

The Hindu Succession Act

“Despite the Constitution mandating gender equality, inheritance in India was traditionally strongly biased against women. The 1956 Hindu Succession Act (HSA) distinguishes individual property from joint ancestral assets which include land. The fact that rights to the latter are limited to a group—the coparcenary—that comprises only males severely limits females’ ability to inherit joint property. To eliminate the gender inequality inherent in this practice, a number of states reformed this Act by passing substantively similar amendments—referred as Hindu Succession Act Amendments or HSAA—starting from 1987.” A World Bank research team used survey data from three Indian states, one of which amended inheritance legislation in 1994, to assess first- and second-generation effects of inheritance reform using a triple-difference strategy (World Bank, 2014).

Quick facts

Barriers addressed



Prerequisites

[Broader legal constraints >](#)
[Lack of credit history >](#)



Social Norms

[Ambivalence or antagonism towards women's financial independence >](#)
[Women's disproportionate time burden >](#)

Segment focus

1 2 3 4

Geography

[India >](#)

Sources

[World Bank, 2014](#)

Customer Journey Relevance



Key stakeholders involved

World Bank
 India's National Council for Applied
 Economic Research
 Government of India

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Key activities

In 1994, two states in India reformed the Hindu Succession Act to allow women and men the same ability to inherit joint family property. This reform required that coparceners' daughters will attain coparcenary rights by birth, thereby making their status equal to that of sons. Though the HSAA was adopted by a select set of states initially, it was adopted at a national level in 2005.

To analyze effects of inheritance reform, the World Bank used "data from a 2011 follow-up to the 2007 Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) conducted by India's National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. The household survey collected information on three generations – the head and spouse at the time of the survey (generation II), their parents (generation I), and their children (generation III). The total sample comprises 1,209 households with 3,193 generation III descendants."

Outcomes/results

When examining daughters whose mothers had been affected by HSAA, the team found that they spent 7% more time on study than those in households where mothers had not been affected by the HSAA. This suggests a strong second-generation effect of the reform. These results suggest that "the HSAA empowered mothers beyond the assets transferred to them, thereby helping to increase the amount of education consumed by girls versus boys, in line with recent emphasis on the far-reaching impacts of female empowerment."

For the 15–18 year old age group, compared to male siblings, "the HSAA is estimated to have led adolescent females to increase the amount of time spent on productive work by more than 30%, mainly by reducing time spent on schooling and household chores."

Key enabling environment factors for the intervention

- The Indian Constitution mandated gender equality.
- Both state governments and national governments took interest in reforming the discriminatory Act.

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Potential for scale/replicability

Though the reforms were initially adopted by several states, the entire country adopted the amendments in 2005. "Evidence on long-term effects of inheritance law reform beyond the immediate beneficiaries is relevant for India and beyond. At a global level, understanding of longer-term impacts of such a measure will help appreciate the potential and limitations of inheritance reform, compared to other measures and policies, as a means to promote gender equity."

Recommendations from the research

The research team suggests to assess the extent to which the results found in this study carry over to other settings, including in North Indian states. The team also recommends for India more precisely gauge HSA-induced benefits, which will "affect the social desirability of measures to more actively disseminate this piece of legislation or support and monitor its implementation."