

# *Educational Gender Inequality in China Rural Area*

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**Abstract:** Gender Equality has always been a concern of researchers all over the world. Every country has made an endeavor to promote gender equality in various domains, one of which is Education. Even though compulsory education has shrunk gender inequality concerning education in rural China, many girls in underprivileged regions still decide to stop their studies after completing the required schooling because of financial problems or some family issues. This phenomenon highlights the difficulties and obstacles that women face when pursuing an education, which is brought on by a variety of circumstances, including societal and familial considerations. This essay examines the reasons behind gender discrimination and the barriers to education encountered by Chinese women living in disadvantaged regions while also proposing strategies for improvement. The results indicate that rural women's pursuit of higher education may be hindered by societal stereotypes, social and cultural effects like patriarchal ideology, and familial factors such as lack of educational resources and low educational levels of parents.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Female Education, Rural Education

## 1. Introduction

For academics both domestically and internationally, gender equality has long been a contentious issue. Despite the recent global push for gender equality, women continue to experience discrimination on a variety of levels. For instance, because of maternity leave, women are often discriminated against by corporations, and many girls decide to get married after completing their compulsory education to live up to social gender-stereotypic expectations. More males than females are visible in some fields like law, politics, and medicine. Among these fields, Education is one of the sectors where gender injustice has the strongest effect, some previous studies have revealed that gender discrimination has an influence on academic pursuit and achievement as well as attitudes and individual expectations regarding gender roles [1]. Along with contributing more to economic growth, girls with higher educational attainment have a larger capacity of improving their self-worth, living circumstances, and career prospects [2].

In recent years, China has worked to lower gender imbalance in the education industry and enhance the quality of national education. The National education situation of China has substantially improved in rural and urban regions, in the decades following the implementation of nine-year compulsory schooling in 1986. Consequently, gender disparity in China is smaller than in other nations. Despite China's remarkable achievements in this field, scholars still found regional

disparities in gender equity in education, with many females being less inclined than boys to seek advanced learning, especially in remote areas[3]. The root reasons for this phenomenon are complicated and involve multiple different aspects, including social culture, regulatory issues, and parental expectations. This issue affects women's social standing and future professional growth in addition to their schooling throughout adolescence. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the origins of this occurrence and come up with resolutions.

The focus of this paper will be on analyzing the challenges and obstacles faced by women in rural areas as they seek higher education, as well as looking for the hidden causes of this social phenomenon to better comprehend it. This is because gender inequality is virtually nonexistent in the stage of compulsory education and as well as the fact that female students in poor and remote areas are more likely to choose to give up the pursuit of education due to external factors than girls in urban areas. Therefore, the concerns and difficulties experienced by women in rural regions while they pursue higher education will be the main topic of this essay. This essay will attempt to respond to three questions by reading earlier studies: The first inquiry is about the current educational situation of China's rural women, followed by an examination of the obstacles and challenges women experience in pursuing higher education, and lastly, the paper will propose some recommendations for resolving these issues.

## **2. Background Information on Educational Gender Disparity in Rural China**

Mandatory education has made it feasible for both boys and girls in China to have equal access to education at the primary and junior high school levels, and as a result of this economic progress, even households in remote areas can afford to send their children to school. 57 empirical publications investigating the gender gap in educational achievement in China were analyzed by Zeng et al, and the researchers came to the conclusion that the gap has been closing over time [3]. However, there has always been gender disparity in rural China. By the 1990s, it was mostly observed in the nation's poorer rural areas where girls were forced to compete with their brothers for limited financial and educational resources [4]. Girls who live in suburban and remote places where they have more options for non-farm jobs than are available for farming tend probably stay in school longer.[5]. In metropolitan regions, where the development of fundamental infrastructure and economy are much better, it is less common to see inequalities in majority aspects of basic education. And according to the research by Dong et al, boys in deprived areas attend and remain enrolled in school at high rates, whereas girls disengage from school at high rates [6]. Women have a significantly higher rate of adult illiteracy than males do, while men have significantly more years of education on average. Gender inequality related to education still occurs today, mostly in rural areas and among low-income households [7].

