



தமிழ்மணம் சர்வதேசத் தமிழ் ஆய்விதழ்

Peer-Reviewed | Open Access | Crossref | Google Scholar
SJIF Impact Factor 3.5 | Multidisciplinary

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63300/tm11012025.01>



A Study on Opportunities and Vulnerabilities of Teenage Girls in the Urban Educational Institutions in Tamil Nadu with a Special Reference to Tiruchirappalli district

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Article Info

Received on 27-June-2026, Revised on 29-June-2026, Accepted on 29-June-2026, Published on 01-July-2026

ABSTRACT

Human rights are the rights of all to equal opportunities for social, economic and psychological development are prescribed and not on the basis of race, colour, caste, religion or gender. The situation has deteriorated to such extent that the majority are deprived of the opportunity to develop them and denied their natural human rights to personal development. Children are a vulnerable section of human societies. Adolescence is a transformative developmental stage marked by physical, emotional, social, and cognitive transitions. For teenage girls, these changes are often intensified by gender norms, academic pressure, safety concerns, and social expectations. In many Indian contexts, including urban and semi-urban regions such as Tiruchirappalli, teenage girls encounter unique challenges that demand systemic support from both families and institutions. The questionnaire has been provided to students ranging from 13 -18 years old both in schools and colleges to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by teenage girls in Tiruchirappalli district.

Keywords: *Social expectations, Vulnerabilities, Gender norms, Safety Concern.*

Introduction

Adolescence is widely recognized as a crucial transitional phase in the human life course, marking the shift from childhood to adulthood. This period is characterised by rapid physical maturation alongside significant emotional, cognitive, and social development. Individuals begin to develop a stronger sense of identity, increased self--

For teenage girls, adolescence often involves negotiating complex and sometimes conflicting demands. Educational expectations intensify during this stage, coinciding with heightened sensitivity to social relationships, peer approval, and self-ongoing brain development, particularly in areas related to impulse control and emotional regulation. As a result, this phase can be both a period of opportunity for learning and self-

Role of Urban Educational Institutions

Urban educational institutions play a central role in shaping the academic and social experiences of teenage girls. Beyond formal instruction, these institutions function as important spaces for socialization, identity formation, and skill development. In urban settings, schools and colleges often provide access to better infrastructure, trained faculty, digital resources, and extracurricular opportunities, which can enhance learning outcomes and broaden career aspirations. Educational institutions also serve as platforms where teenage girls interact with peers from diverse backgrounds, contributing to wider social exposure and increased awareness of societal issues. However, the influence of these institutions extends beyond academic achievement, as they significantly impact emotional well-being, self-confidence, and future orientation during adolescence.

Educational institutions play a particularly influential role during adolescence, as they function not only as spaces of academic instruction but also as key sites of socialization. For teenage girls in urban settings, schools and colleges often provide exposure to diverse ideas, technological resources, and future career possibilities.. The interaction between developmental changes and institutional expectations thus makes adolescence a sensitive and formative stage, requiring careful academic and policy attention.. Tamil Nadu state has historically prioritized access to schooling and higher education, resulting in increased enrolment of girls, particularly in urban areas. At the same time, rapid urbanization and competitive academic environments have introduced new pressures for students. Teenage girls in Tamil Nadu's urban institutions navigate expectations related to academic excellence, social behaviour, and future employment within a changing socio-economic landscape. Examining their experiences within this specific regional context allows for a more grounded understanding of how opportunities and vulnerabilities are shaped by local educational structures and cultural expectations.

Research Gap

While existing studies have extensively explored adolescent development, gender issues, and educational access in India, limited empirical research focuses specifically on the lived experiences of teenage girls within urban educational institutions in Tamil Nadu. Many studies address either opportunities associated with education or vulnerabilities faced by adolescents in isolation, without examining their intersection within institutional contexts. Moreover, the voices and perceptions of teenage girls themselves are often underrepresented in empirical analyses. This study seeks to address this gap by simultaneously examining opportunities and vulnerabilities through primary survey data, thereby offering a contextual and gender- .It focus the Opportunities and Vulnerabilities of Teenage Girls in the Urban Educational Institutions in Tiruchirappalli district , with a population of ~ 2.72 million (2011), exhibits a favorable overall sex ratio (1,013 females per 1,000 males) and a female literacy rate of ~ 76.9%. These suggest a baseline of gender parity better than many Indian districts.

