

News release: Tamil Nadu

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59% of school children in Tamil Nadu had no formal education during COVID-19 school closures: New study warns of further marginalisation

A recent survey of households in Tamil Nadu has shown that large numbers of school-aged children did not have continuity in their formal education during the COVID-19 school closures. A small number (10%) even dropped out.

Among those that were enrolled prior to the pandemic (86% of children between the ages of 5 and 18), the survey revealed that 59% of these children had no access to formal education during the school closures (Figure 1). The 2021 survey, conducted by policy think tanks LIRNEasia and ICRIER, in 500 households in 25 wards of Tamil Nadu, included private tuition classes in its definition of formal education.

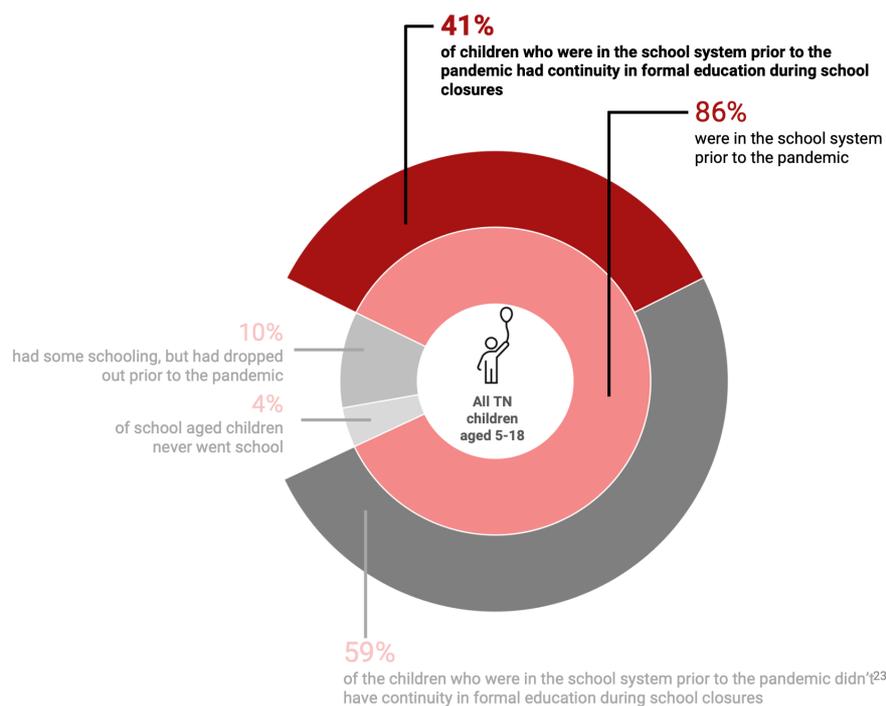


Figure 1: Schooling status of school-aged children in Tamil Nadu during the COVID-19 school closures

While this is an alarming number, it must be noted that Tamil Nadu performed better than the national average, which was 20% of school-aged children across India in the same survey.

The survey data -- statistically representative of the Tamil Nadu state -- also uncovered the gaps between who received education versus who did not. Those that received education came from households in Tamil Nadu which were internet-connected and big-screen devices, were more often female, and were studying in higher grades.

The enabling role of digital connectivity is further evident with students receiving educational content and guidance through apps like WhatsApp and Viber, through phone calls, live online lessons, radio programs, as well as SMS, according to survey responses.

While digital technology has a huge potential for ensuring continuity during disruptions/crises, there is still a clear digital divide between connected vs unconnected households: 50% of households with school-aged children which were internet-connected received education, whereas only 16% of the non-connected counterparts did. This implies that children in unconnected households are more at risk of digital and other forms of marginalization. The fact that unconnected households are more often poorer, more rural, have less educated household heads, and lack big-screen devices, only compounds the problem.

The survey findings were released at a virtual launch event conducted on 12 November 2021, which included a panel discussion with leading government, private sector and civil society representatives. Panelists included Dr. Jaijit Bhattacharya (President, Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research), Abhishek Singh (President & CEO, National e-Governance Division, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology), Nishanth Baghel (Director of Technology Innovations, Pratham) and Helani Galpaya (CEO, LIRNEasia). The discussion was moderated by Dr. Rajat Kathuria (Senior Visiting Professor, ICRIER).

About the research: The research was conducted by LIRNEasia and ICRIER, and funded by IDRC through a joint grant given to three regional think tanks: LIRNEasia, Research ICT Africa and Instituto de Estudios Peruanos. The nationally representative sample for the survey consisted of 7,000 households across India including 350 villages and wards. The sampling methodology has been designed to ensure representation of the target group (population aged 15-65) at a national level with a confidence level of 95-percent and a +/-1.7% margin of error. The data also allows for disaggregation by urban/rural divide, gender and socio-economic classification at the national level and at the state level for 4 focal states, Delhi, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra. The findings for these states are representative at a state level with a confidence level of 95-percent and a +/-6.2% margin of error.

About LIRNEasia: LIRNEasia is an Asia Pacific ICT policy and regulation think tank. Its mission is to catalyze policy change through research to improve people's lives in the emerging Asia Pacific by facilitating their use of hard and soft infrastructures through the use of knowledge, information and technology.

For more information see <https://lirneasia.net/>

About ICRIER: ICRIER is an autonomous economic policy think tank. ICRIER's main focus is to enhance the knowledge content of policy making by undertaking analytical research that is targeted at informing India's policy makers. The Digital Economy, Startup and Innovation (DESI) team at ICRIER is deeply invested in areas of digital access, internet governance and market competition.

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