

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a continuous process in which women have control over the physical and mental resources that include human intellectual, financial, the self, beliefs and moral attitudes. In other words according to Sen (Sen 1997), it is the capacity of self-expression. Even though empowering women prevails, programs aiming to enhance women empowerment continue to spring up all over the globe across different countries. Education being a backbone for a country's economic development, it is also a promising factor for women's empowerment. It is true that higher education provides girls the ability for better survival, avoids early marriage setups, mingling with prosocial peers along with strong social status. Secondary education provides a good pathway to promote the level of young women in the society and also they have the stability in their mental health. The effect of education may not be the same across the countries in the world, as there are differences in culture, locality, socio-economic conditions, geographical influences, etc. The objective of this paper is to analyse and understand how secondary education can enhance the strength of women in the society especially for the girls in Vellore district, Tamilnadu, India. The data has been collected from various schools in vellore and analysis is based on the results in HSC exam from girls higher secondary schools. The paper is concluded with the information that the secondary level education to the girls provides the kick starting for their empowerment.

Keywords: Women, education, empowerment, secondary school, Vellore.

1. INTRODUCTION

“The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant peaceful life for all”, says Aung San Suu Kyi, the general secretary, National League for Democracy, Burma. She is a Nobel Prize winner in the year 1991 for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights [1]. Right from the childhood through primary, secondary and higher education, women education is a continuous process. Introducing education to a girl is better than to educate a woman. Therefore, it has become a necessary action to give school education to the girls from the age of 5 onwards. Providing primary and secondary education to the girls has more possibilities of providing higher education and job opportunities, thereby making them empowered to achieve their goals in life. Women empowerment creates a social change [2]. Women education chases illiteracy in females, helps to develop self-confidence and self-support, motivates to be independent and bold enough to handle challenges in life, provides knowledge that can help them to protect themselves away from sexual harassments, illegal dominion of men, and inculcates the ability for income generation. Education even prepares women to become good leaders.

Empowerment to women through secondary education to women is the focus of the article that emphasises the significance of rendering secondary school education to girls between the age group of 10 to 15. This includes elementary as well as higher secondary education. Higher education promotes individual empowerment [3]. A girl child is found to be physically and mentally similar to the boys till they attain puberty (sexual maturity). It is during this phase of their life, that their physical, mental and emotional health gets separated from men/ boys, their way of thinking, behaving, understanding things becomes matured and different when compared to their earlier ages. Education facilitated at this age provides the women the spirit of empowerment and encouragement. The reason for secondary education, its merits and consequences are dealt in this paper. A case study on how secondary education can be a motivating factor to women empowerment with respect to one of the biggest cities in Tamil Nadu, the Vellore district, is depicted as a research outcome.

2. INDIAN WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Woman being a role model or a political leader is better, but far better is that a woman being a courageous entrepreneur, vigilant employer, skilled employee and the one who can boldly take decisions on her own for her future without being dependant on men.

Indian women can be categorized into three levels, namely women in the front, women in the middle and the women at the end.

Women – “in the front”, implies or tells about the women who are already empowered and are being a role model in the society but the percentage of these women is lesser than the other two categories. We can say that only meagre percentages of Indian women are in the first level. These women proclaim social justice, attain authority in the society, get a sense of independence and competence among the other women and men, have a great sense of control over their lives and achieve the control over the resources available in their family and in the society. These women acquire a better understanding of the world around them. They try to change it according to their standards and this may lead to the upgradation of the society. These women are found to be well educated and have good communication skill that can help them to achieve their desired goal. Education to women makes them literate, develops self-confidence, improves self-esteem, provides knowledge about their bodies and sexuality, produces enough skills for self-employment and income generation. Higher education provides economic independence and an increased stand in the society [4]. Women who belong to this category and skilled enough to overcome the difficulties they face. Their emotional strength also gets stronger every day. They also get moral support from their family members and the peers in the society. They are in a position to face the world with confidence and courage. Education in all the levels like primary, elementary, secondary and higher secondary is a key to achieve this type of empowerment.

