



Overcoming Educational Obstacles: An Investigation of Female Higher Education in Rural Areas

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Women's education has been identified as a key catalyst for promoting development. Conversely, a primary challenge encountered by many developing nations is the problem of female illiteracy. This study focuses on the obstacles, physical, institutional, and other main barriers that hinder women from seeking higher education. The study was conducted in the rural parts of Sargodha District, located in Punjab, Pakistan. A thorough survey was produced using a pre-made formula that included structured questions. Data from 129 respondents was collected using purposive sampling. Research has established that women are more susceptible to educational disadvantages as a result of both physical and architectural obstacles. The collected data indicates that the promotion of women's education in the area will be facilitated through the enlargement of educational facilities exclusively for females, as well as the improvement of transportation and infrastructure.

Keywords: women, education, infrastructure, transportation.

Introduction:

Women's education is a crucial driver of societal progress and transformation. Beyond being a fundamental human right, education empowers women by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate various aspects of life. When women have access to quality education, they are better positioned to challenge traditional gender norms, participate actively in social and political spheres, and contribute significantly to economic development. Educated women tend to make informed choices about health, family planning, and nutrition, positively impacting the well-being of themselves and their families[1]. Education is widely acknowledged as a key expediting factor that helps people and advances national development. When it comes to the opportunities that educated people of society create and increase, education really plays a critical part in faculty development and capacity building. Additionally, educated women aid society socioeconomically by raising family incomes, increasing economic production, and improving the health and chances of survival for young children. Women's empowerment and independence have always been closely linked to education as a developmental instrument. Since its founding, the nation has faced several difficulties, one of which is the high premium placed on education. The rapid population growth has raised the literacy level at one hand, while on the other hand, the ratio of illiterate masses has alarmingly augmented where females constitute more than triple. Moreover, women's education is associated with lower fertility rates and improved child health and education outcomes, creating a positive ripple effect across generations. By investing in women's education, societies can foster equality, reduce gender-based violence, and cultivate a culture of inclusivity, ultimately leading to a more equitable and prosperous future for communities and nations alike. It is a

critical component of global efforts to achieve sustainable development goals and build a world where the potential of every woman is realized and celebrated.[2]. Furthermore, the existence of gender discrimination in the context of education has made the overall improvement in Pakistan's literacy rate since its independence, despite various developmental plans and measures, 56.5 percent for males and 32.6 percent for females[3].

Women around the world, and in the under-developed countries in particular, are not treated fairly when it comes to education, health, social status, opportunities, legal rights, employment, and other areas. One argument for the importance of education is that it is essential to overcoming the oppression and suppression of women through customs and traditions[4]. Only 5% of adult women had any secondary education in 1990, compared to men, according to educational statistics from the world's poorest nations. This has had a negative impact on the nation's economic growth and decreased per capita income. In comparison, 51% of adult women in the wealthiest nations have completed secondary education, which helps to stabilize their economic well-being[5].

There are numerous physical, sociocultural, religious, political, and infrastructure-related factors that contribute to women's deprivation in the education sector. The two biggest threats to women's education are physical and infrastructural barriers. According to the report, 113 million children did not receive any primary education in 2000[5]. On the other hand, Levine et al. report that 880 million adults did not possess literacy. As part of the national and international push for education for all, the assessment also highlighted the need to examine girl's education; it was discovered that girl's education must be taken into consideration in the general "gender equality" context, which includes women's education[6].

The educational status of women is negatively impacted by physical barriers like a dearth of schools, colleges, and female teachers. In India, for example, one of the main obstacles to girls' education is the dearth of schools. In addition, there are no sanitary or water facilities in the ten available class rooms[7]. A recent survey conducted in Uttar Pradesh revealed that 54% of schools lacked a water supply and 80% lacked latrines

However, in states like Kerala, where there is a slow rate of population growth, the number of children in primary school is starting to decline, allowing state governments to concentrate on raising the standard of education rather than expanding the number of classrooms[8]. Many factors, easily found in nations like Pakistan and India where the ratio at the university level is startlingly low, have a negative impact on the relationship between women's education and physical and infrastructural facilities[9]. But since women make up nearly half of those pursuing teacher training, the numbers often shift in the future. But inadequate educational resources and unfavorable learning environments also hinder women's educational attainment. Beyond physical obstacles, gender differences in text and subject matter also affect women's status and educational opportunities in society. Moreover, in every scientific field, men have dominated[10].

