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## Status of girl's education in selected rural areas of Almora district in Uttarakhand

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### Abstract

Education is one of the crucial indicators of status and is vital to human development. Being male dominated the status of women and girl is relatively low in the Indian society. In India, women constitute nearly half of the rural population and play a vital role in the rural economy, and hence they must be considered equal partners in the development process. A qualitative reform among the women through their education and training would not only help in improving the overall educational status of women but also their overall economic development and independence. Lack of education among women hinders their ability to bring about economic development and social transformation of the community and of the nation as a whole. Therefore, one of the important aspects to be considered for women's education is to ensure proper schooling of girl children.

In view of the low literacy rate of women in the state, it was thought pertinent to undertake an investigation to examine the socio-educational status of girl children of Almora district in rural areas with different economical strata, and to assess the attitudinal change towards education in them. Besides reporting on these above points, the paper discusses views of parents on educational requirement and provides recommendations on furthering the educational status of girl children in rural Almora. The effective implementation of the Central Government Sponsored Schemes has played a significant role in improving the education status of children girl's education in hilly areas of the state and as per this study there are only 4.67% drop-out girl children in rural Almora. A considerable change has occurred in the mind set, and currently girls wish to complete their studies prefer to become self-independent and make an identity of their own.

**Keywords:** Education, girl children, Kumaun, rural, status, Uttarakhand

### 1. Introduction

Status is important and signifies the overall position by virtue of which the person enjoys certain privileges in a society. Among certain indicators, income, property, education, training, and skills occupy priority positions. Being male dominated the status of women and girl is relatively low in the Indian society. The low status of women is the result of social evaluation of their biological characteristics. Studies reveal that many issues related to women like education, rights, health, property, training and few others are being looked into and addressed through different Government schemes/programmes. A change in the status of women, therefore, is a good indicator of the pattern and direction of social change.

Education being one of the crucial indicators of status is vital to human development. In India, women constitute nearly half of the rural population and play a vital role in the rural economy; they must be considered equal partners in the development process. Thus, education and training are crucial for achieving this goal; this would not only help in raising the status of rural women and enable development of their potential but help them to live as independent and equal partners. It is widely perceived as a key factor in improving the status of women and even more importantly, as an agent for developing modern attitude and rational outlook. It has been suggested that a qualitative reform among the women is possible through their education and training together with appropriate apparatus being provided to them (Tewari, 1987) [18]. Several scholars have highlighted the importance of women's education (Kapadia, 1966; Kammeyer and Ginn, 1988; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Sen, 1997; Srivastava, 2005) [13, 12, 10, 15, 17]. These workers suggested that education raises the women's status by enhancing their capabilities, economic independence and also their ability to rely on

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themselves; it also brings them out of the confines of the domestic sphere and put them into contact with the outside modern world. They concluded that investment in women's education brings individual psychic and social benefits including increased productivity and also better chances for more educated women's children.

While life in rural areas in general, is difficult, living in mountains is even tougher. Basic requisite of a moderate living, such as potable water, fuel wood, fodder, hospital and maternity centres, veterinary services, schools, postal services, roads and vehicular transport, marketing and banking centres are not easily available in many mountainous places. The far flung habitations remains largely secluded, villages small sized, and scattered far and wide. In this context it must be mentioned that life of the rural hill women is associated with drudgery and deprivation. It is further exacerbated by the out migration of the males resulting in deprivation of the skills, education and entrepreneurship of the men. The women folk are thus forced to perform the functions of the active labour force; this includes all the farm activities as well as entire domestic work.

The Seventh Five Year Plan of India (Anonymous, 1985a, b) [4, 5] had taken notice of the hard lives, low income and enormous responsibilities of hill women, which needs to be improved. Therefore, education is main factor which can contribute to the changes in a society and thus should be seriously provided to children, both boys and girls. Illiterate (uneducated) women, thus face more hardships in life compared to literate ones; they have high levels of fertility as well as mortality, and suffer from malnutrition and various health related problems. Further when a girl or women is illiterate, not only she suffers in life but the entire family has to bear the consequences. Thus, a woman who does not know the importance of education in life does not emphasize the same for their kids (Kaur, 2013) [14].