Women, who belong to the second level, are called as “women in the middle”. These women are literate and employed, but their status is lesser when compared to that of the front line women. This category is found to be more in number in India. These women are empowered but not as much as they require. They take the privilege of survival in the society with limited resources and support. The reason is that they are provided the primary and secondary education. As this education can empower women to come up in life, these women attain the knowledge that can help them to earn, to look after themselves and their family. As the focus of the paper is to prove that secondary education can play a role in empowering women, the authors have taken this group women from the vellore district for the research work. These women can achieve their goals but with limited resources. The government has already taken more number of steps focusing on these women. With secondary education they get enhancements in their cognitive skills, knowledge, and greater productivity, paves way for good health, chances for political involvement and improves social benefits. The education provided to them can help them to survive with confidence in the outside world, but at home-keeping level they are still under family constraints and dominion of their husbands or parents [5][6].

The subjects offered in secondary education helps the girls to attain basic knowledge in all the areas of life. For example, the language helps them to get skilled in their own mother tongue, to become writers, narrators, lyricists etc. The mathematics subject helps them to solve many of the practical problems, like calculations, simplifications, profit-loss evaluations etc. Social sciences help them to know about their country’s history, geographical and political status about various countries in the world. Science subject helps them to understand the different principles, methodologies, helps the girls to think about the evolution of life and inculcates the power of inventing new things, thereby provoking them to be empowered.

The following figure 1 illustrates the importance of secondary education to girls.

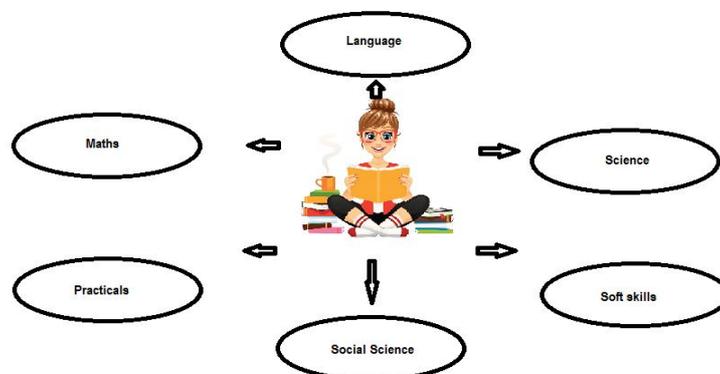


Figure 1.Secondary education subjects offered to Girls.

The knowledge that paves a way for women empowerment grows in a girl from her secondary education and increases as she progresses in each and every level.

The third category women are called “the women at the end”. These women are illiterate, unable to acquire the basic knowledge, do not get enough support from the family members and the society. It is found that majority of the illiterates in the world are women [7]. They face lot of problems and are suppressed to do house hold works, to take care of their children and older ones at home, to work in the field, to gather the necessities like water, woods etc. These women are dominated by the males without having the freedom to talk. They are even treated as domestic slaves. The word empowerment is at a very large distance from them. They are not allowed to express their views, to share their opinions for the welfare of the family. These women are not much in number in India. These illiterate women are not aware of their rights in the country; they do not get to know the schemes provided by the government for their welfare and are not in a status to understand the importance of education. When a woman in a family is uneducated they are making it sure that her girl child also should be like her and they stop or even do not send her to school. Even though it creates a minimum impact on the social development of a country, it is very clear that this category of women is there in the society.

Vellore is one of the biggest districts in Tamil Nadu, India containing around 39 lakhs of human population with a sex ration having 1007 females for 1000 males, according to the 2011 census [8]. Vellore district has its significance for the Vellore fort which was built in the 17th century. It is talked world-wide for the famous places like the Christian Medical College and Hospital(CMCH), Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), the vellore fort, The golden temple at Sripuram, Elagiri hills in Tirupathur taluk, Mordhana dam, PalarAnaicut dam, Amirthi forest and many more. Like the reputed historic background, Vellore has got its reputed educational system covering ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education), CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), Matriculation / state board schools. The schools provided education to both genders. Education system at the secondary level is very well established and gains maximum attention by the females in vellore.

