

GENDER DISPARITY IN EDUCATION IN THE RURAL AREAS OF BALOCHISTAN

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Abstract

Although a plethora of research on gender disparity in education has been carried out across the world, there is still scarcity of research on this issue in Pakistan in general and rural areas of Balochistan in particular. To close this lacuna, the present research unraveled the possible factors causing gender disparity in education among Pashtoon people living in rural area of Balochistan, Pakistan. To this end, a total number of 12 parents were interviewed. All the interviews were conducted in Pashto language (native language of Pashtoon tribe). All the recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into the English language by the one who had a sound knowledge in both English and Pashto language. The findings garnered through thematic analysis showed that inadequate financial resources, long school distances, parent's security concerns, societal factors, and scarcity of facilities were the leading potential factors causing gender disparity in education. The data also showed that some parents had also the realization of girl's education. The findings of the present research implicate Tribal and religious leaders, education policy makers, and Government agencies to play their part to address gender disparity in education issue.

Key Words: Balochistan, Gender, Disparity, Education, Rural Areas

Introduction

It is believed that education sustains and fosters ability of girls. Moreover, education also enhances girls' competence in the face of helplessness, cruelty, and harassment. Despite of this, some parents coming off from financially backward background prefer their sons' education over their daughters' education (Sahibzada, Tayyab & Khan

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2019; Jamal 2016). Additionally, some cultural constraints and taboos restrain parents from sending their daughters to gender mix-up schools (Ally, 2006). The existing patriarchal system in the rural areas of Pakistan has caused a system where particular roles are decided for male and female. For example, most of the females are expected to look after home-related responsibilities, while males are considered fit doing outside home jobs and produce family income. In other words, females coming off from rural areas have a little role in the economic development of a society as their education is largely ignored (Ali, Fani, Afzal & Yasin, 2010). According to the report released by the Government of Pakistan (1999) stated that fewer number of girls than boys enrolled in the schools does not only reflect parents' financial constraints, but it also refers to cultural taboos and inhibitions against female education. These cultural taboos encompass compulsory nature of purdah, negative attitude towards female education, and lesser benefits of female education.

In the culture of the rural areas of Pakistan, sons are considered to have a privilege in family because they have a license to earn money and support their families. Additionally, they are considered as an insurance for parents when they are old (Sahibzada et al., 2019; Muhammad & Askar, 2009). On the contrary, daughters do not have such privileges and they are considered economically expensive because they are not allowed to do jobs and contribute to family income. It is widely held opinion in the rural areas that investing in girls' education is not a wise step at all because they would not be able support their parents once they are married. However, investing in sons' education is considered profitable and lucrative investment. Therefore, providing education to sons is considered a wise decision than providing education to daughters (Noreen & Awan, 2011).

Comparing the educational scenario in rural and urban areas, the number of girls in schools is greater in urban areas than rural areas (Alam and Nasir, 2016). In the rural areas, due to the cultural and social inhibitions, parents are never encouraged to send their daughters to schools. In other words, stress caused by socio-cultural taboos inhibit parents to consider girls' education (Sahibzada, Tayyab & Khan 2019). In the similar vein, Muhammad (2009) also report that majority of

parents in the rural areas do not find any advantage of schooling their daughters because they have to join another family one day after their marriage. In addition to this, some parents also maintain that when they send their daughters to schools located at long distances risk their honour and respect. These practices pave a way for gender disparity in education in the rural areas of Pakistan (Farah & Shera, 2007). These findings evidently assert that people living in rural areas as compared to the people living in Urban areas have cultural and social restrictions (Khan et al., 2010).

Due to the existence of gender disparity in education, a plethora of measures have been considered to address this issue (Afzal et al., 2013). For example, the United Nations Millennium summit in September 2000 discussed this problem in its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with a focus over gender equality and women's empowerment (Noureen, 2015). However, the goal of MDGs has not been achieved particularly in the rural areas where the dominance of males on females still exists. Additionally, the gap due to differential treatment of parents with males and females under usual routine and social desire revealed the partiality for males over females, explicitly in rural areas (Sultan 2018). According to Sathar, Wazir and Sadiq (2013), females in rural areas are still lagging behind as compared to the females in urban areas, and this disparity exists across all the provinces of Pakistan. However, gender disparity in education has been reduced to a great extent in the urban areas of Pakistan (Afzal et al., 2013).

The above discussion led to a conclusion that females have numerous hurdles posed by their socio-cultural practices that prevent them to get education for a better tomorrow. It also shows that women cannot get education unless they have a support from a male family head. It is because majority of schools are situated at long distance that does not facilitate girls to travel on their own without the support of males (Jejeeboy & Sattar, 2001).

