

A view of the abysmal state of research scholars' finances during the COVID-19 pandemic

The picture from JNU

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A brief background

- After the declaration of the pandemic by the WHO, India was under complete lockdown from March till the period during which our survey was conducted. Universities had shut down abruptly, forcing students to leave campus accommodation and return home.
- The pandemic has (already) had a disproportionate impact on 18 to 29 year olds. Nearly three-fourth have experienced educational institution closure.

-- The International Labour Organizations' (ILO) Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19 in 2020

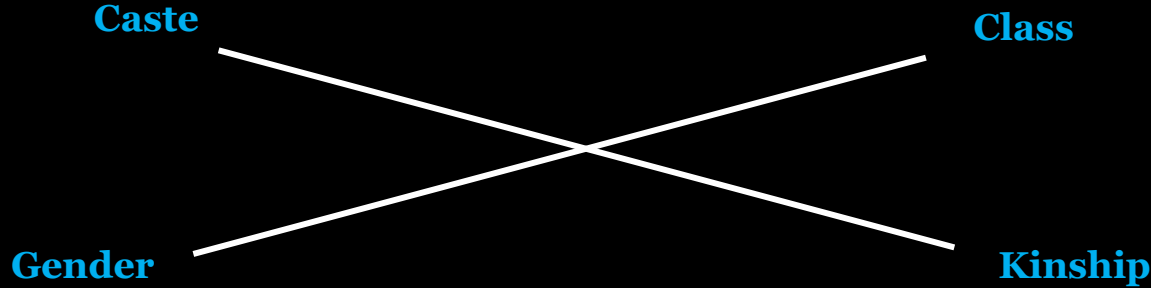
Issues for students:

No place to study

Poor mental health

Tapering finances and career prospects

Intersectional inequality in India's higher education system



- Inequalities in higher education is addressed by constitutionally guaranteed affirmative action. However, inequalities still persist.
- In 2014, the dropout rate in HEI for
 - STs 37.5%
 - Unreserved 19.6%
 - OBCs 28.3%
 - SCs 33.3%

Survey Methodology

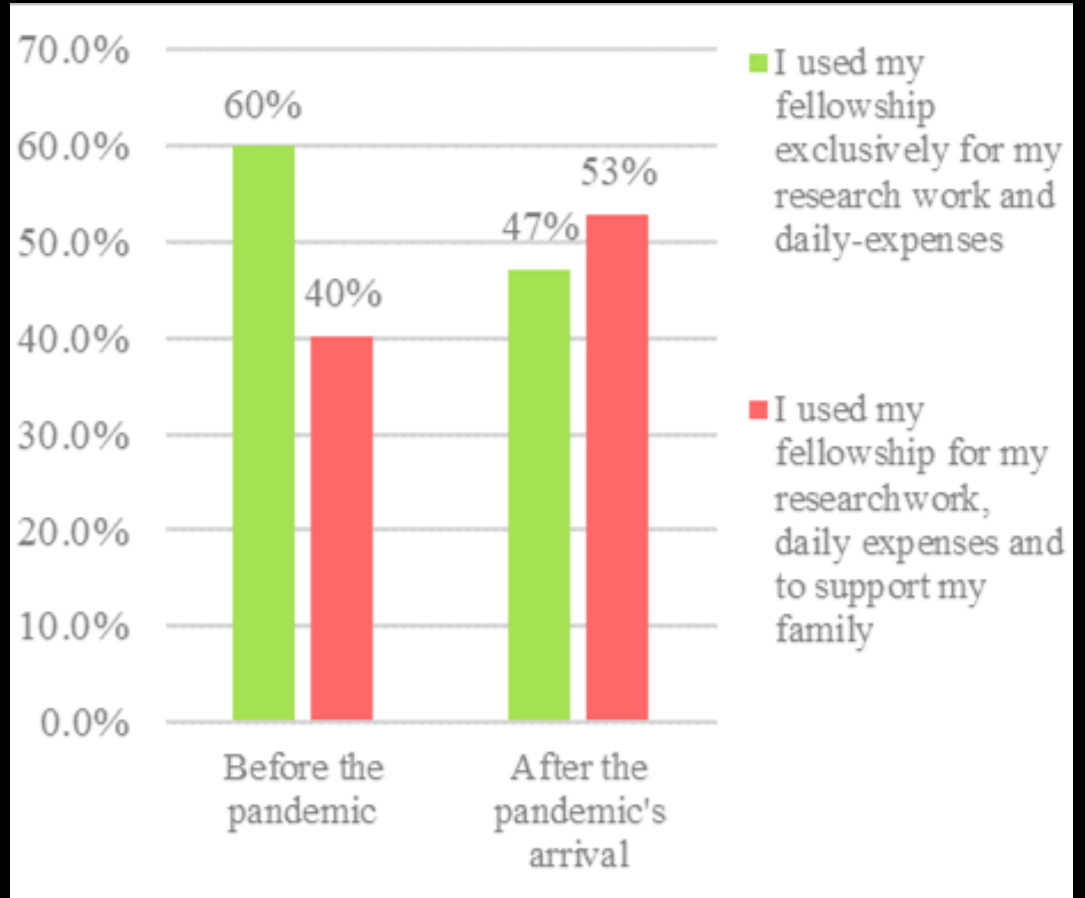
- An **online survey** was conducted between **27th June to 6th July 2020** via the Google form application, circulated through whatsapp, facebook, and email.
- Target population: **All registered under PhD and MPhil and Mtech programme**
- The questionnaire incorporates a total of **57 questions** including demographic information, status of **research work, finances, and mental well-being** during and before the pandemic.
- Reference period: **March to June 2020**
- Method of analysis: **descriptive statistics**: univariate and bivariate cross-tabulation, chi-square analysis for showing degree of association.

