

Glass Ceiling Effect among the Graduating Girls

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Abstract

The glass ceiling effect remains a significant barrier to higher education for women globally, with unique challenges featured in specific regions of India. This study investigates the glass ceiling effect on higher education of graduating girls in Odisha, a major State in eastern India. The study aims to understand the glass ceiling in terms of resource distribution and participation, addressing how cultural, family, individual, and socio-economic barriers impact girls' pursuit of higher education. This study was conducted following phenomenological research design amongst the graduating girls across the State of Odisha, where data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions with 30 postgraduate female students of Ravenshaw University, Cuttack and Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar. The findings of this study reveal that the major factors affecting girls' education adversely in coastal Odisha are transportation issues, cultural norms, challenges in coeducational settings, gender discrimination, parental attitudes, inadequate infrastructure, lack of security, superstitions, socio-economic conditions, and violence against women. The study emphasizes the need for policy interventions to create a more equitable educational environment for women in Odisha in particular and in India in general.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling Effect, Higher Education, Graduating Girls, Academic Success, Empowerment

Introduction

The glass ceiling effect, a metaphorical barrier preventing women from attaining the highest level of professional and academic success, remains a significant issue in many sectors, including higher education. Despite some progression in gender equality, female students still face unique challenges as they approach higher education and transition into the workforce. This barrier, widely studied and taught in educational institutions, refers to invisible obstructions preventing women and minorities from reaching top-level positions (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). Coined by Marilyn Loden in 1978 and popularized by Bryant in 1984, the glass ceiling encompasses various career advancement obstacles. These obstacles are more intangible compared to barriers like education or experience, yet they are frequently mentioned in literature and observed anecdotally (Pothuraju & Alekhya, 2021). Factors contributing to the glass ceiling include cultural norms, family obligations, and gender stereotypes (Kochar & Venkateswaran, 2021).

These barriers can be categorized into individual, organizational, and social obstacles (Hancock et al., 2018). Individual barriers include multiple roles and personal preferences. Social barriers involve occupational discrimination and stereotypes against women (Janus, 2008; Lemon, 2003; Wrigley, 2002). Culturally, traditional views still dominate, with women expected to prioritize household responsibilities over education and careers, despite changing societal attitudes (Prasad, 2018). Socially, gender discrimination persists, affecting women's career advancement and opportunities (Lee, 2002; Jabbar & Imran, 2013; Abbas et al., 2021). Organizational barriers further compound these issues, with biases in curriculum, role assignment, and participation in activities, as well as a reluctance to invest in women's professional development due to traditional perceptions and multitasking roles (Chauhan & Kumar, 2022). In India, some women can be seen in high-ranking positions, but the status of ordinary women remains inferior, reflecting a persistent historical trend of women being treated as less important than men. The glass ceiling is a global issue, with varying intensity across countries. The glass ceiling significantly hinders girls' higher education nationwide. Religious, legal, and economic factors perpetuate gender discrimination in both developing and developed nations.

Despite equal opportunities, women still struggle to advance due to the glass ceiling, facing similar challenges in emerging countries like India (Yadav & Khanna, 2014). This

study was conducted following phenomenological research design amongst the graduating girls across the State of Odisha, where data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions with 30 postgraduate female students of Ravenshaw University, Cuttack and Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar. Several verbatims are mentioned in this paper to substantiate the facts related to the girls participation in higher education. This study aims to explore the glass ceiling effect in the education sector, using education as a tool for fundamental change in women's status.

This study examines its impact, suggests improvements, and explores factors responsible for its persistence in Odisha's higher education, which impede girls from advancing academically despite their qualifications and achievements. Further, this study underlines the importance of addressing these barriers to ensure equal opportunities for all students in academia and beyond.

