

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN ACROSS VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSES IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the socio-economic and cultural barriers to women's higher education in Pakistan. For this purpose, this article uses questionnaires and interview tools to investigate and compare the key barriers to a lower literacy rate among women in Pakistan. Based on detailed comparative analysis, poverty, early marriages, misconception about the religion, accessibility, and social pressure on families have been indicated as major barriers in quest of women's higher education

Keywords: Women education, socio-economic barriers, cultural barriers, religion, Pakistan.

Introduction. In the modern world, education is considered to be the lifeblood of democracy whereby people get an awareness of their constitutional rights as well as their duties. Education is a prerequisite and holds the foremost position in the list of requirements for development in the modern world. As for as the education system of Pakistan is concerned, the government has been leaving no stone unturned to design and implement a system of education where all and sundry have free and affordable access to at least basic education but despite allocating and spending huge budgets, it seems to have been failing in its, seemingly sincere, endeavors. The result of this partially successful strife is the ever-persistent illiteracy, orthodox beliefs, and gender discrimination for the unfortunate females dwelling in rural areas.

According to World Bank report in 2000, developing countries will be unable to get benefits from the universal knowledge-based economy until they give priority to improve higher education. For development of a country it is necessary that women should be well trained to educate their upcoming generation [1]. In the modern time, boys and girls having higher education and advance skills motivate countries towards development and competition in every field of life but the problem with emerging economies including Pakistan is neglecting the up gradation of women's higher education (Haider 2008). Particularly, women's higher education plays an important role in the establishment and raising life standard not only financially but also in social sector as well (Rumana Shah 2007).

These hurdles to women education may be overcome by creating awareness about the importance of education in this class of parents in particular (Amina Latif 2009). This is particularly true for highly educated women having English language skills as well to enter the labor market (Monazza Aslam & Geeta Kingdon 2012). Family Support and social networks are very helpful for her success and variations in attitudes of her parents, in-laws and her partner are required in order to break the boundaries and get access to higher education to make a major impact of young women's lives in Pakistan (Feyza Bhatti & Roger Jeffery 2012). Core barriers to women education are mostly socio cultural such as izzat and purdah (honor and veil), male decision making, and division of labor, limited by stereotype gender role. Girls in some parts of societies are even considered as temporary family members where child marriages are common, thus this also is indicated as a barrier (Azam Romi 2010, Momenah Ambreen 2014).

To overcome this crisis the respective governments should not only provide scholarships to poor students but also increase the salaries of their parents (Pinar Marcan 2010). Women's higher education enables them to get rid of gender discrimination and can change the society towards gender equality.

This will also enhance their decision making abilities to make their own decisions side by side with their male partners either in business or household activities. When they will start earning, the attitude of family members towards them will automatically change (Samina isran 2012). Co-education is considered as the other barrier to women higher education because in Pakistan due to social setup, most of the people are against co-education (Iqbal Ahmed 2014). Secondly, it helps females to make their own decisions about economic development of their family or community (Pell & Winter 2015). Apart from Socio-economic and cultural challenges, feudalism and sexual harassment are also some other barriers to women education in Pakistan (Sumara Mehmood & Li chong 2018). In many underdeveloped regions, the biggest hurdle to women education is poverty where people belonging to rural areas even sell their daughters in exchange for money. Early marriages ratio is so pathetic that two out of three girls get married within the age of 17 years and one out of nine at the age of 14 years (UNFPA 2015). Financial constraints, insecurity of girls in public sector, social control, and gender bias are the main barriers to women’s education for both Muslims and Hindu women in India (Biswamitra Sahu et al. 2017). Poverty, Pashtunwali, poor curriculum, transport, lack of female teachers, lack of girls’ schools, female harassment and lack of facilities inside educational institutes are the main barriers to women’s education [2], Swehra Moeed 2019).

Research Methodology. The research in this study is conducted to unveil the major barriers, which remained unexplored till now, to women education in Pakistan, especially higher education. The tools used for data collection were questionnaire and interviews. The sample we used were random sampling comprising students from different universities, parents, and women with low literacy areas. Data for this research was collected in two parts.

