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Barriers to Female Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan: Challenges and Solution

Aisha Bibi

Ph.D Scholar at Pakistan Study Centre University of Peshawar
madamaisha17@gmail.com

Sana Rahman

M.Phil, Physical Education, Hazara University, Mansehra. Subject Specialist (SS)
at Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Rustam Khel, Mardan
Sanahpe1990@gmail.com

Saima Rahman

M.Phil Physical Education & Sports from Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan.
Assistant Professor at Government Girls Degree College, Rustam, Mardan
Saimarahmanhpe@gmail.com

Uzma Rahman

M.Phil, Physical Education, Hazara University, Mansehra. Lecturer at
Government Girls Degree College, Kernal Sher Khan, Swabi
uzmarahman2015@gmail.com

Abstract

Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province has one of the lowest rates of female literacy in the nation. The government and international organizations have made great efforts to increase the educational opportunities available to women; however, several social, economic, cultural, and political obstacles still prevent them from receiving high-quality education. This study looks at the different barriers that keep women in KP from going to college, using their lack of infrastructure, cultural norms, security concerns, poverty, and political will as focal points. The study highlights the primary educational obstacles that women in KP face and offers potential solutions by analyzing recent studies and data. Creating a supportive environment for women to receive education at every turn is crucial to resolve these problems and ensure equitable educational opportunities. Several institutional, socio-cultural, and financial barriers still restrict girls' and women's access to education in the area, despite advancements in educational access. Long-standing cultural norms, gender discrimination, early marriage, security concerns, a shortage of female teachers, poor infrastructure, and a lack of government policies are some of these obstacles. This study examines the various difficulties that female students encounter and emphasizes the necessity of focused interventions to deal with these problems. The results emphasize how crucial it is to strengthen educational infrastructure, engage the community, and reform policies to advance gender equality in education. The purpose of this paper is to offer suggestions for enhancing KP women's educational performance and their contribution to the socio-economic advancement of the area.

Keywords: Female, education, socio-economic, challenges, education facility, solution.

Introduction

Formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is one of Pakistan's most socio-economically underprivileged areas. The province has a sizable Pashtun population, and social norms, including gender roles, are frequently governed by conservative cultural practices. In the area, one of the most impacted sectors is education, particularly for girls.



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Despite the Pakistani governments and international organizations' efforts to close the gender gap in education, KP's female literacy rate is still much lower than its male counterpart. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that KP has one of the lowest rates of female literacy in Pakistan, with about 34% of women and 60% of men literate. This discrepancy is caused by a confluence of institutional, social, and economic factors. Despite some improvements in girls' access to education over time, there is still a sizable gender disparity in literacy and educational attainment. Because social norms in KP view girls' roles as limited to early marriage or household chores, female education is frequently deprioritized. Due to these outdated beliefs, as well as a lack of funding and suitable facilities, women are significantly underrepresented in educational institutions. Furthermore, security concerns erect psychological and physical barriers for female teachers and students, especially in regions impacted by tribal conflicts and militancy. An inadequate number of schools for girls and the lack of female teachers make the issue even worse. Consequently, many girls are compelled to leave school before finishing their elementary or secondary education.

To comprehend the main obstacles to female education in KP, its need to provides a thorough examination of the causes, effects, and potential remedies. Through an analysis of the socio-cultural and institutional obstacles, the study emphasizes the necessity of coordinated efforts by the government, civil society, and local communities to guarantee equal access to high-quality education for girls in KP. By means of policy reform, improved security measures, and community-based solutions, KP can make substantial progress in enhancing female education and enabling women to play a role in the development of the region. Teachers are the foundation of educational systems, and education is essential to the growth of any country. There are several barriers that prevent female teachers in Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), from doing their jobs well. Social and cultural barriers, inadequate infrastructure, security issues, and discrimination based on gender are some of these difficulties. Due to its conservative cultural outlook, KP poses unique difficulties that disproportionately impact female educators and impede their ability to advance both personally and professionally. These issues restrict women from to get education in school, college and university. It is need of the day to evaluate the main obstacles to women's education in KP, comprehend the ramifications of those obstacles, and suggest remedies that can support women's educational empowerment. These obstacles include structural problems like insufficient educational infrastructure as well as deeply embedded cultural norms. For the province's growth and the overall empowerment of Pakistani women, these obstacles must need be removed.

