



Gender Inequality in Higher Education and Employment Opportunities in India

Rohith Kumar ¹, Akanksha Mohanka ²,
Snehitha Chowdary ³, Arshia Baranwal⁴,
Sagarika Girish ⁵

¹ Assistant Professor, Center for Management Studies, JAIN
(Deemed-to-be University). Bengaluru - 560069,

^{2,4,5} BBA Center for Management Studies, JAIN (Deemed-to-be
University), Bengaluru - 560069,India

³ Undergraduate Student, BBA Center for Management Studies,
JAIN (Deemed-to-be Undergraduate Student,

Abstract – Gender inequality in India remains a major challenge despite progress in education and economic development. Under United Nations SDG 5 (Gender Equality), the goal is to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for women. However, inequalities persist, especially in higher education and employment, due to social norms, financial barriers, and workplace discrimination. This study examines how these challenges affect women’s access to education and job opportunities.

Keywords: Gender inequality, higher education, employment opportunities, gender pay gap, social norms, workforce participation, women empowerment, workplace discrimination, sustainable development, SDG 5.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a significant social issue in India, despite years of progress in education, the economy, and policies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include SDG 5: Gender Equality, which aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination and create equal work opportunities for women and girls in all sectors of society. Higher education and employment show the most pronounced educational inequalities that persist today.

Access to education for women in India has improved over time, as educational institutions now offer better resources at both primary and secondary levels. However, women still face numerous challenges in higher education. These challenges include financial difficulties, societal expectations, safety concerns, early marriages, and lack of family support. Women must reach higher educational levels to access available job opportunities, which become harder to secure as their qualifications increase.

The employment sector reveals an even more striking level of inequality. Women in India encounter obstacles such as limited job openings, wage disparities, workplace discrimination, unsafe working conditions, and the burden of unpaid domestic work. As a result, women participate less in the workforce compared to men. They face barriers to formal employment and leadership roles, which hinders the nation’s economic growth and social progress. Women’s lack of financial independence also contributes to their health issues.

This research paper aims to explore how gender inequality affects women in India, particularly regarding access to higher education and employment outcomes. It will also examine how these issues relate to the broader goals of sustainable development.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE (ROL)

Amartya Sen (1999)

Sen’s concept of “development as freedom” highlights the crucial role of education in empowering women. However, he argues that in societies like India, social norms and gender roles restrict women from fully using their educational achievements. This explains why increased education does not always lead to equal job opportunities.

Martha Nussbaum (2000)

Nussbaum’s capability approach emphasizes that true equality is achieved only when women can make their own choices. In India, even educated women often lack decision-making power because of cultural and familial restrictions, which limits their career growth.

Kingdon (2002)

Kingdon’s study on educational attainment in India shows that while gender gaps at primary levels have decreased, they still exist in higher education. Women from rural and economically weaker backgrounds face more barriers in accessing college and university education.

Desai and Kulkarni (2008)

This study highlights that gender inequality is not isolated but intersects with caste and class. Women from



marginalized communities face multiple challenges, making it harder to access higher education.

Chanana (2007)

Chanana points out that although female enrollment has increased, women are concentrated in fields like arts and humanities. They remain underrepresented in technical and professional courses, which negatively impacts their job prospects.

Klasen and Pieters (2015)

Their research identifies a major issue in India: as women become more educated, their participation in the workforce is declining. This indicates a disconnect between education and employment.

Mehrotra and Parida (2017)

They explain that the drop in female labor force participation is due to a lack of suitable job opportunities, societal expectations, and concerns about safety and mobility.

Das and Kotikula (2019)

This study emphasizes workplace discrimination as a key barrier. Women often encounter bias in hiring, promotion, and pay, which deters them from pursuing or staying in jobs.

World Bank Report (2018)

The report states that India has one of the lowest rates of female labor force participation in the world. This is significant despite improvements in women's education, indicating deeper structural issues.

UNESCO (2020)

UNESCO findings show that while gender gaps in basic education are narrowing, dropout rates for women increase in higher education due to early marriage, financial issues, and safety concerns.

Agarwal (2018)

Agarwal highlights the role of patriarchy in limiting women's economic independence. Even educated women are often expected to prioritize household duties over careers.

