

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION – A STUDY FOR THE PERIOD 2015-16 TO 2020-21

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Abstract

Education plays a critical role in empowerment of an individual. In its commitment to provide 'Quality Higher Education for all', and promoting gender equity through education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated certain scholarships and other schemes for empowerment of women and girl students. This is a study of the selected schemes of the UGC and performance during the period 2015-16 to 2020-21. Secondary Data collected from the Annual Reports of the Commission revealed under-utilisation of available scholarships and fellowships. There is a need to enhance the awareness about the schemes of women empowerment. The scheme for Women Studies Centres in Universities and Colleges was enlarged to include the Scheme of Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education in the twelfth plan. Presently there are 159 Women Studies Centres in various Universities and Colleges across the country. The performance of scheme for construction of women hostels has also been studied. During the year 2017-18, there were maximum beneficiaries for Post-Doctoral Fellowship for Women and Indira Gandhi Post-Graduate Scholarship for Single Girl Child. There is a need to create awareness about the 'Saksham' Portal and enhance the participation of women in research activities.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Gender Equity, Higher Educational Institutions



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Introduction

Women Empowerment is a global issue. Gender Equality and Women Empowerment has been the agenda of United Nations for many years. This was emphasised in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and in the Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDG) as well.

Over the years, it has been observed that education plays a pivotal role in achieving empowerment, especially women empowerment. Recognising this, the University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex body in India for regulating higher education, has undertaken various initiatives for empowerment of women and girl students to enhance the participation of women in higher education (thereby minimising the gender gap in higher education). UGC has reiterated its commitment to the cause of promoting equality and empowerment of women. After the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission proactively informed all the Universities and Colleges that the Gender Sensitization Cells/ Women Studies Centres in higher educational institutions may conduct Webinars/video Conferences on Gender Bias and Stereotyping, Gender Equality and Women’s Rights.² Being the funding agency, it has initiated certain scholarship and other schemes specifically for women as per details given below:

A. Scholarships specifically for women – Table No. 1

S. No.	Particulars	Year of Inception	Number of slots per year and tenure
1	Post-Doctoral Fellowship for Women – with the objective of providing an opportunity to the unemployed women having Ph.D. degree, who intend to pursue post-doctoral research.	1998	100 slots per year, Duration – 5 years
2	Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Fellowship for research in Social Sciences - To compensate direct costs of higher education of such girls who are the only girl child in their family, for pursuing doctoral studies.	2014-15	No limit on number of slots per year, tenure 4 to 5 years
3	Indira Gandhi Post-Graduate Scholarship for Single Girl Child - To compensate the direct costs of post graduate education in non-professional courses of such girls who are the only girl child in their family.	2005-07	No limit on number of slots per year, tenure 2 years

B. Scheme for development of Women’s Studies Centres

Apart from the above, in its programme for promotion of women’s studies, financial assistance has been provided to universities and colleges for setting up centres and cells for Women’s Studies. These Centres/Cells are required to undertake research, develop curricula and organise training and extension work in the following areas

- i) Gender equity
- ii) Economic self-reliance of women
- iii) Girls’ education
- iv) Population issues
- v) Issues of human rights

vi) Social exploitation

Year-wise Plan Grant released to Women Studies Centres during XII Plan (2012-2017)* is as follows.

Table No. 2

Year	(₹ in Crore)
2012-13	12.48
2013-14	1.77
2014-15	9.68
2015-16	6.37
2016-17	13.62
Total	43.92

* https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/9764381_Complete-AR-2016-17-English.pdf, page No. 263 accessed on 09/02/2022

C. Scheme for Construction of Women's Hostel in Universities and Colleges

In order to maintain gender balance and ensure that girls and women are not deprived of higher education for want of hostel facilities, the Commission had introduced a Scheme for Construction of Women's Hostel in Universities and Colleges. The maximum amount of grant to the Universities depends upon two factors viz. Number of Women Enrolments and the location of the University i.e., whether in Metro city or in special category states. For Women enrolment up to 500, in non-Metro cities, the grant is ₹ 100 lakhs and for women enrolments exceeding 500, in non-Metro cities, the grant is ₹ 120 lakhs. The grant is twice the above in Metro city and in special category states.

