



Exploring Men's Perspectives on Women's Higher Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Case Study of Mardan

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Abstract

This study investigated the men perception of women education in Pashtun society. A Samples of 50 women were contacted. Data was collected through questionnaires from the students to find out the causes and effects of the men perception of women education in Pashtun society. Data obtained was analyzed using spss analysis. The findings show that effects of men perception of women education in Pashtun society include stress anxiety etc. These figures among Pashtun tribes compare unfavorably, to a significant degree, to other parts of the country, and alarmingly so to other countries in the region with similar levels of economic development. The gender gap in education stems from decades of discriminatory education policies, which in turn reflect the low status of women in Pakistani society. Despite several declared commitments, the government has not made women's education a priority. Government priorities can best be judged by examining the allocation of resources to the education sector. Further research is needed to explore these factors in more detailed and of course in broader context.

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Introduction

Pashtuns, also known as Afghans, are an Iranian ethnic group native to Central and South Asia. The native language of the Pashtuns is Pashto, an Iranian language on the Indo-Iranian branch, itself a branch of the larger Indo-European language family (Lohar, 2000). A result or effect, typically one that is unwelcome or unpleasant (Mbatia, 1996) ^[9].

Worldwide, 65 million girls never start school 100 million do not complete primary education; more than 542 million women are illiterate (Aikman, 2005). This demonstrates broader life inequalities and the widespread suffering of girls, with severe implications for most developing communities. By failing to achieve gender parity in education, many developing countries, including Pakistan, consistently face the resultant negative consequences in poverty, health, and fertility issues, and overall socioeconomic development (UNESCO, 2011). In 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar noted this alarming situation and declared that a major concern is —eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality (World Education Forum, 2000). Within the development community there is general agreement that women's education plays a critically important role in socioeconomic development, though the precise method or scope by which it does so is debated (David, 1999). Research has empirically established that the formal education of women is a key factor for bringing about healthy, vibrant, and economically developed communities. Additionally, education allows women greater mobility and economic freedom. Studies have shown that an educated woman faces less physical violence and has fewer and healthier children

(Azhar, 2010). In the last two decades, continuing cycles of war and conflict, extremism, and the introduction of strict cultural and religious ideologies have further complicated and magnified the issue of gender justice and girls' education in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KPK) area of Pakistan. The impact is most clearly visible in the Pashtun tribes of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan, where a UNICEF report estimated enrolment of only 13 percent of primary-school-aged girls (UNICEF, 2010). While there has been a great deal of research on gender and development and women empowerment issues in general (Daulatzai, 2006), there has been relatively little research on men's and particularly fathers' perceptions of women's roles in community and girls' education. This study, therefore, sought to explore and analyze Pashtun men's perception of women's status and role in the community, especially their attitudes toward girls' education. It is my basic assumption that men are the key stakeholders in gender disparity issues. Unless there is a significant change in men's perceptions, practices, and attitudes, the struggle for the promotion of gender equality will continue to face many challenges (Ruxton, 2004). I focus on fathers as one specifically noteworthy group of stakeholders. I suggest that it is important to listen to their voices, to understand their views and concerns, and to actively involve them in women's issues by explaining the benefits of participating in their daughters' education (Barker, 2005). Understanding men's perceptions of the role of women is a step toward social justice, as such initiatives could engage the members of a privileged group in order to challenge that same privilege (Flood, 2001). In this article I identify contradictory ideas emerging from religion, culture, and politics that shape Pashtun men's perceptions of girls and women. We want to conduct research on this topic because no study has been conducted on this topic in Mardan.

