



E-ISSN: 2789-1615
P-ISSN: 2789-1607
Impact Factor: 5.69
IJLE 2023; 3(1): 228-234
www.educationjournal.info
Received: 06-04-2023
Accepted: 13-05-2023

Muskan Mustaqeem
PhD, CWAS, JMI, New Delhi,
India

Unveiling the literacy crisis: Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on girls' education in rural Gopalganj, Bihar

Muskan Mustaqeem

Abstract

The effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on girls' access to education in the Gopalganj area of Bihar, India, are examined in this study. Concerns about the global spread of COVID-19 have led to its detection in the Gopalganj area of Bihar, India. The education of children, particularly females, is negatively affected by this pandemic. Most of the students impacted by this epidemic are girls from rural areas. These rural girls from low-income families were already at a disadvantage before the epidemic hit, and now they have even less of a chance of getting an education or the tools they need to continue their studies at home. However, no studies were located that focused on rural girls' access to education in the Gopalganj area of Bihar, India, or on COVID-19. To investigate the effect of this pandemic on adolescent girls, this paper employed a primary research methodology, conducting fieldwork in Gopalganj district, Bihar, and carried out open-ended interviews with 50 Adolescent girls aged between 10 to 18 years old. This research paper seeks to shed light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girl child education in Gopalganj, Bihar. By analysing the current situation and exploring the experiences of girls during the pandemic, it aims to provide evidence-based insights to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in formulating targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of the crisis on girl child education. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on education, gender equality, and inclusive development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

Keywords: Literacy crisis, education, student, COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in various sectors worldwide, with education being one of the most profoundly affected areas. In India, where the importance of education for sustainable development has been widely recognized, the pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges, particularly for girl child education^[1]. This research paper aims to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girl child education, focusing on the Gopalganj district in Bihar, India.

India, as a diverse and populous nation, has made substantial progress in education and literacy over the years. However, despite notable advancements, it still faces significant disparities in educational opportunities and access across different states. India's overall literacy rate stood at 77.7%^[2]. While states like Kerala have achieved impressive literacy rates of over 99.0%^[3], regions like Bihar have struggled to match these figures. In Bihar, the literacy rate stands at 69.83%, with a male literacy rate of 70.32% and a female literacy rate of 53.57%. In rural areas, the overall literacy rate is 43.9%, with males having a literacy rate of 57.1% and females at 29.6%. Meanwhile, in urban areas, the total literacy rate is 71.9%, with males having a literacy rate of 79.9% and females at 62.6%^[4]. Bihar, with a lower literacy rate faces unique challenges in promoting education, especially for girls. Within the Bihar states, the literacy rate of Gopalganj district is 53.98% out of which 62.63% males are literate and 45.51% females are literate^[5].

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing educational disparities in India^[6]. The implementation of nationwide lockdowns and the closure of schools and colleges had a profound impact on the education system. This sudden disruption disproportionately affected marginalized groups, including girls, who already faced numerous barriers to education. The closure of schools not only hindered learning opportunities but also exposed girls to increased risks, such as child labour, early marriage, and gender-based violence^[7].

Correspondence Author;
Muskan Mustaqeem
PhD, CWAS, JMI, New Delhi,
India

Education is a fundamental human right that plays a crucial role in individual empowerment and societal development. Investing in girls' education yields significant benefits for communities and nations as a whole. Educated girls are more likely to break the cycle of poverty, contribute to economic growth, improve health outcomes, and promote gender equality. Thus, ensuring access to quality education for the girl child is vital for building a just and prosperous society^[8]. Adolescent girls in Gopalganj encounter various educational issues and hurdles, including limited access to schools, gender-based discrimination, child marriage, and financial constraints. The COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated these challenges, as schools remained closed for an extended period, hindering girls' educational progress^[9] and amplifying their vulnerabilities.

