

## GENDER DISPARITY IN EDUCATION IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT BUNER

Muhammad Rasheed<sup>\*1</sup>, Chusnul Mar'iyah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>Master Scholar, Department of Political Science, FISIP, Universitas Indonesia;

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Political Science, FISIP, Universitas Indonesia

<sup>\*1</sup>[muhammadrashed38@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadrashed38@gmail.com); <sup>2</sup>[cmariyah2004@yahoo.com](mailto:cmariyah2004@yahoo.com)

Corresponding authors\*

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### ABSTRACT

Gender disparities in education remain a major issue in many developing countries, including District Buner in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This research looks at the socio-cultural, economic, and structural aspects that lead to gender gaps in schooling in this district. The study takes a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to give a comprehensive knowledge of the hurdles females encounter in obtaining and finishing their education. The results show that cultural norms such as early marriage and patriarchal views, economic restrictions such as poverty and low financial resources, and poor educational infrastructure all have a negative impact on females' educational possibilities. The research demonstrates that these discrepancies have an influence on access, enrolment, retention rates, and overall educational quality, further marginalizing females in remote locations. To address these issues, the study suggests enacting gender-sensitive policies, expanding community involvement, enhancing school infrastructure, and giving financial assistance to families. Furthermore, it underlines the need of educational initiatives that promote gender equality and advocate for girls' access to school. This report proposes a mix of regulatory measures, community-driven efforts, and specialized educational programs to give concrete solutions to reduce and eradicate gender gaps in education in District Buner. The results add to the larger discussion on gender equality in education and emphasize the significance of inclusive measures for Pakistan's long-term development.

**Keywords:** Gender Disparity, Education, District Buner, Policy Measures

### INTRODUCTION

It is widely believed that education is a human right, not a luxury (UNESCO, 2015). The remark may not be applicable to everyone in today's society until gender disparities are addressed at national and international levels (Lamprey et al., 2015). According to the International Convention on Human Rights recognizes education as a fundamental right for all citizens, and it is the state's responsibility to offer educational facilities to all citizens. Education helps society develop. A state grows its nation through education for learning, writing, and reading and to embrace new ways for society and country growth. Individuals become self-conscious and courageous to face new difficulties and embrace and bring about change through education. Education is a socialization and

intercultural adaptation institution as well as public instruction. It is a social institution that gives ideological, moral, mental, and physical training to the nation's people so they can find their life's purpose and work toward it (Saeed, 2007).

Education is a strong instrument that empowers individuals, raises their awareness, and allows them to attain their objectives (Hari, 2022). Education is the exchange of information, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and habits via conversations, storytelling, teaching, training, and by research (Ali et al., 2024). Pakistan is a developing country, while the scholars regularly neglect such issues, particularly when it comes to female higher education; consequently, the research tries to address these challenges by analyzing the influence

of socioeconomic determinants on demand for female higher education in rural Pakistan (Iqbal & Shams, 2021). Females are more deprived than men, and at times it is dramatic, when looking at a sum-up comparison between rural and urban areas in Pakistan (Sandhu, 2012). Pakistan's basic and secondary education is declining, Science education, in particular, is at its lowest point and requires immediate reform (Memon, 2007).

Pakistan is the sixth most populous nation having Population of 235.8 million with an average annual growth rate of 2% (Worldometer, 2023). Administratively Pakistan has been divided into four provinces and these are, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit Baltistan (GB is special territory not province). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly known as the Northwest Frontier Province, borders Azad Kashmir to the northeast and east, Afghanistan to the west and north, Baluchistan to the southwest, and Punjab to the southeast and the federal government administers tribal territories along Afghanistan's western border, the province capital is Peshawar while the province covers around 28,773 square kilometers (101,741 km<sup>2</sup>) and has a population of over 21,392,000 (35.53 million) (Worldatlas, 2019). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has 34 districts. Peshawar is the provincial capital and the biggest city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPBOIT, 2024). Pakistan is located in the zone of the globe, including 75% of the world's illiterate population, the bulk of whom are women (S. Khan, 2018). Most Pakistani education policies have not raised literacy rates. This is still the case. The donor-funded Social Action Program Most Pakistani education initiatives have not increased literacy rates, and this remains the case along with this the donor-funded Social Action Program (SAP), which focused on rural female education, also failed to achieve its goals owing to inadequate distribution and execution (Gera, 2004).

