

Girl Child Development: A Historical and Thematic Exploration of Literature

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of literature on girl child development from 1914 to 2024, highlighting the thematic shifts that have occurred in response to changing societal norms, cultural contexts, and policy frameworks. Initially focused on broad explorations of female identity, the literature has evolved to encompass complex issues such as education, health, gender identity, psychological well-being, and the impact of violence and socio-economic factors on girl children. Through a comprehensive analysis of significant literature at each stage of this thematic evolution, this study reveals both progress and persistent challenges in addressing the needs of girls worldwide.

Key findings indicate that while substantial advancements have been made in understanding girl child development, gaps remain in integrating historical insights with contemporary challenges. Cultural biases, structural inequalities, and gender-based violence continue to impede progress, necessitating a deeper investigation into intersectionality and localized solutions.

This paper underscores the need for further research that tracks the long-term outcomes of girl children, evaluates the effectiveness of policies and programs, and explores the implications of technology on their development. By synthesizing existing literature and identifying future research directions, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of girl child development, guiding policymakers, educators, and researchers in their efforts to promote gender equality

and empower girls in diverse contexts. Ultimately, this paper advocates for a nuanced approach that addresses both immediate challenges and long-term strategies for improving the lives of girl children globally.

Keywords: Girl Child Development, Thematic Evolution, Gender Equality, Cultural Contexts, Gender-Based Violence, Educational Disparities, Intersectionality.

I. INTRODUCTION

The thematic evolution of research on girl child development demonstrates the dynamic progression of scholarly interest and societal concerns over more than a century. This evolution reflects the shifts in global awareness, cultural norms, and policy priorities related to gender, child welfare, and societal roles. What started as general explorations of female identity and developmental patterns has become a nuanced and multifaceted body of literature. The focus has shifted from basic biological and social aspects of being female to more complex issues such as violence, gender identity, motor development, and social class. Each theme represents a response to emerging global challenges, such as gender-based violence, shifting gender roles, and the increasing recognition of the girl child's specific needs and vulnerabilities. The thematic progression depicted in the figure traces the evolution of research on girl child development from 1914 to 2024. It highlights how the literature on this subject has matured from broader discussions of "female" development to include more precise inquiries into the various influences on a girl's growth, both physical and societal. These themes reflect the growing attention to the intersection of individual and collective factors, such as the impact of socio-economic status, gender roles, and childhood experiences on long-term development outcomes for girls. This growing body of research underscores the need for a deeper understanding of how early childhood experiences, societal expectations, and external forces like violence shape the lives of girls around the world. Each stage of the thematic development represents a critical moment in scholarly inquiry, reflecting the priorities of the time and pushing forward the boundaries of how we understand girl child development in modern society.

Research Problem:

The literature on girl child development has evolved significantly over the past century, reflecting changing societal norms, cultural contexts, and policy frameworks. Initially, research focused broadly on female biological and social development, with limited distinction between girls and women. Over time, the literature expanded to encompass more specific themes, such as education, health, gender identity, psychological well-being, and the impacts of violence and socio-economic status. This thematic evolution illustrates the growing awareness of the

complex factors influencing girl child development globally. However, despite substantial progress, the literature remains fragmented, lacking a cohesive framework that integrates historical insights with contemporary challenges and future needs. This fragmentation hinders a comprehensive understanding of how far the research has advanced and what gaps persist, particularly in addressing issues like gender-based violence, educational disparities, and socio-economic barriers.

There is a critical need for a thorough analysis of the literature on girl child development, covering its evolution over time, the significant contributions at different stages, and future research directions. Such an analysis is vital for several reasons. First, it helps to trace the progression of scholarly inquiry, highlighting how research themes have shifted in response to global socio-economic and cultural changes. Second, it enables the identification of key studies that have shaped our understanding of girl child development at each stage, from early explorations of female identity to contemporary concerns about empowerment, gender equality, and policy interventions. Finally, examining future trends in the literature will provide insights into emerging areas of research, ensuring that future studies align with the evolving challenges faced by girls, particularly in the context of globalization, technological change, and socio-political instability.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to synthesize a wide body of research, providing a holistic view of how the literature on girl child development has evolved and where it is heading. By doing so, this research will not only fill existing gaps in understanding but also guide future research and policy efforts to better address the needs of girls globally.

Research Questions

1. How has the literature on girl child development evolved over time, and what key themes have emerged at different stages of this evolution?
2. What are the significant contributions of literature at each stage in the thematic evolution of girl child development, from foundational research to contemporary studies?
3. What future trends and emerging themes can be anticipated in the literature on girl child development, and how might these influence future research directions?