This research paper seeks to shed light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girl child education in Gopalganj, Bihar. By analyzing the current situation and exploring the experiences of girls during the pandemic, it aims to provide evidence-based insights to guide policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in formulating targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of the crisis on girl child education. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on education, gender equality, and inclusive development in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

Objectives of the Research

The specific goals of this research are to

- Analyse the effects of COVID-19 on the education of adolescent girls in the Gopalganj district of Bihar, India.
- Analyse the factors that contribute to the effects of COVID-19 on the education of adolescent girls; and
- Propose potential interventions to enhance the education of adolescent girls in the Gopalganj district of Bihar in the post-COMID-19 era.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address the educational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girl child education, with a specific focus on the Gopalganj district in Bihar, India. By delving into the localized challenges faced by girls during the pandemic, this research contributes to the broader understanding of the consequences of crises on education. The findings of this study will aid in the formulation of targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic on girls' access to education. Moreover, this research holds particular importance in promoting gender equality and empowerment. By shedding light on the specific barriers faced by girls in Gopalganj, Bihar, and the ways in which the pandemic has exacerbated gender disparities, this study emphasizes the urgent need to address these issues. It provides evidence-based insights that can guide the development of policies, programs, and

interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in education and empowering girls to overcome the challenges they face.

Furthermore, the significance of this study extends to its potential to inform policy formulation and implementation. The insights gained from this research will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educational institutions, and NGOs working towards improving girl child education in Gopalganj and similar regions. By understanding the vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, stakeholders can develop comprehensive strategies to ensure the continuity of education and establish support systems that address the unique challenges faced by girls during crises.

Overall, this research contributes to the broader research discourse on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, gender equality, and societal development. By examining the context of Gopalganj, Bihar, it provides a localized perspective that enhances our understanding of the specific challenges faced by girls in accessing education. The findings of this study will not only advance academic knowledge but also provide practical insights for fostering inclusive and equitable educational opportunities, mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic, and promoting sustainable development in the region and beyond.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this research involved a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girl child education in Gopalganj, Bihar. A sample of adolescent girls aged 10 to 18 years old was selected using snowball sampling techniques, ensuring representation from five different villages within the district: Tirbirwa, Takiyan, Yaqoob Takiyan, Nawada, and Inderwan. The data was collected in March 2022 to July 2022. Data collection encompassed household surveys and interviews. Structured questionnaires were used for the surveys, administered through face-to-face interviews with caregivers or family members, capturing information on educational access, learning experiences, and challenges faced. The interviews with the selected girls were conducted in a semi-structured manner, delving into their personal experiences and the specific impact of the pandemic on their education. Ethical considerations were adhered to, with informed consent and assent obtained, and confidentiality ensured. Data analysis involved both qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews and quantitative analysis of the survey responses using descriptive statistics. This mixed-methods approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's impact on girl child education in Gopalganj, facilitating informed policy and intervention strategies to address the educational disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Adolescent Girl from Gopalganj District, Bihar

Table 1: Showing the Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Adolescent Girl from Gopalganj District

Attributes/Statements	(Total=50)		
	Rural	Semi Urban	Urban
Nature of the background (in %)	50 (100)	0	0
Religion (in %)	Hindu	Muslim	Others
	16(32)	34(68)	0

Father's Occupation (in %)	Migrant (domestic/international)	Agriculture	Business owner
	26 (52)	18(36)	6(12)
Mother's Occupation (in %)	Home maker	Working	Runs Bussiness
	50 (100)	0	0
Type of Household (in %)	Concrete House	Mud House	Semi concrete House
	23(46)	12 (24)	15 (30)
No. of children in the Household (excluding respondent) (in %)	Between 1-2	Between 2-4	More than 4
	9 (18)	23 (46)	18(3)6
Father's Income (Per Month and in %)	Below 10000	Between 10000 to 20000	Above 20000
	18 (36)	27 (54)	5 (10)

Calculated by author from Interviews conducted among Girls.

