Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on Women's Higher Education

Authors

Rida Khan*
Dr. M. Sheharyar Khan**
Muhammad Babar Khan***

Abstract

The literacy rate is directly proportional to the development of a society. Pakistan lags behind other countries of the region in educating its masses. But since society is patriarchal, women face more problems than men in acquiring education. In this research, the prime objective was to find the socio-cultural factors that could become a barrier in acquiring higher education of women. Parental attitudes regarding the importance of educating girls may contribute to the education gender gap in rural areas. This research analyses the data collected from female students pursuing higher education Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Mainly socio-culture factors are highlighted in this research.

Keywords: Women empowerment, decision making, higher education, socio-cultural factors, gender discrimination

* Student Advisor, Humanities and Social sciences, Bahria university Islamabad. Email: Ridakhan20@outlook.com
** Assistant Professor of IR, Iqra University Islamabad Campus. Email: Sheharyar.Editor@outlook.com
*** Development professional, having more than 30 years of experience in Social Development. Email: Sherwanib@outlook.com

Introduction:

This is a case study about the socio-cultural factors faced by women in acquiring Higher/post-graduation education in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Generally speaking, the problem faced by women is the inequality that stems from the prevalent gender-role which undermines the autonomy of women to take decisions of their lives. Decision making is of the utmost importance when it comes to the choice of education and career path to be adopted. Pakistan is a predominately patriarchal society where men are the primary decision-makers. Men are entrusted with the responsibility of the bread-winning while women are assigned to manage domestic affairs and perform the task of nurturing and care-giving.

Gender segregation in education and occupation is quite evident which can largely be attributed to socio-cultural factors. Women are seldom given the freedom to choose their education which may not complement their traditional and cultural roles. Women face barriers in pursuing post-graduation degrees mostly. And the barriers are mostly social and cultural.

Socio-cultural factors are mostly related to the different sets of people in society and their behaviour, trusts and traditions. The socio-cultural structure holds three concepts which include culture, society and system. A society is several interdependent organisms of the same types. Culture is the well-educated behaviours that are shared by the members of society, together with the material products of such behaviours. The words "society" and "culture" are attached to each other to produce the word "socio-cultural". A system is "collection of parts which interact with each other to function as a whole". The term socio-cultural system is most likely to be found in the writings of anthropologists who specialize in ecological anthropology.[42]

Socio-culture factors and education of women are very closely linked together. The society has affected women's education from the past and is still effecting education of women in many ways. Women face many problems in pursuing higher education. Parents, families, in-laws are the major influential relationships of a woman. Women's pursuit of study and career are mostly defined by their families. Decision making is a key aspect in which gender roles are immensely exercised. Societies of Asia are primarily male-dominated and men are the decision-makers for women in all aspects of their lives. So it is more likely for men to decide whether a girl will pursue higher education or not.

Families often encourage education and professional aspirations of male youngsters but not females. Therefore, it can be concluded that sex difference in career aspirations grows primarily in childhood which reflects societal and cultural expectations. Parents have this thought that girls get married and go to their husband's house, so investing in them will not give any return to them, therefore parents focus on better education of males rather than females.

Throughout history, women with careers were posed with many socio-cultural challenges due to their family authorities. Traditionally women were likely to perform their responsibilities as

---

[42] Kauffman, Draper L. (1980). Systems One: An Introduction to Systems Thinking. Minneapolis, MN:

Future Systems Inc. ISBN 978-99962-805-1-1

housewives and mothers in combination with their career responsibilities since women had to fulfil work and family demands simultaneously, it had a significant impact on their careers. [43]

A restricted faction of the privileged class with an enrollment of less than half a million have access to quality higher education at the university level. Whereas, the lower and middle class repeatedly neglected to attain higher education due to various daunting challenges. Among them, females are further deprived to get higher education and literacy rate in females is 39.2 per cent, which is lowest as compared to males. Low enrollment in higher education is an outcome of various factors.[44]

Despite the increasing figure of women entering the workforce, they have been restricted to lower-paid jobs with low status and are also clustered in a limited number of conventional careers. As women were confined to limited careers, their earnings lagged behind in comparison to their male counterparts with comparable education and experience. [45]

