

Report on
Rapid Need Assessment of Support for Youth Care Leavers in the Context
of COVID-19 Pandemic in Maharashtra

Prepared and Compiled by Mr. Aditya Charegaonkar
(Representative of YCLA, India and Ph.D. Scholar at TISS, Mumbai)

Guided by
Prof. Vijay Raghavan TISS, Mumbai (Faculty at TISS, Mumbai)
and **Ms. Alpa Vora** (Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF, Mumbai).

Edited by MS. Sneha Bhambri

Supported for the Data Collection and verification of online Data:

- 1) Ms. Manisha Shinde (YCLA, India)
- 2) Dimple Parmar (YCLA, India)
- 3) Mr. Tyagrajan (Trustee of Vinimay Trust, New Mumbai)
- 4) Mr. Vijay Johore (Prayas, Mumbai),
- 5) Ms. Kalpana Gaikwad (Our Children),
- 6) Ms. Sachi (Ashiyana Foundation, Mumbai)

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on people across the country leading to difficulties in accessing basic necessities and continues to threaten the survival of a large number of people in the country.

Amongst these groups of people are youth care leavers (YCLs). Youth care leavers are individuals who have completed their stay in child care institutions (CCIs) and aftercare hostels and are now trying to transition into the mainstream society.

Youth care leavers who left institutions and hostels in the wake of the pandemic and after the lockdown find themselves in a vulnerable situation with lack of basic necessities and socio-economic support to fend for themselves. Youth leaving institutions at this time find themselves unequipped to smoothly transition into the society due to lack of job opportunities or loss of the same, lack of financial support to pursue education, lack of shelter and legal documents to avail schemes, services and scholarships.

At this juncture, it is crucial to take into account the needs of and challenges faced by youth care leavers to enforce mechanisms that would provide them adequate support during their stay and coordinate with them upon their departure to ensure that they are able to settle down.

In this context, a study was carried out through telephonic interviews with YCL spread across Maharashtra. A total of 442 respondents agreed to participate in the survey and this report is based on data analysis of their responses to the structured interview schedule that was used to get responses from them.

Profile of Youth Care Leavers

This section focuses on the district wise data of 442 respondents collected through a telephonic survey.

It focuses on factors such as: gender wise breakdown of respondents, age, disability status, parental status, educational status before the lockdown, marital status, employment status before the lockdown and the availability of legal documents as proof of identity, bank account and health insurance amongst youth care leavers.

District Wise Data of Respondents

City/District	No. of YCLs
Kolhapur	123
Thane	103
Pune	65
Mumbai Suburban	64
Palghar	28
Sangli	15
Mumbai city	12
Raigad	9
Nashik	6
Nanded	4
Ahmednagar	2
Aurangabad	2
Jalgaon	2
Uttar Pradesh	2

Chennai	1
Hyderabad	1
Nagpur	1
Satara	1
Solapur	1
Grand Total	442

Table 1. District Wise Data of Respondents

The total number of respondents are 442 and the demographic composition of the data includes four states, namely: Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Majority of the respondents belong to the state of Maharashtra with the highest number of respondents belonging to Kolhapur followed by Thane, Pune, Mumbai Suburban and Palghar. The states of Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh had only one respondent each respectively.

