From Enrolment to Exit and Beyond: Gender Gaps in Economics Academia in India

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Abstract: *This study examines the persistent gender gap in economics academia in India, focusing on the underrepresentation of women at advanced stages of academic progression despite comparable enrollment rates at the undergraduate and master's levels. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines secondary data analysis from AISHE reports with primary qualitative surveys of female economics students, scholars, and faculty members. Trend analysis of enrollment rates and gap analysis of course completion rates are employed to examine gender-wise patterns in the enrollment and completion of economics courses. The findings reveal a pronounced "leaky pipeline," where women's participation declines sharply at the PhD completion stage and further diminishes in faculty recruitment and senior academic roles. Key barriers identified include limited mentorship, gender stereotypes, restricted research opportunities, and exclusion from professional networks. The paper concludes by advocating for structural reforms, inclusive policies, and targeted interventions to promote gender diversity and retention in economics academia, thereby enhancing the discipline's quality and relevance through increased diversity of perspectives. This research thus serves as a crucial step toward understanding and mitigating the barriers that contribute to the "missing women" phenomenon in economics academia.*

Keywords: Gender Economics, women in economics, Indian Academia, Inclusive academics

INTRODUCTION

The field of economics, known for its analytical rigour and influence on policy-making, is a bastion of intellectual inquiry and societal impact. Yet, amidst its scholarly and expert endeavours, a noticeable imbalance persists: the underrepresentation of women in both academic and professional roles within economics. Despite ongoing efforts toward gender equality across various spheres of society, the disparity between men and women in economics remains striking. This phenomenon is not merely a statistical curiosity, it reflects deep-rooted systemic issues that demand critical examination and effective solutions. If we ask undergraduate or master's students of economics to name prominent female economists in India, how many could answer? Is it due to a lack of well-established female economists, or does the curriculum consciously overlook them?

Globally, women hold around 25% of senior-level positions (full or associate professors) in economics departments at universities and business schools (Auriol et al., 2021). This figure drops even lower for full professorships, often hovering around 20%. While the number of women earning bachelor's degrees in economics is closer to parity with men (around 30%), only about 30–35% go on to earn PhDs. This indicates a possible leak in the pipeline as women advance in their academic careers. Though data varies across professions, the trend of underrepresentation is consistent. For instance, women hold a significantly smaller share of positions at central banks and international economic institutions. In the U.S., only 8 out of 140 Federal Reserve Bank presidents have been women since 1914 (Palka et al., 2021).

Certain societal norms still confine women within the walls of their homes. In some places, girls are still denied education in favour of their male siblings. Prevailing beliefs suggest that women should only engage in certain types of work and avoid crossing traditional boundaries, resulting in more women working in sectors like agriculture, cooking, and sanitation, often from marginalized social backgrounds. When women do enter higher education, they face further limitations. Many fields are still perceived as inappropriate for women due to male dominance such as mechanical, aeronautical, and marine engineering while fields like nursing are predominantly female. Economics appears similar in some ways: although women enroll inlarge numbers at the

DOI: https://doi.org/10.62656/SIJSS.v24i2.2380

undergraduate and master's levels, their presence significantly diminishes when it comes to research and academia. This reflects a broader issue often termed "the problem of missing women in economics."

Addressing gender disparity in economics is critically important. Women's perspectives and contributions enrich economic discourse, inform better policy decisions, and help build a more equitable society. However, the barriers limiting women's participation and advancement in economics are complex, involving structural, cultural, and psychological factors. Understanding the root causes, consequences, and potential solutions to this gender gap is vital for promoting inclusivity, diversity, and excellence in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Significant differences can be seen between male and female students who chose to do economics in masters. The gap may also arise due to the tastes and preference and also the knowledge about the nature of economics while entering the college. (Dynan & Rouse, 1995). The proportion of women working in elite institutions and in the prestigious conference is lower than men. In detail, among the articles presented in prestigious conferences, women constitute only 29 percent from the year 2004 to 2017. Responsibilities towards family and related factors may partly explain lower presence of women in the field of economics (Dongre et al., 2021). One-third of the eighty percent of women who were assistant professors in 1989 but left their roles without tenure specifically stated that their gender unfairly affected their chances of getting tenure (Ginther & Kahn, 2004).

