International Journal of Education and Practice
2025 Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 281-296
ISSN(e): 2310-3868
ISSN(p): 2311-6897
DOI: 10.18488/61.v13i1.4057
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Analyzing factors in adolescent girls' school dropout: Insights from slum area

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Article History
Received: 20 May 2024
Revised: 1 January 2025
Accepted: 15 January 2025
Published: 28 January 2025

Keywords
Adolescent
Challenges
Dropout
Education
Girls
Slum areas.

ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the challenges faced by girls in slum areas in accessing education. It assesses the factors contributing to early dropouts and education status in slum areas of Jaipur, Rajasthan. This research employs an exploratory study design with a mixed-method approach. Primary data was collected through interviews and semi-structured questionnaires involving 200 girls aged 12-20 from slum areas and government schools. Interviews with the girls provided in-depth insights while the semi-structured questionnaires allowed for systematic data gathering. Data from mothers, elder siblings and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) offered supplementary perspectives to triangulate and elaborate on the findings. The research identified several significant factors that impede girls' educational access in slum areas. These multifaceted challenges stem primarily from cultural, economic, and household factors and infrastructural deficiencies. Addressing the challenges through a multifaceted approach is imperative to reduce dropout rates and enhance educational outcomes for girls in slum communities. Many school-age girls have been prevented from accessing education due to a lack of awareness and the existence of various cultural beliefs. When girls reach the age of 15, many of them drop out. The findings advocate for a proactive stance in policy formulation and community engagement to ensure that every girl can pursue and complete her education. The study recommends targeted interventions by government and community engagement through supportive policies.

Contribution/Originality: This study focuses on early school dropout rates among girls in slum areas. It provides a holistic understanding of the educational challenges faced by these girls. The findings are expected to contribute significantly to developing targeted and supportive policies to reduce dropout rates and improve educational outcomes for girls in slum areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main pillars of society is education which is essential for advancing cultural, social, and economic advancement. It equips people with the critical thinking, information and skills needed to accomplish their professional and personal goals, actively engage in civic life and improve their communities. Education is a human right and a crucial instrument for attaining gender equality and ending the cycle of poverty (Right to Education Initiative, 2022). Education promotes a wealthier, just, and informed society by providing people with the tools to change their situation. According to Dattatraya (2023) study, education is deemed essential for a country's growth and development with significant societal importance. Education improves an individual's spirit, intelligence, and mindset. Advanced education is particularly crucial in India's transitional society. There are two perspectives

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on women's participation in higher education: the ultramodern perspective, which promotes equality and development, and the traditional perspective which promotes education for entrepreneurship. Theoretically, everyone should have equal educational needs. However, female education is considered more vital. Radhakrishnan (2011) highlighted that educated women are essential for an educated populace. The realization that females face systemic obstacles all around the world that are made worse by elements like poverty, location, disability, and minority status. These barriers prevent them from receiving the benefits of a 12-year high-quality education. Despite these obstacles, education continues to be the most likely route to their empowerment (Right to Education Initiative, 2022).

There is still a great deal of ignorance regarding these topics from the viewpoint of those who live in slums despite extensive research on girls' education and the causes of school dropouts. Studies that have already been done frequently ignore the difficulties and sociocultural factors that these marginalized communities experience. This study will investigate the causes of the high dropout rates among girls in slums from the perspectives of those who live there. It is essential to comprehend these viewpoints since they offer a more complex and situation-specific understanding of the obstacles to education in these fields. This study is especially significant because it examines a group that has not been thoroughly studied before and provides insightful information that will help shape better educational practices.

One of the largest global networks, India's educational system which includes 1.5 million schools, more than 8 million teachers, and 250 million students requires urgent attention (Pathi, 2022). Education is essential for societal development. However, many Indians do not recognize its transformative power in individuals' lives. Unfortunately, some view girls as liabilities and believe investing in their education is wasteful preferring to allocate funds for marriage or dowries instead. This misconception overlooks that education empowers women reducing their dependency on male family members and enhancing their decision-making capabilities. Lack of education among women often leads to poor health and hygiene. In slum areas, numerous girls either do not attend school or drop out early resulting in incomplete education and perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage. Slums are congested, densely populated urban residential areas that lack essential amenities. A major problem in these areas is the very low literacy rate. Lack of education is a severe problem because it is considered key to reducing poverty. In addition, elementary education is legally and constitutionally protected as a fundamental right of children (Tsujita, 2011).

Various factors like non-availability of sanitary napkins, lack of adequately functioning toilets in school, lack of proper water facilities in schools, low financial status, long distance to school and transportation costs, household chores and helping in parents' work, cultural beliefs like early marriage, gender bias, i.e., giving more preference to the son, etc. have kept many school-age girls from getting an education. These factors can cause individuals to drop out of school even if they completed their primary education (Tsujita, 2011) and want to study further; such factors result in them dropping out. Many parents of these slum girls think that even if their daughters get an education, they will only do domestic work and take care of children and families. So, instead of going to school, they should help them with domestic or professional work. This is one of the many common challenges faced by slum girls. Another dimension that adds to the challenge is cultural beliefs. Many parents still believe that educating their daughters won't do wonders for them and wastes time and money because the daughter will one day get married and leave home. They take pride in educating their sons and give them more preference leading to gender bias. The National Family Health Survey (Pedgaonkar, Kant, Shekhar, Kale, & Chaudhar, 2021) conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare show that 23.1% of women were married before the age of 18 and 1.8% were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (Pedgaonkar et al., 2021). School attendance is 95% at the age of 6-14 years but drops sharply to 73% at the age of 15-17 years. Another challenge that can be seen in accessing education is financial problems. Many parents face difficulty paying the school fees, getting their children stationary items or paying for their extra local conveyance expenses. Even if the schools are low-fee, they remain unaffordable for the

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poorest families (Rueckert, 2019). These families risk falling into extreme poverty as they strive to provide their children with a better future through education. Many of them work as laborers or run little stalls in the market to comply with their families' basic needs based on their daily wages.