Number of Youth Care Leavers (YCLs) per District in Maharashtra

No. of YCLs per District

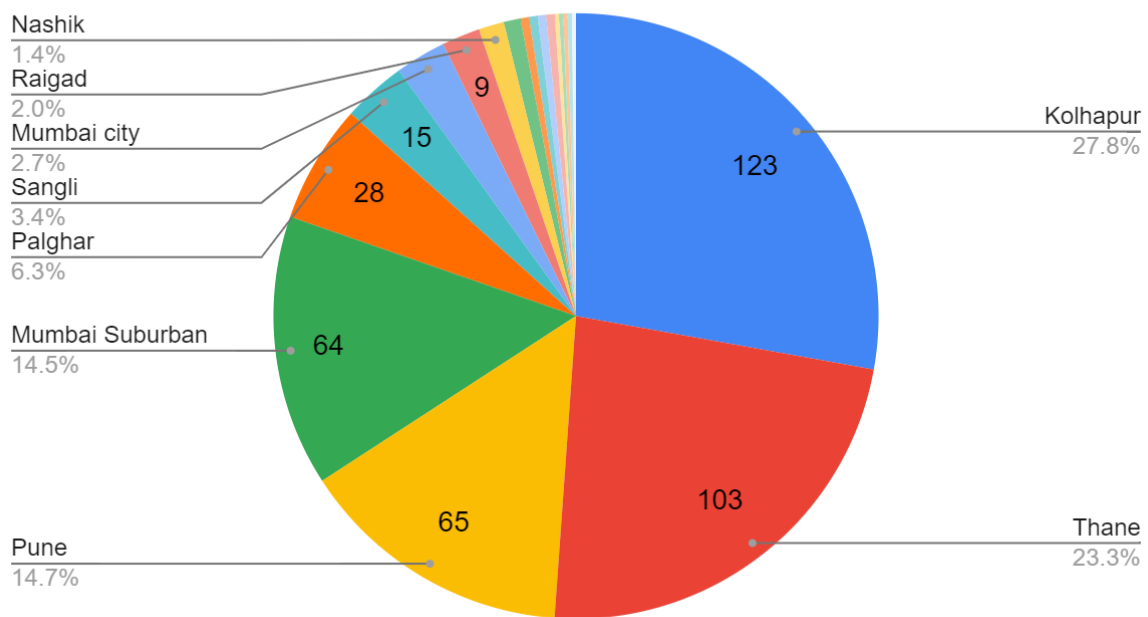


Figure 1. YCLs per District in Maharashtra

Figure 1 represents the number of youth care leavers per district in Maharashtra who formed a part of the study.

From a total of 442 respondents, 123 respondents belonged to Kolhapur thus constituting the majority at 27.8%. This is followed by 23.3% in Thane district, 14.7% in Pune and 14.5% in Mumbai Suburban while the population in rest of the five districts ranged from 1.4% to 6.3%.

While interacting with the youth care leavers, it was understood that most of them had been migrating from urban to semi urban or rural spaces after leaving institutional care due to the expenses for basic needs such as food and accommodation in urban areas being higher than their income.

Gender of Youth Care Leavers

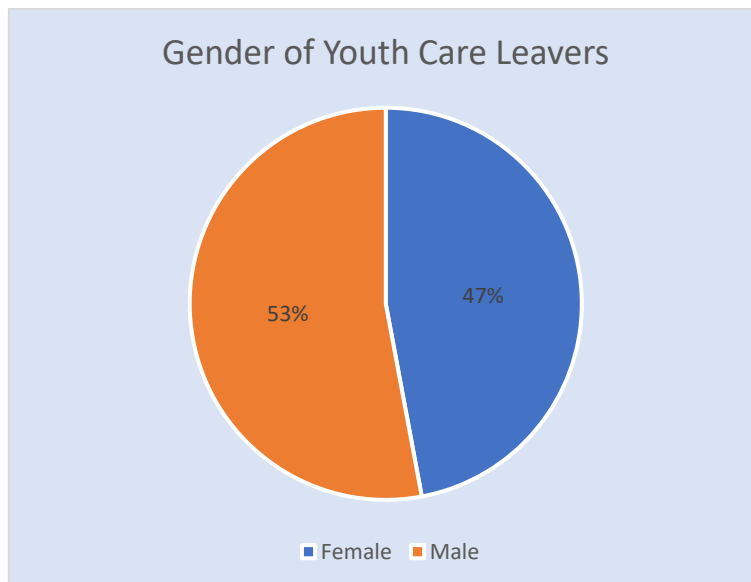


Figure 2. Gender of YCLs

As can be understood from figure 2, from a total of 442 respondents, 234 were male thus constituting 53% of the data whereas the female respondents were 208 in number and 48% of the total.

Age Group of Youth Care Leavers

Sr.No	Age Group	No of YCLs	Percentile
1	Below 18 years	5	1%
2	19 to 21 years	73	17%
3	22 to 23 years	79	18%
4	24 to 25 years	65	15%
5	26 to 30 years	110	25%
6	31 to 35 years	62	14%
7	36 and above	48	11%
TOTAL		442	100%

Table 2. Age group of YCLs

Table 2 shows that majority of the youth care leavers belong to the age group of 26 to 30 years which is 25% of the total respondents.