The proportion of women in undergrad economics has increased to 34 percent from 11 percent between 1970 and 1984. The qualitative study published in the US delves into the reason why women in economics are low and the future of women economists in which he mentioned evidence suggests that departments of economics with senior female faculty members are more likely to recruit more women (Kahn, 1995). There is underrepresentation in the economics area starts in undergraduate education, persists throughout the academy, and shows little signs of improvement over time (Bayer & Rouse, 2016). Around 74 percent of the female students pursuing masters in economics prefer non-academic jobs and the findings from the study states that the financial support, research funding and geographical locations play a vital role (Zepedaet al., 1993).Higher ranking institutions have less women in senior positions. European institutions score higher than the US institutions in gender equality (Auriol et al., n.d.). There is a gap between the number of women in Phd and in the academia and that gap is termed as leaky pipeline ((Lundberg, n.d.). Letter of recommendation was given less in number to women compared to men. In a discipline which has both men and women securing low grades when it is male dominated, more women are likely to discontinue than men. Like-wise the study states finding a co-author for a female academician is also less in the stream. According to a study in 2014, over 50% women makes a statement that the profession is for men, over 75% of the men do not agree and believes a contradictory point that, there is no such gender disparity in common and no such favouritism towards women (Yengin& Lundberg, 2019).

The rejection rate is around 94 percent when women try to publish in the top five economic journals (Briviba& Frey, 2022). Female researchers with children in business and economics are more productive than the female researchers without children, this result was declared after examining the 400 samples from Austria, Germany, and German speaking part of Switzerland (Joecks et al., 2014). In recent years there is a convergence between the men and women research interests; moreover in academia, especially in the economics department, women are under increasing pressure to follow predetermined research goals and standards (Corsi et al., 2019). Women are frequently left out of male-dominated networks, which restricts their access to opportunities and vital information. Gender stereotypes that persist about women's skills restrict them from advancing professionally. (Ali & Rasheed, 2021)

The questions directed at women presenters are more likely to be patronizing or hostile.(Dupas et al., 2021) female students co-author 8.5% fewer papers than males, but students with female advisors publish 7.7% more. Gender pairing matters where male students with female advisors publish 10.0% more, while female students with male advisors publish 8.5% less. No significant difference is found between male students with male advisors and female students with female advisors. These modest effects may grow, increasing gender disparities in academia. (Pezzoni etal., 2016). In academia, women's representation is highest in Africa and Oceania, unlike previous studies that focused on North America and Europe also there are significant regional discrepancies in women's representation in the public sector. (Schuetz et al., 2024). Many areas showed agreement among economists, significant gender-based differences were found on issues such as the minimum wage, labour standards, health insurance, explanations for the gender wage gap, and equal opportunity in the labour market and economics profession (Mayet al., 2014).

Female students tend to be from urban, wealthier, and more educated households, with higher grades and stronger social networks than their male counterparts. This indicates that access to higher education for women is still largely shaped by socio-economic privilege (Kavya Rajendran et al., 2019). The experience of women economists in higher education has been characterized as a 'leaky pipeline,' because the fraction of women in the discipline decreases at each stage along the path from graduate school to the full professor rank (Buckes, 2019). Despite their strong presence in fields like the life, social, and behavioral sciences, women often feel more constrained by invisible barriers to leadership, suggesting that being well-represented doesn't mean having equal chances to rise to the top. (Veelen and Derks, 2022). In academic hiring, candidates whose research closely aligns with that of selection committee members are more likely to be hired but women are less likely to share such similarity with predominantly male committees, this subtle bias helps sustain gender gaps in academia. (Pierra et all, 2023)

Research Gap & Objective of the study:

Research worldwide documents women's underrepresentation in economics, yet India specific mixed-method evidence remains scarce. Few studies track women's

movement from enrolment to academic employment or examine how social norms, care responsibilities, safety concerns, and economic dependence influence career decisions. Although the idea of a leaky pipeline is widely referenced, it is insufficiently examined within India. This study fills that gap by analysing trends in enrolment, completion, and faculty recruitment to assess changes in women's representation in economics academia between 2011 and 2022.

