

Gender Inequality

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I. Introduction

Despite the recognition of gender equality as a human right and a crucial aspect of economic development, India ranks 135th on the global gender gap index¹, indicating widespread gender discrimination in the country. The root cause of this discrimination can be attributed to the traditional and patriarchal society that limits opportunities for women and perpetuates inequities.² One alarming indicator of gender disparity in India is the Sex Ratio of children (CSR), which measures average girl children numbers per 1000 boys between the ages of 0 to 6 years. India's CSR has shown a steady decline from 934 in 1991 to 927 in 2001³ and then to 914 in 2011⁴, highlighting the severity of the issue. Additionally, the labour force participation rate of women in Indian cities has been decreasing, falling from 34.1% in 2000 to 27.2% in 2012.⁵

Female infanticide and foeticide still occur at high rates in Rajasthan with unofficial numbers being as high as 2500 such cases in a year⁶. In Rajasthan, there were 888 women for every 1000 men, according to census 2011 which is lower than most states while areas in and around Jaisalmer showed the lowest sex ratio⁷. Rajasthan was also found to have the highest percentage of girls who were married below the age of 18 among all of the states with 65.2% in 2005-6 as per NFHS – 3 and 35.4% in 2015-16 as per NFHS – 4.⁸ Sex selection is a common practice⁹, and girls are more often than not forced to leave school early to handle household tasks and get ready for marriage. A few stark examples of Rajasthan's high gender inequality include the high rates of domestic violence committed by in-laws, and the strong prevalence of the dowry system as observed by Vikalp Sansthan, NGO¹⁰.

Dhaulpur is a district in the Indian state of Rajasthan. It is located in the state's eastern corner. In 2011, this district had the lowest sex ratio of 846 girls per 1000 males¹¹, which ranked 28th among Rajasthan's 33 districts¹². Moreover, there have also been difficulties in combating the deep-seated patriarchy in the more rural sections of Rajasthan¹³.

The Indian government has launched a national initiative called "The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme" in January 2015 to address the prevalent gender bias in other states. The primary objective of this initiative is to combat gender discrimination through public education about the importance of gender equality and the resources available to improve the well-being of the female population, ultimately leading to the welfare of the whole nation.¹⁴

The relation between empowerment of women and economic development is bidirectional and, as Nobel laureate **Amartya Sen** has persuasively argued, continued discrimination against women can impede development. On one hand, progress can significantly reduce the gap between men and women.¹⁵ On the other hand, empowering women can contribute to economic progress by enabling them to fully participate in society. In this sense, empowerment can accelerate progress.

According to research conducted by **Amit Sharma** and **Shiva Parmar**¹⁶, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme has significantly contributed to the social empowerment of women. Their study found that the rights of the girl child are increasingly being recognized by society, and there has been a marked improvement in living standards for girls. However, a study by **Mitali Nikore**¹⁷ suggests that there are several shortcomings of the BBBP scheme, such as inefficient allocation and release of funds, and implementation challenges that hinder its effectiveness. These conflicting views on the true impact of BBBP scheme makes it an interesting area for an academic research. Also, studies on the impact of BBBP have been undertaken at a macro level, but the author believes that a study focused at the local level in a backward area would give a more realistic picture of the utility of such schemes. It would provide new insights to a major problem faced by a large section of women and help modify the scheme to better achieve the objectives. Thus, the topic and study is **worthy of an academic investigation**.

The study would focus on a village and answer the RQ: **How far has the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (BBBP) scheme introduced in 2015, been effective in lowering gender based discrimination and raising gender equality in Barkhera area in Dhaulpur district, Rajasthan, India?**

II. Methodology

The inquiry would look into how young and adolescent girls, newly married women, new mothers, and women who are pregnant benefited from enrolling in the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme. Since the study is based at the grassroot level it would rely mainly on primary data collected through surveys to reach a conclusion.

For the purpose of greater clarity and understanding two samples were taken for the survey: one of 15 recently married girls, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers (group 1) to grasp the perspectives of women and 40 households (group 2) to understand the social views. Heads of two government schools were interviewed to understand the role played by an important social institution like schools. Further discussion with an officer in the women and children development office of the Dhaulpur district provided a better understanding of the scheme's efficiency and the role of the local administration and political leadership in its execution.