During COVID-19, many of them had to stop their work which led to little or no money in their hands. They had to survive on their savings and wait till the situation became normal again. This even made many girls help their parents in their occupational work and handle household chores while both parents went to work, eventually resulting in dropping out of school. Many of them work with their parents even now, and they have no intention of joining school again soon. They feel too busy and engaged managing the household and other work leaving no time for even the thought of education. Menstruation and lack of sanitary napkins are the second major reasons, after household work for the girls to miss school. The girls' access to education in these areas is restricted by their clothing use.

1.1. Research Questions

i. What are the primary challenges faced by girls living in slum areas in accessing education?
ii. What specific reasons contribute to the high dropout rates among girls in slum areas?
iii. What problems do girls face in government schools, and what are their suggestions for improving these schools?
iv. What recommendations can be made to overcome the barriers faced by girls in slum areas in accessing education and reducing school dropout rates?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Low literacy rates and lack of education among girls are some of the disparities still prevailing in India. Education becomes unexpected for many girls when they become the mothers of the next generation. These educational disparities become periodical. Several issues contributing to the lack of education among girls are cultural values, early marriage, lack of feminine hygiene products, and child labor. The perpetual lack of education among young females leads to poverty, various health issues, and domestic violence. There has been an increment in the literacy rate of females since the 80s because of significant measures taken by the Indian government. However, many young females still lack formal education (Cook, 2020). The National Family Health Survey, 2019-21 discovered that the percentage of girls attending school drops sharply to 68% at age 16-17 years which was earlier 96% at age 6-10 years. The survey also discovered that 31% of the total female respondents have never been to school, and 27% of women aged between 15 and 49 were unemployed. Only 22% of women aged 15-49 in Rajasthan have completed 12 or more years of schooling, compared with 34% of men.

Several interrelated dimensions, such as economic, cultural, and school-level factors can result in school dropouts. Some particularly increase the dropout rate among girls (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). One of the major factors is financial problems especially for those who are already socioeconomically weak. In addition, some of the parents also use gender as a medium to choose who gets to receive education and who doesn't. In most cases, girls aren't allowed to access education. Preference for sons over daughters is a dark reality in rural India (Choudhary, 2019). Providing education to sons is considered a sign of pride and prestige whereas daughters are seen as a burden on the family. Parents prefer to have a son rather than a daughter. At the family level, after financial issues, discouraging attitudes of family members around girls' education were associated with a significantly increased likelihood of school dropout (Prakash et al., 2017).

In India, one of the primary reasons for girls' lack of education is child marriage. Girls who marry early are probable to drop out of school and less likely to complete their education (ICRW & UNICEF, 2017). In the year 2016, India had the highest number of child brides in the world with 223 million child brides of which 102 million got married before the age of 15. Marriage is seen as a more compelling priority leading to early marriages of girls

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and unfinished education. Wives often drop out as the majority of household responsibilities fall to them. Even if there is a choice of continuing education after marriage, factors like early pregnancies, poverty, and strict gender roles make it a rare possibility (Cook, 2020). The NFHS-5, 2019-21., District Fact Sheet, Jaipur, Rajasthan discovered that the percentage of women aged between 20-24 years who got married before the age of 18 years is 23.1%. Shahidul and Karim (2015) argue that if girls are educated up to a higher level but have a lower parental socio-economic background, they face difficulties in getting a husband because the parents need to pay a much higher amount of dowry to get their educated daughters married to similarly educated grooms hence resulting in early dropouts among girls.

Girls' dropout rates are higher in upper standards. The two leading causes are child labor. When the girls get older, their parents want them to go out and work and help them financially instead of going to school and wasting their money. The other reason is child marriage. As girls reach puberty, their parents think it's the right time to get married leading to dropouts among young females. Females are considered a liability as many of them are not allowed to go out and work and their parents have to take care of them. Thus, they marry their daughters off early (Gupta, 2013).

Various dimensions contribute to the challenges faced by women in accessing education. The main factors are more preference for the son, financial problems, dependency on male counterparts of the family and family responsibility (Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). Gender-related norms and poverty can be seen as significant barriers to higher schooling among adolescent girls. Among financially poor families, household duties came at the cost of education for young females (Ramanaik et al., 2018). Girls can be seen doing household work for hours taking up the responsibility of younger siblings while parents are at work. Indulging in household chores makes it difficult for girls to keep up with schoolwork, sometimes leading to dropouts (Cook, 2020). The Indian patriarchal society gives less value to girls' education due to socio-cultural and financial barriers. The onset of puberty and early marriage are common elements affecting girls' education (Cavanagh, Riegle-Crumb, & Crosnoe, 2007).

Mismanagement of menstrual hygiene is a common factor preventing girls from attending school. The lack of appropriate resources during menstruation often causes females to stay at home due to embarrassment. Due to the lack of products and hygiene education, 23 million girls drop out of school every year in India. Many girls are also restricted from going out of their house while menstruating (Cook, 2020). Menstruation is the second major reason for girls to miss school after household work. Studies show that about 23% of girls drop out of school when they attain puberty. Adolescent girls are often seen leaving school halfway through the day because of a lack of adequate facilities to manage their menstruation. Girls in puberty are absent for about 20% of the school year causing inconsistency in schooling. Missing four to five days of school every month impacts education outcomes (Trust, 2015).

Inclusive education can greatly enhance the lives of children and adolescents by offering equitable access to high-quality education for those living in slums. By empowering marginalized communities in the slums with social integration and developing employment skills, the conditions in slums can be reduced. This will end the cycle of poverty and social isolation.

3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The research conducted an exploratory and descriptive study using a mixed method to analyze the various challenges faced by girls in slum areas in accessing education.

