
**Constraints in Access to Higher Education: A Case Study
of Female in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**



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Abstract: Higher Education contributes significant role in building human capital and overall socio-economic and sustainable development of a country. The present study explored female student's constraints regarding higher education in Pakistan. Qualitative research design was employed in this study. Data were collected from students of girl's colleges in district Mardan using semi structured interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Finding of the study revealed some key constraints i.e. cultural restrictions, family obligation and cultural barriers in higher education, Gender discrimination and higher education, Marriage a Barrier in Women's higher education, Lack of universities, Financial needs, Social and cultural barriers. This study recommends that every girl is unique and special and has the right of access to higher education in order to establish a sustainable society.

Key Words: Higher Education, Pakistan, Female, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Introduction

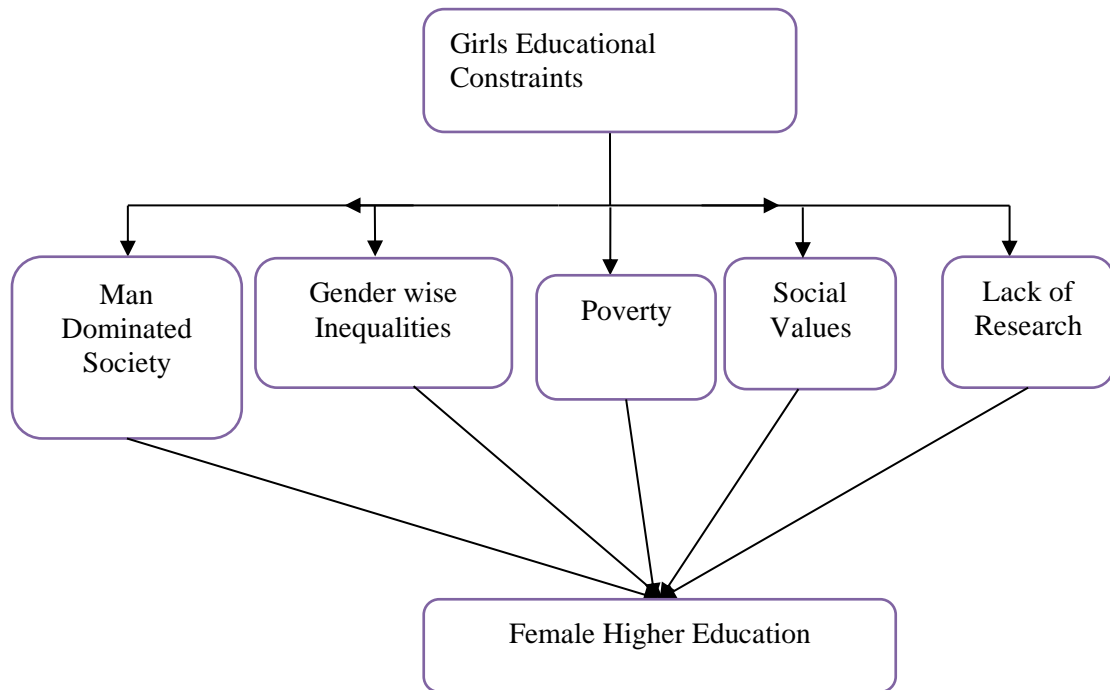
Education portrays significant role in transforming positive change in individual lives. Education empowers women of decision making traits of their own choice in each and every walk of lives. Educating women is educating the entire society (Ghulam, 2006). At one side people are considering humanity, equity and human rights, but despite these so called slogans women face restrictions of getting higher education ([Lindsay & James, 2005](#)).

Federal government with the consultation of the provincial set up has started stipends for girls as a result girls education is increased from the previous 14% to 25% ([Hahn et al., 2018](#)). Pakistani society is a typical society. It has old-fashioned cultural norms. Women are included in the category of mothers and housewives. Men are included in the family leadership category. Women are confined to their daily work and completely obey the wishes of their life partners and in-laws (Tichy, Becker et al. 2009). Often parents recognize that leadership is limited to social male members. Therefore, women should not indulge in higher education. Keeping in mind the various obstacles the researcher intends to investigate various constraints that hinder female university level education.

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Research Objectives

1. To identify problems relevant to female access to Higher Education
2. To analyze the females' stance towards their Higher Education

Research Questions

1. What problems affect female access to higher education?
2. What is female attitude towards higher education?

Review of Related Literature

Development of a sophisticated society is the collective and joint effort of both the genders i.e. men and women (Alam, 2017). Education is the universal right of both the genders i.e. men and women (Terry & Thomas, 1997). It has been observed that the illiterate women most probably can be exposed to victimization of violence more as compared to the women who are literate (Heise et al., 1999). The achievement of girl's higher education can be attributed a lot in the socio-economic growth of the nations (Stephan, 2002). Statistical analysis (Farah, 2007) shows that Pakistani society is a gender-segregated society. Here in Pakistan women has to face varied obstacles like socio-cultural difficulties in order to get basic and quality education (Farah, 2007; Alam, 2017). Gender disparity with respect to education is prominent reason of the illiterate society; consequently, Pakistani females are mostly lagging behind and in almost every profession that they come across (Memon 2007). Parent's socio economic status is a powerful catalyst in their children education especially female education (Blake, 2006). In Pakistani society, this dumb custom of daughter's marriage at their early ages is main obstacle in getting education (Faridi, Z, M & Malik, S, 2009). In

our society (Pakistan) opportunity for female to acquire higher education is below the margin level. We have a joint family system where less focus is sorted out for girl's education ([Naz & Khan, 2013](#)).

