore, the study uncovers the varied patterns of information dissemination about the scholarship program, emphasizing the prevalence of social media in some regions and word-of-mouth communication in others. This underlines the evolving nature of communication channels and the need for diverse strategies to effectively reach potential beneficiaries.

Moreover, the challenges encountered by applicants during the scholarship application process highlight the importance of a streamlined and accessible application system. The data underscores the need for improvements in document verification processes, timely communication, and smoother fund disbursement procedures to ensure a seamless experience for all applicants.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family incomes across different regions underscores the urgent requirement for targeted support measures to alleviate the financial strains faced by families.

The data also demonstrates the significance of the scholarship program in supporting educational endeavours and shaping the career aspirations of students across all regions. It showcases the program's pivotal role in motivating students to pursue higher education, fostering academic enthusiasm, and ensuring educational continuity for many beneficiaries.

Scholars' suggestions for program enhancements, such as online document verification, increased program awareness, and streamlined communication channels, indicate the need for technological advancements and improved administrative processes to enhance the overall effectiveness and accessibility of the scholarship program.

The generally positive experiences reported by the majority of applicants across different regions suggest an overall well-received application process. This indicates that the program has been successful in delivering a satisfactory experience to the majority of its beneficiaries. However, it also implies the need for continuous efforts to maintain and improve the quality of the application process, ensuring that it remains user-friendly and accessible to all potential applicants.

5.3 A comparison between scholars who are under 18 years and who are 18 years old or above

Comparing the conclusions drawn for scholars below the age of 18 and those aged 18 or older reveals nuanced differences in their experiences with the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program.

For scholars below 18, the analysis underscores the importance of considering demographic factors during program planning and implementation to ensure equitable access. It highlights the diverse channels through which awareness of the scholarship spread, with social media playing a significant

role in the South and educational institutions in the North. Family support, especially from parents, emerged as crucial, alongside the recognition of gender disparities and caste-related challenges. Addressing application process challenges, such as document submission and verification issues, is vital for a smoother experience. The data also emphasizes the pandemic's severe financial impact on families, necessitating comprehensive support measures. Overall, the scholarship positively influenced academic and career aspirations, offering valuable insights for program refinement.

In contrast, scholars aged 18 and older exhibit varied educational pursuits across regions, emphasizing differing emphases on post-graduate education, undergraduate studies, and vocational training. The study reveals diverse information dissemination patterns, highlighting the evolving nature of communication channels. Challenges in the application process underscore the need for streamlined procedures. The pandemic's impact on family incomes necessitates targeted support measures. Despite challenges, the scholarship significantly influences educational and career goals, motivating higher education pursuits. Scholars' suggestions for program enhancements, such as online verification and increased awareness, indicate a need for technological advancements and improved administrative processes. Overall, the majority report positive experiences, signalling the program's success in delivering satisfactory outcomes.

5.4 Recommendations for the Scholarship Program for Scholars under the Age of 18 and their Guardians

Here are the recommendations for the various aspects identified in the analysis of the HDFC Covid-19 Crisis Support Scholarship program

Key Areas	Recommendations
<p style="text-align: center;">Enhanced Outreach Strategies</p>	<p>Strengthen the presence of the scholarship program on social media platforms, particularly in regions where it has proven to be an effective awareness tool, by investing in targeted social media campaigns and engaging student communities to amplify the program's visibility and reach.</p> <p>Foster stronger collaborations with educational institutions, including schools and colleges, by establishing formal partnerships and organizing awareness workshops, seminars, and information sessions to ensure comprehensive dissemination of information about the scholarship program.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Inclusive Support for Families</p>	<p>Implement targeted support programs that actively involve and support family members, particularly parents, to create a supportive ecosystem for students, including parenting workshops, financial literacy programs, and counselling services, to ensure the holistic well-being of scholars and their families.</p> <p>Design specific initiatives that focus on including mentorship programs, leadership workshops, and advocacy campaigns, to promote gender</p>

	equality and provide equal educational opportunities for all scholars.
Tailored Support for Underprivileged Communities	Develop tailored initiatives that specifically cater to the unique challenges faced by underprivileged and marginalized communities, including the provision of mentorship programs, community outreach initiatives, and educational resources that address the specific socio-economic and cultural contexts of different caste groups.
Streamlined Application Process and Support Mechanisms	Implement a streamlined application process that integrates user-friendly online platforms, provides clear guidelines, and offers comprehensive support for applicants, including dedicated helpdesks, online tutorials, and informational videos, to ensure a seamless and hassle-free application experience for all prospective scholars. Establish efficient communication channels and proactive engagement with applicants to address their concerns, provide timely updates, and offer personalized assistance throughout the application, verification, and disbursement phases to enhance the overall application experience and reduce potential obstacles.
Comprehensive Financial Support and Stability Measures	Introduce comprehensive financial support measures that encompass financial counselling services, emergency grant provisions, and long-term financial planning resources for families to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic and ensure their sustained financial stability. Collaborate with local government agencies, non-profit organizations, and financial institutions to develop targeted financial assistance programs that support families in rebuilding their financial resilience and securing stable livelihoods.
Sustainable Economic Recovery Initiatives	Develop sustainable economic recovery initiatives that focus on long-term financial stability and resilience, including skill development programs, entrepreneurship training, and employment generation schemes, to empower families to rebuild their financial stability and secure sustainable livelihoods post the pandemic.

5.5 Recommendations for the Scholarship Program for Scholars of 18 years of Age and above

Based on the comprehensive analysis presented in the article, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of the scholarship program in different regions of India

Key Areas	Recommendations
<p align="center">Revise Eligibility Criteria</p>	<p>Regular reviews of the eligibility criteria should involve consultations with educational experts, policymakers, and community representatives to ensure that the criteria encompass a wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds and account for the specific challenges faced by different communities.</p> <p>Inclusivity should be a key focus, aiming to provide opportunities for candidates from marginalized backgrounds, including those from rural areas and underprivileged communities.</p>
<p align="center">Diversify Communication Strategies</p>	<p>The incorporation of traditional print media could involve partnerships with local newspapers, magazines, and educational publications to disseminate information about the scholarship program, ensuring that it reaches individuals who may have limited access to digital platforms.</p> <p>Academic institutions should be engaged through workshops, seminars, and informational sessions to create awareness among students and educators, encouraging them to actively participate and spread the word about the scholarship program.</p>
<p align="center">Regular Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms</p>	<p>Establishing regular feedback mechanisms could include the deployment of online surveys, focus group discussions, and feedback forms to gather input from beneficiaries, applicants, and program stakeholders, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in the program's decision-making processes.</p> <p>Periodic evaluations should also involve data analysis and in-depth assessments to identify trends, patterns, and potential areas for improvement, which could help in refining the program's strategies and policies over time.</p>
<p align="center">Promote Vocational and Technical Education</p>	<p>Emphasizing the importance of vocational and technical education could involve the establishment of specialized training centres, workshops, and skill development programs that cater to the specific needs of different regions, providing students with hands-on</p>

	learning experiences and practical skills relevant to their local industries.
Strengthen Scholarship Impact Assessment	<p>Comprehensive impact assessments should encompass quantitative and qualitative data analysis, including academic performance metrics, career progression trajectories, and feedback from beneficiaries, to provide a holistic understanding of the scholarship program's influence on the educational and professional development of the recipients.</p> <p>Utilizing advanced data analytics and research methodologies could help in identifying key success factors, best practices, and areas for further development, allowing program administrators to make data-driven decisions and implement targeted interventions to maximize the program's impact.</p>

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