Some factors restrict females into traditional role occupations which include social and family influences, lack of knowledge about non-traditional options, discrimination with career fields, less viable environment in male-dominated fields and less seniority in given occupations.[46]

There are various barriers which impact the career development of women and the onset of such hindrance often being since their childhood. These barriers are reinforced throughout women schooling, collage and work and are likely to become more over time. [47] According to Swanson and Woitke, these barriers highlight the gap between women's abilities and achievements or also explain the inhibitions of women's career aspirations. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that these barriers could be overcome but the success depended largely on the type of specific barriers and the individual's personality. Women often perceive barriers and role conflicts as an impeding factor in their career development process. [48]

Girls in some traditional societies are denied even the simple right to existence in the mind of their fathers who are the family heads. Some men do not even count girls if asked the number of children born to them. His is a clear indication of preference detrimental to girls in the family. They are

---

[43] Valdez, R. L., & Gutek, B. A. (1987). Family roles: A help or hindrance for working women? In B. A. Gutek & L. Larwood (Eds.), Women's career development (pp. 157-169).

[44] Shaukat, Sadia & PELL, Anthony. (2017). The Impact of Socio-cultural factors on females passing through Higher Education in Pakistan. Eurasian Journal of Educational Research. 17. 193-214. 10.14689/ejer.2017.71.11.

[45] Domenico, Desirae M. & Jones, Karen H. (2006). Career Aspirations of Women in the 20th Century. Journal of Career and Technical Education, 22(2).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Domenico, Desirae M. & Jones, Karen H. (2006).

[48] Ibert, K. A., & Luzzo, D. A. (1999). The role of perceived barriers in career development: A social cognitive perspective. Journal of Counseling and Development, 77(4), 431-436. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1999.tb02470.x

therefore undervalued with their brothers who are given the right of existence by their fathers. Women in this type of patriarchal society due to helplessness accept these attitudes, which perennially perpetuate gender discrimination. The female child is not even worthy of the property of her father neither alive or inherit them when he dies. In some families, males are provided or allocated rooms, but the young girl is made to share the same room with the mother.[49]

Women's educational and occupational demands are largely affected by certain factors. They include perceived causes or success and failure in a particular field, confidence on one's self and on their abilities, expectations of success and perceived importance of a particular field. It is quite apparent that academics course selection, career choice, the expectation for success and failure, attribution trends and perceived importance of a particular field, all are influenced by the gender.[50]

Research also proves that women education benefits her a lot in the workplace. The more she is educated, the more likely it is that she will herself be in paid employment. Increase in post-graduation degrees enrollment of women is the product of changing roles and expectations of women in society coupled with increased interest of women in job vocation. [51]

There are high numbers of out-of-school children, and significant gender disparities in education, across the entire country (Pakistan), but some areas are much worse than others. In Baluchistan, the province with the lowest percentage of educated women, as of 2014-15, 81 per cent of women had not completed primary school, compared to 52 per cent of men. Seventy-five per cent of women had never attended school at all, compared to 40 per cent of men. According to this data, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had higher rates of education but similarly huge gender disparities. Sindh and Punjab had higher rates of education and somewhat lower gender disparities, but the gender disparities were still 14 to 21 per cent.[52]

The developed nations around the world pay equal attention to male and female's higher education, however, female's higher education in developing countries is the most neglected sector, and the same is true for Pakistan. Though the total enrollment in universities has increased from 0.276 million during 2001-02 to 1.298 million by 2014-15, still Pakistan's Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education was just 10% during 2015-16. For instance, female's enrollment has increased from 36.8% to 47.2% by 2014, but the dream of gender equality in higher education is far away.[53]

---

[49] "The Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Female Child Educational Development in Amassoma" SEPTEMBER 15, 2015. korisamuel.wordpress.com/2015/09/15/the-socio-cultural-factors-affecting-female-child-educational-development-in-amassoma/

[50]Eccles, Jacquelynne S. "Gender-Roles and Women's Achievement." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 15, no. 6, 1986, pp. 15–19. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1175495. Accessed 18 June 2020.

