

Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE)
National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi
and
The University of Warwick, United Kingdom

Invites you to Webinar
on

A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Higher Education Access and Choice
Tuesday 05 April 2022 | 11:00 - 13:00 hrs (IST)

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set new global values centred around inclusion - leaving no one behind. The SDG4 recognises access to quality education as essential for upward socio-economic mobility. Importantly, eliminating gender disparities in access to quality higher education (HE) is at the heart of the SDG4. Access to quality educational pathways to higher education (HE) is crucial in influencing informed decision-making pertaining to choice of HE studies and shaping careerpaths. Globally, there has been progress in achieving gender parity (in favour of women) in access to HE. In India too, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) reached 1.01 in 2019-20. However, there exists wide variations among states across India. The GPI varies from 0.83 in Bihar to 1.36 in Kerala. Even though gender parity of enrolment is being achieved, social and gender barriers remain for women and also for young men from disadvantaged groups, in relation to accessing quality educational pathways to HE and making informed decisions about post-schooling choices.

The empirical evidence generated by the 'A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana' study (a five-year collaborative research project of University of Warwick and research partners in India, 2017-2021), together with other related studies, show that many young people entering HE in India come from families and communities where there is little or no prior experience of HE, or of higher levels of secondary schooling. Students from socially and economically disadvantaged groups are often the first in their families and communities to access HE, so they lack adequate information regarding HE options and the admission process. As such, choices are being made without access to sufficient or accurate information. Informed choices about HE are thus limited. (Please find the link of the research brief here: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/policy_brief_published.pdf).

Furthermore, young people are arriving at HE with different levels of gendered dis/advantage. Families play a key role in educational decision making about HE futures of young people, and gender mediates many aspects of family decision making about HE. These gender influences include: whether and how a young person is able to go on to study; who is listened to and relied upon for information; choice of institution, particularly their location; how family resources are assessed to support young people's study; what the desired outcome of a HE degree may be. For women, college and subject choice are more likely to be based on the college being close to home and/or with a safe reputation, as opposed to availability of subjects or academic reputation. Thus, while there may be gender parity, there are still many gender-based assumptions which affect the HE choices which are available to both young women and young men. They lack access to informed, gender-sensitive information and support.

Government colleges are key institutions providing HE to young people who are first generation higher education learners, from lower socio-economic backgrounds and/or rural or semi-urban areas. Government colleges have the potential to play a greater role in the communities where they are located, to provide greater information and promote gender-sensitive decision-making in families. Government colleges can serve as college knowledge hubs within local areas, to provide knowledge on choice of college, course of study and career prospects. With appropriate support, colleges can become important agents of change in improving HE informed choice.

These research findings, supported by wider research on ways of facilitating access to HE based upon informed decision making, have resulted in the development of a resource pack – an 'Outreach Activity Resource' (OAR) to support colleges in organising a 'taster' day (an outreach programme, in the form of a college visit day, to provide information about HE) for school students, and their families where possible, to visit the campus, meet staff, learn more about the range of courses and the admissions process. (Please find the link of the same here: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/fair_chance_for_education_outreach_activity_resource_published.pdf). This latter phase of the project involved working closely with college principals and academic partners in Haryana, India. The colleges used the OAR to organise taster days, which proved hugely successful in both urban and rural colleges, in spite of ongoing pandemic restrictions.

Promoting a culture of widening participation and informed HE choice is a priority which is shared by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 recognises the need for increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including conducting outreach programmes on HE opportunities among the socially and economically disadvantaged groups to support their successful transition to higher education.

Keeping this context in mind, this webinar aims to initiate a dialogue on the role of HE access outreach efforts by government colleges to promote gender equality in terms of HE access and informed choice. The objectives are to discuss the ways in which educational pathways to HE are gendered in terms of HE access and choice; to discuss factors which affect access to HE opportunities and informed choice, and which therefore contribute to gender inequalities, and to discuss institutional strategies to promote gender equality relating to access to HE opportunities and informed choice.

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