

## SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PATRIARCHAL BARRIERS TO FEMALE HIGHER EDUCATION IN DISTRICT DIR UPPER, KP-PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the socio-cultural and patriarchal barriers to female higher education in District Dir Upper, Pakistan. It explores the challenges preventing women from pursuing higher education, with a particular focus on parental perspectives regarding these barriers. A purely quantitative research approach was adopted for this study. Primary data was collected from Tehsil Wari, District Dir Upper, using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to select respondents. A total of 400 male heads of households were interviewed. Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires administered by the researcher in the field. The data was analyzed at both the demographic level and using a binary logistic regression model. The findings reveal that religious beliefs, safety concerns, and the father's occupation are the primary factors influencing a daughter's ability to pursue higher education. However, the low *R-squared* value suggests that additional significant factors, not covered in this study, may also contribute to this issue.

### INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the basic social institutions that shape the socio-economic, political, and traditional structure of any country. The developed countries of the world have achieved high economic status through equal education opportunities for both genders and thus lead a prestigious life with a higher literacy ratio, consequently advancing in every aspect of life. However, the developing countries, particularly Pakistan, are still behind the minimum criteria of literacy ratio. The relationship between economic growth and development has been explored in a number of studies (Schultz, 1961;

Arshed et al., 2019). The research study suggests that developing countries should focus on education, especially female education, and advance such policies to invest in programs that increase educational attainment in the region (Hanushek and Kimko, 2000). In this regard, the study of Somani, 2017, shows that female education is explicitly linked to development outcomes and is seen as critical to inter-generational knowledge transfer, gender equality, and social change. Further, women's access to and participation in education have been positively correlated with, among other things,

improved child well-being, lower birth rates, and lower maternal mortality rates (Gakidou et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2017). Nonetheless, despite increasing numbers of girls enrolling in school in the last decade, some 62 million girls worldwide were still denied the right to primary or secondary education, and this matter is of very grave concern at the higher education level. Moreover, in a country like Pakistan, more than five million children do not attend school, comprising 63% of the female portion of the population. Similarly, according to another research report conducted in 2015, the literacy rate in the country is 59% for boys and only 47% for girls at the lower school level. These statistics show that gender inequality in terms of the country's education system exists where, just like always and in other ways of life, the female portion of the population faces challenges in their schooling, especially in higher education (Latif, 2009). A number of socio-economic, political, religious, and cultural challenges multiply the severity of the issue, especially among rural communities and the Pukhtun region of the country (Malik and Courtney, 2011). Alongside others, the male members of such society are considered a source of power and prestige, and according to a well-known local saying, "sons are guns," meaning male members are the real asset of the family; thus, they receive preference in every aspect of life, and the same is the case in education opportunities. Besides the socio-cultural and traditional male-dominant society, the government and education institutions are also held responsible for the lack of focus on girls' education, where there are no such separate educational institutions at food distance of the population, and if they exist, they lack fundamental needs like buildings, drinking water, electricity, toilets, and furniture, geographical issues, physical distance between home and school, and wider social barriers in the environment, including pervasive sexual violence towards women and girls embedded in wider class and gender dynamics in the region (Agarwal et al., 2020; Javeed, 2020).

Higher education is the need of the day for the improvement of female literacy in Pakistan. Thus, this study was conducted in Wari district Dir Upper. Studies were conducted on various aspects like the socioeconomic status of the family (Khan & Yaseen, 2022; Shah & Shah, 2012). The parental education

and perception (Ahmad & Jan, 2021; Amin, Rashid & Ahmad, 2019; Shafi, 2015) and societal perception (Zahid, Hashim & Khattak, 2022; Jamal, 2016). However, there is very limited literature to assess the parental perspective on influencing factors on female higher education in Dir Upper, Pakistan.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative methodology. Data was collected in District Dir Upper, Tehsil Wari. The study population comprised fathers having at least one daughter studying at the high school level. The study utilized primary data collected from Tehsil Wari, District Dir Upper. To achieve the research objectives, a non-probability sampling method was employed, specifically using purposive sampling due to the cultural context, where male respondents, typically heads of the family, were more accessible for data collection. A total of 400 sample respondents from a total population of 575,852 was drawn, which further constitutes a female ratio of 49.36%, including 321,807 individuals in Tehsil Wari (as per the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017, provisional census results 2017). It is essential to note that the researchers were aware of the male-dominant societal structure in this locality, limiting data collection to male heads of the family. Data was collected through a pretested questionnaire. The collected data was then analyzed through descriptive statistics, and a binary logistic regression model was used to identify significant factors.

## RESULTS

This inquiry is conducted to understand factors influencing female higher education. Out of 400 respondents, 342 were in favor of female higher education, and 58 did not approve of their daughters continuing higher education due to many factors. Demographic characteristics of the study population indicated that 39.8% of them fall under the age category of 41-50, and 32% fall under the age category of 30-40. Table 1 presents that the majority, 32.8%, of fathers are educated up to 16 years (Master's Degree), and 47.2% live in a joint family system. In response to the type of occupation, 50% own a business, and 26.8% work as government employees.