Related Research and Literature

The empirical studies related to the glass ceiling include the nature of the glass ceiling effect at the global level and in the context of India. Globally, numerous studies have identified significant barriers, such as discriminatory laws, inadequate facilities, and gender biases, which hinder women's professional growth and leadership opportunities. This is evident in research conducted in various countries including Turkey, Pakistan, Sweden, and the United States, where women continue to face substantial obstacles in their career advancement. Mert (2021) in his study, identified a persistent glass ceiling effect in Turkish schools, where paternalistic leadership failed to support female teachers. Akkaya (2020) found significant barriers preventing women from becoming senior managers in educational institutions. Waqar, Khan, and Ullah (2019) highlighted discriminatory laws and inadequate facilities hindering Pakistani female faculty from achieving top positions. Similarly, Abbas and Ashiq (2021) also discovered that perceived discrimination and a male-dominated culture significantly hindered women's career advancement in Pakistani higher education. Uysal and Murat (2020) observed that the glass ceiling strongly impacted entrepreneurial creativity among Turkish female employees, particularly in the public sector. Ayub et al. (2019) observed that both glass ceiling and personal barriers hinder professional growth for women in Pakistan. Despite increasing numbers due to international scholarships, Khokhar (2018) reported a lack of women in higher leadership roles in Pakistani universities. Strom and Burvall (2018) found that while interests influenced Swedish female students' career ambitions,

perceptions of the glass ceiling did not. Madera (2017) revealed persistent gender inequality and a masculinized culture in higher education. Hancock et al. (2018) reported that female sports management students perceived significant career barriers, unlike their male counterparts. Wood (2016) identified ongoing gender equity issues, including workplace bullying and lack of work-life balance, among female faculty. Joseph (2014) found that women leaders in Adventist higher education institutions faced few barriers. Ballengers (2010) identified persistent barriers such as lack of mentors and gender inequalities for women in higher education leadership. Beck (2003) revealed that women in administrative roles had more support than female faculty, who experienced subtle sex discrimination.

In the Indian scenario, studies highlight issues such as early marriage, financial constraints, household responsibilities, and workplace harassment as major barriers to women's higher education and professional development. Studies have also pointed out the significant impact of family barriers and a male-dominated culture on women's career progression in India. So far as the Indian context is concerned, Chauhan and Kumar (2022) revealed the various challenges faced by female students in higher education in Haridwar, identifying gender biases, early marriage, financial issues, and household chores as major barriers. Gupta and Khandelwal (2021) found that the glass ceiling barriers in Indian educational institutions limited women's dynamic contributions. Khochar and Venkateswaran (2021) identified family barriers as significant factors contributing to the glass ceiling in Haryana's education sector. Pothuraju and Alekhya (2021) highlighted gender stereotyping and cultural considerations as major obstacles for women in Telangana's higher educational institutions. Prasad (2018) found that the glass ceiling significantly affected the career development of female executives in Odisha's private sector. Sahoo (2016) reported that poor parental attitudes, lack of infrastructure, and socio-economic conditions impeded girls' education at the elementary and secondary levels in India. Sharma and Sehrawat (2014) confirmed that the glass ceiling persists in modern Indian society, unaffected by age, education, position, or income among female faculty in private universities.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to discover the facts related to the glass ceiling effect among graduating girls in Odisha in terms of resource distribution and participation in higher education.

Operational defenations of key term

Glass Ceiling Effect: Originally the glass ceiling effect is a metaphor used to disclose the barriers on the ways of women life. Here in this research, it refers to the invisible barrier that impedes girls from getting higher education as per their interest and needs.

Higher Education: Higher education refers to the education after higher secondary education. Here in this study higher education means post graduating girls of Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar and Ravenshaw University, Cuttack.

Resource Distribution: Here in this study "Resource distribution" refers to the investment in terms of fees, books and electronic gadgets with respect to the girls' education by their families.

Participation: Participation means the action of taking part in something. Here in this study, it refers to girls given with the opportunity in academic ladder such as choosing course and programme, institutions, cultural event and sports etc. according to their needs and interest.

Delimitation of the Study

The present study is delimited to Post Graduating girl's students of Rama Devi Women's University and Ravenshaw University, Odisha, of the academic year 2021-23 and 2022-24 only.

Methodology

This study was conducted following Phenomenological research design, where data was collected from 30 postgraduate female students of Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, and Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar. 30 postgraduate female students were selected through purposive sampling technique where 15 respondents are from Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, and 15 from Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule and focus group discussions, then analyzed through codification, content analysis, and thick description techniques.

Result

The present study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of support and barriers experienced by girls in their pursuit of higher education. The aim was to explore the various factors influencing their educational journey, including family support, institutional challenges, and personal aspirations. Several critical themes emerged through a comprehensive analysis of the responses, highlighting the enabling and constraining elements in the girls' educational and professional pathways.