The table 1 provides information on various factors related to the background and characteristics of an interviewed population. The factors include the nature of the background (rural, semi-urban, urban), religion (Hindu, Muslim, others), father's occupation (migrant/domestic or international, agriculture, business owner), mother's occupation (homemaker, working, runs a business), type of household (concrete house, mud house, semi-concrete house), number of children in the household (excluding the respondent), and father's income per month.

It is evident from the table that the distribution of the population of respondents based on the nature of the background and all respondents in the data belong to the rural background, as there are no respondents from semi-urban or urban areas. This indicates that the study or data collection primarily focused on rural communities. Moving on to religion, the majority of the respondents identified as Muslim (68%), followed by Hindus (32%). No respondents identified as belonging to other religions, suggesting a lack of religious diversity in the sampled population.

In terms of father's occupation, the most common occupation among respondents' fathers is migrant work (domestic or international), accounting for 52% of the respondents. Agriculture is the second most prevalent occupation at 36%, while 12% of the fathers are business owners.

Regarding mother's occupation, all respondents' mothers are homemakers, indicating that the majority of women in this population prioritize domestic responsibilities over formal employment or running a business.

Examining the type of households, the largest proportion of households have concrete houses (46%), followed by semi-concrete houses (30%) and mud houses (24%). This distribution suggests a mixture of housing conditions, with a significant proportion of households having access to more durable structures.

Looking at the number of children in the households, it is observed that the highest proportion falls within the range of 2-4 children (46%), followed by more than 4 children (36%), and the smallest proportion has 1-2 children (18%). This implies that larger families are more common in the studied population.

The table presents the distribution of respondents' fathers' income per month in three income categories: below 10,000, between 10,000 and 20,000, and above 20,000. It is mentioned that the total number of respondents is 50. Among the respondents, 18 individuals have fathers with an income below 10,000 per month. This accounts for 36% (18/50) of the total respondents. Additionally, 27 respondents have fathers with an income between 10,000 and 20,000 per month, representing 54% (27/50) of the total respondents. Furthermore, 5 respondents have fathers with an income above 20,000 per month, making up 10% (5/50) of the total respondents. Based on these percentages, It can observe that the majority of respondents (54%) have fathers with incomes between 10,000 and 20,000 per month. A significant proportion (36%) have fathers with incomes below 10,000 per month, while a smaller proportion (10%) have fathers with incomes above 20,000 per month. It is important to note that the income distribution within the population may be influenced by various factors such as the nature of the background, occupation, and other socio-economic aspects. However, without further context or additional data, it is challenging to draw definitive conclusions about the overall income status of the population. The data reveals the distribution of respondents' fathers' income across different income categories. A majority of the respondents fall within the income range of 10,000 to 20,000 per month, while a significant portion has incomes below 10,000. Only a small proportion of respondents have fathers with higher incomes above 20,000 per month.

Table 2: Showing Age and Education of Respondent

Age of respondents (in %) (Total=50)	Between 10 to 12	Between 13 to 14 years	Above 15 years
	15(30)	23(46)	12(24)
Educational level of respondent (in %)	Below Secondary	Secondary	Above Secondary
	6(12)	28(56)	16(32)
Status of education before COVID-19 (in %)	Enrolled and attending	Enrolled but not attending	Dropout
	27 (54)	16 (36)	7 (14)
Reasons for not attending School before COVID-19 (Out of 23, (16+7=23)). (in %)	Lack of financial Resource (poverty)	Increase of responsibilities in the Household	Other reasons like Violence, priority of oy education over girl etc
	10(43.4)	5(21.7)	8 (34.7)
Status of education during COVID-	Enrolled and	Enrolled but not attending	Dropout

19(in %)	attending (online mode)			
	11(22)	19(38)		20(40)
Reasons for not attending School during COVID-19 (out of 39 respondents) (in %)	Lack of financial Resource (poverty)	Increase of responsibilities in the Household	Other reasons like Violence, priority of boy's education over girls etc.	Lack of Digital Resources (Smart phone and Internet Access)
	11 (38.2)	5(12.8)	6 (15.3)	17 (43.5)

Calculated by author from Interviews conducted among Girls.