The hill state of Uttarakhand, carved out of Uttar Pradesh in the year 2000, had a literacy rate of 71.62% in the year 2001 (www.indiabudget.nic.in/budget 2013-2014/tab 2012/tab94.xis. Retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2014) [20]. Higher than the national average of 64.84% (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy\_in\_India-Wikipedia. Retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2013) [7]. The female literacy rate in the state during the same year was however as low as 58.73%, compared to 85.74% for males. While Uttarakhand has a relatively high literacy rate, it may not totally reflect the overall education status, let alone for women. Therefore, one of the important aspects to be considered for women's education is to ensure proper schooling of girl children. Although in general the enrolment in school going children for both boys and girls have increased over the last couple of decades yet there are school

drop-outs due to several social and other domestic reasons. Immediately following formation of Uttarakhand, the state Government took serious steps to improve the low literacy level in schools and out-of-school children by continuing the Centrally Sponsored Schemes, namely Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid-Day Meal Scheme and National Literacy Mission Programmes. Subsequently The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE), an Act of the Parliament of India, was enacted on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2009 for free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14 years in Indian Article 21A of the Constitution (http://www.education.nic.in/constitutional.asp. Provision of the Constitution of India having a bearing on Education. Department of Higher Education, Government of India. Retrieved on 1st April 2010) [8]. All these above Centrally Sponsored Schemes were crucial for the state.

### Objectives of the study

In view of the above reasons and the low literacy rate of women in the state, it was thought necessary to undertake an investigation with the following objectives:

- (i) To define the socio-educational status of girl children of Almora district in rural areas,
- (ii) To assess attitudinal change with regards to education and status in the family,
- (iii) To find out the views of parents on the necessity of girl's education, &
- (iv) To provide recommendations on further enhancing the educational status of girl children in rural Almora.

### Study site and Methodology

The study was conducted in Almora district, Uttarakhand (Figure 1) which comprises of 11 blocks (Bhasyia-chhana, Bhikyasen, Chaukhutiya, Dhaula Devi, Dwarahat, Hawalbagh, Lamgarah, Saalt, Syalde, Takula and Tarikhet) and the corresponding forest area. Based on the female literacy rate, the blocks were arranged into two categories, i.e. high and low (source: Vikas Bhawan, Almora, Govt. of Uttarakhand) district is 67.88%, blocks with literacy rate up to 67.88% were categorised under 'low level' whereas the blocks with literacy rate of above 67.88% were placed under 'high level' of literacy. Thus from each of these categories, two blocks each- with lowest and highest literacy rates, comprising a total four blocks, namely Dhaula Devi (60.67% literacy rate; 35 km from Almora), Lamgarah (64.09%; 33 km from Almora), Hawalbagh (73.69%; 14 km from Almora), and Tarikhet (74.04%; 56 km from Almora) were chosen (Figure 1). Information relating to geographical position, area, population, schools and literacy rate of different sites in Almora district selected for the study is summarized in Table 1.

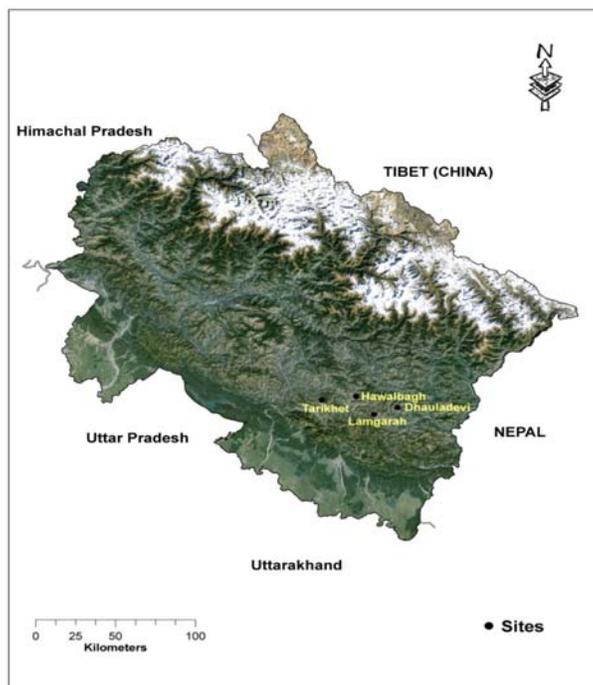
**Table 1:** Table depicting the geographical position, area, population, schools and literacy rate of different sites in Almora district selected for the study

