

Socio Cultural Factors Affecting Girls' Limited Access to School Education in North West Frontier Province of Pakistan

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Abstract: Achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) has been a major concern of education in developing countries since 1990, but its realization does not seem to be easy. One of the major reasons that make realization of EFA difficult seems to be the limited access of girls to school education, especially in South Asia and Africa. Dakar Framework of Action 2000 also indicated that EFA goals could not be achieved without promotion of girls' education. Researches have been made to identify factors affecting girls' accessibility to schools, but most of them seem to have been focusing on the conditions of school education for girls identifying the factors such as the lack of schools for girls and the shortages of female teachers. To tackle with this problem, however, research should also be made from different aspects such as socio-cultural dimension of education. Noticing the very limited access of girls to school education as well as gender disparity in Pakistan, the survey was conducted in September 2005 to the parents in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan to identify social-cultural factors that might have affected on them. The results of the survey revealed that the levels of recognition on the importance of education of their daughters were generally low for both families sending their daughters to government schools and families not sending their daughters to any schools. Parents who have a conservative view of marriage for their children and parents who have limited access to the outside information had negative attitude to the education of their children. Both parents sending their daughters to government schools and parents not sending their daughters to any schools seem to have been influenced by the custom of female isolation "Purdah" on the education of their daughters.

Keywords: Girls' education, Pakistan, Pashutu, socio-cultural

Introduction

Since the World Declaration of Education for All (EFA) in 1990, developing countries have been striving to realize the universalization of primary education as well as to reduce illiteracy. However, it does not seem to be easy to realize them as was indicated in the World Education Forum held at Dakar in 2000 with the purpose to evaluate the progress made about them in the last decade. The Dakar Framework of Action 2000 indicated that EFA goals could not be achieved without promotion of girls' education, and made a target to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in

education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement of basic education of good quality.

In terms of the gender parity in education, however, situation does not necessarily seem to be promising in South Asia as UNICEF stated that South Asia will not reach gender parity by the end of 2005, and is unlikely to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015 (UNICEF, 2005). According to the UNICEF, gender differentials in basic education have been decreasing in most countries in South Asia, but in Pakistan, it seems to have been increasing on the contrary. In Pakistan, regional disparities are also glaring within the country. According to the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey 2001-2002, gross enrollment rate at the primary schools is highest in the urban areas of Punjab Province at 98% and lowest in the rural areas of Balochistan Province at 35%, and the largest gap in enrollment between boys and girls is observed in the rural areas of North West Frontier Province (NWFP). In an attempt to improve the education of NWFP, primary education became compulsory in 2002 and also textbook and tuition became free of charge to decrease a financial burden of the parents. In spite of the commitment on the side of the provincial government to decrease financial burden of the parents, school enrollment as well as gender disparity in basic education does not seem to be improving. This situation suggests the possibility that factors other than these might be affecting them.

In an attempt to identify the factors affecting this serious situation of basic education in the NWFP, Provincial Education Bureau conducted the questionnaire survey to the head teachers and PTA representatives as a part of The 10th Annual School Census of 2001-02. German Association for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) analyzed the results of this survey with the provincial government and published it as *Improving Primary School Enrolments and Quality of Learning in the NWFP* (2000). Regarding the problems of girls' education, head teachers responded that schools for girls are lacking and parents do not approve girls to enter school compared with boys. Qureshi (2003), based on her survey, pointed out the reason for boys not going to school is mainly the financial reason. She also pointed that, in NWFP and Balochistan Province, the main reason for girls not attending school is because parents do not give her permission to go to school. From the results of these surveys, gender inequality in NWFP seems to be related to the large extent to the parents' attitude against girls.

Then, what socio-cultural factors affect such an attitude of parents against their daughters? USAID (1999) pointed out that both NWFP and Balochistan Province have a distinctive mix of ethnic and tribal groups that plays critical role in defining gender roles and the patterns of family and individual lives. These tribal customs regard women as objects of male ownership whose purity must be cautiously guarded. Rural women are confined to family compounds

and local villages. Segregation of sexes is one of the tools used to reinforce male domination and the marginalization of women. Heward (1999) pointed out the lack of women's autonomy in their personal lives and in the household stating that “the importance of *pardah* varies among the various sub-cultural groups, with the Pathans of NWFP being strongest adherents.”(p.208).