However, deeper health and nutrition indicators reveal critical vulnerabilities: about 8.6% of under-5 children are malnourished; while a recent adolescent health screening (2023-24) found ~ 84% adolescents in the district are anemic. These statistics indicate that many girls entering adolescence may already be nutritionally compromised. Given adolescence's demands, rapid growth, menstruation, higher nutritional needs and such deficiencies heighten risks for poor growth, weakened immunity, school dropouts, and long-term health problems.

The existing data gaps regarding early marriage, mental health or educational aspirations for teenage girls in Tiruchirappalli highlight the need for dedicated district-level surveys.. Thus, Tiruchirappalli warrants targeted adolescent-girl interventions: nutrition supplementation, anemia management, adolescent-friendly health services, school retention programmes.

Objectives

The present study aims to examine the experiences of teenage girls in urban educational institutions in Tamil Nadu with specific reference to Tiruchirappalli district both opportunities and vulnerabilities.

- To identify the educational opportunities available to teenage girls in urban educational institutions in Tamil Nadu.
- To examine the academic, social, and psychological vulnerabilities faced by teenage girls within urban educational settings. in Tiruchirappalli district.
- To analyse the influence of institutional environments on the personal and educational development of teenage girls.
- To assess the role of urban educational institutions in shaping aspirations, awareness, and future opportunities among teenage girls. in Urban Educational Institutions in Tiruchirappalli

Review of Literature

Scholars have extensively examined adolescence as a critical developmental stage marked by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social transformations. Santrock (2019) conceptualizes adolescence as a formative period in which identity development, peer relationships, and emotional regulation play a central role in shaping behaviour. The author emphasizes that adolescents are particularly responsive to their social and educational environments, making this stage both developmentally significant and potentially vulnerable.

Santrock's framework provides a theoretical basis for understanding the challenges faced by teenage girls within institutional settings.

Focusing specifically on adolescent girls, Pipher (2017) highlights the psychological and emotional struggles encountered during adolescence in contemporary society. Her work examines issues such as declining self. Pipher argues that educational and cultural environments strongly influence girls' emotional well-being.

From a neuro developmental perspective, Siegel (2014) explains adolescent behaviour through on-going brain development. He identifies emotional sensitivity, heightened stress responses, and risk-taking tendencies as outcomes of neurological changes during this stage. Siegel's work contributes to understanding why adolescents may experience academic and social pressures.

Within the Indian context, Nambissan (2010) examines school education as a social institution shaped by class, gender, and structural inequalities. The author highlights how educational institutions can reproduce

social norms while simultaneously offering opportunities for empowerment. Her analysis is particularly relevant for understanding gendered experiences within urban educational institutions in Tamil Nadu. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive foundation for examining the intersection of adolescence, gender, and education.

Methodology

The present study adopts a survey method to examine the opportunities and vulnerabilities experienced by teenage girls in urban educational institutions in Tiruchirappalli.. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed through Google Forms. The survey method was chosen as it enables systematic collection of quantitative data directly from respondents and allows for efficient analysis of patterns and trends.

The sample size for the study consists of 70 respondents, selected from urban educational institutions. The respondents were teenage girls aged between 13 and 18 years, representing a crucial developmental phase of adolescence. This age group was specifically chosen to capture

