A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana

# Phase 2 Report: The Role of Families in the Gendered Educational Trajectories of Undergraduate Students in Haryana, India

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**Accompanying resources for the project**

In addition to this report, other resources about the project are available on the project website: www.warwick.ac.uk/haryana. This includes various Project Outputs such as project reports and presentations, as well as other information about the project and the people involved.
The project can also be found on Twitter and Instagram as @FCFHaryana.
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# Preface

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This report summarises the development and findings of Phase 2 of the Fair Chance for Education Project (FCF). Phase 2 was developed on the basis of an exploration of the social and family background of the participants from Phase 1 of the FCF project (Henderson et. al 2021). Phase 1 revealed that a majority of the participants identified their family as a key factor and the home as a key space where educational decisions were made and supported. This preliminary finding was supported by a review of literature (see also section 1.1). It was found that gendered access to higher education was influenced by multiple factors such as distance between home and college, family composition and family background. However, there was very limited understanding shown in the literature of *how* educational decisions leading to higher education were made within families.

Phase 2 of the FCF project encapsulated the doctoral training of the lead researcher for Phase 2, and lead author of this report, Anjali Thomas. The doctoral research study was funded by the Fair Chance Foundation in collaboration with the WCPRS (Warwick Collaborative Postgraduate Research Scholarships) scheme and additional funding from the Warwick donor community and the Department of Education Studies at Warwick. The doctoral research study, supervised by Dr Emily Henderson and Prof Ann Stewart, has been successfully examined and is available in full as the PhD thesis entitled *Role of families in the gendered educational trajectories of undergraduate students in Haryana, India* (Thomas, 2021). This findings report presents the findings from the doctoral study in an accessible way for a wider audience.

# Executive Summary
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**Introduction**

Higher education (HE) is a key social institution which is a site for development and dissemination of knowledge and skills, and overall social development through inclusive education. It is recognised that successful graduation from a higher education institution (HEI) improves the variety and nature of social and economic opportunities available to individuals and families. However, HE is a limited facility which is not available in equal measure to all people. It is therefore important to understand how young people, young women and men, especially from marginalised communities and groups, access HE and how they make choices about where to study and which course to select.

Families are known to play a key role in the HE choices of young people. In India, families have a significant role in limiting, supporting, encouraging and facilitating young people's access to HE. This was recognised in the project's Phase 1 study (Henderson et al., 2021). Phase 2 of the FCF project was geared towards understanding how undergraduate students who are enrolled in state-funded government colleges – and their families – make gendered educational decisions about HE. Gendered practices and inequalities can be traced in the educational trajectories of both young men and women. These inequalities are sited within the family and therefore it is important to understand what is happening within the family as decisions about HE options are being taken.

**Research design**

This study used a qualitative research design with a feminist orientation. The study included semi-structured in-depth interviews with undergraduate students which were followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews with their family members. The bilingual (Hindi and English) tools for this study were developed by Anjali Thomas at the University of Warwick. Anjali Thomas conducted fieldwork at the three sampled colleges between December 2018 and March 2019.

This data was collated, transcribed, coded and analysed by Anjali Thomas at the University of Warwick. The analysis involved an examination of the way in which families made educational decisions, the role played in this decision making by different gendered family members and how this gendered process was further influenced by intersectional inequalities such as caste, social class and geographical inequalities.

**Key Insights**

- Educational decisions are group decisions made within families, and these decisions reflect gendered roles within families. Gendered inequalities influence (limit and/or encourage) HE for both young women and men.
- Families are intensely involved in supporting, inspiring, informing and influencing the educational decisions made within the family. These decisions are significantly influenced by gendered considerations such as the gender of the young person in question, and gendered allocation of resources within the family.

- The ways in which families make gendered educational decisions are shaped by relationships and dynamics between the different gendered family members.
- As the family considers different HE choices, family members reflect on family dynamics, perceived and experienced barriers, and opportunities to strategically remain silent or voice their interests. These negotiations are gendered and result in different educational decisions being taken for sons and daughters.
- These negotiations within the family are further influenced by intersectional inequalities such as caste, social class and geographical inequalities.

**The different roles played by the family in educational trajectories**

- The four key roles played by family members in decisions about HE are: (1) support, (2) inspire, (3) provide information, (4) influence decisions.
- Role 1: support takes the form of encouragement from parents, including to ensure that their children access more educational and employment opportunities than they did; support is also provided from the natal maternal family. Support is often linked to pride in and expectations of exceptional academic performance, particularly in relation to young women whose access to HE may be conditional on being a model student
- Role 2: figures of inspiration may not be directly involved in HE decisions within a family, but provide a reference point for families considering HE. These figures are often 'trailblazers' who are other members of the community who have accessed HE. Trailblazers play a vital role. However, the inspiration often follows a gendered pattern where young women trailblazers inspire other young women, and likewise for young men.
- Role 3: information about HE is provided by a number of sources, including parents, who access information through their workplaces and social circles, and trailblazers, who provide direct experiential information about HE. Information is also obtained through the use of cybercafes. The transfer of such information is along gendered lines of communication due to social segregation.
- Role 4: influences on HE decisions included young people's awareness of the family's means, knowledge that they needed to cultivate family support for HE, sensibility to gendered emotional attachments in the family and the desire to remain within the family – for both young women and men.

**How educational decisions are taken within families**

- Educational decisions are affected by (1) family dynamics and (2) how the family rationalises educational decisions.
- Family dynamics (1) include the role of fathers and also brothers, who are key decision makers. Mothers often supervise everyday decisions and act as intermediaries between the children and father.
- Decisions about HE taken within families are rationalised (2) according to family beliefs and priorities. The decision to attend the nearest college to home is rationalised as the *preferable choice* based on cost, distance and commute. HE-related decisions are also rationalised according to aspirations for marriage and employment, which frame decisions to either invest in HE (to improve marriage prospects for both young men and women) or avoid investing in HE due to marriage costs (young women) or to aim for employment prospects (particularly young men).

- Decision-making is influenced by strategic actions in relation to (1) and (2). This includes indirect actions from young people such as selective information provision and locating advocates for their choices within the extended family. Strategic actions also include voices and silences, for instance young people may communicate selectively with their fathers and may also choose to remain silent with their fathers.

**How HE decision making is influenced by intersectional factors**

- It is important to examine individual student cases in order to understand how different factors act as barriers and enablers to HE and to informed choice for HE access.
- The case of Deepika shows that a woman from a rural village with traditional norms, who is from a marginalised caste group (OBC) and a working class background and family with no higher secondary school education, who has attended a government secondary school, faces barriers to accessing HE. However these barriers are countered by living in a joint family which includes a trailblazer, a supportive mother, maintaining a model student profile and the existence of a college in the village.
- The case of Jaya shows the importance of life circumstances in determining HE access. She was from a rural area and marginalised caste group (OBC) and lower-middle class background. Her father had died and her maternal uncle had supported the family until her mother's remarriage. She was the third child but the first to access HE as her sisters had been married during the family strife. She had benefitted from private schooling which had been in part funded by her teachers and had presented as a model student. She had chosen the local college from consideration of the family finances.
- The case of Mohan reveals the effects of social mobility. Mohan was from a rural community and a Dalit caste group (SC), but his family had benefitted from his father's employment in the postal service and connections with the village panchayat. His HE choices were heavily influenced by his father's preferences. He had access to a personal scooter which facilitated the commute.
- The case of Hritik also reveals the importance of life circumstances. His father had passed away and this led to him switching from English-medium to Hindi schooling. His father had attended HE but had died before passing that knowledge on. His mother had, unusually for the study, completed class 12. The family fortunes improved with the mother's second marriage and Hritik was supported by his mother and expected by his stepfather to enrol in HE to improve his marriage chances and employment prospects. He chose the nearest college based on his responsibilities towards the family and the family business.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations from the Phase 2 study focus on recognising the role of families and parents in young people's educational trajectories. Based on this focus, the recommendations **target two outcomes**:

- All family members need to be aware of the educational options for young people. Given that different family members access different spaces and different sources of information, this needs to be recognised in terms of building a holistic approach to informed choice for HE.

- Young people themselves need to be more informed of their options and better equipped with reliable information about HE and negotiating skills in order to participate in decision making within their families about their educational futures.