3.1. Data Collection

The slum area Jhalana Doongri in the city of Jaipur was identified for data collection. Nearby schools were also considered. The data from 200 girls from slum areas and government schools were targeted and collected. Girls aged 12-20 were interviewed using pre-designed semi-structured questionnaires (*bilingual*) with multiple- choice

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questions from girls of government schools and slum areas. The interviews were also conducted with a few of their parents and siblings living in slum areas. Besides this, data was also collected from a nearby NGO through a telephone interview. NGOs stand for Non-Governmental Organizations which are essentially non-profit organizations and contribute widely to vivid social concerns in society.

Secondary data has been obtained from research papers, articles, case studies, etc.

3.2. Sampling

140 girls from government schools and 60 girls from slum areas participated with the target of a 200 samples survey. The data was collected from two government schools, namely Rajkiya Madhyamik Ucch Vidhyalaya, of two sites, Malviya Nagar and Mansarovar situated at Jaipur.

Slum areas of Jhalana Dungri were visited to collect more data on the dropout issue of girls from the schools to gain deeper insights into the issue and identify the causes of dropouts. Interviews were conducted with mothers and siblings of girls in slum areas to understand their point of view towards education and to know the various elements that contribute to challenges for their daughters in accessing education. The families were chosen randomly.

A telephone interview was conducted with the teachers of Pratham NGO, Ramganj, Jaipur to learn about the organization's work in educating girls. This aspect led to understanding how the policies address the issue and what kind of support these girls require.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Figure 1 depicts factors that were taken into consideration by the researcher to properly analyze the problems faced by girls in slum areas in accessing education.

School-level factors like feminine facilities, hygienic washrooms, water facilities, long distances to school, conveyance problems and expenses, availability of resources, parental thoughts on higher education, menstruation, cleanliness in school, extracurricular activities, and proper sitting arrangement.

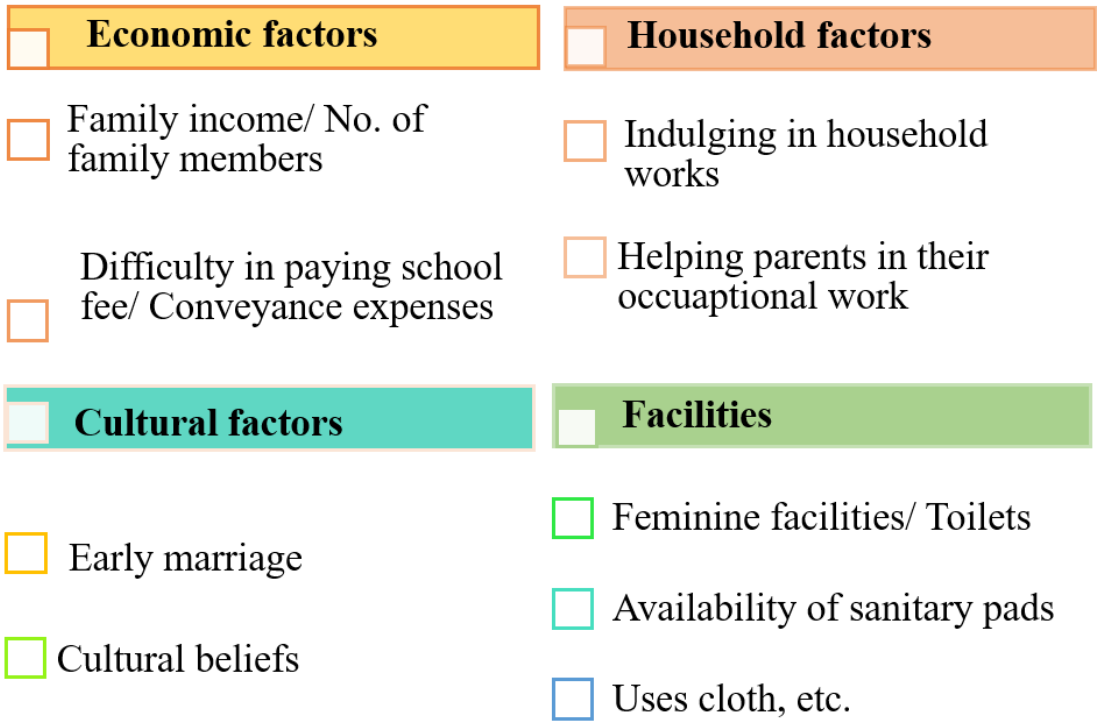

Figure 1. Major factors contributing to challenges for slum girls in accessing education.

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4.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The study on the challenges faced by girls in slum areas yielded the following results:

Girls between the ages of 12 and 20 were interviewed followed by a semi-structured questionnaire. The number of girls was highest under the age of 16-17 years (38%). Almost half of the fathers and male family members were educated up to high school with a few up to graduation level. The maternal population wasn't very educated, with only about 30% of them completing their education up to 5th or 8th standard and only a few up to high school, which remained unfinished for certain reasons. The most common reasons that could be seen for not completing their education were either early marriage, financial problems or engaging in household work at an early age.

Most of the families in slum areas had financial problems even in availing the necessities of life. The average number of family members in each house was more than five with many of them having the responsibility of three children at home. More than half of the male population worked as laborers or sweepers. About 42% of the mothers worked as either maids in houses or helped their husbands in their occupational work for a little more earnings. Many of them still had no work with them.

4.2. Analysis of the Responses

The study showed that the major challenges faced by the girls of slum areas in accessing education are indulging in household work, financial problems, menstruation, etc. The factors are analyzed below and discussed further in detail.

Table 1. Factors contributing to dropouts.

Factors contributing to dropouts	% of responses
Household work	35
• Looking after younger siblings.	
• Helps mother in their job.	
• Responsibility for looking after livestock.	
Early marriages, disinterest in studies and poor grades.	20
Financial problems in pursuing further studies.	15
Occupational work	15
• Girls at an early age sent as domestic help.	
Menstruation and other facility-related issues	15
• No water in the school toilets.	
• Unclean toilets.	
• Small classrooms with no proper seating capacity.	