Literature review

The existence of gender disparity in Pakistan has drawn the attention of academicians, education policy makers, politicians, researchers and so forth. The constitution of Pakistan (1973) also states to remove and provide free and compulsory secondary education to

every citizen of Pakistan. However, Pakistan is still not only lagging behind to bolster overall literacy rate, but the gender disparity in education is also increasing at an alarming rate. In the similar vein, Nasrullah and Bhatti (2012, p. 273) also state that Pakistan is among the worst countries which fail to address gender disparity in education. As Balatchandirane (2003) states the indispensability of women's education in the socio-economic development of a country, the gap between male and female education can exert negative effects on country's social, political and economic growth. The United Nation in its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for 'the global agenda for development' also mentioned gender disparity as a third agenda which emphasizes "to promote gender equality and empower women, with the target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education by 2015" (p.7).

Prior research has also highlighted myriad factors leading to gender disparity in education in Pakistan. The male dominated culture, in which females are treated as subordinates to their male counterparts, often treats females as a child-bearing machine and provides them a few years of education (Jamal, 2016). In some cultures, the age factor also matters as girls are mostly married as soon as they enter in their puberty period (Israr et al., 2020). It also implicates the influence of religion on parents' decisions to take out girls from schools at any time, and the very reason also proscribe them to enroll their girls in the co-educational schools. In addition, parental choice to spend more on males and females is influenced by the fact that male is considered as an insurance for parents' old age. In Pakistan, males are useful in the family's income earning who are allowed to perform any kind of job, whereas females specifically in rural areas do not have such a privilege (Sahibzada et al., 2019).

Gender disparity has been found to have increased in the rural areas of Pakistan. For example, due to continuing cycles of war and conflict, strict cultural practices, and religious ideologies have aggravated the issue of gender justice, particularly girls' education in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KPK) area of Pakistan. In one of the reports of UNICEF (2010), it was disclosed that only 13% percent of primary-school-aged girls from the villages and cities bordering with Afghanistan were enrolled in schools. This report evidently shows how

gender disparity can negatively influence socio-economic development of a country.

Besides some home-related factors, barriers to girls' education are associated with school system. The government of Pakistan has failed to establish educational system lucrative enough to address children's educational needs. The lack of seriousness on the part of the government of Pakistan can be observed in the lack of investment in the schools which is not according to the guidelines given by UNESCO (2012). Professionals working in the educational system have also reached to the conclusion that the government seems to be disinterested to cater to the educational needs of girls (Noreen & Awan, 2011). Such a situation can be noted both on national and provincial level. It has been observed that shifting responsibilities to government schools and religious madrasas do not seem to reduce gender disparity in education. To devise a possible solution to facilitate girls' education, government ought to establish girls' schools in the rural areas so that parent may not hesitate to send their daughters to schools, as they are unwilling to send their daughters in schools offering co-education and are situated in the far-flung areas.

Another gender disparity in the education has been noted in the educational attainment between rural and urban areas of Pakistan. In one of the reports (ADB, 2000) it was revealed that the literacy rate in the urban areas was 58.3% between 1996 to 1997 which was considerably higher than the rural areas: 28.3% and in that women's participation was only 12%. In addition to this, it was also highlighted that literacy disparity also existed across the four provinces of Pakistan with a lowest literacy rate of women in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. This fact calls for more research in the educational backward areas of the province so that factors could be explored and addressed which lead to gender disparity in education.

The Pakistani culture in general and the tribal culture in particular is reckoned to be as a patriarchal culture which creates division between the roles of a male and female. In such a system, man enjoys glory being the authority over the chores outside of home, whereas woman is delimited inside the home space looking after home-related chores. Given to such a social context, parents also consider their sons more productive than their daughters. Therefore, parents

invest considerably more on their sons and provide them access to the skills to generate more family income. Contrarily, daughters are imparted with only those skills which are likely to benefit them to be good wives and mothers (ADB, 2000).

The report given by World Bank (2002) also showed that gender disparity in education may also be linked to the household decisions which are complex due to patriarchal cultural system. Regardless of the nature of decisions, they are mostly influenced by customs and traditional norms. And the existence of such cultural practices does not seem to benefit women's growth in the external world. As a result, women are often denied of their basic rights to spend a quality life with shoulder to shoulder with men. Additionally, besides being deprived of equality, women are also under privileged to have access to basic education.

