Investigation of impact of COVID-19 on Girl's education in India

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ABSTRACT: The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 caused widespread disruption to various sectors, including education. In India, the closure of schools and colleges as a safety measure had significant consequences on the education system. This review article aims to investigate the specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' education in India. It delves into the challenges faced by girls in accessing education during the pandemic and explores the potential long-term effects on their academic, social, and economic well-being. The review also examines the government's response to mitigate the impact and highlights potential strategies for ensuring girls' education remains resilient during future crises.

KEYWORDS- Education, COVID-19, India, Government

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, short for "Coronavirus Disease 2019," is a highly infectious respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. The disease was first identified in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. It quickly spread to various countries and evolved into a global pandemic[1]. The initial cases were linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, suggesting animal-to-human transmission. However, the virus soon demonstrated its ability to spread from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected individual coughs, sneezes, or talks. The virus can also spread by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and then touching the face, particularly the mouth, nose, or eyes. COVID-19 symptoms range from mild to severe and can appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus[2]. The first case in India was reported in Thrissur, Kerala on 30th January 2020 in students returning from Wuhan, China [3]. Subsequently, 24th March 2020, witnessed a total of 9 deaths with 519 confirmed cases [4]. Owing to the imminent threat, the government announced a 21-day strict country-wide lockdown on 25th March 2020 [5]. Due to the severity of the situation, the National Disaster Management Authority further extended the lockdown to 31st May [6].

Government, organisation including community across the globe made preventive measures to the exclusion of COVID-19 and aimed to reverse the curve of the pandemic. Wearing mask, using hand sanitizer and continuing at home, are some measures. Lockdown, was considered as the key measures, which has put shut down all the social activities and recreational activities. It was very difficult for the people to stay at home for a long duration. Educational institutes such as schools, colleges, coachings were also remained close[7]. By using the World Bank's online tool (PovcalNet) household survey data in arguing that this pandemic is pushing people to extreme poverty- India was on number 2 in the countries estimated to have the biggest change worldwide[8]. It is evident from various sources such as OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), WHO (World Health Organization), and a study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate negative impact on women[9]. The regulations implemented by different governments, such as the closure of schools and businesses, have affected women in various ways.

1. Socio-economic status: The pandemic has led to job losses and reduced economic opportunities, and women have been particularly affected in terms of unemployment and financial insecurity. This has further widened gender disparities in the workforce.

2. Health: Women have faced challenges related to their health during the pandemic. This might be due to various reasons, including increased caregiving responsibilities, inadequate access to

healthcare services, and limited support for women's health issues.

3.   Gender-based violence: The pandemic has been associated with an increase in gender-based violence. The stress and strain caused by the crisis, combined with limited access to support systems, have put many women at greater risk of experiencing violence at home or in their communities.

4.   Education: The pandemic has disrupted educational systems worldwide, and girls, especially those from rural and marginalized backgrounds, have faced significant disadvantages. Access to education has been limited due to school closures and a lack of necessary infrastructure for remote learning, making it difficult for girls to continue their studies.

5.   Skill development and job opportunities: Women's ability to access skill development programs and secure jobs has been hindered by the pandemic. This can have long-term effects on their economic empowerment and contribution to their communities[10].

II. OBJECTIVES

A.   Investigate the unique challenges faced by girls in accessing education before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
B.   Review the initiatives taken by the Indian government to enhence girl's education.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on girls' education is crucial for promoting social equity and gender equality. Identifying the challenges they faced can inform policy decisions aimed at mitigating disparities and ensuring equal educational opportunities for girls. The educational setbacks experienced by girls during the pandemic may have long-term consequences on their educational attainment, career prospects, and overall socioeconomic status. Addressing these challenges promptly is essential for the future development of the nation. Findings from this investigation can guide policymakers in developing targeted intervention strategies to support girls' education during emergencies and future crises. The investigation aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), by shedding light on the barriers faced by girls in accessing education.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research study relies on secondary data analysis as the primary method of data collection and analysis. Secondary data refers to information that has been collected by someone else for a different purpose but can be used by researchers to address new research questions[11]. In this study, the researchers are investigating the impact of COVID-19 on girl child in India, specifically focusing on why girl child are not sent to school. Instead of collecting new data through surveys, interviews, or observations, the researchers opt to use existing data that has been collected by others[12]. The advantages of using secondary data analysis include cost-effectiveness, time-saving, and the ability to access a vast amount of data that might not be feasible to collect individually. Additionally, the data might cover a longer time span, which can be beneficial for understanding trends and changes over time[13].

