Dual Impact of Family Structure and Parental Beliefs on Educational Access for Girls

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Abstract
This study aimed to explore parental concerns and the influence of family structure on gender equality in Education in Pakistani culture. This study used the mixed method approach to collect data from 360 parents through household surveys and in-depth interviews. The findings, derived from logistic regression analysis, reveal that living in nuclear families significantly enhances girls' educational opportunities (B = 2.264, p = .001). In contrast, traditional norms in joint family systems act as a constraint (B = 1.930, p = .051). Parental attitudes were found to be pivotal in shaping educational equity; strong support for girls' Education and Higher Education positively predicted gender equality (B = 3.778, p < .001). Conversely, prioritizing boys' Education (B = 3.894, p < .001) and assigning household responsibilities to girls (B = 1.724, p = .035) negatively impacted gender parity. The qualitative results revealed that daughters' safety, family honor, financial constraints, and favoring sons over daughters significantly influenced educational decisions. Interestingly, while not statistically significant, factors such as social norms, economic constraints, and religious considerations were identified as underlying barriers to achieving gender equity. The study concluded that it emphasizes the importance of fostering gender equality in Education as a pathway to broader social and economic development in Pakistan. The study recommends the implementation of parental awareness campaigns, offering financial incentives, improving school safety, and increasing the availability of female teachers to enhance educational access for girls.

Keywords: Education, Culture, Inequality, Parental Concerns, Family Structure.

Introduction

Education is a powerful tool for societal transformation, particularly in fostering gender equality. However, in societies like Pakistan, deeply rooted sociocultural norms and family structures significantly influence the trajectory of gender equality in Education. Family structure, whether nuclear or extended and parental attitudes toward gender roles often dictate children's educational opportunities, shaping perceptions of what is deemed acceptable for boys and girls. Studies have shown that traditional family systems, coupled with patriarchal norms, often reinforce gender disparities in Education, limiting the prospects of female children (Qazi, 2020; Ali & Kiani, 2021). Parental attitudes, particularly those driven by cultural and religious interpretations, further impact

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decisions about schooling, with preferences often skewed towards male children (Khan et al., 2019).

The family structure in Pakistani society is a critical component of cultural identity and social organization, significantly impacting various dimensions of life, Education being one of them. Intact familial establishments, mostly a joint family framework, are significant in education decisions and openings. Often, collective decision-makers extended kinship networks that could be grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives. Though this system creates a network of collective support and accountability, it also reinforces gender stereotypes that play a significant role in girls' access to Education. These norms, which stem from traditional patriarchal practices, curtail parents' (especially mothers') agency to speak up about their daughters' Education and hence reproduce gender disparities (Khan, 2020; Fatima, 2021).

Globally regarded as a critical driver for socioeconomic transformation, Education in Pakistan is beset by various cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that collectively inhibit equitable access. Education has been the most gender discriminatory of all times, and the societal and familial structure acts as one of the most significant determinants in this aspect. In many extended families, men wield considerable influence on decision-making, including Education, where a patriarchal attitude towards the Education of boys over that of girls dominates social decisions. Parental fears about safety, shame, marriage prospects for girls, and more feed into these attitudes to create significant barriers to educational attainment (Anwar & Saleem, 2018).

The traditional family structure of Pakistan (which is patriarchal and extended) has implications for educational attainment vis-a-vis gender. In joint families, multiple parties have a say in how children grow up and what they should study. Though these wider networks offer financial and emotional support, they also tend to reinforce conservative gender roles. This leads to a greater focus on boys' Education, which is consistent with the cultural perception of men as future breadwinners and women as homemakers. Joint families deny women autonomy, and decisions are often taken by male elders, which can deprive girls of pursuing Education. Studies show the relatively higher propensity of women in nuclear family systems to receive higher Education due to the minimal influence of extended kinship norms and greater autonomy of the parents (Bari, 2005; Rahman, 2017).

In addition, family size and birth order are crucial determinants of access to Education. In poorer families, larger families often prefer investing in sons' Education, believing the return it offers in economic stability is far more valuable. In such families, girls experience insufficient resources, which exacerbates the gender gap. Hussain (2017) and Khan (2019) highlighted that children from smaller families have better access to Education and higher aspirations, which signifies the importance of targeted reforms to address the impact of family size on educational equity.

