

EDUCATION AND DISADVANTAGES GROUPS

Education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

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Abstract

A qualitative study was conducted in the northern region of Karnataka, South India, with the purpose of examining the challenges and opportunities that adolescent girls who belong to Scheduled Castes (SC) or Scheduled Tribes (ST) face while attempting to enroll in and finish secondary school. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 25 individuals, including 22 adolescent females, their respective parents or guardians (n = 22), and 11 teachers. All eleven villages that are located in two different districts in the northern region of Karnataka were specially selected to take part in the study. Within this framework, a variety of barriers were discovered that prevented disadvantaged caste adolescent girls from enrolling in school and continuing their education. These barriers were found to exist on several levels, including the person, the family, the community, and the educational establishment. Additionally, a few educational facilitators were among the topics that were explored. The study highlights the need of engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to eliminate hurdles that hinder SC/ST girls from attending school and of altering attitudes and expectations around gender norms. In addition to working to enhance the quality of education in this setting, the research underscores the necessity to implement various strategies.

Keywords: Education, Disadvantages Groups, Karnataka, Barriers.

Introduction

The 21st century is ushering in an era of increased higher education in India. In order to foster improved social, political, cultural, and economic growth, an increase in learning and skill levels is advantageous. Education at the higher level not only enhances the quality of life of each individual, but it also enhances the quality of life of society as a whole. In addition, there is a significant amount of potential for higher education to contribute to the growth of democratic principles and social justice. A significant number of people in India's socioeconomic strata continue to opt out of pursuing higher education. India's higher education system has gone a long way since the country gained its freedom. There are a number of commissions that have provided recommendations about higher education. Two examples of such commissions are the University Education Commission (1948) and the National Policies on Education.

NPE's Key Features: Inclusion and Equity in Higher Education

Targeted educational programs are implemented by the government and postsecondary educational institutions in order to educate the segments of society who are considered to be disadvantaged. Participation of the government in the advancement of inclusiveness and fairness in higher education responsibilities.

- a) Make sure that the socially and economically disadvantaged groups have access to sufficient public money so that they may get an education.
- b) In order to achieve greater GER for economically and socially disadvantaged populations, it is important to establish clear targets.
- c) It is imperative that educational establishments of higher learning boost the gender balance of their admissions processes.
- d) There will be an increase in access if high-quality institutions are established in areas designated for special education and amateur districts.
- e) Establish prestigious educational institutions that provide teaching in many languages or from a regional perspective.
- f) Additional financial help and scholarships should be made available to socially and economically disadvantaged groups at higher education institutions; this includes both public and private universities.
- g) Educational establishments of a higher level have to make an effort to communicate with poor populations and provide them with information on scholarships and other opportunities for higher education.
- h) For the purpose of enhancing academic performance and cooperation, educational institutions of higher learning need to develop technological tools.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are as follows,

1. To examine the structural, cultural, and socio-economic constraints impacting the education of teenage girls from scheduled tribes and scheduled castes.
2. To study the effects of things like societal norms, poverty, inequality, and inadequate infrastructure.

Review of Related Literature

Methodology

Quantitative situational research was conducted by KHPT in the beginning of 2013 in order to collect information on the dropout rates of SC/ST adolescent girls in the northern region of Karnataka. Additionally, a qualitative research study was carried out with the purpose of gaining an understanding of and documenting the perspectives of significant persons who have an impact on the experiences and decision-making processes that are associated with the participation of disadvantaged adolescent girls in educational programs.

We performed 55 in-depth semi-structured interviews with SC/ST girls (N=22), their parents/guardians (N=22), and school teachers/administrative officials (N=11). These interviews were done in 11 villages located in the districts of Bagalkot and Bijapur. There were five in-depth interviews conducted in each of the hamlets. These interviews included one teacher, one guardian, one adolescent girl who was enrolled in school, and one who had dropped out of school. The only girls who were eligible to apply were those who were between the ages of 12 and 17 and were

