Beyond the education silo? Tackling adolescent secondary education in rural India, 2014

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Beyond the education silo? Tackling adolescent secondary education in rural India

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In this paper we examine the factors contributing to gender inequality in secondary schooling in India by critically reviewing the government's secondary education policy. Drawing on the findings of a study in rural Gujarat, we couple this analysis with an examination of the gendered dynamics that restrict girls' ability to fully benefit from the education infrastructure and initiatives that do exist, using Connell's Gender and Power framework. We propose that an extension of the government's current approach to educational reform, focused primarily on expanding infrastructure may aggravate the gender, class and caste asymmetries at secondary level. Fostering an environment that enables vulnerable adolescent girls to benefit from enhanced educational provisions is essential to realizing their rights and the achievement of an equitable system.

Introduction

> Boys cannot work like girls, for example if our daughter is out of the village for some reason then we call our neighbour's daughter for household work. (Mother, age 38, Village E)

Evidence establishing the significant impact of education on social and economic progress has fuelled global efforts to increase equitable educational access as exemplified in the Education for All (EFA 1990) movement and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000) strategy.[1] These initiatives have resulted in significantly improved educational enrolment rates for both boys and girls, particularly at primary level. While overall access to education has increased, targeted programming within and beyond educational institutions is needed to ensure greater equity across gender (and other) divides, particularly at the secondary level. Data from UNESCO (2012) illustrate the extent of this challenge. A majority (56%) of the world's children live in countries that have achieved gender parity at the primary level, but the proportion drops significantly (29%) at the lower secondary level, and even further (to just 15%) at the upper secondary level. India's secondary education system exemplifies this trend. The country has reportedly achieved near-universal enrolment at the primary level through massive infrastructural development, teacher training and community mobilization. These changes were mandated under the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (SSA), the government's flagship programme for achievement of universalization of elementary education. Retention at the upper primary level and ensuring universal transition to the secondary are among the next big challenges. Other major challenges beyond the scope of this paper include improving education quality and learning outcomes.

According to UNESCO (2011), Indian gross enrolment rates in secondary education now lie at 71% and 66% for males and females respectively, a marked increase compared with enrolment rates 20 years earlier of 51% and 36%. Nonetheless, these figures lie well below those of countries with which India is regularly compared economically.

In March 2009 the Government of India (GOI - the central government of India through which education policy is made) launched Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), a scheme to

overhaul its secondary education system over the next decade. The target of this initiative is universal retention by 2020. While the aims are laudable, to date implementation has been sluggish and millions of poor rural children, particularly girls, continue to be pushed out of the school system. As illustrated in Table 1, the discrepancies in attendance rates begin at the upper primary school level (Classes VI–VIII) and become more pronounced as children advance in age.

Table 1. Net attendance ratio by class group for all of India.

Grade	Rural female (%)	Rural male (%)	Urban female (%)	Urban male (%)	India female (%)	India male (%)
I–V	83	86	84	86	83	86
VI–VIII	54	59	64	67	56	61
IX–X	35	40	51	52	39	43
XI–XII	19	25	39	39	2	29
Post-High School (formal education)	5	8	14	13	7	9
Post-High School (any type of education)	6	10	21	20	10	13

Note: This is the ratio of the number of persons attending a particular class group (i.e. VI–VIII, IX–X and XI–XII) to the total number of persons in the corresponding age group (i.e.11–13, 14–15 and 16–17 respectively).

Source: GOI. 2010. "Education in India: 2007–08 – Participation and Expenditure," 64th Round (July 2007–June 2008), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GOI, New Delhi.

This stark difference between urban and rural secondary school participation rates is particularly concerning because more than two-thirds (69%) of India's population reside in rural areas (Census 2011). Rural location is a proxy for many contributing socio-economic factors such as low parental literacy rates[2] and economic disadvantage[3]. Further, compared with urban populations, adolescents in rural areas are more likely to have to travel longer distances to school and those schools are likely to be less well equipped (World Bank 2009). As evidenced by the national enrolment statistics in Table 1 and smaller-scale in-depth studies on participation (Siddhu 2011), these economic challenges and infrastructural shortcomings impact girls most severely. In recent years, significant attention has been paid to achieving gender parity in schooling in the name of equity and broader social benefits (Lewis and Lockheed 2006).