Due to the pivotal importance of gender disparity, a plethora of research has been carried out on gender development and women empowerment (Alam and Nasir, 2016; Fatima 2016; Jamal, 2016; 2009Khan et al., 2010; Muhammad & Askar; Sahibzada, Tayyab & Khan 2019), but there is a paucity of research particularly in the rural areas of Balochistan bordering with Afghanistan on what leads to gender disparity in education. To this end, the present research delves into exploration of causes by involving parents who do not send their daughters to schools. By delineating the first-hand information, the current study is likely to contribute to the existing scanty knowledge on gender disparity in education in the rural areas of Pakistan and draws the attention of higher authorities to take some necessary steps to reduce gender disparity in education.

Methodology

Research Methodology

The present research delved into exploration of determinants of gender disparity in education in economically and socially backward area of Balochistan province of Pakistan. To this end, qualitative research design was deemed appropriate to explore the issue which is sparsely researched (Aamir, 2015-16) in the context of Pakistan in general and Balochistan province in particular. Additionally, qualitative research design was also lucrative to garner first-hand and in-depth

understanding of the phenomenon leading to gender disparity in education. As there could be myriad determinants responsible for gender disparity in education, the use of close-ended questionnaire with predefined determinates, as it has been practiced in the past (Fatima 2016; Sahibzada, Tayyab & Khan 2019).

Research Participants

To recruit participants, 12 schools situated in District Pishin and District Killa Abdullah were contacted. These schools helped us identify family heads who were sending their boys to schools, while they were strict about their girls' education. Initially, we accessed a total number of twenty family heads and only twelve of them agreed to participate in the study on a condition that their names would remain confidential. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the participants:

Table 1.

Participants	Age	Gender	Education	Profession
1	54	Female	No Education	House Wife
2	33	Male	No Education	Labor
3	27	Male	Metric	Machinic
4	52	Male	Masters	Teacher
5	41	Male	Intermediate	Shop Keeper
6	43	Female	No Education	House Wife
7	51	Female	No Education	House Wife
8	37	Male	Metric	Farmer
9	31	Female	No Education	House Wife
10	46	Female	Intermediate	House Wife
11	48	Male	Graduate	Businessman
12	39	Female	Intermediate	House Wife

Data Collection and Analysis

To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted through a local language (i.e., Pashto). Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. Prior to data collection, each participant was informed about the nature of the study and also sought their consent to record their responses. All the audiotaped interviews were transcribed

and translated into the English language by an expert who had a sound knowledge of both Pashto and English language. Back translation was also performed to ensure the validity of the translated interviews into the English language. The data were subject to analysis procedure involving three phases prescribed by Creswell and Poth (2017). The first phase included the reading of transcriptions recursively to find the reoccurring categories (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the second phase, the number of themes were identified according to the nature of research question. The third and the final phase included to ensure if the themes were independent and they had some interconnections. In case, the similarities between the themes, they were collated. All the themes were also revisited and re-checked to establish veracity of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Findings

Inadequate financial resources

Inadequate financial resources have also been associated with gender disparity. It is believed if parents are financially sound, they would not deprive their children of education. In other words, if parents have sufficient resources to afford educational and transport related expenses, they would likely to provide education to their daughters without any discrimination. Contrarily, due to limited or scarcity of resources, they would prioritize their sons' education. For example, participant 7 stated, "Due to limited resources, we can either afford sons' or daughters' education" Additionally, the element of poverty also negatively influences boys' educations. Some parents send their boys to work on agricultural fields, private shops, and motor garages to work on daily wages to produce family income. A participant reported that, "because we have scarcity of resources and lack of jobs in our localities, we want our children to stand by us to generate family income by performing low profile jobs. Sending them to schools rather aggravate our financial problems".

School Distance

School distance is another possible cause that results gender disparity. Location of schools at large distances and unavailability of transport also impede female education. Almost majority of the

participants of the present study also cited that school locations situated far from their homes caused hurdles to send their daughters. This perception is developed due to either there is unavailability of transport or private transport is too crowded to be a safe for girls. Moreover, it is also perceived that public transport is not safe for girls as boys could harass them when they are alone. As participant 5 reported,

“As schools are situated at long distances, it is quite challenging to send daughters to schools. Additionally, they (daughters) are also prone to harassment perpetrated by street boys. Therefore, girls are discouraged to continue their education. Moreover, harassment cases also lead to tribal conflictions that can even end up killing one another in the name of *Ghairat* (i.e., honour). This statement implies that there is scattered population in the rural areas of Balochistan and the government of this province does not have adequate resources to provide school in each village. Therefore, travelling becomes one of the leading problems in impeding girls’ education. However, boys do not face such problems as they are free to go to distal schools devoid of any worry by using cycles, motor-bikes or taking lift from anyone. On the other hand, girls do not have such options. In this vein, a parent also reported that they consider sending their daughters to schools if they are provided with transportation. For example, participant 3, “We think about sending our daughters to schools, if schools provide transportation for girls”.

