Educational Challenges and Institutional Support for First-Generation Girl Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

First-generation girl students represent a critically disadvantaged segment within higher education, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions of India. Although access to higher education has improved in recent years, these students continue to encounter persistent academic, economic, and socio-cultural constraints. The present study investigates the academic and personal challenges experienced by first-generation girl students, examines the influence of family background and social environment on their educational outcomes, and evaluates the role of institutional support in enhancing academic success. A descriptive research design was employed, and primary data were collected from 70 first-generation girl students using a structured questionnaire. The study utilized percentage analysis, mean score analysis, chi-square test, correlation, and regression analysis for data interpretation. The findings reveal that academic workload, time management issues, and financial constraints constitute the major challenges faced by students. Further, family background and social environment exert a significant influence on educational outcomes, while institutional support demonstrates a strong positive effect on academic success. The study underscores the necessity for targeted institutional interventions to promote equity, retention, and empowerment among first-generation girl students in higher education.

Keywords: First-generation students; girl students; academic challenges; institutional support; higher education; India

1. Introduction

Higher education serves as a powerful instrument for social mobility and women's empowerment. In the Indian context, first-generation students—those whose parents have not attained higher education—often encounter distinct challenges while navigating academic environments. These challenges become more pronounced for girl students due to gender-based expectations, socio-cultural norms, and economic constraints, particularly in rural and semi-urban settings.

First-generation girl students frequently experience limited academic guidance at home, financial instability, household responsibilities, and societal pressures associated with traditional gender roles and early marriage. While government initiatives and institutional policies aim to enhance access to higher education, disparities continue to persist in academic preparedness, retention, and performance. Institutional support mechanisms such as scholarships, mentoring, counseling services, and remedial coaching play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges. This study empirically explores these dimensions within the higher education context of Tamil Nadu.

2. Review of Literature

Earlier studies have consistently reported that first-generation students face greater academic, emotional, and psychological challenges compared to their continuing-generation counterparts (Choy, 2001). Gender-oriented research further indicates that first-generation female students experience elevated stress levels due to conflicting academic and social roles (Leu & Price, 2005).

Engle and Tinto (2008) emphasized that institutional support systems significantly contribute to improved student persistence and academic achievement among first-generation learners. Research in the Indian context highlights financial hardship, family responsibilities, and inadequate academic preparedness as key barriers faced by female students in higher education. However, comprehensive empirical studies integrating academic challenges, family influence, and institutional support—especially in rural Tamil Nadu—remain limited. The present study addresses this research gap.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the major academic and personal challenges faced by first-generation girl students in higher education.
2. To examine the influence of family background and social environment on their educational outcomes.
3. To assess the impact of institutional support on the academic success of first-generation girl students.

4. Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Primary data were collected from first-generation girl students enrolled in Arts stream courses at JP College of Arts & Science, Tenkasi District, Tamil Nadu.

- **Sample Size:** 70 students
- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling
- **Data Collection Tool:** Structured questionnaire
- **Statistical Tools:** Percentage analysis, mean score analysis, chi-square test, correlation, and regression analysis

5. Ethical Considerations

Prior informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained. The study adhered to established ethical standards in social science research.

6. Limitations of the Study

The study is confined to first-generation girl students from a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the results are based on self-reported data and may be subject to response bias.

7. Results and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of primary data in alignment with the study objectives.

7.1 Academic and Personal Challenges Faced by First-Generation Girl Students

Understanding the academic and personal challenges faced by first-generation girl students is essential for identifying barriers to educational progress.

Table 1. Major Academic and Personal Challenges Faced by First-Generation Girl Students

Challenge	*Respondents*	*Percentage (%)*
Academic Workload	14	20
Time Management	12	17
Financial Difficulties	11	16
Health / Personal Issues	8	11
Difficulty Understanding Subjects	7	10
Household Responsibilities	6	9
Language Barriers	5	7
Lack of Study Materials	4	6
Transportation Issues	2	3
Others	1	1
Total	**70**	**100**

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Academic workload, time management difficulties, and financial constraints emerge as the most prominent challenges, reflecting the combined academic and socio-economic pressures faced by students.