In recent decades, significant attention has been paid to addressing gender equality in schooling from a variety of perspectives. Many focused on enumerating enrolment rates highlighting the societal benefits of girls' educational inclusion (World Bank 1995). Others, influenced by the Gender and Development theorists such as Kabeer (1994), focused on the broader societal environment in which girls' educational participation is situated (Leach et al. 2003). More recently, many contemporary gender, education and development experts (Unterhalter and Aikman 2005) have drawn on the work of Sen (1990) and Nussbaum (2004) situating girls' educational participation in the broader capabilities approach. They stress the need to explore

both educational provisions and the socio-cultural opportunity structure that can enable or hinder girls' and women's participation. While Connell's framework relates closely to the Gender and Development approach, in this paper we take an interdisciplinary perspective drawing on a combination of insights, theories and perspectives to examine educational inequalities in India today. We aim to probe the factors contributing to gender inequality in secondary schooling by critically reviewing the government's secondary education policy. We couple this analysis with an examination of entrenched gendered, social and cultural norms that restrict girls' ability to fully benefit from the education infrastructure and initiatives that do exist. To illustrate the household and community-level obstacles that inhibit girls' educational progression, we present the findings of a mixed-method study in rural Gujarat. We present our findings using Connell's (1987) Gender and Power framework. We argue that current education policies, restricted as they are to the education silo, cannot reverse entrenched social constraints on reaching the most vulnerable. For education initiatives to succeed, energetic legal, political and social enforcement of prohibitions on child marriage and sexual harassment are essential. Improvements in secondary school enrolment and performance by adolescent girls are intrinsically linked with improvements in gender equity in the material and cultural environment surrounding education – family, community, public institutions.

In the next section we provide an overview of current secondary education policy, with a particular focus on the northwest Indian state of Gujarat where our study was conducted. We outline our study methodology and theoretical framework. Our findings illustrate the contextual and socially embedded nature of gender inequalities and their impact on a key potential tool for empowerment, the completion of secondary education. We conclude with suggested policy interventions to enhance the prospect of a more equitable education system and of female empowerment more generally.

Indian secondary education policy

In the decades since Independence, India has raised education attainment levels, particularly at the primary level. The current five-year plan, India's 12th, addresses deficits in the quality and supply of secondary education as a central policy concern. The plan notes the persistence of 'an insufficient number of public schools, […] poor quality of education offered, and […] high cost of private senior secondary education' (GOI 2012a, 69).

As was mentioned in the Introduction, the current scheme for universalizing secondary education is the RMSA. The government of India launched the RMSA in 2009 with the ambitious goal of universalizing access by 2017 and retention by 2020. The RMSA has three overarching goals: Access, Equity, and Quality. The main priorities of this scheme address supply-side interventions, namely:

(1)   upgrading upper primary schools to secondary schools;

(2)   strengthening existing secondary schools;

(3)   providing additional classrooms, science laboratories, libraries, computer rooms, art, craft and culture rooms, toilet blocks and water facilities in schools;

(4)   providing in-service training for teachers;

(5)   providing for major repairs of school buildings and residential quarters for teachers. (GOI 2012a, Section 21.97, 70)

Part of the planned infrastructural improvement includes construction of hostels with the capacity to house 100 girls in each of 3479 administrative blocks deemed 'educationally backward' (defined as having a female literacy rate below the national average) across the

country. Girls enrolled in Classes IX–XII and belonging to low-caste minority communities and families subsisting below the poverty line would be eligible to stay free in hostels.[4] However, according to the Ministry of Human Resource Development website, construction is still in the early stages and large portions of central government funds have yet to be released pending receipt of revised proposals and spending reports from individual state governments[5]. Administrative delays and under-utilization of funds have been a serious obstacle to progress over the last decade of educational infrastructural development.[6] For example, during the 11th five-year plan, only 32.26% of the outlay for public expenditure directed towards secondary education was actually spent (GOI 2012a, 70). This significant shortfall in spending demonstrates the implementation and absorption challenges facing education reform at the local level. Also, thus far the RMSA only covers public lower secondary schools. Public higher secondary schools (Classes 10–12) and all private secondary schools remain excluded.

In addition to these infrastructural projects, the government also plans to continue its relatively smaller-scale investment in scholarships. To date, there have been two centrally sponsored[7] scholarship schemes, the Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education Scheme and the National Meanscum- Merit Scholarship Scheme. The Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education Scheme provides a one-time Rs 3000 ($60) deposit in a bank account in the name of the female student when she completes upper primary (eighth class) and begins secondary school (ninth class). This deposit can be used once the student completes her lower secondary school examination, two years later. Those eligible to enrol in the scheme are Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe students and those who graduate from special girls-only residential schools provided for students from minority communities and families living below the poverty line. To be successful, such schemes need to provide a financial incentive that encourages families to forgo the economic benefit of adolescent contribution to household income though paid or in-kind labour. This represents a major challenge. Whereas the Girls' Incentive scheme provides Rs 3000 ($60) per year for the two years of lower secondary education, the average daily wage of an unskilled labourer in Gujarat (where the research described below took place) is at least Rs 120 ($2) a day. An adolescent girl can therefore earn Rs 3000 ($60) in 30 days.[8] The financial incentive is therefore too low to offset the opportunity cost of further education.