Scholars' financial status

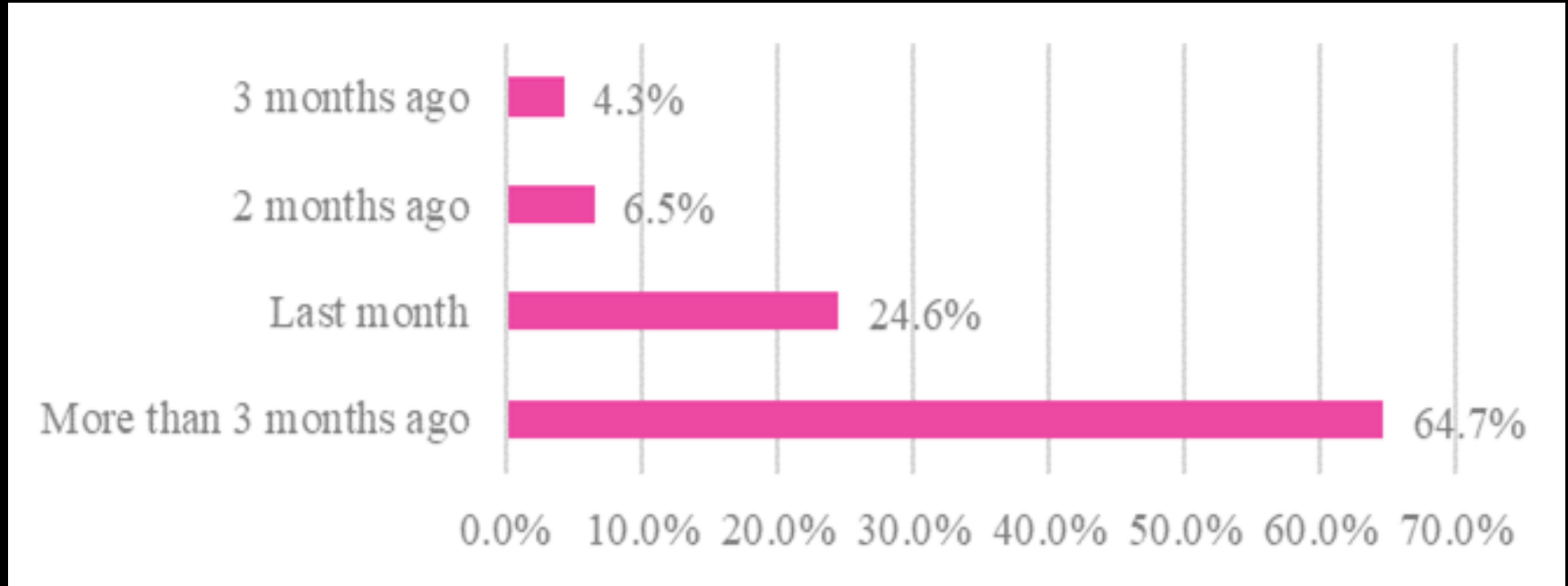
Financial types	%
JRF/RGNF & equivalents (Rs 31,000)	28.8
Non-NET Rs 5000	23.5
Former fellowship holder	20.5
SRF equivalent (Rs 35,000)	9.3
Non-NET Rs 8000	9.1
ICSSR fellowship (Rs 20,000)	3.8
Others	3.8
Foreign national (Self-financed)	0.9

