EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND STUDENT DROPOUT

Educational Problems and Dropout Among SC and ST Students in Boudh District, Odisha: A Study with Reference to the SC and ST Department

Pramod Kumar Rajput[1], Gaurav Bhartia[2]

[1]Department of Education, Shri Rawatpura Sarkar University, Raipur, India
[2]School of Legal Studies, Chandigarh University, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Abstract

This study examines the educational problems leading to dropout among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in Boudh district, Odisha, with specific reference to the role and effectiveness of the SC and ST Department. Boudh, a predominantly tribal and backward district, continues to report significant educational disparities despite various state and central interventions. Data were collected from dropout students, parents, teachers, and departmental officers using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation, and case-study methods. The findings reveal that dropout is not caused by a single factor but by a cumulative interplay of issues. The most prominent causes include severe economic pressure on families, chronic late disbursement of scholarships directly affecting school continuity, overt and covert caste-based discrimination within classroom and peer interactions, and a critical lack of coordination between the SC and ST Department and school-level implementing agencies. The study further finds that departmental interventions are largely reactive and administrative—focused on compliance and target-based reporting rather than proactive, school–community engagement—leaving many student grievances unaddressed until after dropout has occurred. The paper recommends: (i) timely release of scholarships through a monitored digital tracking system; (ii) institutionalisation of regular joint monthly meetings between department officials and school staff to identify at-risk students early; and (iii) establishment of a simple, confidential village-level complaint mechanism to report discrimination or administrative delays. Without such systemic reforms, dropout rates among SC and ST students in Boudh are likely to remain persistently high.

Keywords: dropout; SC students; ST students; Boudh district; SC and ST Department; educational problems

1 Introduction

School dropout among SC and ST students remains a persistent problem in Odisha. Boudh district, a predominantly tribal and rural district, has consistently shown lower retention rates for SC and ST students compared with other social groups. According to the District Education Report (2023), the dropout rate for ST students up to Class VIII is approximately 28%, and for SC students 19%, compared with 11% for other categories. The SC and ST Department at the district level is mandated to support these students through scholarships, residential hostels, and welfare schemes. However, little is known about how this department actually functions on the ground and how its work relates to dropout. This study attempts to address that gap.

2 Review of related literature

Mahapatra (2024). A qualitative study examining how friendship networks and peer interactions affect the educational participation of tribal and non-tribal children in an Odisha tribal village. The study found that social exclusion within school environments—particularly marginalisation of tribal children by non-tribal peers—contributes significantly to dropout decisions, and argued that the social and cultural dimensions of tribal children's schooling remain understudied relative to infrastructural factors.

Nayak, Dhar, et al. (2016). A comprehensive district-level analysis of transition, retention, and dropout rates across Odisha, restricted largely to elementary education owing to data constraints. Girls, SC, and ST children were found to experience persistently low enrolment and high dropout, with the state's elementary-level transition rates described as critically poor.

Government of Odisha, ST and SC Development Department. A policy document outlining the Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme, which provides a one-time incentive of ₹5,000 to ST students transitioning from Class VIII to IX and Class X to XI. The department explicitly notes elevated dropout among tribal students after Classes 8 and 10; the scheme targets approximately 200,000 tribal students with an outlay of ₹156 crore.

Ghadai (2016). A peer-reviewed study analysing the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) model as an alternative to government SC/ST schools, describing tribal students as multi-dimensionally disadvantaged with education as a critical fault line, and contrasting KISS outcomes in gender parity and vocational training with government-school outcomes.

ICSSR Research Project (Gyan Publishing House). A large research project examining the status of higher education among SC/ST girls, the causes of low participation, and remedial measures, based on primary data collection and stakeholder interaction across Odisha; it found that while literacy and primary enrolment had improved, participation in higher education remained problematic.

Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development (Mission Antyodaya). A village-level survey providing data on school availability, enrolment, and dropout for Boudh district across its blocks, including counts of out-of-school children (6–14 years), 2021–22 dropouts, and SC/ST households receiving scholarships.

ST and SC Development Department, Government of Odisha (2024–25). A policy initiative (the 'Zero Dropouts Mission,' under the RISE framework) convening external organisations and government officials to address dropout among the state's tribal students, targeting the critical Class VIII–IX and Class X–XI transitions and generating a set of actionable recommendations.

