

GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIAN REGION



PIONEERS YOUTH

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Introduction to the Department of Creative Engagement

The Department of Creative Engagement is more than just a platform for discussion; it is a catalyst for change in South Asia. We are committed to fostering a culture of critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and constructive debate that will drive progress and address the region's most pressing challenges.

Through our series of structured debates and deliberations, we aim to delve deep into the underlying issues that contribute to the region's problems, going beyond superficial analysis to uncover the true drivers of change. Encourage the use of data and research to inform policy decisions, ensuring that our recommendations are grounded in fact and supported by evidence. Create a safe and inclusive space where diverse perspectives can be shared and debated respectfully, promoting understanding and cooperation. Equip individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to become active participants in the democratic process and contribute to the development of their communities.

By pursuing these objectives, we seek to create a more just, equitable, and prosperous South Asia, where citizens are empowered to shape their own destiny and work together to build a better future for all. These objectives are achieved by a variety of engaging sessions to enhance the experience of our members. The **Demoleague** sessions invite resource persons from outside the organization to delve into the hot topics and conspiracies of the current times. Through critical thinking and analytical discussions, the **SARC** sessions offer fresh perspectives and deepen our understanding of complex issues. At the Department of Creative Engagement, we are dedicated to nurturing a culture of thoughtful discourse and innovation, contributing to the progress and development of South Asian societies.

The South Asian Recommendations Committee (SARC)

Imagine a South Asia where citizens are empowered, governments are accountable, communities are united, economies are prosperous, and peace endures. This is not merely a dream; it is a vision that can be realized through the collective efforts of individuals, organizations, and governments across the region. The South Asia Reformation Council (SARC) is committed to making this vision a reality. By fostering dialogue, promoting critical thinking, and empowering citizens, SARC seeks to create a South Asia where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

This working paper will explore the strategies and initiatives necessary to achieve this ambitious goal, outlining the steps that individuals, organizations, and governments can take to build a better future for South Asia. It is a call to action for all who believe in the potential of this region to come together and create a more just, equitable, and prosperous society.

Initiated by the Department of Creative Engagement and executed by Pioneers Youth, the South Asia Recommendations Council (SARC) is a groundbreaking platform designed to foster critical thinking, dialogue, and collective action among the citizens of South Asia. This ongoing initiative aims to address the pressing challenges confronting the region, providing a much-needed space for individuals to engage in meaningful discussions, analyze complex issues, and propose innovative solutions.

By empowering citizens to become active participants rather than passive observers, SARC seeks to catalyze a transformative shift in the region's trajectory. Through its monthly gatherings, the council offers a unique opportunity for individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together, share their perspectives, and contribute to a more just, equitable, and prosperous South Asia.

The SARC's commitment to fostering dialogue and critical thinking is essential for addressing the region's multifaceted challenges, which include economic disparities, social inequalities, environmental degradation, and political instability.

By providing a platform for open and honest discussions, the council aims to bridge divides, foster understanding, and inspire collective action.

Overview

Education is a fundamental right that is enshrined not only in constitutions but also in the essence of humanity itself. It is a form of knowledge that transcends social class, creed, and most importantly, gender. However, in South Asian societies, inequality is deeply ingrained, leaving nearly half of the population vulnerable. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of 'Girl Child Education' in selected South Asian countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The analysis begins by examining the legal frameworks for Girl Child Education in these countries, considering international obligations and constitutional rights to education. It then explores the root causes of gender inequalities in education, with a particular focus on the prevalence of child marriage as a major obstacle. Additionally, the paper addresses the limitations of the current school education systems in these regions and their impact on the quality of education. A specific focus is placed on STEM education and the disparities faced by girls in accessing these fields, along with proposed reforms aimed at addressing these challenges. Lastly, the paper delves into the role of parents and households in perpetuating the vulnerability of girl children in achieving educational parity.

Legal Framework

Background

The law is the primary tool to ensure the legal guarantee of rights, and create a basis for enforcement and accountability concerning an issue as complex as Girl Child Education. In consideration of the circumstances of the South Asian region, it can be observed that Girl Child Education has been historically undermined and continues to be attacked on multiple fronts even in the present. While this position paper will seek to reform the perspective of the South Asian society towards girl

child education, it is crucial to understand that the law and the legal framework for education provides the foundation for any development towards the The legal framework for education amongst South Asian countries are set out in the laws, policies, and regulations related to education, in each of the countries. However, the legal framework is formulated based on features and principles which are commonly found throughout the region of South Asia:

Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution is the fundamental law of a country, and sets out the framework for the government, the distribution of governmental power and the relationship between the government and its people. However, the importance of the constitution over the concern of girl child education lies in the fundamental rights chapter of the constitution.

Contemporary constitutions include a bill of rights that establishes the legal rights of the individual in relation to the State and within society. A bill of rights, on the other hand, serves as a proclamation of the fundamental values upon which society is built, such as human dignity, freedom, equality, equity, and justice. In accordance with these values, constitutional rights help to protect individuals' vital interests, such as the right to health, housing, personal security, and participation in the conduct of public affairs.

The legal frameworks governing education in South Asian countries are largely shaped by constitutional provisions related to education. These provisions declare education to be a fundamental right and emphasize how important it is to the advancement of society. They act as the cornerstone upon which regional and national policies and laws pertaining to education are constructed. Therefore, the constitution is the foundation for subsequent education acts, policies, and regulatory bodies.

Through the constitutional right for education, South Asian nations not only express their commitment to ensuring that all citizens have access to high-quality education, but they also set forth the duties of the state in ensuring that all citizens have equitable and inclusive educational opportunities. They also serve as a crucial mechanism for defending and advancing the rights of individuals, particularly those from marginalized and disadvantaged groups, to an education.

Additionally, these constitutional protections can be helpful in encouraging a regional culture of educational access and equity by holding governments responsible for upholding their educational obligations.

Education Acts and Policies

Education Acts and Policies are critical in shaping South Asia's legal framework for education for these legislative instruments establish the operational guidelines and regulations required for the effective implementation of the constitution's educational provisions. Curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, funding mechanisms, and administrative structures are generally provisioned through acts and policies.

Education acts and policies are also a tool to address complexities springing up due to regional disparities, infrastructural disparities, and the diversity in the cultural, linguistic and religious landscape of the South Asian region, by ensuring that educational opportunities are tailored to the unique needs of different communities. Furthermore, they define the legal obligations and responsibilities of governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders in the education sector, establishing a framework for accountability and transparency. Therefore, educational acts and policies have been pivotal in the promotion and development of Girl Child Education in South Asia.

Conclusively, rooted in constitutional provision, education acts and policies ensure the ability of a country to adapt and respond to shifting educational needs and emerging global trends while promoting equality and quality in education for all citizens is made possible by education acts and policies, which act as a road map for educational development.

Language Policies

Due to the region's extensive linguistic diversity, language policies are of utmost importance for the legal framework governing education in South Asia. Language can be a potent tool for both inclusion and exclusion, and South Asia is home to many different languages and dialects. In consideration of this diversity in the linguistic landscape across South Asia, effective communication and comprehension in the classroom are important, and are effectively addressed by

these policies, especially those which determine the medium of instruction in schools.

The goal of language policies is to provide equitable access to education while maintaining cultural and linguistic identities. Furthermore, being multicultural societies, these policies are essential for overcoming language barriers and fostering social cohesion. Additionally, language is no longer a medium of communication, but further linked with social development and innovation. Thus, all South Asian countries have focused on the development of English language education, in addition to their national language.

Conclusively, education acts and policies promote a more inclusive and adaptable educational system in South Asia by establishing rules for language use in the classroom and helping to distribute educational opportunities and resources fairly.

Affirmative Action

The legal framework governing education in South Asia places a high value on affirmative action as a legal mechanism to address historical inequalities, advance social justice and foster social cohesion. Social hierarchies in South Asia are diverse and frequently complex, inclusive of issues of caste, ethnicity, and gender inequality. Disadvantaged and marginalized groups frequently face institutionalized discrimination and educational barriers. In order to level the playing field, affirmative action policies, frequently in the form of reservations or quotas, make sure that these underrepresented groups have equal access to educational opportunities. South Asian nations acknowledge the need to right historical wrongs and actively work toward inclusive and diverse educational environments by enshrining such policies in education laws and regulations.

International Agreements

International agreements are essential to South Asia's legal system governing education, especially concerning the education of girls. These agreements provide useful benchmarks and examples of best practices that South Asian countries can utilize to help them develop their educational policies and legal systems.

South Asian nations pledge to uphold international standards and principles that place a priority on equal access to education for girls and women by taking part in

agreements related to education and gender equality. These agreements encourage cooperation and collaboration between nations, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and resources to address shared challenges, in addition to offering insightful information into effective strategies for promoting girl child education.

The following international agreements can be identified as the most significant agreements concerning education.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): While not exclusively focused on education, the UDHR, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, recognizes the right to education as a fundamental human right in Article 26.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): This treaty, adopted by the United Nations in 1966, recognizes the right to education as a legally binding obligation in Article 13. It obligates signatory countries to ensure free and compulsory primary education, access to higher education on the basis of capacity, and equitable access to education without discrimination.
- Convention Against Discrimination in Education (CADE): Adopted by UNESCO in 1960, CADE aims to combat discrimination in education based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin. It ensures equal educational opportunities for all.
- Education for All (EFA) Goals: The Dakar Framework for Action, adopted in 2000, and the Incheon Declaration of 2015 set global education goals to ensure quality education for all, with a focus on access, equity, and learning outcomes.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 4 of the SDGs, adopted in 2015, specifically addresses education. It aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.
- Education 2030 Framework for Action: This framework, adopted at the World Education Forum in 2015, outlines the strategies and commitments needed to achieve the education-related targets of the SDGs.
- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): UNESCO's ESD program aims to integrate sustainability principles into education systems globally, promoting environmental awareness and responsible citizenship.

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): While not exclusively focused on education, the CRC, adopted by the United Nations in 1989, recognizes the right to education in Article 28 and emphasizes the best interests of the child.

Furthermore, international agreements tend to apply external pressure and scrutiny over the governments of South Asia, ensure the guarantees of gender equality in education and accountability for the development in this crucial area. International agreements essentially play a crucial role in advancing the education of girls in South Asia by offering a more comprehensive framework and system of support to address gender disparities and advance equality in education.

Legal Assessment of Country: India

India: Constitutional Provisions

The 86th amendment to the Indian Constitution, through section 2, introduced the Right to Education as a fundamental right. Accordingly, the Constitution emphasizes that The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.

Considering the heterogeneous nature of Indian society and the vulnerability of certain communities, the Constitution further emphasizes the need to promote educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections. Establishing this as a Directive Principles of State Policy, the constitution lays down the promotion of education among scheduled castes, tribes and other vulnerable communities as a fundamental duty in governance, and therefore the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. However, the Directive Principles of State Policy are not justiciable and therefore, as per Article 37, cannot be enforced by the courts.

In the case of *Keshavnanda Bharati vs the State of Kerala* (1973) 4 SCC 225, The court established the principle that, while DPSP are not enforceable as separate rights, they are important in interpreting the Constitution and can be used to

challenge amendments that change the basic structure of the Constitution. This decision established a critical constitutional doctrine that has guided the Indian judiciary in preserving the Constitution's fundamental character.

In *Minerva Mills v. Union of India* (AIR 1980 SC 1789), the court had to decide whether the fundamental rights guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution could take precedence over the directive principles of State policy enshrined in Art IV. The court determined that because neither of the two has precedence over the other, the doctrine of harmonious construction should be used. Because both are complementary, a balance is required.

India: Education Acts and Policies

Giving effect to the aforementioned constitutional provision, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE Act) enacted in 2009, emphasizes that every child between the ages of 6 to 14 years has the right to free and compulsory education. Furthermore, it states that all children will receive free education in government schools, which will be managed by School Management Committees (SMC), and requires private schools to admit at least 25% of their students without charge. Another significance to the RTE Act is the establishment of a National Commission for Elementary Education to monitor all aspects of elementary education including quality.

The bill maintains progressive steps with regard to vulnerable communities,

- If a child over the age of six has not been admitted to any school or has not completed his or her elementary education, he or she will be placed in a class that is appropriate for his or her age. However, if a child is directly admitted to the class appropriate to his or her age, he or she shall have the right to receive special training within such time limits as may be prescribed in order to be on par with others. Furthermore, a child admitted to elementary school shall be entitled to free education until the completion of elementary school, even if he or she is 14 years old.
- No child shall be denied admission to a school due to a lack of proof of age. A child's age shall be determined for the purpose of admission to elementary education on the basis of the birth certificate issued in accordance with the

Provisions of Birth, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act 1856, or on the basis of such other documents as may be prescribed.

- School infrastructure (where there is a problem) must be improved every three years or recognition as a school will be revoked.

The RTE act requires the State and the Central Government to share the financial burden of the implementation of the above provisions. Accordingly, The central government must prepare expenditure estimates. State governments will be reimbursed for a portion of these costs.

The Right to Education (RTE) serves as a valuable platform to reach those who have been left behind, especially disadvantaged groups like child laborers, migrant children, children with special needs, and those facing various forms of disadvantage due to social, economic, cultural, geographic, linguistic, or gender-related factors. RTE places a strong emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning, which demands significant and sustained efforts to bring about substantial reforms.

Among the existing challenges are the need for creative and continuous initiatives to train over a million new and untrained teachers within the next five years. Additionally, enhancing the skills of in-service teachers is crucial to ensure that education is child-friendly and effective.

Families and communities play a pivotal role in ensuring that education is tailored to the needs of each child. In a country as vast as India, where an estimated 190 million girls and boys should be in elementary school, their active involvement is essential.

To achieve our goals, it is imperative to eliminate disparities and ensure that quality education is accessible to all. Investing in preschool education is a strategic move that can significantly contribute to achieving these objectives.