S.N.	Parameter	Blocks			
		Hawalbagh	Tarikhet	Lamgarah	Dhaulta Devi
1.	Geographical position*	29°38.567'N 79°37.968'E	29°36.691'N 79°24.662'E	29°26.786'N 79°33.581'E	29°34.597'N 79°54.023'E
2.	Altitude (m)*	1213	1487	1460	1741
3.	Distance (km) from Almora town	14	56	33	35
As per Census of India, 2011 <sup>#</sup>					
5.	Total population	67447	66831	52169	60620
6.	Male population	32697	31479	25132	28291
7.	Female population	34750	35352	27037	32329

9.	Sex ratio (females/1000 males)	1062	1123	1075	1142
10.	Literacy rate	83.69	88.75	77.09	73.01
11.	Male literacy rate	94.49	95.03	91.39	87.66
	Female literacy rate	73.69	74.03	64.09	60.67
12.	Total area (sq km)	201.8	243.2	214.2	324.4
13.	No. of family	14578	14406	10582	12732
As per 2008-09 data (Block wise recognised educational institutions in the district)					
14.	Jr Basic School	158	184	142	173
15.	Sr Basic School (Total)	25	38	25	34
16.	Sr Basic School (Girls)	5	4	5	4
17.	Higher Secondary (Total)	25	25	20	24
18.	Higher Secondary (Girls)	1	2	2	2

\*Block HQs; Information gathered from Google Earth as on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2015.

# **Source:** Vikas Bhawan, Almora, Govt. of Uttarakhand



**Fig 1:** Map of Uttarakhand showing the different study sites in Almora district (Source: Google Earth).

Once the blocks were selected, from each of these blocks 75 respondents were predominantly selected for interview thus, making a total sample of 300 respondents. The criteria for selection of respondents was only the girl children of 6 to 18 years age (excluding married, widow and divorce) with their parents (without any caste, race or creed) in order to get a complete range of information. The sample is thus representative of various variables like age, standard or class, drop-out, family, financial condition, parental education, and parental attitude of the respondents. The sample consisted of school going and drop-out students of various types of school (Government, Private and under schemes).

**Results and Discussion**

A comparison of data from different areas of the country clearly demonstrates the fact that there is a close relationship between state of education and level of economic development. Education is therefore, regarded as one of the most important ingredients of economic development. Education inter alia improves both quality skill of population. Investment in education, considers investment in development of human resources (Joshi, 1988) [11].

Moreover, it is widely perceived as a key factor in improving the status of women and even more importantly, as an agent for developing modern attitude and rational outlook. Lack of education among women hinders their ability to bring about economic development and social transformation of the community and of the nation as a whole (Srivastava, 2005) [17].

In the present study the levels of education of the respondents have been classified in to four categories- (a) Below 5<sup>th</sup>: Those who study below 5<sup>th</sup> class, (b) Below 10<sup>th</sup>: Those who study between 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> class, (c) Below 12<sup>th</sup>: Those who study between 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> class, and (d) Drop-out: Those who have left the school after enrolment.

**Education and some related factors**

**Age**

Based on the age, all the respondents (300 nos) were initially grouped into different age categories, and their education levels ascertained. The age structure of the respondents indicate that 18.67% were in age group of 6-10 years, 33.67% in 11-15 years and 47.66% of them between 16 -18 years.

Data on the respondents' education under different age categories are provided in Figure 2. The younger generation have better opportunities and being more conscious of the value of education, are usually more careful than those belonging to the older generation. In this study it was noticed that in case of drop-out students only 3.57% (due to some illness) were in 6-10 yrs group, 6.93% (help provided to

mother in domestic work and care of siblings) in 11-15 yrs group and 3.50% (due to domestic work, distance of school, and waiting for good marriage proposal) in 16-18 yrs group were present. The percentage of drop-out students was maximum (6.93%) in the age group of 11-15 yrs (Figure 2). Thus, in general the percentage of drop-out students is very less.