Research Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology to analyze the evolution of research on girl child development from 1914 to 2024. The review process involves several key steps: first, identifying relevant literature in the Scopus database, using specific keywords related to girl child development. A total of 254 studies are identified and are categorized based on their publication dates to delineate

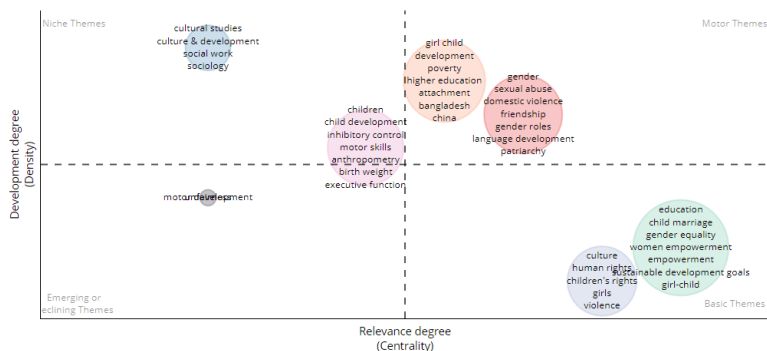
different thematic stages in the literature. Each stage is then examined for significant contributions, methodological approaches, and key findings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how research has evolved over time. Additionally, the analysis incorporates a thematic synthesis of the literature, highlighting recurring themes such as educational disparities, gender-based violence, and cultural contexts. Finally, the study identifies gaps in the existing research and suggests future directions, ensuring that the findings contribute to ongoing discussions about the rights and development of girl children. Through this rigorous approach, the methodology aims to provide a thorough overview of the literature and its implications for policy and practice in promoting gender equality.

Top Journals Publishing on Girl Child Development



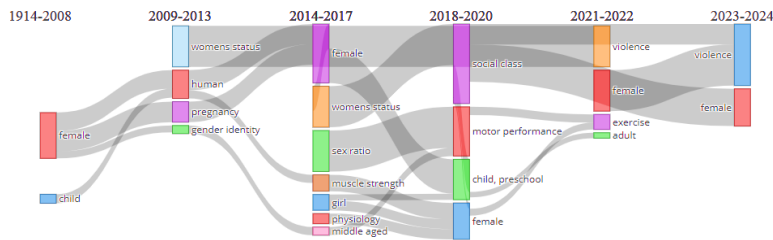
The bar chart reveals the top journals publishing on girl child development, based on the number of articles published. "Social Change" leads the way with 13 articles, followed by the "Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences" with 6. The "Journal of International Women's Studies" and "Library Philosophy and Practice" both published 4 articles. Other journals, such as "Agenda" and "Children and Youth Services Review," had fewer publications in this area. Overall, the graph indicates a growing interest in girl child development research, with certain journals playing a more prominent role in disseminating knowledge on this topic.

Thematic Map



The thematic map offers a visual representation of the existing literature on girl child development, categorizing various themes into three dimensions: relevance degree (centrality), development degree (density), and emerging or declining themes. The centrality axis indicates the importance of themes, with those closer to the center being more influential, while the density axis reflects the volume of existing research, showing that themes positioned higher are more mature and well-studied. Key trends observed include central themes like child development, gender, education, and poverty, which are crucial for addressing girls' challenges. Developing themes such as child marriage, gender equality, and women's empowerment indicate a growing body of research. In the "Emerging" quadrant, themes like human rights, girls' rights, and sustainable development goals are gaining prominence, while themes like motor skills and anthropometry in the "Declining" quadrant suggest decreasing relevance in current studies. Overall, the thematic map provides valuable insights into the literature, highlighting central themes, emerging research areas, and potential future directions for investigation.

Thematic Evolution



1914-2008: Foundation of Female Development Research

The period from 1914 to 2008 marks the foundation of academic interest in the development of the female child. During this era, research focused on the general category of "female," encompassing early explorations into biological and social development with an emphasis on childhood and gender roles. This broad approach laid the groundwork for more specific inquiries that would follow in later decades.

In this early phase, little distinction was made between the developmental stages of girls and women, as researchers focused on establishing baseline knowledge. While general in nature, these studies were essential in recognizing the importance of gender in developmental research, forming the foundation for future, more nuanced analyses.