V. CAUSES OF NOT TO EDUCATING GIRL CHILD

The issue of gender equality in India, particularly concerning girl child education, is indeed a significant challenge that the country has been grappling with for several decades. Despite the government's efforts to implement strategies and laws aimed at addressing gender discrimination, India still has a long way to go to achieve true gender equality[14]. One concerning aspect is the declining sex ratio, with the current ratio of 930 females per 1000 males being lower than the 2011 census data, which reported 940 females per 1000 males. This indicates an ongoing preference for male children, leading to practices such as prenatal sex screening and female foeticide. One of the key areas where gender inequality is evident is in education. Although the overall literacy rate in India is 74.37%, there is a significant disparity between men and women. The literacy rate for men stands at 82.37%, while for women, it is 65.79% according to the last available records. This gap in literacy levels highlights the unequal access to education faced by girls and women in the country. While the enrollment rate of children in the age group of 6 to 14 years is high at 96%, there is a substantial dropout rate among girls in the age of 15 to 18 years. This dropout rate of 39.4% indicates that a majority of girls are compelled to discontinue their education and engage in household chores or even resort to begging. This situation severely hampers their opportunities for personal growth, empowerment, and economic independence[15].

However, it is worth noting that there is a slight improvement in the urban areas compared to rural areas. In urban areas, girl children may have relatively better access to education and opportunities compared to their rural counterparts[16]. Nevertheless, even in urban areas, significant challenges and barriers to girl child education persist. The lack of education for girls in India is a complex issue that arises from a combination of cultural, social, economic, and systemic factors[17]. While progress has been made in recent years to improve girls' access to education, significant challenges remain. Some of the key causes contributing to the under-education of girl children in India include:

1. Gender bias and societal norms: Traditional gender roles and biases often prioritize boys' education over girls'. The perception that girls' primary role is to get married, take care of the household, and bear children can limit their access to education.

2. Child marriage: India has a significant problem with child marriage, where girls are married off at a young age, leading to the termination of their education. Early marriages can also result in health issues and a higher likelihood of poverty. Around 23.3% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday acc. to NFHS Survey.

3. Poverty: Economic constraints are a significant barrier to girls' education. Poor families often prioritize investing in the education of their sons, as they are considered to have better economic prospects and support the family in the future.

4. Distance and safety concerns: In many rural areas, schools might be far away from villages, and parents may be concerned about the safety of their daughters while traveling long distances to attend school.

5. Lack of infrastructure and resources: Some regions in India lack proper educational infrastructure, such as schools and transportation facilities, which further hinder girls' access to education.

6. Discrimination and violence: Girls may face discrimination and harassment in schools, making the learning environment hostile and unsafe.

7. Cultural practices and beliefs: In some communities, there is a preference for educating boys over girls, leading to limited opportunities for girls to pursue education.

8. Child labor: Many girls are engaged in household work or child labor, limiting their time and opportunity to attend school.

9. Lack of female teachers and role models: The shortage of female teachers and role models can impact girls' willingness to attend school and continue their education.

10. Government policies and implementation: While the Indian government has implemented various initiatives and policies to promote girls' education, the effectiveness of these efforts can vary due to inconsistent implementation and other challenges. Efforts to address these issues require a multifaceted approach involving government interventions, community involvement, advocacy, and awareness campaigns to change mindsets and foster an inclusive educational environment for girls in India[18].

VI. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN INDIA

The COVID-19 pandemic had indeed caused significant disruptions to the education sector worldwide. School closures were a common measure implemented by many countries to prevent the spread of the virus and protect the health of students, teachers, and the broader community. These closures had various implications for education and children's learning experiences.10 million girls in India could drop out of secondary school due to Covid-19, issued by the Right to Education Forum in January 2021.A survey was conducted in Delhi, sample size was 766 girls aged between 7-21 from slum to study the impact of schools and colleges have had since shifting their classes online. they found that 33.6% of girls do not have access to digital devices,15.7% have very limited access to the devices owned by the families and 64% of girls said that boys have more access to digital devices and the internet in their communities. It added that the majority of the girls said that their families think that it is more important for the boys to study and get an education[19].

During the COVID-19 pandemic, girls' education faced numerous challenges, exacerbating existing disparities and hindering progress in achieving gender equality in education. Some of the major challenges faced by girls' education during this time include:

1. Limited access to remote learning: Many regions lacked adequate infrastructure and resources to support remote learning, such as internet connectivity, devices like computers or tablets, and access to electricity. This disproportionately affected girls from marginalized communities, rural areas, and low-income families, limiting their ability to participate in online education.

2. Increased domestic responsibilities: With schools closed and families confined to their homes,

girls often had to take on more domestic responsibilities, such as childcare, household chores, and caring for sick family members. These additional burdens on their time made it difficult to prioritize and engage in remote learning activities.

3.   Gender-based violence and child marriage: During periods of crisis, there is often an increase in gender-based violence and child marriages. With schools closed and communities facing economic hardships, some families resorted to marrying off their daughters at a young age to alleviate financial pressures, resulting in girls being taken out of the education system.