Further, while eligibility criteria designed for the study focused on youth care leavers above 18 years of age, the data also comprises of 5 individuals below 18 years of age.

It is also significant to pay attention to the fact that individuals from the age group of 19 years to 23 years, together constitute 35% of the total number of respondents. The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 states that support must be provided to young adults leaving after care institutions upon the completion of 18 years of age however, the data showed that these individuals have not been provided financial or other support by the system.

Respondents who have only recently left institutions in the wake of the pandemic, with a lack of financial assistance from the government, are more susceptible to poverty and lack of basic necessities and therefore require urgent assistance.

Disability Status of Youth Care Leavers

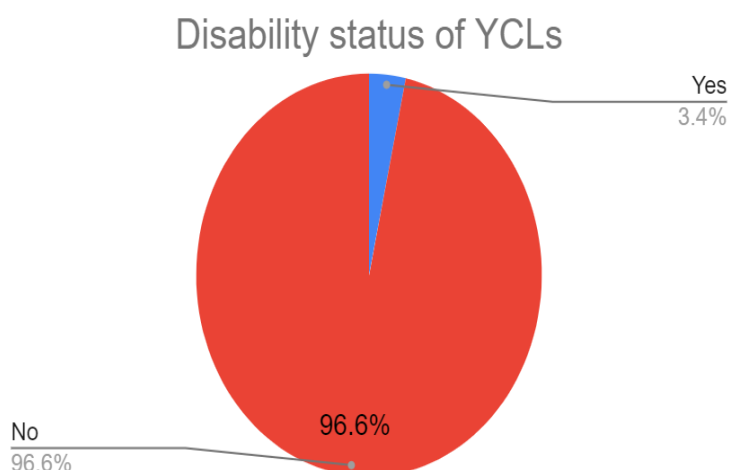


Figure 3. Disability status of YCLs

As can be understood, from amongst 442 respondents, 96.6% of the respondents that is 427 were non-disabled persons whereas 3.4% of the respondents that is, 15 respondents were persons with disability.

While data describing the type of disability could not be gathered, the challenges faced by persons with disability during a pandemic are manifold require urgent attention and assistance.

Parental Status of Youth Care Leavers

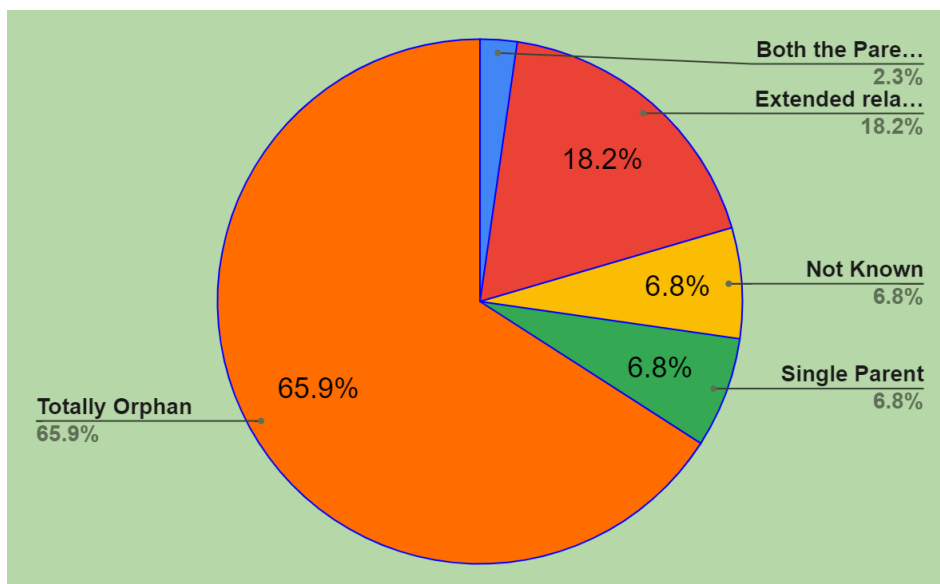


Figure 4. Parental Status of Youth Care Leavers

From the above figure, it can be understood that majority of the youth care leavers, that is 65.9% of them are orphans. Only 18.2% of the care leavers have and extended family while 6.8% come from a single parent household whereas only 2.8% have both parents. Further, in case of 6.8% of the respondents, their familial status is not known.