The recommendations for Phase 2 draw on and extend the recommendations of Phase 1. This is displayed in the table below.

| The role of the government and the NGO sector | |
|---|---|
| Phase 1: state-funded educational schemes and interventions should be disseminated widely in a variety of means, including directly to young people. | Phase 2: this information should be shared with all members of the family (through appropriate means), for the purposes of collective informed decision making. |
| Phase 1: Aanganvadis and other localised state services such as village panchayats, government schools and colleges should collaborate in this effort. | Phase 2: the need for these services to consider parents, grandparents, other relatives and community members as recipients of information on HE, in addition to the young people as targeted recipients.<br><br>It would be beneficial for public service employers to store information about HE to disburse to employees, as the workplace has been identified as one means of parents from disadvantaged groups learning about information. |
| Phase 1: families need to have access to readily available information about school choice and higher education choice (including subject choice) and employability options, and connecting these to envision educational trajectories for young people. | Phase 2: different family members may have different types of involvement and may benefit from the provision of information about HE in different locations and formats. For instance, fathers and mothers occupy different physical spaces in the community, so information targeting different parents needs to be provided in appropriate spaces.<br><br>Audio or video information is particularly important for family members who have not attained high levels of formal education. This needs to be a key consideration as the government develops and supports technology and as HEIs follow the NEP recommendations to provide outreach. |
| Phase 1: information should be included about costs of HE, including fees but also supplementary costs, as well as scholarships and bursaries (including of competitive HEIs which may be located further away). | Phase 2: the need for advice for low-income families for budgeting for HE and information to be presented in a clear and accessible manner including for parents who may have doubts about the worth of HE. |
| The role of colleges | |
| Phase 1: colleges need to engage with families more directly, through visits to communities and through guided visits of the colleges, and mothers and fathers as well as sisters and brothers have different roles and these need to be respected and explored. | Phase 2: it is highly recommended for colleges to interact with young people's relatives, including parents and other family members, as well as the young people. It is important for all those who have a say in decision making to access more information and understanding about HE. Just targeting one family member e.g. young person or father does not reflect the way in which educational decisions are taken within families. |

|  | Some families do contact e.g. a college principal for advice, and this can be extremely helpful. However many parents would not be aware that this is possible nor be aware of how to go about seeking advice from the college. Colleges could usefully discuss how they wish to be contacted and for which types of questions, and should then display this information on any materials circulated about the college.<br><br>Other family members e.g. maternal uncles may also play a strong role in young people's education, so the concept of the family needs to encompass potential input from other relatives. |
|---|---|
| Phase 1: colleges should formalise the role of current students acting as ambassadors for the colleges in disseminating information about higher education in their communities and giving guided visits of the college. | Phase 2: 'trailblazer' students have potential to make a significant contribution to spreading accurate, reliable and experience-based information about HE in local communities who do not have a history of HE. Formalising this role in the form of student ambassadors will enhance informed choice.<br><br>Trailblazer influence is gendered, i.e. young women are more likely to influence other young women and likewise with young men. This should be borne in mind when establishing the role of student ambassador including in terms of gender balance of ambassadors. |
| Phase 1: colleges should provide step-by-step guidance on the admissions process and ensure this is available at schools, internet cafes and at the college itself, and available online. | Phase 2: this information could also be made available to employees in government jobs. Locations where the parental generation frequent can be identified and stocked with this information. |
| **The role of schools** ||
| Phase 1: schools should work with colleges and college ambassadors to facilitate the spreading of reliable, accurate information about higher education options to young people and, where possible, their communities. | Phase 2: when parents are called to school for parent-teacher meetings or other occasions, information about HE should be provided and clearly signalled.<br><br>Some families face misfortune which severely affects their quality of life and livelihoods. Particularly of note are single-parent households including those affected by bereavement. Schools are more likely to be aware of these cases than e.g. targeted colleges, so, in cases like these, schools may need to pay additional attention to HE advice (especially on the systems and processes) for young people in families facing these situations. |
| Phase 1: young women in particular (as well as men) need to receive more training at school level in negotiation skills, so that they can have more involvement in discussions of their futures within the family. | Phase 2: the training can have an emphasis on how to engage in participatory discussion within the family and also on confidence building of young women. |

# 1. The Phase 2 Study

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### 1.1    Introduction: families and access to higher education in India

There are several social inequalities that influence the educational choices which may or may not lead students towards accessing HE. Researchers across the world and in India have identified inequalities such as social class (Reay et al, 2005, Engberg and Wolniak 2010, Lehmann 2016), caste (Deshpande 2006, Singh 2013, Sabharwal and Malish 2016), racial and ethnic identities (Burke 2011, Shiner and Noden 2015, Mendes et al. 2016) and gender (Mullen 2014, Verma, 2014, Gautam 2015, Smith 2017, Sudarshan 2018) as some of the most common factors shaping educational choices and pathways into higher education. Over the decades, there have been many different state and institutional policies which have tried to address these inequalities through different kinds of affirmative action, widening participation and outreach activities. These efforts and the documentation of these efforts have recognised that pathways into higher education are particularly challenging for students who are first generation (Wadhwa 2018), i.e. from the first generation of their family to attend HE, and first-in-family (O'Shea 2015 and 2020), i.e. the first member of their family to access HE. Similarly, in India, there is a rising concern for new entrants or first-generation students into higher education (Wadhwa 2018).

Families are known to play a core role in influencing the HE choices of young people worldwide. Research on students preparing to access HE finds that a majority of students seek information from a small group of family, friends and current students in HE institutions (Slack et al. 2014). Research indicates that a significant role is played by family and other social networks when students enrol in HEIs. It is also important to note that formal and informal information sources are different for first generation students and students who have parents or immediate family members who have had experience of HE (Häuberer and Brändle 2018). Research on HE choice has shown that the maintenance of a middle or upper-middle class social identity and/or upward class mobility seem to be common primary objectives in parental reasoning behind educational choices. This thrust for social mobility cannot be uncoupled from gendered arrangements of family priorities, parental decision making and educational aspirations and choices for daughters and sons (Marks and McLanahan 1993, Davis and Pearce 2007).

Not only are families actively involved in maintaining and/or enhancing their social status through their children's HE choices, families also make educational choices with the consideration of how daughters will in future become mothers who will in turn perform the role of maintaining social status in society (Donner 2006). Similar patterns can be drawn for young men within this gendered pattern operating in the family, wherein young men (especially in Indian families) are steered towards disciplines and careers which lead towards employment (Sudarshan 2018). For instance, a study (Gautam 2015) observed that science is the *de jure* choice for male offspring within families in India; this was perceived to resonate with the family's perception of the son's gendered capabilities and ability to engage in hard work. These gendered differences are rooted in social practices in Haryana (the setting of this project – see Preface) and much of northern India, related to feminine chastity, matrimony, dowry and inheritance (Chakravarti 1993, Kandiyoti 1988, Karve 1953, Dube 1988, Chowdhry 2011a and 2011b). Thus, educational decisions within

the family are both the cause and effect of reproduction of gendered educational inequalities in society.

The findings of the Fair Chance for Education Phase 1 study (Henderson et. al 2021) mirror the observations made by Sudarshan (2018), Sahu et. al (2017) and Verma (2014), who have argued that families of women undergraduate and post-graduate students are predominantly concerned about the safety and reputation of girls in an HEI, distance of the HEI from the family residence, along with the existence, quality and safety of hostel facilities. These concerns are different for young men students, where decisions are more likely to reflect concerns about subject choice, academic reputation of the HEI and employability prospects. These studies also indicate that families are significantly influenced by social concerns such as the family's safety and honour, which are embodied in the body of women. Sahu et. al (2017) show the tremendous amount of control that families, parents in particular, have over the gendered educational choices and mobilities of young people. This is simultaneously a barrier and source of support.

Therefore, there is a need to explore and understand *how families are making gendered educational decisions which lead students towards enrolment in higher education institutions*. The following three research questions guided this study (see Thomas 2021 for the full PhD thesis):

- What are the different roles played by different family members as students access higher education, and how are these gendered?
- How are different gendered educational decisions taken within families? How do different family members justify these decisions?
- How are the families' gendered plans and experiences of enrolling in college influenced by a range of other intersecting factors?

## 1.2    Research design

This study used a **qualitative research design** with a feminist orientation, and is based on the understanding that families play a prominent role in making gendered educational choices which lead young people towards enrolling into undergraduate courses in Haryana. Leading on from the Phase 1 exploratory study (see section 1.1), the Phase 2 study explored what happens within the family or household as gendered educational decisions are being made. While the student was the primary focus of this study, the student was simultaneously placed within the family group, in recognition of the importance of families in educational decision making. The research design, therefore, included **semi-structured, in-depth interviews with students** from across the same government colleges that were sampled for Phase 1 of the study. This was followed by **semi-structured in-depth interviews with students' family members**.

This study obtained **ethical approval** from the Department of Education Studies at the University of  Warwick. The colleges carry the same pseudonyms used in Phase 1 of the project (MDC= Mahendargarh District College; SDC= Sonipat District College; and SiDC= Sirsa District College). Additionally, all the students and family members who participated in this study were anonymised to maintain confidentiality. All participants were provided with information about the research project and they voluntarily consented to be participants of this study. Written informed consent was sought from each participant before commencing the recorded interviews.

The **research tools** for this study were developed on the basis of preliminary analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data of the Phase 1 study. The interview guides were developed and piloted with families of Indian Origin in UK in June 2018, and in Haryana, India in November 2018. These consecutive piloting exercises helped to refine the interview questions. The research tools for this study include interview guides for in-depth interviews with students and family members, along with a pro forma which was used to collect the educational and social backgrounds of the undergraduate student participants and their families. The interview guide and pro forma were bilingual (Hindi and English), as were the consent form and information document which were shared with all participants.

## 1.3    Sampling and recruitment of participants across three districts

The selection of district and colleges for this study followed the sampling set in place by Phase 1 of the project (Henderson et. al 2021, section 1.3). The first phase of the project sampled districts and colleges on the basis of geographical location and distance from the national capital (New Delhi) and indicators of gender based inequalities such as juvenile and overall sex-ratio and literacy of women, the presence of co-educational state-funded (government) colleges and the availability of accessible institutional gatekeepers (Henderson et. al 2021). The same districts (Mahendargarh, Sonipat and Sirsa) and colleges (MDC, SDC and SiDC – pseudonyms, as noted above in 1.2) were sampled for this study.



