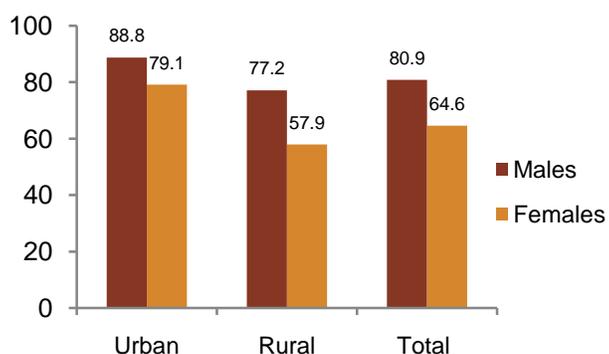


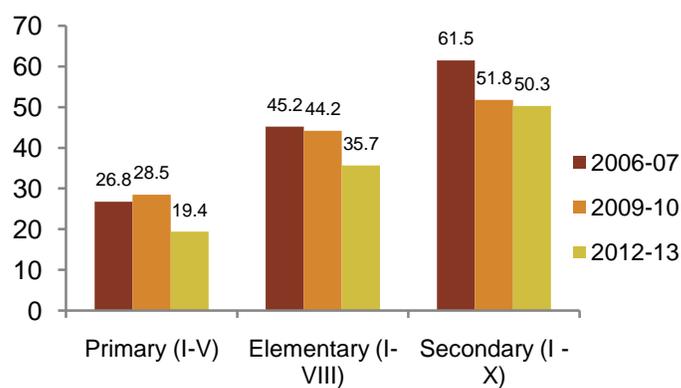
Female Education in India: An Analysis

This brief looks at the various educational indicators for females and the causes influencing poor female education. Furthermore, it provides an overview of various government schemes and initiatives that have been launched to address the issues. The penultimate section also lists down success stories from across the country, which are scalable and have encouraged female education in a sustainable manner.

Women constitute **48.5%** of country's population. According to Census 2011, the female literacy rate is **only 64.64%** (as opposed to male literacy rate of 80.89%) of the total female population of India, with Kerala being at the highest with **91.98%** rate, and, Bihar and Rajasthan being at the lowest levels with **53.33%** and **52.66%** respectively. The enactment of Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 resulted in a steep increase in the enrolment of students across the country countrywide, along with **access to better infrastructures and basic civic facilities under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**. However, despite provisions and measures taken by the Central Government and the State Governments for making education a public good, female dropout rates have been high.



Male and Female Literacy Rate (Census 2011)



Total school dropout rate of Females



In urban areas, the ratio of girls to boys **enrolment** for classes I to V is **0.89**, and for classes VI to VIII is **0.90**. While in rural schools, this ratio for classes I to V is **0.94**, and for classes VI to VIII is **0.96**.



According to UDISE data, **83.78%** rural schools, and **89.88%** urban schools have girls' toilets.

The **Swachh Vidyalaya Abhiyan** started by the current government currently (as on 20th July) states the completed construction of 62.68% toilets (both girls and boys) which were booked.

Causes of Prevailing Poor Female Education

As evident from the data provided above, the school dropout rate has been constantly poor even after impressive enrolment upon provision of free and compulsory elementary education through the RTE Act 2009. Following are the major issues revolving around high school dropout rate among girls:

Poor Sanitation Facilities: Lack of basic sanitation and privacy is driving adolescent girls out of school. According to UDISE 2013-14 data for the *Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya mission*, **9.27%** schools in the entire country do not have a separate toilet for girl students, while **8.03%** toilets are dysfunctional. The lack of water, unavailability of sanitary pads, inadequate sanitation, unhygienic common or separate toilets and absence of separate toilet for girls result in fear of being sexually assaulted, and hence reflect in their extremely low attendance in schools. A national study by AC Nielsen and NGO Plan India in 2012 found that lack of facilities causes widespread absenteeism each month, stating that **girls miss an average of 50 days** of school each year because of menstruation. It also found that **23%** of girls in India drop out of school when they hit puberty.

Lack of Transport: The government, through Right to Education Act 2009, has stipulated availability of primary schools within a walking distance of **1km** and of Upper primary schools within a distance of **3km**, which has helped maximum children access the schooling facility. However, as can be inferred from above provided data, secondary and senior secondary schools are usually located at a far away distance of about 5-6 km. Due to poor connectivity to schools and unsafe surroundings in rural areas, adolescent girls tend to drop out from the schools.

Poor sanitary facilities and lack of transport taken together cater to **lack of safety** for girls in the school compound and during their commute from home to school.

Other than the above mentioned, socio-cultural factors and lack of economic opportunities are also major reasons for not sending girls to school or forcing girls to dropout from schools.

Initiatives and Measures Taken by the Government

The Government of India has taken many initiatives to strengthen the education system of India. The major centrally sponsored schemes are the following :

1. **Right to Education Act 2009:** Envisaged under Article 21-A, the Right to Free and Compulsory Elementary Education obligates every state (except J&K) government to provide elementary education to every child in the age group of 6-14 years in a neighborhood school. According to this act, each non-admitted child must be admitted in an age appropriate class. It specifies duties of appropriate governments, local authorities and parents; provides various norms for infrastructure, pupil teacher ratio, school working hours and days. It prohibits any sort of harassment, screening a student, and holding back a child in any class until completion of elementary education. The act ensures all-round development of the child through a child friendly and child centered learning.

