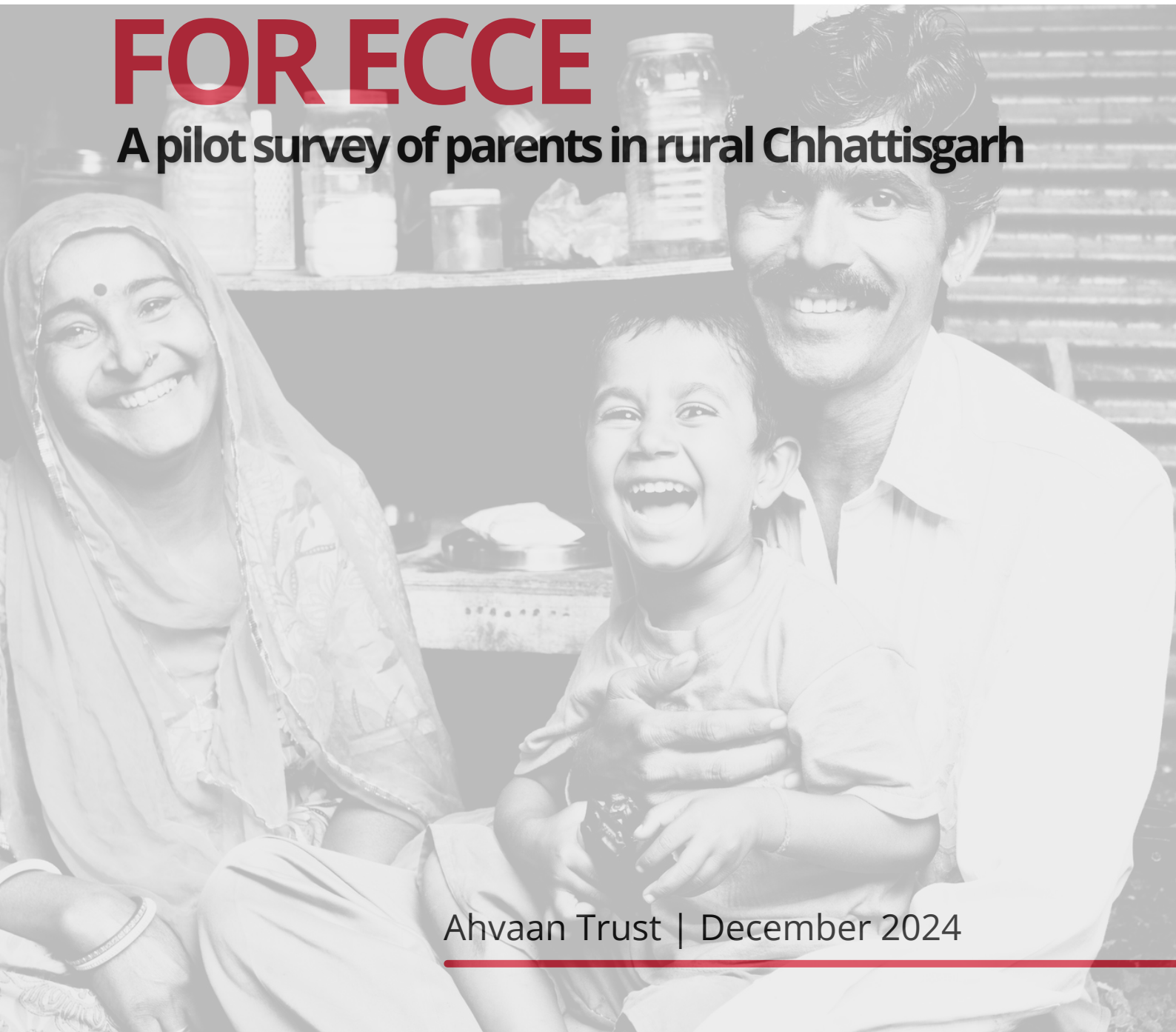


Research Brief

NEEDS, CHOICES, AND ASPIRATIONS FOR ECCE

A pilot survey of parents in rural Chhattisgarh



About the survey

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is essential for a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development, providing the foundation for lifelong learning. Policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, NIPUN Bharat, and the ECCE Policy 2013 emphasize universal access to quality and equitable ECCE. In rural Chhattisgarh, government-run Anganwadis (playschools) and Balwadis (preschools) serve as the primary options for early education for children aged 3 to 6 years from economically weaker sections.

Anganwadis remain the primary choice for pre-schooling among parents, with over 54% of students in Chhattisgarh aged 5 enrolled in Anganwadi centers. Balwadis, introduced by the state government in 2022, have received a positive response since their launch with 21% of students—68,054 children aged 5—enrolled in the academic year 2022-23. Per ASER 2022, private pre-schools hold 23% enrollments of children aged 5.