The literature on girl child development during this period reflects a broad, evolving analysis of the factors influencing the well-being and opportunities available to girls. A persistent theme across studies is the gender bias faced by girl children,

even amidst socio-economic progress. Sudha & Rajan (1999) and Arokiasamy (2004) highlight this trend in India, where female child mortality continues to outpace that of males, particularly in the northern and north-central regions. Both studies emphasize how cultural preferences for sons drive gender-based disparities, with girls often neglected in healthcare, contributing to higher mortality rates.

While Sudha & Rajan (1999) and Arokiasamy (2004) focus on health outcomes, Pagani et al. (2001) shift the focus to education, examining the impact of grade retention on the academic and behavioral development of boys and girls. Pagani's findings reveal that grade retention has a lasting negative effect on girls, exacerbating both academic and behavioral issues. This educational disadvantage parallels the broader gender-based disparities seen in healthcare and social opportunities.

Burman (1995, 2005) critiques the way gender and childhood are often discussed within neoliberal economic frameworks. According to Burman, global development policies sentimentalize the girl child while masking deeper structural inequalities. This critique highlights how universalizing Northern, middle-class norms in global discourse often sidelines the specific struggles of girls in the Global South. Burman's analysis complements the data-driven approaches of Sudha & Rajan (1999) and Arokiasamy (2004), emphasizing the need to address broader social and economic structures, not just statistical outcomes.

Raju (2005) extends this critique, noting that development initiatives aimed at empowering women often fail to address the entrenched gender dynamics that sustain patriarchy in rural India. While well-intentioned, these projects overlook the complex relational dynamics between men and women, which are crucial for genuine empowerment. Like Burman, Raju argues for broader structural changes to address the root causes of gender inequality.

Lanktree et al. (1991) add a psychological perspective, examining the effects of sexual abuse on children, particularly girls. The study reveals that girls with a history of sexual abuse are more likely to experience severe psychological distress, including depression and suicidal tendencies. This highlights how the compounded vulnerabilities girls face extend beyond physical health to psychological well-being. In the educational context, Tanye (2008) examines the limited educational opportunities for girls in Ghana and their impact on social development. Similar to Pagani et al. (2001), Tanye (2008) emphasizes that while education is framed as a key driver of development, girls continue to face significant barriers, both in terms of access and long-term prospects. These barriers highlight how educational disparities reflect broader societal inequalities.

Throughout these studies, cultural norms emerge as a key factor in perpetuating gender inequalities, even amidst economic development and policy interventions. Sudha & Rajan (1999) note that cultural preferences for sons in India

persist despite legislative efforts to curb gender discrimination. Arokiasamy (2004) also underscores that cultural factor, more than economic development alone, play a significant role in sustaining gender biases in child healthcare.

Overall, the literature on girl child development from 1914 to 2008 presents a complex narrative of progress alongside persistent inequality. Despite advancements in healthcare and education, cultural biases and structural inequalities continue to marginalize girls. The studies underscore the need for a holistic approach—one that addresses not only immediate health and educational outcomes but also the socio-cultural frameworks that sustain gender bias. Without addressing these root causes, efforts to improve the lives of girl children may fall short, leaving them vulnerable to continued disadvantages across multiple spheres of life.

2009-2013: Emerging Focus on Gender Identity and Women's Status

From 2009 to 2013, research into girl child development evolved, moving beyond a broad focus on female development to address more specific themes, such as women's status, pregnancy, and gender identity. This shift reflected a growing awareness of the complexities of gender roles and how they impact the experiences of girls. Researchers began exploring the intersection of biology and social roles, particularly regarding pregnancy and early gender identity formation. The focus on gender identity marked a significant recognition that gender is not only a biological construct but also a social one, shaped by cultural norms, expectations, and individual experiences. Discussions during this period increasingly examined how girls navigate their identities in societies that often impose rigid gender roles, setting the stage for future research on empowerment and equality.

The literature from 2009 to 2013 presents a multifaceted analysis of the issues faced by girls across various regions and contexts. While each study highlights different aspects of development—ranging from health and mobility to self-objectification and gender-based violence—there are common themes, particularly the impact of societal norms on perpetuating gender inequality. For example, Raj & Boehmer (2013) and Rafferty (2013) focus on harmful practices such as child marriage, dowry-related violence, and female genital mutilation, which disproportionately affect girls' health, educational opportunities, and social mobility in developing regions. Porter (2011) also highlights the role of patriarchal institutions in sub-Saharan Africa, where mobility restrictions hinder girls' access to essential services like education and healthcare, further limiting their development.

