

## **The Barriers in Promotion of Female Education in District Poonch-Azad Jammu Kashmir, Pakistan**

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**Abstract:** This was an exploratory research carried out to identify the barriers in promotion of female education and the provision of facilities for the female education in District Poonch of Azad Jammu Kashmir. Using convenient sampling method, 400 leaders with equal number of males and females from 13 Union Councils of District Poonch were interviewed to find out their perception about barriers in promotion of female education. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for data analysis and the hypotheses were tested through Chi square method. The study revealed that old customs and traditions are the main barriers in female education in District Poonch. The study concluded that although there is an improvement in female education in District Poonch but the progress is very slow. The barriers identified, need to be addressed to improve the quality of life of girls and women. The people need to have a paradigm shift if they want to boost up the economy of the country and to flourish the quality of their lives.

**Key words:** Old Customs and Traditions • Poverty • Negative Attitude Of Parents

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Education plays an important and central role in developing human society. In a study, Sanaiey [1] pointed out the importance of higher education for the society. As stated by Ghazala & Awan [2], education is a holistic strategy for development and change. Although the Government of Pakistan [3], in Article number 37 of the Constitution of Pakistan has declared that education is the fundamental right of every human being, but it is observed that the gender discrepancies still exist in all sectors including education sector. A report by Government of Pakistan [4] on achieving universal quality primary education clearly state that Pakistan is a signatory of Millennium Development Goals and aimed to eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education by the year 2015 but unfortunately could not achieve these goals. The latest report by the Government of Pakistan [5] highlighting Pakistan Education Statistics 2014-2015, also revealed that education system of Pakistan is facilitating more to male students i.e. 56% than female students i.e. 44% although both the genders are almost equal in population.

The importance of education for female can be viewed from different perspectives e.g. the participation of educated girls and women for the uplift of economy of the country. A study by Habiba, Rabia and Asma [6], argued that in countries, which are economically poor, women can contribute immensely to its economy if given a chance. In Pakistan, there is an increase in the number of working women and the public attitude towards women's work is changing. Women reported respect and cooperation from family and colleagues. Women are a substantial part of a population and they can earn money to support their families. People have realized the worth of female education but there are some barriers, which prevent many females from pursuing their careers. However, with the advent of modern times, many people have understood the importance of education for females. According to Elizabeth and Rebecca [7] educating a girl is one of the best investments her family, community and country can make. Therefore, many developing countries have implemented certain education policies, which ensure the attendance of girls in schools and provide them basic facilities. Thus, literacy rates among females are increasing in many third world countries.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of sample of regional leaders (N= 400)

Demographic characteristics	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	200	50
Female	200	50
<i>Age in years</i>		
18 to 25	42	10.5
26 to 33	102	25.5
34 to 41	96	24
42 to 49	120	30
50 to 57	40	10
<i>Education</i>		
Primary Level (I - V)	136	1.25
Middle Level (VI-VIII)	40	2.0
Matric (Class X)	40	2.5
Intermediate	45	3.0
Graduate	105	26.25
Master	90	22.5
Ph.D.	10	2.5
<i>Occupation</i>		
Government Servant	55	13.75
Private Service	74	18.5
Business	135	33.75
Agriculture	136	34.0
<i>Monthly Income in Pak rupees</i>		
20, 000 & less	25	10.5 5
21, 000 to 40, 000	110	9.5
41, 000 to 60, 000	90	7
61, 000 to 80, 000	80	27.5
81, 000 to above	95	50

Because of the negative attitude towards female education perceiving her as a liability who will leave parents after getting married and will not take part in social and economic development of family, conservative cultural values, poverty, lack of facilities, lack of interest and ineffective role of regional leadership and at the top, insufficient initiatives and support by the Government, the education of female in underdeveloped countries including Pakistan has always been considered as an important issue to be addressed.

This research was carried out to identify the barriers in promotion of female education and to explore provision of facilities for the female education as perceived by the regional leaders in District Poonch of Azad Jammu Kashmir as they are strong and influential change agent and as highlighted by Kin and Omar [8] the role of effective leaders is to bring change.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was an exploratory research using both qualitative and quantitative method for data collection

because it is more effective than either one i.e. quantitative or qualitative method and more over it can offer a holistic view of the subject. Using convenient sampling method, 400 leaders from 13 Union Councils of District Poonch of Azad Jammu Kashmir were selected and interviewed to find out their perception about the barriers in female education in district Poonch. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are given in Table 1. The instrument having both open ended and closed- ended questions, was validated through content validity and face validity. Descriptive statistics and Chi Square test was used to evaluate the research questions and hypotheses testing.

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** What are the different barriers in promotion of female education in District Poonch as perceived by regional leadership?