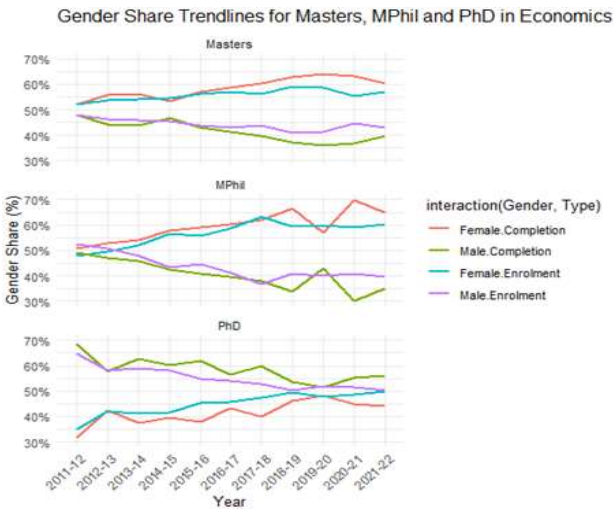
METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) Final reports from 2011-12 to 2020-21 are taken for the data regarding enrolment and completion rate for higher education courses in economics. A trend analysis of gender-wise enrolment and completion, along with a completion gap analysis, has been conducted using R programming. 16 IITs, 18 IIMs and 32 Central Universities are chosen according to the data availability, from which the percentage of the female faculty in economics has been analysed for the year 2024. For the primary data collection, questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to female Master's students, PhD scholars, and faculty members in economics across various regions of India. The respondents were selected using snowball sampling. To account for the varying academic roles, three separate questionnaires were prepared for Master's students, PhD scholars, and faculty members in economics. The survey yielded a total of 120 responses.

Findings:

The leaky pipeline in the economics education:

Gender representation in higher education is a critical indicator of equity and inclusion, particularly in disciplines like Economics that have historically exhibited gender imbalances. This section examines the gender distribution in enrolment and completion across MPhil, Masters, and PhD programs over the past decade. By visualizing gender shares over time, we can better understand not only access to advanced education but also the extent to which men and women progress through these programs successfully



Source: *All India Survey on Higher Education report from 2011-2022.*

The above graph depicts the share of male and female enrolment and completion rate out of the total enrolment and completion rates. At the Masters level in economics, female enrolment and completion shares have been greater than male shares for almost the entire time period. The gap appears to widen particularly in the later years (around 2015 onward), with female shares often above 55% and sometimes even closer to 60% in enrolment and completions. This reflects a strong trend of women dominating the pipeline at this level.

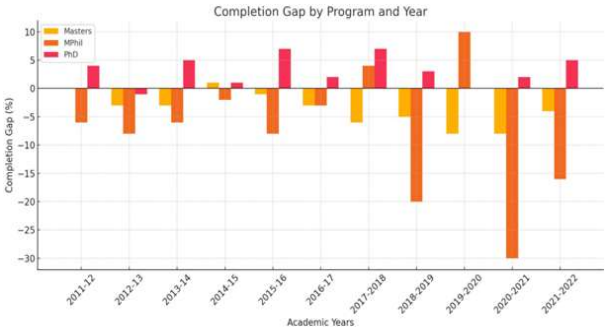
In the MPhil program, the data reveals a more gradual shift toward gender parity. Earlier in 2011-12, male shares in enrolment and completion were either balanced or slightly higher, but female shares gradually increased over time. By the final years, female shares in both enrolment and completion are roughly equal or slightly higher. This suggests that although progress is happening more slowly at the MPhil level, the trend is moving in the same direction as Masters.

