

# FACTORS INFLUENCING COLLEGE DROP-OUT AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS

## AN EMPIRICAL STUDY CONDUCTED IN NAYAGARH DISTRICT, ODISHA

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### **Abstract**

The present study examines the issue of college drop-out among adolescent girls in Nayagarh district of Odisha. Education plays a significant role in women's empowerment and socio-economic development. However, many adolescent girls discontinue higher education due to poverty, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, parental negligence, gender discrimination, and infrastructural barriers. The study was conducted among 120 adolescent girls from rural and semi-urban colleges of Nayagarh district using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mean score analysis, percentile analysis, and thematic qualitative interpretation were used for data analysis. The findings reveal that economic hardship, social customs, transportation difficulties, and family pressure are the major determinants of college drop-out. The study recommends policy interventions including financial assistance, counselling services, awareness programmes, hostel facilities, and community participation to reduce female drop-out rates in higher education.

**Index Terms:** College drop-out, adolescent girls, Odisha, Nayagarh, higher education, gender inequality, educational discontinuation.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Education is considered one of the most effective instruments for social transformation and empowerment of women. Higher education enables adolescent girls to achieve economic independence, social mobility, leadership skills, and decision-making power. Despite governmental initiatives such as scholarships, free bicycles, Kanyashree schemes, and hostel facilities, a significant number of girls discontinue education after secondary and higher secondary levels in rural India.

In Odisha, particularly in rural districts like Nayagarh, adolescent girls face multiple barriers to continuing college education. Poverty, early marriage, household work, lack of transport, safety concerns, and conservative social attitudes contribute significantly to educational discontinuation.

The present empirical study attempts to analyze the socio-economic and cultural causes of college drop-out among adolescent girls in Nayagarh district and suggest remedial measures for improving female educational retention.

Recent studies on Odisha show that dropout among girls continues despite increased enrolment due to migration, domestic responsibilities, and early marriage.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the major causes of college drop-out among adolescent girls.
2. To analyze socio-economic factors influencing educational discontinuation.
3. To study parental attitudes toward girls' higher education.
4. To examine psychological and institutional barriers affecting retention.
5. To suggest measures for reducing female college drop-out rates.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

1. Poverty significantly affects college continuation among adolescent girls.
2. Early marriage increases the probability of educational discontinuation.
3. Lack of parental support contributes to higher drop-out rates.
4. Transportation and safety issues negatively affect college attendance.

### **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **- Sambit Rath and Soma Wadhwa (2017)**

Their mixed-method study on girls in Odisha revealed that even after receiving conditional cash transfers, many girls discontinued education due to weak agency, family pressure, and socio-cultural barriers.

**- Satyanarayana Ramanik et al. (2018)**

The authors emphasized that poverty and gender norms interact strongly in influencing girls' school retention. Family honor, mobility restrictions, and social expectations limited continuation of education among girls in rural India.

**- Basanta Kumar Bindhani (2021)**

The study conducted in Koraput district identified poverty, household work, distance from school, parental disinterest, and language barriers as major reasons behind drop-out among tribal adolescents.

**- Mohammed Imran and Snigdharani Behera (2023)**

The review highlighted that economic deprivation, conservative cultural norms, lack of female teachers, transportation issues, and early marriage contribute significantly to girls' educational discontinuation in Odisha.

**- Pradeep Kumar et al. (2023)**

The researchers studied determinants of school dropouts among adolescents in India and found that poverty, parental illiteracy, paid work, and gender discrimination significantly influenced drop-out rates. Mother's education and family support reduced the chances of discontinuation.

**- Kalawanti Prasad and Kalpesh H Pathak (2023)**

Their meta-analysis concluded that economic instability, gender bias, domestic responsibilities, and poor educational infrastructure are the primary causes of discontinuing education among rural girls.

**3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design.

**Area of Study**

The study was conducted in rural and semi-urban areas of Nayagarh District.