To begin with, surveys were conducted using questionnaire with closed-ended questions for objective study and information.

In order to obtain comprehensive and detailed information about women's empowerment different indicators pertaining to awareness of the scheme, behavioural changes and other factors like infant mortality rates were considered. Secondary sources like research papers, journals, government publications, news articles were used for further information and analysis.

The administrators of the Anganwadi Centers were also interviewed to learn how expectant mothers are induced to register for various schemes and how awareness is created on gender equality.

A Theoretical Perspective on the Significance of BBBP On reducing Gender Bias

Started on January 2022, in the state of Haryana by the Indian Prime Minister, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) is a government programme aimed to deal with the decline in Child Sex Ratio (CSR) of the nation from 927 in 2001 to 918 as per the 2011 census report with 100 districts initially but then later expanded to 640 districts of India.¹⁸

The BBBP scheme was an Indian government-led initiative aimed at addressing gender inequality issues faced by girls and women. Its objectives were to stop gender-based selective abortions, make sure that girls child are born and protected, and encourage their education and social participation. The scheme aimed to coordinate efforts to empower girls and women to become entities of change and contribute to the development of their communities and the country.

The BBBP scheme has identified three target groups for its initiatives. The first group comprises young and women who are newly married, as well as mothers who are lactating and those who are pregnant. The second group includes adolescents, youth, medical practitioners, in-laws, private healthcare centres, private nursing homes, and diagnostic centres. The third and final group targeted are government staff, medical workers, different self-help groups, religious leaders, other organisations and the general citizens. The BBBP scheme aims to involve and educate all three target groups to ensure the success of its initiatives towards the empowerment and protection of girls and women.¹⁹

The BBBP scheme has specific eligibility criteria that families must meet to benefit from it. Firstly, they must have a girl child under the age of ten. Secondly, they need to have opened a Sukanya Samridhi Account (SSA) in the girl's name in any Indian bank. Lastly, the girl must be a resident of India, and non-resident Indian (NRI) citizens are not eligible for the BBBP scheme. By meeting these criteria, the family can access the scheme's initiatives aimed at safeguarding and empowering girls and women in India.²⁰

BBBP as a strategy for Women Empowerment

India has a very prevalent issue of gender inequality, gender bias and gender discrimination which has led to the girls and women of India being confined to their household chores and never truly being able to help either society or the economy. As a study done by **Bhartiya Stree Shakti** organization and backed by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)** indicates, a girl child is a many times denied proper education and even in some cases good or even decent healthcare services mainly due to the high dowry system that is still present in most places due to the male-dominated society of India.²¹ The same investigation also suggests the women are also being targets of crimes like sexual harassment, cruelty, assault, rape, dowry deaths and feticide.²² Moreover, even the different cultures of India, all have only men perform most rituals thus, reducing a woman's soc to lower that of a man. Because of these reasons, a boy child is preferred over a girl child and celebrated, affecting the Child Sex Ratio to a large extent.

Quoting **Bill Clinton**, "women perform 66% of the world's work and produce 50% of the food, yet they earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property." Therefore, empowering women is vital to addressing several global challenges, including improving education in developing countries, fighting climate change, and reducing poverty. Moreover, the study by **Mariam Sohail** suggests that by enhancing participation of women in the labor force, the economy benefits from their contributions to their families and society. Women's ownership of

property and access to resources, such as for farming, can significantly impact production, leading to economic development. Women's empowerment is a critical part of the equation towards building a more inclusive and sustainable economy.²³

The BBBP scheme is, therefore, an essential step towards improving CSR and enabling young girls and women of India by strongly focusing on eradicating sex selection in an attempt to save the girl child to increase the participation of women in society and the economic standing. The scheme also helps monitor and supervise the implementation by forming task forces from the national level to the district level, so that girls and women from even remote parts of India can avail the benefits of this scheme.

During the Fourth UN Conference on Women, James Wolfensohn, the ex-World Bank President, emphasized the catalytic impact of education for girls on various dimensions of development.²⁴ These include reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates, higher education for both male and female children, enhancement in skills, and better management of common pool resources like natural resources, which can lead to higher growth rates for countries and more equitable distribution of increased incomes due to faster economic growth. Moreover, educating girls can build future women leadership across sectors, from village health clinics to parliamentary seats in the capital.²⁵ The empowerment and education of women and girls will directly affect how the economy can grow and prosper.