Security Concerns

Security is another potential factor that keeps girls away from education in rural areas of Pakistan. Due to the recent rise in the terrorist attacks on the educational institutes, and tribal conflictions, kidnapping issues, and harassment cases, parents exhibit reluctance to send their daughters to schools. Some of the study participants also mentioned that existing educational environment is not lucrative and safe for their daughters as they are mentally disturbed and fearful for being harassed and bullied in streets by vulgar boys. Participant 9 shared his experience,

“We are deeply concerned of our daughters’ security. There are copious examples in the rural areas where street boys who roam around and tease girls. Therefore, girl is mostly escorted to school by a family

male to confront any uneven situation that can bring a bad name to a family. Such insecure prevailing situation compel us to keep girls at home” Under such situations, family males keep their daughters at home because they fail to carry out responsibilities for the pick and drop their daughters/sisters at schools.

Societal Factors

Society exerts effect on the gender disparity in education in various ways, such patriarchal practices. Pashtun tribe in the rural areas is under the strong influence of Islam and ‘Pashtun Wali’ which is a principal code for Pashtoons to live on. Pashtoon considers their code of life on priority in which the *GHAIRAT*, *NANG* have core importance. Under *GHAIRAT* and *NANG*, females are not allowed to mingle with strangers. In case females are found in relationship with others, it leads to confliotions that end up with the devastating deaths and injuries. The concept where most of the conflict arise due to ZAR (Gold), SHAZA(Women), ZMAKA(Land). The historical and traditional perceptions is still alive that restrict females to home to perform household chores. Similarly, participant 2 narrated, “Our *Ghairat* (i.e., honour) is largely associated with females. If they are harassed or seen with an evil eye by other males, it arises our *Ghairat* that could lead to serious problems. Therefore, we prefer boys education over girls education”.

Low Standard of Schools

Availability of standard schools is a lucrative quality of education that plays indispensable role to carve the minds of parents to school their children. Contrarily, the low standard of education and defective teaching methods practiced in public schools deter the intentions of parents. Moreover, they do not also keep the option for private schools which are not affordable for them. Participant 10 stated, “Not to talk of scarcity of schools, teachers appointed in girls’ school in the rural areas do not attend schools regularly and there is no well-organized set-up to supervise their job. It badly disturbs our girls’ education and also discourages us to send them to schools”

Parent's volitions for girl's education

It was also found that if parents are assured of their daughters' security inside and outside of school, they would not hesitate to send their daughters to school. Some of the parents were well acquainted with the importance and practicability of female education. However, their unwillingness to send their daughter to school was solely based on some of the security concerns. The following excerpts portray their views about the female education:

1. If government take some measures and open schools in our localities, we shall be happy to send our daughters to schools (Participant, 8)
2. If area religious leaders and feudal (i.e., tribal leaders) start sending their daughters to schools, it would also motivate others to follow them" (Participant, 4)

Despite majority of respondents favored male education, but some of the parents had a realization that future generation can benefit if the daughters are educated. It was also reported that by educating girls, many of the tribal fights can also be diminished as they can intervene to address problems. For example, respondent 11 stated that, "Education can enable females to be good mothers to educate their kids even if kids' fathers are away from home as educated mothers can play a role of their family's foundation and can also instill a vision among their children".

The qualitative data also delineated that some of the parents also viewed that their daughters could also be the source of their family support if they receive education. A responded 12 reported that, "If girls are educated, they would be in a good position to support their husbands and children in a good way either finically or bringing up their children in a good way".

Additionally, some parents also acknowledged that by educating girls, own resources can be generated. As there is paucity of female doctors in the rural areas, educating girls can produce female doctors. A respondent 4 stated "by providing education to girls, many problems can be addressed. As there is scarcity of female doctors in the rural areas of Balochistan, providing education to girls can produce many female doctors to serve their community". In addition to this, it

was also found that parents also admitted that girls can contribute to the societal development if they are provided with education. However, due to some cultural practices and restrictions particularly in the rural areas, females can receive services or education from females only. This indicates to the embedded cultural norms where girls cannot mingle with boys. Therefore, coeducation system is largely discouraged in the rural areas of Balochistan province of Pakistan.