**Sample Size**

A total of 120 adolescent girls aged 16–21 years were selected.

**Sampling Technique**

Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were used.

**Sources of Data**

- Primary Data: Interview schedule and questionnaire
- Secondary Data: Journals, reports, books, government publications

**Tools Used**

- Percentage analysis
- Mean score analysis
- Qualitative thematic analysis

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS**

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	16–18 years	52	43.3%
	19–21 years	68	56.7%
Residence	Rural	84	70%
	Semi-urban	36	30%
Family Type	Nuclear	71	59.2%
	Joint	49	40.8%
Parents' Education	Illiterate	44	36.7%
	Primary	39	32.5%
	Secondary & Above	37	30.8%

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

**Table 1: Economic Causes of Drop-Out**

Variables	Mean Score	Percentage
Poverty	4.52	90.4%
Inability to pay fees	4.31	86.2%
Need for household income	4.18	83.6%
Lack of educational materials	3.94	78.8%

#### *Interpretation*

Poverty emerged as the most influential factor affecting continuation of college education among adolescent girls.

**Table 2: Social and Cultural Factors**

Variables	Mean Score	Percentage
Early marriage	4.44	88.8%
Gender discrimination	4.06	81.2%
Household responsibilities	4.38	87.6%
Restriction on mobility	3.92	78.4%

#### *Interpretation*

Traditional gender roles and family expectations strongly affect girls' educational participation.

**Table 3: Institutional Factors**

Variables	Mean Score	Percentage
Distance from college	4.12	82.4%
Lack of transportation	4.26	85.2%
Lack of hostel facilities	3.88	77.6%
Safety concerns	4.08	81.6%

#### *Interpretation*

Transportation and infrastructural deficiencies significantly contribute to educational discontinuation.

**Table 4: Psychological Factors**

Variables	Mean Score	Percentage
Lack of motivation	3.96	79.2%
Academic stress	3.78	75.6%
Low self-confidence	3.69	73.8%
Lack of counselling support	4.02	80.4%

#### *Interpretation*

Psychological and emotional factors also influence educational retention among adolescent girls.

### QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The qualitative component of the study provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of adolescent girls who discontinued college education in Nayagarh district. Through personal interviews, focused discussions, and informal interactions, several socio-economic, cultural, psychological, and institutional themes emerged. The narratives of respondents reflected the complex interaction between poverty, gender norms, family expectations, and educational barriers.

The findings reveal that college drop-out among adolescent girls is not caused by a single factor; rather, it is the outcome of multiple interrelated conditions that gradually push girls away from higher education.

- ***Poverty and Financial Crisis***

Economic hardship emerged as the most dominant factor influencing college drop-out among adolescent girls. Most respondents belonged to low-income families dependent on agriculture, daily wage labour, small-scale business, or seasonal employment. Families often struggled to meet basic household needs, making higher education appear as a financial burden.

Although tuition fees in government colleges were relatively lower, additional expenses such as transportation, examination fees, books, uniforms, private tuition, hostel charges, and digital learning materials created considerable pressure on families. In many cases, parents preferred investing limited resources in the education of male children rather than daughters.

Several respondents revealed that after completing higher secondary education, continuing college studies became economically impossible due to increasing educational costs.

“My father is a daily wage labourer. After Class XII, it became difficult to continue college education.”

“Sometimes we did not even have money for bus fare, so I stopped attending classes regularly.”

The study also found that some girls engaged in wage labour, tailoring, domestic work, or agricultural activities to support family income. These responsibilities reduced study time and eventually resulted in educational discontinuation.

The qualitative findings clearly indicate that poverty indirectly affects educational aspirations, self-confidence, attendance, academic performance, and continuity of higher education among adolescent girls.

- ***Early Marriage***

Early marriage emerged as another significant factor contributing to college drop-out. In many rural communities of Nayagarh district, traditional beliefs continue to prioritize marriage over higher education for girls. Parents often fear social criticism if daughters remain unmarried after adolescence.