Literature Review

The challenges faced by female educators in various locales, including rural and urban ones, have been the subject of numerous studies. Because of the socio-cultural dynamics and security concerns in areas like KP, these issues are even more noticeable in Pakistan. One of the main obstacles facing KP women educators is the patriarchal culture, which prevents them from pursuing teaching positions or limits their freedom of movement within educational institutions (Aslam, 2011). The issue is further compounded by security concerns, especially in conflict-affected areas like KP, where female teachers are frequently the



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targets of harassment or another significant issue is the lack of opportunities for professional development for female educators. According to Abbas and Ahmad (2016), female teachers in KP have limited access to training. KP's female teachers' professional development is further hampered by their limited access to training and promotion opportunities. Furthermore, many schools lack basic amenities like separate restrooms for female teachers or appropriate security measures due to inadequate infrastructure (Khan et al., 2019). Ahmad, S. (2020) claimed that the rural regions of KP where cultural norms prevent women from attending school are the main subjects. There is numerous gender-based educational barriers that still exist which prohibit girls from achieving education. Ashraf and Raza, (2018) examine the cultural values that affect how girls' education is perceived, especially in KP, more conservative areas. Khan and Abbas, (2021) argued that female education in KP is the topic of reconsideration where female education is still very low. Although girls have faces security threats, harassments hampered girls from acquiring primary education.

Malik & Imran, (2019) a more thorough examination of gender inequality in Pakistani education, with a focus on the KP region that is particularly affected by social and cultural norms and traditional values limited girls' education. Mustaz (2020) examines how gender roles and other social changes affect educational access in rural Pakistan, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Rehman & Nawaz, (2017) emphasis on KP educational system investigates economic factors such as poverty and household priorities impede girls' access to education. Pervez and Bibi, (2020) explain the ingrained customs and cultural practices that restrict girls' access to education in KP. Khan and Raza, (2021) offers a thorough examination of government policies and explains why they haven't been successful in removing obstacles to girls' education in KP.

Siddiqi, (2019) explores the wider social and economic effects of KP's girls' education, connecting it to the advancement and empowerment of society. Girls' education is impacted by such religious norms and traditions which restrict them from higher education. UNICEF, (2022) A thorough analysis of gender inequality in South Asian education, with an emphasis on Pakistan and its problems, particularly those in KP. The World Bank, (2020) This report provides an update on the condition of education in Pakistan, emphasizing the urgent need to focus on girls' education in KP to ensure sustainable development.

Methodology

The research method is based on primary and secondary sources I.e., books, magazine, articles, research papers, MPhil and PhD thesis and relevant websites.

Barriers to Female Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Social and Cultural Norms

The deeply ingrained conservative and patriarchal cultural norms that restrict women's roles in society are one of the biggest obstacles to female education in KP. In many regions of KP, families consider girls' education superfluous, considering women's primary roles to be caring for the home and raising children. Cultural perceptions of women's education are frequently associated with worries about their safety, reputation, and ability to get married.

Girls in KP's rural areas are frequently married off at a young age, and their education is viewed as a secondary priority. Girls are expected by society to prioritize taking care of the home and raising children after marriage, leaving little time for further education (Bashir, 2020). The desire to maintain family



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honor and the low regard for female education result in high dropout rates among girls, particularly after primary school.

Economic Barriers and Poverty

In KP, poverty is a major obstacle to female education. The expenses of sending their daughters to school, such as transportation, uniforms, and school fees, are frequently beyond the means of families in rural and semi-urban areas. Families frequently prioritize the education of their male children over that of their female children because the household income is insufficient to support education for all children. The expense of traveling to neighboring towns or cities for education exacerbates financial difficulties in rural areas, where educational facilities are scarce (Ali & Khan, 2018).

Furthermore, children, especially girls, are frequently expected to work to support their families, which further diminishes their likelihood of going to school. In the areas of KP most families give best opportunity of education to boys, are expected to provide for their families in the future, families may prefer to send them to school, leaving girls at home to help with household chores or to look after younger siblings (Khan & Ahmad, 2019).

Issues with Safety and Violence

Continuous conflicts, militancy, and extremist ideologies have made KP's security situation worse, particularly in areas that border Afghanistan. In many areas, militant groups that oppose female education because they believe it to be improper or un-Islamic pose a direct threat to girls' education. One famous instance of how the security situation can impact female education in the region is the 2012 attack on Malala Yousafzai by the Pakistani Taliban. In addition, some regions have made it dangerous for girls to go to school due to attacks on schools, kidnappings, and threats from extremist organizations. Schools have closed because of the lack of security in educational institutions, and parents are reluctant to send their children to school. (Ali, 2020).