[51] Bronstein,Black, pfenning and white, 1986, "Getting Academic Jobs. Are Women Equally Qualified-And Equally Successful?" American Psychologist 41.

[52] Rabia, July 2017 " barriers to girls education in Pakistan."

[53] Mehmood, Sumara & Chong, Li & Hussain, Mehmood. (2018). Females Higher Education in Pakistan: An Analysis of Socio-Economic and Cultural Challenges. Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal. 5. 10.14738/assrj.56.4658.

Pakistan was described as "among the world's worst-performing countries in education," at the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education and Development. The new government, elected in July 2018, stated in their manifesto that nearly 22.5 million children are out of school. Girls are particularly affected. Thirty-two per cent of primary school-age girls are out of school in Pakistan, compared to 21 per cent of boys. By grade six, 59 per cent of girls are out of school, versus 49 per cent of boys. Only 13 per cent of girls are still in school by ninth grade.

This study presumes since Pakistan is a patriarchal society, the socio-cultural factors would affect the higher education of women in Pakistan. This hypothesis would be tested with data collected from the students.

To investigate this, this study asks the following questions:

- What are the Socio-Cultural factors faced by women in acquiring Higher/post-graduation education in Islamabad and Rawalpindi?
- How patriarchal system has affected the women in taking decisions on their education and career?
- Are men the primary decision-makers for women's lives?

The study was supported by primary data which was collected by survey questionnaires. A structured questionnaire was prepared that was distributed among female students. The questionnaire was to be filled by the female students enrolled in post-graduation studies at the universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The questionnaire has all the related questions to social and cultural problems women had faced or were facing in pursuing post-graduation degree.

The study aimed to purposively pick females who were in the middle of their post-graduation degrees from Bahria University (BUIC), Iqra University Islamabad Campus (IUIC), Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU), Fatima Jinnah University (FJWU) and International Islamic University (IIUI). The sample comprised of 20 female students of post-graduation from each university mentioned above. The sample size was kept equal at every university to find similar results. These universities were selected for sampling because they fulfilled the criteria of being located at the urban centres with students coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Female students were randomly approached during the university hours and were given a questionnaire to fill.

100 questionnaires were filled by the females of post-graduation degrees from the above-mentioned universities.

However, there were some limitations of the study as well. It included restricted access to the universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Therefore, the sample size remained small and limited. The participants had the option to refuse to participate in the study at any time thus affecting the return rate of the surveys and data collection. Some of the respondents were not comfortable sharing their responses as well.

The following themes were highlighted under which a questionnaire was constructed:

- How did they make up to the decision of taking admission in this university?

- Challenges faced in university
- Who supports their education?
- Transport challenges
- Family pressure
- Extended family pressure
- Cultural factors
- Social factors
- Efforts made to stop them from pursuing post-graduate studies

Data Collection, Result and Analysis

The data has been collected from 96 women of post-graduation studies. The questionnaires were filled by them. The analysis of case study research is an iterative process and can involve one or multiple techniques depending on the data achieved. In the current study, the aim was to study the problems women were facing in pursuing post-graduation degrees. The data from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed through SPSS version 15. Multiple Responses' technique was used for simplifying the data and for its analysis.

Information gathered through questionnaires were exposed to frequency counts. In other words, subjects' responses for every individual question were combined together to find the highest frequency of occurrence. These responses to the questions, which are quantified, are then presented in percentage forms. This analysis is shown in tabular form. I have used tables containing a variable and in some cases combined two or more variables in a single table.

1. Age and Background of Respondents

Table 1 - Age and Rural/Urban Setup

Age	Urban	Rural	Total
18 – 27	22	60	82
28 – 27	4	9	13
38 above	0	1	1
Total	26	70	96

Table 1 shows that the age of most of the respondents ranged between 23 to 26 years and belonged to rural setup.

2. Names of Institutions Selected for Study

Table 2 – Institution by Setup			
Name of Institution	Urban	Rural	Total
Bahria University Islamabad Campus	3	17	20
Fatima Jinnah University	3	13	16
International Islamic University	9	11	20
Iqra University	6	14	20
Quaid e Azam University	5	15	20
Total	26	70	96

Table 2 the shows that the highest of numbers who students of who belonged to rural setup were in BUIC.