The PhD level shows the slowest shift toward gender balance. Even though the female enrolment and completion shares are rising, male shares have remained dominant through most of the years. However, by the later years (2020-21 and 2021-22), the female share approaches parity, particularly in enrolment. Completion shares still lag slightly, which may reflect both the long duration of PhD programs and historical imbalances. This indicates progress, but also room for improvement in supporting women through to PhD completion.

While the gender share trend lines highlight increasing female participation in enrolment and completion, they do not fully capture differences in completion outcomes between genders. To further understand gender disparities in academic progression, a completion gap analysis was conducted. This provides insight into how many enrolled students actually complete their degrees and whether this rate differs by gender.

Completion Gap = (Number of males who completed the course / Number of enrolled males) × 100 " (Number of females who completed the course / Number of enrolled females) × 100

A positive value indicates that a higher percentage of males completed the course compared to females in that particular year and a negative value indicates that a higher percentage of females completed the course compared to males. If the completion gap is zero, then there is gender parity in course completion rates among those enrolled.



Source: *All India Survey on Higher Education report from 2011-2022.*

Only in the case of Masters students during 2011-12 gender parity has reached where there is no gap in completion rate between male and female students. But in later years there is a consistent increase in the completion rate of female students than the male students, showing a reversal of traditional gender bias. This trend suggests improved retention and performance of women in the Masters program, potentially due to increased support systems and greater motivation among female postgraduates.

The MPhil program displays significant volatility in completion gaps. Large negative gaps such as "20% (2018–19) and "30% (2020–21) highlight years where women significantly out performed men. Conversely, positive gaps (e.g., +4% in 2017–18 and +10% in 2019–20) show intermittent years of male advantage. While recent trends favor female completion, the inconsistency suggests that external factors (program structure, cohort size, policy changes) may be impacting completion differently across genders from year to year.Mphil program was stopped in 2022 after National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). Hence it is interesting to know if the direct chance to join PhD from Masters have enabled more enrollments in PhD or not. But the latest available report is till 2022.

The completion gaps for PhD are mostly positive, with peaks in 2015–16 and 2017–18 (both +7%). Only one year (2012–13) showed a slight female advantage ("1%). There is apersistent gender bias favoring men in PhD completion. This reflects structural barriers, such as gendered access to mentorship, financial support, or research opportunities, which disproportionately impact female doctoral candidates. Most of the government schemes like WISE-KIRAN scheme of GoI are focusing on promotion of enrolment of female candidates in STEM (Science, technology, engineering and mathematics) PhD programs which provides aid in scientific research and other further opportunities. But there is a general concession in application fees for female candidates for PhD in most of the premier institutions of economics in the country. Still the higher gap suggests that the reason is not just a monetary issue or the problem of affordability.

Gender composition of economics faculties in IITs IIMs and Central Universities:

Who teaches economics in our top institutions says a lot about how inclusive and diverse our academic spaces really are. When we look at the gender composition of faculty in Economics departments across IITs, IIMs, and Central Universities, a clear picture starts to form and it's not always encouraging. Women are still significantly underrepresented in many of these spaces. At the same time, there are a few institutions showing signs of progress. This section takes a closer look at the numbers, highlighting both the gaps and the growing efforts towards greater gender balance.

Table 1: Latest data Gender distribution among faculty members of IITs and IIMs

S.No	Name of the IIT	Female to male proportion W/(T-W)	Name of the IIM	Female to male proportion W/(T-W)
1.	IIT Bombay	0.86	IIM Ahmedabad	0.10
2.	IIT Madras	0.00	IIM Calcutta	0.50
3.	IIT Kanpur	0.30	IIM Bangalore	0.18
4.	IIT Delhi	0.38	IIM Kozhikode	0.22
5.	IIT Guwahati	0.40	IIM Shillong	0.00
6.	IIT Roorkee	0.56	IIM Rohtak	0.00
7.	IIT Ropar	0.00	IIM Raipur	0.33
8.	IIT Bhubaneswar	0.17	IIM Ranchi	0.25
9.	IIT Hyderabad	0.00	IIM Kashipur	0.00
10.	IIT Jodhpur	0.50	IIM Tiruchirappalli	0.33
11.	IIT Patna	0.50	IIM Udaipur	0.25
12.	IIT Indore	3.00	IIM Amrister	0.00
13.	IIT Tirupati	0.00	IIM Bodh gaya	0.25
14.	IIT Dharwad	1.00	IIM Jammu	0.00
15.	IIT Jammu	0.50	IIM Nagpur	0.50
16.	IIT Goa	0.00	IIM Sambalpur	0.50
17.			IIM Sirmaur	0.50
18.			IIM Visakhapatnam	1.00

