



# 'College knowledge hubs' in rural India to open up higher education to disadvantaged communities

- Researchers identify the need for rural universities and colleges in India to advise young people on higher education options
- Young people in rural and semi-urban areas often miss out on appropriate higher education choices due to lack of information

**More young men and women from rural areas of India could gain informed access to higher education and better life chances, tackling age-old obstacles of gender, caste and class, thanks to a project led by the University of Warwick – and a half-million-pound boost from the Fair Chance Foundation.**



Working with communities and higher education college students in the northern Indian state of Haryana, research partners from India and the UK have identified significant social and gender barriers that prevent young people in rural and semi-urban areas from progressing through education and entering university, or that prevent young people from making appropriate decisions about their post-schooling choices.

Funded by the Fair Chance Foundation for an initial five-year project (2017-2021), the team from Warwick, with partners in National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), TISS Mumbai and Ambedkar University Delhi, found that **young people in rural areas and their families have little to no contact with higher education colleges in their vicinity before making higher education choices.**

In rural and semi-urban areas, young people are often the first in their families and communities to have the option of attending higher education. However, they are making choices about their futures without reliable information, which means that choices are being made on the basis of hearsay – and often reinforce stereotypes associated with gender, class and caste.

Equipped with these findings, the research team with project leads at Warwick and the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education/NIEPA are working on a new four-year project – funded by Fair Chance Foundation – **to develop the capacity of state higher education institutions in rural and semi-urban areas of**

**India so they can become 'college knowledge hubs' in their locations.**

The project is working across multiple states in different regions of India. **It is designed to empower college principals and staff to become ambassadors for equity in access to higher education**, passing on vital knowledge and practical guidance in local communities about further study to pupils from the socially and economically disadvantaged groups and their families alike.

**Dr Emily Henderson, from the Department of Education Studies at the University of Warwick, is one of the project leads. She commented:**

“From the first Fair Chance Foundation project, we have the evidence to support the importance of our work with higher education institutions in rural and semi-urban India. With this second funded project, we will be able to facilitate young people making more informed choices about their futures”

**Dr Nidhi Sabharwal, from the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), NIEPA, is leading the project's work within India. She commented:**

“Given the potential for higher education to break the cycle of transmission of socio-economic disadvantage from one generation to the next, widening higher education access for young people from disadvantaged socio-economic groups should be seen as a way of reducing inequalities in the wider society. With our research we believe that we will be able to bring forth the importance of local government colleges as key partners towards realising the national equity goal of improving access and informed choices for students from the socially and economically disadvantaged groups in India.”

**Sumir Karayi, Founder of Fair Chance Foundation commented:**

“The University of Warwick has always championed inclusion and internationalisation in education, which is why we are delighted to have partnered with them. This project is delivering fundamental research to enable policy makers to provide a fairer chance for women in India and beyond. The first project provided research and interventions which we can now work on introducing across many states in India. The project's impact and its potential to help millions of women and disadvantaged young people has far exceeded our expectations when we started the project 5 years ago”.

The Fair Chance Foundation exists to improve the future livelihoods of disadvantaged children and young adults in India through education, and they have generously gifted £500,000 to support the next five years' work of this project.

**Notes to Editors:**

The first funded project, 'A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana' was a five-year research project (2017-2021) that seeks to determine the gendered factors that contribute to educational success for young people in Haryana, India. More information [here](#).

The second funded project, 'Widening Access to Higher Education in India: Institutional Approaches', is a four-year project starting in April 2022, which seeks to develop the capacity of rural and semi-urban higher education institutions to serve as 'college knowledge hubs' in their local areas.

**Image credit:** Anjali Thomas

**15 February 2022**

**For further information, contact:**

Luke Walton, International Press Manager

L.Walton.1@warwick.ac.uk

+44 (0) 7823 362 150

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University of Warwick

Coventry

CV4 7AL

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)24 7652 3523

Fax: +44 (0)24 7646 1606



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Page contact: Web Editor

Last revised: Wed 16 Feb 2022

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