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Review Paper

Assessing the Extent of Gender Inequality Experienced by Unmarried Female Students in Haryana and Exploring Strategies for Empowerment and Equality

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ABSTRACT

The issue of gender inequality is very common in some of the Indian states like Haryana. There are some particular states located in India where people value traditional patriarchal norms rather than the particular rights of women in the society. In Haryana unmarried female students often experience various kinds of gender-based discrimination in the society which ultimately negatively impacted their educational and personal development opportunities as well as this discrimination affected their overall quality of life. In this review the extent of gender inequality among the unmarried females of Haryana is acknowledged in details. In the overall study the disparities that they face in educational access and quality, societal expectations defined and the psychological impact of such inequities on the unmarried females also asses in this study. A comprehensive analysis of existing literature and studies are presented in the paper which highlights the persistent gender gaps in education and the characteristics of societal norms in extending these inequalities. There are various strategies which help to empower the women, including educational reforms, awareness and advocacy programs, and policy interventions also explored in this study. The findings of the review shed light on the fact that progress has been made but beside of the progress there still a lot of efforts is needed to achieve gender equality and empower unmarried female students in Haryana. In the end of the paper recommendations for future research and policy directions are mentioned briefly.

1. Introduction

In this upgraded generation it is very surprising that many parts of India still face diverse types of complications due to gender inequality. Particularly Haryana is the state which extensively relies on patriarchal social norms and in Haryana gender inequality is very common thing in the society. From the long history of the state it is clear that the state has a strong preference for male children which is also proved from its skewed sex ratio between female child and male child. In Haryana, unmarried female students often face different type of challenges due to some traditional societal norms which create several hurdles in their daily life. The unmarried females of Haryana do not have the scope to access quality education and they are pressurized for early marriage. Each and every issue initially affects their personal and academic development.

In this modern society it is very important to empowering women and addressing gender inequality particularly in the context of education. Education is recognized as a major driver of social and economic development. For this reason, it is very important to ensure that each and every person of this society should have the scope of accessing education beyond the barriers of gender. Education is gateway to achieve broader development goals. Unmarried female students in Haryana

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face significant difficulties in the context of assessing education and personal development. Societal expectations and familial pressures making the situation difficult for them so they are unable to achieve their future development goals. The main aim of this review paper is to assess the extent of gender inequality that is experienced by unmarried female students in Haryana. Limited Educational access and quality, societal expectations, and the psychological impact of these factors on an unmarried female of Haryana are main discussion area of this paper. The paper also point out some strategies that help to empower these students and promote gender equality among the society of Haryana. There are basically four main sections in this review which are (1) Educational Disparities Faced by Unmarried Female Students; (2) Societal and Familial Pressures; (3) Impact on Personal and Academic Development; and (4) Strategies for Empowerment and Equality.

2. Educational Disparities Faced by Unmarried Female Students

2.1. Access to Education

In Haryana there are so many unmarried female students existed who are unable to accessing a complete education because in Haryana people believe in traditional gender norms that prioritize the education of males over females.

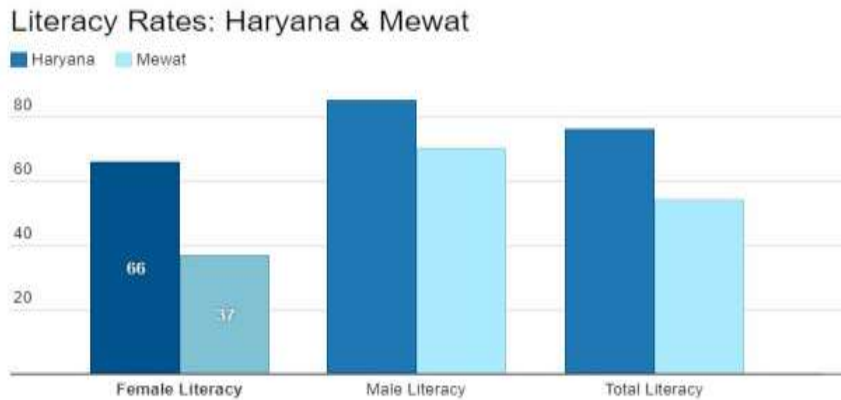


Fig 1: Literacy rates of both genders in Haryana. (Source: Census 2022)

As reported in *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)*, Haryana's female literacy rate stands at 65.94%, compared to the male literacy rate of 84.06% (Census 2022). The huge education gap that is seen between male and female of Haryana highlighted the fact that the state Haryana is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and this male centric society does give value to female education.



