

Barriers to Girl's Education in Rural Areas of Mardan: Cultural Norms, Safety, and Facilities

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Abstract

This study looked at the various obstacles to education that females in District Mardan, Pakistan, encounter, including those related to culture, safety, and other factors. The current study identified a number of impediments, including cultural and safety concerns, that prevent female students from pursuing higher education. The study used a qualitative research approach, and data was gathered from 10 male heads of household (parents) of girls in District Mardan who had not received an education through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The literature study on the subject highlights the several challenges that impede girls' education, including societal and cultural norms, family responsibilities, gender discrimination, marriage, financial demands, and safety concerns. The purpose of this study was to examine how cultural limitations affect girls' educational opportunities in District Mardan. For clarity, the thematic analysis emphasised many points in detail. This study was

important for enhancing educational facilities and incentives, increasing work opportunities for girls, and increasing awareness of the importance of girl education among families, communities, and policymakers. The study's findings assisted in making sensible policy decisions and taking practical steps to support girls' education. The results obtained highlighted certain aspects of patriarchal disparities and the need for better and more equitable educational opportunities for girls.

Keywords: education, rural areas, cultural norms, safety, different facilities, Mardan

Introduction

Pakistan is a South Asian country with diverse population and vibrant culture. Despite the bright historical background and culture, the country has struggled to maintain gender balance. One of the most evident factors of gender discrimination in Pakistan is the cultural, safety, and other factors that limit the girls' opportunities for education. The cultural norms and values, which explain acceptable behaviour, embrace cultural understandings and etiquette towards girls. These factors are deeply entrenched in Pakistan's society and cultural life. They have evolved as a consequence of historical practices, cultural and religious backgrounds, and patriarchal attitudes. The identified factors have determined the level of gender norms that have limited the opportunities for girls' educational and social-economic opportunities (Yaqoob, 2012).

Educational attainment is one of the most critical factors in realizing gender equality. However, educating girls is regarded as a fallacy due to conventional beliefs that position girls in the home. The view is driven by patriarchal systems that attach greater importance to a girl's intellectual abilities than to her ability to perform activities in the home setting. Furthermore, this situation is influenced by socioeconomic aspects such as poverty, which poses many challenges, making it difficult for girls to access education due to their poor financial situation. Moreover, even in other cultural standards of living there has already been gender disparity in educational attainment, which was also caused by poverty, lack of infrastructure, and difficult transportation (Ullah et al., 2021). Girls' education has been drastically undermined by Pashtunwali in KPK and Mardan, in particular, is no exception. People in this region of Pakistan have their own customary code of conduct and way of life governed by a code of conduct known as Pashtunwali. This code is embedded in the very fabric of society in the area, but while there are many positive aspects to Pashtunwali ranging from bravery to hospitality and loyalty, the code in fact enforces certain cultural restrictions that

deter girls' education in KPK. The major cultural restriction imposed by Pashtunwali is purdah, which is the word that refers to the splitting of women and girls. However, another restriction under this cultural element is the family honour, or izzat. The latter is hugely focus on the girl's behaviour and conduct. (Shaukat & Pell, 2017).

Cultural gender norms dictate that females, by means of modest behavior and compliance with traditional cultural norms, are professionally and socially obliged to secure the honor and good identification of the family and group (Amin et al., 2021). Girls getting married young is another obstacle to their enrolment in school. Furthermore, Pashtunwali highlights the importance of girls' roles in the house as mothers, wives, and carers, which may deter parents from supporting their daughters' education. Because they feel that their daughters' main responsibilities are to take care of their families and carry out their household chores, some families may consider sending their daughters to school to be a waste of time and money. Due to family reluctance to send their daughters to school for concern that their education will lead them to behave in a way that is viewed as improper or un-Islamic, these restrictions may restrict girls' access to an education (Jalal-ud-din & Khan, 2008).

The disparity in the literacy rates of boys and girls is far greater because of Pashtunwali's cultural restrictions as well as other factors. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2021–22, the general gender literacy rate is as follows: girls have a literacy rate of 51.9 percent, while men have a rate of 73.4 percent. The survey results indicate a worsening of the gender-based literacy rate in KPK. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2021–22, the literacy rate for men is 72.8 percent in KPK and 37.4 percent for girls. This demonstrates the significant obstacles that KPK girls must overcome in order to pursue an education. Based on the district-specific demographics released by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, district Mardan's overall literacy rate is 36.5%. In Mardan, the female literacy rate is 18.38%, while the male rate is 53.5% (Government of KPK, 2023).

