



Impact of Quality Education in Reducing Gender Disparities: A Study of Marginalised Communities in Jharkhand

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Abstract: *Quality education is essential for marginalised communities so that no child is left behind in receiving formal education because of background or gender. As per the Census of India (2011), gender imbalance in education still affects marginalized people in Jharkhand, especially Scheduled Tribes (26.2% of the state population) and Scheduled Castes (12.1%). The total literacy rate in Jharkhand was 66.4%, with a notable gender disparity of more than 21% but scheduled tribes and scheduled castes have higher gender disparity in literacy. To investigate how enhancements in educational quality reduce the gender disparities, this study is descriptive and analytical in nature based on secondary data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21), the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+ 2024–25) and relevant government papers. In the 6–14 age range, there is no gender difference in school attendance; however, in the 15–17 age group, gender disparity is still present. At upper primary and secondary levels, dropout rates are still higher. Moreover 30% of women in Jharkhand between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before turning 18, indicating the ongoing correlation between early marriage and low educational attainment. Full gender parity at higher education levels is still hampered by socioeconomic limitations, household duties, and geographic inaccessibility. According to the study's findings, completion rates and the shift to higher education are all crucial for reduction of gender disparities among Jharkhand's marginalized communities. Along with Jharkhand's early marriage rate has decreased because to high-quality education, additional government initiatives are needed to prevent early marriage, particularly in underprivileged areas.*

Keywords: *Quality Education, Gender disparity, Marginalised Communities.*

Introduction

Education is a powerful tool for reducing and eventually eliminating gender disparities in society. However, it is unfortunate that significant inequalities in education still persist in India based on location, social category, and gender. These disparities create serious challenges in overcoming deeply rooted conservative attitudes and in building inclusive human resources. The adverse effects of such inequalities are most strongly felt by marginalised communities, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled tribes (STs), who continue to face limited

access to quality education. Jharkhand offers a crucial setting for investigating the connection between gender disparity and high-quality education, especially among marginalized groups like Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs). Due to their poverty, rural location, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted institutional access, these people suffer from a number of disadvantages. Significant gender differences still exist in literacy, school retention, the transition to higher education, and educational attainment, despite the fact that educational expansion has increased enrolment over time. The overall literacy rate of Jharkhand was 66.41% according to the 2011 Census, with a significant disparity between male literacy (76.84%) and female literacy (55.42%), underscoring the structural educational disadvantage experienced by women and girls. The persistence of early marriage is one of the most obvious effects of this imbalance, since girls who drop out of school early are more susceptible to child marriage and long-term socioeconomic reliance. However, due to obstacles including distance, safety concerns, financial difficulties, and social push toward marriage, access to higher education is still uneven, particularly for rural, tribal, and poor girls. For girls to continue their education, school infrastructure and safety such as separate restrooms, drinking water, electricity, hostels, transportation, and safe learning environments are essential. Therefore, by concentrating on three important dimensions - early marriage, higher education disparities, and the role of infrastructure, safety, and government initiatives in improving educational outcomes for marginalized girls, this study has investigated how quality education can lessen gender disparities in Jharkhand.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the work is to investigate how high-quality education might reduce gender inequality among Jharkhand's underprivileged communities. Girls continue to confront a number of obstacles that limit their general development in many rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged regions, such as lack of awareness, early marriage, social discrimination, and restricted access to school. Significant gender differences in enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes still exist despite the government's deployment of numerous efforts to support education. In light of this, the study aims to examine how high-quality education may support women's empowerment, lessen gender-based disparities, and guarantee equal opportunity for boys and girls. Additionally, it seeks to pinpoint the main obstacles preventing underprivileged groups from obtaining high-quality education and to suggest ways to make Jharkhand's educational system more inclusive and equitable.

Research Questions

1. How does Quality Education reduce early marriage in Jharkhand?
2. Are there gender disparities in Higher Education in Jharkhand?
3. How do school infrastructure, safety concerns and government initiatives control gender disparities?

