



Aneela Firdoos ¹ Farah Latif Naz ² Zuha Masud ³

Abstract: *This quantitative study explores the complex phenomenon between societal expectations and cultural norms for shaping gender discrimination and further investigates the factors that affect gender differences in educational attainment in Pakistan. There are still large gender differences in the educational environment in Pakistan, and these issues have been raised with time. The goal of this research is to present a thorough investigation of the underlying causes of these differences, with an emphasis on the influence of societal standards and cultural expectations. This study is based on a quantitative approach with pertinent primary data gathering through surveys. Data on attitudes, beliefs, and practices about gender and education have been collected through a survey of a representative sample of Pakistani families and educational institutions. In addition to this quantitative data for collecting the gender gaps, qualitative interviews with important stakeholders were also conducted. This research tries to discover significant drivers of gender gaps in educational attainment by examining the links between variables such as parental expectations, cultural attitudes regarding gender roles, access to resources, and educational results. The results of the study anticipated and concluded that social norms and cultural standards affect Pakistani students' decisions and performance in school. Additionally, the study recommended insightful information to educational institutions and policymakers for the purpose of creating focused interventions that will address these discrepancies and solve the gender equality issues in education.*

Key Words: Gender Inequality, Pakistan, Discrepancies, Educational Achievement, Cultural Norms, Social Expectations

Introduction

Gender disparities still exist even though many developing nations around the world have institutional institutions and laws that codify gender equality. In Pakistan, gender inequality has long existed, and although women are guaranteed equal rights under the country's constitution, they are frequently seen as second-class citizens. The status of women in Pakistani society differs from the rights they are formally guaranteed (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2022). This study provides an answer to this query by demonstrating that Pakistan's path to gender equality is not a straight line. The difficult situation of gender equality in Pakistan is not likely to get any better unless we take on systemic issues that work against women's empowerment initiatives. This research investigates how ingrained sociocultural norms and gender biases are impeding gender equality by preventing women from accessing critical strategic empowerment areas like political freedom, work, and education in spite of institutional laws that uphold equal rights and promote women's empowerment (Eden & Wagstaff 2021).

Gender differences in educational achievement are a major worldwide problem that has a big impact on people's personal growth, social justice, and the advancement of nations. These differences still exist and take many different forms in Pakistan, a country known for its rich cultural diversity and intricate social structure. This chapter provides background information and an introduction to the research project, "Exploring the Role of Social Expectations and Cultural Norms in Shaping Gender Disparities in

¹ Visiting faculty, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Layyah Campus, Punjab, Pakistan.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

³ Research Scholar, Department of Education, Bahauddin Zakariya University. Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

Educational Attainment in Pakistan." It establishes the framework for comprehending the study's background, importance, goals, and hypotheses (Anjum, Kamal et al., 2019).

One of Pakistan's human rights concerns is gender discrimination, which has a significant impact on the nation's female population. Approximately 50% of women in Pakistan do not have a high school diploma; Pakistani women also have worse nutritional and health conditions. In addition, the majority of women are confined to their houses and have little to no freedom to make decisions that directly impact their living circumstances and other elements of their families [2]. On the other hand, men are viewed as dominating in Pakistani society. Women's subjugation has detrimental effects on various phases of their lives (Aghai, Goudar et al. 2020). Nestled in South Asia, Pakistan is home to almost 220 million different people, making it the sixth most populous country in the world. A diverse range of linguistic, religious, and ethnic groups form the fabric of the nation's culture and society, each adding to its distinct identity. Pakistan must tackle the issue of gender gaps in education within this diversity, which is rooted in a complicated web of historical, cultural, and socioeconomic influences (Waidler, Sunny et al. 2021).

Everyone agrees that education is a basic human right and a strong driver of both socioeconomic advancement and personal growth. However, Pakistan remains concerned about the gender disparity in educational achievement. There are still gender-based differences in education across all educational levels, from primary to postsecondary, despite tremendous progress being made to increase access to education. These discrepancies impede personal growth, sustain poverty cycles, and limit the country's capacity to utilize its population to the fullest extent possible (Kitterød Nadim 2020).

Significance of the Study

In addition to being morally required, comprehending and resolving gender differences in educational attainment is crucial for sustainable development. This research study is significant because it has the ability to clarify the complex aspects of these differences and pinpoint the fundamental influence of social norms and cultural standards. This study looks at the intricate interactions that exist between Pakistani society, culture, and education in order to:

1. Give a thorough evaluation of the gender gaps in education attainment in Pakistan as they currently exist.
2. Learn how cultural norms affect people's educational possibilities and choices, with a focus on gender-related issues.
3. Examine how cultural norms and gender roles are seen to affect students' educational paths, taking into account both the opportunities and obstacles that have to be faced.

