



Gender Inequality In Higher Education: “Causes And Consequences”

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Abstract: India ranked 131st out of 148 countries participating in the 2025 Global Gender Parity Index. The enormous disparity in opportunity between women and men is highlighted by this ranking, which raises serious concerns. We observe so many types of discrimination against women in society, which leads to inequality. Female enrollments in basic education are good, but inequalities are found at various level of higher education enrollments. Recent data on all India GER is 29.5% for the (18-23 age population). India aims to achieve a GER of 50% by 2035. Now it is essential to study challenges for higher education enrolments and consequences that follow. Socail, cultural and traditional factors affect women's higher education drastically, how should women overcome all the barriers in higher education and solution part plays significant role in this regard and if female higher education enrollments gets decreased then directly it will impact on work force participation.in this regard gender issues in accessing higher education to be addressed on a first priority bases.

Keywords- Gender inequality, Causes, Consequences, Higher education, GER.

1.INTRODUCTION

Historically, Indian society has framework that marginalises women in various domains, like education, healthcare, decision-making, and financial autonomy. Dowry system significant is reason for harrasemen on women. The majority of Indian households treat girls child as a burden. sons still preferred over daughters. That's why girls are less in numbers getting into pursue higher degrees. Women won't paid equal in employments. Women continue to be the preferred gender for household management tasks in the twenty-first century. Due to obligations to their families, many women resign to their job positions and decline leadership positions. However, men rarely act in this way.

2) Significance of Gender equality in higher education : Achieving greater socio-economic progress depends on both gender having equal access to opportunities. Women often face marginalisation and are denied equal rights in health, education, decision-making, and financial independence. This long-standing societal system limits girls' opportunities compared to boys. Women are typically the primary caregivers in families, which results in their being mostly involved in domestic tasks. They are under represented in leadership roles, decision-making positions, and higher education, and this gender gap impedes a nation's

growth. When more women join the workforce, the country's economic growth increases, and gender equality boosts overall well-being. Women, being most affected by the pandemic, are also essential to community recovery. Centring women in economic development will have a significant impact. Fundamentally GE connected to SDG aims and important for realising basic rights for all. The main goal of gender equality is, in society where everyone should get equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities in all areas of life.

3) Constitutional Right to Education:

After an amendment was made in 1976, this privilege was added to the concurrent list. India has international agreements, including the SDG Charter of Children and the MDG Goals. April 1st, 2010, India implemented Right to Education Act, free education from six age group to fourteen. Education becomes a fundamental right by virtue of Article 21A. every sections of society children should get free primary education under this Act. Even private schools kept aside 25% of seats for low income groups.

Article 15: Nobody is discriminated based on race, religion, gender should not been discriminated. which is forbidden under Article 15(1). To promote economic social progressive and human capital accumulation, many nations introduced innovative steps to increase enrolment in tertiary educational institutions. China has expanded its HE system, raising the gross enrolment ratio to over 50% in 2018, up from 12% in 2000 (World Bank 2020).

4) Higher education and gender inequality related issues: Gender inequality in India are observed in several important areas of socio, cultural, traditional, income, education, workforce participation, political life. The major dimensions include. If these inequalities are closed, a greater outcome is expected. There are always many disparities observed at all levels.

5) Study Objectives:

- 1) To study importance of gender equality.
- 2) To find-out various causes for gender inequality in higher education.
- 3) To study consequences of gender disparity in higher education.

6) Methodology of the Study: This study is based on secondary data sources.

7) Major causes for Gender inequality in Higher education:

- **Systemic in nature:** At the heart of educational inequality lies a systemic challenge deeply rooted in socioeconomic factors (Ulsaner and Rothstein 2016). The cyclical relationship between poverty and educational inequities, as highlighted by various studies, underscores the systemic forces that perpetuate educational disparities (Romesun, Sarma, and Samarakoon 2022). This theme emphasises the significance of policies that go beyond superficial interventions, urging policymakers, deal with structural and cyclical aspects of inequality. A systemic approach is imperative to break the enduring cycle and pave the way for lasting change (Bladen, Doepke, and Stuhler 2022).
- **Social and cultural norms:**
- **parental education:** parents' education level and awareness also contribute for women's higher education enrollments.
- **Social beliefs:** and practices plays key role for gender inequality. The way society perceives gender, along with traditions and cultural practises, often limits women's access to opportunities compared to men. Historically, men have held more privileges and power.
- **People Mindset:** Although societal mindset appears less significant , it's not true. mainly it results in propagation of gender disparity . The way society perceives and values for both genders in areas such as employment, legal systems, and healthcare greatly affects gender disparity.