Thus, orphans constitute majority of the population. Leaving institutional care without any familial support which is further marked by a lack of financial support from the government could severely affect an individual's transition into the society. The lack of training and support to face the world and more so in the middle of a pandemic can severely affect these youth care leavers not only socio-economically but also in terms of their mental health.

The aforementioned issues can also emerge in cases of youth care leavers who have a single parent who may either be the only earning member or may have lost employment due to pandemic, in case of family and extended relatives, it would also be difficult if the family does not accept them or lacks resources to shelter them.

These are therefore serious issues questions that have emerged and need to be looked into.

Parental Status and Status of Anath (Orphan) Certificate amongst Youth Care Leavers

Status of Parents	Yes	Percentile	Not Applicable	Percentile	No	Percentile	Total (in numbers)	Percentile
Totally Orphan	6	1.4%	0	0%	181	41%	187	42%
Not Known	0	0%	0	0%	10	2%	10	2%
Extended Relatives	1	0.2%	0	0%	106	24%	107	24%

Single Parent	0	0%	124	28%	0	0%	124	28%
Both Parents	0	0%	14	3%	0	0%	14	3%
Grand Total	7	1.6%	138	31%	297	67%	442	100%

Table 3. Parental Status and Status of Anath (Orphan) Certificate amongst YCLs

From the aforementioned data, it can be seen that only 6 orphaned respondents and 1 respondent with extended relatives have received the Anath certificate. 297 respondents therefore do not have the certificate as a proof of identity to access services and schemes.

In 2012, the Government of Maharashtra issued an affidavit stating that an Anath certificate would be issued to orphaned individuals while leaving the child care institutions (CCIs). Further, in 2018, the Government of Maharashtra granted 1% reservation to orphans holding the Anath certificate in the education and employment sector.

As per the ‘Aftercare for Young Adult Orphans’ policy paper published in July 2019, as of January 2019, 70 youth care leavers had applied for the Anath certificate and 22 certificates had been issued.

The data obtained as a part of this study also goes on to highlight the delay in the issuance of Anath certificates. Amongst the several reasons for delay, a lack of knowledge and direction to the youth care leavers regarding officials and authorities to contact for the issuance of these certificates and delay on the part of the administrative authorities in issuing the same. There is a need for the establishment of a database to keep a track of the certificates issued and to be issued to ensure accountability.

This is a matter that requires urgent attention in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when the availability of this certificate could have helped the respondents avail educational and employment opportunities.

Educational Status of Youth Care Leavers

Sr. No	Educational Status	Male	Female	Grand total
1	Below 8 th standard	19	11	30
2	Below SSC	25	30	55
3	Completed SSC	56	41	97
4	Below HSC	24	16	40
5	Completed HSC	60	53	113
6	Appeared for Graduation	29	24	53
7	Completed Graduation	21	33	54
GRAND TOTAL		234	208	442

