



Towards Gender Equality in Education

MR. SANDEEP KUMAR SHARMA
Assistant Professor,
National College of Education, Sirsa.
Haryana (India)

Abstract:

Gender disparity has been a major issue in India's pursuit for achieving the goal of universal elementary education. In order to overcome the problems faced by girls, several measures have been initiated across the country. While female enrolment has increased rapidly since the 1990s, there still a substantial gap in upper primary and secondary schooling. Increased female enrolment is, however, compromised by persistently high rates of drop-out and poor attendance of girls relatives to boys. Girls also constitute a large proportion of out-of-school children. Gender inequalities interlock with other forms of social inequality, notably caste, ethnicity and religion, with girls from scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and Muslim minorities particularly, constituting the population out-school and drop-out children. The greatest surges in female enrolment have been achieved in the most educationally disadvantaged states such as Bihar and Rajasthan, these states still have a long way to go to catch up with the better performing states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh girls are over-represented in the public school and learning centres provided by government demonstrating continuing 'son' preference whereby boys are educated in school managed by non-state providers which are of better quality, girls sent to public school of relatively poor quality. finally, the above factors point to a continuing failure of Indian educational interventions to take serious stock of gender inequality in education while DPEP was successful in merging supply and demand side interventions, leading to a surge in female enrolment, the lack of attention to gender-sensitive institutional reforms and quality education have resulted in difficulties in sustaining these high levels of demand for female education. Indian constitution directs the state to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. This goal has been pursued by the country for nearly six decades through successive development plans. The last two decades have witnessed significant improvements in children's participation in schooling, accompanied by substantial increase in investments. The recent effort to raise resources for the sector through imposition of an education cess is major effort in that direction. Even though school education has traditionally remained a subject for action by state government, government of India has, during the last two decades following the national policy on education-1986, begun to play a leading role. This culminated in the launching of the national programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001. Despite all these efforts, the final goal of providing quality education for all has eluded the country. Urgency of reaching the goal has been heightened in recent years due to several national and international developments, including commitment made under the Dakar framework for action for providing quality education for all by 2015, which not only covers primary education but also focus on literacy goals, gender equality and quality concerns.

Keywords: Education, Gender equality, Quality

1. Children's school attendance

- Only two-thirds of girls and three-fourths of boys age 6-17 years are attending school. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1,000 boys.

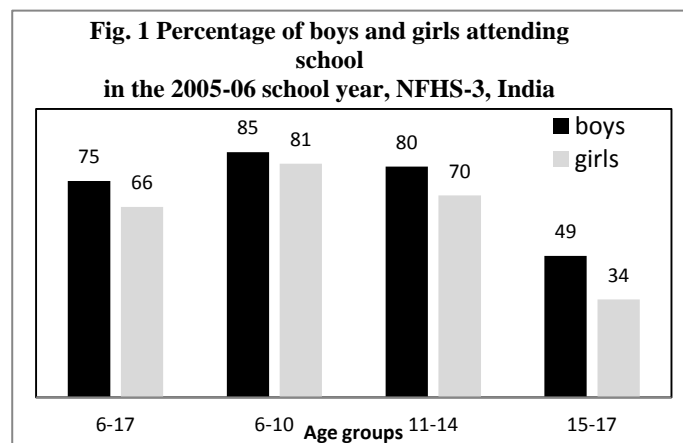
- There is gender equality in school attendance in urban areas; but, in rural areas, the female disadvantage in education is marked and increases with age.
- Age-appropriate school attendance is lower than any school attendance for both boys and girls. However, boys and girls who are in school are about equally likely to be in an age-inappropriate class.
- School dropout beyond primary school is a major problem for both girls and boys.

3. Literacy and educational attainment among adults

- The percentage of adults who are literate is much lower in rural than in urban areas; nonetheless, even in urban areas one-fourth of women and more than one tenth of men are not literate. Gender disparity in literacy is much greater in rural than in urban areas and declines sharply with household wealth.
- Forty-one percent of women and 18% of men age 15-49 have never been to school.
- Educational attainment remains very low: even among the 20-29 age group, only 27% of women and 39% of men have 10 or more years of education.
- The percentage of ever-married women with 10 or more years of education has risen very slowly from 11% in NFHS-1 to 17% in NFHS-3.

Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key Elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of Women. In recognition of the pivotal role of education in development and of persistent Gender inequalities in access to education, the elimination of gender disparity in primary Education is one of the Millennium Development Goals. The achievement of universal primary education has been a key goal of Indian planning since Independence. However, increasing access to primary schooling still leaves the twin questions of educational quality and school retention unanswered. Continued economic development cannot be sustained with a population that has merely completed primary school; it needs a dependable supply of highly educated and skilled human capital for which a high level of educational attainment of both women and men is necessary. However, ensuring a continued supply of skilled human capital to sustain economic growth is only one objective of reducing gender inequalities in educational attainment: the other is that education, particularly higher education of women, is a key enabler of demographic change, family welfare, and better health and nutrition of women and their families. Higher education has the potential to empower women with knowledge and ways of understanding and manipulating the world around them. Education of women has been shown to be associated with lower fertility, infant mortality, and better child health and nutrition.

This chapter focuses both on gender differentials in children's school attendance and in Educational attainment of the adult population. The analysis of children's school attendance is based on their attendance at any time during the 2005-06 school years. To increase accuracy and comparability, children's ages are adjusted to the start of the 2005-06 school year assumed here to be April 2005.



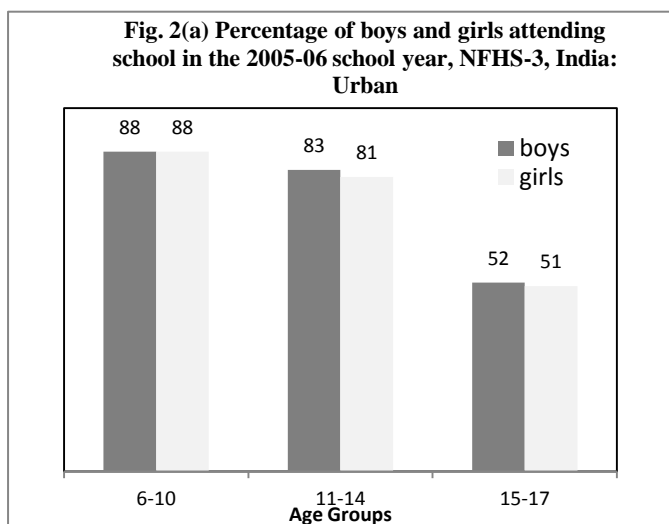
3.1 School Attendance of Children Age 6-17 Years: Levels and Differentials

School attendance by age In the school year 2005-06, 71% of children age 6-17 attended school; 77% in urban areas and 69% in rural areas (IIPS and Macro International, 2007).

As Figure 1 shows, 66% of girls age 6-17 attended school, compared with 75% of boys in the same age group. The sex ratio of children 6-17 attending school in the 2005-06 school year is 889 girls per 1,000 boys. While gender differentials in school attendance are minimal among children age 6-10, they increase with age. In fact, the sex ratio of girls attending school per 1,000 boys attending school declines from 957 in the age-group 6-10, to 884 in the age-group 11-14, and then to a low of only 717 in the age-group 15-17.

In addition to the gender differential in school attendance among children age 15-17, the low absolute levels of school attendance for both girls and boys in this age group is also of concern. Less than half of boys and about one-third of girls age 15-17 attend school. An examination of the data on school attendance by age, however, reveals that gender disparity in school attendance

is largely a rural phenomenon (Figures 2A & 2B).



In urban areas, about equal proportions of boys and girls attend school at each age; however, in rural areas, gender inequality in attendance is evident in every age group and increases with age. Notably, even in urban areas, only about half the children age 15-17 attend school. Both supply and demand-side factors play a role in whether children attend school or not. Key supply-side factors include the availability, accessibility, and quality of schools—factors for which no information is

available in NFHS-3. The demand-side factors include the level of education of household members and household wealth—factors whose influence can be examined using NFHS-3 data. Adults who are educated are more likely to ensure that their children are educated. Wealth enables access to education by providing the resources needed to buy quality education and by reducing the opportunity cost of children's time. For poorer households, children's time spent in school is time not spent in contributing to the economic sustainability of the household.