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the quality education in reducing early marriage in Jharkhand.
2. To study the gender disparities in higher education in Jharkhand.

3. To study the school infrastructure, safety concerns and government initiatives to control the gender disparities.

Significance of the Study

The study is important because it examines how high-quality education might reduce gender inequality in Jharkhand's marginalized areas, where girls' development is still hampered by poverty, social marginalization, early marriage, and poor educational facilities. It emphasizes how education may increase girls' access to higher education, postpone early marriage and foster empowerment. In order to create successful plans for attaining gender equality and inclusive development, the study also offers insightful information to researchers, educators, and legislators.

Review of Literature

Quality Education and Reduction of Early Marriage

Existing studies indicate a strong association between education and delayed marriage among girls, particularly in marginalized communities. Singh (2020) shows that in Jharkhand, early marriage is closely linked with school discontinuation, driven by poverty, safety concerns, and weak institutional support. Similarly, Ranjan (2019) finds that education enhances women's awareness and decision-making ability, which contributes to postponing marriage and improving socio-economic conditions. However, most studies focus primarily on access to education rather than its quality, and they do not directly examine how improved educational standards such as better infrastructure, teaching, and safety impact the reduction of early marriage. This highlights a gap in understanding the qualitative dimensions of education in influencing social change.

Gender Disparities in Higher Education

Despite increased enrolment, gender disparities in higher education continue to persist. Nayak (2025) reports that tribal girls face disadvantages in literacy, retention, and access due to structural factors such as poverty and social exclusion. Ranjan (2023) further identifies high dropout rates among tribal girls, attributing them to parental illiteracy, financial constraints, and cultural norms. While these studies provide important evidence on the extent of inequality, they largely remain descriptive and do not sufficiently analyse how improvements in institutional quality or targeted interventions can reduce these disparities. As a result, their contribution to policy formulation remains limited.

School Infrastructure, Safety, and Government Initiatives

Institutional conditions, along with government interventions, play a crucial role in shaping girls' educational outcomes. Mohanty (2019) highlights that inadequate infrastructure, absence of female teachers, language barriers, and geographical isolation significantly restrict tribal girls' access to quality education. Singh (2020) also identifies safety concerns and lack of basic facilities as major contributors to school dropout in Jharkhand. In response, various government initiatives have aimed to improve access and participation; however, their effectiveness often depends on proper implementation, accessibility, and community

engagement. The literature suggests that while such initiatives have increased enrolment, they have not fully addressed issues related to safety, infrastructure, and quality. Moreover, these factors are often studied separately rather than as interconnected components of a comprehensive educational framework, limiting the scope for holistic policy solutions.

Research Gap

Studies already conducted demonstrate how education can lessen gender disparity, yet there are still significant inequalities. While early marriage is still common in Jharkhand (NFHS-5: approximately 32% of women aged 20–24 married before 18), the majority of studies focuses on access to education rather than how high-quality education (infrastructure, safety, and learning environment) contributes to postponing marriage. Furthermore, gender discrepancies in higher education continue to exist due to dropout, poverty, and social restraints despite gains in educational access (NFHS-5: 79.6% women having bank accounts; rising schooling levels). However, studies are primarily descriptive and lack analytical depth.

Furthermore, there is no comprehensive methodology evaluating the combined effects of infrastructure, safety, and government measures on results related to gender equality, empowerment, and retention. Therefore, a thorough, data-driven research is required to investigate how high-quality education might concurrently lower gender gaps and early marriage in Jharkhand.

Research Methodology

The current study examines the effect of high-quality education on lowering gender gaps among marginalized communities in Jharkhand using a descriptive and analytical research approach, all based on secondary data.

Data Sources and Coverage

The Census of India 2011, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4, 2015–16 and NFHS-5, 2019–21), Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2021–22), Jharkhand Economic Surveys, reports from the Jharkhand Education Project Council (JEPC), and publications from the Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of Jharkhand. Peer-reviewed publications, scholarly texts, and policy documents provide more information.