Insufficient Facilities for Education

The lack of proper school infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is another significant obstacle to female education in KP. Many schools lack basic amenities like sanitary facilities, clean water, and functional classrooms. Another problem is the lack of female teachers, since many families find it awkward when their daughters are taught by men. In more conservative communities, where women are prohibited from interacting with men outside the home, are the obstacles prohibits girls from acquiring education.

Families are further deterred from sending their daughters to school by the lack of separate schools for girls or the considerable travel time required for them to get there. A United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019) study found that 70% of girls in rural KP lack do not have access to secondary education due to the lack of nearby schools and infrastructure.

Unstable Politics and Insufficient Government Will

The difficulties faced by girls have been made worse by KP's political unrest and the continuous lack of government funding for education. Political unpredictability, corruption, and a lack of funding have made it difficult to execute policies meant to boost female school enrollment, despite the provincial government's efforts to improve the educational system. Furthermore, the gender gap in education has been sustained due to a lack of political will to



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implement gender-sensitive education policies (Siddiqui, 2021).

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Socio-cultural barriers are also a big challenge in front of female education in KP Pakistan such as:

Views of Patriarchy

Patriarchal customs and gender norms favor male education over female education in many parts of KP, especially in rural areas. Families frequently believe that girls' education is superfluous or of lesser importance. Additionally, girls' educational opportunities are restricted by socio-cultural norms and views on women's roles in the home.

Getting married young and having children

In KP, girls are often married off at a young age, which leads to their school abandonment. Early marriage often reinforces the idea that women's primary role is domestic, limiting their educational options. Young girls were unable to finish their education in the event of an early marriage. Because they had a lot of responsibilities after marriage, they did not have time to finish their education, and as a result, their in-laws did not permit them to continue their education.

Economic Barriers

In KP, certain economic obstacles stand in the way of women's education, limiting and even preventing them from pursuing an education. Due to their economic vulnerability, girls in rural and some urban areas do not pursue higher education. Due to high education fees poor families cannot support their girls' children to acquire higher education.

Lack of resources

For many families in KP, poverty makes it difficult to pay for school fees, uniforms, books, and transportation, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Because girls early marriage off and have no need for education in such circumstances, parents frequently choose to invest in their sons' education. Due to a lack of financial and economic resources, most families in KP are unable to give their kids an education. Furthermore, schools lack basic amenities that are essential for providing children with an education, like clean water, furniture, and electricity.

There is a lack of space for pupils in government schools because of their high enrollment. Children are discouraged from enrolling in classes where there are frequently more than 100 students seated. Even though the government intended to raise the percentage of girls enrolled in school, they chose not to build classrooms or schools, which presents a significant obstacle to the education of KP girls.

Private Schooling Costs

Due to inadequate facilities in many KP government schools, many families choose to send their daughters to private schools, which can be costly.

Infrastructure and Accessibility

Female's education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is severely hampered by inadequate infrastructure and restricted accessibility. The absence of basic amenities like boundary walls, restrooms, electricity, clean drinking water, and adequate classrooms in many government schools for girls deter both students and their parents (Zada et al., 2023). Because of cultural sensitivity to privacy and safety, female students are disproportionately affected by these shortcomings. Additionally, because there are so few schools for girls, especially in rural and



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isolated areas, many young girls are forced to walk great distances to go to school—a journey that is frequently viewed as unsafe or socially inappropriate (Jan & Azeem, 2024). The lack of gender-sensitive and dependable transportation makes accessibility even more difficult, especially for girls from conservative homes. In certain places, families merely decide not to send their daughters to school.

Insufficient Schools in Remote Areas

The dearth of educational institutions, particularly secondary and upper secondary ones, in rural KP is a major problem. Because they are less likely to travel long distances alone due to safety concerns, girls are especially affected by this.

Inadequate Teachers and Facilities

Due to the lack of female teachers in many KP government schools especially in the primary level there are only two teachers whom they teach to six classes of about seven to eight subjects and have limited time to give more time to every student, families are deterred from sending their daughters to school. Furthermore, there are frequently insufficient restrooms, safe areas for girls, and adequate sanitation.