The 'Needs, Choice and Aspirations Survey' of parents was undertaken by Ahvaan with a view to understand current levels of parental awareness, engagement and aspirations from Balwadis. Ahvaan Trust, in partnership with the Government of Chhattisgarh, has been working towards improving the content and teacher capacity in Balwadis since their inception in 2022. Parent engagement is a key element of Ahvaan's Strengthening Mor Balwadis project. This survey provides initial insights towards designing the future, context informed interventions to enhance parental involvement in Balwadis. This survey was conducted by Ahvaan's field team in Balod, Durg, Gariaband, and Kanker districts in November and December 2024, through home-based structured interviews of 120 randomly selected parents-majority of whom were mothers- associated with government pre-school centers.

About the survey

The findings show a remarkable parental awareness of the academic contribution of Balwadis, and appreciation of their role in developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Distance from home emerged as a major challenge, while affordability, academic quality and proximity to home emerged as key factors influencing parents' choice of Balwadis. Many parents expressed the need for greater information sharing between teachers and parents to improve their experience with Balwadis.

Pre-primary initiatives such as Balvatikas and Balwadis are expanding across states under national and state ECCE policies. NEP 2020 emphasizes the role of parents in quality and universal ECCE and envisages a direct role for non-profits in enhancing parental engagement with schools. In this context, Ahvaan's exploratory survey helps understand parental awareness and level of engagement while providing directional inputs towards improving access, quality, and last-mile delivery of ECCE programs. A scaled-up survey could serve as a critical tool for shaping targeted interventions that ensure high-quality ECCE reaches every child as envisaged in our policies.



Key Findings

Parental preference for traditional vocations: Traditional vocations such as doctor, teacher and government jobs remain the primary aspirations of parents for their children (60% parents). A minority, 9% of parents, believe that children should opt for vocations of their choice. This needs to be seen in the context of parents' education, professions and income levels which comprise 45% of parents having studied up to class 10 while 23% up to class V. About 8% of respondents are engaged in formal employment (Government/Private) and the majority-92% are engaged in agriculture and informal labor.

Scope to create local awareness about Balwadis: Over 79% of the surveyed parents responded that they are aware of Balwadis, however a small number of parents enrolled in Anganwadis responded that they are unaware of Balwadis, despite majority of the Anganwadi and Balwadi centers being co-located in Chhattisgarh.

Affordability, quality of education and proximity to home are the top factors that matter for parents in selecting preschools: Among the other prominent factors- availability of facilities and safe environment ranked top. The majority, 72% of parents, did not consider sending their children to private schools due to affordability. A significant 40% cited affordability as the exclusive reason while 32% of parents also believed that the quality of education in government schools is good. Those who considered sending their children to private schools believe that the private schools offer better facilities, and the quality of education is better therein however they are unaffordable.

Key Findings

Over 50% parents expect Balwadis to help develop foundational reading and writing skills among children whereas the other half believes that children should develop reading and writing skills along with other important areas such as physical development, and socio-emotional skills

Most of the parents believed that Balwadis prepared their children for formal schooling by developing a habit of learning. A smaller percentage of parents also believed that along with the habit of learning, Balwadis introduce children to various subjects and help develop confidence and independence.

Over 50% of parents rate the quality of education in Balwadis good or excellent. Many observe visible improvement in their children's reading abilities and level of confidence. Amongst those who rated the quality as alright, or needs improvement, cited the addition of facilities-including availability of teachers, infrastructure and safety as areas of improvement.

The level of parental engagement with Balwadis is alarmingly low with over 60% of parents responding that they occasionally or rarely interact with teachers. Amongst those who engage with teachers, the majority, i.e. 79%, find it comfortable to interact with the teachers.

Implications

1

Parents prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy skills for their children. There is a scope for building greater parental awareness about the importance of physical, cognitive, and socioemotional skills in early education in regional languages

2

Low levels of parental engagement with teachers highlights the need for structured programs to foster regular and meaningful interaction between parents and Balwadi staff which includes standardized feedback mechanisms, and platforms such as SMCs.

3

With increased smartphone access of mothers (72.5%), leveraging digital tools and platforms can facilitate teacher-parent communication e.g. sharing learning resources, information on child development and resources synchronizing home and school-based efforts towards high quality ECCE.

4

Proximity and affordability as primary factors underline the importance of ensuring Balwadis remain accessible and affordable.

