

**Causes of Primary School Drop out
Among Rural Girls in Pakistan**

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Causes of Primary School Drop out Among Rural Girls in Pakistan

Gulbaz Ali Khan*, Muhammad Azhar** and Syed Asghar Shah***

Abstract

The high rate of drop outs in Pakistan is a cause for concern and it means that social and public policies have to be realigned to tackle this important issue. Although there are many reasons for children dropping out of school as given in various studies on the subject, this paper tries to explore the reasons from the perspective of girls' parents, teachers and students. The findings in this paper are drawn from a research study on drop outs in Pakistan based on the country wide data collected from four provinces, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the federal capitals. Data was compiled and analyzed by using simple descriptive methods. The major reasons behind drop outs will be discussed at the end of the paper with recommendations on how to tackle the issue of high drop out rates

Keywords: rural girls, dropout, primary education, poverty.

I. Introduction

Education is a basic human right and fosters economic growth and human development (Okidi et al., 2004). In its bid to promote economic growth and human development, the government of Pakistan is a member of the international accord, Universal Primary Education under Education for All 2015 Framework. In this respect, Pakistan has been assigned a target to achieve 100 percent primary school enrollment rate within the mentioned stipulated timeframe.

At present, the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) for primary education stands at 70 percent, out of which 50 percent children aged between 5-9 years, leave school prior to completion of grade-V. About one in three children i.e. only 30 percent of students of the remaining 50 percent pass primary education and continue beyond primary education. (NCHD UPE Programme, 2010). Even though these rates have slightly improved over time, Pakistan still faces the risk of defaulting on EFA 2015 targets. The education system in Pakistan is riddled with problems but one of the most pressing of these is the high rate of drop outs.

In Pakistan, the overall dropout rate for both boys and girls is 50 percent. Whereas, the dropout rate for girls is 56 percent and it is 44 percent for boys. (AEPAM, 2006-07). Similarly, the

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findings of Bilqees and Saqib show that the dropout rate for girls is higher in rural areas as compared to urban regions.

Table 1: Dropout Rates by Region and Gender

Region and Gender	Dropout Rate (in Percent)
All Areas	
Male	23.6
Female	21.1
Urban Areas	-
Male	23.5
Female	17
Rural Areas	-
Male	23.7
Female	24.6

Source: Bilqees and Saqib, 2004

Low priority in female education means that, today there is a nationwide shortage of girls-only schools and female teachers to staff them, particularly at the secondary level.

The national and international commitments for the right to education of every child regardless of economic status such as the Pakistan Constitution, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EPA) has not had fruitful results. Among developing and South Asian countries, Pakistan still remains a country with a significant number of out-of-school children. UNICEF reports more than half of the primary school going age children (5-9) remain out of school. Most strikingly, seven million out of 13 million out-of-school children are girls (SPARC 2004). Earlier reports (Lieten 2004; Khan 2005; UNDP 2007) reveal that low performance in primary education and especially the exclusion of girls has far reaching effects on the overall literacy rate and human development ranking.

Gender disparities exist at the primary level of education. These are largely explained by the fact that parents are disinterested in their girls' education. Other factors are cultural constraints, high fees or poor economic conditions. One of the explanations for a higher drop out rate for girls is the parents' education and lack of interest in girls' education is that investing in a girl's education is often considered a waste of money and resources as there is a common view that boys will earn and therefore support the parents financially after getting a good job whereas parents do not see their girls working or bringing home any income once they leave home. They marry them off and after that they are seen as the responsibility of their husbands. This perpetuates a cycle of discrimination against girls in terms of educating them. However, generally when either of the parents is literate or when the mother is literate, there is a higher chance that parents would want to send their daughters to school.

The parents' decision to educate boys and not girls shows a high level of discrimination at the household level. The girls are denied educational opportunities for being seen as unproductive in their ability to support the family financially in the future. Such parental attitudes further perpetuate stereotypes in Pakistani cultural. These kinds of stereotypes limit opportunities and

choices for women, both in the present and the future. Quoting Amartya Sen's phrase "the capabilities of girls will be severely restricted by the denial of education. If freedom is the goal of development, it will be substantially restricted by the fact that illiterate girls will become illiterate women". This quotation is enlightening and shows that women empowerment starts at home and it is there women can begin to see themselves as productive members of society in terms of being able to earn a living and perform various roles outside the home as well.

Girls being out of school may not be attributed to a single reason. Generally, there are numerous reasons which hinder girls' education in the country.

Physical accessibility may include distance from the school, absence of a school in the area, inadequate infrastructure etc. Social reasons like cultural and religious beliefs, social exclusion, low social positioning, low parental perception etc. are also restricting girls' education. Economic reasons are worth mentioning which may include high poverty, deprivation due to lack of food, illness, lack of choices, unemployment, wage work by children, vulnerability, unpaid family labour, sibling responsibility, cattle grazing, high cost of education etc.