*A roadway in rural Haryana*

Sampling the same colleges in the same three districts brought several benefits. One of the key benefits was that Phase 1 of the study provided a set of quantitative data which described and illustrated the context of the students and HEIs. This allowed Phase 2 to complement and extend the exploratory findings and observations made in Phase 1 (Henderson et. al 2021). Additionally, this continued relationship with the three colleges

facilitated the researcher's entry into and access within the sampled colleges. The key institutional contacts included principals and teaching faculty at each government college. The existing contacts at the colleges facilitated the researcher's initial interaction with undergraduate students, who were then given the opportunity to volunteer to become participants of the study.

## 1.4    Fieldwork implementation and study sample

Students who volunteered to participate in the study in the three sampled colleges were recruited for this study. The in-depth interviews with students were conducted at locations selected by the students. Interviews were conducted with 26 students across the three sampled colleges (see Table 1.1) and the interviews were usually conducted within the college campus or at home. The students enrolled in the sampled colleges were residents of villages in rural Haryana or were residing in urban and semi-urban neighbourhoods. Across these neighbourhoods, communities monitor the movement of young people, especially young women. Therefore, students actively chose between college campus and home interviews, on the basis of their personal comfort. In-depth interviews with students were followed by interviews at the homes of 11 students. At home, depending on the availability of parents and other family members, individual or group interviews were conducted with family members.

Table 1.1 illustrates the demographic diversity of the students who were interviewed for this study across the three sampled districts, in relation to gender and caste group.

*Table 1.1: Undergraduate participants; gender, caste and geographical location*

| Participants | Mahendargarh | Sirsa | Sonipat | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Men Undergraduate Participants** | 2 Suvarna<br>3 Bahujan | 4 Dalit | 5 Suvarna<br>1 Dalit | 7 Suvarna<br>5 Dalit<br>3 Bahujan |
| **Women Undergraduate Participants** | 2 Suvarna<br>1 Bahujan | 1 Suvarna<br>3 Bahujan | 3 Suvarna<br>1 Bahujan | 6 Suvarna<br>5 Bahujan |
| **Total Interviews** | **8** | **8** | **10** | **13 Suvarna<br>5 Dalit<br>8 Bahujan** |

*Note: Dalit and Bahujan are terms used for marginalised caste groups categorised within the Indian constitution as Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) respectively. Suvarna refers to the relatively privileged or elite caste groups which are not listed in the national and state lists of SC and OBC caste groups. These terms are infused with political meanings and objectives which aim to address caste-based inequalities.*

## 1.5    Data analysis

The **interviews with students and family members** were transcribed and collated with the information collected in the proforma (the students' and families' educational and social background). This was followed by multiple thematic readings of the interview. The repeated reading and analysis of the transcribed interview data was conducted with the support of Dr Emily Henderson who was supervising the development of Dr Anjali Thomas' doctoral thesis (which is the basis for this report, see Thomas, 2021).

The first round of analysis of the transcripts led to the identification of themes such as the different roles being played by family members across chronological moments in the participating student's life. The transcripts were analysed for a second time to explore *how these decisions were being made* within the families, and *how different gendered family members were negotiating* their educational preferences and priorities within the family group. Finally, the transcripts were analysed again to examine how these gendered decision-making processes within family-groups were influenced by *intersectional factors* such as gender, caste, social class and rural-urban inequalities. For greater detail on the analysis process and resultant findings see Thomas (2021).

# 2. The Different Roles Played by the Family in Education Trajectory

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### 2.1 Introduction to the roles played by families in educational decision making

Phase 1 of the project revealed that family members are actively involved in encouraging, supporting and influencing young people's choices to access HE. This was principally observed through the quantitative questionnaire. The questionnaire observed that there was a gendered difference in how students reported that different family members with different gendered identities and relationships were involved in the decision making process (see Henderson et al., 2021, section 3.3). This Phase 2 report chapter addresses the first research question, which sought to explore *in greater depth* how family members are supporting, encouraging and influencing young people's educational choices.

The following four roles were identified from this study, and are explained further in the subsequent sub-sections of this chapter:

a. *Support.* This is performed in multiple ways such as: approval of children's interest in pursuing HE, providing (gendered) support in the form of financial support to pay tuition fees and daily expenses, and encouragement in young people's educational endeavours.

b. *Inspire.* This is a very important role, often played by 'trailblazers' within first-generation families, i.e. the young women and men who are the first generation of women and men in a family and/or community to access HE. Such figures of reference inspire parents to support their children and simultaneously provide immediate and first-hand examples of potential educational pathways for young people.

c. *Provide Information*. Students and families who are contemplating access to HE often seek information regarding application and enrolment procedures, the quality of education and teaching staff at a particular college, college facilities and future career opportunities. This information is key to shaping how education choices are perceived within the family, especially with regard to different educational courses and colleges. Apart from information that parents and family members gather through their personal social networks at home and at their place of work, trailblazing older siblings and cousins are important sources of direct, experience-based information for students and family members.

d. *Influence decisions.* This is a particularly difficult role to perform (and to identify through research). Influencing education-related decisions involves a delicate balance of considering the needs and desires of all family members, cultivating gendered support for higher education, and negotiating what are often intense and complicated emotional gendered relationships with different family members.

## 2.2    Role Type 1: Support

As noted in 2.1, support is performed in multiple ways such as: approval of children's interest in pursuing HE, providing (gendered) support in the form of financial support to pay tuition fees and daily expenses, and encouragement in young people's educational endeavours.

**Support from parents**

Parents were shown to be key family members who support students' access to HE. Parents supported their children in terms of financial and practical support and also in terms of emotional support. In some instances, parents were perceived as a unit in terms of support for access to HE, but in other instances there were differences between mothers and fathers, for instance where mothers acted as intermediaries between fathers and their sons and daughters.



*A household in a small urban centre in Haryana*

In several instances, mothers shared that they had experienced a lack of support for their educational interests in their youth, and were therefore supporting their children's access to HE in hopes for a better future for them. As identified in section 1.1, social mobility aspirations were a key incentive for parents. Parental support was complemented by a general development in accessible, locally provided education. For instance, over the last two decades, the government school in Geeta's (SiDC) village had changed from a primary school (up till grade 5) to a secondary (grade 10) and senior secondary (grade 12) over the years, and attending higher education had begun to be more normalised. Geeta's mother said:

> at first I wanted to send all my children to school. As my eldest [Geeta's elder sister] finished school, my neighbours and other girls in the neighbourhood came to me and

> asked me if I could also send her [Geeta's elder sister] to college with the others. So I agreed and made her do graduation.

The support provided by parents is gendered. Parents who expressed support for their children simultaneously referred to gendered behaviours and observations, such as daughters being skilled in household activities and sons and daughters contributing to different household chores. These reflect the patriarchal gender norms operating within Haryana and North India (Karve 1953, Dube 1988). In the Phase 2 study, support for access to HE was gendered along similar lines. For instance, there were significant pressures on young men to become positioned in the family as breadwinners, which influenced their HE choices towards employability.

### The role of the natal maternal family and maternal uncles

Several young women in the study, such as Geeta (SiDC) and Jaya (SDC), shared that their maternal uncles were supporting and financially funding their schooling and higher education. In this way, young women were able to garner financial and social support through traditional patriarchal family structures. This is also allied with how traditional gendered practices bestow maternal uncles with gendered responsibility to support and fund the marriage and matrimony of young women in the family. This is allied with gendered norms of inheritance, dowry and matrimony in northern parts of India (Karve 1953, Dube 1988).

The natal family does not only support the young woman after she marries, but also supports her children, especially the education and marriage of her children in the future. We can see this in the narratives of several young women participating in this study, where they have been supported in several ways by their mother's natal families and maternal uncles. These gendered relationships are significant means through which young women are able to mobilise the economic capital required to access higher education.

### Linking support and academic performance

Another aspect of support was observed in family members' expression of great pride in the academic performance and single-minded focus on education observed in their children. This pattern, where the family acknowledges the academic achievements of their children, especially girls, is gendered. For instance, Deepika's (SiDC) grandmother shared,

> Yes, she studies very well. Very well she studies. The children are alright. Goes her own way and comes back her own way [indicating that she is not looking around or getting distracted]. She works hard.

The focus on academic study is based on the social understanding that, since an adolescent girl or young woman is only intent on the pursuit of her studies, she will not have time to develop friendships and relationships with any young men in her vicinity. This is intimately linked with a patriarchal preoccupation with feminine chastity (Chakravarti 1993, Kandiyoti 1988). A similar pride was not observed among parents of young men who participated in the study.

## 2.3    Role Type 2: Inspire

As noted in 2.1, inspiring is a very important role, often played by 'trailblazers' within first-generation families, i.e. the young women and men who are the first generation of women and men in a family and/or community to access HE. Such figures of reference inspire parents to support their children and simultaneously provide immediate and first-hand examples of potential educational pathways for young people.

**The importance of 'trailblazers'**

Similar to the observations made by Henderson et al. (2021) in Phase 1 of the project, a majority or participants of the Phase 2 study are from first-generation families. Among first-generation students, a significant proportion of students are also the first people in their families and indeed sometimes their communities to access higher education. The study identified these first-in-family students as 'trailblazers', as they are establishing new educational trajectories within their immediate families and communities, and have a lasting role within families and communities as figures of reference, inspiration and sources of information and advocacy.

