

# One step forward towards gender equality through the Kanyashree Scheme in West Bengal

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**Abstract:** This article suggests that socio-economic exclusion and disadvantages of young girls is developed with a revolutionary prism. Identifying social and economic programme elements could help build a package of interventions for "transformative social protection" for girls in developing countries. The article explores an indicative collection of social security elements that could turn teenage girls' social protection lens by engaging in their long-term human capital accumulation and social inclusion. An initiative by West Bengal Govt. "Kanyashree" scheme is one step forward towards the empowerment of girls. In this article, the impact of "Kanyashree" to society is studied.

**Keywords:** Kanyashree prakalpa/scheme, girl students, child marriage.

**Introduction:** In recent decades, developed countries have seen several milestones in their development rates, allowing them to pull millions out of poverty. Despite this, the systemic discrimination faced by girls remains an unresolved problem, manifested by difficulties facing access to education (Lewin and Little 2011) and employment (Banu 2016). Despite increased enrolment in primary education (Chitrakar 2006), access to and completion of secondary education for adolescent girls remains a challenge, particularly for girls from the most impoverished families (Herz 2006). Cultural practises like child-marriage (Raj, McDougal, and Rusch 2012) further impede girls' access to secondary and tertiary education and decent work (Child Rights Committee 2016). These problems have a negative impact on how adult girls interact with the organised labour market, with fewer women being able to access economic opportunities (World Bank 2018) and social gains (International Labor Office 2017b).

This dilemma gets more knotty as parental decisions regarding teenage girls and community norms surrounding early marriage and pregnancy are strongly interrelated (Psaki, 2016). Field and Ambrus (2008) found that a one-year marriage interval between 11 and 16 years will increase schooling by an average of 0.22 years, and adult literacy by 5.6%. Sheehan et al. (2017) found that there are high economic advantages to countries' investments in secondary school attendance, quality schooling, and child marriage reduction; and these investments are especially significant in low-income countries where gender disparity is also high. Chaaban and Cunningham (2011) use cross-country evidence to demonstrate that the participation of teenage girls in the education system is essential, particularly in developing countries where the returns to girls' education are substantial and often surpass the returns in developed countries and boys' education.

Ensuring young girls access to schooling, though, is full of obstacles. The key challenges to girls' education are – social and cultural influences, early marriage, schooling opportunity costs, lack of separate toilets, lack of female teachers, school or school abuse, distance to school, schooling costs, low value for girls' education and insecurity (GPE 2018). Several of these obstacles are socio-economic. Analysis has demonstrated that well-designed social security initiatives such as cash transfers can effectively overcome these socio-economic hurdles, and such interventions can be especially beneficial for girls in youth (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011). As Baird says, "Adolescent girls are seen as a crucial population focus community to crack poverty transmission in developed countries effectively. Interventions that help teenage girls achieve their full potential by enhancing their education, enhancing skills, and delaying childbearing have the potential to build a virtuous circle that improves health, particularly child health, and empowerment of women – eventually leading to higher economic development" (Baird, McIntosh, and Özler 2016). It is a win-win scenario for politicians, as promoting teenage girls' advancement and empowerment will not only help stronger economic growth but will also help the realisation of the international child rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. One means of resolving the particular socio-economic disadvantages of teenage girls can be found in the "Transformative Social Security" system suggested by Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2007).

The Revolutionary Social Security paradigm conceptualises vulnerability as rooted in a socio-political context, with the need for disadvantaged people to handle systemic threats. It thus goes beyond the normal emphasis on economic vulnerability and locates vulnerability in a socio-political context. In this context, the "transformative" aspect focuses on resolving social vulnerability by implementing policies that "integrate people fairly into society, empowering all to benefit

from the gains of development and encouraging excluded or oppressed communities to assert their rights" (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2007).

This makes the system special for challenging the underlying risks and weaknesses facing young girls and future steps to resolve them. This is because it conceptualises the need for concrete strategies that directly and indirectly contribute to balancing social and power dynamics within the family and between girls and boys, rather than relying on economic disadvantage. This is important as girl children face unique physical/biological vulnerabilities, vulnerabilities linked to dependence as well as an institutionalised disadvantage (Sabates-Wheeler and Roelen 2011), which prohibits them from reaching their true potential.

This article argues that social security systems can be developed in emerging countries through a transformative perspective to effectively tackle the socio-economic exclusion and insecurity of girls in accessing higher education, thus assisting them in chalking socio-cultural norms towards empowerment. The rest of the paper is structured as follows – the next section presents the social security literature that examines teenage girls' vulnerabilities and is backed up by learning from country-specific examples discussing these interventions and their effects. The final segment introduces a package of components planning and introducing transformative social security for young girls in developed countries.