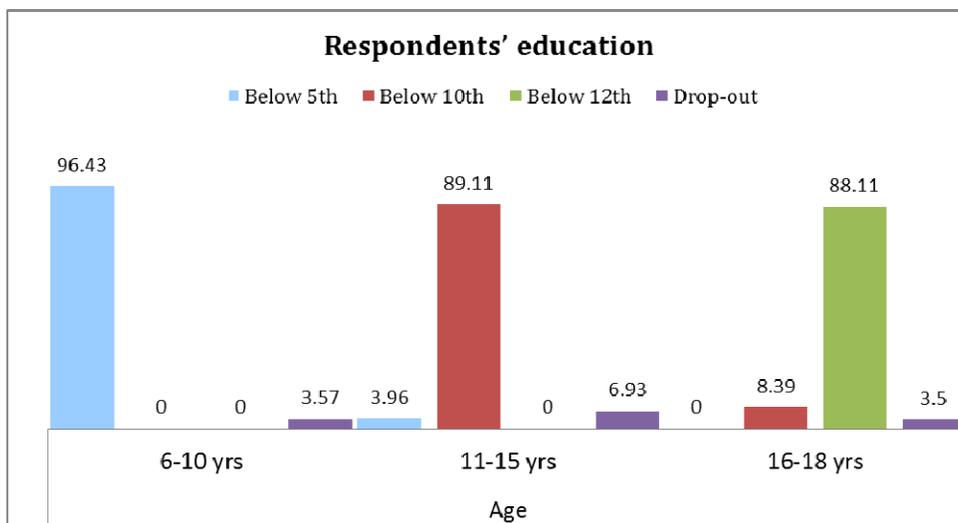


Fig 2: A graph depicting the respondents' education and age.

**Fathers' education**

Education of the parents does influence the education of their children. The educated parents are aware of the importance of education and they essentially want their children to be better educated so that they can make use of the opportunities available in the society. In this context, it is important to look at the educational background of the respondents' parents. Analysis of the respondents' fathers (300 nos) revealed that 23.00% of the fathers were illiterate, 39.33% were educated up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard, 28.00% up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard and 9.67% qualified up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and above. When a detailed analysis was carried out (see Figure 3), it can be noticed that amongst the fathers of young girl

children, only 11.59% were illiterate and maximum 48.27% had education up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and above. On the other hand none of the fathers whose daughters were not school going (drop-out) were educated up to class 10 and 12 or above, but were illiterate (13.04%) or otherwise studied up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard (4.23%). From Figure 3 it can also be noticed that fathers' education level (class 12 and above) in children studying in class 10 and 12 were relatively less, i.e. there were 48.27% fathers of 5<sup>th</sup> standard students, 27.59% fathers of 10<sup>th</sup> standard students and 24.19% father of 12<sup>th</sup> standard girl students. There was no father whose education level was up to class 10, or class 12 or above amongst any drop-out student.

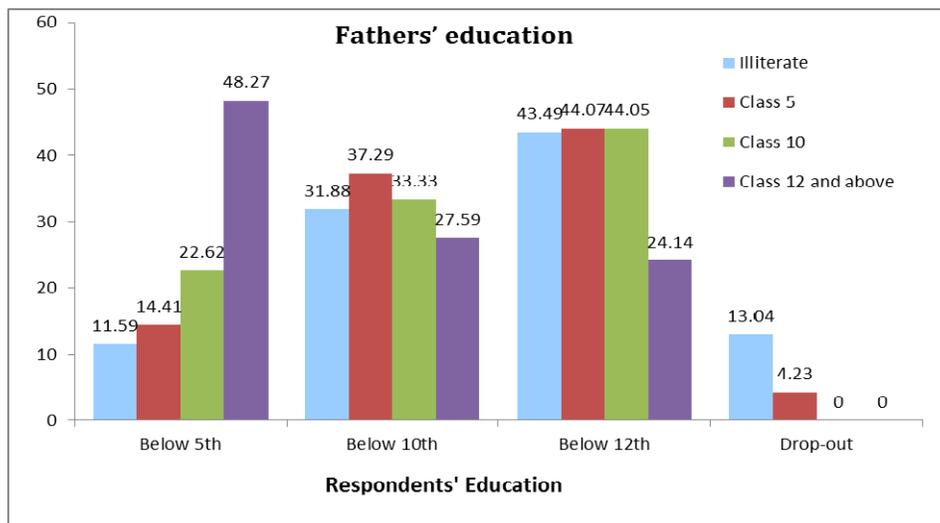


Fig 3: A graph showing respondents' education and their fathers' education.

