

Women Dropout in Higher Education: A Societal Analysis in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu India

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological factors that led to the discontinuation of education among girl children during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey of 127 undergraduate women students in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, revealed that a combination of factors, including lack of family support, single parenting, lower socio-economic background, limited access to technology, mental stress and domestic responsibilities, contributed to this trend. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to support these students in mitigating the pandemic's effects on their education and future prospects. This research underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to support under graduate girl students in Coimbatore and similar regions in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on their education and future prospects.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Girl Children, Dropout Rates, Higher Education, Psychological Factors, Women's Education

INTRODUCTION

*“When you educate a Man; you educate only an Individual
When you educate a Woman; you educate a Generation”*

-Brigham Young

The activities and development of women depends on family situations and social disturbance. As per above words of Brigham Young, if a girl gain a good and favourable family environment, she can shine and gain a momentum in her life, otherwise the life will become a terrible and faced lot of struggles. All the sectors in the economy occupied by the educated personalities neither a white collar nor blue collar jobs. Education sector leads the other sectors and its function. So Education is a most important ornament than any other ornaments like gold, silver, diamond, platinum etc. to the girls. This study focus on the girls who left their under graduation without completing during the pandemic period.

Education is the basic requirement for human development. With education, employment opportunities are broadened and income levels are increased. The development of the individual and the progress of a nation depends on education. The development of a society can be judged by measuring the issues that extend educational inequality prevalence in the society (Singh, 2021). Students in higher education undergo various processes of institutional, societal and personal interactions when they progress through education. Student behaviour is related to their retention, which requires theoretical constructs that

encapsulate the multiplicity of institutional, personal, familial and interactional factors emerging from the environment of students participation in higher education (Rout, 2015).

Academic success in higher education is vital for jobs, social justice and economic growth. Dropout represents the most problematic issue that higher education institutions must address to improve their success. The proportion of dropout of students who dropout varies between different studies depending on how dropout is defined, the data source and the calculation methods (Realinho et al., 2022)

RISING ENROLMENT AND PERSISTENT DROPOUT

The number of Indian studies and surveys stated that enrolment of women in higher education was increasing and it signifies progress of a country towards gender parity. However, the dropout rates was also increasing due to some barriers they encounter during their academic journey. Understanding the reasons behind these dropouts is essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment of a women students.

WOMEN DROPOUT RATE IN INDIA

At Undergraduate level the highest number 32.7% of students are enrolled in Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences courses followed by Science 16%, Commerce 14.9% and Engineering and Technology 12.6% (AISHE, 2019 Report). The representation of female students in higher education in India marks its all-time high at 2.07 crore in 2021-22, AISHE report.

The sensation of student dropout in education is a most important subject, especially for higher education institutions. Women who received education are most likely to lead healthy and productive lives (Karmaker & Lemon, 2024). It eliminates inequalities and disparities as the means for recovering their status within and outside their families (*SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities*, n.d.). Education provides more strength to not only to herself, but also to their families. According to the NSO reports, in India the female literacy rate is 70.3%, while the male literacy rate is estimated at 84.7%. India's average literacy rate stands at 77.7% (*Literacy in India - Wikipedia*, 2021).

For the country's development, education for women is more complex and obstacle. An educated and empowered women are proficient to manage her personal and professional life. The frequent problems faced by women were early marriage (66 per cent), household chores (65 per cent) and cost of education (62 per cent) were hindrances for girls' education (Jayanta Mete, 2024). The underlying causes for early marriage were due to fear of elopement/love affair. Parents were also worried about the physical security of girls stepping out for their higher education (Rai, 2019).

Dropping out of college is a complex process, and students have very different motivations for dropping out of college without a degree (Behr et al., 2021). The higher relationships within the academic problem dimensions as compared to the lower relationships between the academic cluster and the social or religious cluster suggest that these may be separate problem areas for different individuals (Kristen P. Kremer *et al.* 2017). The analysis should help the students to have a linear, chronological, progressive transition from one institutional structure to another, covering both information and academic, content, as well as activities that facilitate socialization, integration into student life (Elena-Ramona *et. al* 2023).

