



Research Article

## Household Economic Conditions and Girls' Education

Josephine Lakra

Research Scholar, Department of Education, RKDF University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

Corresponding Author: \* Josephine Lakra

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19597038>

### Abstract

Household economic condition plays a crucial role in determining girls' access to education, particularly in developing regions. Families with limited financial resources often prioritize immediate survival needs over long-term investments like education. Poverty directly affects educational participation by limiting the ability to afford school-related expenses such as fees, uniforms, books, and transportation. Indirect costs also influence girls' education through domestic responsibilities, including caring for siblings, cooking, and fetching water or fuel. However, improving household economic conditions can significantly enhance girls' educational outcomes through financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, conditional cash transfers, and free educational provisions. This paper examines the multi-dimensional relationship between household economics, family structure, and girls' educational access in rural India, with emphasis on policy interventions required to achieve educational equity.

### Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 13-11-2025
- Accepted: 28-12-2025
- Published: 30-12-2025
- IJCRM:4(6); 2025: 713-716
- ©2025, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

### How to Cite this Article

Lakra J. Household economic conditions and girls' education. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2025;4(6): 713-716.

### Access this Article Online



[www.multiarticlesjournal.com](http://www.multiarticlesjournal.com)

**KEYWORDS:** Household economy, Girls' education, Poverty, Gender inequality, educational access, School dropout, Financial constraints, Child labour, Early marriage, Domestic responsibilities, Literacy, Economic empowerment, Social norms, Educational inequality, Human development.

## INTRODUCTION

Household economic conditions play a decisive and often determining role in shaping the educational opportunities available to girls in rural areas. While education is widely acknowledged as a pathway to empowerment, mobility, and improved life outcomes, the economic realities of rural households frequently limit the extent to which families can support consistent schooling for their daughters.

Poverty, resource scarcity, livelihood patterns, and economic dependencies create an environment in which educational decisions become closely intertwined with survival strategies. As a result, girls often bear the brunt of economic hardships, leading to lower enrollment, higher absenteeism, and increased dropout rates. Understanding the complex relationship between economic conditions and girls' education is therefore critical for developing meaningful interventions and policy solutions.

## 2. Economic Barriers to Girls' Education

### 2.1 Direct Financial Constraints

In many rural households, economic constraints are the most significant barrier preventing girls from accessing education. Even though government schools offer free education, families still incur various indirect expenses such as uniforms, footwear, stationery, exam fees, transport, and supplementary learning materials. These costs may seem small individually, but collectively they represent a substantial financial burden for families struggling with daily subsistence.

When forced to choose, many households prioritise immediate survival needs—food, shelter, healthcare—over educational investment, especially in the case of girls. Girls' schooling is often the first to be compromised because daughters are perceived as less likely to contribute economically to the parental household in the long term.

### 2.2 Household Labour and Domestic Responsibilities

Poverty not only affects access to education but also shapes the nature of children's participation in the household economy. In rural communities, girls are frequently engaged in household labour that is economically valuable to the household and reduces the need for hired labour. Common responsibilities include:

- Cooking, cleaning, and fetching water or firewood
- Tending to livestock and fetching fodder
- Caring for younger siblings
- Assisting in fields during peak agricultural seasons
- Contributing to small-scale family businesses or wage labour

As a result, schooling becomes secondary, interrupted, or abandoned entirely. Economic dependence on girls' labor reinforces discriminatory gender norms and constrains their educational opportunities.

### 2.3 Seasonal Income and Gender-Biased Investment

The structure of income within the household further influences educational decisions. Families that rely on seasonal employment, such as agricultural labor or daily-wage work, face fluctuations in income. During periods of low income,

parents may withdraw girls from school to reduce expenses or increase household labor.

Sons, by comparison, are perceived as future breadwinners expected to support parents in old age. This belief leads to unequal investment in education, with sons' schooling receiving priority over daughters. Such choices reflect deeply ingrained gender biases shaped by both economic imperatives and cultural norms.

### 2.4 Learning Environment and Nutrition

Household economic conditions also affect the ability to provide a conducive learning environment at home. In economically disadvantaged families, girls often lack access to basic educational resources such as books, notebooks, or a quiet study space. Many girls study under dim lighting, after completing household chores late in the evening, or not at all due to exhaustion.

Poor nutrition and healthcare—common in low-income households—further affect girls' concentration, energy levels, and overall academic performance. Additionally, financial stress within the household may create an environment of instability, affecting children's emotional well-being and motivation to attend school.

### 2.5 Early Marriage

Another factor linked to economic conditions is early marriage. In many rural communities, families struggling with poverty may marry their daughters early to reduce the financial burden of feeding and caring for them. Early marriage almost always results in the end of a girl's education. Once married, girls are expected to take on adult domestic responsibilities and eventually motherhood, leaving little scope for continued schooling. Economic pressures therefore indirectly perpetuate the cycle of early marriage and educational deprivation.

### 2.6 Transportation, Safety, and Migration

Household income also affects transportation and safety—critical factors influencing girls' education. In many rural areas, schools are located far from villages, requiring transportation or long walking distances. Families unable to afford travel costs may hesitate to send their daughters to distant schools, especially at higher levels where schools are fewer and farther away. Safety concerns increase with distance, and parents may fear harassment or social criticism if girls travel alone.

Migration patterns also play a significant role. Families engaged in seasonal or permanent migration—such as for brick kiln work, construction labor, or agricultural employment—often disrupt children's schooling. Girls who accompany their parents experience long breaks or permanent discontinuation of education. Even when educational facilities exist at migration sites, parents may not enroll daughters due to unfamiliarity, lack of documentation, or fear for their safety.