Many respondents reported that pressure from relatives, neighbours, and community elders influenced parental decisions regarding marriage. Once marriage discussions began, girls were expected to discontinue their studies and prepare for domestic life.

“My relatives insisted that girls should marry early rather than study further.”

“After my engagement, my in-laws did not allow me to continue college.”

The findings revealed that early marriage not only interrupts education but also limits economic independence, decision-making capacity, and future employment opportunities. Some respondents expressed regret that they could not complete graduation due to societal pressure.

The study further observed that in economically weaker families, marriage was sometimes considered a strategy to reduce financial responsibility. Consequently, education became secondary to cultural expectations and social obligations.

- ***Domestic Responsibilities and Gender Roles***

Traditional gender roles significantly influenced educational discontinuation among adolescent girls. Most respondents stated that they were expected to perform household duties such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, collecting water, caring for younger siblings, and assisting elderly family members.

In joint and economically disadvantaged families, girls frequently carried a disproportionate burden of domestic work compared to boys. Many respondents experienced exhaustion and lack of time for academic preparation.

“I had to cook for the family before going to college and after returning home.”

“My younger brothers could study peacefully, but I had to manage household work.”

The study revealed that during agricultural seasons or family emergencies, girls often remained absent from college for extended periods. Continuous irregular attendance gradually reduced academic interest and increased the likelihood of dropping out.

Gender discrimination within families also emerged strongly in interviews. Some parents considered investment in girls' higher education unnecessary because daughters were expected to marry and join another household.

These findings demonstrate that deeply rooted patriarchal norms continue to restrict educational opportunities for adolescent girls in rural Odisha.

- ***Safety and Transportation Problems***

Transportation difficulties and safety concerns were major institutional barriers affecting college retention. Many villages in Nayagarh district are located far from higher educational institutions, requiring girls to travel long distances daily.

Respondents highlighted several challenges including:

- Lack of regular public transport
- Overcrowded buses
- High transportation costs
- Poor road conditions
- Fear of harassment during travel

“The college is very far from my village. Sometimes buses were unavailable, so I missed classes.”

“My parents were worried about my safety while travelling alone.”

Parents often restricted girls from attending college due to concerns about harassment, eve-teasing, and insecurity during commuting. In some cases, irregular transportation led to absenteeism, poor academic performance, and eventual discontinuation.

The absence of nearby colleges and hostel facilities particularly affected girls from remote rural areas. Several respondents expressed that if safe transportation or hostel facilities had been available, they could have continued their studies.

The findings indicate that infrastructural deficiencies significantly contribute to educational inequality among rural adolescent girls.

- ***Lack of Family Support and Parental Awareness***

Parental attitude toward girls' education played a decisive role in educational continuation. Many respondents reported that their parents lacked awareness regarding the importance of higher education for girls.

In families with low literacy levels, education was often viewed only as a means to acquire basic reading and writing skills rather than long-term empowerment or career development.

“My parents believed girls do not need higher education after adolescence.”

“They thought marriage was more important than graduation.”

Some parents discouraged college attendance because they feared that excessive education would reduce marriage opportunities or increase dowry expectations. Others believed that girls should prioritize household responsibilities over academic pursuits.

The study further revealed that emotional support from family members was often absent. Girls who experienced academic stress, low performance, or financial difficulties rarely received counselling or encouragement.

In contrast, respondents who received strong parental motivation showed greater educational resilience and determination to continue studies despite hardships.

Thus, family environment and parental perception emerged as critical determinants of educational retention among adolescent girls.

- ***Psychological and Emotional Challenges***

Apart from socio-economic barriers, many respondents experienced psychological stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Financial insecurity, family pressure, social restrictions, and academic difficulties negatively affected mental well-being.

Some girls felt emotionally isolated because their educational aspirations were not valued within the family or community.

