The Evolution of the Social Security Pension Scheme Models in Haryana

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of a government to citizen service delivery model in Sonipat district, Haryana. In this study, I analyse the effectiveness of the multiple modifications in the citizen service delivery model of the social security pension schemes introduced by the Government of Haryana over a period of 11 months, between July 2017 and May 2018. The modifications in the policy design have been introduced by the government to strengthen the implementation of the standard operating procedures (SOP) of the schemes and to optimise the citizen experience while availing benefits of this schemes. The study aims to capture the implementation status of the schemes by using the experiences of 359 citizens – currently availing one of the four social security pension schemes: Old Age Pension, Widow Pension, Handicap Pension, and Financial Assistance to Destitute Children, spread over 336 villages and 4 municipal zones of the district. Also, all the beneficiaries interviewed were enrolled under their respective pension schemes during the time period of the study, i.e. July 2017 to May 2018. The experiences of the citizens were adjudged based on an extensive questionnaire designed to capture the steps followed by them during the application and disbursal phase of the social security pension schemes, the compliance with the established SOP at the government to citizen touch-points, and the level of awareness among the citizen about the SOP. The study analyses this separately for rural and urban areas of Sonipat and undertakes a comparative analysis of both. Lastly, the study identifies the weak spots in the revised model and suggests structural changes in it. It was found that a wide degree of diversion exists in the implementation of the citizen service delivery model from the SOP. Multiple factors contribute to poor policy performance, such as a lack of coordination among stakeholders, political pressure, lack of coordinated planning, absence of standardisation of procedures based on multiple possibilities, intra-agency antipathies, complexity of joint actions, multiplicity of decisions, to name a few. For the purpose of this paper, these factors have been categorised under five broad categories: Irrational design of policy, poor management of the policy, lack of organisation process framework within the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, challenges faced by the front line bureaucratic machinery, and the impact of political factors in the overall model.

I   INTRODUCTION

As the Chief Minister's Good Governance Associate (CMGGA) in Sonipat district, Haryana, I had the opportunity to understand the challenges involved in public policy implementation by working closely with the district administration. By June 2017, I was given a problem statement to re-engineer the application and disbursal process of the social security pension schemes in the state of Haryana. Social security pension schemes target the most vulnerable sections of the society such as low-income senior citizens, widows, destitute children, physically handicapped, etc. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the processes to avail the services are citizen friendly. As part of the project, I held multiple discussions with over 25 stakeholders, ranging from administrative secretaries to ground-level staff of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DSJE), which is the nodal department responsible for the implementation of the social security pension scheme in Haryana. I also interviewed over 300 pension scheme beneficiaries and applicants during the course of the project.

The application process for social security pension schemes has a few unique features. Take for example the multiple government touch-points a citizen has to encounter during the course of pension application and disbursal process. Each of these touch-points maybe at a different government department and hence they need not be in the same location. The DSJE has clearly articulated standard operating procedures (SOP) to be followed by the government officers at each of these touch-points. The other unique feature is the requirement of physical verification which means that an applicant has to be present before the staff of the department with the required original documents for the purpose of document verification. This is a mandatory condition in three out of the four pension schemes, namely old age, handicapped, and destitute pension, included in the scope of this study.

Ensuring hassle-free government to citizen services is one of the key objectives of the Right to Services legislation enacted by the Government of Haryana. Many states in the country have prioritised simplifying institutional delivery mechanism(s) to citizen through optimal and innovative ways. Recently the central government also introduced the digital locker feature using which a citizen can store all his official documents online by seeding them with *Aadhar* (*Aadhaar* is a 12-digit unique identity number that can be obtained by residents of India, based on their biometric and demographic data). The data is collected by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a statutory authority established in January 2009 by the Government of India, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, following the provisions of the *Aadhar* (Targeted delivery of financial and other subsidies, benefits and services) Act, 2016. Many government departments also use digital signature

features to eliminate the need of signing paper documents and to simplify the process of file movement in government departments.

Recently, the Haryana government has come up with an ambitious project known as SARAL which is in alignment with Digital India's vision of faceless, paperless and cashless service delivery model. The aim of the project is to make a unified platform to deliver and track over 380 citizen services across the state. Aligning with the vision of Digital India program of establishing a faceless, paperless, and cashless service delivery model, Antyodaya-SARAL project aims to transform citizen service delivery in Haryana through complete digitisation of over 350 services. The project envisions a unified platform to deliver and track government-to-citizen (G2C) services/schemes across the state. For example, the scheme has radically transformed the process of obtaining driving license for commercial and non-commercial vehicles from the manual process to a one touch, technology enabled, seamless process that requires the citizen to visit the citizen service centre only once. Social security pension schemes, which are the concern of this study, are also part of this project. Therefore, the DSJE is currently exploring ways to make the pension application and disbursement process faceless in the state.

The findings from this study will provide a baseline data of the compliance status at different touch points and help in strengthening the implementation of the SARAL project. It will also help gauge the awareness levels of the general public regarding the provisions and safeguards granted to them under the Right to Services Act.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire attempts to capture aspects ranging from socio-economic condition of the citizen to the scheme of events undergone by them during the application phase to avail social security pension scheme. The questionnaire also attempts to capture some qualitative aspects such as behavior of staff at DSJE and banks. The questionnaire went through three levels of iterations, each followed by an extensive field survey conducted by me in collaboration with a team of twenty youngsters enrolled under the *Saksham Yuva* employment scheme of the Haryana government. I gathered learnings from every field visit and utilised my learnings to make the questionnaire more focused and concise. In addition to the purpose served by the questionnaire, there are two more broad concerns of the study:

a. **Calculating the number of beneficiaries from each village of the district**: The number of applicants to be interviewed from every village, block, or sub-division was mathematically calculated using the method of random sampling.

First a database of the pension beneficiaries enrolled with different pension schemes across the district was collected from the DSJE. A sample size of 400 was fixed for the survey and out of this a total of 359 responses were recorded. Based on the sample size, villages and blocks were assigned a mathematical weight depending on the number of pension beneficiaries in that village/block. The mathematical weight was the ratio of

the number of pension beneficiaries in that village to the total number of pension beneficiaries in the district. Based on this weight, the selection of the total number of pension beneficiaries from a village who would be interviewed was made. This was calculated by multiplying the weight with the total number of beneficiaries in the village. An illustration of this has been tabulated below:

Village/MC	Beneficiary	Villages	Weight	Sample Size
Rai	16717	56	0.112538	45.01531522
Sonipat	23844	75	0.160517	64.20680602
Ganaur	20272	71	0.13647	54.58817193
Mundalana	15695	32	0.105658	42.26328722
Kharkhoda	16075	46	0.108216	43.28654616
Kathura	9819	20	0.066101	26.44047258
Gohana	15066	36	0.101424	40.56952439
MC Sonipat	19838		0.133549	53.41950251
MC Ganaur	3660		0.024639	9.855599313
MC Gohana	5472		0.036837	14.73492881
MC Kharkhoda	2087		0.01405	5.619845838
TOTAL	**148545**			**400**
SAMPLE SIZE				**400**

Against the sample size of 400 which was set mathematically, a total of 359 responses were recorded. The details are summarised below:

| Block/MC	Sample Size	Total Recorded	OAA	WP	HP	FADC
MC Sonipat	53.41950251	51	39	9	0	3
MC Ganaur	9.855599313	10	4	4	0	2
MC Gohana	14.73492881	10	7	2	0	1
MC Kharkhoda	5.619845838	6	1	4	1	0
Murthal	*	31	8	14	4	5
Sonipat	*64.2068060183783	35	24	7	3	1
Kathura	26.44047258	31	2	16	8	5
Mundalana	42.26328722	37	16	12	4	5
Gohana	40.56952439	36	30	2	2	2
Kharkhoda	43.28654616	40	12	16	7	5
Ganaur	54.58817193	43	12	18	6	7
Rai	*45.0153152243428	29	19	9	1	0
		359	**174**	**113**	**36**	**33**

b.   **Preparing the interview plan and its execution:** After finalising the questionnaire, I prepared a three month roster plan to conduct the interviews from March to May 2018. I started the interviews from the rural part of the district and moved block-wise. With the help from the local engineering department, I designed an optimal travel plan in each block of the district and conducted the interviews. Most of the villages carried a sample size of one to two beneficiaries. I used to send messages to the village *sarpanch* about my arrival at least five days in advance. In addition to that, I used to send each *sarpanch* a list of beneficiaries that was three times the sample size of his/her village. This was done to ensure that the number of pension beneficiaries that turn up for the interview were at least equal to the stipulated sample size. However, who gets called for the interview by the *sarpanch* was left to his discretion.