This research study is part of a larger project on lack of primary schooling in Pakistan. It will explore the reasons behind the high drop out rates amongst girls at primary school level. The findings of the research will help to formulate policies at the micro and macro level to streamline gender into primary education. It will provide a basis for policy intervention, for NGOs, the private sector and the government. The research will focus on the reasons for drop outs from the perspective of girls, their parents and teachers.

II. Methodology

The data for this paper is drawn from SDPI-HDF research study on lack of primary schooling in Pakistan. The multistage random sampling technique was used for data collection in this study. At the first stage, the country is divided into eight zones all over the four provinces, AJK, GB and FATA. These are taken as unit of sampling at the initial stage. At the second stage, the numbers of villages were randomly selected from all categories (high dropout prevalence, medium dropout prevalence and low dropout prevalence) by using stratified random sampling with proportional allocation. At the third stage the statistically significant numbers of households were selected from each selected village and respondents' selection was carried out while keeping in the drop out prevalence. The following respondents have been selected from dropout children.

- The dropout girl (child) students
- Parents (Especially the mother)
- Teacher of the respective school

The study covers all the four provinces, AJK and Federal Capital and sample size was calculated as follows:-

Dropout students (Before primary completion) = (292 dropout children, 292 parents of dropout children and 90 teachers of the respective schools, Total number of sampled population interviewed =1000) from the target area, further it was subdivided into all region on the basis of propositional allocation.

Parents especially the mother of the dropout children were interviewed. Dropout children and their parents were the direct respondents, from which information was collected about the three environments (school, home and society). The third category of respondents was teachers of the respective schools from which students dropped out. The aim was to find out the actual causes of dropouts from the teachers' point of view. The current study gathered the responses of rural dropout girls, their parents and teachers.

III. Findings & Discussion

Causes of drop out as perceived by parents

The discontinuation of the education of girls is a threatening signal to our educational system. To find out the plausible reasons, parents were interviewed.

The table below shows the reasons for girls leaving schools before the completion of primary education. It is quite evident that poverty is the dominant reason for girls dropping out of school. The poor economic conditions of the parents often force them to remove girls from school and engage them in either domestic activities or make them work. As mentioned above it is a perception shared by many especially in rural areas that investments on boys' education benefit parents and the family at large unlike an investment on girls' education which would not benefit parents. Another major reason is intrinsically linked with the cultural perceptions of society as parents do not want to send their girls to schools in the absence of proper security. This culture is entrenched in the parents' perception and 19 percent of them believed that girls leave schools due to lack of security.

Table 2: Causes of Dropout: Parents Response

No.	Causes of Dropout	Views (In Percent)
1	Poverty	21.7
2	Girls child security	19.0
3	Lack of child Interest	14.7
4	Parents death	10.3
5	HH Chores	9.8
6	School at distance	8.0
7	Teacher attitude	5.3
8	Lack of free Education	5.0
9	Migration	4.0
10	Lack of school	2.2

Source: Compilation based on field data

More than 14 percent of the parents believe that their girls are not interested in studies. One or both parents' death is also a factor that compels girls to leave school due to financial and/or psychological reasons.

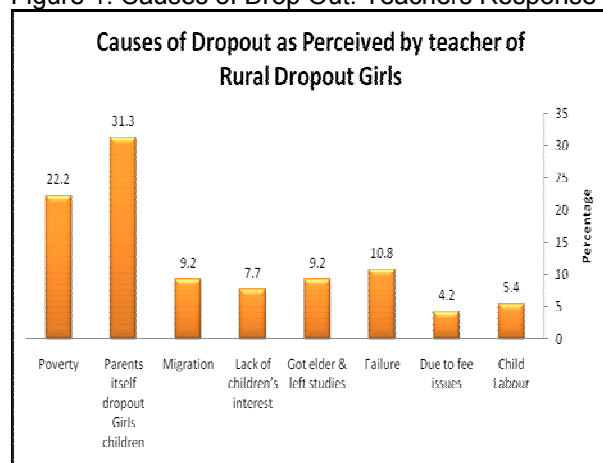
More than nine percent of the parents believed that involvement in household activities force girls to leave schools before completion of their education. They also felt that girls always preferred to attend schools close to home due to security reasons as discussed earlier.

Almost eight percent of parents' stated that schools were located at very long distances from their homes and girls were forced to stay at home, rather than continue their studies. Some parents said that the teachers' negative attitudes, lack of free education, migration and unavailability of the schools were also the contributing towards girls dropping out of school. However it should be mentioned that only five percent were of the view that lack of free education was a hindrance to girls' education.

Causes of drop out as perceived by Teachers

The teachers' representations of the school environment and their perceptions regarding dropouts was significant because it would be fed into the policy recommendations. The teachers have a close interaction with the children due to their time spent in the school during classes and extra curricular activities.