One of the most pressing challenges faced is bringing eight million out-of-school children into age-appropriate classes while providing them with the support they need to remain in school and succeed. This undertaking calls for innovative and flexible approaches to address the diverse needs of these children.

Another important aspect in consideration of the education acts and policies of India is the National Education Policy (NEP). The NEP 2020 is the first education policy of the twenty-first century, succeeding the 34-year-old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. Based on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability, this policy aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs, and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student.

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 places a strong emphasis on ensuring universal access to school education across all levels, ranging from preschool to secondary education. To achieve this, the policy outlines various strategies, including improving infrastructure, establishing innovative education centers to reintegrate dropouts into mainstream education, monitoring students' progress and learning levels, and promoting multiple pathways to learning, encompassing both formal and non-formal education modes. The involvement of counselors or well-trained social workers in schools, open learning opportunities for classes 3, 5, and 8 through institutions like the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools, secondary education programs equivalent to Grades 10 and 12, vocational courses, adult literacy initiatives, and life-enrichment programs are among the proposed measures to make universal access a reality. NEP 2020 aims to bring approximately 2 crore out-of-school children back into the mainstream education system.

The policy also places a strong focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and introduces a new curricular structure of 5+3+3+4 corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years, respectively, replacing the traditional 10+2 structure. This reform recognizes the critical importance of the 3-6 age group in a child's cognitive development and includes them in the school curriculum. The system comprises 12 years of schooling, with three years allocated to Anganwadi/pre-schooling. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will develop a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE). ECCE will be delivered through an expanded network of institutions, including Anganwadis and pre-schools, with teachers and Anganwadi workers trained in ECCE pedagogy and curriculum, involving collaborative efforts between various ministries.

Recognizing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy as fundamental prerequisites for learning, NEP 2020 advocates the establishment of a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy. States are tasked with developing implementation plans to ensure universal foundational literacy and numeracy for all primary school learners by grade 3, aiming to achieve this goal by 2025. The policy also emphasizes the need for a National Book Promotion Policy.

In addition, the NEP calls for reforms in school curricula and pedagogy to foster holistic development, equip learners with essential 21st-century skills, reduce curricular content to enhance critical thinking, and promote experiential learning. It encourages flexibility and choice of subjects for students, breaking down traditional barriers between arts and sciences, curricular and extracurricular activities, and vocational and academic streams.

India: Language Policies

The National Education Policy highlights the importance of using a child's mother tongue, local language, or regional language as the medium of instruction, particularly up to Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8 and beyond. It also emphasizes the inclusion of Sanskrit as an option at all school and higher education levels, as part of the three-language formula. Furthermore, it encourages the availability of other classical languages and literatures of India as optional subjects. Importantly, the policy stresses that no language will be imposed on any student, promoting a flexible and inclusive language education approach.

To foster a deeper understanding of India's linguistic diversity, students will engage in enjoyable projects or activities related to 'The Languages of India' during Grades 6-8, aligning with the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' initiative. Additionally, the policy plans to offer several foreign languages at the secondary level to broaden students' horizons.

In a bid to support students with hearing impairment, the policy aims to standardize Indian Sign Language (ISL) nationwide and develop national and state curriculum materials tailored for the benefit of these students.

India: Affirmative Action

Provisions and policies based on Affirmative Action can be observed throughout the aforementioned analysis. However, the constitutional provision specifically allowing for affirmative action is Article 15(3), which emphasizes that nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

India: Summary of International Agreements

UDHR	ICESCR	CEDAW	CADE	EFA	SDGs	Edu 2030	ESD	CRC
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Legal Assessment of Country: Pakistan

Pakistan: Constitutional Provisions

In its 18th amendment to the Constitution, under section 9, Article 25A was introduced to the Constitution of Pakistan. Ensuring the right to education as a fundamental right, the article provisions that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such a manner as may be determined by the law.

In consideration of Girl Child Education, the Pakistan Constitution also emphasizes that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex, and accordingly all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal treatment, as emphasized in Article 25 to the Constitution.

Article 22 protects against coercive religious instruction in educational institutions and guarantees religious institutions equal taxation treatment. The article highlights that (1) no person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own, and (2) in respect of any religious institution, there shall be no

discrimination against any community in the granting of exemption or concession in relation to taxation.

Conclusively, these constitutional provisions emphasize the state's responsibility to promote and facilitate education as a means of achieving social justice and equality in Pakistan.

Pakistan: Educational Acts and Policies

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2009 is the most recent in a series of education policies that date back to Pakistan's inception in 1947. The process of reviewing the National Education Policy 1998-2010 began in 2005, and the first public document, known as the White Paper, was finalized in March 2007. The White Paper served as the foundation for developing the Policy document. The four-year duration of this review process was influenced by various factors, including the consultation process adopted and significant political changes within the country. The objective of this policy was clear as highlighted, "Our education system must provide quality education to our children and youth to enable them to realize their individual potential and contribute to development of society and nation, creating a sense of Pakistani nationhood, the concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, their regional and local culture and history based on the basic ideology enunciated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan."

The decision to initiate the review in 2005, well before the existing Policy's time horizon (1998-2010), was driven by two primary reasons. Firstly, the previous Policy had not yielded the desired educational outcomes, with shortcomings in crucial areas such as access, quality, and equity in educational opportunities. Secondly, Pakistan had made new international commitments related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Dakar Framework of Action for Education for All (EFA). Additionally, Pakistan faced challenges arising from globalization and the nation's aspirations to become a knowledge-driven society. These goals were further influenced by domestic factors like the devolution of power and demographic changes, all of which underscored the need for a renewed commitment to expanding access to quality education for all.

Ensuring access to quality education for all, especially for girl children, is a paramount goal in Pakistan's education policies. The National Education Policy (NEP) underscores the need to address various challenges that hinder girls' education, particularly in marginalized and rural areas. This comprehensive summary delves into the policy measures designed to promote and enhance girl child education in Pakistan.

Primary Education Access and Equity:

One of the central themes of the NEP is to bolster primary education and mitigate the obstacles that impede girls from attending school. The policy sets a clear target of bringing all children, both boys and girls, into school by the year 2015. It recognizes that the participation of girls, particularly in rural regions, has been significantly lower than desired. To address this, the policy prioritizes the expansion of educational facilities, especially dedicated schools for girls in rural areas. It also emphasizes targeting locations with low ratios of secondary schools, where access to education has been historically limited.

Financial Support to Prevent Dropout:

A critical aspect of girl child education is the prevention of dropout rates due to financial constraints. Recognizing this challenge, the policy commits to increasing student support to keep students, particularly girls, from leaving school due to financial reasons. This support is essential in enabling girls to continue their education without facing economic barriers, thereby fostering greater gender equity.

Improving the Learning Environment:

The NEP highlights the importance of creating a conducive and attractive learning environment for girls. It suggests that schools should adopt more student-centered pedagogies to enhance the learning experience, making education more engaging and beneficial. Additionally, counseling facilities will be made available to address psychological distress, including issues related to aggression and other challenges that students may face. By providing support and guidance, girls can be encouraged to stay in school and pursue their education with confidence.

Promoting Life Skills and Career Counseling:

The policy underscores the value of Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) for girls, equipping them with essential life skills needed for personal and social development. Moreover, it recognizes the importance of career counseling, especially at the higher secondary level, to help girls make informed decisions about their educational and career paths. This empowers them to explore diverse fields of study beyond traditional norms, including technical and vocational options, promoting gender diversity in educational and career choices.

Secondary and Higher Education:

Beyond primary education, the NEP addresses the importance of secondary and higher education for girls. The policy aims to increase enrollment in higher education and raise investment levels to support this expansion. It acknowledges the critical role of research and development (R&D) in higher education, offering girls opportunities to engage in innovative pursuits and contribute to economic growth and sustainable development.

Effective Use of ICT and Distance Education:

Recognizing the potential of technology in bridging educational gaps, the NEP emphasizes the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in delivering quality education. This includes both on-campus and distance education, enabling girls, especially those in remote areas, to access technical and scholarly resources and communicate with teachers and researchers.

Equitable Access through Scholarships:

The policy highlights the importance of need-based scholarships to ensure equitable access to higher education for girls. By awarding scholarships to meritorious students, the policy aims to remove financial barriers and enable more girls to pursue advanced studies, contributing to greater gender parity in higher education.

Social Sciences, Integration, and Collaboration:

To foster a more inclusive and balanced education system, the NEP emphasizes the integration of social sciences into educational curricula. This not only promotes a broader worldview but also encourages girls to engage in fields traditionally dominated by male students. Furthermore, the policy encourages collaboration

with the global scholarly community, providing opportunities for girls to connect with international educational and research networks.

In conclusion, Pakistan's National Education Policy places a strong emphasis on enhancing girl child education. It addresses various aspects of access, equity, and quality from primary to higher education. By implementing these policy measures, Pakistan aims to create a more inclusive and gender-equitable educational system, empowering girls to pursue their educational aspirations and contribute to the nation's development.

Pakistan: Language Policy

Pakistan is a multilingual state with six major languages—Punjabi (spoken by 44.15% out of a population of 153 million in 2003); Pashto (15.42); Sindhi (14.10); Siraiki (10.53); Urdu (7.57); Balochi (3.57)—and about 57 minor ones. Urdu is the national language and English the official one (Census, [2001](#)). In 2009, a new education policy of the country was released by the federal government stating that the teaching curriculum should include Urdu, English and a regional language.

Pakistan: Affirmative Action

There is no specific or standalone provision in Pakistan's Constitution labeled as affirmative action. Instead, affirmative action principles are incorporated into various articles and clauses dealing with equality, nondiscrimination, and special provisions for disadvantaged groups. These constitutional provisions serve as the foundation for affirmative action policies in Pakistan.

Accordingly,

1. Article 25 - Equality of Citizens:

Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the equal treatment of all citizens under the law. It states that "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law." This article forms the basis for various affirmative action measures aimed at achieving equality.

2. Article 27 - Safeguard against Discrimination in Services:

Article 27 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, residence, or place of birth in relation to access to public offices and employment in government services. This article underscores the commitment to providing equal opportunities to all citizens.

3. Article 28 - Preservation of Language, Script, and Culture:

Article 28 of the Constitution emphasizes the preservation of minority languages, scripts, and cultures. It acknowledges the importance of protecting and promoting the rights of religious and linguistic minorities.

4. Article 34 - Special Provisions for Minorities:

Article 34 of the Constitution outlines special provisions for religious minorities. It allows religious minorities to establish and maintain their educational institutions while receiving financial assistance from the government. This provision is a form of affirmative action to support minority communities in education.

5. Article 37 - Promotion of Social Justice and Removal of Social Evils:

Article 37 of the Constitution emphasizes the promotion of social justice and the removal of social evils. It includes provisions related to child labor, the welfare of workers, and the protection of women and children. These provisions reflect affirmative action efforts to address social and economic disparities.

While the term "affirmative action" or "compensatory discrimination" is not explicitly used in the Pakistani Constitution, these constitutional provisions lay the groundwork for policies and programs aimed at promoting social and economic equity and addressing historical inequalities for the country's disadvantaged groups.

Pakistan: Summary of International Agreements

UDHR	ICESCR	CEDAW	CADE	EFA	SDGs	Edu 2030	ESD	CRC
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Legal Assessment of Country: Nepal

Nepal: Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of Nepal enacted in 2015 identifies the Right to Education as fundamental right of the citizens of Nepal. Article 31(1) of the constitution observes that every citizen has the right to access to basic education, while Article 31(2) of the constitution highlights that every citizen shall have the right to compulsory and free basic education, and free education up to the secondary level. Accordingly, education remains a right of all citizens of Nepali without discrimination, including sex discrimination. Furthermore, Article 31(3) of the constitution, in identifying the value of free higher education, emphasizes that the physically impaired and citizens who are financially poor shall have the right to free higher education as provided for in law.

In further consideration of disabled persons, the constitution of Nepal establishes that the visually impaired person shall have the right to free education with the medium of braille script.

However, the constitution of Nepal continues with more progressive steps with regard to the diversity and the vulnerability of certain communities within the country. Accordingly, the constitution of Nepal maintains a separate article for the rights of women. Emphasizing on the rights of women, article 38(5) of the Nepal Constitution establishes that women shall have the right to special opportunity in the spheres of education, health, employment and social security on the basis of positive discrimination.

Additionally, the constitution of Nepal maintains another separate article for the rights of children. Article 39(2) makes it a fundamental right for every child to have the right to education, health care nurturing, appropriate upbringing, sports, recreation and overall personality development from family and the State.

Furthermore, in consideration of the untouchable (*dalits*), the constitution of Nepal takes a remarkable step towards the constitutional identification of these people, and accordingly provisions free education towards the *dalits* through Article 40(2) of the Nepal Constitution. The Article maintains that provisions of free education with scholarships shall be made for Dalit students from the primary to higher level

of education as provided for in law. Special provision shall be made in law for Dalits to pursue higher education in technical and professional subjects.

Towards the protection of the right of education of the poor and vulnerable communities, the constitution of Nepal, under Article 42(2) highlights that the citizens who are economically very poor and communities on the verge of extinction, shall have the right to special opportunity and facilities in the areas of education, health, housing, employment, food and social security, for their protection, progress, empowerment and development.

Accordingly, the constitution of Nepal can be considered to be a constitution providing one of the strongest protections available to the right to education as a fundamental right.

Nepal: Education Acts and Policies

Within the Directive Principles, Policies and Responsibilities of the State chapter of the Constitution of Nepal, the following aspects concerning education and education policy have been recognized:

- Making education scientific, technical, professional, skill-oriented, and employment and people oriented in order to prepare the human resources to be competent, competitive, moral, and committed to national interest.
- Increasing the investment of the State in the educational sector, and regulating and managing the investment of the private sector in it to make education service oriented.
- Making higher education easily available, of high quality and accessible, and gradually making it free.
- Establishing and promoting information centers and libraries for the personality development of citizens.