The concept of social adjustment has made the classroom teacher more conscious of the social factors that are largely responsible for the group organization and identifying the undesirable cliques in finding isolated students and discovering other chilling elements of the class structure (Palak Lakhani & Kusum Jain, 2017).

The past studies on droppers learn from their experience to improve the educational services and in-depth factors like personality, and internal and external dimensions and investigate the antecedents of dropout that are more socio-demographic. Furthermore, the research could adopt a different view and examine some outcomes of interest that are other than dropout as transfer out (Anita Shuja & Akhtar Ali, 2022). The previous researches have emphasized various issues related to student dropout were psychological, socio-economic conditions, academic performance, family situations and financial needs. The evolution to isolate learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated prevailing inequalities, particularly among relegated groups such as girls from low-income families. The present study has emphasized the psychological impact of women dropout and its importance on social sustenance, technological advancement and mental well-being in mitigating dropout risks during crises.

CAUSES OF WOMEN DROPOUT

Several factors contribute to women dropping out of higher education. These may include socio-economic constraints, familial responsibilities, cultural expectations, gender-based violence, lack of access to support services, and discriminatory practices within educational institutions. Moreover, issues such as early marriage, pregnancy, and caregiving responsibilities often disproportionately affect women, leading to their discontinuation of education (Putchal, 2023).

CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN DROPOUT

The consequences of women dropping out of higher education extend beyond individual outcomes to impact communities and societies at large. Women who do not complete their education often face limited employment opportunities, lower earning potential, and reduced socio-economic mobility. Additionally, dropout can perpetuate cycles of poverty and reinforce gender disparities in various spheres of life, including decision-making roles and access to resources (Heath & Jayachandran, 2018).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following objectives have been set for the study:

1. To examine the social-economic status of women dropout in the Coimbatore district.
2. To study the how psychological impact increased the dropout among women student dropouts in Coimbatore district.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology indicates the method adopted to measure the factors responsible and implications of the analysis. This research utilized a mixed-method approach to gather comprehensive data on the psychological factors of dropout among college students in Coimbatore District. Quantitative data were collected through surveys by distributing the questionnaire and interview method, while qualitative insights were obtained through in-depth interviews with dropout students, educators and stakeholders. The information gathered were evaluated for the quantitative analysis by using multiple regression analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey instrument included questions related to socio-economic background, access to technology, psychological well-being, domestic responsibilities, and reasons for discontinuing education. Interviews

were conducted using semi-structured guides to explore participants' experiences in greater depth. Data were analyzed using both quantitative techniques, such as descriptive statistics, and qualitative methods, including thematic analysis.

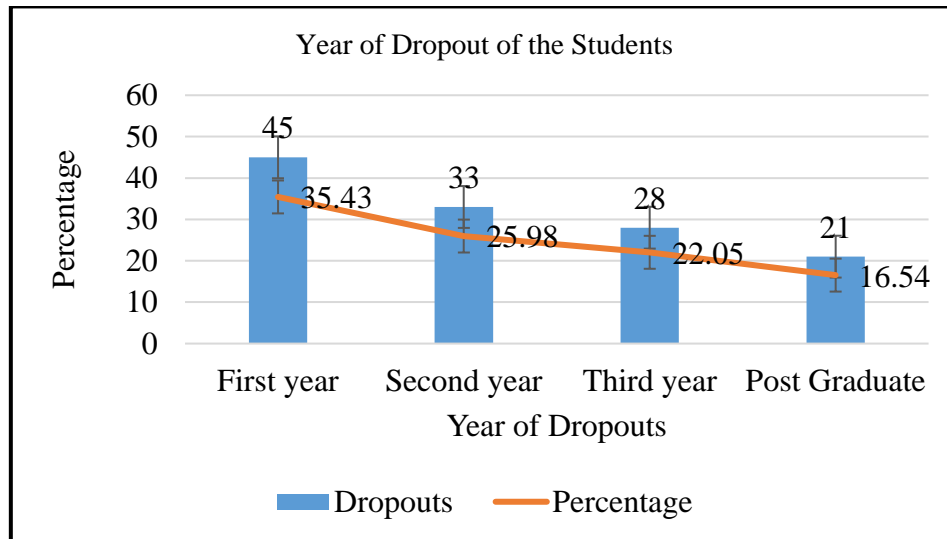


Fig 1 - Year-wise Dropout Rates (in 2020)

