Abstract

Education is universally acknowledged as a vital investment in human capital, playing a key role in alleviating poverty, fostering economic growth, boosting GDP, creating jobs, and improving overall health. Investment in higher education is crucial as it creates a skilled workforce, reduces poverty, and enhances economic growth. Higher education encompasses all formal post-secondary education, including universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools, both public and private. As a developing country, India aims to become a knowledge superpower, and higher education must play a key role in this vision. The rapidly growing middle class has fuelled a rising demand for higher education. Despite this growth, higher education remains inaccessible to many, particularly among the poorest and most marginalized, including women. Barriers such as poverty, violence, and child marriage hinder young females from accessing higher education and the labour force. Achieving gender equality is essential for eradicating extreme poverty and fostering inclusive prosperity. The main objectives of this thesis are: first, to identify household-level factors (including state policies) that influence the enrolment decisions of young people, especially young females in higher education; next, to analyze higher education enrolment across different Indian states and identify factors impacting state-level enrolment rates. Next, examine the gender gap in technical higher education at the household level and exploring factors contributing to reducing this disparity, and finally, observing the state-wise graduated unemployment situation in India and identifying factors to mitigate this issue. Several secondary data sources such as NSSO 75th Round Household Social Consumption on Education dataset, NFHS-4, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Home Affairs, Census Report (2011), RBI, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Govt. of India have been used. It is found that young females' enrolment in higher education in India is increasing at both household and state levels. However, state-level analysis reports that the GER of females is very poor in post-graduation and technical education courses, with no states achieving gender parity in technical education. Factors such as household income, location, mother's education and empowerment, and state expenditure on higher education encourage parents to enrol their children in higher education. Key household-level supportive variables that can reduce the gender gap in technical higher education include better family income, internet availability, and proximity to higher education institutions. State-specific policy factors such as increased expenditure on technical and vocational courses and better police density can also reduce the gender gap. Finally, the dynamic panel regression

indicates that expanding the service sector to create more employment opportunities for females with technical and professional degrees and enforcing an effective marriage age of 21 years and above can reduce the unemployment problem among female graduates in India.