Nayak et al. (2016). A companion district-level analysis noting persistent regional disparities and higher illiteracy among SC/ST populations in backward districts, and cautioning that improvements in pupil–teacher ratio alone may be insufficient given the largely contractual nature of teacher appointments.

Odisha State Scholarship Portal and ST/SC Development Department Guidelines. Framework documents outlining pre-matric and post-matric scholarship mechanisms for SC/ST students; guidelines for the Shahid Madho Singh scheme note that beneficiaries of other scholarships remain eligible, suggesting scope for overlap and cumulative effects that warrant evaluation.

Analysis of OPEPA data (2016). Drawing on Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority statistics, this analysis found continual growth in ST enrolment at each level but persistent difficulty in

the elementary-to-secondary transition, while SC enrolment declined at the elementary level even as it improved at the secondary and higher-secondary levels.

2.1 Research gaps

The review identifies ten specific gaps in the literature on SC/ST educational problems and dropout as they pertain to Boudh district:

1. Absence of Boudh-specific empirical research: no peer-reviewed study analyses educational outcomes, dropout patterns, or causal factors unique to Boudh district, despite the availability of raw survey data (e.g., Mission Antyodaya).
2. Post-2016 data gap: the most comprehensive state-level analysis (Nayak et al.) used data through 2011–12, leaving a near decade-long gap in understanding current trends and the impact of subsequent policy interventions.
3. Implementation evaluation of transition-incentive schemes: no baseline study exists for Boudh against which to evaluate the Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme, and evaluation frameworks for similar programmes remain underdeveloped.
4. Caste-specific comparative analysis: existing studies rarely compare differential dropout patterns between SC and ST groups within the same geographic and institutional context.
5. Qualitative investigation of social-exclusion mechanisms: beyond one tribal village (Mahapatra, 2024), no research examines how caste-based discrimination, teacher attitudes, curriculum irrelevance, or language barriers operate specifically in Boudh's schools.
6. Gender-disaggregated dropout analysis: no current research examines whether girls in Boudh face distinct barriers—menstrual hygiene management, travel safety, early marriage pressure—compared with boys.
7. Post-COVID impact assessment: the effect of COVID-19 school closures on SC/ST dropout, learning loss, and the digital divide in Odisha or Boudh specifically remains unexamined.
8. School infrastructure–accessibility gap analysis: no study links village-level school availability data to the actual distance SC/ST students must travel for upper-primary, secondary, and higher-secondary education, or to resulting dropout.
9. SC and ST Department programme impact assessment: no independent evaluation assesses the cumulative impact of scholarships, incentives, and hostels on dropout in specific districts such as Boudh.
10. Longitudinal tracking of student cohorts: existing studies rely on cross-sectional data; no study tracks a cohort of Boudh SC/ST students through the educational pipeline to identify precisely when and why individual students drop out.

2.2 Origin of the problem

The existing literature establishes that SC/ST students in Odisha face significant educational disadvantages, particularly during the transition from elementary to secondary schooling. Policy recognition of this problem is evident in the Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme and the Zero Dropouts Mission under the RISE initiative. However, Boudh district remains severely under-researched, with no empirical study specifically examining its SC/ST student population's educational challenges. The gaps identified above—particularly the absence of Boudh-specific data, the post-2016 data gap, and the lack of intervention evaluation—provide clear direction for the present study, which

combines quantitative and qualitative investigation of the social, economic, and institutional barriers to schooling in the district.

3 Statement of the problem

> "A study of the educational problems and dropout among SC and ST students in Boudh district of Odisha, with reference to the SC and ST Department."

4 Operational definitions

Boudh District: The administrative boundary of Boudh district in western Odisha where all data collection occurred, including its schools, villages, and the district SC and ST Department office.

Educational Problems: Barriers hindering the academic progress of SC/ST students in Boudh district, measured by: (a) economic pressure on families, (b) scholarship disbursement delayed by more than two months, (c) caste-based discrimination incidents in schools, and (d) the absence of joint meetings between the SC and ST Department and school staff in the preceding six months.

Dropout: A former student enrolled in a Boudh district school (Classes 6–10) who discontinued attendance for three consecutive months or more prior to data collection, as confirmed by self- or parent report.

SC Students: Students belonging to a Scheduled Caste as per the Indian Constitution, holding a valid caste certificate issued in Boudh district; the sample includes dropout students from the district.