Variables and Indicators

The study employs important metrics like these to evaluate the connection between gender inequality and high-quality education:

Access to and involvement in education: enrolment, dropout, and transition rates
Infrastructure (restrooms, classrooms), instructor availability, and the learning environment are examples of quality indicators.

Gender indicators include years of education, female literacy, and the gender parity index. Social indicators include early marriage, mobility, and education-related decision-making. These factors aid in capturing the aspects of education related to both quality and access.

Tools and Techniques of Analysis

A wide range of analytical methods are used in the study:

Descriptive statistics, such as trends, ratios, and percentages

Comparative evaluation, particularly between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5

Using trend analysis to monitor changes throughout time

Policy examination of government programs pertaining to the education of females

Thematic interpretation to comprehend educational hurdles particular to gender

This method makes it possible to evaluate educational disparity both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Analytical Framework

The study uses a multifaceted, gender-sensitive paradigm that connects:

gender imbalance results, sociocultural impediments, and educational quality.

It is predicated on the idea that raising the standard of education is essential to empowering women and lowering inequality.

Limitations of the Study

Reliance on Secondary Information

Because the study only uses secondary sources, it is unable to fully reflect the experiences and perspectives of marginalized women.

Restricted Disaggregated Information

Detailed intersectional analysis is limited by the lack of recent data at the district, caste, and gender levels.

Variability in Sources of Data

Strict comparability may be impacted by variations in definitions, indicators, and methodology among datasets (NFHS, UDISE+, AISHE).

Data Time Lag

Certain datasets, like the 2011 Census, might not accurately represent the state of affairs now.

Restricted "Quality" Measurement

Because of its complexity, educational quality cannot be adequately measured by the quantitative metrics that are now available.

Context-Specific Scope

Findings are specific to Jharkhand and may not be fully generalizable to other regions.

Analysis of the study

First Objective: Quality Education and Reduction of Early Marriage in Jharkhand

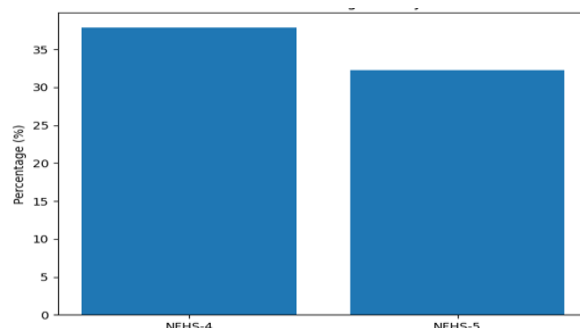


Fig. 1: Women Married Before Age 18 in Jharkhand

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4, 2015–16) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21), Jharkhand State Fact Sheets, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India / IIPS.

Early marriage is a significant indicator of gender inequality and is closely linked to girls' educational discontinuity in Jharkhand. Girls who drop out of school are more likely to be married before the legal age, while continued schooling especially at the secondary level helps delay marriage and promotes greater autonomy. According to NFHS-4 (2015–16), 38 percent of women aged 20–24 years in Jharkhand were married before the age of 18 which declined to 32 percent in NFHS-5 (2019–21), showing a reduction of 6 percentage points. This decline is indicating gradual progress and suggests that improved access to education, awareness and policy interventions have contributed to reducing early marriage. However, the continued high prevalence of child marriage has displayed that stronger efforts are still needed particularly among rural and marginalised communities. Thus, the data clearly suggests that quality education plays an important role in reducing early marriage and gender inequality in Jharkhand.

Interpretation:

Although early marriage has significantly decreased from 38 percent to 32 percent, the rate is still high. This implies that although girl-focused initiatives and higher education are beneficial, access is not enough on its own. According to the research, early marriage rates in Jharkhand are positively correlated with high-quality education, especially when that education is maintained into adolescence.