- **Early age marriage:** In India 18 years (recently 21 years) legal marriage age for girls. concerning marriage age of girls, most of the families ignore it with illiteracy background. As a result, girls are married early, are deprived of education and better career opportunities. The practice overall discourages girls from acquiring higher education.
- **Inadequate Educational Settings for Girls:** In India, many schools won't have proper facilities, to make available of safe and supportive learning environment for girls. Basic needs as clean and safe drinking water, separate toilets, and proper infrastructure are often missing or inadequate, discouraging many girls from attending regularly. The overall school atmosphere sometimes fails to encourage female students. Teaching methods are often dull and unengaging, making learning less appealing. Moreover, the shortage of female teachers can make girls feel less comfortable and motivated at school.
- **Child labour issues:** remains a significant social issue in India, impacting millions of children nationwide. UN's reports indicates child labours are more in India compared to other countries. 50 lakh children are working in various forms of work, such as carpet weaving, beedi making, construction, brick manufacturing, domestic chores, and other low-wage jobs.
- In many of these industries, female employees are preferred over male workers, because employers find them more productive, obedient, and less costly to hire. This situation leads many girls to start working at a young age instead of getting educated. which can harm their education, health, and overall growth. Child labour childhood spoiled and also keeps the cycle of poverty , gender inequality going in society.
- **Poverty** remains a significant issue in India, making it one of the poorest countries worldwide. This economic hardship is a key factor behind gender inequality in the country. While rural areas have schools and educational institutions, a major challenge is that families facing financial difficulties often prioritise educating their sons over their daughters. Despite these disparities, women are regarded as the more dominant gender in India.
- **Religious restrictions** and intolerance can also contribute to gender inequality in India. In societies with limited religious freedom, women often face greater discrimination so gets few opportunities. Traditional beliefs and conservative practices may restrict women's mobility, decision-making power, and economic independence.
- **Without solving basic education issues, higher education barriers can't be addressed.**
- **Deep-Rooted Gender Beliefs in India:** In India, gender-related beliefs and stereotypes are deeply rooted in society. the nation has made huge progress by implementing laws, policies, and structural reforms to promote gender equal society , resistance to these changes still exists. Traditional patriarchal attitudes often continue to influence people's thinking and behaviour, leading to discrimination against women in areas such as education, employment, property rights, and decision-making.
- Women often encounter unequal treatment despite existing legal protections. Achieving genuine gender equal society is essential in modern days more than laws; it demands a shift in social attitudes and beliefs. Without a change in people thinking gender roles and an embrace of equal opportunities for everyone, gender inequality will persist, and true social and economic advancement will be hindered.
- **Violence and Harassment Against Women:** Violence and harassment are major forms of gender inequality faced by women in India. Many women experience physical, emotional, sexual, and domestic violence both inside and outside their homes. Harassment at workplaces, schools, public places, and online platforms also affects their safety, confidence, and freedom.

- **Dowry System, Impact of Dowry on Girls' Education:** The dowry system remains a serious social problem in India despite laws. Still it is practiced in rural areas, the practice of giving dowry during marriage continues. Families of girls are often expected to provide money, property, or valuable goods to the groom's family, which places a heavy financial burden on them.
- In many low-income families, it is a belief that a more educated daughter will require a higher dowry at the time of marriage. Because of this fear, some parents hesitate to invest in their daughters' higher education. They often prefer to provide only basic or education for girls, instead of encouraging them to pursue college or professional studies.
- **Caste System:** The caste system is another major factor contributing to social inequality in India. Lower caste girls are not offered higher education due to their caste identity. The country has numerous castes and sub-castes, and lower castes girls faced discrimination and limited opportunities. Basic education denied, many of these children given manual skills type work and engage in labour work from an early age.
- **Labour-intensive home production:** The economic development of a country is marked by improved physical infrastructure, advanced technology, and higher household income. Together, these factors lead to more efficient and less labour-intensive home production over time.
- For example, using an electric stove takes less time than a wood-burning stove that needs wood gathering. Since women in India do most household chores, improving home appliances can free up their time, enabling them to engage in other activities.
- **Economic Causes :**
- **The economic condition of the families:** Every family may not be able to give higher education for all children equally; in a few families, sons may be given priority while providing education.
- **Higher education is most expensive:** poor and rural women can't access it due to high fees for admission.
- **Inadequate infrastructure:** students from rurals will face more challenges, a lack of educational institutions, setup, and teaching facilities, proper guidance.
- **Lack of transportation facilities:** In rural areas, those who get admissions for higher education in the city face many problems while reaching educational institutions from their home.
- **Lack of prior schooling experience:** there are no basic education facilities built properly, in most of the areas. If girls don't get basic education, then how come enrollments are higher in higher education?
- **Lack of Awareness:** The government should implement adequate awareness programmes to make the population aware of various schemes, policies, and programs implemented for higher enrollments in HE (mainly in STEM fields)
- **Caste and Gender discrimination-**there is a chance of discrimination by gender and their caste. People have an outdated mindset that identity is yet made through caste and gender.