In the Phase 2 study, only three participants were second-generation entrants to HE, one man student from the OBC caste group, and two women students from the General caste group. The remaining participants were all first generation. Several participants had family members who had already accessed HE before them, in the form of at least one sibling or cousin. Ten men students were in this position (6 General, 1 OBC, 1 SC) and four women (2 General, 2 SC). The remaining participants were in the trailblazing position of being the first in their family to access HE. Four men students were in this position (1 General, 1 OBC, 2 SC) and five women (2 General, 3 OBC).

When a majority of students are members of the first generation in their family and community to access higher education, common figures of inspiration are older siblings and cousins. Older brothers and older sisters – who are often themselves trailblazers – inspire the educational aspirations and trajectories of the young people. In several instances, they also influence the educational aspirations of parents, uncles and aunts, who encourage and support students to access higher education. While the Phase 1 report (Henderson et al. 2021, section 3.3) identified parents (fathers more than mothers) and siblings (brothers more than sisters) as important sources of support for accessing HE, the Phase 2 study explored *how* family members are *actively or passively encouraging, supporting and influencing educational decisions*.

**Being an inspiring trailblazer**

Students who were trailblazers within their families shared how their own successful entry into higher education and exposure to the outside world had led them actively to encourage their younger siblings and cousins to pursue higher levels of education. It was observed that a majority of these older siblings and cousins were aware of the fact that their own educational experiences were useful to younger members of their families and communities. They used their knowledge and experiences and observations to inform and advise young people and their parents towards particular subjects, courses and institutions. For instance, Hema (SiDC) said,

> My brother was doing his B.Com [Bachelors in Commerce] so he suggested it to me, that I could also do the same.

Similarly, Jaspal (SiDC) said,

> *Bhaiyya* [elder cousin brother who is a family trailblazer] kept telling us that we should go to college. 'Get good marks now, in class and in plus two [class 12] to later go to college. The better your number [marks] are you can go to a better college'.

This trailblazing older cousin in this family advised the participant and his siblings to focus on getting better grades, and also assisted them as they filled out the application and enrolment forms for different higher education institutions.

**Gendered nature of inspiration**

The different patterns of adherence and deviation from established educational pathways is gendered. The initial pioneering movement of young trailblazer women involves a compromise with the gendered norms operating in their families and villages. However, over time, the daughters are seen to be slowly changing the regime and educational pathways available to young people in the family and the village. On the other hand, participants such as Ajay (MDC) and Bobby (MDC) said that they were inspired to access higher education through an older male cousin who was employed in the armed forces. The participant said that he was hoping to replicate the career and success pathway established by his cousin. This is congruent with the gendered pathways and norms within families in Haryana regarding access to higher education and graduate employment for young men.

## 2.4    Role Type 3: Provide information

As noted in 2.1, providing information was the third role type. Students and families who are contemplating access to HE often seek information regarding application and enrolment procedures, the quality of education and teaching staff at a particular college, college facilities and future career opportunities. This information is key to shaping how education choices are perceived within the family, especially with regard to different educational courses and colleges. Apart from information that parents and family members gather through their personal social networks at home and at their place of work, trailblazing older siblings and cousins are important sources of direct, experience-based information for students and family members.

**Information through parents**

Although supportive, parents were able to offer little or no information or direct experiences of accessing higher education, due to the limited educational experiences of the parental generation (see Phase 1 findings, Henderson et al. 2021, section 2.4). Parental advice was often limited to recommending a college closer to home or those which were considered (by word of mouth) to be located in a safer location. There were a few exceptions to this trend. Chandni (MDC) said that her parents were acquainted with one of the faculty members working at MDC, and he had informed them about the application process and academic performance of the college. Jaya (SDC) said that her paternal aunt and her aunt's husband had given her the information regarding SDC and the application and admission processes. Another rare experience involved Neil (SDC), who noted that both his parents were in the

local police force and that they had shared their experiences and observations at work with him and his siblings. He said,

> They told me about how many papers are there. Their department [in the police force] is only such that all the time…you know people talk about the department where they work. So they kept telling me about the responsibilities and the work to be done. So this created an interest in me to do something like this in the future.

Even though both his parents had not experienced higher education, the particular context of the parents' employment gave his parents opportunities to interact with colleagues and co-workers from different backgrounds, and the knowledge to inform their children educational choices and decisions. Similar observations have been made by Brooks (2003) who observed that parents' workplace was an alternate source of knowledge about higher education.

## Trailblazers providing information

A majority of the participants' educational trajectories mirrored the trailblazing educational trajectories established by their older siblings or cousins. For instance, Sachin (SDC) was enrolled in the same college as his elder sister.  However, this pioneering entry by families into higher education is not gender neutral. Daughters were often encouraged to enter (private) women's colleges, which were socially perceived to be safer for 'chaste' young women, since family members believed that in women's colleges their daughters were less likely to encounter or interact with men outside their own families. Notably, the pioneering step taken by an elder sister helped Geeta's (SiDC) educational trajectory. Geeta was eventually able to gain confidence and autonomy to negotiate a transfer to a government co-educational college to pursue her interest in sports. She was able to operationalise her elder sister's access and experience of higher education to formulate her own unique choice to pursue higher education and sports.

## Gendered transfer of information

Studies on youth in India (DeSouza et al. 2009) have observed that young people rarely have friends and acquaintances who are from a different gender. This is a gendered pattern of segregation cultivated within most Indian communities and schools. This is recognised by educationalists such as Krishna Kumar (2021) who have written about education and growing up as a boy in India and how young men have no socialisation with women outside their families in their childhood. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe segregated gendered patterns of inspirations, sources of information and educational pathways.

In Phase 1, Henderson et al. (2021) observed that more young women consulted parents than young men, who tended to consult peers and friends as well as parents. Raj (SDC) is one such example from Phase 2. He said,

> So I chose to do it [HE] here because even my friends and seniors from schools are in this college. They had also advised me for this college.

The Phase 2 study also observed that the influence of peers such as classmates, friends and seniors from school is observable in narratives regarding the choice of subject both at school and higher education. A couple of participants who were young men pursuing

science and commerce courses, said that they decided to select science or commerce subjects on the basis of similar choices being made by their classmates and friend circles. For instance, a young man, Bobby (MDC) said, 'I took science. All the children [male noun used in Hindi] in school were taking [science] so I too took science.'

**The local cyber-café: a gendered public space where educational decisions are made**

The cyber-café is a common sight (see figure 1) across rural and urban Haryana and India more generally. These shops usually provide a variety of goods and services. Most undergraduate participants' narratives of access to higher education feature the cyber-café. The cyber-café is a popular site where students and family members fill in their higher education application forms for a small fee. For instance, Kajal (SDC) said, 'When we went to fill the form at the [cyber-café] shop, they told us about the cut off lists [eligibility to apply] of different colleges.' It was observed that the owner of the cyber-café has knowledge about the paperwork or certificates required for applications to higher education institutions and state (government) employment opportunities. For instance, Sachin (SDC) said, 'My friend's [cyber-café] shop is there and there is always a discussion.'


*A Cyber-café in Haryana*

Since several people in the cyber-café's area would go to this shop to fill forms for employment and educational purposes, discussion and information circulates at this site, making it a significant site where families are accessing information and advice regarding different higher education choices. The owners or individuals providing services in these cyber-cafes, who are being identified as sources of information by the participants, were all men. Gendered practices and inequalities operating in Haryana allow young men to experience relatively less restriction and more freedom in social spaces than young women (Chowdhry 2005). Because of this, most young women mention that their application process in the cyber-café and in the college was not a solo endeavour. Young women such as Amrita (MDC), Hema (SiDC) and Madhu (SDC) said that their brothers who accompanied them or filled their forms dictated their educational decisions for them. This pattern was not observed in the narratives of undergraduate men.

## 2.5    Role Type 4: Influence Decisions

As noted in 2.1, influencing decisions is the fourth role type. This is a particularly difficult role to perform (and to identify through research). Influencing education-related decisions involves a delicate balance of considering the needs and desires of all family members, cultivating gendered support for higher education, and negotiating what are often intense and complicated emotional gendered relationships with different family members.

**Considering the collective family economy**

In the Phase 2 study, participants seemed to be aware of the household economy and the impact of their educational choices on the family expenses. The nature of financial considerations on a family's educational decisions can be observed in the following excerpts from the interview with Om (SDC);

> I: Why only [apply to] this college?
> Om: Travel was the reason. That time the situation was such that I could not go out much.
> I: What kind of a situation was that?
> Om: Mostly a financial reason.
> I: But your sisters were also studying.
> Om: We could not manage all that together.

Here, Om mentions that 'We could not manage all that together', referring to his collective awareness of the family budget and its role in his decision to apply to a nearby college.

**Cultivating support to access higher education**

Different participants engaged in various strategies to influence the decisions being taken by family members about their educational futures. This included gaining support from trusted family members other than parents, who could then advocate for the participant (Jaya, SDC). Other participants deliberately made compromises in order to placate their families, choosing for instance the nearest college to assuage their parents' fears (Amrita, MDC; Madhu, SDC). In another example, Deepika (SiDC) worked hard to gather support within her family. She demonstrated a single-minded focus on her studies during schooling and received merit-based scholarships both in school and in the college. These scholarships subsidised the cost of higher education tuition fees. She said that, when contemplating access to higher education, she chose to apply to the cheaper co-educational rural government college, rather than the more expensive private women's universities. This position satisfied her educational aspirations with the additional benefit of not being a drain on the family finances. This degree of effort to maintain an ideal, chaste, academic identity within the family was not observed in the narratives of any of the men participants.