The other main centrally sponsored initiative is the National Means-cum- Merit Scholarship Scheme. This awards 100,000 scholarships of Rs 6000 ($120) per annum to meritorious students from economically weaker sections of the community. The amount awarded is more substantial than the Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education Scheme. However, vulnerable adolescent school girls have many competing obligations that militate again a concerted focus on their academic work. These pressures combine with the current infrastructural inadequacies of secondary schools to severely limit the chances that marginalized rural adolescent girls would achieve the academic results needed to benefit from this merit-based scholarship scheme. This is evidenced by the fact that only 37% of available scholarships were awarded in 2011/12 (as reported by The Hindu, 3 September 2012)[9], despite the millions of families who struggle to cover their children's secondary education.

In the next section we outline the results from our mixed methods study in rural Gujarat, using Connell's Gender and Power framework. The findings illustrate the multi-faceted challenges that many rural girls face in their pursuit of a second level education.

Methodology

Our data are drawn from a multi-year action research education project. The project was a partnership between the Self Employed Women's Association, an Indian national women's trade union with 1.2 million members, and the François Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human

Rights at Harvard University. The project was conducted in two phases, a pre-intervention needs assessment followed by an experimental intervention. The needs assessment employed a sequential explanatory design (Creswell 2003) to explore the nature of barriers to educational progression experienced by adolescents in five research villages, situated in rural northwest Gujarat. Primarily agrarian, the villages range in population from 1000 to 2500. The villages were selected using a non-random purposive sample based on socio-economic similarity and a high rate of Self Employed Women's Association membership. Employing a convenience sampling method somewhat limits the generalizability of study findings. However, while the villages were not selected randomly, local experts assured us that the villages were typical of other villages in the block.

The research included a structured survey followed by 15 focus groups of three types: female adolescents in school, female adolescents out of school and the mothers of adolescents. The data collection took place across five villages over a six-month period from July 2010 to January 2011. The results from the first quantitative phase informed the qualitative data collection protocols, allowing for a more in-depth investigation.

Quantitative phase

A total of 752 individuals were randomly selected for interview using a stratified sampling approach. The demographic breakdown of the sample was as follows: 94 males aged 10–13, 94 females aged 10–13, 94 males aged 14–17 and 94 females aged 14–17 (n = 376) and 376 female caregivers. Using census data provided by the village administration, lists of households with one or more adolescents were categorized on the basis of adolescent age and gender. Households were randomly selected for participation until the participant quota for each village was met. Survey sample sizes were weighted proportionally to population per village and ranged from 72 to 152. The survey tool was developed by the research team, locally pre-tested and refined through a series of pilots. The tool was divided into two parts. The first part, based on the national sample survey household profile section, was administered to female caregivers. It was designed to gather a personal, economic and educational profile on all members of the household. Data were collected on a total of 2102 individuals. A 10-variable section was developed by the research team to assess caregiver perceptions of school quality, motivations for sending children to school and aspirations for children's futures. The second part was administered to adolescents. This section contained a time log that captured participants' typical daily activities in two-hour blocks across the day, from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. In addition, a 10-variable section assessed adolescent perceptions of school quality, their regularity of attendance and their aspirations for the future. The reliability of the survey scale items was established based on both pilot and main survey administration.

Preliminary quantitative findings were presented to the community for comment six months after the initial data collection. The community discussion of the first round of data collection, organized by local Self Employed Women's Association leaders, acted as a recruitment site for the qualitative data collection phase.

Qualitative phase

The qualitative phase of the research included 15 focus groups, three per village. In each village, focus group discussions were held with: girls aged 10–17 enrolled in school; girls aged 10–17 not enrolled in school; and their adult caregivers, 80% of whom were female. Criteria for inclusion in the focus group for adults were a minimum of two years residence in the village and having an adolescent aged 10–17 in one's household. Criteria for inclusion in the focus group for adolescents included age (10–17), gender (girls only) and a minimum of two years' residence in the village. Due to the convenience sampling strategy, the size of the focus groups varied

between four and seven persons per village. Trained researchers facilitated group discussions based on five to 10 open-ended questions grounded in the findings of the quantitative research. The discussions centred on participants' attitudes to education, parental and personal aspirations, and barriers to girls' education. They also included perceptions of school infrastructural quality and teacher expertise, and opinions about how to improve attendance in and quality of schools. Focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. We conducted a thematic analysis of the text data using QSR Nvivo 9 qualitative software for data storage, coding, and theme development. Integrating the quantitative and qualitative data at the intermediate stage, through the focus groups and community feedback, helped the research team to understand the scope of issues and the contours of the quantitative data (Creswell 2003).