Against these viewpoints that explain girls’ and women's position from the conservative and closed society based on the cultural custom in the region, The Population Council Report in 2000 pointed out that the parents' attitudes against girls’ education is changing. There is a trend to value education more for many reasons such as the strong appreciation for all the social benefits of schooling for girls and so on (Sathar, et al., 2000). The change in the parents’ attitude toward girls’ education might have been influenced by the media in recent years since no region can escape from the wave of globalization today. In an attempt to identify factors affecting parents’ attitude toward girls’ education, much attention should be paid to the history and the characteristics of the tribes.

For this reason, this study was conducted to identify the factors obstructive to girls’ education in Swat District of NWFP in Pakistan. Specific concerns in this study were the relationship between parents’ attitudes toward education of their children and their marriage and occupation, and the relationship between parents’ attitude and their household situation.

Method

The survey was conducted in September, 2005 in Swat District in NWFP of Pakistan..The majority of people in Swat District are pious Islamites of the Yusafzai tribe that has migrated from Kandahar of Afghanistan in 1500's and is known by the brave character and hospitality. It was very important for them to strengthen the connection with another family through marriage since the tribal contention did not cease for a long time. The woman plays a role to connect families in such tribal contention, and has been kept domestically, extremely severely before the marriage.

To identify the social awareness of girls’ education at primary school level, research focused on parents of the child of that age. The answer from the family was made from either father or mother. In order to identify the influences of social classes, the families were divided into three categories of "sending daughter to private school”, “sending daughter to government school” and “not sending daughter to any school”.

The questionnaires were prepared in three different languages. English questionnaires were distributed to the families sending their children to private schools since the written language

usually used by them is English. From this group, 85 out of 93 (91%) were responded. For the families sending their children to government schools, the questionnaires were prepared in the national language that is Urdu and it is also used at schools as a medium of instruction. There were 77 out of 91 (85%) answers collected. Interviews were made to 68 Pashutu families not sending their children to schools who are almost illiterate.

Level of Educational Attainment and Marrying Age

In the interview to educational officers and school principals, an early marriage was suggested to be one of the factors that the girls do not go to school or drop out before completion. In this region, the girl students were said to have never returned to school after marriage. Therefore, the relationships between the levels of educational attainment parents expect for their children and the marrying age parents expect for their children were examined. “No education” includes children who had never attended school. “Primary Education” includes both children who have completed primary education and who have dropped out from primary school before completion. The compulsory education in NWFP is five years in primary school and students who passed the board examination after completing secondary school are called Matric.

Table 1: *Level of Educational Attainment Parents Expect for Their Children*

Level of Educational Attainment	No education	Primary Education	Secondary Education	University
Son (n=222)	17(7.7%)	10(4.5%)	21(9.5%)	174(78.4%)
Daughter (n=225)	43(19.1%)	22(9.8%)	24(10.7%)	136(60.4%)
Total	60(13.4%)	32(7.2%)	45(10.1%)	310(69.4%)

As shown in Table 1, considerable differences were observed between boys and girls in the parents' expectation about education of their children. As a result of the χ^2 test, there was a significant relationship between parents' expectation about the education of their children and gender differentials ($\chi^2(3, N = 447) = 20.61$ and $p < .01$). From this result, it is clear that the intention of parents in bringing up their children differs by gender.