The scheme aims to remove long-held prejudices against the birth of a girl child by emphasising the importance of celebrating the birth of a girl child in a variety of ways. As a result, some indicators related to the improving gender equality and empowerment of women (particularly adolescent girls) will be considered, such as

- i. The discrimination of the girl child and the boy child in terms of access to opportunities for education, healthcare, and other necessities of life is reflected in the way the girl child is treated in the family.
- ii. The level of confidence and respect that women receive in both their household and society can be reflected in their decision-making capacity.
- iii. The level of awareness that girls have about the benefits provided by the scheme can be observed through their access to education and opportunities.

Overview Of Study Area

Barkhera Village is located in the Barkhera Tehsil of the Dhaulpur district in Rajasthan and is home to approximately 200 families²⁶. It is a small village, situated 13 km from the district headquarters in Dhaulpur and 11 km from the sub-district headquarters in Sepau. The village has a population of 1315, with 729 males and around 586 females, according to the 2011 Population Census. There are 223 children under the age of 6, which makes up about 16.96% of the total of the village population.²⁷ The sex ratio in Barkhera village was found to be 804, which is below the state average (Rajasthan) of 928. The sex ratio for children in the village is 922, which was found to be higher than the state average of 888.17.²⁸

Table 1: Literacy rates in Barkhera²⁹

	Male	Female	Total
Population	729	586	1315
Adult literacy rate	78.63%	45.93%	64.29

The table demonstrates that while educational opportunities exist in Barkhera, there is a significant gender gap in access to education for girls.

Data Analysis

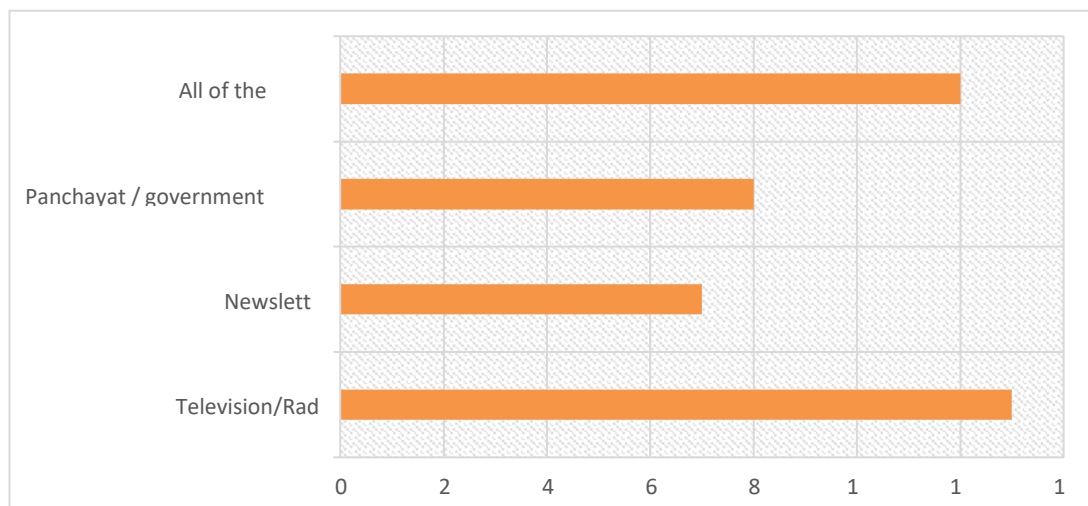
To comprehend how the BBBP plan has affected gender equality, 15 "pregnant women, newly married women, and breastfeeding mothers" undertook surveys (group 1) and 40 randomly selected "Households" (group 2), questionnaires for principals of schools and an interview with Mr Bhoopesh Kumar Garg, assistant director in women empowerment department of Dhaulpur district in order to get data on the social changes and behavioural changes towards girls. Analysis of collected information reveals the following:

General awareness among the respondents:

In the study area, all respondents from the sample households, newlywed females, pregnant women and breast feeding mothers reported awareness of the government program. However, only 68% of group 1 and 72% of group 2 were able to correctly identify all three of the program's objectives. This suggests that the Indian government has effectively raised awareness about gender equity. Furthermore, the respondents learned about the program from multiple sources, such as television, newspapers, radio, and agencies, indicating a long-term advocacy effort and extensive media campaign to enhance awareness and encourage behavioural change as seen

in chart 1.