either currently enrolled in school or attending it on a regular basis or had attended school for at least one to two years prior to applying. Decision-making, education, marriage, joining the job, sex work, and girls' education were some of the topics that were discussed during the interviews, which were tailored to the responsibilities and needs of the participants.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in order to choose participants from each and every town for the research. According to *Green and Thorogood (2004)*, this kind of sampling is often used in qualitative research in order to identify and choose persons who are capable of providing data that is pertinent to the analysis. For the purpose of conducting the interviews, research investigators who had previously worked in both districts were responsible. Training in tactics for establishing rapport and conducting investigations was provided to a total of six investigators, three of whom were female and three of whom were male. Researchers who were male conducted interviews with male participants, while researchers who were female did interviews with adolescent girls. This was done in an attempt to reduce the obstacles that prevented people from discussing difficult subjects. Every single one of the interviews was conducted in Kannada, which is the local language.

Both the LSHTM ethics committee and the Institutional Ethical Review Board of St. John's Medical College & Hospital in India granted their blessing to the study. Both of these organizations are located in India. Participants gave their consent to take part in the study on their own will. In addition, the signed informed consent was obtained by the parent or legal guardian of the adolescent girl. Every interview was recorded on audio with the participant's permission, and the transcription of the recordings was done either on the same day or within a short time after the interviews were conducted. After each interview, the researchers also gathered observational field notes, which were then translated into English, double-checked, and filed away with the transcript of the interview. After being conducted in Kannada, the interviews were translated into English by translators. For the sake of the transcripts, interviewers were denoted as (I), while respondents were denoted as (R).

A framework that includes familiarization, thematic framework identification, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation was used in order to conduct the analysis of the data (Pope et al., 2000). Following the development of a systematic coding scheme (LB, SN, HS), those modifications were made when further data became available. Both the mapping and interpretation processes were structured in such a way as to meet the aims and objectives of the research, as well as the primary themes that emerged from the data. Creating participant summary profiles allowed for the cross-reference of profiles with coding as well as the comparison of daughter and parent matches within the data set. The Dedoose Software was used in order to code and classify the data. In an attempt to improve the accuracy of data interpretation and coding, three researchers (LB, SN, and HS) conducted tests to determine the inter-coder reliability.

An iterative technique for clarifying the data was carried out in order to ensure that the data were accurate and rigorous throughout the process. As part of this process, we went over the original transcripts, engaged in talks with the interview team, gained first-hand experience in the field, and engaged in informal interactions with stakeholders.

The primary advantage of this research is that it examined the viewpoints of several stakeholders on the same issue. This resulted in the collection of extensive data and made it possible to make comparisons across different groups. The interviews covered a wide range of sensitive topics, including child marriage, sex work, and 'eve teasing', which is a euphemism for instances in which a female is sexually harassed or abused. These are just some of the topics that were discussed. When conducting private interviews, there were times when family members and neighbors would sometimes drop in to watch. This may be a challenge in certain situations. During these occasions, interviews were interrupted and restarted after the participants' privacy was restored; yet, it is possible that the participants' fear of having their confidentiality violated influenced the responses they provided. While translating the interviews from Kannada to English, there may have been some nuances that were difficult to portray due to the language barrier. Cross-checking and other processes were used in qualitative research in order to achieve the highest possible level of rigor while yet adhering to the boundaries of validity.

Data Analysis

The results of this study illustrate how a number of factors, including a range of barriers, work together to prevent females from attending school, as well as some facilitators who assist them in continuing their education. The majority of adolescent girls who left school cited a variety of reasons for their decision, the most prevalent of which were that they had no interest in acquiring knowledge and that their families did not provide them with assistance. Having a family that is both caring and supportive was, however, the most prevalent rationale for pursuing one's education.

From the findings of the research, it was discovered that there are four types of barriers and facilitators that may be classified as follows: macro-societal, educational, interpersonal, and individual characteristics. Our conceptual framework, which can be shown in Figure 1, was developed on the basis of the findings.

It is possible to see similarities between the framework's concentric rings and the ecosystemic model that *Bronfenbrenner* proposed in 1979. On the other hand, the model was produced via the study of the data that was acquired, and it is representative of the particularities of the Indian, gender, local, and caste contexts. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the relevant findings from each of these levels in further depth by using examples of comments from a wide range of respondents.