In this paper, data of Nandakumar block have been collected. The data have been collected for the duration of 12 years. The source persons are from randomly selected villages. Based on the data set, the effects of Kanyashree scheme on the society is discussed with statistical results.

### Literature review on social security for girls:

"Social security" can be described as "a series of public activities addressing hunger, insecurity and exclusion, as well as providing means to cope with significant life-cycle risks" (UNICEF and World Bank 2010). Over the past few decades, social security systems have been developed globally to ensure that economic development gains meet the poorest and most vulnerable communities in developing countries (UNICEF 2009). Children's social protection how-ever lags behind (International Labor Office 2017b). In contrast, the need to build tailor-made social protection interventions has taken on a new life with Sustainable Development Target 1.3 on social protection systems. This is troublesome as studies have demonstrated the efficacy of social protection services, particularly child-focused cash transfers; There is growing evidence that child-sensitive social security services will interrupt intergenerational poverty loops (UNICEF and World Bank 2010). This is significant as intergenerational poverty has long-term impacts on children in different ways – poverty during childhood is closely correlated with lower school attendance, higher dropouts, lower educational performance, decreased economic ability and the consequent impact on future living standards (many of the challenges mentioned in section 1).

Long-term research has shown that educational improvements in upper primary and secondary schools have a significant effect in reducing early fertility among teenage girls (including early fertility leads to girls dropping out of school, early childbirth affects teenage girls' wellbeing as well as their children; Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer 2015). A comprehensive analysis of initiatives targeting teenage girls in low- and middle-income countries found that across various types of interventions, cash transfer services were especially successful in raising marriage age, decreasing teenage marriage rates, overall fertility rates, and teen pregnancy prevalence. The review also found that interventions that encourage or enable school attendance among teenage girls substantially minimise early marriage and childbirth (McQueston, Silverman, and Glassman 2013). Crucially, incentive-based activities and empowerment programmes will help discourage child marriage (Lee-Rife et al. 2012).

Therefore, implementing social protection services customised to the threats and vulnerabilities posed by adolescent girls in their local environments is key for social protection services to develop human resources. This is important as one of the main critiques received by social security policies is that they do not sufficiently distinguish between various disadvantaged populations in the challenges they face in taking up programmes and provisions, nor do they aim to overcome systemic obstacles present in society that inhibit people from making a meaningful change in their lives (Sabates-Wheeler and Roelen, 2011). Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler's "transformative social security" definition provides a solution to this by factoring risks and vulnerabilities into creating effective social protection systems. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler describe transformative social security as "All interventions that shift income or assets to the disadvantaged, protect the disadvantaged from the costs of living, and improve the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the ultimate goal of expanding the benefits of economic growth and reducing the economic or social deprivation of the disadvantaged, disadvantaged and marginalised; This system points out the following social security categories:

- i. Provision: interventions relieving poverty;
- ii. Preventive: steps to avoid deprivation;
- iii. Promotion: revenue and capacity-enhancing measures;

iv. Transformative: steps to resolve social rights and exclusion issues.

### Cash handling to girls, Indian perspective:

Various government agencies across India have established project-specific cash transfers for girls to improve the importance of girls and tackling child marriage. Some of these programmes include girl education, which also provides the girls a lump sum allowance when she is 18 years old, provided they are not married and are school full. Qualitative research showed that the direct financial assistance provided to children by some of these government programmes, with the funds distributed to banks on behalf of the girl child, were viewed by the government and beneficiaries as a powerful empowerment mechanism (Sekher 2012).

One example is the cash conversion system for West Bengal's Kanyashree Prakalpa. This policy is structured to discourage, provide and facilitate cash transfers to unmarried girls (from low-income families) aged between 13 and 18 and gives a one-time, broader transferral to the 18-year-old girl to help the recipient remain unmarried and in the school. Interestingly, as she turns 13, the little girl herself takes part in the class. Kanyashree girls must open bank accounts and provide cash deposits on their accounts, thereby the the financial incorporation of beneficiaries and getting acquainted with the banking system. The curriculum also starts to interact with tertiary education and to establish links to livelihoods. A recent independent key survey of Kanyashree beneficiaries shows initial signs of a highly successful programme , particularly in addressing youth casualties and child marriages (Dutta and Sen 2018).

### Database:

To find the effect of the Kanyashree scheme, the data of three parameters have been collected. The parameters are 1. School attendance, 2. Child marriage, 3. Abortion of girl child. These are three major drawbacks of our society in the recent past. The data of these three parameters have been collected 4 years before the scheme (2008-2011), initial 4 years (2012-2015) and last 4 years (2016-2019).

