

## Parents' Attitude toward Daughters' Education in Tribal Area of Dera Ghazi Khan (Pakistan)

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### Abstract

The paper aimed to investigate the parents' attitudes toward their daughters' education in tribal areas of district Dera Ghazi Khan (Pakistan). To achieve the objectives four research questions were established. Focus of the questions was to examine the significance of girls' education for tribal parents. Existing and expected role of tribal parents as well as contribution from government and community for girls' education was also aimed to explore in research questions. Sample comprised thirty parents and five teachers/educational workers. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and was analyzed using content analysis approach. The findings disclosed the parents' positive perceptions toward their daughters' education but at the same time severe scarcity of human and physical infrastructure for girls' education was also presented in the area. The paper recommended several empirical steps to overcome these problems including provision of new school locations and ensuring the availability of school buildings, supporting infrastructure and teachers for already functioning schools in the area. Financial aid for poor students was also proposed in the study.

**Keywords:** Gender disparity; madrasa education; infrastructure

### Introduction

Gender disparity is remained an unsolved issue from decades in Pakistan. Government of Pakistan has signed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and consequently was responsible to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015. Pakistan, a country with the people of different social, financial, and ethnical backgrounds, expressed varied results for different targets and indicators of MDGs (Academy of Educational Planning and Management, 2008). Data presented in Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) surveys revealed high gender disparity in the favor of boys in primary and elementary education in tribal districts of the country (Government of Pakistan, 2008 & 2009). Various studies investigate the situation of girls' education in different areas of the country (Aslam, 2007; Lall, 2009; Qureshi, 2007) and conclude the pathetic position of girls' education in rural and tribal areas of the country.

Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) surveys claim low literacy and enrollment rates of girls in Pakistan. Simultaneously, Qureshi (2003) reveals high dropout rate of girls in these areas. Data for the years of 2006-07 reveals the Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 0.63 with lower Net Enrollment Rate (NER) of girls in all levels of education across the country (Government of Pakistan,

2008a). Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of girls' enrollment to the boys' enrollment. A GPI of more than one indicates that, in proportion, for every male in the school, there is more than one female. Data for the years 2006-07, although, shows a better trend than previous year i.e. GPI of 0.62 for the year 2004-05 but the situation is worse in tribal based regions of the country. The GPI of 0.42 for Khyber-Pakhtoon-Khaw province and 0.38 for Balochistan province for the years 2006-07 reveals strict position of girls' education in such areas.

Aslam (2007) and Khalid and Mukhtar (2002) conclude that, in Pakistan, poor families prefer to educate sons rather than their daughters due to financial constraints. In another study Aslam (2007a) further elaborates this notion. He argues that parents' preferences also affect school selection for their children (boys and girls). According to him, generally, parents select comparatively better schools, in context of fees, for their sons. Daughters are ignored or enrolled in the schools having lower fees and fewer facilities.

Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary school enrollment is 0.72 for Punjab, 0.63 for Sindh, 0.42 for Khyber Pakhtoon-Kha, and 0.38 for Balochistan for the years 2006-07 (Government. of Pakistan, 2008a). Lynd (2007) discovers the differences of female primary and elementary NER and literacy rates (youth and adult) between rural and urban areas of the country. According to him the female NER in rural areas is lower than urban areas for primary classes. Lall (2009) finds out that tribal people are more likely to not send their girls in schools. Literacy data of a remote district of Dera Ghazi Khan strengthen this idea. Literacy rate of 10+ age group of district Dera Ghazi Khan is 28% for females with compare to 62% of males for the year 2006-07. Net Enrollment Rate (NER) in primary classes is 48% for girls and 60% for boys for the same period (Government. of Pakistan, 2008). *Tehsil* Tribal area of District Dera Ghazi Khan comprises tribal Baloch population. Though people strictly follows Baloch traditions however the impacts of media and development of Punjab province has changed the tribal behaviors of the people of tribal area of district Dera Ghazi Khan more than other Baloch tribal areas of the country.