Figure 1. Distribution of academic and personal challenges faced by first-generation girl students
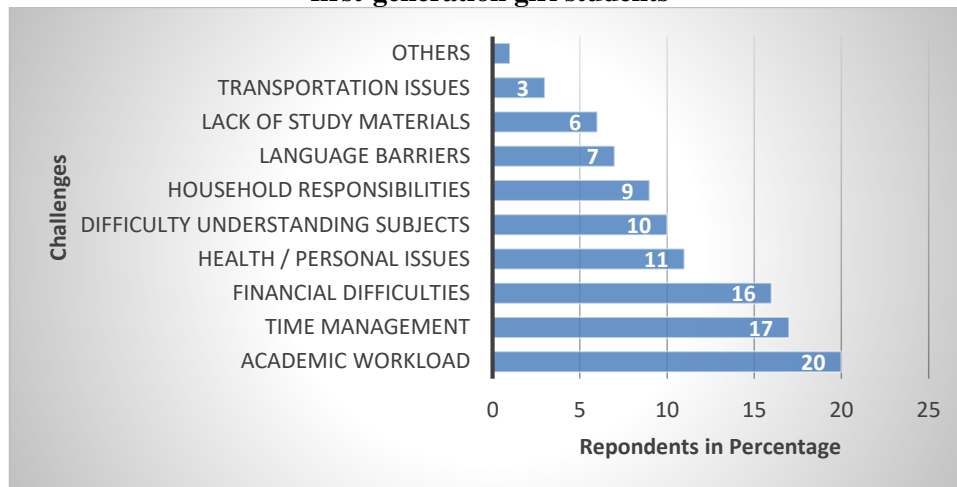
Mean score analysis reveals a moderate to high level of difficulty in pursuing higher education (Mean = 3.4).

## 7.2 Influence of Family Background and Social Environment

Family background and social environment play a significant role in shaping students' educational experiences.

Table 2. Level of Family Support for Education

Level of Support	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Supportive	40	57
Somewhat Supportive	22	31
Not Supportive	8	12
Total	**70**	**100**

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Figure 2. Level of Family Support for Education
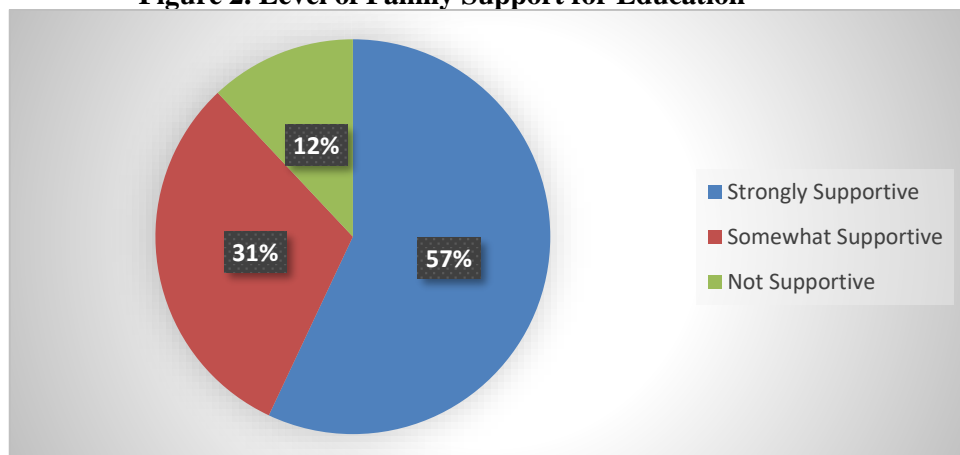
Table 3. Effect of Social and Cultural Expectations on Education

Level of Effect	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strong Effect	22	31
Some Effect	30	43
No Effect	18	26
Total	**70**	**100**