2. **Mid Day Meal Scheme:** Under this scheme, free lunches are supplied to school students of Primary and Upper Primary classes in Government, Government aided, Education Guarantee Scheme, and Alternate Innovative Education Centres, Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and National Child Labour Project schools run by the Ministry of Labour. **10.48 crore** children were covered in **11.58 lakh schools** in the year 2013-14 under this scheme.

3. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls - SABLA: It is a centrally sponsored scheme which started on April 1, 2011 under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It targets girls in the age group of 11-18 years in 200 districts in all states and UTs, and aims at providing nutrition, iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation, health check-up and referral services, nutrition and health education, counseling/guidance on family welfare and Adolescent Reproductive Sexual Health, child practices and home management, life skills education and public services, and, vocational training for girls aged 16 and above under National Skill Development Programme.

4. Model School Scheme: Initially supported by the government of India, this scheme is now transferred to States/UT Governments for appropriate action. The objectives of this scheme include: to have at least one good quality senior secondary school in every block, to have a pace setting role, to try out innovative curriculum and pedagogy, and to be a model in infrastructure, curriculum, evaluation and school governance, The scheme envisages setting up of (i) 3,500 schools in as many educationally backward blocks (EBBs) through State/UT Governments, and (ii) remaining 2,500 schools under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode in blocks which are not educationally backward.

Way Forward

In correspondence with the above stated problems, a few suggestions are listed below :

1. Menstrual Hygiene and Female Health: As already listed, poor sanitation facilities, which composes of lack of water in toilets, lack of privacy and even lack of proper disposal facility in toilets have led to an increase in school drop out rates among girls. In this regard, interventions aiming at health and hygiene of school going adolescent girls may turn out to be beneficial. Initiatives like availability of sanitary napkins and IFA tablets available for girls in schools, and providing counseling to adolescent girls have been taken by various state governments, and have seen significant improvement in attendance of girls in schools.

Menstrual Hygiene and Management (Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu) : Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Government of Tamil Nadu and UNICEF initiated this programme in 8 schools in Krishnagiri in 2009 which is focused on the capacity building of adolescent girl students to demystify taboos surrounding menstruation, orienting them to manage the menstrual process, provide sanitary napkins and disposal of soiled ones. UNICEF developed the counselling kit and designed incinerator attached to girls' toilet for disposal of soiled napkins in the schools. Sanitary napkin vending machine, selling napkins at Rs. 2/- each, were also installed in school to promote privacy and easy access. A counselling team consisting of two female teachers and four students reaches out to girls with correct information and skills to manage their periods. The model intervention in the school has triggered Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Government of Tamil Nadu, to extend the programme to 150 high schools in Krishnagiri.

2. Transport Facilities: Many studies have indicated that girls dropout from schools due to schools being located at a farther distance and no transport being available to cover that distance in rural areas. Therefore, initiatives in the direction of overcoming the commutation issue would prove to be beneficial. In areas well connected with roads, providing transport facilities like women-only buses and free bus-passes would also contribute towards improved safety of women.

Mukhyamantri Balika Bicycle Yojana: The chief minister cycle scheme was launched in the year 2007-08 in Bihar for school going girls of class IX and X. This scheme entitled such girls to a free cycle from the state, or Rs. 2000/- to buy a cycle. Around Rs. 136.74 crore were spent on this scheme which saw around 8.71 lakh beneficiaries over a period of 3 years. 15 beneficiaries and 5 non-beneficiaries girls were selected on the basis of random sampling, from every school covered under the scheme. Out of 15 beneficiaries, 10 beneficiaries were selected in proportion of enrollment in class IX and X, and 5 were selected from passed out beneficiaries girls.

3. Conditional Cash Transfers: On performing cost benefit analysis for women going to school, it has been seen that monetary incentives to students belonging to socially and economically backward families encourage them to attend schools. Initiatives like awarding cash and in-kind scholarships to female students attending school regularly and/or showcasing good academic performance would add value to efforts of reducing school drop out rates.

Odisha Girls' Incentive Programme: This programme is a collaborated effort of government of Odisha, and is funded by the Department of International Development and the technical assistance is provided by IPE Global. The programme was aimed at the issue of school dropout among girls after class VIII. In this programme, all girls from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) joining class 9 for the session 2012-13 received an annual cash incentive amount of Rs. 2,000 in 10 monthly installments. The money was transferred to the bank or post office savings accounts opened in the names of the girls. There is a monthly attendance conditionality of 75 per cent for receiving the money. The scheme is likely to benefit nearly 2.5 lakh SC and ST girl students in the State. The programme is being implemented across the 30 districts of the State, covering around 4.2 lakh SC/ST students (in 2013-14) studying across approximately 8,900 high schools. Further, bank accounts for almost 4.15 lakh students have been opened. Preliminary analysis of the data collected revealed a 40 per cent reduction in dropout rates owing to the programme. Further, the overall mean attendance rates also showed an improvement of around 10 per cent when compared to the attendance of the students in their previous class (class 8).

Conclusion

The education scenario for women has improved significantly because of the various measures taken by the government in educating women. However, there continue to exist several loopholes, which need immediate attention to reduce the school dropout rate of girls. Interventions **towards menstrual health and hygiene, transport, safety and good sanitation facilities along with cash incentives** in schools would go a long way in bridging the school dropout rate, and encourage female education.