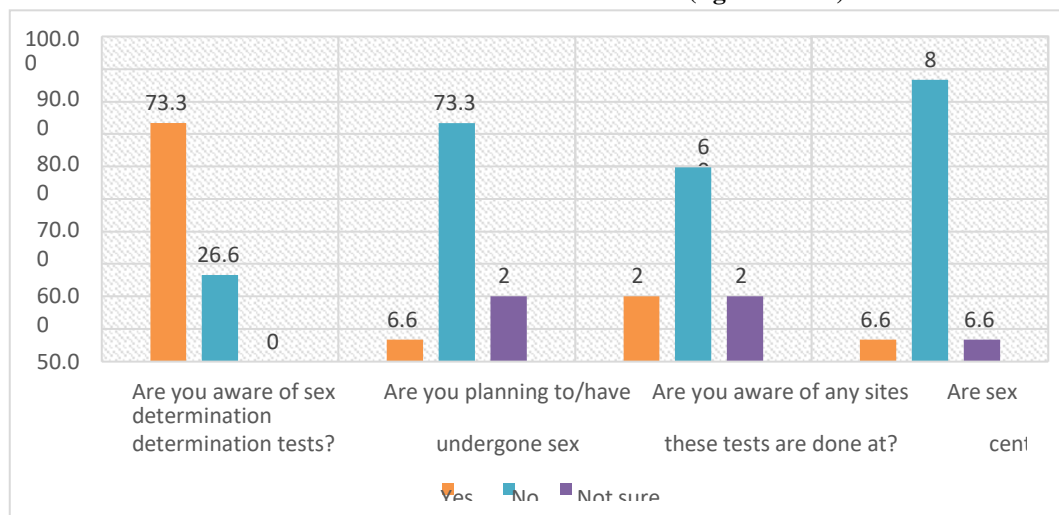
Chart 1: Source of information about the BBBP scheme³⁰



It was observed that various school and local programs, such as the "Kishor-Kishori fitness program," "National Girl Child Day," and self-defence program, as well as government-mandated programs like "Beti Janmotsava" and "Mission Jivan Rakshak," were used to increase³¹ awareness. These efforts suggest that local authorities, schools, and the government are working together to address the "information failure" that exists in this area. The local council was also found to have organized events such as road shows, street plays, and workshops for newly married and pregnant women to educate them about health, sex determination, nutrition, and sterilization programs.³² Additionally, health and nutrition awareness camps were held, and trees were planted to celebratethe birth of a girl child. These events aimed at **encourage behavioural change**.

Sex determination and Infant homicide of female children

Chart 2: View on Sex determination Test (figures in %)³³



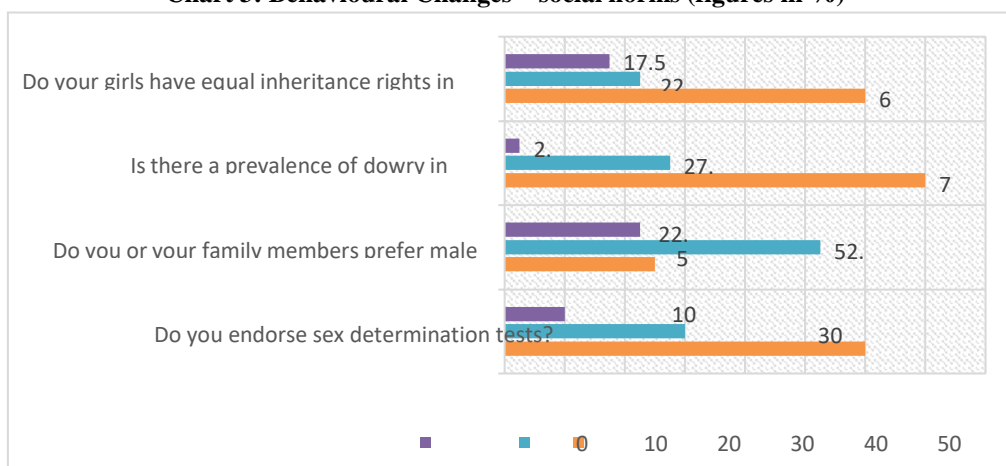
The data from chart 2 shows that while a large majority of people are aware of sex determination tests, only a small percentage have undergone or are planning to undergo the test. This is a good sign because it suggests that there is less bias against girls among young women. Additionally, the fact that a significant number of people are unaware of where the test is done and believe that it is not easily available indicates that the government and local authorities have effectively limited access to the test. This likely means that the rate of female infanticide and gender-selective killings will decrease, which **will help improve gender equality** and the overall balance of males and females in the population.