**Gendered emotional attachments in family decision-making processes**

While many of the influences on educational decisions were rooted in practical considerations, it is important to recognise the influence of emotional attachments on these decisions. In the participants' accounts, often these attachments were inextricably interwoven with more practical concerns. For instance, Chandni (MDC) rationalised the decision for her to stay with her family for HE in a nearby college, despite having gained entry to Delhi University, by stating (among other practical factors) 'I just did not feel like it then, to suddenly leave the family'.

Three of the young men who participated in the study said that they chose the nearest and most convenient college as they felt obliged to live with their parents or widowed mothers. This can be observed in the following arguments made by Dilip (MDC):

Anywhere else would have been too far away. Also I am alone. At home there is only me. All my siblings, sisters are married, one brother is in Delhi and my *tauji's* [older paternal uncle] son has died. Now only I stay at home and study at home.

This reflects a gendered emotional pull for young men. While in essence both young women and men were making a decision to continue living with their parents and families, there is a gendered difference in the rationale for this decision that is provided by the young women and men. Young women alluded to a sense of emotional attachment and feelings of sadness when they contemplated living away from family; the young men did not make any emotional allusions. Instead, the educational trajectories of the young men were being influenced by a gendered sense of obligation and responsibility towards parents, and the need to take care of them as they age.



*Households in a village in Haryana*

# 3. How educational decisions are taken within families
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### 3.1    Introduction to how families make educational choices

This chapter builds on the roles being played by families to further explore *how these roles contribute towards how educational decisions are being made within families* for young women and men. The ways in which families make educational decisions are based on

(a) the dynamics or nature of relationships and decision-making practices within the family, and
(b) the ways in which the family rationalises their educational decisions

The dynamics between family members lead each family member strategically to plan and act in specific ways in order to garner support or convince parents to approve access to higher education. Perceptions regarding barriers and aspirations are operationalised by family members to influence the final educational decision made within the family. Additionally, the different barriers and aspirations perceived by different family members motivate each member of the family to act strategically to negotiate access to higher education.

### 3.2    Family dynamics which foreground decision-making processes

**Fathers/brothers as key decision makers**

The precedence of masculine relationships such as fathers and brothers over feminine ones such as mothers and older sisters while making educational choices and decisions was observed in Phase 1 of this project (Henderson et al., 2021, section 3.3). The interviews conducted in the Phase 2 study illustrated that, within parental approval, approval by the father was a key component of family decision-making processes. The influence of the father within the family can be seen in this excerpt from the interview with Mohan (SiDC):

> I: So your father told you about you having to go to college?
> Mohan: Father himself said that 'you can do you BA here and then do a B.Ed. [education course]'

On the other hand, Chandni (MDC) said that when her family had to take decisions, the parents discussed between themselves. She explained that they offered her different options from which she could choose. At the same time, she also said that if they, especially her father, did not permit her to go somewhere, she did not go against their wishes. Across most undergraduate women's narratives, the father seemed to have final power to veto any decision. While many families seemed to engage in discussing and sharing different opinions and interests, there were some members, usually the men, who convinced, approved or enforced the final decision for the student.

**Mothers as overseeing everyday decision making**

A majority of the narratives clearly indicate that mothers supervise the enactment of everyday decisions made by family members, especially within the household. For instance, Raj (SDC) said that his mother was involved in decisions regarding concerns within the household. When asked about this, he explained, "No, the house is taken care of by mother so she has more say. Papa used to often stay outside." Raj's father was a driver and there was a clear gendered division between the private and the public spheres. Similar patterns were observed in other families such as Mohan's (SiDC). This indicates a normative division in this family wherein the private, everyday household decisions were undertaken and supervised by the feminine head of the family, whereas the public domain decisions which involved significant financial and social considerations, such as education and marriage, needed the approval and supervision of the masculine head of the family. Mothers of several young women (such as Amrita in MDC, Hema in SiDC and Jaya in SDC) said that they additionally monitored their daughter's movements outside the home.

## 3.3  Rationalising decision making within the family

**Rationalising choosing the nearest college: cost, distance and commute**

The study found that, while making educational decisions, students and family members rationalised the educational decisions made within the family. Phase 1 of the project had identified distance and commutability as significant factors affecting decisions to access higher education (Henderson et. al 2021, section 3.4). Along with distance and commutability, financial considerations also influence educational choices. However, it is often difficult to identify these factors in isolation as financial cost and commutability constraints usually increase proportionately with distance. In the Phase 2 study, many participating students and family members also identified distance and availability of affordable public transport which is regular, safe and efficient as important considerations. The location of the college changed how the parents perceived the accessibility of higher education, which in turn influenced how parents rationalised their educational decisions. For instance, Sachin's (SDC) mother stated,

> Children will have to be sent to where the family [parents] say, according to the money they have. If you send them far away to hostel or you send them nearby according to your condition. If the college is in [the same town as home] then what is the need to send them far away?  It takes a lot of money and wastes a lot of time.

The mother's explanation indicates that families have to make educational choices which are compatible with their financial capabilities. Rather than describing the choice as a compromise, she rationalises the decision as the most sensible and economical choice. This finding shows that, when analysing family decision-making processes about HE choices, it is important to note that family members may rationalise the decisions taken rather than acknowledge compromises made. Any recollection of decisions taken is seen through an indirect lens as it is a *representation* of the decisions and thus layers the rationalisation with family pride and values, for example.

**Rationalising HE decisions based on aspirations for marriage and employment**

In the Phase 2 study, it was clear that aspirations were a significant factor influencing educational choices. Aspirations within this study included three concerns: pursuing further education and its connection with marriage and employment.

Aspirations about marriage are relevant in this study as marriage or matrimonial concerns significantly influence the educational decisions of young people and their families (Sudarshan 2018). Several participants in the Phase 1 study (Henderson et al. 2021, section 3.1) expressed the view that that some of their women classmates did not access higher education as their families arranged their marriage as soon as they turned 18 and finished their schooling (class 12). In the Phase 2 study, Babeeta (MDC) was a family trailblazer who had an older sister who did not enrol in higher education after she completed her schooling. Babeeta rationalised her choice of a shorter course in the following way,

> I have an older sister who is not married and education can be a disturbance. The plan is for both of us sisters to get married together [on the same day to different men] to manage wedding expenses. So, I cannot plan to study for a long time.

The gendered differences in aspirations, education and matrimony are visible in the following excerpt from the interview with Jaspal (SiDC):

> I: So what do you want to do in future?
> Jaspal: In future a government job…looking at the condition of the family it feels as though, if we get a job we will improve our family condition…my father is, you know, now 53 years old and can work less now. Once I get a job, two brothers have studied, there will be an effect from this.
> I: Do you feel that boys have more pressure to start earning fast? And do girls not have that much pressure?
> Jaspal: Yes this is definitely there in our society that only the son works and only the son has to work.
> I: What is the difficulty if a daughter works?
> Jaspal: It is for the son. 'You will get married in the future and you only will have to work'. For the daughter it is that 'we will get you married whether you study or not you will get married'. The daughter has to take care of the family, because of which she is quickly married off.

In most parts of India, especially northern India, marriage and wedding costs are dominant concerns as educational decisions are made for daughters, but none of the literature explored in the section 1.1 of this report express similar concerns regarding educational decisions for sons. Hritik (MDC) stated that he was asked to enrol in college by his stepfather as this would improve his marriage prospects. He said that his father believed that, in their merchant caste group, young women were very educated and would prefer their husbands to have a degree.

These gendered differences in how families rationalise children's educational pathways are further illuminated in the following excerpt from the interview with Sachin's (SDC) mother:

> I: Why didn't you send the younger son to college?

Mother: We also have to judge the mind of a child. How is he [performing] in studying matters. My elder son's three years were wasted in college; we should have made him study in college via distance.

I: You think that the three years have gone to waste?

Mother: Yes

I: Why?

Mother: If he could have done college through distance education, he could have done some work along with that. Probably could have taken a coaching in his spare time.

I: You think the three years your elder son has gone to college has been a waste of time…a complete loss?

Mother: [Laughs] According to his father it has not been a waste of time…

I: According to his father, what has been the benefit of college?

Mother: That they can fill forms for all posts, particularly higher posts.

I: So higher posts have been the benefit of going to college?

Mother: Yes. Forms can be filled on the basis of +2 [12th class] and 10th standard [class].

I: So at the time of the younger son, his father didn't insist on sending him to college?

Mother: He said 'I got the elder one into college, you plan the younger son's education'. I told him to do ITI [Industrial Training Institute[1]].

I: What did the younger son want?

Mother: He was more content with ITI.

In this excerpt we see rationalising of educational decisions based on employment prospects, with different points of view emerging within the same family. Sachin's mother also shared that the family thinks that the daughter could get a job as a teacher through college education. There is a gendered difference in the scope of careers imagined by the family for the sons and the daughter (Sudarshan 2018). The discussion in the family regarding the education of the sons is primarily directed towards optimizing the employment of the sons in the future. However, this desire is somewhat diluted for the daughter as the primary goals are to educate her and get her married. It is clear from this excerpt that the ways in which educational decisions are rationalised is gendered.