**Mothers' Education**

In general mothers want their daughters to be educated. The influence of mothers' education on their daughters can be observed in the present study. Analysis of the respondents (300 nos) mothers revealed that a major proportion of the respondents' mothers had either no education or possessed only lower levels of education; thus 26.33% of the total respondents' mothers were illiterate, 43.33% were educated up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard and 24.00% were educated up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard. In total only 6.33% of the respondents mothers' were qualified up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and above.

The data presented in Figure 4 exhibits the detailed educational position of the respondents' mothers. It was observed that 63.16% mothers of class 5<sup>th</sup> standard children

has education up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and above, meaning thereby that with changing time the mothers' education has also improved. When education level of mother's of students of class 12 was considered, 43.03% were illiterate, 46.93% studied up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard, 38.89% were below 10<sup>th</sup> standard and 15.79% studied up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and above. Careful examination of Figure 4 reveals that drop-outs from the school had about 17.72% illiterate mothers.

Thus it can be concluded that although girl students studying in higher classes (10 and 12) have moderate percentage of illiterate mothers, nevertheless, due to changing trend and importance of education such mothers do encourage their daughter to get educated.

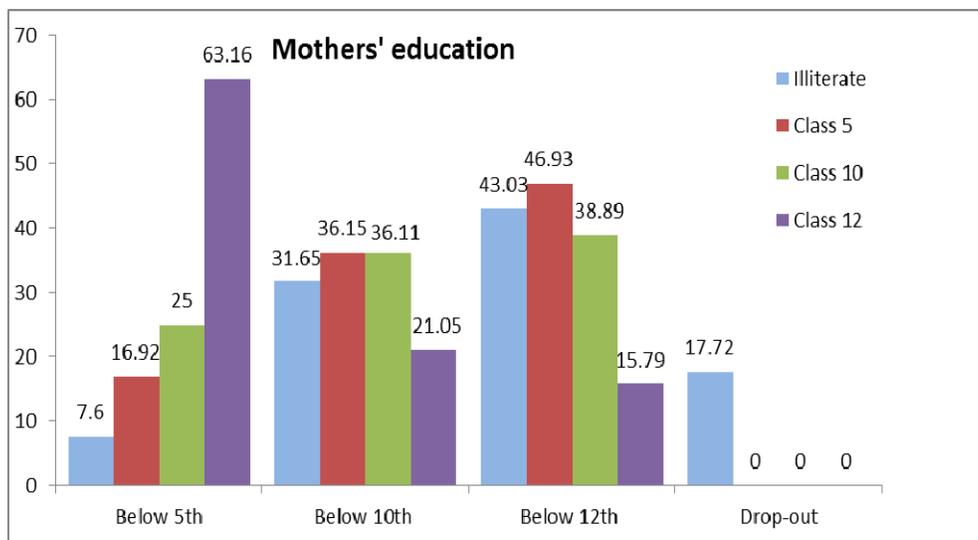


Fig 4: A graph showing respondents' education and their mothers' education.

**Objective of Education**

When asked about their objective of education majority of respondents (mostly class 12 students) stated that the objective of education is to be independent. Amongst the respondents (300 nos) interviewed it revealed that a major proportion (42.67%) of the respondents wanted to be independent (to do job and earn money), 25.00% wanted to make an identity, 18.00% of the respondents did not know what they wanted to become and 14.33% said it would improve their marriage prospects.

A detailed breakup of the data (see Figure 5) indicate that amongst the 42.67% respondents who wanted to be independent, 5.47% belonged to 5<sup>th</sup> standard, 34.38% studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard, and 58.59% were students up to class 12<sup>th</sup> standard while only 1.56% were drop-outs. Moreover, it was observed that amongst the 25.00% of the total respondents who were going to school every day, believe that one day they will make an identity of themselves (as Doctor, Nurse, Engineer, Professor, Teacher, Dancer and Journalist) in which 22.67% were 5<sup>th</sup> standard students, 34.67% class 10 students, and a maximum of 42.66% students of class 12; a ray of hope was seen in their eyes during the interview, but no such response was noticed from drop-out section as it appears that they have forgotten to see a dream in their life. When the drop-out respondents were asked about the objective of education, majority of them said that they did not know while a few indicated about improving marriage prospects.