Behavioural change

The BBBP program aims to raise the value of girls and promote education, which requires transforming patriarchal and traditional social norms³⁴ that have hindered gender equality and women's

empowerment, especially in rural areas of India. Assessing the program’s impact necessitates examining changes in attitudes towards issues such as inheritance rights for girls, dowry, preference for male children, and views on sex determination. The survey results from the household sample (group 1) indicate some positive changes as a result of the program, as seen in chart 3. Although 74% of respondents did not support sex determination tests, showing a shift in attitudes, a significant proportion of 52.5% still preferred male children.³⁵ The presence of inheritance rights for girls with 60% of the respondents agreeing, is a positive aspect, but 70% of the respondents voting that the dowry system is still prevalent suggests that not all traditional beliefs have changed. Despite some progress, more work must be done to address these issues fully.

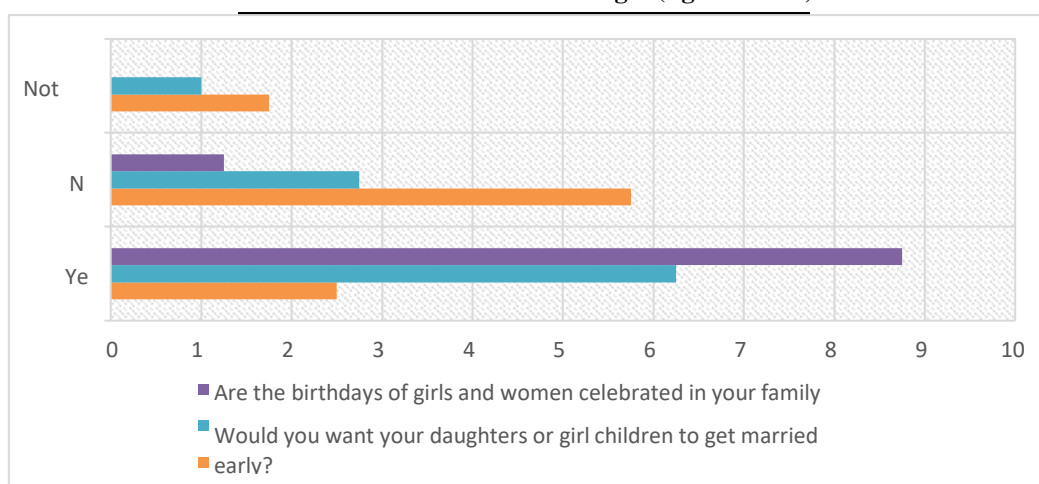
Chart 3: Behavioural Changes – social norms (figures in %)³⁶



As suggested by the study done by **Momoe Makino**,³⁷ the rise in the girls getting equal inheritance rights would eventually lead to lower rates of dowry as they become redundant with the presence of equal inheritance rights. Therefore, there would be a decline in the presence of dowry in the long run, benefitting the girl child and showing the effectiveness of the awareness campaigns under the BBBP scheme.³⁸