The chart explains that, 45 students (35.43 per cent) are dropped in first year, 33 (25.98 per cent) are left in their second year, 28 (22.05 percent) are left in final year of their study and 21 respondents (16.54 per cent) left the college in their post graduate level. This underscores the fact that the level of education of the females is especially low in the study area.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Results – Problems in Academic Performance of Dropout Respondents
(N = 127)

S NO.	Problem Area	Response	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	χ^2 Value	df	p-value
1	Academic Failure	Yes	30	30	0	1	1
		No	97	97			
2	Irregular Attendance	Yes	113	113	0	1	1
		No	14	14			
3	Can't Study at Home	Yes	36	36	0	1	1
		No	91	91			
4	Parental Support	Yes	21	21	0	1	1
		No	106	106			

Source: Field Survey

- All the χ^2 values are 0.00, and p-values = 1.000, indicating no statistically significant difference between observed and expected frequencies in each case.
- This happens because observed frequencies exactly match expected frequencies, implying no deviation under the null hypothesis of independence.

CROSS TAB FOR AGE AND CAUSES OF DROPOUT

Table 2 - Age-wise Distribution of Dropouts

Reasons	Age-wise Distribution			Total
	17 – 20	21- 24	25 – 28	
Family background	18 (28.57)	10(24.39)	3(13.04)	31(24.41)
Inability in studies	5(7.94)	4(9.76)	8(34.78)	17(13.38)
Not interest	4(6.35)	7(17.07)	2(8.69)	13(10.24)
Job interest	7(11.11)	0	0	7(5.51)
Parents death and Sickness	11(17.46)	5(12.19)	1(4.34)	17(13.38)
Academic failure	2(3.17)	6(14.63)	3(13.04)	11(8.67)
Family migration	15(23.81)	0	4(17.39)	19(14.96)
Health	1(1.58)	9(21.95)	2(8.69)	12(9.45)

Sources: Field Survey

The above table 13 shows the age wise dropout reasons. Dropout reasons have been differing from their concerned age. Major reason for dropout in all the age group are family related problems such as not interest (67 per cent). The other reasons as per age factors were inability in studies (13.38 per cent) and 13 respondents are not interested in their studies. In the age group between 17 – 20 family background (28.57 per cent), migration of parents to their native places (23.81 per cent) and parent's death and sickness (17.46 per cent) and job interest (11 per cent). The table concluded that, in the age group of 17 – 20, the reason for dropout of women folk is due to family related reason. In this age, first reason being family background, second is family migration and third is parent's demises due to Corona virus war in the world.

Table 3 – Re-enrolment in college by Dropouts

Status	Satisfied/ Not Satisfied	Dropouts	Percentage
Like to continue the education	Yes	84	66.14
	No	43	33.86

Source: Field survey

The table reveals the respondents willing to re-joining the courses. Most of the students were interested in re-enrolling in colleges, if they get an opportunity to continue their studies. The table explores, 66.14 per cent of dropout respondents (84 girls) exposed interest to study if they give an extra coaching. A few were keen to complete at least graduation level education while some of them wanted to pursue some value added courses to enhance their employment purpose and 33.86 per cent not interested in their studies because their family background do not allow them to continue their studies.