In the analysis of this result in three categories of the families sending their children to schools (private schools; government schools), all parents who send their daughters to private school and 90 % of the parents who send their daughters to government schools preferred their sons to complete the higher education. Also, 98 % of the families sending their children to private schools and 71 % of the families sending their children to government schools wished their daughters to complete higher education. As parents who send their children to

private schools have very high educational awareness, there were no gender differences at the level of educational expectations. However, parents who do not send their children to any schools cannot expect any higher education because of their severe circumstances. In this district, the number of schools decreases sharply as the level of education increases. According to the statistical report of NWFP, the number of boy's school decrease from 834 to 83, then to 64 in the primary, middle and high schools respectively, and the number of girl's school decreases from 446 to 41, then to 15 in the primary, middle and high school respectively, making it difficult to proceed their education to higher levels (Directorate of School & Literacy, NWFP, 2005). However, families sending their children to government schools still desire higher level education since it is regarded as the status of the society.

In this region, almost all marriages are still arranged by parents. Because it is usual to quit school when girls got married in Swat district, the level of education and marrying age parents expect have a closer relation. The average age of marriage parents expect for their children was 20.88 years old for the daughter and 25.48 years old for the son (The two-side test: $t(429, N=436) = 14.65$ and $p < .01$) and was extremely significant. Although the average age of marriage that parents expect for their daughters is lower than the son's, it exceeds 20 years old. The percentages of parents who expect higher education for their children were high for both boys and girls. This corresponds to the age of marriage of the children, and indicates that parents want their daughter to be better educated before getting married.

Reasons for Sending Children to Schools

To identify the factors which are obstructive to girls' education, it would be worthwhile to examine the relationships between educational awareness and other social factors that take important place in the life course of women. In order to identify the group of people who have negative attitude toward education, the type of the family sending their daughters either to private schools or government school, and gender of parents were used in analysis (Table 2).

Table 2: *Reasons for Sending Daughter to School*

Reasons for sending daughter to school	Family sending to private schools	Family sending to government schools	t-test	Father	Mother	t-test
It is obvious to go	2.86	2.63	*	2.60	2.85	*
Daughter herself wanted to go	3.00	2.63	**	2.68	2.49	n.s.
Someone told me to do	1.37	2.38	**	1.47	1.87	**

so

To get knowledge	3.00	2.70	*	2.85	2.74	n.s.
For occupation	2.57	2.30	**	2.36	2.46	n.s.
For marriage	2.65	2.44	*	2.49	2.52	n.s.
To be active and social	2.85	2.32	**	2.46	2.69	*
Work for Pakistan	2.96	2.63	**	2.65	2.72	n.s.

* : $p < .05$ ** : $p < .01$

Regarding the reasons for sending their daughters to school, choices of three levels of education were given to the parents of which 3 was the highest value "very much think so". Then, the level of significance was tested by average and using t-test. As a result, the significance was found among the type of the families sending their daughters to different kinds of schools rather than in the parents' gender. The reason for sending their daughters to schools was clearly expressed by the families sending their daughters to private schools such as "daughter herself wanted to go" and "to get knowledge".

Noting that the increasing importance of the global market these days, 'education is sifting to economy-centered vocational training and said that it losing ground as a public good to become rather another marketable commodity.' (Stromquist, 2000, p.12). However, in this particular region, education and occupation was not closely related. Pashtun people seem to think negatively for woman to get job since there were responses such as "job is unnecessary for women" and "there are no job exist in our society for woman" in the answer sheet in the survey. Even from the families sending their daughter to private schools, there was a voice such as "a suitable job for the women are either doctor or a teacher" because of the reason that there will be no chance to meet with men.

Influence of Relatives on Parents' Decision

There was a significant difference between families sending their children to private schools and government schools in making decisions to send their children to schools. In the families sending their children to government schools, existence of person other than parents, such as the powerful person in their relatives, was found in making decision to send children to schools. Pashtun family have a strong relationship within a big family, and even after the marriage and independence, they cannot disregard opinions of parents and senior relatives. The typical Pashtun house consists of many bedrooms that become private space of one family and other spaces. Veranda, garden, kitchen and living room are the common space. Brothers live in this house with their wives and share the space other than bedroom with parents and other brothers' families.