Table 1 presents the reasons that lead to dropouts. 35% of the reasons for school dropouts were mainly related to having domestic responsibilities. It becomes essential for the girls to stay at home and care for their siblings while both parents work and in some situations; she also takes responsibility for raising livestock. The second major component contributing to dropout was found to be early marriages, disinterest in studies, and poor grades which detach the girl from her studies. While speaking to one of those girls, she revealed.

> *" I get up early to finish my household work and make my siblings ready for their school; it takes me one and a half hours to reach school late by walking. It becomes difficult for me to cope with my studies since I am the only one to take care of siblings till my mother is back."*

In such a scenario, the girl loses interest in her studies, fetching poor grades and this becomes an imperative cause for her to quit her studies. According to the study of push and pull factors contributing to school dropouts (Jordan, Lora, & McPartland, 1994) where push factors are those that force to move out of the academic stream. These push factors and lack of support from the family become a pull factor for the girl to withdraw from the studies and consequently either get married or engage in domestic help.

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4.3. Perceived Reasons by Parents for Not Supporting the Education of Girl Children

Another factor that contributes is gender discrimination has societal acceptance owing to this, girls are expected to be at home. Similarly, it is perceived by parents that with limited resources, they cannot support the education of all the children, so it's the eldest girl child who is made to sacrifice. When interviewed, these girls showed interest in becoming government officials and wanted to continue studying.

4.4. Other Factors

24% of the girls who participated in the research now attend school out of all the participants from the slum areas. Ninety percent of them are between 12-15 years. A small percentage of people above the age of 15 attend school. When asked about their reasons for not going to school, about 85% of girls stated that their parents face financial problems and they help their parents with household work and sometimes even their occupational work. 15% of the girls left school after attaining the age of 15. Another major reason that could be seen was menstruation. About 17% of the girls missed going to school because of menstruation.

Most of the girls from the ages of 15-18 years were thought to believe that even if they went to school, there would not much benefit as after some time their parents would get them married and all they'll be left to do is household work and raise children just like their mother. Some girls above the age of 15 who go to school want to study further. However, they said that their parents continue to face challenges financially and that they have little hope of continuing their education along with the fact that they also participate in domestic duties as both of their parents can go out and earn for them.

Another reason they stated was the conveyance problem. It became difficult for them to spend daily money on local conveyance facilities to attend school. The total amount they spent per day on local conveyance could provide them with a person's one time meal which meant a lot to them. When asked whether their parents have proposed the idea of getting married, 78% of girls aged 16 and above answered yes. One of the 18-year-olds got married only a few months ago and is also in her early pregnancy. 86% of the total participants agreed that they have no right to make decisions about their future, and it solely depends on their parents as early marriage is common in their areas.

The study showed that the most challenging factor for the girls of slum areas in accessing education is indulging in household works and helping their parents in their occupational work especially if their mothers are maids and go to work in other houses.

Table 2. Factor: Household works.

Parameters	Age (Years)	Answers	Percentage
Indulge in household works.	14 Dec	Yes	45
		No	30
		Sometimes	25
	15-17	Yes	78
		No	0
		Sometimes	22
	18-20	Yes	94
		No	0
		Sometimes	6
Indulge in occupational works.	14 Dec	Yes	4
		No	94
		Sometimes	2
	15-17	Yes	52
		No	16
		Sometimes	32
	18-20	Yes	86
		No	6
		Sometimes	8

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Table 2 exhibits the fact that the girls aged between 17-20 years were the most engaged ones in the household work. 86% of girls helped their parents in their occupational work.

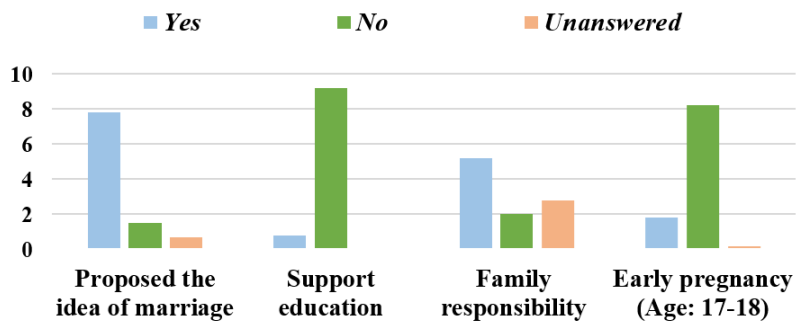

Figure 2. Factor: Cultural beliefs.

Figure 2 shows that about 92% of the parents of these girls do not support the idea of education. The majority of the girls living in slum areas don't seek education as they think that it will do no wonders for them or their families; instead, it's just a waste of time and money.

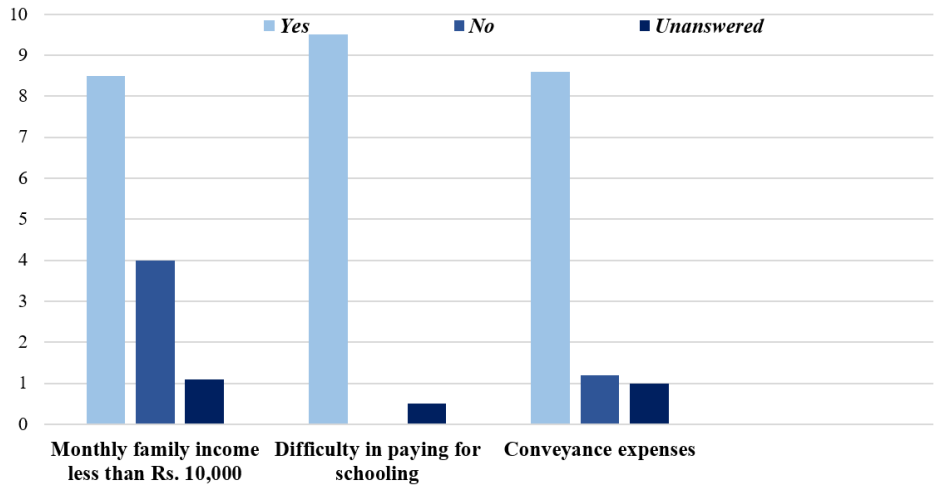

Figure 3. Factor: Financial problems.