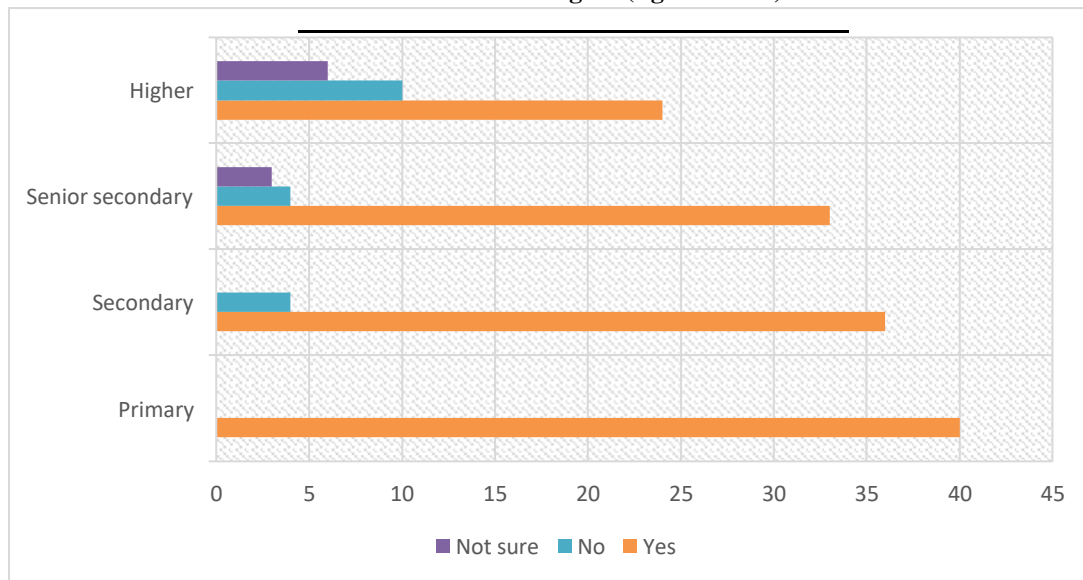
Despite the existence of the "inheritance rights" law for girls in India, the widespread practice of dowry may still lead to less wealth in the hands of women as those inherited assets may be given as dowry to the in-laws of the bride.

Chart 4: Other behavioural Changes (figures in %)³⁹



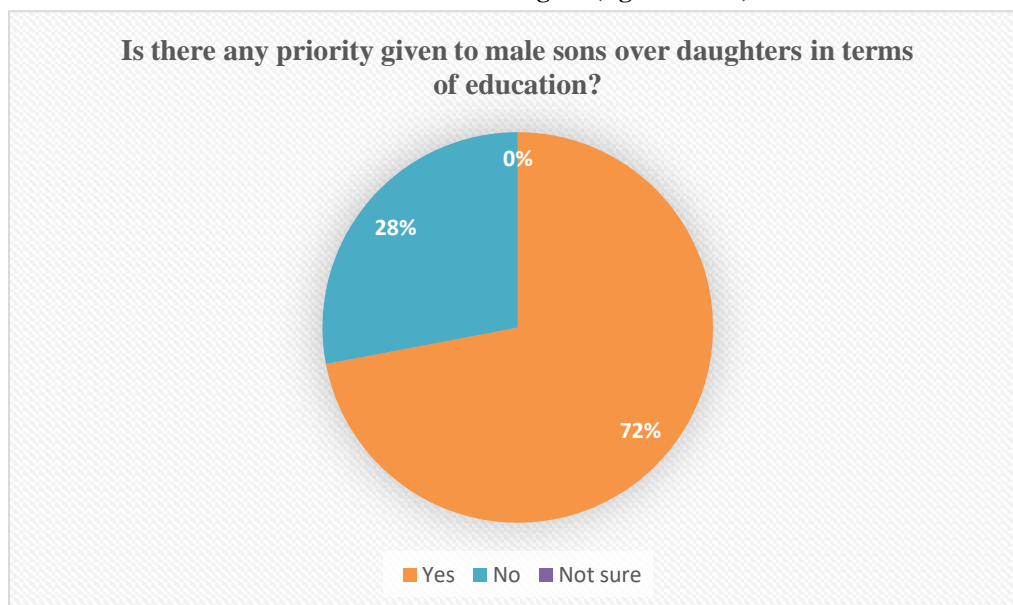
The attitudes towards girls were also investigated. Chart 4 revealed that a significant number of households observe the birth or birthday of girls with celebration (87.5%), indicating a decrease in gender bias within families. The **widespread disapproval of early marriages for girls is a positive indication** that they are no longer perceived as a burden. Additionally, the lack of concern for the safety and security of girls expressed by a large portion of the households (57.5%) suggests a decrease in violence and increased safety, **empowering girls to have more freedom, attend school, and participate in social events without discrimination.**