Goldin (2014)

Goldin discusses the gender wage gap and factors like occupational segregation and the motherhood penalty. Women are often paid less and face career interruptions due to family responsibilities.

International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021)

The ILO reports that many women in India work in the informal sector, where jobs are insecure, low-paying, and lack benefits. This reduces the positive impact of education on job quality.

Bhandari and Dubey (2019)

Their study highlights how concerns about safety, lack of transport, and poor workplace infrastructure discourage women from working, especially in urban and semi-urban areas.

AISHE Report (2022), Ministry of Education, India

The report shows that female enrollment in higher education has increased significantly. However, women are still underrepresented in professional and technical courses, which hampers their transition into high-paying jobs.

III. OBJECTIVES:

To understand the level of access to higher education by analyzing the enrollment, continuation, and completion rates.

- To understand the level of access to employment by analyzing the involvement in the workforce, employment opportunities, and growth.
- To understand the relationship between educational attainment and employment opportunities by analyzing the gaps.
- To understand the level of income distribution and wage differentials to understand the existence of inequality in earnings despite similar qualifications and skills.
- To understand the level of representation in leadership roles, highlighting the level of participation in the higher professional roles.
- To understand the role played by social, cultural, and economic factors in the context of education and employment.
- To understand the role played by infrastructure, safety, and support systems in the context of education and employment.

IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- Equal access to higher education is not possible for everyone, as people encounter difficulties such as financial constraints, social pressures, and lack of support. This creates inequality among people in terms of enrollment and graduation rates.
- There is a huge gap between educational achievements and employment success, where people with higher qualifications do not receive equal opportunities to grow in their careers.
- Workforce participation is also unequal among people, as many individuals are unable to join the workforce because of the lack of opportunities.
- Pay scale inequality is still present among people, even if they possess the same educational qualifications, skills, and experience. This shows the inequality present in the job market.
- Social and cultural factors still affect the minds of people and influence their decisions regarding



education and employment, which creates obstacles in the growth of individuals.

- Safety issues, lack of proper infrastructure, and poor transportation facilities are the biggest challenges people face in accessing education and employment opportunities.
- Improper implementation and lack of awareness about the support programs hinder the success of the initiatives taken to promote equality among people.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design is descriptive in nature.

Data Collection

a) Primary Data

The primary data collection instrument used is a questionnaire prepared through Google Forms. The questionnaire was randomly sent to the respondents through the online platforms WhatsApp and social media.

b) Secondary Data

Secondary data collection includes:

- Research articles and journals
- Government reports
- Online reports related to gender inequality and employment

Sampling Method

The sampling method used is random sampling.

Sample Size

The sample size for the study is 55.

Target Respondents

The respondents for the study are students from various age groups.

Tools for Data Analysis

The data collection tools used for the study are:

- Percentage analysis
- Graphical representation such as pie charts and bar graphs

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The sample size is less
- The responses are based on the perceptions of the respondents
- The questionnaire was sent online, which is not diverse

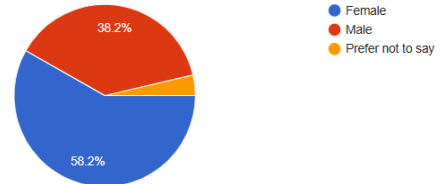
VII. INTERPRETATION

Gender Distribution

Most respondents were female (58.2%), followed by males (38.2%), with a very small percentage preferring not to disclose. From this, it is evident that the respondents were

slightly female-dominated, which might affect the results to show greater sensitivity to gender issues.

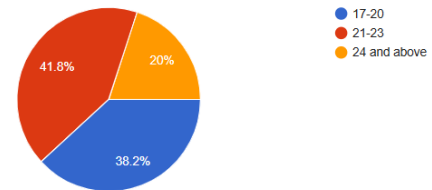
Gender
55 responses



Age Group

Most respondents belonged to the 21-23 age group (41.8%), followed by 17-20 years (38.2%), and the remaining 20% belonged to the 24+ group. From this, it is evident that the results pertain to the views of young adults pursuing higher education.

