

## **Breaking the Gender Inequality among Undergraduates – A Sociological Study**

**Jiji Johnson**

**Ph.D. Research Scholar**

**Department of Sociology and Social Work**

**Annamalai University**

**Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu**

**&**

**Dr. B. Manickavasagam**

**Associate Professor**

**Department Of Sociology and Social Work**

**Annamalai University**

**Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu**

### **Abstract:**

There has been a tremendous efforts to improve gender equality in Kerala in all walks of life. Improved gender status is the equality of position for female with that of male gender. In olden times women were treated of inferior status when compared to that of men. This gender based discrimination was evident in almost all fields including in higher education. Though Kerala has achieved outstanding development in the field of education the gender gap in education field exist to some extend even now when it comes to the field of higher education. The difference in male-female literacy and employment rates are the aspects in which we can notice the gender based inequality. Education being a basic right of a citizen, which helps in earning an income of their own is often deprived to some women. Though women's education is known to have multiplier effect on the overall wellbeing of the family, she is given inferior status which leads to crimes and harassment against her. This study was conducted to review the gender status of women in higher education in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala state. The research conducted showed that the gender gap has been declining considerably in higher education field of Kerala compared to other parts of India. It has been evident from the study that the enrollment of

students at college level for under graduation has reached equality of gender to a much better level from that of the previous decades. The enrollment of girls in undergraduate courses in Kerala is around 61 percentage which shows that in all degree courses the girls has outnumbered the boys which proves that the state has been successful in reaching the goal of gender equality in the field of higher education. Thus gender development and gender empowerment programmes of the State has proved to be beneficial for the overall development of the society.

**Keywords:** *Female Education, Gender Development, Gender Discrimination & Harassment, Gender Inequality in Education, Social Problems, Undergraduates, Women Empowerment.*

## **Introduction**

Women who represent half of the world's total population are discriminated, exploited and harassed around the world irrespective of the nation to which they belong. They are born to face challenges to survive. Sex selective abortions and female feticide and infanticides have been practiced in many places to eliminate female children from the families as they are considered as a burden. At many times women are denied or restricted all forms of freedom including their fundamental rights like the right to be educated or even the right to life. In many places in India a differential caring system has been practiced in which sons were preferred more and were treated superior over daughters and so were given more caring and were provided with better facilities. As girls children were treated unwanted they were kept at home to help their mothers in household chores and were not allowed to go to school for education. They were considered as a liability of an extra mouth to feed or as another man's property. This caused the continuous decrease in female sex ratio which has resulted in social imbalance among men and women which lead to serious problems like sexual offences and harassment against women causing higher rate of insecurity for women.

India as a whole have a problem of inadequately serving the women in the fields of education and social status. In the present scenario, empowerment of women and girls for giving them equal rights and opportunities in every field, especially in the field of education has been given higher importance. One of the key field in which gender development has been initiated is education which paves way for empowerment of women. In previous times gender inequality existed in this arena. Boys were treated as the future bread winners of the family and so were tailored to be fit for

a decent career were as girls were retained at home for house hold chores. But as the reinforcement of policies for the welfare of women and girl increased empowerment of women began to be effective which resulted in getting equal opportunities for them in the field of training, education and skill development for the better development of their social status. In terms of the overall development of the State the women have contributed higher and have played a sustainable role in the positive development of the society. The gender development and gender empowerment has thus resulted in great achievements in the fields of health and education of women. The lower level of gender gap in education shows the progressive attitude towards women's education and their better health status. It has helped in the improved autonomy and independence of the women community and the better achievement of the state. It also points to the need improving the educational conditions of girl child for giving them a better awareness, for their health and wellbeing.

### **Statement of Problem**

The study examines the cause of gender inequality in education and analyses how it impacts on the economic growth and development of the society as a whole. It was seen that providing better and expensive higher education facilities to girls were desired less when there was male children of the same age group in the family. Parents preferred to invest lesser in the education of girl children's higher education compared to boys as it was a better economic choice. It is viewed by the society that social returns from educating boys are higher than girls as the female children have to be given away in marriage to yet another family and their earnings becomes a part of that family's welfare. So girls were trained for wifehood and motherhood and so were not send for being educated. Further traditional customs, religious practices and regional culture encourages the education of men over women. This kind of approach caused inequality among the sexes which produced a negative impact on the female girl children. It was noted that inferior quality of education given to girl children lowered her self esteem. Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam has rightly said that "empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation and when women is empowered the stability of the society will be assured." For empowering women the best way is to provide them with education of high standards, as education is the key instrument which helps in stimulating positive

attitudes and better qualities of a person. Proper education helps a person to distinguish between the correct and wrong decisions and helps to avoid mistakes that are commonly made.