Chart 5: Education for girls (figures in %)⁴⁰



According to a survey of household samples, a majority of households plan to send their girls to primary and secondary schools, demonstrating the value placed on education as a **merit good** with positive impacts on society. However, fewer households prioritize higher education for their daughters, indicating a belief that women should only be literate to be able to do basic work and investment in higher education and skill building for employment is not seen as a strong social outlook. Empowering girls through education, especially at higher levels, is crucial for reducing gender bias and while some progress was noticed **more stress need to be given towards building social awareness** which would truly lead to greater gender equality.

Chart 6: Education for girls (figures in %)⁴¹



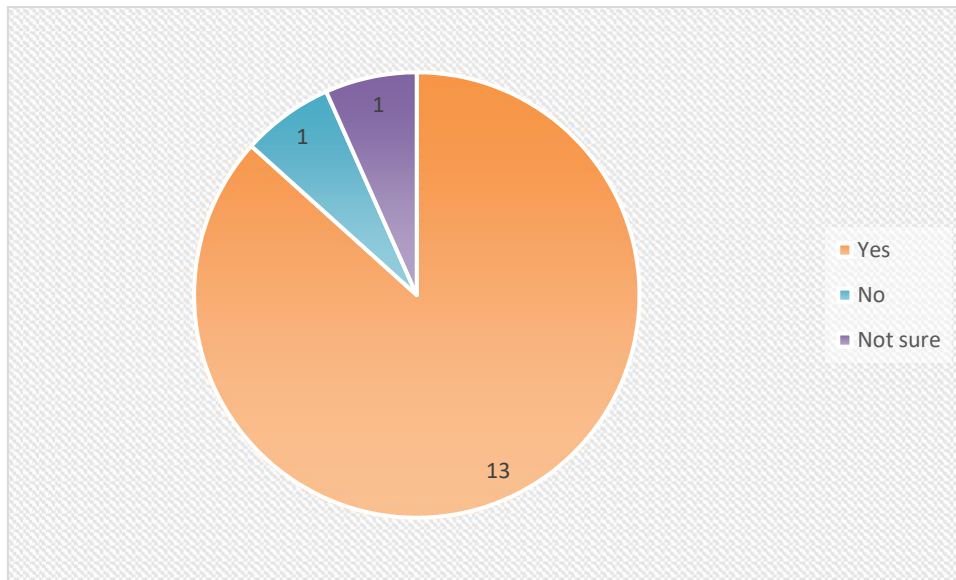
A survey revealed that, despite efforts to promote gender equality, in general, most households still favour boys over girls regarding access education, as shown in Chart 5. This can be attributed to the belief that boys need greater support, for future employment, as they would be the primary income earner for the family. In contrast, girls' education is deemed less important as they are expected to focus on household duties. This mentality contributes to the issue of "missing women" and low female labour participation rates. However, there has been a decrease in the number of households showing a preference for boys over girls concerning food and healthcare, which means the discrimination faced by girls in terms of health care and nutrition has lowered and **indicating a reduction in gender discrimination.**

A significant positive change in attitudes and behaviour towards girls has been observed, leading to a decrease in discrimination against them in most areas, except for education. Therefore, this trend suggests that there has been progress towards greater gender equality in the Barkheravillage.