The 2013 Annual Statistics of Education Report (ASER) states that Mardan's literacy rates for men over the age of ten are 70%, while those for girls are 35%. Girls make up 45 percent and boys make up 55 percent of the 371,364 students enrolled in government schools. Out of 25 districts, the district is ranked 10th overall in the literacy index. While the KPK government's report discusses the district's overall gender-wise literacy rate, this one focuses on the specifics of the higher secondary school in Mardan (ASER, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to determine possible interventions that may be used to remove the cultural barriers preventing girls in the Mardan district from accessing education. The cultural barriers that prevent girls in District Mardan from receiving an education are clarified by this research. Increasing the number of girl education institutions, hiring qualified teachers, building facilities in those institutions, involving the community, and encouraging parents to take an encouraging stance towards their daughters' education are just a few of the policy recommendations made by the study.

Research Objectives:

Examining the various obstacles cultural, safety, and otherwise that keep girls in District Mardan from going to school is the main objective of this research. The study specifically aims to identify the social and cultural, safety, and other challenges that girls encounter when trying to get an education.

- To examine the barriers to girl's education in rural areas of Mardan such as cultural norms, safety, and different facilities.

Research Questions:

Following are some of the research questions that have been incorporated into this research.

1. What are the main cultural barriers that girls in District Mardan confront when they want to go to school?
2. In what ways do preconceptions and cultural restrictions prevent girls in District Mardan from attending school?

Significance:

For a number of reasons, the term "Barriers to Girl's Education in Rural Areas of Mardan: Cultural Norms, Safety, and Facilities" is important. The study's goal was to look into the various obstacles cultural, safety, and otherwise that keep girls in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Mardan district from going to school. This study is extremely important because gender inequality is a prevalent issue in Pakistan, particularly in rural regions. Girls are frequently forced to stay inside their homes and denied access to educational opportunities. This impedes their progress both personally and professionally and affects the country's social and economic development.

The study is important because it clarifies the social constraints that prevent girls from pursuing higher education. It is expected that the results of this study will influence education policy, particularly in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. NGOs, educational institutions, and other stakeholders promoting gender equality and girl empowerment would also find the report to be a useful resource.

The study is significant since it concentrates on Mardan, a specific district in Pakistan where there hasn't been much research on girls' education. The research's conclusions allowed policymakers to make well-informed decisions based on the cultural, sociological, and economic factors that affect girls' access to school. Understanding how cultural norms and behaviors may be changed to support gender equality and girls' education would also be helpful.

The study is important since it helped to increase Pakistani girls' access to higher education. It is believed that the research will raise awareness and knowledge of the various barriers that exist in the area, including cultural, safety, and other challenges, and will ultimately lead to legislative reforms that support gender equality and the empowerment of girls. The findings of this study may have helped educators,

administrators, and legislators create more effective and acceptable frameworks for instructor training.

Literature Review

Girls' education is vital to human development and that it is a key to both gender equality and economic growth. However, cultural barriers have frequently prevented girls from obtaining an education, especially in developing nations like Pakistan. Education for girls was outlawed by the Taliban regime from 1996 and 2001. The researchers look at the impact of the Taliban regime on fertility outcomes, the labour market, and schooling using data from the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. For every extra year that a woman is exposed to the Taliban occupation while attending school, her chances of finishing her basic education are decreased by roughly two percentage points, especially in rural and Pashtun districts (Noury & Speciale, 2016). They came to the conclusion that the Taliban's restrictions on girls' education had a negative impact on the educational, labour market, and fertility outcomes of Afghan girls.

Mahmood (2012), who discusses the cultural limitations and gender-based education in Pakistan, girl empowerment is an important yet unmet objective that cannot be attained without receiving a top-notch education. Girls' education has been ignored despite making up more than half of the population, which has created reliance and hampered economic growth. Governments have tried to achieve gender equality through their education policies, but social and cultural barriers have prevented them from living up to their promise. He concentrated on the difficulties that Pakistani girls have encountered on a social, cultural, and economic level. He came to the conclusion that the biggest barriers to girls' education are cultural beliefs, especially in Pakistan's rural areas.

Ahmad et al. (2014) concentrated on the political and sociocultural impediments to girls' education in Pakistani society, particularly those that prevent coeducation. The study discovered that the main obstacles to the coeducation system include male dominance, the patriarchal system, strict norms and traditions, stereotyped social codes, acute and chronic poverty, and conservatism. The study also reveals that obstacles to co-education included male insularity towards girls' duties, a complicated social structure, the Pardah (veil) system, gender inequities, girl segregation, household issues, and a lack of girl political empowerment. The challenges of coeducation in Pakistani society are additionally exacerbated by religious misconceptions and illiterate Mullahs (clergymen). They came to the conclusion that encouraging girls' education might result from taking down these obstacles.

