A Fair Chance for Education:
Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana

Phase 1 Findings Report

Emily F. Henderson, Anjali Thomas, Julie Mansuy, Nidhi S. Sabharwal,
Ann Stewart, Sharmila Rathee, Renu Yadav, Nikita Samanta

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Department for Education Studies and School of Law
University of Warwick

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Emily F. Henderson ORCID: 0000-000205723-9560
Anjali Thomas ORCID: 0000-0002-2358-5748
Julie Mansuy ORCID: 0000-0003-3775-5362
Nidhi S. Sabharwal ORCID: 0000-0001-8089-2624
Ann Stewart ORCID: N/A
Sharmila Rathee ORCID: 0000-0002-8718-0707
Renu Yadav ORCID: 0000-0001-9339-3760
Nikita Samanta ORCID: 0000-0002-9573-5020

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Accompanying resources for the project

In addition to this report, other resources about the project are available on the project website: www.warwick.ac.uk/haryana. This includes various Project Outputs such as project reports and presentations, as well as other information about the project and the people involved.
The project can also be found on Twitter and Instagram as @FCFHaryana.
The project Team can be contacted at fcfharyana@warwick.ac.uk

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Preface

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This is a report on the findings from Phase 1 of the 5 year 'Fair Chance for Education' project on gender and access to higher education in Haryana, India. Phase 1 was an exploratory study designed to understand the social background of students accessing higher education, and to identify how their educational trajectories and experiences of accessing higher education are gendered within their particular social context in Haryana. This involved an examination of the various intersectional factors influencing their educational choices and how students had overcome different barriers to access higher education in Haryana. This study provides key insights which inspired the research conducted in Phases 2 and 3 of the 5-year project.

Phase 1 found that (i) families are intensely involved in the educational trajectories and choices of students, especially in terms of supporting, encouraging and approving their access to higher education, and (ii) most state-funded higher education institutions or government colleges engage in very limited outreach or widening participation activities. Phase 2 of the project therefore focused on the involvement of families in the gendered educational trajectories of undergraduate students and Phase 3 on the institutional outreach mechanisms operating within educational institutions in Haryana.

Executive Summary

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Introduction

Higher education (HE) is an important educational site which not only develops skills, graduate employability and knowledge, it is also a key social institution through which we can redress social inequalities based on gender, social class and forms of social marginalisation such as caste-based discrimination. Historically, access to education and higher education has been denied to women and non-elite or marginalised groups. Therefore, access to HE is a concern for the state, policy makers, educationalists, students, families and communities. Gender inequality in terms of access to HE is a significant concern. This is especially with regard to *how young women and men are making different gendered educational choices*, in terms of choice of discipline, course and HE institution, especially for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses. The Fair Chance for Education project focusses on gender-based inequalities and access to higher education in Haryana, India.

The first phase of the fair chance to education action research project was geared towards understanding the social and educational background of undergraduate students and their motivations and experiences of accessing HE in the various state-funded government colleges in Haryana, India. Access to HE is influenced by several factors such as gender, social class and caste in India. As HE in India is massifying, government colleges, affiliated to various state funded universities, are one of the most affordable and accessible types of higher educational institution in the state.

Haryana is a state which reports numerical gender parity in favour of young women in terms of enrolment in HE and an overall enrolment ratio (29.2) which is significantly higher than the national average (26.3). Haryana also reports exponential economic and industrial growth which is nevertheless accompanied by increasing number of incidences of gender-based violence and gender conservatism.

Research design

This study used a case study design which included a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. It included a quantitative survey of students, semi-structured interviews with young women and men enrolled in undergraduate courses and college representatives, focus group discussions with undergraduate students and collection of outreach and information documents from the colleges. The bilingual (Hindi and English) tools for this study were developed by the project team in the University of Warwick in collaboration with partners in India. Research assistants (RA) in India were recruited through project contacts and were trained to collect data. The project team from the University of Warwick along with the RAs conducted the fieldwork at two of the two sampled urban colleges in February 2018. Quantitative data was also conducted in a third rural college in November 2018.

This data was collated, transliterated and analysed collaboratively at the University of Warwick. The analysis involved an examination of the various intersectional factors influencing their educational choices and how students had overcome different barriers to access higher education in Haryana.

Key Insights

- Families are intensely involved in the educational trajectories and choices of students, especially in terms of supporting, encouraging and approving their access to higher education.
- Most state-funded higher education institutions or government colleges engaged in very limited outreach or widening participation activities.

Who are the students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India? How is this access gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

- The participants' gender and caste identities were representative of the sampled districts, however, there were more SC students in the rural college.
- Most students' parents had gendered occupations, in that most mothers were engaged in housework and fathers were engaged in agriculture, labour and local businesses. Many women in Haryana are also engaged in agricultural work, but this was not represented as such on the survey.
- Most of the students enrolled in the three sampled colleges were from families which had no direct first-person experience of higher education and were therefore first-generation students to access higher education.
- A majority of the participants' grandparents had no formal education; indicating that there is no multi-generational history of formal education. Grandmothers and mothers had attained lower levels of formal education than grandfathers and fathers.
- Out of a total of 326 participants, only 58 out of 654 parents had accessed HE. Out of this 58, 43 were fathers. Thus, most of the young women enrolled in the government colleges were members of the first generation of women in the family to access HE.
- Prior to accessing higher education, most students were enrolled in schools in the same urban centres as the colleges.
- More girls than boys started and remained in government schools and more boys than girls started and remained in private schools, thereby indicating that within families more resources were allocated towards education of sons than daughters.
- In terms of academic performance in schooling, which is the primary factor determining enrolment in HE in India, women had a higher mean score by a few percentage points. This suggests a gendered choice by young women to enrol in an institution based on it being closer to home rather than more academically competitive.
- The sampled government colleges had relatively small catchment areas.
- Staying at home was the automatic choice for most students (more than 95% of the respondents).
- Choices regarding higher education institution were focused on distance, duration of commute (less than 50 minutes) and availability of safe and affordable public transport.
- Distance and availability of safe commute was a greater concern for young women than the young men.

How and why are students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India? How is this access gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

- Students sought information regarding higher education through their personal networks – which differed for young women and men – and teachers.
- Students were supported by a wide variety of family members, especially parents and siblings, schoolteachers and occasionally by other individuals in their neighbourhoods.
- Students were aware that they were making choices or accessing HE in rural communities which are generally conservative, particularly regarding gender relations, and which have placed a low value on HE. Colleges were viewed as having a poor social reputation as well as quality of education; public transport was viewed as unsafe as well as unaffordable; HE was viewed as financially prohibitive.
- Within their own families, students did not enrol in college due to concerns relating to financial constraints; pressure (especially on young men) to start earning; pressures (especially on young women) to marry.
- Students lacked adequate information regarding HE options and admission process and were more generally interested in – or lacked information in relation to – other professional and vocational courses.
- Students enrolled in HE because it was an obvious choice after completing schooling, motivated by possible graduate employment and their families' and personal aspirations.
- Some young women chose to access HE as a means to either delay marriage or to enhance their social status and marriageability.

These findings drove the consecutive phases of the project to focus on families and institutional outreach mechanisms through which colleges can become more accessible, safe and offer quality educational provision to students.

Recommendations

These recommendations are directed at a range of for stakeholders: schools, colleges and the government and the NGO sector and focus on outreach activities.

They are based on a key study finding that, for some students, government colleges represent their only opportunity to access higher education, while for other students these same colleges represent a restriction on choice and opportunity.

There are two target **outcomes**:

- Where attending the nearest government college is currently the only opportunity for young people to access higher education, colleges should be accessible, safe and offering quality education provision.
- Where young people's higher education choices are limited to accessing the nearest government college due to financial, geographical and/or cultural factors, young people's choices need to be opened up so that they can maximise their potential.

The role of the government and the NGO sector

- State-funded educational schemes and interventions need to be sustainable and accountable, and should involve consultation with young people and different stakeholders in the community, connecting families, schools and colleges. Information about schemes should be disseminated widely in a variety of means, including directly to young people.
- The role of Aanganvadi workers (including training) and other localised services including village panchayats and khap panchayats should be joined up with schools and colleges to promote informed educational choices from an early age.
- The Department of Higher Education should further liaise with the Department of Transport and Infrastructure to consult on bus routes, bus stand locations and bus requirements for college access. Consultation with students and mapping of the catchment area are essential parts of this process.
- Further colleges should be considered where there are no colleges within an appropriate catchment area (1 hour of travel and/or 70-100km distant from students' homes).
- Colleges need to receive sufficient funding to recruit high quality teachers on permanent contracts, to maintain and develop facilities, and to develop a high-quality offer for students (e.g. extra activities, prizes and bursaries).
- Information to be distributed through schools, community groups and directly from colleges.
  - Families need readily available information about school choice and higher education choice (including subject choice) and employability options
  - Information should include positive messaging (a) valuing of girls' educational trajectories; (b) on class 12 marks that are needed for accessing HE, so that families are in an informed position to act if there are concerns about young people's school progress.
  - Information should (a) cover the costs of HE, including fees and supplementary costs, as well as scholarships and bursaries (including of competitive HEIs which may be located further away); (b) include guidance on transport options for students to reach colleges and suggestions for safe journey planning.
- The NGO sector relating to education needs to be stimulated in Haryana.

The role of colleges

Colleges should:
- build a more public presence in their catchment areas, to increase understanding of higher education. They should engage directly with families through visiting communities including villages. College teachers should be more visible in local communities. When engaging with families, colleges need to be aware that parents have the ultimate say in young people's HE access, but respect that mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers have different roles and these need to be respected and explored. Young people need emotional and informed support from their families.
- open their doors to (guided) visits from families and young people.
- liaise with schools to ensure that young people are receiving information directly to ensure that the school-college transition is facilitated in an informed manner and that young people are aware of their options.

- formalise the role of current students to act as college ambassadors disseminating information about higher education in their communities and giving guided visits of the college.
- engage in more active information and diversely targeted marketing campaigns attractive to young people (e.g. social media) but also to family members (e.g. newspaper, television, radio).
- liaise with local internet providers (e.g. internet cafes) to ensure that young people applying to the colleges from these providers have access to current information. Student ambassadors can play a part here too.
- train any personnel involved in the admissions process to be informative and welcoming to applicants.
- provide step-by-step guidance on the admissions process and ensure this is available at schools, internet cafes and at the college, and available online.
- Some young people are making decisions about HE on their own. Colleges should be aware of this College ambassadors can (in collaboration with schools) work with individuals on their college applications.

The role of schools

- Schools should work with colleges and college ambassadors to facilitate the spreading of reliable, accurate information about higher education options to young people and, where possible, their communities.
- Young people need to be informed of their options, and young women in particular need to receive more training at school level in negotiation skills, so that they can have more involvement in discussions of their futures within the family. Young people at school level should be encouraged to identify different sources of support and information that they could consult. Again, this is a potential role for student ambassadors in collaboration with schools.

1. The Phase 1 Study

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1.1   Introduction

Higher education (HE) is an important social institution which performs multiple roles such as building knowledge and skills, developing the human resources available to society, and enhancing the employability of students. HE can also address social justice concerns such as historical marginalisation of women and young people from disenfranchised communities (Varghese 2015, 2015; Tierney 2012; Nussbaum 2012; Castells 1994). Increasing access to HE helps to address these multiple social concerns. As a result, state governments as well as universities implement policies to increase enrolment. The government of India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020) confirms a national interest in increasing the GER (gross enrollment ratio) for India, which according to the most recent annual survey of HE in India, (AISHE 2018-19) stands at 26.3%.

In terms of access to HE, women's participation has been a concern across the world (Boliver 2013; David 2015) and in India (John 2012; Chakravarti 2012; Chanana 1988, 1990, 2000, 2007, 2017). Educational choices as students access HE in India are significantly gendered (Sudarshan 2018; Sahu et al. 2017; Gautam 2015; Verma 2014; John 2012) and additionally influenced by intersectional factors such as caste and social class (Varghese et al. 2019; Wadhwa 2018; Sabharwal and Malish 2016). The AISHE 2018-19 reports a gender parity of 1 for the first time to indicate that cumulatively there is parity in the number of young women and men enrolled in higher education (HE) in India. However, the GER is lower for marginalised caste communities (23 overall) in India, and there are also concerns about gendered access to HE which go beyond gender parity to query the inequalities within HE choice. Indian higher education has also been expanding and massifying (Varghese 2015). Within the massifying social ecology of higher education institutions in India, state funded colleges (i.e. government colleges) cater to the needs of "full-time and local, or regional traditionally aged students" (Tierney and Sabharwal 2016: 24). Students from wealthier and higher social status families are able to afford to stay away from home and travel longer distances to access HE (Varghese et al. 2019). A similar difference is also noted in the distances travelled by young men and women. Young men are selecting institutions which are more prestigious and farther away from home, whereas young women tend to be enrolled in institutions are closer to home and are accompanied by safer and often more expensive commute options (Borker 2017).