In contrast, studies like Goodin et al. (2011) examine the internalized pressures of sexualized consumerism in Western societies. Although these pressures manifest differently compared to the physical and health challenges in developing contexts, both highlight how societal expectations shape girls' experiences, whether through survival and basic rights or psychological disempowerment. These findings

suggest that societal norms, regardless of geographic or economic context, are central to shaping the lives of girls.

Health disparities also emerge as a significant theme, particularly when comparing developing and developed contexts. Raj & Boehmer (2013) link child marriage to adverse maternal health outcomes, such as higher maternal and infant mortality rates, though they challenge assumptions that early marriage correlates with higher HIV rates. Meanwhile, Catani et al. (2009) delve into psychological trauma in Afghan children, revealing a gender disparity in PTSD prevalence, with boys reporting more traumatic events but girls enduring more complex forms of abuse and exploitation, including labor and domestic violence.

The contrast between structural health outcomes and psychological trauma reflects the multi-dimensional nature of the challenges girls face. While Raj & Boehmer (2013) focus on health, Catani et al. (2009) emphasize mental well-being, showing that both are severely affected by societal conditions. Porter (2011) expands the discussion by exploring how restricted mobility in sub-Saharan Africa perpetuates cycles of poverty and disempowerment. Alongside Rafferty (2013), Porter (2011) demonstrates how gender roles and physical limitations reinforce economic and educational marginalization, creating a vicious cycle of disempowerment.

In developed contexts, Goodin et al. (2011) examine psychological limitations imposed by societal pressures, contrasting the physical mobility restrictions seen in developing countries with internalized gender norms. This juxtaposition highlights the diversity of challenges girls face globally. However, whether the barriers are physical or psychological, they all stem from broader societal pressures that reinforce gender inequality.

Cultural differences also shape how girl child development is framed in the literature. Studies focusing on the global South, such as (Catani et al., 2009; Porter, 2011; Raj & Boehmer, 2013), emphasize survival, access to education and healthcare, and trauma from direct violence. In contrast, studies from the global North, like Goodin et al. (2011) and Sparrow (2010), discuss identity, self-objectification, and technological ethics. Sparrow (2010) takes a philosophical approach, exploring the ethical implications of sex selection and the possibility of a "post-gender" society. This contrasts with the practical policy-based solutions suggested by Rafferty (2013) and Raj & Boehmer (2013), who call for structural interventions to address the root causes of gender inequality.

The literature from 2009 to 2013 illustrates that girl child development is influenced by multiple, intersecting factors, with some challenges being universal and others context-specific. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that tackles both immediate concerns, such as health and education, and the deeper societal and ideological norms that limit girls' potential. Without addressing these

underlying cultural frameworks, efforts to improve the lives of girls are likely to fall short, leaving them vulnerable to continued marginalization.

2014-2017: Intersection of Physical Development and Societal Expectations

From 2014 to 2017, research on girl child development increasingly focused on the intersection between physical and social factors. Themes like muscle strength, physiology, and sex ratio highlighted a growing interest in the biological aspects of development, alongside ongoing concerns about gender imbalance and women's status in society. This period also saw a clearer focus on girls, particularly in their formative years, reflecting an awareness that their experiences differ from those of adult women.

The literature during this period presented a comprehensive understanding of the challenges girls face, including early marriage, education, child labor, domestic violence, and menstrual hygiene management (MHM). Studies examined both the causes and potential solutions to these issues, offering diverse perspectives based on geographical and socio-economic contexts.

Efevbera et al. (2017) and Kyari & Ayodele (2014) both highlighted the negative impact of early marriage on girls' health and education. Efevbera et al. (2017) found that early marriage in sub-Saharan Africa led to higher risks of developmental delays and stunting for children born to young mothers, emphasizing the intergenerational consequences. Kyari & Ayodele (2014), studying northern Nigeria, identified early marriage as a major barrier to girls' education, creating a cycle of limited opportunities. While both studies focused on early marriage, Efevbera et al. (2017) explored how maternal education and wealth could mitigate some of the negative effects, whereas Kyari & Ayodele (2014) focused on structural barriers to education.

Bandara et al. (2015) explored how economic instability impacts child labor, revealing gender differences in response to income shocks. In agricultural contexts, boys increased their labor hours, while girls were more likely to drop out of school, particularly in response to crop shocks. The study suggested that financial resources, such as access to bank accounts, could reduce both male child labor and girls' household work hours. However, it also noted that assets had different effects on boys and girls, indicating that gender norms shape the effectiveness of economic interventions.