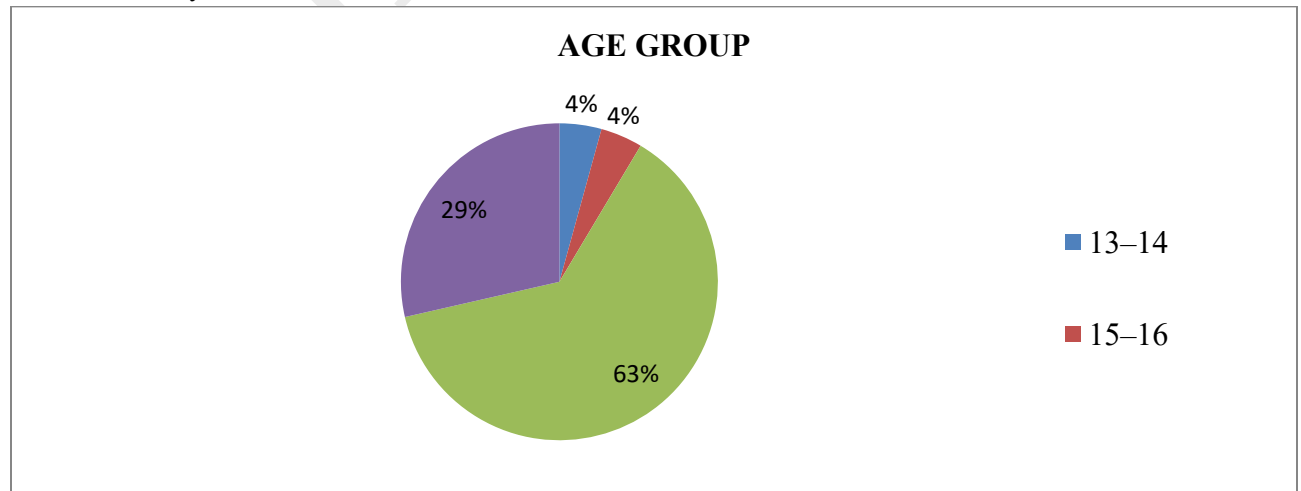
perceptions related to academic experiences, institutional support, and challenges faced within urban educational settings.

Ethical considerations were given due importance during the data collection process. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that the data would be used solely for academic and research purposes. For data analysis, Google Sheets was used as the primary analytical tool. The responses collected through Google Forms were exported into Google Sheets, where the data were organized and processed. Statistical representations such as pie charts generated to visually present the findings.

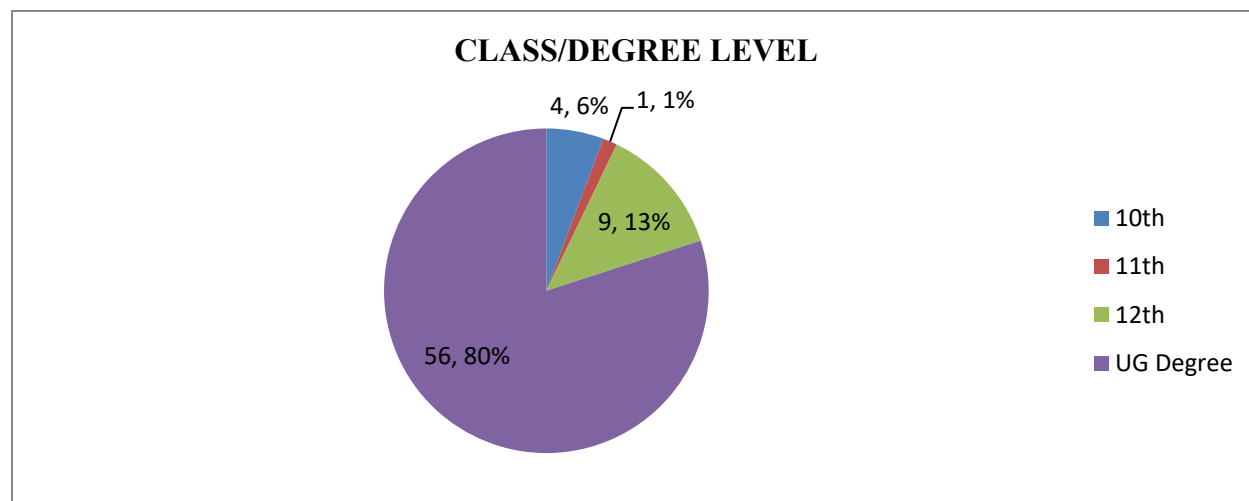
Data Analysis and Interpretations

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey was conducted among 70 teenage girls studying in urban educational institutions. The age distribution indicates that a majority of respondents fall within the 15–18 years age group, representing the core adolescent phase. A smaller proportion belonged to the 13–14 age groups, while many respondents were above 18 years.