Aslam (2007 & 2007a), Hussain, Zakaria, Hassan, Mukhtar and Ali (2003), Khalid and Mukhtar (2002), Lall (2009) and Qureshi (2007) in their recent studies, have explored the issue of girls' education in Pakistan. The studies provide statistical data regarding female literacy rates, girls' enrollments in different level of education, educational infrastructures located for girls, gender disparity indexes and the reasons of gender disparity in different areas of the country. Lall (2009) investigates the shift of educational dynamics in different ethnic groups in Pakistan. As a part of her study, she interviewed the parents of enrolled girls and acquired data regarding their preferences for boys or girls' education from different areas of the country. There is a need to get understanding of perceptions and attitudes of the parents of both enrolled and out of school girls regarding their daughters' education which was the major thirst of the study.

Less enrollment of girls in the country especially in tribal areas demands to investigate different factors which are affecting overall situation of girls' education in these areas. Parents' attitude is central point in these circumstances which can play the role of change agent. Parents' attitudes and behaviors reflect the cultural and social picture of this segment of society. Major purpose of this study is to deeply explore the mind-set of tribal parents toward their daughters' education so that if there are some barriers and weak points, it can be planned to improve them. The study contributes to draw a clear and comprehensive scenario of girls' education in tribal areas of the district Dera Ghazi Khan (Pakistan).

## Research Questions

The research purpose of exploring parents' attitudes has vast grounds. It was necessary to focus the study on research objectives and concentrate to get the understanding of parents in this regard. To get the comprehension of attitudes of tribal parents toward their daughters' education, the study attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. How do tribal parents define the significance of girls' education?
2. What type of role, tribal parents wish to contribute for their daughters' education?
3. What type of role, tribal parents are contributing for their daughters' education?
4. What could be possible measures to enhance tribal parents' role for their daughters' education?

## Methodology

In previous studies, conducted on the topic of parents' behaviors, researchers used both quantitative and qualitative methods (Aslam 2007, 2007a; Hussain et al., 2003; Lall, 2009; Qureshi, 2007; Qureshi, 2003). Research purpose as well as research questions of the present study demand a deep exploration of parental attitudes either they send their daughters to schools or not. Creswell (2003) and Bernard (2000) recommend qualitative method of inquiry to achieve such type of purposes when the task is to investigate the behaviors rather than count down.

## Sample

*Tehsil* Tribal Area of District Dera Ghazi Khan comprises five union councils (UCs) named UC Tumman Qaisrani, UC Fazla Kachh, UC Barthi, UC Mubarki, and UC Tumman Leghari. In UC Fazla Kachh total two middle and 19 primary schools are on the record for girls. In UC Tumman Qaisrani one middle and 24 primary, in UC Barthi one middle and 27 primary, in UC Mubarki 11 primary and in UC Tumman Leghari four middle and six primary schools are functioning on the record. In this study, equal numbers of parents (six from each UC) and Educational/literacy workers (one from each UC) were included in the sample. Thus the sample comprised five educational/literacy workers and thirty parents.

## Data Collection

To enhance the richness and accuracy of the findings, the data was gathered from total five union councils of *Tehsil* Tribal Area of district Dera Ghazi Khan. Boundaries of the data were defined and confined only to search the answers of research questions. Two sources of data including parents, and educational workers of the area were accessed. To create unity in the findings, the data from the area was analyzed in its own (tribal) cultural and educational context. Data was collected in three stages. In first stage data regarding numbers of girls' schools in each UC with their level was gathered from DMO (District Monitoring Officer) Office Dera Ghazi Khan. Previous studies concerning parents' attitudes toward their daughters' education especially in tribal perspective were reviewed in second stage, and the third stage consisted of interviewing of participants. Semi-structured interview technique was used to collect required data. Consent to use audio tape recorder was sought from the participants. It was intended that each interview did not take more than 25 minutes.