Sociocultural norms have a strong influence on parental attitudes towards Education in Pakistan. Boys are seen as future breadwinners and, as such, are favored, while girls' Education is often neglected because they would eventually fulfil the role of caregivers and homemakers. These attitudes are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where dominant traditional values, along with socioeconomic constraints, further undermine girls' access to schooling. On the other end of the spectrum, urban parents, including mothers, still express progressive attitudes and push for their daughters' Education. It highlights how cultural norms, geographic location, and socioeconomic status play significant roles in determining educational access for girls (Ali, 2018; Shah, 2018).

Girls' access to Education is heavily influenced by parental concerns regarding their safety and security. Long commutes to schools, lack of infrastructure, and absence of female-only schools deter parents from sending their daughters to school, especially at higher levels. The fears are

heightened by cultural notions of honor and societal pressures, leading families to withdraw girls from Education to avoid tarnishing their reputations. Early marriages and having children also curtail the aspirations of girls concerning Education, exemplifying how deeply embedded sociocultural norms restrict gendered education access (Ali, 2018).

There is a vital economic factor in the widespread education gender gap. Financial and economic deprivation has a significant impact on the Education of girls because limited family resources often lead to boys being prepared for higher Education. There are also indirect costs, such as those associated with transportation and uniforms, which represent significant barriers to girls in marginalized and rural communities. Such financial challenges are further compounded by opportunity costs, with families needing girls to engage in household chores or informal labor, limiting their education prospects (Haq et al., 2023).

Socioeconomic status and parental education levels are the most critical drivers of girls' access to Education. Studies show that educated parents, especially mothers, are more likely to value and invest in their daughters' Education. Conversely, low socioeconomic families with less educated parents also follow norms, such as giving their sons priority in Education, which leads to the end of the cycle of gender inequality (Rahman, 2017; Khan, 2019).

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the influence of family structure on gender equality in access to education
- To examine the impact of parental attitudes and perceptions toward gender roles on the educational opportunities
- To explore the sociocultural dynamics that reinforce or challenge gender disparities in education.
- To identify key barriers within family and cultural settings that hinder the achievement of gender equality in education.

Literature Review

Gender equality in Education is a primary concern globally, and Pakistan is not an exception. When efforts are made to promote gender equality, girls and women face many obstacles. Gender Equality in Education in Pakistan. There is little knowledge and understanding regarding the obstacles that parents face with gender equality in Education due to family setup.

Using Pakistan Integrated Household Survey data (2001-2002), Aslam (2008) examines whether a preference for boys over girls exists in household education spending. Study findings Point out that there is clear gender bias in decisions related to school enrollment and education expenditure, where it is shown that preference has been given to men by the school authorities whether it was elementary level or high school level education. A significant finding in the study is that educational choices favor sons over daughters, and a significant level of partisanship accompanies this.

Rahji (2005) finds that in rural households, more boys than girls are enrolled in school. While the mother's Education has little effect on either gender, the father's Education increases boys' enrollment but does not increase girls'. This gender gap of 12.56% is indicative of boys being more in demand when it comes to Education. This gap between genders is determined by the parent's education level and their ambitions, convictions, and social norms (Bursztyn & Jensen, 2015).

Gender equality is not only a moral issue; according to the OECD (2019), it also matters for a better, more sustainable, and more inclusive economy. Equality is a primary concern, especially

in the context of gender and social justice, and the OECD's (2019) Equality Document encourages gender parity or gender equalization through a variety of policies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stresses that it is essential to create an enabling environment where action to promote gender equality can be sustained; thus, significant actions have been taken by the OECD to support countries in pursuing such efforts linked to the agenda. This global framework addresses economic, cultural, and social inequality towards women (Zajda, 2022).

Educational leadership discussions always explore how gender reassignment policies and emerging gender identity research challenge the stable and cohesive view of gender in the educational setting (Blackmore, 2011). Thereby, social justice informs equity ideals and practices through educational contexts diverse enough to warrant social and educational transformation to attain equity. However, Teese et al. (2007) claim that the widening gap of social inequalities accompanies a profoundly neo-liberalized world, where more wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few, especially the rich and powerful men.

