

Educational Empowerment of Women in Ranchi District of Jharkhand: Trends and Challenges

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Abstract

Women's educational empowerment is a critical determinant of gender equality and sustainable development, yet numerous challenges and barriers hinder its realization. This study examines the multifaceted factors influencing women's educational empowerment, including socio-economic constraints, gender-based discrimination, cultural norms, and access to quality education facilities. Findings highlight the urgent need for policy reforms, community engagement, and investment in educational infrastructure to promote women's educational empowerment.

Keywords: women's empowerment, education, gender equality, barriers, policy interventions.

Introduction

Educational empowerment encompasses the process of providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to enhance their educational attainment, critical thinking abilities, and socio-economic prospects. At its core, educational empowerment seeks to equip individuals with the tools to make informed decisions, engage actively in learning, and participate meaningfully in society¹. For women, educational empowerment is particularly transformative, as it not only enables them to break the cycle of poverty and discrimination but also fosters gender equality, social mobility, and personal fulfillment. Educational empowerment for women involves ensuring equal access to quality education at all levels, from primary schooling to higher education and vocational training. It entails addressing barriers such as poverty, cultural norms, gender-based violence, and systemic discrimination that hinder women's educational opportunities². Moreover, it encompasses efforts to promote girls' enrollment, retention, and completion rates in educational institutions, as well as initiatives to enhance the relevance and inclusivity of educational curricula and pedagogical approaches. Beyond access and enrollment, educational empowerment entails equipping women with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the complexities of modern society, participate in the workforce, and contribute to economic development. This includes fostering literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, and vocational skills, as well as promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership abilities. Educational empowerment also involves addressing socio-cultural barriers and stereotypes that limit women's educational and career aspirations, fostering a supportive environment that encourages women to pursue their educational goals and aspirations. Furthermore, educational empowerment extends beyond individual benefits to encompass broader societal transformations. Educated women are more likely to marry later, have fewer children, and invest in the education and well-being of their own children, thus breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and contributing to sustainable development. Additionally, educated women are better equipped to participate in decision-making processes, advocate

for their rights, and challenge gender inequalities in their communities and societies. In summary, educational empowerment for women is a multifaceted process that involves ensuring equal access to quality education, promoting skill development and critical thinking abilities, addressing socio-cultural barriers, and fostering broader societal transformations. By investing in women's education, societies can unlock the full potential of half of their population, driving progress towards gender equality, social justice, and sustainable development.

Educational empowerment of women is a pivotal aspect of gender equality and sustainable development, encompassing efforts to provide women with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities needed to access and excel in education. It involves breaking down barriers such as poverty, gender discrimination, cultural norms, and lack of access to schooling that hinder women's educational attainment³. By ensuring equal access to quality education at all levels, from primary school to higher education and vocational training, educational empowerment enables women to develop the competencies and confidence necessary to navigate the complexities of modern society. Moreover, it fosters critical thinking, leadership abilities, and economic independence, empowering women to contribute meaningfully to their communities and societies. Educational empowerment goes beyond academic achievement to encompass the acquisition of life skills, vocational training, and digital literacy, equipping women with the tools to pursue their aspirations and advocate for their rights. Ultimately, by investing in women's education, societies can foster greater social inclusion, economic prosperity, and gender equality, leading to a more just and sustainable future for all.

Significance of Educational Empowerment of Women

The significance of educational empowerment for women lies at the heart of fostering gender equality, socio-economic development, and individual well-being. By providing women with access to education, they are equipped with the tools to challenge societal norms, overcome barriers, and actively participate in shaping their own futures. Education serves as a powerful pathway towards economic independence, as educated women are better positioned to secure employment, generate income, and contribute to household and community prosperity. Moreover, education plays a pivotal role in improving health outcomes, as educated women are more likely to make informed decisions about their health and the health of their families, leading to reduced maternal and child mortality rates. Beyond tangible benefits, educational empowerment fosters a sense of agency and self-determination among women, enabling them to advocate for their rights, pursue their aspirations, and effect positive change in their communities. Ultimately, investing in the educational empowerment of women is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic imperative for building more inclusive, resilient, and equitable societies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the educational empowerment of women in Ranchi District, Jharkhand, with a focus on understanding the current status, challenges, and

opportunities. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the educational landscape in Ranchi District, the study aims to identify the factors influencing women's access to education, their participation and success in educational endeavors, and the impact of educational empowerment on their lives and communities. Additionally, the study seeks to explore the effectiveness of existing policies, programs, and interventions aimed at promoting women's education, as well as to provide recommendations for future initiatives. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the educational empowerment of women in Ranchi District and to inform evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at fostering gender equality and sustainable development in the region.