In Pakistan, rural school enrollment is much lower than in metropolitan regions. The net enrollment rate in rural regions is 23 percentage points lower at the primary level and 22 percentage points at the secondary level of schooling. (R. E. A. Khan & Ali, 2003). Being a female in rural Pakistan lowers the chances of attending school (Sathar, 1993). Higher education is not as acceptable in conventional territories like (Tribal Areas, District Torghar, and District Buner) in Pakistan, particularly among

women (Mehmood et al., 2018). A restrictive worldview limits female involvement in schooling (Shaukat & Pell, 2016). In rural places, females' poor attendance is partly the result of severe restrictions on their travels outside the family when they hit puberty (Duraismy, 2000). Traditionally, women were not permitted to leave their houses throughout Asia, and it is still a popular norm in most of Pakistan's areas today (Sandhu, 2012).

Pakistan is a male-dominated society, and women lack fundamental rights, generating inequity. Due to long-held perceptions and behaviours, Pakistani women are not considered equal to males, many have viewpoint that men's physical structure makes them stronger and bolder than women. (Mahar, 2020).

In Pakistan, many feel education is not necessary for women, People say education is worthless for women since they cannot be permitted to work outside because they would be shouldering the burden of a mother and wife (Jayaweera, 1997). During their schooling, families force and pressurize them into various unknown activities that divert them from their education (Komuhangiro et al., 2003). The majority of Pashtun people from varied rural tribal groups believe that a woman's duty is restricted to either the family or the tomb, and this idea is inspired by the status of women in the households of preachers and religious leaders living in these Pashtun areas (Siddique, 2023).

Patriarchy, cultural norms, regional disputes, son preference, and conventional views of women about childbearing, household responsibilities, and early marriage have strong roots in society (Ashraf & Ali, 2018a). Girls' education costs money and has little long-term economic reward, thus parents have no motivation to educate their daughters, reducing females' educational advantages. (Sawada & Lokshin, 2001). Barriers to females' secondary school enrolment include distance, early marriages, cultural beliefs, expense, security concerns, early births, bad school experiences, menstrual hygiene management, and labour market involvement (Bank, 2013).

The District Buner is one of the Smallest District by area "1865 km<sup>2</sup>" while medium by Population "897319" which composed of 42% of male and 52% of Female. The area has been a population of approximately 77% last 19 years while economically, Buner is one of the poorest districts

of KPK. Women and children are the dependent segments of our society. People are living in a joint family and the only head of the family is responsible for the whole family (KPEZDMC, 2020). While in most of the Conservative Societies of KPK, girls are not allowed to get out of the home without the permission of the family member because her honour is considering the honour for all (Sahibzada et al., 2019). Patriarchy, cultural norms, regional differences, son preference, and conventional ideals of womanhood surrounding procreation, household chores, and early marriage are deeply ingrained in society (Ashraf & Ali, 2018b). Gender maintains a social order in which women and the feminine are subservient via institutional and cultural behaviours (Acker, 1990). Numerous extremist individuals exist in various areas of KPK mostly in the rural areas like District Buner they forbid women from leaving their homes and oppose female education. These individuals have attacked several girls' schools, resulting in thousands of students losing their lives while pursuing an education, in addition to threatening the government and educational institutions to forbid female education (Khan, 2018).

District Buner, located in the heart of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), reflects the broader socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by the region, particularly in the realm of education. Despite some progress towards educational development, girls and women in Buner continue to encounter systemic barriers that hinder their educational access and opportunities for personal growth. Structural violence, defined by the systematic denial of rights and opportunities, remains a significant obstacle to gender equality in education.