Figure 2.says that a girl child in vellore is capable of getting education from any of the four boards mentioned above.

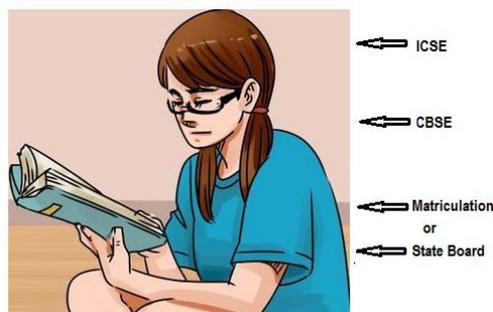


Figure 2.Educational boards available to a girl child in vellore district.

3.METHODOLOGY

Higher education opportunities to girls inculcate analytical skills, help to get trained in logical reasoning and stimulate lifelong learning. This type of education enhances the understanding and knowledge about things around them. It promises improved skills to face the challenges in life, ensuring that they achieve their goals in the way they want.

Secondary school education is provided to everyone in Vellore district. Based on the statistical report for the year 2013, the following chart has been generated to understand the how the girls from government girls’ higher secondary schools have performed in the public examination.

There are 153 government schools in Vellore, among which the 18 girls higher secondary schools were surveyed and the generated results by the Tamilnadu government was analysed.

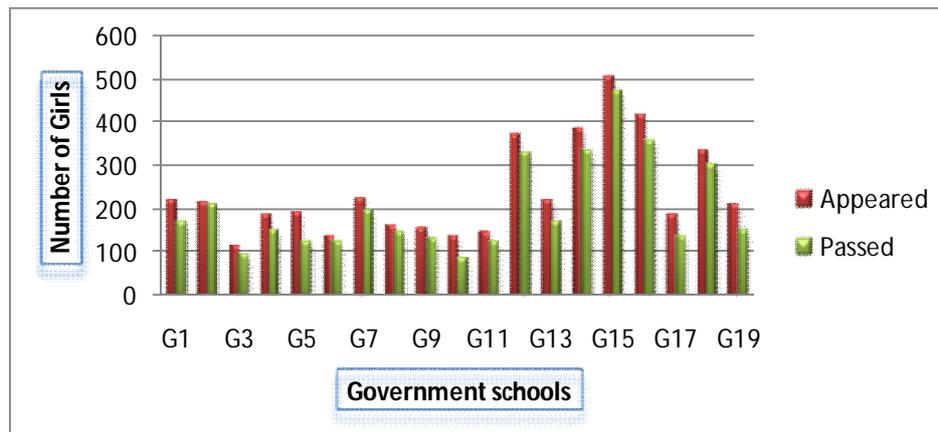


Figure. 3. Depicts the number of girls appeared and passed from Government Girls Higher Secondary Schools in public exam in the year 2013.

The figure 3 depicts the information about the appeared and passed details of girls from government girls higher secondary schools in vellore district in the year 2013. There are about 19 schools especially for girls. The x axis projects the schools and y axis maps with the numbers of girls. Table 1 projects the 19 government girls' higher secondary schools (G1 to G19) and the number of girls appeared and passed in the public exam, along with the pass percentage (%) of the corresponding schools.

