

# Why Is She Dropping Out of Higher Education Institutions in India

Della Raju

Had recently completed her Master's in Applied Economics from the Centre for Development Studies (J.N.U) in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

## ABSTRACT

The study investigates the gender-specific reasons for dropping out of higher education institutions (HEIs) in India. The analysis reveals significant variations in dropout reasons based on gender and specific states within the country. Marriage emerges as a prominent cause for female dropouts in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, and Kerala, while engagement in domestic activities is common in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Sikkim, and Goa. Males tend to drop out due to engagement in economic activities in states like Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Nagaland, and Jharkhand. Academic difficulties and lack of interest in studies contribute significantly to female dropouts in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Financial constraints play a role in female dropouts in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, and Meghalaya. Addressing gender-specific factors through targeted interventions is recommended to reduce dropout rates and ensure equal educational opportunities in HEIs across India.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Gender-specific reasons, Higher education institutions (HEIs), Dropout rates.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, the decision to pursue higher education is recognized as a voluntary endeavour, shaped by a multitude of complex factors such as economic circumstances, social dynamics, cultural influences, and individual characteristics. Equally significant is the exploration of the factors that lead to the choice of discontinuing education after enrolment in higher education institutions (HEIs). Astonishingly, the literature on this subject has paid little attention to the gender aspect of the issue, thereby leaving a critical gap in our understanding. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to bridge this gap by examining the distinct reasons for dropout experienced by males and females, while also delving into the variations across different states in India. To accomplish this, the study draws upon the rich dataset obtained from the 75th round of the NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) survey on Household Social Consumption of Education in India, which provides a comprehensive foundation for analysis and the generation of valuable insights. By shedding light on these important gender-based disparities and state-level variations, this research seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge on dropout phenomena and facilitate the development of targeted interventions and policies to address the challenges faced by students in their educational journey.

### Is 'She' Important?

The reasons behind dropping out from higher education institutions in India exhibit significant gender discrepancies, as highlighted in Table 1. Notably, approximately 45 percent of males cite engagement in economic activities as their primary cause for leaving higher education institutions, while this figure dwindles to a mere 7 percent among females. Conversely, marriage constitutes a prominent factor for female dropouts, accounting for about 32 percent of cases, followed by domestic activities at around 20 percent. It is worth mentioning that marriage does not feature as a reported cause for male students discontinuing their higher education, and a meagre 3 percent of males leave due to involvement in domestic activities. Financial constraints, on the other hand, lead to dropout for about 19 percent of males, while only about 8 percent of females attribute their departure from HEIs to such limitations. It is essential to consider these findings in conjunction with other pertinent factors, such as an individual's community affiliation, household economic conditions, and additional elements that influence their decision to withdraw from higher education institutions.

**Table 1: Reason for Dropping Out of Heis in India**

The major reason for never enrolled/ever enrolled but currently not attending	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Not interested in education	11.54	9.36	10.64

Financial constraints	19.19	8.48	14.74
Engaged in domestic activities	2.64	19.72	9.73
Engaged in economic activities	44.71	7.27	29.16
School is far off	0.00	0.61	0.25
Timings of educational institutions not suitable	0.02	0.01	0.02
Language/medium of instruction used unfamiliar	0.01	0.03	0.02
Inadequate number of teachers	0.06	0.00	0.03
Quality of teachers not satisfactory	0.07	0.00	0.04
Route to educational institutions is not safe	0.01	0.78	0.33
Unable to cope with studies/failure in studies	9.12	7.96	8.64
The unfriendly atmosphere at school	0.17	0.00	0.10
Completed desired level/class	2.11	4.50	3.10
Preparation for competitive examination	4.23	0.16	2.54
Non-availability of girl's toilet	0.00	0.32	0.13
Others	6.12	8.36	7.05
Marriage	0.00	32.44	13.48
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

### RESULTS

The reasons for dropping out of higher education institutions (HEIs) in India vary significantly due to the diversity of the nation. Given that only a small fraction of individuals enroll in HEIs, with less than six percent of them ultimately dropping out, there is limited data available to generalize beyond state-wise analysis. However, examining gender differences in the reasons for dropping out of HEIs within different Indian states can provide valuable insights.