Braun & Davidson (2017) examined gender socialization in the UK, finding that children favored gender-conforming behaviors. Boys engaging in masculine activities were preferred by peers, while those showing feminine traits faced rejection. In contrast, girls who participated in masculine activities were more accepted, reflecting societal devaluation of femininity. This study highlighted the complexity of gender dynamics, contrasting with studies like Kalokhe et al. (2015), which emphasized more universal challenges faced by girls in patriarchal societies.

Kalokhe et al. (2015) and Ndlovu & Bhala (2016) both addressed gender-based violence and socio-cultural barriers but took different approaches. Kalokhe et al. (2015) focused on domestic violence (DV) in India, critiquing existing legal definitions and calling for a culturally tailored understanding of DV that includes control over reproductive decisions and finances. Ndlovu & Bhala (2016)'s study on MHM in Zimbabwe emphasized the impact of cultural silence surrounding menstruation on girls' education and participation in school. While Kalokhe et al. (2015) called for structural reforms, Ndlovu & Bhala (2016) suggested practical interventions, such as better sanitation facilities and menstrual hygiene education. MacDonald (2016) critiqued Western-led education initiatives for girls, arguing that campaigns like "Because I Am a Girl" often rely on a static, oversimplified image of girls in the Global South. Using transnational feminist theory, MacDonald warned against imposing Western ideals without considering local cultural realities. This critique stood in contrast to studies advocating for education as a solution to issues like early marriage, such as those by Efevbera et al. (2017) and Kyari & Ayodele (2014).

Ndlovu & Bhala (2016) explored MHM in Zimbabwe, highlighting how poor sanitation facilities, lack of information, and cultural taboos around menstruation hinder girls' participation in education. Their findings emphasized the importance of practical solutions, such as providing reusable menstrual pads and improving sanitation in schools, to enhance girls' educational outcomes. This practical approach complemented broader discussions on socio-cultural barriers, suggesting that immediate, tangible interventions can work alongside structural reforms to support girl child development.

In summary, the literature from 2014 to 2017 presented a nuanced analysis of the challenges girls face, balancing immediate needs, such as health and sanitation, with long-term societal changes, such as education and legal reforms. The diversity of studies highlights the complex interplay between physical, social, and economic factors in shaping girls' development globally.

2018-2020: Social Class, Motor Development, and Early Childhood

In the period from 2018 to 2020, research began to increasingly focus on how external social factors, such as social class, influence girl child development. The inclusion of motor performance suggests that physical development, particularly in early childhood, was a growing area of interest. Researchers were beginning to explore how factors such as socio-economic status and access to resources affect both the physical and cognitive development of girls.

The theme of child, preschool indicates a distinct shift towards early childhood development, with researchers paying closer attention to the formative years and their long-term impact on girl child development. The interplay between social class and early childhood experiences reflects a broader recognition of the role

that structural inequalities play in shaping developmental outcomes for girls, particularly in terms of physical health and educational opportunities.

The literature from 2018-2020 on girl child development presents a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors that impact the lives and development of girls across diverse regions. This body of research highlights both progress and continuing challenges in promoting gender equality and protecting the rights of the girl child.

Several studies emphasize the importance of education and digital empowerment for the girl child. For instance, Oboh (2020) focuses on how technology can empower girls, though it acknowledges existing barriers such as inadequate skills and discrimination. Similarly, Ahoo (2019) highlights the positive cultural changes in Nigeria, where girl-child education is increasingly seen as crucial for socio-economic development. Both studies underscore the transformative potential of education and technology in driving gender equality. These findings align with SDG 5 on gender equality, emphasizing that education plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable development.

In contrast to the optimistic findings on education, other studies like Warri (2018) and Abusaleh & Islam (2019) depict the darker side of cultural practices and systemic issues that continue to harm girls. Warri (2018) discusses the ritual of "sexual cleansing" in Malawi, a practice that violates girls' rights and impedes their development. Similarly, Abusaleh & Islam (2019) explores how patriarchal systems in Bangladesh expose girls to violence and prevent access to justice. These studies provide a stark reminder that harmful traditions still hold back the progress of gender equality in many parts of the world.

Salia et al. (2018) offers a nuanced perspective on women's economic empowerment through microfinance in Ghana. While microfinance is intended to empower women, the study reveals unintended negative consequences, such as conflicts within households, girl child labor, and neglect of domestic responsibilities. This finding presents a contrast to the generally positive narratives around women's economic participation, pointing out that empowerment efforts can sometimes exacerbate existing social tensions.