The provided table presents data on the age of respondents and their corresponding educational levels. The age categories include between 10 to 12 years, between 13 to 14 years, and above 15 years. The educational levels are categorized as below secondary, secondary, and above secondary. Looking at the age distribution, among the respondents, 15 individuals (30%) fall within the age range of 10 to 12 years, 23 individuals (46%) are between 13 to 14 years old, and 12 individuals (24%) are above 15 years old. Moving on to the educational level of the respondents, it is observed that 6 individuals (12%) have an educational level below secondary, 28 individuals (56%) have a secondary level of education, and 16 individuals (32%) have achieved an educational level above secondary.

These findings indicate that the majority of respondents (46%) are between 13 to 14 years old, followed by those above 15 years old (24%), and the smallest group consists of respondents aged 10 to 12 years (30%).

Regarding educational attainment, the highest proportion of respondents (56%) have achieved a secondary level of education. The next largest group consists of individuals with an educational level above secondary (32%), while the smallest group comprises respondents with an educational level below secondary (12%). Based on the available data, the analysis suggests that the majority of respondents are in the age range of 13 to 14 years and have achieved a secondary level of education. However, without further context or additional data, it is challenging to draw comprehensive conclusions about the educational profile of the population or any potential relationship between age and educational attainment.

The data from the tables 2 provides valuable insights into the status of education among adolescent girls before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the reasons for not attending school. Before COVID-19, a total of 50 respondents were considered. Among them, 54% were enrolled and attending school, indicating a relatively favourable situation. However, a significant portion of respondents (36%) were enrolled but not attending, suggesting underlying barriers to regular attendance. Furthermore, 14% of the respondents had dropped out of school, signifying a concerning trend.

Analysing the reasons for non-attendance before COVID-19, it becomes evident that lack of financial resources (43.4%) was the most prevalent challenge faced by adolescent girls. This was followed by an increase in responsibilities within the household (21.7%). Other reasons, such as violence and the prioritization of boys' education over girls', accounted for 34.7% collectively. During the COVID-19 period, the situation worsened. The number of respondents enrolled and attending school dropped to 22%, showcasing a substantial decline. The percentage of those enrolled but not attending increased to 38%, indicating significant obstacles to participation. Alarmingly, the dropout rate rose to 40%, highlighting a severe consequence of the pandemic on education.

Exploring the reasons for non-attendance during COVID-19, it is apparent that lack of financial resources remained a persistent issue, affecting 28.2% of respondents. Similarly, an increase in household responsibilities was a notable barrier, impacting 12.8% of adolescent girls. Additionally, other reasons like violence and the preference given to boys' education accounted for 15.3% of non-attendance. A new challenge emerged during the pandemic, as 43.5% of respondents faced a lack of digital resources, such as smartphones and internet access, preventing them from engaging in online learning. The data gathered through interview and field work shows that the closure of school has serious impact on these girls' ability to read, write and basic asthmatic (basic literacy).

Comparing the two periods, it becomes evident that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on education among adolescent girls. The percentage of students attending school declined, while the dropout rate increased. Lack of financial resources was a persistent barrier, and household responsibilities continued to be a concern. The introduction of the digital divide further exacerbated the challenges faced by girls, hindering their access to education during the pandemic.

The data emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the barriers faced by adolescent girls in accessing education in the Gopalganj district of Bihar. Efforts should focus on tackling financial constraints, addressing household responsibilities, and bridging the digital divide. By addressing these factors, it is possible to ensure continued access to education for adolescent girls and mitigate the long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on their educational prospects.