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Figure 3. Effect of Social and Cultural Expectations on Education
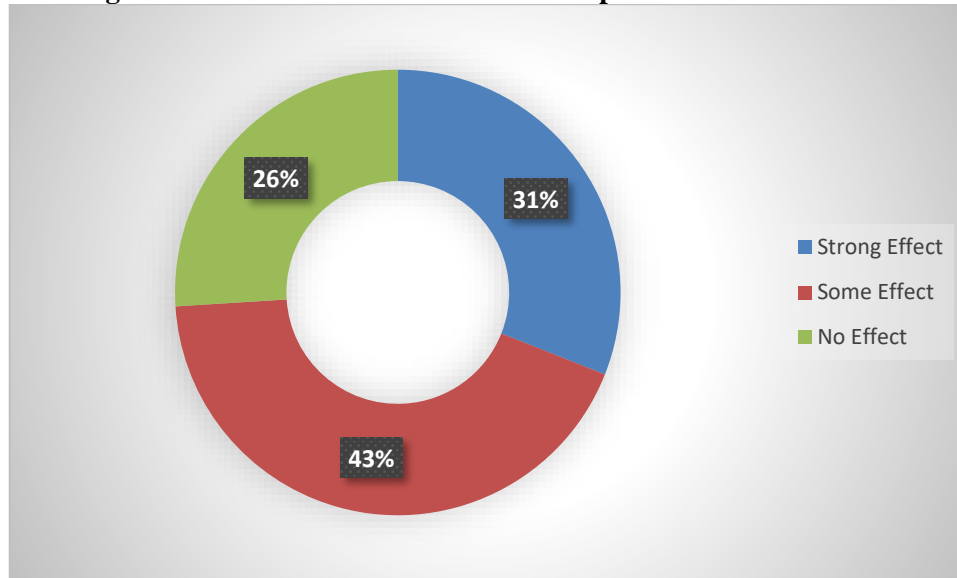
Table 4. Chi-Square Test Results

Relationship	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Result
Family Background vs Educational Outcomes	9.134	4	0.028	Significant
Social Environment vs Educational Outcomes	10.842	3	0.017	Significant

Source: Computed from Primary Data

The chi-square results confirm that family background and social environment significantly influence educational outcomes.

**7.3 Impact of Institutional Support on Academic Success**

Institutional support plays a critical role in enhancing academic performance.

Table 5. Institutional Support Received by Students

Type of Support	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Scholarships / Financial Aid	25	36
Remedial Coaching	20	29
Emotional / Peer Support	15	21
Hostel Facilities	10	14
Total	**70**	**100**

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Figure 4. Types of Institutional Support Received by Students
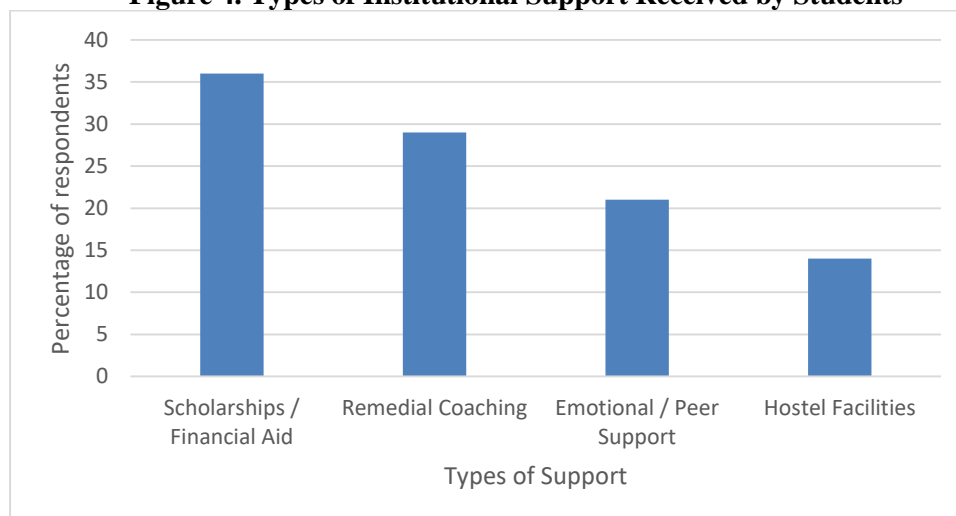
Table 6. Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation (r)	p-value
Academic Challenges & Academic Success	−0.56	0.001
Institutional Support & Academic Success	+0.62	0.001

