



Keeping Girls In School

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This article is based on **Making sure that girls don't drop out of school** which was published in The Indian Express on 28/08/2021. It talks about the issue of girls dropping out and ways to ensure their stay in higher education.

For the past few decades, Indian women have taken a great stride in all fields of activity. Yet, a lot remains to be achieved. Indian women excelled in the Olympic Games for India. There is no reason for it to be otherwise in any other field, especially education, given the right support.

As a nation, we can not afford to ignore half the potential workforce if we aspire to be an economic powerhouse. As a society, women can be the pivot to bring about critical and lasting social transformation. As individuals, they deserve a shot at being the very best they can.

In this context there is a need to relook into various issues related to women's education especially higher education.

State of Girls Dropping Out

- **Reasons For Girls Dropping Out:** The reasons for girls dropping out in India are varied. The primary ones are obvious: Girls drop out of school because,
 - Engaged in domestic activities (31.9%)
 - Have financial constraints (18.4%),
 - Not interested in education (15.3%), and
 - Get married (12.4%).
- **Gender Biases and Social Norms:** The problem is not only rooted in poverty and poor quality of school education, but also gender biases and outdated social norms. The states having the highest rate of secondary school drop-outs among girls are also the ones where a significant percentage of girls get married before the age of 18 years.

- **Low Expenditure on Girls Education:** Deep-rooted gender biases are also reflected in the choice of schools, access to private tuitions and the choice of discipline in higher education.
 - The average annual household expenditure on girls at this level is Rs 2,860 less than that on boys.
 - In India, the average annual cost for professional courses is much higher compared to that of simple graduation programmes (Rs 50,000 vs Rs 8,000).
 - Of the girls who do manage to enrol in a tertiary degree, a smaller proportion go on to pursue professional courses such as engineering (28.5%), while many more take courses such as **pharmacy (58.7%)** or opt for “**normal graduation**” (52%) as per **AISHE 2019-20**.
 - Their representation is lowest in institutions of national importance, followed by deemed and private universities.

Girls Drop Out- Data

- It is estimated that over 2.4 crore girls globally are on the verge of dropping out of schools due to the **Covid-19 pandemic**.
 Pandemic-induced **school closures and economic hardships** have significantly exacerbated many vectors that influence the problem of women in education.
- In the Indian context before the pandemic, there was a welcome trend in the gradual increase in the **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** for women in higher education — from 19.8% in 2012-13 to 27.3% in 2019-20.
 - That said, a more nuanced picture of the problem of women and higher education can be seen. Lately, it has been affected badly by the pandemic induced lockdowns.
 - It is estimated that **over one crore girls** are on the verge of dropping out of schools due to the pandemic alone.

Importance of Education: Social Development of the Women

- **Higher Social Return:** The global average for the private rate of return (the increase in an individual’s earnings) with just one extra year of schooling is about 9%, while the social returns of an extra year of school are even higher — above 10% at the secondary and higher education levels as per a decennial **World Bank** review.
- **Positive Impact of Higher Education:** Interestingly, the private returns for women in higher education are much higher than for men — 11 to 17% as per different estimates.
 This has clear policy implications. For their own empowerment, as well as for society at large, we must bring more and more women within the ambit of higher education.

- **Women Can Play Leadership Roles:** Healthy, educated girls with equal access to opportunities can grow into strong, smart women who can take on leadership roles in their countries. This will help in having a better view of women's perspective in the government policies.
- **Poverty Alleviation:** Women constitute almost half of the country's population, therefore improving their condition in the country can immensely contribute to poverty alleviation.
 - Women's empowerment plays a catalytic role towards the achievement of transformational economic, political and social changes required for sustainable development.

Way Forward

- To overcome these systemic challenges, the government has taken a number of initiatives in the past such as the **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE)**, supernumerary seats in all IITs and the **PRAGATI Scholarship scheme** for girls in technical education.
 - However, in these unprecedented times, we need unprecedented measures to address the issue of girl child school drop-outs and bring more girls in professionally and monetarily rewarding fields of higher education.
- **Community Learning Programme:** As an immediate step, in every locality, a mohalla school or a community learning programme should be started with appropriate Covid norms.
 - **NITI Aayog**, with the help of civil society organisations, had started a community programme led by volunteers called "**Saksham Bitiya**" in 28 aspirational districts where more than 1.87 lakh girl students were trained in socio-emotional and ethical learning.
 - Such initiatives should be replicated to ensure more girls do not drop out of schools during the pandemic.
- **Gender Atlas/Dropout Mapping:** To predict likely drop-outs, a gender atlas comprising indicators that are mapped to key reasons for school drop-outs should be developed.
 - Teachers should also be trained in all the scholarships and schemes available that provide economic support to girls and their families for continuing their education.
- There is a **need to revise the National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education** in areas or states with high prevalence of drop-outs and early child marriages.
 - The scholarship amount may be increased and tied to the completion of graduation, with yearly scholarships paid to students upon successful completion of each year of their undergraduate degree.

- **Special Education Zones For Backward Districts in Education:** Every panchayat showing a consistent trend in girl child drop-outs should have composite schools till higher secondary (classes I-XII).
 - **The National Education Policy 2020** provides for a **gender inclusion fund**. This fund should be utilised to support **STEM education** in these schools as well as in all Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas.
 - State governments need to leverage existing schemes to design interventions to promote women in higher education.
- **Behavioural Nudges in Tackling Social Prejudices:** Social prejudice and orthodox cultural norms prevent girls from achieving their innate potential.
 - **Behavioural Insights Units (BIU)** may be established across states to tackle social issues with the help of ultra-local NGOs/CSOs to reach the last mile.
 - NITI Aayog has taken a leap forward in this direction by establishing a BIU to tackle nutrition and health challenges in aspirational districts.

Conclusion

The **Covid-19 pandemic** has brought unprecedented challenges for all including educators and students, especially for those on the margins, including girls. However, with recent experiments and learning experience, informed targeting of ample resources and an agile policy environment, this challenge could well prove to be an opportunity. Given the right enabling environment, educational outcomes can be improved.

Addressing gender bias in education requires providing social, financial and emotional support to the girl child.

Drishti Mains Question

India's women who are enrolled in education are far less than their counterparts. Examine the reasons and probable solutions for this gap in India.