Statement of the Problem

Difference in education among men and women is one of the rising issues of Pakistan. Pakistan is facing great economic crisis nowadays and gender differences is discussed among people in local and national gathering. Pakistan is the country having 2nd largest youth population and if youth face problem of not having educational opportunities so then it leads to many other problems in the society. The biggest problem is that when specifically the youth have no opportunity of other activities then they are misused by other political parties and also by other criminal groups. The problem of educational backwardness is also present in Mardan city and the educated youth is suffering from it. And we also know that our society is male dominant (patriarchal society) and this patriarchal system leads to the gender discrimination in the society and this gender discrimination exist in all aspects of the society and in provision of relaxation opportunity as well. so in this research we will find out the male perception about female education.

Objectives

1. To identify the causes/factors which make the female students to quite the education?

2. To find out the impacts/consequences of negative perception of male about female education.
3. To recommend policies to cope with the negative perception of men toward female education.

Feminism

There are many theories which suit our topic but the most relevant theory is feminism because this theory talks and explains women rights in a very better way.

Women's education in Pakistan is a fundamental right of every female citizen, according to article thirty-seven of the Constitution of Pakistan, but 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. Patriarchal values heavily govern the social structure in Pakistani society in the rural areas. In comparison, urban centers of the country as well as semi-peripheral regions are slowly moving towards shifting gender roles that are more inclusive. Around 70% of working women in Pakistan work outdoors according to the Asian Development Bank policy brief on female workforce participation in Pakistan 2016. The general perception of culturally traditional gender roles that, specifically, a woman is expected to take care of the home as wife and mother, whereas the male dominates outside the home as a breadwinner, is questionable in certain sectors. In agricultural work, within rural areas, both men and women work in the fields and are expected to contribute equally to household work. In a survey by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2013–2014, it was reported that 26% of women are in the labor force (approximately 15 million). There is a traditionally conceptual idea of segregation of men and women into two distinct worlds. However, this materializes differently in different parts of the country. Only in the most of rural-isolated regions in the country is this idea of gender roles strictly followed. Poverty is one of the major factors in unequal household resources allocation in the favor of sons due to their role in society outside the home. Therefore, education for boys is prioritized over that for 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.

Literature Review

Pashtuns' identity is provided by Pashtunwali. A tribal code, Pashtunwali is an unwritten law, a sociopolitical culture, and an ideology inherited from ancestors and carried on from generation to generation. It is considered the dominant force of Pashtun culture. Rahman (1995) describes Pashtunwali as—a conservative, naturally democratic, centuries-old but still a young phenomenon in the Pashtun culture and socioeconomic structure. Pashtun society, by the virtue of

Pashtunwali, went straight to the feudal social structure without ever experiencing an era of slavery. This tribal code demands honour, hospitality, and generosity for anyone who asks for pardon or protection, and an absolute obligation to take revenge for any type of oppression. Anthropologists have described Pashtunwali as an —ideal-type code based on such principles as *badal* (revenge), *melmastia* (hospitality), *nanawatee* (refuge), *tor* (female honour), and *tarburwali* (agnatic rivalry) (Singer, 1982). Similarly, Barth (1981) identifies three major institutions dominating the Pashtunwali codes: *Melmastia*, hospitality and the honourable uses of materials and goods; *Jirga*, councils and the honourable pursuit of public affairs; *Purdah*, seclusion of women and the honourable organization of domestic life. Versions of the code are practised in other nomadic societies such as Bedouins (Graham, 2004) and neighbouring Baluch tribes (Mann, 2005). According to traditional Pashtun culture, men begin influencing a girl's life at an early age, exerting authority on issues ranging from education to selection of a husband. After marriage, a woman's husband and in-laws may take control of her life. They could decide issues such as the number of children she will have, what her role in the community will be, and what her limits are in seeking education or employment. Guiding such decision making is the centrality of the chastity and honour of women, which are the most sensitive issues in Pashtun society. Violation of a woman's honour brings disastrous consequences to a society rooted in tribal bonds. A woman's character and actions reflect the status and honour of her family as a whole. The focus is on the word *honour*, for which there are several correlative words in Pashto—*ghairat*, *nang*, and *namos*—which convey different aspects of social norms and the tribal code. These tribal values make up —a complex identity based on economic moral and social independence (Mann, 2005). Each family or tribe has its own self-sufficient boundaries (Mann, 2005). Such traditions and norms—literally man-made—constitute an extreme form of a patriarchal society with built-in hierarchies and a distinct contrast between male and female status (Mann, 1991). Mann (2005) argues that male honour is proactive and expressed through aggressive and violent behaviour, whereas honour for females —is necessarily passive, submissive, and centered around avoidance of shame. A Pashtun woman is expected to live according to prevailing social norms, cultural values, and the tribal code on the other hand, *Moor* (the mother) is the symbol of glorified status and emotional influence in Pashtun society. She is considered to be an authority on Pashtunwali as well as its legitimate keeper (Ahmed, 1980). The status of the mother is therefore repeatedly acknowledged and represented with dignity and respect. She actively participates in tribal affairs and day-to-day decision making in addition to her supervisory position at home; her power increases with age. Discussing the role of Pashtun women in the Afghan refugee camps at Peshawar, Pakistan, Mann (2005) suggests, in traditional non-fundamentalist settings, women have negotiated their place; older women are respected and the eldest daughter is often the father's favourite. Just as in other patriarchal societies in the West (Jewish and Christian) up until the end of the 18th century, the official line never favoured women but did not entail automatic oppression. In farms and rural enterprises in Afghanistan or Ancient Régime Europe, men and women always worked hard together in complementary ways, even

