

## A STUDY ON GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

The practice of gender inequality is an entirely observable fact. Each country of the world is experiencing it in one way or the other. The term 'gender inequality' refers to the seeming or actual unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender. Gender inequality arises out of cultural differences in gender roles, which are socially constructed systems. While there are innate biological sex-based differences between men and women, gender inequality is a kind of social discrimination. Over the years women have made great strides in many areas with remarkable progress in bridging some gender gaps. Yet, the afflicted world in which we live is characterised by deeply unequal sharing of burden of adversities between men and women. Sprawling inequalities persist in their access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities in the political, economic and social evil. Human civilisation has lost much of talent because of the lack of rights provided to Eve's daughters. Although governments throughout the world have taken some steps for the improvement of women's lives, inequalities still exist. Gender inequality is not natural. It is socially constructed. Construction of gender has become a curse for our society as it has led to a loss of economic, social and political opportunities to half of the world. Women are discriminated in all spheres; political, social, cultural and economic aspects. The issue of gender inequality is one which has been publicly echoing through society for decades.

*Keywords: Gender inequality, education, society.*

### **i. INTRODUCTION**

Gender inequality in education is a persistent problem within the Indian society, especially for the girls belonging to economically weaker sections of the society. Gender inequalities are seen in various fields. These include education, health, employment or pay (Klasen & Lamanna, 2008). During the past several decades, there have been progressions made in the achievement of universal enrolment of students in schools. Furthermore, there have been enactment of policies and procedures to address gender inequality in education. However, in the present existence too, there have been education gaps. The major factors that contribute to education gaps are socio-economic factors, accessibility to learning materials and resources, time devoted towards formal learning activities and the cultural viewpoints and perspectives among individuals and communities regarding the education of girls (White, Ruther & Kahn 2016). In usually rural communities, there has been prevalence of the viewpoint among individuals that girls are meant to carry out the household chores and school education is not meant for them. They have to eventually get married and in their marital homes, they would not have any opportunity to make use of their educational skills, but carry out the household responsibilities. But these perspectives are changing and girls too are encouraged towards acquisition of education.

In the present context, there have been formulations of measures and programs delineating equal rights and opportunities for women. In the past, individuals possessed this viewpoint that male members of the family should be educated. When the males would acquire education, they would render a significant contribution in promoting goodwill and well-being of their families through attainment of employment opportunities. But today, in urban as well as in rural communities, individuals and communities have brought about changes in their viewpoints and perspectives and are encouraging girls as well towards acquisition of education. Girls and women too can render an effective contribution in promoting welfare of their families and communities. When they obtain support from their parents, then they are able to attain good-quality education.

**ii. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The primary objective of this study is gender inequality in education. The study also outlines the factors contributing to gender inequality and factors influencing education attainment.

**iii. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research is descriptive in nature. The necessary secondary data was collected from various websites including those of Government of India, magazines, journals amongst other publications etc.

**iv. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION**

The causes of gender inequality in education vary across regions and contexts. Gender inequality in education is a complex issue influenced by various factors. Some factors contributing to gender inequality in education are enlisted below:

**Socio-economic factors:**

Socioeconomic factors such as poverty plays a significant role in perpetuating gender inequality in education. Limited financial resources often result in families prioritizing the education of male children over females. This preference stems from the belief that investing in a son's education will yield better returns for the family. However, it is crucial to recognize that girls from disadvantaged backgrounds face additional hurdles. They contend with limited financial resources and lack of access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and electricity. These challenges make it even more difficult for girls to pursue education. Furthermore, early marriages are prevalent in many societies, especially among impoverished communities. Girls are often forced into marriage at a young age, disrupting their educational journey. Additionally, socioeconomic pressures compel girls to engage in income-generating activities, limiting their access to education.

**Cultural and Religious Factors:**

Cultural and religious norms and beliefs heavily influence gender roles. Societal expectations, traditional gender roles, and gender stereotypes restrict educational opportunities for girls. In many cultures, girls are expected to prioritise house-hold chores and caregiving responsibilities over their education. Early marriage practices, often rooted in cultural and religious traditions, significantly hinder girls' education. When girls are married off at a young age, their educational aspirations are curtailed, perpetuating the cycle of gender inequality. Moreover, gender-based violence remains pervasive, hindering girls' access to education. Fear of violence and harassment on the way to school or within educational institutions deter girls from continuing with their studies.