On the statement of asking barriers in female education, majority of the regional leaders mentioned that old customs and traditions do not allow girls to get education followed by the response about the lack of parental co-operation. Other difficulties mentioned were; lack of interest by the government, poverty and inadequate educational institutes for girls. The results are given in Table 2.

**Research Question 2:** What facilities are provided for female education in District Poonch as perceived by regional leadership?

The regional leaders gave their opinion about facilities provided for female education as indicated in Table 3. The majority mentioned that the facility for transport is available. Other responses included; trained teachers, latest technology, co-operation of parents, quality educational institutes and sufficient number of educational institutes.

**Research Question 3:** What are the suggestions given by the regional leadership to promote female education in District Poonch?

Different suggestions given by regional leaders for the improvements of female education are highlighted in Table 4. Majority suggested; co-operation with parents, provision of land to establish new schools for girls, changing views or mindset of society to support for female education and giving importance and priority for female's education as a mean to improve female education.

Table 2: Barriers in female education as perceived by regional leaders (N=400)

S. No	Problems	N	%
1	Poverty	22	5.5
2	Inadequate educational institute for girls	18	4.5
3	Lack of government interest	40	10
4	Lack of parental cooperation	60	15
5	Old customs and traditions	260	65

Table 3: Facilities provided for female education as perceived by regional leaders (N=400)

S. No	Facilities	N	%
1	Transport	128	32
2	Trained teachers	52	13
3	Latest technology	60	15
4	Cooperation of parents	50	12.5
5	Quality educational institutes	50	12.5
6	Sufficient number of educational institutes?	60	15

Table 4: Suggestions given by regional leaders for the improvement of female education (N=400)

Suggestions	N	%
Parent teacher cooperation	56	14
Good educational Institutes	56	14
Awareness	56	14
Expert Teachers	56	14
Establishment of Vocational institutes	78	19.5
Separate colleges and universities for girls	78	19.5
Free Education	78	19.5
Transport facility	78	19.5
Quality education	100	25
Delegation should visit government Authorities	100	25
Provision of job	100	25
Financial support	100	25
Cooperation with parents	156	39
Provision of land	156	39
Change views or mindset of society	156	39
Giving importance and priority to female education	156	39

Table 5. Role of Government in promotion of female education (N=400)

S.No.	Government role	N	%
1	Government has not established any institute of higher education for female.	40	10
2	Government should upgrade the schools and colleges	35	8.75
3	Government has not provided well equipped institutes for female education.	60	15
4	Government do not take interest in female education	100	25
5	Government has promoted institutes for female education in different places	5	1.25
6	No efforts from government to promote female education.	22	5.5
7	Female teachers are disappointed in education system from government	40	10
8	In educational policies government neglect female.	16	04
9	Government has taking good steps	60	15
10	Government has not established vocational training centers for female.	42	10.5

**Research Question 4:** What role the Government of Pakistan is playing for the promotion of female education in District Poonch as perceived by regional leadership?

The perception of regional leaders about the role of government in promotion of female education is reflected through Table 5. Some positive comments included; the government has promoted institutes for female education in their region and the government has taken good steps. The majority mentioned weaknesses on the part of Government to play an effective role for the promotion of female education.

## DISCUSSION

**Barriers in Female Education:** Research studies identified many barriers in female education e.g. a study by Yaqoob [9] highlighted poverty, negative attitude of parents, family and the society, inadequate educational facilities for girls, conservative cultural values, early marriage of girls and other social taboos as barriers in female education. A report by Government of Pakistan [10] showed various reasons for the girls who never attended school. The top most reason was that their parents did not allow them. Other reasons were: expensive education, lack of interest by girls and distance of schools. The reasons that why boys were not attending school included, lack of interest, expensive education and boys helping parents in their work. The same report identified two key issues in Azad Jammu and Kashmir related to education sector namely; lack of access to education; and poor quality of education.

A study by Hussain [11] highlighted that illiterate parents were found to education conservative; sticking to their traditional values. Their conservatism has a strong negative effect on female education. Another study by Norwaliza *et al.* [12], highlighted the importance of schools for parental involvement to be aware of the importance of education. A study by Mukherjee [13] comparing female education and employment in Japan, China and India argued that in Japan, it seems that the number of women shunning education for marriage has decreased. Another researcher Xing [14] discussed psychological barriers in female education in China like; men considered being superior than women and mentioned that no one publicly opposed female education or create barriers in female education but the negative biases against women has a negative impact on women's education.

The current study showed that some regional leaders also mentioned poverty and costly education as the barriers in female education. A study by Amao and Ayantoye [15] also argued that poverty causes lack of education. A Pakistani study by Ali, Jumani and Ejaz [16] on higher education of women in Pakistan found financial constraints and security risks as barriers in female education as university education involved mobility away from home, often alone.