8) Consequences of Inequalities in Higher Education will result in –

- **Lack of political participation and leadership:** Economic and Social Consequences. Social Mobility: Unequal access to elite institutions leaves individuals from low-income families trapped in lower-income brackets, cementing privilege for wealthier households.
- **Impacts on Health and Well-being:** women health is associated with good education with significant geographical and health disparities, showing that individuals with fewer educational opportunities experience greater inequalities in life expectancy.

- Underprivileged background girls , who pursue higher education frequently encounter exclusionary policies, microaggressions, and significant academic pressure. This sense of isolation contributes to increased levels of depression and anxiety.
- Replication of Inequalities: Institutions that fail to implement inclusive "widening participation" policies risk reproducing systemic inequities. When underrepresented groups face barriers in admissions, the diversity of the student body suffers, degrading the educational experience for all.
- Epistemic crises, driven by inequalities in academic opportunities and funding, lead to widespread protests. These problems highlight major challenges related to institutional knowledge, authority, and fairness in modern society.
- **Workforce shortage:** Disadvantaged students frequently drop out or join underfunded programs, resulting in a lack of specialised skills and slower economic growth.
- Higher Educational inequality causes significant disparities in student academic performance. Children from marginalised social and economic backgrounds tend to perform worse in exams, drop out at higher rates, and encounter obstacles in entering and completing higher education. These educational gaps undermine their future career prospects, income, and overall quality of life.
- **Low socio-economic status:** Nonetheless, educational inequality constrains equal access to success and perpetuates poverty and disadvantages. Children from low-income households have few facilities compared to their wealthier peers, which hampers their future growth and development.
- The economic inequalities are due to higher education. A poorly educated workforce reduces a country's productivity, economic growth, and global competitiveness. Inequalities in education create a skills gap, decreasing the number of qualified and skilled workers and limiting innovation and development. Therefore, reducing educational inequality is not only a social responsibility but also an economic necessity for national progress.
- Moreover, disparities in Higher education undermine social inequalities, and it will divide society by class and economic status. When educational opportunities are unequal, they reinforce social stratification, discrimination, and stereotypes among various groups. Implementing fair, inclusive higher education by gender can foster equality, social harmony, and national unity by ensuring that everyone has an equal chance to succeed.
- **Income inequalities:** without a higher education, women won't get high-paid jobs
- **Legal protection will be lacking:** She will be protected against discrimination and harassment.

9) Policy Intervention and Solutions:

Challenges in implementing existing policies form a critical theme. While some interventions show promise, their efficacy is often constrained by the persistence of educational inequalities. Policymakers must consider the multifaceted nature of these factors and adopt adaptive strategies, such as implementing targeted interventions and reevaluating existing policies, which are imperative for comprehensive and lasting change. (Hadden and Easterbrook 2020).

This theme highlights the importance of policy frameworks that address current challenges and proactively anticipate future issues related to educational disparities. Tackling policy dilemmas requires a deep understanding of the systemic roots of educational inequality and supports adaptable solutions that evolve with the evolving challenges they aim to resolve (Erwin and Thomsen 2021).

10) Conclusion:

This research paper explores the factors and policies that drive inequality in higher education. researchers identify basic interconnected factors and policies that significantly influence higher education inequality.

This study highlights the systematic nature of disparities in the cyclical relationship between poverty and educational inequalities, primarily caused by socioeconomic factors discussed. Firstly interconnected influences of factors social norms, parents education, ethnicity, prior schooling, gender, and location, which together contribute to education and HE inequality over time. These interconnected factors complicate efforts to address the issue through research and policy. To develop effective solutions, understanding of systemic educational inequality is essential, as is adaptable strategy. Parental education significantly influence the dynamics of educational disparities. Although these factors are globally widespread, locally tailored policies that consider cultural and societal norms are crucial. However, study is mostly required in subject-specific insights on educational inequality, such study on increasing STEM enrollments to reduce disparities. The need of more detailed understanding of the variables driving inequality in higher education. Additionally, the small number of studies reviewed is a constraint, but still provided clear data to focus the research issues. The gender disparity gap and its causes emphasise significance for further study understanding and inform policy in similar contexts.

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