Source: Computed from Primary Data

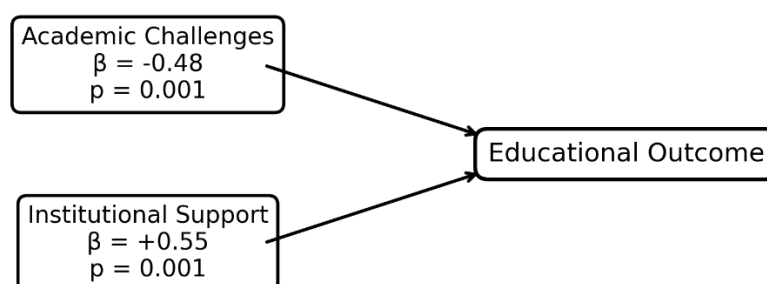**Figure 5. Relationship Between Institutional Support and Academic Success**
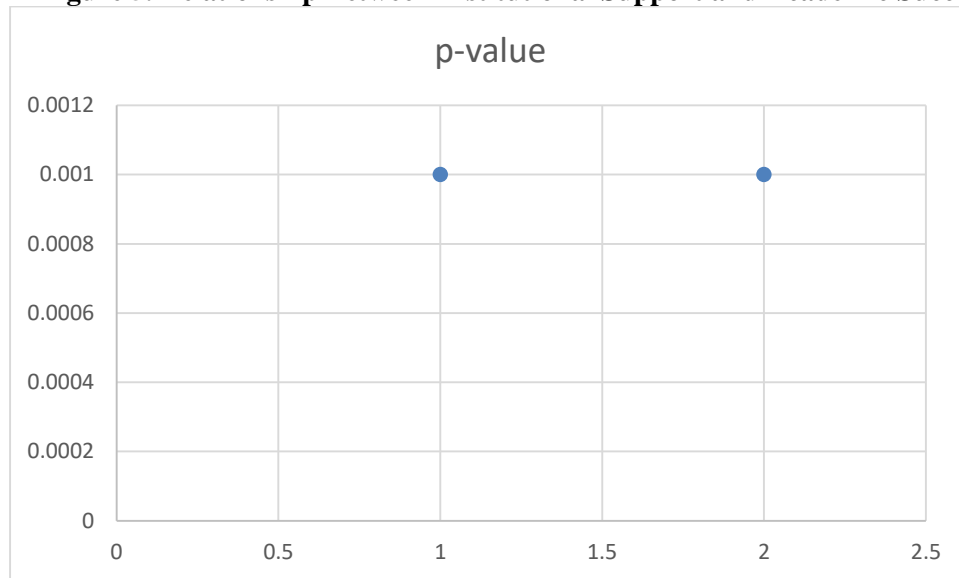
Table 7. Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	t-value	p-value
Academic Challenges	−0.48	−4.23	0.001
Institutional Support	+0.55	5.10	0.001

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Figure 6. Regression Model Showing Impact of Institutional Support on Academic Success

The regression results indicate that institutional support is the strongest predictor of academic success among first-generation girl students.

8. Major Findings of the Study

- Academic workload, time management, and financial difficulties are the most significant challenges faced by first-generation girl students.
- Students experience a moderate to high level of difficulty in higher education.
- Family background and social environment significantly influence educational outcomes.
- Social and cultural expectations continue to affect girls' participation in higher education.
- Institutional support has a strong positive impact on academic success.
- Financial aid and remedial coaching emerge as the most effective support mechanisms.

9. Suggestions and Policy Implications

- Institutions should implement structured academic mentoring and support programs.
- Targeted financial assistance schemes should be strengthened for first-generation girl students.
- Counseling and emotional support services should be enhanced.
- Gender-sensitization and community awareness programs should be promoted.
- Bridge courses and orientation programs should be introduced to support academic transition.
- Family engagement initiatives should be encouraged to strengthen parental support for education.

10. Conclusion

The study concludes that first-generation girl students encounter substantial academic, financial, and socio-cultural challenges in higher education. Family background and social environment significantly shape their educational outcomes, while institutional support plays a decisive role in enhancing academic success. Strengthening institutional support mechanisms is essential for promoting equity, retention, and empowerment among first-generation girl students in higher education.

References

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