

An Evaluative Study on Challenges of Women's and Girls, Their Socio-Economic and Educational Opportunities

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Abstract: *This essay focuses on the problems and obstacles associated with women's empowerment while attempting to assess the state of women's empowerment in India. Women's empowerment has emerged as one of the 21st century's most pressing issues. However, in practice, women's empowerment remains a fantasy. In our daily lives, we witness the ways in which women are harmed by a variety of social ills. The key to increasing women's access to resources and their capacity to make wise decisions in life is women's empowerment. The process of improving the economic, social, and political standing of women—who have historically been marginalized in society—is fundamentally known as women's empowerment. It involves protecting kids from all types of violence. The study's sole source of information is secondary. According to the report, despite numerous government initiatives, Indian women still have a relatively low level of empowerment and a somewhat lower status than men. It is discovered that women continue to accept unfair gender standards in society. The study ends by noting that the only things that facilitate women's empowerment are access to education, employment, and a shift in social structure. Women's empowerment has been found to be greatly aided by education, which allows them to fully engage in the political, social, and economic realms. But access to education remains a major obstacle for women, especially in poorer nations. The literature on women's access to education and how it affects their empowerment is thoroughly reviewed in this paper. It looks at the different elements—such as poverty, prejudice, cultural norms, and a lack of resources—that influence women's access to education. The study also emphasizes how education promotes women's empowerment through better health outcomes, more economic opportunities, and higher political participation. The study concludes by outlining the obstacles still facing women's educational access as well as the laws and initiatives that can be used to get beyond them.*

Keywords: *women's empowerment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is essential to the growth of the person and the community and is a fundamental human right. But access to education remains a major obstacle for women worldwide, especially in developing nations. The literature on women's access to education and how it affects their empowerment is thoroughly reviewed in this paper. It draws attention to the different elements that influence women's educational opportunities as well as the advantages of education for women's empowerment. A fundamental right and a major driver of women's empowerment is access to education. Education

gives women the abilities, information, and self-assurance they need to take part in society, assert their rights, and live better lives. But even with recent advancements, millions of women and girls still face obstacles to education.

Without taking into account the role of women in decision-making, it is impossible to claim that gender equality and democratic norms have been upheld in a democratic system. Countries are making valuable contributions to women's empowerment in decision-making as they work to consolidate democracy. To encourage women's participation in decision-making, they have ratified international law and agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the United Nations Charter on Human Rights (Gylman, 2008). Women are making significant contributions to the community. Mothers, housekeepers, home managers, and sociocultural and community activists are all women. Nonetheless, women are frequently excluded from political, social, and decision-making processes. Women have not occupied higher government posts or participated in political or decision-making responsibilities (Booke, 1972).

In addition to being a global development goal and a World Bank strategic priority, ensuring that all girls and young women obtain high-quality education is their human right. The World Bank Group's goal of eradicating poverty on a livable planet revolves around achieving gender equality. The World Bank, the world's largest education development partner, makes sure that all of its initiatives are gender-sensitive and seeks to remove obstacles that keep boys and girls from equitably benefiting from national education investments. Getting girls into school is only one aspect of their education. Along with learning and feeling safe in school, it also aims to give girls the chance to finish all levels of education and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to compete in the labor market, as well as the socio-emotional and life skills they need to make decisions about their own lives, navigate and adapt to a changing world, and contribute to their communities and globally.

Girls' education benefits both people and nations. Women with higher levels of education typically marry later, have fewer children, are more educated about healthcare and nutrition, and, if they decide to have children, produce healthier offspring. They are more likely to make more money and engage in the formal work market. According to a 2018 World Bank report, countries lose between \$15 trillion and \$30 trillion in lifetime productivity and earnings from "limited educational opportunities for girls, and barriers to completing 12 years of education." When taken as a whole, these elements have the power to raise individuals, groups, and nations out of poverty.

Objective: To Study Challenges of Women's and Girls, Their Socio-Economic and Educational Opportunities

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study. The study collected secondary sources of data from published and unpublished documents, journals, books, magazines and newspapers which have direct relations to the study.

Challenges of Women and Girls

UNICEF estimates that 122 million females worldwide are not enrolled in school, comprising 34 million elementary school-age girls and 87 million secondary school-age girls.