4.   Lack of safety and security: Girls may face safety concerns while accessing remote learning or when schools are closed. This is especially true in areas with higher rates of violence, leading parents to keep their daughters at home to protect them, thereby further limiting their educational opportunities.

5.   Mental health and psychosocial challenges: The pandemic and its associated stressors can take a toll on mental health. Girls may have experienced anxiety, depression, and loneliness, affecting their ability to concentrate on studies and engage in learning activities effectively.

6.   Loss of learning and knowledge gaps: Extended school closures and disruptions in education led to significant learning loss. Girls who were already at a disadvantage in education, particularly in STEM subjects, faced greater challenges catching up with their peers once schools reopened.

7.   Economic constraints and poverty: Families experiencing financial hardships might prioritize the education of boys over girls, perpetuating gender inequality in education. Economic constraints may also force girls to drop out of school to support their families or contribute to income generation.

8.   Limited menstrual hygiene management: With school closures, girls faced challenges in accessing menstrual hygiene products and facilities, making it difficult for them to manage their menstruation with dignity, leading to potential absenteeism from school.

9.   Reduced support from community structures: Schools provide not only education but also a safety net for many girls, offering support and protection from adverse circumstances. With schools closed, girls might lose access to these community structures.

10.   Uncertain educational future: The pandemic's impact on the global economy may lead to decreased funding for education, resulting in reduced resources for schools and limited support for girls' education initiatives[20].

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from governments, policymakers, educators, and communities to ensure that girls' education remains a priority during times of crisis and that the progress towards gender equality in education is not reversed.

VII.   INDIAN GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS GIRL'S EDUCATION

The Indian government has implemented various initiatives and programs to promote girl education and address gender disparities in education. Some of these initiatives include:

1.   Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter): Launched in 2015, this flagship program aims to address the declining child sex ratio and promote the education of girls. It emphasizes the importance of educating girls and empowering them to realize their full potential.

2.   Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): Launched in 2001, this program focuses on universalizing elementary education and enrolling out-of-school children, especially girls. It seeks to provide quality education and improve access to schools, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.

3.   Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV): This scheme was launched in 2004 to provide education to girls from disadvantaged communities at the upper primary level. It aims to ensure that girls have access to education and are retained in school.

4.   National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education: Under this initiative, a one-time cash incentive is provided to encourage the enrollment of girls in secondary education. The incentive is given to girls belonging to scheduled castes (SC) and other economically backward communities.

5.   Balika Samriddhi Yojana: This scheme aims to address the dropout rate of girls at the secondary level by providing financial incentives to families to encourage them to educate their daughters.

6.   Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA): Launched in 2009, this program focuses on enhancing the quality of secondary education and increasing the enrollment of girls in schools.

7.   Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY): Although not specifically an education initiative, this savings scheme encourages parents to invest in

the future education and welfare of their girl child. It offers tax benefits and a higher interest rate to promote long-term savings for the girl's education and marriage expenses.

8. UDAAN is a project launched by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in India. The primary goal of UDAAN is to address the low enrollment of girl students in prestigious engineering institutions and to bridge the teaching gap between school education and engineering entrance examinations.The project aims to empower girl students and provide them with a platform to pursue their aspirations of joining prestigious engineering institutions. By encouraging more girls to participate in engineering education, UDAAN seeks to enable them to play crucial roles in nation-building and contribute to the development of the country. UDAAN focuses on enriching the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics at the school level[21].

VIII. CONCLUSION

The investigation of the impact of COVID-19 on girls' education in India reveals a concerning exacerbation of existing educational disparities. The pandemic magnified the challenges faced by vulnerable girls, particularly those from disadvantaged communities. While response strategies were employed to mitigate the disruptions, a more comprehensive and sustained effort is required to ensure the long-term recovery of girls' education[22]. Families should be educated on the overall significance of education, as it contributes to the mental, emotional, and psychological development of individuals. Once people understand the importance of education, they should recognize the need to provide education to all children, regardless of their gender. By emphasizing the benefits of education, it becomes possible to address resistance to change and traditional cultural beliefs that may hinder the empowerment of females[23]. Education can serve as a tool to challenge and overcome gender disparities by enlightening individuals about the positive impact that empowering females can have on their own lives and the broader society. Furthermore, education can help dispel stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions that often restrict the opportunities available to women. By educating males, especially those deeply rooted in cultural norms, about the benefits of female empowerment, it becomes possible to foster a more inclusive and equitable society. In summary, proactive measures should be taken to address resistance to change when promoting female empowerment[24]. Education plays a vital role in this process by enlightening individuals about the importance of education itself and the positive impact that empowering females can have on individuals and societies.

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