

Use of ICT in Gender Disparity in Education in India

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Abstract: The gender difference in child schooling is one of the most fundamental problems faced in developing countries. Where the initial enrolment rates at the primary educational levels and thereafter, the overall schooling outcomes at the subsequent educational levels are significantly lower for female children in comparison to male children. Even in some countries it is observed that the drop-out rates at the primary and secondary educational levels are far more for female children than male children.

This leads to the debate, if there is any disparity in parental investment in children, if not then, why we observe the gender difference in schooling outcomes. Do we need any further clarification to understand this concept? In this paper, we have tried to study the much discussed gender disparity in child schooling in India, while controlling for a range of other individual, household and community level characteristics and then, if this is a manifestation of the intra-household resource allocation favoring the male child, using household fixed effects estimation model.

Keywords: Child Schooling, Gender Discrimination, Gender Disparity

I. Introduction

In the developing world, gender discrimination is a devastating reality, which has resulted in millions tragedies individually adding up to lost potential for those countries. A country's attitude toward women and its social and economic progress are directly linked as women's status is in center for the health of a country. It is a tragedy that against the trauma of gender discrimination, it is a women who is the most defenseless. The obstacles like education and employment are stark examples of what is faced by women worldwide.

It can't be denied that to reduce poverty and encourage sustainable development a nation has to invest in human capital but without any discrimination. Yet, in developing countries, women usually receive less education and generally enjoy far less employment opportunities. Besides these, some large gender disparities exist in resources, basic human rights, opportunities and political rights too. And so discrimination ultimately harms the society, at large the nations too, by hindering their development.

II. The experience in India

Looking far behind, since 1950s to the present, it can be seen that in India enrolment went up to 113.8 million at the primary stage, 42.8 million at the upper primary stage and 27.6 million at the higher secondary stage. The ratio of

the girls too was at 43.76%, 40.89% and 38.77% respectively, which can be

considered as quite impressive. (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2001)

Table 1: Growth in enrolment from (in millions) from 1950 to 2001

PRIMARY				
YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	% GIRLS
1950-51	13.8	5.4	19.2	28.13
1960-61	23.6	11.4	35	32.57
1970-71	35.7	21.3	57	37.37
1980-81	45.3	28.5	73.8	38.62
1990-91	57	40.4	97.4	41.48
2000-01*	64	49.8	113.8	43.76
UPPER PRIMARY				
BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	% GIRLS	
1950-51	2.6	0.5	3.1	16.13
1960-61	5.1	1.6	6.7	23.88
1970-71	9.4	3.9	13.3	29.32
1980-81	13.9	6.8	20.7	32.85
1990-91	21.5	12.5	34	36.76
2000-01*	25.3	17.5	42.8	40.89
HIGH SCHOOL (Secondary)				
BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	% GIRLS	
1950-51	1.3	0.2	1.5	13.33
1960-61	2.7	0.7	3.4	20.59
1970-71	5.7	1.9	7.6	25.00
1980-81	7.6	3.4	11	30.91
1990-91	12.8	6.3	19.1	32.98
2000-01*	16.9	10.7	27.6	38.77

Source: Select Education Statistics, Department of Education, MHRD, GOI, 2000-01

The credit for this goes to many government policy interventions for the girl child, like the National Committee report on Education of women (1958-59), the report of Kothari Commission (1964-65) and the National Policies of 1968 and 1986 on Education. All of these efforts stressed on empowering women. The aim was to make them able to guide their own destiny and become self-sufficient through exposure to education. A special programme DPEP

(District Primary Education Programme) is being run in 42 districts in 7 States. The aim is to increase enrolment of girls and sustain it. One of its thrusts is to eliminate gender discrimination in its jurisdiction as it has a substantial gender focus in it.