Globally, the percentage of girls and boys enrolled in primary and secondary education is approaching parity (92% male, 90% female). The completion rates for girls are lower in low-income countries, where 63% of female primary school students finish primary school, compared to 67% of male primary school students, even though enrollment rates are comparable—in fact, two-thirds of all countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrollment. Girls' secondary school completion rates are still below average in low-income nations, where just 38% of them complete lower secondary school, compared to 43% of boys. Similar discrepancies exist in lower-income nations with regard to upper secondary completion rates, which are 26% for young men and 21% for young women.

In nations impacted by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV), the disparities are more pronounced. Girls in FCV countries are 90% more likely than those in non-FCV environments to be out of secondary school, and they are 2.5 times more likely than boys to be out of school overall.

There is a learning problem affecting both boys and girls. The percentage of kids who cannot read well by the age of ten is known as Learning Poverty (LP). Despite the fact that girls are typically 4 percentage points less likely than boys to be learning-poor, both groups' percentages are nonetheless quite high. In low- and middle-income nations, the average percentage of women living in learning poverty is 50%, whereas the average for men is 56%. In low-income nations, where learning poverty averages over 93% for both boys and girls, the disparity is less pronounced.

Higher education enrollment marginally benefits young women in many nations, but improved learning outcomes do not translate into improved career and life outcomes for women. Globally, there is a significant gender disparity in labor force participation rates. With some of the lowest percentages of female labor force participation—26% and 20%, respectively—South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa are particularly affected. Given that rates in other regions, such as East Asia (59%) and Latin America (53%) are still lower than those for men, these are incredibly low rates.

In addition to influencing girls' aspirations and their own views of their roles in society, gender bias in schools and classrooms can also result in occupational segregation and differences in labor market activity. Gender stereotypes can have a long-lasting effect on academic performance and field of study choice, particularly for young women pursuing STEM fields. These stereotypes can be conveyed through the layout of classrooms and schools or through the actions of peers, teachers, and staff.

One of the key determinants of a girl's ability to obtain and finish her education is her level of poverty. In terms of access to and completion of education, research continuously confirms that girls who experience several disadvantages—such as low family income, living in distant or underserved areas, having a disability, or belonging to a minority ethnolinguistic group—fall behind the most.

Additionally, violence keeps females from getting an education and finishing it; many are compelled to walk long distances to school, which puts them at higher danger of violence, and many are victims of violence while attending school. According to the most recent figures, every year, almost 60 million girls are sexually assaulted while they are traveling to or from school. In addition to lowering attendance and increasing dropout rates, this frequently has detrimental effects on their general well-being and mental and physical health. Eliminating gender-based violence in schools is crucial because an estimated 246 million children encounter violence in and around schools each year. Sexual exploitation or abuse can result in adolescent pregnancies. Communities frequently stigmatize and even discriminate against girls who become pregnant. Disparate gender standards combined with the stigmatization load can cause females to leave school early and never return.

Another significant issue is child marriage. Compared to their counterparts who married later, girls who marry early are significantly more likely to drop out of school and finish fewer years of education. Additionally, they are exposed to higher levels of violence committed by their partner and are more likely to become parents early in life. This in turn impacts their capacity to make a living, as well as their children's education and health. In fact, girls who complete secondary school have a six-fold higher marriage rate than youngsters who have little to no education. A 2017 study found that over 41,000 girls under the age of 18 get married every day. Stopping this practice would raise women's predicted educational achievement and, consequently, their earning potential. The paper forecasts that preventing child marriage might result in annual benefits of almost US\$500 billion.

Girls' health and wellbeing are suffering as a result of COVID-19, and many may not be able to go back to school when classes resume. According to the research that is currently available, the pandemic has increased the prevalence of violence against women and girls, endangering their general well-being, safety, and health. During the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, women and girls were subjected to increased sexual abuse, coercion, and exploitation as a result of quarantines and school closures. Teenage pregnancies increased during the Ebola outbreak when schools were closed. Many "visibly pregnant girls" were prohibited from returning to school after classes resumed. In the underdeveloped world, where there is a shame associated with adolescent pregnancies, schools are closing, thus it is likely that dropout rates will rise as more teenage females get married or pregnant. Due to their increased household chores, girls may spend more time helping out at home rather than studying as a result of being at home during school closures. This could persuade parents to keep their daughters at home even after classes resume, especially if they place a lower priority on girls' education. Furthermore, research indicates that when caregivers are out from the home, females are more likely to drop out of school since they usually have to (partially) replace the labor performed by the absent caregiver, who may be absent due to COVID-19-related work, illness, or death. Therefore, it is possible that

more girls than boys may assist at home, fall behind in their studies, and drop out of school as a result of the present COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary issues that women encountered in the past and, to some extent, still face today