Theoretical framework

The findings are presented using Connell's (1987) Gender and Power framework. Connell provides a lens to examine the interplay of 'structure and agency' in the formation of gendered social practices. According to Connell, structure is the constraint on social practice (or agency) produced by a given form of social organization such as family, workplace, community. Connell takes a holistic view of structures. She maintains that structures experienced by women are manifestations of a complex set of economic, cultural, religious and other societal factors that intersect with pre-existing characteristics such as race and class. These factors always include the structures of labour, power and cathexis. 'Labour' includes the segregation of labour markets and the creation of 'men's jobs' and 'women's' jobs (Connell 1987, 96). For Indian rural adolescents, the division of labour within the household is most relevant. 'Power' includes the structures of authority, control and coercion that govern gender roles (1987, 96). Finally, 'cathexis' covers the gendered character of sexual desire within intimate relationships, including marriage (1987, 111). In this model, gender dynamics emerge from the interaction between these structures. A 'structural inventory' specifies the configuration of these three factors. According to Connell, women's experiences are constrained and shaped by the structure of gender relations. The relevant structural inventory, be it a specific institution like the home, workplace, school or street, is its 'gender regime'. In this paper we investigate the gender regime of the primary units of socialization for rural adolescent girls in India: the family home and the local community.
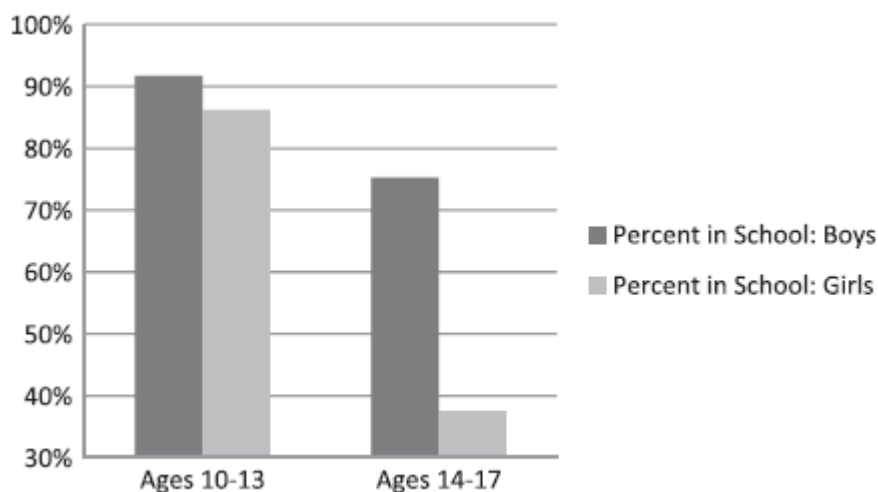

Figure 1. Self-report enrolment of adolescents by gender and age.

Table 2. Local government school enrolment data.

	Standard	Boys	Girls
Village 1	IX	22	6
	X	20	5
Village 2	IX	24	4
	X	20	1

Findings

In all five villages surveyed the effects of the SSA (primary school education for all) movement were striking: 91% of boys and 86% of girls aged 10–13 self-report attending school. While lower than the national averages, these attendance rates signify a dramatic intergenerational change, as 75% of the mothers and 46% of the fathers in the villages surveyed had never attended school. The data show a dramatic decrease in school attendance as children, particularly girls, progress through adolescence. Only 75% of boys and 38% of girls between 14 and 17 years of age self-report attending school on a regular day (see Figure 1). Of the survey population, 75% would be classified as 'Other Backward Caste', 15% as Scheduled Caste/ Tribe, 8% as Muslims and 2% as other. These mixed-community, agricultural villages with low levels of parental education exemplify the communities that need attention if the advances of the SSA are going to generate an equitable system of education at the secondary level.

The extremely low female attendance figures amongst older adolescents across the five villages are consistent with official enrolment data (Table 2) from the two local lower government secondary schools. In both schools, the enrolment ratio for boys outnumbers girls by more than five to one.

In our survey, gender is a consistently significant predictor of enrolment. When the effects of factors such as age, village and migration are controlled for, boys are 1.4 times more likely to be in school than girls (95% confidence interval = 0.971, 1.836). Using Connell's (1987) Gender and Power framework, we examine some of the underlying social causes of the gender divide in educational participation. We take an inventory of the labour, power and cathexis structures in adolescent girls' households and local communities. The deconstruction of the gender regime allows us to move beyond the 'education silo' and to conceptualize how the gendered power dynamics affect adolescent girls' educational participation as they transition from childhood to womanhood.