## Data Analysis

Data gathered through interviews was written in transcripts. Data was analyzed using relational analysis which was a type of content analysis approach. Huckin (2008) suggests relational analysis for

qualitative inquiry to focus on both explicit and implicit concepts available in the data. Different concepts were derived from the data and were analyzed exploring their roots and relationships. Local school teachers and literacy workers were a better source to discuss the findings to maintain reliability. Following this approach, the findings and important points were discussed with local educationists of the area and was crystallized and finalized. It provided opportunity to create association among different opinions and interpret the data according to local context. Conclusions were drawn and verified looking at all previous stages of data collection and analysis. Finally recommendations were provided to better the parents' attitudes as well as girls' education situation in the area.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In qualitative research trustworthiness of collection and analysis of the data is considered as traditional validity and reliability of the quantitative method of research. Richards (2005) and Silverman (2001) have demonstrated the measures to meet the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. In present study, different steps were adapted in this regard. Initially formal consent was sought from all participants before interviewing. Confidentiality was assured to all participants and acquired data was only used for research purpose and dealt as confidential document. Use of triangulation is best, according to Patton (2002), to meet trustworthiness, neutrality, credibility, and consistency features of a research. For this regard, multiple data sources were used in the study to draw a single picture. For example numeric data of girls' schools and qualitative data from parents of enrolled and out of school children and educational workers active in the area were used to increase trustworthiness of the study.

It was maintained that the data was appropriate and was appropriately handled. Richards (2005) described two rules to meet this requirement. Firstly, specific way of checking was designed, which checked consistently how the data and handling of the data were supportive to answer the research questions. Secondly, researcher's ability was ensured to account each step of the research properly.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The major limitation of the study was generalizability of its conclusions. Emerging themes from the research accept the relevancy with only the contexts of tribal areas of district Dera Ghazi Khan. Boundaries of the study were firmed for research, which were limited to the exploration of parents' attitudes toward their daughters' education in the area. Self-selected participants were strong point for the study to get relevant and significant data however to ease the critiques any volunteer participant (If he/she was willing) was welcomed. It was tried to access equally mothers and fathers of girls in the area however due to the constraints of tribal customs and traditions only males could be accessed. Consequently, the study based on only fathers' opinions toward their daughters' education in the area.

## **Findings**

### **Significance of Daughters' Education**

There were no major differences among the opinions of tribal parents regarding the significance of their daughters' education. Education for girls was described as a source of awareness and Islamic knowledge. "Though girls' education has financial benefits but I prefer to educate my daughters only for the sake of knowledge especially Islamic religious knowledge" a tribal man of 40 years age who was running a small Islamic religious school (*Madrasa*) on the tribal area stated. And when he was

asked to opine about the girls' enrollment in non-religious government established girls' school, he revealed his disagreement for this. But at the same time the parents having other financial backgrounds like labor, business, farming, and jobs argue in the favor of both religious and non-religious education. The viewpoints expressed by majority of tribal men lead to a positive trend toward girls' education in the areas.

### **Expected Role of Tribal Parents for their Daughters' Education**

Two major categories of opinions emerged under this question; (a) the parents who want to educate their daughters at any cost. Some of these families migrated to urban areas to make their children (well) educated. The families who did not have resources to migrate are settled in the tribal areas but have desire to educate their children. A tribal person of age 30 who has a small shop in tribal area at 60 kilometers distance from nearest urban city Taunsa Sharif stated that there was a girls primary school in his area but with no proper building and only one female teacher who often remained absent from the duty. The tribal shop keeper showed his commitment for his daughters' education and opined that if the government provided transportation he was agreed to educate her daughters in Taunsa Sharif. Lack of resources is proved reluctance for many parents who had desire of daughters' education but could not educate them due to absence of school buildings, unavailability of teachers and transport facilities. Some parents prefer private schools which exist in the areas in very short numbers but there provided standard of education is also low with high cost, generally, unaffordable for common tribal man.

(b) Category B comprised the parents who proposed only Islamic education for their daughters. These people are dependent on *madrassa* education (education offered by Islamic religious schools comprised from simple Holy Quran recitation skill to Islamic philosophy and Fiqa (Malik, 2008)) for their daughters. Although the data about the numbers and level of *madrassas* (Islamic religious schools) is not available for the areas but during the visit in the areas observed numbers of *madrassas* for girls were very short. In some mosques, boys' religious schools or in some homes there is facility to educate girls only the reciting of Holy Quran without translation. The religious schools offering higher level of Islamic religious education especially for girls are unavailable in the areas. When a tribal father of age 42 years was asked that how the skill of recitation of holy Quran could meet the requirements of religious education and awareness? He replied strictly that it is their tradition and he would not negate his traditions at all. It reveals a connection between cultural and religious thought of some tribal men who, at the moment, are not prepare to adapt modern concepts of education. The majority of religious education schools or study centers which exist in the tribal areas of Dera Ghazi Khan are non-registered. There is no mechanism of students' shift and/or promotion from *madrassa* to mainstream schooling especially for girls. The parents of this category had showed no concern on this issue. For them the only thing which has importance is the traditional religious education for their daughters.

