

WOMEN EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Improving Women girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects of their entire community. The infant mortality rate of babies whose mothers have received primary education is half that of children whose mothers are illiterate. In the poorest countries of the world, 50% of girls do not attend secondary school. Yet, research shows that every extra year of school for girls increases their lifetime income by 15%. Improving female education, and thus the earning potential of women, improves the standard of living for their own children, as women invest more of their income in their families than men do. Yet, many barriers to education for girls remain. In some African countries, such as Burkina Faso, girls are unlikely to attend school for such basic reasons as a lack of private latrine facilities for girls.

Education increases a woman's and her partner and the family's level of health and health awareness. Furthering women's levels of education and advanced training also tends to lead to delay initiation of sexual activity, first marriage, and first childbirth. Moreover, more education increases likelihood to remain single, have no children, or have no formal marriage while increasing levels of long-term partnerships. Women's education is important for women's health as well, increasing contraceptive use while lowering sexually transmitted infections, and increasing the level of resources available to women who divorce or are in a situation of domestic violence. Education also improves women's communication with partners and employers, and rates of civic participation.

Keywords: *Women Education, Challenges, Gender Bias*



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Women Education and Challenges

Introduction

Ensuring that all girls and young women receive a quality education is their human right, a global development priority, and a strategic priority for the World Bank.

Achieving gender equality is central to the World Bank Group twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. As the largest financing development partner in education globally, the World Bank ensures that all of its education projects are gender-

sensitive, and works to overcome barriers that are preventing girls and boys from equally benefiting from countries' investments in education.

Girls' education goes beyond getting girls into school. It is also about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in school; have the opportunity to complete all levels of education, acquiring the knowledge and skills to compete in the labor market; gain socio-emotional and life skills necessary to navigate and adapt to a changing world; make decisions about their own lives; and contribute to their communities and the world.

Both individuals and countries benefit from girls' education. Better educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and their children are usually healthier, should they choose to become mothers. They are more likely to participate in the formal labor market and earn higher incomes. A recent World Bank study estimates that the "limited educational opportunities for girls, and barriers to completing 12 years of education, cost countries between in lost lifetime productivity and earnings. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty

The Challenge

According to UNESCO estimates, around the world, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million of primary school age, and 97 million of secondary school age.

Globally, primary, and secondary school enrollment rates are getting closer to equal for girls and boys (90% male, 89% female). But while enrollment rates are similar – in fact, two-thirds of all countries have reached gender parity in primary school enrollment – completion rates for girls are lower in low-income countries where 63% of female primary school students complete primary school, compared to 67% of male primary school students. In low-income countries, secondary school completion rates for girls also continue to lag, with only 36% of girls completing lower secondary school compared to 44% of boys. Upper secondary completion rates have similar disparities in lower income countries; the rate is 26% for young men and 21% for young women.

The gaps are starker in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). In FCV countries, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys, and at the secondary level, are 90% more likely to be out of secondary school than those in non-FCV contexts.

Both girls and boys are facing a learning crisis. Learning Poverty (LP) measures the share of children who are not able to read proficiently at age 10. While girls are on average 4

percentage points less learning-poor than boys, the rates remain very high for both groups. The average of Learning Poverty in low- and middle- income countries is 55% for females, and 59% for males. The gap is narrower in low-income countries, where Learning Poverty averages about 93% for both boys and girls.

In many countries, enrollment in tertiary education slightly favors young women, however, better learning outcomes are not translating into better work and life outcomes for women. There is a large gender gap in labor force participation rates globally. It is especially stark in regions such as South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, which have some of the lowest female labor force participation rates at 24% and 20% per region, respectively. These are appallingly low rates, considering what is observed in other regions like Latin America (53%) or East Asia (59%), which are still below rates for men.

Gender bias within schools and classrooms may also reinforce messages that affect girls' ambitions, their own perceptions of their roles in society, and produce labor market engagement disparities and occupational segregation. When gender stereotypes are communicated through the design of school and classroom learning environments or through the behavior of faculty, staff, and peers in a child's school, it goes on to have sustained impact on academic performance and choice of field of study, especially negatively affecting young women pursuing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

Poverty is one of the most important factors for determining whether a girl can access and complete her education. Studies consistently reinforce that girls who face multiple disadvantages — such as low family income, living in remote or underserved locations or who have a disability or belong to a minority ethno-linguistic group — are farthest behind in terms of access to and completion of education.

Violence also prevents girls from accessing and completing education – often girls are forced to walk long distances to school placing them at an increased risk of violence and many experience violence while at school. Most recent data estimates that approximately 60 million girls are sexually assaulted on their way to or at school every year. This often has serious consequences for their mental and physical health and overall well-being while also leading to lower attendance and higher dropout rates. An estimated 246 million children experience violence in and around school every year, ending school-related gender-based violence is critical. Adolescent pregnancies can be a result of sexual violence or sexual exploitation.

Girls who become pregnant often face strong stigma, and even discrimination, from their communities. The burden of stigma, compounded by unequal gender norms, can lead girls to drop out of school early and not return.

Child marriage is also a critical challenge. Girls who marry young are much more likely to drop out of school, complete fewer years of education than their peers who marry later. They are also more likely to have children at a young age and are exposed to higher levels of violence perpetrated by their partner. In turn, this affects the education and health of their children, as well as their ability to earn a living. Indeed, girls with secondary schooling are up to six times more likely to marry as those children with little or no education. According to a recent report, more than 41,000 girls under the age of 18 marry every day. Putting an end to this practice would increase women's expected educational attainment, and with it, their potential earnings. According to the report's estimates, ending child marriage could generate more than billion in benefits annually each year.

Conclusion

Women and Girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality. It contributes to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals – including boys and men – the opportunity to fulfil their potential. But education for girls is about more than access to school. It's also about girls feeling safe in classrooms and supported in the subjects and careers they choose to pursue – including those in which they are often under-represented.

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