Second Objective: Gender Disparities in Higher Education in Jharkhand

Table 1: Males and Females of age 15 years and above who have Secondary & Higher education (%)

Year	Females	Males	Gender Disparity in educational Attainment
2019-20	26.8	39.6	0.68
2020-21	25.9	38.1	0.68
2021-22	25.6	38.7	0.66
2022-23	29.1	40.7	0.71
2023-24	29.3	39.7	0.74

Source: PLFS (MoSPI), Different Rounds

The percentage of males and females aged 15 and older who have completed secondary and higher education throughout a five-year period, from 2019–20 to 2023–24, is shown in this table. Males regularly outperform girls in terms of educational achievement across all years, according to the data. In 2019–20, the gender gap ratio was 0.68, with 26.8% of women and 39.6% of men having secondary and higher education. The gap ratio stayed at 0.68 in 2020–21 despite a minor reduction in female attainment to 25.9% and a decline in male attainment to 38.1%. The difference ratio dropped to 0.66 in 2021–2022, a brief worsening of the gender gap as female attainment slightly declined to 25.6% while male attainment increased to 38.7%. However, in 2022–2023, the disparity ratio improved to 0.71 as female educational attainment increased to 29.1% while male attainment increased to 40.7%. The discrepancy ratio improved to 0.74 in 2023–2024 with female attainment rising to 29.3% and male attainment at 39.7%.

Interpretation:

The table demonstrates that despite the ongoing gender gap, female educational achievement has gradually improved in recent years. The gender difference ratio increased from 0.68 to 0.74, indicating that women are gradually catching up to men in secondary and postsecondary education. Nonetheless, the disparity is still significant because in 2023–2024, women will still lag behind men by about 10 percentage points. This suggests that although women's access to school has increased, structural obstacles including poverty, rural disadvantage and sociocultural limitations still prevent them from advancing in their education.

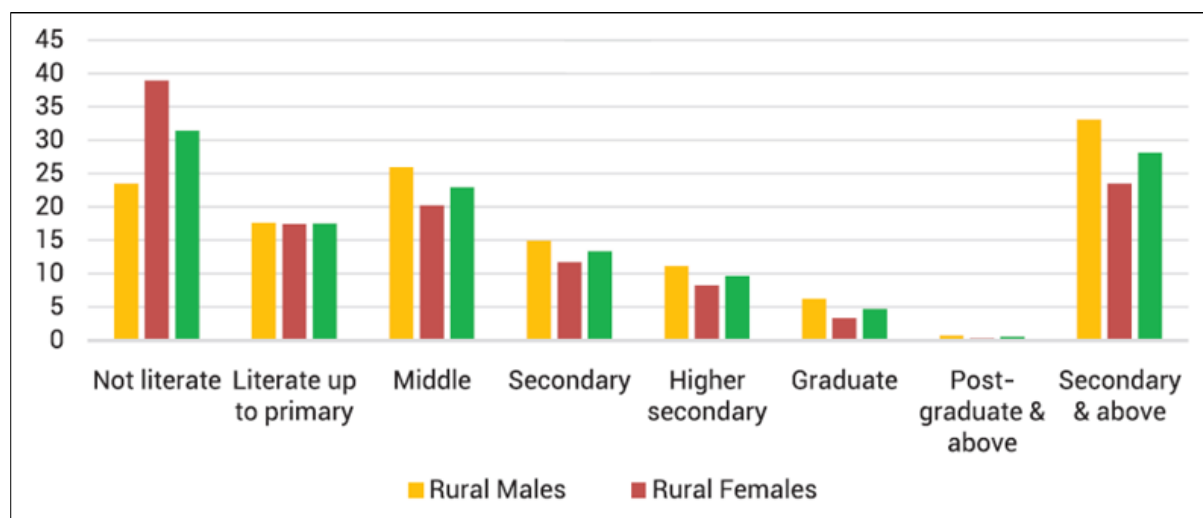


Fig. 2: Rural Males and Females of age 15 years and above by their educational level in the year 2023-24