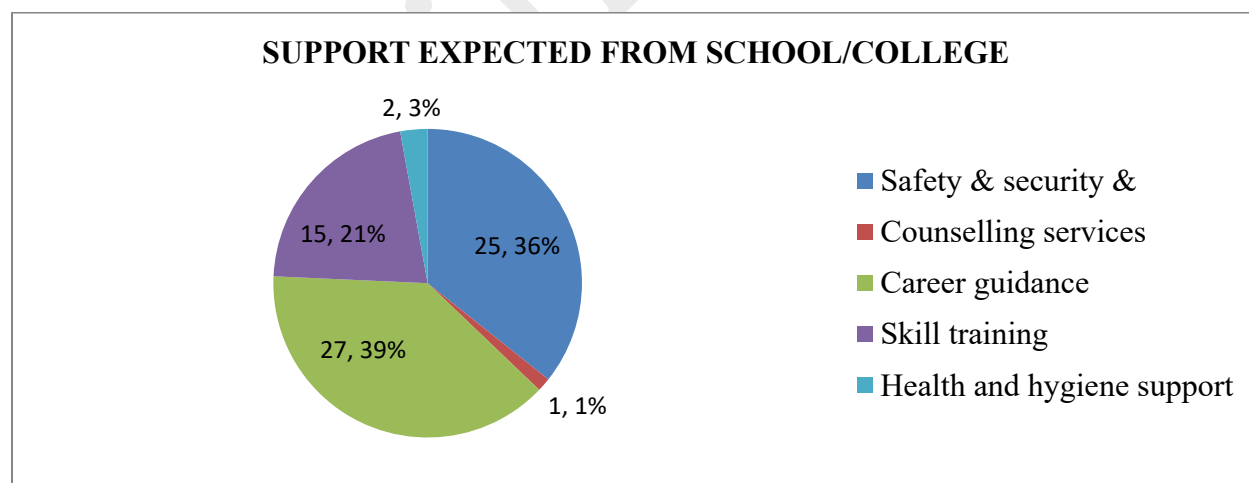


This table illustrates the age-wise distribution, highlighting that late adolescence constitutes respondents were pursuing undergraduate degree programmes, followed by students from higher secondary classes. and college students . This indicates that the study largely captures perceptions of girls who are transitioning from school to higher education.

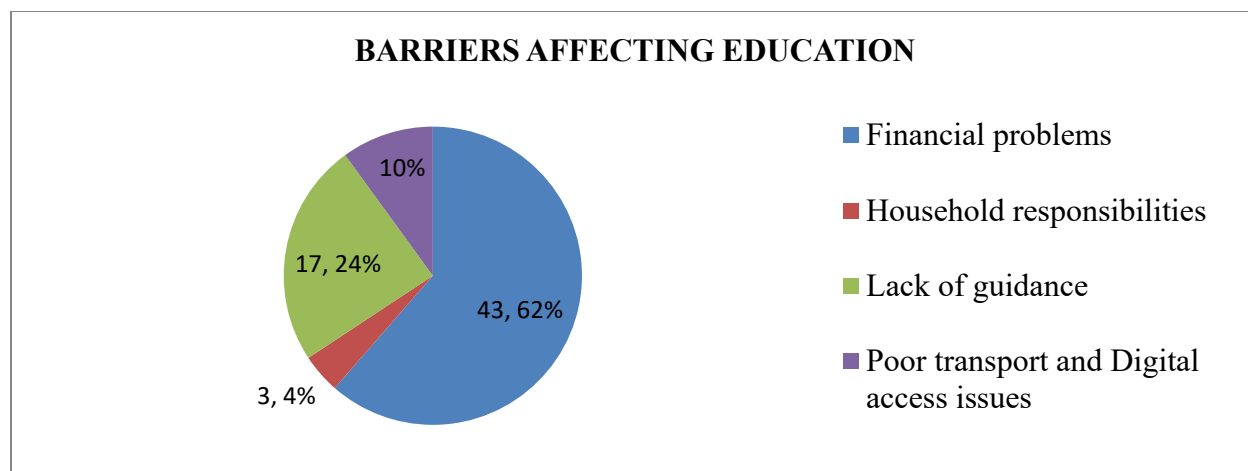


This table shows the distribution across class and degree levels. The institutional background of respondents shows that a majority were enrolled in private educational institutions, followed by aided institutions, while a smaller proportion studied in government institutions. It depicts the institutional composition of the sample, reflecting the dominance of private institutions in urban educational spaces.