Figure 3 shows that 85% of the families living in slum areas earn less than Rs. 10,000 per month. They already face a lot of financial problems to begin with, and educating their children rarely gets on their priority list. Most of these parents also do not send their girls to school because of additional local conveyance expenses.

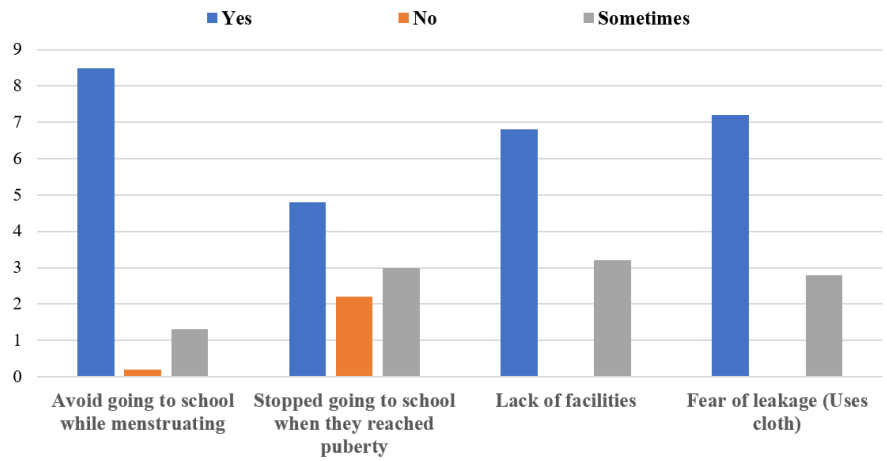

Figure 4. Factor: Menstruation.

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Figure 4 shows another major challenge the girls in slum areas face in accessing education is menstruation. About 37% of girls missed school because of menstruation. A lack of facilities to manage their menstruation caused 48% of girls to leave school.

Many girls from slum regions attend schools and many of them drop out. The highest number of dropouts can be seen in the upper standards, i.e., from the age of 14-15 years. Four major causes can be seen contributing to early dropouts of girls. The first is indulging in household work and helping parents financially. As girls start to get older, their parents are most likely to want them to do work and help them financially instead of wasting money on education which they'll leave soon. About 24% of the dropouts are caused by household factors.

The second reason is *financial problems*. With low-income levels and the responsibility of the family members, educating children, especially girls doesn't seem to be on the priority list of parents. Schooling costs are even sometimes also associated with the gender of the children as parents become unwilling to pay schooling fees for their daughters because they know that their daughters will get married and won't live with them forever anyway. Another financial parameter that is considered is the fact that education in India is free and compulsory till the age of 14, and after that, parents do have to pay some amount to the school for their education. 15-18% of families dropout of their girls because of financial problems. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many families had to put a pause to their work resulting in no daily wages for them. Most of them had to survive on their savings. When the pandemic was over, about 38% of the girls left schools and started to help their parents in their occupational work. A 16-year-old lost her father during the pandemic. She helps her mother financially by working with her as a maid and has taken responsibility for her siblings along with her mother.

The third major cause of early dropouts of girls is *menstruation*. According to a survey, 23% of girls drop out of school when they hit puberty. Girls in puberty are typically absent for 20% of their school year, the various reasons being pain, fear of leakage, unavailability of feminine facilities, unhygienic washrooms, etc. Missing five days of school every month impacts educational outcomes, leading to poor academic performance and low learning, further leading to high dropout rates among girls.

The fourth primary reason that was seen during the study was early *marriage*. When girls reach puberty, their parents consider it the right time for their marriage and tend to prepare for their marriage instead of continuing their schooling.

Many parents discourage their daughters from receiving even a primary education because they believe that there is no use in educating them when all they will need to do in the future is take care of the housework and provide for their family. About 21% of the girls' dropout of schools in their early years of education because of early marriage. Another cultural factor that can be seen is more *preference for son*. A lot of families consider the son's education over their daughters as the future responsibility of the family is on the male counterpart and the girls will leave the home after marriage. Some of the girls are even not allowed to work and their families consider them a burden on their already tight budget; hence, the only priority is to get them married.

Teenage pregnancy also contributes as one of the reasons for early dropouts. According to the *National Family Health Survey* (Pedgaonkar et al., 2021) it can be analysed that 4% of girls from the age of 15-19 have already begun childbearing, i.e., they either already had a live birth or are pregnant with their first child. The proportion rises from 1% at age 17 to 5% at age 18 and almost 13% at age 19.

The dropout rate at the upper primary level is about 2.26% whereas when we move towards the secondary level it increases to 10.8%. At the higher secondary level, the dropout rate is 15.54%. School attendance is 85% at age 12-14 years but drops sharply to 68% at age 15- 17 years.

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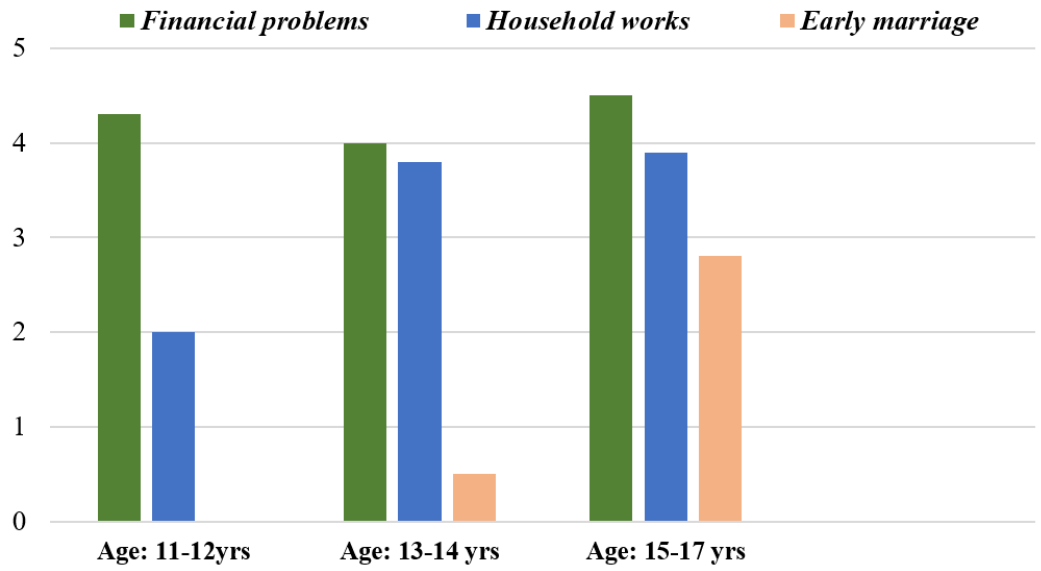