Table 4. Educational Status of YCLs

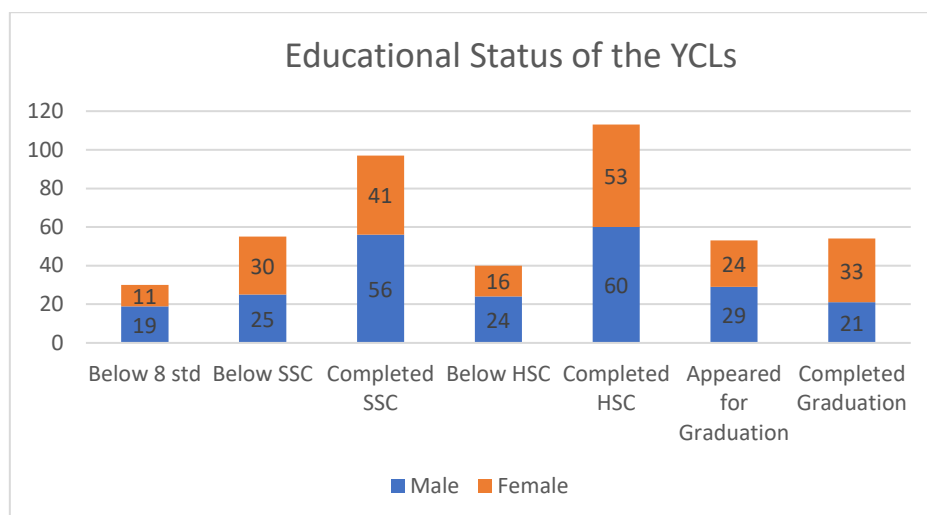


Figure 5. Educational Status of the YCLs

Table 4 and figure 5 show that from amongst a total of 442 respondents, majority of the respondents had completed their HSC.

From amongst this 113, 60 were males and 53 were females therefore not showing a wide gender gap in access to education. This is followed by 97 having completed SSC from amongst which 56 are males and 41 are females.

From amongst all the age groups, females have a higher number in comparison to males with regards to completion of graduation. However, the number of students below HSC and below SSC is comparatively higher and almost similar to that of graduation and therefore calls for attention.

This data also brings to light the importance of formulating scholarships for children in institutions and youth care leavers to access education. When individuals who have had a lack of access to education or have not completed the same during their stay in the institution due to several reasons, stepping out in the real world during a crisis situation entails a large number of difficulties in not only finding employment but also further continuing education and the financial burden associated with the same especially during the pandemic.

Marital Status of Youth Care Leavers

Marital Status	Male	Percentile	Female	Percentile	Total	Percentile
Single	160	36%	105	24%	265	60%
Married	74	17%	90	20%	164	37%
Divorced/Deserted	0	0%	13	3%	13	3%
Grand Total	234	53%	208	47%	442	100%

Table 5. Status of Marriage amongst YCLs

As can be understood from table 5, majority of the respondents are single with 160 males and 105 females, respectively and in summation constituting 60% of the total respondents.

However, the number of respondents who are married is higher amongst females as against males with 90 females and 74 males being married, respectively with the total adding up to 37%.

While none of the male respondents have been deserted, 13 female respondents have been divorced/deserted constituting 3% of the total respondents.

The implication of their marital status can further be understood through the number of children borne by the YCLs from the table below.

Marital Status and No. of Children Borne by YCLs

The implication of their marital status, as mentioned in Table 6 can further be understood through the number of children borne by the YCLs from the table below.

Status of Marriage	If Married/Divorced and No. of Children	No. of YCLs	Total in Number	Total in Percentile
Single	Not applicable (NA)	265	265	59.95%
Married	- No children	43		9.73%
	- 3 children and more	7		1.58%
	- 2 children and more	55		12.44%
	- 1 child	59		13.35%
Total		164	164	37.10%
Divorced/Deserted	- No children	1		0.23%
	- 2 children	5		1.13%
	- 1 child	7		1.58%
Total		13	13	2.94%
GRAND TOTAL			442	100%

Table 6. Marital Status and No. of Children Borne by YCLs

From amongst 442 respondents, 265 respondents are single, thus constituting a majority whereas 164 respondents are married.

From amongst the 164 married respondents –

- 59 respondents have one child
- 55 have two and more children
- 43 have no children and
- 7 have more than three children.

On the other hand, the number of deserted/divorced respondents is very low with only 2.4% of the respondents (13) belonging to the aforementioned category. From amongst these respondents –

- 7 have one child
- 5 have 2 children and
- 1 has no child.

Marital status has a crucial role to play in the roles and responsibilities that the youth care leavers may have to fulfil and how they sustain themselves. During the pandemic, with the lack of access to basic resources and socio-economic issues, the youth care leavers may face multiple challenges especially if they have no financial support and are the sole earner.

Employment Status of Youth Care Leavers before Lockdown

Sr. No	Employment Status	Total
1	Student	61
2	Part time job and part time education	30
3	Full time employment	142
4	Self employed	50
5	Unemployed	159
GRAND TOTAL		442

Table 7. Employment status of YCLs

From amongst a total of 442 respondents, majority of the respondents, that is 159 were unemployed whereas the other majority, 142 were employed full time. The number of self-employed individuals on the other hand was 50.

