



The Social Science Review
A Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 2584 – 0789



(Open Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly Journal)

Homepage: www.tssreview.in

WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Higher education helps women to gain the skills and knowledge required to become active participants in the developmental process of a country. Education is an essential instrument in bringing social change. The society can only thrive if the contributions of women are acknowledged. Women's education is as essential as the education of men. Hence, this study focuses on the women's perception of the effects of higher education. The present study is a descriptive type of research, where women from different parts of West Bengal have been selected as samples following the quota sampling technique. A self-prepared close-ended questionnaire based on the main objective containing ten items was developed for conducting the survey. The significant findings of the study are that there is a difference in opinion about higher education between rural and urban women in the areas of equal educational opportunity, Social, economic and political empowerment, financial and crisis management, environmental awareness, creativity, male dominance, gender discrimination in family, early marriage, religious instructions and government policies and laws. It is found that positive responses towards the effects of higher education on women are more common among the rural population than the urban population.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Factors of Higher Education, Higher Education, Perception of Women, Women Education,*

Introduction

Higher education helps women gain the skills and knowledge required to become active participants in the development process of a country. According to Roy and Kareem (2016), "higher education and training hold the key to the acquirement of skills, competencies, attitudes and behaviours necessary to contribute to sustainable development" (p. 96). Additionally, it enables women to have the freedom to live outside the cultural bondage provided by societal norms and gender roles. It creates opportunities for women to be financially independent and have economic empowerment. Empowering women with education ensures that they participate in the country's economy, thereby reducing the poverty levels among the women population.

Furthermore, higher education enables women to develop rational thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. She gains the power to challenge the status quo ideology on women and advocates for their rights, whether at the workplace, home or political arena. Furthermore, the gender gap

Published by:

Pather Dabi Educational Trust, (Regn No: IV-1402-00064/2023), Under Govt. of West Bengal, India.

that is witnessed in India's education system presents a barrier to women's empowerment. Indian women are discriminated against women in at all stages of their lives, including during their education. According to the Gender Gap Index 2013, India is one of the countries with the lowest gender parity in education. Unfortunately, Indian women face discrimination, which results in all aspects, such as education, economic and political empowerment. A woman plays a crucial role in the progress of a family, society, and nation. It further promotes the quality of life in how they approach their life endeavours, upbringing, education, and economic empowerment of their family. Educated women can attain valuable capabilities to generate economies actively, create more health and nutrition conditions, and boost their decision-making boundaries in themselves and the nation. Educated women also play a crucial role in the economic and physical well-being of the nation. They contribute to the overall economic growth, which reduces poverty and enhances gender equality. Additionally, education is associated with gender parity to social advantage, including a high life expectation and increased political and business involvement. Generally, women's education increases their empowerment and that of society.

Rationale of the Study

Education is an essential instrument in bringing social change. The education of society is only fulfilled if half of the population (i.e., women) is addressed. Women's education is as essential as the education of men, but it is more critical in the present time. Hussain and Jadhav (2013) emphasise higher education as a crucial tool for empowering women. It equips them with knowledge, skills, and self-confidence to actively participate in development. Bhat (2020) highlights education's role in enabling women to challenge traditional roles, respond to challenges, and contribute to family, society, and national progress. Gantaloo (2016) emphasises education's role in promoting gender equality and overcoming discrimination. Kumar and Santhosh (2021) suggest remedial measures to overcome constraints faced by females in the teaching profession and throw light on the balance between women's personal and professional lives. Nagaraja (2018) views education as essential for empowering women and girls to build their lives with equity and equality. Shaukat and Pell (2015) discuss how higher education empowers women to become leaders, role models, and decision-makers impacting social, economic, and cultural development. Gewin et al. (2020) acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequality in higher education. Ahmed and Nisa (2017) discuss the privatisation of higher education in India, arguing that it can improve access and quality with proper regulation.

Much research has been conducted on the significance, impact, challenges, privatisation of education and its effect on women. Hence, the researcher attempts to find out the perception of the effects of higher education on women in various areas like equal educational opportunity, Social, economic and political empowerment, financial and crisis management, environmental awareness, creativity, male dominance, gender discrimination in family, early marriage, religious instructions and government policies and laws.