ST Students: Students belonging to a Scheduled Tribe as per the Indian Constitution, holding a valid tribal certificate issued in Boudh district; the sample includes dropout students from the district.

SC and ST Department: The district-level government body in Boudh responsible for SC/ST welfare schemes, measured by: (a) reactive interventions (actions taken after dropout occurs), (b) frequency of quarterly meetings with schools, and (c) average complaint-resolution time.

Parents: The biological parent or primary caregiver of a dropout student residing in Boudh district.

Teachers: Regular or contract teachers in Boudh district government schools who taught the dropout student for at least six months prior to dropout.

5 Objectives of the study

1. To identify the main educational problems faced by SC and ST students in Boudh district.
2. To understand the reasons for dropout as reported by students, parents, and teachers.
3. To examine the role and limitations of the SC and ST Department in preventing dropout.

6 Variables of the study

- Educational problems (independent variable) and dropout (dependent variable).
- Role of the SC and ST Department (independent variable / moderator).
- Parents, teachers, and departmental officers (demographic variables).
- Boudh district (geographical variable).

7 Hypotheses of the study

1. H01: There is no significant educational problem faced by SC and ST students in Boudh district.
2. H02: There is no significant reason for dropout among SC and ST students as reported by students, parents, and teachers.
3. H03: There is no significant role or limitation of the SC and ST Department in preventing dropout among SC and ST students in Boudh district.

8 Limitations of the study

1. Limited geographical coverage: the study is confined to Boudh district, so findings may not represent conditions in other districts of Odisha or India.
2. Restricted target group: the research focuses only on SC and ST students, limiting comparison with other social categories.
3. Dependence on self-reported information: data from students, parents, and teachers may include personal bias, incomplete responses, or inaccurate reporting due to fear, hesitation, or social pressure.
4. Time constraint: the study was conducted within a limited period, restricting detailed observation of long-term trends.
5. Lack of longitudinal analysis: the study reflects current conditions and does not track students over time.
6. Institutional data constraints: school or departmental records on dropout, attendance, or welfare schemes may be incomplete or outdated.
7. Limited scope on external factors: migration, health issues, income instability, child labour, and cultural practices are not explored in full depth.
8. Policy evaluation constraints: the study examines the SC and ST Department's role but does not fully assess broader government policy or inter-departmental coordination.
9. Changing educational environment: schemes and facilities evolve over time, so findings reflect conditions only during the study period.

9 Methodology of the study

9.1 Research design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the educational problems and dropout issues among SC and ST students in Boudh district and to analyse the role of the SC and ST Department in addressing these issues.

9.2 Area of the study

The study was conducted in selected schools and communities of Boudh district, where a significant population of SC and ST students resides.

9.3 Population of the study

- SC and ST students studying in schools.
- School dropout students.

- Parents/guardians of SC and ST students.
- Teachers and headmasters.
- Officials of the SC and ST Development Department.

9.4 Sample and sampling technique

A purposive and random sampling technique was used to select respondents from schools and villages across three blocks of Boudh district (Boudh, Harabhanga, and Kantamal), ensuring representation from both rural and tribal areas. The final sample comprised 50 dropout students (30 girls, 20 boys) who had left school between 2022 and 2025, 20 parents, and 20 teachers drawn from 10 schools.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by school and block.

Sl. No.	Name of School	Block	Boys	Girls	Parents	Teachers
1	Govt. H.S. Mendhimal	Boudh	02	03	02	02
2	Govt. Girls' H.S. Badabandha	Harabhanga	02	03	02	02
3	Gopabandhu Govt. H.S. Harekrushnapur	Harabhanga	02	03	02	02
4	Baisipada Ashrama School	Harabhanga	02	03	02	02
5	Jhadrajing Ashrama School	Harabhanga	02	03	02	02
6	Madhapur Ashrama School	Harabhanga	02	03	02	02
7	Badabandha Sevashram	Harabhanga	02	03	02	02
8	Bargochha Ashrama School	Kantamal	02	03	02	02
9	Kumarkeli Ashrama School	Kantamal	02	03	02	02
10	Sindhugora Ashrama School	Kantamal	02	03	02	02
	Total (3 blocks, 10 schools)		20	30	20	20

9.5 Tools and techniques of data collection

Structured questionnaire. Administered to the 50 dropout students, covering educational background, family economic condition, reasons for leaving school, school environment, availability of government support schemes, and personal/social challenges, through closed- and open-ended items.