Mehmood et al. (2018) draw attention to the problem of Pakistan and other developing nations' disregard for girls' education. Even with a rise in enrolment, there is still a gender equality gap. The study examined the socioeconomic and cultural, safety, and other various challenges that Pakistani women students encounter while

pursuing their education using primary data collected from 601 individuals throughout the nation.

Maqsood et al. (2012) investigated the obstacles that females encounter on their path to education, concentrating on cultural, safety, and other impediments as well as coping mechanisms. The results revealed that girls had to overcome resistance from their families in order to be admitted to universities, and that cultural, safety, and other impediments stemmed from gender stereotypes reflecting the norms of male-dominated society. Nonetheless, the challenges faced by female students in overcoming these hurdles related to culture, safety, and other factors have had a positive impact on other girls in their families, inspiring them to pursue higher education. Girls now have more options to attend institutions close to home thanks in large part to the HEC's expansion of university campuses in major cities. Even with these advancements, girls still have a difficult time getting an education.

Shaukat & Pell (2017) looked at the obstacle's girls have to overcome to pursue higher education and careers. The results imply that girls who succeed in school encounter a male-dominated culture at work, which perpetuates sociocultural norms and creates a conflict between cultural and professional expectations, ultimately demotivating the girls. Based on how these socio-cultural norms were received, four categories of girls were distinguished. Successes in the system who have the support of their families have withstood prejudice that is part of larger society. System warriors are driven by internal motivations yet sense prejudice intensely when they lack assistance. While neutral acceptors accept the external socio-cultural environment with little resistance, motivated realists have embraced socio-cultural practices and plot to overcome the system in order to succeed.

Jalal-ud-din & Khan (2008) examined the socioeconomic and cultural obstacles that Mardan girls had to overcome. According to the findings, girls' socioeconomic position was worse because to things like low literacy rates, a lack of education and skills, unfavourable economic circumstances, and a culture that did not offer a safe atmosphere for working girls. Girls had an obligation to look after their kids and stay inside their houses. They advocated giving girls access to high-quality education and establishing cottage and agro-based industries to provide them with jobs.

Sameer and Jan (2018) examine the cultural barriers that Pashtun girls in the Malakand region must overcome in order to receive an education. The findings showed a significant correlation between the low ratio of girl education and a number of Pashtun cultural sub-dimensions, such as early puberty, conservatism, Pardah, male dominance, lack of freedom of expression, early or child marriage, girls' lack of participation in decision-making, and rejection of co-education. They suggested that in order to improve girls' education, the government concentrate on raising awareness, provide better educational resources and incentives, and expanding job prospects.

Research Methodology

A qualitative method was used in the research design to collect primary data. Its main goal was to comprehend the types and effects of cultural, security, and other hurdles that impede girls' access to school in Pakistan, particularly in District Mardan. Qualitative approaches were preferred over quantitative ones. In order to gather information from respondents, semi-structured interviews were done, with an emphasis on their viewpoints and experiences with relation to cultural, safety, and other various barriers to education. Male household heads from different rural parts of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Mardan District were among the population of interest. The study was designed to specifically target parents of girls who had difficulty getting an education. To choose parents and guardians of females who had dropped out of university or were not enrolled in higher secondary education, purposeful sampling was used. The interviewees were targeted based on having first-hand expertise and experience that has direct relevance to the issue being researched. The research conducted interviews with Ten male family heads in rural areas of Mardan District. As the requisite of a qualitative study is to acquire extensive data given particular logistical constraints, this sample size was selected. Semi-structured interviews were used as a research instrument to gather qualitative data.

The interview questions were designed to elicit information about interviewees' perceptions and experiences concerning cultural, safety and other obstructions of female's education. The chosen respondents were subjected to semi-structured in-person interviews. Because the interviews were meant to be flexible and open-ended, comprehensive and in-depth Respondents were possible. To take into account each respondent's comfort and availability, a flexible schedule was developed. The analysis of thematic coding was utilised to interpret the qualitative information obtained from the interviews. The notes made both during and after the interviews were coded as part of the analysis, and themes were found using both deductive and inductive methods. The results were analysed and connected to previously published research, offering new perspectives on the obstacles girls encounter when trying to obtain an education and directing the creation of initiatives and regulations.

Results

Based on participant responses, the following subthemes outline the main obstacles to female education in Mardan District.

Social and Cultural Restrictions

Girls' access to school is restricted by sociocultural norms influenced by Islamic beliefs and the notion of "Haya," or modesty. The idea that girls' education should follow cultural and religious norms is upheld by patriarchal ideology, thus restricting girls' access to education. In this perspective, it is clear that modesty and Pathan culture are related.