Most of the graduating participants, except P14, told that their families supported them economically with regard to their requirements despite many challenges impoverished economic condition. Although there seems to have a little bias in terms of siblings, elder siblings have been supported more profoundly, but still the financial support was never withdrawn. Mentally, socially and physically like they are giving sound environments, freedom to choose their career, motivation for growing academically. Their families never created any discouraging situations for them.

For a girl, to pursue education, it is extremely important to have the family's support. My parents are supportive, no doubt, but their thoughts or the mindset is stuck that a girls' education is just enough in terms of literacy; holding an honorable position in any kind of sectors is just not necessary. They believe that a girl should be educated for the sake of teaching or educating her kids. Apart from all the said reasons, they also believe that the sum of money expended on the girls' education can better be saved for her marriage and after that, her in-laws may decide on providing education to her. From childhood to till now, I have got a very good support (Financially, Physically and Mentally). From my family, when they got know about my flying marks and good positions in my respective educational institutions, which made them support me even more. I have never felt any type of obstacles from my parents and siblings, but somehow, my grandparents show extra concern towards me as I am a girl, which upsets me some time, but I realize that they are too concerned about me that how I will live all alone far from them.

Few girls narrated that their families mind set is extremely conservative. They believe that the ultimate aim of girl's life is marriage rather their knowledge and they think that girls are burden to them and holding respectable position in any kind of sectors is not necessary. They also believe that the sum of money expended on the girls' education can better be saved for her marriage and after that, her in-laws may decide on providing education to her.

For a girl, to pursue education, it is extremely important to have the family's support. My parents are supportive, no doubt, but their thoughts or the mindset is stuck that a girls' education is just enough in terms of literacy; holding respectable position in any kind of sectors is just not necessary..... they believe that a girl should be educated for the sake of teaching or educating her kids. Apart from all the said reasons, they also believe that the sum of money expended on the girls' education can better be saved for her marriage and after that, her in-laws may decide on providing education to her..... ”

My family supported me only financially but mentally they are not supporting because I'm belonging to scheduled tribe community. It is a belief that girls must get married after completion of +2 or +3. I always wanted to doing higher education and becoming financially independent but my family is not giving this opportunity. The mindset of my family is extremely conservative as they think the ultimate aim of girl's life is marriage no matter how highly educated the girls are....., They supported me financially but not morally”.

The study narrates that the girl respondents were interested in humanities, languages, journalism and mass communication and they got fully support from their parents. Their families are providing them all opportunities to turn their dream in to reality.

I get enough opportunity to making my carrier through higher education as per my interest. I always wanted to do masters in Journalism and mass communication and I'm doing it right now. Yes, initially it was difficult to persuade them for humanities but at the end they agreed and till now they allow me to proceed accordingly. yes, I have always been interested in literature and English language in general ever since I was in school, my parents, even though sceptic, allowed me to pursue English literature..... ”.

The girl respondents were not allowed for the technical studies as per their interest rather they were allowed to the higher studies but not common in every society. Although the girls got opportunity to choose their own career decision regarding higher education but not in their own interest area. They were bounded in a rule which they have to follow for pursuing their higher interests.

No, I have not got opportunity to choose my career as per my interest. During my career starting point I got confused and entered to NEET(UG) preparation after +2 Science, although I never assess my capabilities. Then after 2 years of drop I came to Int. BA B.Ed. programme because the course was on demand, but I was not sure whether I had interest in it or not.yes, I have got this opportunity to make career my higher education but did not get the opportunity to choose courses as per my interest. I am pursuing PG in

this subject because my brother think that this is good for me...". I get opportunity to pursuing higher education but did not get opportunity to make my carrier as per my interest because I'm interested in technical education. My parents are told me that going for teacher profession because it is suitable job for girls.....".

The study states that the girls were interested for the extra-curricular activities but due to their studies and busy schedule they could not follow them. Some of the girls attempted to participate extra-curricular activities within the restricted time. Some of the girls were active on their school days but could not do the same for their busy classes. Some of the girls are interested and selected for national and international levels but due to their parent's hesitation, they could not follow their dreams for such curricular activities.

Yes, I take part in extracurricular activities. I like yoga, meditation, art, singing and craft work. I take part in cooperative work with my friends. List of these craft work fell me most attractive. I like to take part in activities such as debate, and also attending seminars which are helps me to know about what is happening around the world or to up-to-date with society....." I take part in extracurricular activities to improve my academic performance. I like yoga, meditation, art and craft, indoor games, music, dance, public speaking, sports etc. This considered part of a well-rounded education in my life. Because I did not get scope and classes are never suspended for any extracurricular activities.