## 3. Family Structure and Girls' Education

### 3.1 Nuclear Families

The nuclear family—consisting of parents and their children—is becoming increasingly common in rural India due to migration, economic shifts, and social change. Nuclear families often have simplified decision-making processes, which can enable quicker and more flexible support for girls' education. In such families, parents who value education can independently decide to enroll their daughters in school, invest in learning materials, or encourage participation in academic activities.

However, without extended family members to share household responsibilities, girls may be burdened with chores such as cooking, cleaning, sibling care, and agricultural work. In families where the mother is overburdened or economically active, daughters often assume domestic responsibilities, leading to irregular school attendance.

### 3.2 Joint Families

The joint family system, traditionally common in rural areas, includes multiple generations living together and sharing resources. Joint families can offer advantages for girls' education: with more adult members, household responsibilities can be distributed, reducing the workload on girls. The presence of grandparents or aunts can ensure supervision, provide emotional support, and assist with homework.

However, joint families also carry significant disadvantages. Traditional hierarchical structures may reinforce conservative beliefs about gender roles, limiting girls' mobility and prioritizing domestic duties over schooling. Decisions regarding education may be made by senior male members who may prefer early marriage or believe that girls' education has limited value.

### 3.3 Extended and Female-Headed Households

Extended family networks often provide emotional, financial, and logistical support. Relatives may help with childcare, household chores, or transportation to school, and may serve as role models if they are educated or supportive of girls' empowerment.

Female-headed households, led by widows, divorced women, or single mothers, may exhibit greater autonomy in decision-making regarding girls' education. Research suggests that daughters in female-headed households sometimes have better educational outcomes because mothers are more supportive and empathetic toward their aspirations. Yet the economic challenges faced by such households—limited income, lack of access to land, absence of male support—can create financial hardships that hinder educational participation.

### 3.4 Family Size, Sibling Composition, and Emotional Climate

Large families with many dependents face greater financial strain, often resulting in fewer resources per child for education. Girls in large families are more likely to drop out of school to help manage household work or assist in income-generating activities. Birth order also matters: firstborn girls often carry heavier household burdens, while younger daughters may experience less pressure and greater educational support.

The emotional climate of the household significantly impacts motivation toward learning. Supportive family environments that encourage open communication, celebrate academic achievements, and provide a nurturing atmosphere create positive educational experiences. Conversely, in families characterized by conflict, strict control, or emotional neglect, girls may struggle to stay motivated in their educational pursuits.

## 4. Enablers and Interventions

### 4.1 Government Support Schemes

Despite significant challenges, some households manage to prioritize girls' education even under economic strain. Government schemes have been instrumental in helping economically disadvantaged families send their daughters to school. Key initiatives include:

- Scholarships and conditional cash transfers for school attendance
- Free uniforms, textbooks, and mid-day meals
- Bicycle distribution schemes to improve access to distant schools
- Free sanitary napkin distribution and hostel facilities for girls
- Financial incentives for completing secondary education

### 4.2 NGO and Community Interventions

The presence of NGO interventions also moderates the impact of economic hardships. NGOs that offer community-based learning programs, tutorial support, or financial assistance for school supplies help alleviate economic pressures on families. Self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as powerful catalysts in changing household economic dynamics, enabling mothers to contribute financially and thereby influence educational decisions in favor of their daughters.

Awareness programs that challenge gender biases and emphasize the long-term benefits of educating girls can shift parental attitudes. Exposure to success stories, mentorship, and community mobilization efforts have helped families recognize the returns on girls' educational investment.

### 4.3 Intersectionality: Caste, Ethnicity, and Geography

It is important to note that household economic conditions interact with broader structural inequalities such as caste, ethnicity, and geographic location. Girls from marginalized communities—Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and minority groups—often face compounded disadvantages due to historical exclusion, limited access to quality education, and persistent poverty. For these households, economic constraints are more severe, making it even more challenging to support girls' education.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Household economic status serves as a central determinant of girls' educational trajectories in rural India. Economic hardships reduce enrollment, increase dropout rates, and shape parental attitudes toward education. Structural factors such as poverty,

labour demands, seasonal income fluctuations, and lack of resources create barriers that disproportionately affect girls.

Family structure further mediates educational outcomes—whether nuclear, joint, extended, or female-headed, each configuration presents unique opportunities and constraints shaped by gendered expectations and resource availability. Addressing economic barriers must therefore go hand in hand with tackling social and cultural factors.

With targeted interventions, financial support systems, awareness campaigns, and strengthened community institutions, it is possible to reduce the impact of economic constraints and promote greater educational inclusion for girls. Empowering families economically and promoting gender equality can lead to increased enrollment, retention, and academic success, ultimately contributing to broader social and economic development.

## REFERENCES

1. UNESCO. Education for All Global Monitoring Report. 2015.
2. UNICEF. Annual Report on Education and Gender Equality. 2018.
3. World Bank. Girls' education and economic development report. 2020.
4. UNDP. Human Development Report. 2019.
5. International Labour Organisation. Child labour and education report. 2017.
6. Ministry of Education, India. Educational statistics at a glance. 2021.
7. National Sample Survey Office. Household social consumption on education. 2019.
8. National Council of Educational Research and Training. Status of girls' education in India. 2020.
9. Oxfam International. Inequality and education report. 2016.
10. Save the Children. State of the world's mothers report. 2017.
11. Sen A. Development as freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1999.
12. Kabeer N. Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender Dev.* 2005;13(1):13–24.
13. Duflo E. Women empowerment and economic development. *J Econ Lit.* 2012;50(4):1051–1079.
14. Asian Development Bank. Gender equality and education report. 2014.
15. Global Partnership for Education. Girls' education strategy. 2018.
16. Plan International. Because I am a girl report. 2016.

### Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.