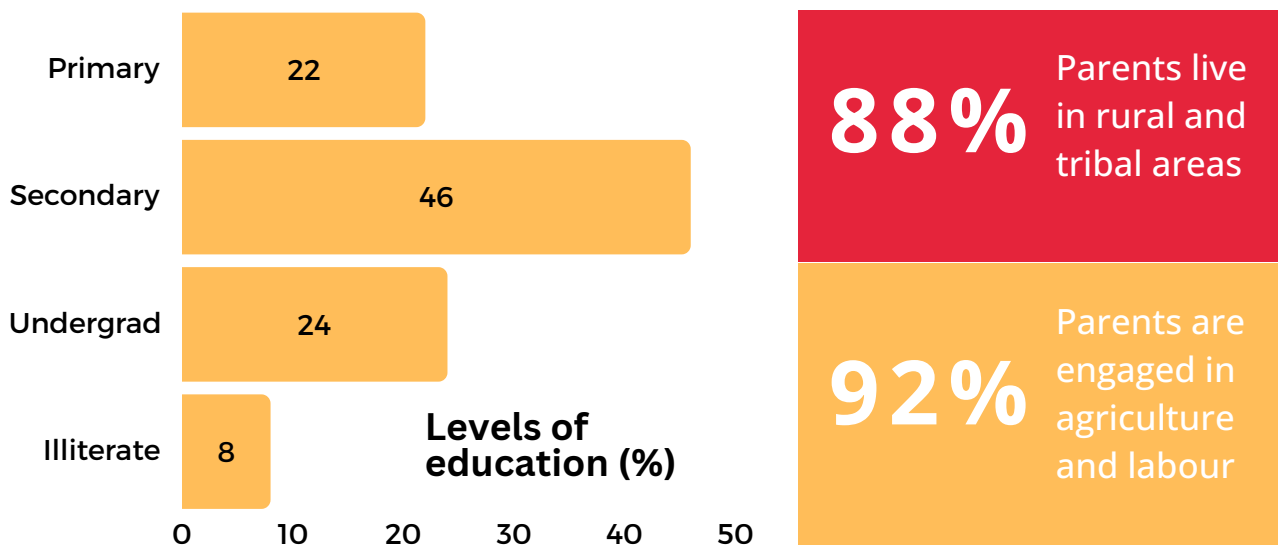
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While many parents recognize improvements in children's reading abilities and confidence, enhancing basic facilities in Balwadis such as availability of teachers, access to toilets, and enhancing activity-based learning, inclusion of physical activities remain key areas for improvement.

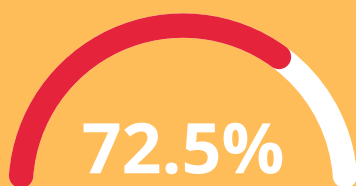
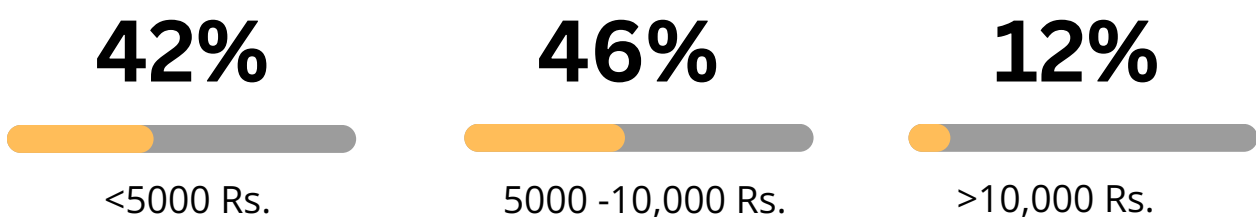
The survey findings offer initial insights into parental aspirations, awareness, and engagement with Balwadis, While these implications offer directional inputs, they require greater statistical validity and nuance. A large-scale survey focused on low-income parents from rural areas can drive collective action towards last mile coverage of quality and equitable ECCE

Parent Profile

Primary Language: 59% of parents speak Chhattisgarhi, 14% Odia, 2.5% Hindi, and 24.5% a mix of Chhattisgarhi, Uriya, Hindi, and tribal dialects like Gondi, Halvi, and Bhujia.



Monthly Income levels



Mothers have access to Smartphones, while 78% fathers have access to smartphones

Acknowledgements

We thank the field team for their enthusiastic participation at every stage of this survey including their hard work in visiting remote villages and carrying out these conversations with parents. We are grateful to the parents for their forthcoming participation in the survey and for sharing their views with us. We also appreciate the government schools and teachers for helping us connect with parents and supporting the survey process.

About Ahaavn

Established in 2010, Ahvaan is a pioneer in early childhood education, foundational learning, and parent engagement in India. The organization comprises Ahvaan Trust (AT), a non profit organization and the Ahvaan Education Foundation (AEF), a consulting arm- with a unified vision of creating a strong academic and values-based foundation for young learners. Ahvaan's work spans curriculum development, professional development for educators, and building state capacities- driving access to high quality early childhood education for children from underserved communities.

Over the years, Ahvaan has collaborated with state governments and partner organizations in Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Ladakh, and Tripura, impacting over 300,000 students aged 3 to 8 years. We have mentored 10,000 teachers representing over 1200 schools across these states. Our innovative interventions such as creation of model Balwadis (pre-schools) and building functional synergies between Anganwadis and Balwadis have created a strong proof-of-concept for the future interventions in early childhood education.

Ahvaan has been a trusted partner to state agencies for policy formation and implementation in the areas of ECCE and FLN curriculum. Our approach to ECCE and FLN aligns with key policies such as National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2013, and initiatives such as NIPUN Bharat, focusing on skill-based, developmentally appropriate, and contextually relevant learning.



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