In urban areas, the exercise was simpler. I booked two days per municipal zone and visited the entire district. Since I had the exact address and mobile numbers of the beneficiaries it was comparatively easier to locate them. However, in order to stick to the stipulated time and date, I always made sure that I have a conversation with the beneficiaries prior to the interview.

The baseline survey outlines the touch-points where there has been greater degree of non-compliance from the set procedures. It also highlights the various challenges involved in ensuring compliance to the SOP. The survey helped to gauge the level of awareness among the citizens regarding the provisions of the Right to Services (RTS) rules. It also shows the extent to which citizen have sought institutional redressal in the past against any form of non-compliance with the procedures laid down by the department regarding pension schemes application. With a focus on quantitative data, the baseline study provided the requisite information to devise better strategies to promote awareness among citizens. It will also helped to improvise the existing process flow designed for the pension scheme application and disbursement. But more crucially the findings helped to customise the SARAL project in order to make it more relevant for the common citizens living in rural areas. Lastly, the exercise of social audit was also help generate awareness about the rights and safeguards available for the citizens under the RTS.

II   THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION SCHEME MODELS

I had begun to analyse the evolution of the citizen service delivery model in the social security pension schemes in the year 2015. This study has greatly benefited from the multiple discussions with the stakeholders held over the years and analysis of specific exchange of communication received by the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO) from the DSJE in the form of guidelines and letters. Within the department, the Dispatch Register has served as the most critical piece of literature that has helped me understand the reasoning behind every change introduced in the social security pension scheme model. In addition to this, the inputs received from citizens, Common Services Centre (CSC) owners, and other ground staff, during my public dealing hours as CMGGA greatly helped me discern the intricacies of the model. I discerned that the social security pension scheme model has evolved quite rigorously over past three to four years. I have depicted the evolution in the form of block diagrams given below:
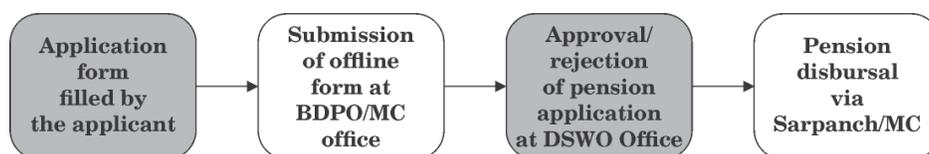
Model 1: *This model was prevalent in Haryana till December 2015 as per the directives issued by the DSJE.*

Step 1: The applicant collects the offline form from the elected village head also known as the *sarpanch* or a nearby book depot and fills it. He/she attaches all the relevant documents (Ration card, voter ID card, domicile certificate, etc). He/she gets the application form attested by the concerned *sarpanch* in rural areas or by the concerned officer at the Municipal office (MC).

Step 2: The applicant either submits the form at the local block or municipal office as is applicable. The official staff member (s) from DSJE comes to collect the application forms from the concerned block or MC office on a fixed date. The Block/MC office staff prepares a list of all the applications received and hands it over to the DSJE.

Step 3: The applications are analysed at the DSJE office. The complete and satisfactory applications are approved. A list of eligible pension beneficiaries is prepared and sent to the head office of the DSJE in Chandigarh.

Step 4: The money corresponding to the pension beneficiaries would be credited to the account of the disbursement agency via the head office. A list of all eligible beneficiaries would also be provided by the DSJE to the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO).

Based on this list, the disbursal agency would distribute pension to the existing beneficiaries in cash. In rural areas, the disbursal agency was the village *sarpanch* and in urban areas it was the concerned MC Office depending on which part of the city the beneficiary was located in.

Demerits of this model:

a.   There was no official mechanism in place to educate the applicant about the documents required, the procedure to be followed to avail social security pension, and the provisions of the Right to Service Act.

b.   There was no way for an applicant to check the status of the application after applying at step 1. He/she would have to wait till Step 5 to know whether the application is approved or not.

c.   The offline mode increased the chances of malfeasance and corruption. The *sarpanch* of the village could easily resort to favouritism in pension disbursal.

d.   Often people who are ineligible could easily get their pension application approved through unfair means and fake documents. There was no way to physically verify whether the applicant was genuinely needy.

e.   There was no official mode of communication between the citizen and the department head office. Citizens would have to depend on the department staff to get any information regarding their application.

f.   Often people with good relations with the DSJE staff could easily bypass all the steps in the process and get the pension approved directly through the department as there was no mechanism in place to record the applications received.

Filling application form by applicant at C.S.C. or offline	→	Application submission at BDPO or MC office	→	Approval of pension application at DSJE	→	Collection of pension ID from DSJE by applicant	→	Pension disbursal by bank/ post office

Model 2: *This model was an evolved version of the previous model. It was in practice till May 2016 as per the directives issued by the DSJE.*

Step 1: The applicant collects the offline form from the *sarpanch* or some nearby book depot and fills it. He/she attaches all the relevant documents (ration card, voter ID card, domicile certificate, others). He/she gets the application form attested by the concerned *sarpanch* in rural areas or by the concerned officer at the MC in urban areas. The applicant can also apply directly online at the nearest common service centre. After submission of the application, the applicant is also provided an acknowledgement receipt. In the online application, the applicant could provide details of his bank account and *Aadhar* for pension accrual. Also, he/she could provide his mobile number for the purpose of communication with the department. However, none of these details were mandatory.

Step 2: The applicant submits the form at the local block or municipal office, as applicable. The applicant had to carry a printout of the application form in case of an online application as well. The staff member(s) from DSJE come to collect the application forms from the concerned block or MC office on a fixed date. The block/MC office staff prepares a list of all the applications received and hands it over to the DSJE staff. Prior to the collection of the application forms, the department staff would physically verify each original document and the applicant. In case of any discrepancy, the applicant would be asked to furnish additional proof otherwise his/her application would be rejected.

Step 3: The applications received are analysed at the DSJE office. The applications adjudged as satisfactory by the department are approved. A list of all the approved pension beneficiaries is then generated and uploaded on a portal of the DSJE. From this portal, the pension ID is generated. However, the portal has no linkage with the portal where the applicant had submitted his/her application at the CSC. So, the details provided by the applicant were not used in the pension approval process.
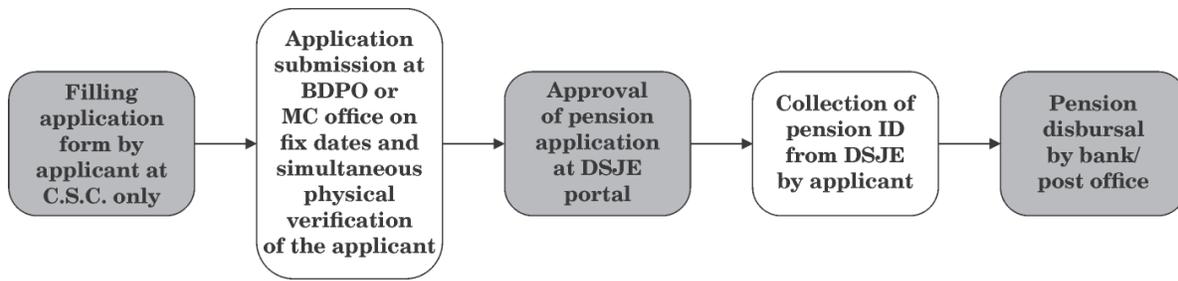
Step 4: The concerned pension applicant would come to the DSJE office to check the status of his application. The successful applicant would be provided a pension ID.

Step 5: The applicant had to give his pension ID at the concerned bank or post office. The bank would integrate the pension ID with the bank account and initiate the accrual of the pension amount. In case the applicant had provided bank details earlier and the DSJE staff had fed the bank details on the portal, the pension ID would reflect the same. In such cases, the integration of bank account and pension ID would be faster. However, in practice, it was almost never the case that the details mentioned in the pension application form were copied in the ID.