Educational Opportunities

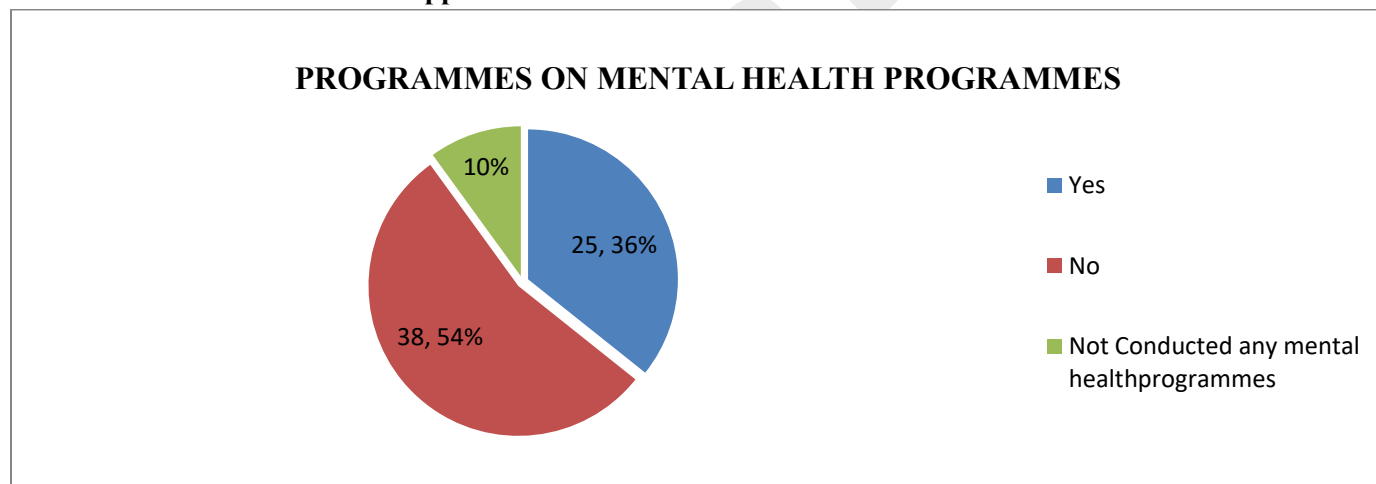


The findings reveal mixed experiences regarding access to educational opportunities. Half of the respondents reported having access to coaching or skill- no access. This suggests need of counselling services for the enrichment opportunities within urban institutions.



This table illustrates the major barriers impacting education. When asked about barriers affecting education, financial difficulties and lack of guidance emerged as the most significant challenges, followed by issues related to digital access and transportation. This highlights that despite urban settings, structural and socio-economic constraints continue to affect educational continuity.

Mental Health and Emotional Support

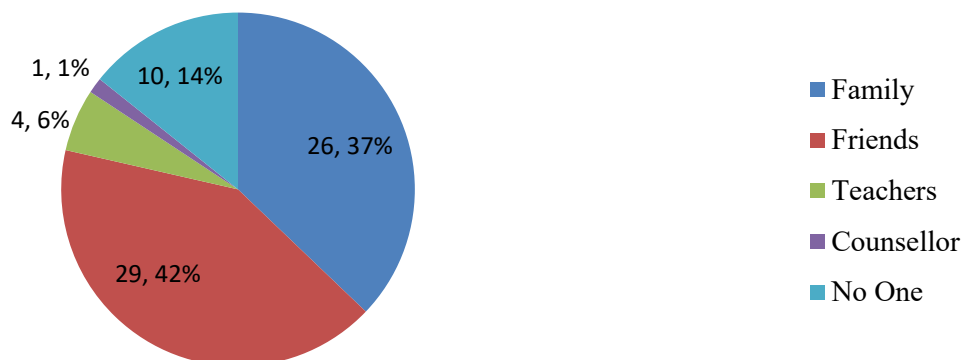


Participation in counseling or mental health awareness programmes was reported by only a minority of respondents, while many indicated that such programmes were either not attended or not conducted at all. This reflects a significant gap in institutional mental health initiatives

