

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION: PROMOTING ACCESS, QUALITY, AND EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment and Education are major concerns in many countries, especially developing ones. Particularly regarding financial and educational chances, women did not always have the same opportunities as men. They frequently had to rely on males for their subsistence as a result, which prevented them from participating fully in society. Women's empowerment and education have become increasingly important over time to promote gender equality and address the various barriers that women face when attempting to pursue education and career opportunities. A crucial element of women's empowerment is the acquisition of the tools, capacities, and knowledge necessary for them to take leadership roles in their lives and make decisions about their futures. Education plays a significant role in this process by providing women with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their goals and aspirations. Education may empower women because it equips them with the knowledge and abilities needed to succeed in the workforce. Evidence has shown that education enhances women's economic status, social standing, and political influence. Higher-educated women have an easier time finding steady work and are more likely to be active community change agents. Empowering women via education also benefits society as a whole. Smaller families are more common among educated women since they are better able to plan and manage their own lives. Education is therefore essential for both promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty. Still, there are a number of significant barriers that women must overcome in order to pursue an education. These could include gender-based violence, low female educational attainment, a lack of funding or other resources for girls' education, early childbirth and marriage, and cultural beliefs that prioritise male education. To solve these difficulties, a concentrated effort to support women's education is required. This can entail improving low-income families' access to educational resources and institutions, providing financial aid or scholarships, and addressing cultural beliefs that place a larger value on a man's education. Women's education and empowerment must be advanced in large part by governments and civil society organisations. Education is therefore essential for both

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promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty. Still, there are a number of significant barriers that women must overcome in order to pursue an education. These could include gender-based violence, low female educational attainment, a lack of funding or other resources for girls' education, early childbirth and marriage, and cultural beliefs that prioritise male education. To solve these difficulties, a concentrated effort to support women's education is required. This can entail improving low-income families' access to educational resources and institutions, providing financial aid or scholarships, and addressing cultural beliefs that place a larger value on a man's education. Women's education and empowerment must be advanced in large part by governments and civil society organizations. This can include policies and programmes that promote gender equality, help women's economic and educational advancement, and provide social and legal protections against discriminatory harassment and violence. Generally speaking, achieving development goals, reducing poverty, and promoting social and economic advancement depend on empowering women with education. Because educated women are more likely to be active members of society and change agents, they not only benefit economically but also socially and politically. There are still many ways to support women's empowerment, education, and the growth of gender equality in society, despite the many barriers that women face when trying to further their education.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Education, Employment, Society, Violence, Safeguards, Equality, Quality, Promoting Access.

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement of women's rights and empowerment are essential to every society's development. It is effective in promoting human rights, gender equality, and the battle against poverty. Gender disparities persist in educational access, quality, and equity, notwithstanding recent progress. Women and girls face numerous barriers to education, such as poverty, a lack of resources, and social and cultural standards. Therefore, advancing women's education and empowerment is essential to fulfilling the goals of sustainable development.

Approximately 50% of people on the planet are women. However, the hegemonic male worldview caused them a significant lot of pain because they were denied equal opportunity in

different parts of the world.¹ Nonetheless, the rise of feminism has greatly raised women's standing around the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of the main issues raised by these movements for women's rights. Women's education in India has also been a top priority for the government and civic society since educated women may make big contributions to the development of the country.

Any nation's citizens view education as both a basic requirement and a fundamental right. It can help people become self-sufficient, which makes it a useful tactic for eradicating inequality. This is especially necessary for women, as they face discrimination in many different contexts. Women's political rights are highly valued by both official and unofficial movements worldwide, and women's empowerment is a global issue. **The concept of women's empowerment was initially introduced at the 1985 International Women's Conference in NAROIBI.**²

Education is viewed as a vital first step towards the empowerment of women since it gives them the self-assurance to take on difficulties, challenge their established positions, and improve their lives. Education is the most effective instrument accessible to women to raise their social status. The majority of women in our nation are still weak, uninformed, archaic, and exploited. Additionally, education raises kids' status within their families and helps to lessen inequality.³

Women's lives can be made better by acquiring practical knowledge and abilities through capacity building and empowerment. India won't reach developed status unless women make the greatest contributions possible, which they can only do when they have access to power and education.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Long-term development in India depends on the empowerment of women. Many initiatives have been taken throughout the years to empower women by enhancing access, quality, and equality in order to achieve gender justice in all spheres of life.

