

Women's education in Pakistan

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen, according to article thirty-seven of the Constitution of Pakistan¹but gender discrepancies still exist in the educational sector. According to the 2011 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program, approximately twice as many males as females receive a secondary education in **Pakistan**, and public expenditures on education amount to only 2.7% of the GDP of the country.

Gender role in Education

Patriarchal values heavily govern the social structure in Pakistani society. Home has been defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space where she performs her productive role as a mother and wife, while a man dominates the world outside the home and performs his productive role as a breadwinner. Men and women are conceptually segregated into two distinct worlds. The household resources are allocated in the favor of sons due to their productive role. Education for boys is prioritized vis-a-vis girls, because it is perceived that boys must be equipped with educational skills to compete for resources in the public arena, while girls have to specialize in domestic skills to be good mothers and wives. Hence, education is not perceived as being important for girls.

This gender division of labor has been internalized by the society, and girls do not have many choices for themselves that could change these patriarchal realities of their lives. Society does not allow girls to develop their human capabilities by precluding them from acquiring education. Lack of emphasis on the importance of women's education is one of the basic features of gender inequality in Pakistan. The Human Development Report (HDR) listed Pakistan in the category of "low human development" countries with a female literacy rate of thirty percent, and Pakistan has ranked 145 in the world in terms of human development.

Importance of women's education Education has been of central significance to the development of human society. It can be the beginning, not only of individual knowledge, information and awareness, but also a holistic strategy for development and change. Education is very much connected to women's ability to form social relationships on the basis of equality with others and to achieve the important social good of self-respect. It is important, as well, to mobility (through access to jobs and the political process) and to health and life (through the connection to bodily integrity). Education can allow women to participate in politics so they can ensure that their voices and concerns are heard and addressed in the public policy. It is also crucial for women's access to the legal system.

Education is a critical input in human resource development and is essential for the country's economic growth. It increases the productivity and efficiency of individuals, and it produces a skilled labor force that is capable of leading the economy towards sustainable growth and prosperity. The progress and wellbeing of a country largely depends on the education choices made available to its people. It can be one of the most powerful instruments of change. It can help a country to achieve its national goals via producing minds imbued with knowledge, skills, and competencies to shape its future destiny. The widespread recognition of this fact has created awareness on the need to focus upon literacy and elementary education, not simply as a matter of social justice but more to foster economic growth, social well-being, and social stability. Women's education is so inextricably linked with the other facets of human development that to make it a priority is to also make change on a range of other fronts; from the health and status of women to early childhood care; from nutrition, water and sanitation to community empowerment; from the reduction of child labor and other forms of exploitation to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.^[7]

Economic benefits of women's education

Apart from the acquisition of knowledge and values conducive to social evolution, education also enables development of mind, training in logical and analytical thinking. It allows an individual to acquire organizational, managerial, and administrative skills. Moreover, enhanced self-esteem and improved social and financial status within a community is a direct outcome of education. Therefore, by promoting education among women, Pakistan can achieve social and human development, and gender equality. A large number of empirical studies have revealed that increase in women's education boosts their wages and that returns to education for women are frequently larger than that of men. Increase in the level of female education improves human development outcomes such as child survival, health and schooling. Lower female education has a negative impact on economic growth as it lowers the average level of human capital. Developmental Economists argue that in developing countries female education reduces fertility, infant mortality and increases children's education. Gender inequality in education directly and significantly affects economic growth. Empirical studies done by using regression analysis reveal the fact that the overall literacy rate, enrollment ratio, ratio of literate female to male have positive and significant impact on economic growth. Chaudhry (2007) investigated the impact of gender inequality in education on economic growth in Pakistan. The secondary source of time series data drawn from various issues has been used. In his regression analysis, he estimated a set of regressions showing a moderate explanatory power. The variables, overall literacy rate, enrollment ratio, ratio of literate female to male have positive and significant impact on economic growth. It was found that gender inequality in initial education reduces economic growth.^[11] In another empirical study, Chaudhry (2009) investigated factors affecting rural poverty in Southern Punjab (Pakistan), and he concluded that alleviation of poverty is possible by lowering the household size and dependency ratio, improving education,

increasing female labor participation. He employed regression models and used primary source of data from the project area of Asian Development Bank for estimation. Results indicate that as dependency level and household size increase the probability of being poor increases too. Education has the significant inverse relationship with poverty because it provides employment opportunities and rejects poverty. The inclusion of trained and education women workforce will not only ensure women's welfare, it will also increase the overall productivity of the workforce due to more competitiveness. Hence, the developmental and feminist economists argue that it is desirable for the government to allocate more resources towards women's education, as it is going to benefit the whole society.

Gender disparity in education in Pakistan

According to UNDP 2010 report, Pakistan ranked 120 in 146 countries in terms of Gender-related Development Index (GDI), and in terms of Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM) ranking, it ranked 92 in 94 countries. Gender inequality in education can be measured in different ways. Gross and net enrollment rates and completion and drop-out rates are the ways to identify the gender inequality in education. Pakistan aims to achieve Millennium Development Goals and also aims to eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education by the year 2015. Elimination of gender disparity at all levels of education requires higher allocation of resources on women's education. Strong gender disparities exist in literacy and educational attainment between rural and urban areas of Pakistan.