Support Expectations and Perceived Challenges

Respondents expressed a strong expectation for emotional support and trust from family, followed by freedom and encouragement. Financial and academic supports were considered important but secondary. This figure presents family-based support expectations

SUPPORTERS WHILE STRESSED



From educational institutions, students primarily expected career guidance, safety measures, and counseling services, indicating that girls view schools and colleges as key support systems

Interpretation

Adolescent girls in Tiruchirappalli encounter a range of interconnected challenges that affect their educational progress, health, and psychosocial development. Strong academic expectations combined with inadequate career counseling and unequal access to quality educational and digital resources contribute to heightened stress and uncertainty about future pathways, particularly among those from rural and semi-urban settings. Concerns related to personal safety in public spaces and during routine travel restrict mobility and reduce participation in extracurricular, leadership, and sporting activities. Psychological distress, including anxiety and emotional strain, is intensified by examination pressure, social comparison, and limited

availability of professional counseling and supportive environments.. Structural gender inequalities persist in the form of differential educational investment, disproportionate domestic responsibilities, and early social expectations regarding marriage. Inadequate awareness of menstrual health, social stigma surrounding reproductive issues, and insufficient sanitation facilities in some schools further compromise health and dignity.

Financial limitations constrain access to higher education, skill development, and enrichment opportunities, while prevailing cultural norms impose behavioural restrictions and fear of social judgment. Emerging risks, including unregulated peer relationships, substance exposure, and uncertainty created by a rapidly changing labour market, highlight the need for context-specific, gender-responsive interventions to support adolescent girls' holistic development. Teenage girls in Tiruchirappalli today stand between growing opportunities and social vulnerabilities. Improving counseling support, safety measures, health awareness, life-skills training, and equal opportunities can greatly empower them.

Suggestions for Improving Opportunities and Safety

The respondents suggested multiple measures to improve opportunities and safety for girls in Tiruchirappalli. Key recommendations included strengthening security systems, improving safe transport, increasing career guidance programmes, conducting awareness campaigns, and expanding mental health support services. Several respondents also emphasized the role of family and community involvement in enhancing girls' well-being.

Suggestions

To effectively address the multidimensional needs of adolescent girls, a coordinated, evidence-based strategy is essential. Conducting a comprehensive district-level survey among girls aged 10–19 years would generate critical data on nutritional status, anaemia prevalence, menstrual hygiene practices, school retention, early marriage, aspirations, digital access, mental health needs, exposure to abuse, and levels of parental support, thereby enabling informed planning. Improving school retention requires gender-sensitive educational policies that build on female literacy levels by promoting secondary and higher education enrolment, offering targeted scholarships, integrating life-skills education within schools. Counseling services across urban and rural areas would further support physical and mental well-being. Finally, instituting a robust

monitoring and evaluation framework with periodic data collection at two- to three-year intervals is crucial for assessing progress, identifying gaps, and refining targeted interventions to improve outcomes for adolescent girls.

Conclusion

India has implemented several government-led initiatives aimed at improving the health, education, and overall empowerment of adolescent girls. The Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation (WIFS) programme addresses the high prevalence of anaemia by providing supervised iron–folic acid supplementation and periodic deworming to adolescents nationwide. The Menstrual Hygiene Scheme seeks to enhance menstrual health management among girls aged 10–19 years in rural areas by improving access to sanitary products and promoting awareness on hygienic practices. The Kishori Shakti Yojana focuses on unmarried adolescent girls from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly school dropouts, with interventions centered on nutrition improvement, life skills development, and confidence building. Balika Samridhi Yojana provides financial incentives at birth and educational scholarships to encourage school enrolment, delay early marriage, and foster positive societal attitudes toward the girl child. Complementing these efforts, the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA) adopts a holistic approach for girls aged 11–18 years by integrating supplementary nutrition, health services, life skills education, and vocational guidance. Collectively under these schemes could addressing the nutritional, educational, and social needs of adolescent girls.

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