Gender wicked problems, from Education to the broader and disproportionate risks faced by women and children in impoverished contexts, are central to international development discourse. Women and girls in many conflict zones are subjected to forced marriages, forced female genital mutilation, and poor access to primary Education and health care. High female dropout rates are due to government policies, not poverty or parental reluctance, according to Unterhalter (2006). Finally, enabling women and girls in Education and economic independence counteracts traditional gender norms and supports social change. Despite these achievements, progress in Pakistan has been stymied by deep-rooted gender imbalances and inadequate investment in Education at state and family levels that undermine gender equality and economic development (Kleven et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2018).

Gender equality in Education is a burning economic development issue in developing countries like Pakistan, where abundant human capital exists. Gender inequality continues due to sociocultural beliefs, patriarchy, and traditional values like son preference and early marriage (Ashraf, 2018). In areas such as Baluchistan, societal norms limit the ability of girls to access the same educational and healthcare opportunities available to males, leading to a severe lack of educational opportunities (Aziz et al., 2023). The judiciary has a critical role in obtaining the expected implementation of women's rights protections as determined in Pakistan's constitutions (Aziz et al., 2023)

The social construction of gender is the context in which sociocultural and socioeconomic factors mediate the meanings associated with gender roles established based on perceptions about religion or morality (Benazir et al., 2021).

Gender inequality is one of the biggest challenges, especially in health, Education, political empowerment, and economic opportunity. Pakistan's case of educated girls is one of the worst in the world, where female literacy is more than double in urban areas compared to rural areas. Chaudhry (2009) reported that girls' literacy rates are lower than boys' in every age group, but the gap is more expansive in rural areas.

As the (HRW, 2018) states, the longer we wait to take action, the greater the risk for all girls, millions of whom in Pakistan are still out of school. Pakistan, despite being the sixth most populous country, has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, with more than 40% of girls not receiving any formal education (Nizam, 2020). While Education is legally guaranteed for girls in Pakistan, many sociocultural objections and challenges exist that undermine girls' academic participation (Barrech et al., 2019).

In patriarchal nations such as Pakistan, girls are more likely to encounter cultural and economic barriers to Education. One of the many reasons remote area girls cannot go to school is the cost of transport and logistics (Barrech & Sadia, 2019). In Baluchistan, for example, 60% to 70% of children do not complete elementary Education, and many secondary school students do not attend school. 84 (1998) aroused awareness of the magnitude of the problem by claiming that 78 % of the out-of-school population are girls compared to 63 % of boys.

Gender discrimination is much more prominent due to the traditional Baloch society. In this region, women are often subjected to early marriage, limited access to Education, and strict social norms that limit their access to health and education services. In some instances, girls may be permitted to study but are discouraged from subsequent Education or professional aspirations (Benazir et al., 2021).

Gender inequality in Education exists across the broader education system as well, where discrimination against women occurs about participation and performance. Save the Children (2001) stated that one area where gender inequality is prominent is girls' participation in schools. This is mirrored in performance gaps where boys perform better than girls, particularly in the upper echelons of Education. There is an urgent need for informed interdisciplinary research to understand the cognitive and non-cognitive traits that contribute to the gender differences in early childhood education (Buchmann, 2008) and by changing the nature of pedagogy, how institutions of Education can be designed (and redesigned) to close the education gender gap.

Baten et al. (2021) investigate the association between male Education and gender inequality, arguing that although male Education has been historically associated with an increasing gender gap, the gap has been decreasing in the past couple of decades, especially in places with Christian missionaries, railroads, or urbanization. However, they say that agricultural labour divisions and family structures are not linked to gender differences in Education.

According to Chaudhry (2007), the status of women in Pakistan has been the subject of much debate. However, the world has rallied around promoting women's equality, as seen in the number of ratifications of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, where gender equity has become a significant development appeal.