Large-scale society

Conviction that teaching females is pointless

In Figure-1, we provide a conceptual framework that encompasses the individual, interpersonal, educational system, and macro/societal barriers and facilitators to education for adolescent girls who belong to the SC/ST community.

The extent to which a girl places priority on furthering her education is heavily influenced by the community in which she lives. At the same time that they were attending school or not, adolescent girls were under the impression that their communities put a larger focus on educating boys than they did on educating females. It was shown via interviews with both teachers and parents that this is the case. In a society where males are more prevalent than women, for instance,

a teacher made the observation that the education of a guy is more significant than that of a female.

When it comes to dropping out of school, do men and females choose for different reasons? (R) Due to the fact that males are dominating our society, the education of a boy is appreciated more highly than the education of a female. Considering that daughters will ultimately marry their husband's spouses, it is common for families to place a greater emphasis on the success of their sons than they do on the success of their daughters. He is a male educator from Bijapur.

In light of the fact that, in the end, females would be sent to live with their spouses, while guys would work and take care of their parents, a significant number of the adolescent girls expressed their belief that younger men should be pushed to study more. Teachers confirmed that this was the prevalent opinion in society, despite the fact that many individuals stated that this did not align with their own personal values.

Some young women were under the impression that society would question the decision of a family to pay for their children's education in addition to the dowry, which is the sum of money that is needed for marriage. A family's decision to keep a boy in school, on the other hand, is not something that a whole community would question. Despite the fact that they would take out loans to pay for their son's private education, some families said that they would enroll their daughters in free public schools that they believed provided a poorer level of education.

Additionally, there was the notion that education was pointless for women, especially those who belonged to the SC/ST categories. It was believed that even if they had received an education, they would be restricted to working in physical labor and farming. The majority of the people who were responsible for this way of thinking were teenage girls who were not enrolled in school as well as their parents or guardians. The participant's judgments that education in and of itself is a vital component in motivating females to continue their education, especially after puberty, were not supported by a significant amount of evidence that was provided by the interviews.

Fear of having one's reputation damaged

It became clear from the interviews, particularly those with parents, that there is a significant amount of anxiety that sending girls to school may be detrimental to both their own image and the image of their family. A great number of parents have voiced their profound concern that, once a girl reaches puberty, she will begin engaging in 'love affairs' with other individuals while commuting to or from school, in addition to displaying other behaviours that are seen as inappropriate within the framework of her culture. In the long run, this might be detrimental to her prospects of getting married as well as the reputation of her family in the contemporary culture. It was believed that dropping out of school would assist in lowering the probability of this happening. Parents were thus provided with a socially acceptable justification for discontinuing their daughter's education if they were of the opinion that she was heading in the 'wrong path'. As an illustration of this, consider the following male instructor:

A number of individuals get married at a young age due to the fact that they are experiencing financial troubles at home, while others blindly follow to superstition. Where does it fall under the realm of superstition? (R) Superstition holds that as a girl reaches puberty, she is more likely to fall in love and deviate from the path of righteousness. This is because of the

increased likelihood of falling in love. The phrase “deviating from the right path” is a question that has to be answered. It gives the impression that they may fall in love without intending to do so. This is not the way that things should take place. Older people are concerned that girls are becoming more deviant as a result of the fact that they are watching television and reading newspapers in today’s society. They also feel that once a girl enters puberty, she should not be limited home. These are the sorts of views that are prevalent in the families, and every family wants to see their children get married as soon as possible. He is a male educator from Bijapur.

In the event that there are suspicions or charges that a girl had an affair with a guy, it is possible that her image will be tarnished, and her family and community may feel ashamed. Moreover, the child was held responsible for “Eve teasing”, since she was expected to safeguard the dignity of her family during the whole process. As a direct result of this, females who were subjected to “eve teasing” or who had a romantic relationship with a male were subject to disciplinary action. There were two cases in which the administration of the school dismissed a girl for “eve teasing”, such as when a male student pursued a female classmate.

As a method of damaging the reputation of both her family and herself, the girl would sometimes be married off to someone from a different group. This was done in order to bring shame upon both of them. Sometimes, in order to avoid being humiliated and punished, a teenage girl would break all relations with her family and run away with her love. The seriousness of this issue was brought to light by a teacher who said that a young lady who attended the school committed herself after her parents found out about her relationship with a male student.