Understanding the Influencing Factors on the Educational Status of Adolescent Girls during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences on education systems worldwide, resulting in the widespread closure of schools, colleges, and universities ^[10]. These disruptions have disproportionately impacted disadvantaged children, particularly girls, exacerbating existing inequalities in educational opportunities. The adverse effects of the crisis on early learning and formal education for girls are substantial, potentially limiting their social and academic prospects. The closure of schools in rural areas, particularly Gopalganj in Bihar, has a significant impact on girls' education. It disrupts learning, increases dropout rates, limits access to resources, hinders girls' empowerment, and exposes them to increased vulnerability. The lack of educational opportunities negatively affects their future prospects and well-being. Efforts should be made to provide alternative learning options, address barriers to education, and promote support programs to mitigate these effects and ensure that girls have equal access to quality education ^[11].

It is crucial to acknowledge and address the unique

difficulties faced by girls during this pandemic. The impact of disrupted education goes beyond immediate academic setbacks, as it can perpetuate long-standing inequalities and hinder their future opportunities. By recognizing and prioritizing the needs of girls in education, efforts can be directed towards minimizing the long-term consequences of the pandemic on their educational journeys and overall well-being.

There are some factors were analysed from the field work and interview with the respondents as an influencing or contributing component on the Educational Status of Adolescent Girls during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

A) Poverty or lack of Financial Resources: Poverty significantly limits the financial resources available to families, making it challenging to afford educational expenses such as school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and transportation ^[12]. This situation disproportionately affects girls, as families often prioritize the education of male children over female children due to prevailing gender biases. Poverty not only affects access to education but also compromises the quality of education available to girls in Bihar. Many impoverished communities lack well-equipped schools, qualified teachers, and essential learning resources. As a result, girls receive substandard education, limiting their learning outcomes and future prospects. In impoverished households, girls are often burdened with domestic chores, caring for younger siblings, or engaging in income-generating activities to support their families. These responsibilities consume their time and energy, leaving little room for education due to which Early dropout from educational system happen in a large number.

B) Deep-rooted cultural and social norms: Deep-rooted cultural and social norms in Bihar perpetuate gender disparities, devaluing girls' education. These norms create significant barriers for girls' education in multiple ways:

1. **Restrictions on Mobility:** Girls often face restrictions on their mobility due to societal norms and concerns for their safety. This limits their ability to travel to and from schools, especially in rural areas where schools may be located far from their homes. Fear of harassment or violence during travel further discourages parents from allowing their daughters to pursue education.
2. **Early Marriage:** Early marriage remains a prevalent practice in some communities in Bihar, where girls are married off at a young age, often before they reach the legal age of marriage. Early marriage interrupts their education and forces them into adult responsibilities, depriving them of the opportunity to continue their studies.
3. **Expectations to Fulfil Traditional Gender Roles:** Girls in Bihar often face expectations to conform to traditional gender roles, which prioritize household chores and caregiving over education. These expectations limit their time and energy for attending school and hinder their ability to pursue academic goals.
4. **Gender Bias and Discrimination:** Gender bias and discrimination against girls in education persist in Bihar. Girls may experience lower expectations from their families and communities regarding their

educational achievements. In some cases, boys are prioritized over girls when it comes to accessing educational resources, further perpetuating gender disparities in education. Addressing these cultural and social norms requires a multifaceted approach that involves community engagement, advocacy, and education. Efforts should focus on challenging gender stereotypes, promoting girls' rights to education, and fostering a supportive environment that values and encourages girls' education. Collaboration with local leaders, religious institutions, and community organizations is crucial in shifting societal attitudes and norms towards gender equality in education.