Research Objectives

The examination of the social expectations and cultural norms with gender differences in educational attainment is guided by the following research objectives.

1. To find aspects of cultural norms and societal expectations in Pakistan that influence the enrollment and retention rates of girls in primary and secondary education.
2. To investigate the traditional gender roles and expectations that impact the choice of education for career aspiration in Pakistan.
3. To suggest the perceptions and attitudes of parents, teachers, and community leaders in Pakistan regarding gender-related educational disparities.

Literature Review

In the analysis of gender disparities in the field of education, especially in Pakistan, Fizza (2023) contends that socioeconomic factors have a role in educational equity and access. Extreme poverty sometimes leaves rural families with insufficient financial means to give their kids a higher education. Pakistan's rural villages also confront a host of other difficulties, including a dearth of buildings, electricity, and clean drinking water, as well as a shortage of infrastructure and educational supplies. To make matters worse, females face barriers to attending school due to a lack of highly trained female teachers. Female enrolment in schools is also impacted by factors like poor political involvement and a lack of government funding.



Strong gender differences are noted in the gender assessment of political engagement and academic attainment. She highlights the influence of cultural elements, patriarchal notions, and customary norms on the gender roles that men and women play in society and offers policy suggestions for Pakistan's national and provincial governments should take concrete action to reduce these gender differences. Two important elements are absent from her study, though: 1) actual data demonstrating how patriarchy and gender norms contribute to these gender disparities, and 2) an investigation into how institutional and governmental issues affect gender results (Fizza, [2023](#)).

Hayward ([2021](#)) closes some of these gaps by analyzing the impact of sociocultural and economic factors on women's educational results in India using nationally representative data. Their economic study shows that households in affluent areas are more likely to educate girls than those in poorer districts, which is consistent with different findings. Greater gender parity in education is typically the outcome of wealthier communities having higher enrolment rates and more financial resources. When looking at cultural factors that influence women's education, researchers revealed that patrilocal is a prevalent social system in various states where a woman moves to live with or close to her husband's family after marriage; this has a strong correlation with worse educational outcomes for any women as well as larger gender gaps. This is particularly noticeable where gender inequality in schooling is more pronounced and is in frequent practice. Cultural institutions promote gender equality, which is significant in Pakistan, where different cultures' residence is frequently the preferred type of post-marital residency due to the country's predominantly patriarchal society (Kramer, [2023](#)).

The literature on gender disparity frequently provides practical policy proposals to support women's empowerment through the actions of the government, but it does not examine the true impact that different aspects of government have on gender outcomes. Constitutional rights do not always equate to women's equality in society, as we have demonstrated (Odera and Mulusa, [2020](#)).

Sánchez, Jones, et al. ([2023](#)) suggested that more state variables are involved in closing this gap; they examine whether state willingness factors that enable systemic discrimination against girls based on their gender or poor state capability and support are to blame for the gender discrepancies in schooling. Findings from a study conducted between 1970 and 2010 in 57 developing nations, including Pakistan, indicate that state willingness—rather than state capacity—is the main cause of gender imbalance in education. The association between gender parity in education and capacity characteristics like economic development is positive, but the authors found the relationship to be statistically inconsequential. Conversely, it was shown that there is a considerable correlation between high levels of urbanization and gender parity in schooling.

Teixeira and Shin ([2020](#)) stated that even with the second half of the 20th century seeing a global increase in higher education, access disparities still exist almost everywhere. Selective education systems, which function in such a way that young people from the most disadvantaged economic, social, and cultural backgrounds are rejected or discouraged from higher secondary level to university level, are another cause of inequality. Each of these elements, which frequently occur in different combinations, contributes to and exacerbates inequality. Discrimination against women is still pervasive in society and can be seen in many aspects of the labour market today, such as career advancement and pay disparities, childcare policies, the ideology of gender equality and its existence, and the effects of laws promoting gender equality. Gender-based discrimination against female employees and students was noted in that environment of a higher education system that shaped public opinion. In all facets of their graduate studies, female students encountered traditional barriers to access, such as perceived stereotypes and a dearth of positive role models. These included the application process, evaluation, and lack of flexible entry and exit points for postsecondary education that may be necessary due to family obligations (Showunmi, [2023](#)).

Policy development centered on women's empowerment in higher education is necessary for career advancement, employment, decision-making, and granting women's legal, political, economic, and social rights. According to Terry and Thomas (1997), there should be equal treatment for the male and female genders in our society, as both have a right to higher education and its advantages. Every adult and student has an equal chance to actively engage, experience achievement, and uphold human dignity while

acquiring the abilities, information, and attitudes needed to make a significant contribution to society (Abdullah, Shoukat, et al. 2021).