"Haya" (modesty) component of Pashtun culture and our community. Since coeducation is a feature of modern education, religious individuals avoid sending their girls to these kinds of schools." (Respondent 9)

"Girls' access to an education is restricted by their cultural and religious beliefs." (Respondent 5)

The aforementioned factors make it difficult for girls to pursue an education; even when these factors are known, action is taken slowly. Increasing the number of girls allowed seemed to go against long-standing sociocultural norms. A constructive change was taking time and effort to implement.

Lack of Institutes

The government of Pakistan actively promotes and distributes a wide range of financial resources to different educational sectors. On the other hand, inadequate supervision results in a lack of effective utilisation. This problem causes a noticeable lag in the efficient distribution of resources meant to promote educational advancement. In this specific situation, patriarchal inequities are very evident.

"There exists an inequality in the distribution of educational institutions between males and girls in the KPK region," (Respondent 8).

"There were very few seats available at the University of Peshawar, the only university; there was no university in Mardan." (Respondent 2)

The ambitions of girls living in small towns are severely hampered by the differences in the educational approach that one government has chosen. There were no educational facilities in the area.

"The Higher Secondary School was four to five km from our house and offered instruction up to the interlevel. Furthermore, there was no university in our village, and letting your daughter leave the village by herself was frowned upon in Pashtun customs." (Respondent 04)

The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is made up of large regions with difficult terrain, which places significant restrictions on the ease of transit and transportation. Girls in the designated regions have extra obstacles that not only severely limit their prospects but also altogether prohibit them from pursuing an education because there aren't any practical means of gaining access to high-quality educational opportunities. Two primary considerations influence the family's decision: the dearth of universities in the area and the perceived danger of the obligatory long-distance class trip.

Lack of Transportation

Problems with transportation make it more difficult for girls to pursue higher education. The patriarchal paradigm frequently places less emphasis on addressing these issues because it considers girls' mobility to be less important than men's.

"The main obstacles are poverty acts, early marriages, Pashtun indigenous traditions, and a lack of transportation facilities." (Respondent 6).

There is a widespread conviction in Pashtun society that girls should always be safeguarded and given a sense of safety. The assumption that men bear the majority of the duty for family travel and mobility is reinforced by this observation. The idea that

safety should come first in transit worries men a great deal. The pursuit of education is given up if that option is also impractical.

Lack of Resources (Poverty)

The majority of people don't seem to be in stable financial situations. A large number of families experience financial hardships that make it impossible for them to pay for university fees, housing, and transportation. Education expenses are rising above predetermined levels, yet the income of a person earning an average salary stays the same. After a thorough analysis of these many options, it is determined that it is more cost-effective to forgo sending girls to college. Two participants expounded on the inherent tension that exists between the pursuit of education and the maintenance of financial security.

"Poverty is the biggest obstacle to an education for district Mardan girls." (Respondent 10)

"The largest obstacles are poverty, lack of universities, transportation, and cultural limitations. The largest obstacle in this regard is poverty. (Respondent 8)

Using the prism of patriarchal theory—which emphasises the inequalities that girls face in society—this phenomenon can be understood. Consequently, this hinders their capacity to take advantage of different educational chances and interferes with their overall ability to function practically in society. Jalal-ud-din & Khan (2008) examined the socioeconomic and cultural obstacles that Mardan girls had to overcome. According to the findings, girls' socioeconomic position was worse because to things like low literacy rates, a lack of education and skills, unfavourable economic circumstances, and a culture that did not offer a safe atmosphere for working girls.

Early Marriages

It is well known that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province has a high rate of early marriages. It is often held in society that girls ought to be married as soon as possible.

"Everyone tries to perform early marriages of their daughters/sisters in Pashtun families." (Respondent 7)

As a result, this occurrence causes the gender gap in literacy rates to worsen even more because girls face major barriers when trying to pursue educational possibilities. Among the study's noteworthy conclusions is the claim that jealousy manifests itself as a competitive spirit within the context of cousin relationships. This affects not just the level of education attained by a single woman but also the larger population of girls living in the home.

"The testimony of a participant, who states that there is competition among cousins at wedding ceremonies inside Pashtoon households, helps to understand the general approach of girls towards this subject. As a result, this stress and response frequently lead to girls being married young. Girls' lack of access to education is a persistent observation." (Respondent 3)

Education becomes extremely important in communities with patriarchal norms, when girls face challenges due to male domination. However, in circumstances in which educational opportunities are restricted for people of all genders, the resulting discrepancy between men and women is especially pronounced.