### **Existing Role of Tribal Parents for their Daughters' Education**

There are also two categories in this section; (a) first the parents who have desire to educate their daughters and are striving for their daughters' education. Some of them have resources like tribal chiefs, government servants, businessmen etc. They migrated to urban areas which had adequate education facilities. The people who do not have resources for migration are settled in the tribal areas with a hope for better future of their daughters' education. They have enrolled their daughters in Public schools; the schools without buildings and other facilities like electricity, drinking water, sanitation, boundary walls etc and with insufficient numbers of teachers and their weak management and monitoring system.

(b) Category B was included with the parents who were satisfied by sending their daughters to educate them recitation of holy Quran. Though, this category comprised very few parents but these were the persons who claimed the worth of their traditions showing no concern for modern education and its social and personal benefits for girls and families, as well. In both cases, the victims are tribal girls. The parents are unconvinced (in fewer cases) or education facilities are not available (in large cases), the educational status of tribal girls is painful and far from other parts of the country.

### **Possible Measures for Improvement**

All the parents who were aware of the importance of education were agreed on the demand of educational opportunities for girls including their daughters. When a Secondary School Teacher working in the area was asked about the behaviors of some people who totally denied the girls' general education on the basis of their traditions, he described the ignorance as sole cause of such behaviors. According to him if adequate educational facilities will be provided for girls in the areas than majority parents will start their daughters' education and consequently the behaviors of such people, who were fewer in numbers and opposed girls' education, will be changed. This time, majority tribal parents are unaware of the personal, domestic, social, and financial benefits of girls' education. According to parents' opinions, less numbers of girls' schools, distance of schools from homes, insufficient numbers of female teachers, absence of school buildings, electricity, toilets, boundary walls etc are the problems which demand immediate solutions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It was observed that, generally, tribal parents had soft corner for their daughters' education. They were aware of the significance of daughters' education. But the scarcity of resources has compelled them not to engage their daughters in education. If there were some weak voices against girls' general education, these were based on ignorance of parents. The opponents of general education of girls also supported religious education for girls. The important thing in all scenarios is that people in tribal area of Dera Ghazi Khan want to educate their daughters. The major problem for majority of them is the absence of Schools and school related human and physical infrastructure. The problems of transportation, drinking water, electricity, school buildings and boundary walls are severe in tribal cum rural areas than settled areas. Special efforts are recommended to refine girls' schools infrastructure on priority basis. Quality infrastructure ensures quality education and quality education ensures masses participation in education programs.

Since the population in the tribal area is scattered, the paper recommends wide provision of girls' schools and school related infrastructure in the area. To ensure the attendance of teachers, special administrative and managerial arrangements should be taken. Providing transport facility to female teachers and special incentives for the teachers serving in remote tribal areas can be proved helpful in this regard. Teachers should be assigned task to motivate parents to enroll their daughters in schools especially the parents who are reluctant to do so due to unawareness and ignorance. The parents who focused only on religious education for their daughters also need motivation and inspiration. Up gradation of girls' schools which are functioning, to some extent, better is also recommended. The availability of elementary and secondary schools will not only support the further education of already enrolled girls but work as a motive for many other girls in the areas who wish education.

To reduce the impacts of poverty on daughter' education, giving stipend to enrolled girls is a good solution. The study revealed that the people who have resources are migrated to developed areas for

their children education or personally made alternate arrangements for their children education like personal transportation or enrollment in boarding schools of settled areas. Majority of residents of tribal areas is poor having minimum resources for their living including children education. Stipends and financial assistance will promote their efforts for daughters' education.

Since there is not found any strong barrier in parents' attitudes for their daughters' education, the study promotes the idea of providing a mechanism of quality and easy accessible education for girls in the areas. The steps will helpful to create an educational environment in the areas as well as broaden the mindset of tribal parents.

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