Haryana reports an overall GER of 29.2 (AISHE 2018-19) which is significantly higher than the national average, and numerical parity between enrollment of young men and women. However, the state continues to report increasing number of incidence of violence against women and social scrutiny and monitoring of young people's movements outside the home, especially that of young women (Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression 2015, 2014; Ahlawat 2012; Chowdhry 2012). Haryana also is a state which has one of the lowest overall and juvenile (0 to 6 years) sex ratios in India, which is indicative of persistent social preference for sons, sex-selective abortions, dowry and gendered matrimonial and inheritance practices. It is therefore important to explore how these gendered social inequalities feed into HE access and choice.

The 'Fair Chance for Education project' in Haryana is based on the understanding that access to HE is gendered and aims to influence equitable and informed access to HE. The Phase 1 study

provided the solid evidence and rich foundation upon which to build the further phases. It was thus designed to better understand the personal and educational backgrounds and trajectories of young people in Haryana who have accessed higher education via government colleges. Moreover, it sought to explore a variety of facets of the young people's lives, in order to avoid pre-determining findings, and indeed to permit the discovery of the unexpected, particularly in relation to gender. Finally, the Phase 1 study facilitated the development of long-term sustainable contacts in Haryana, in order to deepen the project's engagement at a district level. The Phase 1 fieldwork was conducted during a project visit in February 2018.

The **research questions** for this phase 1 study were as follows:

1. Who are the students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India?
    - How is this access gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?
2. How and why are students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India?
    - How is this access gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

1.2 Research design

The study was designed as a **mixed methods case study**, initially of two colleges in two separate districts, with a third site added later. The aim of the study was to explore the background and educational trajectories of young people who have accessed higher education via government colleges, and to explore how gender influenced these trajectories. The study sought to understand how and why young people accessed higher education at all, and why in their chosen college. As such, the study focused on *access to* and *choices pertaining to* higher education. Case study was selected as a methodology because the study sought to recognise and explore differences between districts and colleges within the state, due to factors relating to proximity of other states and higher education institutions, and degree of rurality. The study therefore sought to explore gendered access to higher education in Haryana through in-depth case studies of specific areas, with the inclusion of multiple sites facilitating generalisability.

Within the case study methodology, the **methods** chosen were as follows: institutional profile and background statistics for documentary analysis; semi-structured interview with college Principal or nominated member of senior leadership to facilitate our understanding of the student body and institutional policies; survey of around 100 undergraduates in each college, across subjects, to include men and women students, with the purpose to assess socioeconomic status, family education history, mobility (social and geographical); focus group discussions (FGDs) with 5 women students and 5 men students in each college, focusing on their perceptions of the barriers and enabling factors for access to higher education; semi-structured biographical interviews with 2 women students and 2 men students in each college, focusing on their perceptions of the barriers and enabling factors that had influenced their own educational trajectories.

The design of the study was followed by an application for **ethical approval** from the appropriate University of Warwick ethics committee. Ethical approval was granted. The colleges and all study participants were carefully anonymised. The colleges are given the following pseudonyms: Mahendergarh District College (MDC), Sonipat District College (SDC), Sirsa District College (SiDC).

1.3 District and college selection

As noted above, initially two districts were selected for the study, Mahendergarh and Sonipat, with data collection conducted in February 2018. While it was not possible to replicate the full case study design in the third district, we replicated the survey in a rural college in Sirsa district in November 2018. This enabled the study to encompass a wider range of locations and students. The districts were chosen based on (i) contrast (e.g. proximity to NCR[1]), (ii) statistical profile regarding sex ratio and education, (iii) strength of local contacts.

Table 1: District comparison

District	Urban Population	Sex Ratio	Juvenile Sex Ration	Female Literacy	Overall Literacy
Mahendargarh	14.41%	895	775	64.6%	77.7%
Sonipat	31.27%	856	798	69.8%	79.1%
Sirsa	24.65%	897	862	60.4%	68.8%
Haryana	34.88%	877	834	65.9%	75.5%

Source: Census of India 2011

One co-educational government college was selected in each sampled district, in comparable environments (small urban centres, not the district centre). All three selected colleges were co-educational at the time of the study, although it was observed that strict gender segregation was observed within the college spaces. None of the colleges maintained a hostel. MDC and SDC offered all three general education streams (BA, BCom, BSc), but SiDC offered just two of these (BA and BCom) at the time of data collection, although it has since begun to offer BSc.

SDC, previously a coeducational college, was in the process of moving to being a women's college. The college representative stated that, even before this change, there had been more women than men in the college population. At the time of the study, **MDC** was in the process of opening up more courses to women. However, it was populated by more men as there was a women's government college in the same urban centre, which was preferred by women. Women wanting to study BSc had to enroll in MDC. **SiDC** was a new college which had been established about 10 years before our study, on land donated by a landowner in the village; the college was located about 5km from the nearest small urban centre.

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[1] The National Capital region or NCR refers to districts from different states surrounding New Delhi, the administrative capital of India. Several districts in Haryana such as Mahendargarh, Sonipat, Gurgaon, and Faridabad are part of the NCR are therefore located in prominent national corridors of development and special economic zones for industrial development. Being located within the NCR and proximity to NCR is associated with greater degree of industrial and infrastructural development such as investment and development of national and state roadways and transport facilities (Planning Commision 2009; Apex Cluster Development Services 2015).

Figure 1.1 Government college building in Haryana

1.4 Fieldwork implementation

The research instruments for the study were initially workshopped in January 2018 by the Warwick team. The instruments were piloted by three members of the project's Consultative Group (CG): Sharmila Rathee, Manju Panwar, Roma Smart Joseph. Research Assistants (RAs) were recruited for the study through project contacts; all RAs were doctoral researchers. Sooraj H. S. was the RA for SDC data collection along with Anjali Thomas (PhD 1). Annu Kumari and Sohan Lal were the RAs for MDC data collection. Before embarking on the fieldwork, a training workshop was conducted for the RAs by the project team.

Following the preparation stages, the research team departed for Haryana, with MDC data collection conducted by Ann Stewart and Renu Yadav with Annu Kumari and Sohan Lal, and SDC data collection conducted by Emily Henderson and Sharmila Rathee with Anjali Thomas and Sooraj H. S. SiDC data was collected by Anjali Thomas on a separate occasion. Nidhi S. Sabharwal prepared a background discussion note on the nature of challenges that students from rural/semi-urban areas experience in the pathways to higher education with students studying in the State University and its affiliated colleges located in the district of the SiDC. Access to the colleges was facilitated by CG members Renu Yadav (MDC) and Sharmila Rathee (SDC and SiDC). Key contacts were established in each college, who then assisted with recruitment of participants. The questionnaire survey was completed in classrooms with the kind permission of tutors, and in MDC students were summoned to the lecture theatre for questionnaire completion. The college contact then selected participants for the interviews and FGDs, which were conducted in private spaces (e.g. empty computer room) by the RAs and PhD 1. The interviews with the college representatives were conducted by the project team. Data collection proceeded smoothly, with the expected sample reached for the survey and rich qualitative data produced. The colleges were supportive of the study, for which the team is appreciative.

1.5 Data analysis

The **questionnaire survey** was administered using a bilingual (Hindi/English) paper form. Nidhi S. Sabharwal provided significant inputs in the development and finalisation of the research instruments, including student survey questionnaire, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion guide. For the purposes of data inputting, Hindi responses were transliterated/translated as appropriate. The forms were then inputted to SPSS. The questionnaire data was relatively high quality, in that the students were of high literacy and enrolled on degree courses, so had a good level of competence in completing the form. The free text responses were coded by Anjali Thomas (PhD 1) with Emily Henderson. Following inputting, each variable was analysed using descriptive statistics and graphic representations. The survey was designed to provide a general picture of the college populations, against the specific detail of the qualitative data collection. As such, a more involved statistical analysis was not necessary for our purposes. In the analysis, at times we refer to the 'case colleges' (MDC and SDC) together, where e.g. the numbers were too small to draw conclusions from the single college data. SiDC is always analysed separately as it forms a rural comparator.

Figure 1.2 Explanation of the questionnaire survey to students

The qualitative data audio files were transcribed into Hindi with Roman script. The **student interviews** were analysed in a multi-stage, collaborative process. The first stage involved a data analysis workshop during the UK project visit in 2018. The workshop included Nidhi Sabharwal, Renu Yadav, Sharmila Rathee along with members of the project team. Four interviews were read and discussed for the purposes of identifying important issues and themes. In relation to higher education access and choice, the discussion identified important facets of the interviews to focus on in the subsequent coding: family educational and employment background, including caste/class factors; siblings including their educational background; participant's schooling and hobbies/extra-curricular activities; participant's motivation for studying the chosen subject and their employment aspirations; their basis for college choice (including discussion of other HEIs considered) and who was involved in this decision; their process of applying to the college and any obstacles identified; their journey to college. Initial findings from the analysis were presented to the CG and in some research presentations to ascertain the potential for the full, detailed analysis, which was then conducted. The student interviews were then read and discussed by Emily Henderson with Nikita

Samanta (PhD 2), who assisted with Hindi comprehension. The interviews were biographical in nature, so the resultant analysis involved compiling a student profile for each student, using the same format for each profile to ensure comparability. Participants were then considered both holistically as individuals, and thematically in line with the different aspects of the survey.

The **FGDs** were analysed using thematic analysis. To facilitate this process, Anjali Thomas (PhD 1) translated the transcripts into English. These were then thematically analysed using the questionnaire structure and the key aspects identified in the data analysis workshop as the basis for deductive coding, in addition to inductive coding where unexpected themes emerged. The college representative interviews were analysed in the same manner. Following this process, the structure of the findings was established, and the resulting findings sections include a combination of data from across the different sources.

Figure 1.3 Data analysis workshop

The case study methods included **document analysis** of materials about the college. However, there was very little documentation available, which was in itself a finding of the study – that the colleges are not engaging in a practice of producing and circulating brochures or information leaflets about the colleges. For the purposes of our study, we were able to obtain some information from the administrative personnel regarding the student body. SDC handed the team some brochures, but these were a few years out of date. There was at that time no internet presence for the colleges. We were therefore unable to include document analysis in the study.

2. Who are the students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India? How is this Gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

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2.1   Sample information

Sample

The sample for the questionnaire survey amounted to: 124 from MDC, 118 from SDC, 84 from SiDC.

Gender

Our case college sample (MDC and SDC) consists of 40% women, 60% men, and no other genders listed. At SDC, which was transitioning to being a women's college, 66% of our sample were women and 34% men. MDC was a mixed gender college, but was located near to a women's college, so was attended by more men (84% men and 16% women in our sample), with the women attending this college having made an active choice to do so (e.g. for Sciences). At SiDC, the gender balance of our sample was 48% women and 52% men.

Caste

Our study sample was divided according to the four caste groupings in Haryana – Non-SC/ST/OBC, BCB, BCA, SC, where BCB is less marginalised than BCA. MDC was characterised by a relatively high BCB population, while SDC had a larger Non-SC/ST/OBC group. The SC population of the colleges (according to our sample) was fairly representative of the district averages, with the exception of SiDC, where there was a higher proportion of SC students in our sample than in the district by a margin of 10%. At MDC, the study sample is characterised by more Non-SC/ST/OBC and more SC men than women. At SDC, there were more women from Non-SC/ST/OBC groups than men, and more men from SC groups than women. At SiDC, there was a very large SC women group and a very small Non-SC/ST/OBC group. There was a great deal of variety across specific named castes across the colleges. However in each college there was a numerically dominant caste (Ahir, BCB at MDC; Jaat, Non-SC/ST/OBC at SDC; Meghwal, SC at SiDC).

Figure 2.1 Caste group distribution across colleges and genders

Legend: General (blue), BCA (red), BCB (yellow), SC (green)

Y-axis (College/s and Gender): MDC & SDC - all, MDC & SDC - F, MDC & SDC - M, MDC - all, MDC - F, MDC - M, SDC - all, SDC - F, SDC - M, SiDC - all, SiDC - F, SiDC - M

X-axis (Percentage): 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%, 125%
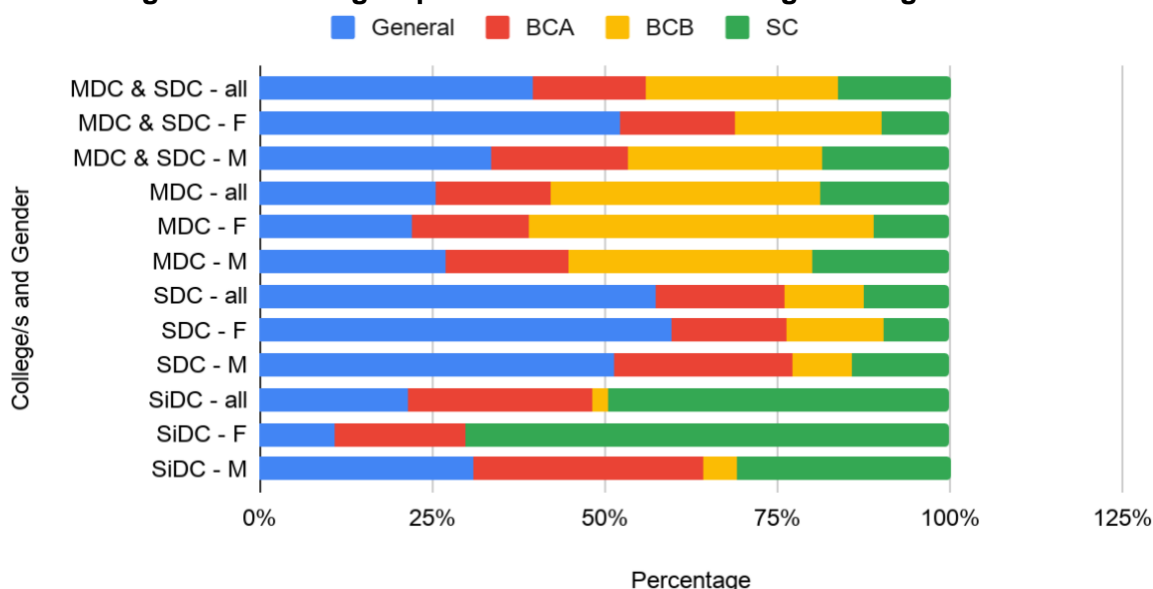
Religion

The study sample was almost exclusively Hindu, matching the respective district statistics (MDC 100% Hindu, 99.04% Hindu for Mahendargarh district; SDC 98.2% Hindu, 95.87% Hindu for Sonipat district – Census 2011). The exception was SiDC which included some Sikh respondents (7.1% Sikh for SIDC, 26.17% Sikh for Sirsa district – Census 2011).