Objectives

1. Assess the current status of women's education in Ranchi District, Jharkhand.
2. Identify the barriers and challenges hindering women's access to and completion of education.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programs aimed at promoting women's education in the region.

Research Questions

1. What is the current enrollment rate and educational attainment level of women in Ranchi District?
2. What are the primary obstacles preventing women from accessing and completing education in the area?
3. How successful have past initiatives been in promoting women's education, and what factors have contributed to their success or failure?

The historical context of women's education in India is characterized by a complex interplay of cultural, social, religious, and political factors that have shaped the opportunities and challenges faced by women seeking education throughout the centuries. Traditionally, education for women was often limited to informal settings within the household, where they were taught basic literacy and domestic skills by family members or community elders. Formal education, particularly for girls from higher social strata, was largely inaccessible and reserved for boys, reflecting deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and societal expectations. However, there were notable exceptions to this trend, particularly in ancient India, where women from privileged backgrounds, such as the daughters of aristocrats and scholars, received education in fields like philosophy, literature, and the arts. The Rigveda, one of the oldest scriptures of Hinduism, contains hymns composed by female sages and scholars, suggesting that women in ancient India had access to intellectual and spiritual pursuits⁴. During the medieval period, the advent of Islamic rule in parts of India brought significant changes to women's education. While Islamic law emphasized the importance of education for both men and women, educational opportunities for women were often restricted to religious instruction within the confines of the home or Quranic schools (madrasas). The colonial era marked a significant turning point in the history of women's education in India. British colonial authorities, influenced by Victorian values and missionary zeal, established

formal education systems that sought to impart Western-style education to Indian boys, while largely neglecting the education of girls. Missionary schools, however, played a pioneering role in providing education to girls, particularly in the fields of primary and secondary education.

The 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the emergence of social reform movements and women's rights activism in India, spearheaded by leaders such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Pandita Ramabai⁵. These reformers advocated for the education of girls and women as a means of promoting social progress, gender equality, and women's empowerment. As a result, efforts were made to establish schools and colleges for girls, and initiatives were undertaken to improve female literacy rates. Independence in 1947 heralded a new era of educational reform and expansion in India. The Indian government, committed to the principles of equality and social justice enshrined in the Constitution, embarked on ambitious initiatives to promote universal education, including for girls and women. The establishment of the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) program aimed to address gender disparities in education and improve access to quality education for girls⁶.

Despite significant progress in recent decades, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to education for girls and women in India. Socio-cultural barriers, including gender stereotypes, early marriage, and lack of support for girls' education, continue to impede efforts to achieve gender parity in education. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses systemic inequalities, invests in girls' education from an early age, and promotes gender-sensitive policies and practices in education.

Global and National Perspectives on Women's Educational Empowerment

Women's educational empowerment is a critical issue on both global and national levels, with implications for gender equality, socio-economic development, and human rights. From a global perspective, organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) advocate for the right to education for all, regardless of gender⁷. The global community recognizes that investing in girls' and women's education yields significant dividends, not only for individuals but also for communities and societies as a whole. At the global level, initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), underscore the importance of women's educational empowerment in achieving broader development objectives⁸. The international community has committed to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, with a specific focus on eliminating gender disparities in education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for girls and women. On a national level, governments play a key role in formulating policies and implementing programs to promote women's educational empowerment within their respective countries. Many countries have adopted national education policies and strategies that prioritize gender equality in education and address barriers to girls' and women's access to education. These policies may include measures such as abolishing school fees, providing scholarships and

incentives for girls' education, and implementing gender-sensitive curriculum reforms. In India, for example, the government has launched several initiatives aimed at promoting girls' education and women's empowerment, such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, the National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE), and the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) program⁹. These initiatives seek to address gender disparities in education, improve access to quality education for girls, and empower women to make informed choices about their health, education, and well-being.

At the grassroots level, civil society organizations, community-based groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in advancing women's educational empowerment through advocacy, capacity-building, and direct service delivery. These organizations work to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education, mobilize communities to support girls' schooling, and provide educational opportunities and resources to women and girls in marginalized and underserved communities. In conclusion, women's educational empowerment is a multifaceted issue that requires concerted efforts at both the global and national levels. By investing in girls' and women's education, countries can unlock their full potential, promote gender equality, and build more inclusive and prosperous societies. It is essential for governments, civil society, and the international community to work together to ensure that every girl and woman has the opportunity to access quality education and realize her right to learn, grow, and thrive.