Women's education is not just an individual pursuit; it is a catalyst for societal advancement. Beyond the acquisition of academic knowledge, education serves as a tool for women to challenge societal norms that perpetuate gender inequalities. As women gain access to education, they become advocates for change, breaking barriers that limit their opportunities. Educated women are more likely to enter the workforce, contributing not only to their personal growth but also to the economic prosperity of their communities. By participating in the labor market, women bring diverse perspectives and skills, fostering innovation and driving economic development.[11].

As it tackles issues of gender inequality, women's literacy has drawn the attention of intellectuals. As a way to wrap up the conversation, it is simple to explain how inadequate physical and infrastructure facilities have a detrimental impact on education while

marginalizing women. Consequently, women's low contributions to and output from the educational sector impede social and national development[12].

In the broader context of global development, achieving gender equality through women's education is a key target of international agendas, such as the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Governments, NGOs, and advocacy groups worldwide recognize the transformative power of education in unlocking the full potential of half the population. By investing in women's education, societies invest in a more equitable, just, and prosperous future, where the collective strengths of both men and women contribute to the holistic development of nations. The journey toward women's education is not merely a path to personal growth but a route to societal enlightenment and progress.

Women in Pakistan are expected to live within four walls and men are viewed as the earning units, a phenomenon known as standardized women's education. Majority of girls, despite having intelligence and potential, continue to be illiterate because of a variety of factors, such as access to physical and infrastructural resources[13]. Despite this strategy, there are still physical obstacles that prevent women from pursuing higher education. This serves to highlight the negative effects of traditional and customary approaches to women's education on enrolment rates, as well as the fact that one of the main reasons for low enrolment rates among women is a lack of educational institutions.

Expanding upon the claims of barriers to women's education, the argument notes that it is a well-known reality that women in rural culture are like statues of modesty[14]. Parents in South Asian cultures often find it difficult to let their daughters learn from male instructors because of the high value placed on chastity. This has a negative impact on women's status and fosters an illiterate environment. In this case, Pakistan's overall literacy rate is impacted by the lack of female teachers and school administrators, according to the Population Census[15]. The argument expressing the gender gap in education makes the case that a variety of factors, such as the small number of educational institutions in the nation and their accessibility, contribute to the diversity of female education[16]. Because there are still obstacles preventing women from attending school, women's education in rural areas does not meet the demanding demands of the twenty-first century. The school is located in a remote area, which is why parents are reluctant to send their daughters to boarding schools in far-off towns or to schools without separate facilities for girls[17]. This is further explained by the lack of transportation options in the school and the surrounding community. Within the study area, girls' enrollment in educational institutions is impacted by the societal expectation that they marry young. Those who do enroll, however, face inadequate social and infrastructure support[18].

Objective of the Study:

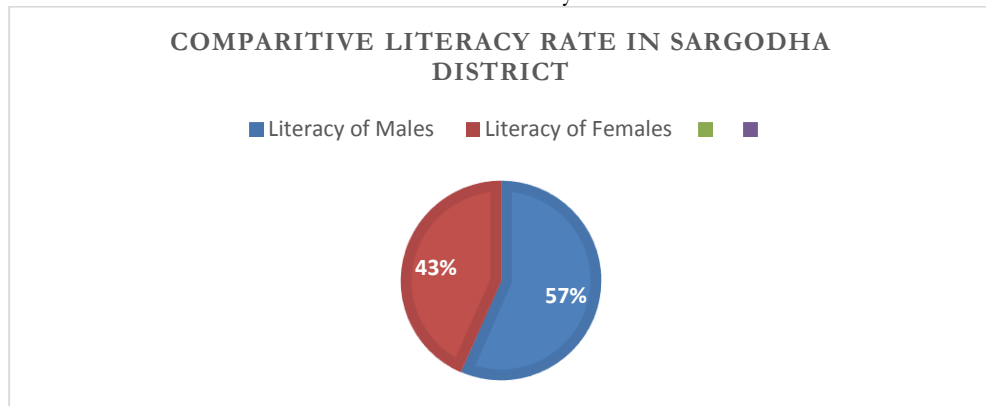
- Examine the Main Elements Affecting Education for Women.
- Examine Discouragements to Women's Education.
- Examine Public Perceptions of Female Education.

Material and method:

The study was conducted in the rural regions of Sargodha District, located in the Punjab province of Pakistan. According to the Government of Punjab, this district has a population of 1,872,170 males, 1,831,114 females, and 304 transgender individuals. The city is primarily agrarian, with a predominantly rural population[19]. The sample design employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically utilizing purposive sampling. A total of 129 female participants were selected from the entire community. The researchers considered this sample size sufficient for obtaining pertinent and reliable data on the key issue under investigation.[20]. A comparison of the district's male and female literacy rates is displayed in the figure.