3. Qualification

Table 3 – Highest Education Acquired

Education	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor	69	71.9
M. Phil	5	5.2
Masters	6	6.3
MS	16	16.7
Total	96	100.0

Table 3 shows the highest level of education our research candidates have achieved, mostly students were enrolled in Post-graduation degrees and their highest qualifications were Bachelors.

4. Currently Enrolled

The table below shows the urban and rural distribution of currently enrolled students

Table 4: Setup and Discipline wise Currently Enrollment

Setup / Discipline	M. Phil	MBA	MS	PhD	Total
Urban	2	2	18	4	26
Rural	13	12	39	6	70
Total	15	14	57	10	96

5. Challenges on the Campus

Table 5 – Challenges on the Campus

Name of Institution / Challenges	BUIC	FJWU	IIUI	IUIC	QAU	Total
Administrative	3	5	5	4	3	20
Biasedness	0	0	0	0	1	1
Educational Competition	2	0	0	0	0	2
Ethnic Slurs	0	0	0	1	0	1
Food	0	1	0	0	0	1
Grading System	2	0	0	0	0	2
Harassment	1	0	0	1	0	2
Politics, Favoritism	0	0	3	1	3	7
Racism	0	0	0	0	1	1
Teaching Methodology	0	1	1	1	0	3
Total	8	7	9	8	8	40

Table 5 shows the challenges that the female students were facing in their universities. The table shows that 56 (58.3%) students do not face any difficulty or challenges in their universities while 40 were facing challenges. Out of 40, 50% of the students who face issues while studying were administrative.

6. Who financed their Education

The study shows that 83 (86.5 %) students received financial support for their studies from their parents, five per cent were sponsored by their brothers while only eight per cent of students were self-financed.

7. Factors Leading the Decision for Opting Post-Graduation

49 students said that they have pursued their post-graduation degree for their career enhancement, 32 said that they pursued because of family persuasion, 11 said it was their own will, 2 said because of friends and 2 said because of peer pressure. 51% of the students opted post-graduation for carrier enhancement which shows that students believe that the higher studies is a basic requirement for professional growth.

8. Pressure and Cultural Barriers

88 students said that they faced no pressure while only eight students replied they face pressure while opting for the post-graduation degrees. 6 said that their families pressurized them while 2 said that it was their job requirement. 10 students faced cultural aspect to discouragement towards pursuing post-graduation degrees. Extended families of 5 students objected over their starting of post-graduation studies. All 5 who received objections by extended family belonged to rural setup.

Majority of the extended families i.e., 80% believed that girls do not need to study while 20% of the families thought that girls should be less educated than men.

Those who were encouraged by their families were asked the reasons for it and 73 students said that their families preferred education, and rest have the educated and supportive families of the opinion that the girls should also get higher education.

9. Efforts made to stop from pursuing post-graduation

20 students faced problems which were stopping them from pursuing post-graduation degree. 64 did not face any efforts and 12 said that they don't know. Furthermore, it was revealed from the data that out of 20 who were tried to stop from pursuing post-graduation 13 belonged to rural and 7 to the urban background. The nature of these problems that the students faced reveals that 9 students faced psychological pressure, 5 faced physical efforts while 6 said emotional efforts were made to stop them.

Out of 9 who were psychologically pursued, 5 belong to urban while 4 to rural setup. Out of physically pursued 5 students, 1 belong to urban while 4 to rural setup. Moreover, out of 6 emotionally pursued, 1 belong to urban and 5 to rural setup.

Students who belonged to the rural setup were more likely physically and emotionally pursued to stop education than students who belonged to urban setup, while psychologically both were pursued almost in the same manner.

10. Reasons for being Restrained from Pursuing Post Graduate Studies

Table 6 – Reasons for Restraining

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Cultural	16	15.6
Financial	14	14.6
Mental torture	1	1.0
No reason	18	18.8
No Response	8	8.3
Other	33	34.4
Psychological	2	2.1
Religious	4	4.2
	96	100.0

Table 6 explains the reasons for the students being restrained from pursuing your postgraduate studies. 16 faced cultural barriers, 14 faced financial barriers, 4 faced religious barriers, and 2 faced psychological barriers and 1 faced mental torture.