Demerits of the model:

a.   Since online application wasn't made mandatory, the process was suboptimal. During the pension ID generation, all details of the applicant had to be fed in a separate portal manually by the DSJE staff. This information could be easily fetched from the CSC portal if the two portals were linked and the online application mode was made mandatory.

b.   Often people who are ineligible could easily get their pension application approved through unfair means and fake documents. There was no way to physically verify whether the applicant was genuinely needy.

c.   Any person with a known contact in the DSJE staff could easily bypass all the steps required to avail pension and get the pension approved directly through the DSJE portal. The final and most crucial step in the entire process was step 5. A person could easily bribe the DSJE staff and ask them to directly generate the pension ID.

d.   After the generation of the pension ID, there was no way to ensure direct benefit transfer. Applicants had to rely on the co-operation of the bank or post office staff

to get the pension amount. Once the pension ID was generated, the DSJE played no role in the process. The beneficiary would have to go to the bank/post office (PO) to get his ID linked with the bank/PO account. In many cases, the banks/PO were found to be highly uncooperative. In many cases it was found that an applicant had to open a new account to get the pension as the old account was found to be inactive. The banks/PO often followed complicated procedures to open a new account.

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┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│   Filling    │   │ Application  │   │  Approval    │   │Collection of │   │   Pension    │
│ application  │   │ submission at│   │ of pension   │   │  pension ID  │   │  disbursal   │
│  form by     │─▶ │   BDPO or    │─▶ │ application  │─▶ │  from DSJE   │─▶ │  by bank/    │
│ applicant at │   │ MC office on │   │  at DSJE     │   │ by applicant │   │ post office  │
│  C.S.C. only │   │ fix dates and│   │   portal     │   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
└──────────────┘   │ simultaneous │   └──────────────┘
                   │   physical   │
                   │ verification │
                   │of the applicant│
                   └──────────────┘
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Model 3: *This model came into the picture since May 2016 as per the guidelines of the DSJE.*

Step 1: The applicant applies for social security pension scheme online at the CSC. After submission of the application, the applicant is also provided an acknowledgement receipt. In the application online, the applicant could provide details of his bank account and *Aadhar* for pension accrual. The applicant can provide his/her mobile number for the purpose of communication with the department. Although the applicant need not necessarily provide these details in order to successfully submit his/her application.

Step 2: The applicant submits the form at the local block or MC, as applicable. The staff from DSJE comes to collect the application forms from the concerned block or MC office on a fixed date. The block/MC office staff prepares a list of all the applications received and hands it over to the department staff.

Step 3: The applications are analysed at the DSJE office. The applications adjudged as satisfactory by the department are approved. The list of the approved applicants is generated and uploaded in a portal of the DSJE. From this portal, the pension ID is generated. However, this portal has no linkage with the portal where the applicant had submitted his/her application at the CSC. So, the details provided by the applicant were not used in the pension approval process.

Step 4: The concerned pension applicant would come to the DSJE office to check the status of his application. The successful applicant would be given a pension ID.

Step 5: The applicant had to give his pension ID at the concerned bank or post office. The bank would integrate the pension ID with the bank account and initiate the accrual of pension amount. In case the applicant had provided bank details earlier at the stage of online application (mentioned in step 1) and the DSJE staff had fed it on the online portal of DSJE made for this purpose, the pension ID would reflect it. In such cases the integration of bank account and pension ID would be faster. However, in practice, it

was almost never found to be the case that the details mentioned in the pension application form were copied in the ID.

Certain demerits of this model:

a. Even though the online application was made mandatory, the process was still suboptimal. During the pension ID generation, all details of the applicant had to be fed in a separate portal manually by the DSJE staff making the process both cumbersome and time consuming. This information could be obtained from the CSC portal if the two portals were linked and the online application mode was made mandatory.

b. The communication regarding date and time of physical verification at block or MC level was not communicated properly to the applicants. Often the applicants had to make multiple visits to the office to complete the verification process. With physical verification being made mandatory for all, people who were handicapped had an added disadvantage.

c. Any person having good relations with the DSJE staff could easily bypass all the steps in the process and get the pension approved directly through the DSJE portal. Despite all the preceding steps, the final and most crucial step was step 5. This can be clearly seen from several cases of pension beneficiaries observed during the course of this study and also from the several instances quoted by the CSC owners, the DSJE staff, and the DSWO as well. Take for example the case of a person desirous of availing old age pension. Consider that the person does not have any valid document (s) to prove that he is above 60 years of age. Nevertheless, the person somehow manages to convince the DSJE staffs at the district headquarter to approve and sanction his pension by offering a bribe or some other favour. There was practically nothing to stop this from happening in this model and all the preceding models. In fact, the person could simply get his pension sanctioned without having applied through any of the formal channels mentioned in step 1, 2, 3, 4 of the model.

d. After the pension ID generation, there was no way to ensure direct benefit transfer. Applicants had to rely on the co-operation of the bank or post office staff to receive their pension amount. Once the pension ID was generated, the department played no role in the process of transfer of pension amount in the beneficiary's bank account. The beneficiary had to go to the bank/PO to get his ID linked with the account. In many cases, the banks/PO are found to be highly uncooperative. Often the applicant had to open a new account to get his/her pension as the old account was found to be inactive. Sometimes the banks/PO followed complicated procedures to open a new account.
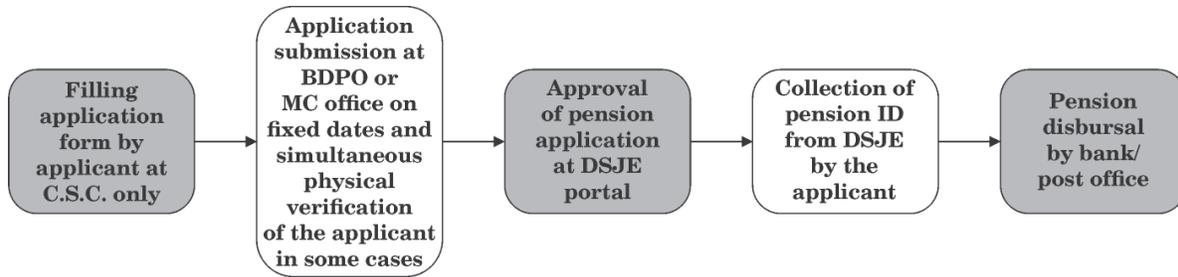
Model 4: *This model was initiated around June 2017 as per the department guidelines.*

Step 1: The applicant applies online at the CSC. After submission of the application, the applicant is provided an acknowledgement receipt. In the online application system, the applicant could provide bank account and *Aadhar* details for pension accrual. The applicant has to provide a mobile number for the purpose of communication with the department. Bank account number and mobile number were made mandatory in this model.

Step 2: The applicant submits the form at the local block or Municipal office as applicable. The DSJE Staff comes to collect the application forms from the concerned block or MC office on a fixed date. The Block/MC office staffs prepare a list of all the applications received and hands it over to the DSJE staff. Physical verification was made mandatory only for selected cases related to old age, handicap, and destitute children pension. For other categories such as widow pension, the pension applicant could come on any date to the block/MC office and submit the printout of the form.

Step 3: The applications are analysed at the DSJE office. The complete and satisfactory applications are approved by the DSWO. At this stage, the two portals of DSJE and CSC were linked. So, in order to generate the pension ID, the DSJE staff could now easily get all the details of the applicant from the CSC portal that he/she had provided during the application submission process. However, the DSJE staff could still ignore all the previous application details and manually fill the details in the DSJE portal to generate a new pension ID.

Step 4: The concerned pension applicant would come to the DSJE office to check the status of the application. The successful applicant would be provided a pension ID.

Step 5: The applicant had to give his pension ID at the concerned bank or post office. The bank would integrate the pension ID with the bank account and initiate the accrual of the pension amount. In case the applicant had provided bank details earlier and the DSJE staff had fed the details on the portal, the pension ID would reflect it. In such cases, the integration of bank account and pension ID would be faster. However, in practice, it was almost never the case that the details mentioned in the pension application form were copied in the ID.

