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IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries throughout the world, including India. It has had a major impact on the health sector, which significantly disrupts all sectors of an economy. The education sector has also been affected badly because of the pandemic. In this paper, an attempt is made to find out the impact of the pandemic on household expenditure on education in Assam. The qualitative research method, such as a case study, is used to collect in-depth data from the sample households regarding the experiences of the impact of the pandemic on household expenditure on education.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Household, Expenditure, Education*

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries throughout the world, including India. It was first detected in the City of Wuhan, China, in 2019. Its outbreak has been declared a public health emergency of international concern and recognised as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. It has a major impact on the health sector, which significantly disrupts all sectors of an economy. When India was about to be affected by the pandemic, the government of India decided to implement a lockdown system to secure the lives of the people of the country. However, the lockdown system badly affected the economy of the country. The education sector has also been affected badly because of the pandemic. According to UNESCO, the outbreak of coronavirus has affected education worldwide, and around 89.4% of learners are affected around the world due to the closure of educational institutions (Kaur et. al., 2023).

In Assam, the first lockdown was imposed on March 24, 2020, and it involved the restriction of the movement of people in and out of the state, closure of commercial establishments, offices, museums, and educational institutions, etc., to prevent public gatherings. The government of Assam has opted for an online mode of education during the time of the pandemic to protect the students and control the pandemic.

2. Objective and Methodology

An attempt is made to find out the impact of the pandemic on household expenditure on education among the sample households in the study area. The qualitative research method, such as a case study, is used to collect in-depth data from the sample households regarding the experiences of the impact of the pandemic on household expenditure on education. The sample households are asked to narrate their experiences of the effect of the pandemic on household expenditure on education from as far back in memory as they can. For this, some households belonging to low, middle, and high-income groups are asked to narrate their views regarding the effect of the pandemic on expenditures on education. It is found that their experiences regarding educational expenses during and after the pandemic are more or less similar. Therefore, to study the impact of the pandemic on household expenditure on education, case studies are collected from 6 households. Case

studies are made on 6 sample households of Guwahati City. These households are selected on the basis of their economic status, which includes the low-income group, the middle-income group, and the high-income group households.

3. Discussion of Case Studies

In order to understand the effect of the pandemic on household educational expenditures, members of the households are asked to share their experiences regarding expenses on education during and after the pandemic. They are also asked to share their experiences with respect to how they are financing the expenditures related to education during the pandemic period. The experiences shared by the 6 sample households represent the overall situation faced by all households during and after the pandemic regarding household expenditure on education.

Household 1:

"I am Mr Deka. I had a small shop during the pandemic. But due to the closure of the shop, I faced a severe financial crunch. Because of this, the education of my two children was heavily affected during the pandemic. I enrolled them in nearby government schools after the pandemic."

Mr Deka is the father of two children. He is from a poor family. His wife works in a beauty parlour. Now, Mr Deka earns his livelihood with a small grocery shop. He has said that survival is not easy during the pandemic in the city. His shop has mostly remained closed during the pandemic because he is not able to purchase the required goods for his small shop. With the limited income from the shop, it was very difficult for him to save money before the pandemic. Due to the loss of income during the pandemic, it is quite difficult for him to maintain the family. So, it is impossible for him to continue schooling his children even in online mode during the pandemic because he is not able to afford the internet connectivity costs for the education of his children. They were suffering from economic hardship at that time. Due to financial problems, he has decided to enrol his two children in nearby government schools after the pandemic. He has shared that he is not in a position to bear educational expenditures in private schools. His wife also started working to help the family financially after the pandemic.

Household 2:

"I am Mrs Begum. Earlier, I worked as a daily wage earner. My husband was also a daily wage earner. But due to the strict lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19, we stayed at home at that time. So, we faced unemployment. Without work, we had no money to spend on the education of our children."

Mrs Begum is the mother of two girls. She comes from a disadvantaged background. Now she and her husband earn their livelihood by working as daily wage earners in the city. They have shared that their economic condition has been affected badly by the lockdown. They lost their jobs during the pandemic period. Due to loss of work, they have no source of income and no money to spend on their survival. So, they are forced to borrow money from their relatives for survival. In such a situation, they have no money to spend on their children's education. Their two girls were studying at government schools at that time. But during COVID-19, the online class system required a mobile phone and internet connectivity, which were out of their budget. Their two girls dropped out of school during the pandemic due to the unavailability of economic resources. They were unable to bear the expenditures related to education at that time. But after the pandemic, when schools were opened, they again decided to enrol their two girls in nearby government schools.