Labour

In India, as in many other patriarchal societies, there are firmly established gender roles, according to which girls do household chores and are tasked with care of younger siblings (Sundaram and Vanneman 2008; Kis-Katos 2012). This form of child labour is generally overlooked and considered a normal or natural aspect of a female child's role within the household. Evidence from our study and others in Pakistan (Hazarika and Bedi 2003), Peru (Levison and Karine 1998) and Egypt (Assaad, Levison, and Zibanib 2010) confirms the deleterious effect of domestic burden on educational attainment. To capture the extent to which this was true for this community, the survey contained a log of daily activities: adolescents were asked to report the activities undertaken in two-hour blocks, between 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. on a regular weekday. This time-use component revealed that only 33% of girls aged 14 and over reported being in school on an average day during the mandated school hours of 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (regular school hours). Interestingly, the self-report rate of

school enrolment for the same population was 38%, a notable discrepancy in enrolment and attendance. Boys evidenced a much smaller discrepancy between indirect reporting of attendance: 75% of boys reported being enrolled in school, as opposed to 73% reporting attendance through the time-use log. In the morning hours between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m., 57% of girls as opposed to 28% of boys are doing household work. Conversely, during the same period 44% of boys and but only 16% of girls are doing homework. As Table 3 illustrates, many adolescent girls spend their mornings and evenings engaged in household work. The same trend can be seen in the evening hours: 38% of girls are doing chores and 20% are doing homework, as opposed to 11% and 48% respectively for boys.

Similar (although less marked) trends were observed among younger adolescents (ages 10–13). The younger adolescent girls reported higher rates of school enrolment than actual attendance: 87% of girls reported being enrolled in school but only 77% reported attending on a given day. Adolescents aged 10–13, most of whom are in school, have a more equitable distribution of chores by gender. As illustrated in Table 4, 69% of girls are doing housework in the evening hours of 7:00–9:00 p.m. Sixty-two per cent of boys also report contributing to household work during these hours. When compared with Table 3, we see a marked increase in the hours spent by adolescent girls on household work as they progress in age, to the detriment of their education.

The questionnaire asked participants about their perceptions of the primary cause of school drop-out amongst adolescents in the village. Confirming data set out in the tables above, both caretakers and adolescents cited the obligation to perform household chores as the most common reason for school drop-out.

Table 3. Adolescents' activities during school hours by gender: ages 14–17.

Time /activity	Sleep or rest (%) Girls	Boys	Household work (%) Girls	Boys	Work (to support family) (%) Girls	Boys	School (%) Girls	Boys	Craft (%) Girls	Boys	Homework (%) Girls	Boys	Other (%) Girls	Boys
Morning hours														
9:00–11:00 am	0	3	57	28	7	12	3	5	5	0	16	44	12	8
School hours														
11:00 am–1:00 pm	5	1	46	9	9	11	33	73	3	0	0	2	1	4
1:00–3:00 pm	29	6	17	10	7	5	33	72	11	0	0	2	1	3
3:00–5:00 pm	25	7	16	4	11	7	33	73	10	0	1	2	2	6
Evening hours														
5:00–7:00 pm	6	3	38	11	7	11	7	10	10	0	20	48	10	17
7:00–9:00 pm	3	5	80	59	2	1	1	2	2	0	3	12	9	11

Table 4. Adolescents' activities during school hours by gender: ages 10–13.

	Sleep or rest Girls	Boys	Household work Girls	Boys	Work (to support family) Girls	Boys	School Girls	Boys	Craft Girls	Boys	Homework Girls	Boys	Other Girls	Boys
Morning hours														
9:00–11:00 am	0	1	41	27	1	5	7	10	2	0	34	39	15	18
School hours														
11:00 am–1:00 pm	1	1	14	2	0	4	78	90	2	0	3	0	2	3
1:00–3:00 pm	8	2	2	3	2	2	77	88	4	1	3	3	4	1
3:00–5:00 pm	6	2	2	1	4	3	77	87	4	1	3	3	4	3
Evening hours														
5:00–7:00 pm	4	4	29	5	1	1	2	1	0.0	0	50	68	14	21
7:00–9:00 pm	2	3	69	62	0	0	0	0	1	0	14	18	14	17

The focus group data also illustrate the lasting and far-reaching impact of these onerous gender-specific responsibilities, as in the quotation at the beginning of the paper:

> Boys cannot work like girls, for example if our daughter is out of the village for some reason then we call our neighbour's daughter for household work. (Mother, Village E)

Clearly labour structures constrain girls' ability to engage in education. In an analysis of the implications of Connell's theory, Maharaj elucidates the long-term implications of these gendered labour structures:

> The gendered division of labour … forecloses a whole range of job options to women: it limits or constrains her economic and other social practices in significant ways. (1995, 52)

In terms of adolescent girls' educational attainment, the time-use data above clearly illustrate the shift in the labour structure that occurs for girls during these crucial pubescent years. While enrolment is high at the upper primary level, participation begins to slip. As girls make the critical transition to secondary school, enrolment drops dramatically. Meanwhile, domestic pressures within the home mount.