This research adopts quantitative approach to explore the factors contributing to the educational marginalization of girls and women in Buner. The research focuses is on the hurdles to girl's education.

By examining these factors within the context of entrenched patriarchal norms, discriminatory legal practices, and socio-economic inequalities, this study seeks to uncover the root causes and manifestations of educational disparities faced by women in Buner. Furthermore, it explores the broader implications of these educational inequities on women's lives, stressing the urgent need for targeted educational policies, community

engagement, and systemic reforms to address these persistent injustices and promote gender equality in education.

### **Literature Review**

Socio-cultural discrimination is one of the Female/Girls Discrimination which began with the birth of girls. Females have numerous socio-cultural challenges, with a preference for boys in home roles due to their leadership and productivity. Parents want to invest more in their son's education for retirement security (S. A. Khan, 2007). When a boy is born, people prepare a "wama, suhbat" party on the seventh day and give the local kids money to do so.

Cultural hurdles in the Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, hinder women's access to higher education (S. S. Jan, n.d.). The low ratio of female higher education in Pashtun culture is linked to factors such as early puberty, conservatism, Pardah, male dominance, lack of freedom of expression, early/child marriage, lack of female involvement in decision-making, and rejection of Girls education (S. U. K. Jan et al., 2018). In Pashtun culture, women are not allowed to leave their homes and are solely responsible for household activities (Daraz et al., 2013).

Poverty is a major factor driving child marriage in rural Pakistan. According to the Ministry of Finance Pakistan (2011, p. 216), 22.3 percent of Pakistan's population lived in poverty during the 2005-2006 fiscal year, with rural regions accounting for 27% and urban areas for 13.1%. According to the Economic Survey for the current fiscal year, "if the poverty line is \$2 per day in line with international standards for middle-income countries, then 60.19 percent of the population falls below the poverty line in Pakistan" ("Half of Pakistan lives below the poverty line"). Most parents marry their daughter off by claiming her safety at her future husband's home since he would provide her needs (Naveed & Butt, 2020). Women account for over half of Pakistan's population and play a crucial role in economic development. To build Pakistan, we must educate its females in rural areas. Pakistan has five provinces, each with its own set of circumstances. In rural areas, women enrol in higher education at a lower rate than in other provinces. Urban women have the same facilities as urban males. Rural women are, however, discouraged from seeking higher

education due to a variety of social and cultural considerations, including concerns about their safety, the size of their children, gender inequity, and poverty (Shaheen et al., 2023). Poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and transportation have exacerbated the gender gap in schooling (Ullah et al., 2021). Research indicates that financial resources, family income, and parents' pay level are significant factors influencing education levels, particularly among women in underdeveloped countries (Huy, 2012; Moav, 2005). Low family finances often prevent parents from prioritizing education for their daughters (Khalid & Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002). Because men dominate the majority of the economic resources and the sociocultural milieu, women in this culture always confront barriers to education, political engagement, and resource management (King & Hill, 1997).

Honor and Namous contribute to the lack of education for girls in this district. Pashtun culture and ethics revere honor/namous. In Pashtu (izzatdara korany da), dignified families honor ladies at home. In pushtu (be izzata korany), non-honorable families educate their daughters. Some men in these families say, "Ta deer biagairat ye Che haza Bahar owzi," which implies it's shameful that your ladies leave home. The outgoing woman is considered characterless and unsuitable for marriage. So 25% of respondents said these cultural values prevent girls from getting an education (Rasheed & Mar'iyah, n.d.).

In Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Jamshaid did research to investigate the barriers that prevent women from seeking higher education and the results showed that women encounter numerous obstacles while trying to pursue higher education, including restricted access because of geography, ignorance, household duties, early marriage, and security worries while In rural areas where women's possibilities are limited by patriarchal and tribal customs, he stressed the importance of addressing these issues in order to enhance female access to higher education (Jamshaid, 2020). Because of the antiquated belief that men should only play major roles in society and the professional sphere, narrow-minded parents typically do not want to invest in their daughter's education because they feel that girls are more driven to take care of the home (Colclough et al., 2000). In Pakistan's patriarchal society, women experience prejudice

that hinders their social, economic, and political advancement (S. Khan, 2016).

