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A Study on the Impact of COVID on Farm Sector Higher Education and Employment

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The issue of the COVID-19 and its impact on higher education is an emergent focus of debate across the globe. Higher education sectors all over the world are exceptionally disordered and disrupted radically and students are struggling a lot to navigate this crisis. An Analysis of Higher Education, Placement, Employment and Earning Contours of TNAU Farm graduates during the Pre and Post COVID 19 Regimes was conducted with the following objectives. For the present study, 372 past candidates were contacted. Data was collected by mailed Questionnaire. The issue of the COVID-19 and its impact on higher education is an emergent focus of debate across the globe. Higher education sectors all over the world are exceptionally disordered and disrupted radically and students are struggling a lot to navigate this crisis. Among the respondents 57 per cent were girls and 43 percent were boys. Around 42 per cent of the graduates were from rural background, 31% from urban and remaining from peri-urban areas.

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Over 61 per cent of the passed out graduates were preparing for competitive examinations, 26 per cent were pursuing higher education and only 13 per cent were employed. The percentage of graduates doing higher education and employed has reduced by nearly 50 percent during the COVID. All the students were employed within India during the pre and post COVID period and the difference between these periods was negligible. However it could be noted that the number of graduates being employed in private sector reduced drastically in the first year of Covid while it increased by 35 percent during the second year after CoVID. The choice of jobs were prioritized in the following preference. They were Salary, passion and job security. However it can be found that the job security aspect has reduced by 20 percent in the Covid situation. About 59 per cent indicated that their jobs were not secured and 36 per cent expressed that they found it difficult to get admission in national and international institutions due to covid pandemic and 17.2 per cent indicated that they were not able to pursue education in National and International institutions even after getting admissions and fellowships. COVID has impacted higher education and job prospect in abroad and far way places.

Keywords: COVID; higher education; farm graduates; COVID-19 impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, Indian students aspiring for higher education in overseas have to re-consider their options. The global higher education landscape has dramatically changed in the past few months due to the spread of the COVID-19. The issue of the COVID-19 and its impact on higher education is an emergent focus of debate across the globe. Higher education sectors all over the world are exceptionally disordered and disrupted radically and students are struggling a lot to navigate this crisis. According to Andreas [1] International students were particularly badly hit at the start of the lockdown as they have had to sort out the implications of university closures on their status on campus and within their host country. Students had to decide whether to return home with limited information about when they might return, or remain in their host country with restricted employment and education opportunities, all while sorting out their visa status.

Projections for the long-shadow implications of COVID-19 range from a five-year disruption to six months. Forecasts predict anywhere from a 15% to 25% decline in enrolment, depending on which part of the world the calculations are made (UWN, 2020). Right now, this pandemic has added a new layer of complexity and confusion to the higher education sector and to those who seek to study in colleges and universities, both in India and abroad. COVID-19 has exacerbated learning gaps further, taking 1.6 billion students out of school at its peak [2].

The higher education sector worldwide is increasing its commitment to sustainable

development thanks to the 2030 Agenda. Yet, obstacles remain to ensure full engagement and more work needs to be done. It is important to continue to strengthen the science-policy interface and to listen to what the higher education sector as a whole has to contribute to achieve the SDGs [3]. There has been a shift from culture by doing online learning. As of now, many agricultural universities started accommodating to the new system of education and learning environment. The academic and financial situations of farm institutions are to undergo a challenging phase in the days ahead. Higher education opportunities (both domestic and overseas), job markets/employment avenues in Government and other non-institutional sectors as well as the salary packages even for meritorious and front line farm students would definitely face a challenge under post COVID-19 environment. It is expected that this transformation will affect farm students' recruitment/placement and higher education openings. International employment and overseas education, getting visas are a matter of apprehension. Social distancing and restricted travel, both domestic and international mobility create a challenging milieu for career options for graduates in general and farm graduates in particular. In the short run, international student mobility (both in and out) will decline significantly. Students' preference to go abroad for higher education without work visas will definitely have a say on enrolments in renowned foreign educational institutes. There are instances and reports that women graduates are restricted to pursue education (both in national and foreign institutions) and not allowed to take up challenging employment/assignments outside their place of domicile by their families. This will

create a vacuum in the job market in the long run and promising and talented aspirants (women candidates) will not occupy the decision making hierarchy. These are some of the prickling issues in the sector that need to be analysed to formulate workable strategies and policy prescriptions.

2. METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted with students of 13 UG and also PG students. A total of 372 students covering both pre and post covid batches were enquired for the survey. Responses were received from 107 graduates of Pre Covid batch (2019) and 265 graduates of Post Covid (2020 and 2021) batch.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the respondents 57 per cent were girls and 43 percent were boys. Around 42 per cent of the graduates were from rural background, 31% from urban and remaining from peri-urban areas. Over 61 per cent of the passed out graduates were preparing for competitive examinations, 26 per cent were pursuing higher education and only 13 per cent were employed. The percentage of graduates doing higher education and employed has reduced by nearly 50 percent during the COVID. According Niranjana [4] to the percentage of students who selected agricultural studies by their own decisions have increased with increase in the degree level, which was 36, 57, and 62 per cent at bachelor, master and doctoral degree levels, respectively.

All the students were employed within India during the pre and post COVID period and the difference between these periods was negligible. However it could be noted that the number of graduates being employed in private sector reduced drastically in the first year of Covid while it increased by 35 percent during the second year after CoVID. The choice of jobs were prioritized in the following preference. They were Salary, passion and job security. However it can be found that the job security aspect has reduced by 20 percent in the Covid situation. According to Ganesh Das [5] all the respondents used news papers as sources for job placement followed by websites (88.36%). Among the least used mass media sources was radio (only 1.72%). Among the informal sources it is noted that students received maximum information regarding job from their friends (88%) followed by their parents (50.43%) and least used sources for information was neighbours (6.46%)

Among the salaried group, about 44 per cent were earning less than Rs.20,000 /month; 47 per cent between Rs.20,000-50,000 and the rest over Rs.50,000/month. It was indicated by 28.4 per cent of the graduates that the salary during Covid decreased significantly and 64.6 per cent opined that their life style in terms of income, employment and standard of living changed during the covid. The self-employed graduates are very negligible and insignificant [6-8].

About 94 per cent expressed that there were no gender disparity in the institutions, in which they were employed during the pandemic. About 59 per cent indicated that their jobs were not secured and 36 per cent expressed that they found it difficult to get admission in national and international institutions due to covid pandemic and 17.2 per cent indicated that they were not able to pursue education in National and International institutions even after getting admissions and fellowships.

Among the students doing higher education, 71.5 per cent were pursuing the course of their own choice while the remaining were by chance. The reason for preference of the academic programme by chance was done for fellowship purpose by 51 per cent. Only 18.6 per cent of the students were given with some kind of fellowships while the rest are doing on their own. The cost of education varied from Rs.25 lakhs in IITs to Rs.50000 for PG Diplomas. The average cost for OG education was 3 lakhs and there was not much change during the Pre and post covid periods.

All the students during the Covid pandemic were doing higher education in India. The support extended by the parents for doing higher education was mainly for arranging finance (over 50 per cent). The general opinion was that the Covid had delayed the completion of degree programme in time which led to non-availability of preferred courses in the desired location and envisioned job/employment.

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4. CONCLUSION

The COVID has hit the students higher education and employment in one way or the other. The general opinion was that the Covid had delayed the completion of degree programme in time which led to non-availability of preferred courses

in the desired location and envisioned job/employment. About 59 per cent indicated that their jobs were not secured and 36 per cent expressed that they found it difficult to get admission in national and international institutions due to covid pandemic and 17.2 per cent indicated that they were not able to pursue education in National and International institutions even after getting admissions and fellowships.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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