2.2 Students' higher education details

Class 12 marks

Class 12 marks are the primary measure through which higher education isntitutions in India evaluate applications made by prospective students for BA, BSc and BCom (Commerce) courses in India. Professional courses such as medicine, nursing engineering, architecture, law, fashion design, art and hotel management often use additional public national or state competitive examinations to evaluate prospective students. The government colleges in this study exclusively use class 12 marks to evaluate prospective student applications. The mean class 12 marks at the case colleges were just over 75%; at SiDC the mean mark was just under 70%. Women students had a higher mean score for class 12 marks than men by a few percentage points. This could be attributed to women's higher performance in these exams. However, it should also be noted that women tend to attend colleges that are closer to home, so it is possible that more high-performing women had applied to the colleges, with high-performing men able to apply to more competitive colleges and courses such as engineering, medicine and law. The mean class 12 score decreases by caste group in accordance with levels of marginalisation, with a 6% difference in mean score between Non-SC/ST/OBC and SC groups; this is also reflected at SiDC but there is a wider discrepancy between Non-SC/ST/OBC and BCA.

Course studied

In our study sample, the majority of students were studying BSc or BCom, with fewer students enrolled on a BA course. At SiDC, however, the vast majority of students were studying for a BA, with a low number enrolled on BCom courses – there was no BSc option at that time. The colleges vary when course selection is compared by gender. Given the location of MDC in proximity to the women's college, there is a higher likelihood of women choosing MDC to study subjects that are unavailable in the women's college. However it can be said that, across all three colleges, proportionally more women were studying for BA courses, and proportionally more men were enrolled on BCom and BSc courses. This reflects common gendered subject choices; however, we are unable to dig deeper into specific subject choice due to variation in students' reporting of their subjects on the survey. Nevertheless, there were no conclusive findings relating to subject choice and caste group.

Scholarships

Though the findings relating to scholarships must be treated with caution due to inaccuracies in student responses, it is noteworthy that 21.3% of the MDC/SDC respondents versus 56.3% of SiDC respondents stated that they were in receipt of scholarships. This reflects different conditions of accessing HE for the different college populations. The majority of students stating they received a scholarship were SC, with some from the BC groups. Of the total of 5 Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group students across the three colleges who received scholarships, these may have referred to other scholarships such as merit-based or relating to sports or military. More men from the case colleges stated they received a scholarship, while more women at SiDC noted this. There are no conclusive findings regarding gender and scholarships, but it should be noted that women did not have to pay tuition fees at these colleges due to state government policy to increase enrolment of women in HE.

2.3   Family structure

Student marital status

Very few of the participants in our study were married. Across all three colleges, 11 respondents were married (six women, three men, two gender unknown) and four were engaged (three women, one man); no student interview or FGD participants stated that they were married or engaged. The implication of this is that the vast majority of students, irrespective of gender, are still living at home with their families, and thus their higher education decisions were determined within the family. There is also the suggestion that, having reached HE, it was possibly easier to postpone marriage until after graduation, or even Masters level. Early marriage is portrayed in our study as a phenomenon that occurs *elsewhere*, whether in another (more rural) location or in another era. However, it is clear from the qualitative data that marriage figures strongly in students' future planning, and that there is pressure from different parties for both men and women to fix the timescale for marriage.

Family unit

The study suggests that the majority of the students' decisions relating to HE were taken in a household unit consisting of a relatively small nuclear family (but with more than 3 people).

However, we also know from the qualitative data and the parts of the survey relating to HE choices that other family members were closely involved. The respondents of the questionnaire significantly identified parents (more participants identifying fathers than mothers) and siblings (more participants identifying brothers than sisters) in a gendered manner. Additionally, extended family members such as uncles and aunts and cousins often provided advice and information to students and family members.

Siblings

Only one respondent in our survey was an only child. This means that the vast majority of students had taken their decisions relating to HE in families where there were also siblings. Students' decisions will therefore have been situated among family decision-making processes for multiple offspring, including considerations of investment in education and preparation for marriage. Many students' families included more than two offspring, suggesting that decisions about HE were taken in relation to more than one sibling. Women students in our study sample had more siblings than men students. This has the implication that decisions about young women's education were being taken in relation to more siblings then for young men's education, suggesting more complex consideration in terms of dividing resources and planning futures. Our study revealed that many families consisted of older daughters and younger sons. There was a tendency for girls to have younger brothers (and sisters) and for brothers to have older sisters. This seems to reflect the tendency of families to 'try for a boy'. This shapes the decision-making process around HE, as the young women in these families are engaging in formal education – and potentially HE – before their brothers. In families where there is no history of HE, as most of the families in our study were, this means that older sisters were potentially the first in family to access HE, with their brothers and younger sisters able to make plans and decisions based on their sisters' experiences. It is possible to conjecture, however, that multiple girl children places a financial burden on the family due to marriage costs, thus potentially limiting potential willingness to invest in education and/or postpone marriage until after graduation. Families tended to have more than one older sister, but just one older brother. With the value placed on the boy child, if there is just one older brother in the family, it is possible to conjecture the level of responsibility this member of the family is given, and the role he may play in family decision-making. However it is also possible to consider the older sisters as a resource which may not be fully tapped due to gendered constraints within the family. This family structure analysis is thus important to consider when exploring the decisions and influences impacting upon young people's access to HE.

2.4   Family educational history

Grandparents' schooling

In our study, many students were unaware of their grandparents' education levels. However, it is noteworthy that more students seemed to be aware of their grandfathers' education (on both sides) than the level of education attained by their grandmothers (on both sides). Students were more aware of their paternal grandparents' education than their maternal grandparents' education, probably because they live in greater proximity to their paternal grandparents due to the tendency of brides to relocate to their husbands' place of residence upon marriage. This knowledge of family members' educational profiles is important in terms of young people situating themselves within the educational history of their family – as following in the footsteps or breaking new ground. The

students' grandparents had low levels of formal education, with almost 50% having accessed no formal education at all (and over 60% at the rural college). This indicates that, for the students accessing HE in government colleges, there is no multi-generational history of formal education in their families. This has implications for HE decision-making, as it marks a huge disparity between the educational experiences across the three generations, meaning that there is potentially little experience to draw on from family members. Notably, a much higher proportion of grandmothers than grandfathers had received no formal education, meaning that fewer women students then men were positioned in multi-generational histories of gender-specific formal education. Where grandparents had accessed formal education, many finished formal schooling after primary school (class 5) or part-way through secondary education (class 8); more grandfathers tended to leave at class 10 or 12 than grandmothers, most of whom had already left by that point. Again this shows that, even where a multi-generational history of formal education exists, this is for many students limited to primary or secondary school, and in some cases high school. Women students are more likely to be positioned as first or second-generation gender-specific learners than men students, who are more likely to be second or third-generation. Grandparents from Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group were most likely both to access formal education and go on to access HE. Grandparents from the BCA group were least privileged in both regards. This may reflect the enhanced measures for SC groups to access education, but equally there is a clear discrepancy between Non-SC/ST/OBC group and all three marginalised groups (BCB, BCA and SC).

Figure 2.2 Parents' education levels by maximum class attained
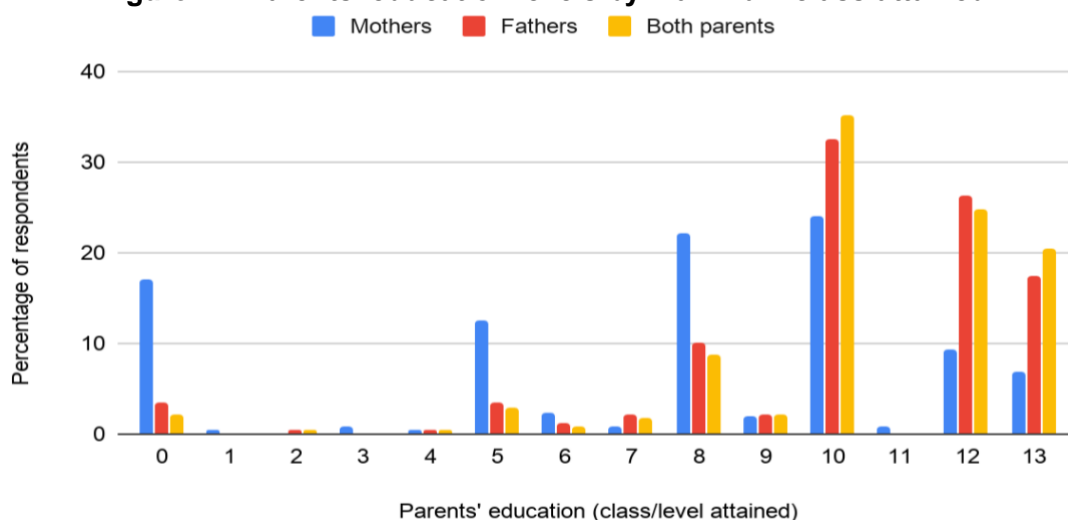
Parents' schooling

For parents' educational attainment, there was less missing information. However there were still more missing responses for mothers than fathers. Most students, unlike their parents, had not grown up in households where neither parent had accessed formal education, although incidence of no formal schooling was higher at the rural college. This means that most students were at least 2nd generation learners within their households. When incidence of no formal education is compared for mothers and fathers however, proportionally more mothers had not accessed formal education than fathers, with this figure still reaching over 50% of mothers at the rural college. The concerning finding here was that, despite significant improvement in access to formal education between the grandparents' and parents' generation, a higher proportion of grandfathers from the case colleges had accessed formal education than mothers at the rural college. The findings from this analysis

indicate that, while most households contained at least one parent who had accessed formal education, there was still a fairly high chance that women students entering HE came from families where they were the first generation to access any formal schooling. Again this sets the scene for HE decision making. As with grandparents, more mothers had exited formal education earlier than fathers, with class 5 and 8 as well as 10 constituting exit points. The difference between mothers' and fathers' educational attainment was striking, with many more fathers having completed secondary school, high school and even higher education. This again reflects the imbalance between maternal and paternal educational histories in students' families, with women's education being less normalised for future generations to follow. The majority of students' fathers had attained higher levels of education than their spouses, with a lower percentage having the same level and an even smaller number being less educated than their spouse. In some cases, fathers who had accessed HE were married to women who had not accessed or completed primary school. This sets the scene for families with vast gendered discrepancies in parental educational capital. More mothers from Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group accessed higher levels of education, and fewer had not accessed any formal education. This was the reverse for mothers from the SC group. The disparity was less evident for fathers, but still apparent, particularly in relation to accessing no formal education. Students from the Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group were more likely to have mothers who were more educated or equally educated as their spouses. SC households were least likely to include mothers that were equally as educated as their spouses, and no mothers were more educated than their spouses. This suggests that more Non-SC/ST/OBC group households were already challenging gendered expectations of spousal education levels in the parental generation. It is clear that, when considering e.g. the ideal age of marriage versus the ideal age to complete education, the women students in our study were negotiating the ideal age of education completion, as opposed to following in the footsteps of previous generations of educated women.