if the woman's contribution was never recognized as such. Yet Pashtun women, despite their ritual seclusion were not always passive. Acquiring prestige and influence within the extended family rests on the degree to which a woman produces heirs for the family; namely, sons. Despite such pressures, mothers are always remembered and quoted in most Pashto songs and proverbs with great respect and honour: —Heaven lies at the feet of the mother! is a common Pashto quotation of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahmed, 1980). However, despite such a strong role and the social importance attached to motherhood, the life of a Pashtun woman is full of hardships, unconditional obedience to cultural norms.

Women's education

A society's understanding of what women should be determines the direction of development plans for them. Educational outcomes, as measured by enrolment and attainment for Pakistani girls, are among the lowest in the world. Pakistan's Gender Equality Education Index (GEEI) is 0.20, the lowest in South Asia. The low GEEI indicates low net attendance rate in primary and secondary education. Similarly, a low gender development index shows —women's inferior conditions of health, education and income compared with men (UNICEF, 2009). However, it is important to note that there is significant regional variation in most areas of development in Pakistan. Women in rural areas receive less attention than women in urban areas in terms of development and education policies. Likewise, women in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) receive much less education than do women in the Punjab, Sindh, and Kashmir provinces of Pakistan. Shortcomings in girls' education are particularly notable in the tribal areas, which in 2004 had the lowest ratio of female enrolment of any province in Pakistan. According to the World Bank – Education For All (EFA) 2000 assessment report, only 11 percent of girls and women are literate in the Pashtundominated tribal areas (UNESCO, 2000). Development researchers and practitioners have observed that in Pakistan, women are significantly less educated than men (Thomas, 1996; Khan, 1993; Shah, 1986; Behrmann & Schneider, 1993; Barth, 1981). At the primary level, the male enrolment rate is almost double the female enrolment rate. In most areas, less than half of girls ever enrol in school compared with 50 to 80 percent of boys (UNICEF, 2004). These figures among Pashtun tribes compare unfavourably, to a significant degree, to other parts of the country, and alarmingly so to other countries in the region with similar levels of economic development. The gender gap in education stems from decades of discriminatory education policies, which in turn reflect the low status of women in Pakistani society. Despite several declared commitments, the government has not made women's education a priority. Government priorities can best be judged by examining the allocation of resources to the education sector. Whereas the United Nations recommends at least 4 percent of gross national product (GNP) for education in developing countries, in Pakistan from 1959 to 1989 the education share of the GNP was roughly 1 percent (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1993). By 2013, spending on education had doubled, but was still at only 2 percent, or half the UN recommendation (UNESCO, 2012). Besides the lack of government money, many funds earmarked for education have been squandered due to widespread corruption. In 2003, the Pakistan