Elder person's opinion will be very much reflected in the life of the younger members of the family in the daily life situation and mental connection. In relation to this, Qureshi (2004) pointed out the generation conflicts. 'In Pakistan, the joint family system still exists and grandparents have a significant to say in the day to day affairs of the family. Of many girls interviewed it was more of grandmother's or grandfather's opposition to their attending of school than their parent's.'(p.55). In the interview with a family sending their children to private schools, it became clear that not only schooling but also marriage and employment are decided by grandparents and they will never be realized when grandparents did not agree. Such characteristic of the family is found in all Pashutun people, but lower class people seem to be more controlled in the educational matter.

Parents' Attitude toward Girls' Education and *Purdah*

Being not able to find a clear feature of the reason parents do not send their daughter to school, the effect of individual circumstances can be predicted. The item which obtained high numerical value were "it is unnecessary for job" (2.40), "school is too far" (2.04), and "education can be done at home" (1.91). The complaints against school and administrator were hardly seen. Usually, the poverty is regarded as a factor obstructive to the education of children of poor families since household income of the family affects parents' decisions on the education of their children. (Khalid & Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002). Also, PIHS (2000) found a positive correlation between household income and school attendance. However, in this survey, respondents rather reflected the custom of *purdah* as a reason for not entering school rather than the long distance to school and the poverty.

As stated in the above, there are only 41 middle schools for girls while 446 primary schools for girls exist in Swat District. Few students continue their study after completing primary education in case middle school was not attached to the primary school.ⁱ The reason that parents of these children pointed out was the problem of long distance to schools. According to them, besides the transportation fee, their daughters do not like long distance to school as boys tease them on the way to school.ⁱⁱ In addition, unlike the families sending their children to private schools, many families sending their children to government schools and families not sending their children to any schools do not evaluate active behavior of girls.

Conclusion

There were no significant differences by father's and mother's attitudes in sending his/her daughters to school. This means the domestic values is stable to some extent. Both father and mother have almost the same opinion because the marriage is arranged by the relatives who may have grown in the similar situation and have similar way of thinking. Also, when

the husband is elder than his wife, he must be respected and wives should obey him in everyday life. These situations will influence in the way they think and express themselves.

On the other hand, the differences in the attitude of parents among three types of families in sending their children to schools were remarkable. Families sending their children to private English medium school and who can afford to do it expected higher level of educational attainment for both son and daughter. Moreover, no movement was observed to deny the daughter to have a job and behave very actively. These people sometimes reside in the foreign country with the family and have a chance to know and see modern societies. Also, higher level of education is counted as one of the status even for girls. The importance of the education is recognized by the people who are sending their daughters to government school and hope to receive higher level of education. However, this change of awareness is still not lead to the behavioral changes in social life. Some of the families having conservative viewpoints for girls even accepted girls' education. The balance between *pardah* as an index of household status and education seems to be affecting people.

The families not sending their children to schools responded by expressing disapproval of girls going outside the house. They had gender norm that girls should stay inside the house and not to do any work at the public space. One of the reason that girls are kept away from the school is that they think that school education do not contribute much for the housework.ⁱⁱⁱ Since parents hesitate to let their daughters stay outside for a long time, the long distance to school will be a big obstacle. These people keep *pardah* as a social status and have a conservative way of thinking.

The relationships between socio-economic conditions of the household and attitudes of parents toward education were identified by analyzing three types of families. On the other hand, the existence of the person other than parents was identified who have strong influence on the decision of children to enter school that was influenced by the reality of the family structure and feeling of solidarity of the whole family from the historical background of Pashutun. There is a complicated power balance among the relatives specially brothers. Any families did not criticize school management or quality of education, but willing their daughters to attend school. Some of the parents send their daughters to boys' school where no girls' school exists. Before reaching the age of twelve, it is culturally permitted for girls to study together with boys. Therefore, it is decided by the cultural value of the family whether girls are able to access to schools or not.

ⁱ Middle or high schools are usually established as an annex of the primary school.

ⁱⁱ This opinion was confirmed by interviewing directly to children who quitted school because of this

reason. She said that boys were always on the way to school and teased her by words everyday which she could not suffer.

ⁱⁱⁱ Parents will send their daughters to other houses for housework if they need. But they have great difficulty to accept women to work outside the house.

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