

Career Aspirations for Girls in Rural and Urban vis-à-vis Vocational Education

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Vocational and technical education and training systems are viewed as key indicators of youth preparedness for employment as they can provide young girls and boys with the right competencies and equip them for the world of work, thus facilitating smooth school-to-work transition. Post independence, the major recommendation of the first Education Commission (1964-66), popularly known as Kothari Commission, was integrating work experience with education to ensure productivity. The policy document on Vocationalisation of Secondary Education (1976) is a landmark in the history of vocational education in India. The National Working Group on Vocationalisation of Education reviewed the Vocational Education Programme (VEP) extensively and developed guidelines for the expansion of the programme. The National Policy on Education (1968), for the first time, recommended bifurcation of secondary stage of school education into vocational and academic streams. It recommended introducing work education from Classes I to VIII, prevocational education in Classes IX and X, and vocational education as a distinct stream in XI and XII. Its recommendations led to the initiation of the centrally sponsored scheme on Vocationalisation of Secondary Education. The main objectives of the scheme were to enhance individual employability, reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skilled human resource and provide an alternative for those pursuing higher education without particular interest or purpose. It further emphasised on increasing access to vocational education among the girls.

However, even today there has been no significant achievement in this direction. The enrolment statistics continue to reflect strong

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gender bias in vocational courses. Against this backdrop, this qualitative study examined the aspirations of parents, teachers and girls themselves for girls as career women and studies them in relation to participation of girls in vocational education as compared to that of the boys.

The sample consisted of girl students from standard X, XI, and XII, and their respective parents from a few schools of Chandigarh and Goa. It also included teachers of secondary level as well as vocational teachers. To get a national representative sample, initially one state from each region, north, south, east and west, was selected, but later due to operational difficulties, only Chandigarh and Goa were purposively selected as these states had Vocational Education Programmes. Following stratified random sampling (the strata being rural and urban), from each State two schools, each from rural and urban areas, were randomly selected. Schedules for collecting the data from the State/UT Directorate of Education were prepared in order to assess as to how the VEP is being implemented, in how many and which schools, which schools are in rural/urban areas, which schools are coeducation schools or single sex schools, etc. Based on the information from the concerned Directorate, sampling of schools was done. Further, information was collected from the girl students (Class X and XI-XII) studying in both vocational as well as general streams, and their parents and teachers. The sample of X standard girls was randomly selected to elicit opinion on their selection of vocational or general stream after giving them an orientation about the vocational stream and the vocational courses. To assess teachers' attitudes, 20 teachers from secondary stage were randomly selected, while all the 10+2 teachers from vocational stream of selected schools were included. For data triangulation, some of the questions were common to all. The schedules were pilot tested before using for data collection.

Results revealed that majority of the respondents believed that the goal of education for girls is to make them economically independent, to increase their chances of employment, and to widen their knowledge and skills. Hence, they viewed vocational courses from employment perspective and its merit lay in securing employment in the job market. These choices supersede the traditional narratives (e.g., to make them a better homemaker, to make them better mother and/or to increase their prospects of marriage with a great margin). On the whole, while a majority of the

parents in both the States did not have problem with co-educational schools and did not prefer schools only for girls, about 13.5 per cent respondents did not like co-education and 22.5 per cent gave preference to girls' schools. As regards the choice of streams, the subject choices of girls, by and large, matched with their parental choices, wherein, the top three choices were vocational course, science and commerce while the last three choices were arts, home science and agriculture. Surprisingly, none of the parents wanted their daughters to study vocational courses on agriculture. The parents further opined that current vocational courses were not suitable for girls and hence advocated for a major restructuring in the current vocational courses, which can accommodate girls also and add to their employment perspective in the job market.

The findings of the study have implications for increasing the participation of girls in vocational courses, especially in rural areas. The study will help in restructuring vocational education to match societal and individual (girls) aspirations. To attract sizeable segment of female population to vocational courses, a non-restrictive policy need be adopted. A non-restrictive policy will encourage widespread participation of girls so that girls get access to a wider range of vocational courses enhancing their productivity, economic independence and individual prosperity. To meet the huge targets of skill development in the country, a plurality of models of implementation of vocational education should be given preference. As both the parents and the girls expressed their choice towards self employment, the policies need to be suitably modified to facilitate this in the form of making the soft loans available, developing marketing channels, etc.