- Large differences in the monthly stipend amount of these fellowships
- Fellowships are known to be disbursed erratically.
- Over the years, there have also been delays in revision of fellowship amounts with respect to inflation rates and delays in notifications for Minority and SC/ST fellowships.

What scholars need their fellowships for (Before and after the onset of the pandemic)

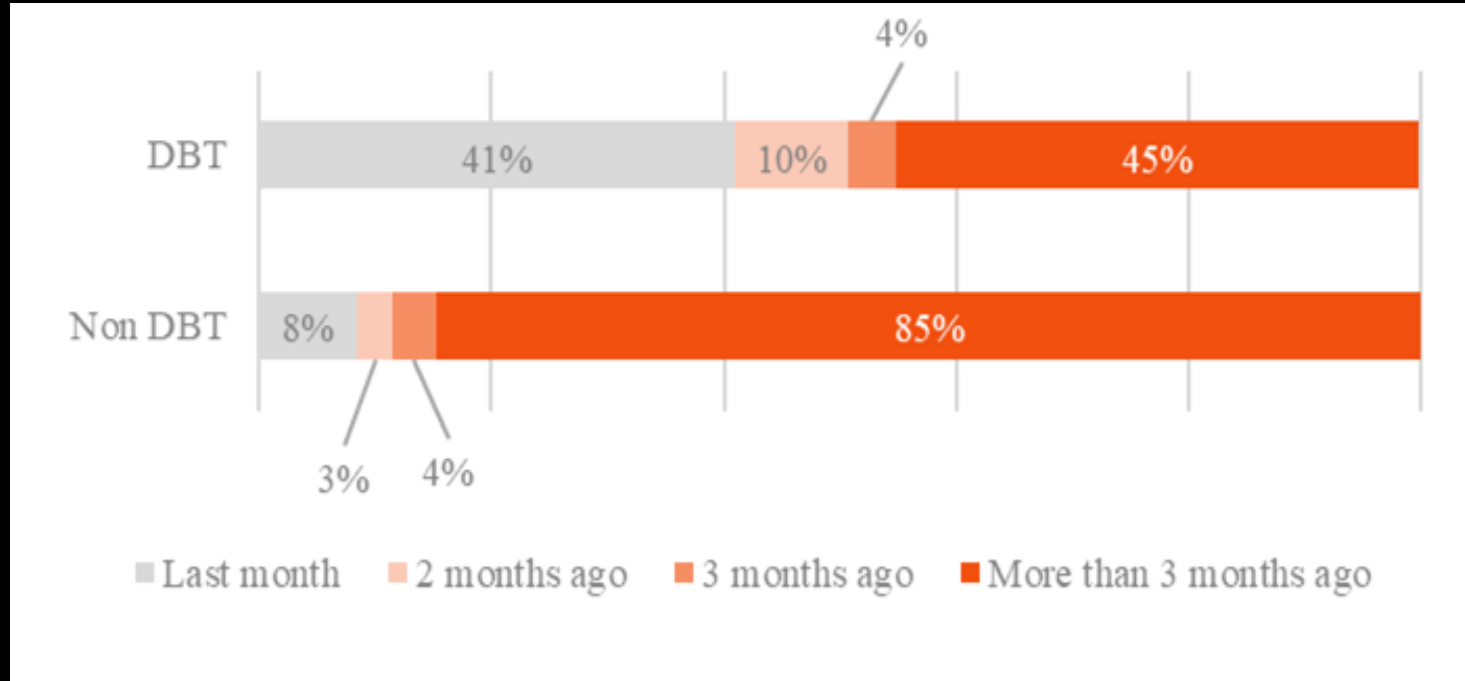


The abysmal state of fellowship disbursal during pandemic



Last received their fellowship

Disbursal Direct Bank Transfer (DBT) and Non-DBT fellowships



- Non-NET fellows and ICSSR fellows were most adversely affected
- Their fellowship amount is significantly lower than that of JRF + a huge share of them had not received their fellowship in more than three months.

Research scholars grim mental health and causes of anxiety due to financial issues

- The survey reveals the prevalence of anxiety among JNU scholars on a massive scale.
- About **87.5%** of the respondents reported of being anxious and **10%** said they 'may be' anxious.
- Among different reasons of anxiety, there are **3 anxiety-causing factors related to finance** that scholars have pointed out:
 - having run out of money or having fast-depleting savings (58%)
 - a lack of clarity regarding fellowship/finances for the extension period if an extension period were to be given (56%).
 - financial/health situation at home (48%).

Association between scholars' socio-economic identities
and reasons for deregistering/ dropping out

Association between scholars' gender and reasons for deregistration/ dropping out

	<i>Research period extended but scholarship is not extended (n=517)</i>	<i>Look for a job to sustain my family (n=517)</i>
GENDER		
<i>Male</i>	111 (51.4%)	105 (48.6%)
<i>Female</i>	114 (37.9%)	111 (36.9%)
	Chi-square value=9.345†	chi-square value=7.118†
Notes: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, †p<0.01, ††p<0.001 Source: calculated from primary data Figures in parentheses are percent share of responses out of total respondent in respective variables mentioned above.		

Association between scholars' caste and reasons for deregistration /dropping out

SOCIAL CATEGORY	<i>Look for a job to sustain my family (n=510)</i>