Interview schedules. Separate semi-structured schedules were used for 20 parents (family income and occupation, attitude toward education, causes of dropout, scheme awareness, children's household responsibilities) and 20 teachers from 10 schools (student attendance and performance, school facilities and teaching challenges, observed reasons for dropout, retention efforts, and effectiveness of SC & ST welfare schemes).

Observation. The researcher directly observed school infrastructure, classroom environment, attendance patterns, availability of educational facilities, and teacher–student interaction.

Case study method. A small number of individual dropout cases were examined in depth to understand the personal, social, and economic factors behind school discontinuation.

10 Data analysis and interpretation

10.1 Gender-wise distribution of dropout students

Table 2. Distribution of students by gender (N = 50).

Gender	Number of Students	Percentage
Girls	30	60%
Boys	20	40%
Total	50	100%

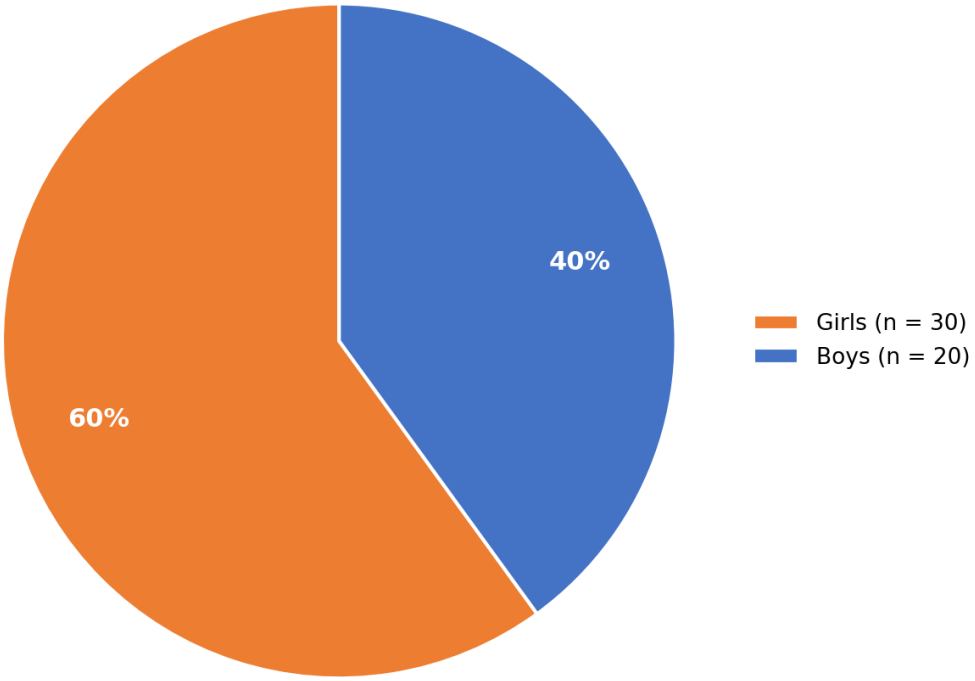

Figure 1. Gender-wise distribution of dropout students (N = 50).

Dropout among girls (60%) is markedly higher than among boys (40%). Girls are disproportionately affected by domestic responsibilities, early marriage, and limited family support for continued education, whereas boys' dropout is driven mainly by financial pressure and the need to undertake labour. This pattern reflects the compounding effect of gender inequality and poverty on schooling among SC and ST students.

10.2 Economic condition of families

Table 3. Family economic status of dropout students (N = 50).

Economic Status	Number of Students	Percentage
Poor	35	70%
Middle Income	12	24%
Relatively Better	3	6%