Himachal Pradesh stands out from other states as marriage is not commonly reported as a reason for dropping out of HEIs. Interestingly, a higher percentage of males (about 40 percent) in Himachal Pradesh drop out due to engagement in domestic activities. In contrast, only about 14 percent of females drop out for the same reason. For females in Himachal Pradesh, the distance between their place of residence and the educational institution is a significant factor contributing to their decision to drop out.

In Rajasthan, compared to other states in the northern zone, a relatively high percentage of females (about 14 percent)

drop out of HEIs because they engage in economic activities. This percentage is similar to the share of females dropping out due to engagement in domestic activities. Additionally, around 54 percent of males in Rajasthan drop out due to engaging in economic activities. About 17 percent of females in Rajasthan drop out because of the distance to educational institutions or difficulties in commuting, while this is not a reason for males in the state. In contrast to Himachal Pradesh, marriage is a reason for dropping out among about 29 percent of females in Rajasthan.

In Punjab, reasons other than those explicitly listed are more prevalent causes of dropping out of HEIs. It is noteworthy that the distance to educational institutions or the route to the institution is not a reason for dropping out in Haryana and Punjab. The primary reason for dropping out of HEIs in Punjab and Haryana is engagement in domestic activities. However, only about 16 percent of females in Punjab drop out due to marriage-related reasons, whereas it is 33 percent for females in Haryana.

In the state of Uttar Pradesh, a substantial proportion of females (approximately 37 percent) opt out of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) due to marriage. However, Uttarakhand presents a contrasting scenario, where marriage is not identified as a cause for dropping out of HEIs. Instead, a significant 85 percent of females in Uttarakhand attribute their discontinuation to a lack of interest in studies. In contrast, only 13 percent of males who drop out cite disinterest in studies as a reason in Uttarakhand. Notably, around 59 percent of male dropouts in Uttarakhand leave HEIs to prepare for competitive exams, a motive that does not feature prominently among female dropouts.

Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, a higher percentage of females (about 23 percent) express their departure from HEIs due to a lack of interest in studies, whereas only approximately 6 percent of males cite the same reason for dropping out. In contrast, marriage is reported as a reason for dropping out by a mere 9 percent of female students in Madhya Pradesh. Meanwhile, in Chhattisgarh, females predominantly discontinue their education due to their inability to cope with studies or academic failures, accounting for about 27 percent of female dropouts. In contrast, a negligible 0.11 percent of males attribute their dropouts to academic difficulties.

In the state of Bihar, marriage is the primary reason for approximately 68 percent of female dropouts from HEIs, while preparing for competitive exams accounts for about 68 percent of male dropouts. This disparity in reasons between genders is evident in Bihar, with no females leaving HEIs to prepare for competitive exams and no males dropping out due to marriage.

Similarly, in Odisha, marriage is the leading cause for approximately 65 percent of female dropouts from HEIs. Notably, a higher percentage of males (around 12 percent) discontinue their education due to engagement in domestic activities, compared to 7 percent of females citing the same reason. Furthermore, compared to other Indian states, a significant 24 percent of female dropouts in Odisha attribute their discontinuation to financial constraints. This percentage is notably higher than the approximately 4 percent of male dropouts who report financial constraints as a reason for leaving HEIs.

In Sikkim, marriage is a factor that contributes to a minimal percentage (only about 1 percent) of female dropouts from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The predominant reason for female students (approximately 60 percent) in Sikkim to discontinue their education is engagement in domestic activities. Conversely, for males, the primary reason (approximately 51 percent) for dropping out of HEIs is engagement in economic activities. This gender disparity is evident in Sikkim, as no females leave HEIs due to economic engagements and no males drop out because of domestic responsibilities.

In Jharkhand, a significant proportion of female dropouts (around 35 percent) cite an inability to cope with studies or academic failures as their primary reason for leaving HEIs. This percentage is considerably higher than the approximately 20 percent of males who attribute their dropout to the same academic difficulties. For males in Jharkhand, financial constraints emerge as the major cause of discontinuing their education. Marriage is reported as a reason for dropping out by only about 21 percent of females in Jharkhand. In West Bengal, a lack of interest in studies is a reason for approximately 21 percent of female dropouts from HEIs, compared to only 12 percent of male dropouts. Additionally, marriage stands out as a major contributing factor for about 34 percent of female dropouts in West Bengal.