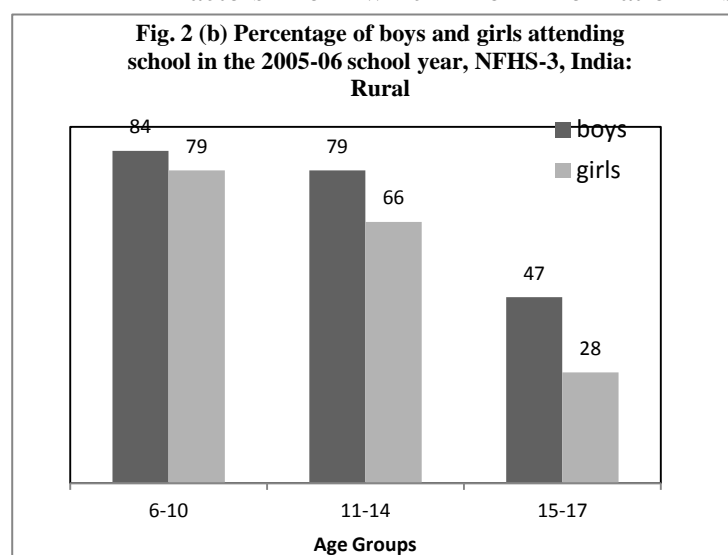
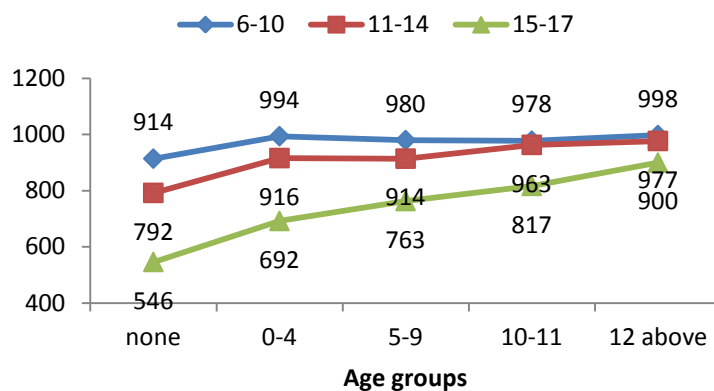


Fig. 3 Sex ratio of children age 6-17 who attended school in 2005-06 by education of household head, NFHS-3, India

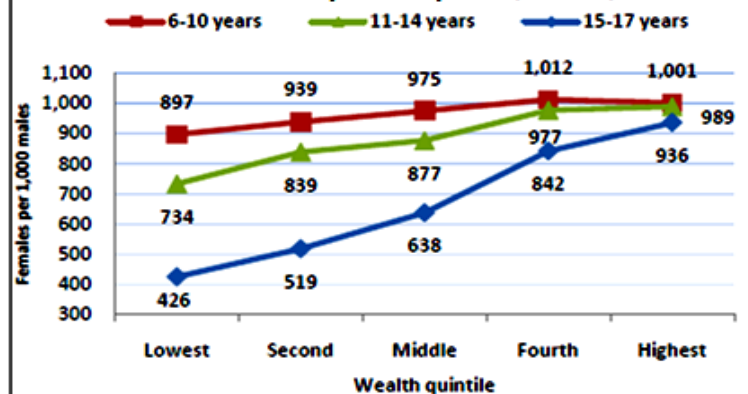


School attendance by education of household head: School attendance at all ages and for both boys and girls increases with the education level of the household head. Among all children age 6-17, only 53% of girls and 65% of boys attended school in 2005-06 if they belonged to a household with an uneducated head of household. By contrast, 9 out of 10 boys and girls attended school if they belonged to a household where the head had 12 or more years of education. It is also notable that belonging to a household in which the household

head has a high level of education is associated with higher educational attainment for the next generation: almost three out of four children age 15-17 in households where the household head has 12 or more years of education were attending school, compared with the national average of 35% for girls and 48% for boys age 15-17. Gender differentials in school attendance decline sharply as the educational level of the household head increases (Figure 3). The differentials are particularly notable for the age group 15-17: in this age group, the sex ratio of children (females per 1,000 males) attending school increases from a low of 546 in households with an uneducated household head to 900 in households with a household head who has at least 12 years of education.