System of Education

The educational systems in both districts presented a number of challenges that made it difficult for girls to continue their primary education. According to the findings of the interviews, there are a lot of factors, some of which include remoteness, the quality of education, and harassment by males and instructors. Furthermore, access to government programs that give financial incentives to encourage girls to attend school, such as bicycles, school uniforms, and scholarships, was not based on equal opportunity. These programs were designed to encourage females to attend school.

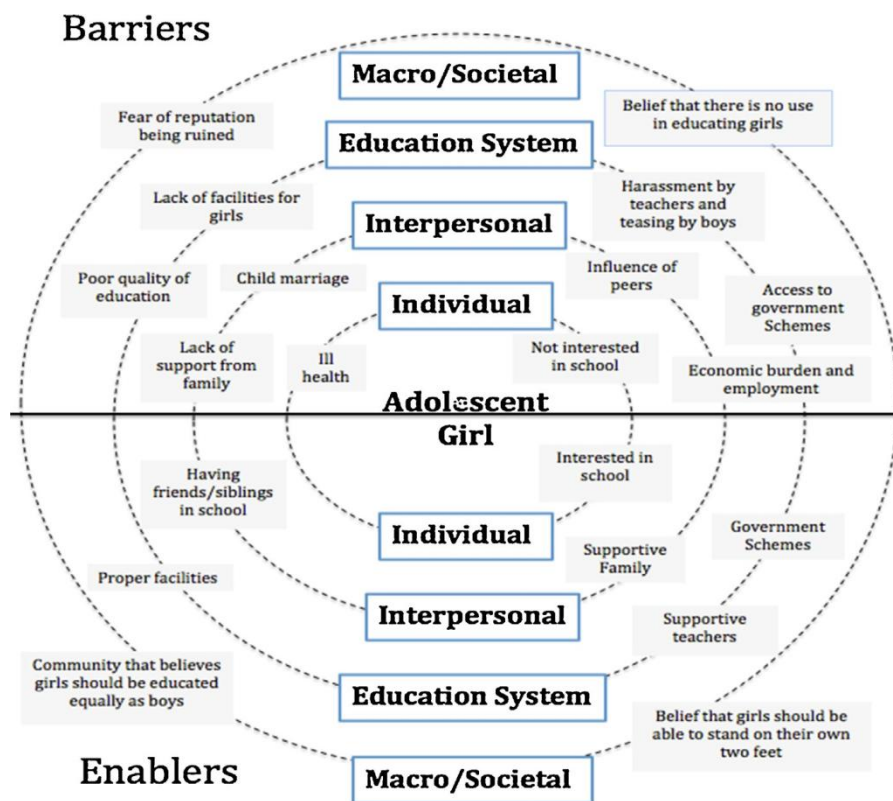


Fig-1: Macro/societal levels, a conceptual framework of the obstacles and facilitators of education for SC/ST teenage females is presented by this study

Inadequate Instruction

It was disclosed during the field visit that local education authorities had instructed schools not to fail female students out of concern that the girl’s families could take them out of school. This information was shared at a meeting with a local school headmaster. Nevertheless, this has the unintended effect of causing the girl to progress to a level that is above her capabilities, which may lead to her becoming disinterested and finally stopping her participation in the program. Additionally, there was uncertainty about the educational experiences of the females. Although they had completed the seventh grade, which is the last grade of primary school, there were several girls who were not even able to write their own names out. That this was the cause of embarrassment and the reason for dropping out of school was something that was often brought up. One adolescent girl made the observation that the fact that some teachers do not show up for class is another factor that has an impact on the educational experiences of young women.

Teachers harassing students and males “teasing” them

In addition to making girls feel uncomfortable, harassment from teachers and male mockery on the way to school contributed to the alarmingly high number of students who dropped out of school every year. Furthermore, teachers sometimes resorted to physical punishment, insults, harassment, and reprimanding of female students who did poorly in their classes. During the course of an interview, a teacher admitted to indulging in verbal and physical harassment of her students, despite the fact that she was aware that such conduct is against the law. Despite the fact that the majority of reports on student-teacher interactions were positive and showed instructors lending support to their charges, a girl once left school because her instructor had battered and punished her.