The number of students amongst YCLs was also high with 61 respondents pursuing education full time and only 30 pursuing education on a part time basis along with a job.

With majority of the candidates being unemployed before the pandemic, questions regarding financial support and other forms of assistance provided by the government as per the act come forth. Further, with impact of the lockdown on access to education and employment status, there is a possibility of a decline in the number of respondents being able to access education, be employed and sustain their businesses.

This also brings to light the need for not only financial support from the government but also access to skill based and vocational training programmes and guaranteed 1% reservation in employment in accordance with the GR issued by the Government of Maharashtra on 2nd April, 2018.

Gender Wise Breakdown of Employment Status of Youth Care Leavers before the Lockdown

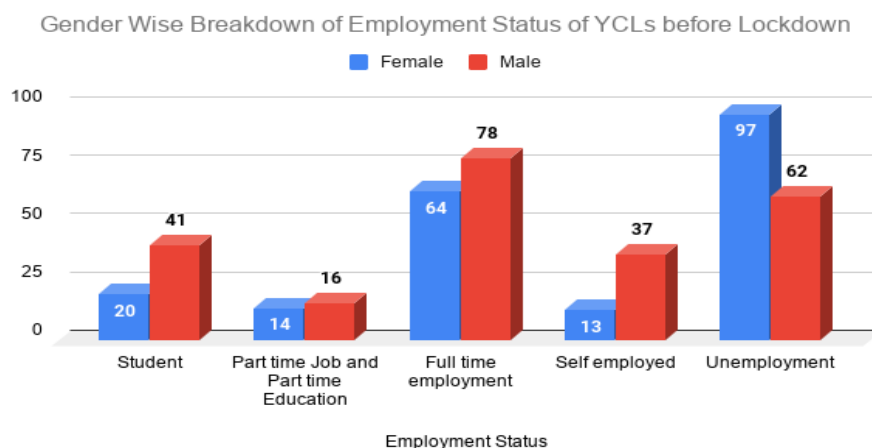


Figure 6. Gender wise breakdown of employment status of the YCLs before lockdown

From amongst 442 respondents, in all of the categories, the males were doing comparatively better in comparison to women in terms of their employment status before the lockdown.

The number of females is highest in the unemployed category constituting 90 females whereas the males have the highest number in terms of full time employment. The number of males pursuing education full time and the number of males who are self-employed is also higher than that of females.

It is only in terms of part time job and part time education that the male to female ratio was almost equal.

This gender wise breakdown of employment status raises questions about the sustenance of household in the wake of a pandemic which has not only led to lose of jobs but also a decline in recruitment. All of these factors have a crucial role to play in understanding how the youth care leavers sustained themselves before the lockdown and currently are, during the lockdown.

Legal Documents Possessed by Youth Care Leavers

One of the major challenges faced by children and youth in institutions is the lack of documents that serve as a proof of identity. Not only do a large number of youth enter institutions with none or not more than one legal document as a proof but also that a significant percentage of them go on to leave institutions without any legal proof.

Child care institutions have a crucial role to play in helping children and youth avail these documents but often fall behind in doing the same. This can be understood through the table below:

Sr. No	Legal Documents	Yes	Percentile	No	Percentile	Total	Total Percentile
1	Aadhar Card	411	92.99%	31	7.01%	442	100%

2	Pan Card	352	79.64%	90	20.36%	442	100%
3	Voter ID	207	46.83%	235	53.17%	442	100%
4	Driving License	68	15.38%	374	84.62%	442	100%
5	Ration Card	146	33.03%	296	66.97%	442	100%
6	Passport	55	12.44%	387	87.56%	442	100%

Table 8. Legal documents amongst YCLs.

From amongst all the legal documents, majority of the respondents have an Aadhar card and Pan card. However, half of the respondents do not have a voter ID and ration card which is an issue of concern. These documents are essential not only as citizens to exercise one's right to vote and prove identity but also that to receive ration from the public distribution system (PDS) and to avail any scheme, citizens are required to present their ration card as proof.

The lack of a ration card serves as a major hurdle, particularly during the lockdown where acquiring ration through the PDS or the requirement of a ration as a proof to avail any other benefit would serve as a hindrance and further aggravate the socio economic condition of the youth.