A report by Brock and Cammish [17] that identified the factors affecting female participation in education in developing countries concluded various Socio-cultural effects on female education including; traditional early marriage; early pregnancy; heavier domestic and subsistence duties of females, especially in rural areas and a generally lower regard for the value of female life. The same study further mentioned that health factor has indirect but a very significant effect on female participation in education, the economic factor, especially in terms of grinding poverty and hunger, is probably the most influential in adversely affecting female participation in education, especially in rural areas. A Pakistani researcher Khan [18] considered cultural and traditional tribal restraints and inappropriate safety measures as the reasons responsible for poor accessibility to basic education for girls in the far-flung areas of the country.

The Table 2 also reflects that majority of the regional leaders mentioned that old customs and traditions do not allow girls to get education. The results of current study are supported by the findings of different studies. A study by Mehran [19] found that traditional norms and cultural beliefs impede female education. Another study by Kakepoto [20] in rural area of Sindh province in Pakistan also showed that traditions in rural areas do not permit higher education for girls irrespective whether the parents were educated or uneducated. The same results were further endorsed by another Pakistani researcher Wahab [21] in a study on women education mentioning that Pakistani society expect women to observe pardah or Hijab and confined them to stay at home.

Similar situation is found in Afghanistan which is a neighbor country of Pakistan. A study from Afghanistan by Yazdany [22] showed that although there is no restriction by Government on female education, still many girls do not have permission from their families to go out for education. The same study further pointed out that the tradition culture is also imposed on President of Afghanistan Karzai who although in favor of women education and women freedom, but his wife Dr. Zeenat Karzai stayed at home since 2001 and does not do any job.

**Facilities Provided for Female Education:** District Poonch is ranked at number 38 out of 148 districts in education based on Alif Ailaan Pakistan District Education Rankings 2015 [23], but ranked 140 out of 148 in terms of facilities and infrastructure. In current study, on inquiring about the facilities provided for female education in District Poonch, the results as shown in Table 3 revealed that most of the leaders mentioned about the availability of transport facility. Other responses included; trained teachers, latest technology, co-operation of parents, quality educational institutes and sufficient number of educational institutes. The educational institutes in District Poonch are mostly private schools and colleges. The government schools and colleges were not sufficient so the role of Government is not so positive. All such facilities affect the enrollment rate of female in education. Other studies from Bangladesh by Bergmann [24] and from Kenya by Heckman [25] also concluded that the factors such as; quality of schools, teaching by female teachers and safe transport facilities effect more on girls' enrollment rather than boys.

**The Role of Government in Promotion of the Female Education in District Poonch:** Majority of the leaders in District Poonch mentioned weaknesses on the part of Government to play an effective role for the promotion of female education although the Government should play a model role. The government of Pakistan is committed to provide every citizen an access to education, but the allocation of budget towards education is not sufficient. A report by Government of Pakistan [26] reveals that only 2.1 % of Gross Domestic Product is allocated for education sector however the Government of Pakistan is fully committed to increase this budget from 2.1 % to 4.0 % by the year 2018. A study by Khan [18] also emphasized that the Government should increase funding for female education. A research report by Brock & Cammish [17] mentioned that in developing countries although policies like universal primary education, equal educational opportunities for girls and boys and the abolition of gender bias from texts and other materials exist, but due to severe economic constraints the political will seems to be weak to carry these policies. Another study by Psacharopoulos [27] considered investment in women's education as more profitable than that for men specially at primary level in developing countries.

A study by Shaukat [28] identified many challenges regarding girl's education in rural areas of Pakistan compounded by the country's complex political and social contexts and the low priority given to the education sector and girls' education by the government. A research

study by Jehan [29] conducted in Pakistan argued that women can only play their vital role in national development if government promotes access of education for girls and women. Similarly, another study by Latif [30] emphasized that the government should promote female participation in schools by increasing its investment in schooling to lower the costs to households.

The results of the current study will create awareness among public, leaders and policy makers to rectify issues related to female education thus encouraging more and more girls to be enrolled at all levels of education. The Government needs to have action plans for implementation of policies about equal rights of education, provide infrastructure and other facilities to promote female education in district Poonch and other areas of Azad Kashmir.

### CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that although there is an improvement in female education in District Poonch but the progress is very slow. The barriers in female education in Pakistan were highlighted through many studies conducted in the region but the serious efforts need to be made to address these issues by the leadership at the top level because these barriers prevent girls and women to play their role for the development of economy of Pakistan although the females constitute almost half of the population of Pakistan.

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