According to the Article 49 of the Nepal Constitution, this chapter will be a guideline for the governance of the State and the State must mobilize or have it mobilized, the required resources and means for the implementation of the principles, policies and responsibilities mentioned in this Part.

The Education Act, 2028 (1971) is the primary piece of legislature concerning the education system in Nepal. The bill provides legal provisions for the management

of education institutions and education in general in Nepal. However, since this act was enacted 52 years ago, the federal legislature of Nepal is currently in the process of enacting a new bill to amend and unify the existing law on education. According to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST), once the bill is promulgated as an act, the national standards and norms of school education can be determined, and equality, uniformity, and quality in the fundamental aspects of school education will be maintained. The MoEST is said to have moved forward with a new school education act based on the federal structure for the same purpose. However, many provisions in this proposed legislature have been shadowed with controversy.

Furthermore, because Nepal is a federal republic, local governance laws play an important role in education. These laws give local governments the authority to not only oversee schools within their jurisdictions, but also to allocate budgets, develop tailored education plans, and actively engage communities. They emphasize the importance of School Management Committees (SMCs) in decision-making and resource management. SMCs are made up of parents, teachers, and community members. Local governments are encouraged to address issues of access and equity, as well as to promote inclusive education and ensure that no child falls behind. Furthermore, these laws promote community involvement, quality improvement, and collaboration with higher-level educational authorities. Local governance laws, by bringing decision-making closer to communities, play a critical role in fostering community participation, responsiveness, and accountability, ultimately contributing to the improvement of Nepal's education system.

Nepal: Language Policy

Article 31(5) of the Nepal Constitution makes it a fundamental right for every Nepali community living in Nepal to have the right to acquire education in its mother tongue up to the secondary level, and the right to open and run schools and educational institutions as provided for by law.

Rooted on this constitutional provision it can be identified that the language policy of Nepal concerning education strikes a balance between the use of the official language, Nepali, and the mother tongues of students to facilitate effective

learning. The policy promotes the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in the early years of education to ensure familiarity and comprehension. As students progress through their education, Nepali becomes the primary medium of instruction, allowing them to become fluent in the official language. Bilingual education models are being promoted in order to aid in this transition and linguistic development. This policy not only preserves the country's rich linguistic diversity, but it also promotes inclusivity by catering to students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, including those with disabilities. Curriculum development, teacher training, and government support are all essential components of this policy, which ensures that students receive a high-quality education while appreciating the linguistic mosaic of Nepal.

Nepal: Affirmative Action

While affirmative action has not been explicitly recognized in the constitution of Nepal, the inclusion of Right to Equality, Right to Property, Right to Education, Right to Healthcare, Right to Culture, Rights of Women alongside provisions for representation, social inclusion, protection of vulnerable communities ensure a well-rounded mechanism towards affirmative action.

Nepal: Summary of International Agreements

UDHR	ICESCR	CEDAW	CADE	EFA	SDGs	Edu 2030	ESD	CRC
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Legal Assessment of Country: Bhutan

Bhutan: Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of Bhutan does not specifically recognize the Right to Education. However, the constitution recognizes the Right to Equality, which has and can be generally used for the interpretation of equal opportunity in education. Accordingly, in the fundamental rights chapter, Article 7(15) highlights that all

persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal and effective protection of the law and shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics or other status.

Nevertheless, the Principles of State Policy emphasize on particular policies concerning education that will ensure the good quality of life for the people of Bhutan in a progressive and prosperous country. Accordingly, article 9(8) requires the State to provide free education to all children of school going age up to tenth standard and ensure that technical and professional education is made generally available and that higher education is equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Bhutan: Education Acts and Policies

Bhutan has no Education Act or Law (though plans are in the works to institutionalize and enact a law soon). While the Kingdom of Bhutan's 2008 Constitution makes no mention of non-state education provision, the National Education Policy 2019 (which governs both state and non-state education in Bhutan from early childhood to tertiary level) refers to "private" actors and the "Zhung Dratshang" (the supreme monastic body overseeing Buddhist education), with "communities" also mentioned in the provision of early childhood education.

The term "private" is defined as a "institution that is privately owned, whether by an individual, a corporation, or any other nongovernmental body" in Bhutan's Tertiary Education Policy of 2010. It also states that the owner of such an institution is solely responsible for its financing and management.

Bhutan's education system is primarily managed and financed by the state, with a strong emphasis on providing free and compulsory education up to the first year of upper secondary school. The government has expanded access to education by reducing the primary enrollment age to five years and providing free scholarships to class 10 passed students for their further education.

State schools constitute the majority (93%) of educational institutions in Bhutan, offering primary and secondary education. Additionally, the government has established extended classrooms in remote areas to reduce walking distances for younger children.

There are also autonomous schools (69) that operate independently under state grants, providing flexibility in curriculum implementation. Central schools (64) offer tuition-free residential education in rural and remote areas.

Private schools, including international schools, exist in Bhutan and offer education beyond the free and basic levels. Monastic education institutes, both public and private, focus on spiritual and traditional learning. State-funded monastic institutes exclusively serve male pupils and follow a separate curriculum.

Homeschooling's legal status is unclear, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, home-based education delivery was implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE) using various platforms.

The government's efforts include expanding compulsory education, supporting private schools, and providing scholarships to enhance access to education, reflecting Bhutan's commitment to education for all.

Bhutan: Affirmative Action

Bhutan does not have a formal affirmative action provision in its constitution or through policy. However, the Bhutanese society is strongly rooted in Buddhist philosophy, which has shaped their culture. Buddhist teachings promote the idea that all sentient beings, regardless of gender, have the potential for enlightenment. This philosophical foundation has influenced societal attitudes toward gender equality.

Bhutan: Summary of International Agreements

UDHR	ICESCR	CEDAW	CADE	EFA	SDGs	Edu 2030	ESD	CRC
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Legal Assessment of Country: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka: Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of Sri Lanka does not host the Right to Education as a fundamental right. However, in the case of *Chandani De Soysa v Akila Viraj Kariyawasam* SC. FR. No.77/2016, the courts of Sri Lanka highlighting the right to equality and the right to be free of discrimination in accordance with the Right to Equality emphasized under Article 12 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, held that all children of Sri Lanka have the full right to education and cannot be discriminated against.

Whilst the Right to Education may not have been specified in the Fundamental Rights chapter of the constitution, the Directive Principles of State Policy found in Article 27(2) of the Constitution highlights that it must be the responsibility of the State the complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels. This article of the Constitution was highlighted in the aforementioned case law, where the courts emphasized that the human rights of all persons must be promoted, protected and respected. Furthermore, in consideration of the ethnic diversity within Sri Lanka, the Directive Principles of State Policy further enumerate that the State must seek to strengthen national unity by promoting co-operation and mutual confidence among all sections of the People of Sri Lanka, including the racial, religious, linguistic and other groups and shall take effective steps in the fields of teaching, education and information in order to eliminate discrimination and prejudice.

Furthermore, in the case of *Kavirathne v Pushpakumara* SC. FR. No. 29/2012, the courts of Sri Lanka opted for an expansive interpretation of the equality clause in Article 12(1) of the Constitution to recognise the fundamental right to tertiary education.

Therefore, while lacking the right of education in the fundamentals rights chapter, the progressive interpretation by the courts of Sri Lanka have ensured the tacit enactment of the right to education.

Sri Lanka: Education Acts and Policies

Sri Lanka takes pride in its system of free education, which is designed to provide access to education for all citizens without any associated costs. This, coupled with the requirement that every child must attend school until the age of 14, has

contributed to the country's impressive literacy rate. Under the regulations gazetted by the Sri Lankan government under the Education Ordinance (1939), it is compulsory for all children between ages five and sixteen, to obtain a formal education.

A recent report from the National Education Commission of Sri Lanka recognizes education as a fundamental right accessible to all citizens. The Government of Sri Lanka utilizes its education system as an effective means to ensure access to nutrition by providing mid-day meals to children in specific coverage areas. To encourage high enrollment rates, children also receive complimentary textbooks and two sets of uniforms. Upon finishing primary education, which goes up to grade five, students have the opportunity to take a competitive "scholarship exam" for admission to well-regarded schools in urban areas that offer top-notch facilities. As they enter grade nine, students can choose to continue their academic studies, enter an apprenticeship program for technical skills, or engage in agricultural activities. Those who successfully complete their secondary education up to grade 13 and pass the Ordinary Level examinations receive a General Certificate of Education. In 1997, Sri Lanka implemented educational reforms that align with the country's commitment to inclusive education, fostering a more inclusive and accessible educational environment.

However, the reality on the ground tells a different story, as educational challenges are prevalent in various regions of the country. While it's true that the provision of free education has encouraged students from underprivileged backgrounds to engage in education until the age of fourteen, the system is not without its shortcomings.

The National Education Commission (NEC) was established in 1991 through the National Education Commission Act No. 19. It plays a central role in shaping education policies and advising the President on various education-related matters. The NEC's responsibilities cover a wide range of issues related to educational reforms and development in the country.

Sri Lanka currently follows a National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) (NEPF), a comprehensive and ambitious plan aimed at transforming the country's education system over the next ten years. This framework is built on key principles,

including equity, quality, relevance, and inclusivity, with the goal of creating a learning environment where every student can reach their full potential.

- **Equity:** The NEPF strives to ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances, have equal access to quality education. This involves expanding early childhood education, enhancing education quality in rural and disadvantaged areas, and providing inclusive education for students with special needs.
- **Quality:** The NEPF aims to enhance education quality at all levels by improving the curriculum and assessments, strengthening teacher training and development, and investing in educational infrastructure and resources.
- **Relevance:** Making education more relevant to students' needs and the evolving job market is another goal. This includes integrating 21st-century skills into the curriculum, establishing pathways for lifelong learning, and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation.
- **Inclusivity:** The NEPF envisions an inclusive education system that welcomes all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances. This involves providing support for students with special needs, promoting gender equality, and addressing the needs of marginalized communities.

The NEPF marks a significant departure from previous education policies in Sri Lanka. It prioritizes learning outcomes over inputs, emphasizes equity and inclusion, and recognizes the importance of 21st-century skills and lifelong learning.

While the NEPF has received positive feedback from various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and education experts, there are challenges to its implementation. Adequate resources and investments from the Sri Lankan government are essential for effective implementation. Additionally, achieving the NEPF's goals requires commitment and cooperation from all levels of the education system, including teachers, principals, and school administrators.

Despite these challenges, the NEPF 2020-2030 has the potential to bring about transformative changes in Sri Lanka's education system, aligning it with the country's development objectives.

Nevertheless, with regards to Girl Child Education, the Acts and Policies of Sri Lanka have ensured the advancement of Girl Child Education. In fact, in certain fields of education, girls perform better than boys. Thus, grounded on universal free education, including free tertiary education, together with the education policies implemented, Sri Lanka has been able to to remove barriers and ensure that girls have equitable access to quality education, empowering them and advancing gender equality in Sri Lanka's educational landscape.

Sri Lanka: Affirmative Action

The Constitution of Sri Lanka provisions affirmative action through article 12(4). According to the article, nothing in the article on the right to equality can be used to prevent special provisions being made, by law, subordinate legislation or executive action, for the advancement of women, children or disabled persons.

Sri Lanka: Summary of International Agreements

UDHR	ICESCR	CEDAW	CADE	EFA	SDGs	Edu 2030	ESD	CRC
Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Child Marriage in South Asia

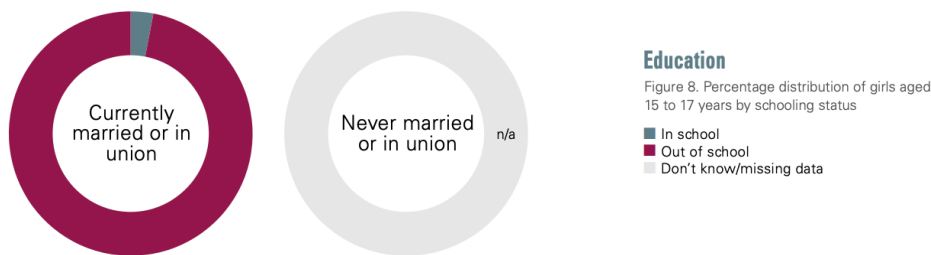
Background

Marriage is the very foundation of a civilized society, the relationship once formed, the laws step in and binds the parties to various 'socially defined' obligations and liabilities thereunder. It is the very foundation of the family and in turn the society and nation without which no civilization may exist. Particularly, this institution of marriage is a much complicated one and the matter becomes more difficult within a diverse society as India and other nations like Sri Lanka and Pakistan where there are religious, ethnic and cultural differences and each of them have their own defined customs, meanings and importance of marriage institution. This complexity can be predicted with Indian example where there is the *Hindu marriage Act 1955*[3] for Hindus, for Muslim the *Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act 1937*[4], for Christian and Parsi :*The Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872* [5] and *The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936*[6] respectively. For the one who doesn't profess any religion there is *The Special Marriage Act, 1954*[7] to govern their marriage. All of these have their own rules for marriage institutions which includes the most important ones like the provisions for divorce, alimony and marriage age (*hence there's a need for a Uniform Civil Code but the debate goes on as to how to codify a law for such a diverse community of people*).