The study found that the families of the girls have encouraged them to choose teaching as a profession because this profession is suitable and safe for the girls and they are not much interested or encourage them to choose any other professions like law, technical courses because they feel that it may not safe or secure profession for girls for their future propose. Due to lack of encouragement, financial conditions, proper guidance girls are choosing the humanities by chance. All participants of the study reported that they are facing barriers at the institutional level.

The study reveals the career interests and opportunities available to female respondents. It shows that many girls are interested in humanities, languages, journalism, and mass communication, receiving full parental support to pursue these fields. Their families provided all the necessary opportunities to help turn these dreams into reality. However, a notable trend emerged where female respondents were often not allowed to pursue technical studies despite their interests, bound by societal rules limiting their academic interests. There was a notable difference between urban and rural families; urban families

were more open to diverse career choices for their daughters, whereas rural families tended to restrict options to traditionally “safe” professions. The study also highlighted that while some girls expressed a strong interest in STEM fields, but they were discouraged by their families due to perceived gender roles and societal expectations. Families generally encouraged girls to choose teaching as a profession, considering it suitable and safe. They were less supportive of professions like law or technical courses. As a result of this lack of encouragement, financial constraints, and inadequate guidance, many girls opted for humanities by default rather than by choice. Societal perceptions played a significant role, with many families viewing non-traditional careers for girls with skepticism, further limiting their professional choices. The study found that girls are interested in turning their passions into professions in various fields, such as professional sports, dance academies, modelling, gardening, writing, teaching, painting, poetry, singing, plantation, cooking, and becoming beauticians. However, middle-class families found it challenging to support careers in these fields. Financial conditions and parental choices often dictated professional paths, preventing girls from pursuing their passions. The lack of time, exposure, and platforms made it difficult for girls to consider turning their passions into professions. Societal expectations and pressure to choose conventional and “safe” careers further limited the pursuit of passion-driven professions. The study states that girls are interested in extracurricular activities, but busy schedules due to higher studies limited their participation. Some managed to balance both, though it was challenging. Some girls were selected for national and international levels in extracurricular activities, but parental hesitation prevented them from pursuing these opportunities fully. A few respondents indicated that they were able to excel in extracurricular activities during school but had to abandon them due to the increased academic pressure in higher education. Participation in extracurricular activities are also influenced by the availability of facilities and opportunities, which are significantly lower in rural areas compared to urban centres. Institutional barriers are found to be quite profound among the graduating girls. They clearly reported facing barriers at the institutional level, including disrespectful behaviour from teachers towards girls, resulting in fear, loss of self-confidence, and limited career counselling. Higher education institutions often lacked adequate infrastructure, including laboratories, classrooms, toilets, and hostels, and did not offer sufficient non-scholastic activities to enhance practical knowledge and skills.

Language barriers also posed significant challenges. Institutional support services, such as counselling and mentorship programs, were often inadequate, leaving girls without the

necessary support to navigate academic challenges. Some institutions had rigid rules and regulations that disproportionately affected female students, further hindering their academic progress. Institutions provided good security and took responsibility for the girls, but free movement and healthcare facilities are inadequate. Many girls reported feeling unsafe while travelling, in markets, and even on campus. Hostels had strict rules and regulations for girls, and sanitation and healthcare facilities are poorly maintained, with issues related to toilets, food, and water purifiers. Some respondents highlighted the lack of female staff in security and healthcare roles, which exacerbated feelings of insecurity and discomfort. The study also noted the need for better mental health support services within institutions to address the psychological impacts of safety concerns.

