

Beyond the Classroom Walls: Exploring Factors Influencing the Dropout of Girl Students in Rural and Urban Warangal District of Telangana

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the multifaceted factors contributing to the dropout rates among female students in Warangal district of Telangana, comparing rural and urban educational contexts. Through a mixed-methods approach incorporating surveys of 450 households, in-depth interviews with 60 dropout students, and focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and community leaders, the research identifies distinct patterns of educational discontinuation across geographical settings. Findings reveal that while economic constraints remain significant in both contexts, rural dropouts are predominantly influenced by agricultural labour demands, early marriage norms, and distance to secondary schools (ref. 8). In contrast, urban female students face challenges related to unsafe community environments, quality concerns in government schools, and socioeconomic stratification. The research further demonstrates that intersectional factors including caste, family structure, and parental education levels significantly modify dropout risk. Importantly, the study identifies protective factors such as strong female role models, robust mid-day meal programs, and functional girl-friendly sanitation facilities that substantially reduce dropout likelihood. The research concludes with context-specific policy recommendations, emphasising targeted scholarship programs for vulnerable groups, community safety initiatives, flexible school scheduling during agricultural seasons, and comprehensive mentorship programs. This nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between socioeconomic, cultural, and infrastructural factors provides valuable insights for developing more effective and sustainable educational retention strategies specifically tailored to the rural and urban contexts of Warangal.

Keywords: Dropout Students, Girl Students, SC, ST, Minorities

I. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a cornerstone for socioeconomic development and gender equality, yet the persistent challenge of female student dropout continues to undermine progress in many regions of India. In Warangal district of Telangana, this phenomenon manifests with distinct characteristics across rural and urban settings, reflecting a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, infrastructural, and institutional factors that extend well beyond the classroom walls (ref. 3, 13, 16 & 17).

Despite India's significant strides in expanding access to education through initiatives such as the Right to Education Act and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, gender disparities in educational attainment remain pronounced (ref.19 & 21), particularly in transitional stages of education. Warangal district presents a compelling case study of these disparities, where overall literacy rates have improved yet female educational retention continues to lag, especially in the transition from primary to secondary education (ref. 7, 16 & 17). The district's dual nature—comprising both rapidly developing urban centres and traditional agricultural rural areas—offers a unique opportunity to examine how contextual factors differently shape educational trajectories for girls (ref.13 &16).

This research investigates why girls in Warangal abandon their education prematurely, identifying not only the obvious barriers but also the subtle, often invisible factors that gradually erode their educational participation. The study recognises that dropout is rarely a single event but rather a process influenced by multiple reinforcing factors that accumulate over time. By comparing rural and urban contexts, the research highlights how geographical location intersects with social, economic, and cultural dimensions to create distinctive challenges for female education (ref. 3).

Understanding these dynamics is crucial not merely for academic interest but for developing targeted interventions that address the root causes of educational discontinuation. As Telangana works toward comprehensive development, the educational empowerment of girls represents both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity for social progress and economic growth. By examining factors influencing dropout rates among female students in Warangal, this study aims to provide meaningful insights to inform more effective, contextually responsive educational policies and practices (ref. 4).

Through this investigation, we move beyond simplistic explanations of educational attrition to develop a nuanced understanding of how various forces—from household economic pressures and traditional gender roles to school infrastructure and teaching quality—collectively shape girls' educational journeys in both rural and urban Warangal (ref. 8). This holistic perspective acknowledges that sustainable solutions must address not only in-school factors but also the broader social and economic context in which education occurs.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach (quantitative surveys + qualitative interviews) to analyse the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to girl student dropouts in rural and urban Warangal. Location of the survey at Warangal district, Telangana (India). The target Groups are 10 villages from Geesukonda and Narsampet mandals and five neighbourhoods in Warangal city. The sample Size is 400 dropout girls (200 rural, 200 urban) aged between 12–18 and their parents 100 (50 rural, 50 urban); and also 50 teachers/school administrators (25 rural, 25 urban). The sampling technique used is stratified random sampling (school records + local NGO data) and snowball sampling for hard-to-reach dropout cases.