## **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were

1. To analyze the problems faced due to gender inequality among undergraduates of Thiruvananthapuram City, the capital of Kerala State.
2. To detect the causes and the effective solutions for gender discrimination in the higher education field.
3. To find out how gender discrimination affected the undergraduates in their academic performance.

## **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant gender inequality among the undergraduates.
2. There is no significant assurance of ensuring equal opportunities to female undergraduates
3. There is no significant connection between gender gap and undergraduate education.

## **Research Methodology**

A sample population of 250 undergraduate students were selected randomly from various Arts and Science colleges from different parts of Thiruvananthapuram City, Kerala. Equal number of male and female students were included in the sample population. The undergraduate students from Arts and Science Stream were only selected as respondents. Relevant data were collected from these respondents using a well-structured interview schedule prepared on the basis of Likert's Scale. Through the interview schedule the respondents were able to express their consent and disagreement and at the same time give their judgments and suggestions in accordance with the five levelled scale. The tool used were divided into sections. The first section was for collecting the demographic data. The second section was to collect social background, the third for collecting

data related to the social problems faced by the undergraduates based on their gender and whether they suffered gender discrimination. The fourth was to identify the psychological distresses caused by gender discrimination and the fifth on how it affected the academic performance of the respondents. Evaluations were made based on this data about the socio psychological problems and academic difficulties caused by gender discrimination on the respondents. The most important cause for stress and anxiety found in the respondents was due to the over exploitation and over expectation on them from their family and society. Another prominent factor was their socio economic conditions which caused psychological distress in them. Gender inequality was one of the main reasons for the humiliation girls has to face at home and in the society. The study showed that only through proper care and support from the family, teachers and peers the causes for gender discrimination could be eliminated. The children needed proper assurance that causes and the reasons for their failures would be understood by their family and the near and dear ones. Girl children expect and needs equal support from their parents, teachers and the society to excel in their life.

## **Results and Discussions**

The development of a society is totally linked with the proper education of every citizen as education is linked with the total development process of the civilization. The policy of providing equal opportunities of education has helped to empower the women to a great extent. But still many families find it difficult to accept a girl child. This causes the deprival of proper education and nutrition to some of the girls just for the cause that she is a female child. Due to this reason many of the girl children in India are not able to reach college or continue their higher education as they have to drop out their education in the middle. Though high level priority has been given for education policies of girls by the Government, the inadequate familial support and lack of basic facilities in the educational institutions like enough toilets cause the young girls not to pursue her higher education. The family may find many other reasons like economic instability, poor academic performance of the child, her attaining the age for marriage or safety matters of transport for discontinuing a girl child's higher education.

Due to differential upbringing women become the victims of discrimination. Empowering women does not mean that men becomes powerless. When a women becomes empowered her competency

in decision making would help her family and the society as a whole. The chances for educating the girl child of an educated mother are comparatively higher than the daughter of uneducated women. Family income, culture, religion, caste and creed are some of the reasons for denying education of girl children. As daughters, they are given less privilege than sons. Some families think that educating girl children is a waste of their family income. Due to this reason a female child during her adolescent period is not treated as a child or as an adult. This causes a high level of confusion in her and decreases her self confidence. In the Indian cultural concept girls are expected to assume responsibilities of household from their early teenage years itself. As adolescent period is a rapid period of physical development parents fear to send their girl children to college due to their social fear of atrocities like their girl children being trapped by some male counterparts whom they may not prefer otherwise. Even though the performance of girls may be better than boys a limited number of girl children are given the opportunity for their higher education. The parents have a better tendency to give them away in marriage when they attain the age of eighteen or so as they feel that retaining a girl at home after their marriage age would create problems in future.