Figure 5. Major reasons for dropouts according to age.

Figure 5 shows the reasons for dropouts. According to age, financial problems are always a significant concern, and growing household work and early marriage contribute to the dropout rate.

4.5. Description of Responses Given by Government School Girls

To answer one of the research questions about the current status of education in government schools, girls from classes IX-XII, i.e., from 14-19 years participated in 2 government schools in Jaipur. The study yielded the following results:

The girls aged 16 were the highest in number constituting 38% of the total participants followed by 17-year-olds constituting 32%. Most of the fathers were educated to higher secondary level and some graduated. Their occupations varied from being a labourer or an auto driver to a few being government school teacher.

The educational qualification of most mothers was up to middle school with a few of them up to secondary level or higher secondary level. Only 2% of them graduated. 88% of the mothers were housewives, the rest being either laborers or maids. 36.8 % of the families had a monthly family income of Rs. 10,000 or less. About 85% of the families had 5 family members and above with at least 3-4 children at home. The study showed that from the total number of children at home at least 1 child did not go to school and most were girls.

When asked whether all the girls in the family attend school, 46% answered no. 41.2% of girls agreed that their parents face financial problems in paying for schooling and other related items. About 37.4% of the girls were engaged in household chores and 21.6% also helped their parents in their occupational work. One of the 17-year-old from the slum area who goes to one of these schools says that:

> *"I lost my father during COVID-19 and my mother's health isn't good most of the time. I have the responsibility of my grandmother and my 2 siblings. I go to school in the morning and work in evening to help my mother. But since the school reopened in January, I haven't attended a single class because of my family's poor condition. I dream of becoming an I.P.S officer one day and working for the girls just like me who want to go to school and help their parents in the future."*

The study also showed that about 32.8 % of the parents have already proposed the idea to their daughters of them getting married. About 78.3% of the parents support the idea of education and understand the importance of education. Some girls weren't sure if their parents would allow them to study further or not. When asked the reason for it, they said that their parents take decisions on their behalf and it's less likely for them to continue their education as they get married early in their community.

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The study also revealed that the resources and study materials were easily available to most of them but if they are too late in collecting the materials or if they get stolen, they become unavailable and they have to purchase them from the market at a lot higher cost. *One of the major problems faced by more than 65% of the girls in government schools is the conveyance problems.* About 31.7% of the girls travel 4 km and above every day to school.

The expense of local conveyance every day adds a lot of pressure on the ones who already have a tight budget. The majority of the girls felt the need to have extracurricular activities in the school like having different sports and games in school along with at least one class of dance or yoga in a week. Students of the co-ed school also complained about the improper sitting arrangement and lack of tables as some of them had to share their table with another student.

When asked about the suggestions on anything they feel like the school should improvise on, the two major suggestions by the students were either a proper sitting arrangement or a good playground in the school. Some of them wanted their school to provide them a good library, NCC and arts and crafts classes. The major problems faced by the girls of the all-girls school in Malviya Nagar were unclean and unhygienic washrooms and the unavailability of sanitary napkins.

About 88.7% of the girls agreed that the washrooms were not clean at all and didn't have proper water facilities especially drinking water. 76.5% of the girls also wanted their school to provide them with sanitary napkins on a regular basis. One of the things that the researcher noted in the school was that the students were going out of the school in the market during their lunch time. Other students said that more discipline should be there in the school for this reason.

Another thing the researcher noted was that many of the students as well as teachers weren't wearing their masks showing a lack of discipline. Other suggestions made by the students were cleanliness in the school on a regular basis and various competitions should be held in school regularly along with some computer classes. Some also said quiz-based learning should also be there in the school.

Both the schools took online classes during COVID-19 through WhatsApp. Groups were made on WhatsApp and the teachers made videos of the respective lectures and sent them to the groups. The study also showed that about 93.04% of the students also use YouTube and the Internet for studying and learning concepts.

The various things that the students mentioned for their school to do or improvise in are discussed below in the form of a chart.

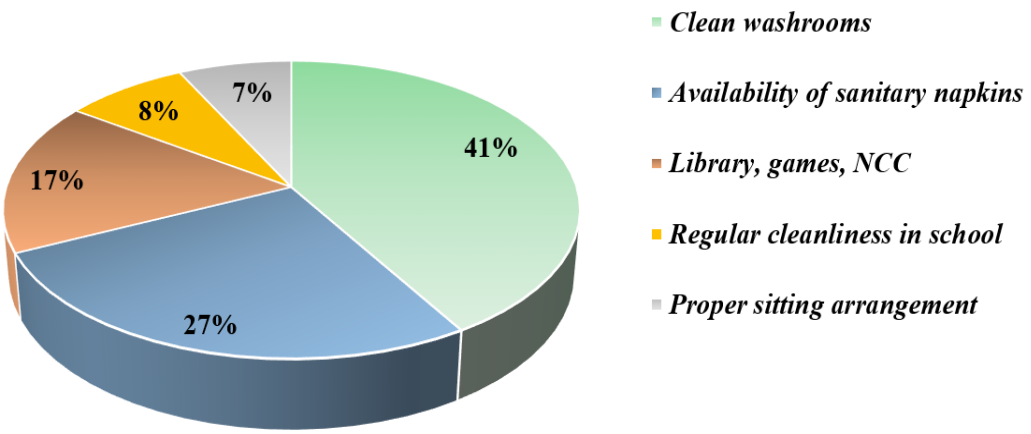

Figure 6. Suggestions given by girls of government schools.

