

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND INCENTIVES SHAPE THE ASPIRATIONS OF YOUNG GIRLS: CASE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF DELHI

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ABSTRACT

The government of NCT of Delhi launched Ladli Scheme in January 2008. A study was carried out to determine the perceptions of young girls enrolled in the scheme about its usefulness and their future aspirations. The study also attempted to secure evidence on the use of maturity claim money by the beneficiary girl children. The study also took into account the influence of the school environment, in shaping the aspirations of the girls. The study used mix methods design to elicit information about the aspirations of ninety girls studying in class XII in three types of Government schools namely Rashtriya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas, Sarvodya Kanya Vidyalayas and the Government Girls Senior Secondary schools of Delhi. North West district of Delhi with the highest enrolments under the Ladli scheme was selected as the locale of the study. The aspirations of the girls seemed to be shaped more by the type of school they studied in and the promised incentive money under the Ladli scheme gave them confidence of being able to pursue education.

Keywords: Girl Child, Sex selective abortions, Girls' education, Ladli scheme, Career aspirations

INTRODUCTION

The gender imbalance caused by a skewed sex ratio against girl children is a result of excess female infant mortality due to malnutrition and neglect, and sex-selective abortions, the roots for these practices lie in strong cultural preference for sons (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2009). Another endemic pattern against girls is the high opportunity cost of educating them against their contribution to the family for household chores and care of the younger siblings. The schemes for protecting the girl children have been conceived to help reverse these trends and motivate and enable parents to send their daughters to school. This is steeped in the decades of empirical evidence and practical experience of linear relationship between women's educational attainment and development outcomes. It is now conventional wisdom in development discourse that where education levels are high among women, fertility rates are lower, family size is smaller, and women's health and economic status are better. So, there is no denying that education is essential to prepare girls for healthy, safe and productive transition into adulthood

(Klasen, 1999). Girls' education has also proven to be a remarkably effective catalyst for social development and economic growth. So it is in some sense not only the individual girl who is empowered – it is the broader society (UNICEF, 2007).

The government of NCT of Delhi launched Ladli Scheme in January 2008 with the aim of ending discrimination against girls and promoting their education. The scheme aims at ensuring proper education to make the girl self-reliant. It attempts to provide economic security by providing financial assistance to school going girls. Thus, it attempts to mould the traditional mind-set of the people towards the birth of a girl child and to impart education to their daughters. It would also increase girls' presence in schools and reduce their dropout rates.

A study was planned to understand the future aspirations of young girls studying in class XII and to examine the influence of Ladli scheme (if any) in shaping the future aspirations of beneficiary girls. The study also attempted to assess the influence of school environment (if any) in shaping the career aspirations of the girl students. Evidence was also secured to analyse the influence of Ladli scheme in helping young girls realise their aspirations with the help of maturity claim amount received by them. According to the data procured from Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of NCT of Delhi, the ministry responsible for this initiative, the North West district had the highest rate of enrolments under the Ladli scheme in the year 2014-2015 and hence it was chosen as the locale of the study.

Ladli Scheme of Delhi

Under the Ladli scheme the government sanctions financial assistance to school going girls. The financial partners of the Delhi government for implementing the scheme are SBI Life Insurance Company Limited (SBIL) and the State Bank of India. The financial assistance sanctioned by the government in favour of girls is deposited with SBIL till the girl becomes eligible for claiming the maturity value at 18 years. The financial assistance under this scheme is restricted up to two girl children in the family.

The Directorate of Education of the Delhi Government is responsible for implementing the scheme. It runs three kinds of schools for girls in higher secondary classes namely Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVVs), Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalayas (SKVs) and Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools (GSSS). Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVVs) provide education from VI to XII standard. In these schools meritorious students from all government schools are admitted through a planned achievement-cum-aptitude test. These schools are prestigious institutions that have facilities and teaching faculty as per the established standards. The second type of schools are Sarvodaya Kanya

Vidyalayas (SKVs), these are also called composite schools and run classes from I-XII. Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools (GSSS) are the third type of schools which include middle, secondary, senior secondary classes (Mahajan and Goyal, 2005).