**Table 1 Demographic information**

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	30-40	128	32.0
	41-50	159	39.8
	51-60	90	22.5
	60 & above	23	5.8
Education	Primary (>10 years)	77	19.2
	Secondary 10 years	87	21.8
	Bachelor 14 years	104	26.0
	Master 16 years	131	32.8
	Postgraduate 18 years	1	0.2
Family type	Nuclear	152	38.0
	Joint	189	47.2
	Extended	59	14.8
Head of household Occupation	Government Employee	107	26.8
	Private employee	80	20.0
	Unemployed	47	11.8
	Own Business	160	40.0
	Farmer	6	1.5

The influence of four key factors on parental support for female higher education is presented in Table 2. A higher number, 192 parents, acknowledge the influence of culture, and 305 point out social criticism and pressure as key factors. The problem of accessibility stands with a balanced response (Yes =

166, No = 176) for the Yes category. The parents' concern about their daughter's safety and security is significant, with 289 respondents in the Yes category and 39 in the No category. This proposes that parents are committed to their daughter's education, but uncertainty about safety is a major deterrent.

**Table 2 Parental Support and Sociocultural Factors**

Parent's support of higher education	Culture		Society critics		Accessibility to institutions		Fear about safety	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Yes	192	150	305	37	166	176	289	53
No	38	20	47	11	32	26	39	19

Table 3 discovers that all parent occupations did not deter support for female higher education. A strong relation exists between religious beliefs and the limitation of female higher education (115 "Agree" and 83 "Strongly Agree" responses). Cultural norms,

with 170 in the agreed category, consider its role as compared to 21 for not influencing. Media rated 201 respondents for Yes, as it may be the major player in promoting and discouraging female higher education in the respective universe.

**Table 3 Parental Support relation with occupation, religious beliefs, cultural norms and media influence**

Head of the household occupation					
	Govt Employee	Private Employee	Businessman	Farmer	Unemployed
Yes	92	73	141	3	33
No	15	7	19	3	14
Religious beliefs restrict female higher education.					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Yes	83	115	131	12	1
No	34	8	12	4	0
Cultural Norms					
Yes	59	170	102	5	6
No	19	21	10	5	3
Media Influence					
Yes	86	201	45	6	2
No	23	28	7	2	0

Table 4 presents a Binary Logistic Regression analysis of considered factors responsible for influences on female higher education. Religious beliefs are negatively associated with female higher education ( $\beta = -0.724, p = 0.000$ ). In contrast, fear of safety is positively associated ( $\beta = 1.328, p = 0.000$ ), with an increase in safety and an increased likelihood of female higher education. Father’s occupation indicates a positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.296, p = 0.026$ ), as certain occupations in Table 3, like employment and business, show more Yes responses than farming and unemployment. Community

criticism is not very significant ( $\beta = 0.849, p = 0.058$ ) but positive. Other variables like accessibility ( $\beta = -0.571, p = 0.092$ ), media ( $\beta = -0.392, p = 0.129$ ), and cultural norms ( $\beta = -0.352, p = 0.119$ ) have  $p > 0.05$ . Hence, they are not significantly associated. Nagelkerke R square value was 0.156. Therefore, the considered variables may vary by 16.5% in response to independent variables. This suggests that these factors are important, but another variable not included in this study also influences female higher education status.

**Table 4; Binary Regression Model of Variables**

Statement	Co-efficient	Standard error	P value
Religious beliefs	-.724	.202	.000
Fear of Safety	1.328	.362	.000
Community Criticism	.849	.448	.058
Accessibility	-.571	.339	.092
Father Occupation	.296	.133	.026
Media	-.392	.258	.129
Cultural Norms	-.352	.226	.119
Constant	-1.415	1.093	.196

Nagelkerke R square = .165

## DISCUSSION

Many factors constrain the participation of females in higher education, and Pakistani women have to pass through this transition (Rana, Lee, Saher & Shabbir, 2024). Parental religiosity is one among them. As Table 4 indicates, parental religiosity or beliefs coefficient is -0.72, showing a negative trend. The research study of Kokkizil (2024), on parental religiosity also showed similar trends. Furthermore, the more parents are strong in religious beliefs, the lower the school attainment of female children in higher school (Stokes, 2008). Thus, this finding follows earlier studies in Pakhtun society reporting the denial of female higher education due to religious factors (Bangash, Fatima & Ahmad, 2020). Fear of safety is another factor positively related to higher education. The more parents are confident about their daughter's safety, the more they attain higher education. Fear as a significant contributor was also discussed in early research (Nigar, Uzzaman & Sagar, 2025; Mehmood, Chong & Hussain, 2018). Father's occupation showed a significant relation with higher education. This may be due to economic and cultural factors. Occupation shows the class and status of families in capitalist societies like Pakistan. A more economically well-off father has a positive influence on the daughter's higher education (Iqbal

& Shams, 2021). Societal status is also a leading factor behind the father's occupation (Siddique, Safdar & Parveen, 2024; Ahmad & Jan, 2021; Amin, Rashid & Ahmad, 2019).

The cultural and community response also plays a pivotal role, but it may need more studies to assess its impact. However, past studies report community perception and criticism about female education (Zahid Khan, Hashim & Khattak, 2022; Maqsood, Maqsood & Raza, 2012). Despite our findings, studies exist that are not aligned with these factors. They perceive gender-based discrimination as a contributing factor (Hussain, Zulfiqar & Ullah, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

This research collected data from the male head of the household through purposive sampling, as willingness to participate in research was a great issue due to the cultural sensitivity of the topic. The research findings provide valuable insights into various aspects related to female higher education, encompassing demographic details and perceived barriers. The binary regression analysis suggested that the father's occupation, religious beliefs, and fear of safety are significantly related to female higher education

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