Source: Annual report PLFS (MoSPI), 2023-24

The educational distribution of rural males and females aged 15 and older in 2023–2024 is depicted in this image. The most noticeable trend is the large percentage of rural women, roughly 39% in the "not literate" category, compared to about 23% of rural men. This suggests that compared to rural men, rural women continue to face much greater disadvantages in literacy and educational opportunities. Both rural males and females are about equal in literacy up to primary level, at about 17% which indicates that basic literacy has spread to both populations to a comparable degree. At higher levels, however, discrepancies become increasingly apparent. Rural males (about 26%) outnumber rural females (about 20%) in the middle level. Rural males make up around 15% of secondary school students, while rural females make up about 11%. Rural males make up around 11% of the population in the higher secondary stage, while rural females make up about 8%. With rural males at roughly 6% and rural females at roughly 3% at the graduate level, the gender disparity widens even more. The percentage is incredibly low for both at the post-graduate and above level, although women still lag behind men. Approximately 33% of rural males and only 23% of rural girls have attained this level in the combined category of "Secondary & above."

Interpretation:

The most educationally impoverished group is rural women, as this statistic demonstrates. They are least represented across all higher education levels and have the largest share in the category of nonliterate people. The sharp drop in female participation after primary and middle school points to the impact of early marriage, poverty, domestic workloads, dropout rates and sociocultural constraints. The extremely low number of rural women pursuing graduate and postgraduate degrees indicates that rural women's access to higher education is still severely limited.

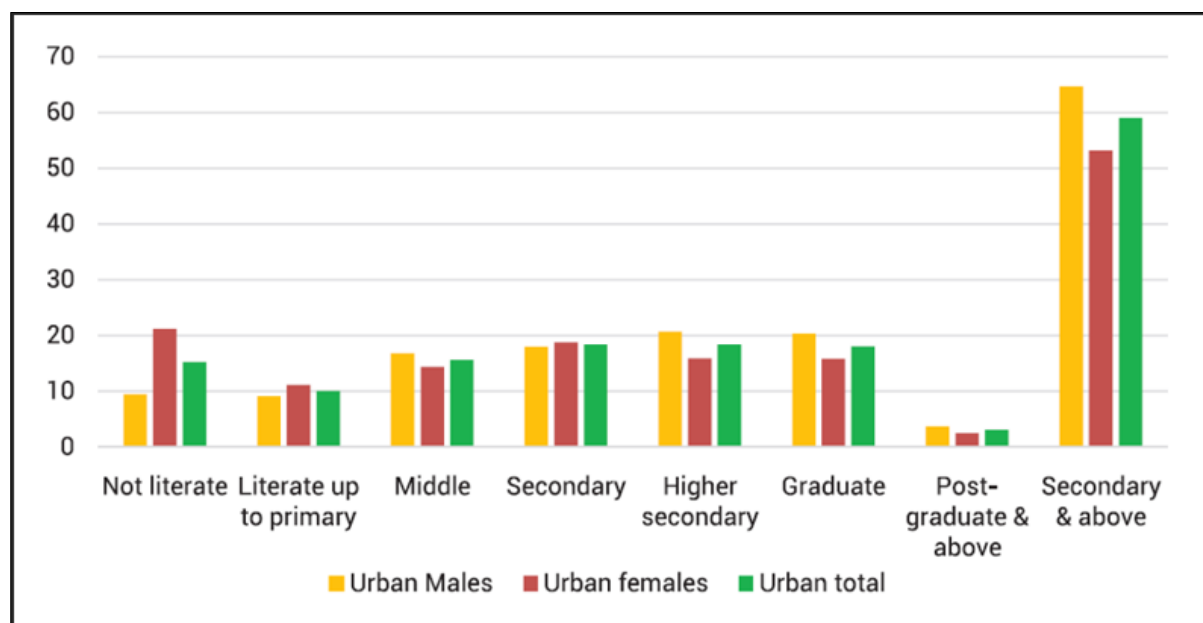


Fig. 3: Urban Males and Females of age 15 years and above by their educational level in the year 2023-24.