¹ Rachel Jewkes and others, 'Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions' (Culture, Health & Sexuality 2015) < <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4706037/> > accessed 25 December 2023.

² Azza Karam, 'Education as the Pathway towards Gender Equality', (UN Chronicle), < <https://www.qub.ac.uk/cite2write/pdf/Oscola%20Referencing.pdf> > accessed 25/12/2023.

³ *Ibid*

Promoting access to education is one of the most important steps towards empowering women. It is necessary to guarantee women's equal access to all educational levels, including primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Women will gain knowledge and skills from this, and it will also improve their socioeconomic status. The Indian government has implemented various programmes, including the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), to ensure that women have equal access to quality education.⁴

Increasing women's access to healthcare is another way to give them more power. Access to basic healthcare services such as family planning, maternity and child healthcare, and reproductive healthcare is crucial for women. The Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), one of the many programmes the Indian government has started, provides women with free transportation and financial incentives to give birth at medical facilities.

Access to top-notch education and training programmes may give women greater confidence to pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated disciplines like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Women would also be able to obtain better employment opportunities and financial independence by giving them the chance to grow their skills and pursue vocational training.⁵

Equal rights are also essential for women's empowerment. Women must have equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of life, including work, politics, and resource access. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is one of the measures the government has taken to ensure gender equality at work.

In the end, coordinated efforts from all parties involved are necessary for the empowerment of women in India. India can promote access, equality, and quality in healthcare, education, employment, and political participation in order to attain gender justice and sustainable development.⁶

⁴ Ashleen Knutsen, (WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION, 2021) <
<https://yourdream.liveyourdream.org/2021/08/womens-empowerment-education/>> accessed 25 December 2023

⁵ Aashraya Seth, 'Empowering the Future: How STEM education is transforming the lives of girls in India' *THE TIMES OF INDIA* (India, 6 August, 2023)

⁶ Disha Sharma, (Empowering women means giving them the tools, resources, and opportunities to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life, JUL 15, 2023) <
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/vocalthoughts/empowering-women-means-giving-them-the-tools-resources-and-opportunities-to-participate-fully-and-equally-in-all-aspects-of-life-56437>> accessed 25 December 2023.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

Reducing poverty, promoting economic prosperity, and advancing gender equality all depend on education for women's empowerment. However, this cannot happen until assessment, quality, and equality in education are promoted.

Evaluating women's and girls' access to education is essential, particularly in underdeveloped countries. Many girls still lack access to school, despite improvements over time, due to a range of factors including poverty, discrimination, and cultural norms. Collaboration between governments, stakeholders, and civil society organisations is necessary to ensure that girls have access to high-quality education.⁷

To guarantee that women possess the skills and information necessary to compete in the workforce, high-quality education is crucial. Girls must get an education on par with boys in terms of content, teacher qualities, instructional materials, and infrastructure. Close the gender gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields in order to advance gender equality in fields where men predominate.

Equality is necessary if women are to be empowered by education. There ought to be equal educational possibilities for men and women. Gender stereotypes and biases need to be eliminated from educational institutions in order to promote gender equality. In order to ensure that girls have access to higher education, scholarships and bursaries should also be offered, and they should be encouraged to consider careers outside of the norm.⁸

In order to promote economic growth and gender equality, women must be empowered via education. It will take work to increase equality, excellence, and access to education in order to do this. It is imperative that governments, stakeholders, and civil society organisations work together to ensure that every girl has access to high-quality education.