In most regions, gender disparity in Education is rapidly reducing, except for Pakistan and other South Asian countries. According to Hinduja (2023), traditional perceptions of Education viewing boys as future providers and girls as housewives and nannies persist and amplify the gender gap. Girls are expected to juggle domestic and educational responsibilities in low-income and middle-class households with limited opportunities. The anti-modern conservative dogma, common among many educationists and public-sector institutions conservatism, still does not think higher Education for girls and women is very much needed. In a similar vein, Iqbal (2023) finds that while gender inequality in Pakistan is rooted in a variety of complex political, religious, and social issues, poverty, conservatism, and patriarchy are vital contributing factors. Jose and Sivaraman (2023) looked at Gender Inequality in India using secondary data. They found evidence of unequal education attainment based on gender, while again, these disparities reflect pre-existing inequalities in broader society. Restrictive norms and unequal opportunities for women to participate in the formal economy lead to a waste of human capital that constitutes a substantial loss of growth; Klasen & Lamanna (2009) estimate that under some political regimes, the employment and Education of women will account for up to 40% of economic growth and that, net losses are more significant in regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, and especially South Asia as opposed to East Asia. For instance, Pasha (2023) highlights that in Pakistan, the differences between boys and girls in Education are fueled by socioeconomic differences and the

social distribution of resources. View these findings from a lens where educational gaps denote gaps created and partaken in by broader societal instances where non-state actors push to instigate meaningful change. Haq et al. (2023) highlight that family income and urbanization contribute to gender differences in Education in Pakistan. With an emphasis on how Education reproduces global gender inequities, Zajda (2022) applies feminist critical theory and points out that gender equality is essential in promoting more inclusive economic growth. Salik and Zhiyong (2014) discuss how gender inequality in Education, politics, and the economy increases social injustices in Pakistan, suggesting the need for more excellent restoration of these gaps. In Pakistan, the gap is breathtaking, and women are under-educated yet must participate in the social, political, and economic spheres as much as possible (Tusińska, 2020).

Methodology

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the influence of parental concerns and family structure on gender equality in Education in typical Pakistani culture. To find out what factors lead to Parental concerns and how family structure influences gender equality in Education in typical Pakistani culture, data was collected from 360 parents selected from the local community of district Okara.

Phase-I

The first phase involved a survey of 350 parents from urban and rural areas of Pakistan. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. A questionnaire was used to collect data on parental concerns, family structure, and attitudes towards gender equality in Education. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to identify relationships between variables.

Phase-II

The second phase involved semi-structured interviews with 10 parents (5 mothers and five fathers) selected from the survey sample, representing diverse family structures and parental concerns. The interview protocol explored parental concerns, family dynamics, and educational decision-making processes. Thematic analysis, coding, and categorization were used to identify patterns and themes in the data.

Logistic regression analysis was applied to evaluate the data, revealing significant findings regarding the impact of nuclear and joint family systems and parental priorities on gender equality in Education. This approach ensured the study's robustness while capturing the diverse sociocultural contexts of the district Okara.

Results and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic profile of the Respondents

Valid		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
	Male	155	44.2
	Female	195	55.7
Resident			
	Urban	171	48.9
	Rural	179	51.1

Age			
	Below 25 years	53	15.1
	26–35 years	95	27.1
	36–45 years	110	31.4
	Above 45 years	92	26.2
Family System			
	Joint	164	46.9
	Nuclear Family	186	53.1

The demographic profile of the respondents highlights a diverse group in terms of gender, residence, age, and family system. A slightly higher percentage of respondents are female (55.7%) compared to males (44.2%). In terms of residence, rural respondents (51.1%) slightly outnumber their urban counterparts (48.9%). Age-wise, the majority of participants fall within the 36–45 years age bracket (31.4%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (27.1%), while 26.2% are above 45 years, and the smallest group, 15.1%, is below 25 years. Regarding family systems, more respondents belong to nuclear families (53.1%) compared to joint families (46.9%), reflecting a balance in familial living arrangements within the population studied. These demographic characteristics provide a broad representation of various societal and cultural backgrounds.