Power

The concept of power in Connell's framework includes gendered structures of authority, coercion and control. In our data, adolescent girls' unquestioning submission to parental will and their strong sense of obligation to families emerge as manifestations of the constraining nature of the structure of power. In the interviews, the girls emphasized their sense of obligation and responsibility to the family. This dominant preoccupation seems to supersede any personal ambitions, so that in many cases girls did not even consider completing higher education or embarking on a career:

> Out of duty to her family and family members, girls are leaving school early. It is much easier for parents if there is a girl to do household work and the other reason [for leaving school] is her marriage. (Girl not in school, Village E)

> I had an older sister that had to leave school because my parents were tired and she had to help them. It is her obligation to stay at home to help. (Girl in school, Village C)

> Once a girl reaches a certain age then she must care for her siblings and do her embroidery and go to the fields. It is a girl's responsibility to her parents. (Girl out of school, Village B)

In line with this obedience to parents, girls unquestioningly accept that their parents make all decisions about their life. These decisions range from allocation of daily chores, to marriage, education, mobility and career:

> But decisions on education are not made by the society or community, what the parents want is final. (Village B Girl out of school, Village C)

> I will be whatever my parents decide I should be, if it is a doctor then I will be a doctor, if they wish for me to stay at home then I will stay at home and that is fine too. (Girl in school, Village C)

Tensions between parents' support in principle for girls' education and their insistence in actuality that girls perform household duties (and thus conform to the structure of labour) resonated throughout the interviews. This tension between notional parental support for their daughters' education and the opportunity costs of freeing up girls from work at home created a precarious balance with a direct impact on the quality of girls' school performance:

> [When I was still in school] I always did my homework but I always finished it late at night because after school I had to do household chores too. (Girl not in school, Village E)

The interplay of these restrictive labour and power structures limits young women's voices in deciding their priorities and undermines their potential for educational participation.

Cathexis

Cathexis relates to the socially constructed nature of sexuality and relationships that reflect the dominant interests. According to Maharaj:

> 'Cathexis' in Connell's terms refers to the structure that constrains and so shapes people's emotional attachments to each other. It refers both to the hegemonic 'limits' placed on practices

that constitute emotionally charged social relationships in which the bodily dimension features and to the social practices which challenge such hegemony. (1995, 61)

In the villages surveyed, mixed gendered relationships were referred to only in the context of marriage. Friendships, relationships or even contact between adolescent males and females were outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour. This form of gender segregation is particularly common in rural communities where the male-dominated cultural context affords little contact between the sexes (Verma and Mahendra 2004). In the exchanges relating to marriage, girls spoke of it as a looming destiny over which they had little or no control. In the survey, early marriage emerged as the second most commonly cited factor after performance of household chores for female school drop-out. The impact of the structure of cathexis on girls' educational attainment also emerged in the focus group data:

> Girls leave the school at an early stage because when they are to be married, we often refuse to educate them. However if their in-laws want to educate them then we don't say no. (Mother, Village D)

> Another reason for female school dropout is the girl's marriage. Once she is married then she becomes totally busy with household work and cannot even think of education. (Girl out of school, Village C)

These quotes illustrate the extent to which the structures of labour, power and cathexis intertwine to limit a girl's agency and educational participation. Adolescent girls are powerless to challenge the authority of their parents and in-laws. The labour and power restrictions in the family home prepare girls for life as an obedient, domesticated wife.

This fear and distrust of sexual relationships with men (whether forced or consensual) emerged as a substantial barrier to continued education. When mothers were asked how they would feel about their daughter leaving the village for secondary school, they responded:

> When our daughter goes to school or goes to do any other work, we are afraid very much because the time is not good. (Mother, Village C)

> My mother said that she would worry that I would have to walk alone for long distances because school is 25 to 30 kilometers away and the bus is irregular. (Girl not in school, Village D)

Clearly, parents associated continued education with an increased risk of sexual violence. In many exchanges, men were portrayed as menacing forces from which young women were to be protected. Out-of-school adolescents in Village E were asked why girls are not allowed to go beyond the village for school. After a long silence, suggesting that this prohibition had never been challenged, the girls explained:

> In the past about five girls were gone to Radhanpur [the local town] to study but all five ran away with boys, so parents are afraid to send girls now. They believe if their girls run away with boys they lose their prestige in the society. (Girl in school, Village E)

> They think that once we leave the village we will have affairs with boys and marry them, so they won't send us beyond the village to study. (Girl in school, Village E)

Increasing investment to raise the number of schools in these areas should have positive impact on educational participation as girls will not have to travel so far outside the village. However, beyond access there are other factors at play. According to parents, continued education increased the risk that girls would challenge the constraints of the prevailing social order and start romantic relationships with adolescent boys. Within this conservative rural community, a love marriage would result in great shame for both the girl and her family. The structure of cathexis radically restricted girls' movement and participation in public life, affecting their engagement in education.