Research Methodology

The relationship between cultural norms, societal expectations, and gender differences in educational achievement in Pakistan is examined in this study using a quantitative research design. To guarantee representation, a sample of female students and female teachers from different universities of Lahore and Islamabad were selected as samples. The researchers used a stratified random selection technique. Likert-scale items will be included in structured questionnaires used to gather data. The researchers adapted descriptive statistics like the value of the samples, and data was explained in the form of mean and standard deviation to explain the distribution of educational attainment and the sample's demographic features. Statistical tool SPSS is used for data analysis and participant confidentiality and informed consent—two ethical requirements for research involving human subjects were followed. This research aims to enhance our understanding of cultural norms and social expectations that shape gender disparities in educational attainment in Pakistan, ultimately informing policies and interventions for greater equity. However, it acknowledges potential limitations, such as sampling bias or questionnaire design.

Data Analysis

Table 1

Social analysis of Gender disparities related to Culture norms

Statement	N	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1. I have witnessed cases where girls' education was discouraged due to cultural norms.	200	184	10	06
2. Educational disparities between genders can have negative consequences for society as a whole.	200	193	05	02
3. I feel empowered to challenge gender-related barriers in education within my community.	200	191	04	05
4. Efforts to challenge gender disparities in education should be a priority for policymakers.	200	188	06	06
5. Gender-related cultural norms have influenced my educational choices.	200	174	19	07
6. I have faced pressure to conform to traditional gender roles related to education	200	169	18	13
7. Cultural norms play a significant role in perpetuating gender disparities in education.	200	197	02	01
8. In my community, there are initiatives to promote gender equality in education	200	192	06	03
9. I believe that educational opportunities should be equal for both genders.	200	198	00	02
10. Parents should encourage their daughters as much as their sons to pursue higher education.	200	199	01	00

This survey's data, which examines gender differences in educational achievement and the impact of societal expectations and cultural norms in Pakistan, is based on responses from 200 participants. Over 90% of respondents reported having seen instances in which cultural norms hindered girls from pursuing higher education (Statement, 1), and they overwhelmingly agreed that gender differences in educational attainment can have detrimental effects on society at large (Statement, 2). Furthermore, a sizable portion of participants feel equipped to confront gender-related educational hurdles in their local communities (Statement 3) and think that policymakers ought to give priority to addressing gender disparities in education (Statement 4). Almost all respondents strongly support gender equality in education, with nearly all agreeing that educational opportunities should be equal for both genders (Statement, 9) and that parents should encourage their daughters to pursue higher education as much as their sons (Statement,10). The majority of respondents also agree that gender-related cultural norms have influenced their



educational choices (Statement, 5) and that cultural norms play a significant role in perpetuating gender disparities in education (Statement, 7). In general, the research indicates that despite cultural norms and societal pressures, gender equality in education is still important.

Table 2

Comparison of mean performance

Total Number	Female Teachers	Female Students	Mean	Std. Deviation
200	60	140	1.5650	.56335
200	60	140	1.5900	.55988
200	60	140	1.6650	1.2834
200	60	140	1.5800	.56141
200	60	140	1.5850	.61209
200	60	140	1.6350	.65107
200	60	140	1.6250	.62154
200	60	140	1.6000	.60980
200	60	140	1.5150	.54889
200	60	140	1.6100	.58275

The above table presents the data from a sample of 200 individuals, including 60 female teachers and 140 female students. The mean (average) score for a particular variable across the sample ranged from 1.5150 to 1.6650, with a standard deviation indicating variability in responses ranging from .54889 to 1.2834. These statistics suggest variations in the responses of the surveyed individuals across different measures. Further statistical analysis, such as t-tests, can be conducted to assess the significance of these differences between groups or variables.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the complex mechanisms of gender differences in educational attainment in the context of Pakistan's multifaceted social and cultural environment. The results highlight the enduring nature of these differences as well as the significant impact that cultural norms and societal expectations have on opportunities and choices related to education, especially for women and girls. Notably, the study shows a latent possibility for change by revealing a strong undercurrent of support for gender equality in education. With this backing, campaigners and policymakers may question and alter societal norms and expectations that are already in place, eventually creating an atmosphere in the classroom where students of all genders are given equal opportunities to succeed. One effective strategy to remove gender-related barriers in education is through community engagement and individual empowerment. Reducing gender gaps in education becomes a strategic necessity for Pakistan's socioeconomic growth as it aims to maximize its population's potential and create a more inclusive and forward-thinking society, not just a question of equity. Gender parity in education must become a feasible and long-lasting reality in Pakistan through further research and coordinated initiatives.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations based on the present research.