Source: *Official websites of respective IITs & IIMs as on march 2024.*

The table presents the gender distribution among Economics faculty members in selected IITs and IIMs and reveals a persistent imbalance across both institutional groups. In most IITs, Economics does not function as an independent department and is housed within Humanities, Liberal Arts, or Social Sciences. Despite this, the gender pattern remains striking. Several IITs, including Madras, Ropar, Hyderabad, Tirupati, and Goa, reported the complete absence of women faculty in Economics, indicating structural exclusion rather than isolated gaps. Even older and well-established institutions such as IIT Kanpur and IIT Delhi show very low female representation, suggesting that institutional prestige does not translate into gender inclusivity.

Some newer or smaller IITs, such as Dharwad and Indore, display relatively higher female-to-male ratios, including women-dominant faculty compositions. However, these cases are exceptions and do not reflect a broader

systemic shift. Overall, women constitute only about one-fourth of Economics faculty across the sampled IITs, highlighting sustained male dominance.

A similar pattern emerges in IIMs. Several institutions, including Shillong, Rohtak, and Kashipur, report no women faculty members in Economics. Older IIMs such as Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and Kozhikode also show low female representation, indicating that longevity and reputation have not corrected gender disparities. Moderate improvements are visible in some newer IIMs, where women are present but remain numerically fewer than men. IIM Visakhapatnam stands out as an exception by achieving gender parity.

Taken together, the data indicate that improvements in representation are uneven and institution-specific. While isolated cases of balance exist, the overall trend reflects limited inclusion of women in Economics faculty positions. These patterns point to deeper institutional barriers in recruitment, retention, and career progression within elite academic spaces.

Scenario in Central universities:

Out of the 318 faculties in the chosen 32 central universities in India, only 68 were female, that accounts to only 21.4 percent of the total faculties. In 5 of the 32 central universities, no female faculties were found in the economics department. Only 8universities had percentages of females nearing 50 percent. Above that, most of the women faculties arei n the position of Assistant Professor whereas men can be seen in the position of Associate Professor and Professor hinting at the presence of vertical segregation.

What women in Economics are saying?

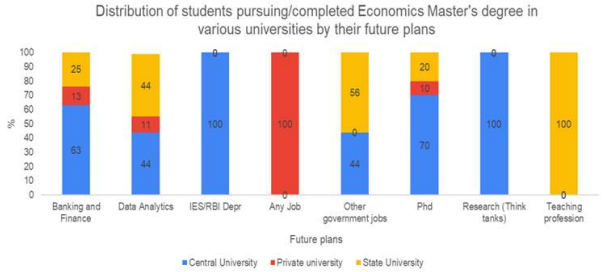
The study collected data from women pursuing or completing Masters in Economics, Phd in Economics and women faculties in various educational institutions all over India using 3 different questionnaires and got 68 responses for Masters questionnaire, 27 responses for the Phd one and 25 faculty responses. The responses are compiled, analysed and arrived at the following empirical results.

Career Aspirations of Economics Postgraduates: A University-wise Comparison

The future plans of students pursuing or having completed a Master's in Economics vary significantly across Central, State, and Private Universities, especially in research-oriented careers.