Security and Safety Concerns

Security and safety issues continue to be significant barriers to female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Many parents, particularly in rural and impoverished areas, are deterred from sending their daughters to school by the fear of harassment, gender-based violence, and kidnapping. Parents' concerns about their daughters' safety are made worse by the absence of safe transportation and boundary walls in schools (Khan et al., 2021). A climate of fear has also been exacerbated in some areas by threats from conservative or extremist elements that oppose female education (Gul et al., 2023). Girls' dropout rates have increased because of teachers and students feeling unsafe, especially when traveling long distances to school (Zada et al., 2023). Furthermore, the lack of female security guards or school-based safety measures exacerbates the education system. As a result, many families prefer early marriage or home confinement over formal education, perpetuating cycles of illiteracy and dependency among women in the region.

Conflict and Militancy

Violence and militancy have plagued the KP region, particularly in the tribal areas. Attacks on schools, especially those for girls, have resulted from this, making the environment unsafe and frightening for female teachers and students. Due to the insecure environment that has plagued the life difficult for girls to go to school.

Institutional and Political Barriers

There are major institutional and political obstacles to female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The lack of proper educational infrastructure for girls is one of the primary problems, particularly in rural areas where schools are either too few or too far away and frequently lack basic amenities like restrooms, boundary walls, and other basic facility. Because of conservative opposition and changing priorities, political support for girls' education has been erratic. Poor governance, a lack of accountability, and a lack of funding frequently result in the poor implementation of policies that support female education. Furthermore, local political leaders occasionally refrain from advocating for girls' education out



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of concern for the reaction of traditionalist societal groups. Together, these elements support a system that keeps girls at the margins, limiting their educational and future economic opportunities.

Insufficient Political Will

In certain parts of KP, especially those that are extremely conservative or have been impacted by ongoing conflict, there is not enough political will to give female education top priority.

Curriculum and Bias Against Women

Like many other regions of Pakistan, KP's educational system might have gender-biased curricula that perpetuate stereotypes and traditional gender roles. This may deter girls from pursuing courses, especially those related to STEM. Female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is severely hampered by several institutional and political barriers. Insufficient educational facilities lead to a high dropout rate among girls, especially in rural and hilly regions where transportation is difficult. This includes a dearth of boundary walls, unsanitary conditions, an unsafe atmosphere, and not enough schools for girls.

This is made worse by culturally ingrained patriarchal norms, which dictate that male family members frequently make decisions regarding girls' education and may stigmatize or discourage female education because of "Haya" (modesty) or a fear of getting married young. Politically, KP has policies and scholarship programs, but poor governance, insufficient funding, and little institutional accountability make it difficult to carry them out. Local political leaders frequently give in to pressure from conservatives or lack the political inertia to maintain systemic barriers that restrict girls' access to quality education and perpetuate gender disparities in the region.

Insufficient Knowledge and Awareness

One of the biggest obstacles to female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is the general ignorance of the value and long-term advantages of educating girls. A lot of families, particularly those in conservative and rural areas, think that girls don't need to go to school because a woman's main responsibilities are taking care of the home and getting married young (Jan & Azeem, 2024). This kind of thinking frequently stems from generational illiteracy, in which parents are not informed about the benefits of education for their daughters and the community, because they are not formally educated themselves. A dearth of awareness campaigns and restricted exposure to role models also deter investment in female education. Under such circumstances, girls' education is frequently viewed as less important in these settings than that of boys, which results in lower enrollment, higher dropout rates, and little support for postsecondary education. In the absence of focused initiatives to alter these beliefs through public awareness campaigns and community involvement, these ingrained beliefs will keep impeding girls' educational progress in KP.

Lack of literacy and gaps in information

Female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is severely hampered by the lack of adult literacy and pervasive informational gaps. Mothers in particular frequently have little to no formal education themselves, which restricts their comprehension of the long-term benefits of educating their daughters in KP and many other rural areas. Parents who lack basic literacy skills are unable to search for or understand information about government programs, educational opportunities, or scholarships that could help pay for their daughters' education.



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The idea that education is improper or even harmful for girls is frequently reinforced by erroneous assumptions about cultural or religious restrictions (Jan & Azeem, 2024). "The people who need it most frequently do not receive important information about enrollment deadlines, school safety and health protocols, or the presence of female teachers due to a lack of outreach by educational authorities. Due to poor decision-making, low enrollment, and early dropout among girls, this information gap exacerbates the gender education gap in the area.