Demerits of the model:

a.   The communication regarding date and time of physical verification at block or MC level wasn't done properly. Often people had to make multiple visits to the offices to complete the verification process.

b.   Any person, having personal ties with the DSJE staff, could easily bypass all the steps in the process and get his pension approved directly through the DSJE portal. Notwithstanding the importance of the preceding steps, the final and most crucial step was step 5. A person could easily bribe the DSJE staff member and ask him/her to directly generate the pension ID. This is possible because there was no feature in the portal to stop those working in the DSJE from creating a new pension ID despite there being no application history in the CSC portal.

c.   After the pension ID generation, there was no way to ensure direct benefit transfer. Applicants had to rely on the co-operation of the bank or post office staff to get the pension amount. Once the pension ID was generated, the department played no role in the process of pension amount credited. The beneficiary had to go to the bank/PO to get the ID linked with the bank/PO account. In many cases, the banks/PO are found to be highly uncooperative. Often the applicant had to open a new account to get his/her pension as the old account was found to be inactive. The banks/PO often followed a complicated procedure to open a new account.

Since at the time of pension ID generation manual entry was possible, an applicant could give random bank account details during the application submission stage at the CSC and change the bank account details at the time of pension application stage.
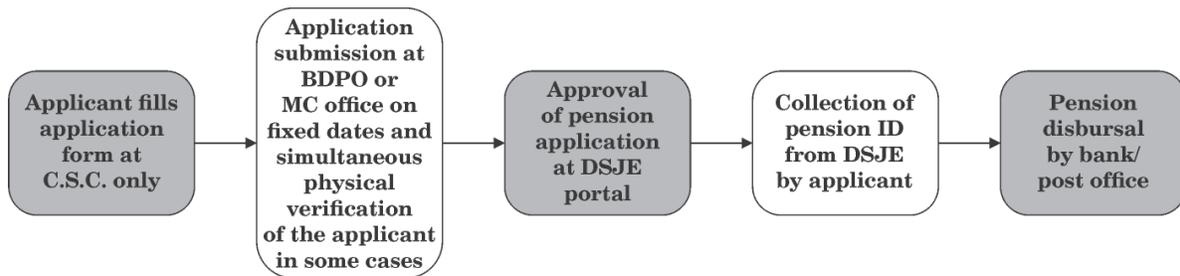
Model 5: *This model was initiated since January 2018 as per the department guidelines.*

In this model, the demerits of the previous models were addressed. Improvements were made in terms of:

a.   Elimination of the possibility of a person getting his pension ID generated directly from the DSJE portal. He/she could no longer bypass the CSC application process.

b.   Making it impossible for a person to change his/her bank account details after submitting it at the CSC.

The government has always prioritised simplifying the process of citizen service delivery. With the advent of technology based interventions, such as digital signatures, digital-locker, biometric database, the scope of optimising the process flow for citizen services delivery has expanded. The government launched the Digital India programme with the intention to create a paperless, faceless, and cashless model for all types of services rendered by government to citizen. Apart from introducing technology features during the citizen service delivery processes, the government has also strengthened institutional safeguards available for citizens under the Right to Services Act. The act clearly outlines

several punitive provisions for any government official found violating the right to service of a citizen.

Awareness generation regarding the schemes and services related to social justice and empowerment among the masses has also been a high priority area for the government. The advent of technology has enabled innovative methods to improve citizen service delivery. Features such as SMS based application tracking, IVRS based feedback collection, and internet connectivity have all created a revolution in the field of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC). Most departments have interactive IEC features such as flexes, banners, videos, etc.

In this study, I present a baseline study of the effectiveness of the several measures adopted by the Government of Haryana in recent past (2-3 years). I will critically analyse the steps taken by DSJE to optimise the service application and delivery model and to promote awareness among the citizens about their rights and safeguards using innovative IEC techniques. The effectiveness of the steps taken by the department would be gauged using a structured questionnaire designed to capture the citizen experience at the department, citizen awareness of the provisions of the Right to Services Act, and the degree of non-compliance by the government departments from the laid-out standard operating procedures by the DSJE.

To begin with, the study will capture the degree of compliance with the standard operating procedure (SOP). The model of pension service delivery is characterised by multiple government to citizen touch-points, which are geographically apart. This study will investigate the degree of compliance with the SOP at each touch point and also identify the touch points/ steps in the pension application process where there are aberrations. Having identified this, the study will attempt to understand the reasons for the non-compliance by correlating the responses recorded from citizens through the questionnaire. In addition to that, the study also analyses the differences seen in urban and rural areas with regard to the degree of compliance with the SOP of the scheme. The study focuses on four broad types of social security pension schemes:

a. Old Age Pension

b. Widow Pension

c. Financial Assistance to Destitute Children

d. Handicapped Pension

Within this focus area, the study also attempts to assess the impact of innovative information, education, and communication initiatives taken by the state government by analysing the level of awareness among the citizen about the different means, such as SMS, internet, mobile application, available to seek information regarding the pension application and their awareness about their rights as per the Right to Services Act. The findings of the study involving over 359 citizens in Sonipat district will provide a blueprint of the effectiveness of the model in the state of Haryana.

III RESULTS OF THE BASELINE ASSESSMENT

The results section has been divided into three sub-sections: Rural Sonipat, urban Sonipat, and comparative analysis of the results obtained in the urban and rural Sonipat. The first two sections have been further sub divided in two parts. The first part provides a brief account of the socio-economic and demographic details of the beneficiaries interviewed and the second part sheds light on the areas where the compliance level with the SOP was found to be low.
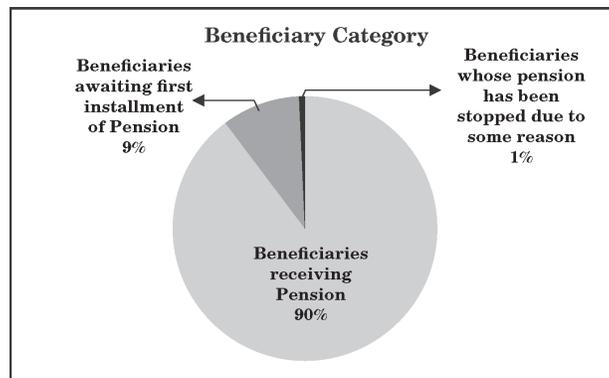
1.   **Rural Sonipat**

Demographic details:

a.   **Pension scheme under which the beneficiary is enrolled**
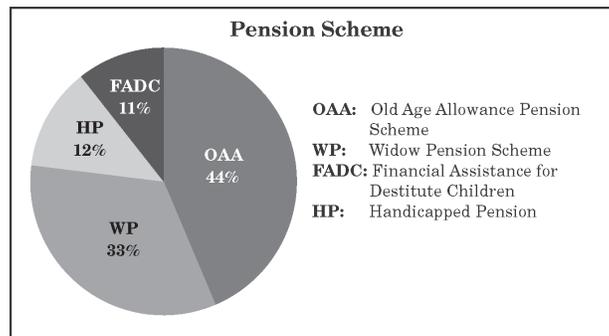
b.   **Categorisation of pension beneficiaries into three broad categories based on the receipt of their pension installment**

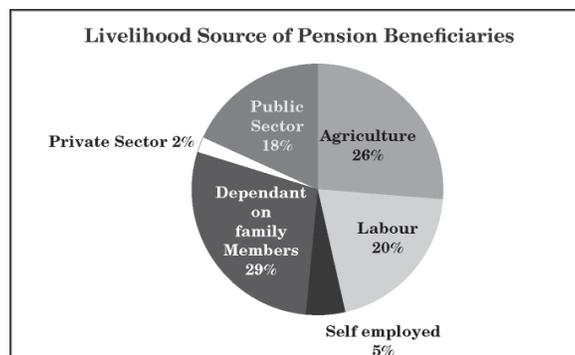**c.   Highest education qualification of pension beneficiaries**

Highest Education Qualification

4% 1% 1%

14%

40%

30%

10%

- ■ Illiterate
- ■ Below 5th grade
- ■ 5-10th grade
- ■ 10th grade Pass
- ■ 12th grade Pass
- ■ Graduate
- □ Post graduate
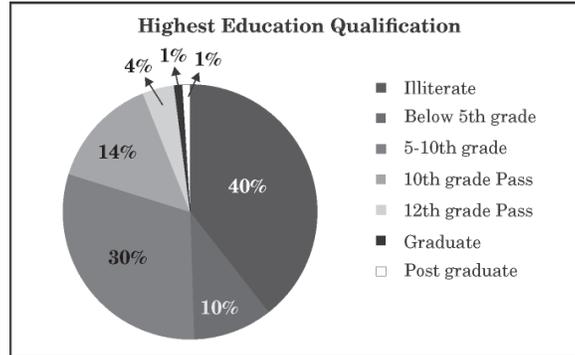
d.   Marital status of pension beneficiaries