For the study, in all 90 girls were selected from one school each of the above mentioned three types of schools to ascertain the influence of Ladli scheme and also the school environment in shaping their future aspirations. In addition to these, ten girls who had passed out from these schools were also interviewed to document evidence about the usage pattern of the maturity claim amount of the scheme.

Only girls studying in class XII were selected for the study as it is the last lock-in period for the scheme therefore these girls could provide better insights into the functioning of scheme and also would be more have relatively better sure of what they wish to do after completing their school education.

The study revealed that 62% of the beneficiary girls under study had enrolled in the 3rd lock-in-period i.e. in 6th class, 36% in 9th class due to issues with procuring the required certificates and only 2% of the girls in 10th class as they had migrated from other schools and were helped in getting registered under the scheme by their teachers. This shows that efforts need to be made to create awareness among the stakeholders especially the teachers of MCD schools in Delhi as the students can avail the maximum benefit of the scheme if they get enrolled at the early stages.

The socio economic profile of the respondents reflected that most of these girls came from resource poor backgrounds with minimal economic resources and majority of them were living in joint families. Their parents were involved in menial jobs with minimal wages. Cash incentives being provided under the scheme were an attraction for these girls to continue their schooling.

Future Aspirations of Young Girls studying in Class XII

Almost all the girls wanted to continue their education to be successful and to secure their future. The girls in all the three types of school had some idea about what would they like to pursue after their schooling, 70% of the girls wanted to get enrolled in a regular college and the courses of their choice. RPVV girls were more explicit in their choices as compared to GGSS and SKV girls. It was heartening to know that the awareness level of the students of RPVV schools about the future career options available was quite high and they were conscious about the choices they made. RPVVs offer all the three streams i.e. Science, Commerce, Humanities, which made it possible for them to know about the avenues available in diverse fields unlike girls from SKV and GGSSS who had limited choice of subjects for class XI and XII and could pursue only humanities or commerce. Even the commerce stream was available in a few SKVs and GGSSS.

On being probed about their motivation to study, the girls expressed their desire to create an identity for

themselves. They wished to meet their family's needs. 66% of the girls wanted to be economically independent. It was also observed that these girls were sure of their parents support for pursuing further education.

Influence of School Environment in shaping the Career Aspirations of the Students

It was observed that the girls from RPVV were more motivated and determined towards their future as they were all meritorious (admitted in school through a competitive exam) and their school had good facilities and competent teaching faculty.

For the purpose of study the facilities in the three types of schools were also examined and on the basis of observation and focus group discussions carried out with the girls, these facilities were classified into three categories: Basic, Desirable and ICT enabled facilities. Basic facilities for the purpose of this study included drinking water, toilets, and cleanliness in the school and furniture in their classrooms. Desirable facilities included laboratories and playground and ICT Support facilities included computers and smart class rooms in the school.

The data depicted that the facilities of RPVV schools are good and offer opportunities to the students to realise their potential whereas on the contrary SKV and GGSS schools need to be supported to enhance their infrastructure and improve facilities.

After examining the quality of infrastructure and its possible influence on students' achievement potential and exposure, the study examined the influence of Ladli scheme in shaping the future aspirations due to the available cash incentive. 55% of the girls believed that Ladli scheme can help in improving the status of the girls as the parents who cannot afford to spend money on their daughter's education, have now started sending their daughters to school and let them complete education up to 12th standard. Therefore the length of the schooling period for girls gets extended and it helps them in getting a better understanding of the future options available for pursuing studies and career options available after school like vocational education opportunities or job opportunities to become self- sufficient. The students expressed that in the last few years in school, while in classes X to XII they became aware of many options which they were ignorant about earlier like vocational courses, distance education facilities, jobs in call centres and beauty and fitness industry and felt competent to work in future. They felt they could fight for their rights. Some of them for whom pursuing education could be difficult felt assured of continuing their education with the help of maturity claim amount. On the contrary, 45% of the girls believed that Ladli scheme may not be of great help as per their seniors' experiences. They felt that most of case beneficiary girls do not get money in time and generally for most of them, it is a meagre amount, owing to their enrolment in the scheme at a delayed milestone level, reducing the

maturity claim they were entitled to and hence it may not be enough to meet their future educational needs. At the same time, 91% of the girls believed that they will try to pursue their education or get into vocational training even if they do not get the maturity claim. This was heartening that the girls across the schools were motivated to continue their education irrespective of receiving Ladli scheme benefits or not.

