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Education and women empowerment

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Abstract
Female education is a catch-all term for a complex set of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, and health education in particular) for girls and women. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education, and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Also involved are the issues of single-sex education and religious education in that the division of education along gender lines as well as religious teachings on education have been traditionally dominant and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussions of educating females as a global consideration.

Keywords: education, women, health, empowerment

Introduction
Higher attendance rates of high schools and university education among women, particularly in developing countries, have helped them make inroads to professional careers with better-paying salaries and wages. Education increases a woman's (and her partner and the family's) level of health and health awareness. Furthering women's levels of education and advanced training also tends to lead to later ages of initiation of sexual activity and first intercourse, later age at first marriage, and later age at first childbirth, as well as an increased likelihood to remain single, have no children, or have no formal marriage and alternatively, have increasing levels of long-term partnerships. It can lead to higher rates of barrier and chemical contraceptive use (and a lower level of sexually transmitted infections among women and their partners and children), and can increase the level of resources available to women who divorce or are in a situation of domestic violence. It has been shown, in addition, to increase women's communication with their partners and their employers, and to improve rates of civic participation such as voting or the holding of office.

Concept of Schooling of Girls
Education is a basic human right that should be exercised fully in all nations, but for many girls in India, attending school is not an option. A girl's education is an essential starting point in establishing equality everywhere. Despite the Indian Constitution guaranteeing equality before the law and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, India remains a patriarchal society. Male inheritance and property ownership, early marriage, dowry, honor crimes, lack girls' education, witch hunting, violence against women, and trafficking are all serious issues in the country. There are schools, but most girls do not attend, often because of religious reasons or cultural pressures**.**
A study conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau states that three out five girls receives primary education versus three out four boys. There should not be differences in the numbers of such a basic, universal human right. The law of the land makes it clear that both boys and girls have an equal opportunity to attend school from the age of six through fourteen, and that primary education is a fundamental right (Indian Constitution, Art 21)**.** If the constitution does not make it clear enough, there is also an article in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defining that education is a universal human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art 26**).** Girls are not receiving equal access to primary education in rural India and therefore are not achieving equality**.**

Limited Access to Laws and Rights
The laws governing education in India are remarkably similar to the laws of western nations. Â These laws are accessible to the citizens of India, but many of the citizens are unsure of how to properly live them out and where to go with complaints. Complaints usually fall on deaf ears and the citizen is told that there is equal access but that they are not fully utilizing it.
In addition to national laws, there are also international laws that also govern these states. These laws, however, are harder to access for the average citizen. The citizens are only able to access these laws through local NGOs. However, the NGOs are not usually located in rural India. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has a clear article outlining that the access to education is a basic human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art 26). These declarations should give more power to the government to provide access to education to all children.

Education is the Crux
The impact of education on girls is extraordinary. Education sustains human values. It forms the foundation for learning and critical thinking. Education also provides skills for girls to become more self-reliant and provides them with more opportunities. Thinking into the future, education also provides them with the knowledge to manage health problems. A girl understanding her own body can make the

difference between an unwanted pregnancy and an illegal abortion. Having the knowledge beforehand is crucial to saving and protecting lives.

Education does impact human development, as mentioned, along with economic Â development but the greatest impact is on democracy. Education is the only way a girl Cana be an informed citizen, leading the way for her to having her voice heard in society. Â Education also provides a better overall quality of life. Research has shown the life expectancy rises by as two years for every one percent increase literacy (U.S. Census Bureau 1998). When women have a voice there can be changes made to existing laws changing the future for young girls.

Why Girls are Pulled out of School

The first reason why girls are pulled out of school is because of family responsibilities. Girls provide free labor at home for the family. Home is also where they learn to be a better housewife. Many girls are kept at home because it is a better payoff than going to school. Having the girl attend school is not valuable to the whole family. This problem is lucidly evident in India, even in urban areas, but more prevalent with poorer families. Girls can be found doing everything from farm work to household chores.

The family plays a central role in a girl's life and shaping her future. Respect is given to elders in all situations and no decision can be made without consulting an elder. This often leads to the practice of arranged marriages. The decision is entirely up to the family and the girl often does not even see her future husband until the day of the wedding. Compared to American norms, individuals growing up in India are much more dependent on their families, especially parents.