### 3.4   Strategic actions within the family

**Influencing decision making through indirect actions**

The study found that family dynamics within each particular family, in combination with the ways in which decisions are rationalised in the family, lead young men and women to take up different strategic positions. These positions are taken up in order to influence the decisions being made about their educational options. While the young people were often unable to influence directly the final decisions being made about their futures, they were very well aware of those who could influence these decisions, and they actively sought to influence the decisions through indirect actions.

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[1] ITIs are industrial training institutions which provide (6 months to 2 years) courses which train students in different trades.

The strategic manoeuvres that were described by participants in the study include: selective use of different kinds of information to convince parents, using middle-persons such as mothers to communicate with fathers as key decision makers, demonstrating a good academic record as a 'model student' in order to influence choices, and seeking support from traditional gendered sources such as maternal uncles to counteract lack of support from fathers and brothers (see also 2.2).

Particularly of note is young women's strategy of presenting a 'model student' image to their parents in order to avoid objections to HE based on fears about reputation risk and elopement. For instance, Deepika and Esha (SiDC) seemed to be acting strategically to present themselves as model students, with the understanding that they needed to convince their parents to obtain their permission to access higher education

**Influencing decision making through strategic voices and silences**

The study showed that different family members chose to speak or not speak as educational decisions were made.

The study found that young people were strategically careful when they expressed their HE interests within the family, and even avoided speaking at all. For instance, this can be seen in the following excerpt from the interview with Mohan (SiDC),

> I: So your father told you about you having to go to college?
> Mohan: Father himself said that 'you can do your BA here and then do a B.Ed. [education course]'
> […]
> Mohan: If we say…here in this region [rural Haryana]…if we speak up, there could be a problem at home later on… 'I had told you to do this' …if in future I do not get a proper job in my area of interest.

When asked further about this later in the interview, he said,

> it is just a bit of shame [on my part], that it is ok [to not object to father]. If everyone follows what he says his respect [and honour] increases.

Neelam (SDC), who wanted to pursue a career in the police, did not share this aspiration with her parents 'because what our parents say is right'.

Silence was also deployed within decision-making processes as a form of power. The study revealed that, in several cases, the primary decision maker or the individual who held the power to veto a decision chose to remain silent. In most cases, the decision maker was the father or the elder brother (3.2). It was observed that, even through silence, fathers were able to wield a considerable amount of power and control over the educational decisions made within the family. This placed the mother in the centre performing the difficult task of managing the emotions of all the family members (3.2). The following excerpt illustrates this situation in the case of Mohan (SiDC):

> I: So mother tells everything to your father?
> Mohan: I don't say anything to him. It does not feel good to say something directly to father. I tell mother, she then tells him.

    I: You don't like talking directly to your father?

    Mohan: We can discuss things but for important things, we have to do as father says. That is just how things are done.

While key decision makers (particularly fathers) influenced decisions by remaining silent, young women and men who chose to remain silent were seen to accept educational choices which were not of interest to them.

# 4. How HE decision making is influenced by intersectional factors

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### 4.1    Introduction

This chapter presents four cases of undergraduate students and their families to illustrate how intersectionalities such as geographical location, social class and caste backgrounds, in addition to gender, affect the decision-making processes about HE options for young people within their families.

For each case, two questions are explored: (i) which factors acted as potential barriers to HE access for this young person? (ii) which factors enabled the young person to access HE, in spite of the barriers in place? Within the second question, the extent to which the young person engaged in informed choice is also included.

The goal of this chapter is to show how the roles identified in Chapter 2, and the family decision-making processes discussed in Chapter 3, play out in an individual's life, thus demonstrating the applicability of the findings from Chapters 2 and 3. The second goal of the chapter is to show how social inequalities interact with life circumstances to produce different educational pathways for young people. The third goal is to highlight the potential for stakeholders to use the in-depth understanding of the role of families in HE decision-making processes, in order to contribute to more equitable HE access.

### 4.2    Case 1: Deepika (SiDC)

### (i)    Which factors acted as potential barriers to HE access for this young person?

Deepika was a **young woman** who was enrolled in SiDC, the most rural college in the study. Her home was located in a village in a **rural** area. As a young woman located in a traditional rural community, she faced **conservative norms** about appropriate educational trajectories for young women, and discussions in the village about risks to young women's (and therefore families') honour from attending HE. She was from the **OBC caste group** (Bhaat). She was from a **working class** background, with her parent/s engaged in **farming**. Her mother had been educated to Class 5, i.e. end of primary; her father had attended school up to Class 8, i.e. mid-secondary. In her nuclear family, she was the **eldest child**, meaning she was the **first in her family to complete secondary education**, and there was no prior experience of HE in her family. She was followed by one younger brother and one younger sister. She had attended the village **government school** for her prior education.

*Fields in rural Haryana*

### (ii)  Which factors enabled the young person to access HE, in spite of the barriers in place?

Deepika lived in a **joint family**, with two sets of parents and then also grandparents living in two adjoining houses, which meant she was very close with her cousin and they navigated being the first daughters in their families to complete secondary education and progress to HE together. She and her older cousin, who attended HE before Deepika, helped each other to be **trailblazers** in their respective families (2.3). Deepika's cousin was the first young woman in the village to attend HE. Deepika's **mother** was supportive (2.2), in part because she wanted her daughter to have a better life than she had had. This was in spite of some of the rumours about young men and women socialising together at the co-educational college. Deepika also gained her parents' support by acting as a **model student** (2.2, 2.5). The fact that there was a **college in their village** was a major deciding factor. Without this college, the nearest college would have been a private women's college in the nearby urban centre. This would have required a vastly higher income and also the resources and trust to commute. The **choice of the local college was rationalised** by Deepika, including based on her **considerations of the family economy** (2.5), and by her family based on the notion that hard work ensures success irrespective of institutional quality (3.3). Deepika's **father was the decision maker** in the family (3.2), and once he accepted this pathway for his daughter, he accompanied her to enrol in the college. As a final note, Deepika was now acting as a trailblazer herself (2.3) – a source of inspiration, advice and support – for her own siblings on their educational trajectories.

### 4.3 Case 2: Jaya (SDC)

**(i) Which factors acted as potential barriers to HE access for this young person?**

Jaya was a **young woman** who was enrolled in SDC, one of the colleges located in small urban centres. Her home was located in a village in a **rural** area. She was from the **OBC caste group** (Saini). She was from a **lower-middle class** background (on the basis of parental occupations and the amenities and condition of her home), with her parent/s engaged in **farming**. Her mother had been educated to Class 5, i.e. end of primary; her father had attended school up to Class 8, i.e. mid-secondary. In her nuclear family, she was the **third child**, with two elder sisters, one younger sister and two younger half-brothers. Her elder sisters completed schooling (Class 12) but did not proceed to HE. She was the **first in her family to access HE**, and there was no prior experience of HE in her family. As such, she was the family trailblazer. Her **father had passed away** during her childhood. Her **maternal uncle** (2.2) played a key role for the family during the bereavement period. Jaya's mother then re-married. In Jaya's family, the siblings had accessed different educational opportunities depending on whether they reached important educational decisions before or after the second marriage had taken place. Jaya's elder sisters were married before they could access HE and they attended government school. During the bereavement period, the three eldest daughters stayed with the maternal uncle. However, Jaya was very young at that point, so soon re-joined her mother who was by then living with her new husband and the youngest daughter. The two eldest daughters' educational decisions and marriages were overseen by the maternal uncle. Both sisters, who were present during the fieldwork, stated that attending college would have delayed marriage and placed a further burden on their uncle, who had already been generous to them. Had Jaya been born earlier, her trajectory may have been very different. This illustrates the **importance of life circumstances** in determining HE access and choice. Jaya also noted **gendered differences of freedom** within the family, where the sons of the family were less limited in their choices and activities than the daughters.

**(ii) Which factors enabled the young person to access HE, in spite of the barriers in place?**

Jaya's educational trajectory was, as noted above, dependent on her good fortune in terms of her **position in the birth order** in her family. The two elder sisters had been limited in their education by the passing of their father, while Jaya's education – accessing **English-medium private school** and then contemplating HE – coincided with the arrival of her step-father. Jaya initially faced opposition towards her HE plans from her step-father (3.2), but she approached her **paternal aunt (biological father's sister) and her aunt's husband** for support for HE and also information about HE (2.5); they acted as advocates for Jaya's progression to HE. They lived near SDC and had sought information about the college and even used their personal networks to talk to the SDC College Principal to facilitate Jaya's enrolment. Jaya also received help and support from **teachers** at her private school, who, when she was nearly withdrawn from the school, stepped in and paid her fees and then arranged for a fee waiver. Jaya also personally deployed the **model student** strategy (2.2, 2.5). Finally, in order to access HE, Jaya accepted a **compromise** on her choice of college, **choosing the nearest college** in order to be able to access HE at all (3.3), partly in **consideration of the household economy** (2.5). As with Deepika, Jaya was also acting as a trailblazer, inspiring the HE aspirations of her younger sister.

### 4.4   Case 3: Mohan (SiDC)

**(i)    Which factors acted as potential barriers to HE access for this young person?**

Mohan was a **young man** who was enrolled in SiDC, the rural college in this study. His family home was located in a **rural** village. He was from a **Dalit** (Meghwal) family. His mother had not attained any level of formal school; his father had completed class 12. **Neither of his parents had first-hand experience of higher education**. Mohan was educated in the **local government school** in the village.