Marital Status

Divorced
0%

Unmarried
7%

Widowed
39%

Married
54%
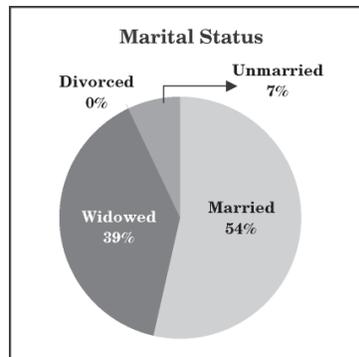
e.   Caste composition of pension beneficiaries
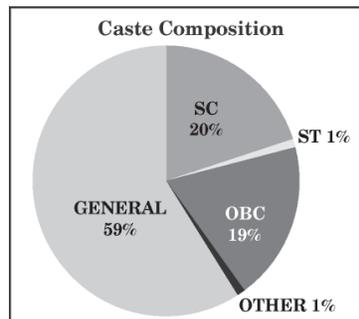
Caste Composition

SC
20%

ST 1%

GENERAL
59%

OBC
19%

OTHER 1%

f.   Livelihood source of the pension beneficiaries

Livelihood Source of Pension Beneficiaries

Public
Sector
18%

Agriculture
26%

Private Sector 2%

Dependant
on
family
Members
29%

Labour
20%

Self employed
5%

g. Mode of collection of pension amount

Mode of Pension Collection

3%   2%

15%

80%

- ■ Bank
- □ Vodafone M Pesa
- ■ NA (Pension not yet received)
- ■ Post Office
- ■ Business Correspondent Agent
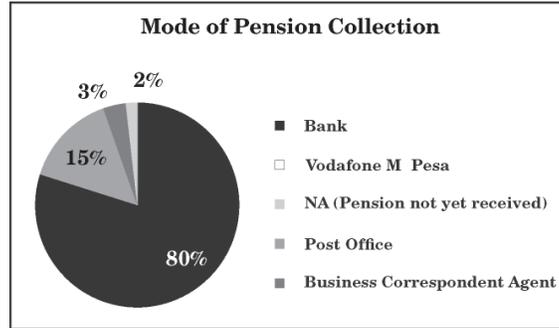
Compliance with standard operating procedures

a. **Bank or post office passbook upgrade**: Thirty per cent of the pension beneficiaries interviewed said that the bank or post office staff do not update their passbooks on the day the pension amount is withdrawn.

b. **Staff behavior at banks and post offices**: The pension beneficiaries were asked to rate the behavior of the bank or post office staff at the centre where the pension was withdrawn. Interestingly, it was further observed that among the beneficiaries who rated the staff behavior as "non-helpful" or "extremely non-helpful", 62 per cent beneficiaries were referring to the staff at post office banks.

Rating of Staff Behavior

Not Applicable
3%

Extremely
Non
Helpful
35%

Very
Helpful
38%

Non Helpful
1%

Moderately
Helpful
21%

Neutral 2%
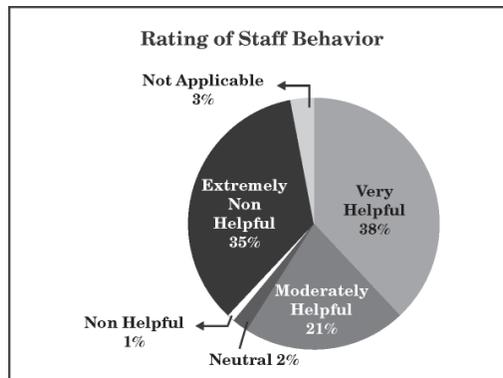
c. **Mode of pension application submission:** Nearly 65 per cent of the respondents has applied for social security pension schemes by directly visiting

Mode of Pension Application Submission

Other
3%

Sarpanch
16%

Private
Agent
16%

CSC
65%
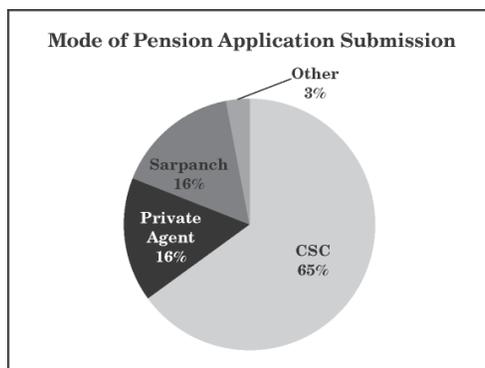
the nearest Common Services Centre themselves. Nearly 16 per cent of the respondents did not do this themselves and relied on the village *sarpanch* to do the same for them. This is quite contrary to the guidelines prescribed by the DSJE. Another 16 per cent of the respondents applied via some non-official channels of private agents.

d.   **Awareness about common services centre (CSC):** It was observed that awareness about the availability of an active CSC was necessary for a beneficiary in the rural areas to visit the CSC for his/her pension application. Most people who were aware of the availability of nearest CSC centre went there to apply for the pension scheme. All the pension beneficiaries who applied for the pension scheme either themselves or with the help of a family member or a friend were aware of the location of the active CSC owner. It was observed that nearly 65 per cent of the beneficiaries applied for the pension schemes by directly paying a visit to the CSC.

e.   **Role of CSC in ensuring proper submission of pension application:** It was observed that in nearly 85 per cent of the cases where a person had applied via a CSC, all the necessary requirements such as document verification, uploading of bank account details, etc., were fulfilled. Thus, it can be concluded that CSCs serve as an important centre to ensure proper submission of pension applications and the government should strive to activate CSCs in every village.

f.   **Role of SMS in sensitising the public about pension application progress:** Out of all the pension beneficiaries only 35 per cent registered their mobile number during the submission of the pension application at the CSC. Only one-third of the beneficiaries could confidently say that they were intimated about the status of their pension application by the DSJE through SMS. I concluded that in rural areas the degree of attentiveness to SMS received is very low. Therefore, despite its potential benefits, it is not surprising that SMS is not yet the key source of information for pension application in rural regions.

g.   **Pension application receipt:** Nearly 61 per cent of the pension beneficiaries were provided a receipt after successful submission of the pension application. However, it was observed that nearly 33 per cent of the applicants who had applied for the pension scheme from the CSC were not provided any receipt. This observation indicates a lack of awareness among the applicants and possible laxity on the part of the CSC owners who are supposed to follow the SOP.

h.   **Incorrectly charging for pension application:** Seven per cent of the pension beneficiaries were charged a fee for pension application that was beyond the prescribed fee range mentioned in the SOP. Almost 65 per cent of such beneficiaries had gone to private non-licensed agents to make their pension application submission. Interestingly, nearly 39 per cent of the pension beneficiaries were not

charged any fee for submission of their pension application. The details regarding the break-up of the mode of pension application submission is given below:

Modes of Free Pension Application Submission
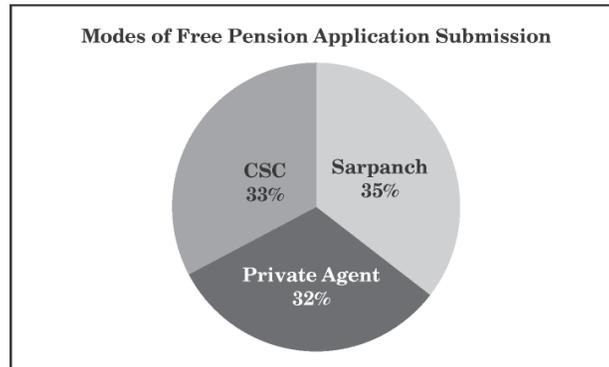
i.   **Physical verification:** Physical verification of the pension applicant and his/her original documents is considered as an important step to eliminate fraudulent and bogus complaints. The DSJE has stressed on this aspect of the pension disbursal process. However, the study shows that physical verification did not take place for 93 per cent of the pension beneficiaries. It was only in 7 per cent cases that original documents were verified. In these cases, no formal method of communication with the applicant was made. Rather, the applicant had arrived at the office of the DSWO to enquire about the status of the application.