The theme of sexual violence and marginalization of girls surfaces prominently in the works of Warri (2018) and Abusaleh & Islam (2019), where girls are victims of systematic violence within patriarchal frameworks. This is echoed by Sharma et al. (2018), who discusses sex-selective abortions and strong son preference in Haryana, India, contributing to a skewed sex ratio. These studies converge on the idea that cultural and systemic discrimination against girls remains a pervasive issue, especially in rural and patriarchal societies.

A key contradiction arises between the studies that view empowerment as a straightforward solution (Ahoo, 2019; Oboh, 2020) and those that highlight the

potential downsides of empowerment (Salia et al., 2018). While education and technology are presented as avenues for empowering girls, Salia et al. (2018) points out that without addressing deeper social dynamics, these interventions can lead to unintended consequences like child labor or domestic conflict. This suggests that empowerment initiatives need to be carefully tailored to local contexts to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities.

Ahoo (2019) finds evidence of positive cultural change in Nigeria, where attitudes towards girl-child education are shifting. This contrasts with the findings of Warria (2018) and Sharma et al. (2018), who highlight the persistence of harmful cultural practices, such as sexual cleansing and sex-selective abortions. These contradictions suggest that cultural change is uneven and context-dependent, with progress in some areas while traditional practices persist in others.

The reviewed literature contributes to the theoretical development of girl-child empowerment by extending frameworks of social change, gender equality, and rights-based approaches.

Ahoo (2019) and Oboh (2020) contribute to understanding how shifts in cultural practices and increased access to education and technology can drive gender equality. Their findings support theories of social change that posit education as a critical tool for shifting traditional gender roles. These studies highlight the importance of interventions that challenge deeply ingrained patriarchal structures. The work of Salia et al. (2018) complicates the narrative of empowerment by demonstrating that economic interventions can have mixed results, depending on the social context. This aligns with intersectional feminist theory, which suggests that empowerment cannot be understood in isolation from broader social structures, such as household dynamics, economic status, and gender roles. The study stresses the need for holistic approaches that account for the intersection of economic, social, and gender-based factors.

The studies by Warria (2018) and Abusaleh & Islam (2019) provide critical insights into the ongoing human rights violations against girls. These works reinforce the theoretical framework of rights-based approaches to development, which argue that the protection and promotion of human rights are essential for achieving gender equality. They call for stronger legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect girls from violence and abuse.

Kastor & Chatterjee (2018) and Sharma et al. (2018) add to the body of literature examining the role of patriarchal values in shaping fertility preferences and gender discrimination. Their findings emphasize the persistence of son preference and its impact on fertility decisions and female marginalization. These studies bolster arguments within feminist theory that patriarchal norms remain deeply embedded in many societies, perpetuating inequality and hindering the realization of gender equality.

The literature from 2018-2020 presents a multifaceted view of the challenges and opportunities related to girl-child development. While there is evidence of progress in areas like education and technology access, cultural practices and systemic violence continue to hinder the development and rights of girls. Theoretical advancements point to the need for holistic, context-sensitive approaches to empowerment that address both the material and cultural dimensions of gender inequality. Empowerment initiatives must consider the local context and potential unintended consequences to ensure sustainable and equitable outcomes.

2021-2022: Violence and Physical Well-being

The period from 2021 to 2022 saw a sharp focus on the theme of violence, reflecting the increasing global awareness of the issue of gender-based violence and its impact on the development of young girls. This era marks a critical point in the evolution of girl child research, as scholars began to explore how exposure to violence, whether within the home or society at large, affects the psychological and physical development of girls.

In addition to violence, themes such as exercise and adult suggest a dual focus on promoting physical well-being and understanding the long-term consequences of childhood experiences. The continued presence of female in the thematic map indicates that gender remains a central concern, with researchers continuing to explore how being female affects one's life trajectory from early childhood through adulthood.

The literature from 2021 to 2022 highlights key insights into girl child development, with various studies examining life satisfaction, child marriage, educational attainment, and health outcomes, among others.

Henkens et al. (2022) provides a nuanced examination of life satisfaction among adolescents transitioning into adulthood, focusing on gender and immigration status. The study highlights that girl, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, experience lower and more unstable life satisfaction compared to boys. Life satisfaction followed a nonlinear "M-shape" development, decreasing at specific life stages (ages 17–18 and 20–23). This gender disparity in life satisfaction is significant and reflects broader sociocultural and economic inequalities experienced by girls during adolescence.