One of the customs in marriage is **Child Marriage**. It refers to any formal or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. Child marriage is a global issue. It is fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, social norms and insecurity, and has devastating consequences all over the world. *Majorly, child marriage threatens the lives, well-being and futures of girls around the world.* Here is the table representing some key indicators about marriage and fertility rate from **Indian National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) 2019-2021**:

Indicators	NFHS-5 (2019-21)			NFHS-4 (2015-16)
	Urban	Rural	Total	Total
Population and Household Profile				
Marriage and Fertility				
20. Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%)	14.7	27.0	23.3	26.8
21. Men age 25-29 years married before age 21 years (%)	11.3	21.1	17.7	20.3
22. Total fertility rate (children per woman)	1.6	2.1	2.0	2.2
23. Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%)	3.8	7.9	6.8	7.9
24. Adolescent fertility rate for women age 15-19 years ⁵	27	49	43	51

A proper analysis of the table may indicate alarming *Adolescent Fertility Rate for Women age 15-19* reaching almost half as 43% (slightly better from the last survey but not promising). Alternately, being a mother forces these adolescents to bear the burden of child marriage if not the proper case of child marriage which is the main concern. Also the rate of *married women under 18* is stressing the way even after strong legislations like *Prevention of child marriage Act 2006* in India. Similarly the situations in **Pakistan**, which is home to nearly **19 million** child brides; **1 in 6 young women** were married in childhood according to *Child Marriage Country Profile - Pakistan* submitted in UNICEF and the following statistics is a perfect evidence of how **child marriage is a big obstacle in Girl Child Education** in Pakistan particularly representing the South Asian Region as a whole:



Statistical profile on child marriage: Pakistan

Early childbearing

Figure 9. Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who gave birth before ages 18 and 20

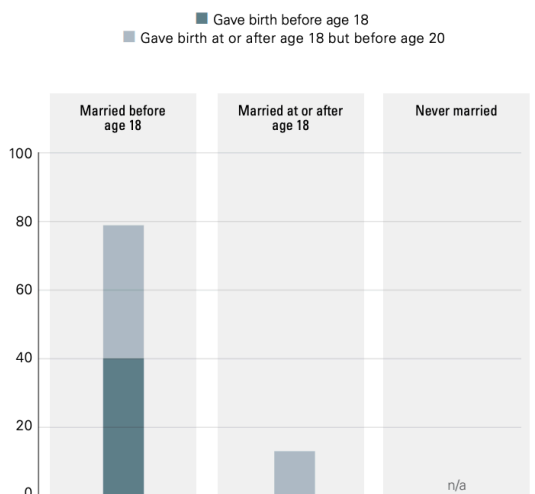
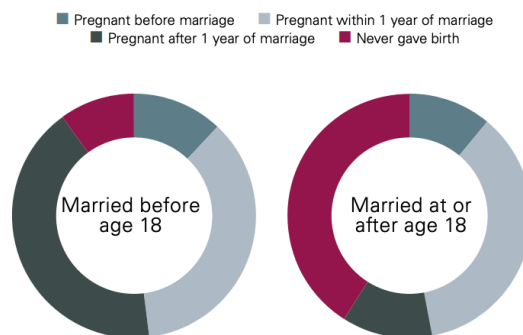


Figure 10. Percentage distribution of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years by timing of pregnancy and marriage



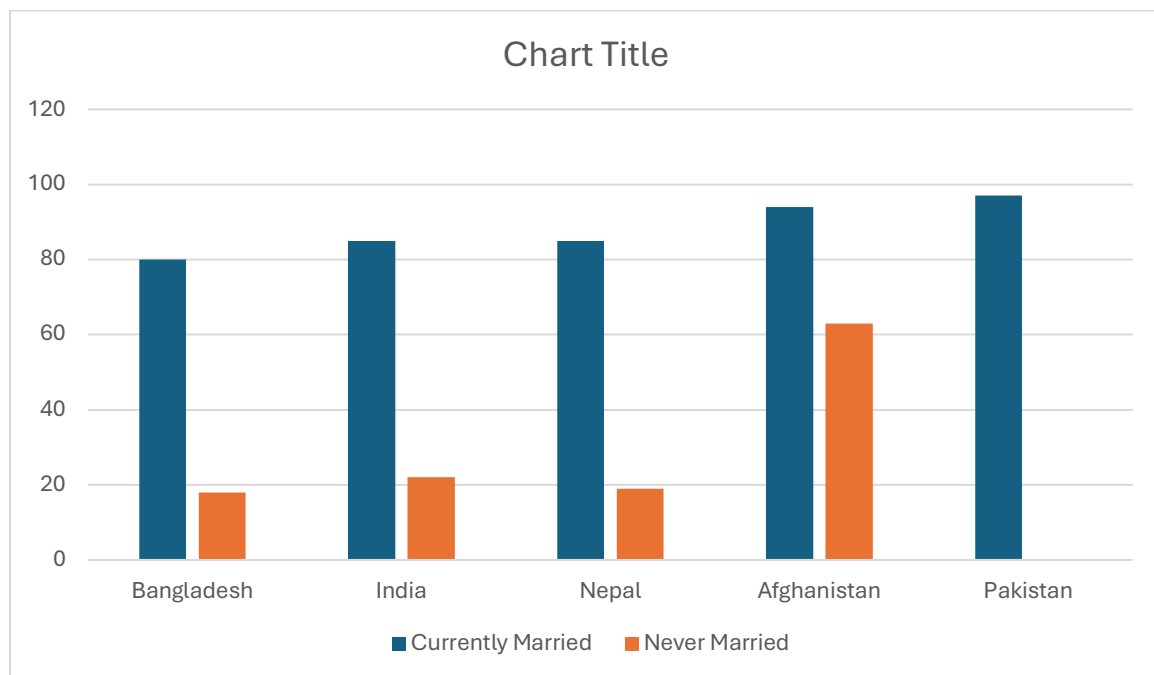
Almost all the women who are married have no access to education. This brings us to the new concept of 'Educating wives' along with educating daughters and sisters in a family.

The South Asian region as whole is home to **around 290 million child brides**, accounting for 45 per cent of the global total. Around **one in four** young women in South Asia were first married or in union before their 18th birthday.

In recent years, South Asia has experienced a significant decline in child marriage, especially among girls under 15 years. This decline is driven predominantly by India, where child marriage rate declined from 47% in 2005 to 23% in 2021. However, this practice continues to be widespread and often concentrated in certain geographic regions or among specific cultural groups, necessitating more targeted efforts to protect adolescents from marriage.

Education & Child Marriage

The vast majority of child brides in South Asia are out of school. Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years who are out of school, by marital status:



In Bangladesh, India and Nepal, child brides are four times more likely to be out of school than their unmarried peers.

The reason is of course the societal obligations that a woman needs to take up after marriage i.e. taking care of the family, doing house chores, bringing up their children, cooking food and washing dishes, etc.,. It is considered as one of their sole responsibility that every woman must take up one day for the rest of her life. Another reason is to restrain a woman from educating herself in a way that she never asks for her own human rights, if exploited by the family in domestic violence or sexual harassment. Education is a human right and child marriage is the violation of it. Child marriage is now firmly on the global development agenda, most prominently through its inclusion in *Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3*, which aims to eliminate the practice by 2030. However, the progress in South Asia is not promising, it indicates that if we have to attain this goal by 2030, we need to increase this reduction rate by almost **seven times** of the current pace.

Contributing Factors

Major factors contributing to this social evil of child marriage are as follows:

1. **Individual level factors** are responsible for child marriage in South Asian Regions such as:
 - **Poverty** makes it difficult for the family to take care of all the people, availability of food, living standard etc., hence to reduce the number of people these poverty stricken families reduce the burden of bearing a girl child, they marry her off. Families see child marriage as a way to cope with growing economic hardship
 - **Dowry system** is another social evil which actually puts a lot of pressure on the family of a girl child. The design of this system has proven to entrench child marriage. As your daughter grows older, the number of suitors decreases. And parents “have to pay more to get her off your books”. Parents opt to marry their daughters off, while young, as a way of reducing this cost.
 - **Gender discrimination** on the basis of better opportunities for education, health and well-being which indicates that girls and women are inferior to boys and men. This again raises the existing differences and provides very less opportunities for women to succeed in life and they are left with only one option provided to them from their families and that is to marry off.

- **Place of Residence (mostly rural)** : Rural poverty, which is characterized by a lack of basic infrastructure and services, is also seen as a risk factor, as it can limit girls' and young women's opportunities and increase their vulnerability to child marriages
- **Low Level of Education in Family** : Majorly, uneducated family involves into this derogatory practice of child marriage as they do not understand the importance of education for living a self reliant life with dignity.

2. Cultural & Religious Factors : various researches have proven that tradition and culture are the driving factors for early marriage. In a cultural context, marriage is considered as the only way for women to gain social identity. Also the decision to get married is related to the influence of religion. For example, one of the understandings of marriage in Islam is '*to increase maturity*' mentioned in *Koran (2: 286)*, which means: "*Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability*". Hence families encourage their children to get marry and mostly religions like Islam does not define a particular age for women except the sentences like - "*When she attains puberty*" which we know that this age differs from one girl to another and mostly ranges between 8-13 years or 15 at max which is defined as the marriageable for women in *Sharia Laws*. So girls could not make decisions independently because they were too young and lacked adequate knowledge and skills. The age at marriage is high in Christianity as it encourages celibacy and late marriage by attaching purity and sanctity to unmarried life. Hindus and Christians consider marriage to be a sacrosanct act whereas it is a contract according to Islam. Hence spirituality or religious beliefs are often used to justify early marriage.

3. Marriage as Protection and Better Way of Controlling Female Sexuality : Patriarchal systems – that is, systems that are controlled by men – value girls according to their virginity, leading to limits on female sexuality and reproductive choices. This can mean controlling how a girl behaves and dresses, where she goes, who she sees, and if, who and when she marries. Especially in South Asian Regions, girls who have relationships or become pregnant outside of marriage are shamed for bringing dishonor to their family or even stopped from going to school. In such circumstances, parents may see early marriage as a way to protect their daughters and their

families. So in South Asia, women are considered as “Family’s Honour” and controlling their sexuality is considered to be their responsibility. To reduce the insecurity about their girl’s future, they marry her off at a very early age and do away with their ‘*so considered*’ responsibility.

4. Inadequate & Poor implementation of laws : This is a major cause for which governments need to analyze and reframe their laws with regards to the loopholes that people have created in child marriages.

5. Lack of education and job opportunities for girls : *Digital Gender Divide* and *Gender Pay Parity* are the issues that the economies of South Asian Regions are struggling with. It is important that the better half of the globe get an equal responsibility in handling the global and economic affairs for the overall development. Lack of jobs and education is a lingering issue that must be dealt with.

Some of the major consequences of Child Marriage are -

- increased school dropouts
- increased marital violence
- increased maternal morbidity and mortality
- increased risk of unintended pregnancies
- decreased utilization of antenatal care and postnatal care services
- decreased institutional delivery in health care facilities
- decreased deliveries assisted by skilled birth attendants

Possible Method of Resolutions

As we have already observed above, child marriage has its causes in many spheres as on the individual level where the poverty and economic conditions play a major role along with socio-cultural and religious factors. Even with enormous legislation already in place, statistics clearly serves as the evidence that this phenomenon does exist. Hence to eradicate these are proposed resolutions:

1. Efforts targeting improvement in education, employment, exposure to health information via mass media, and gender egalitarianism are required
:

Moreover, child marriage has its individual causes as well where the poverty stricken people are not able to cater to the needs of a girl due to already lesser amount of resources available to them. For which some community level steps are necessary and we can hold the regional government accountable for providing better education, health and an egalitarian society. This is not possible without societal collaboration, hence awareness must be created for better implementation of government run programmes and policies.

2. Incentivising the child marriage information supply in targetted areas:

Targeted efforts are required to achieve the goal of eradicating child marriages, for example there are certain places where child marriage is widely accepted so there we can incentivise individuals for informing the concerned authorities about such marriages so that those can be restricted and more and more people come out and inform about such practices.

3. Compulsory Sex Education in All Educational Institutions of South Asia

Along with formal education, women should be made aware of the risk and adverse outcome of child marriage and teenage pregnancy through sex education. They must be made aware of their body's autonomy rights and must be taught to handle situations like sexual abuse and violence.

4. Vigorous attempts should be made to remain the girls in school for an extended period

For achieving this major objective, the following steps can be taken:

- a.) Better and safe transport facility available to all girls on their way to home and school.
- b.) School infrastructure and most importantly the toilet facility must be available.
- c.) School teachers must promote gender equality psychologically i.e. not telling a girl just to cook, teachers must widen their perspectives and accommodate larger levels of gender equality especially in *rural areas*.

5. A Uniform Marriageable Age - 21 Years (For both Men & Women)

As already defined above the importance of marriage in a society, which is the basis of overall existence of a civilization. Most of the provisions of personal laws perpetuate child marriage by codifying or giving legal weight to harmful customs and traditional attitudes that discriminate against women and girls or place them in subordinate roles. We cannot use the centuries back personal laws that were created in a different society, with different sets of people with different goals and understandings. Today in modern society, it is an accepted fact that women stand at an equal edge as men and are performing enormously better than the other counterparts in many spheres.

This is not to scrap out all provisions of personal laws and follow everything on the basis of new standards. Understanding the diverse population with religious and ethnic differences, it will be more beneficial if the derogatory practices that harm the very existence and dignity of women must not be followed. For example the practices *nikah-halala* , *Taalak-e-biddat* and *Purushsukta defined tasks* (which are only meant for men, not for women) and majorly the marriage age for women.

Marriageable age for women is different in different countries, for example in India, it is

18 for women and 21 for men, in Sri Lanka 18 and in Pakistan it is still 16 years (except the Sindh Province).

Even in India, there is already a bill proposed to amend the *Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006* to increase the minimum age of marriage for women to 21 years overriding any other provision of personal laws in regards to this marriageable age.

Why should 21 years be the minimum age for marriage ?

- The minimum success of already existing provisions to restrict child marriages

The existing provisions aimed at restricting child marriages have been found to be minimally effective. Despite the legal age for marriage being set at 18 years, it has come to light that child marriages are still occurring within the age range of 9 to 17 years. These circumstances have highlighted the need for flexibility in the formulation and implementation of laws, particularly in civil matters. In order to improve the outcomes and address these concerns, it is proposed that the

minimum age for marriage should be increased to 21 years. This amendment would ensure that no marriages take place below the age of 18 years, particularly when considering any changes in societal contexts or conditions.