Source: Annual report PLFS (MoSPI), 2023-24

The educational distribution of urban males and females aged 15 and older in 2023–2024 is shown in this image. Both men's and women's educational profiles are significantly higher in urban areas than in rural ones. The percentage of illiterate urban women is about 21% which is significantly lower than that of rural women but still greater than that of urban men, who are roughly 9–10%. This suggests that while living in an urban area greatly increases access to education, gender inequality still exists. Urban girls (about 11%) are marginally higher than urban males (about 9%) in literacy up to primary school. Urban males (about 17%) are marginally ahead of urban females (around 14–15%) in the medium level. Urban females tend to be almost equal to or slightly ahead of urban boys at the secondary level, both at about 18%. This shows that female education at this time is comparatively better in urban settings. On the other hand, urban boys (around 20%) outnumber urban females (about 15–16%) at the higher secondary level. At the graduate level, urban males make up roughly 20% of the population, while urban females make up about 15–16%. Both are low at the post-graduate and higher levels, but men still have a little lead. About 64–65% of urban males and 53% of urban girls fall into the "Secondary & above" category.

Interpretation:

The graph shows that although urban women are in a far better educational position than rural women, they still lag behind urban men in terms of advanced education. Better educational facilities, institutional access and educational possibilities are all found in urban areas. However, the persistent disparity in higher secondary, graduate, and post-graduate education

indicates that, even in metropolitan regions, women are still impacted by gender norms, safety concerns, family expectations and unequal access to higher education.

Third Objective: School Infrastructure, Safety Concerns, and Government Initiatives

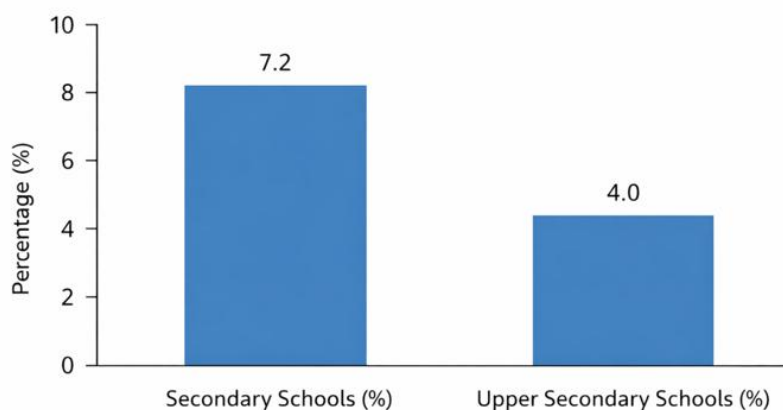


Fig. 4: Availability of Schools in Jharkhand (%)

Primary Source: Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2022-23.

Table 2: School Infrastructure Supporting Girls in Jharkhand (%)

Schools with girls’ toilet	96.1
Schools with drinking water	95.9
Schools with internet facility	47.8
Female teachers	40.0
Single teacher schools	17.1

Source: Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), specifically the 2022-23 Flash Statistics reports.

For teenage females from marginalized areas in Jharkhand in particular, school facilities and safety are crucial aspects of educational quality. The overall availability of schools is necessary here, such schools which can provide Secondary tier of education are 7.2% of all Jharkhand schools and Higher Secondary tier of education are 4% of all Jharkhand schools. Girls' attendance, dignity, health, and retention are directly impacted by basic amenities such working separate restrooms, drinking water, electricity, boundary walls, assistance with menstrual hygiene, safe school grounds and connection to neighbouring secondary schools. While UDISE+ 2022–2023 demonstrates a significant improvement in school infrastructure nationally, Jharkhand faces challenges related to the availability of basic amenities, the scarcity of secondary and higher secondary institutions and the uneven quality of facilities in rural and tribal areas. Girls sometimes drop out of school before finishing their education due to safety