Female infant death rates

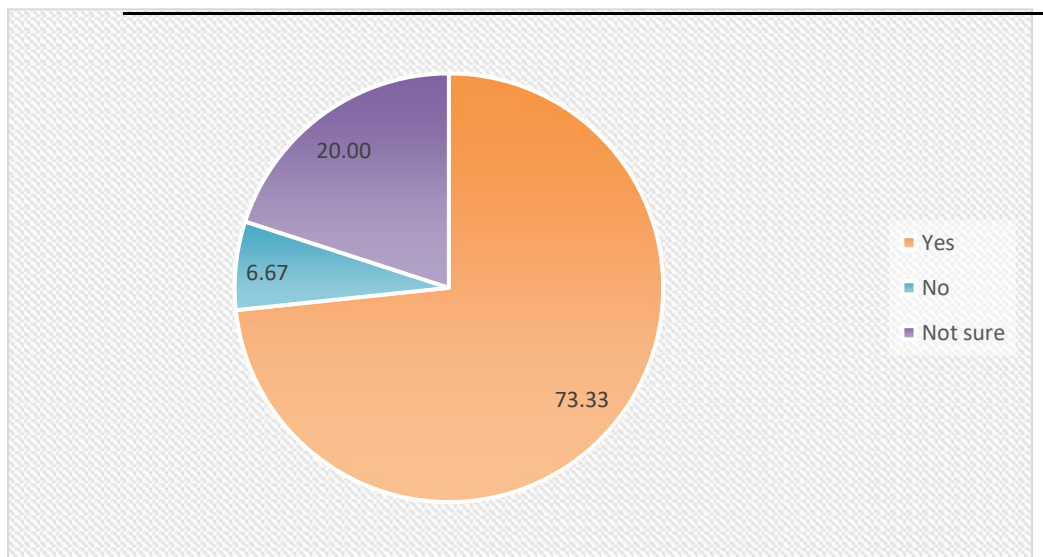
Although no data was accessible on female infant mortality rates in the region, the study of women who are newly married, or breastfeeding mothers (group 2) indicated that roughly 76% (as seen in chart 7) of participants were cognizant of and using the care offered by government to pregnant women, which encompassed four free consultations, medical check-ups, medication, and injections. Furthermore, 84% of the respondents obtained advice on their nourishment while pregnant.

Chart 7: Mothers who had/plan to have an institutional delivery ⁴²



The survey found that around 86.6% of deliveries were "institutional deliveries" and most of them were undertaken through National Health Mission's "Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)" scheme, which provides free pregnancy check-ups and delivery services as indicated by the chart below.

Chart 8: Opting for the Janani Shishu Shayastha Karyakram Scheme ⁴³



Other factors

Two school principals were interviewed and it was found that while the number of girls enrolling in secondary and senior secondary levels has gone up, it still lags behind the number of boys enrolling⁴⁴. The main factors contributing to this disparity are a lack of parental support for educating girls, the cost of school supplies like books and uniforms, and the expectation for girls to perform household chores. The schools had a 1:1.6 ratio of male to female teachers⁴⁵, with more female teachers present, which could encourage more girls to attend school. The principals reported that discrimination has decreased thanks to the BBBP program and 72.5% of the households surveyed believed that the sex ratio has improved, with 67.5% crediting the government for the improvement.⁴⁶ The successful implementation of the initiative, backed by the council and local authorities, showcases their commitment to achieving gender equality.

The findings of this study suggest that there is a need for continued efforts to promote gender equality and reduce discrimination against girls, particularly in the area of education. The high ratio of female teachers in the evaluated schools could be leveraged as a tool to encourage more girls to attend school and improve the enrollment ratio for girls. The decline in discrimination reported by the heads of the schools and the positive views of the surveyed households towards the BBBP program and government efforts show promising progress towards gender equality, but more work needs to be done to ensure that all girls have access to education and the opportunities that come with it.

III. Conclusion

This study found that the "Beti Bachao Bati Parao (BBBP)" scheme implemented by the government of India has been largely effective in **lowering gender bias** and **enhancing gender equality** to a significant extent in the Barkhera region of the Dhaulpur district in Rajasthan. The program has increased household knowledge and positively changed social norms and practices. It has also resulted in increased female enrollment in schools, more favourable attitudes towards girl's and fewer early marriages. Additionally, there has been a massive decrease test undertaken to identify the sex of an unborn child, infanticides of females, causing a significant increase in the children sex-ratio in the study area. The scheme has been implemented with the support of local authorities and schools, and village council members have cooperated to ensure its success following government regulations.

However, the study identified some remaining barriers, especially in terms of higher education for girls and their skill development as their future role is still perceived to be as households workers.

The study also acknowledges some limitations, such as the possibility of bias or misinformation in the data collected. It is also assumed that the significant decline in gender bias is achieved through the BBBP initiative only, other interventions and causes influencing gender issues like awareness and other government schemes have had a minimal impact.

Therefore, further research can be performed in the study area by taking in consideration other factors affecting gender discrimination or compare it with other districts having low sex ratios such as Jaisalmer, and explore the impact of BBBP on women's empowerment.

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