Research Methodology

The research design for this study employs a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's educational empowerment in Ranchi District, Jharkhand. This mixed methods approach allows for the collection and analysis of both numerical data and qualitative insights, offering a more nuanced understanding of the research topic. The study follows the scientific method, which involves systematic observation, measurement, and analysis to test hypotheses and answer research questions. By adhering to the principles of objectivity, replicability, and validity, the scientific method ensures rigor and reliability in the research process.

The study utilizes a descriptive research design, aiming to describe and analyze the current status of women's educational empowerment in Ranchi District. Descriptive research provides valuable insights into the characteristics, trends, and patterns related to the research topic, laying the groundwork for further exploration and analysis. The sampling method employed in this study is purposive sampling, specifically targeting 200 women respondents from Ranchi District. Purposive sampling allows for the selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as gender, location, and educational background. By purposively selecting women from Ranchi District, the study ensures that the sample represents the population of interest and provides meaningful insights into the local context.

The study utilizes two main data collection techniques: Interview Schedule and Non-Participant Observation. The Interview Schedule involves conducting structured interviews with the selected respondents to gather information about their experiences, perspectives, and challenges related to educational empowerment. Non-Participant Observation involves observing women's interactions, behaviors, and experiences in educational settings, providing additional context and insights into their lived experiences.

The collected data are analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data from interviews and observations are thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and narratives related to women's educational empowerment. Quantitative data are analyzed using statistical techniques to summarize and interpret numerical findings, such as demographic characteristics, educational attainment levels, and access to educational resources. The study relies on both primary data, collected directly from the field through interviews and observations, and secondary data, obtained from existing literature, reports, and statistical sources. Primary data provide firsthand insights into the research topic, while secondary data offer additional context, background information, and comparative analysis. By triangulating primary and secondary data sources, the study enhances the validity and reliability of its findings.

Educational Status of Women in Ranchi District

The educational landscape of women in Ranchi District is a multifaceted tapestry reflecting varying levels of educational attainment, access to opportunities, and the intricate interplay of socio-cultural factors. Through a comprehensive survey conducted with 200 women respondents, a nuanced understanding of the educational status of women in Ranchi District emerges, shedding light on both achievements and persistent challenges within the realm of women's education. At the heart of this educational portrait lies a spectrum of educational attainment, ranging from foundational literacy to advanced academic qualifications. The survey unveiled that while progress has been made, significant disparities persist. Among the respondents, a notable proportion of women, comprising 30 individuals, reported having no formal education, indicating a substantial segment of the population lacks access to even the most basic educational opportunities. This underscores the urgent need for interventions to address foundational literacy gaps and provide pathways to education for marginalized communities in the district. Conversely, the survey revealed encouraging signs of progress, with primary education emerging as the most common educational level among respondents, with 50 women having completed primary schooling. This suggests strides in expanding access to primary education and laying the groundwork for future educational pursuits. Furthermore, 60 women reported having attained secondary education, reflecting a growing trend of educational advancement beyond primary levels. This upward trajectory continued, with 35 respondents having completed higher secondary education, indicating a notable cohort of women pursuing education beyond the secondary level and potentially accessing higher education opportunities. Moreover, the survey unveiled a cohort of women who had attained higher education qualifications, with 15 holding bachelor's degrees and 8 holding master's degrees. These individuals represent the vanguard of educational achievement in the district, serving as role models and catalysts for change within their

communities. Additionally, 2 women had undergone vocational training, signaling efforts to equip women with practical skills and enhance their employability in various sectors.

However, behind these educational achievements lie persistent barriers that impede women's access to and completion of education in Ranchi District. The survey identified various obstacles, including financial constraints, early marriage, household responsibilities, gender discrimination, and cultural norms. Financial constraints emerged as a significant barrier, with 55 respondents citing financial limitations as a hindrance to education. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to alleviate economic burdens and ensure that cost does not serve as a barrier to educational access. Furthermore, early marriage, reported by 35 respondents, poses a significant threat to girls' education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting opportunities for personal and professional growth. Household responsibilities, mentioned by 25 respondents, underscore the burden of unpaid care work disproportionately borne by women, hindering their ability to pursue educational aspirations. Additionally, gender discrimination and cultural norms, each cited by 30 and 15 respondents, respectively, underscore deep-rooted systemic barriers that perpetuate gender disparities in education. Despite these challenges, the survey illuminated the transformative power of education in women's lives. Respondents reported a range of positive outcomes associated with education, including improved economic opportunities, enhanced decision-making abilities, increased confidence and self-esteem, greater participation in community activities, and improved health outcomes. These findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of education beyond academic achievement, highlighting its role in empowering women, fostering social inclusion, and promoting holistic well-being.