➤ Bringing Equality in Marriage Institution

As it has been established and widely accepted that the marriageable age for men must be 21 years as they are required to take care of the family, they need financial independence, and they become capable enough to handle all the responsibilities at this age. Then why for women, it is 18, this creates a kind of an imbalance between these two counterparts and again leads to the formation of a *Patriarchal Society* where men dominate for many reasons which include him being an elder and having more experience as one of them.

➤ Equal Opportunities of Time in Educational & Career Perspectives

What a girl achieves at 18 years of age, hardly she is able to complete her school education and she is eligible to get married as per law. This leaves her with no time to focus on her higher education and career perspectives. And some families forcefully marry off their daughters even if they want to complete their education and do a job, it always remains a dream for them. After marriage, she is a new creature, who has a lot of responsibilities on her shoulders, her husband and the in-laws. After some time, kids too. We need to understand, in today's rising economic stress, where it is equally important for both husband and wife to earn for a better living standard, it is important for women to be self-reliant. We cannot leave the rest half of our population unskilled and unemployed.

Diversification of Education

Introduction

The rapidly advancing world of today requires versatility in all fields of life. Then how can education be left monotonous? To compete with such a dynamic world, we need to have a holistic approach towards educating the young minds. Previously, the whole curriculum primarily revolved around STEM fields. The brains were being fed limited knowledge. But now is the time to break all the stigmas of our society and bring about a revolution in the education sector. We not only need brains, but also personalities and attributes. We need to inculcate in our education system the importance of many other diversified education domains like emerging technology, personality grooming, character building, communication skills, presentation skills, sports and conflict resolution skills.

Current condition of South Asian Education Sector

At present, the education system of this region is producing intellectual minds, but this falls back in the rat race the world is running now. We need to bring up such talented people who have developed both caliber as well as personality. One of the leading causes of this setback is gender-based schooling. The students who have not been studying in co-education schools and colleges find it nearly impossible to interact with the other gender. A world that works on the principle of Teamwork can never approve of such students to enter into the professional market.

Another cause of lack of interpersonal skills is the educational curriculum that focuses on gender roles. No mind is born a scientist. We are like an empty slate with room for knowledge to enter, just as proposed by John Locke in his idea of tabula rasa. Thus, if students get to learn the gender roles, they can never see the sense of equality for each other. This produces a huge gap between the two genders. The thought process behind such discriminatory development keeps the person caged and enslaved of his own mind set. We can not outgrow such a mind set without bringing change in our textbooks.

In addition to this, the pedagogy of teachers is also a main cause of conventional mind sets. The teachers need to come up with advanced teaching methodologies to inculcate a gender free attitude towards the students. The repellants of co education pose lame allegations stating the involvement of students in each other's personal lives. Whereas there is no such issue in engaging with your batchmates specially after acquiring this much modernisation in lifestyles. Diversification of Education can only be achieved if it is taught in a diverse manner. The same conventional styles with boredom seeping in the minds of students can never work out well.

One of the major causes also involve the attitude of the parents towards the Equal education for both girls as well as boys. Their discriminatory approach has limited the horizon of education. The primary socialization by parents makes up the mindset of children and later on in their lives, this approach reaches climax. In order to facilitate potential growth, the diversification of Education is necessary. And this can only be done by the support of parents and students both.

The monotony of curriculum

In the aforementioned information about curriculum of the South Asian Countries, we can witness a monotony which is primarily subject to the promotion of conventional subjects.

How to cope up with monotonous education standard/ possible Method of Resolutions

To produce such individuals who are the perfect fit for Jack of all traits, we need to induce diversified education system that allows diversity to embed its roots in the growing minds of students from the very first grade. The syllabus needs to be updated in a holistic manner. The pedagogy must adhere with the modern tools and techniques to broaden the horizon of students of this region. The conventional subjects range must be broadened in such a way that technological, political, economic, humanistic and interpersonal development subjects are also added into the curriculum. We need to produce such professionals who can compete with the world at the required pace. Teacher training workshops must be provided by the public sectors primarily responsible for better education facilities. Students must be encouraged to participate in international programs.

Women in STEM Fields and Infrastructure

Introduction:

Women's participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields is not only pivotal for individual empowerment but also essential for the overall progress of societies. In the South Asian region, where deeply rooted gender disparities have traditionally hindered women's entry into STEM disciplines, the importance of girl child education in challenging these norms cannot be overstated. In South Asia, women's representation in STEM fields has historically been disproportionately low due to societal norms, stereotypes, and biases. To counter these obstacles and create a more inclusive STEM landscape, a primary focus on girl child education emerges as a crucial catalyst for change. This part of the position paper examines the background of the South Asian region regarding women in STEM, highlights the issues faced by women in pursuing STEM careers, and proposes possible solutions to pave the way forward.

Background

The lack of women's participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields in South Asia is deeply rooted in historical gender disparities and compounded by infrastructural barriers. For generations, South Asian societies have been shaped by traditional norms that assign specific roles to men and women, with STEM fields traditionally viewed as male-dominated and unsuitable for women. These deeply ingrained gender biases have discouraged girls from pursuing STEM education and careers.

Moreover, access to quality education has been a longstanding challenge in the region, particularly in rural and underprivileged communities. Many girls face barriers like inadequate schools, long commutes, and the absence of basic facilities like clean and safe sanitation. These infrastructural deficiencies not only limit girls' access to education but also affect the quality of the education they receive.

In some parts of South Asia, there is also a glaring digital divide, with limited access to technology and the internet in rural areas. This inequality hinders girls' ability to engage in online learning or access educational resources, particularly in STEM subjects, where technology plays a significant role.

Transportation remains another critical issue, as many girls must travel long distances to reach schools or colleges, often facing safety concerns. This can deter families from allowing their daughters to pursue education, especially in STEM fields that might require them to study in distant institutions.

Overall, the lack of infrastructure, combined with deeply rooted gender biases, creates formidable obstacles for girls and women in South Asia who aspire to enter STEM fields. Addressing these infrastructural barriers, alongside challenging gender stereotypes, is essential to encourage and empower more women to participate in STEM and harness their untapped potential for the region's scientific and technological development.

iii. Issues faced by Women in STEM in South Asia:

a) Gender Bias

Gender bias in STEM fields in South Asia is a complex issue deeply rooted in societal norms and historical disparities. While statistical data may vary across countries and regions within South Asia, several trends and patterns can be observed:

1. Underrepresentation in STEM Enrollment:

- According to UNESCO, in South Asia, the gender gap in STEM enrollment is substantial. For example, in tertiary education, the male-to-female ratio in engineering, manufacturing, and construction courses is often highly skewed, with females accounting for a minority of students.
- In India, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for women in engineering, manufacturing, and construction courses stood at only 17.4% in 2019-2020, significantly lower than that of men, which was 28.5%.

2. Disparities in STEM Employment:

- In the workforce, women in South Asia continue to be underrepresented in STEM occupations. According to the World Bank, the female labor force participation rate in South Asia was 20.1% in 2020, significantly lower than the global average.

- Within STEM fields, women's participation is particularly low, and they are often concentrated in support or administrative roles rather than in technical or leadership positions.
3. Gender Pay Gap:
 - Data from various South Asian countries indicate a significant gender pay gap in STEM occupations. In India, for instance, a study by the World Economic Forum in 2020 revealed that women in professional, scientific, and technical activities earned only 61% of what their male counterparts earned.
 4. Underrepresentation in Research and Innovation:
 - Women in South Asia are also underrepresented in research and innovation. Data from institutions and research organizations show that women make up a minority of researchers and scientists, limiting their influence on technological advancements.
 5. Stereotyping and Social Pressure:
 - While statistical data may not fully capture the extent of stereotypes and social pressure, qualitative studies reveal that girls in South Asia often face discouragement from pursuing STEM fields. Stereotypes that portray STEM as masculine and socially isolating discourage girls from considering these careers.
 6. Educational Attainment Disparities:
 - Although strides have been made in improving access to education, data from South Asian countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to show gender disparities in primary and secondary education, particularly in rural areas. Unequal access to quality education influences girls' choices and opportunities in STEM later on.

These statistics underscore the deeply entrenched gender bias in STEM fields in South Asia. Overcoming these biases and promoting gender equity in STEM education and careers requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy reforms, awareness campaigns, targeted scholarships, and mentorship programs to empower girls and women to pursue and excel in STEM disciplines.

b) Educational Barriers

In South Asia, women face numerous educational barriers that hinder their participation in STEM fields. While these barriers can vary across countries and regions within South Asia, statistical data highlights key challenges:

1. Unequal Access to Quality Education:

- Enrollment Disparities: UNESCO data indicates that gender disparities in enrollment persist in South Asia. In some countries, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, girls' enrollment rates in primary and secondary education are lower than boys', particularly in rural areas.
- Quality of Education: Inadequate infrastructure and resources affect the quality of education available to girls. A significant percentage of schools in South Asia lack basic amenities like proper sanitation facilities, libraries, and well-trained teachers.
- Dropout Rates: Girls in South Asia often face higher dropout rates due to various factors, including early marriages and societal norms. UNESCO's data reveals that girls' transition rates from primary to secondary education are lower than boys', limiting their access to advanced STEM courses.

2. Stereotypes and Social Expectations:

- Discouragement from STEM Courses: Gender stereotypes and societal expectations play a substantial role in discouraging girls from pursuing STEM subjects. Data from organizations like UNICEF and Plan International highlight that parents and communities may prioritize domestic roles over girls' educational aspirations, leading to lower enrollment in STEM-related courses.
- Teacher Bias: Some studies suggest that teachers in South Asian countries may hold biases that influence their treatment of male and female students. This bias can affect girls' self-confidence in STEM subjects and their likelihood of pursuing them at higher levels.

3. Digital Divide and Limited Access to Technology:

- Limited Internet Access: South Asia faces a significant digital divide, with many rural areas lacking access to the internet and technology. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this issue, as remote learning became essential. The lack of access to digital resources disproportionately affects girls' education, including STEM education.

- Inadequate Infrastructure: According to data from the International Telecommunication Union, internet penetration rates vary widely across South Asian countries, and in some regions, infrastructure limitations hinder widespread access to technology and online educational resources.

4. Gender Disparities in Advanced STEM Courses:

- Tertiary Education: In tertiary education, gender disparities in STEM fields persist. For example, data from India's Ministry of Education reveals that women's enrollment in engineering and technology programs at the undergraduate level remains significantly lower than men's, with only around 22% female enrollment in these fields.
- Limited Opportunities: In some South Asian countries, women may face limited opportunities to pursue advanced degrees in STEM fields due to social norms and safety concerns, further exacerbating the gender gap in these professions.

Addressing these educational barriers requires targeted interventions, including policy reforms to promote gender equity in education, initiatives to challenge stereotypes and biases, and investments in infrastructure to ensure girls' access to quality STEM education in South Asia.

c) Lack of Role Models

In South Asia, the scarcity of female role models in STEM fields is a notable concern. While data on the lack of role models may not be as readily available as quantitative statistics, qualitative studies and anecdotal evidence highlight the issue:

- According to a UNESCO report, women in South Asia frequently cite the absence of visible female scientists, engineers, and technologists as a barrier to their own aspirations in STEM.
- Anecdotal accounts reveal that girls and young women often struggle to find relatable figures in STEM, which can impact their confidence and motivation to pursue these fields.
- Surveys and interviews with female STEM students often reveal that they are more likely to be inspired by male scientists and researchers than their

female counterparts due to the limited visibility of women in STEM leadership positions.

- The importance of role models is emphasized in various studies on women in STEM globally, and it is likely that a lack of role models has a similar impact in South Asia.

d) Workplace Discrimination

Workplace discrimination against women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields is a pervasive issue in South Asia, negatively impacting women's careers and representation. While specific statistics may vary across countries and regions within South Asia, available data and research shed light on the extent of workplace discrimination:

1. Gender Pay Gap:

- India's Gender Pay Gap: In India, a significant gender pay gap exists across industries, including STEM. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020, women in India earned, on average, only 34% of what men earned. This data indicates a substantial wage disparity, which extends to STEM professions.
- Pakistan's Gender Pay Gap: A report by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics found that the gender pay gap in Pakistan was 33.5% in 2019-2020. This gap is reflective of income disparities across various sectors, including STEM.

2. Underrepresentation in Leadership Roles:

- Low Representation in STEM Leadership: Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles within STEM organizations. Data from South Asian countries, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, shows that men hold the majority of senior positions in academia, research institutions, and industry, while women often struggle to attain such roles.

3. Limited Opportunities for Career Advancement:

- Promotion Disparities: Workplace discrimination in the form of biased hiring and promotion practices can significantly hinder women's career advancement in STEM. While statistical data may

vary, surveys and qualitative studies in South Asia often reveal that women face barriers to career progression.

- Career Breaks: Women in STEM sometimes encounter challenges in returning to the workforce after taking career breaks for family reasons. A lack of flexible work arrangements and supportive policies can contribute to this issue.

4. Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment:

- Harassment Incidents: While harassment and discrimination often go underreported, surveys and studies have highlighted instances of gender-based discrimination and harassment in STEM workplaces in South Asia. These incidents can have severe consequences for women's mental health and job satisfaction.

5. Unequal Access to Resources and Opportunities:

- Resource Allocation: Some STEM organizations may allocate fewer resources and research opportunities to women compared to their male counterparts. This unequal distribution of resources can limit women's ability to conduct research, publish, and excel in their fields.

6. Lack of Support and Mentorship:

- Mentorship Disparities: Women in STEM may have limited access to mentors and professional networks. Without adequate support and mentorship, it can be challenging for them to navigate the complexities of their fields and advance in their careers.

Addressing workplace discrimination against women in STEM in South Asia requires a concerted effort, including implementing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies, promoting gender diversity, and creating inclusive work environments. The statistics underscore the urgency of these measures to ensure that women have equal opportunities and are treated fairly in STEM careers throughout the region.