issues including long commutes to higher education institutions, a lack of transportation, fear of harassment, parental limitations and the lack of secure dorms. Samagra Shiksha, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), Jharkhand Balika Aawasiya Vidyalayas (JBAVs), e-VidyaVahini and learning enhancement programs centred on fundamental learning and inclusivity are just a few of the significant measures that Jharkhand has put in place in response. One of the most successful institutional responses to gender inequality in the state is residential schooling for girls, which is especially important because it helps with distance, safety, school continuity and early marriage concerns.

Interpretation:

Gender equality in education is largely determined by school facilities and safety which are not just administrative issues. Government initiatives in Jharkhand have improved girls' access to and support for education, but major obstacles still exist, such as poor transition support after school, a lack of secondary and higher secondary institutions, unsafe mobility and inadequate functional infrastructure. Girls from rural, tribal, and marginalized groups are especially affected by these inequalities which frequently prevent them from continuing their education and worsen already-existing gender disadvantages.

Discussion

The study shows that early marriage, restricted access to higher education, and school infrastructure create a continuum of gendered educational disparity where sociocultural and institutional impediments compound one another. According to Human Capital Theory, females' potential and long-term socioeconomic achievements are limited by unequal access to high-quality education. In a similar vein, Gender Stratification Theory describes how cultural and institutional norms, especially in hazardous or subpar educational environments, lead to higher dropout rates among girls.

The results, which emphasize how early marriage restricts girls' freedoms, education, and agency, are also consistent with the Capability Approach. The loop is clear: inadequate infrastructure causes dropouts, dropouts increase early marriage, and early marriage limits chances for higher education and jobs.

Enrolment has increased and child marriage has decreased thanks to policy initiatives like the Right to Education Act of 2009 and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. Progress is still unequal, nevertheless, with more success being achieved in increasing access than in guaranteeing quality, retention, and meaningful learning.

In overall, a comprehensive, life-cycle strategy that goes beyond enrolment to emphasize quality, safety, and empowerment while addressing intersectional disadvantages related to caste, class, and geography is needed to reduce gender inequality in education.

Findings & Suggestion

On the basis of above analysis, it has been found that Quality Education has contributed positive response in reducing early marriage in Jharkhand but there should be more government programme in protection of early marriage specially in marginalised communities.

It has been shown that gender disparity in higher education remain significant and largely stem from weak transition rates from secondary to higher secondary levels but poverty, socio cultural constraints continue to limit their educational progress as well as educational advancement remains highly restricted for women. So, need to increase in literacy there should be more focused on targeted educational investment and also increase in literacy growth in residential schools.

It has been found that the shortage of secondary and higher secondary institutions school infrastructure and safety, including functional toilets, safe campuses, transport, and residential facilities are basic barriers in improving girls' retention. The government should expand the number of secondary and higher secondary schools, especially in rural, tribal, and educationally backward blocks, to reduce distance-related dropout among girls.

Conclusion

This study has shown that decreasing gender gaps among Jharkhand's vulnerable people requires high-quality education. The results demonstrate that early marriage, the transition from school to college, infrastructure deficiencies, safety issues and the unequal distribution of educational opportunities are all major contributors to the state's educational inequality which extends beyond literacy and enrolment discrepancies. The decrease in child marriage between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 suggests that programs targeting girls and expanding education are having a good impact. However, girls' progress is also hampered by enduring obstacles in secondary and higher secondary availability, mobility, safety and access to higher education especially among tribal, scheduled caste, and rural poor households.

As a result, the study has come to the conclusion that high-quality education needs to be viewed as a whole educational pathway that includes access to higher education, protection from early marriage, secondary retention, fundamental learning and long-term empowerment. The future of gender equality in Jharkhand, particularly among vulnerable communities, hinges not only on getting girls into school but also on making sure they can stay, study, advance and flourish.

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