However, the disturbing is that the median number of years of schooling is only 5.5 for boys and 1.8 for girls, and what is more disturbing is that only 35.6

per cent boys and 19.7 per cent girls complete middle school. In 1996 about 38 per cent of girls in India, 45.6 per cent in rural India and 21.8 per cent in urban India the 15-19 age group were married. 17 per cent of total fertility in India is attributed to girls in the 15-18 age group. (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2001)

In the urban areas, although there is a discernible difference in terms of the opportunities, it is heartening to see, if given the opportunity, they have excelled more than boys. For example, in the all India level CBSE exams for 10th and 12th grades, for over a decade now, girls have been bagging the top positions. In contrast to this, If the rural and the backward or disadvantaged groups are taken into account, this scene looks far worrisome. The gender discrimination is more pronounced and the situation of girls is worse. India is a picture of contrasts in terms of educational opportunities for girls. Because of social, cultural and economic factors, getting education and employment for a female is a mirage. In the rural parts, household and agricultural chores like looking after siblings, grazing the cattle and physical

safety & fear of sexual harassment are some key factors, which limit their education. For example

- She has to do daily struggles for fodder fuel and wage.
- Her social role is preset and well-defined. Her norms of interaction have no room for education.
- She is not able to share her oppression experience with other women. She can't tap her strength collectively with others.
- She has no access to information and can't involve in decision-making processes. Even she is a passive recipient of the government schemes.
- She is forced to live with her environment of fear and suspicion.
- She is paralysed by her own low self-image because of the social system's systematic robbery of her confidence.

It is evident from the figures given in the following tables that women are caught in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle; their inability to educate themselves perpetuates the stereotype that education is irrelevant to women. (Mahila Samakhya: Education for Women's Equality, Government of India, 1991)

Table 2: Girls Education: Overview of issues

Systemic issues	Content and process of education	Economy, society and culture
Problem of Access	Gender stereotyping	Poverty / powerlessness
Dysfunctional schools	Perpetuation of gender-bias	Status of women
Quality of schools	Relevance of curriculum	Cost to family
Motivation of teachers	Language	Child labour / domestic chores
Existence of multiple delivery systems - formal, non-formal, condensed, satellite and residential.	Joyful learning	Farm / non-farm work
Calendar and timings	Ready access to books, magazines, papers and so on	Caught up in survival battles
	Appropriate reading material for the newly literate	Perception of herself
		Post puberty practices
		Child marriage

Source: Ramachandran, 1998 UNESCO-PROAP / ASPBAE

Table 3: Literacy rates: All-India and Major States, 2001

State	Male	Female	Male-female gap	Decadal increase Male	Decadal increase Female	Increase ranked in descending order M F	
All India	75.96	54.28	21.68	11.83	15.00		
AP	70.85	51.17	19.68	15.72	18.45	4	6
Assam	71.93	56.03	15.90	10.06	13.00	11	16
Bihar	60.32	33.57	26.75	8.95	11.58	16	17
Chhattisgarh	77.86	52.40	25.46	19.79	24.87	2	1
Gujarat	80.50	58.60	21.90	7.11	9.68	18	18
Goa	88.88	75.51	13.37	5.24	8.42	19	19
Haryana	79.25	56.31	22.94	10.16	15.84	10	8
HP	86.02	68.08	17.94	10.61	15.82	9	9
J & K	65.75	41.82	23.93	NA	NA	NA	NA
Jharkhand	67.94	39.38	28.57	12.14	13.86	7	11
Karnataka	76.29	57.45	18.84	9.03	13.12	15	15
Kerala	94.20	87.86	6.34	0.58	1.69	20	20
MP	76.80	50.28	26.52	18.26	20.93	3	3
Maharashtra	86.27	67.51	18.75	9.71	15.20	14	10
Orissa	75.95	50.97	24.98	12.86	16.29	6	7
Punjab	75.63	63.55	12.08	9.97	13.14	12	14
Rajasthan	76.46	44.34	32.12	21.47	23.90	1	2
Tamil Nadu	82.33	64.55	17.78	8.58	13.22	17	13
Uttaranchal	84.01	60.26	23.75	11.22	18.63	8	4
UP	70.23	42.98	27.25	15.40	18.61	5	5
W. Bengal	77.58	60.22	17.35	9.77	13.66	13	12