Table 2: Logistic Regression of Factors Influencing Gender Equality in Education

		B	S.E.	df	Sig.	95% C.I for EXP(B)	
						Lower	Upper
Step 1ª	Age	-4.13	1.177	1	0	0.002	0.16
	Family structure support educational opportunities for boys and girls	0.549	0.695	1	0.43	0.443	6.767
	Nuclear family promote better educational opportunities for girls	2.264	0.708	1	0.001	2.4	38.563
	In joint family systems, do gender norms limit educational opportunities for girls	1.93	0.989	1	0.051	0.992	47.878
	My parents believe that boys' education is more important than girls' education	3.894	1.11	1	0	5.57	432.524
	Parents in my family support girls pursuing higher education.	3.778	1.011	1	0	6.027	317.265
	Parents believe girls should prioritize household responsibilities over education	1.724	0.816	1	0.035	1.133	27.757
	Social norms in our community prioritize boys' education over girls' education.	-1.581	1.01	1	0.118	0.028	1.491
	Financial constraints in my family limit girls' access to education.	1.333	0.937	1	0.155	0.605	23.795
	Safety concerns discourage girls from attending school.	0.764	0.829	1	0.356	0.423	10.893
	Lack of female teachers in schools is a barrier to girls' education.	0.083	0.739	1	0.911	0.255	4.624

The logistic regression analysis examines various factors influencing gender equality in education within family and societal contexts. Age emerges as a significant predictor with a strong negative

relationship (B = -4.13, p < .001), suggesting that older respondents are less likely to perceive equal educational opportunities. Living in a nuclear family significantly promotes better educational opportunities for girls (B = 2.264, p = .001, Exp (B) = 9.621), indicating that this family structure fosters equality. Similarly, parental support for girls pursuing higher education (B = 3.778, p < .001, Exp (B) = 43.727) and rejection of the belief that boys' education is more important (B = 3.894, p < .001, Exp (B) = 49.083) strongly predict positive attitudes toward gender equality. Conversely, traditional gender norms in joint family systems (B = 1.930, p = .051) and prioritization of household responsibilities over girls' education (B = 1.724, p = .035) indicate constraints on educational opportunities. Other variables, such as community norms, financial constraints, safety concerns, and the availability of female teachers, are not statistically significant, though they reflect nuanced influences.

Qualitative Results
Thematic analysis was used for analysis of qualitative results. This approach was used to explain the emerging themes of this research.

Male Respondent's Views
The male respondents were less interested regarding higher education of girls and gave adverse remarks about the higher education of girls. However, few males showed positive concern regarding higher education of girls.

> Girls don't need higher education; basic knowledge is sufficient
> Girls shouldn't go out for education or work
> Limited education is enough for girls to manage their families
> Girls should stay at home and not pursue jobs or further education

These views perpetuate gender-based discrimination, limiting girls' potential and opportunities, and reinforcing harmful societal norms.

> Women's education is acceptable, but only up to a certain limit
> Women should not work outside the home, even in times of financial struggle
> Women earning money is seen as against tradition and may lead to a loss of male authority
> Women's primary role is to stay at home and manage the household

These views disseminate gender-based discrimination, restricting women's autonomy, and reinforcing harmful societal norms.

> Women's education should be limited to avoid challenging male authority and traditional gender roles. The community and cultural traditions are cited as reasons to restrict women's education and autonomy. Women's safety and security are used as justifications for limiting their freedom and choices.

These views perpetuate gender-based discrimination, reinforcing harmful societal norms and restricting women's potential and opportunities.

> Education is essential for both men and women
> Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's education, regardless of gender
> Societal pressure and community norms can limit girls' education, but some parents resist these influences
> Family structure and dynamics impact children's education and bonding
> Girls face more struggles and require more confidence to succeed

Most parents want their children to receive higher education, but societal pressure can   prevent this, especially for girls

There are some progressive parents who prioritize their children's education over societal norms.

Female Respondent's Views

The female emphasizes the importance of education, parental support, and resisting societal pressure to ensure equal opportunities for both boys and girls. The respondent emphasizes the importance of equal education for both boys and girls, despite societal norms that often prioritize male education. They believe that:

Education is crucial for both genders to survive and thrive

Girls face more obstacles in pursuing higher education, especially in rural areas

Societal pressure and cultural traditions often limit girls' education

Boys are generally more supported and encouraged to pursue higher education

The speaker supports equal education for boys and girls, despite community criticism

Education can bring positivity and improvement to society

Girls often face additional pressures, such as household responsibilities, that hinder their education

Education is seen as less important for girls in backward areas

Girls are often married early or discouraged from pursuing education beyond primary or secondary level