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this study qualitative research design was employed. The goal of this method was to explore the participant's experiences and perceptions regarding the obstacles and barriers that hinder female access to higher education. This approach allowed the researcher to purposefully select individuals for an in depth semi structured interview of how and what sort of barriers effect girls higher education. Therefore, the researcher visited along with a female assistant to the public sector Girls Degree Colleges (GDC) for data collection. The target population of the study was the graduate students of public sector Girls Degree Colleges (GDC) of district Mardan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These colleges were (i) GDCG Sheh Maltoon (ii) Women University Mardan (iii) GDCG Mardan. In this research study Convenience sampling technique was employed to select the interviewees. This technique was used through random selection procedure. For qualitative data collection, data saturation principle was considered. The data collected were analyzed through thematic data analysis technique.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative Results

Open-ended questions were asked from respondents regarding various constraints that hinders girl's higher education. Following themes were extracted from respondent's opinions: themes were analyzed separately.

Family Obligation and Cultural Barriers

Respondent (1) stated "Cultural barriers and family expectations as the reason women are not advancing in their educational goals, another participant Parents, added for a women raising a family, and being a housewife, the traditional way of thinking of certain parents in which the man makes the money while the woman takes care of the house and kids". Student (2) expressed her beliefs that "challenges of raising a family and trying to keep up with their educational goals, the expectation of women to be a good wife and mother creates even more difficulties for them to achieve their educational aspirations". Most of the respondents were in strong agreements that education help to empower the traits of recognition and awareness of how to resolve the societal issues and barriers that hinders their education.

Gender Discrimination and Higher Education

Participants added that "There is significant variety in the status of women across classes, regions, rural urban due to uneven socio economic development and the influence of tribal, religious and social formations on women's lives, however, the women's situation versus that of the men's is one of general subordination, determined by the forces of patriarchy across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide". In Pakistan society male members are considered as superior to females and

women should only care about the household activities. Beyond the education system women are far backward in each and every walk of life.

Marriage a Barrier in Women's Higher Education

Early marriage is the most common element that hinders women of their higher education. According to girl's opinions the main causes of women that hinder higher education are:

1. Girls at very young age are get married and expected to do that all their lives
2. Families have expectations to get marry and have children too early
3. Girls are encouraged look for a husband rather than on an education
4. Women should sacrifice their education to oblige their parental expectations

Lack of Universities

All participants expressed their views that if there is no nearby institution then girls are not allowed to go into far flung areas. For girls' travel is a sensitive threat to their lives due to possible incidents of sexual harassment and sexual abuse to consider that's why girls are no allowed to far away universities.

Cultural Barriers

Majority of students have stressed some negative aspects of the society that hinders higher education for girls like as:

1. Stereotypes mindsets
2. Women the caretaker of the family
3. Poor awareness about importance of girls' education

Summary

This study helped to explore student's attitude and experiences towards girl's education and the obstacles that obstruct regular female higher education. Qualitative semi-structured interviews elaborate respondents 'descriptions of their opinions and how their experiences inform the barriers in girl's educational practices. Following parameters were extracted during data collection from respondent's interview. Family obligation and cultural barriers higher education, gender discrimination and higher education, marriage a barrier in women's higher education, lack of universities and cultural barriers .

Findings of the Study

Following findings were extracted from this study

1. It was found that family obligation and cultural barriers was the main cause and barrier in girl's higher education.
2. It was also found that early marriage hinders access to girl's higher education.
3. It was found in the study that female needs equal rights and encouragement for smooth access to higher education.

4. It was found that after marriage there are so many problems to get higher education.
5. Data analysis revealed that most of female were culturally restricted to their homes

Recommendations

This study produced following recommendations

1. Girl's higher education needs to be encouraged to contribute positively in society.
2. Number of women universities need to be increased to achieve higher education.
3. To promote girls' higher education higher education commission may asses for financial support to the needy students.
4. Policy makers should eliminate barriers that affect girl's higher education.

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Appendix

Students Interview Guiding Questions

1. Could you please share your story of getting higher education in Pashtun culture? (To the extent you are comfortable)
2. Could you please shed some light on your experience as female gender?
3. What were the hurdles that you crossed to reach here?
4. In your schooling did your family support or oppose you and how?
5. Did you feel that as a girl, you were treated differently in the college and at home?
6. What other challenges did you face while struggling for education?