Figure 2.3 Mothers' and fathers' education compared by caste group

Legend: Mother more educated | Equal | Father more educated

Caste group	Mother more educated	Equal	Father more educated
General	13.8	26.4	59.8
BCB	11.5	15.4	73.1
BCA	11.1	25	63.9
SC	0	13.3	86.7

% of pairs in each caste group
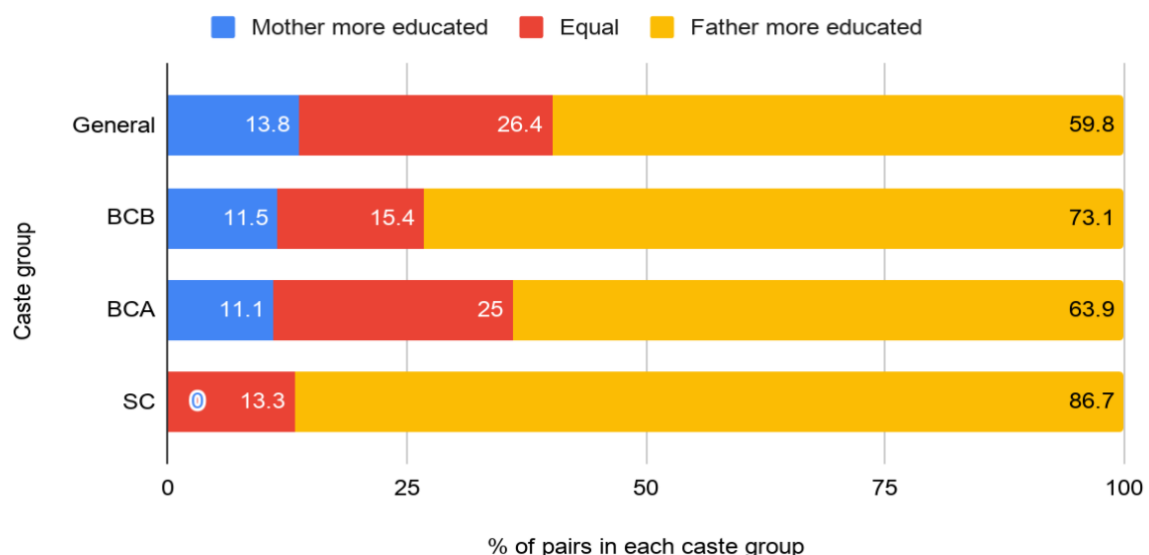
Generational difference between grandparents' and parents' educational attainment

Families with low or no formal education in the grandparents' generation also tended to have relatively low levels of parental education, with very few parents from these families having accessed HE. Families with higher levels of education in the grandparents' generation tended to have higher levels of education in the parents' generation. This reinforces the educational capital

that some students brought to their own HE experiences, with some students being family newcomers and others having had a more stepped generational trajectory towards HE. At each college, there were a concerning number of students (24 in total) where the maximum level of education that their parents had attained was lower than the maximum level attained by at least one of their grandparents. There were also several students (45) where the maximum level of education that their parents had attained was equal to the maximum level attained by at least one of their grandparents. These findings disrupt the progress narrative that our study seemed to indicate, with a stepped increase in level of education attained for each generation. However the narrative was upheld by the remaining students, where their parents were more educated than the grandparents, usually by 1-4 classes. A significant number of students (52) were from families where the maximum level of education that their parents had attained was at least 10 classes higher than the maximum level attained by at least one of their grandparents. This latter finding suggests a leap into the unknown for many families at the parental generation.

History of HE in the family

The vast majority of the respondents in our study were first generation higher education students (68.5% at MDC, 84.7% at SDC, 96.4% at SiDC). Very few students' families (22) included multi-generational access to HE. In some cases (10), grandparents had accessed HE but parents had not. No grandmothers had accessed HE, and only two had attained class 12. This means that no women students were positioned as 3rd generation HE women entrants. More grandfathers had attained HE (24), meaning that more men students were 3rd generation men in their families to access HE. Grandfathers' HE qualifications ranged across vocational and general education qualifications. 4 grandfathers had obtained an MA qualification. The majority of grandparents having accessed HE were from Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of students had no family history of HE beyond their parents' generation, meaning that grandparental input to the decision-making process was not based on personal experience of HE. There was more evidence of parents having accessed HE than grandparents; a total of 58 parents across the three colleges had attended HE. This meant that there were students who were not the first in family to attend HE. However 43 of these parents were fathers, meaning that the vast majority of women students were the first generation of women to attend HE. Of students in families where parents had accessed HE, Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group was proportionally over-represented. A range of qualifications had been attained by fathers, with the most common being BA (24). 6 fathers had obtained a Master's degree. Fewer qualifications were mentioned for mothers, though again BA was most common (8). 4 mothers had obtained a Master's qualification. Since only 11 students in our entire study came from families where at least one member of the family had attained a post-graduate qualification, there was also a very limited extent to which parents' future aims for their offspring's education were based on personal understanding of education beyond the undergraduate degree.

## 2.5   Employment background

Mothers' employment

Over 90% of respondents' mothers were homemakers across the three colleges (extending to 98.5% at SiDC). Of the few external jobs reported for mothers, this included teacher, business, government job, childcare, farming, skilled/technical labour, nurse, labourer. This means that the

majority of respondents' mothers were not working outside of the home, irrespective of their educational attainment. This point is salient for young women's educational decisions, as they were living in households where educational attainment had not influenced their mothers' employment possibilities.

Fathers' employment

For fathers, there was a greater variety in job type. No fathers listed 'home-maker' as their occupation. The majority of fathers of students at the case colleges were employed in farming, business or labour, which is to be expected in small urban centres within an agricultural state. It is important to note that many women in Haryana are also engaged in agricultural work, but this was not represented as such on the survey. At SiDC, the rurality of the college was reflected in the only significant job types being farming and labour. This finding is important as a backdrop for the decision-making processes relating to young people's HE choices. The majority of parents were not employed in jobs that required graduate education or even class 12 completion. This must have contributed to the (gendered) employment horizons of the students.

Figure 2.4 Father's jobs – top types by caste group
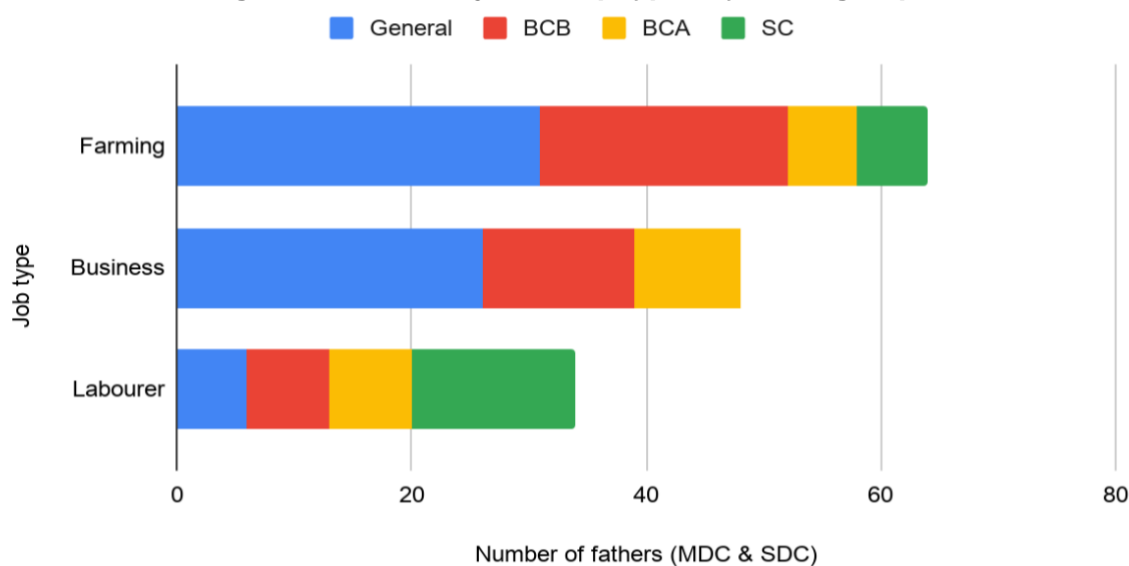
Employment type in relation to caste group

Regarding caste group, farming and business were dominated by Non-SC/ST/OBC and then BCB groups, while labourers had a higher concentration of SC fathers. Almost half of the SC fathers were labourers, with a further quarter in government jobs, perhaps reflecting the reservations for marginalised groups in government jobs. Students in the sample from less marginalised groups were more likely to have grown up seeing a variety of jobs including agriculture and business, which may have contributed to their own aims and motivations when selecting higher education options.

Students engaging in part-time work

Very few students stated that they were engaged in part-time work. Those who did record part-time work were predominantly men. There were no patterns relating to caste group. Given the low numbers of married students in the sample, it is striking that three of the working students were

married. The jobs listed did not include farming or labour, which adds to the notion that students did not declare the work they were doing to assist with the family economy. Some students were engaged in serious hobbies which involved either earning money during their studies (e.g. singing for occasions) or which would assist with future career options (e.g. NCC, boxing).

Students' employment aspirations

Aspirations (as recounted by students in the qualitative data) bore little resemblance to the employment background they had grown up in, reflecting recent changes in the Indian employment market and related aspirations for upward social mobility. Students mentioned achieving post-graduate qualifications, which seemed to have become normalized for their generation although few of their parents had been educated beyond high school. No students mentioned agriculture or continuing a family business. All of the women had clear and ambitious further study and employment prospects, but it was not clear if this was for pre-marriage studies and employment, or if they expected to continue once married. Banking and finance was a popular sector and seen as appropriate for women due to the possibility of staying in the family home and because they could enter banking without further qualifications (thus potentially meaning that marriage could happen sooner). Some students aspired to work in education, but this occurred as a back-up option if other careers in e.g. sport or the military did not work out. Others aspired to work in government jobs, including the civil service, police and military. Generally there was a large discrepancy between parents' employment background and their aspirations for their children. As such, parents were encouraging their children to enter into jobs that they had no experience of, which also necessitated college education with which they were also mostly unfamiliar.

2.6   Students' educational backgrounds

Medium of instruction (MOI) in schooling

The majority of students in the case colleges had been schooled in Hindi, across genders and caste groups. Men students had had more exposure to English MOI than women. Non-SC/ST/OBC caste groups also had received more exposure to English MOI education. SC and BCA groups had received the least exposure to English MOI. At SiDC, the vast majority of students had completed class 12 in Hindi, with no SC students having accessed English or English/Hindi MOI education. Whilst recognising the benefit of being fully educated to a high level in Hindi, access to English MOI education unlocks certain future opportunities for HE, including more prestigious HE institutions and the Sciences. Not having studied in English prior to HE means that it is both less likely that a student will opt for a prestigious institution and/or a Sciences course, and also that, should a student take this path, that they will not be able to succeed or thrive in their HE studies. MOI is also significant as an indicator of investment in previous education, in that many English MOI schools are either private or state schools with competitive entrance exams that may require tuition or at least the time and space at home to study. Having been educated in English therefore gives further indication of the foundation for HE laid by previous schooling.

Private versus public schooling

Most of the students in our study had attended private and/or government schools. Over 50% of students at the case colleges had attended private school across all four periods of schooling

(classes 1-5, primary; classes 6-8, lower secondary; classes 9-10, upper secondary; classes 11-12, high school), peaking at 66.5% for classes 6-8 (i.e. lower secondary school). The lowest proportion was 57.1% for classes 11-12. This was also noted for SiDC, where enrolment in private school was lowest for high school at 22.9%. This may represent parents only having resources for a limited period of private schooling (perhaps affected by the arrival of other siblings), or be based on notions of government schooling quality being higher for high school. It is noteworthy that the majority of SiDC students had studied at government schools, reflecting the lower socio-economic status of students' families, and also potentially different investments and strategies relating to children's education. While girls and boys started off with close to the same proportion of pupils in government and private schools, a split opened up in the latter three educational periods, where the proportion of boys in private school increased, while the proportion of girls in government schools increases. It appears from these results that girls may be transferred out of private education into government schools, with the reverse being true for boys, which seems to reflect gendered investment in schooling. Furthermore it should be noted that, although all of these respondents had 'succeeded' educationally, in that they had all accessed higher education, there is a stark gender difference in terms of parental investment in education. There seems to be a gendered pattern where daughters are enrolled in government schools, and more sons are enrolled in private schools which are more expensive and considered to provide higher quality education. Because of this, there is also a gendered disparity in terms of the type of educational preparation (for example Medium of Instruction) that students received in their schooling histories. There is also a caste dimension to the split between government and private schooling. There is a stepped effect for each period of schooling, with a marked increase in proportion of pupils attending government schools as the social disadvantage of the caste groups increases. These results may show some preference for state systems for more marginalised groups, but it is likely that these results are based on the financial capabilities and restrictions for different groups.

Schooling pathways

The majority of students in our study had stayed in the same school type throughout their education. For those who had changed school type, the most common was to be enrolled in one type for one period, and the other type for three periods, such as starting in private and changing to government for the remaining periods, or spending three periods in private and switching to government for high school. A minority of students had switched schooling type multiple times. Schooling pathways are a gendered phenomenon. More girls than boys started and remained in government schools throughout, more girls than boys changed between schooling pathways, and fewer girls than boys started and remained in private education throughout. This could reflect the tendency of parents to invest more in their sons' education, with daughters' education perhaps more likely to reflect changes in family fortune and considerations about return on investment. We also know from the siblings analysis that daughters are more likely to be succeeded by sons and indeed further daughters, the arrival of which may affect family educational planning. Broadly speaking, the more privileged caste group students were in, the higher the likelihood of starting and remaining in private school; changing school is also less likely for more privileged groups, and starting and remaining in government schools is less likely. The reverse is true for more marginalised groups. Stability in schooling is the preserve of the most and least privileged. The schooling pathways reveal substantial discrepancies relating to caste and gender, when schooling pathways lay the foundation for students accessing HE. It should be remembered that these are the students who have accessed HE through its most accessible form - namely, government colleges. We might expect to see heightened inequalities for more expensive and competitive forms of higher education.