j.   **Rejection of pension application:** For a significant number of pension beneficiaries their application was not being submitted for the first time. Nearly 63 per cent of such beneficiaries reported that they were neither provided any valid reason for the rejection of their application nor were they intimated about the rejection of their pension application. Most of them said that they were given arbitrary reasons for the rejection of their pension application. Some were as bizarre as "the application form got lost or was not received online."

k.   **Receipt of pension ID after sanction of pension:** Despite there being clear guidelines issued by the department regarding issuance of pension ID to the concerned bona-fide beneficiary only, it was observed that only 28 per cent of the beneficiaries had collected their pension ID document from the DSWO office.

l.   **Bank account integration with pension ID:** After the issuance of pension ID, the bank account needs to be linked to the pension ID document. To ensure this, a guideline has been issued by the DSJE. It was observed that the SOP had not been followed in the case of 45 per cent of the beneficiaries who were interviewed. This data was cross referenced with respect to the different modes of pension disbursal. It was found that nearly 70 per cent of the banks followed the SOP but in the case of post offices the figure was as low as 10 per cent.

m.   **Non-Receipt of pension in a month**: Nearly 37 per cent beneficiaries said that there have been one or more month(s) when they have not received their pension amount. This data was cross referenced with respect to the different modes of pension disbursal. It was found that nearly 35 per cent banks have, at least for a month, defaulted in disbursing the pension amount to the beneficiary. In case of post offices and business correspondence agents, this figure was observed to be 70 per cent in each case.

n.   **Clearance of pending arrear amount:** It was observed that nearly 30 per cent of the beneficiaries mentioned in point 13, who hadn't received their due for at least one month, got their arrear amount in subsequent months.

For the remaining 70 per cent beneficiaries (73 in number) the pension due amount was pending. The duration of their pension arrear has been tabulated as below:
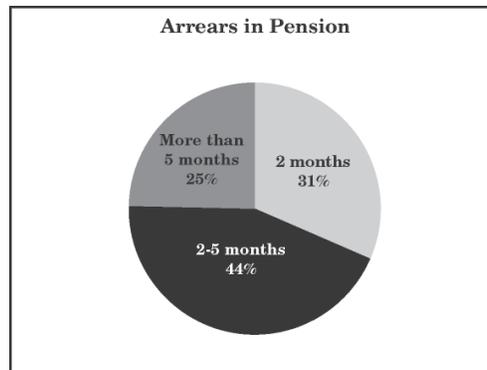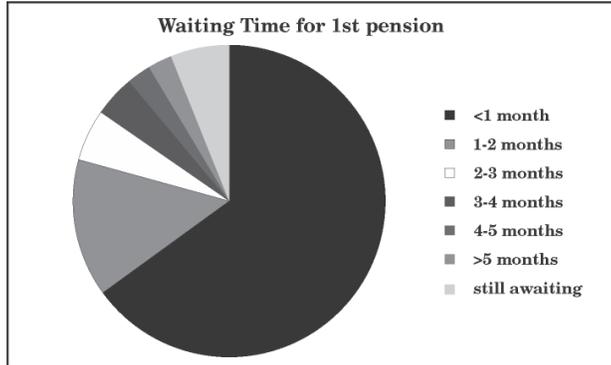

o.   **Beneficiaries changing their bank/post office account after sanction of pension amount:**

It was observed that nearly 25 per cent of the pension beneficiaries (70 in number) had changed their bank or post office account after the official approval (or sanction as it is called by the DSJE) of their pension application. This data was cross referenced with the different modes of pension disbursal. It was found that in nearly 22 per cent of the banks and 66 per cent of the post offices, the beneficiaries had been getting their pension amount despite the fact that they had given details of some other bank or post office account at the time of pension application submission.

Interestingly, it was observed that in 30 per cent cases (21 in number) the pension beneficiary had not provided any bank or post office details during the application submission stage. He/she added the details after the sanction of pension.

p.   **Time elapsed between pension ID generation and accrual of the first installment of pension:** Nearly 20 per cent of the pension beneficiaries said

that they had to wait for more than one month for the accrual of their 1ˢᵗ pension installment after the receipt of their pension id document.
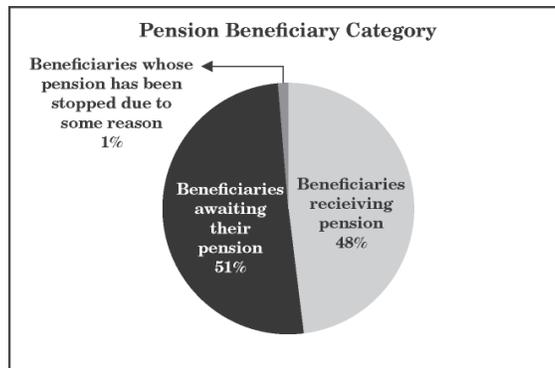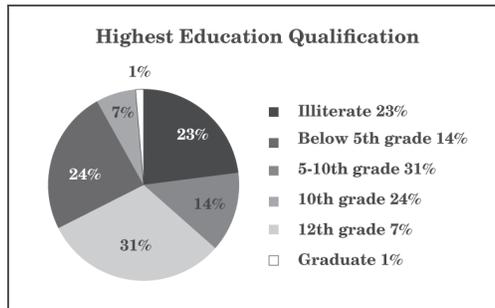
Waiting Time for 1st pension

- ■ <1 month
- ■ 1-2 months
- □ 2-3 months
- ■ 3-4 months
- ■ 4-5 months
- ■ >5 months
- ■ still awaiting

2. **Urban Sonipat**

    Demographic details:

    a. **Pension scheme under which the beneficiary is enrolled**
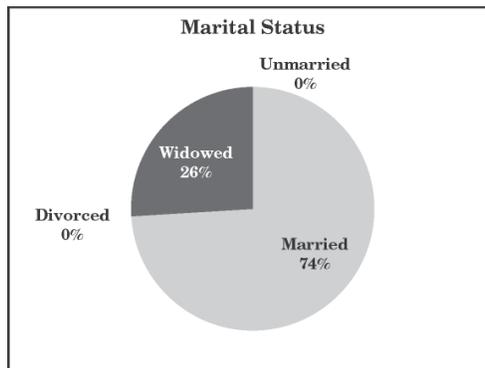
Pension Scheme

HP 1%
FADC 8%
WP 25%
OAA 66%
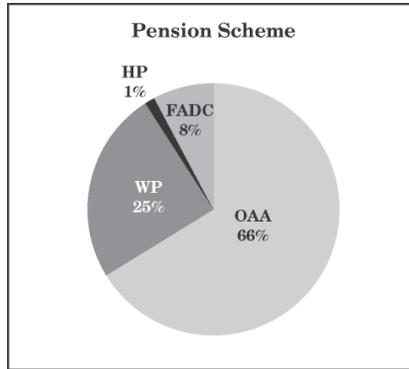
    b. **Pension beneficiaries have been categorised into three broad categories based upon their receipt of pension installment**
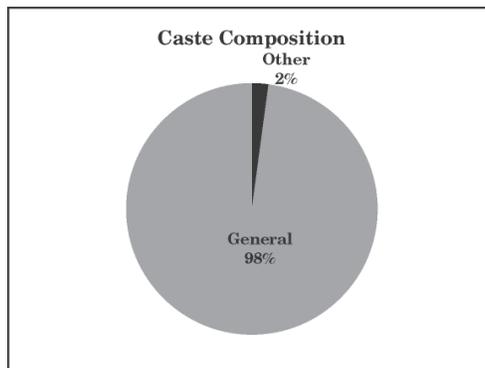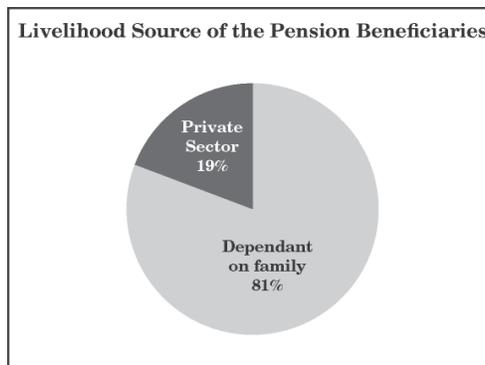
Pension Beneficiary Category

Beneficiaries whose pension has been stopped due to some reason 1%

Beneficiaries awaiting their pension 51%

Beneficiaries recieiving pension 48%

c.   Highest education qualification

Highest Education Qualification

- Illiterate 23%
- Below 5th grade 14%
- 5-10th grade 31%
- 10th grade 24%
- 12th grade 7%
- Graduate 1%

1%
7%
23%
24%
14%
31%

d. Marital status

Marital Status

Unmarried 0%
Widowed 26%
Divorced 0%
Married 74%

e. Caste composition

Caste Composition

Other 2%
General 98%

f. Livelihood source of the pension beneficiaries

Livelihood Source of the Pension Beneficiaries

Private Sector 19%
Dependant on family 81%

g. **Mode of collection of pension amount**

All the pension beneficiaries invariably collect their pension amount via banks.