The data from the research project demonstrate how underlying power structures of labour, power and cathexis impact education for rural adolescent girls. Improvements in educational provision will only be of benefit to marginalized girls in communities such as these if they are integrated with other structural changes.

Discussion

Indian government secondary education policy is primarily aimed at achieving universal enrolment by increasing and upgrading school facilities and expanding stipend programmes. But will this be enough to bring marginalized rural girls into the fold of secondary education, given the underlying power constraints that many rural girls are negotiating at home?

An interesting attempt to move beyond the education silo and take on the structures of labour, power and cathexis that inhibit adolescent girls' advancement, is the girls-only residential school movement. This movement began in the non-governmental organization sector and has since been adopted by government. As previously discussed, part of the central government's plans to increase enrolment is the construction of 3479 hostels for rural girls from poor communities. This approach does hold promise for increasing access for the most marginalized as it removes them from the confining gender structures within the home. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, [10] the aim of girls' hostels is to ensure girls are not deterred by distance to schools, parents' financial conditions and 'other societal factors'. The programme is an extension of the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas scheme, [11] which is a residential school model at the primary level. A 2008 national review (GOI 2008) of the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas scheme found that, despite implementation challenges, the scheme has effectively raised enrolment and retention rates in selected educationally backward blocks of the country. It was:

> well received by parents and the community and has the potential to respond to the educational needs of out-of-school girls in the 11+age. In particular, it is of immense value in areas where girls drop out after primary schools because of distance or of terrain. (GOI 2008, 3)

Evaluations of the impact of hostel schemes on rural girls' education at the secondary level are still in the early stages. Of course such a radical course of action presents significant implementation challenges. As yet, many large questions remain unanswered. One clear concern is whether scaling a scheme of this nature would be economically and operationally viable considering India is home to over 100 million adolescent girls. The social and political challenges involved in persuading families to send their girls away without fear of reputational impact are also significant. A longitudinal study to assess how these girls reintegrate into their communities once they have finished their education would also be an important element of evaluation.

Conditional cash transfers for girls' school attendance found to be effective in other contexts (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2008; Kane 2004) are another method of disrupting the gender inequitable status quo. But just as scholarship schemes, discussed earlier, have proved difficult to implement effectively in rural India, so stipends also have had a low take-up rate, indicating serious problems in implementation. An evaluation of a government initiative 'to raise the status of the girl child' in Gujarat, carried out by the Planning Commission, the International Institute for Population Sciences and the United Nations Population Fund, highlighted some of the many challenges. They include considerable delays on the part of the banks charged with disbursing the grants, non-cooperation between implementing agencies, demands from above poverty line families for similar funds, and overburdened local government service providers (Sekher 2010). The report recommended simplification of schemes by cutting down on the number of conditionalities and registration procedures. Perhaps similar measures could be

taken with regards to education initiatives, particularly given the low education levels of many parents in poor rural communities.

While it is impossible for governments to intervene directly in the underlying power structures in adolescent girls' homes, the lack of enforcement of laws to protect against the ubiquitous practice of child marriage amounts to tacit complicity with the inequitable cathexis construction. Nearly one-half (47%) of young women in India marry before the legal age of 18, and this figure rises to 53% in rural areas (UNFPA 2012). By the age of 20, 63% of Indian women are married (Moore et al. 2009). Current legal provisions compound the problem as child marriages are voidable only when children or guardians seek annulment of the marriage. Burdensome and impractical reporting provisions undermine the Prevention of Child Marriage Act's intended purpose. As a result, according to a government report (GOI 2012b) only 113 cases of child marriage were reported under the Act in 2012. This figure is disturbingly low since UNICEF (2011) reports that nearly one-half (43%) of women aged 20–24 are married before the age of 18. Early marriage stands in direct opposition to continued education. As noted by Aikman and Unterhalter (2007), equality entails the removal of deeply embedded obstacles and structures of power and exclusion, such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices, and institutional processes, all of which undermine opportunities and outcomes in education.

Other smaller-scale research and intervention initiatives have examined the effects targeting different elements of the labour, power and cathexis structures that girls are negotiating. Illustrating the effect of targeting the structure of labour outside the home, Jensen (2010) found that securing white-collar jobs (e.g. in call centres) for female secondary school graduates positively impacted female schools attendance at all levels. Similarly, Beaman et al. (2012) found that rigorous enforcement of a government quota system that reserved places for women in local government jobs also increased educational attainment amongst girls.