C) Lack of Access to Digital Platform: Digital platforms have the potential to empower and provide access to education for girls in India. However, there are certain challenges and issues that can hinder girl child literacy or education in the digital realm ^[13]. Here are some factors to consider:

1. **Limited Access to Technology:** One of the main barriers to digital education for girls in India is the lack of access to technology. Many girls, particularly those in rural areas or marginalized communities, do not have smartphones, computers, or reliable internet access. Without these resources, they are unable to take advantage of digital learning opportunities.
2. **Gender Bias and Discrimination:** Deep-rooted gender biases and discrimination can impact girls' access to digital platforms. In some households, boys are prioritized when it comes to accessing technology and educational resources. Girls may be discouraged or restricted from using digital platforms due to traditional gender roles and cultural norms.
3. **Safety and Security Concerns:** Safety is a significant concern when it comes to girls accessing digital platforms. There are risks associated with online harassment, cyberbullying, and privacy breaches. Parents and guardians may be apprehensive about allowing girls to use digital platforms, fearing potential harm or exploitation.
4. **Language and Content Limitations:** The digital content available for education may not always be accessible or relevant to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of girls in India. Language barriers can create obstacles in understanding and engaging with the content, limiting the effectiveness of digital learning platforms.
5. **Socio-economic Factors:** Poverty and economic disparities can exacerbate the challenges faced by girls in accessing digital education. Families struggling with financial constraints may prioritize basic needs over investing in digital devices or internet connectivity, making it difficult for girls to benefit from online learning opportunities.
6. **Lack of Digital Literacy:** Limited digital literacy among girls and their families can hinder their ability to navigate and utilize digital platforms effectively. Without proper training and guidance, girls may struggle to access educational content, interact with online resources, and take full advantage of digital learning tools.
7. **Infrastructure and Power Supply:** In many parts of India, especially rural areas, inadequate infrastructure and frequent power outages can disrupt digital

education. Unreliable electricity supply and poor internet connectivity make it challenging for girls to access online resources consistently. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving government initiatives, community involvement, and concerted efforts by various stakeholders. It involves increasing access to technology, promoting digital literacy, addressing gender biases, ensuring online safety, and providing relevant and localized content that caters to the diverse needs of girls in India.

Empowering Adolescent Girls: Key Interventions for Enhancing Education in the Post-COVID-19 Era in Gopalganj District, Bihar

In the post-COVID-19 era, several potential interventions can be implemented to enhance the education of adolescent girls in the Gopalganj district of Bihar. Here are five major interventions that could be considered:

1. **Financial Support and Scholarships:** Providing financial assistance and scholarships to economically disadvantaged families can help alleviate the financial burden associated with girls' education. This intervention would ensure that girls have access to educational resources, including school fees, uniforms, books, and transportation.
2. **Community Awareness and Sensitization Programs:** Conducting community awareness and sensitization programs is crucial to challenge deep-rooted social and cultural norms that hinder girls' education. These programs can help change societal attitudes, promote gender equality, and emphasize the importance of girls' education for community development.
3. **Digital Inclusion and Access:** Ensuring access to digital platforms and technology is essential in the post-COVID-19 era. This intervention involves providing girls with the necessary resources, such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, and ensuring reliable internet connectivity. Training programs can also be conducted to enhance their digital literacy skills.
4. **Safe and Supportive Learning Environments:** Creating safe and supportive learning environments is vital for girls' education. This intervention includes implementing measures to prevent and address gender-based violence in schools, promoting girls' participation and engagement in classrooms, and providing counselling services to support their overall well-being.
5. **Life Skills and Vocational Training:** Equipping adolescent girls with life skills and vocational training can enhance their prospects for the future. These interventions can include providing training in areas like entrepreneurship, financial literacy, health and hygiene, and leadership skills. Empowering girls with practical skills can increase their confidence and enable them to make informed decisions about their education and careers.

Implementing these interventions requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, NGOs, community leaders, and families. By addressing financial barriers, challenging social norms, ensuring digital access, creating safe environments, and providing relevant skills training, the education of adolescent girls in the Gopalganj district of Bihar can be significantly enhanced in the post-COVID-19 era.