The study revealed that societal barriers to girls' higher education include gender stereotypes, lack of parental support, child marriage, domestic workload, health issues, sexual abuse, transportation problems, co-educational issues, financial constraints, gender discrimination at home, family illiteracy, cultural norms, lack of residential facilities, distance from educational institutions, and increasing incidents of violence. Cultural norms and expectations placed heavy restrictions on girls, with many being pressured to prioritize family responsibilities over education. There are significant regional differences, with rural areas facing more pronounced barriers due to entrenched traditional views and lack of resources. The stigma around girls' education in some communities was so strong that it deterred many from even considering higher education. All respondents agreed that self-silencing prevented them from expressing their points in class and other aspects, creating a gap in interaction with resource persons. This led to fear, loss of self-confidence, and feelings of guilt, resulting in depression and anxiety, affecting their mental peace. Due to self-silencing, girls did not express their thoughts and feelings to their parents, leading to quiet suffering from injustice and inequality. The cultural expectation for girls to remain silent and obedient further reinforced this behaviour, limiting their ability to advocate for themselves or seek help. Self-silencing also impacted their ability to form supportive peer networks, as they are often isolated in their experiences. The study found that urban areas have better facilities and resources for education, such as transportation, network access, coaching centres, and qualified personnel. In contrast, rural areas lacked these resources. Rural areas faced significant challenges, including language barriers, long distances from home to institutions, and lack of interaction with peers, which severely hindered educational opportunities. Girls in rural areas often had to overcome additional hurdles such as limited access to educational materials and internet connectivity, further widening the

educational gap between urban and rural students. Community support systems were stronger in urban areas, providing girls with better networking opportunities and role models compared to rural settings. The study disclosed that the household work burden compelled girls to take serious steps to avoid higher education. The time spent on domestic chores limited their ability to engage in scholastic and non-scholastic activities, restricting their knowledge and skill enhancement. Girls from rural areas and those who were married faced significant difficulties in continuing higher education due to family responsibilities, leading to distractions and hindering academic focus. Domestic work was often prioritized over education, with girls expected to contribute significantly to household duties, leaving little time for studies. Some respondents highlighted the lack of understanding and support from family members regarding the importance of education, further exacerbating the burden of domestic work.

Conclusion

The study has revealed many grave facts by analyzing the experiences and perceptions of graduating girls regarding their participation in higher education and the distribution of resources, particularly in the context of the glass ceiling effect. Historically, gender inequity has deep roots in Indian society, manifesting as the glass ceiling phenomenon within higher education institutions. This study aligns with previous research, which has extensively documented the barriers faced by working women in various professions and the persistent glass ceiling in higher education (Chauhan et.al, 2022; Abbas et.al, 2021; Pothuraju et.al, 2021; Sahoo, 2016).

The study explored the challenges faced by graduating girls encountering gender inequality in higher education, identifying barriers rooted in traditional culture, family, and institutional practices. These include transportation issues, cultural norms, co-educational challenges, gender discrimination, parental attitudes, lack of infrastructure, security concerns, superstitions, socio-economic conditions, violence against women, geopolitical issues, and self-silencing behaviours. Despite economic constraints, many families support their daughters' education; however, conservative beliefs often prioritize marriage over education, especially in rural areas.

Societal norms limit girls' career opportunities to traditionally "safe" professions, and extracurricular activities are often sidelined by academic pressures, particularly in rural areas. Professional education choices are influenced by a lack of encouragement,

financial constraints, and inadequate guidance, leading many girls to default to humanities rather than pursue genuine interests. Societal barriers such as gender stereotypes, child marriage, domestic workload, and health issues, along with institutional barriers like disrespectful teacher behaviour, inadequate infrastructure, and language problems, further impede girls' educational progress.

Urban areas provide more support systems compared to rural areas. Security concerns and inadequate healthcare facilities in educational institutions, along with rigid hostel rules and poor sanitation, create a challenging environment for girls. Cultural expectations of obedience and silence drive self-silencing behaviours, lead to psychological distress. Financial limitations and societal pressures constrain girls from turning their passions into professions, with domestic work significantly hindering their educational pursuits, particularly in rural areas. Based on the study's findings, several measures are suggested to boost the educational and professional prospects for girls.

Family support should be strengthened through community outreach programs and workshops to shift conservative mindsets and prioritize the value of education over early marriage. Schools and colleges need to provide comprehensive career counselling and expand scholarships to support diverse fields, including STEM. Encouraging extracurricular engagement through flexible schedules and parental awareness can help balance academic and extracurricular commitments. Institutions must improve infrastructure, address gender biases through teacher training, and offer robust counselling programs. Societal barriers such as child marriage and domestic workload should be tackled through awareness campaigns and policy interventions while enhancing transportation and safety measures. Comprehensive security and healthcare within educational institutions are crucial for addressing both physical and psychological well-being. Developing platforms for passion-driven careers and redistributing domestic responsibilities can support girls in turning their interests into viable professions. By implementing these measures, stakeholders can foster a more supportive and equitable educational environment, in enabling girls to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential.

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