The second reason why girls are kept from receiving a primary education is because they are pulled out early to protect family honor. This also can affect the dowry when the girl is married. The boy's side of the family can raise the dowry if they suspect she has been in school with boys during puberty. The practice of dowry is illegal, but laws are not always implemented. If the dowry cannot be paid, the bride runs the risk of being ruined, or worse, being killed. Honor killings are prevalent among the poor.

The third reason for inequality during primary education is because girls can't attend school due to inadequate facilities. Schools are unable to provide safe and sanitary facilities for young girls to attend, and with the population increasing at a rapid speed the priority for new facilities is given to boys. In many cases, though, this is exacerbated by basic infrastructural problems: roads, running water, and electricity are often scarce.

The fourth reason girls are kept from school is because of the shortage of female teachers. The problem can be solved, but it starts with first educating girls so they can aspire to be teachers. The government, however, does not see this as a problem and continues to deny that there is gender inequality within the education sector. There have been efforts, as listed earlier, by the government to enroll more girls but this has not been for the nation of India, but rather for international recognition and numbers.

It seems that although the prevalent ethos and the legislation (including the Right to Education Act of 2008) in India nearly guarantees that every Indian student will start schooling, it does not yet have the abilities to ensure that the environment to actually attain an education exists.

The effect of this problem is indeed exacerbated where women are concerned, as effective literacy rates in 2011 was at about 82.14% for men, versus 65.46% for women. So why do girls, in particular, leave school?

Reasons for the Marginalization of Girls from the Schooling System

There is not obviously any single good answer, nor is there conclusive data to show us which factors relatively impact girls the most. However we can identify a range of possibilities that could suggest specific reasons for the marginalization of girls from the schooling system.

1. Expectations of Domesticity

To start with, girls are expected to contribute to the household far younger than boys are – the implicit understanding being that a girl is being trained for a role as a wife, mother and daughter-in-law, whereas boys are being trained for an occupation. Girls get married younger than boys do – a Harvard School of Public Health survey conducted studies in Gujarat looking into rates of child marriage, and found that of girls aged 14-17, 37% were engaged and 12% married. On the other hand, for boys in the same age range, only 27% were engages and 3% married. The same study found strong correlation between marital status and school attendance rates (in which marries children were over twice as likely to not attend school as single children), but also marriage proved to be worse for the educational prospects of girls than boys.

Besides, families often think that the cost of education, both monetary and psychological is wasted on a girl because of her decreased earning potential and this selfsame expectation of domesticity. The economic benefit thereof is not immediately apparent to most families. Overall, the expectation of the girl child's participation in family life seems to be a hindrance in her participation in schooling.

2. Safety

Safety of girls travelling alone is a major concern for Indians – the prevalent discourse surrounding recent events has brought to the forefront a longstanding problem. We also see a fear that educating girls causes excessive independence, and this is seemingly manifested in the attitude that parents take to a girl's education.

In an article, the Guardian told the story of a girl in Delhi who was being taunted by boys on the way to school. She was afraid to tell her parents, for she thought that they would prevent her from attending school if she did. She was right – her family was, in the words of the author, 'worried about the effect on their "honor" if she was sexually assaulted.' These stories are not isolated; rather, this is an endemic and Very gendered problem in economically disadvantaged India, be it rural or urban.

3. Infrastructure Barriers

The Right to Education bill has set forth some norms and standards in this regard – it codifies expectations and requirements of norms and standards relating inter alia to

pupil-teacher ratios buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours. Therefore we do see legislators are at the very least, considering this area of concern further. It is also one of the easier aspects to tackle, as it falls within the purview of Education Departments in the Centre and in States. However, it is commonly perceived that girls suffer for various reasons from the lack of infrastructure much worse than boys do—for instance, as of 2012 40% of all government schools lacked a functioning common toilet, and another 40% lacked a separate toilet for girls. This in fact creates even more reluctance to allow for girls to be educated.
Although including girls in the scheme of Indian universalized education, these causes seems to make one thing clear – the causes are ingrained in systems that are larger than education. While temporary solutions are rampant and popular, it will take attention on the long-term scale to ensure that girls across India are able to freely, safely, and consistently attend school and access an education.