**(ii)   Which factors enabled the young person to access HE, in spite of the barriers in place?**

While **neither of his parents had first-hand experience of higher education, they were highly motivated to educate all of their children** (2.2), and unlike many participants in the study his father had completed Class 12. The parents were key figures of support who ensured access to higher education for all of Mohan's elder sisters, Mohan and his younger brother. Mohan was **not the first in family to attend HE.** His older sisters were enrolled in the private women's college in the nearest urban centre, which provided a private chartered bus service to its students. On the other hand, Mohan and his younger brother were both enrolled in SiDC and both of them had access to **personal motorcycles**, which provided them with mobility in their daily commute to college. Mohan's father was formally employed as a postal officer and one of his extended family members used to be a part of the formal village panchayat members. Within the village, his family was **relatively privileged** since they **had personal vehicles,** larger homes and access to agricultural land. Here it is important to note that the upward social mobility experienced by this Dalit family had empowered them to afford educating daughters in relatively more expensive private colleges. A significant factor in Mohan's access to higher education was that he was not able to communicate directly with his **father who usually remained silent**, yet who had the power to approve and veto educational decisions (3.2), and who played an active role in determining his son's HE choices. The mother was enlisted as a middle-person (3.4) for these negotiations. The young people in the family had to be strategic as they communicated with parents to gain approval to pursue their educational goals.

### 4.5   Case 4: Hritik (MDC)

**(i)    Which factors acted as potential barriers to HE access for this young person?**

Hritik was a **young man** who was enrolled in MDC, one of the colleges located in small urban centres. As with Jaya, Hritik's fortunes had also changed when his **father passed away**. This was a turbulent time involving moving back to Haryana from another state, and a period of his mother having to support her children with limited assistance from her husband's family members. Hritik had been attending private school up until then, but then switched to **government school**. He completed Class 12 in government school. The **switch from private to government school** was challenging as he had been attending an English medium school and then had to move to Hindi medium. However, it was more challenging for his sisters as they had completed more years of schooling in English. **Neither Hritik's step-father nor mother had attended HE**, though his mother had,

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unusually, completed Class 12 (high school), and his step-father had completed class 10 (secondary school). His birth father had attended HE but his untimely death had prevented any knowledge of this process being passed down to the next generation. This again highlights the **importance of life circumstances** in determining HE access and choice.

**(ii)    Which factors enabled the young person to access HE, in spite of the barriers in place?**

Hritik's home was located in the **same urban centre as the college**. He was from a **non-marginalised caste group** (Baniya). Hritik's mother had remarried and his step-father ran a **small business**; they **owned their own, newly-built home** and could therefore be described as **middle class within a relatively disadvantaged area**. Although Hritik's step-father and mother had not attended HE. In the project it was relatively unusual to find a **mother who had completed Class 12** (Henderson et al., 2021, section 2.4) and highly unusual to find a family where the mother had attained a higher level of education than her spouse (ibid.). Even though Hritik's birth father had died before being able to transfer his knowledge of HE to his children, there was still a **legacy of HE** in the family which may have contributed to the expectation that Hritik would also attend HE. Hritik was the **third child**, the **only son** and the **youngest child**. His eldest sister had attained Class 10 (secondary). She had been married after Class 10 due to the financial situation of the mother at that time and a proposal from a family not requiring a dowry. The second sister was the family **trailblazer** (2.3). She had attained a Masters qualification from MDC. This sister had acted as a source of **inspiration and advice** for Hritik about his educational choices. Hritik's **mother** was also a key source of **support** for her children accessing HE (2.2), as she did not want her own challenging experiences of early marriage and the ensuing lack of opportunities to be repeated for her children.  She had striven for her children to continue with their education even during the bereavement period. She had received support from her natal family who facilitated her second marriage. Hritik received pressure from his **step-father** to access HE (2.2), some of which was based on **gendered, caste-related** expectations of a **groom's marriageability** (3.3) and also his **role as a son to financially support the family**. There were also **caste-related** expectations of Hritik's **future employment**, as he was from the merchant caste group and as such was studying Commerce. Hritik was not particularly invested in attending HE, in contrast with his elder sister and Deepika and Jaya. He and his sister received advice and support from many different sources, including seniors, friends and teachers. Hritik's **step-father** was the **decision-maker** (3.2). It is important to note that, although in Hritik's case the enabling factors outweighed the barriers, there was still **limited choice**. Hritik **rationalised attending the nearest college** based on his responsibilities to look after his parents and the family business (3.3). Hritik's mother rationalised choosing the local college based on the fact that hard work produces success, and institutional quality does not matter (3.3).

# 5. Conclusions
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This in-depth qualitative study has revealed the importance of family decision-making processes in young people's educational trajectories. Arguably, in order to understand how access to HE – and in particular enhanced informed choice about HE options – can be achieved, **it is vital to understand *who* within families is making decisions about HE, *how* these decisions are taken and *why* particular decisions are taken**. Taking these avenues of exploration shows how these decision-making processes are **gendered** and are also affected by other **intersecting factors**.

### 5.1    The different roles played by the family in educational trajectories

Family members play a variety of roles in facilitating access to HE.

(i)      Family members may **support** young people's access to HE. Support from **parents** was shown to be essential. **Mothers** were sources of support in particular due to their own hardship and lack of opportunities growing up and the desire to see different futures for their children. Parents provided **gendered support**, showing different expectations of **sons (future breadwinners)** and **daughters (future wives in other families)**. The **mother's natal family** and in particular **maternal uncles** played a role in influencing the educational choices of young people, including where paternal support was not forthcoming. Support was linked with **academic performance**, leading to young women in particular playing the role of **ideal daughter/model student** in order to gain support for accessing HE.

(ii)     Family members **inspire** young people's access to HE. **Trailblazers**, i.e. first members of a family and/or community to access HE, are very important in first-generation families. Often these figures are older siblings or cousins who have already accessed HE. They become beacons of aspiration for young people in families without a history of HE, also inspiring parents to consider HE for their children. Young people who have been inspired by trailblazers then can become trailblazers for others. Trailblazers can inspire across genders, but more often there are **gender-specific trailblazers**. Because of the dominant norms of masculinity and femininity, often it is the case the young women forge the path for other young women, and likewise for young men.

(iii)    Family members **provide information** that facilitates young people's access to HE. Information is provided by **parents**. However the nature of this information is often based on informal advice and hearsay, based on parents' own lack of direct experience of HE. Parents often **recommend the nearest college**, irrespective of institutional quality. **Other family members** may provide more accurate information. **Trailblazers** are important sources of more accurate information, based on their direct experience of HE. There is a **gendered transfer of information**, based on the fact that young people follow patterns of **gender segregation**, which then influences the transmission of information. Young men have access to more sources of information due to leading more public lives.

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(iv)  **Cybercafes** are an **important yet gendered public space** where families access information and make educational decisions. Young men, who experience relatively fewer restrictions in public spaces than young women, are able to actively interact in this gendered public space to make informed decisions, whereas young women are usually accompanied by fathers or brothers who significantly influence their educational decisions.

(v)  Family members **influence decisions**. This takes a number of different forms. Young people are **aware of the collective family economy** and negotiate HE options based on consideration of the expenses of the family as a whole. Young people **cultivate family members' support** to access HE by locating **advocates** who can represent their cause to their parents, and by **making compromises** about HE choice in order to guarantee HE access. **Emotional attachments** also influenced decisions within families. **Young women** expressed not wishing to live away from home. **Young men** also stated this, but based on their family responsibilities.

## 5.2    How educational decisions are taken within families

Educational decision making within families depends on family dynamics and also how families rationalise their decisions.

The role of **key decision maker** tended to be occupied by **fathers and sometimes brothers**. Final approval from the father was shown to be essential in order for access to HE to be secured. The involvement of the mother in this varied. **Mothers** tended to be more involved in **everyday decision making** within the family.

Decisions taken within the family about HE were rationalised based on a number of factors. **Choosing the nearest college** was rationalised based on **cost, distance and commute**. Practical concerns were raised as the basis for choosing the nearest college. However, rather than admitting that this lowered the quality of the HE that young people were accessing, families tended to **cover over the compromise** and state that **success depends on hard work, irrespective of institutional quality**. HE choices were also rationalised based on **aspirations for marriage and employment**. **Marriage** was a **limiting factor for women**, as the expected age of marriage conflicted with the period of HE study. For **men**, marriage was either a **limiting factor** (for men from lower-income families where they needed to earn sooner) or an **enabling factor** (for men where HE was an expectation for marriageability). **Employment** was mainly a concern for young men, where again employment aspirations were either a **limiting factor** (for men from lower-income families HE would conflict with earning sooner) or an **enabling factor** (for men where HE was an expectation for the type of job aspired for).

Decision making within families about educational prospects involves **strategic actions** by different family members. For **young people**, they often engaged in **indirect actions** because they lacked agency in their families for direct action. Actions included: **selective use of information, locating an advocate, performing the 'model student' role, seeking support from e.g. maternal family members to counter paternal family members.** These actions were particularly engaged in by **young women**. Decision making was influenced by **strategic voices and silences**. Young men and women alike were **strategically silent with their fathers**, choosing other ways to influence these key

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decision makers due to the impossibility of directly opposing fathers. **Fathers were also strategically silent**, leaving others (often mothers) to act as intermediaries and absenting themselves from a negotiating process.