“The vast majority of people lack literacy, and they have a very unfavourable opinion of female education. Poverty and early marriages are further obstacles to girls’ education.” (Respondent I).

Discussion

The second-largest city in the province, Mardan is located in the middle of KPK and is primarily home to families from all regions of the province. The province's efforts to ensure that girls have equal access to education are primarily dependent on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments; unfortunately, misinterpretations of the phrase "Pashtunwali" and the clergy present obstacles to these efforts. (Hamad and Sidra, 2012) In rural areas, where chances for girls are limited by patriarchal and tribal customs, it is imperative to address these challenges in order to promote girl access to education, as highlighted in the major thesis (Jamshaid, 2020). Because they place a higher value on marriage and conventional gender roles than education, these patriarchal and tribal customs frequently dissuade families from sending their daughters to school.

Girls' access to school is further hampered by the lack of resources and infrastructure in rural areas, hence it is imperative that the government and non-governmental organisations make investments to improve these circumstances. Girls have historically faced discrimination in various areas of empowerment, including social, economic, and political arenas, especially in Third World nations like Pakistan. Even if girls are becoming more involved in society, politics, and the economy, this growth is not fast enough to satisfy the needs of 50% of the population (Naz, 2010).

The region as a whole has quite different views on girls' education, with rural communities being particularly affected. It is evident that patriarchal domination persists because of cultural ramifications, while girls are unaware of their rights to equal status since education is either unavailable to them or they do not desire it, in accordance with feminist theory. In these locations, gender inequality is further perpetuated by a lack of knowledge and restricted access to education. Furthermore, girls who do not receive an education are unable to actively participate in the economic development of their communities, which results in a lost chance for advancement and development on all fronts.

The residents of the rural region of District Mardan were some of the most useful sources; they offered the researcher a description and an evaluation of the barriers that restrict access to learning for girls in most rural areas of Pakistan. Even with the comparison of male and female community members' views with the conditions that practically detained girls from rural Pakistan in pursuit of education, it is apparent that the state was not in any way concerned (Asia & Samee, 2020).

Based on desegregated qualifications of the participants, family income and ownership of agricultural land: Moreover, evidence was presented that the local community perceived the cost of schooling and lack of awareness among parents and children as constraints to rural girls' education.

In addition, the householders did not buy the fact that quality of education and access to education were also barriers to female education in rural places. They considered girl discrimination due to one's gender a big thing because they did not go to school, instead they could keep them in their homes safe from anything and would never be educated. The local community also believed that girl education in the rural areas was not enough compared to other provinces. There was a noticeable shift in the story, though. The local community views the degree to which cultural and religious factors impede girls' education in rural places, therefore the patriarchal narrative is reinforced. There is a noticeable difference between the opinions of male and female community members regarding the barriers that girls in Pakistan's rural areas face when trying to further their education. On the other hand, men's influence is seen as Pashtunwali (a moral code). This moral code reinforces the patriarchal narrative by dictating that girls should prioritise their household responsibilities before their education. In addition, the absence of adequate infrastructure and resources in rural areas makes it harder for females to pursue an education, which widens the gender gap already in place.

Conclusion

The survey identified a number of themes that included early marriages, poverty, sociocultural limitations, and a lack of transportation as significant obstacles to girls' education. Financial obstacles to girls' education were a subtheme of the main theme of family barriers to education. The implications of education, which encompasses the subthemes of migration, symbolic power, moral authority, and stigmatisation, is another theme. The relevance of girl education and its positive perception are subthemes of the main issue, which is the future of girl education in the family. Furthermore, district Mardan is the second-biggest city in the province of KPK. Here, non-governmental organisations primarily oversee girls' education opportunities; however, the misinterpretation of religion combined with the cultural, safety, and other barriers mentioned above present serious obstacles to girls' education. Therefore, enhancing the environment for girls' education requires extensive government intervention as well as the much-needed collaboration between the government and non-governmental organisations.

Recommendations

1. Although data collected directly from girls would have been more relevant, the researcher obtained her data from male heads of households. Future researchers can work with girls directly to collect data with their help, as it is not customary for outsiders to interact with girls in Pashtoon society.

2. The available data set is insufficient to fully understand this intricate problem. Realistic conclusions could be drawn more effectively with a wider set of data.
3. Public awareness campaigns for girl education should be conducted by the government and non-governmental organisations in order to spread acceptance among the general public.
4. In order to recruit female students in a safer setting, the government and non-governmental organisations need to give the infrastructure needs of schools the attention they deserve.
5. In order to guarantee student safety, the government should provide transport for female students around the district and the province as a whole.

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