Figure 6 shows the suggestions from the girls of government schools. Notably, clean washrooms are the deepest concern with 41% followed by the availability of sanitary napkins being the second highest concern and sitting arrangements being the last at 7%.

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4.6. Push Factors Turning to Pull Factors for Dropouts

Repeated failure, poor grades, bullying, and lack of proper facilities at school contribute to the push factors, while marriages, disability, illness, household work and lack of parental support become the pull factors (Dutta & Smita, 2020).

4.7. Pratham NGO

Pratham is a non-governmental organization started in 1995 to improve the country's education quality. There are three centers in Pratham in the Jaipur district. The girls who get enrolled in the NGO are the ones who dropped out of school and left education due to various reasons like failing in a class not being supported by parents due to poor financial conditions, long distance, household chores, etc. When these girls grow up and want to continue their education, they feel shy and easily embarrassed about going to school and studying and gaining education with younger girls. Pratham aims at providing education to these girls free of cost. No age limit is specified for the girls.

They can enroll at any age and start learning even basic concepts according to the knowledge they have gained. They provide these women with a foundation course for 2 months. The foundation course includes basic subjects like English, Mathematics, and Hindi. The students first learn and understand these basic subjects and their concepts and then study further. The students have to pass a series of tests for these subjects to evaluate their performance to get promoted for the next learning session according to their qualifications. If the student qualifies for the test, the NGO prepares them for appearing for the Class X examination. The learning process is the same as it goes in any other school. Even if the women don't have prior knowledge or have forgotten what they learnt before , Pratham aims to prepare them for Class X examination so that they can attain a certain level of educational qualification. After qualifying the Class X, 80-90% of the girls get admission for higher education. Some of these women from Pratham also work and help their families financially. They can also teach young children at the Pratham institution and earn a certain amount. All the study material is being provided by Pratham only. At present, 132 girls are enrolled in Pratham in the Jaipur district. During COVID-19, the teachers also took online classes and later switched to a hybrid teaching mode.

5. ANALYSIS

The study's main aim was to understand the various challenges faced by the girls of slum areas in accessing education. The research has considered the main dimensions contributing to these girls' significant challenges. The four major factors that surfaced during the study were economic, household, cultural, and menstruation.

85% of the families living in slum areas have a monthly family income of less than Rs. 10,000 which restricts them to various luxuries of life, one of them being education. Most of these families have at least 5 family members, leaving them with a lot of responsibility and poor financial status. Schooling costs and conveyance expenses are the primary financial reasons for not sending the girls to school. Parents of girls in slum areas tend to have the mindset that education is just a waste of time and money and they get married and leave the house anyway. The source of income of most of these families are from daily wages and for most of them education is not the priority. During COVID-19, many of them lost their work and had to restart again.

About 80% of girls aged 16 years living in slum areas engage themselves in household chores. If the mother also goes out to earn, the girl in the house tends to take responsibility for her siblings and do the majority of household work.

Many of the girls even help their parents with their occupational work. If their mothers go out to work, their daughters are likely to join them at an early age. One of the major challenges that girls in slum areas face in accessing education is indulging in household work.

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The cultural dimension can be seen in the following three aspects: *cultural beliefs*, *early marriage*, *teenage pregnancy*. Various cultural norms and beliefs restrict girls from gaining an education. The most prevalent of them is that girls are only meant to do the household chores take care of children and prepare meals for their families with little or no right to decision-making.

Early marriage is also one of the most common dimensions in preventing girls from receiving education. When girls attain puberty, parents reckon it is time for them to get married and tend to arrange for their marriage instead of sending them to school.

Some parents think that in the future, all their daughter has to do is get married, so they don't even get their daughters to complete their primary education. Early marriages lead to teenage pregnancy and close the door to education forever. It has been discovered that 4% of girls from the age of 15-19 years have already begun childbearing.

Menstruation is one of the biggest challenges faced by girls in gaining access to education. 23% of girls drop out of school when they reach puberty. A girl is absent for about 20% of the school year and avoids going to school while menstruating because of reasons like fear of leakage, using clothes, and unavailability of other feminine facilities. Missing five days per month affects their school life and further impacts their educational outcomes. All these factors are also the dimensions contributing to dropouts.

Feminine facilities like *hygienic washrooms* and *adequate availability of sanitary napkins* should *regularly* be taken care of in government schools. These are the basic things in any school that should be done and made available to all without any doubt.

The government has taken several initiatives to improve the quality of education in India encouraging more and more children and their parents to pursue education. Some of them are as follows: 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009', mid-day meal schemes, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Chief Minister Rajshree Yojana which aims at educating and empowering girl children by providing their parents with financial assistance at different stages and *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*. Even after these governmental schemes and awareness programs, many girls are still far from receiving an education.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study delved into the numerous challenges that girls living in slum areas face in accessing education leading to high dropout rates. The research identified four primary factors contributing to these issues: household responsibilities, financial constraints, cultural beliefs, and menstruation-related challenges. The diverse factors identified during the research are household factors (household chores and occupational work), financial factors (low financial status, schooling costs, and conveyance expenses), cultural factors (cultural beliefs, early marriage and teenage pregnancy), *and menstruation (fear of leakage and lack of feminine facilities)***.** Basic feminine facilities like hygienic washrooms, proper water facilities, proper sanitation, and sanitary napkins should be taken care of in the government school. There are still so many girls left behind who haven't even completed their upper primary or secondary education although the government and other NGOs have taken several steps towards the encouragement of girl child education. Women's empowerment is possible only when the women of our society are independent and actively participate in decision-making which is only achievable through education.