Source: Government of India 2001a, pp.126

Table 4: Crude Literacy Rates by Sex and Residence, India, 1981-2001

Year	Source	Males		Females			
		Rural	Urban	All Areas	Rural	Urban	All Areas
1981	Census(all ages)	49.6	76.7	56.4	21.7	56.3	29.7
1987-88	NSS	48.4	72.3	-	25.9	55.9	-
1991	Census (all ages)	57.8	81.1	64.1	30.6	64.1	39.3
1992-93	NFHS-1	62.9	84.1	68.8	34.5	67.5	43.3
1993-94	NSS	63.7	85.3	74.5	36.6	68.7	52.7
1998-99	NFHS-2	69.5	87.5	74.5	43.7	72.2	51.4
2001	Census (all ages)	-	-	64.1	-	-	45.8
2001	Census (7+ age)	-	-	76.0	-	-	52.9
% Increase 1982-91		16.12	5.3	12.4	41.1	14.0	29.8
% Increase 1991-2001				21.6			42.2

Source: Census 1981, 1991, 2001; NSSO 43rd, 50th Rounds, and NFHS I and II

The participation of women in education in the school is considered as subtly wrong, inappropriate and definitely dangerous to their womanly virtue and chastity. The better-educated and well off families send their daughters to school, but they also follow the cultural trend of keeping women at home after the completion of schooling.

“Out of approximately 200 million children in the age group 6-14 years, only 120 million are in school and net attendance in the primary level is only 66 per cent of enrolment.” *Of the 80 million children in the 6-14 age group who are either out of school or enrolled but not attending school, about 60 per cent are girls. Of the 121.3 million adult illiterates in the age group 15-35, 62 per cent are women.* (Government of India, 2002)

III. Gender Mainstreaming for ICT in Education

ICTs have the potential to alleviate or remove some of the barriers or constraints that prevent women and girls from accessing educational opportunities, such as illiteracy, poverty, time scarcity, socio-cultural factors, mobility, and relevancy, leading to women empowerment and gender equality. Unless explicit measures are taken to address the constraints girls and women face, any attempt to formulate ICT as a tool for knowledge and information dissipation for the underprivileged may increase gender disparities and lessen the potential impact of ICT in education.

Thus to bridge the gap of Gender Digital Divide, appropriate policy frameworks

to be established at the national level to address the issue of Gender Mainstreaming along with proper research work on the issues of Gender, ICTs, and Education.

Simple access to information and improved communications can end the isolation of women and promote improved health, access to reproductive services, economic growth as well as alleviate poverty.

The Information Village project in Pondicherry cites significant educational results from their project including support to women's small business development. Women's self-help groups use the system to contact other women's groups with which to share their experiences. One innovative use of ICTs is the development of a multimedia presentation and multimedia flash cards to provide gynecological information to reach women who are prevented by cultural attitudes from discussing their health problems with male doctors and younger females.

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India is an initiative to encourage women to become fully employed and self sufficient. SEWA's initiative to start Rudi no Radio, the first community radio station in a village near Ahmedabad has made hundreds of women gain access to knowledge and information on career opportunities, education, health and sanitation and so on.

IV. Conclusion

Encouraging women to use ICT remains however a challenging task since technology uptake of women and girls tends to be low in South Asia, even in environments where computers are available; since it is generally the boys who are encouraged to use it. To ensure that ICT is used efficiently to deliver education and to overcome the gender gap, differential attention is needed for boys and girls in ICT schemes in Education. Positive discrimination or Affirmative Action in favor of girls, in provision of access to ICT facilities in schools needs to be explored in many of these traditional societies.

What is needed today are the trends where women can not only break out the culturally determined educational patterns but also can advise about career possibilities, which look beyond the traditional jobs.

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