Societal pressure and cultural traditions limit girls' education and autonomy

The community and family often prioritize traditional values over the future of their children

Few people in the community support girls' education and those who do are often discouraged by societal norms

Girls face pressure to abandon their studies and dreams due to family and societal expectations

The respondent climaxes the prevailing cultural and societal norms in backward areas that prioritize traditional roles for girls over education and autonomy. It emphasizes the belief that girls should focus on household duties and basic skills rather than pursuing higher education, as they are expected to eventually marry and fulfill familial responsibilities. This mindset is reinforced by older generations and perpetuated by the community, resulting in limited opportunities for girls to receive education and pursue their ambitions. Economic considerations also play a role, with families often investing in boys' education as they are seen as future breadwinners. Despite some individuals recognizing the importance of girls' education, societal values often outweigh these sentiments, leading to girls being deprived of opportunities for personal and economic development.

The pervasive influence of cultural and traditional values in rural communities, particularly in controlling the education of females. It highlights that a significant portion, around 80 percent, of rural society adheres to these values, hindering females' access to education. Families often perceive sending females for education as a threat to their honor and respect. While some families in rural and backward areas struggle against these norms and support female education, such views are often considered regressive by the wider community. Despite challenges, there are instances where women manage to receive education with family support, but overall, opportunities for

female education remain limited. This suggests a need for broader societal changes to facilitate greater educational opportunities for females in rural communities.

> The importance of education for girls but highlights the challenges faced in rural communities due to entrenched traditional norms. While some families support female education, many adhere strictly to traditional rules that discourage it. Despite this, there are instances of educated parents advocating for their daughters' education. However, overall, societal pressure often hinders girls' access to education, relegating them to household roles. They perceives this societal mindset as a hindrance to progress and emphasizes the need for greater support for female education.

Discussion

This study explored how family values and attitudes of parents affect gender equality in education in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan. These findings are vital in understanding how family structure, cultural norms, and social attitudes influence access to education among girls (Ali & Ahmad, 2020). These outcomes test how types of obedient and new households relate to gender fairness in education.

These findings reveal the key role of family structures in shaping educational opportunities for girls. Families that usually are lower in hierarchal restrictions and involve more individual decision-making in the front are believed to create circumstances that help or push equal education opportunities for boys and girls (Shahid et al., 2022). This supports prior research suggesting that more progressive gender norms, with girls more access to resources and educational opportunities, are offered in nuclear family systems. Another study suggested that girls' education is restricted because of collective decision-making and patriarchal customary practices through joint family systems (Fatima & Khan, 2021). These family systems often emphasize males' education to be above females', thus strengthening traditional gender concepts. These dynamics suggest the importance of tackling the entrenched norms within extended families to enable girls to pursue education as adults.

Parental attitudes were identified as a significant factor in determining educational gender equality. Placing boys' education over girls' becomes systemic and fails to break down the age-old, deeply engrained bastion of patriarchal values (Qureshi & Ahmed, 2020). These assumptions are rooted in societal norms that see boys' education as an investment in the future, with implications for economic security and social mobility. In contrast, girls' education is considered a secondary concern. On the other hand, progressive families that encourage girls to aspire towards higher education provide an image that departs from the conventional stereotype. Parental support is essential for enabling girls to pursue academic and career aspirations and emphasizes the need for positive reinforcement from parents to ensure gender equality (Fatima & Khan, 2021).

Even though family structures and parental attitudes are the strongest determinants, societal norms and structural barriers to girls' education cannot be ignored. In some communities, boys' education is considered a priority and essential, while girls' education is regarded as of inferior status (Ali & Ahmad, 2020). While such norms did not independently emerge as statistically significant covariates for this study, they reflect a continual cultural bias that has evolved, which still influences access to education. Likewise, although not prominent in the present study, many families still need to address financial limitations (Qureshi & Ahmed, 2020). Because providing education can be too expensive, families are often forced to make a choice, preferring boys over girls.

While safety concerns and a dearth of female teachers do not rise to the level of statistical significance, they are factors that must be considered, especially in conservative or rural contexts. The data does demonstrate the value of teaching. In previous studies, concerns regarding the safety and availability of female teachers were cited as directly affecting school attendance rates for girls (World Development Report, 2021). These findings highlight the importance of targeted solutions that respond to community-specific conditions affecting girls.