Possible Solutions for a way forward:

a) Promoting STEM Education at an Early Age

To address the gender gap in STEM, South Asian countries should introduce initiatives that promote STEM education from an early age. This includes:

- Gender-Neutral Curriculum: Developing gender-neutral curricula that encourage both girls and boys to explore STEM subjects without stereotypes.
- STEM Extracurricular Programs: Providing extracurricular STEM programs in schools to nurture interest and aptitude among students, especially girls.
- Teacher Training: Offering training for educators to create inclusive and engaging STEM classrooms that encourage girls' participation.
- Community Engagement: Engaging communities through awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of STEM education for girls.

b) Scholarships and Mentorship Programs

To empower girls to pursue STEM education and careers, scholarship and mentorship programs are essential:

- STEM Scholarships: Establishing scholarships specifically for girls pursuing STEM education to alleviate financial barriers.
- Mentorship Networks: Creating mentorship programs that connect girls with successful women in STEM fields to provide guidance, inspiration, and role models.

c) Raising Awareness

Challenging stereotypes and raising awareness about women's achievements in STEM is crucial:

- Public Campaigns: Launching national and regional campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and celebrate the achievements of women in STEM.
- Media Representation: Encouraging media to feature more stories and profiles of women in STEM fields.

d) Equal Opportunities and Inclusive Policies

Promoting gender equality in STEM workplaces is vital:

- Equal Pay: Enforcing policies that ensure equal pay for equal work, addressing the gender pay gap.

- Flexible Work Arrangements: Promoting flexible work arrangements to accommodate family responsibilities without hindering career progression.
- Inclusive Leadership: Encouraging organizations to promote women to leadership positions within STEM fields.

e) Creating Support Networks

Establishing support networks for women in STEM is essential:

- Professional Organizations: Encouraging the formation of professional organizations that provide networking opportunities and resources for women in STEM.
- Peer Support Groups: Creating peer support groups within STEM workplaces to address issues related to workplace discrimination and share experiences.

f) Government Initiatives

Governments in South Asia should play a proactive role in promoting women in STEM:

- Investment in STEM: Allocating resources and investments to enhance STEM education and research, with a specific focus on improving access and opportunities for women.
- Incentives for Diversity: Providing incentives for organizations that actively promote gender diversity in STEM fields.

By implementing these comprehensive solutions, South Asian countries can break down barriers and create a more inclusive STEM landscape that harnesses the full potential of women, driving innovation and progress in the region.

v. Conclusion

In conclusion, the participation of women in STEM fields in South Asia is not just a matter of equality but is also a critical catalyst for progress, innovation, and socioeconomic development. This exploration has illuminated the multifaceted challenges and encouraged advancements on this journey towards gender parity

in STEM and the concurrent battle against infrastructural barriers impeding girl child education. Historically, South Asia has grappled with deeply ingrained gender biases that have stifled women's involvement in STEM fields. However, recent years have seen a shift in societal attitudes and opportunities, with governments, NGOs, and educational institutions taking commendable steps to dismantle these barriers. Yet, formidable challenges persist, particularly regarding educational barriers and workplace discrimination.

Educational disparities, characterized by unequal access to quality education, dropout rates, and the perpetuation of gender biases, continue to hinder girls' access to STEM education. Moreover, the lack of visible female role models in STEM further compounds this issue, dampening the aspirations of young women. Workplace discrimination, exemplified by gender pay gaps, limited advancement opportunities, and instances of bias within STEM professions, acts as a significant deterrent for women seeking to enter and thrive in these fields.

Simultaneously, the infrastructural challenges impeding girl child education pose a critical issue. These challenges include unequal access to quality education, deeply entrenched stereotypes, a digital divide, and transportation limitations, all of which hinder girls' ability to access and benefit from education.

The path forward necessitates a holistic approach. Initiatives to promote STEM education from an early age, along with scholarships and mentorship programs, can empower girls to explore STEM subjects. Raising awareness about women's achievements in STEM and enforcing policies that ensure equal opportunities in STEM workplaces are equally crucial. Moreover, the creation of support networks and governmental investment in STEM education and infrastructure will play pivotal roles in overcoming these challenges.

Addressing infrastructural barriers to girl child education requires efforts to improve educational infrastructure, challenge gender norms, bridge the digital divide, and ensure safe transportation options. Collectively, these measures will not only empower women in STEM but also break down infrastructural barriers to education, ultimately fostering gender equality and driving innovation and socioeconomic development across South Asia. The progress achieved will not only benefit individuals but also contribute to the advancement of societies as a whole, ensuring a brighter, more equitable future for all.

Parents and Girl Child Education

Introduction

In societies around the world, the pursuit of gender equality has been an enduring challenge, and nowhere is this more evident than in the realm of education. Education is often hailed as a cornerstone of human development and societal progress, but access to quality education has not been uniform across genders. The access and quality of education available to girls have been a subject of paramount concern, igniting discussions and inspiring initiatives aimed at addressing the systemic barriers that hinder their educational journey.

This research endeavours to delve into the complex landscape of girls' education, with a specific focus on understanding the perspectives, experiences, and challenges faced by parents in ensuring their daughters' access to quality education. The questionnaire outlined above served as a foundational instrument to collect valuable insights from parents, providing a platform for them to voice their opinions and share their personal experiences.

Purpose of the Research:

The primary purpose of this research is to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of girls' education from the parental perspective. By engaging with parents, who play a pivotal role in shaping their children's educational pathways, we seek to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To gauge the perceived importance of girls' education on a scale of 1 to 5, enabling us to understand the level of significance parents attribute to their daughters' schooling.
2. To examine parents' satisfaction with the quality of education provided to their daughters, providing insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the educational systems in place.

3. To identify the factors that parents believe influence a girl's access to education, ranging from socioeconomic constraints to cultural beliefs and safety concerns.
4. To explore the challenges parents encounter in ensuring their daughters' access to education, which may encompass issues related to infrastructure, societal norms, and gender disparities.
5. To understand whether parents perceive gender inequality within the education system of their communities.
6. To solicit parents' opinions on measures and initiatives that

The main research gap in the study on girls' child education, as outlined in the introduction, is the need to understand and explore the parental perspective on various aspects of girls' education. While there is existing research on gender disparities in education, much of it focuses on broader societal and systemic factors. This study seeks to bridge the gap by concentrating specifically on the viewpoints and experiences of parents, who play a crucial role in shaping their daughters' educational trajectories.

By engaging with parents through the questionnaire, the research aims to uncover valuable insights into their perceptions, challenges, and recommendations related to girls' education. This approach is essential because it provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing access to education for girls and the dynamics within families that may impact educational opportunities. Thus, the main research gap being addressed is the limited exploration of parents' perspectives in the context of girls' education, which can offer unique insights for policy formulation and program development.

Research Method:

The research employed a quantitative survey method to gather data on girls' child education. This method allowed for systematic data collection, enabling us to examine the parental perspective comprehensively. Surveys are well-suited for this purpose as they can efficiently collect data from a large and diverse group of respondents.

Data Collection:

To collect data, we designed a structured questionnaire consisting of a series of questions aimed at understanding various aspects of girls' education from the perspective of parents. The questionnaire was administered to a carefully selected sample of parents who had daughters. Data collection took place through the following steps:

Sampling: A diverse sample of parents was selected to ensure representation from various demographics, including different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural contexts, and geographic locations. This sampling strategy aimed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives.

- The questionnaire was distributed to the selected parents using various methods, such as in-person interviews, online surveys, and paper surveys, depending on the accessibility and preferences of the participants. This approach allowed for flexibility in data collection.
- Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their rights as participants, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before they completed the survey.
- The survey was administered over a specific period, ensuring that data collection occurred consistently across the selected sample.

Ensuring Reliability and Validity:

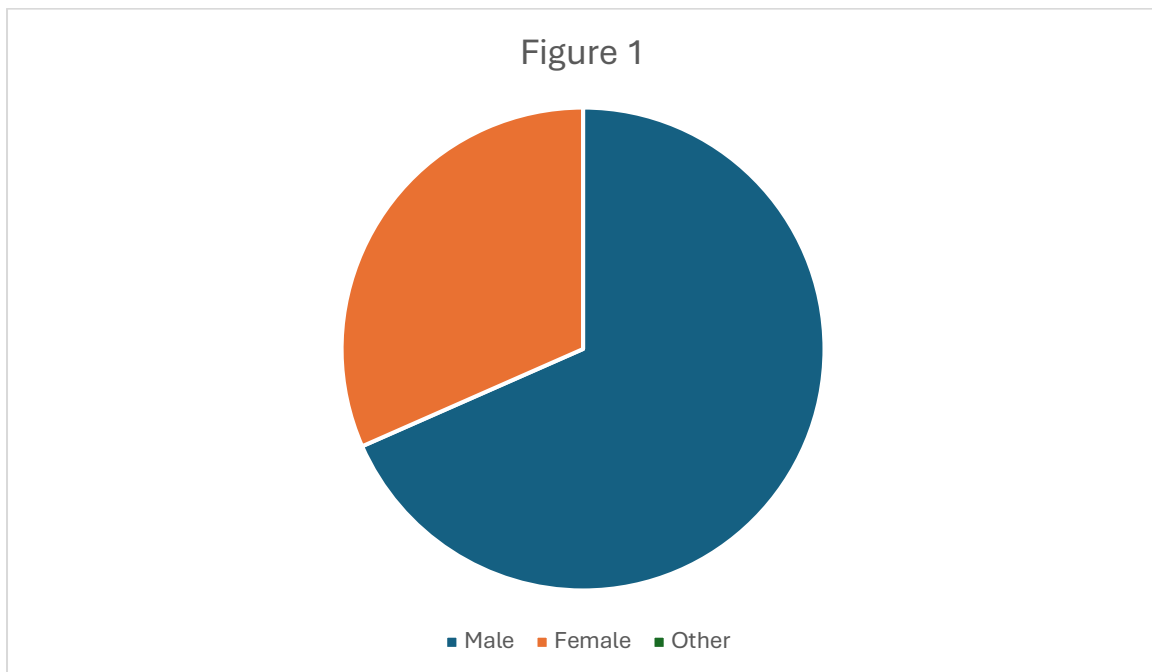
To ensure the reliability and validity of the survey instrument and the data collected, several measures were taken:

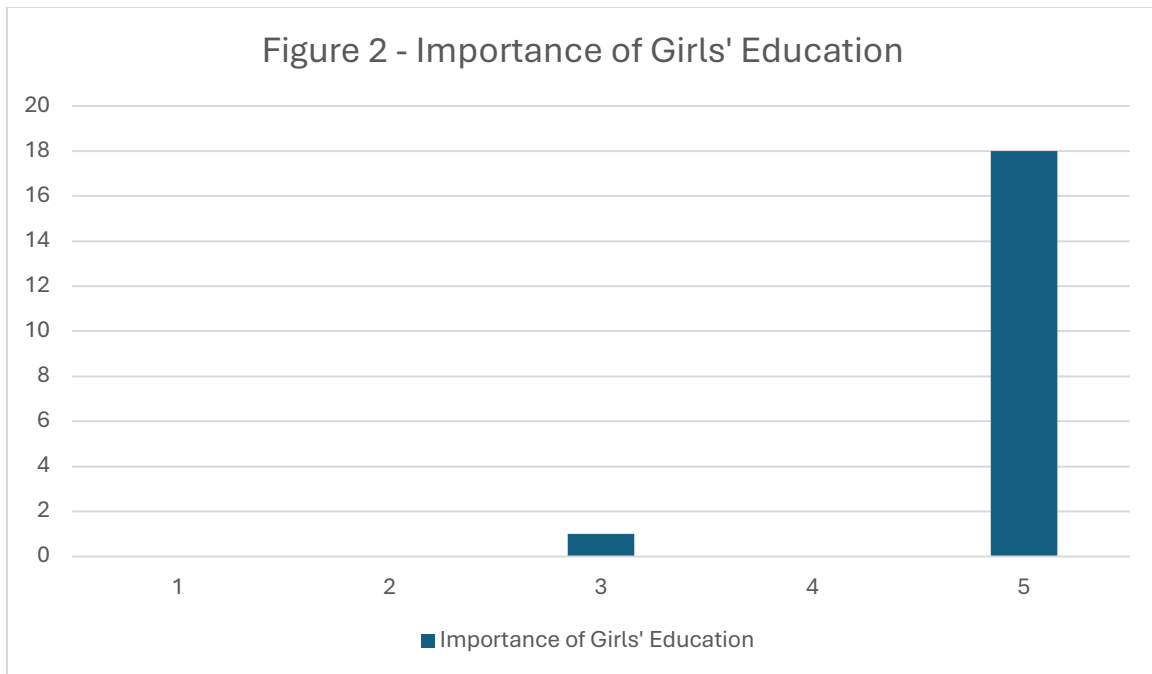
- Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of parents to identify and rectify any ambiguities, confusing questions, or issues related to response options. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine the survey instrument.
- To reduce response bias, the order of questions and response options was randomized for different participants, ensuring that any potential bias associated with question order was minimized.
- Most questions were designed to be clear and objective, requiring factual responses. This minimized the risk of interpretation bias.

- The use of a structured scale (e.g., the 5-point scale for importance and satisfaction) allowed for consistent measurement across respondents, enhancing reliability.
- The diverse sampling method ensured that the data collected represented a wide range of perspectives, increasing the external validity of the study.
- Statistical analysis techniques were applied to the collected data to identify patterns, correlations, and statistically significant findings, which enhanced the validity of the research findings.

By implementing these measures during the research process, we aimed to maximize the reliability and validity of the survey instrument and the data collected, ultimately ensuring that the findings accurately represented the parental perspective on girls' child education.