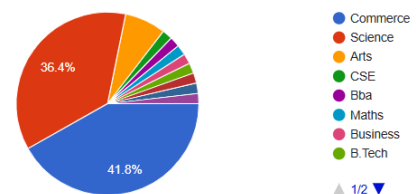
Age
55 responses



Course/Stream

Most respondents belonged to the Commerce (41.8%) and Science (36.4%) streams, with fewer respondents belonging to other streams. From this, it is evident that the results pertain to the views of students pursuing professional and academic courses.

Course/Stream
55 responses



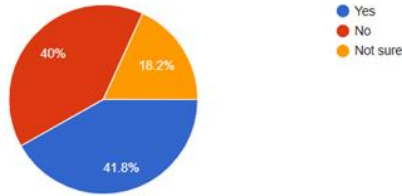
Equal Access to Higher Education

Results show that 41.8% believed in equal access to higher education, whereas 40% disagree and 18.2% were unsure. From this, it is evident that although there is some improvement, still a larger percentage perceives inequality in access to higher education.



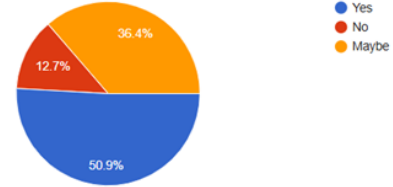
Do you believe males and females have equal access to higher education in India?

55 responses



Do you think certain courses are still considered "gender-specific"?

55 responses

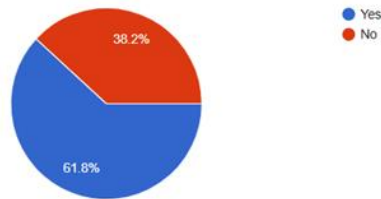


Gender Discrimination in Educational Institutions

Most respondents (61.8%) reported having seen gender discrimination in educational institutions. From this, it is evident that gender inequality is also present even at the academic level.

Have you observed gender discrimination in educational institutions?

55 responses

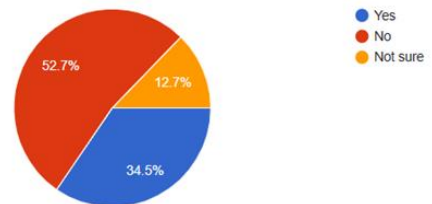


Equal Job Opportunities

A majority (52.7%) think that both men and women do not enjoy equal job opportunities, while only 34.5% think they do.

Do you think men and women receive equal job opportunities in India?

55 responses

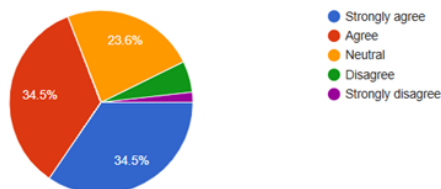


Family Expectations Affecting Girls' Education

Most respondents either strongly agree (34.5%) or agree (34.5%) with the statement that family expectations affect girls' education. From this, it is evident that family pressures play a huge role in determining the educational prospects of women.

Do family expectations affect girls' decisions regarding higher education?

55 responses

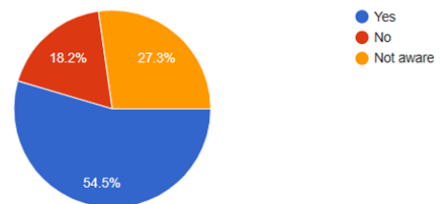


Gender Pay Gap

More than half (54.5%) think that there is a gender pay gap, while 27.3% are not aware.

Do you believe there is a gender pay gap in India?

55 responses

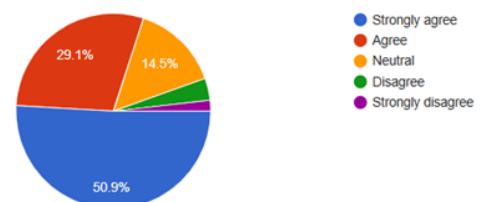


Career Interruptions Due to Family Responsibilities

A large majority (over 80%) either strongly agree or agree with the statement.

Do you think women face more career interruptions due to family responsibilities?

55 responses



Gender Specific Courses

Half of the respondents (50.9%) think that courses are still gender-specific, while 36.4% are not sure.

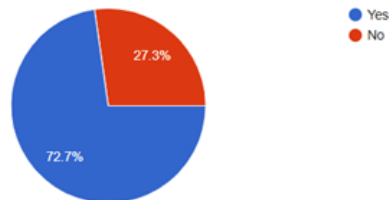


Awareness of Workplace Discrimination

A significant majority (72.7%) have heard about cases of gender discrimination in the workplace.