Early marriage is another obstacle to women pursuing higher education because, following marriage, a young girl's access to formal and even non-formal education is severely limited because of childrearing, housekeeping duties, and cultural norms that see marriage and education as mutually exclusive (Mathur et al., 2003). Child marriage has negative physical, psychosocial, and health repercussions on girls, hindering their development and well-being. It also terminates their childhood, schooling, and work chances. Furthermore, it increases their vulnerability to aggression and abuse. Despite the negative repercussions, child weddings persist unabated. This is a significant issue that requires legislation and response (Naveed & Butt, 2020). Daughters typically marry early and handle household duties. Their ambitions include parenthood and being a decent wife (Maqsood et al., 2012). "The minimum marriage age, with or without parental approval, should be 18 years old, regardless of gender" (No, 2003). They had a lot of duties after being married young, including being confined to the home, having no use of riches, and having to deal with tight finances (Jain & Kurz, 2007). In these societies, males are expected to work and females to care for the family also Females are not considered equal to their male counterparts, forcing them to create their own roles in society (Glaeser, 2014). Lack of education is both a risk factor and a result of child marriage (Klugman et al., 2014).

Parents' education is one of the most important variables influencing females' secondary education. People in rural areas are generally uneducated, yet they understand the necessity of education. Parents' education has a huge impact on females' schooling. Parents who have some education will send or enroll their children in school. Illiterate parents do not communicate with their children's instructors about their academic progress. Educated parents visit the school on a frequent basis to stay up to date on their children's academic development. Parents help their children complete schoolwork. They understand the importance of education, which is why they send their daughters and sons to school. Parental illiteracy has a bad impact on their children's education, particularly their daughter's education.

According to Humala and Eshya (2000), Illiteracy is rampant among the disadvantaged and rural population. Rural girls from impoverished and illiterate families are the most marginalized group who lack access to education. Parents' education has a significant impact on their children's education, particularly among girls. Children of parents who have attended some schoolings are far more likely to have attended school than those whose parents have never attended school. This distinction is far more pronounced in rural regions than in cities, and for females as opposed to boys. Poor illiterate households have a lack of communication between parents and teachers, leading to inferior learning attainments, according to head teachers

This study examines how rural, uneducated parents see their daughters' higher education. The study's results may help stakeholders and policymakers develop ways to alleviate the barriers that women face in higher education. The study emphasizes the importance of sociocultural norms on country growth. To increase female empowerment, the report emphasizes the critical significance of female education and calls for a rethinking of the country's sociocultural trajectory. The research looked at how rural parents felt about sending their daughters to college in the Punjab region.

Illiterate parents consider boys as a lucky symbol and girls as a burden, resulting in less opportunities for girls to receive an education (Jalal-ud-Din & Khan, 2008). Rural Pakistani women prioritize household skills above education, leading them to spend a significant portion of their life at home. Females in rural communities with illiterate parents are expected to learn domestic chores (Pirzada et al., 2022). Parents in distant places may only offer a basic education for their daughters due to financial constraints. Education and professional experience are exclusively related with male family members.

Other significant factors that have adverse effects include teacher absenteeism and a shortage of female teachers on Girls' education, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Suleman et al., 2015). A dearth of female instructors is one of the factors contributing to gender disparities in education. Unless there are female instructors, parents will not send their daughters to school. Despite the government's allocation of a female teacher, she

seldom visits school owing to security and transportation issues (Jamal, 2016).

In the Pashtun community, the percentage of female literacy increased throughout 1990, but this tendency reverted following 9/11, while additionally, the growing conflict in Pakistan's northern province has worsened the situation for women's education; 190 government schools for girls have been destroyed, and 8,000 female instructors have lost their jobs (A. Ali, 2010).