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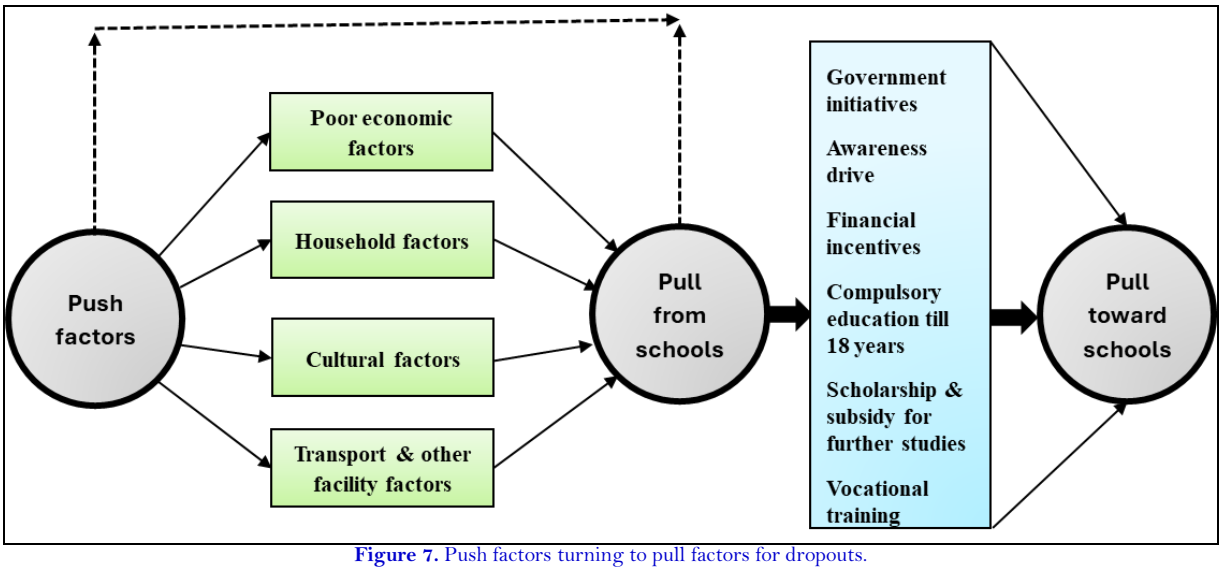

Figure 7. Push factors turning to pull factors for dropouts.

Figure 7 illustrates how "push factors" hindering girls' education such as economic and cultural barriers can be transformed into "pull factors" that promotes education through government interventions and societal awareness efforts. Both government and society play crucial roles in driving this change.

The government should focus more on the slum areas. The government has made numerous policies for rural areas but has neglected the slum areas in the urban cities. Slum areas should also become the mainstream focus of the government when it comes to framing and implementing policies. Lack of awareness and the existence of various cultural beliefs have held many school-age girls from accessing education. A lot of dropouts can be seen among girls when they reach the age of 15. According to the Right to Education Act (RTE), the government provides free and compulsory education to all till the age of 14. But after that, the parents have to pay for schooling and other related fees. The difficulty paying school fees makes them drop their children out of school. The government can also work to provide conveyance facilities to girls only within the school. Thus, education should be available to all, free of cost, until the age of 18. NGOs like Pratham are much needed to eradicate illiteracy and the dependency of females on male counterparts of the family and make them independent.

The national Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog has recommended several measures to enhance the gross enrolment ratio of girl children in schools in India. These include:

1. Providing incentives and scholarships to girls who complete their education.
2. Sustained campaigns and programs promoting girls' education and creating awareness about its importance.
3. Creating a supportive school environment for girls, including separate toilets, safe transportation, and female teachers.
4. Strengthening the education infrastructure in rural areas and economically weaker sections to enable greater access to education.
5. Encouraging participation from local communities, parents, and NGOs to promote girls' education. We can encourage more girls from slums and vulnerable areas to enroll in school and help them receive the education they deserve by implementing these measures.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.
Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the IIS (Deemed to be University), India has granted approval for this study on 26 November 2021 (Ref. No. IISU/2021-22/RPC/19295).
Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.
Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Authors' Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Appendix 1 presents a questionnaire on qualitative data to capture responses from girls in slum areas.

Appendix 1. Interview guide.

	S.No.	Questions
Personal details	1	School
	2	Age
	3	Class
	4	No. of family members
	5	No. of children at home
	6	How many of them are girls?
	7	Does everyone go to school ?
	8	Monthly family income
	9	Father's occupation
	10	Mother's occupation
	11	Educational qualification of father
	12	Educational qualification of mother
Economic factor	13	How much your monthly average schooling cost ?
	14	Does your parents face any financial problem while paying for your school ?
Household factor	15	Do you indulge in any household work ?
	16	Do you help your parents in their occupational work ?
Thoughts on higher education	17	Do you enjoy coming to school ?
	18	Do you want to study further ?
	19	What do you want to become in future ?
	20	Have your parents proposed the idea of getting married in the near future ?
	21	Does your parents support the idea of higher education ?
Books and conveyance	22	How much is the distance from your home to school ?
	23	Do you have a conveyance problem ?
Teaching factor	24	How many teachers are there in your school?
	25	How many of them are male teachers ?
	26	Does any teacher teach more than one subject ?
	27	Are there any abusive teachers ?
	28	How regular are the teachers in school ?
	29	Quality of teaching -
	30	Do the teachers ask money from your parents to promote you ?
Proper facilities	31	Are there any extra curricular activities in the school ?
	32	Is there sufficient space in the classrooms ?
	33	Are the washrooms clean ?
	34	Is there proper electricity?
	35	Is the school overcrowded ?
	36	Does your school provide mid-day meal ?
Other means of teaching	37	Do the teachers use any other means of teaching like using projectors or charts ?
	38	Did your school take online classes during COVID ?
	39	Do you take tuition or use any online means to study ?
Suggestions	40	Any other thing you would like your school to do or improve ?

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