The multifaceted factors that influence Chinese women's opportunities for higher education include the long-standing traditional Chinese culture, the stereotyped allocation of household duties between men and women, the family's financial position, the parent's educational background, etc. Researchers from both home and abroad have already been investigating the reasons for this societal phenomenon over the past few decades. Jacka proposed that families may have different expectations because they believe there is a gender pay disparity in the results of education or because they believe men will provide more assistance for their elders than daughters will [8,9]. Depending on the child's gender, these views or expectations may result in different investments in that child, and a different treatment may result in different academic performances from that child [10]. Yang Xing believed that there is no market for the existence of the idea that "men are superior and women inferior." However, this idea which could be one of the obstacles to female education does exist in life [11]. Additionally, sociological and psychological viewpoints can aid in our

understanding of the possible link between gender disparity and teenagers' educational aspirations. [1].

### **3. Analysis of Female Educational Situation in Rural Area and Factors of Inequality**

Educational gender inequality has been a hot topic and concern of many developing countries, one of them is China. During the following part, what situation girls in rural China are facing and what factors cause this issue will be analyzed. Then given to the analysis, this paper will propose some practical suggestions to help girls in the remote area of China to overcome obstacles and defend their right of education.

#### **3.1. The Current Female Educational Situation in Rural China**

Gender equality is a significant component of achieving educational equality. Boys had the privilege of attending school in ancient China, whereas girls from common backgrounds were deprived of this possibility. Even though females are now required to attend school compulsorily, many of them who live in rural regions do not have the same available opportunities or desire for further education as boys. Women in China are less inclined than men to pursue higher education and embrace chances due to the country's centuries-old ideology and culture. According to some studies, gender inequality harms girls' future growth in life as well as girls' possibilities to and expectation in higher education. More importantly, poorer self-esteem, lower academic achievement, and lack of enthusiasm of female to pursue a career in STEM are all associated with higher levels of gender disparity[1,11-13]. Compared to more economically developed regions like Hebei, Beijing, and Shanghai, the number of persons with college or higher education is significantly lower in distant parts of central and western China like Ningxia and Qinghai. And in almost all of these rural areas, the number of women with advanced degrees is lower than the number of men. Additionally, rural regions have significantly greater rates of illiteracy than cities do, and women are more likely than males to be illiterate as a percentage of the population aged 15 and older [14].

Furthermore, there are gender variations in parents' expectations for their kids' academic performance. Hannum had investigated this issue in 2009, the result showed that nearly one in five of the moms who were investigated agreed with the adage that female education is meaningless since they will finally be someone's wife and move out. Most mothers still intended to depend on their sons for financial assistance in their older life. Girls were more likely to be asked to help with domestic duties and had somewhat lower (albeit still extremely high) mother educational expectations than males [9]. Additionally, there are geographical variations in gender inequality. According to a cross-province study, Chinese women generally have worse outcomes than men in a variety of areas, and women in Western Chinese provinces are much poorer than women in Eastern Chinese provinces [1].

Therefore, it is evident from the statistics above that Chinese women continue to experience gender unfairness in a variety of ways, with education ranking highly among them. Although there is less discrimination against women in education in places with higher economic growth and geographic position, such as Guangzhou and Beijing, it is still the impoverished rural parts of China that experience the worst gender imbalance in education and require the greatest attention.

#### **3.2. Factors that Cause Discrimination in Female Education in Rural China**

The corrupt culture of male superiority in society, the social expectations of parents in the family, and some of the women's limitations on self-worth and self-achievement are all sources of many invisible obstacles that women face in the pursuit of their own academic achievement. While

women are not overtly discriminated against or prevented from pursuing higher education in today's society, there are many visible barriers that women must overcome.

### **3.2.1. Unbalanced Resources Distribution**

As we all know, China's economy has been growing rapidly in recent years, and as part of its aim to advance its society via Science and Education, it has given more priority to its inhabitants' education. Despite this, there is still an obvious inequality related to education between urban and rural communities. The uneven distribution of educational resources is the main reason for this educational inequity. The equality of preschool education services, according to Zhuang and Zhu, increased in the majority areas of China between 2008 and 2014, nevertheless there remained a glaring disparity between the eastern and central region [15]. Then a result demonstrates that between 2000 and 2018, China's average number of school years increased, educational inequality decreased. However, the education gap between developed and remote areas remains stark and even for the youngest age group, the average number of years spent in school in cities was longer than that in villages [16]. We may also better understand why parents focus more on their boys' education by considering the unequal distribution of educational resources and the patriarchal mindset. Due to physical and financial limitations, resources for schools and teachers are limited in rural regions, and not every child can have the chance to go to high school. Additionally, a family's financial resources are constrained, and as they are more dependent on their boys as they age, parents are more likely to give their sons what little money they do have because, in rural areas, their daughters will ultimately wed into another family. Therefore, women have much less access to higher educational opportunities and resources than males do in rural areas where educational resources are already low and in rural communities where patriarchal beliefs are strongly ingrained. Higher education for girls has beyond their parents' financial capacity and legal obligations [17].