The methods of data collection include a quantitative survey using a tool of structured questionnaire (paper-based), and the variables measured are: Socio-economic status (family income, parental education), School-related factors (distance, infrastructure, teacher quality), Cultural practices (early marriage, gender roles) and Reasons for dropout (open-ended + multiple-choice). The data were collected from door-to-door in selected villages of selected mandals. The qualitative interviews were also conducted as structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) - 5 FGDs with dropout girls (separate rural/urban groups) and 3 FGDs with parents and teachers.

The secondary data were collected from Government reports and NGO studies on girl education in Telangana. The data were analysed using quantitative analysis, using software, i.e. SPSS 26.0 and Excel. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages), Chi-square tests to compare rural vs. urban dropout factors. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was ensured (no names/addresses recorded); sensitive topics (early marriage, harassment) were handled by trained female researchers.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Urban and Rural respondents' reasons for dropouts from the school/college

Table – 1 Depicts the data on reasons for difficulty in travelling for dropout girl students between rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state.

Parameter	Area	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Total	Chi-Square
Difficulty in Travelling	Urban	54	32	2	2	10	100	$\chi^2 = 26.5385$ $df = 9$ $\square = .000025$ $p < .05$. Result: S@0.05
	Rural	28	54	6	10	12	100	
	Total	82	86	8	12	22	200	

The Chi-Square results between respondents on “There is no significant difference in the reasons for difficulty in travelling for the dropout girl students between rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state” the results are in tune with ref 3. The rural and urban revealed that the chi square (χ^2) value is 26.5385; it is greater than the table value. The df value is 9, and the rho ($\square$) value is .000025, which is significant at the 0.05 level. It has a significant association with them. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table -2 Depicts the data on difficulty in household working for the dropout girl students

between the rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state.

Parameter	Area	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Toal	Chi-Squire
House hold working	Urban	52	29	2	15	2	100	$\chi^2 = 38.9842$ $df = 9$ $\square = .000001$ $P < 0.05$ Result: S@0.05
	Rural	14	64	8	12	2	100	
	Total	66	93	10	27	4	200	

The Chi-Squire results between respondents on “There is no significantly difference reasons of difficulty in house hold working for the dropout girl students between rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state” with rural and urban data revealed that the chi square (χ^2) value is 38.9842 it is greater than the table value the df value, is 9 and the rho ($\square$) value is .000001, which is significant at 0.05 level. It has a significant association with them. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table -3 Depicts the data on difference in looking after siblings for the dropout girl students between the rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state.

Parameter	Area	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Toal	Chi-Squire
Looking after siblings	Urban	58	22	4	12	4	100	$\chi^2 = 41.466$ $df = 9$ $\square = .000001$ $P < 0.05$ Result: S@0.05
	Rural	20	62	9	7	2	100	
	Total	78	84	13	19	6	200	

The Chi-Squire results between respondents on “There is no significant difference in the reasons for looking after siblings for the dropout girl students between the rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state”. The rural and urban data revealed that the chi-square (χ^2) value is 41.466; it is greater than the table value. The df value is 9, and the rho ($\square$) value is .000001, which is significant at the 0.05 level. It has a significant association with them. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table - 4 Depicts the data on getting married for the dropout girl students between rural and urban areas of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state.

Parameter	Area	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Toal	Chi-Squire
Getting married	Urban	12	18	16	52	2	100	$\chi^2 = 26.887$ $df = 9$ $\square = .000021$ $P < 0.05$ Result: S@0.05
	Rural	30	34	14	20	2	100	
	Total	42	52	31	72	4	200	

The Chi-Squire results between respondents on “There is no significant difference in the reasons for getting married for the dropout girl students between rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state”. The rural and urban data revealed that the chi-square (χ^2) value is 27.6083; it is greater than the table value. The df value is 9, and the rho ($\square$) value is .000015, which is significant at the 0.05 level. It has a significant association with them. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table – 5 Depicts the data on parents' compulsion for the dropout girl students between rural and urban areas of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state.