Many areas of KP are characterized by a lack of understanding regarding the value of education and the opportunities that are accessible. The importance of education for their daughters is also lost on illiterate parents, especially uneducated mothers. Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province has several serious obstacles to women's education. Frequently made worse by historical and regional problems, these difficulties are the result of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Here is a detailed list of the main obstacles and possible fixes:

Solutions to Overcome Barriers

The following are some solutions to remove these kinds of obstacles to female education:

Campaigns for Community Involvement and Awareness

Increasing awareness of the value of female education is one of the best ways to overcome cultural barriers. Social perceptions of girls' education can be altered with the support of community-based initiatives that involve influential people, local leaders, and religious leaders. The long-term advantages of educating girls should be highlighted in awareness campaigns, as this will not only empower them personally but also help families and communities to grow and enhance female education in a broader sense.

Financial Assistance and Scholarships

Family needs to receive financial assistance and scholarships from the provincial government and non-governmental organizations to help them pay for their children's education. Free uniforms, school fee waivers, and transportation subsidies are a few examples of this. Programs for conditional cash transfers, which offer families financial rewards for sending their daughters to school, have proven effective in other regions of Pakistan and could be used in KP to promote greater rates of girl enrollment and retention.

Enhancing Safety and Security in Schools

School security must be a top priority for the government, especially in areas that are prone to conflict. This may entail creating community watch programs, enhancing law enforcement around educational facilities, and giving girls access to transportation so that they go to school in safer neighborhoods. To prevent extremism or violence from interfering with education, the government should also collaborate closely with local communities.

Training Teachers and Developing Infrastructure

It is essential to upgrade the infrastructure for education, especially in rural areas. The government should spend money constructing new schools, renovating old ones, and making sure that necessities like sanitary facilities and clean water are available. More female teachers would be hired and trained, especially in rural areas, to help families feel comfortable sending their daughters to school. In this way the education ratio will be increased. In primary school,



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each school should give subject wise teachers to give more attention to each student. In this way education will be increased.

Political Support for Education's Gender Equality

It is utmost necessary to maintain female education as a top priority in KP. It needs to have a strong political commitment. More funding for the education sector should come from the government, with a particular emphasis on resolving gender differences in educational quality, retention, and enrollment. Policies that make schools more accessible should also be put into place, particularly in rural areas of KP.

Conclusion

In conclusion, widespread illiteracy, institutional flaws, security concerns, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of awareness all pose significant obstacles to female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Due to socio-economic, political, and cultural barriers, these factors are intricately linked. It is crucial to raise awareness, provide financial aid, enhance security, and modernize infrastructure to ensure that girls in KP have access to high-quality education. Empowering women through education is essential to Pakistan's overall development and the expansion of the surrounding region. A multifaceted approach involving the government, civil society, local communities, and international organizations is required to address the obstacles to female education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A combination of financial aid, community engagement, infrastructure improvements, and policy changes can be used to overcome the challenges. The Empowerment of girls through education is not only beneficial for individual families but is crucial for the socio-economic development of the entire region and country.

The gender education gap will not be closed without focused interventions, such as enhancing school infrastructure, raising community awareness, and expanding information availability. A thorough, grassroots strategy is necessary to guarantee that every girl in KP has access to a high-quality education.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces many challenges to female education, including infrastructural, cultural, political, and economic ones. But if the government and non-governmental organizations collaborate and carry out targeted interventions, these problems can be solved.

A comprehensive, long-term strategy that addresses the root causes of inequality is necessary to remove the barriers to women's education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Empowering women via education can lead to revolutionary social, economic, and political change, benefiting entire communities. It is imperative that the province prioritize infrastructure spending, ensure the safety of teachers and students, and change public perceptions through education and advocacy. Together, the government, local communities, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations must create an environment where girls can receive a top-notch education without facing fear, discrimination, or financial limitations. Gender equality and sustainable development in KP ultimately depend on promoting female education. This will allow teachers to prosper and make valuable contributions to the education industry. As a result, educators will be able to thrive and earn valuable

Some of the biggest challenges facing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's female education are inadequate infrastructure, security issues, and sociocultural dynamics. These problems require a multipronged approach that includes improved security



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measures, policy changes, and easier access to educational development opportunities. These barriers need to be removed to support the region's overall development, empower female educators, and improve KP education.

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