## 5.3    How HE decision making is influenced by intersectional factors

Each young person who is making decisions about their future educational trajectory faces **potential barriers to HE access** and **enabling factors that facilitate HE access**. These barriers and enabling factors also affect **HE choice**.

**Deepika (Case 1)** faced a number of barriers as a young woman located in a traditional rural community with strong gendered expectations of young women's behaviour. She was also from a marginalised caste group (OBC) and a family who worked in farming and had low educational attainment in the parental generation. She was the first in family to complete secondary school. Enabling factors included that she lived in a joint family, and was preceded by her cousin as an HE trailblazer. Other enabling factors were the mother's support, Deepika's model student image, and the fact that there was a college in the same village. The local college was selected out of consideration of the family economy. The father was the decision maker and he accompanied Deepika with the enrolment process. Deepika was herself becoming a trailblazer for other siblings.

**Jaya (Case 2)** faced a number of barriers. She was also based in a rural community, from a lower-middle class, farming family and OBC caste group. Her parents had also not completed secondary school. She was the third child but the first in family to access HE. She had experienced a change in fortunes as her father passed away. Her maternal uncle stepped in and then her mother re-married. Jaya mentioned gendered differences of freedom for sons and daughters in her family. Jaya's own position in the birth order meant she had more favourable experiences than her older sisters. She was firmly located in her mother's new marital home and received private education. She mobilised support from her paternal aunt and her husband, and also received substantial support from her school teachers. She used the model student strategy. She also accepted compromise and chose the nearest college, in part based on consideration of the family economy. She was also becoming herself a trailblazer for others.

**Mohan (Case 3)** faced relatively fewer barriers than other participants. The family was from a Dalit caste background but had significant social networks within the village and a history of being members of the local village panchayat, which enabled them to experience upward social mobility. Though Mohan's parents had not attended HE, and his mother had received no formal education, his father had completed class 12. Moreover, Mohan was the fourth child after three older sisters who had attended HE, so he was not the first in family to access HE. Mohan and his brother had personal motorcycles, which facilitated his commute to college, and the family was able to afford sending three daughters to private colleges. Mohan's access to higher education was greatly influenced by his father's wishes and the family dynamics, including his father influencing his HE choices.

**Hritik (Case 4)** faced fewer barriers. He experienced a change of fortunes when his father died and experienced a disruptive change of home state and also a switch from private English-medium school to government Hindi-medium school. His mother and step-father had not accessed HE. Many enabling factors appear in Hritik's case. He resided in the same urban centre as the college, he was not from a marginalised caste group, and his

family were relatively wealthy and ran their own business. His mother had completed Class 12 and his step-father had completed secondary school. His birth father had attended HE. He was also the youngest child and the only son, and he followed from an older sister who had played the trailblazing role before him. His mother was also very supportive. His step-father had actively pressured him to attend HE based on caste-related expectations of his marriageability and employment prospects. He himself was not highly invested in attending HE. Despite all the favourable conditions, he still experienced limited choice and chose the nearest college based on his responsibilities towards his parents and the family business.

## 5.4    Final conclusions

The study shows that it is vital to understand the multiple, gendered roles that families play in supporting – and opposing – young people's educational trajectories. Young people are unable to access HE without family support. **Many HE interventions are based on the idea that young people make HE decisions themselves. This is clearly not the case for these first-generation families and communities in Haryana, North India.** It is essential to understand the roles that families play, and the roles of different family members, in order to design programmes to enhance equitable HE access that are based on the decision-makers as well as the young people. For targeted programme design, it is also necessary to understand how decisions are made – for instance understanding the mediating role of mothers even when fathers take the final decision. It is also necessary to understand that each individual faces different barriers and enabling factors that affect educational decisions. These are social inequalities but also personal circumstances and changes of fortune. Planning for equitable HE access needs to recognise that not all young people and their families are making decisions in the same circumstances, and moreover that gendered social norms affect all decisions pertaining to HE. Finally, it is noteworthy that **most young people in this study were not making HE decisions based on informed choice.** They were often not aware of the different HE options and nor were their families, and it was difficult to locate sources of accurate HE information. Even young people who were comparatively privileged were still making choices of e.g. institution or course based on hearsay and gendered stereotypes.

# 6. Recommendations
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The recommendations from the Phase 2 study focus on recognising the role of families and parents in young people's educational trajectories. Based on this focus, the recommendations target two outcomes:

- All family members need to be aware of the educational options for young people. Given that different family members access different spaces and different sources of information, this needs to be recognised in terms of building a holistic approach to informed choice for HE.

- Young people themselves need to be more informed of their options and better equipped with reliable information about HE and negotiating skills in order to participate in decision making within their families about their educational futures.

### 6.1    The role of the government and the NGO sector

- In the Phase 1 report, it was recommended that state-funded educational schemes and interventions should be disseminated widely in a variety of means, including directly to young people.
  - o  The Phase 2 study clarifies that this information should be shared with all members of the family (through appropriate means), for the purposes of collective informed decision making.

- In the Phase 1 report, the role of Aanganvadi workers and other localised services such as village panchayats was mentioned including the need for schools and colleges to join up with these.
  - o  The Phase 2 study highlights the need for these services to consider parents, grandparents, other relatives and community members as recipients of information on higher education, in addition to the young people as targeted recipients.
  - o  Moreover, it would be beneficial for public service employers to store information about higher education to disburse to employees, as the workplace has been identified as one means of parents from disadvantaged groups learning about information.

- In the Phase 1 report, it was identified that information about higher education should be disseminated to community groups and to schools. The Phase 2 study helps to refine these points as discussed below.
  - o  Phase 1 recommended that families need to have access to readily available information about school choice and higher education choice (including subject choice) and employability options, and connecting these to envision educational trajectories for young people.
    - ▪  Phase 2 highlights that different family members may have different types of involvement and may benefit from the provision of information about HE in different locations and formats. For instance, fathers and mothers occupy different physical spaces in the community, so

information targeting different parents needs to be provided in appropriate spaces.
  - Phase 2 recommends that audio or video information is particularly important for family members who have not attained high levels of formal education. This needs to be a key consideration as the government develops and supports technology and as HEIs follow the NEP recommendations to provide outreach.
- Phase 1 recommended that information should be included about costs of HE, including fees but also supplementary costs, as well as scholarships and bursaries (including of competitive HEIs which may be located further away).
  - Phase 2 highlights the need for advice for low-income families for budgeting for HE and information to be presented in a clear and accessible manner including for parents who may have doubts about the worth of HE.

## 6.2   The role of colleges

- Phase 1 highlighted that colleges need to engage with families more directly, through visits to communities and through guided visits of the colleges, and that mothers and fathers as well as sisters and brothers have different roles and these need to be respected and explored.
  - Phase 2 highly recommends that colleges interact with young people's relatives, including parents and other family members, as well as the young people. It is important for all those who have a say in decision making to access more information and understanding about HE. Just targeting one family member e.g. young person or father does not reflect the way in which educational decisions are taken within families.
  - Phase 2 showed that some families do contact e.g. a college principal for advice, and that this can be extremely helpful. However many parents would not be aware that this is possible nor be aware of how to go about seeking advice from the college. Colleges could usefully discuss how they wish to be contacted and for which types of questions, and should then display this information on any materials circulated about the college.
  - Phase 2 also recognises the strong role that other family members e.g. maternal uncles may play in young people's education so the concept of the family needs to encompass potential input from other relatives.

- Phase 1 recommended that colleges should formalise the role of current students acting as ambassadors for the colleges in disseminating information about higher education in their communities and giving guided visits of the college.
  - Phase 2 notes the importance of 'trailblazer' students and their potential contribution to spreading accurate, reliable and experience-based information about HE in local communities who do not have a history of HE. Phase 2 reinforces the notion that formalising this role in the form of student ambassadors will enhance informed choice.
  - Phase 2 further notes that trailblazer influence is gendered, i.e. that young women are more likely to influence other young women and likewise with young men. This should be borne in mind when establishing the role of student ambassador including in terms of gender balance of ambassadors.

- Phase 1 recommended that colleges should provide step-by-step guidance on the admissions process and ensure this is available at schools, internet cafes and at the college itself, and available online.
  - o Phase 2 extends this recommendation to suggest that this information is also made available to employees in government jobs, and also that locations where the parental generation frequent are identified and stocked with this information.

## 6.3    The role of schools

- Phase 1 recommended that schools should work with colleges and college ambassadors to facilitate the spreading of reliable, accurate information about higher education options to young people and, where possible, their communities.
  - o Phase 2 extends this recommendation further to suggest that, when parents are called to school for parent-teacher meetings or other occasions, information about HE is provided and clearly signalled.
  - o Phase 2 showed that some families face misfortune which severely affects their quality of life and livelihoods. Particularly of note is single-parent households including those affected by bereavement. Schools are more likely to be aware of these cases than e.g. targeted colleges, so, in cases like these, schools may need to pay additional attention to HE advice (especially on the systems and processes) for young people in families facing these situations.

- Phase 1 recommended that young women in particular (as well as men) need to receive more training at school level in negotiation skills, so that they can have more involvement in discussions of their futures within the family.
  - o Phase 2 reinforces this recommendation, with the emphasis on how to engage in participatory discussion within the family and also on confidence building of young women.

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