“I wanted to study further, but nobody supported my dreams.”

“After missing classes frequently, I lost confidence and stopped going to college.”

The absence of counselling services in educational institutions further intensified emotional difficulties. Several respondents expressed feelings of hopelessness regarding future educational opportunities.

The findings suggest that psychological support systems are essential for preventing drop-out among vulnerable adolescent girls.

## 5. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The empirical investigation conducted in Nayagarh district revealed several important findings regarding college drop-out among adolescent girls:

- ***Poverty is the strongest determinant of college drop-out among adolescent girls.***

Economic hardship emerged as the most influential factor behind educational discontinuation. Families with unstable income sources were unable to bear educational expenses such as transportation, books, tuition fees, and hostel costs. Financial insecurity forced many girls to prioritize household survival over higher education.

- ***Early marriage continues to interrupt higher education.***

Traditional social norms encouraging early marriage remain prevalent in rural areas. Many adolescent girls discontinued education after engagement or marriage due to family pressure and societal expectations. Early marriage restricted educational aspirations and reduced opportunities for personal and professional development.

- ***Household work and caregiving responsibilities disproportionately affect girls.***

Girls were burdened with domestic responsibilities including cooking, cleaning, sibling care, and agricultural labour. Excessive household duties reduced study time, increased absenteeism, and negatively affected academic performance, eventually leading to drop-out.

- ***Transportation and safety concerns reduce college attendance.***

Long travel distances, inadequate public transportation, poor road conditions, and fear of harassment discouraged regular attendance. Lack of hostel facilities further intensified educational barriers for girls residing in remote villages.

- ***Parental illiteracy and conservative attitudes contribute significantly to discontinuation.***

Parents with low educational backgrounds often failed to recognize the long-term value of girls' higher education. Conservative gender attitudes led families to prioritize marriage and domestic responsibilities over academic achievement.

- ***Lack of counselling and emotional support negatively affects retention.***

Many respondents experienced stress, anxiety, low self-confidence, and emotional isolation. Educational institutions lacked adequate counselling mechanisms to support vulnerable students facing personal and academic challenges.

- ***Rural girls are more vulnerable to educational discontinuation compared to semi-urban girls.***

The study found that girls from rural areas faced greater infrastructural, economic, and social disadvantages than semi-urban respondents. Limited educational facilities, transportation barriers, and conservative social environments increased the likelihood of dropping out.

- ***Gender discrimination remains deeply rooted in family and community structures.***

The study revealed unequal treatment between boys and girls regarding educational investment, freedom of mobility, and career opportunities. Families often considered sons' education more important than daughters' higher studies.

- ***Institutional support mechanisms are insufficient.***

Many colleges lacked adequate hostel facilities, career guidance services, mentorship programmes, and student support systems. Weak institutional infrastructure contributed indirectly to educational discontinuation.

- ***Educational discontinuation affects long-term empowerment of women.***

Girls who discontinued college education experienced reduced employment opportunities, economic dependence, lower self-esteem, and limited participation in social decision-making processes. The findings indicate that female educational retention is essential for sustainable social development and gender equality.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government scholarship schemes should be expanded for rural girls.
- Free transportation and hostel facilities should be provided.
- Awareness campaigns on girls' education must be conducted at community level.
- Strict implementation of laws against child marriage is necessary.
- Career guidance and counselling services should be introduced in colleges.
- Parents should be sensitized regarding the importance of higher education for girls.
- Community-based monitoring systems should identify girls at risk of dropping out.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that college drop-out among adolescent girls in Nayagarh district is influenced by multiple socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Although enrolment of girls in higher education has increased over the years, retention remains a serious challenge. Poverty, gender inequality, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and transportation difficulties continue to restrict educational opportunities for girls. Sustainable interventions involving government agencies, educational institutions, parents, and local communities are essential for ensuring uninterrupted higher education among adolescent girls and achieving gender equality in education.

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