Compliance with standard operating procedures:

a.   **Bank or post office passbook upgrade**: Nearly all the pension beneficiaries interviewed said that the bank staff update their passbooks on the day their pension amount was withdrawn.

b.   **Staff behavior at banks and post offices**: The pension beneficiaries were asked to rate the behavior of the bank or post office staff at the centre from where the pension was withdrawn.
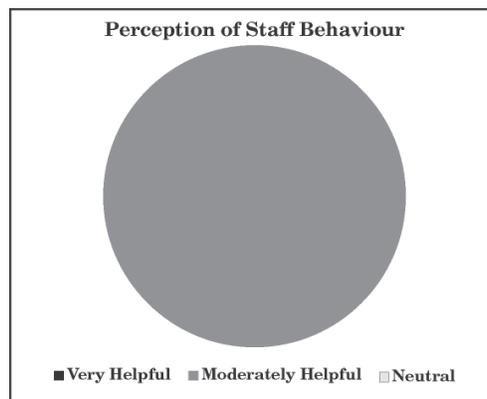
All the pension beneficiaries rated the behavior of their bank staff as moderately helpful during the survey.

c.   **Mode of pension application submission:** Nearly 97 per cent of the pension beneficiaries went to the nearest CSC centre for submission of the pension application.
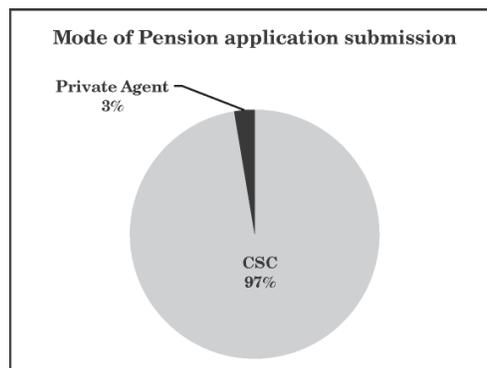

d.   **Awareness about Common Services Centre (CSC):** It was observed that the awareness about the availability of an active CSC was both necessary as well as sufficient criteria to ensure ease of pension application submission and subsequent follow ups regarding the application status in urban areas. Also, it was noticed that nearly all the beneficiaries were well aware of the location of the nearest CSC centre in their locality.

e.   **Role of CSC in ensuring proper submission of pension application:** It was observed that in nearly all the cases where a person had applied via a CSC, all the necessary requirements such as document verification, uploading of bank account details, etc., were fulfilled properly.

f.   **Role of SMS in sensitising the public about pension application progress:** Out of all the pension beneficiaries, almost 75 per cent registered their mobile number at the point of pension application submission (i.e. at the CSC). Among these beneficiaries, all informed that they were intimated about the status of their pension application by the DSJE through SMS. This observation suggests that the degree of attentiveness in urban areas towards SMS is very high. Therefore, SMS is a key source of information for pension application in urban areas.

g.   **Pension application receipt:** Nearly 85 per cent of the pension beneficiaries were provided an application receipt after successful submission of the pension application.

h.   **Over-charging and under-charging for pension application:** Eighty six per cent pension beneficiaries were charged a fee for pension application that was within the prescribed fee range mentioned in the SOP. Interestingly, nearly 14 per cent of the pension beneficiaries were not charged any fee for submission of their pension application. Almost all such beneficiaries claimed that they had a friendly relation with the CSC owner of their area.

i.   **Physical Verification:** Physical verification of pension applicant and his/her original documents has been declared as a very important step towards eliminating fraudulent and bogus complaints. Repeated guidelines have been issued by the DSJE to ensure this.

However, it was noticed that physical verification took place as per the prescribed guidelines in the case of 50 per cent of the pension beneficiaries. It was only in 5 per cent cases that some form of original document verification was done when the applicant had arrived at the office of the DSWO for enquiring about the status of the application. In the remaining 45 per cent cases no formal physical verification was done.

j.   **Rejection of Pension Application:** Nearly 20 per cent of current pension beneficiaries had applied for the same pension scheme in their previous attempts also. All such beneficiaries reported that they were neither provided any valid reason for the rejection of their application nor were they intimated about the rejection of their pension application. Most of them said that they were provided very arbitrary reasons behind the rejection of their pension application. Consider for example the excuse that the application form got lost or was not received online.

k.   **Receipt of Pension ID upon sanction of pension:** Despite there being clear guidelines issued by the DSJE regarding issuance of pension ID to the concerned

bona-fide beneficiary only, it was observed that only 33.3 per cent of the beneficiaries had collected their pension ID document from the DSWO office. The remaining beneficiaries collected it either from the CSC owner or someone from their family or acquaintance brought it for them.

l.   **Bank account integration with Pension ID:** After the issuance of pension ID, the bank account needs to be linked to the pension ID document. Clear guidelines have been issued by the DSJE regarding this. It was observed that the SOP had not been followed in the case of 32 per cent of the beneficiaries who were interviewed.

m.   **Non-Receipt of Pension in a month**: Only 6 per cent beneficiaries said that there have been one or more month(s) when they have not received their pension amount at all from their mode of pension disbursal.

n.   **Clearance of pending arrear amount:** It was observed that none of the arrears has been cleared yet by the banks. In fact, it was observed that all of these beneficiaries were the ones who were awaiting the first installments of their pension amount. Their waiting period was within the time span of two months.

o.   **Beneficiaries changing their bank/post office account after sanction of pension amount:** It was observed that only 2 per cent of the applicants had changed their bank accounts from what was mentioned by them when they applied at the CSC centre.

p.   **Time elapsed between pension ID generation and accrual of the first installment of pension:** Nearly 52 per cent pension beneficiaries had to wait for less than two months' time from the date of their pension ID generation to receive their 1st installment of pension.
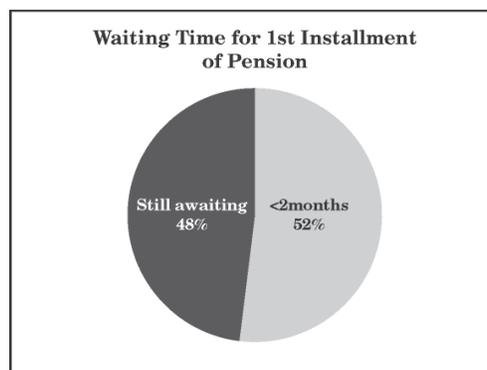
3.   **Comparative analysis between rural and urban pension beneficiaries of Sonipat:**

a.   In urban Sonipat, a high level of awareness was observed among the people with regard to CSC, pension application process and awareness regarding SMS received from the department. Nearly all the CSC owners also provided application receipts to the applicants upon submission of the online application. None of the

beneficiaries ever resorted to any private agent for the purpose of pension application submission. This was in contrast to the situation in rural Sonipat.

b.   In urban areas, nearly 50 per cent people went through a formal verification process as per the SOP in urban areas.

c.   This was unlike in rural areas where only 20 per cent cases were found where pension applications were rejected for arbitrary reasons without even informing the applicant.

d.   In terms of collection of pension ID from the DSWO office, rural as well as urban Sonipat have seen almost equal degree of non-compliance. People continue to get the pension ID document through the CSC or other sources.

e.   Performance of banks in terms of timely disbursal of pension amounts and linking of bank account with pension ID is better in urban areas compared to rural areas.