This study has important policy and practice implications. Alleviating gender gaps in education requires action on both the family and societal levels. Awareness-generation programs around parents can help break the traditional stereotype about girls and motivate families to go for girls' education. Awareness campaigns around the positive impact of girls' education can strengthen community engagement programs that shift social norms and challenge the resistance to change (Shahid et al., 2022). Also, the financial incentives such policies can provide (over scholarships or conditional cash transfers) can relieve economic barriers and convert families into investors in girls' education (World Development Report, 2021).

In Pakistani society, education is often accessible to males rather than females. Even if females have the desire to pursue education, they face major problems, mainly because of the lack of resources and societal constraints. A girl who wants higher education faces difficulty in gaining acceptance because her pursuit is considered to be against society. She is usually criticized when she goes to a university or out of her hometown to study, as her behavior is considered against the traditional norms of gender. She is supposed to engage in household work rather than getting education or working for her independence. Societies regularly tell girls to not continue further education, rather, that they should meet the conventional standards of life.

There is also need to be structural changes within the education system. Ensuring the presence of more female teachers and setting up sufficient safety precautions for girls would be beneficial and would persuade parents and caregivers to send girls to school. Programs that actively engage extended family members around joint family systems can also be transformative in changing collective attitudes around girls' education.

If the girl successfully diverges from such expectations perhaps through study abroad. She is more often teased and shamed. This dents her self-confidence and sometimes sends her psychological messages, as if she's doing something that does not "fit" into the "role" of her community. In contrast, male children are encouraged to pursue education even if it is abroad or in other cities. Such opportunities for men are considered an investment in their future and in their families. The same opportunities for women, however, are considered unnecessary or inappropriate. Families and communities tend to be unwilling to provide financial and moral support for a girl's education, which further limits her ability to achieve her potential.

The stigma surrounding women's education stems not only from uneducated individuals but also from educated members of society who perpetuate these traditional views. This mindset confines women to their homes, stifling their ambition and denying them the independence that education and personal growth could offer. Talented and capable women often find themselves unable to utilize their skills and knowledge due to these restrictions, further exacerbating gender inequality. These deeply ingrained societal roles continue to hold women back in our communities. They deprive women of opportunities to thrive, become independent, and contribute meaningfully to society. Until these perceptions and expectations change, the cycle of gender inequality in education and professional development will continue, depriving our society of the potential contributions of countless talented women.

Theoretical Debate

Access to education for girls is a key issue in the global and regional agenda, suggested by an interplay of structural and ideological factors. Of these, family structure and parental beliefs are paramount. The theoretical discussion on this topic covers multiple positions from sociology, psychology, gender studies, and economics. In the following sections, we will involve more deeply into the theoretical frameworks that frame the understanding of how these two factors interact with each other in affecting girls' educational opportunities.

Functionalist Perspective

Functionalist theorists focus on the role of family as a social institution that ensures the stability and continuity of society. In this context, education is viewed as a means of preparing individuals for their future roles.

Functionalists posit that nuclear families, in which the role for each parent is defined, create a supportive learning environment for the children. More resources like time, money, and emotional support are regularly made available to girls in such stable family structures. About traditional parental beliefs, usually functionalist, may be inclined to believe that boys are to be educated and girls are not, because the man is a future breadwinner and the woman has to stay home. This leads to girls being deprived of education, as their educational needs are considered secondary to the training they receive in preparation for being caregivers. As the societal norms are changing, it can be more egalitarian belief within families where more girls can gain access to education due to parents' consideration of education for all children without any gender biases.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory focuses on power dynamics and inequality, arguing that societal structures often reinforce disparities, including those in education. Low-income families, especially single-parent families, will have limited opportunities to give all their children the same level of education. They may have to give more attention to the boys since they are likely to have a better return in terms of earnings. The parental beliefs, which are informed by patriarchal ideologies, also tend to ensure that girls primarily have a domestic role. Due to this belief, the investment in the education of girls by families may become less, hence perpetuating gender-based inequality cycles. Conflicts are more heavily highlighted in the need to change systemic barriers that form structural barriers to equality and advocate for policies cutting down economic disparities and overcoming patriarchal norms.