### **3.2.2. Chinese Feudal Society and Gender Identity**

The reality that systemic sexism and patriarchy, which are strongly related to institutional obstacles and more conventional gender ideas, are the key indicators in explaining why gender disparity is adversely connected with children's ambitions for education [18]. And the disparity in social standing between men and women in Chinese feudal society must be mentioned when discussing the core reason for gender discrimination in education. The subsistence-based smallholder economy that predominated in ancient China was defined by the necessity for a large number of laborers to grow crops. Because women did not possess the same physical strength that males had, men were primarily responsible for providing for families. For a very long period, this division of work inside the family persisted, slowly forming the notion that men are superior than women. Due to this notion, women are evaluated and discussed more critically and more stringently which increases the difficulty of women getting higher education. This is demonstrated by the fact that women have a far greater percentage of illiteracy than men do, and that female admittance rates to all levels of education are lower than male admission rates [10]. Role positioning of women and men is another idea that affects female potential and access to better academic accomplishment. While women are viewed as sexual weaklings and helpers, men are more frequently connected with terms like "powerful, leading, family decision-maker." While males are solely questioned about how to accomplish and pursue their objectives, even in many interviews with successful women, reporters constantly ask questions about how to reconcile family and job. Gender stereotypes, according to which a man is a natural conqueror who may have his own profession and successes, whilst a woman concentrates more on her family, are at the root of such concerns. According to the widespread belief that education is a crucial component of success and that people pursue higher

education in part to have more successful careers, women are frequently persuaded they do not need a college education because their social obligations lie in caring for their family rather than pursuing their own self-worth, whereas men find it meaningful and worthwhile to pursue a college education. When it comes to marriage rates by gender in 2021, rural women in the age range of 15 to 19—when they should be attending school—marry at considerably greater rates than urban women and rural males.

Gender education inequality is less apparent in metropolitan areas than it is in rural regions because of the economic and cultural foundation and sophistication of these communities. People in rural regions tend to retain outmoded beliefs from the past and fail to invent their own ideas since they are provided with fewer educational and economic resources and have lower levels of knowledge per capita. Therefore, rural women have greater challenges than metropolitan women in their quest for higher scholastic achievements in such a human milieu.

### **3.2.3. The Influence of Family on Women**

In psychology people often refer to a concept, "family of origin", the influence of the family of origin on a child's development is not to be underestimated. Likewise, when we refer to a woman's higher education, her family can be both a positive influence and a hindrance to her. Scholars studying women's educational aspirations have emphasized the importance of family background, which includes the level of parental education as well as parental educational involvement [1]. Low educational attainment and lack of knowledge about schooling were characteristics of the parents in the rural area. It was particularly challenging for girls to get a proper education in houses when their parents were uneducated. The research was conducted by Lars and Iversen to better understand the cultural restrictions on women's access to education in China's rural areas [19]. They discovered that early marriages, caste-based gender discrimination, the preference for boys over daughters, and domestic duties are all stumbling blocks to women's education. In terms of educational prospects, parents often favor their sons. Another study on gender inequity of family education resources shows that parents expect different things from their daughters than from their sons, with parents relying more on their sons to provide support for their older life and therefore willing to invest more in their sons' education than in their daughters'. As for their daughters, mothers claim that they are far more inclined to ask daughters to help out around the house [9]. The aforementioned information leads us to the conclusion that rural parents have much lower expectations for their daughters' academic performance than they do for their sons. As a result, the family's support for their daughters' academic success—both on a material level, like financial support, and on a spiritual level, like parental encouragement—is much lower than it is for their sons.

### **3.3. Suggestions for Educational Gender Equality in Rural China**

The essay has examined the barriers to higher education that rural women must overcome thus far, and in light of the aforementioned issues, it makes the following key suggestions.