1. Discrimination based on gender
 2. Insufficient education
 3. Female infanticide
 4. Budgetary Restrictions
 5. Duty to the Family
 6. Limited Movement
 7. Low risk tolerance
 8. Minimal drive for success
 9. Lack of drive for accomplishment
- Social standing Child marriage (still occurring) and dower marriage in the same caste Atrocities Against Women: Nearly every day, women are raped, kicked, killed, subdued, and humiliated.

Sociocultural factors

Numerous social and cultural elements that impact or influence girls' education are referred to as sociocultural variables. These cover a broad range of subjects, such as common customs, ways of life, and beliefs held by the community. These elements include language, political and legal processes, religious connections, social structures, technological advancements, material culture, and prevailing attitudes and values.

Economic factors

Economic elements are those aspects of the economy that have an impact on a female child's education. Interest rates, tax rates, wages, laws, and other governmental actions are all included. These elements have an impact on education and each nation's educational system.

Government Schemes for Female Students

Government of India has initiated many programmes for increasing the enrolment rate and decreasing the drop-out rate of female students and some of them are as follows:-

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao
2. Sarv Siksha Abhiyaan
3. Rashtriya Madhayamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)
4. Early Child Care Education Centres
5. National Programme on Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)
6. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya
7. Kishori Shakti Yojana
8. Mahila Samakhyia (Education for Women's Equality)
9. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)

Suggestions

1. The education of women should be the first focus, as it is the issue at the ground level. Therefore, extra emphasis must be given to women's education.
2. Awareness campaigns must be planned to educate women, particularly those from underrepresented groups, about their rights.
3. Women should be permitted to work and given the necessary safety and assistance to do so. To improve their standing in society, they ought to be paid fairly and treated on an equal basis with men.
4. Programs and Acts should be strictly implemented in order to stop the widespread malpractices in society.

III. CONCLUSION

The literature on women's access to education and how it affects their empowerment has been thoroughly reviewed in this research. Women's political engagement, economic prospects, and health are all significantly impacted by

education. But access to education remains a major obstacle for women, especially in poorer nations. To solve these issues and guarantee that women have equal access to education, policies and initiatives must be created. We can advance gender equality and women's empowerment by encouraging women's access to education. In conclusion, one of the most important aspects of women's empowerment is their access to education. Women can advance gender equality, raise their economic and social standing, and gain knowledge and skills through education. Men and women still have very different access to education, especially in underdeveloped nations, despite tremendous advancements in recent years. In order for women to fully benefit from education's liberating impacts, policymakers and stakeholders must keep working to expand their access to it.

Therefore, the situation of women's empowerment appears to be relatively poor in terms of income/employment and educational achievement. Finding the gaps or restrictions preventing women from achieving their full potential is urgently needed, and this effort must begin with the women themselves, as well as—more importantly—with governmental and societal policy initiatives. Let's pledge to create an egalitarian society in which all people, men and women alike, have an equal chance to express themselves and improve their own and society's overall well-being. Women around the world, especially in South American nations, have been fighting and altering gender inequality since the dawn of time, therefore the idea of women's empowerment is not exclusive to the North. Many men who have been incensed at injustice against women have also backed these movements. Every country in the world has gender inequality, and women make up half of the population. Whole communities will be doomed to function below their actual capacity until women are granted the same possibilities as men. A shift in societal perceptions of women is urgently needed.

"The family, the village, and the country all move when women advance." It is crucial since their values and ways of thinking guide the creation of a decent family, a decent society, and eventually a decent country. Perhaps integrating women into the development mainstream is the best approach to empower them. Only when women are given money and property will their empowerment be genuine and successful, allowing them to establish their own identities and stand on their own two feet. One of the most significant issues of the twenty-first century, both domestically and globally, is the empowerment of women. To accomplish this, government actions alone would not be enough. In order to eliminate gender discrimination and provide women the freedom to make their own decisions and participate in the social, political, and economic life of the nation with equality, society must take the initiative.

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