Promote Gender-Inclusive Curricula: Develop educational materials that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality from an early age. Include diverse role models and success stories of both genders in textbooks and classroom discussions.

Teacher Training and Sensitization: Provide training and workshops for teachers to raise awareness about the impact of cultural norms and social expectations on gender disparities in education. Equip teachers with strategies to create inclusive and supportive classroom environments.

Community Engagement: Foster community dialogues and awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms and promote the value of girls' education. Involve local leaders, religious figures, and parents in these discussions to gain their support.

Financial Incentives and Scholarships: Introduce financial incentives and scholarships specifically targeting girls in regions with significant gender disparities in education. These incentives can help alleviate economic barriers and encourage families to prioritize their daughters' education.

Safe Transportation and Facilities: Improve transportation infrastructure to ensure the safety of girls traveling to and from school, particularly in rural areas. Invest in the construction and maintenance of girls' schools and sanitation facilities.

Access to Career Guidance: Offer career counseling and guidance programs that challenge traditional gender stereotypes in career choices. Provide information on a wide range of career options to both girls and boys.

Monitoring and Data Collection: Establish robust data collection and monitoring systems to track enrollment, retention, and achievement of boys and girls in educational institutions. Use this data to identify regions and communities with the most significant gender disparities and tailor interventions accordingly.

Policy Reforms: Advocate for policy changes and reforms that address gender disparities in education, such as legal measures to combat child marriage and early dropout rates for girls. Ensure the enforcement of existing laws aimed at promoting gender equality in education.

References

- Abdullah, M., Shoukat, A., & Chaudhary, M. G. (2021). Into the civic life: The nexus of urbanization, education and women's empowerment in Pakistan. *iRASD Journal of Economics*, 3(2), 212–222. <https://doi.org/10.52131/joe.2021.0302.0038>
- Aghai, Z. H., Goudar, S. S., Patel, A., Saleem, S., Dhaded, S. M., Kavi, A., Lalakia, P., Naqvi, F., Hibberd, P. L., McClure, E. M., Nolen, T. L., Iyer, P., Goldenberg, R. L., & Derman, R. J. (2020). Gender variations in neonatal and early infant mortality in India and Pakistan: A secondary analysis from the global network maternal newborn health registry. *Reproductive Health*, 17(S3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-020-01028-0>
- Anjum, G., Kamal, A., & Bilwani, S. (2018). Antecedents of gender gap in workforce participation: A phenomenology of psychologists and medical doctors in urban Pakistan. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 29(2), 282–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2018.1536576>
- Eden, L., & Wagstaff, M. F. (2020). Evidence-based policymaking and the wicked problem of SDG 5 gender equality. *Journal of International Business Policy*, 4(1), 28–57. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-020-00054-w>
- Fizza, K. (2023). *Exploring the Influence of Sociocultural Norms and Gender Biases on Women's Empowerment in Pakistan*. Harvard University.
- Hayward, D. (2021). "Marginalised people's land rights and access: ethnic minorities, the poor and women." <https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/2021-06-00-Extended-Synopsis-9-Marginalised-People-en.pdf>
- Kitterød, R. H., & Nadim, M. (2020). Embracing gender equality: Gender-role attitudes among second-generation immigrants in Norway. *Demographic Research*, 42, 411–440. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2020.42.14>
- Kramer, K. L. (2022). Female cooperation: Evolutionary, cross-cultural and ethnographic evidence. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 378(1868). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2021.0425>
- Maheshwari, G., & Nayak, R. (2020). Women leadership in Vietnamese higher education institutions: An exploratory study on barriers and enablers for career enhancement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50(5), 758–775. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220945700>
- Odera, J. A., & Mulusa, J. (2019). SDGs, gender equality and women's empowerment: What prospects for delivery? *Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Rights*, 95–118. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30469-0_6
- Sánchez, S. I., Jones, H. R., Bogen, K. W., & Lorenz, T. K. (2023). Barriers experienced by emerging adults in discussing their sexuality with parents and health care providers: A mixed-method study. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 93(4), 335–349. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000677>



- Showunmi, V. (2023). Visible, invisible: Black women in higher education. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.974617>
- Teixeira, P. N. & J. C. Shin (2020). *The international encyclopedia of higher education systems and institutions*, Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8905-9>
- Waidler, J., B. Sunny, et al. (2021). *Family-friendly policies in South Asia*. UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Family-friendly-policies-in-South-Asia.pdf>