In the present day scenario, it appears that girls are not very keen on marriage; this is reflected by the fact that only 14.33% students said that it would help to improve marriage prospects. Amongst these respondents, 55.82% were class 10 students, 34.88% class 12 students and 9.30% were drop-outs; none of the class 5 students said about marriage prospects. Therefore, based on the level of education, in general it was found that there is an indication of change in the attitude of respondents and their parents as the level of education increases. Currently the girls are more interested in becoming self-independent and making an identity of their own.

Education is considered as an important and powerful instrument of economic development, social transformation and mobilization of human resources. The progress and prosperity of a community and a nation is determined by their level of education (Srivastava, 2005)<sup>[17]</sup>. Therefore, education plays a significant role in the dissemination of modern attitude, values, approach and outlook. This remarkable modernizing potential of education needs to be realized by every individual or social community and hence must be followed (Ahmad, 1987)<sup>[1]</sup>. It has been suggested that education helps women in lighting the burden of tradition of ignorance and strict seclusion within the home, in equipping them with the expertise and knowledge required to play modern roles, in widening their horizons and raising their general status in society (Akhtar, 1992)<sup>[2]</sup>. When women obtain higher level of education and enter labour

force, they are exposed to broader communication network. These two factors are likely to increase their status relative to men (Kammlyer and Ginn, 1988) <sup>[12]</sup>.

In the past education of women in rural areas of the country was thought to be a wasteful expenditure but at present a lot of change has taken place in the educational status of girl children. The empirical data gathered demonstrates that education has contributed significantly in raising the status of girl children in rural Almora. All the girls aged between 6 to 18 years were found to be enrolled in schools. The number of drop-out students is negligible, indicating that now the parents are also aware about the importance of education. It can be also notable from the educational status of the parents that new generation of parents had greater level of education than the older ones and was found to influence respondents' education i.e., the higher the education of the parents, higher was the educational level of the girl children.

This study was also aimed to assess the extent of attitudinal change towards the respondents (girl children) with disparity with reference to their education. During interviews a significant and quick change in the people's attitude (girls, including parents) was observed in the rural area in Almora, and this could be noticeable throughout the whole interviewed sequence. The socio-educational profile of school going girl children indicates that a remarkable changing scenario is going through education and now the confident girl children in different age groups with different economical category are the product of different educational effort.

When the respondent's parents (fathers & mothers) were asked about the level of education they wanted for their girl children than most people said they favoured education up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard and above. On enquiring why their daughters were dropping school after 10<sup>th</sup> standard, the parents' response indicated sheer ignorance about the need for education. The parents also stated that education develops confidence to face situation or any kind of eventuality such as death of earning member, separation or divorce. Further, they added that education makes good house-wives and helps in proper upbringing of children. Moreover, they indicated that educated women assist their husbands in making decisions logically.

Based on the belief of mothers, Sharma (1999) <sup>[16]</sup> found that mothers want their daughters to be educated and professionally sound as they feel that only education and employment can enable a girl to be free from the shackles of drudgery at home which they could not achieve on their lifetime. The influence of mothers' education on their daughters is also well observed in the present study. It is interesting to note that majority of the parents, particularly mothers, expressed their willingness to educate their daughters. The parents who were not in favour of higher education for girls have given economic constraints as the reason for their opposition. But the majority of parents having some level of education has reflection on their attitude towards the education of their daughters, is appreciable. The parents expressed that these days, education is extremely important and necessary for one and every girl for their overall development. Thus, mothers no longer considered the role of women as "house wives and mother"

instead their aim is to empower their daughters in the field of education. Hence, in other words it can be concluded that most of the parents granted freedom to their daughters to decide the stream of education and higher level of education.

The parents formed the source of encouragement for higher education of their daughters. The nature of encouragement from parents is indicative of the high practical value they had for higher education which contrast with a number of stereotyped notions about girls' education in rural areas. Although girls studying in higher classes (10 and 12) have moderate percentage of illiterate parents, nevertheless, due to changing trend and improvement in understanding of the importance of education such parents did encourage their daughters to get educated. Higher income of parents was likely to place the children in a better educational position. But parents with poor financial background were also found to influence their daughters' accessibility to education.