Conclusion

Education plays a significant role in the liberation and progress of communities. It is crucial for families to understand the overall significance of education, as it contributes to the mental, emotional, and psychological development of individuals. When people fully grasp the importance of education, they will recognize the necessity of providing equal access to education for all children, irrespective of their gender. Unfortunately, girls in India have historically faced disadvantages, and the impact of the pandemic has further exacerbated these disparities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the education sector, amplifying existing inequalities. School closures disrupted learning for millions of students, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups with limited access to remote resources. The digital divide became more evident as students without technology and internet access faced significant challenges in participating in online classes. Unequal learning environments, mental health concerns, and learning loss further widened educational disparities. Girls experienced additional barriers, including increased household responsibilities and heightened risks of gender-based violence. Addressing these inequalities requires targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to technology, support marginalized students, mitigate learning loss, prioritize mental well-being, and safeguard girls' education.

In the Gopalganj district of Bihar, three significant factors have been identified as having a severe impact on girls' education. The first factor is poverty and a lack of financial resources. Many families in the district struggle with economic hardships, making it challenging to afford educational expenses, such as school fees, uniforms, and study materials. This financial constraint often leads to girls being prioritized for household chores or early marriage instead of receiving an education. The second factor is deep-rooted social and cultural norms. The district, like many parts of Bihar, has traditional beliefs and practices that restrict girls' education. Gender roles and expectations limit girls' mobility and autonomy, reinforcing the idea that their primary role is within the household. These norms perpetuate discrimination against girls and discourage their participation in formal education. The third factor is limited access to digital platforms. In an increasingly digital world, access to technology and the internet is crucial for educational opportunities. However, in Gopalganj district, many girls face barriers to accessing digital platforms due to a lack of resources, such as smartphones, computers, and reliable internet connectivity. This digital divide further hinders their ability to engage in online learning or access educational resources.

Addressing these factors requires targeted interventions and collaborative efforts. Initiatives should focus on providing financial support and scholarships to economically disadvantaged families, raising awareness about the importance of girls' education within the community, and bridging the digital divide by improving access to technology and digital platforms in the district. Additionally, advocacy and empowerment programs can challenge and transform deep-rooted social and cultural norms that hinder girls' education.

References

1. Abari AO, Orunbon NO. Building bridges and walls:

- Education and COVID-19 in Nigeria. *Research Journal in Comparative Education*. 2020;1(1):39-52.
2. Census of India; c2011. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/>
 3. Saravanabavan V, Vinothini C, Balaji D, Manna A, Mohan A, Rajesh A. A geo-spatial approach on COVID-19 mortality in Tamil Nadu. *Int. J Geogr Geol. Environ* 2022;4(1):123-131.
 4. Census of India; c2011. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/>
 5. Gopalganj, About district, <https://gopalganj.nic.in/about-district/>
 6. Girl's Education and COVID-19, Malala Fund. https://downloads.ctfassets.net/0oan5gk9rgbh/6TMYLYAcUpjhQpXLDgmdIa/3e1c12d8d827985ef2b4e815a3a6da1f/COVID19_GirlsEducation_corrected_071420.pdf
 7. "Educate Girls: Annual Report," Educate Girls, accessed; c2020 Jun 13. <https://www.educategirls.ngo/pdf/Annual Report 2017-18.pdf>.
 8. World Health Organisation. The impact of COVID-19 on women. Policy Brief; c2020.
 9. Educate Girls, Educate Girls, <https://www.educategirls.ngo/>.
 10. World Health Organization. WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19- 11 March 2020. Geneva, Switzerland, Guidance Note on Education Systems' Response to COVID19; c2020 Mar. p. 6.
 11. Singh S, Roy D, Sinha K, *et al*. Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: a narrative review with recommendations. *Psychiatry Res*. 2020;293:113429.
 12. United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unfpa.org/>
 13. Subedi S, Nayaju S, Subedi S, Shah SK, Shah JM. Impact of e-learning during COVID-19 pandemic among nursing students and teachers of Nepal. *International Journal of Science and Healthcare Research*. 2020;5(3):9.