

Reviewing the Influences of Education Gender Issues of Female Students in the Rural Society of China

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ABSTRACT

The academic society had widely acknowledged the gender gap in education; however, there lacks a complicated review of the lack of educational gender equity in the circumstances of rural China. In this paper, we have investigated how various factors influence female students in rural areas of China based on previous studies and reviewed the current progress in this area of research. The situation of female students is evaluated critically from the dimensions of school, family, and society, and potential solutions are given. The research showed that the gender inequality of China had been developed from long-term patriarchal thoughts. The whole society's depend on men makes the resources tilt to men more. The family and society are more willing to give more resources to the men to get more payback. Our hypothesis is supported by the articles and policies that we found. The general finding of us is the family preference, society discrimination, patriarchal society, sex education, and one, two, and three child policies are all considered to be the factors that influenced the gender inequality in China.

Keywords: Education, Gender, Female Students, Rural China.

1. INTRODUCTION

With calling for equality between men and women across society and the popularization of education, it seems that male and female students have equal rights to education. In many cities with a developed economy, men and women have already possessed equal rights to education. However, in less developed rural areas, this is not the case. Female students in the countryside are still ignored and discriminated against by society, the school, and family. By figuring out the problem of the education for female students in the countryside, can we offer realistic and practical help to women students in the countryside, and solve the difficulties they are faced with currently in their life and study. This paper is a tentative probe into the education of female students in China's countryside from the following four aspects: social preference, sex education, family background, and suggestions.

2. SEX EDUCATION TO FEMALE STUDENTS

Lacking sex education has been a significant issue in China for a few decades. This issue caused a high number of STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) patients in China. According to the Chinese STD patient-specific research that Zhao has done, the results show that 92% of patients never use condoms, and 90% of the patients do not use condoms while they were suffering from the pain of STD symptoms [1]. Based on Gao's research, he pointed out two reasons teenagers have poor sex knowledge in rural China [2]. The first one is the strong unwillingness of rural Chinese adults to instruct the teenagers in the sex part [2]. The second one is Chinese rural schools were lacking sex education [2]. This view was supported by Liu, who believes that only a small number of rural schools, including health education, are part of their teaching content [3]. Moreover, the school with health education as one course does not teach sex

knowledge, and few schools organize specific sex education lectures for parents [3]. Similarly, Jiang claims that in most rural schools, learning Chinese, Maths, and English is the top priority for students, and sex education can be missing [4]. Tan provided a reason why Chinese rural schools have such a poor sex education situation [5]. She pointed out that rural schools have relatively poor access to get information, and this turns out the rural girls hard to get sex knowledge in magazines, books, or networks [5]. Overall, the reason why rural girls lack sex education is complex. We will then separately discuss the families' attitudes, teachers' attitudes, and female students' attitudes.

2.1. Families' Attitudes

Referring to Jiang's research, the grandparents who took care of the left-behind rural girls do not teach sex education because they lacked the awareness of girls' sexual safety precautions, and traditional feudal ideas have been ingrained in their minds [4]. Moreover, Tan claims that unbalanced family structure in rural areas is one of the main reasons why rural girls lack sex education. Since the economic level in cities is much higher than in rural areas, many rural parents choose to work in the city, making the number of rural left-behind girls keep increasing [5]. This finding was consistent with Jiang, who claims that many rural parents take boys with them to work in the city because of patriarchal ideas, which leads to a larger number of rural left-behind girls than boys. Under this circumstance, the responsibility of taking care of girls fell on their grandparents [4].

In the research of Wu on women who have ever had an abortion in Beijing, 75.9% of women did not know they can take emergency contraceptives, and 63.7% of women have never been educated about contraception [6]. As reported by the Women's Federation of Guangdong Province, 94% of girls who have been left behind were sexual abuse victims in Huazhou city [7]. The situations in other cities of Guangdong Province are similar [7]. We can conclude that one major reason why girls suffer from adolescence and even sexual abuse is that their elders do not pay attention to giving girls sex talk or education.