Location of previous school

There was limited evidence of feeder schools for these colleges. An important figure to note is that over 40% of students across the three colleges had attended their previous school in the same town as their college, meaning that a high proportion of students had attended a college in a place with which they were already familiar. Beyond the towns in which the colleges were located, there were no school locations with a substantial proportion of respondents. This reflects the contexts of the case colleges as being located in small urban centres, with relatively dispersed rural communities surrounding them. For SiDC, which was situated on the edge of a smaller urban centre, there were higher concentrations in surrounding villages. Across the 3 colleges, a total of 58 students (including 35 from SiDC) had attended their previous school in the same location as their place of residence. While we cannot assume that these students did not study in other locations in earlier periods of schooling, it is possible that, prior to attending college, some students in our study sample had not attended educational institutions away from their home location. This may have significance for educational choices at higher education level, as students who have previously occupied a relatively small geographical area in their educational and life trajectories may be less likely to consider opting for a higher education option that is further away.
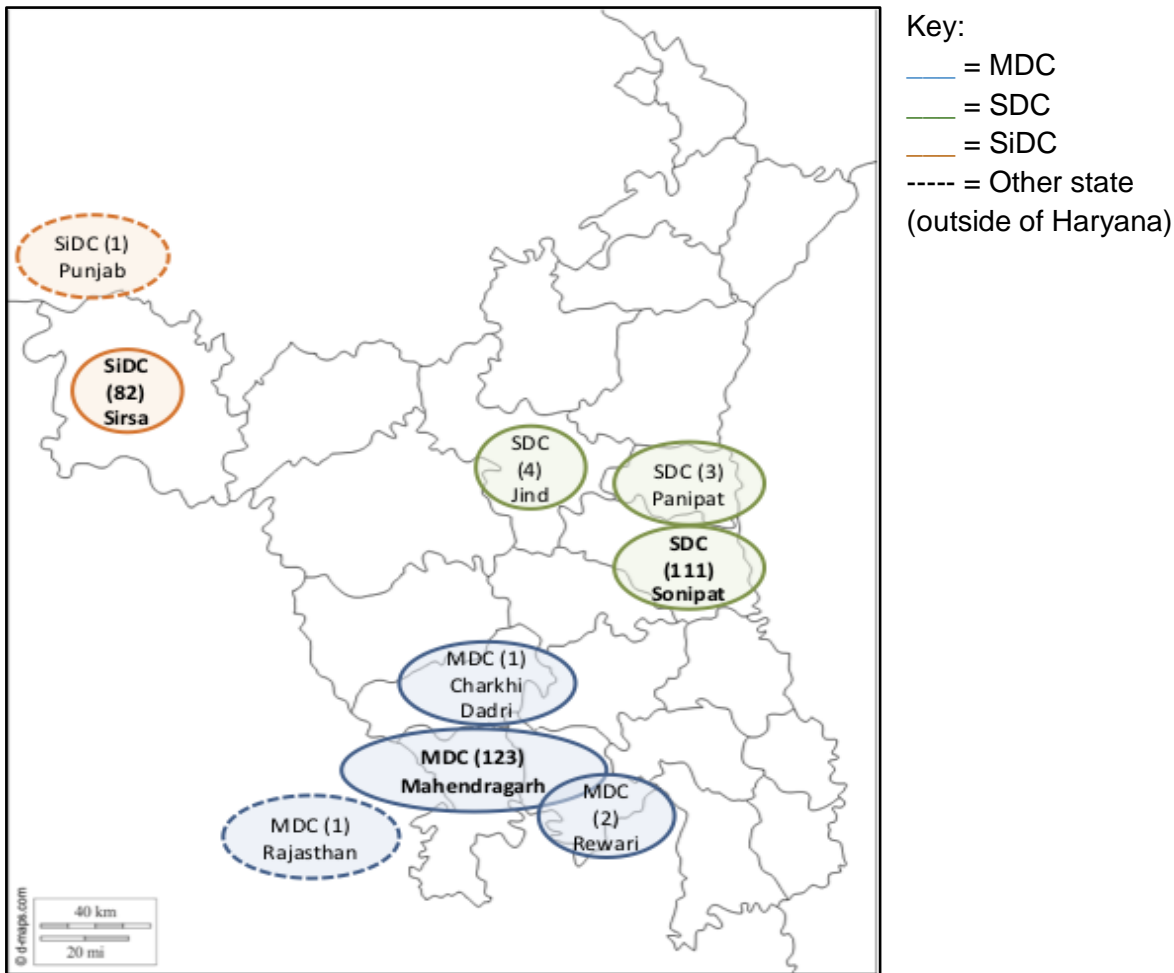
2.7   Geographical factors

Accommodation status

The vast majority of students (over 95%) across the three colleges were living at home, at their permanent address. This is important for our analysis of HE decision-making processes, as the students were making decisions about HE at home, knowing that they would then stay at home during their studies. The vast majority of students lived with their parent/s (more than 95%). Of those few who lived with others, this included living with other relatives, other students and living in the marital home. The majority of students had not enrolled in a college that would necessitate leaving their parental home. The qualitative data reveal insights into students' lives as they live at home and make decisions about their futures – including who does the housework (the student? Or the student is free to study?) and family farm work, where students can study (in shared spaces?), and who is present in the house when decisions are made (other relatives apart from parents?). The qualitative data also reveal strong relationships between students and their parents, based on freedom of action, trust and support.

Proximity of residence to college (distance)

The vast majority of all respondents across the three colleges resided in the same district as the college. Only 12 respondents from the entire sample did not reside in the same district. All of the students not residing in the same district as their college resided in neighbouring districts or states which bordered onto the colleges' districts. For those studying at the colleges but residing in other districts or states, there was no gender element, but it is notable that 7 of these respondents were from the Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group, which could reveal a tendency for more privileged students to exercise more choice with wider horizons. The catchment area for each college is less than 100km x 70km. MDC shows the largest catchment area, followed by SDC and SiDC.

Figure 2.5 Map showing the districts in which respondents resided

Key:
____ = MDC
____ = SDC
____ = SiDC
----- = Other state
(outside of Haryana)

SiDC (1)
Punjab

SiDC
(82)
Sirsa

SDC
(4)
Jind

SDC (3)
Panipat

SDC
(111)
Sonipat

MDC (1)
Charkhi
Dadri

MDC (123)
Mahendragarh

MDC
(2)
Rewari

MDC (1)
Rajasthan

40 km

20 mi

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Proximity of residence to college (time)

The commute to college was in general relatively short, with the mean travel time for all 3 colleges being less than 50 minutes. The mean travel time for MDC was c. 15 minutes longer than for SDC, as shown also in the larger catchment area. The travel time for SiDC lay between that of MDC and SDC, reflecting the nature of the catchment area, where students live within relative but not immediate proximity to the college. The range of journey times is large, varying from 5 minutes to over an hour. It is important to take the commute time into consideration because the families in the study had selected the college based on its commutability. Commutability is itself a relative concept so it is important to take into consideration this value of <1 hour when exploring reasons for the choice of college, for example. Across the case colleges, men travelled for an average of about 15 minutes longer than women to reach the colleges, with women's average travel time being under 30 minutes, though this is not carried through to SiDC. This is a further important consideration when exploring gendered access to HE for commuter students, as there are different standards for acceptable distance and/or directness of transport links for young women and men. When we explore time to college by caste group, in each case the mean duration of journey to college is lowest for students from the Non-SC/ST/OBC caste groups and highest for SC groups. This could be attributed to a number of factors, such as SC students having less access to direct and personalised transport means. Students with a longer journey to college have less time for study

and other activities, and may also be subject to greater delays or non-attendance due to transport issues, depending on mode of transport.

Mode of transport used to access college

Most students in our study access their college by bus (potentially in combination with other means of transport). This ranges from about 50% at the case colleges up to over 80% at SiDC. We know from the qualitative data that this may include private bus services (e.g. run from villages by the village residents) as well as state services, for which students can obtain a pass. The popularity of the bus as a mode of transport adds further nuance to the question of whether students are accessing colleges that are closer to home and/or on direct transport links. Buses were reputedly often late, or were cancelled, or terminated the service midway, and that they were very full. The students noted that their attendance at college was directly impacted by the unreliability of the bus service. Many students also included walking in their journeys to college, again around 50% for the case colleges (but lower for SiDC). For SiDC, walking and using a bike were in equal second place. Bike was also relatively popular in the case college at c. 20%, with rickshaws being used by c. 15% of respondents. Reflecting the small catchment areas of the colleges, and the unavailability of train travel to most locations in the district, only 3 respondents took the train to reach the college, with no students from SiDC using the train. Many fewer students had access to more privileged modes of transport such as being dropped off at college by a family member (11 respondents from the case colleges; 2 from SiDC) or using a personal car (4 respondents; none from SiDC). Some students used a tractor or a scooter to travel to college. For the scooter, this may be considered a solution as a low-cost but rapid form of personal transport, but there are also issues of being hassled by boys on the journey. These findings must be taken into consideration in combination with the travel time to college. If transport time to the college needs to be under one hour in order to be 'commutable', and the main forms of transport are either dependent on transit routes and schedules (bus) or slower (walking, bike), then the calculation that families are making on the commutability of a college is significantly affected by these limitations.

When exploring the modes of transport by gender, it emerges that, while bus is the most popular form of transport for the whole sample, walking is the most common mode of transport for women. This may reflect the fact that women are choosing to attend a college that is within walking distance, and/or that families find walking safer than the bus, due to the known problems of over-crowding and women-directed harassment on buses. Men students' higher use of the bus may reflect the larger catchment area for men students as well as a lack of concern about taking public transport in terms of safety. More men use a bike to reach college. All three students who noted that they took the train were men; while the numbers are too small to draw clear conclusions, it is important to consider that a college may not be considered 'commutable' for a women student if the journey involves train travel, given that train travel implies that the distance is greater from home. At the case colleges, walking was more common for Non-SC/ST/OBC caste groups and less common for SC groups, possibly due to the more rural dwellings of SC students. However this was reversed for SiDC. SC students were more likely to take the bus than Non-SC/ST/OBC students across all 3 colleges, possibly reflecting SC students' restricted use of other forms of transport due to location and cost. The students being dropped off were limited to Non-SC/ST/OBC and BCB groups. Students taking the train, on the other hand were limited to SC and BCA groups. Students having access to a personal family car were in Non-SC/ST/OBC group and BCA. Overall the main finding relating to caste was that the bus is very important to SC students. This means that, when making decisions about HE, it is possible that access to a bus route would enter into the picture strongly –

which must be combined with our knowledge that the bus is also considered undesirable for women.

Journey to college

The more in-depth picture of the journeys was captured by the interviews. While some journeys were quite straightforward, it was also clear that some participants (particularly in rural areas) faced journeys which were complex, unreliable and even dangerous. The women participants facing long walks alone as part of their commute did not seem to have solutions in place for preventing these issues, but rather relied on retrospective action of parents. These issues are important to consider as reports of issues that others face on the commute, and fear of anticipated danger on the commute, are taken into account during the HE decision-making process.

Figure 2.6 Walking to college in Haryana

3. How and why are students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India? How is this gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

_____

3.1   Why do some students not apply for HE? Presenting the views of students in our study

Social environment factors

Few young people were aware of wider social environment factors that would affect access to HE. Those who mentioned these factors referred to the poor implementation of interventions, including corruption issues, and also named some interventions which were perceived to be more effective, such as 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' and computer centres/classes.

Community factors

Community factors affecting access to HE were portrayed as relating to a traditional or village (i.e. rural) mentality. This was perceived to be both exacerbated and challenged by media representations which either increased fears about women's safety or displayed role model figures for women. One of the aspects of community factors includes the **low valuation of HE** in Haryana societies. This particularly applied to young men, where employment was valued and HE was seen as potentially a waste of time. Participants inferred that there was something of an anti-intellectual spirit in Haryana, with sports and the army valued above formal educational attainment. A second community factor related to **gender conservatism**. Gender conservatism included restrictions on young women's appearance and behaviour, as well as a high degree of surveillance and control over their movements. Young men were seen as having more freedom e.g. in going out in the evening, with women constantly monitored and questioned. Gender conservatism also set an ideal early age for women's marriage, meaning that access to HE was seen as delaying marriage – a delay which some families were unwilling to permit. Moreover the fears for a woman's honour getting damaged led to decisions not to delay marriage. Finally, because investment in young women is still perceived as benefiting the in-laws instead of the birth family, there was a perception that young women were not permitted to access HE as class 12 was considered sufficient. The final factor identified in this set of community factors relates to **caste-based prejudice**. There was little discussion of caste in the study, but students identified caste-based prejudice occurring at college from classmates, family and community members and teachers. This can be inferred to pertain to previous educational experiences as well as experiences of admission (which are also reflected in the literature).

HE-transport nexus

The HE-transport nexus was identified as a barrier to HE. This was due to the combined geographical distribution of HEIs and of public transport services. For students who were depending on public transport to reach colleges that were at some distance from their houses, there were various issues such as the college being far from the bus stand, villages not being served by buses, and the bus arriving full, arriving late, terminating the service mid-route or not arriving. Gendered issues included boys having to sit on the bus roof and girls experiencing harassment on the buses. Public transport and a sparse distribution of HEIs were therefore a barrier both in terms of not being able to access a college and in terms of fueling safety concerns preventing some families from permitting their daughters to apply for college.