Source: Primary data 2024

Central University students show a strong inclination toward academic and research pathways. Notably, 70% plan to pursue a PhD, and 100% of those interested in think tank research come from Central institutions. This suggests a well-developed academic environment in these universities, offering exposure, mentorship, and institutional support for higher studies and research careers. In contrast, students from Private Universities show minimal interest in research. Only 10% plan to pursue a PhD, and none opted for research or policy



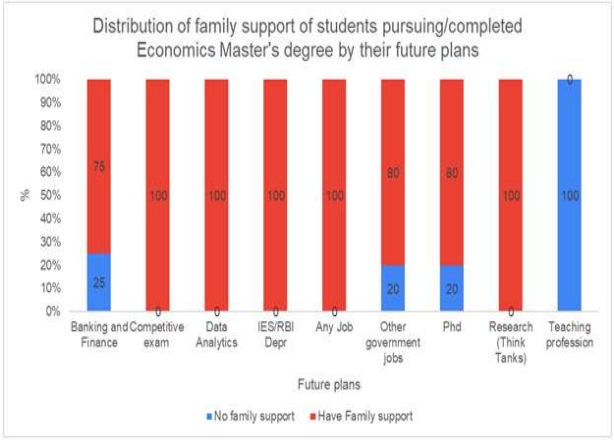
roles. Instead, 100% are categorized under broad aspirations like "any job" pointing to either a lack of guidance or fewer academic opportunities.

On being asked whether they would eventually move for a Phd in the subject, many responded "No". However, the reasons for not going for Phd were rarely disparities based. About 89% responded against disparities being a reason prompting them against Phd. The reasons stated were lack of personal interest in research, the long term commitment, rigorous nature of Phd, lack of proper guidance and reluctance about market opportunities with a Phd. The career focus here appears to be more employment driven than research oriented. Also 100% of those interested in IES/RBI Depr are from central universities.

State University students reflect a mixed trend. While 20% are interested in a PhD, a large share 100% aspire to join the teaching profession, and 56% aim for government jobs. This suggests a leaning toward stable public sector roles and local academia, with limited but present research interest. Overall, the data underscores how institutional type shapes student aspirations. Central Universities emerge as key hubs for research and policy careers, while Private and State Universities lean more toward general employment and teaching. Strengthening research exposure and academic mentorship in State and Private institutions could help broaden students' horizons and promote more inclusive access to research pathways.

Source: Primary data 2024

The data reveals a significant influence of family support on students' career choices after their Economics Master's degree. Students who plan to pursue competitive exams, data analytics, IES/RBI Department roles, research (think tanks), or "any job" report 100% family support. These paths often require financial backing, time investment, and emotional encouragement, which their families seem willing to provide. Those aiming for a PhD or government



jobs also largely report family support, though 20% in each category are pursuing these goals without family support, indicating a degree of self motivation and resilience despite potential family hesitation.

A few did face warnings for reconsidering it because it was deemed as a "tough" and "maths based" subject. When asked their opinion on the lower number of women in academic economics while comparing to other social science subjects globally. Some of them refused to acknowledge the statement because they have seen more women in their classes compared to men whereas according to some, women might have found it difficult to thrive in a technical subject. Others cited domestic responsibilities, lack of role models and lack of proper guidance as their reason.

Responses from women pursuing or completing Phd in Economics

The average age of women enrolled in PhD programmes in economics is 26, with most specialising in development economics, environmental economics, and agricultural studies. Interest in research and academic inquiry emerged as the main reason for entering doctoral programmes. Despite this motivation, 27 percent of respondents admitted that they had seriously thought about discontinuing their PhD due to academic pressure and personal responsibilities. One scholar explained her dilemma by stating, *"The pressing personal life obligations and work pressure"* as the reason behind such thoughts. Another respondent expressed uncertainty about future prospects, noting, *"Even after completing PhD, chances of getting a job is little difficult."*

Family and social responsibilities continue to influence research outcomes, with 32 percent reporting that domestic expectations disrupted their academic work. Many women perform dual roles as researchers and caregivers, leaving little time for focused scholarly engagement. Respondents also pointed to institutional shortcomings, including the absence of mentorship, lack of privacy, and limited female-friendly academic spaces. As one scholar stated, *"No academic support, no female friendly academic space."* Fieldwork-related concerns, particularly unsafe travel and accommodation during data collection, further constrained research activities.