The scheme for construction of women's hostels in colleges has been in force since the year 1995-96. Eligible colleges are sanctioned 100% assistance up to the ceiling limits mentioned below which depend on the number of women enrolments and location of the college.

Table No. 3

Women Enrolment	Amount ₹ Lakh Non-Metropolitan cities	Amount ₹ Lakh - Metropolitan cities Jammu & Kashmir, North eastern Region & Sikkim
Up to 250	40	80
251-500	60	100
more than 500	80	120

(Reference: https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/5789724_UGC_AR_2020-21_FNL.pdf Page No. 202)

D. 'SAKSHAM' portal

Over and above, one landmark event of recent times was **the Launching of the 'SAKSHAM' portal on 6th March, 2020**, by the Hon. Minister of Human Resource Development. *As an extension of its existing initiatives, UGC has developed SAKSHAM which is a dynamic portal that aims towards empowerment of women in campuses through creating awareness on opportunities and initiatives in HEI for women, Support and redressal mechanism for students and employees of HEIs and Web resources in the form of Government and United Nations policy documents for women.*¹

The portal is developed exclusively for women students, women faculty and women staff members. The portal provides a platform for registering complaints related to violence and harassment against women in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) through the following three ways:

- National helpline number for students, faculty and staff members of HEIs.
- Email address
- 'Upload your complaint' option under Grievance redressal on the portal.¹

Further, the portal provides information about the fellowships, scholarships for women, Women's Studies Centres, Legal Provisions advisories and information of the Annual Return on Cases of Sexual Harassment and information of appointment of Gender Champions in HEI, furnished by the Universities and colleges across the country.

Objective of the study

- 1) To study the trends in grant of scholarships/fellowships to women during the period 2015-16 to 2020-21.
- 2) To know the performance of schemes for construction of women hostels in HEI and establishment of Women's Studies Centres during the period 2015-16 to 2020-21.

Method of data collection

Secondary data was collected from

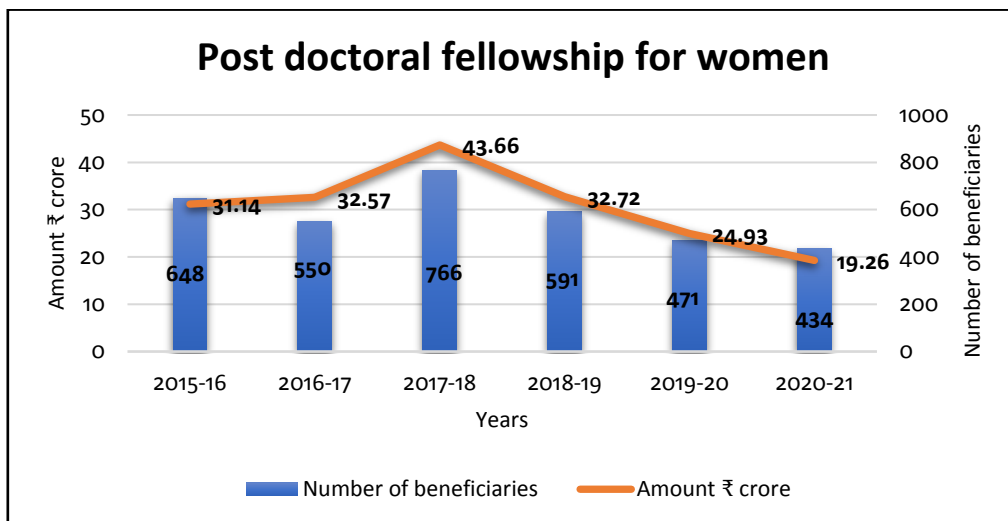
- a) UGC Annual Reports for the years 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 available on the website of the Commission (<https://www.ugc.ac.in>)

The collected data was tabulated and analysed using statistical tools.