2.2. Teachers' Attitudes

From previous research, we can infer that rural teachers do not positively promote sex education. Tan provides us with a view that the traditional conservative ideas have influenced rural teachers, then they believe that the best way to deal with the problem is avoiding taking it [5]. In addition, in Jiang's research of investigating rural left-behind girls' sex problems [4]. She provides an original opinion which is rural schools believes that parents are the one responsible for the education of sex. In contrast, rural parents believe school is responsible for sex education [4].

2.3. Female Students' Attitudes

Rural girls were suffering from unequal treatment in the family, school, society, etc., which caused them to be more introverted and inferior. According to Tan, rural left-behind girls' behavior tends to be implicit. They prefer to write diaries or talk to their close friends instead of communicating with their parents and teachers due to their inferiority complex. When they receive wrong information from irregular channels, they will not have the ability to distinguish between good or bad [5]. Similarly, Jiang claims that female left-behind children cannot protect themselves from sexual assault when the danger occurs [4]. Also, Jiang provides a new perspective: grandparents are not as close as their parents for rural girls, which is why it is hard for them to talk to their grandparents about intimate topics [4].

2.4. Solutions to Sex Education

Overall, in the countryside, not only students but also their parents and teachers should participate in sex education if they pay great attention to sex education and provide sex education to students. In this way, they provide more protection for the children. For example, lectures about sex education can be held in the village committee to raise adults' awareness of sex education.

3. FAMILY INFLUENCES ON FEMALE STUDENTS

The impact of the family is crucial during a child's development because the household environment and the attitude of parents can have multiple effects on a child's education process. Previous research had investigated the multiple connections between family background and educational outcomes of female students in developing countries. Among the various household factors, socioeconomic status, family size, and traditional ideology are the most influential ones that can shift parental aspiration and support for female students. The change in parental support would eventually lead to gender gaps in education in rural China, which can be found in enrollment rate and academic performances, especially in educational investments.

3.1. Socioeconomic Status

3.1.1. Family Income

Family income is highly relevant to enrollments and academic performances of female students in rural China. Family income is positively related to children's enrollment rate and parental aspirations regarding children from 7 to 16 [8]. It is noticeable that girls' enrollment is related to household income to a greater extent than that of boys, which indicates that an increase in household assets is more beneficial for the development of female students [8]. On the contrary, in

those families with lower household incomes, female students are especially disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts, which can be embodied in lower parental expectations and educational investments. Moreover, the increasing educational cost in China had brought further difficulties for rural female students. For families with relatively low household incomes, parents cannot provide sufficient investment for their children's education, which makes rural girls become the biggest victim of this shift [9]. When the uneducated children from these families grow up, their families tend to remain impoverished and unable to support their children's education [9]. According to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, four types of capital, including human capital, cultural capital, financial capital, and social capital, can reinforce social stratification and class division [10]. In this case, parents with less economic and social capital tend to foster children with less education, a human capital, which finally leads to less human capital received by the children, forming a vicious cycle consisting of low education and poverty. Although the Gaokao system had provided almost equal entry to higher education for poor and elite students, students with lower family incomes are still disadvantaged by their family background, especially for female students in rural China.

3.1.2. Parental Education Level

The parental educational level can also affect the quality of education received by girls in rural China. Parental education level is positively associated with the investment that they provide for their children's education, which may be attributed to the fact that parents with higher educational backgrounds generally have jobs with higher wages [11]. On the other hand, parents with lower education levels are likely to provide lower investments for their children's education. In the context of rural China, since parents generally have lower education experiences, the investments received by female students are at a low level. The study also found that mother's education has a larger impact on educational investment for female students, whereas father's education has a bigger influence on educational investment for male students [10]. This gender difference may be explained by the gender difference in how parental education is indirectly linked to children's academic development. Higher parental education can generate higher parental expectations for boys, which leads to more parent-child communication and eventually results in better academic achievements. However, for girls, higher parental education can lead to more parent-child communication or result in more home monitoring, which affects the children's academic performances [12]. In this case, the gender difference in the linkage between parental education and educational investments can be better understood.