Publication outcomes remain uneven. About 40 percent reported publishing in newspapers or journals such as EPW, Sage, or Springer, while the rest had no publications. Some felt their work lacked recognition, with one stating, *"Our research is considered inferior,"* and another adding, *"Social connections help in publication, which I lacked."*

All respondents acknowledged the lower presence of women in academic economics globally. They attributed this to financial constraints, limited opportunities, weak peer support, inadequate recognition, job insecurity, persistent stereotypes, and broader socio-cultural barriers.

Responses from women faculties in Economics:

The final section of the primary survey examines responses from economics faculty members across higher education institutions in India. Unlike master's students and doctoral scholars, faculty members clearly acknowledged the presence of gender disparities within academic economics. Several women reported being compelled to be co-authors during their PhD, despite having undertaken most of the research work independently. Around 36 percent stated that they had personally experienced gender-based discrimination within their departments. A female professor from a central university highlighted the structural nature of this inequality, stating, *"Economics being technical and based on quantitative analysis, few women opt for the subject. Of those even fewer come to academics, because of biased recruitment and many other reasons. As their number is less, opportunities for networking, collaborations etc are limited. Career progression takes longer for various reasons."*

Disparities were also visible in access to institutional resources, with nearly 13 percent reporting unequal allocation of research support. Respondents noted that male faculty members often held greater influence in departmental decision-making, leading to preferential task distribution. Women were frequently assigned roles perceived as "women-friendly," such as food committees, rather than research-intensive responsibilities. An associate professor from a private college remarked, *"My work was not given any preference by my head as he preferred someone else from his close circle over me. It was demotivating."*

Opinions on networking effectiveness varied. About 21 percent considered networking opportunities ineffective, while smaller shares rated them effective or very effective. Half of the respondents remained neutral. Limited socialisation adversely affected publication output, conference invitations, and academic visibility. Only 9 percent attended more than ten conferences annually, while the majority participated occasionally or rarely. As one assistant professor observed, *"Women may have limited access to the opportunities and collaborative research projects within the team and which are crucial for career development."*

Limitations and future research:

The most recent comprehensive data on higher education enrolments in India are available only up to 2022. Policy changes, including the removal of MPhil, may influence subsequent doctoral enrolment patterns. In addition, delays in updating university websites restrict accurate tracking of women scholars and faculty members. The primary survey also had a limited sample due to time constraints, reducing the scope for broad generalisation. Reluctance among respondents to discuss discrimination further constrained insights. This study offers a foundation for future research using larger, anonymised samples that encourage trust, openness, and detailed disclosure of gendered academic experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study analyses gender inequality in economics academia in India using time-series data on higher education from 2011 to 2022. While women enroll in postgraduate economics programmes at rates comparable to men, their participation declines sharply at advanced academic stages. A pronounced "leaky pipeline" is visible at the levels of PhD completion, faculty recruitment, and progression into senior academic roles. This drop-off often leads to the incorrect perception that gender parity has already been achieved within the discipline.

The evidence shows that women's lower representation is not driven by academic ability but by structural barriers. Social expectations, unequal caregiving

responsibilities, limited institutional support, and implicit biases significantly affect women's academic trajectories. These patterns closely resemble trends observed globally in the economics profession. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study combines secondary data from AISHE reports with qualitative insights from women students, research scholars, and faculty members. This approach helps capture the lived experiences behind aggregate trends. Respondents highlight several obstacles, including lack of mentorship, gender stereotyping, fewer research opportunities, and exclusion from informal professional networks that influence hiring and promotion decisions.

Importantly, institutions with senior women faculty tend to attract more women academics, indicating the value of representation and inclusive academic environments. Although women demonstrate strong engagement during coursework driven stages, their weak integration into academic employment reveals a gap between educational success and career advancement. Platforms such as *Women in Economics* help bridge this gap by providing mentorship, visibility, and access to research networks. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for gender equity but also for strengthening economic research through diverse perspectives and more inclusive knowledge production.

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