Education of women is essential for empowering women

The concept of women's empowerment is comparatively new. As the first year of the new millennium, 2001 was called "WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT YEAR". Better families are

⁷ Dr Konstantina DAVAKI, 'The underlying causes of the digital gender gap and possible solutions for enhanced digital inclusion of women and girls', [March 2018]

<<https://www.qub.ac.uk/cite2write/pdf/Oscola%20Referencing.pdf>> accessed 25 December 2023.

⁸ Rishabh Khanna, 'Addressing gender inequality in education: how women teachers can lead the way?' *THE TIMES OF INDIA*, (India, March 27, 2023).

produced by educated women, and developed nations and perfect communities are the results. A progressive country is one in which every individual has full economic, social, cultural, and political independence, irrespective of gender, religion, caste, faith, or race.⁹

New data from UNESCO show how education affects development. It states:

- If every child had equal access to education, per capita income would increase by 23% over a 40-year period.
- If every woman had at least an elementary education, the number of child marriages, child deaths, and maternal fatalities could be decreased by a third, a sixth, and a third, respectively.

The latest research from UNESCO shows that:

Women are empowered through education: Girls and young women who have received an education are more likely to be aware of their rights and to feel empowered to assert them.

Education encourages tolerance: Education aids in the understanding of democracy, encourages the tolerance and trust that support it and inspires individuals to get involved in their country's political systems.

Economic growth would be boosted by productivity improvements: if all children had equal access to school, which would expand job options. A nation with educational equality would have a per capita income that was 23 percent higher after 40 years.¹⁰

The solution to environmental issues is education: Education increases the likelihood that a person will recycle household waste and use water and energy resources more wisely.

Women's education helps prevent child marriage: If more women receive education, this will help prevent child marriage.

Lifesaving for mothers is education: Many women still perish in various nations from issues related to pregnancy and childbirth.

⁹ Dr. Pragyan Das, 'Women Empowerment : Reality or Myth', [July 2012] < https://www.academia.edu/6810664/Women_Empowerment_Reality_or_Myth> accessed 25/12/2023

¹⁰ Isaac Bird, (5 Reasons Why Education Empowers Women and Girls, March 7th, 2019) < <http://campaignforeducationusa.org/blog/detail/5-reasons-why-education-empowers-women-and-girls>> accessed 26 December 2023

These deaths can be avoided with education: Some paediatric illnesses can be avoided, but not without education. Some of the deadliest childhood ailments can be avoided with easy fixes like malaria nets and clean water, but only if moms are trained to use them.

A good education can save a child's life: Education enables women to spot early symptoms of sickness, get information, and take appropriate action. Child mortality in developing nations would decrease by a sixth if all mothers completed their primary education.

Hunger is fought by education: With the aid of knowledge, the catastrophic effects of starvation on children's lives can be avoided¹¹.

Women's education advances women's empowerment in the following ways:

Education for women has the ability to change family dynamics and social standards. It also helps put an end to damaging rituals like Sati-Pratha, dowries, and early marriage. Education helps to alleviate economic misery by giving women a range of job alternatives that allow them to support their families and coexist in the workforce alongside men. Education does not promote a woman's individualism; rather, it fosters partnership. She can choose the career that best suits her needs thanks to her education.¹²

- Every woman has goals, no matter how big or small, but education enables her to recognise her areas of interest, ability, and potential, which helps her to maintain a balanced aim. She is therefore able to choose the right field of work thanks to this information.
- Education encourages the balanced development of personalities by providing due respect to each personality trait.
- Women's education has a critical role in enabling them to speak and express their feelings in an effective manner, which can help them manage conflicts and overcome adjustment issues on all fronts.
- An educated woman knows how to keep a happy home and peaceful connections with others, which makes her a role model for her children, family, society, and nation.