In conclusion, while progress has been made, the journey towards gender equality in education in Ranchi District is far from complete. Addressing persistent barriers and promoting women's educational empowerment requires a multi-pronged approach encompassing targeted interventions, policy reforms, community engagement, and investment in infrastructure and resources. By prioritizing women's education as a cornerstone of development, Ranchi District can unlock the full potential of its female population, foster inclusive growth, and pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future.

Educational Level of the Respondents

Educational Level	Number of Respondents
No Formal Education	30
Primary Education	50
Secondary Education	60
Higher Secondary Education	35
Bachelor's Degree	15
Master's Degree	8
Vocational Training	2

Educational Level	Number of Respondents
Total	200

Table:-1.1**Barriers to Women Education**

Barriers	Number of Respondents
Lack of Access to Schools	45
Financial Constraints	55
Early Marriage	35
Household Responsibilities	25
Gender Discrimination	30
Cultural Norms	15
Lack of Support from Family	15
Total	200

Table-1.2**Impact of Educational Empowerment on Women's Lives**

Impact	Number of Respondents
Improved Economic Opportunities	55
Enhanced Decision-making Abilities	50
Increased Confidence and Self-esteem	20
Greater Participation in Community Activities	35
Improved Health Outcomes	25
Reduced Gender-based Violence	15
Total	200

Table-1.3**Factors Influencing Women's Educational Empowerment**

Women's educational empowerment is influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, institutional, and policy factors that shape access to and participation in education. Among these factors, socioeconomic conditions exert a significant influence, with poverty and parental education levels serving as key determinants of women's educational opportunities. Poverty often restricts families' ability to invest in their daughters' education, leading to lower enrollment rates and higher dropout rates among girls. Additionally, parental education levels play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards education within households, with higher levels of parental education correlated with increased support for girls' education.

Cultural and societal norms also play a pivotal role in shaping women's educational empowerment. Traditional gender roles and expectations often prioritize boys' education over girls', perpetuating gender disparities in access to education. Deep-rooted beliefs about women's roles as caregivers and homemakers may discourage families from investing in girls' education, further entrenching gender inequalities. Moreover, cultural practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation can disrupt girls' education and hinder their academic progress. Addressing these norms requires challenging traditional gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and fostering supportive environments that value and prioritize girls' education.

Infrastructure and resource allocation are critical determinants of women's educational empowerment, as access to quality education hinges on the availability of schools, trained teachers, and educational materials. In many communities, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, inadequate infrastructure and limited resources pose formidable barriers to educational access and attainment. Girls may face long distances to travel to school, lack of sanitation facilities, and shortages of qualified teachers, all of which impede their ability to access and complete education. Ensuring equitable distribution of resources and investment in educational infrastructure is essential for promoting women's educational empowerment and narrowing gender gaps in education.

Gender-based discrimination and violence present significant obstacles to women's educational empowerment, as they create hostile environments that undermine girls' confidence, safety, and well-being in educational settings. Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, assault, and early marriage, can force girls out of school and perpetuate cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Additionally, discriminatory practices within educational institutions, such as unequal treatment of boys and girls or limited opportunities for girls in certain fields of study, can hinder women's educational progress and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Efforts to address gender-based discrimination and violence must be comprehensive, encompassing legal reforms, institutional policies, and community-based interventions to create safe and supportive learning environments for women and girls.

Government policies and programs play a crucial role in shaping women's educational empowerment by providing a supportive policy framework, allocating resources, and implementing targeted interventions to promote gender equality in education. Policies that prioritize girls' education, eliminate school fees, and provide incentives for female enrollment can increase access to education and improve retention rates among girls. Moreover, programs that address socio-economic barriers, such as conditional cash transfers and school feeding programs, can help alleviate financial constraints and promote girls' educational participation. Additionally, efforts to mainstream gender equality in education policies and curricula can challenge discriminatory norms and promote inclusive and equitable learning environments for all. By addressing these multifaceted factors and fostering an enabling environment for women's educational empowerment, governments can unlock the full potential of women and girls, promote gender equality, and foster sustainable development.