Fig 2: Percentage of 15-19 aged girls and boys of Haryana who are not enrolled in any educational institute as the survey of *Pratham Education Foundation* (Source: Self-developed)

A survey conducted by the *Pratham Education Foundation* found some vital key points about accessing education in rural Haryana. The survey revealed that there are approximately 25% of girls aged 15-19 were not enrolled in any educational institution in rural Haryana, on the other side seen just 10% of boys belongs to same age group not enrolled in any educational institution (*Pratham 2022*). Most of the people who live in rural Haryana have financial issues which put a stop in the education of girls, as well as after the age of 15-19 often girls are pressurized for early marriage which hinder the necessity of further education among them.

2.2. Quality of Education

Even when unmarried female students of Haryana enrolled in schools of areas rural they face a lot of criticism from their male counterparts. Another significant lack that is seen in those educational Institutes are lack of resources, poorly trained teachers, and inadequate infrastructure which ultimately destroy the quality of education among students. A report by the *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)* revealed that schools in rural Haryana have a student-teacher ratio of 30:1, compared to the national average of 24:1 (*ASER Centre 2023*).

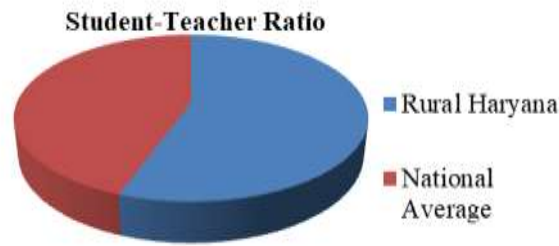


Fig 3: Student teacher ratio presented by *Annual Status of Education Report*. (Source: Self-developed)

The big difference that is seen in student teacher ratio ultimately affected the overall quality of education. Teachers are often unable to give individual support to students particularly those girls who may need additional support due to the barriers they face at home. As well as the curriculum and pedagogical approaches in these schools often prioritize traditional gender roles which limits the academic and career goals of female students. In the society of rural Haryana people believe that the primary role of female is in the home and male in professional and leadership fields.

3. Societal and Familial Pressures

3.1. Societal Expectations and Gender Roles

In Haryana, societal expectations play a noticeable role in the matter of shaping the lives of unmarried female students. According to the traditional cultural norms of the state women should prioritize family responsibilities and marriage over their own personal and academic development approaches. These stereotypes social norms are significantly embraced by community leaders, educators, and even family members. In Haryana particularly in rural areas people creates a societal environment that limits the future opportunities of unmarried female students. A study by the *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)* mentioned that approximately 68% families of Haryana prioritized the fact that woman’s primary responsibility is to manage the household over, her educational qualifications (CSDSn.d.). The traditional norms of Haryana places enormous pressure on unmarried female students to choose household responsibilities over their education and personal development aspects.

3.2. Familial Pressure about marriage

Factor	Details/Statistics	Source
Child Marriage Rate in Haryana	22.7% of women aged 20-24 married before 18	NFHS-5 (UNFPA 2023)
Impact on Education	50% less likely to complete secondary education if married before 18	ICRW (2016)
Correlation Between Early Marriage and Education	Strong correlation between early marriage and lower educational attainment	ICRW (2016)
Primary Barrier for Unmarried Female Students	Familial pressure to marry, disrupting education	NFHS-5 (UNFPA 2023); ICRW (2016)

The state Haryana has one of the highest rates of child marriage in India. According to the report of *NFHS-5* 22.7% women are married before the age of 18 (UNFPA 2023). The society emphasized early marriage which ultimately disrupts the educational opportunities of female and limits their scope of personal development. In a study by the *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)* it is mentioned that in Haryana a strong correlation is found between early marriage and lower educational attainment among women (ICRW2016). According to this study girl who was getting married at an early age are 50% less interested to complete secondary education compared to those who married later.

4. Impact on Personal and Academic Development

4.1. Psychological Effects

In Haryana, the gender discriminations have significant psychological effects on unmarried female students. The constant pressure to balance lifestyle with societal expectations and the limitations placed on personal freedoms bring feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and anxiety among those females. A study by the *Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)* mentioned that in Haryana probably 40% unmarried female students experienced anxiety related to societal and familial pressures (TISS2023). Whereas, many of them also express concerns about their ability to balance academic ambitions with traditional gender roles. The psychological effects of traditional norms disrupt their academic performance. As well as the psychological burden of gender inequalities also affects life style of unmarried female students and create numerous complexities in their path of academic success.