School attendance by household wealth: School attendance also increases sharply by the wealth status of households. The data suggest that belonging to a household in the lowest wealth quintile is associated with even lower rates of school attendance at every age than belonging to a household where the household head is uneducated. In addition, gender inequality in school attendance also varies more sharply by wealth in every age group than it does by education of the household head. The greatest variation in the sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) of children attending school by wealth is for the age-group 15-17: in this age group, the sex ratio of those attending school increases from a low of 426 in households belonging to the lowest wealth quintile to 936 in households belonging to the highest wealth quintile (Figure 4).

Fig. 4. Sex ratio of children age 6-17 who attended school in 2005-06 by wealth quintile, NFHS-3, India



Age-appropriate school attendance: Examining school attendance of children by age does not tell us whether children are beginning school at the right age (considered to be age 6 years in India) and are progressing from class to class in an age-appropriate manner. The net attendance rate (NAR) and the gross attendance rate (GAR) are measures of age-appropriate school

attendance. These rates are defined separately for the primary and secondary levels of education as follows:

For primary school

NAR: Children age 6-10 years in classes 1-5 as a proportion of all children age 6-10 years

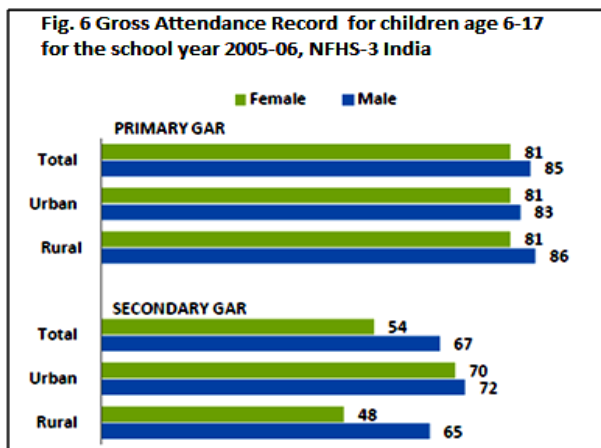
GAR: All children in classes 1-5 as a proportion of all children age 6-10 years

For secondary school

NAR: Children age 11-17 years in classes 6-12 as a proportion of children age 11-17 years

GAR: All children in classes 6-12 as a proportion of all children age 11-17 years

Figure 5 shows the net attendance rates for all boys and girls by residence. Age-appropriate primary level school attendance, at about 7 out of 10 children, is considerably lower than school attendance by children age 6-10 discussed earlier (more than 8 out of 10). This suggests that a large number of children are not starting school at the recommended age. Even at the primary level, gender inequalities are evident in rural areas. The NAR at the secondary level also reveals large gender disparities in rural areas and a high dropout rate for girls as well as for boys. Girls and boys are also about equally likely to be in an age-inappropriate grade. The proportion of girls age 11-17 attending school is 55%, 9 percentage points lower than the secondary school NAR for girls (46%). For boys the corresponding difference between the proportion in this age group attending school (67%) and the NAR (57%) is 10 percentage points (not all data shown). The GAR estimates (Figure 6) also lead to similar conclusions. Gender disparities are much greater in rural areas and at the secondary school level; and age-inappropriate school attendance is more common at the secondary school level than at the primary school level for both boys and girls.