Findings

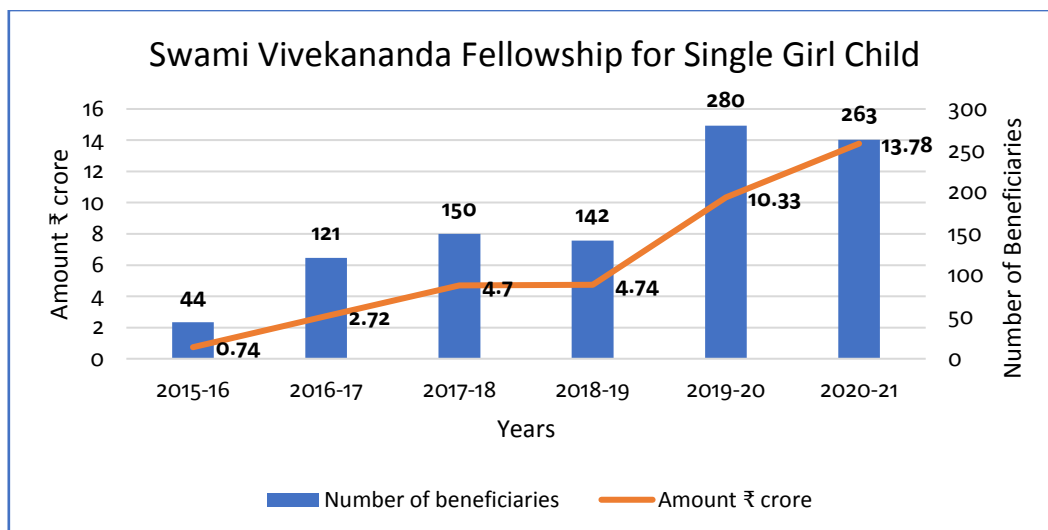
A. The performance for the six-year period 2015-16 to 2020-21 under the above referred fellowship and scholarship schemes is as follows

Fig. 1 Post- doctoral Fellowship for Women



The duration of fellowship is five years and maximum slots per year are 100, so at any point of time, the number of beneficiaries should be at least 500. Year 2017-18 shows maximum utilisation, while the year 2019-20 and the year 2020-21 show under-utilisation.

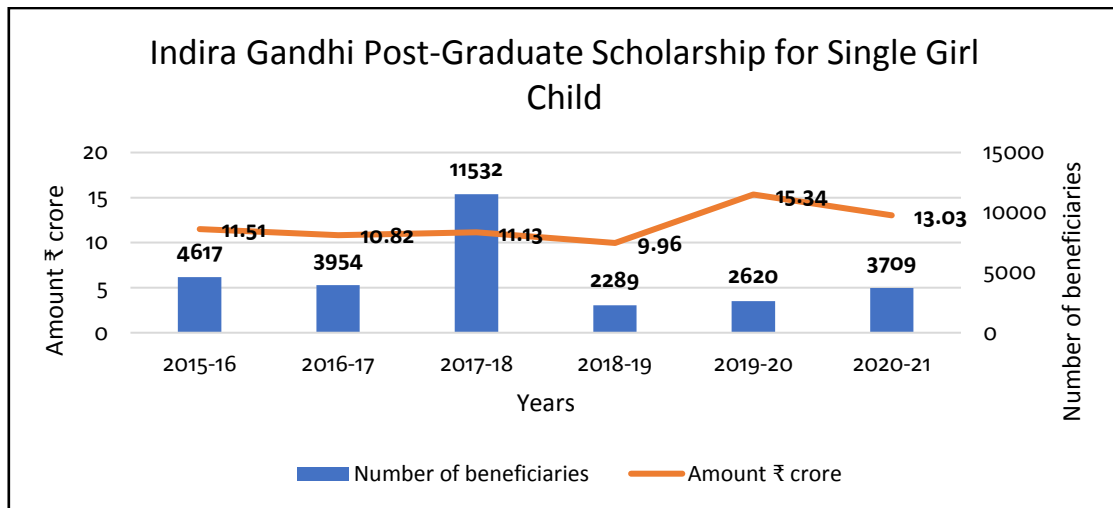
Fig. 2 Swami Vivekananda Fellowship for Single Girl Child