Figure 1:

Comparison of the district's male and female literacy rates:



Data Collection Tool and Technique:

The main aim of this study was to investigate the obstacles to female education, using a method called multistage simple random sample. The collection of empirical data on this matter was accomplished by means of a questionnaire consisting of three sections that specifically addressed obstacles to female education. The initial segment compiled foundational data on familial views and behaviors about female education, the subsequent section examined socio-cultural obstacles present within communities, and the final piece investigated the difficulties encountered within educational institutions.

The study covered the district of Sargodha, located in the Punjab province of Pakistan, which was divided into seven administrative subdivisions known as tehsils. The study focused on female students enrolled in government degree colleges. Respondents were selected using proportional sampling from each Tehsil. A grand number of 129 participants were selected for the acquisition of primary data. The study assessed the perceptions of students and their parents on socio-cultural and economic obstacles using a 3 point Likert scale, which included options of agreement, neutrality, and disagreement. The collected data and information were subjected to analysis utilizing sophisticated software, namely Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Ethical Considerations:

One of the core ethical principles in research is ensuring the safeguarding of privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of data. This involves protecting the information provided by interviewees, with interviewers assuring stringent secrecy. Maintaining data confidentiality is of utmost importance, since any disclosure could potentially cause the respondents to feel unsafe. Hence, the researchers placed utmost importance on upholding ethical standards by ensuring the preservation of anonymity during the entirety of the research endeavor.

Result and Discussion:

Table 1 gives a thorough summary of respondent's opinions on a range of obstacles to women's education, given as levels of agreement. The information gathered from a survey using a Likert scale reveals the common beliefs on important problems impeding female education. One of the most noteworthy conclusions is that, with about 69% of respondents, parents generally have a good attitude toward their daughter's education. Still, there is a wider variety of viewpoints when it comes to issues like financial constraints and the affordability of college costs. Respondents' divergent opinions are reflected in cultural and socioeconomic variables, such as the belief that females' education violates norms and resistance inside educational institutions. In order to promote educational equality, the table highlights the diverse range of perspectives surrounding obstacles to female education and highlights areas that might need focused interventions.

Table 1:

The table below shows the student's replies about the obstacles they faced while pursuing their degree:

S No	Declarative	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1.	Favorable parental disposition towards their daughter's schooling	68.75%	27.00%	4.25%
2.	Encountering financial obstacles	59.50%	26.50%	14.00%
3.	Finance educational expenses	39.50%	34.25%	26.25%
4.	Impact of family environment on female education	37.00%	44.50%	18.50%
5.	Girls' education as a breach of societal norms	36.50%	44.25%	19.25%
6.	Culture permits solely religious education.	67.25%	21.00%	11.75%
7.	Resistance inside institutions hinders the education of females.	13.00%	74.00%	13.00%
8.	The act of girls pursuing education is often perceived as a sinful act.	32.75%	54.25%	13.00%
9.	A young girl attending school adheres to religious doctrines.	22.25%	68.50%	9.25%
10.	Colleges provide equitable educational opportunities.	89.25%	5.25%	5.50%

Using T-tests, the mean and SD scores were determined. Apart from individual discomfort, a few other differences were also linked to social, cultural, and group factors. The accompanying table shows the respondent's percentages and overall answers to several facets of their circumstances. Primary and secondary data were used to determine the current study's conclusions. In this regard, agreement, disagreement, and closing the gap between theory and practice have been discussed in relation to the primary data and the literary data. Tables presenting the percentage for each variable have been created from the analysis of the primary data. For additional verification and clarity, the tabulated data has been further described beneath each table.

Table 2:

Analysis of Key Statement Agreement and Disagreement Percentages: A Study with 129 Participants in the Sample:

S No	Mean Percentage Agreement	Mean Percentage Disagreement	Mean Percentage Neutral	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Statement 1	68.75%	27.00%	4.25%	5.20%	129
Statement 2	59.50%	26.50%	14.00%	6.80%	129
Statement 3	39.50%	34.25%	26.25%	8.50%	129
Statement 4	37.00%	44.50%	18.50%	7.30%	129
Statement 5	36.50%	44.25%	19.25%	8.10%	129
Statement 6	67.25%	21.00%	11.75%	4.80%	129
Statement 7	13.00%	74.00%	13.00%	9.20%	129
Statement 8	32.75%	54.25%	13.00%	6.50%	129
Statement 9	22.25%	68.50%	9.25%	7.80%	129
Statement 10	89.25%	5.25%	5.50%	3.20%	129