Household 3:

"I am Mrs Boro. Earlier, I had a small food shop near the highway. My husband was an e-rickshaw driver. But due to the strict lockdown, we could not go outside to earn an income. So, we faced income loss at that time. Without income, how can we think about the education of our children?"

Mrs Boro is the mother of two children. She comes from a poor economic background. Now she works as a daily wage earner, and her husband earns his livelihood by driving an e-rickshaw in the city. Moreover, her in-laws also live with them. They live in a kuccha house. Their financial condition is very weak. Now, they are suffering from financial hardship as they are unable to save money from their limited income. They have faced a severe financial crisis due to the lockdown during the pandemic period. They have said that they have purchased an e-rickshaw by taking a loan from the bank. Due to loss of work, they have no source of income to repay the loan. So, they are forced to borrow money from their relatives to repay the interest on the loan. They have sold some of their livestock for their survival. In such a situation, they have also used their small savings for their survival, and they have no money to spend on their children's education during the

pandemic. After the pandemic, they have again started to work and somehow managed the expenditures related to education for their children. But because of the high cost, they are unable to give study materials and private tuition for their children properly.

Household 4:

“I am Mr Saikia. I am working as a private school teacher. I have two sons, and they are now studying at colleges. During COVID-19, they were studying in schools. We faced financial hardship due to the pandemic at that time.”

Mr Saikia is the father of two children. He belongs to a middle-income group. He has said that he is working as a private school teacher. His wife is a nurse. They live in a joint family. Mr Saikia has shared that he has faced financial hardship due to the closure of the school during the pandemic. But he and his wife are quite serious about the education of their children. Although he was suffering from economic hardship at that time, his wife supported the family financially and purchased a digital device from her savings for their children so that they could continue their studies. Moreover, they have shared that a substantial amount is spent on books, stationery, and other study materials, and also on online private tuition from Mrs Saikia's income by cutting other household-level expenditures during the pandemic. Mr Saikia has said that without her financial support, it would have been impossible for him to make expenditures on education for their children.

Household 5:

“I am Mr Kalita. I am working in the government sector as an employee. I have two girls, and they are now studying in college. During COVID-19, they were studying in schools. We did not face any financial problems regarding educational expenditures due to the pandemic at that time.”

Mr Kalita is the father of two girls. He is working as a government employee. His wife is a housewife. They are financially sound as he earns a good amount of money each month. During the pandemic, he and his family did not face any financial hardship regarding their survival. Mr Kalita has said that due to the sudden shift in the method of teaching from offline to online, the demand for digital devices has increased among households during the pandemic. So, he has also purchased a laptop and other digital devices to support the education of his children. As schools are closed, no money is spent on travel to attend educational institutions. He has shared that he has spent his money on the purchase of books, stationery, other study materials, and online private tuition so that the education of his children should not be hampered by the pandemic.

Household 6:

“We are working as government sector employees. We have one boy and one girl. One is studying at college, and the other is studying at university. We do not face any financial hardship regarding our survival and educational expenditures during the pandemic.”

Mr Lahkar is the father of one boy and one girl. He and his wife both work as government sector employees. They live in a nuclear family. They are financially secure and sound, as both of them earn a good amount of money each month. They are also earning some money from house rent. During the pandemic, he and his family did not experience any financial hardship. They have shared that they have helped some poor people by distributing food during the pandemic. They have also supported underprivileged students by offering books and other educational materials during the pandemic. Apart from helping others, they have also spent money on the purchase of books, stationery, and other study materials for their children. Moreover, online private tuition is also arranged by them to support education for their children during the pandemic.

4. Conclusion

From the above case studies, it is found that people from a poor economic background have suffered mostly during the pandemic. They are financially affected because of the pandemic. They suffer from economic hardship and cannot afford the expenses related to education due to weak economic conditions during the pandemic. After the pandemic, poor households have somehow managed the expenditures related to education for their children.

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