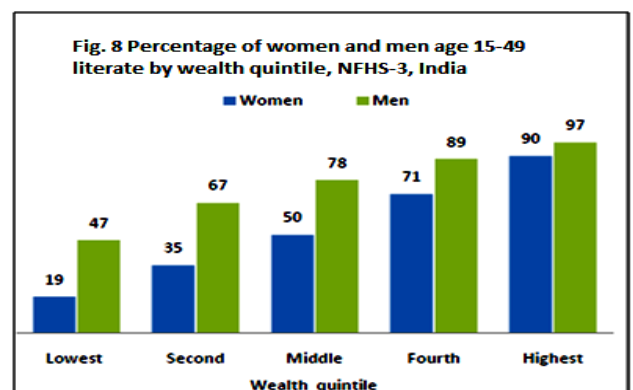
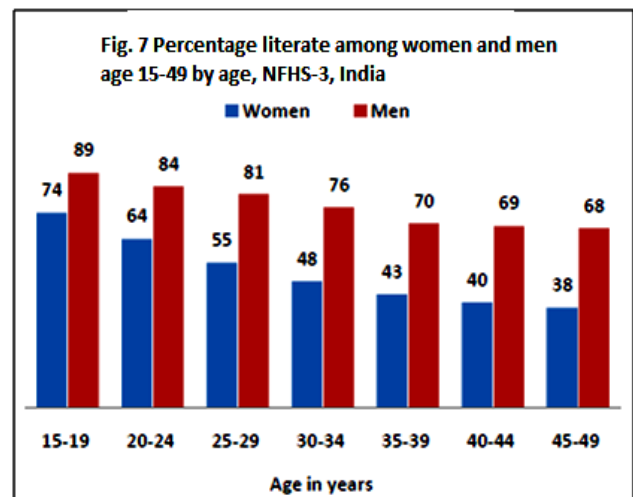


only 55% of women and 78% of men are literate in India. Literacy has, however, been increasing over time for both women and men as measured by changes across age groups (Figure 7). In fact, literacy among women is almost twice as high in the 15-19 age group than in the age-group 45-49 that is 30 years older. Nonetheless, even in the youngest age group, one in four women and one in ten men are not literate.

Although the gender differential in literacy has declined over time, the differential remains high even in the youngest age group: among those 15-19 years of age, the

4. Gender Differentials in Adult Literacy:

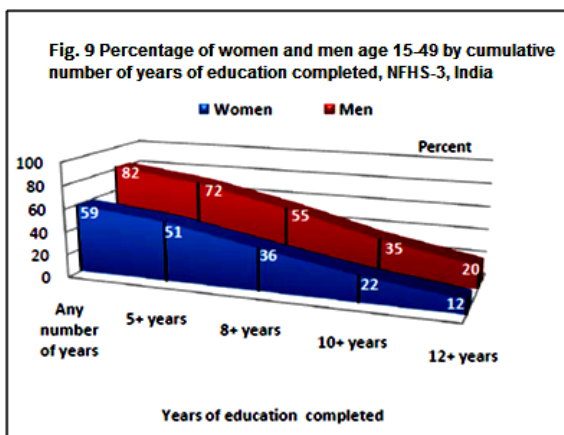
Literacy, i.e., the ability to read and write, is the foundation of education. NFHS-3 shows that



percentage of females who are literate (74%) is 15 percentage points less than the percentage of males who are literate (89%). Literacy is much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Notably, the differential by residence for women is much greater than for men (29 percentage points for women vs. 16 for men) and the gender disparity in literacy is also much greater in rural than in urban areas. Nonetheless, even in urban areas, one-fourth of women are not literate. Figure 8 shows great disparity in literacy by wealth, especially for women. In the lowest wealth quintile, only 19% of women are literate, compared with 47% of men. However, literacy increases sharply with wealth and the increase for women is greater than for men. Consequently, the gender differential in literacy narrows rapidly with wealth, so that in the highest wealth quintile, 90% of women are literate, compared with 97% of men.