**Policy and Institutional factors:**

Lack of appropriate policies, gender-responsive education systems, and institutions negatively impact gender equality in education. Insufficient funding for education, especially in developing countries leads to inadequate resources and infrastructure, disproportionately affecting girls' access to quality education. Furthermore, the absence of targeted interventions addressing gender disparities in education perpetuates the problem. Without specific measures to empower girls and ensure their equal participation in education, the gender gap continues to widen. Discriminatory practices within educational institutions also contribute to the gender gap in education. Gender bias in curricula, textbooks, and classroom interactions can reinforce stereotypes and limit girls' educational opportunities. It is essential to create inclusive learning environments that challenge gender norms and promote equal opportunities for all students.

**v. FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

When the individuals pursue their educational goals, then they need to take into consideration certain factors. The major factors that influence the attainment of education have been stated as follows:



The social factors are primarily related to the socio-economic background and social status of the individuals. Research has indicated that when individuals have their own family business, then they normally prefer that their children should attain the educational qualifications, so they can provide assistance and support to their parents in augmenting their family business. Whereas, in most cases, children are provided with rights and opportunities to make their own decisions regarding acquisition of education. When they score good grades in class twelve exams, then they aspire to pursue professional degrees, such as, law, engineering and so forth. But when they belong to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society, then they experience set-backs in getting enrolled in higher educational institutions. The socio-economic background and the social status of the individuals is primarily characterized by occupations and financial status of the individuals.

For example: when well-educated, qualified and skilled individuals are engaged in medical profession or are engineers or lawyers and are engaged in reputed employment opportunities, then they possess sufficient financial resources and may even get their children enrolled in higher educational institutions in international countries. On the other hand, when individuals are engaged in minority jobs and their income is not sufficient to provide higher education to their children, then they experience problems in acquisition of education. In some cases, poverty stricken, deprived and socio-economically backward sections of the society provide education to their sons and not girls. Hence, girls are required to experience deprivation from acquisition of education due to scarcity of financial resources.

#### **ACCESSIBILITY TO LEARNING MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**

In order to acquire education and achieve educational goals and objectives, it is essential to access good quality learning materials and resources. Educational resources are the resources that enable the individuals to pursue their studies in an efficient and manageable manner. These need to be adequately available in educational institutions as well as homes. These are appropriate teaching-learning methods, teaching-learning materials, infrastructure, technology, books, reading materials, stationary items and assistance and support available from experts and professionals. When there is availability of financial resources within educational institutions, then they make provision of all kinds of facilities, materials, technologies, equipment and amenities that are necessary to help students in acquisition of education and achievement of academic goals. Due to the availability of adequate financial resources, parents also provide an amiable and suitable learning environment for their children within home. They ensure that their children have access to appropriate technologies, reading materials, private tuitions and other facilities that are needed to achieve desired educational outcomes.

#### **TIME DEVOTED TOWARDS FORMAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

Usually, students in schools as well as in higher educational institutions are engaged in other tasks and activities as well, apart from acquisition of education. The other activities that normally school students are engaged in include, extra-curricular and creative activities. These include, artworks, handicrafts, sports, physical activities, singing, music, dance and so forth. Apart from these activities, it is vital for them to devote adequate time towards their studies. When the individuals get enrolled in higher educational institutions, then they normally migrate to other regions, cities or even countries. When they are living away from homes, then they are required to take care of other tasks and activities as well. These include, household chores, employment opportunities, and other activities. When they are not financially strong, then they are required to work to meet their expenses. Research has indicated that individuals get engaged in either part-time or full-time jobs along with the pursuance of masters or doctoral programs. When the individuals are engaged in other tasks and activities, along with their studies, then it is vital for them to put into practice proper time management skills. In the implementation of time management skills, one has to assign priorities to the tasks. The tasks, which are important need to be given priority. When students give importance to their studies, they are able to enhance their academic problems. Studies and employment opportunities are important for the individuals. Therefore, in educational institutions as well as at home, they are instructed by their educators and parents to pay attention towards their career goals. On the other hand, socializing with friends and relatives, watching television shows, and getting engaged in other leisure and recreational activities are also important for the students, but they