Institutional factors

Institutional factors preventing access to HE included the reputedly poor quality of colleges, including teacher quality, poor toilet facilities, lack of hostel facilities. However, a stronger institutional factor pertained to the college 'environment' (*mahaul*). This included colleges having a reputation for cheating and fraud in admissions and exams. There was also a strongly gendered aspect to environment, as attending a college with a poor reputation could in turn incur reputational risk to the young woman and her family. Reputational risk was attached to colleges which were reputed for romance as well as for 'loafing boys' who would hang around the college and pass comments. The effect of reputational risk was to push some families to choose a college that was further from home, but for students where the choice was between attending the nearest college or no HE, this became a solid impediment to accessing HE. Co-educational colleges were in themselves associated with reputational risk due to the presence of young men. One of the college representative interviews included the perspective that the solution of opening more single-gender colleges would not challenge the gender conservatism that lies at the root of women's differential access to HE.

Family factors

Families were seen as barriers to HE access for a number of reasons. This included a lack of financial and emotional support. **Financial barriers** were cited as a family-related barrier. This was due to general socio-economic disadvantage, but also due to specific circumstances, where the offspring had to leave formal education early and seek employment. Circumstances included family unemployment, ill health of family members and alcoholism in the family. HE was considered unaffordable for many families, because of the direct costs such as fees and travel costs. The **pressure to earn** was also cited as a family-related barrier. This was associated with the foregone earnings caused by taking longer to complete education. It was considered that families were unable and/or reluctant to spare their children's labour for any longer than class 12. Young people were helping out at home with managing the household and contributing to income-generating activities. This was particularly an issue for young men, who were expected to contribute to the household economy, including contributing to siblings' wedding and education costs. **Marriage** affected young women at this stage of education, as there was a social perception that class 12 was sufficient education for young women. Once married, women then struggled to access HE as they were dependent on being granted this opportunity – and the time to study – by their in-laws. It was perceived that young married women were burdened with domestic duties and/or enrolled in other courses or jobs, according to the in-laws' preferences.

Family and individual overlapping factors

A further set of barriers affecting access to HE was where family and individual factors overlapped. Firstly, both individuals and their families **lacked information and understanding of HE options and admissions processes**, meaning that there was a lack of guidance. Secondly, **other education options were selected instead of HE**; these choices represented decisions taken by young people and their families, often based on family pressure to earn sooner by taking a shorter and/or more practical course. This issue seemed to be more prevalent for young men. Thirdly, and again often due to family pressure and/or a sense of responsibility for the family, young people **chose to seek a job** instead of applying for HE. This seemed to be rooted in the anti-intellectual culture and low valuation of HE.

Individual factors

There were two factors which could be classified as individual factors, though with caution as our sociological analysis situates these factors against a backdrop of socio-economic disadvantage. Firstly, **low marks achieved in class 12** was cited as a major barrier to accessing HE. Secondly, a **lack of interest in further studies** – and/or having other priorities – were also cited as motivating young people to opt for other trajectories.

3.2   Why do students apply for HE?

HE as the obvious choice

From the qualitative data there was some evidence of students attending HE because it was the obvious thing to do, which is perhaps surprising when they do not come from families with a history of HE. However, it is possible that the high proportion of peers and siblings attending HE meant that HE had become the obvious option.

Family and personal motivations

Students also referred to family-related motivations for attending HE, such as the family expecting a student to attend HE, wishing to support parents in their old age, and contributing to the upward social mobility of the family. Students discussed the general purpose of HE as contributing to personal development, in terms of being more educated and potentially more successful.

Employment related motivations

Students considered that an undergraduate degree would boost their employability, as it was considered preferable to employers, and that it would lead to a good job and higher salary. A degree would also improve the entry point for job applications e.g. for government jobs. Graduating was thus seen by some as a hurdle to clear before they could apply for the jobs they wished to do. Students in our study expressed general employability-related motivations for attending HE, but others had planned a specific trajectory in order to qualify for a specific job (e.g. teacher, self-employed business owner). A degree was also seen as a fall-back option which could lead to other career options if they failed to gain admission into their preferred option (e.g. police service).

Gender-related motivations for women

Students discussed that attending HE was a way for women to pass the time before getting married, or on the other hand it was a way to actively delay getting married. Having a degree was also considered a means of enhancing marriageability in terms of finding a prospective groom, as this is desirable in an era when young men are also more highly educated. Students also discussed the benefit of HE for young women to set a trend for other girls in the family to be educated. They also discussed the fact that HE can lead to students becoming more confident and independent.

3.3   Who encourages and supports students in applying for HE?

Sources of encouragement and support

Students were encouraged and supported to enrol in HE by: mother, father, sister/s, brother/s, other relatives, school teachers, seniors, neighbours, elders, college teachers, government workers, Aanganvadi workers, friends. Some students indicated that they had taken this decision alone. There is very little mention of outside organisations (governmental or NGOs) in terms of their influence in young people's HE trajectories, with the exception of formal mechanisms, principally schools.

Figure 3.1 People influencing students to apply for Higher Education
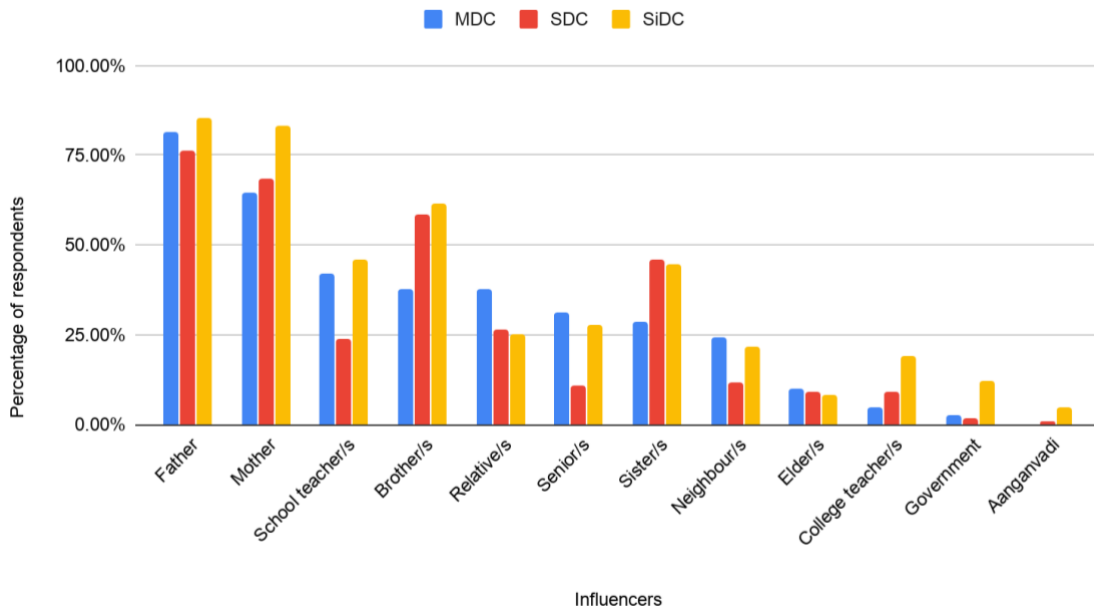
Immediate family

Immediate family is clearly extremely important. For the most part, the immediate family is ranked by gender, from father to mother to brother to sister. This holds true for the most part across gender groups and caste groups. It is important to note the centrality of the parents and the other siblings to the decision to apply for higher education, so any widening participation drive should consider how to tap into family decision-making processes in addition to targeting potential applicants. It is important to note that, though close family members were cited as important sources of encouragement and support for the decision to apply to HE, these families were mostly first

generation HE entrants, so may not have been fully equipped with knowledge to advise on options. Further research is needed on the form that the influence takes, and the extent to which the influence involves participatory discussion between family members or instructions from more powerful to less powerful family members.

Parents

Parents were referred to by participants as a unit, invoking for example a family ethos with regards to educational opportunities. Parents had often not availed of educational opportunities and were keen to ensure that their offspring accessed the opportunities they had missed. There were examples of parents interacting with other actors (e.g. neighbours, college principal) who were encouraging or discouraging them to grant their children permission to attend HE. It is important to consider parents as social actors whose decisions are embedded in local contexts with associated beliefs and assumptions about the meaning of HE. In addition to being portrayed as a family unit, parents also have different roles and are also recognised differently by their sons and daughters. For daughters, mothers were equally or almost equally cited as being influential. For sons, fathers were cited more commonly as influential than mothers (with the exception of SiDC, where they were equal). There is also a caste-group dimension here, where students from Non-SC/ST/OBC group were more likely to list their mother and father, perhaps due to higher levels of education among mothers of this group. If an HE intervention targets parents, it is important to take into consideration these patterns of influence. In the qualitative data, mothers were considered potentially more approachable than fathers. There was an example of a mother who had attended college and been very successful, but was married soon after and prevented from achieving her professional ambitions, so she was very supportive of her son's aspiration to attend college too. Fathers were referred to as being supportive, but were also discussed as being the decision-makers in the family who are potentially vulnerable to being dissuaded to permit their children (in particular daughters) to attend HE. It is clear that parents are extremely important in facilitating access to HE, but that the nature and form of influence is worthy of further exploration.

Siblings

Siblings were extremely important in influencing the decision to apply for HE, though caution is needed as it is possible that students were in places referring to 'brothers' and 'sisters' in the wider, community, sense of the term. Women students were more likely to be influenced by their siblings than men students. Brothers were cited more frequently than sisters, for both men and women students. This finding is somewhat surprising, as we might have expected to find that sisters influenced their sisters to apply, and likewise brothers with their brothers, given the gendered life pathways of women and men in Haryana. Given the prevalence of sisters, particularly older sisters, we may have expected to see a greater role for sisters, though any older sisters who had married at that time would in general not be living in the family home, so may have less direct involvement. We may also point to gendered norms that could lead students to not recognise the role of their sisters in their higher education trajectory, so it is also important to recognise that the findings report on the people that students *perceived* to have been influential in their decision to apply. Sisters' educational experiences and career choices were important to their younger siblings. Brothers were referred to in the same way, giving specific advice about HE options. This demonstrates the need to differentiate between different types of influence, ranging from basic/emotional support and encouragement, to informed support and encouragement.

Other family members

Beyond the close family members, other relatives seemed to be less important in terms of encouragement and support to apply for HE, though still at least 25% of participants across gender/college groups cited other relatives as having been influential. Grandparents lent their grandchildren support in terms of encouraging them to study (due to their own lack of opportunities) and ensuring their duties (e.g. farm work) were taken care of. Aunts and uncles also featured, with an aunt (a teacher) acting as a source of guidance to her niece and her niece's friend, with her son also helping out, and an uncle acting as a role model and providing an opening for experiencing life and work beyond school before entering college. Cousins were mentioned as sources of information and also as a role model (a college teacher). The relative paucity of accounts of extended family members' influence here is indicative of students' close relationship with their nuclear families and the strong influence of their close family members on their decision to apply for HE.

Other actors

Other actors featured less in students' educational trajectories, with the exception of schoolteachers and seniors, and to a lesser extent neighbours. These actors were more influential for the college where more choice was being exercised, particularly for women (MDC). At SiDC, schoolteachers and also college teachers were commonly cited in student interviews as influential – our fieldwork conversations showed that there were informal 'outreach' networks operating in that area. College teachers barely featured in the survey analysis. This seems to indicate a lack of 'widening participation' and 'outreach' activities and networks, whether informal or formal, and would be a vital area for further exploration.

Neighbours tended to be more influential for men students, perhaps in part because women may avoid discussing with neighbours due to neighbourhood surveillance. Only Non-SC/ST/OBC group students had included Aanganvadi workers. School teachers were represented as a positive influence, particularly where there had been one teacher who supported students to apply for HE. On the other hand, teachers were evoked as giving generic encouragement as opposed to more detailed information about HE options. This highlights the difference between general support and encouragement and specific guidance, with different types of support appreciated and expected from different actors. In terms of potential strategic target areas for future intervention, school teachers are already well-established sites of influence, but a culture of outreach would need to be created to develop a conduit between college teachers and the community and/or schools to open paths of access to higher education.

Peer-group influence

In the student interviews, we also explored the HE options that students' peers had taken after high school, in order to explore their 'reference group'. Most of the students' peers had enrolled in HE of some kind, including the same college, colleges in nearby districts, other districts in Haryana and cities beyond including Delhi and Jaipur. Others were referred to as having obtained government jobs, including the army, or taking coaching to work towards jobs. Others were already working in family businesses or on the farm. Some were 'sitting at home' – particularly women were referred to in this way – unless they had already been married. For classmates who were unable to continue with studies, this was attributed to poverty and family circumstances, marriage, gender restrictions on attending college for women and the availability of other options (e.g. family business). Dropout

was mentioned as an issue for men students – one participants' classmates had joined the same college but had left the college after one year.