Table 4 - Constraints faced by Dropout Respondents

S No.	Constraints	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Low employment opportunity	24	18.90
2	Low income	73	57.48
3	Depending on others	30	23.62

Source: Field Survey

The table indicates the constraints faced by dropout from higher education institutions. The constraints are classified into three categories, as low employment opportunity, low income and depending on others. From the total, more than half of the dropouts (57.48 per cent) are working with low salary, 18.90 per cent of the respondents are facing no proper employment opportunities and more than one-fifth depend on others. Most of the women dropouts faced a constraint of low employment and low salary.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The table explain the multiple regression analysis table for examining the causes and consequences of women dropout in higher education. This analysis aims to identify significant predictors of women dropout while controlling for other variables.

Table 5 - Relationship between Socio-demographic and Economic Variables

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value
Social and cultural	-0.345	0.078	-4.423
Economic Constraints	0.212	0.062	3.419
Family Pressure	0.134	0.045	2.978
Lack of Support	0.101	0.037	2.730
Systems			
Psychological factors	0.076	0.028	2.714
Control Variables			
Age	-0.015	0.021	-0.712
Family Income	0.291	0.053	5.493
Parental Education	-0.102	0.035	-2.919
Constant	0.750	0.082	9.146
R-squared	0.731		
Adjusted R-squared	0.718		
F-statistics (p-value)	56.839	<0.001*	

Source: Primary Source

Interpretation of Results:

The negative coefficient for "Social and Cultural" suggests that as societal and cultural factors increase, the likelihood of women dropout decreases. This indicates that addressing societal norms and cultural barriers could potentially reduce dropout rates among women.

The factors "Economic Constraints", "Family Pressure", "Lack of Support Systems", and "Safety and Security" imply a Positive coefficients which observed higher levels associated with an increased likelihood of women dropout. This suggests the importance of addressing economic, familial and institutional support systems can mitigate dropout rates.

Among the control variables, "Family Income" and "Parental Education" show significant negative coefficients, indicating that higher family income and parental education are associated with higher dropout rates among women.

The overall model is statistically significant (F-statistic = 56.839, $p < 0.001$), and the adjusted R-squared value of 0.718 suggests that approximately 71.8% of the variance in women dropout can be explained by the predictors and control variables included in the model.

The findings provides a structured format for presenting the results of a multiple regression analysis examining the reasons and significances of women dropout in higher education.

DISCUSSION

The study indicates that dropout among college girls in Coimbatore District during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, technological, psychological and familial factors. Socio-economic disparities emerged as a significant determinant of dropout, with students from low-income families facing heightened financial constraints and limited access to educational resources. Moreover, the transition to online learning exacerbates existing inequalities, as many students lacked access to reliable internet connectivity and electronic devices. Psychological stress emerged as another prominent factor contributing to dropout, with students reporting increased anxiety, depression and feelings of isolation during the pandemic. The uncertainty surrounding academic schedules, examination formats and future career prospects further exacerbated mental health challenges, leading some students to disengage from their studies.

Domestic responsibilities, particularly among students from traditional households, also played a significant role in dropout decisions. The closure of educational institutions compelled many girls to assume additional household duties, including childcare, eldercare, and domestic chores, leaving little time or energy for academic pursuits.

The consequences of dropout among college students in Coimbatore District are multifaceted and long-lasting. Beyond the immediate impact on educational attainment, dropout diminishes future career opportunities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Furthermore, dropout girls are at increased risk of early marriage, unplanned pregnancies and exploitation, further limiting their social and economic mobility.

CONCLUSION

The enrolment rates in institutions also start reducing due to financial matters and loss of family members made the students to engage in jobs which was not fit to their surveillance. So the study was taken and data were collected from the respondents those who are severely affected by COVID 19. In concluding remark, corona virus not only teaches a lesson to the population, but it takes the lives and deviate the living conditions of large group of teenagers and young females those who are not still get away from the bad impact of Corona virus. The government schemes must also support the affected girl students to continue their education and live their life in a peaceful way. This students can also be given weekly classes to

complete their courses in a concession. Number of scholarship availability and easy accessibility to the students.

This study highlights the need for targeted interventions to support undergraduate girl students in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on their education and future prospects. Policymakers and educators should prioritize providing access to technology, mental health support, and family counselling to reduce dropout rates among girl children.

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