Bengesai et al. (2021) and Deane (2021) explore the adverse effects of child marriage on girls' education and well-being. Both studies reinforce the widely acknowledged link between early marriage and poor educational attainment, as well as developmental delays. In Zimbabwe, Bengesai et al. (2021)'s research found that child marriage severely hampers the completion of secondary education, a crucial milestone for future socioeconomic mobility. The study emphasizes that child marriage reduces the likelihood of completing high school and achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality).

Deane (2021) highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the child marriage crisis, particularly in Nigeria, the country with the highest global rate of child marriage. The study underscores that pandemics worsen the vulnerabilities of young girls, leading to increased child marriage as a coping mechanism. This aligns with Singh et al. (2022), who found a strong positive relationship between armed conflict and child marriage rates, reinforcing the narrative that girls are disproportionately disadvantaged in times of crisis.

In contrast to the clear disadvantages of child marriage outlined in the aforementioned studies, Čvorović (2022) found that early marriage among Roma mothers was not associated with negative nutritional or developmental outcomes in their children. Instead, the study emphasized that child well-being was more influenced by factors such as maternal literacy, sanitation, and reproductive behaviors. This finding contrasts with studies like Bengesai et al. (2021)'s and Deane (2021)'s, where early marriage was a clear determinant of adverse outcomes. Čvorović (2022)'s research introduces a contextual nuance, suggesting that the impact of early marriage may differ depending on social, cultural, and economic factors.

Wirba et al. (2021)'s study focuses on the gender earnings gap in Cameroon's informal labor market. Like other studies in this review, it highlights gender disparities but emphasizes the economic realm rather than developmental or educational outcomes. The study found that men enjoy an earnings premium over women in the informal labor market, though women have an educational advantage in wage-earning positions. The findings point to the need for interventions focused on human capital development, particularly for women, aligning with the conclusions of Bengesai et al. (2021) and Deane (2021), who called for social change to address gender-based disadvantages in education and labor.

The studies collectively affirm that gender plays a critical role in shaping life satisfaction, educational outcomes, and economic opportunities for girls. However, there are some contradictions. For instance, while Henkens et al. (2022) and Bengesai et al. (2021) reveal significant gender disparities in life satisfaction and educational outcomes, Čvorović (2022) suggests that early marriage among Roma populations does not necessarily result in negative child outcomes. This contradiction might be explained by different socio-cultural contexts, with Roma settlements possibly having distinct coping mechanisms that buffer against some of the negative impacts of early marriage.

Moreover, while child marriage is universally regarded as detrimental to education (Bengesai et al., 2021; Deane, 2021), the nuanced findings from Čvorović (2022) indicate that maternal age at marriage might not always be a predictor of adverse child outcomes, suggesting the importance of contextual factors such as maternal literacy and sanitation.

2023-2024: Persisting Challenges of Violence and Gender

The most recent period, 2023-2024, continues to focus heavily on the theme of violence, indicating its ongoing relevance in discussions about girl child development. This period underscores the persistent challenge of addressing gender-based violence and its enduring impact on girls. The renewed emphasis on violence suggests that while much progress has been made in understanding the complexities of girl child development, significant challenges remain in protecting girls from harm and ensuring their safety.

Alongside violence, the theme of female reappears, reinforcing the importance of gender as a foundational aspect of research on girl child development. This persistence of gender as a theme suggests that, while the specifics of research may have evolved, the central concern of understanding how girls navigate their gendered identities in a complex world remains as important as ever.

The studies provided discuss gender-related challenges across various countries, examining the effects of factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, educational disparities, and gender-based violence on women and girls.

Afrin & Shammi (2023) highlights the exacerbation of gender inequality in Bangladesh due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased domestic violence and widened gender gaps. Similarly, Bawa & Kaur (2023) examines how gender-based violence in displaced person camps in Nigeria affects girls' education, linking violence to the widening of gender achievement gaps.

Murewanhema et al. (2023) also discusses the impact of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in Zimbabwe, illustrating how socioeconomic factors and COVID-19 exacerbated this issue. Both studies highlight the heightened vulnerabilities of women and girls during crises.

Afrin & Shammi (2023) explores the negative effects of the pandemic on women's education, health, and economic contributions in Bangladesh, leading to greater risks. This theme is also present in Ramatsetse & Ross (2022), which discusses the psychosocial impact of absent fathers on young women in South Africa, although it shifts the focus more towards familial structures and their effect on gender identity.

Zing & Shishkina (2024) emphasizes how women's participation in local governance in Ghana is limited, although women are seen as key agents in community development. While the focus is more on governance, the struggles women face in decision-making are related to larger societal disruptions, such as those caused by the pandemic.