Further it was also found during surveys that majority of parents send their sons and daughters to the same level (quality) of school reflecting an unbiased attitude towards their daughters and value education equally for their children of both sexes. In a few cases, however, some parents were found to send their sons to the Public School and girls to the local Government Primary School in view of the thought that "what will they (girls) do after becoming educated?" Such partiality is unfair, and instead parents should provide proper encouragement and equal opportunity to both girls and boys; there must be a positive deviation from the traditional thinking of giving preference to boys in all sphere of life and not confining the role of girls within the four walls of home as a dependent housewife and holding a subordinate position in the family.

India has the second largest education system (World Bank, 2003) <sup>[19]</sup> and largest number of children out of school in the age group 6-10 years (Huebler, 2007) <sup>[9]</sup>. But over the last few decades there has been considerable change in status of girl's education in hilly areas of Uttarakhand. The situation has improved considerably following the formation of Uttarakhand state. The effective implementation of the Central Government Sponsored Schemes, namely Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, National Literacy Mission, and Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education have played significant role in improving the education status of children. It would be important to mention that the literacy rate in the state has improved significantly from 71.62% (in 2001) to 78.82% (in 2011), which is once again higher than the national average of 74.04%. The female literacy rate in the state during these ten years has also improved markedly from a low 58.73% to 70.7% (Census of India, 2011) <sup>[6]</sup>.

It is noteworthy that currently the drop-out girl students of 6-17 years age form only a very small proportion, i.e. 2.9% in rural Almora and 0.5% in urban Almora (Annual Health Survey 2011-12) <sup>[3]</sup>. In this investigation too, it was observed that among the total number of respondents interviewed there were only 4.67% drop-out children, quite closer to the data published in the above mentioned Survey report. Thus, it can be concluded that now a day gradual a change has occurred in rural areas; the rural people now want to give chance to their daughters to live a hazard-free, open and enjoyable life.

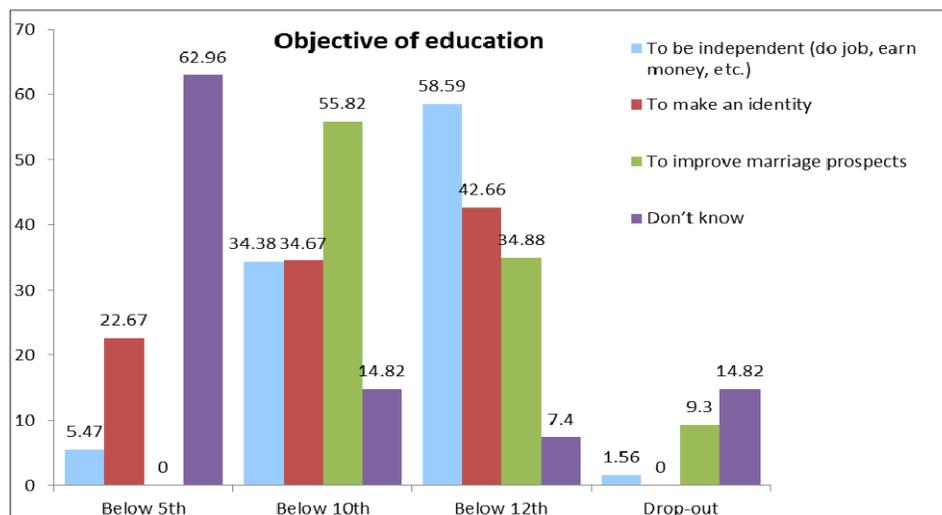


Fig 5: A graph showing respondents' education and objective of education.

**Conclusions**

The study indicated a change in the educational status of girl children in the region, and in the attitude of their parents. The 'compulsory education programmes for all', implemented by the Government has brought considerable improvement. Currently the girls are interested in becoming self-independent and making an identity of their own. All young girls are enrolled in school and are now continuing school education with a belief that they will be economically independent after completing their education and enjoy a standard quality life. Nevertheless, several challenges would come their way but they need to overcome them. They should be prepared to study more seriously, improve their skills, get ready to face the challenges of a competitive world, and become a good citizen. While the Government efforts have been substantial and be continued, however it needs revamping, addressing seriously other areas to improve the quality of education in schools, particularly the quantity and quality of teachers, ameliorating transport and sanitation facilities, and development of exposure with modern world. These would not only help in improving the overall educational status of women but also their overall economic development and independence.

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