Parameter	Area	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Toal	Chi-Squire
Parents compulsion	Urban	2	24	14	48	12	100	$\chi^2 = 54.8753$ $df = 9$ $\square = .000021$ $P < 0.05$ Result: S@0.05
	Rural	4	74	4	16	2	100	
	Total	6	98	18	64	14	200	

The Chi-Squire results between respondents on “There is no significant difference in the reasons of parents' compulsion for the dropout girl students between rural area and urban area of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state”. The rural and urban revealed that the chi square (χ^2) value is 54.8753; it is greater than the table value. The df value is 9, and the rho ($\square$) value is .000021, which is significant at the 0.05 level. It has a significant association with them. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table - 6 Depicts the data on bad influence for the dropout girl students between rural and urban areas of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state.

Parameter	Area	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Toal	Chi-Squire
Bad influence	Urban	1	4	4	54	37	100	$\chi^2 = 14.1662$ $df = 9$ $\square = .006783$ $P < 0.05$ Result: S@0.05
	Rural	2	16	6	32	44	100	
	Total	3	20	10	86	81	200	

The Chi-Squire results between respondents on “There is no significant difference in the reasons for bad influence for the dropout girl students between rural and urban areas of Warangal (old) district in Telangana state”. The rural and urban revealed that the chi square (χ^2) value is 14.1662; it is greater than the table value. The df value is 9, and the rho ($\square$) value is .006783, which is significant at the 0.05 level. It has a significant association with them; hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The study analysed dropout rates among girl students in both rural and urban areas of Warangal, identifying key socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to the issue.

Poverty was the most significant factor in rural areas, with 65% of dropouts linked to financial constraints (compared to 35% in urban areas). Many families prioritised boys' education, withdrawing girls to save costs or engage them in household/agricultural work. In urban areas, economic pressures led to girls taking up informal jobs viz., domestic work, small trade (ref.6 & 25)

Early marriages accounted for 28% of rural dropouts, compared to 12% in urban areas. Gender stereotypes discouraged higher education, especially in rural communities where traditional roles were reinforced. Safety concerns (harassment, lack of transport) were higher in urban areas (22% influence on dropouts) than in rural areas (15%).

Poor infrastructure (lack of toilets, drinking water) contributed to 20% of rural dropouts, particularly post-puberty. Teacher absenteeism and low-quality instruction demotivated students, especially in government schools (ref 2). Urban schools had better facilities but faced overcrowding, leading to higher disengagement (18%).

Parental illiteracy correlated strongly with dropout rates (40% in rural vs. 25% in urban). Negative peer influence (especially in urban areas) led some girls to leave school for part-time work or due to disinterest.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings highlight a rural-urban divide in dropout causes, emphasising the need for context-specific interventions. Scholarships, conditional cash transfers (CCTs), and free textbooks could reduce financial barriers, especially in rural areas. Urban dropout prevention may require vocational training to balance education and income needs.

Awareness campaigns on girls' education and early marriage laws are crucial in rural areas. Safe transport initiatives (e.g., bicycle schemes, escort programs) could improve urban retention (ref. 9 & 10).

Separate toilets, availability of sanitary pads, and girl-friendly spaces must be prioritised in rural schools (ref 1). Teacher training and accountability measures could enhance engagement in both settings (ref.2)

The policy recommendations include strengthening enforcement of the Right to Education (RTE) Act to prevent dropouts and community-based monitoring systems involving parents and local leaders.

Policy Frameworks for Warangal : Short-Term Interventions (1-3 Years) such as Warangal-specific CCTs (e.g., ₹500/month for girls with >80% attendance) and free uniforms, textbooks, and sanitary kits to reduce hidden costs (ref 1). GPS-tracked school buses in urban areas and Self-defence training in collaboration with local NGOs—mother-teacher associations to monitor girls' attendance and village education committees to discourage early marriages (ref. 4).

Long-Term Strategies (5 and above years) such as girl-friendly schools (toilets, drinking water, sanitary pad vending machines) and digital classrooms to improve learning quality. Gender-sensitive pedagogy workshops for teachers and performance-linked incentives for reducing dropouts. Stricter enforcement of RTE and child marriage laws and media campaigns like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao may be adapted locally (ref. 12).

V. CONCLUSION

While economic hardship dominates rural dropouts, urban dropouts are more influenced by safety concerns and disengagement. A multi-pronged approach—combining financial support, infrastructure development, and societal change—is essential to keep girls in school.

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