



Girls' Dropout in Higher Education: A Study of Maharashtra

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DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.18861364

Abstract:

Despite major advancements in literacy and elementary attendance, girls' involvement in higher education in India, especially in Maharashtra, is still far lower than that of boys. Dropout rates surge at when students move from secondary to higher education, revealing profound socio-economic, cultural, and institutional issues. Using data from official reports, national surveys, and scholarly research, this paper investigates the causes, effects, and policy responses to girls' dropout in Maharashtra. While government programs offer only partial solutions, the analysis identifies poverty, early marriage, safety issues, and inadequate infrastructure as major causes. According to the report, lowering female dropout rates is crucial for social development, inclusive economic growth, and gender equality.

Introduction:

Everyone agrees that education is essential to empowerment, social mobility, and national development. Higher education has the power to change women's lives by giving them access to skilled jobs, allowing them to take part in decision-making, and improving the welfare of their communities. However, female participation in higher education is still disproportionately low in India, despite notable advancements in literacy and elementary school enrolment. This disparity is especially evident in Maharashtra, where girls' dropout rates rise as they move from secondary to higher education, a reflection of ingrained socioeconomic and cultural obstacles. Girls who drop out of school have fewer career options, lower earning potential, and less social autonomy. These results undermine both individual goals and societal advancement by sustaining cycles of poverty and gender inequality. In tribal and rural regions of Maharashtra, where infrastructural

deficits and traditional norms are most entrenched, dropout rates are especially high, highlighting the intersection of economic hardship, cultural expectations, and institutional shortcomings.

The goal of this study is to examine the various factors that contribute to and result from girls in Maharashtra dropping out of higher education. According to the research, lowering the dropout rate among girls is crucial for promoting inclusive social and economic development as well as gender equality. To ensure that girls can access and finish higher education, addressing this issue calls for a comprehensive strategy that incorporates financial assistance, infrastructure upgrades, and cultural transformation.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to girls' dropout in Maharashtra.
2. To evaluate the impact of dropout on women's participation in higher education, employment, and social development.
3. To examine the effectiveness of government schemes and propose recommendations for improving retention and access to higher education for girls.

Review of Literature:

Female dropout rates continue to be substantially higher than male rates, particularly in rural areas, according to Gochhayat and Ravindran's (2025) analysis of NSSO data. They argued that cultural norms that undervalue women's education and financial constraints necessitate gender-sensitive approaches. Yadav (2023) highlighted household duties, safety concerns, and socioeconomic pressures as the main causes of dropout. The study made clear that dropout rates among girls sustain patterns of poverty and inequality in the absence of structural changes. In their analysis of instructors' viewpoints, Sharma et al. (2023) found that early marriage, financial difficulties, and parental attitudes were frequent factors. In order to encourage females' education, teachers stressed their role in community involvement and counselling.

Pillai (2023) conducted a study in Pune district, showing that socio-economic level and parental education related to dropout rates. Due to financial strain and household duties, girls from low-income families were more likely to drop out of school.

Chamatkar (2022) examined tribal districts like as Gadchiroli and Gondia, where the main factors were cultural traditions, poverty, and a lack of infrastructure. Girls' access to higher

education was frequently restricted by considerable travel distances and the lack of dormitory facilities. According to the NSSO 75th Round (2019) survey, among girls aged 15 to 19, financial limitations were the main cause of cessation. The Maharashtra government's 2018 data on dropout rates by district revealed that tribal areas were most impacted.

Methodology:

Design: Analytical and descriptive study based on secondary data.

Sources: UDISE+ reports, NSSO surveys, and peer-reviewed articles.

Approach: Comparative analysis of dropout trends in Maharashtra, focusing on rural vs. urban and tribal vs. non-tribal regions.

Limitations: Reliance on secondary data; primary field surveys were not conducted.

Factors Contributing to Dropout:

1. Financial Constraints: Boys' education is often given more importance by poor families. To cut down costs or earn more for the family, girls are pulled out.
2. Early Marriage and Home Chores: Girls in rural Maharashtra are married at a tender age, which hinders their education. Their ability to pursue education is further hampered by home chores.
3. Infrastructure and Safety Issues: It is advised that families do not send females to college because of the poor facilities in the dorms and lack of safe transport. Girls are more affected by the absence of sanitary facilities.
4. Cultural beliefs: Even now, the choice is not unaffected by cultural beliefs, with females' education being of less significance than that of males.

Consequences of Dropout:

1. Less Participation in the Labor Force: With fewer women seeking higher education, fewer women will be employed in professional jobs, hindering economic development.
2. Cycle of Inequality: Women without a college education have limited career prospects, making them dependent and poor.
3. Effects on Social Development : Educated women are better prepared to make decisions about their families, communities, and health.

Statistical Data:

Indicator	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Dropout Rate (Std. IX–X, Maharashtra, 2024–25)	12.6	10.3
Transition to Higher Education (India, 2023)	27	19
Dropout in Tribal Districts (Maharashtra, 2022)	15	22
Girls citing “Marriage” as reason for dropout	Not applicable	31

Analysis and Discussion:

The findings confirm that socioeconomic constraints, early marriage, and security issues contribute to the likelihood of dropouts among rural and tribal girls. Scholarship programs for economically backward sections and government initiatives such as Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao are beneficial, but they are not enough.

For instance, the Maharashtra government gives free bicycles to girls to encourage them to go to school, but this program is only up to the secondary level and does not address the issues related to further studies. The tribal districts, which have a higher dropout rate, lack proper hostel facilities.

Conclusion:

The dropout rate of girls in higher education in Maharashtra is a very complex issue. The transition from secondary to higher education remains a major challenge for girls, although there has been considerable progress in literacy rates and elementary school attendance. The issue highlighted by the data in this research is how early marriage, poverty, domestic chores, safety, and infrastructure are all interlinked to restrict girls' education. All these factors are not separate but are interlinked, thus creating a cycle of inequality and restricting women's entry into skilled work.

Though the government programs such as free distribution of cycles, scholarships, Beti Bachao, and Beti Padhao have made little progress, their implementation is still limited. The lack of proper hostel facilities, transport, and gender-sensitive infrastructure is still discouraging families from spending on girls' higher education.

This research proves that addressing the issue of female dropout requires structural and cultural shifts, besides funding support. Key measures include increasing scholarships, improving housing and transport infrastructure, and promoting e-learning. Community outreach programs that challenge patriarchal norms and shift parental attitudes towards educating girls are also essential.

The state of Maharashtra can unlock a brighter future where women are actively engaged in society, politics, and economic spaces by empowering women through education.

The vision of an inclusive and gender-equitable higher education system can be realized through collective efforts of the government, despite the challenges involved in the task.

Suggestions:

1. Boost Financial Assistance and Scholarships: Programs for females from disadvantaged areas should be scaled up.
2. Improve Hostel and Transport Services: Girls from rural areas will be encouraged to pursue higher education if they are provided with secure and affordable hostel and transport services.
4. Awareness Programs in the Community: It is essential to involve parents and community leaders to bring about a shift in mindset.
5. Improve Implementation of Policies: Programs such as SSA and RTE should be implemented more effectively, with mechanisms to monitor dropout rates.
6. Encourage E-Learning: E-learning tools can offer flexible and affordable opportunities for higher education to girls who cannot physically attend classes.

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