Economic Status	Number of Students	Percentage
Total	50	100%

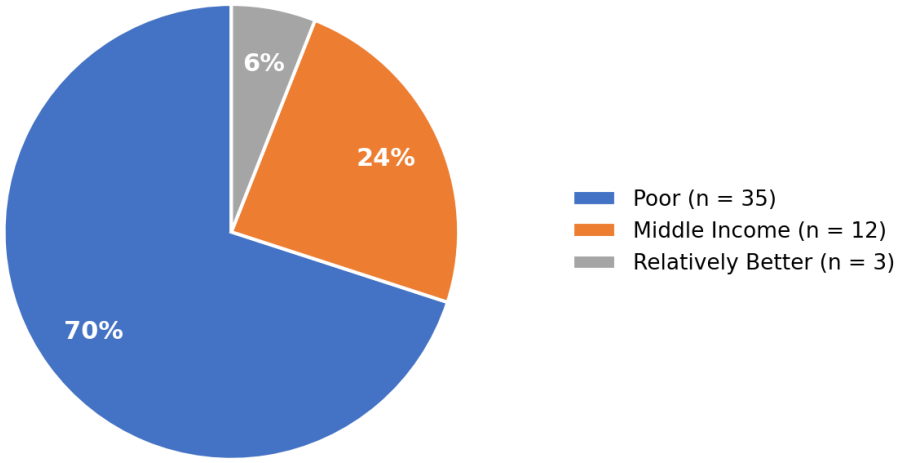

Figure 2. Family economic status of dropout students (N = 50).

The large majority of dropout students (70%) belong to poor families. Economic hardship limits parents' capacity to meet educational costs such as uniforms, books, and transport, and often compels children to work to supplement family income — directly undermining regular attendance, academic performance, and continuation of schooling.

10.3 Major reasons for dropout

Table 4. Causes of school dropout (N = 50).

Reason	No. of Responses	Percentage
Poverty / Financial Problems	16	32%
Early Marriage	10	20%
Child Labor	8	16%
Distance to School	5	10%
Family Responsibilities	5	10%
Lack of Interest in Studies	4	8%
Poor Academic Performance	2	4%
Total	50	100%

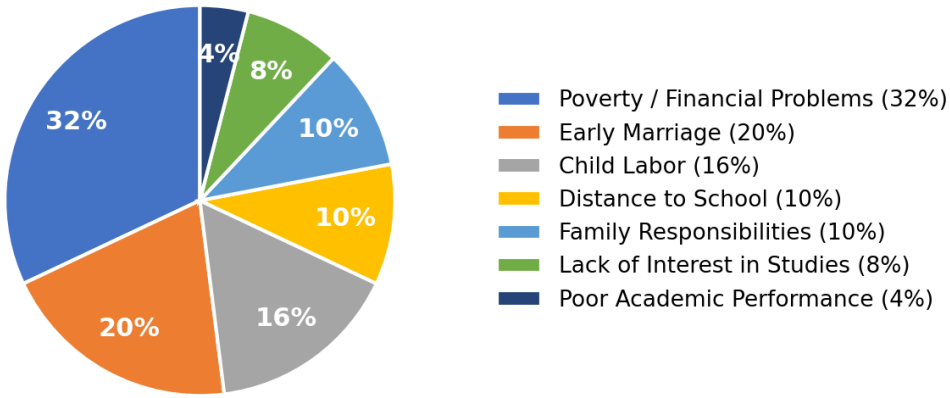

Figure 3. Major causes of school dropout (N = 50).

Poverty is the single leading cause of dropout, followed by early marriage and child labour. Girls are disproportionately affected by domestic responsibilities and marriage, while boys are more often drawn into labour activities. Distance to school and lack of interest in studies contribute further, particularly in remote tribal areas.

10.4 Parents' awareness about education

Table 5. Awareness level of parents (N = 20).

Awareness Level	Number of Parents	Percentage
Aware about Importance of Education	7	35%
Partially Aware	8	40%
Not Aware	5	25%
Total	20	100%

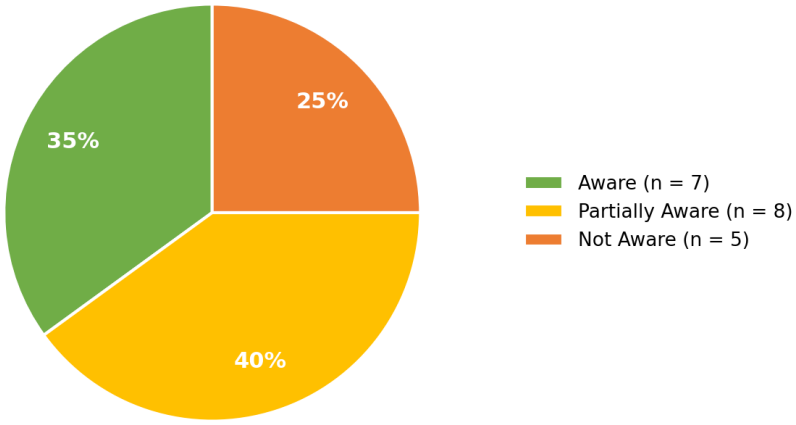

Figure 4. Parents' awareness level about education and welfare schemes (N = 20).