The first parameter is school attendance. The percentage of girl students are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: The data of attendance of girl students (numbers in the table indicates the percentages of girl students)

School Names	Before Kanyshree (2008-2011)	Initial four years of Kanyashree (2012-2015)	Kanyashree (2016-2019)
BMNHS	45	46	51
KVBM	52	51	54
JKHS	55	53	59
MRHS	46	48	48
BAHS	36	37	40

The first parameter is child marriage, i.e. the marriage before 18 years of age. The number of child marriage are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The number of child marriages.

Villages	Before Kanyshree (2008-2011)	Initial four years of Kanyashree (2012-2015)	Kanyashree (2016-2019)
DhitaiBasan	10	9	2
Mandergechiya	15	14	2
Sonamui	9	10	0
Keshabpur	23	22	1
Basudebpur	13	10	0

The third parameter is the number of girl child deaths/abortion due to several diseases. The data is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: The number of girl child deaths and abortion.

Villages	Before Kanyashree (2008-2011)	Initial four years of Kanyashree (2012-2015)	Kanyashree (2016-2019)
DhitaiBasan	10	8	2
Mandergechiya	15	12	2
Sonamui	9	8	0
Keshabpur	23	15	1
Basudebpur	13	10	0

Data analysis:

Result 1

Anova: Single Factor

#### SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Before Kanyashree (4 years)	5	234	46.8	53.7
Initial three years of Kanyashree	5	235	47	38.5
Kanyashree (Last 4 years)	5	252	50.4	50.3

#### ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	40.93333	2	20.46667	0.430877193	0.659608442	3.885293835
Within Groups	570	12	47.5			
Total	610.9333	14				

From result 1 it seems that, the attendance rate of girl students has increased after the implementation of the Kanyashree Scheme. At very beginning after implementation of Kanyashree Scheme (first 4 years) the average attendance of girl children have increased by 0.2 percent (from 46.8% to 47%). However, it is significantly increased by 3.4 percent after 4 years of implementation of Kanyashree Scheme (from 47% to 50.4%).

By testing ANOVA with single factor, we have seen that, the probability value of F-statistic is 0.6596 i.e. the model is not significant at 10 percent level at all. Hence, we cannot be concluded that The attendance of girl students is increased after the Kanyashree scheme. This result is seen from the average values of four years of time gap. But the result is not significant as  $p=0.659608442$ , which is well greater than 0.5.

Result 2:

Anova: Single Factor

#### SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Before Kanyashree (4 years)	5	70	14	31
Initial three years of Kanyashree	5	65	13	29
Kanyashree (Last 4 years)	5	5	1	1

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	523.333333	2	261.6667	12.86885	0.001034	3.885294
Within Groups	244	12	20.33333			
Total	767.333333	14				

Child marriage is one of the major problems in our society. After the implementation of the Kanyashree scheme, the trends of child marriage significantly decreased.

By testing the ANOVA with single factor, from result 2 we have seen that, the probability value of F-statistic is 0.001 i.e. the model is significant at 1percent level which concludes that the rate of child marriage is significantly decreased after the implementation of Kanyashree scheme. The major problem of our society is child marriage. After the Kanyashree scheme, the result of child marriage is significantly decreased. As  $p=0.001$ , which is less than 0.05. Hence the result is concluded.

### Result 3

Anova: Single Factor

#### SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Before Kanyashree (4 years)	5	70	14	31
Initial three years of Kanyashree	5	53	10.6	8.8
Kanyashree (Last 4 years)	5	5	1	1

ANOVA							
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit	
Between Groups	454.5333333	2	227.2666667	16.71078	0.00034	3.885294	
Within Groups	163.2	12	13.6				
Total	617.7333333	14					

Deaths of girl children is also an important shock in our society. After the implementation of the Kanyashree scheme, the average number of girl child death significantly decreased year after year.

By testing the ANOVA with single factor, from result 3 we have seen that, the probability value of F-statistic is 0.0003 i.e. the model is significant at 1percent level which concludes that the rate of girl child death is significantly decreased after the implementation of Kanyashree scheme.

#### Conclusion:

Since the study was conducted in one of West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district's community development blocks, women's empowerment understanding is not concrete. Moreover, the sample is also limited. The research will also help to clarify the actual school conditions of female students. One of the study's interesting results is the parents' level of understanding of their female children's further schooling. In most cases, parents and respondent female students acknowledged that they would incur the sum of Rupees Twenty-five thousand they earned from Kanyashree Prakalpa after they reached the age of 18 because of their higher education. To find issues with fact, the research will be performed in other district blocks with various cross-sections of women at their varying levels.

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