Figure 1: Causes of Drop Out: Teachers Response



Source: Compilation based on field data

The figure displays the responses of the teachers. The biggest factor that was given was the lack of parents interest in girls' education. This confirms the earlier finding that girls' education is given the least priority by parents. SDPI is also conducting a study in collaboration with Plan Pakistan International on gender disparity in primary and secondary education in two districts of the Punjab province. The preliminary findings also revealed that parents are not interested in sending their girls to schools.

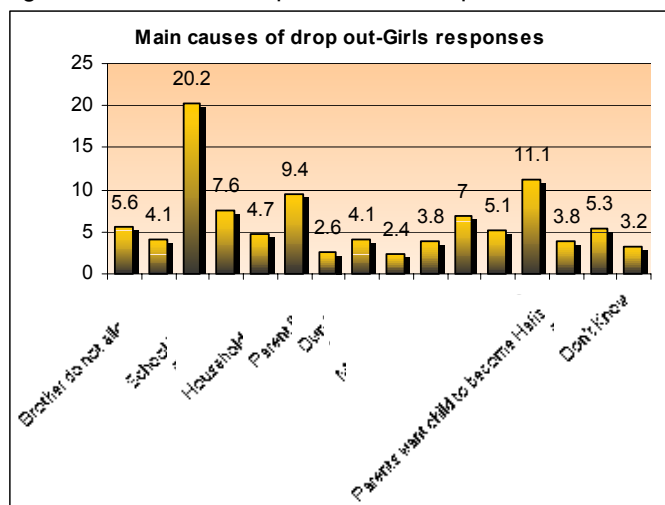
Another major reason teachers gave was the poor economic conditions of the parents which restricted them from sending their girls to schools. More than 22 percent of the teachers felt that poverty was a major reason. Not only were boys given education but often they would also be given more food in their homes. Girls generally remained disadvantaged while growing up at home.

Not doing well in their studies and migration were also reasons given for high drop outs. More than nine percent of teachers felt that girls left schools due to the age factor as well. Lack of children’s interest in education was also seen as contributing towards drop outs. Teachers felt that high fees and child labour also restricted girls from primary education. However, it is important to highlight that high fees and children’s involvement in economic activities were not seen as significant reasons although researcher studies often seem to cite this as a major reason for drop outs.

Causes of drop out as perceived by rural girls

The children are the recipients of education and therefore the focal point for any study on this issues. They are the ones who are directly and indirectly impacted. Their views are therefore pivotal for the purposes of this study or any study on this topic. The figure below shows the responses of rural girls.

Figure 2: Causes of Drop Out: Girls Response



Source: Compilation based on field data

According to the girls the most compelling reason for not completing primary schooling was poor economic conditions (20.2%) of their families. Teachers and parents also mentioned this as a major reason. There were numerous other reasons given which were held responsible for drop outs in rural girls. Prominent among these were lack of school facilities (11.1%) and involvement in household chores (9.4%). 4.1 percent of girls held their brothers responsible for not sending them to schools. Girls also wanted to stop education because they wanted to go to an all-girls

school instead of a co-education school (4.7%). Parents' illness and death also contributed towards girls dropping out of school. Interestingly, nearly 4 percent of girls admitted that their parents wanted them to become Hafiz-e-Quran.

Readmission Effects: Despite the traditional reasons unearthed by the study, the majority of the parents wanted to send their girls to schools for primary education. Only 28 percent of parents did not want their girls to go to school because they wanted to involve them in household chores.

Table 2: Readmission efforts

No.	Re-admission Efforts	Views (In Percent)
1	Yes	72
2	No	28

Source: Compilation based on field data

IV. Conclusion

The study explores the reasons behind drop outs in rural girls. The perceptions of the parents, teachers and girls were studied to find out possible reasons. The main reasons given by all the respondents for this were low economic status of the parents which restricts both parents and girls for continuing primary education. Other compelling reasons were the parents and child's interest in primary education, parent/s' death, involvement in household chores and economic activities. Low investment in girls' education is primarily due to perceived low returns as described above. As is evident intra-household inequalities do exist and girls are victims of these.

V. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations to improve rural girls' primary education:-

- Parents must be sensitized regarding the investment on girls' education.
- To address the poverty-education issues, NGOs and public partnerships must be established through fostering greater confidence of government on NGOs working in the education sector.
- Accessibility of education must be enhanced in rural areas, so that parents can send their girls to nearby schools without worrying about their safety
- There should be free and compulsory education up to secondary levels of schooling. In addition, the scope of incentives should not be limited only to the concession of the school fee to the girl students from low income families but should also be provided transport and lunch facilities on the pattern of Sri Lanka where free education is being provided during the last 50 years. As a result, Sri Lanka has experienced a remarkable advancements in human development, inspite of serious internal conflicts and upheavals.
- In addition to providing for instructional materials, it is necessary to invest in school structures including classrooms, libraries, gender sensitive facilities, and providing a safe water supply to all schools.

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