3.4   How do students choose their college?

College choice as opportunity or compromise

We have tried to understand what makes students choose government colleges when they otherwise would not have been able to choose any college (i.e. access to HE via government colleges as an *opportunity* to pursue HE), and secondly what makes some students choose government colleges when they could have chosen other colleges based on their grades, for example (i.e. access to HE via government colleges as a *compromise*). Students in the study had limited access to information and guidance about HE choices, but they were aware of the other options that could have existed, and of the status of their college and degree in comparison with more elite forms of HE. For many, attending the local government college represented a compromise of their aspirations. For many students, when they seriously approached taking admission for an HE course, the local college was the only option. Students in the sample also referred to a lack of personal choice in the decision-making process, in that their college had been chosen for them.

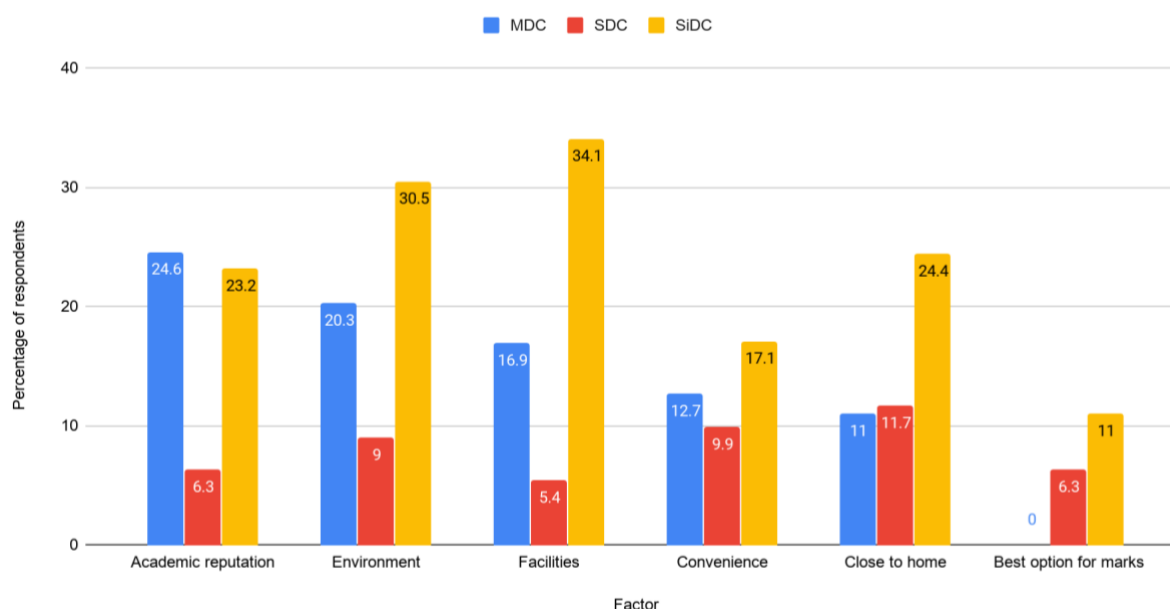**Motivations for college choice**

The qualitative data gave rich insights into students' motivations for studying at the government colleges. Firstly, students had selected colleges based on their **reputation**. This related to their reputation as government colleges (as opposed to private colleges), as they were seen to be more correct (i.e. less corruption). As government colleges, they were also perceived to have a good standard of teaching. Reputation was also a gendered phenomenon, as some colleges were perceived as having bad reputations based on harassment from men students. This would have made attending these colleges a risky move for women, who relied on their parents trusting them to attend college without incident in order to stay within the HE system. Returning to the earlier discussion of neighbours intervening (in the parents' influence section) and of daughters being kept at home after school completion (in the peer group analysis), attending a college with this reputation can be understood as highly undesirable for a young woman. Some students had also chosen their college based on it being 'easier' than e.g. more selective colleges, and on the standard of the college being unimportant for undergraduate study. Secondly, a clear motivation for choosing government colleges was on the **financial basis** of the fees and extra costs being low for these colleges. This was a major factor for students at these colleges. Thirdly, students were motivated to choose their college through **active and passive recommendation**. Active recommendation was where e.g. family members (perhaps a sibling who had attended the college) directly recommended that they enroll in the college. In other cases, a more passive strategy was followed of choosing the same college as friends or others in the village. Fourthly, many students cited the fact that the college was **'close to home'** as a major motivation. However this was a complex factor as it comprised many different aspects. The notion of 'outside' (*bahar*) was deployed here, as a subjective marker which relates to distance as well as in part to commutability. For some families, 'outside' refers to anywhere outside the direct place of residence, and for others this refers to a college that necessitates taking accommodation elsewhere. Thus, for some families, MDC and SDC were themselves 'outside' (and thus inaccessible), and for others these colleges were not

considered 'outside', or were less 'outside' than others (so were preferable). For some students at the colleges, not having gone 'outside' for college was seen as a compromise of their aspirations. One aspect of 'close to home' involved commutability within financial restrictions, where going 'outside' was costly in terms of transport fees (for a long daily commute) or a hostel (for a non-commutable college). It was considered that a long commute was wasteful of time and resources, and this also reduced the potential for students to contribute to the household economy after college hours. Taking a hostel was considered too expensive by students' families. 'Close to home' was also a gendered notion, as women students had to negotiate (and extend) the boundaries of 'outside' (and 'inside') to accommodate college education. This involved a generational shift from school completion within the near vicinity to attending a college further away. This was already seen by some relatives and parents as inappropriate. Young women were under pressure to meet the conditions of their families for attending HE – to maintain the family's honour. Men students were seen as more free to attend HE 'outside' (and further 'outside' too), and this was also seen as a family priority in order to enhance young men's career options. The qualitative data from individual student interviews revealed how these motivations were intertwined, combining different considerations according to different family situations and living conditions. It is vital to view the different motivations as interconnected – one motivation set cannot be singled out for an intervention, for example, as the students should be viewed in terms of their holistic motivations profile.

Motivations for college choice (variations between colleges)

Regarding motivations for college choice, there seemed to be a sense of the colleges having different profiles. For students at MDC, academic reputation, college environment and facilities were singled out. For SDC, distance from home was the most popular option, with convenience for travel and college environment following. This reflects the difference between MDC as a college which students are more actively choosing, and which has a larger catchment area, and SDC, which more students choose as the default option because it is close to home. At SiDC, facilities and environment were the top factors. However, for SiDC it should be noted that this college was the only option for many students (even more so than the case colleges) and therefore the process of choice and decision-making implied by this question and these findings should be treated with caution. Overall this analysis shows the extent to which student populations in equivalent institutions vary. For women at MDC, distance from home and convenience of travel barely featured as motivational factors, and rather women had chosen MDC as it was the best option for their marks, indicating the active choice women had taken to attend this college. For men students at MDC, the academic reputation was the most popular motivational factor. This reflects a pattern across the colleges of men students being more preoccupied with reputation, though this may be linked with the expectations of masculinity. At SDC, women's top factors were distance from home, environment, convenience of travel. For men students, SDC seemed to simply be the default choice, though academic reputation also featured in their survey responses. For SiDC, the academic reputation of the college features more highly for men respondents than women. Women and men students do not necessarily share the same motivations for choosing the college, which should be borne in mind for interventions, particularly given the socially inscribed gender norms which underpin some of these decisions.

Figure 3.2 Factors influencing the final decision to enrol in the chosen college

Sources of information consulted for college choice

When students were asked which sources of information they had used to inform their choice of college, parents played a less important role than for encouragement and support to apply to HE. School teachers, seniors and siblings were commonly cited as sources of HE information. It is clear from this analysis that *informed guidance* was sought from others who had experience of HE, alongside or even instead of parents. College teachers did not feature highly. Newspaper and web did not feature highly, though most for MDC. Students were not accessing information about the college directly from the college. Fathers still featured highly for women and men students alike, though less than in relation to support and encouragement. Mothers were cited as sources of information by few students, even less so for men than women. This reflects the role of mothers as sources of aspiration but not necessarily of information, which may be attributable to their lower level of education. Brothers were very commonly cited as sources of information for both men and women students (bearing in mind that this may not refer to siblings but to community 'brothers'). Sisters were ranked higher than brothers for women students, presumably as they provided sources of information on how to negotiate accessing HE as a daughter. Brothers were also influential for women students, but sisters were not reported as influential for men students (with the exception of SDC). Seniors and school teachers played a strong role for both women and men at MDC – presumably due to their active choice to attend this college – and similarly at SiDC, where accessing HE was not a given in the local community. This was less the case at SDC, perhaps because SDC was simply the obvious college choice, so external sources of advice may have been less important. Newspaper information was accessed by men and women at MDC, but less so in the other colleges. Web information was accessed by few students, but more so by men than women, suggesting young men may have more access to e.g. internet cafes than women. College teachers were referred to as a source of information by few students, but even fewer men than women. The colleges were referred to by few students as sources of information about college choice – in terms of direct contact with college teachers and with information in the newspapers or on websites. We were unable to obtain substantial or indeed any recent documentation from the colleges with promotional and/or informational material, as this was not available. It was clear that

the colleges were not engaging in active marketing strategies, in part because they have a somewhat guaranteed intake, and because there is no or a limited culture of outreach. The college representatives confirmed this. At MDC, they do engage in newspaper publicity (as reflected in the students' survey responses). They also engage in indirect communication with communities – particularly with regard to women's access to HE – by encouraging current students to support others to apply for HE. However they do not go to these communities themselves as part of a formal programme. It was observed in the semi-structed interviews with students, especially in SDC that SDC was the only college they considered as this was the only college which was geographically accessible to them. Similar sentiments could be inferred from the catchment area mapped for SiDC, most of whose students were from the villages surrounding this rural college.

Figure 3.3 Government College in Haryana

3.5   How do students choose their HE course?

Own choice of course

The vast majority of the students in our study said that they had chosen their own course. However, it should also be noted that the notion of 'choosing one's own course' is layered with notions of individual agency, whereas we know from the literature and from the above analysis that the choice of course is embedded in layered processes of decision-making by multiple stakeholders, over many years. For example, for women the choice of subject was often restricted in a previous education stage through their enrolment in a school without a science curriculum.

Motivations for course choice

The top motivations for course choice (coded from the free text responses on the survey) for the case colleges combined were: 34.9% of respondents identified a link with career (specific); 26% of respondents identified own interest in subject; another 26% of respondents did not specify their preference; 10.2% of respondents felt that this course was required for success/personal development; and 9.3% of respondents linked their course with employment (general). For SiDC, the top motivations were slightly different. 40.3% of respondents cited their own interest in subject; 20.8% of respondents had linked their course with career (specific); another 20.8% of respondents did not specify their preference; 13.9% of respondents linked their course with employment (general); 8.3% of respondents identified the college as their reason; 8.3% of respondents shared that they chose this course as they had the same subjects in school. To explore the motivations for course choice in more detail, they were separated into 6 themes. **Unspecified preference**, where

students had expressed a general preference for the course without a more specific explanation. **Specific subject reasons**, where students had chosen subjects that were easy for them or that they knew they could pass, where students had studied these subjects in school and wanted to continue and where students chose their course because they were interested in the subjects. However, these reasons should be read against the backdrop of the course hierarchy, with Sciences at the top, followed by Commerce, followed by Arts, and which cannot be separated from students' interests and choices. **Employability.** Students had chosen their course either because it would lead to a particular job or sector, or had chosen the course because they thought it would enhance their employability more generally. **Future planning/aspiration.** Students chose their courses because they would assure their personal development and/or future success, because they would lead to further study and/or coaching for entrance examinations, and because they wanted to contribute to the development of the country. **Active decision-making.** Some students had chosen their course because other options did not work out, so they had to arrive at a compromise option. **Other actors.** Parents, siblings, other relatives and teachers advised – or in some cases pressured – students to apply for certain courses. Exploring the motivations for course choice within the more holistic picture of the students who participated in the individual interviews, it is clear that most students had various interconnected reasons for choosing their courses.

3.6 How do students experience the admissions process?

Admissions as a challenging process

Our study shows that it is necessary to explore the admissions process as a step in how students access HE in government colleges, as this process is experienced as highly daunting and complex by many students, due to the multiple steps and lack of guidance. The process was acknowledged to be more streamlined than before, due to online forms, online banking, computer provision in and near to the college.

Assistance with admissions

Students were assisted during the admissions process by different actors, including members of the community who had graduated. Some students had gone to the college alone for admissions. Others had not gone to the college at all, but rather another member of their family had completed admissions for them. An applicant is vulnerable to decisions being taken for them (or her, if this is a gendered phenomenon), if the applicant is not physically present during the admissions process.

Issues with admissions

A variety of issues were raised about the admissions process. The lack of step-by-step advice was noted, and applicants had had to physically go to the college to try to understand the process. However, within the college, the administrative staff had not been welcoming or helpful. Filling in the form in the college computing facilities was deemed to be a good idea, but it seemed that this opportunity had not been made clear to applicants. Issues with the admissions process had been more serious for some applicants, for whom access to HE had potentially been jeopardised by issues with accessing the admissions process. This was particularly an issue for young people from marginalised households (with parents and family members who had not accessed formal education) in marginalised areas (without internet shops), who faced higher costs for admission associated with hiring a 'helper' and paying for their own and the helper's travel expenses.