There is no cap for maximum number of scholarships awarded per year, so all the eligible applicants are able to receive fellowship for pursuing research leading to award of Ph.D. degree. As per the Annual Report of UGC for the year 2018-19, the selection process for the scholarships for the year 2018-19 was in progress (*3060779_UGC-ANNUAL-REPORT--ENGLISH--2018-19.pdf, Page No.262*). During the year 2019-20, the selections for the year

2018-19 were made and 269 women candidates had been selected for fellowship under the scheme (*1120661_UGC-ANNUAL-REPORT-ENGLISH-2019-20.pdf, Page No. 267*). This explains the rise in number of beneficiaries by 97% in the year 2019-20. However, number of beneficiaries have reduced in 2020-21, though the amount disbursed increased by 33.4%

Fig. 3 Indira Gandhi Post-Graduate Scholarship for Single Girl Child



It is observed that maximum number of beneficiaries are in the year 2017-18, but maximum funds are disbursed in the year 2019-20. The reason for the trend is known from the Annual Report of UGC as follows:

“The scheme was on-boarded since 2017 on National Scholarship Portal (NSP), NIC Govt. of India, New Delhi. Selection for the year 2017-18 and 2018-19 are being finalised through National Scholarship Portal (NSP)”. (*3060779_UGC-ANNUAL-REPORT--ENGLISH--2018-19.pdf, Page No.264*)⁴ “During the period 2019-20, the selections for two years were made. 2417 candidates were finally verified for scholarship for the year 2017-18 and 2445 candidates were finally verified for scholarship for the year 2018-19. The process of selection for the year 2019-20 has already been initiated”. (*1120661_UGC-ANNUAL-REPORT-ENGLISH-2019-20.pdf, Page No. 268*)³ Though the number of beneficiaries increased in 2020-21 by 42%, the funds disbursed reduced by 15%. Also, compared to the fact that there is no cap on the number of scholarships awarded to girl students under the scheme, there is a possibility of under-utilisation.

B. Scheme for development of Women’s Studies Centres

Till the Eleventh Plan, the Commission had introduced two separate schemes viz.

- i) Development of Women’s Studies Centres in Indian Universities and Colleges, and

ii) Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education.

During the Twelfth plan, both the schemes were merged and the scope of the scheme for development of Women’s Studies Centres was enlarged. After the end of the twelfth plan, and in light of the UN- SDG, revised guidelines have been issued to strengthen the Women’s Studies Centres. Till the end of the year 2020-21, 159 Women's Studies Centres were established in various Universities and Colleges (84 Universities and 75 Colleges) in the country².

C. Scheme for Construction of Women’s Hostel in Colleges

During the period under study, the number of beneficiary colleges has declined, a sharp decline is observed in the year 2018-19. The year-wise release of amounts reveals that maximum funds were released in the year 2016-17. The sharp fall in release of funds and beneficiaries in the year 2020-21 has occurred due to COVID-19 pandemic. The total amounts sanctioned since 1st April 2012 till the end of each year show a marginal increase.