#### **3.3.1. Increase State Funding and Promote Regional Resource Distribution Equity**

It is evident from the above that one of the major causes of educational inequality is the unequal allocation of educational resources between urban and rural sections of the nation. Children in cities are more likely to have access to the most recent educational knowledge and to obtain a higher quality education than children in rural regions since there are more schools, larger classrooms, and more qualified professors there than in rural areas. To overcome gender disparity in rural education, the state should begin with an equitable distribution of educational resources because females in rural regions have even fewer educational resources at their disposal. For youngsters to have the



same prospects for further education after completing their compulsory education as their urban counterparts, the state should spend more on rural infrastructure, construct more schools, and recruit more qualified instructors. In addition to improving infrastructure, the government could provide female bursaries to low-income families to encourage girls who lack the resources to pursue their academic goals.

### **3.3.2.Promote Gender Equality in Education**

The state's plan for encouraging equal education may take some time to show results, but it is the method that will deal with the underlying issues that rural women face in terms of educational imbalance. Many rural parents of girls are limited by conventional patriarchal ideas that their daughters' educational investment is pointless and worthless since they too have not completed a higher degree. Many girls receive an education that leads them to feel that their life's purpose is to get married and have children, and as a result, they give up following their own morals and aspirations. Therefore, the state should make every effort to promote gender equality education and awareness in villages. First, the government can improve the unequal distribution of family educational resources by conveying the concept of gender equality to villagers through village chiefs and raising their awareness of the importance of higher education for their daughters. More importantly, the government should pay attention to women's own awareness of gender equality and the pursuit of higher education. Only when girls are aware of their right to education and are willing to break free from traditional thinking to pursue their dreams, can they truly realize their self-worth.

### **3.3.3.Increase Regulation of Mass Media and Reject Objectification of Women**

Due to the Internet's rapid expansion, the channels via which children in today's society obtain information are diversifying constantly, spreading quickly, and there is a tremendous amount of knowledge available. However, since they are still growing, youngsters do not have the capacity to discern between different types of information, and as a result, the influence of this redundant information on their worldview, attitude toward life, and the formation of their values can be enormous. Therefore, the state must strictly control the mass media's content and disapprove of commercials, TV shows, and short films that objectify and denigrate the image of women. In addition, the government should promote the entry of more women into professions that have traditionally been dominated by males, such as politics, academia, law, and medicine, in order to create female role models that have a favorable influence on young girls' development.

## **4. Conclusions**

Gender equality has been a hotly debated topic in academia in recent decades, and has generated much public discussion and reflection, with efforts and notable achievements on the topic of gender equality around the world. At least today, women in most regions are able to choose their own educational paths, career plans, and their lifelong partners in ways that were not possible in the past. But while we see the light, we still have to see the truth hidden in the darkness. In China's mountainous and remote areas, there are still many girls who drop out of high school and then obey their parents to become wives or even mothers before they reach the age of 20.

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the background, current situation, and complex causes of sexism in education. Recent data and previous studies in the area indicate that a system of deeply ingrained patriarchal thinking and gender stereotypes is what is driving this societal issue. In this system, people in society, parents in the family, and even girls themselves use harsher standards to discipline women, suppress women's pursuit of self-worth, and unjustly turn the pursuit of education and career, which should belong to men and women equally, into a male privilege. Given

this, the paper proposes promoting the equitable deployment of regional educational resources, increasing financial support for female students, promoting gender equality education, and establishing female role models in order to promote the vision of social equity, educational equity, and gender equality.

Finally, even though the paper has made efforts to be objective and comprehensive, it still has its limitations. One of its limitations is reliance on secondary data. The issue analysis in the study is based on recent population prevalence statistics as well as prior research in the area. However, because of Covid-19, no field research such as interviews or surveys were done to gather primary data. To get the most recent primary data, future research might be carried out through questionnaires, field surveys, structured interviews, and other research techniques. Another one is that this article only talks about gender equality in education, thus, in the future, research can be done on topics such as employment and politics for rural women. Not only in education, but women still face gender discrimination in many areas, such as in business, where a woman can be denied employment because of her reproductive plans, even though she is perfectly capable of doing the job, or in Chinese politics, where we see more male officials and fewer female politicians. Even in an environment where women are judged harshly through the lens of the "male gaze" and where many teenagers are experiencing appearance anxiety, it is time to stop this discrimination or at least realize that we should not see women as the weaker sex and that we should recognize women's human rights.

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