Challenges and Barriers to Women's Educational Empowerment

Challenges and barriers to women's educational empowerment persist across various contexts, posing significant obstacles to girls' access to quality education and hindering their academic advancement. Among these challenges, the lack of access to quality education facilities stands out as a pervasive issue, particularly in rural and marginalized areas where educational infrastructure is often inadequate or non-existent. Schools may lack basic amenities such as classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, making learning environments inhospitable and discouraging girls from attending school. Additionally, socio-economic constraints and financial barriers further exacerbate the challenge, as families struggling with poverty may prioritize boys' education over girls' due to limited resources. The costs associated with schooling, including tuition fees, uniforms, and transportation expenses, may be prohibitive for many families, particularly in low-income households. As a result, girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often unable to access education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality.

Gender-based discrimination and cultural norms present formidable barriers to women's educational empowerment, perpetuating inequalities and restricting girls' educational opportunities. Deep-rooted gender stereotypes and traditional roles may dictate that girls' primary responsibilities lie within the home, leading to societal expectations that prioritize household chores and caregiving over educational pursuits. Additionally, discriminatory practices such as early marriage and gender-based violence can disrupt girls' education and limit their ability to participate fully in school. Cultural norms that prioritize boys' education or devalue girls' intellectual capabilities further compound these challenges, perpetuating gender disparities in educational access and attainment.

Distance to schools and transportation issues pose additional barriers to women's educational empowerment, particularly in rural and remote areas where schools may be located far from residential communities. Long distances to travel to school, coupled with inadequate transportation infrastructure, may deter girls from attending school, especially if they must navigate unsafe or inaccessible routes. The lack of transportation options, such as buses or bicycles, further limits girls' ability to access educational opportunities and exacerbates gender disparities in educational access. Moreover, limited awareness and support for girls' education within communities contribute to the persistence of these challenges, as families may prioritize boys' education or be unaware of the benefits of educating girls.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses policy reforms, community engagement, and investment in educational infrastructure and resources. Governments must prioritize girls' education through the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programs that address socio-economic barriers and promote gender equality in education. Community-based initiatives, such as awareness campaigns and parental education programs, can help shift societal attitudes towards girls' education and garner support for girls' educational empowerment. Additionally, efforts to improve access to quality education facilities, including the construction of schools and provision of transportation services, are essential for ensuring equitable access to education for all. By addressing these challenges head-on and fostering an enabling environment for women's

educational empowerment, societies can unlock the full potential of women and girls, promote gender equality, and drive sustainable development.

Conclusion, Findings and Suggestions

In conclusion, the examination of challenges and barriers to women's educational empowerment reveals a complex landscape characterized by a myriad of interconnected factors. The lack of access to quality education facilities, compounded by socio-economic constraints and gender-based discrimination, hinders girls' ability to access and complete education. Additionally, distance to schools and transportation issues further exacerbate the challenge, particularly in rural and remote areas. Limited awareness and support for girls' education within communities perpetuate gender disparities and restrict girls' educational opportunities.

Findings from this analysis underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to address these challenges and promote women's educational empowerment. Policy reforms aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination, expanding access to quality education facilities, and providing financial support to economically disadvantaged families are crucial for enhancing girls' educational opportunities. Community-based initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of girls' education and engage families and communities in supporting girls' educational aspirations are also essential. Moreover, investments in educational infrastructure, including the construction of schools and provision of transportation services, are necessary to ensure equitable access to education for all girls, regardless of their geographic location. Additionally, efforts to challenge cultural norms and stereotypes that perpetuate gender disparities in education are vital for fostering a supportive environment for women's educational empowerment.

In light of these findings, several suggestions can be made to promote women's educational empowerment. Firstly, governments should prioritize girls' education through the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programs that address socio-economic barriers and promote gender equality in education. Secondly, community-based initiatives should be strengthened to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education and mobilize support from families and communities. Thirdly, investments in educational infrastructure and resources should be increased to ensure equitable access to quality education for all girls. Finally, efforts to challenge cultural norms and stereotypes that hinder girls' educational opportunities should be intensified to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women's educational empowerment. By addressing these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, societies can unlock the full potential of women and girls, promote gender equality, and foster sustainable development. Women's educational empowerment is not only a fundamental human right but also a catalyst for social and economic progress. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to overcome the barriers to women's educational empowerment and create a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

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