4.2. Academic Performance and Career Aspirations

The combined impact of educational disparities, societal expectations, and familial pressure ultimately disrupt the career aspirations of unmarried female students in Haryana. Many of these students accepted the fact that their primary role in society is take household responsibility after marriage and raise a family. This believes leading them towards

deprioritizing their educational and career goals. *Plan India* is a NGO that working on gender equality conducted a survey on the unmarried women's of Haryana and found that 60% of unmarried female students in Haryana enthusiastic to pursue higher education, but only 30% thought that they would be able to do so due to family and societal pressures (Plan India 2016). There is a huge gap is located in between aspirations and perceived opportunities which point out the crucial impact of gender inequality on the educational and career prospects of unmarried female students.

5. Strategies for Empowerment and Equality

5.1. Educational Reforms

It is very important to focus on improving access to quality education for girls, particularly in rural areas to properly address the educational disparities faced by unmarried female students in Haryana. The approach of providing financial incentives can encourage families to keep their daughters in school. The *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)* scheme has been successful example of this kind of approach which increases the enrolment rates of girls in schools. The government scheme provides financial support and promoting awareness about the importance of girls' education among the society (Parmar and Sharma 2020). Also improving the infrastructure of schools and colleges in rural Haryana is very important as this initiative can help to build encouragement among students and teachers. The *Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)* has introduce several programs which are upgraded the infrastructures of schools, implemented new facilities and provide gender-sensitive training for teachers (Chowdhury 2022). The diverse initiatives of government can successfully create a more conducive learning environment for unmarried female students in Haryana and encourage them to actively participate in educational courses.

5.2. Awareness and Advocacy Programs

Awareness and advocacy programs can help to reduce societal norms and stereotypes thoughts of people about gender inequality. There are several NGOs and civil society organizations now seen in in Haryana which gives lots of efforts to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and the rights of unmarried female students (Sachdev and Mazraani 2021). Through community meetings, workshops, and public campaigns it is easy deliver the importance of gender equality among the society and encouraging families in the matter of educating and empowering their daughters. Social media campaigns like *#IamHaryanaGirl* successfully establish a platform for young women where they can freely share their stories and aspirations which are working like an inspiration for others.

5.3. Policy Interventions

The *Government of Haryana* has introduced several policies which play an essential role in improving the status of women in the state. The *Haryana State Commission for Women*, contributes to protect the rights of women in Haryana as well as it also address issues of gender-based violence and discrimination faced by women in the society of Haryana (Tripathy and Raha 2019). Apart from all these practices, still more comprehensive and targeted policies are needed to specifically address the challenges faced by unmarried female students in Haryana. It is also very important to integrate studies related to gender equality into the school curriculum which help the students to understand the issues of gender inequality from an early age (Chowdhury 2022). These efforts can contribute to creating a more gender-equitable society in Haryana in future.

5.4. Support Networks and Mentorship Programs

Support networks and mentorship programs are also play a significant role in the context of empowering unmarried female students in Haryana. Some mentorship programs can be very helpful as they provide the guidance, encouragement, and resources needed to overcome the challenges they face. Initiatives like the *Girls Education Program by Room to Read* have demonstrated the positive impact of mentorship on the academic performance and self-confidence of female students (DeJaeghere 2017). In Haryana there are also some local organizations and women's groups who have started mentorship programs to connect unmarried female students with successful women in various fields. Through this initiative unmarried female students have the opportunity can freely share their experiences and challenges.

6. Conclusion

Although the Indian society progress in several fields but Gender inequality remains an obstacle for unmarried female students in Haryana. For the reason of gender inequality they face educational disparities, societal and familial pressures, and psychological affects which ultimately limit their scope of personal and academic development. In the context of Haryana the deeply ingrained societal norms hinder the empowerment of unmarried female students. As seen in this article it is very important to addressing these issues to establish the equal right of females in the society of Haryana. Multifaceted approaches like educational reforms, awareness and advocacy programs, policy interventions, and support networks can helps in improving access to quality education, challenging traditional gender roles, and providing targeted support for unmarried female students, it is possible to create a more equitable and empowering environment for all students in Haryana. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies and exploring new approaches to addressing gender inequality in education. Policymakers and educators must continue to prioritize the needs of unmarried female students, ensuring that they have the opportunities and support needed to achieve their full potential.

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