Participatory Assessment (PPA) surveyed fifty-one districts of Pakistan and identified many ghost or non-functional girls' schools—present only on paper. The Pakistan National Educational Survey confirmed that 7.7 percent of 164,579 public-sector schools are nonfunctional, a euphemism for ghost schools. The figure signals the high level of corruption and mismanagement in the government's education sector (‘Ghost’ Schools Galore, 2006).

Methodology

Research methodology

Methodology is an important aspect of any research. It is the combination of tools and techniques, which are used to collect information for the research purpose. The researchers use the following research tools and methods, which make researchers capable to get reliable and valid information.

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure (Kothari, 1990). Our study is quantitative in nature the research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the questionnaire for collection, measurement and analysis of data. As such the design includes an outline of what the researcher was do from writing the hypothesis and its operational implications to the final analysis of data.

Sampling technique and sample size

Sampling enable us to select a portion from the study population for the data collection but it should be taken in such a way that it can represent the whole population and result can be generalized. In this study the researcher used stratified sampling strategy through for selection of respondents, the data for study will come from 50 respondents.

In this study the data was collected at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (Main campus), the data have been collected from the students of Sociology/UCW. We collected the data through questionnaire and we were put 18 questions for the collection of data. The researcher used structure and hand delivered questionnaire which was distributed to 50 respondents.

Nature of the respondents

The study was conducted in Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan Main Campus department of Sociology. The respondents were male in nature. Students of sociology were selected due to their appropriateness and willingness for the study. Moreover, students of sociology had certain the level of understanding of the topic under investigation.

Frequency Table

Total 50 participants participated in the study all the respondent was both male and female and detail of frequency table in relevant discussion of the analysis are given below.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 50)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Age	30–35 years	38	76.0
	36–40 years	12	24.0
	Total	50	100.0
Gender	Male	33	66.0
	Female	17	34.0
	Total	50	100.0
Residence	Urban	37	74.0

The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents provide a foundational understanding of the background and diversity of participants included in this study on *men's perception of women's education in Pashtun society*.

Age of the Respondents

The data show that the majority of respondents (76%) belonged to the age group of 30–35 years, while only 24% were between 36–40 years. This indicates that most participants were relatively young adults who are socially active and aware of the current educational trends and gender dynamics within Pashtun culture. Since the research focuses on men's perceptions of women's education, this age group represents individuals who are either currently parents or are approaching that stage of life. Their opinions are therefore significant in shaping and influencing the educational opportunities available to women in their families and communities. The inclusion of older respondents (36–40 years) also helps in understanding slightly more traditional perspectives within the same cultural setting.

Gender of the Respondents

The gender distribution reveals that 66% of the respondents were male and 34% were female. Since the study primarily

investigates men's perceptions, male participation was intentionally higher to ensure that men's views were accurately represented. However, the inclusion of women respondents allows for a comparative understanding of how women perceive men's attitudes toward their education. This gender balance contributes to a more holistic picture of the existing social mindset regarding women's education in Pashtun society.