It is therefore crucial for the government to create mechanisms and provide support to the youth care leavers to avail documents during their stay or immediately after leaving the institution.

Youth Care Leavers with a Bank Accounts

Sr. No	Bank Account	Number	Percentile
1	Yes	395	89.37%
2	No	47	10.63%
GRAND TOTAL		442	100.00%

Table 9. No. of YCLs with a bank account

Bank accounts have a crucial role to play in order to avail government schemes and while majority of the respondents had one, in case of 10.63% of the participants who do not have a bank account, there is a need to look into the factors that have curtailed them from making an account and provide assistance with regards to the same and provide cash transfer to offer respite during the lockdown.

With the availability of a bank account, the government can provide financial assistance on an immediate basis at present to help improve the situation of the youth care leavers.

Youth Care Leavers with a Health Insurance

Sr. No	Health Insurance	Number	Percentile
1	Yes	52	11.76%
2	No	390	88.24%
GRAND TOTAL		442	100.00%

Table 10. No. of YCLs with a health insurance

As per the aforementioned table, 88.24% that is 390 participants do not have a health insurance while only 50 respondents have a health insurance.

This is particularly concerning during the COVID-19 pandemic with access to health care being financially straining. With the pandemic and lockdown affecting the physical and mental health of individuals, a health insurance is of immense significance at this point in time, particularly for youth care leavers who find themselves lacking social support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the aforementioned issues and challenges that have come forth, the following recommendations need to be looked into in order to ensure smooth transition of youth care leavers into the society and their holistic development.

YCLs do not have a strong social support system to rely on and therefore need direction and support from the state in order to avail access to basic necessities such as shelter, healthcare, financial security etc.

There is a need for attention towards the challenges faced by YCLs during the pandemic and urgent intervention to deal with the same in accordance with these recommendations.

Housing

Lack of housing is a primary issue of concern for youth care leavers. With no social support to rely on, the YCLs are left to fend for themselves. Further, the situation is dire for the YCLs in the wake of the pandemic due to lack of housing on rent or the rent being beyond the financial capacity of the YCLs.

The government should provide support in terms of shelter for YCL, especially in the wake of the pandemic so as to ensure that they can smoothly transition into the society.

Healthcare

Health Insurance: Over the course of the years, the central government has launched various health insurance schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Bima Suraksha Yojana and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana for the marginalised.

Similarly, at the state level. Maharashtra's **Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Scheme** has provided access to subsidised health care to the marginalised population. It is in this context that we suggest the amendment of the Mahatma Phule Jan Arogya Scheme to include YCL and ensure their access to the same.

Further, the **Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana** is applicable for destitute individuals aged below 65 years of age, orphaned children, persons with disabilities and those suffering from TB, cancer, AIDS and other such critical illnesses. It is crucial to ensure that before leaving the institutions, YCLs who are orphans and persons with disabilities are made aware of and are included as beneficiaries to the scheme.

Mental Health and Psycho Social Support: Youth in institutions are mentally vulnerable when brought into the institution, during their stay and post leaving due to the lack of support system. It is therefore crucial to focus on their mental health during their stay and more so upon their exit from the institution.

Mental health of YCLs is an issue of concern and requires more attention during the pandemic as they do not have support mechanisms.

Free counselling services must be provided to the YCL. Peer to peer support groups should be established through the institutions amongst the youth leaving institutions to ensure that they remain in contact and can support each other. There is a need to orient the youth before leaving institutions regarding helpline numbers to avail counselling and other services provided by professionals for free.

Education

Many YCL had saved money from their first job in order to pay for their higher education but are now forced to use these savings to meet basic needs since they did not receive any support from the government for accessing basic supplies such as rations and groceries for free or at a subsidised rate during the lockdown due to the pandemic which has led to an exhaustion of their savings.