Pakistan is a Muslim country, and the majority of people practice "Islam" as their religion. Almighty Allah has provided comprehensive directions for following religion and living a fulfilling life. The Holy Quran and the quotations of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) provide complete guidance and principles for pursuing religion and living lives that would be successful both now and after death. Almighty Allah's initial revelations to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) were regarding knowledge (G. Ali et al., 2021; Hakim & Aziz, 1998).

Studies have indicated that in nations with higher numbers of ethno-religions, Hindu and Muslim believers, there are substantial negative correlations between female educational attainment (Norton & Tomal, 2009). Similar findings were discovered in a bigger survey of 143 nations, where Islam was found to have a larger detrimental impact on female education than males (Feldmann, 2016). There is a common misperception that education for females contradicts Islamic values, yet this is not true (Rasheed & Mar'iyah, n.d.).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research uses Johan Galtung's structural violence theory to the context of schooling in District Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, used the term "structural violence" to describe a kind of violence in which societal structures or organizations deliberately restrict people from satisfying their fundamental needs and realizing their full potential. This sort of violence is deeply established in society standards and often accepted, making it difficult to identify and confront. In the context of education, structural violence is defined as the systematic denial of educational opportunities to girls and women, which is supported by patriarchal societal institutions and cultural norms. Structural violence against women

is visible in District Buner, where women have restricted access to education owing to strongly established patriarchal traditions that privilege male education above female education. Economic dependency on males strengthens male domination by limiting educational opportunities for girls and promoting gender stereotypes that confine women to household chores. Sexism in the community fosters educational inequality by discouraging or even preventing females from seeking an education, resulting in high dropout rates and low enrolment numbers. Cultural traditions like as the Jirga system, in which male-dominated councils determine communal and family choices, further restrict girls' educational possibilities by enforcing gender-biased decisions that benefit boys' schooling. Furthermore, legal inequality in inheritance and property rights has an indirect impact on females' access to school, since families with limited finances may prioritize boys' education over daughters. Familial pressures and cultural expectations also play a role, since females are often expected to marry young and put family obligations before education. These cultural institutions and practices contribute to the persistence of educational disparities and deny females in District Buner the right to an education, therefore constituting a kind of structural violence. Addressing this demands a holistic strategy that breaks down cultural and institutional obstacles, promotes gender equality, and assures equitable access to education for everyone.

### Methodology

This review study takes a quantitative research technique within the positivist paradigm, using an inductive method to examine gender inequalities in education in District Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To undertake a full examination, the research only uses secondary data.

### Secondary Data Collection:

- **Literature Review:** A comprehensive review of current academic literature was carried out, including academic papers, books, journals, and reports. This study focused on sources on educational inequality and the structural impediments that girls and women experience in school.

- **Analysis:**
- **Data Synthesis:** The secondary data was analysed to identify major themes and patterns regarding gender inequalities in educational achievement, access, and quality. The study aimed to assess the scope of educational discrepancies as well as the socio-cultural elements that influence them.
- **Contextualization:** Secondary data findings were contextualized within the Buner District's unique educational environment to give a more comprehensive view of gender discrepancies.

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION EDUCATION

Girls' education is very important and an urgent worldwide need. Educated females make major contributions to social growth, promoting wealth for both their families and countries. Their potential is limitless, and empowering children via education equates to strengthening whole communities. Furthermore, women's education is an effective instrument in addressing sexual assault, discrimination, and other social evils. However, various impediments prevent women from obtaining an education. Poverty is a widespread problem, with many families unable to afford basic basics, much alone education for their children. Lack of resources exacerbates the situation, with fewer girls' schools and colleges, especially in isolated mountainous areas, restricting educational prospects. Furthermore, the lack of government facilities such as hostels complicates the situation. Addressing these hurdles is critical to ensuring that girls have fair access to education in this area and elsewhere. The third reason why females in this region do not get an education is because to honour/namous. Honor / Namous are fundamental principles in Pashtun culture and tradition. It signifies that when women are inside the borders of their homes, they are considered respectable in Pashtu. In Pushto (be izzata korany), families that educate their daughters are considered less respectable and liberal. The guys of these households are blaming and taunting other males in society, such as (ta deer baigairata ye Che haza Bahar owzi), which implies it is highly humiliating for your ladies to leave the house. The lady who is going out is considered characterless and unsuitable for marriage later on.