A large proportion of parents (65%) are only partially aware or unaware of the importance of education and of government welfare schemes. Illiteracy and poverty reduce parental involvement in children's studies, and this lack of guidance and support is associated with poorer attendance and a higher likelihood of dropout.

10.5 Teachers' opinion on dropout causes

Table 6. Teachers' responses on causes of dropout (N = 20).

Cause Identified by Teachers	No. of Teachers	Percentage
Poverty	7	35%
Irregular Attendance	5	25%
Lack of Parental Support	4	20%
Early Marriage of Girls	2	10%
Distance and Transportation Problems	2	10%
Total	20	100%

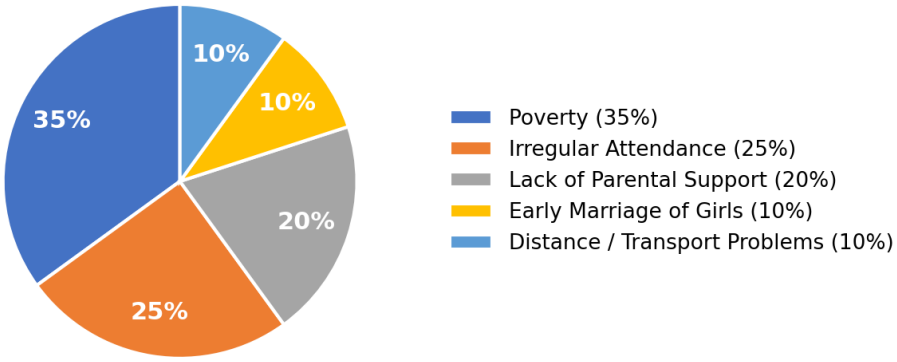

Figure 5. Teachers' opinion on causes of dropout (N = 20).

Teachers identify poverty and irregular attendance as the leading causes of dropout, followed by lack of parental support, early marriage among girls, and transportation problems. Teachers report that weak monitoring systems and insufficient educational support make dropout difficult to prevent in rural and tribal schools.

10.6 Government support and welfare schemes

Table 7. Students receiving government benefits (N = 50).

Type of Support	Number of Students	Percentage
Scholarship	32	64%
Free Textbooks	42	84%
Hostel Facility	15	30%
Did Not Receive Benefits Properly	8	16%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% because respondents could report receiving more than one type of benefit.

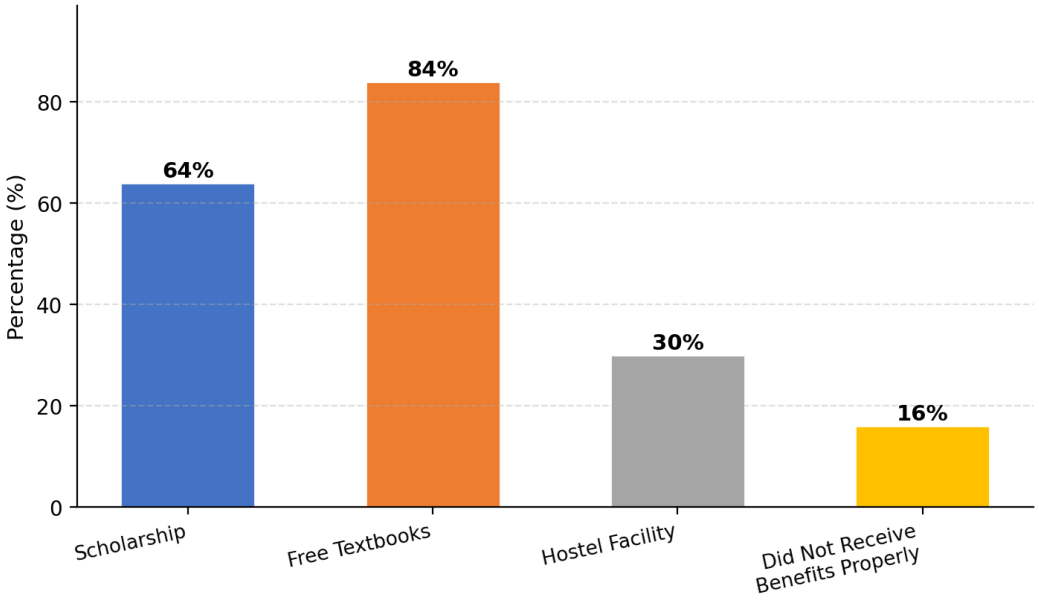

Figure 6. Students receiving government support and welfare benefits (N = 50).

