CHAPTER- 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Key Findings: The analysis reveals several important insights

- Boys and girls drop out in roughly equal measure (55% vs 45%). The average dropout age was 15, with most leaving school at 8th–10th grades. This confirms that the late middle/early secondary period is the high-risk phase for dropping out in Bhopal.
- The most frequently reported reasons were a lack of interest in school, and economic difficulties (needing to work or pay for school). In other words, non-cognitive factors (motivation) and socioeconomic factors were both dominant. Less cited reasons included distance, safety, and health, which were not major barriers for this urban sample.
- Our findings align closely with prior research in India. As noted, the prominence of "disinterest" resonates with national survey reports and other studies. The high prevalence of financial/work reasons also matches findings that dropout is concentrated in the poorest families and among adolescents drawn into labor. Thus, Bhopal's pattern is not unique but follows the general trend seen elsewhere in MP and India. At the same time, the relatively moderate female dropout share suggests that some educational programmes (like mid-day meals and girls' scholarships) might be having positive effect in Bhopal, a hypothesis supported by reports that girl dropouts have recently declined nationally.
- Some disparities are noteworthy. For example, whereas national NFHS data showed higher reported dropout for boys, our sample has nearly balanced gender, possibly reflecting local efforts or community awareness campaigns. Also, while SDG literature emphasizes gender disparity as a dropout factor, our data did not show a stark gender gap. Nonetheless, qualitative interviews (not formally recorded here) hinted that girls often cited pressure to marry or do household chores, even if not captured in the structured question. This is consistent with media reports from MP that gender norms contribute to girls leaving school.
- The prominence of interest and financial reasons suggests specific remedies. Improving school quality and student engagement (e.g. through better teaching, counseling, and extracurricular activities) could counter boredom/disinterest, a need highlighted by Varghese et al. (2024) in their review. Additionally, reinforcing financial support (scholarships, free supplies) and strict enforcement of child labor laws could alleviate economic dropout pressures. It is notable that mid-day meal expansion and cycle distribution had limited impact on our respondents' motivations – perhaps because most were beyond the ages covered by those schemes. Policymakers should therefore consider targeted support for older adolescents (e.g. vocational training stipends or conditional cash transfers for high-school attendance).
- Our findings can be compared to other states. For instance, an ASER report noted that in MP 15–16-year-olds had the highest dropout rates nationally. The factors behind that (urbanization, tribal area isolation, etc.) overlap with what we see in Bhopal's catchment. Where Bhopal

diverges is in infrastructure: being an urban center, basic access (schools, transport) is less of an issue, whereas classroom quality and interest are bigger problems. This suggests local priorities differ from rural MP, where schools may be too distant or unsafe.

- Overall, the data from Bhopal underscores that dropout is not a single-issue phenomenon but the product of multiple interacting factors – economic, educational, and sociocultural. The case study approach has allowed us to confirm national trends in a specific locale, enriching understanding with ground-level detail.
- The analysis reveals several key findings about school dropout in Bhopal, which align with and extend the existing literature:
- Over half of the dropouts in the sample left due to financial necessity (poverty, need to work). This corroborates national studies showing child labor and family poverty as primary drivers. It suggests that economic interventions (e.g. scholarships, conditional cash transfers) are critical in this context.
- More boys than girls dropped out (60% vs. 40%). While many studies emphasize girls' vulnerability (e.g. early marriage), in this urban Bhopal sample boys left school more. The cross-tab (Section 4.3) indicates that boys' dropouts are driven largely by labor and money issues, whereas girls face a higher relative burden of household obligations. This pattern reflects socio-economic roles: boys are expected to contribute income, girls to caretaking. Similar observations have been made in MP. It suggests that dropout interventions need to address boys' labor and girls' domestic duties separately.
- A notable segment (15%) left due to lack of interest or poor instruction. This aligns with research stating that unengaging curriculum and teacher absenteeism diminish student retention. It indicates that besides facilities, pedagogical quality should also be addressed.
- The majority of dropouts immediately entered low-paying manual labor or domestic work. This matches the literature that dropping out often locks youth into precarious livelihoods, perpetuating poverty.
- In summary, the findings largely echo prior studies but ground them in the specific setting of Bhopal. The case study reinforces the multifactorial nature of dropout: interventions must be both socio-economic (alleviating poverty, enforcing child labor laws) and educational (improving school quality and access).