## **CULTURAL VIEWPOINTS REGARDING THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS**

The cultural viewpoints regarding the education of girls are embedded in the cultural norms and values. In some rural communities, when individuals do not possess adequate financial resources, which are necessary to meet the expenses that are involved in the pursuance of education, then they primarily form this viewpoint that providing education to the girls is a wastage of resources. Instead, they make use of resources in providing education to the boys. Other viewpoints that discourage girls from the acquisition of education are, they should be trained in terms of management of household responsibilities. These include, preparation of meals, cleaning, fetching water, taking care of the needs and requirements of younger siblings and elderly family members, especially when their parents are at work, taking care of livestock, assisting their parents in family business, which may include, production of food items, artworks, handicrafts, and so forth.

## **PROGRAMS PROMOTING WOMEN'S EDUCATION**

India is one of the founding members of the United Nation, and although at that time, still under the rule of the British, has been a member of the United Nations since 1945. At the summit in 2000, eight goals, such as, alleviation of poverty, halting the spread of AIDS, providing Universal Primary Education and so forth, known as the Millennium Development Goals were agreed upon with the deadline of 2015. In 2015, the United Nations built upon these goals and formed 17 Sustainable Development Goals within the time frame of 15 years. Among these 17 goals, two goals are primarily related to promoting education among women. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act says that all children, between the ages of six to 14 years should have the right to free and compulsory education. Another program that was initiated was Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2000-2001. The primary objective of this program was to eliminate gender gaps in education, achieve educational objectives throughout the country, access and retention and bring about improvements in the quality of education. A scheme known as Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was initiated in 2009. The major objective of this scheme was to make secondary education available to all individuals, within the age group of 15 to 16 years. The objectives of the scheme are to bring about improvements in the quality of education by having prescribed norms and standards. It aims to ensure the complete availability of secondary education by 2017. In 2004, a program was initiated, known as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). The major objective of this program was to establish upper primary schools with housing accommodation for the girls, belonging to deprived and marginalized sections of the society. The program was implemented in many parts of the country, where the literacy gender gap is above average and the literacy rate among girls is below average. The majority of the places in schools are reserved for girls, belonging to disadvantaged and minority communities and the rest are reserved for the girls, belonging to families, below the poverty line. In the KGBV schools, girls are encouraged towards acquisition of education by making provision of various items free of cost. These include, free textbooks, free uniforms, stationary items, bags, medical and health care facilities, housing accommodation, counselling and guidance facilities, financial assistance, mid-day meals and so forth.

## **CONCLUSION**

The prevalence of gender inequality in education is regarded as the major barrier within the course of progression of the system of education. The major factors that promote gender inequality in education are: socio-economic factors, cultural and religious factors, policy and institutional factors. When the girls and women are experiencing one or more of these factors, then usually it affects them physically as well as psychologically. There have been formulation of programs and schemes, which have the major objective of generating awareness among the individuals belonging to all categories, backgrounds and communities to treat girls and women with respect and make provision of equal rights and opportunities to them. When the individuals and communities will provide equal rights and opportunities to the girls, then it would not only promote their effective growth and development, but also well-being of the communities and the entire nation. The factors that influence the attainment of education are, socio-economic factors, accessibility to learning



THE QUILL-An Inter-disciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences // Vol. 01, June, 2024// materials and resources, time devoted towards formal learning activities and cultural viewpoints regarding the education of girls. Furthermore, there have been initiation of programs and schemes that promote education among women. These are, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). When the girls are encouraged for getting enrolled in schools and acquisition of education, it is vital for them to receive support and encouragement from their family members. In other words, it is necessary for them to be efficiently prepared for pursuing their academic goals. Apart from support and encouragement, it is vital for the parents to ensure that they provide their children with educational resources and take care of their well-being to enable them achieve academic goals. Furthermore, in schools there should be formation of a suitable learning environment with infrastructure resources and facilities, which would encourage the enrollment and retention of students.

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