3.2. The Number of Siblings in Family

The number of siblings can affect gender equality in education in rural China as well. There is a quantity-quality tradeoff between family size and educational outcome in China: under the circumstance of limited fixed resources, the more children a family has, the less resource each child will receive, and the lower the average educational outcome of the family will be [13]. Moreover, this tradeoff is especially strong for girls compared to boys in rural China. Although having siblings does not necessarily bring disadvantages to boys' education, the number of siblings is negatively related to the enrollment of girls [14].

After the relaxation of the one-child policy, the situation of female students in rural China further deteriorates. Due to the traditional preference of sons over daughters, the relaxation had increased the family size of girls, while the family size of boys was statistically unchanged [15]. With the quantity-quality tradeoff, it can be deduced that the average quality of education received by rural girls would decrease and that the gender inequality would be exacerbated. However, as the socioeconomic status of rural households improves during the previous decades, there are signs that the effect of the quantity-quality tradeoff is diminishing, or even had already been broken down [16]. This means that having more siblings does not necessarily negatively impact girls' enrollment and academic performances, which reveals the progress in education regarding girls in rural China.

3.3. Other Factors

Despite the factors mentioned above, there are still many household factors that influence rural girls' education. The traditional idea is a barrier to achieving gender equality in education. Many parents in rural China believe that boys have higher aptitudes while girls have more dedication to studying [17]. This stereotype may lead to lower parental expectations towards girls and prevent female students from entering higher education. In addition, the requirement for girls to complete household chores is another restriction. In China, parents expect their daughters to share responsibility for chores, affecting their learning and enrollment [17]. Furthermore, many parents in rural China have gone to urban areas to seek better employment opportunities, leading to increasing left-behind children. The absence of parent(s) can also be harmful to the academic achievements and the mental health of girls in rural China [18]. In particular, the migration of fathers to working in cities has a more significant negative impact on female students because they may have to undertake more household work as they are left behind with children [18].

3.4. Solutions to Supporting Girls' Education

The government should help girls in the countryside who cannot go to school because they are from poor families, although there is compulsory education in China. But there are high dropout rates of girls due to family pressures. Girls should be given special allowances so that their families can be relieved from the education expense. Only in this way can girls in the countryside finish their schooling smoothly. The allowances for boarding school students should be appropriately increased. Special funds should be allocated to help students from poor families to cover their expenses for books. The allowances for students should be given promptly. Build hope project primary school to accept more girl students who need help. All China women's federation and provincial women's federation shall continue to promote education for girl students with the help of the China Girls Foundation and provincial girls' foundation. Funds will be raised from society to establish the "Foundation for Girls' Education in the Poor Rural Areas". Such funds will be raised from people and communities at home and abroad and used for girls' education. In addition to the usually higher allowances for girls, special allowances should also be established according to girl students' physiological needs. Girls' reward foundation shall be established.

4. SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Society is also a very critical part of women's status in China. The patriarchal society and the traditional son preference create a lot of educational and social injustice for women. Therefore, the government creates some policies aim to solve those problems. The most famous one is the one-child policy. However, these policies straightly affect the birth rate of boys and girls into a very tilted ratio and consequently exacerbate the unfair situation between men and women.

4.1. Patriarchal Society

China has been a patriarchal society for thousands of years. The rules under this kind of tradition are strict and numerous. One thing that plays a vital role in proceeding this unbreakable society is Confucianism. Furthermore, this is the primary reason for women's low social status and educational injustice in China. The main thought of Confucianism is to be obedient. You are obliged to obey your leader, your parent, your brother politely, but for women, most importantly, they need to be obedient to their husband and their family. Obedience has always been considered an essential virtue for women. Although feudalism has disappeared, obedience is still the default virtue for women in China. Under this influence for the long term, more education for women is considered for many poor families as a waste. Some parents believe higher education will influence their daughter to become

picky towards men and hard to be controlled by their husbands [19].