5. Educational Attainment among Adults: Levels and Trends

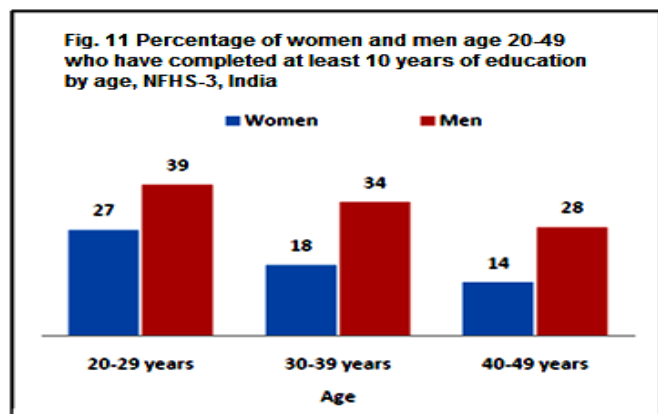
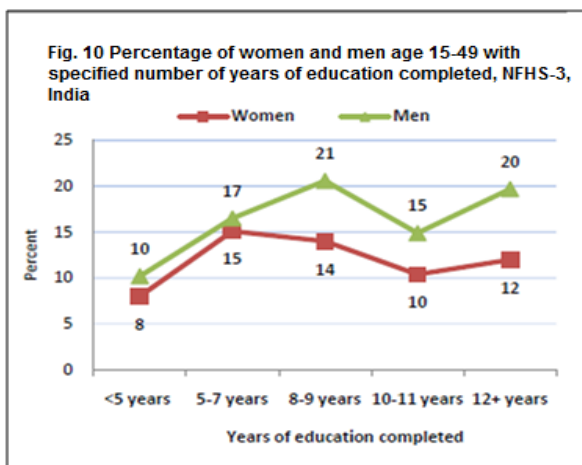
Figures 9 and 10 depict the educational attainment of women and men age 15-49 in two different



ways. Figure 9 shows the percentage of women and men with years of education greater than the number of years specified on the x-axis. Only 59% of women and 82% of men age 15-49 years have ever been to school and only 22% of women and 35% of men have 10 or more years of schooling. While this figure clearly shows that educational attainment at each level of education is lower for women than for men, the pattern of gender differentials is easier to see in Figure 10 which shows the percentage of women and men with a specified number of years of education.

Gender differentials in favour of men are very small at low levels of education (<5 and 5-7 completed years of education): 23% of women, compared with 27% of men who have 0-7 complete years of education. Beyond seven completed years of education, gender differentials widen dramatically and remain wide.

Although educational attainment is very low among both women and men age 15-49, it is higher among the younger age groups than among the older age groups



(Figure 11). Among the age-group 40-49, only 14% of women and 28% of men had 10 or more years of education. By contrast, among the 20-29 year-old population, 27% of women and 39% of men have 10 or more years of education. Despite the continuing absolute low level of educational attainment even in the 20-29 age group, the proportion who have 10 or more years of education has increased at a faster rate for women than for men. Specifically, the proportion of women with at least 10 years of education has nearly doubled between the youngest and the oldest age cohort; whereas, for

men, it has increased by only 40%. There is also a slight decline in the gender differential in the proportions who have 10 or more years of education.

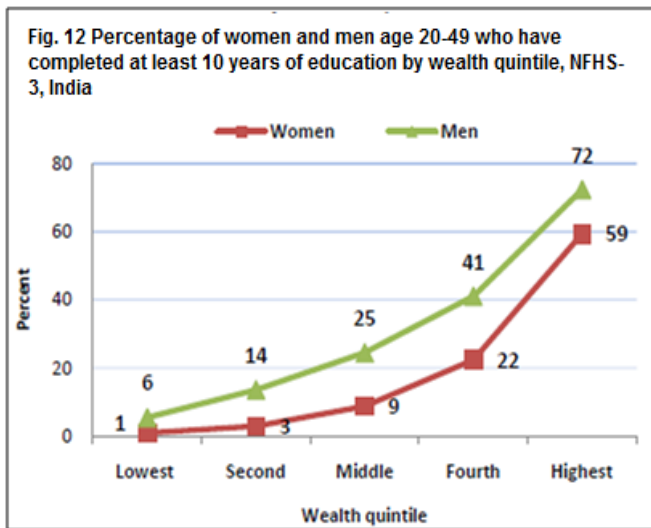
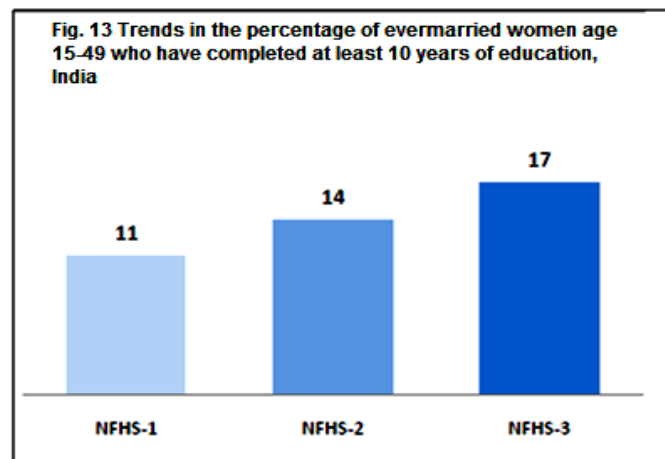