Fig. 4. Scheme for Construction of Women’s Hostel in Colleges

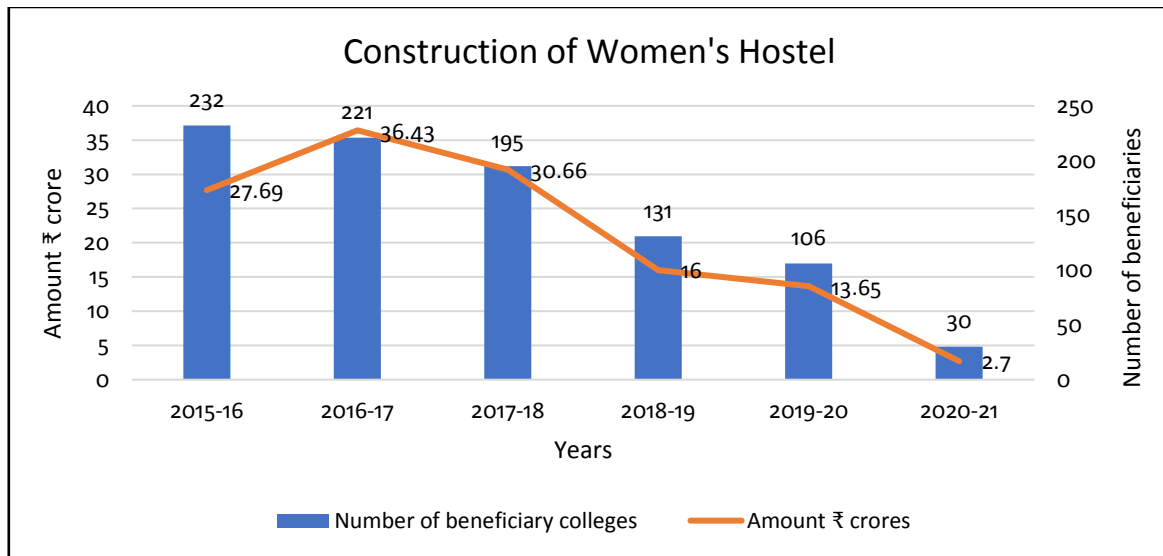
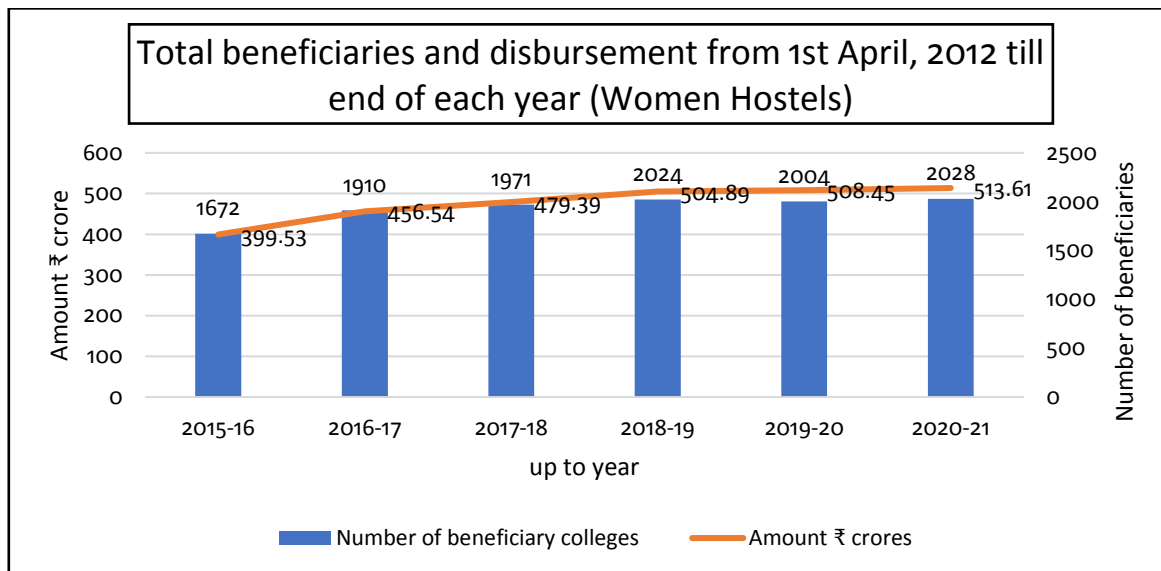


Fig. 5 Performance since 1st April 2012



Conclusion

For all of the schemes of scholarships as discussed above, the utilisation is very low. The scholarships for single girl child aim at achieving the twin objective of promotion of small family and enhancing participation of girl students in research activities. However, there is a need to enhance the awareness about the schemes of women empowerment and scholarships and fellowships for women. More HEIs should come forward for establishment of Women’s Studies Centres and also avail the scheme of construction of Women’s Hostels. There is a need to enhance awareness about the ‘Saksham’ Portal and facilities offered by it.

Web References

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