Data Analysis : From the form that we circulated, the findings are as mentioned below:





Within our survey, we had 31.6% of participants were male. In comparison, the other 68.4% were females (mentioned in Fig.1). According to Fig.2, 94.7% of the people believe that educating their daughters is very important, on the rate of 1-5 they selected it as their highest priority. Cultural and traditional beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward education, yet there are several changes in how much importance people give to educating their female children now. While 5.3% still haven't put much importance on this factor in their female child's life. This could be due to the fact that In some South Asian communities, there may still be deeply ingrained cultural norms that assign specific roles and responsibilities to women, focusing on their duties within the household and as caregivers. These traditional gender roles can lead some families to prioritize domestic skills over formal education for their daughters.

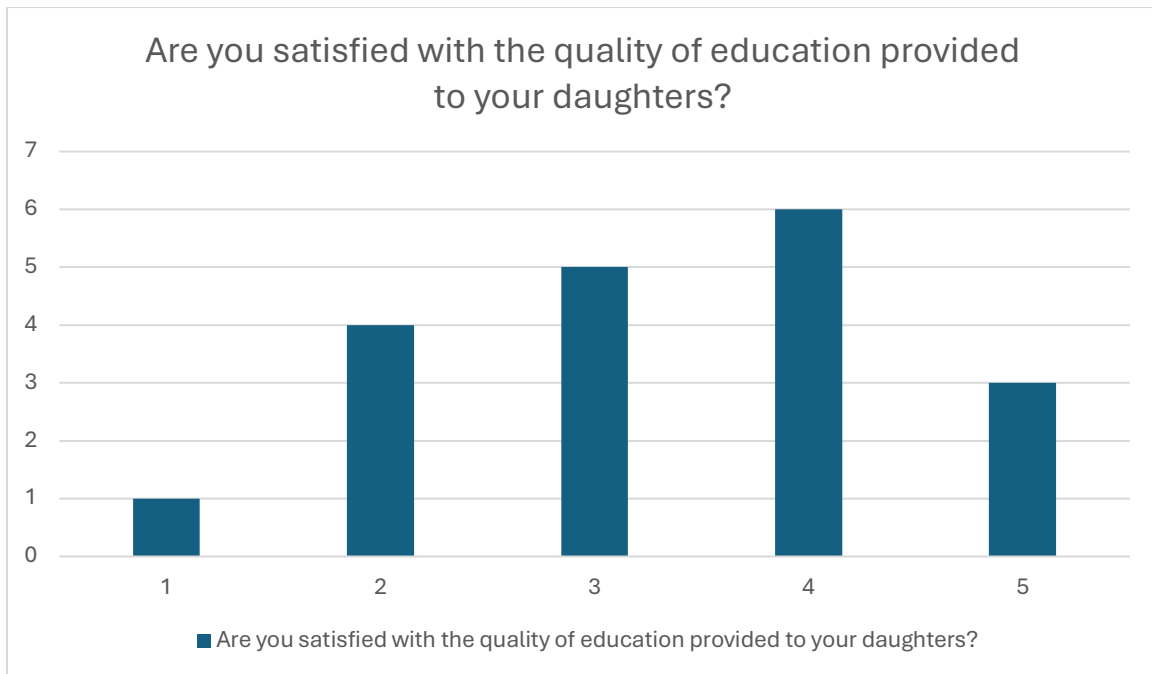


Figure 3 represents the scale on which people have mentioned their level of satisfaction with context to the quality of education that is provided to their daughters, with 1 being the highest scale of dissatisfaction and 5 indicating that they are happy with it. 31.6% of people have chosen 4 which indicates that they are mostly satisfied with how the provisions are set up within our education systems. We can also see that 5.3% of the participants have shown their dissatisfaction with the quality of education provided to their female child. But most people lie within the middle aspect where they believe that they are satisfied. Although we as individuals can acknowledge that there are still improvements that can be made, a large amount of parents fail to acknowledge the cracks and points within the system that are potentially disrupting the quality of education that their daughters receive, this gap can bridge a difference between how they perceive the system to be and how it acts which can lead to inadequate teachings or expectations from their girl child which they would've received with a good quality educational system. For that we addressed the next question which asked them what they think could be the reasons for such gaps in the educational quality they receive.

In Fig.4 Socioeconomic and safety reasons were one of the main concerns of everyone with it being chosen by 73.7% of participants each. It showcases the most prevalent issues that restrain these countries. Although at a time like these where there has been a lot of infrastructural development and emphasis on providing schools in areas where there's less development and availability of schools and of

accommodations available to reach those said schools, distance still remains a prevalent reason for influence on a girls' access to education (as also shown in fig.4). Around 26.3% participants agree on that. Also shown in the figure we can say that cultural beliefs still take up a huge part of the influence played on a girl's access to education, 57.9% of responses were noted for the same.

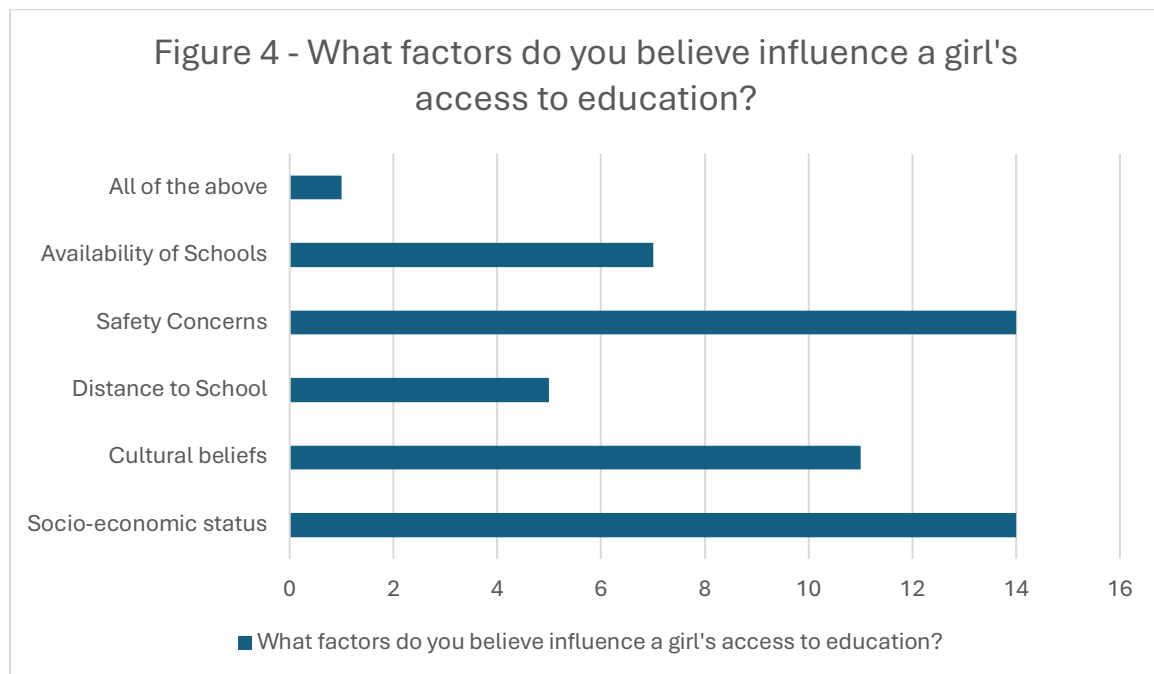


Fig.5 represents the benefits that people think girls can obtain if they are educated properly. Better quality of life was something agreed upon by 78.9% of the participants. While quality of life in general takes the cake, 73.7% of the participants also emphasize the self-esteem of the child which is a very important aspect of parenting that one should focus on, as Education as a tool for personal development, can significantly enhance a girl's self-esteem by instilling knowledge and skills. As she achieves academic milestones, her growing confidence in her abilities can strengthen her self-image. This is particularly important in South Asian societies where traditional gender norms often undervalue the role of women. Additionally, education fosters increased self-efficacy, enabling girls to believe in their capacity to overcome obstacles and make informed choices, despite societal pressures. It also promotes autonomy and independence, providing girls with the

means to make decisions about their lives, careers, and futures, which shown in the figure is believed by 52.3% of the people.

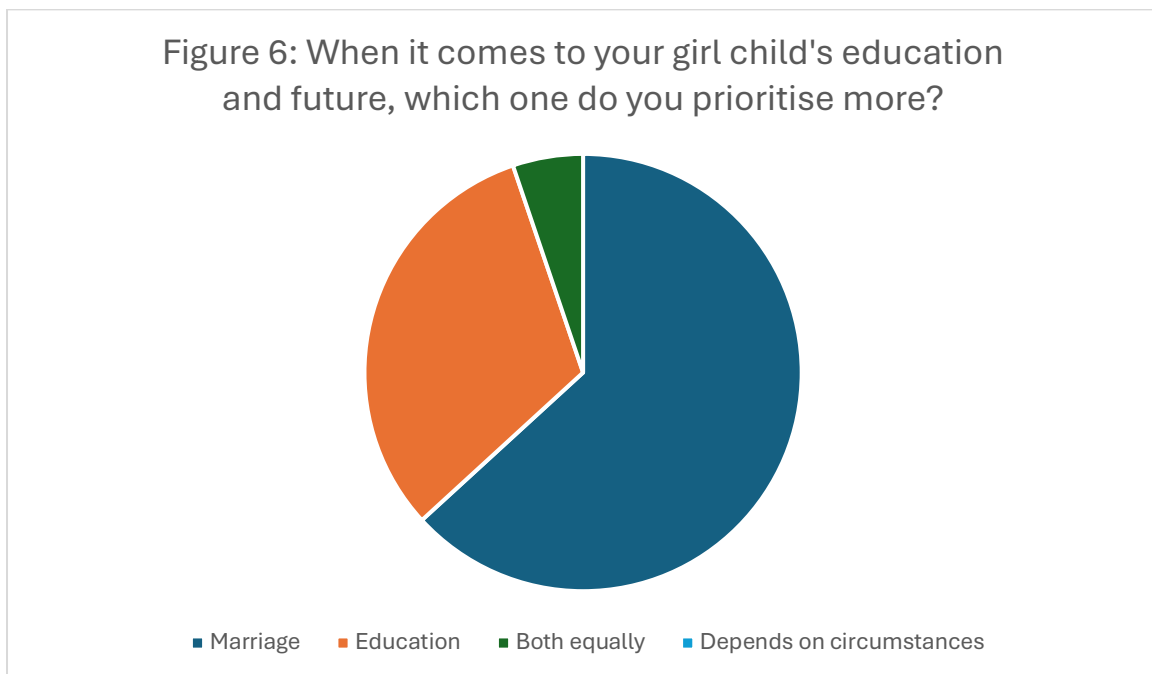
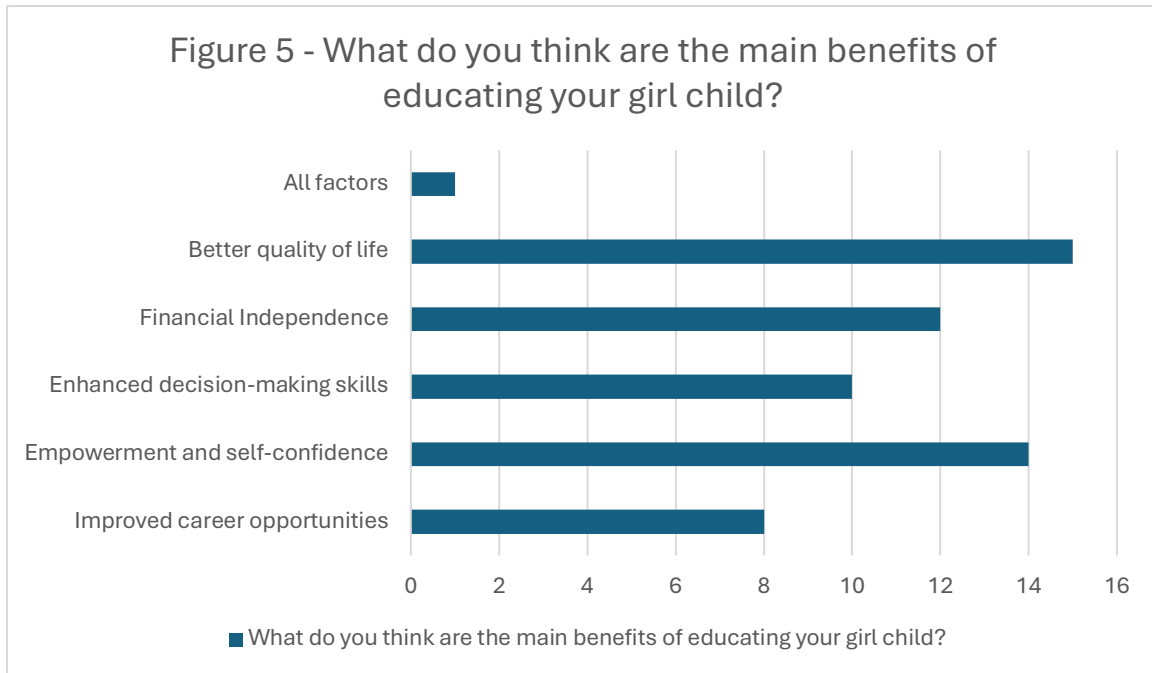


Fig.6 shows the attitude parents have towards prioritization of certain aspects of a girl's future. Around 5.3% of the participants believe that marriage is a more important factor in a girl's life than her education, While 63.2% disagree with them. Education is emphasized by a huge number of participants and it shows their view on what they need to focus on more, they would rather educate their child before

focusing on her marriage which would showcase in their parenting as well. 31.6% of people believe in focusing on both aspects of her life equally.