On top of that, women who were classified as SC or ST were often subjected to prejudice because of their poor scholastic performance and caste. They made the observation that they had a greater risk of being teased and socially isolated, which caused them to feel alienated and ultimately led them to drop out of school. Another factor that contributed to the dropout rate of teenage females was the fact that they were made fun of by males on their way to school. The parents of one girl said that their daughter had dropped out of school because it was too far to her school, and they were frightened that boys would make fun of her on the walk there, as well as that she would have romantic interactions during this time.

Absence of female restrooms

The fact that some schools did not have toilets specifically for female students was another issue that was brought up over the course of the field excursions. When we questioned about the best place for the girls to use the lavatory, one of the teachers pointed to the area beyond the gate, suggesting that they were required to go to the field that was located beyond the school structure. This is a challenge for young women, especially during their menstrual cycles, and it may encourage them to stay indoors rather than go out.

Availability of Govt. programmes

The Department of Social Welfare in Karnataka provides a number of initiatives; including scholarships, uniforms, books, backpacks, pencils, and bicycles, with the goal of encouraging SC/ST people to send their children to school. These programs are designed to encourage their children to attend school. Nearly all parents and adolescent girls were aware of the government initiatives that were available, and all of them, with the exception of one, participated in those programs. There were programs that girls and their parents believed were essential in order to enable them to complete their education; nonetheless, there were issues about corruption as well as deficiencies in the programs' coverage and accessibility. Parents often voiced their dissatisfaction with the fact that they were compelled to pay extra cash to cover the excess, since the plans did not provide sufficient funds to cover both the real and hidden costs. In addition, a number of the young ladies said that their parents had stolen all of the scholarship money and used it to cover other expenditures related to the family. In spite of the fact that there are programs offered by the government, the headmaster of one school underlined that parents need to create financial arrangements in order to overcome the difficulties associated with sending their children to school.

For the purpose of assisting and enabling girls to attend and continue their education, teachers went to the houses of girls who had dropped out of school in order to have conversations with the families of those girls and to provide other options. In order to enable female students to complete their studies, several instructors offered financial assistance to them. In order for a student to be able to attend courses, the headmistress of a school that was exclusively for female students went to the extreme of caring for the student's child.

As part of my work, I have provided assistance to a significant number of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pencils and notebooks have been provided to them by me. I have continued to follow them even after I collapsed here earlier. Whether or not they stop after the eighth, I have seen them, and if they do, I have urged them to go on with their journey. Whenever they want payment for fees, I have asked that they get in touch with me. Because I had cash on hand, I paid. Another case is one that I would like to share with you. One woman was compelled to quit since she was given the responsibility of caring for a newborn child. I told the

young lady to bring the baby to school as per my instructions. I was responsible for the care of the baby. I gave the baby some food and biscuits for him to consume. That very same child finished in top place in the school. To me, this was a remarkable achievement that I must mention. This is the principal of an all-female school.

Educational Implications

Based on the findings of this study, it has been determined that there are several barriers to continuing education for SC/ST adolescent girls in North Karnataka, as well as a few facilitators. While there are some of these that are more contextual or made worse by the disadvantage that the caste system places on these girls, there are others that are consistent with the amount of information that is currently available on the participation of females in school. Educational opportunities may be of considerable value to adolescent females in a variety of ways. However, in order to continue her education in any of these two locations, a young girl who is classified as SC & ST must first overcome a number of challenges. It is imperative that attention be devoted to adolescent girls in order to allow them to fulfill their full potential. This is especially true in rural areas of Northern Karnataka, where these girls face a numerous obstacles. The study highlights the need of interacting with a number of stakeholders in order to eliminate impediments that low caste girls confront in their pursuit of an education. Additionally, the research highlights the necessity of shifting attitudes and expectations linked to gender norms and improving the educational experiences of these girls. In conclusion, in order for interventions to be successful, they will need to improve the quality and value of education, in addition to addressing the evolving gender norms and relationships that are occurring at the home and macro-societal levels.

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