In Arunachal Pradesh, approximately 14 percent of female dropouts report a lack of interest in studies as a reason, while it is not cited as a reason for male dropouts. In Assam, a higher percentage of females (around 65 percent) attribute their dropout to a lack of interest in studies, which is relatively higher compared to the percentage of males (approximately 13 percent) who drop out for the same reason. Interestingly, about 53 percent of female dropouts in Nagaland mention engagement in economic activities as their reason for leaving HEIs, whereas only about 10 percent of males in Nagaland identify this as a reason for their dropout.

In Manipur, financial constraints account for a higher proportion of female dropouts (approximately 34 percent), while only about 10 percent of males attribute their dropout to financial constraints. Similarly, in Meghalaya, a higher

percentage of females (around 19 percent) leave HEIs due to financial constraints, whereas males do not report financial constraints as a reason for their dropout. In Mizoram, marriage and engagement in economic activities emerge as major factors contributing to female dropouts from HEIs.

In Tripura, a notable disparity exists between the reasons for female and male dropouts from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A significantly higher percentage of females, compared to males, attribute their dropout to challenges in coping with studies or academic failures and the inability to achieve their desired level of education. These reasons are not cited by males as causes for their HEI dropout. Additionally, marriage remains a prominent factor for female dropouts in Tripura. In Maharashtra, engagement in domestic activities continues to be a primary reason for female dropouts from HEIs. However, in Gujarat, a higher proportion of females (around 41 percent) who discontinued their HEI education cited completing their desired level of education as the reason for their dropout.

In both Kerala and Tamil Nadu, a substantial percentage of females (approximately 47 percent and 59 percent, respectively) who dropped out of HEIs pointed to marriage as their reason for discontinuing their education. Similarly, in Karnataka, around 27 percent of females who dropped out of HEIs attributed their dropout to marriage, while a similar percentage of female dropouts also mentioned engagement in domestic activities as their reason for leaving HEIs. In Goa, engagement in domestic activities emerges as the primary reason for female dropouts (reported by approximately 83 percent of female dropouts) from HEIs.

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh exhibit contrasting patterns of reasons for HEI dropout. In Telangana, financial constraints are cited by about 42 percent of females as their reason for dropping out, whereas only around 11 percent of males attribute their dropout to financial constraints. In Andhra Pradesh, approximately 48 percent of females who dropped out of HEIs mentioned the completion of their desired level of education as the reason for their dropout, while only a mere 2 percent of males in Andhra Pradesh reported the same reason for their HEI dropout.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the reasons for dropping out of higher education institutions (HEIs) in India exhibit substantial variations based on gender and the specific states within the country. This comprehensive analysis of state-wise data from the NSSO survey sheds light on these disparities. Some noteworthy findings include the prominence of marriage as a cause for female dropouts in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, and Kerala. Engagement in domestic activities emerges as a common reason for female dropouts in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Sikkim, and Goa. Meanwhile, males in states like Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Nagaland, and Jharkhand tend to drop out due to engagement in economic activities. Academic difficulties and lack of interest in studies contribute significantly to female dropouts in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Financial constraints play a role in female dropouts in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, and Meghalaya.

Based on these findings, it is crucial to address the gender-specific factors influencing dropout rates in HEIs. Implementing targeted interventions and policies can help alleviate the challenges faced by female students, such as providing support for balancing marriage and education, improving access to education through transportation infrastructure, offering financial assistance, and fostering a supportive environment for academic success. State governments should consider these recommendations to reduce dropout rates and ensure equal educational opportunities for all. Moreover, further research is necessary to gain deeper insights into the underlying causes and develop more comprehensive strategies to promote educational retention and success for both male and female students in HEIs across India.

### Biography of the Author:

Della Raju had recently completed her Master's in Applied Economics from the Centre for Development Studies (J.N.U) in Thiruvananthapuram.