An important insight was to gain how much the culture shapes the way the parents make decisions in their community today. 1 on the scale in Fig.7 being no influence while 4 shows the most amount of influence of peer pressure on parents and their view on educating their girls. 10.5% believe that culture does not shape the decision-making process of the people in their community, While on the other side, 73.6% of the people chose a scale of 3 and 4, indicating the significant influence of cultural beliefs on the way they make decisions regarding their girl child's education. Although it is important to know what the community thinks, we also wanted to know how the community influences their own personal decisions. In Fig.8 it was noted that only 10.5% of the participants actually resonate their thinking process with their own community. 63.25% of the people were on the other spectrum of this, they believed that their opinions were unlikely influenced by their own community due to their disagreement with the values that their community upholds.

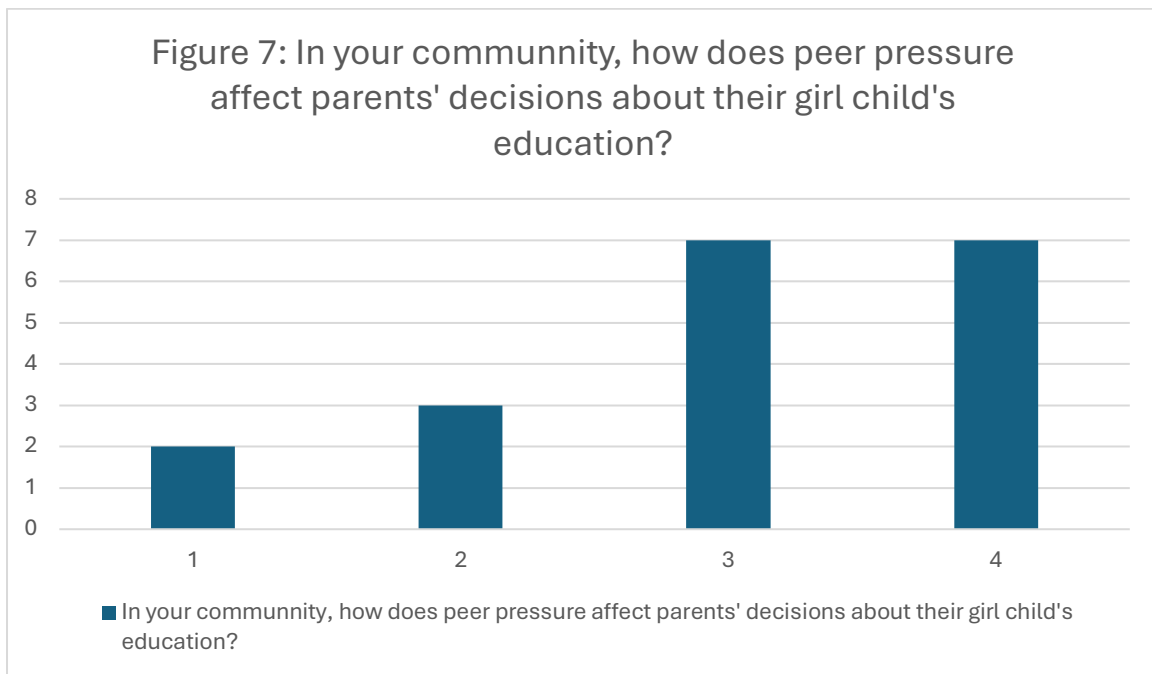
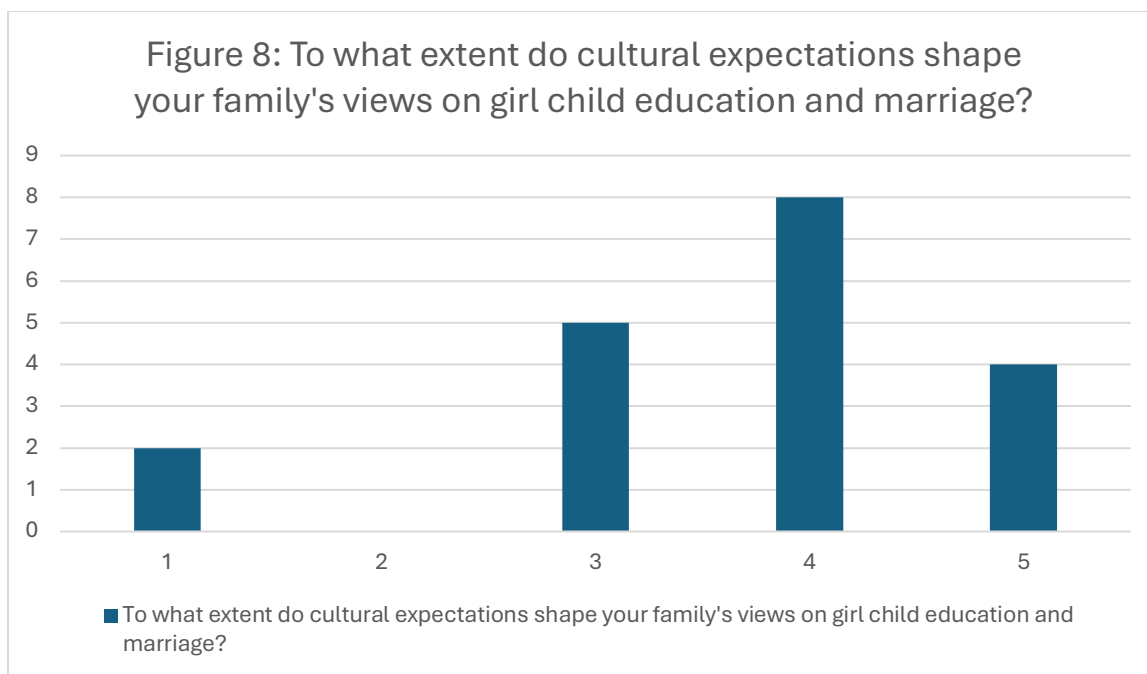


Figure - 8



We also noted that 42.1% of the participants believe that there is gender inequality within the education system that hinders the quality of education that their girls get. 31.6% of people do not agree with that, while 26.3% are unsure if it does. The way that the parents perceive the system and the way it actually is is something that needs to be examined in the future, as the gap between these two can lead to confusion, and uncertainty and can result in dissatisfaction with the child's ability to inherit information rather than it being acknowledged as systematic issue that inhibits their child from learning properly.

It was observed that 10.53% of people said that they did not actively do something to support their girl child's education but the remaining made sure to mention some of the things they did to encourage their child to continue studying. One person said "Attending parent-teacher meetings, helping with homework, and celebrating their achievements are all ways to show our unwavering support.", while one parent mentioned that they sent their girls to schools where their growth would be fostered in a meaningful way. Here are a few more responses to the same "I give all necessary rights to my daughters including education which I believe will give them self-confidence and the power to make decisions in their life.", "Yes. I have two daughters and my very first priority is to educate them and make them self-sufficient and financially successful and independent.", "Yeah so many of our relatives discouraged her education but we never listened and did what we should". The answers clearly showcased the fact that parents have started to take

an active role in educating their female children to ensure that they are independent and can self-sustain themselves in the future, disagreeing with the societal norms of confining the females to the houses and their responsibilities there, especially after marriage.

Around 68.4% of the people mentioned that they do not know of any initiatives that are there to accommodate the problems that they face while educating their girls, which is a large number that indicates the need for the introduction and much-needed implementation of policies that address these issues. The remaining ones could only mention “beti bachao beti padhao” , which is a popular campaign launched by the government of India while the remaining ones mentioned a local women's university built by their own community to accommodate those who do not have access to greater economic resources to sustain themselves.

Upon being asked if there is any societal norm that they believe hinders a girl's access to education, 21% of people said that early marriage is one of the biggest reasons that we as a society fail to eliminate, leading to less emphasis on personal and educational growth of girls in south Asia. Others also showed dissatisfaction with societal norms that perpetuate the same old duties of women as caretakers and men as the breadwinners of the house. There is also a safety concern that the parents emphasize heavily within their responses. Additional comments also mentioned things they would like to be changed, The concluding remarks of a few were as follows: “ Encouraging girls to join extracurricular activities that match their interests can help them grow and develop their skills. It's also important to create a safe and inclusive learning environment where girls feel comfortable asking questions and expressing themselves. Supporting initiatives that offer scholarships or financial aid can help remove barriers to education for girls. And let's not forget about comprehensive sex education that empowers girls with knowledge to make informed decisions about their bodies and futures.” , “There should be a quality education in our community. Our community girls are awfully intelligent and if they get the quality education, assuredly, they will bring a positive change in the community.” , “If girls are educated they will lead an educated generation and they can be confident enough to make decisions. They can equally have a chance to utilize their energy and capabilities.”.

Significant Findings:

Our survey on girls' child education yielded the following noteworthy findings:

- A significant majority of parents (over 94.7%) rated girls' education as extremely important (scored 5 on the scale), emphasizing the critical role it plays in their daughters' lives and future prospects.
- While the majority expressed satisfaction with the quality of education provided to their daughters, a substantial percentage (around 26.3%) reported varying levels of dissatisfaction. This suggests room for improvement in educational standards.
- Parents identified multiple factors influencing girls' access to education, with socioeconomic status, distance to school, and safety concerns topping the list. Cultural beliefs also played a significant role, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity in educational policies.
- Approximately all parents reported encountering challenges in ensuring their daughters' access to education. These challenges ranged from limited school availability to gender-specific societal norms that restrict girls' education.
- A substantial proportion of parents (around 42.1%) perceived gender inequality within the education system in their communities, indicating the need for gender-sensitive reforms.

Parents' Views:

Parents' views, as expressed through the survey responses, highlighted their strong commitment to their daughters' education. They emphasized the following key points:

- Parents expressed a resounding belief that educating their daughters was a means of empowering them to pursue their dreams and contribute positively to society.
- Parents demonstrated an awareness of the challenges faced in ensuring girls' access to education, recognizing that systemic issues and cultural norms could hinder their daughters' educational opportunities.

- Dissatisfied parents provided valuable insights into areas where improvements in educational quality were needed, advocating for better infrastructure, trained teachers, and safer learning environments.

Implications:

The findings of this survey carry significant implications for policy, programs, and initiatives related to girls' child education:

1. Policy Reforms:

Policymakers should take note of the perceived gender inequality within the education system and consider gender-sensitive reforms to promote equal educational opportunities for girls.

2. Quality Enhancement:

Efforts should be directed towards improving the quality of education provided to girls, addressing the concerns expressed by dissatisfied parents.

3. Cultural Sensitivity:

Education initiatives should be designed with cultural sensitivity in mind, recognising that cultural beliefs can be both an asset and a barrier to girls' education.

4. Support Mechanisms:

Parents' experiences of challenges highlight the need for support mechanisms, such as scholarships, transportation assistance, and community engagement, to overcome barriers to girls' education.

5. Awareness and Advocacy:

The survey results underscore the importance of awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts aimed at challenging and changing societal norms that limit girls' access to education.

It provides valuable insights that can inform policies and initiatives to promote girls' child education, with the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality in education and empowering girls to reach their full potential.

Solutions:

Based on the findings, here are some actionable solutions to promote girls' child education:

1. Policy Revisions:

Governments should review and update education policies to address gender disparities and promote gender equality in schools. This includes measures to ensure safe and inclusive learning environments for girls.

2. Teacher Training Programs:

Develop and implement teacher training programs that focus on gender-sensitive teaching methods, classroom management, and awareness of the specific challenges faced by girls in education.

3. Financial Support Initiatives

Introduce and expand scholarship programs, especially for underprivileged girls. Provide financial incentives to families to encourage them to send their daughters to school.

4. Safe Transportation Services

Establish safe and reliable transportation services for girls, particularly in rural and remote areas. This will remove a significant barrier to their attendance.

5. Community Empowerment

Organize community forums and workshops to engage parents, community leaders, and stakeholders in discussions about the importance of girls' education and ways to overcome cultural barriers.

6. Gender-Responsive Curricula:

Collaborate with educational experts to revise curricula to be more gender-responsive, ensuring that girls' needs and interests are considered in the learning materials.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Implement rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress in girls' education, identifying areas that require further attention and adjustment.

8. Public Awareness Campaigns:

Launch sustained public awareness campaigns using various media channels to challenge stereotypes and emphasize the long-term benefits of girls' education for individuals and society.

By implementing these solutions and maintaining a focus on the findings and discussions generated by the survey, communities, governments, and organizations can work together to create an environment where girls have equal access to quality education and the opportunity to realize their full potential.

Conclusion

The study of girls' education in South Asia highlights the profound and multifaceted challenges that inhibit young women in the region from realizing their full academic and personal potential. Although recent attention to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields has emphasized the importance of increasing girls' participation in these areas, it is evident that a broader focus on ensuring comprehensive education for girls must take precedence. While awareness of the importance of educating daughters is growing, cultural traditions and gender norms continue to influence parental and societal attitudes, often placing higher value on domestic roles than on educational opportunities for girls.

Survey results reveal that, while many parents are supportive of their daughters' education, significant barriers remain. Economic pressures, societal expectations, safety concerns, and limited access to educational resources collectively constrain girls' educational prospects. Additionally, enduring gender inequalities within the educational and social systems contribute to discrimination that discourages parents from prioritizing their daughters' schooling. This reality underscores the need for robust interventions that extend beyond educational reform, addressing the societal and cultural biases surrounding girls' education.

For substantive progress, a collaborative approach involving government, educational institutions, and communities is imperative. Policy reforms are essential to address gender biases within educational frameworks, while increased investment in educational infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas, is necessary to make quality education accessible to all. Furthermore, engaging parents through awareness campaigns on the societal benefits of educating girls is crucial. Support structures, including scholarships, mentorship programs, and networks of role models, can provide a sustainable foundation that empowers girls academically and socially, fostering a more inclusive culture.

Ultimately, meaningful transformation in girls' education requires sustained commitment and partnership across government, educational bodies, and society. This integrated approach will not only enable South Asian girls to reach their academic potential but will also catalyze economic resilience, innovation, and social progress across the region. Investing in the education of girls has the power to reshape South Asian societies, promoting a future where gender equality and educational access drive lasting prosperity and well-being for all.