Statement of the Problem

The present study is stated as “Women’s Perception of The Effects of Higher Education.”

Objectives: To find out the perception of the effects of higher education on women regarding:

- Equal opportunity in education
- Environmental awareness
- Financial Crisis Management
- Creative thinking.
- Male dominance
- Gender discrimination in family
- Early Marriage
- Religious interpretations
- Government policies

Delimitation of the Study

- The study sample is limited to 120 women located in West Bengal.
- The extraneous variables, such as the socio-economic background of the women, the educational level, and their resultant exposure, were not under control.
- The report on the perception of higher education was based on the women's self-report.

Methodology

The present study was descriptive research, and women from different parts of West Bengal were selected as a sample following the quota sampling technique. A self-prepared questionnaire with a 3-point Likert Scale was developed to conduct the survey and get the data. The content validity of the items was ensured by taking expert opinion. The test-retest method was followed to check the reliability of the tools, which involves administering the survey with a group of respondents and repeating the survey with the same group at a later date (15 days gap) with an r value equal to 0.73. The data were analysed by using percentages and qualitative descriptions.

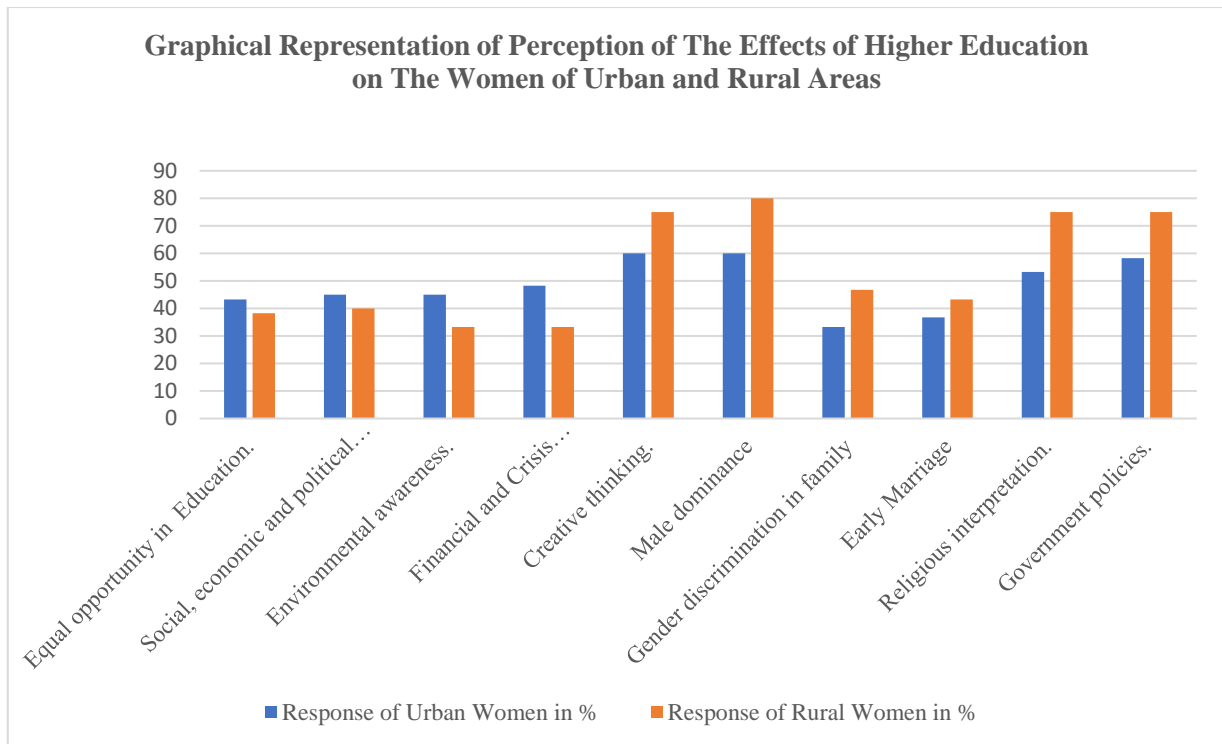
Analysis and Interpretation

As mentioned earlier, the perception of the effects of higher education on women had been taken in the form of a close-ended questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using percentages and followed by qualitative interpretation. The analysis is given in the following table. Further, a graphical representation has been provided to understand better their perceptions of various issues related to higher education.