IV   DISCUSSION

The SOP designed by the department often gets customised as per the whims and fancies of the ground level bureaucrats at the district and block level. The stark difference observed in compliance levels in rural and urban areas also points to the fact that the degree of alteration done to the SOP by the department is proportional to the level of awareness of the beneficiaries. The level of awareness about procedures among the rural population is low. The problem of non-compliance to SOP in rural areas is also affected by the presence of financial institutions such as banks, post offices, business correspondent agents, etc., in the rural economy. It has been empirically proven through this study that the post offices and business correspondent agents have shown higher degree of non-compliance with the SOP. The post offices still follow a redundant offline system of maintaining financial records and passbook upgrade. This makes a beneficiary more vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to get the grievances redressed. It has been observed in many cases that a pension beneficiary has not been provided his due amount by the post office staff on account of various random excuses. Despite that, the post office staff has managed to exploit the poor and often unaware beneficiary by tricking him to sign or put his thumb impression on a document that states otherwise. Similarly, several allegations of the post office staff and the CSC owners asking for a standard 10 per cent share in the pension amount have been obtained during the course of this study. All these instances point to the loopholes in the system, which are being exploited by the ground level staff. Often CSC owners are found running their centres in urban areas despite their centre being in a village. It was noticed that they pay a visit to the village sometimes once in a week and collect a hefty amount that is well beyond what has been prescribed in the government guidelines. Many times, the village *sarpanchs* pay extra money to the CSC owners and the DSWO staff to get the pension application of their village streamlined on priority basis. Traditionally, a village *sarpanch* has been seen as the key resource person to get pension applications approved. It was observed by me during my interviews with several pension beneficiaries and village *Sarpanch* that the political capital and the effectiveness of a *Sarpanch* is often calculated on the basis of how smoothly he/she can get the pension approval done for all the residents of his village.

The issues identified during the course of this study can be categorised as follows:

a.   **Faulty policy design**: There is complete lack of clarity on policy goals and objectives regarding ensuring citizen convenience and to minimize the scope of subjectivity during pension application and disbursal process. The pension scheme is not designed in a way to minimise the procedural hassles for the citizens. The citizen is required to visit the Common Service Centre at the village level, block

development office and district social welfare office. It was observed that inter-departmental co-ordination was missing in the district. Also, the effectiveness of CSC as a citizen service delivery channel has not proven to be a successful initiative in Haryana. Keeping this in mind, the decision to integrate multiple departments and the CSC in the pension model seems irrational and counter intuitive.

Also, there is complete lack of monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the SOP within the department. At most, the department has interactive dashboards to track quantitative data related to the number of applications received and approved. But there is no survey mechanism in place to analyse the effectiveness of the model in terms of its implementation.

b. **Poor management practices within the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DSJE)**: There is complete lack of quick, clear and two-way communication between the department heads and the district level functionaries. Also, there is little involvement of the district level officers, such as DSWO, who are the actual implementers of the government policy, in the policy design process. As a result, most of the DSWOs interviewed during the process admitted that they feel a sense of alienation from the Department's topmost management structure. The communication mostly takes place in a one-sided manner wherein the Department issues guidelines to the District Social Welfare Officer, who rarely expresses his/her opinion on the rationale behind the guidelines. This is based on the observations I made as the CMGGA in Sonipat. It was observed that the DSWO was not sufficiently aware of some crucial aspects of the SOP. It was only when the implementation related irregularities were highlighted from the survey that he expressed his rational objections regarding the department guidelines. He further added that the department rarely offers a chance to the district level officers to express their concerns. Lastly, the department has an acute shortage of officers from the district to the headquarter level. There is nearly 50 per cent vacancy in terms of human resources and nearly 70 per cent shortage in terms of physical infrastructure resources, such as computers and other electronic equipment. The reasoning behind the poor implementation of the physical verification process in the scheme has been attributed to lack of human resources on the ground level by most DSWOs interviewed during the course of this study.

c. **Lack of any organisational development goals within the department**: The performance of policy implementation depends on organisational leadership capacity, team-building, the engagement of the various parties involved, their participation, motivation, coordination between them and their commitment. However, no formal attempt to ensure this has been made by the department in the past five years.

d. **Bureaucratic hurdles**: Successful policy implementation relies heavily on the role of ground level bureaucrats who directly come into contact with citizens. The correct discretionary power of front-line implementers positively influences the implementation of policy. In reality, a very poor sense of judgement has been

observed among the frontline workers. This can be further substantiated from the fact that nearly 30 per cent of rural pension beneficiaries said that they had applied before as well for pension scheme and their application was rejected without any valid reason. Despite multiple enquiries, they were given random and arbitrary reasons behind the rejection of the application forms by the DSJE staff. Such behavior sheds light on the misuse of discretionary power by the members of the frontline staff. Also, there have been several cases when the department staff is asked by the senior bureaucrats of the district administration to favorably consider the pension application of a particular applicant despite the demerits in the application. This deviance from the SOP because of pressures from higher officials in the district often affects the status of public policy implementation.

e. **Political factors**: Often political factors lead to favoritism towards a particular community or village within the district and this affects the status of policy implementation. Consider an example of a village that is dominated by the people of a particular caste and has been a traditional stronghold for a politician presently serving in the state government as a cabinet minister. In such circumstances, the politician is frequently found to persuade the bureaucratic machinery to approve the pension applications of a selected group of people without following the necessary procedures prescribed in the SOP. Several other instances of similar nature have been cited by the department during the course of this study wherein nepotism has led to favouring of a particular community or group.

f. **Determination of success of the scheme:** The performance of policy implementation depends on the outcome of interactions between the organisational capacity of stakeholders and their bargaining power, conflict resolution, and often unplanned factors such as monitoring of the scheme by political players and administrative officers during visits to the district or at the state level. In pension schemes, the overall success can be determined by analysing certain key parameters which reflect the nature of interactions between the different stakeholders' present in the model. For example, the role and availability of CSC is found to be of crucial importance for any applicant to register himself/herself. It is often through this CSC owner that the applicant can track the status of the application. Second, the interaction between database and staff at CSC and DSWO office at the district headquarters determines the speed and efficacy of the pension application process. If the DSWO office does not process the applications received, the application will remain in the pipeline for a longer duration. Lastly, the institutional grievance redressal mechanisms at the DSWO office and at the office of other senior district level officers such as the deputy commissioner play a crucial role in resolving public grievances related to the issue.

The government needs to understand the futility of the one size fits all approach for rural and urban set ups. The model adopted for pension application and disbursal in urban and rural areas are largely on similar lines despite the fact that a wide degree of variation has been observed in the socio-economic status and the digital and financial literacy of the citizens belonging to the two segments.

Some of the key recommendations from this study are:

a.   A separate SOP needs to be designed for the pension scheme in rural areas which will ensure minimum travel time and government touch-points.

b.   The government needs to set up a committee to study the cases of pending pension amounts in the post office accounts of the beneficiaries. Solutions have to be devised to ensure that each and every arrear gets cleared.

c.   Wherever possible, the banks should replace the traditional post office banks.

d.   A complete overhaul of the post office bank accounts is needed. In fact, the post office banks should be asked to incorporate all the latest features adopted by their bank counterparts such as online banking, core banking software, daily clearances, RTGS, etc. With the advent of several regional rural banks (RRBs) in the country, post offices could overhaul their structure based on them. Transparency and uniformity in operations should be made the core feature of operations in the post office banks.

e.   Digital payments could help ensure financial inclusion in rural areas. The government needs to evaluate a strategy to provide handholding support to the rural beneficiaries who might be new to adopting digital modes of money management.

f.   Physical verification is an integral part of the pension application. It needs to be reinforced on ground, especially in rural areas. It has often been said by the DSWO staff that they lack human resources and therefore can't do the physical verification work properly. The government needs to sit with the stakeholders and figure out a working model to ensure proper physical verification takes place in rural areas. Also, the same needs to be done in urban areas to increase the degree of compliance with the SOP for pension schemes. In addition to the conduct of physical verification, it is crucial to ensure that it happens on a fixed date and time and for a fix set of people. Often it has been found that the staff doesn't reach on the date given on the application receipt.

g.   The pension schemes cater to the most vulnerable population and that the pension applicants anyway have to come to the district headquarter for enquiry related to the application. Keeping this in mind, the government may consider setting up one-stop centres at decentralised level for the rural population. The one stop centres should serve as a touch point where the entire process of pension application submission, verification and sanction should take place on the same day.