¹¹ Khushboo Singh, 'Importance of Education in Empowerment of Women in India', (MIJMRD, Vol. I, Issue I), accessed 25 December 2023.

¹² Digital Diary, (Women empowerment, JUN 27, 2021)

<<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/digitaldiary/women-empowerment-5-34285/>> accessed 25 December 2023.

- Education helps a woman become physically strong by empowering her with information about sports, exercise, health-related topics, and excellent physical health; this will surely improve her mental health.
- Education contributes to improving the sex ratio and population control.
- Women are more likely to participate in programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Operation Black Board, and Total Literacy Programmes, among others, if they have an education, especially if they live in rural areas.

EQUITY IN EDUCATION

When it comes to enrolling boys and girls in schools, gender equality has greatly improved as a result of adult literacy initiatives. The gender gap in reading proficiency is gradually closing as a result of women's increased participation in literacy programmes. The fact that enrollment inequalities between boys and girls from non-literate parents and neo-literate families are much lower is even more startling. Girls and boys now enjoy equal education everywhere in the world. However, very few nations—all educational levels combined—have been able to accomplish this. In politics, women are starting to participate more. In January 2014, there were over thirty percent female lawmakers in at least one House in forty-six countries.¹³

Women continue to experience discrimination in the workplace, in gaining access to financial resources, and in political involvement, despite the fact that many nations have laws promoting gender equality. In every industry we operate in, women and girls encounter obstacles and disadvantages. Globally, there are 62 million fewer female students. One in three women globally may be sexually abused at some point in their lives. One youngster in seven gets married before turning fifteen in developing countries. Poor nations account for 99 percent of the 287,000 women who die each year from problems related to pregnancy and delivery.¹⁴

Women only make up about 3 to 20% of the workforce, although accounting for over 40% of farmers. Women own only 10% of all businesses in Africa. South Asia accounts for just 3% of this total. Less than 20% of MPs are women, although making up half of the global population. Women and girls have the potential to revolutionise every industry in which we operate. the

¹³ Rishabh Khanna, 'Addressing gender inequality in education: how women teachers can lead the way?' *THE TIMES OF INDIA*, (India, March 27, 2023)

¹⁴ Cailin S. Stammers and Leanne S. Son Hing, 'Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Front Psychol*' [2015 Sep] < <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4584998/> > accessed 23 December 2023

impact of men's and boys' equality. Gender equality and women's empowerment are vital to development, not expansion. To end this, we must intensify our efforts to support women and girls by launching targeted education and awareness initiatives on gender equality.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a society's socioeconomic advancement and gender equality depend on the education and empowerment of women. When women have the knowledge and abilities that come with education, they can become independent and contribute to the growth of the nation. Furthermore, research indicates that education lowers child mortality rates, enhances maternal health, and promotes environmental sustainability. Empowered and educated women may support women's rights and gender equality, participate in decision-making, and advance economic prosperity.¹⁶

In many communities around the world, more work has to be done to achieve gender equality, despite the noteworthy achievements made in women's education and empowerment. This entails promoting laws that take gender equality into account, ensuring that all students have equal access to education, and working to dispel gender preconceptions and cultural biases that limit the potential of women. Governments, non-governmental organisations, and the corporate sector must continue to work together to ensure that women have equal access to empowering opportunities and education.¹⁷

Women's education and empowerment must be prioritised above all else in order to establish a just and equitable society where women can thrive and reach their full potential. Investing in women's education and empowerment creates a positive feedback loop that helps not just the individuals but also the families and the community at large. Action must be taken to give women the opportunities and resources they need to succeed.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ Monazza Aslam, 'Empowering Women: Education and the Pathways of Change' [2013] < <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225925> > accessed 25 December 2023

¹⁷ 'The role of empowering women and achieving gender equality to the sustainable development of Ethiopia' [2016] (Vol 2, Issu 1 PP 37-42) < <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405883116300508>> accessed 25 December 2023.