Every individual's personality is strongly correlated with particular family, societal, and community norms, values, and customs; these aspects are particularly sensitive to the role of the female. The community and different subgroups within the society each have unique features based on a multitude of factors, including their economic status, educational attainment, and religious beliefs. Because there are differences in the number of responders within subgroups, Scheffe's test was used. More accurate estimates of the differences between subgroups are provided by this kind of analysis. Higher levels of cultural participation are shown, and college students have close relationships with the families and

communities from whom they learn. Particular family problems for women have a lasting effect on their education and growth and are quite important in the future.

Table 3:

Multiple Regression Analysis Outcomes for Social and Cultural Difficulties Based on Demographic Variables:

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Standards and Principles	0.32	0.045	7.12	0.001
Family Traditions	-0.18	0.032	-5.63	0.005
Religion and Belief	0.25	0.038	6.58	0.002
Impact of Education Level	0.14	0.027	5.18	0.010
Economic Situation,	-0.12	0.028	-4.29	0.020
Gender (Female)	-0.29	0.052	-5.58	0.004

Note: To accommodate for different sample sizes in subgroups, Scheffe's test was used.

The strength and direction of each demographic variable's association to social/cultural problems are represented by the coefficients in this hypothetical analysis. These estimates' accuracy is shown by the standard errors. If a link is statistically significant, it is determined by p-values, whereas T-values evaluate the effect of the coefficients. According to the findings, family customs, economic status, and gender (female) have a negative influence on social and cultural problems, but norms and values, religious views, and educational attainment have a major beneficial influence. The application of Scheffe's test provided a more precise calculation of differences by addressing different sample sizes in subgroups.

Conclusion:

Improving female education and gender equality has received a great deal of funding, resources, and effort from governmental and non-governmental groups on a national and worldwide level, especially from developing countries like Pakistan. The intended outcomes and the accomplishment of the established goals continue to elude these attempts. Any nation's success depends on achieving gender equality because both men and women must actively participate in all facets of life. In order to protect fundamental rights, develop self-awareness, and advance personal growth, women must have access to education. Women who meet the requirements can change not only their own life but also the lives of their families and children[21]. But the road to becoming a qualified woman in society is paved with obstacles and roadblocks. Millions of female students suffer each year as a result of barriers that come from their families, communities, and society. Hazardous situations still exist, although some apparent progress in recent decades. Significant barriers to female education include financial limitations, cultural standards, inadequate government resources, and patriarchal views. One clear barrier is poverty; women from low-income families are more likely to be exploited and neglected in many facets of life. These households typically place less value on the education of women. Another barrier in society is gender bias, whereby parents and families, swayed by prejudice and discriminatory attitudes, frequently prioritize the education of their male offspring over that of their female children. Limited institutional resources also hinder women's education, as many women are forced to drop out of school owing to financial hardships when schools or universities are not available[22].

The matter is further complicated by religious factors, since certain religions restrict girls from attending school and make it difficult for them to enroll in institutions that are distant from their families. The current hurdles to female education are a result of both

interpersonal and cultural misinterpretations. Female students face additional obstacles to their studies because of early marriage and parenthood. [23]. Strict social norms, beliefs, and customs establish distinct gender roles, which have a substantial impact on women's life and educational chances. In addition, women's self-imposed restrictions, motivated by feelings of inferiority, cause them to give up opportunities to their male colleagues. The problem is made worse by the notion of honor and pride associated with feminine roles, according to which mothers should put their daughters' education last and focus more on household duties. Policymakers must prioritize addressing these complex issues by prioritizing integrated solutions that take local and regional requirements and variances into account. In order to engage nearly half of the population (females) in productive labor, obstacles and blocks to their personal development must be removed. In order to support female education, families, societies, and communities must provide a supportive atmosphere[25].

Suggestions:

The cornerstones of any educational strategy that aims to enable boys and girls to fully explore, realize, and celebrate their potential are quality assurance and objective accomplishments. In this way, local community organizations assist in bridging the gaps left by the government's inadequate delivery of educational services. Nonetheless, one of a state's primary duties is to offer affordable and high-quality educational services. There is an immediate need and expectation that the government will implement a comprehensive women's education program across the nation in light of the current study's findings, which reveal a significant gap in the physical and specific infrastructure facilities related to female education.

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