As a result, 25% of respondents state that females in this country do not get an education because of cultural norms. Inadequate school availability is another key barrier to females' education in the region. Six percent of respondents said a shortage of educational institutions makes it difficult to get an education. Additionally, five percent believe that education for females is incompatible with Islamic principles, which is untrue. Islam, in reality, promotes the pursuit of knowledge for all genders. Addressing these myths and establishing adequate school infrastructure are critical steps toward boosting girls' education and breaking down obstacles to their academic success. Another cause for the lack of education is social prejudice against women. Discrimination has existed from birth. When a boy is born, people organize a distinct program known as (wama, subhat), which means celebration, on the seventh day, and some money is provided to the young people in the community to help them organize the party. In contrast, when a girl is born, she is not regarded the same as a male. Furthermore, in this region, there are conservatives who have never believed in women's education. They think that (haza da koor shy dy) means "women are for home" and "home is for women." Women in this area face significant cultural and societal restrictions that limit their access to education. Despite certain early permits, many women eventually abandon their studies owing to these hurdles. Surprisingly, 61% of respondents said they are unable to continue education beyond the upper school level. This figure highlights the critical need to address the structural obstacles impeding women's educational achievement in the district, ensuring that they have the chance to fulfil their full academic potential and make important contributions to society.

### Conclusion

Johan Galtung's theory of violence offers a critical perspective on the educational inequities that women experience in District Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to Galtung, violence is the difference between what exists now and what may be accomplished under alternative conditions. Applying this idea to the educational situation in District Buner reveals that girls' education deprivation is a type of structural violence. Just as untreated TB in the seventeenth century was not deemed violence owing to a lack of effective

treatment, the denial of education to females in Buner, despite the presence of viable educational possibilities, is a contemporary kind of violence. Girls in District Buner suffer various educational challenges, including poverty, restricted social standards, inadequate resources, and strongly ingrained patriarchal systems. These limitations limit not just their educational opportunities, but also their wider rights, such as inheritance, employment, and political engagement. Women's inheritance rights are regularly overlooked, career possibilities are limited, and many weddings take place without the girls' permission. This persistent restriction of rights and opportunities, regardless of their viability, highlights the region's underlying brutality. Galtung's theory helps to describe how these factors perpetuate inequality and impede females from reaching their full educational and career potential. The violence is not only shown in overt acts of denial, but also in the institutional institutions and cultural norms that make such denial seem normal or appropriate. To counter this kind of violence, there must be a coordinated effort to break down these obstacles via targeted educational programs, community participation, and empowerment measures that guarantee girls have equal chances. By identifying and responding to these types of violence, we may strive toward a society in which education is available to everyone and gender gaps are considerably decreased.

### Recommendations

**Awareness Campaigns:** The government should start awareness programs to educate communities about the value of girls' education and the advantages it provides for social progress. These initiatives should try to shift societal attitudes that devalue females' education.

**Involve Community Leaders:** Make a collaborate with local community leaders, religious academics, and influencers to campaign for girls' education. Their assistance may help change public attitude and urge families to prioritize their girls' education.

**Encourage Female Role Models:** Highlight and promote successful female role models from your community who have benefited from education. This may encourage and push females to continue their studies and combat gender stereotypes.

**Provide Financial Support:** The government should provide scholarships, stipends, and conditional monetary transfers to families that send

their girls to school. This financial assistance may help to cover the costs of schooling and minimize the economic load on families.

**Protect Girls' Rights:** The government should make it a priority to defend girls' rights in all educational settings. Create clear rules for dealing with discrimination and harassment in schools to ensure a secure learning environment for females.

**Establish Community-Based Education Programs:** The government must design non-formal education programs that are adaptable and address the special needs of girls who are unable to attend normal schools due to cultural or economic restrictions.

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