Several studies focus on the educational struggles faced by girls. Krishna Nair & Mishra (2023) discusses the lack of basic household amenities in India and how it impedes female education. This focus on structural barriers complements

Afrin & Shammi (2023), who highlights how the pandemic in Bangladesh led to school dropouts, particularly for girls.

Eloff et al. (2023), however, takes a broader look at gender equality, particularly through education and wellbeing. Using vignettes from South Africa and Austria, the study ties gender and wellbeing into broader educational contexts, affirming that while progress has been made, full gender equality remains elusive.

Both Arun & Olsen (2023) and Afrin & Shammi (2023) discuss how women face extreme exploitation in the labour market. Arun & Olsen (2023), however, takes an intersectional approach by focusing on modern slavery, specifically within supply chains and care work, highlighting how gender and economic inequalities enable exploitation. Afrin & Shammi (2023) also ties women's economic hardships during the pandemic to issues such as increased household burdens and job losses, contributing to wider socio-economic disparities.

Afrin & Shammi (2023) and Eloff et al. (2023) both discuss the role of institutions in advancing gender equality. Afrin & Shammi (2023) examines how academic libraries in South Africa contribute to SDG 5 through community engagement, while Eloff et al. (2023) focuses on how educational institutions in South Africa and Austria can promote gender equality through teacher education. Both studies emphasize the need for institutional involvement beyond traditional roles to tackle gender disparities.

Afrin & Shammi (2023) and Zing & Shishkina (2024) both examine gender inequality during the pandemic, but while Afrin takes a broad national and socio-economic view, Zing focuses specifically on women's representation in local governance in Ghana. Zing's localized approach provides a more focused lens on political participation, while Afrin covers multiple areas, including health and education.

Krishna Nair & Mishra (2023) finds that poverty does not significantly impact female education in rural India, but rather, the lack of basic household amenities like sanitation and electricity does. This finding contrasts with the broader discussions in Afrin & Shammi (2023) and Bawa & Kaur (2023), which tie poverty directly to educational disparities for women and girls.

Afrin & Shammi (2023) advocates for a paradigm shift, arguing that neoliberal market economies have failed to address gender inequalities during crises, recommending an ecofeminist approach. On the contrary, Zing & Shishkina (2024) suggests that women's participation in local governance can drive community development, focusing on improving current institutional mechanisms rather than overhauling the economic system.

While all studies discuss the multidimensional impacts of gender inequality, the variations in context and scope reveal nuanced understandings of the challenges women face across different regions. COVID-19 emerges as a critical factor

exacerbating pre-existing inequalities, but the studies differ in how they conceptualize solutions—ranging from structural overhauls to enhancing institutional roles and governance participation.

Future Research Directions:

1. Intersectionality and Identity: Future research should focus on the intersection of gender with other identity factors such as race, socio-economic status, and disability to understand the unique challenges faced by girl children.
2. Impact of Technology: Investigating the effects of technology and digitalization on girl child development is crucial, including the opportunities and challenges it presents in education and social empowerment.
3. Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies to track the developmental outcomes of girl children over time will provide insights into how early experiences and interventions influence their long-term well-being.
4. Cultural Contexts and Local Solutions: Emphasizing culturally sensitive approaches, research should explore how local norms and practices shape girls' experiences and highlight successful community-led initiatives.
5. Mental Health and Policy Effectiveness: Future studies should delve into the psychological impacts of gender-based violence on girl children and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at improving their lives.
6. Despite advancements in understanding and supporting girl child development, significant gaps remain. Cultural biases, socio-economic disparities, and gender-based violence continue to impede progress, underscoring the necessity for targeted research and effective policy interventions. As we look to the future, it is crucial to focus on intersectional approaches that consider the diverse identities of girls, the role of technology in shaping their experiences, and the importance of local cultural contexts in developing effective solutions.
7. In conclusion, this paper not only underscores the critical milestones in the literature on girl child development but also sets the stage for future research directions that will further illuminate the complexities of girlhood. By integrating insights from historical and contemporary research, we can better inform policies and practices that empower girl children, ensuring that their rights, needs, and potential are recognized and nurtured in an increasingly complex world.

II.CONCLUSION

The evolution of literature on girl child development over the past century reflects a dynamic interplay of social, cultural, and policy changes that have shaped our understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by girls globally. From early explorations of female identity to contemporary discussions encompassing education, health, gender identity, and the impacts of violence, the thematic progression illustrates a growing awareness of the complexities surrounding girl child development. This study highlights significant contributions from various stages of research, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that addresses the multifaceted nature of girlhood.

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