For the initial part of the survey, questionnaire was distributed in different universities. Out of 174 universities in Pakistan, 5 public universities were selected for sample data collection. To obtain data, questionnaire was distributed in the female students using five point Likert scale with responses (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The full survey included 100 questions out of which. 90 questions were close ended while 10 questions were open ended. The questions were related to the main barriers to women education in Pakistan and what are the best possible strategies to meet these challenges. The entire data was collected on paper.

Results

Means of Indicators. Through the lens of this survey we concluded that the means of indicators across different categories of people in upper, middle and lower class, about 42% in middle class and 74% lower class girls respectively did not get access to higher education due to poverty. However, early marriages mostly affect lower class i.e. 67.1% followed by middle class where the average ratio is 43.9%. Early marriages affect only 16.25% girls’ higher education in upper class and that is mostly in rural areas. Social pressure mostly affect middle class i.e. 46.5% followed by lower class 42.4%. As means of indicators 52.2% participants from lower class indicated the misconception about religion as one of the barriers to women’s education while accessibility and insecurity mostly affected the lower class with the average ratio of 52.3% followed by middle class at 42%. For upper class accessibility was not a barrier to women education.

Table 1: Mean of indicators across different categories of people in upper, middle, and mower class

Indicator	Upper Class %	Middle Class %	Lower Class %
Poverty	4.167	42.077	73.889
Early Marriages	16.25	43.923	67.111
Social Pressure	11	46.526	42.417
Misconception about Religion	33.333	40.41	52.222
Accessibility & fear	4.833	42.949	52.361

Co-efficient of Variation. The Co-efficient of Variation values for poverty was very close in middle and lower class which means that poverty had the same effect on girls’ education in middle and lower class i.e. 0.30886 & 0.29686 as compare to the upper class 2.44. Early marriages affected all the

classes. The coefficient of variation value was 0.95211 in upper, 0.48463 in middle and 0.24476 lower class. A close coefficient of variation was observed to social pressure on family between the middle and lower class however the misconception about religion indicated a close relationship between all the classes. The coefficient of variation values to accessibility and fear indicated a close relationship between the middle and lower class regarding barriers to girls’ education.

Table 2: Co-efficient of variation indicators across different categories of people in upper, middle, and lower class

Indicator	Upper Class	Middle Class	Lower Class
Poverty	2.44949	0.30886	0.29686
Early Marriages	0.95211	0.48463	0.24476
Social Pressure	1.83177	0.56959	0.63595
Misconception about Religion	0.7875	0.58323	0.6233
Accessibility & fear	1.98628	0.30299	0.28916

Discussion. Observing Pakistani society at large, we, unfortunately, find gender discrimination generally observed between sons’ and daughters’ education. They mostly prefer to invest in their sons’ higher education hoping that they will support the whole family in the future. Many people think that investment in a son is lucrative and positive while investment in a daughter’s education is useless as they are destined to be part of other families after their marriages so their education is deemed to be a liability rather than an asset. According to this survey following are the main obstructions to girls’ higher education.

The main barriers to women’s higher education leading to a lower gender ratio have been discussed. The rural society of Pakistan suffers extremely from gender discrimination restricting women’s contribution in the field of higher education. Sons in the families are favored daughters’ higher education due to the perception of the former being a token of the financial pillar whole family in the future. According to this survey participants indicated poverty as the mother of all evils resulting in less female population ratio to pursue higher studies. Due to financial overburden poor families are unable to afford tuition fees and schooling accessories which ultimately disturb the balance of literacy rates of the society.

Social setup of the Pakistani community in rural areas in special favors early marriages of children, thus the main family responsibilities possess another challenging front for women to pursue their higher studies. In Pakistan joint family system is common which generates unnecessary social pressure on families causing insecurities in women’s higher education. In such systems, the decision-making authority is just the top tier of the hierarchy in the family usually the male members. On the other hand family’s displeasure and orthodox traditions also proved to be unsurpassable barriers to girls’ securing the right to higher education. Results of the present study showed that girls pass through difficult circumstances in the process of getting admission into higher education. Analysis of different barriers indicated that the basis of these barriers originated in gender discrimination such as problems of security and safety due to long distance, fear and threats to family honor due to co-education, and social pressure on family regarding girl’s marriage.

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