Table: Perception of the Effects of Higher Education on the Women of Urban and Rural Areas

SL. NO.	STATEMENTS	Response of Urban Women in %	Response of Rural Women in %
1.	Higher education of women will help in demanding equal rights like men	43.3	38.3
2.	Higher education of women will help to establish their social, economic and political freedom and empowerment	45	40
3.	Higher education brings environmental awareness among women	45	33.3
4.	Highly educated women can deal with financial crisis and have the knowledge of crisis management	48.3	33.3
5.	Higher education encourages women in creative thinking	60	75
6.	Higher education helps women to overcome male dominance	60	80
7.	Higher education provides awareness to women about gender discrimination in the family.	33.3	46.7
8.	Higher education brings awareness among women about the harmful effects of early marriage.	36.7	43.3
9.	Higher education helps in providing better understanding of religious interpretations.	53.3	75
10.	Higher education gives more knowledge and understanding of government policies and the laws.	58.3	75

It is found that there is a difference in opinion about higher education between rural and urban women. 43.3 % of urban women and 38.3% of rural women perceived that higher education of women would help in getting equal rights to education like men. 45 % of urban women and 40% of rural women perceived that higher education of women would help to establish their social, economic and political freedom and empowerment. Regarding the statement of environmental awareness, 45% of urban and 33.3% of rural women think that higher education helps build the concept of environmental awareness and protection. 48.3% of urban and 33.3% of rural women feel that higher education knowledge better manages financial crises. 60% of urban and 75% of rural women think that higher education would help in creative thinking. 60% of urban and 80% of rural women find that higher education would help to overcome male dominance. Higher education is perceived as an eye-opener to stop gender discrimination in the family, according to 33.3% of urban women and 46.7% of rural women. 36.7% of urban women and 43.3% of rural women perceive that higher education would bring awareness about the harmful effects of early marriage. Better understanding and interpretation of religious instructions could be given by highly qualified people, as perceived by 53.3% of urban and 75% of rural women. Different government policies and laws are better understood by the people who pursued higher education, according to 53.3% of urban and 75% of rural women.



The above diagram shows the difference in perception between rural and urban women about higher education in the areas of equal opportunity in education, Social, economic and political empowerment, environmental awareness, financial and crisis management, creative thinking, male dominance, gender discrimination in the family, early marriage, religious instructions and government policies. It was found that urban women are more optimistic about the role of higher education in equal opportunity in education, social, economic, and political empowerment, environmental awareness, and financial and crisis management. In contrast, rural women are more favourable than urban women in the areas of creative thinking, male dominance, gender discrimination in the family, early marriage, religious instructions and government policies.

Educational Implications and Conclusion: Educational implications of the present study are:

- To provide knowledge about the women's perception of the effects of higher education. This would help educators, future planners and policymakers to plan the curriculum and design policies for women.
- To understand the difference in perception of higher education between urban and rural women.
- To provide feedback about the expectations of women from higher education
- To make the parents aware of the worth of education and motivate them to support their girl child for higher education
- Guide the female students to pursue higher education for their empowerment

The present study on 'Women's Perception of The Effects of Higher Education' shows that urban women are more responsive towards the effects of higher education in areas such as achieving opportunity, Social, economic and political empowerment, financial and crisis management and environmental awareness. On the other hand, rural women perceive the effects of higher education in the areas of creativity, male dominance, gender discrimination in the family, early marriage, religious instructions and government policies and laws. The difference in perception between rural and urban women could be due to their socio-economic background, position in the family, experience of gender disparity in society, lack of exposure, and influence of religion and culture.

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