The Solution

All of these contribute to the issue of unequal access to education for girls along with many more issues. These four issues have many underlying issues that contribute to the overall problem. And to solve this issue we can look to three conclusions: NGOs and nonprofits, and the government's response**.**

First, NGOs and nonprofits can offer the most helpful solution to this problem because of grassroots movements across rural India. Many of the past efforts have come from reviewing previous reports. NGOs and nonprofits work at a local scale where a difference can made, whereas the government has worked on a larger scale with less success.

Second, the government's response can help the whole process of providing primary schools for girls. The Indian government has recognized the problem has been slow to act on the issue. As mentioned earlier, education is not a priority for the government right now; rather the government is focused on the economy. Without girls being involved in the future economy, the government is taking a risk and putting the issue off for another generation.

Education and Women's Empowerment

Education systems vary in administration, curriculum and personnel, but all have an influence on the students that they serve. As women have gained rights, formal education has become a symbol of progress and a step toward gender equity. In order for true gender equity to exist, a holistic approach needs to be taken. The discussion of girl power and women's education as solutions for eliminating violence against women and economic dependence on men can sometimes take dominance and result in the suppression of understanding how context, history and other factors affect women (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). For example, when past secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, referenced the tragedies of Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan and the girls kidnapping in Chibok, Nigeria as comparable, using girls' education as the focus, history and context were ignored. What led to the shooting of Malala was reduced to being solely about her educating herself as a girl. United States interference, poverty, and government corruption and instability were not addressed.

Current policies

Before and after Independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, has been a path breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of female education.

The major schemes are the following:

- **Mahila Samakhya Programme**: This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of the New Education Policy (1968). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working and recommend new changes that could be made.
- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV):** This scheme was launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools that were set up have 100% reservation: 75% for backward class and 25% for BPL (below Poverty line) females.
- **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):** This programme was launched in July, 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls who the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the "hardest to reach girls". This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, "model schools" have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.
- One notable success came in 2013, when the first two girls ever scored in the top 10 ranks of the entrance exam to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). Sibbala Leena Madhuri ranked eighth, and Aditi Laddha ranked sixth.
- In addition, the status and literacy rates between West Bengal and Mizoram were found to be profound; a study compared the two states as they took on politically different approaches to helping empower women (Ghosh, Chakravarti, & Mansi, 2015). In West Bengal, literacy rates were found to be low even after fulfilling the 73rd amendment from 1992. The amendment established affirmative action by allotting 33% of seats at panchayats, or local self-governments, to women. Mizoram chose not to partake in the 73rd Amendment but has seen greater literacy rates, it is second highest in the country, and also has a better sex ratio. It was thus found that affirmative action's steps alone were not enough. Women also need to be given the opportunity to develop through formal education to be empowered to serve and profit from holding these public leadership roles.

Conclusion

In India, there are more than 12 million 10-year-old girls, far more than in any other country. Based on secondary school-progression data, nearly 900,000 - about 9 per cent - of these 12 million girls, while already having access to basic education, are at risk of not continuing on to secondary school," the report said. According to estimates, as much as USD 21 billion a year dividend for developing countries can be unlocked if all 10-year-old girls complete secondary education. UNFPA warns that forced marriage, child labour, female genital mutilation and other practices undermining girls' health and rights threaten the world's ambitious development agenda.

It noted that of the 125 million 10-year-olds today, 60 million are girls who are systematically disadvantaged at the global level as they move through adolescence into adulthood. Girls are less likely than boys to complete formal schooling at the secondary and university levels, are more likely to be in poorer physical and mental health, and will find it harder to get paid jobs.

The past two decades have also seen extremely rapid changes in the proportions of children attending school; dramatic declines in maternal, neonatal, and infant deaths; and a slow transition to greater gender equality. If these improvements continue and we collectively invest in developing this cohort in ways that allow them to maximize their potential, 10-year-olds may well prove pivotal to transforming the world for the better.

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