While examining the influence of Ladli scheme in realising the aspirations of the beneficiary girls, who have passed out from the schools, it was found that most of the girls had to face problems while claiming the maturity amount. They had to follow a cumbersome procedure of getting their documents verified, which took very long resulting in delay in claiming the money. Also there were delays in renewal of the forms and in most cases they had not received the renewal receipts from the department, hence they did not have any proof of registration. It was also observed that the girls who had passed out after 2014 were able to receive the money, but still there were many girls who had passed out from school earlier and their maturity claims got delayed due to the reasons discussed above.

Based on findings of this research, a few suggestions could be considered to implement the scheme better. These can be -

1. Generating awareness about the relation between Lock-in period and Maturity claim amount:

Awareness should be created that the parents who register their daughters at birth in the scheme would only get one lakh rupees at the time of claim. Most of the girls and their parents did not know this and had very high expectations of receiving the advertised claim amount of Rs. One lakh even they get their daughters registered at later stages of the scheme. Also this would motivate people and create awareness about earliest registrations at birth and enrolling eligible girls under the scheme.

2. Issue Identity cards to all registered girls and reduce paper work: The Implementing authority should make an endeavor to reduce paper work involved in registering under the scheme and a better method needs to be devised for easy renewal. For every applicant, reapplication in the next successive stage is mandatory. Besides this, parents are also required to attach a number of other documents along like voter ID card and ration card, due to this, some applicants are unable to receive the benefits of the scheme as they are unable to produce all such documents. Instead every beneficiary girl child may be issued an identity card at the time of registration and subsequent renewals can be made on presenting this card at every stage. The card can have all the details about the applicant and also a table depicting the six different stages of this scheme. When the applicant applies for the scheme, the parent, the implementing authority like school principal and district officer should acknowledge by signing in the respective cell.

3. Offer financial assistance within two weeks after declaration of senior secondary examination

result: The maturity claim amount can be transferred to the bank account of girls within two weeks of announcement of result of class 12th, and not until after one year as then the beneficiary girls would be able to utilise the maturity claim to pay fee for their admission to the desired courses in time without any delays. This will enable young girls to pursue studies despite economic constraints and the benefits will be able to give economic and emotional satisfaction.

4. Employ more staff: The department must employ more workers at the district office to enhance its service provision so that the maturity claim procedure and the verification procedure can be done smoothly without any backlog.

5. Training of public information officers and staff in government offices: The people appointed to provide information about the Ladli Scheme at the time of birth and in schools must be well-trained and well-informed about its procedure and other details. They should be genuinely willing to explain this to the parents, considering not many parents may be fully aware of all the requirements and eligibility criteria due to their low educational levels and poor access to information about the scheme beyond the school system.

CONCLUSION

The idea and design of the Ladli scheme of Delhi is commendable. Making educational milestones as the conditions to avail the benefits at 18 years of age by the beneficiary girls is a very appropriate structure to promote education among girls and to extend years of schooling for girl children and also delaying the age at marriage for young girls. The increase in the number of girls getting registered under the scheme gradually over the years is a testimony of the good response from parents of girl children from economically deprived sections. However there is a lot of scope for improvement in implementing the scheme. There is a need for greater synergy between the Department of Women and Child Development of NCT of Delhi and Department of Education and the Banking system to plug the gaps in the process of registration, renewals and disbursement of maturity claim. Similarly, it must enhance its service by employing more staff and training all the implementing stakeholders regularly to reduce the delays and avoid inconsistencies in the data for renewals and maturity claims.

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