4.2. How the Value Boys' Trend Impact on Women' Education and Career

In a traditional Chinese family, women are expected to be good wives and moms. They need to give up their jobs and opportunities to higher education if their family needs them. This concept becomes an obstacle for Chinese women when they pursue their ambitions in career and education. From China's National Bureau of Statistics, the amount of female graduate students is 1.27 million in 2017, take parts 48.4% of all graduate students in China. There were 14.47 million female undergraduates, take part 52.5% of all undergraduates in China. However, there are only 43.5% of China's workforce is female. This reflects the reality that Chinese women faced after they graduate. Their ambitions are not acceptable to society. Under this kind of situation, women were forced to return to the family and be obedient [19]. This reflects the reality that Chinese women faced after they graduate. Their ambitions are not acceptable to society. Under this kind of situation, women were forced to return to the family and be obedient [19]. The preference towards higher, their power and salaries will be more significant. This makes parents preferred the boys more because the government did not have complete social security; the parents need to depend on ore ton—their kids. While the boys can give them a higher quality of life when they get old, they prefer to have boys [20].

4.3. The One-Child Policy

Due to the imbalance of sex and overpopulation, the Chinese published law in 1973. This law regulates that one legal married couple could only have one kid. A wide known name for this policy is the one-child policy. This policy aims to shorten the imbalance between the population of boys and girls, but this policy makes it worse. Because of the son's preference, some parents used to give birth as much as they can until they get the boy. This use to be a dangerous gamble because, in the past, the only way they get to know their unborn kid's gender is to see them after the birth. However, with the medical techniques develop, B-ultrasonic can determine the sex before they are born. Especially when the one-child policy was published, one family would only have one quota. These unborn kids would take this precious quote. For the rural parent who are the ones who bias the boy the most, they will not allow a girl to disturb their plan. Therefore, many people choose to abort the girls. This policy also makes many couples married and give birth earlier. Women were forced to put on IUD (Intrauterine Device) or other birth control implants. Women's willingness and aspirations become useless at this point. The data shows, after decades, Infanticide, the

abandonment of baby girls, and sex-selection abortions make the sex ratio in China distorted [19-22].

4.4. The Two and Three Child Policy.

The one-child policy made China's birth sex ratio turn into extremely imbalanced statics. Therefore, the Chinese government shifts the one-child policy into two and three children. However, the new policy may exacerbate gender inequality in China. Because Women's disadvantaged status in the labor market exacerbates gender inequalities in access to resources, and the fewer resources wives have relative to their husbands may diminish women's bargaining power, their ability to push for equality in the family, and their ability to stop childbearing when they don't want additional children, which may, in turn, jeopardize women's careers [21]. To solve inequality in gender, more policies are needed, which can reduce the risk women will face in both society and family after giving birth. Also, it is important to raise women's status in every aspect of life [21].

4.5. Solutions to Social Influences

Parents should change their traditional idea and form a broader outlook on life and education. They should get rid of their original stereotyped idea that boys are superior and girls are inferior, that it is useless for girls to receive education, and that girls should get married earlier in the future. Parents, custodians, or related persons should be criticized or punished by the rural committee if they refuse to send their girls to school. And those who fight against the traditional marriage practice will be protected, encouraged, and rewarded. Equality between men and women should be maintained both in ideology and actions. In this way, it is possible to gradually eliminate the old and remnant influences and improve the social environment for rural girls' education.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper reviews the education of female students in China's countryside from the following four aspects: social preference, sex education, family background, and suggestions. Below are three main findings of this paper: 1) from the perspective of the social environment. Confucius thought has brought about the whole society's preference for boys over girls and the negation of women's value outside the family, which is the longstanding and deep-rooted traditional cultural ideology. As a result, women have always been subjected to discrimination in education, no matter the one-child policy or policy of two or more children. Female students in China, especially those in the countryside, feel suppressed by a prevailing social prejudice which regards the education of boys as more valuable and promising than the education of girls; 2) from the aspect of sex education, the parents and schools in China's countryside both regard that the other side should take responsibilities

for the sex education. As a result, many female students in the countryside do not have an awareness of sex. In addition, many girls' innate introverted character and passiveness in socializing have caused dropping out of school because of pregnancy; 3) From the aspect of family background, a female student in the countryside will be access to fewer educational resources if her family has a very small income, her parents have received very little education, and she herself has a lot of siblings. We should pay great attention to each female student's difficulty within education, especially girl students in the countryside. We should find out their causes. Through this way, it is possible to solve their problems and ensure that each girl student can grow up strong and healthy, get rid of poverty, and carry on knowledge and education from one generation to a generation.

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