4. Conclusions

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This exploratory study has enabled us to analyse holistically young people's access to higher education via government colleges in Haryana, India. This is vitally important as the young people who formed the subject of this study are part of a huge wave of entrants to HE during the massification of HE in India. **Arguably to understand access to HE it is imperative to study the _frontiers of access_ – i.e. colleges attended by students who would otherwise not access HE, and who have little or no HE history in their families.**

4.1 Who are the students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India? How is this gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

Our study has painted the picture of young people accessing HE at the _frontiers of access_ according to multiple dimensions. Young people were undertaking decisions about HE – and their HE studies – living at home in close family units, often living in close proximity to other family members. They were generally not yet married, but marriage plans were in progress. Multiple siblings were common, with daughters more commonly going through their education before their younger brothers. The young people were growing up in families where, in general, there was no history of accessing HE or in many cases higher levels of schooling from either parents or grandparents. Fathers had attained higher levels of education than mothers; marginalised caste groups tended to have accessed lower levels of education. The young people's mothers were mostly homemakers, irrespective of their educational attainment; fathers were employed in business, farming and labour, with more marginalised caste groups working in labour. Young people, men and women alike, were aspiring towards graduate-level jobs in finance, business and government sector. Most of the young people had received previous schooling from Hindi or Hindi-English medium schools, with more women and marginalised caste groups accessing secondary education in government, Hindi medium schools. Boys and Non-SC/ST/OBC caste group students were more likely to have begun and then stayed in private schooling throughout their secondary education. The students and their families were living in close proximity to the colleges they had chosen, with a commute of under one hour. They were accessing the college by bus and/or walking for the most part. There were issues with bus travel which negatively impacted on access to HE, as the bus routes and colleges were not always well connected, and there were harassment issues for women students on the bus (as well as when walking), which also affected whether other young women would be allowed to apply for HE.

In short, students accessing HE through government colleges in Haryana are living locally and are embedded in close family structures, and they aspire to receive education and gain employment in ways that are markedly different to their parents. Important gendered factors relate to differences between women and men in previous generations, where sons are following on from fathers and grandfathers with higher levels of education than mothers and grandmothers, meaning that young women are making more of a leap in their educational – and employment – aspirations. These findings are in general exaggerated for young people from marginalised caste groups.

4.2 How and why are students accessing HE in government colleges in Haryana, India? How is this gendered and/or influenced by other intersecting factors?

It was reported that students often did not continue their education after schooling due to a variety of reasons, including: the devaluation of HE, gender conservatism, distance and/or transport reasons, institutional reasons particularly related to college 'environment', family factors including financial barriers, pressure to earn and marriage, other factors such as lack of guidance or preference for direct employment or other education, and academic performance in school. Students had enrolled in HE because, for some it seemed the obvious next step, for others it related to family support or pressure or employment aspirations. For some young women, they were trying to delay marriage, pass time before marriage, or enhance their marriageability – or become role models in the community. Young people had been encouraged and supported to apply for HE predominantly by their parents, with siblings also playing a significant role, as well as seniors and school teachers. Young people had chosen their college either as their only opportunity to access HE or as a compromise choice due to other options being ruled out. Students chose their college on the basis of reputation (academic and moral), low fees, recommendation from others, proximity to home. Moral reputation and proximity to home were particularly important for young women. Young people were informed about college options again by fathers and siblings, but less so by mothers, and seniors and school teachers were also important. Very few students accessed web or newspaper information about college choice (and there was little available), mainly relying on word of mouth. Young people had chosen their course based on a range of factors, including employment reasons, personal interest in the subject and as a compromise because another course had not worked out. As the final stage of the HE access process, admissions was recognised as a challenging process, requiring assistance from those already experienced with the process. In the absence of assistance, admissions was identified as a point where marginalised students may not proceed to accessing HE.

To summarise, young people are making the decision to access HE with the knowledge of others around them not having this opportunity, or selecting other options; HE is not a given. The decision to access HE was taken within the family, with parents and siblings playing a vital role in both opening up and limiting HE choices. The colleges were barely involved in promoting access to HE for the young people, and decisions about the college and course were taken based on word of mouth information rather than information from the colleges or college teachers. Admissions was a challenging final hurdle to accessing HE. The process of applying to HE was gendered in a number of ways. Marriage factors affected women more, in that women are expected to marry younger than men, so there was more time pressure on women. HE was also seen as a risky endeavour in terms of young women's honour (and therefore the family's honour) being damaged by romantic relationships and/or sexual harassment at or *en route* to college. College choice was therefore more likely to be based on the college being close to home and/or with a safe reputation. Young men were more affected by the pressure to earn and contribute to the family economy (including sisters' weddings and siblings' education), whether via HE or instead of HE. Caste-related factors included some caste-based discrimination in colleges, which could act as a deterrent for future applicants from marginalised groups.

4.3 Final conclusions

The students in our study were undoubtedly accessing HE at the frontiers of access, in government colleges located in rural areas or small urban centres. They represent the new wave of students entering HE through the massification phase. While there were vast discrepancies in the sample between more and less privileged students, this is within a spectrum of disadvantage, as none of the students in our study were highly privileged. They all took the decision to apply for HE in a situation where classmates had not done so, but the majority had taken this decision based on word of mouth information and assumptions/beliefs about what HE is for and what it entails. Moreover, the decision had been taken within a close family structure where the elders of the family (including parents) had not attained HE or high school, so had limited personal experience of HE, but had a strong influence in the decision-making process.

From a gender perspective, it is easy to argue that HE access is fair due to gender parity statistics. However, it is important to recognise that young people's educational trajectories are gendered.

Young women are more likely to be sent to Hindi-medium, government schools, or to have a disrupted schooling trajectory where they start in private and are transferred to government. Their subject choices may be limited by their previous schooling, where Sciences may not have been offered. They are highly unlikely to have mothers and grandmothers who have attained HE or completed schooling, or who are working outside the home, so they have more ground to cover to negotiate access to HE and employment. They are more likely to be first in family to access higher levels of education due to the birth order resulting from son preference ('trying for a son'), so must be the first to negotiate the systems involved in HE access. Alternatively, they may be married before being able to access HE, or enrolled in a shorter course to enable earlier marriage. Their HE choices (college, subject) are not associated with future employment so are less likely to be prioritised in terms of family investment. Young women are holders of the family honour and reputation, and their HE access may be prevented or limited by this gender conservatism. College choice for young women is less likely to be determined based on class 12 mark or employment aspirations (as is the case for men), but rather involves seeking a college that is close to home and/or involves a direct commute, and that does not have a reputation for romantic relationships or sexual harassment. **As such, while *access to HE* is now held up as equitable in India, *HE choice* is limited for women.**

Young men are privileged in their families, but there are still gender issues to highlight and to address. Young men are under pressure from their families to contribute to the family economy, and also to set themselves up well professionally so they are ready for marriage. Because young men stay with their families even after marriage, they are seen as providers for old age and for their siblings. This leads to pressures to take shorter courses or obtain a job sooner, and students were often taking coaching classes for job applications alongside their HE studies; HE was somewhat devalued for young men. In communities where marriage was encouraged at or near to the legal minimum, this clashed with young men's HE trajectories. Young men were also making choices to attend HE close to home and at a commutable distance due to their family and household duties, and to avoid incurring extra expenses to their families. **As such, young men's *HE choice* needs to also be taken into consideration alongside the women's gender issues.**

Regarding other factors affecting HE access and choice, it was clear that the issues outlined above were exaggerated for more marginalised caste groups. For instance, previous educational levels (of parents and grandparents) were lower, so students accessing HE were launching into a more unknown sphere, particularly young women. The financial situation of families would have been less secure based on the prevalence of labour as fathers' employment. Young people from marginalised caste groups were more likely to access previous education in Hindi-medium government schools, which led to restrictions on subject and HE choice regarding courses were offered in English. It is noteworthy that the BCA group (the more marginalised of the two OBC groups in Haryana) often emerged as similarly or even more disadvantaged than the SC groups, perhaps due to not accessing as many social mobility schemes as SC groups. There was some mention of caste discrimination occurring in colleges. It was more difficult to disentangle social class from caste as we did not take a measure of class as such, but it is clear from the study that most young people were aware of financial limitations on their educational trajectories, and on the pressure to earn (for young men) and either to leave the birth family for marriage or to earn briefly before doing so (for young women). The young people at the frontiers of access have clear limitations on their HE choices based on financial and related cultural factors.

For some students at the frontier of access, accessing HE in the nearest college to home was their *only* option to attend HE, and for others it was a *compromise* based on their options being restricted by financial and/or cultural factors. On this basis, one clear requirement here is to elevate the quality of educational provision in these key sites of localised HE provision. A second requirement is to provide young people and their families with more guidance about their HE options, so that young people are able to make informed choices about HE. Further support is needed for families and young women to guide young women's HE choices, with a noteworthy finding that young men and their families would also benefit from further support. This support would be beneficial for all young people, but would be most beneficial for marginalised caste groups, where families may have the least existing knowledge of the HE systems and processes.

5. Recommendations
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Our recommendations are based on a key study finding that, for some students government colleges represent their only opportunity to access higher education, while for other students these same colleges represent a restriction on choice and opportunity. Based on this fact, our recommendations target two outcomes:

- Where attending the nearest government college is currently the only opportunity for young people to access higher education, colleges should be accessible, safe and offering quality education provision.
- Where young people's higher education choices are limited to accessing the nearest government college due to financial, geographical and/or cultural factors, young people's choices need to be opened up so that they can maximise their potential.

5.1 The role of the government and the NGO sector

- State-funded educational schemes and interventions need to be sustainable and accountable, and should involve consultation with young people and different stakeholders in the community, connecting families, schools and colleges. Information about schemes should be disseminated widely in a variety of means, including directly to young people.
- The role of Aanganvadi workers (including relevant training) and other localised services such as village panchayats and khap panchayats should be joined up with schools and colleges to promote informed educational choices from an early age.
- The Department of Higher Education should further liaise with the Department of Transport and Infrastructure to consult on bus routes, bus stand locations and bus requirements for college access. Consultation with students and mapping of the catchment area are essential parts of this process.
- Further colleges should be considered where there are no colleges within an appropriate catchment area (1 hour of travel and/or 70-100km distant from students' homes).
- Colleges need to receive sufficient funding to recruit high quality teachers on permanent contracts, to maintain and develop facilities, and to develop a high quality offer for students (e.g. extra activities, prizes and bursaries).
- Information about higher education should be disseminated to community groups and to schools.
    - Families need to have access to readily available information about school choice and higher education choice (including subject choice) and employability options, and connecting these to envision educational trajectories for young people.
    - Positive messaging for consideration of and valuing of girls' educational trajectories should be included.
    - Messaging should also be included about the class 12 marks that are needed for accessing HE, so that families are in an informed position to act if there are concerns about young people's school progress.
    - Information should be included about costs of HE, including fees but also supplementary costs, as well as scholarships and bursaries (including of competitive HEIs which may be located further away).
    - Information should include guidance on transport options for students to reach colleges and suggestions for safe journey planning.
    - This information can be distributed through schools, community groups and directly from colleges.
- The NGO sector relating to education needs to be stimulated in Haryana.

5.2 The role of colleges

- Colleges should build a more public presence in their catchment areas, including going out to villages to increase understanding of higher education. College teachers should be more visible in local communities. Colleges need to engage with families more directly, through visits to communities and through guided visits of the colleges. When engaging with families, colleges need to be aware that parents have the ultimate say in young people's HE access, but that mothers and fathers as well as sisters and brothers have different roles and these

need to be respected and explored. Young people accessing HE need both emotional as well as informed support from their families.

- Colleges should also open their doors to visits from families and young people.
- Colleges should liaise with schools to ensure that young people are receiving information directly. Colleges need to liaise with schools to ensure that the school-college transition is facilitated in an informed manner and that young people are aware of their options.
- Colleges should formalise the role of current students acting as ambassadors for the colleges in disseminating information about higher education in their communities and giving guided visits of the college.
- Colleges should engage in more active information and marketing campaigns via different channels, including via means that young people access (e.g. social media) as well as via means that family members access (e.g. newspaper, television, radio).
- Colleges should liaise with local internet providers (e.g. internet cafes) to ensure that young people applying to the colleges from these providers have access to current information. This is another opportunity for the involvement of current students as student ambassadors.
- Colleges should train any personnel involved in the admissions process to be informative and friendly to applicants.
- Colleges should provide step-by-step guidance on the admissions process and ensure this is available at schools, internet cafes and at the college itself, and available online.
- Some young people are making decisions about HE on their own. Colleges should be aware of this and again this is where college ambassadors could (in collaboration with schools) work with individuals on their college applications.

5.3 The role of schools

- Schools should work with colleges and college ambassadors to facilitate the spreading of reliable, accurate information about higher education options to young people and, where possible, their communities.
- Young people need to be informed of their options, and young women in particular (as well as men) need to receive more training at school level in negotiation skills, so that they can have more involvement in discussions of their futures within the family. Young people at school level should be encouraged to identify different sources of support and information that they could consult. Again, this is a potential role for student ambassadors in collaboration with schools.

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