Have you heard of workplace gender discrimination cases?

55 responses



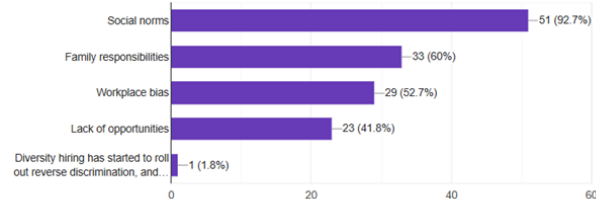
Biggest Reason for Gender Inequality

Social norms were cited as the biggest reason for gender inequality (92.7%), followed by family responsibilities (60%), and workplace bias (52.7%).

In your opinion, what is the biggest reason for gender inequality in employment?

Copy chart

55 responses



From the above statistics, it is evident that despite the progress towards gender equality, the situation is still the same. Gender inequality still exists in educational institutions and the workplace. It is caused by social norms, family responsibilities, and workplace bias.

VIII. FINDINGS

Prevalence of Gender Inequality

A considerable number of respondents believe that gender inequality prevails in education as well as in jobs, thus showing that the achievement of SDG 5 has not yet been achieved.

Unequal Job Opportunities

Over half of the total respondents (52.7%) believe that there are no equal job opportunities for both males and females, thus showing a high level of inequality in the job sector.

Existence of Gender Pay Gap

The majority of the respondents (54.5%) believe that there is a gender pay gap in India.

Impact of Social Norms

The major factor for gender inequality is social norms, which have the highest impact on gender inequality (92.7%).

Career Interruptions for Women

The majority of the respondents (80%) believe that there are more career interruptions for women due to family responsibilities.

Influence of Family Expectations on Education

The majority of the respondents believe that family expectations influence girls' decisions regarding higher education.

Presence of Gender Bias in Education

The majority of the respondents (61.8%) have observed gender bias in educational institutions.

Gender Stereotyping in Courses

The majority of the respondents (50.9%) believe that there are gender-specific courses in educational institutions.

Awareness of Workplace Discrimination

The majority of the respondents (72.7%) have heard of gender discrimination in the workplace.

Mixed Views on Equal Access to Education

The views of the respondents on whether there is equal access to higher education for both males and females are mixed.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote Gender Awareness Programs

Awareness programs should be carried out in educational institutions and workplaces to break social norms.

2. Encourage Equal Opportunities in Employment

Organizations should ensure equal employment opportunities.

3. Strict Equal Pay Policies Should Be Implemented

Government and companies should ensure equal pay for equal work.

4. Work-Life Balance Should Be Provided to Women

Facilities such as flexible working hours and maternity leave should be improved.

5. Gender Stereotyping Should Be Reduced in Education

Students should be encouraged to take courses based on their interests.

6. Strict Implementation of the Law



Laws against harassment and discrimination should be implemented.

7. Female Participation Should Be Encouraged in Higher Education Financial support and awareness programs can be helpful.

8. Corporate Diversity Initiatives Should Be Adopted

Companies should promote diversity and inclusion programs.

X. CONCLUSION

This study shows that gender inequality is still one of the biggest challenges in the field of higher education and employment opportunities for women in India. Even though there is significant improvement in the enrollment of women in educational institutions, the situation is still far from being equal. Although the enrollment of women in educational institutions is not a major issue, the inequality is still present at the higher education level. Financial constraints, social factors, safety, and family pressures hinder the education of women.

This study shows that education is not the only factor to ensure equality between the two genders. Even if women are educated, they still face difficulties in finding employment. Issues such as unequal employment opportunities, salary disparities, and harassment at the workplace hinder the growth of women.

Social norms and cultural values are found to be the most dominant driving forces for inequality, implying the need for mindset and structural shifts in conjunction with policy interventions. While the awareness about gender discrimination is high, the implementation of the existing legislation and support systems is still lacking.

In conclusion, gender equality is not possible without the combined efforts of the government, educational institutions, organizations, and society as a whole to create an environment where women can attain equal opportunities, make free choices, and contribute to the growth of the economy. This is the way to achieve the broader objectives of sustainable growth.

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