Table 1. Results in HSC exam from girls higher secondary schools in vellore

S.No	SCHOOL NAME	APPEARED	PASSED	PASS PERCENTAGE (%)
G1	VKVM GHSS,VELAPADI	221	167	75.57
G2	GGHSS,ODUKATHUR	217	209	96.31
G3	GGHSS, USSOOR	113	94	83.19
G4	GGHSS,THIMIRI	187	151	80.75
G5	GGHSS,KALAVAI	193	123	63.73
G6	GGHSS, POIGAI	138	120	86.96
G7	GGHSS,ANAICUT	222	195	87.84
G8	GGHSS,KAVERIPAKKAM	158	144	91.14
G9	GGHSS,NEMILI	153	130	84.97
G10	GGHSS,THAKKOLAM	135	85	62.96
G11	GGHSS,PONNAI	145	124	85.52
G12	EVRN GIRLS,VELLORE	373	332	89.01
G13	GGHSS,PALLIKONDA	219	168	76.71
G14	GGHSS,SHOLINGUR	388	336	86.60
G15	GGHSS,WALAJA	505	473	93.66
G16	GGHSS,ARCOT	420	359	85.48
G17	GGHSS,ARRAKKONAM	189	137	72.49
G18	GGHSS,PANAPAKKAM	337	305	90.50
G19	GGHSS,BANAVARAM	212	148	69.81

The highest pass percentage is 96.31% from GGHSS Odukathur, and the lowest is 62.96% from GGHSS, Thakkolam. The average pass percentage is 82.28% which is a decent score.

The empowerment to women starts at the school level, right from primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. The purpose of this paper is to identify the reasons for women empowerment and its effects on secondary school girls. As education plays a vital role in empowering women, the authors are trying to observe and find the various reasons for empowerment to girls in schools.

4. DISCUSSION

Research findings on the effect of secondary school education on women empowerment in vellore district:

1. Girls learn and attain more knowledge in schools. They are taught to understand the basics and advanced levels of subjects like English, Language (Mother Tongue), Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Computer science, Economics, Commerce, Accountancy, etc.
2. They learn something that can help them to think, take good decisions, act according to the situation and solve problems in life.
3. They break the shell around them and start to lead an independent life.
4. They even get advice from their class teachers and try to obey them as they treat their teachers as gods.
5. As all the government schools have lady teachers, the girls feel free to share their problems and try to clarify their doubts without any hesitation, thus making them active in and out of the class rooms.
6. Even the parents show more interest in sending their girl children to schools as they are comfortable with lady teachers in schools.
7. Government has given many facilities especially for girls in terms of healthy food, sanitary napkins, free books and notebooks, good education with minimum fees, comfortable school timing, and free bus or train travel.
8. Girls can complete their house hold works before and after the school hours, which can satisfy their family members for sending them to school.
9. Mid-day meals provided to the girls helps them a lot to get good and healthy food that can give nourishment to their body as well as brain.
10. Government schools involve the girls to participate in various competitions, sports and other social activities in district and state levels that create a positive effect on their empowerment.
11. The support given to them is tremendous if the student performs well. Moral and financial support is provided to participate in the competitions and also to build their skills in that particular field.
12. Girls are not burdened with more subjects. In secondary school level there are 5 subjects like English, Language, Mathematics, Science, Social studies. The exam will be conducted for 500 marks.
13. In the higher secondary level the girls are allowed to choose the subjects based on their choice thus providing a way that helps them to come in flying colours.
14. In government schools some of the extra-curricular activities are given to the girls like tailoring, embroidery, cooking, fashion designing, handicrafts, house-keeping and fitness.
15. Empowerment to girls is provided in secondary schools by throwing away the caste discriminations. Girls are given uniforms that cover the discriminations in terms of their financial status, cast and religion. This is another important factor that provides empowerment to women to be in equal status with other women and men.

5. CONCLUSION

Girls grow as women, women empowerment should start at girls level, especially in schools where they are moulded, motivated and nourished. The paper has taken into account the education to the girls in vellore district. The study has brought out some statistical measures from 2013 public exam results from the government girls higher secondary schools in vellore. The analyses identified that the girls are empowered through secondary and higher secondary education. The empowered girls can become empowered women. The study also identifies the various factors that pave the way for empowerment. It's true that education is the best way to empower women in the society.

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