Socio-economic hurdles

Patriarchal values are deeply embedded in the society of Pakistan, and its different manifestations are observed in different aspects of the society. As mentioned above, gender division of labour enforces women to primarily specialize in unpaid care work as mothers and wives at home, whereas men perform paid work, and come out as breadwinners. This has led to a low level of resource investment in girls' education not only by their families but also by the state. This low investment in women's human capital, compounded by negative social biases and cultural practices, restrictions on women's mobility and the internalization of patriarchy by women themselves, becomes the basis for gender discrimination and disparities in most spheres of life. Some of the ramifications are that women are unable to develop job-market skills, hence, they have limited opportunities available to them in the wage-labour market. Moreover, social and cultural restrictions limit women's chances to

compete for resources in a world outside the four walls of their homes. It translates into social and economic dependency of women on men. The nature and degree of women's oppression and subordination vary across classes, regions and the rural and urban divide in Pakistan. It has been observed that male dominant structures are relatively more marked in the rural and tribal setting where local customs and indigenous laws establish stronger male authority and power over women.

Insurgency hurdles

Destruction of schools and killings have harmed women's education in Pakistan. 16-year-old education activist and blogger Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head and neck by Taliban insurgents 9 October 2012 after she had blogged about the destruction of schools and closing of all-girls schools in her town of Mingora in the Swat District. Later, the Taliban denied that it opposes education and claimed "Malala was targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism and so-called enlightened moderation."

In September 2012 the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* reported that 710 schools have been destroyed or damaged by militants in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 401 schools have been destroyed or damaged in Swat. While the Taliban's campaign extends beyond girls to secular education in general, at least one source reports the damage was related to Taliban opposition to girls' education. Another source includes the bombing of girls' schools as among the Taliban policies.

Rural vs. urban

In year 2006, the literacy rate in urban areas was recorded 58.3% while in rural areas it was 28.3%, and only 12% among rural women. An interesting factor in this context is that female enrollment was recorded highest at the primary level, but it progressively decreases at the secondary, college and tertiary levels. It was estimated that less than 3% of the 17–23 age group of girls have access to higher education.

The latest official statistics on enrollment that are provided by the Ministry of Education of Pakistan are of year 2005–2006. The statistics can be divided into two categories, public schools and private schools.

Pre-primary|Public Sector

According to the government of Pakistan, total enrollment level of pre-primary in public sector was 4,391,144. Out of 4,391,144 pre-primary students, 2,440,838 are boys, and 1,950,306 are girls. It shows that 56% of enrolled students are boys, and 44% are girls. Further breakdown of these statistics into urban and rural enrollment levels reveals almost similar percentage of enrollment among boys and girls, i.e. in rural schools 57% are boys and 43% are girls.

Private Sector

There is a huge sector of private education in Pakistan. According to the government of Pakistan, 2,744,303 pre-primary students are enrolled in private schools. Among them, 1,508,643 are boys, and 1,235,660 are girls. It shows that 55% of enrolled kids are boys and 45% are girls. Of the total number, 39% students are in rural areas, and the percentage of enrolled boys and girls in rural areas are 58% and 42% respectively.

Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for every child in Pakistan, but due to culture, poverty, and child labour, Pakistan has been unable to achieve 100% enrollment at the primary level.

Public Sector

The total enrollment in primary public sector is 11,840,719, and among them, 57% (6,776,536) are boys, and 43% (5,064,183) are girls. The 79% of all the primary students in Pakistan are enrolled in rural schools, and the gender enrollment ratios are 59% and 41% for boys and girls respectively in rural Pakistan.

Private Sector

The private schools are mostly located in urban centers, and the total enrollment in private primary schools was 4,993,698.

Middle school level

The enrollment level falls dramatically from primary to middle school level in Pakistan. These statistics can be very helpful in comprehending the problems faced by Pakistan in its educational sector.

Public Sector

3,642,693 students are enrolled in public middle schools, and among them, 61% (2,217,851) are boys, and 39% (1,424,842) are girls. Of the total enrollment, 62% students are in rural areas, and the enrollment of girls are much lower in rural middle schools vis-à-vis urban schools. In rural schools, 66% enrolled students are boys and 34% are girls.

Private Sector

The enrollment in private schools declines sharply after primary level, as the cost of attendance in private schools increases and the majority of the population cannot afford private education in Pakistan. The total number of students enrolled in private schools at middle level is 1,619,630. Of the total level of enrollment in private schools, 66% students are in urban schools. Hence, the ratio of boys and girls is relatively balanced with 54% boys and 46% girls.

High school level

In Pakistan grades 8 to 10 constitute high school education.

Public Sector

The total number of students enrolled in private high schools is 1,500,749. The 61% of students are boys and 39% are girls. Overall enrollment decreases sharply at high school level. A very disproportionate gender ratio is observed in rural high schools, only 28% of the enrolled students are girls, and 72% are boys.

Private Sector

632,259 students are enrolled in private high schools. Most of them are in urban centers. The ratio of boys and girls enrollment is 53% and 47% respectively.

Higher secondary

The overall ratio seems to equalize among boys and girls in higher secondary education.

Public sector

There are 699,463 students enrolled in higher secondary education in public institutions. There is almost 50% boys and girls enrollment in higher secondary education. But there is a discrepancy between urban and rural enrollments. Only 16% of the students from the total number are from rural areas, and among them only 28% are female students. While in urban centers, 55% students are female students.

Private Sector

154,072 students are enrolled in private higher secondary institutions, with 51% boys and 49% girls.

Degree level education

Female students outnumber their male counterparts in degree level education.

Public Sector

There are only 296,832 students are enrolled in degree level education in public sector institutions, and 62% of them are female students while 38% are male students. Very small number (less than 1%) of students are in rural institutions.

Private sector

29,161 students are enrolled in private sector institutions, among them 4% are female students, mostly in urban city centers