<i>OBC</i>	81 (50.6%)
<i>SC</i>	36 (46.2%)
<i>ST</i>	15 (39.5%)
<i>None of the above</i>	81 (34.6%)
	chi-square value = 10.782**
<p>Notes: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, †p<0.01, ††p<0.001</p> <p>Source: calculated from primary data</p> <p>Figures in parentheses are percent share of responses out of total respondent in respective variables mentioned above.</p>	

Association between scholars' family income and reasons for deregistration /dropping out

	<i>Research period extended but scholarship is not extended (n=505)</i>	<i>Look for a job to sustain my family (n=505)</i>
FAMILY INCOME		
<i>Below 0.5 million per year</i>	69 (52.3%)	67 (50.8%)
<i>0.5 million—0.3 million per year</i>	55 (50%)	52 (47.3%)
<i>0.3 million -0.6 million per year</i>	53 (41.4%)	52 (40.3%)
<i>Above 0.6 million per year</i>	40 (29.9%)	41 (30.6%)
	chi-square value=16.478††	chi-square value=12.717†
Notes: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, †p<0.01, ††p<0.001 Source: calculated from primary data Figures in parentheses are percent share of responses out of total respondent in respective variables mentioned above.		

The global picture

Within just four months into the closure of universities, our participants report high chances of dropping out from their research programmes.

Need of the hour:

- Allow researchers to rethink and reframe research methodology (supported by UKRI)
- Provide flexibility in time and finances (done by UKRI, University of Melbourne)
- Consider domestic commitment as a reason for work disruption (done by Open University, UK, University of Melbourne)

India cannot afford to abandon its researchers and academic workers. The need of the hour is a flexible mitigatory policy that permits the modification of the scope of a doctoral research project, including a change in the dissertation title, a change in scope of research, and an evolving criterion for the availability of additional funding. It must also consider the intersectional inequality between caste, class and gender, and dropouts from research programmes. Such a policy will help more research scholars to submit their PhDs without the need for continued work-period extensions.