Government schemes such as scholarships, free textbooks, and hostel facilities support continued education for most students, but delays in scholarship distribution and gaps in awareness reduce their effectiveness. Stronger implementation and monitoring are needed to ensure that all eligible SC and ST students receive benefits in full and on time.

10.7 Overall interpretation

Taken together, the findings show that dropout among SC and ST students in Boudh district is shaped by the interaction of poverty, gender-related vulnerability, child labour, and limited parental awareness. Girls are disproportionately vulnerable to dropout owing to early marriage and domestic responsibilities. Although government schemes have improved educational access, implementation gaps and underlying socio-economic pressures continue to erode student retention. The findings point to the need for: increased parental awareness; financial assistance to poor families; prevention of early marriage; improved school infrastructure and transport; more effective monitoring of scholarship distribution; and stronger community participation in education.

11 Findings of the study

1. More girls than boys drop out of school in Boudh district, indicating that girls are more vulnerable to leaving education early.
2. Poverty is the strongest reason behind dropout, as many families cannot afford basic educational needs.
3. Early marriage and household responsibilities mainly push girls out of school before completion.
4. Many boys leave school to work and support their families financially.
5. A lack of parental awareness and education reduces support for children's learning.
6. Long distances to school and transport difficulties make regular attendance hard, especially in rural areas.
7. Poor attendance and weak academic performance gradually lead students to leave school.

8. Government schemes such as scholarships and free textbooks are helpful but not always properly delivered.
9. Many families are not fully aware of the benefits available to them, and so miss out on support.
10. Teachers try to reduce dropout, but limited resources and support make this work challenging.
11. Qualitative evidence indicates that delayed scholarship disbursement and weak coordination between the SC and ST Department and schools reduce the effectiveness of welfare interventions.
12. Departmental responses tend to be reactive and compliance-oriented rather than proactive and community-engaged.

12 Conclusion

The study shows that school dropout among SC and ST students in Boudh district is not caused by a single reason but by a combination of poverty, social pressure, and inadequate support. Many children leave school because their families face financial hardship, or because social customs such as early marriage curtail their education — particularly for girls. While government schemes help, they do not always reach everyone in time or in full. Closer coordination among families, schools, and the government — through improved awareness, support, and school facilities — would allow more children to continue and complete their education.

13 Educational implications of the study

1. There is an urgent need to strengthen educational support for SC and ST students in Boudh district, especially those from economically weaker backgrounds.
2. Schools should focus on reducing dropout through regular monitoring of attendance, early identification of at-risk students, and remedial teaching support.
3. Parental awareness programmes need strengthening so that families understand the importance of education and of government welfare schemes.
4. Girls' education requires special attention, including prevention of early marriage and provision of safe school environments.
5. Better implementation of government schemes — scholarships, free textbooks, and hostel facilities — is essential to ensure that benefits reach all eligible students on time.
6. Schools in remote areas should be strengthened with better infrastructure, transport facilities, and adequate teaching staff to encourage regular attendance.
7. Teachers should receive training and support for counselling students, particularly those at risk of dropping out.
8. Community involvement is important for creating a supportive environment for education and reducing social pressure on children to leave school early.
9. The SC and ST Department should introduce a monitored digital tracking system for scholarship release and a confidential village-level complaint mechanism for discrimination and administrative delays.
10. Regular joint monthly meetings between departmental officials and school staff should be institutionalised to identify at-risk students early.

14 Suggestions for further study

1. Future research can be conducted across a larger geographical area, covering multiple districts or the entire state, to compare dropout patterns.
2. A longitudinal study can track students over time to understand long-term dropout trends and outcomes.
3. Further studies may focus separately on gender-based educational challenges, especially those faced by girls in rural and tribal areas.
4. Research can explore the effectiveness of specific government schemes in detail to identify implementation gaps.
5. Comparative studies between government and private schools can help clarify differences in dropout rates.
6. Further studies can examine the role of community organisations and NGOs in reducing school dropout.
7. Future research may also incorporate psychological and motivational factors influencing students' decisions to continue or leave school.

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