Figure 12 shows that educational attainment increases rapidly with household wealth for both women and men, although, at every level of wealth, women are much less likely than men to have 10 or more years of education. Further, the percentage point change with each unit increase in the wealth quintile is greater for men than for women, except between the fourth and the highest quintiles. Consequently, the gender differential in absolute terms increases from 6 percentage points in the lowest wealth quintile to 19 in the fourth wealth quintile, and then narrows to 13 in the

highest wealth quintile. It is also worth noting that negligibly small proportions of women and men have 10 or more years of education in the lowest wealth quintile.

Trends in educational attainment Trends in educational attainment can be examined by looking at changes across age cohorts or at data from multiple time points collected using the same questions. Figure 13 shows the proportion of ever-married women age 15-49 who have 10 or more years of education in each of the three NFHS surveys. This comparison of educational attainment is restricted to ever married women since never married women were not interviewed in NFHS-1 and NFHS-2.



The educational attainment of a sample of ever-married women is not representative

of all women since the more educated women in the younger age cohorts, particularly the 15-19 and 20-24 cohorts, are less likely to be married and, hence, will be under-represented in this sample. Nonetheless, a sample of ever-married women serves well in representing the women currently bearing and rearing children and making reproductive health and nutritional decisions. Figure 13 shows that educational attainment of ever-married women has increased between the three surveys. In NFHS-1, only 11% of ever-married women had 10 or more completed years of education; this proportion rose to 14% in NFHS-2 and is now at 17% in NFHS-3. Despite this increase, however, less than 1 in 5 ever-married women have completed 10 or more years of education in India.

References

1. Aggarwal, Y. (2000). Primary Education in Delhi. How Much Do the Children Learn? New Delhi: NIEPA.
2. Aggarwal, Y. (2000). Assessment of Trends in Access and Retention. New Delhi: NIEPA.
3. Aggarwal, Y. (2001). Quality Concerns in Primary Education in India. Where is the Problem? Available from: [Accessed April 2007].

4. Aikara, J. (1997). *Learner Achievement in Primary Schools*. Mumbai: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Unit for Research in the Sociology of Education.
5. Bardhan, P. (2001). Social justice in the global economy. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36 (5 and 6): pp. 467-480.
6. Bashir, S. (1994) *Achievement performance*
7. Bhatt, G.D. (2005). *Educational Development of Scheduled Caste*. New Delhi: Himalayan Region Study & Research.
8. Census of India (1981). *Social and Cultural Tables, Series 1-India, Part IVA-, Table C-1*. New Delhi: Registrar General and Census Commissioner.
9. Census of India (1991). *Primary Census Abstract. General Population. Part II-B (i), Volume II*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner.
10. Census of India (2001). *C Series Data: Social and Cultural Tables*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner.
11. Crook, R. and Manor, J. (1998). *Democracy and Decentralization in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
12. Jeffery, P., Jeffery, R. and Jeffrey, C. (2007). *Investing in the Future: Education in the Social and Cultural Reproduction of Muslims in UP*. In: Hasan, M. (ed.), *Living with Secularism: The Destiny of India Muslim*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
13. Jha, J. and Jhingran, D. (2002). *Elementary Education for the Poorest and other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalisation*. New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research.
14. Jha, J. and Subrahmanian, R. (2006). *Secondary Education in the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh: Gender dimensions of state policy and practice*. In: Hassim, S. and Razavi,
15. Kabeer, N. and Subrahmanian, R. (1999). *Institutions, Relations and Outcomes. A Framework and Case Studies for Gender-aware Planning*, New Delhi: Zubaan.
16. S. (eds.) (2006). *Gender and Social Policy in a Global Context Uncovering the Gendered Structure of 'The Social'*. Basingstoke: UNRISD/Palgrave.
17. Series. New Delhi: NIEPA.