Other initiatives have effectively targeted the threatening aspects of cathexis structures in the public sphere by initiating safe transport schemes and harsh punishment for those who sexually harass girls on their journey to school (Bennell, Hyde, and Swainson 2002).

Bajaj (2011) found that curricular innovation addressing gender roles, human rights principles and non-discrimination norms seeded changes in attitudes, gender stereotypes and role expectations that have transformative potential for addressing adolescent girls' domestic burden.

Other initiatives include long-term mentorship and psycho-social support (Save the Children 2009), and teacher incentives (Muralidharan and Sundararaman 2011). UNESCO (2005) found that community mobilization initiatives by government that complement the work of non-profit organizations positively affected educational participation and the quality of that education. Given the extent to which the life course of adolescents is determined by parental will and community norms, education initiatives that target community norms and structures as a whole beyond the education silo are a critical policy development area.

Conclusion

In this article we have explored the nuanced causes of the low rates of educational attainment of rural adolescent girls by critically evaluating current government secondary education policy and deconstructing the underlying power dynamics that young women face in their homes. Our findings suggest an urgent need for a more radical approach to girls' educational opportunity if the most marginalized are to be reached. At present, initiatives are hampered by implementation challenges and a narrow sectoral approach that neglects the multiple dimensions relevant to progress. Using Connell's Gender and Power framework as a lens we

have explored the constrained gender regimes to which rural adolescent girls are subject. Girls are expected to conform to strict notions of femininity that involve sole responsibility for an extensive roster of household chores, unquestioning acquiescence to parental will and repressed sexuality in preparation for similar roles as dutiful wife in the marital home. These structures heavily restrict their educational prospects, their control over personal decision-making and their overall life trajectories. Essential policies aimed at promoting educational opportunity by positively affecting social structure such as banning child marriage remain weakly enforced, despite their particular significance for secondary school enrolment and gender equality in educational access.

Consistent with other recent scholarship, such as the comprehensive report on education research by the Brookings Institute (2010), we strongly propose a more innovative and holistic approach to education at every level. In the absence of significant changes to the social structures to which adolescent girls are subject, government schemes to strengthen girls' educational access to secondary education will not yield decisive results. The RMSA alone and other education schemes contained within an education silo cannot, despite their positive goals, unleash the full potential of India's rural adolescent girls.

Funding

Notes:

1. Millennium Development Goal 2: achieve universal primary education, with the target of ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. Millennium Development Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women, with the target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education by 2015. The Millennium Development Goals complement other international declarations on gender equality in education, formulated but not yet realized: the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action for gender equality and the 2000 Dakar Education for All Framework of Action.

2. In rural areas, male and female literacy rates lie at 79% and 59% respectively, compared with 90% and 80% for urban dwellers (Census 2011).

3. In 2012 average rural monthly per-capita expenditure was Rs 1281.45 ($25), as opposed to Rs 2401.68 ($46) in urban India (68th National Sample Statistics Office 2012).

4. Girls belonging to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Caste minority communities and below poverty line families studying in Classes IX–XII in a recognized school (run by any authority, State, District or nongovernmental organization) in deemed Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) with a valid certificate from a school headmaster are eligible to stay in the hostels. At least 50% of the girls admitted to the hostels should belong to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Caste, and minority communities.

5. See http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Updation_of_website_on_ 31.12.2013.pdf (accessed 27 January 2014) 6. During the 11th five-year plan period, public expenditure directed towards secondary education was increased as a percentage of gross domestic product from 0.78% in 2007/08 to 1.05% in 2011/12. About one-half of the central der for elementary (39%) and secondary (12%) education. In the State sector, about 75% of education expenditure is for school education, of which 44% is on elementary education and 30% on secondary education.

7. Similar smaller-scale schemes are available through the Department of Social of Justice and empowerment and at state level. In Gujarat, for example, see http://sje.gujarat.gov.in/ddcw/showpage.aspx?contentid=1490&lang=English.

8. As of January 31st, 2014 on the Paycheck website http://www.paycheck.in/main/salary/minimumwages/gujarat.

9. See http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/centre-to-enhance-income-criteriato-help-more-students-under-scholarship-scheme/article3851640.ece.

10. See http://mhrd.gov.in/girls_hostel accessed January 27, 2014.

11. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, named after Mahatma Gandhi's wife, was launched in 2004. The schools are residential and completely free of charge for girls at the upper primary level covering Classes VI–VIII. Seventy-five per cent of the seats in these residential schools are reserved for girls of the above communities while the rest are available for upper-caste girls whose families are below the poverty line.

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