1. There is a need for designing a scheme to ensure that YCL are provided financial support of scholarship till the completion of their education. This would not only ensure higher rates of education amongst YCL but also ensure that the youth are not forced to take up employment at an earlier age due to lack of financial support to avail education.
2. As the youth continue to leave institutions during the pandemic, the government must provide the youth with electronic devices such as a cell phone or cash transfer to purchase the same and be able to pay for the recharge in order to ensure that they are able to attend classes from home through these devices.
3. It is also important for the government of Maharashtra to ensure that the 1% reservation allotted for YCL in higher education ensures the inclusion of these youth in the same in order for them to be able to access education during the pandemic with no financial burden.

Employment and Financial Security

Majority of YCL do not have support to guide them through the initial years of their career post leaving the institution. This problem has been further aggravated in the wake of the pandemic and lockdown in the state of Maharashtra which has reduced the mobility of youth within their own cities and also put a halt on their migration to different parts of the state for employment.

This calls for a need for change in the long term aspects and looking into short term aspects to provide immediate relief.

Short term: The government must provide a six month relief pension to the youth care leavers in order to reduce their financial burden with regards to rent and to help them avail other basic necessities.

Long term:

1. There is a need for career counselling to guide the youth through their career options, available opportunities post leaving and train them in the same. This professional shall remain in touch with youth post their leave from the institution to map their career for a span of a few months to a year to ensure that the youth have smoothly transitioned into the society and are now independent.

2. In the wake of the pandemic, it is important that the state comes forth and provides support to these youth in getting jobs to ensure that they are not left in a vulnerable state with no access to basic necessities and ensure that they are able to fend for themselves.

3. Those youth willing to engage in business or showing potential for the same must be trained by the Higher Education department and the Ministry of Entrepreneurship in skill development for enhancing their skills and provided financial support and professional guidance as they start their business.

Now more than ever, it is important that the government of Maharashtra ensures the speedy implementation of the 1% reservation policy that it has instituted for the orphans in higher education and employment to provide respite to the youth in the wake of the pandemic. In order to ensure the same, there is a need to work on reducing the gaps and challenges in availing the Anath certificate in order to ensure that majority of the youth care leavers are able to avail the benefits of reservation and secure themselves professionally.

Participation, Inclusion and Social Protection

1. As the YCL transition into society, they have the potential to contribute effectively to the larger system and can be resourceful if their potential is recognised and put to use effectively.

This calls for increased interaction between the YCL and the bureaucracy at the local, regional and national level for creating peer groups amongst YCL in order to work together to improve their lives socially and professionally, to work on advocacy on the issues of YCL and engage in public campaigns.

2. Further, amongst the YCL, girls and women are vulnerable group susceptible to discrimination and exclusion and are vulnerable. They need guidance and support as they transition into the society in multiple aspects such as health, education, housing etc. It is therefore necessary to develop mechanisms where issues of gender discrimination and other challengers pertinent to women are discussed amongst both men and women YCL to ensure sensitivity and more support to one another as they transition into the society.

The aforementioned are particularly important in the wake of the pandemic whereby social distancing can lead to isolation, loneliness and other such feelings and therefore a strong network and connection amongst youth through electronic media would help them stay in contact with one another, provide support and encourage solidarity.

Legislative Policy, Reforms and Documentation

There is no clear guidance/advisories during covid-19 and beyond which are specific to the YCL. Care authorities are accessible only remotely which does not provide the required support. This is further aggravated by the fact that majority of the YCL have not been able to access social protection schemes and avail other benefits due to the lack of legal documents that serve as identity proof.

Legal documents serving as proof of identity and bank accounts are crucial for the youth care leavers to access essential services and schemes provided by the government. It is therefore vital for a mechanism to be put into place to ensure that the process of availing these documents initiated immediately after their arrival in the CCIs or before their leave.

In the wake of the pandemic, these documents have a vital role to play to access essential services and the lack thereof shall affect the youth care leavers manifold and it therefore pivotal

for the government to take into consideration the aforementioned and work speedily at the moment to provide documents to the YCLs.

Mapping and Database of YCLs

There is a need to maintain a comprehensive database from the period of their institutionalisation in order to map their transition and provide support. This institutionalisation of a system would help in developing a care plan and ensure smooth transition into the society with regular follow ups and tracking by social workers, probation officers or other officials as prescribed.

Such a comprehensive database from the time of institutionalisation would ensure that when leaving, the youth are equipped with and are provided necessary documents, adequate skills and financial support to transition into the society.