73% of the female students being restrained faced cultural, financial, religious, psychological barriers, while only 10% of the male faced these barriers

The study reveals that students with rural background faced more pressure while opting for post-graduation degrees in comparison with students with an urban background.

Findings:

The analysis of data revealed that most of the students who opted post-graduation i.e., 72.9% belonged to the rural background while 27.1% were from the urban background. Highest numbers of students who belonged to rural setup are in Bahria University Islamabad Campus which shows students prefer to study at Bahria University Islamabad campus more than any other university.

The data has also revealed that students who belonged to the rural setup feel more pressure while opting post-graduation. And students who belonged to the rural setup were more physically and emotionally pursued to stop education than students who belonged to urban setup, while psychologically both were pursued almost same. 51% of the students opted post-graduation for career enhancement which show that the higher studies is a basic requirement for professional and career growth.

Data also tells us that more than 11% of the students were married which show that the higher studies are becoming a need of the day.50% of the students who face issues while studying were of administrative nature, while others were facing issues of harassment, favouritism, politics etc.

The financial status of the families shows that maximum students who were studying belong to a group whose income is more than 50-000 Rupees or above. This shows that acquiring higher education in universities is an expensive matter.

Students who faced objections by extended family belonged to rural setup. Their extended families thought that girls do not need to study more.76% of the extended families encouraged them for higher studies.73% of the female students being restrained faced cultural, financial, religious, psychological barriers, while only 10% of the male faced these barriers, 81% applied for the job after completion of under graduation were able to secure the job which shows that there is job potential in the market for undergraduate students.

The findings are telling that females face problems in accruing higher education but not to the extent that the theory of patriarchy would suggest. Mostly women who are from rural background are facing these problems.

Recommendations:

Women decision making is a critical domain of their lives which eventually determines their future socio-economic prospects. The autonomy women have in their decision making directly influences their lives and those around them in many significant ways. Therefore, it is immensely important to give them their due autonomy so that they not only prosper but also avail their basic human right of choice.

Enhancing or empowering women decision making autonomy is a multifaceted approach which needs to be addressed at the institutional, religious and social level. Mostly in rural areas empowering women for education specifically needs to be addressed. Institutions should try to find ways to progress the quality of their management by producing attentiveness, understanding and gratitude of different management styles. This can be attained through training, self-analysis, and many feedback mechanisms. Diversity training, specifically, is essential in this process.

The transport issue needs to be tackled for girls by the institute or government. Early child marriages should be ended so that girls facing problems after marriages to study should be able to study freely.

Violence against women should be addressed who want to pursue advanced studies. Men should be targeted to become part of discussions about cultural and societal practices, they need to get aware of women to get an education. More importantly, Scholarships, stipends and cash rewards should be given to women, so that they do not depend on anyone for pursuing higher education.

Conclusion:

In our culture and society, decision making autonomy for women is quite a complex issue because the patriarchal norms and perceptions are deeply embedded in our society. Even though education and mass media awareness has enhanced the autonomy of women in various spheres of their lives. Still a dependency on men largely prevails. Women cannot remain employed or engaged in their careers on for their entire lives, they have to discontinue it at some point in their lives keeping in view the traditions of our culture and society. The female students are facing problems but not as much as we had thought at the outset of the study. Mostly students who are from rural backgrounds are facing problems such as being pressurized to not to take admission in post-graduation studies, they face transport issues and are dependent.

They have to face the problem of being discriminated by their family members, as their male siblings are preferred more over them and they are told that they do not need to study further and there is no use of higher education. But most female students were not facing such problems as their family members were very supportive and wanted females to study as it was important for their career. The data suggested that the hypothesis that due patriarchy women would face too many socio-cultural problems proved wrong as the majority of the students did not face such problems. However, the data was acquired from those students who already were able to get admission in postgraduate studies which means that we did not cover those students were already stopped from higher education by socio-cultural factors. That area is open for further research.