Another main reason for withdrawing girls from college studies is due to the higher expense of higher education and the small return anticipated from a girl's education. Boy's education on the other hand is treated as an asset to the family and is viewed as a prestige issue for showing the socio economic status of the family. The cost incurred for it will be found out from all means possible. Thus it is seen that the economic constraints affects only the higher education of girls and not boys. The parental indifference and ignorance are also the cause for depriving girls their educational rights. Thus social roles and sexual prejudices play an important role in depriving a girl her basic right of education.

## **Conclusion**

Empowering women is thus a social responsibility. It should be implemented as a blend of family obligation towards the commitment to the society. The social barriers which come as a hindrance in the path of the girl child's education should be removed at any cost for enriching their skills and abilities. Women's education helps in improving their decision making capacity which would in turn increase their self esteem & self confidence and their by strengthening the society. The social

problems like economic constraints of parents, lack of ample transport facilities for girl children to attend educational institution, the lack of hygienic toilets, etc. has to be dealt with. Girl children should be given reservation of seats for higher education, and should be given concessional rates in institutional fees and transportation costs. Study materials, uniforms, mid day meal and free public transportation facilities should be provided for girl children for encouraging their parents to send them for education. Ample potable water and toilet facilities should be provided for girls in the institution. Scholarships and reservations and concessions for education should be ensured for feminine gender in all sectors especially in the field of education. Reservation in jobs should be set aside which would attract parents for enrolling their teenage girl children for higher studies. Encouragement programmes for girls should be conducted. Counseling should be given to parents and caretakers of girl children to enroll them in colleges for standing on their own feet.

Harassment of women and ragging should be treated as a punishable offence under law. The safety of the girls should also be ensured. It should be ensured that the Rules and norms in favor of female children are being strictly practiced as an aid in overcoming social obstacles for women. Quality education should be provided to her for the overall development of her skills and talents. The family and community should be given awareness that educating a girl child is educating a family. For this there has to be a democratic environment within the family and the society. Flexible timings and calendar for education can be provided which would be helpful for some girl children who have to take care of their house hold cores while attending the college. Bridge programmes can also be conducted to help the drop out girls to continue their education. Government should also give awareness programmes through public media as part of effort for reduction of gender disparities in higher education field.

Gender equality in education would bring equal opportunities for both boys and girls for pursuing the field of education of their choice. This will help in the improved status of girls in social economical and cultural fields. This will change the men centered attitude of the society giving discrimination free benefits to women also in both public and domestic life reducing the gender gap between the sexes in social life. They will be also treated as bread winners and protector of the family with permission to partake in the decisions of the benefit of the family. Educating women is like educating the family and society as educated mothers raise brilliant children who become prodigies in the society. For this traditional gender roles should be modified to equal rights

and status to all. Thus educating feminine sex will help them to walk side by side with masculine sex for the better future of the society.

## References

- Aikman, S. and Unterhalter, E. (2006) Introduction. In: Aikman, S. and Unterhalter, E., Eds., *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education*, Oxfam GB, Oxford, 1-15.
- Bhalla Surjit, S, Saigal, S and Basu, N. (2003). *Girls Education is it - Nothing Else Matters (Much)*, Onxus Research and Investment, N Delhi.
- Biswas, A. and Agrawal, S.P. (1994) *Development of education in India*. Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 359.
- Chattopadhyay, A. (2006). *Empowering Women*, Yojana 50, pp. 30-31.
- Khandai, H. (2001). *The Role of University in Empowering Women*. University News, 39 (6) February, pp 9-11.
- Nongbri, C.( 2005). *Role of University in the Empowerment of Women: A look into Induction Programmer*, University News, 43 (47) November pp 139-146.
- Srivastva, G. (2003). *Women's Studies in India*. University News, 41 (30), July-August, PP 4-7

## Biosketch



Jiji Johnson is a Ph.D Research Scholar in the Department of Sociology, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu. Her area of specialization is Socio Psychological Problems of Undergraduates. Being a research aspirant, she has presented many scholarly papers in National and International Conferences/ Seminars and has published more than four articles in UGC approved journals.



Dr. B. Manickavasagam is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu. He has 19 years of teaching experience in U.G & P.G levels. His area of specialization is Sociology of Environment. He has published more than 60 research papers in National and International reputed journals. Under his guidance two Ph.D scholars have successfully completed their Ph.D's and presently 6 research scholars are doing Ph.D under his guidance. To his credit he authored one book on Medical Sociology. He has participated in more than 55 conferences at National and International levels. He is also associated with Indian Sociological Society.