Attached Benefits of Boys' Education

In the Pakistani patriarchal society, boys have more opportunities to reap different benefits than girls. For example, male education is more preferred than girls because boys are expected to be with their parents even after marriage, whereas girls would leave their parent's home soon after their marriage. Moreover, sons are a breadwinner and look after their parents in their senility. These overall factors advantage boys more than girls. In the similar vein, participant 6 mentioned that,

“In Pashtun culture, it is widely held that boys are insurance for their old age as they are likely to look after them when are unable to earn family income. Contrarily, girls are not considered lucrative for the family income as they must leave their home one day after their marriage. Therefore, girls are merely trained to look after home-related chores and given less priority for the education than boys”. In addition to this, the data also showed that some parents opposed girls' education as it could make them practical and rebellious to cultural practices to only look after home. For example, a participant 1 reported that, “Education also spoils girls' minds and causes their divorces as they are unwilling to follow cultural principles to look after home and obey their husbands”.

Discussion

The overall findings of the present research showed that patriarchal norms, societal practices, limited resources, and shallow mindedness were the leading sources causing gender disparity in education in the rural areas of Balochistan province of Pakistan. Besides, the findings also showed that some parents were fervently willing to send their daughters to school if the government provided

them schools in their localities, transportation, and security. These findings are commensurate with prior research (Sahibzada et al., 2019; Jamal 2015; Jamal 2016; Memons 2007; Moheyuddin 2005; Butt, Akbar & Roshi 2013 and Sultan & Sharif 2018) in which it was found that parents' biased approach towards children, proximity of schools, scarcity of resources, and cultural practices inhibit girls' education.

The present research found that the scarcity of resources was one of the factors causing Gender disparity in education. This finding is also in line with Memons (2007), study in which economic conditions were solid reason causing gender disparity. However, this factor was not responsible for gender inequality in Swabi district (Sahibzada, Tayyab & Khan 2019). The contradiction between the prior research and present research warrants further research. However, the present research finds that family per capita income is directly related to the improvement of Gender disparity in education.

Concerning the findings regarding patriotically practice leading to gender disparity shows that existing cultural practices in the Pashtoon culture is partially responsible for gender disparity. However, Virk (2008) reported that culture has the least involvement in gender inequality at secondary school level and the similar findings also been reported by Sahibzada et al., (2019). These contradictions in the findings might have emerged due to differential cultural practices by pashtoon people living in rural areas, where both the sexes are not provided equal opportunities to avail education. Another reason in the differences of results could be Geographical locations of Virk's, (Sahibzada, Tayyab & Khan 2019) and current study. The research site of the present study is adjacent to Afghanistan boarder where cultural norms are strictly followed. On the contrary people living in swabi district have exposure to bigger cities such as Peshawar and Islamabad which is the capital city of Pakistan.

In addition to cultural practices, the present research also found that parents' attitude towards male and female education also caused gender disparity in education. It was found that majority of parents attached least importance to female education as they thought that girls had little and no role in producing family income as compare to boys. These findings are also reflected in the previous research (Moheyuddin, 2005; Butt, Akbar & Roshi, 2013; Sultan & Sharif, 2018). These

evidences portray the fact that a Pashtoon culture is under the massive influence of male dominated culture where male is considered as decision makers, bread winners, and superior to women. Whereas, female is treated as caretakers of home, giving birth and bringing up children. This existing situation calls for local authorities, and tribal and religious leaders to initiate awareness program among Pashtoon parents in the rural areas to infuse awareness among them regarding the importance of girl's education.

Parents concern regarding the lack of security for their daughters was another potential factor causing gender disparity in education. The similar findings have also been reported by Afzal et al., (2013) and Sultan and Sharif (2018). The data revealed that parents had the fear that daughters might be harassed by street boys and it could bring bad name to the family. As girls represent family's honor, therefore, parents did not want to take risk to spoil their family's name. The very existing norm inhibited girls to avail education. This finding also implicates religious and tribal leaders of the region to motivate people to send their daughters to school devoid of any fear. This finding also calls for the attentions of government to make necessary security arrangements to reduce the security fears among the parents.

Conclusion

Drawing on findings of the present research, it can be concluded that gender disparity in education is the result of myriad factors. The present research contributes to the existing knowledge on the issue by including the views of Pashtoon parents of Balochistan dwelling near to the boarder of Afghanistan. This study also concludes that gender disparity can be reduced to the great extent if tribal and religious leaders, Government agencies and education policy makers intervene to reduce parent's concerns and their views about girls' education. As no study can be exhaustive in itself; therefore, this issue can be further explored in the rural areas of rest of the three provinces of Pakistan. Such studies can emanate more in-depth understanding of factors contributing to gender disparity in education in Pakistan.

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