Feminist Theory

The feminist theory criticizes the patriarchal structures that characterize family dynamics and parental beliefs and emphasizes their impact on girls' educational opportunities. In patriarchal societies, family structures often reinforce gender roles, with girl's assigned domestic responsibilities that interfere with their schooling. These structures limit girls' ability to access education and achieve their potential.

Feminist theorists advocate shifting parental beliefs from seeing girls' rights to education as inferior to boys. It can be empowering parents with information about the importance of educating girls to break this cycle of inequality.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory is concerned with the role of networks, relationships, and community resources in shaping educational outcomes. Two-parent families or those embedded in supportive community networks are more likely to provide the necessary resources and encouragement for girls' education. Social capital within these families can mitigate structural barriers, enabling girls to pursue education despite societal challenges. Educated parents with a good social network can advocate for their girls' education, create an environment which somehow challenged the traditional norms and created opportunities for girls to excel academically.

Cultural Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu)

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explains how families pass on advantages or disadvantages through their values, habits, and resources. Families with higher cultural capital, such as educated parents and exposure to academic resources, are more likely to encourage girls' education. In contrast, families with limited cultural capital may unconsciously perpetuate gender disparities by adhering to traditional norms. The beliefs that emphasize boys' education as a means of further improving family status also disadvantage girls. Changing these beliefs requires changing more general societal norms that devalue girls' education.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw)

Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework highlights the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, and other social identities in shaping experiences of oppression. Girls are doubly disadvantaged; they come from the marginalized families-the single-parent households or extended families. For example, a low-income girl in school may encounter financial barriers combined with cultural undervaluing of her education. Parental beliefs that are based on cultural or religious traditions may further limit girls' access to education. These barriers require a nuanced understanding of how intersecting identities affect girls' educational opportunities.

Human Capital Theory

According to human capital theory, education is an investment in future productivity and economic growth. Progressive parents will view education as a worthwhile investment for boys and girls. These beliefs align with the fact that educated girls help generate family income and societal development. The economic value of girls' education may be overemphasized in families that strictly value traditional beliefs. Promotions that advertise the potential economic returns of investing in education may shift such beliefs and make such education more accessible.

Conclusion: Theoretical Synthesis

This study underscores the significant dual impact of family structures and parental beliefs on educational access for girls, emphasizing the interconnected role of both factors in shaping opportunities. Nuclear families with equitable parental attitudes often provide a nurturing environment, fostering access to education for girls. These settings challenge entrenched norms that traditionally favor boys' education by prioritizing resource allocation and encouraging academic participation for all children. Extended families and parental beliefs based on traditional or patriarchal values can be a source of reinforcement for gender disparities. Here, girls are confined by cultural expectations, limited mobility, and giving up education to take care of domestic responsibilities.

These may remain some persistent issues of social and structural norms; however, they have very localized and nuanced impacts that necessitate more sensitive intervention. Programs for making people aware of girls' education's value and monetary assistance through scholarship or stipend would reduce financial burden. Secondly, safety and security in learning institutions and the availability of a supportive community would ensure families invest time and energy into educating their daughters. These findings call for long-term efforts in the removal of systemic biases, changing the societal attitude, and ensuring that the educational landscape is inclusive. Transformation in gender equality within education can be achieved by addressing family-level dynamics as well as the broader societal structures.

The dual impact of family structure and parental beliefs on girls' access to education is complicated by the involvement of multiple intersecting factors. For instance, although stable family structures and progressive parental beliefs may boost access, the structural barriers and patriarchal norms often work as obstacles to girls' opportunities. This requires the following

Policy Interventions: Governments and institutions need to design policies that would offer financial incentives, promote gender equity and challenge discriminatory norms.

Community Engagement: Engaging families and communities to shift beliefs about the value of girl's education is key to sustainable change.

Intersectional Approaches: This will pay attention to the variety of challenges girls from different backgrounds face to make effective interventions.

This allows stakeholders to develop far-ranging strategies toward improving female access to education, thereby ultimately breaking cycles of inequality and empowering future generations.

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