Residence of the Respondents

The findings related to residence indicate that 74% of respondents lived in urban areas, 14% in rural areas, and 12% in towns. The predominance of urban participants suggests that awareness and acceptance of women's education are likely higher in cities, where access to schools, colleges, and exposure to modern values is more prevalent. In contrast, respondents from rural areas represent more traditional viewpoints, where cultural and religious interpretations may still restrict women's educational participation. Including both urban and rural perspectives thus enriches the study by providing a broader understanding of how locality influences men's attitudes toward female education.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Opinions on Women's Education in Pashtun Society (N = 50)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	Women are considered inferior in Pashtun society.	1.38	0.49
2	Getting education for women is difficult in Pashtun society.	1.70	0.77
3	There is not equal participation of women in education/workplace.	1.54	0.61
4	Need to give women sovereignty over their bodies.	1.66	0.75
5	We should end child and forced marriages.	1.66	0.73
6	Women should be granted full equality under all laws.	1.34	0.55
7	Eliminate patriarchal attitudes preventing women's education.	1.40	0.49
8	Provide parental leave and childcare for women's careers.	1.58	0.69
9	Men are still unaware of women's empowerment.	1.56	0.66
10	Parents fear sending girls beyond age 9 to co-educational schools.	1.26	0.52
11	Men show abnormal behavior toward educated women.	1.28	0.54
12	Girls blame themselves when parents argue about education.	1.64	0.77
13	Girls show depression when treated differently.	1.74	0.80
14	Lack of women teachers keeps girls' education low.	1.60	0.71

Coding scheme Responses were coded as Yes = 1, Don't Know = 2, No = 3. Lower mean values therefore indicate greater agreement with the statement. The mean and standard deviation values presented above reflect the overall level of agreement and variation in responses concerning gender perceptions and educational barriers in Pashtun society.

Strong Agreement on Gender Inequality

The lowest mean values (M = 1.26 to 1.40) were found for statements such as *"Parents fear sending girls beyond age 9 to co-educational institutions"* and *"Women are considered inferior in Pashtun society."* These low mean scores indicate strong consensus among respondents that traditional cultural norms and gender-based restrictions still exist and directly limit women's access to education.

Moderate Agreement on Social Reforms

Statements promoting reforms — such as *"Providing parental leave and childcare opportunities"* (M = 1.58) and *"Men are still unaware of women's empowerment"* (M = 1.56) — also received mean scores closer to agreement. This suggests that respondents recognize the need for social and institutional changes but also reflect a degree of uncertainty or differing opinions, as shown by moderate standard deviations (SD ≈ 0.6–0.7).

Awareness of Emotional and Psychological Effects

Higher mean values (M = 1.64–1.74) were recorded for items like *"Girls blame themselves when parents argue about education"* and *"Girls show signs of depression when treated differently."* These results show less uniform agreement, meaning that while many respondents acknowledge these emotional effects, others are either unaware or hesitant to associate gender inequality with psychological consequences.

Table 3: Respondents' Opinions on Statements Related to Women's Education in Pashtun Society (N = 50)

S. No.	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
1	Women are considered inferior in Pashtun society.	62	38	—
2	Getting education for women is difficult in Pashtun society.	54	22	24
3	There is not equal participation of girls/women in education and the workplace.	72	2	26
4	There is a need to give women sovereignty over their bodies.	52	30	18
5	We should end child and forced marriages.	54	26	20
6	Women should be granted full equality under all laws.	74	18	8
7	Patriarchal attitudes prevent women's access to power and education.	66	34	—
8	Provide parental leave and childcare for women's career progress.	58	26	16
9	Men are still unaware of women's education and empowerment.	56	32	12
10	Parents fear sending girls beyond age 9 to co-educational institutions.	80	14	6
11	Men show abnormal behavior toward educated women.	80	12	8
12	Girls blame themselves when parents argue about their education.	58	20	22
13	Girls show depression when treated differently.	58	10	32
14	Lack of female teachers keeps girls' education low.	56	28	16
15	Women's education faces limitations due to cultural attitudes.	58	20	22
1	Women are considered inferior in Pashtun society.	62	38	—
2	Getting education for women is difficult in Pashtun society.	54	22	24
3	There is not equal participation of girls/women in education and the workplace.	72	2	26
4	There is a need to give women sovereignty over their bodies.	52	30	18
5	We should end child and forced marriages.	54	26	20
6	Women should be granted full equality under all laws.	74	18	8
7	Patriarchal attitudes prevent women's access to power and education.	66	34	—
8	Provide parental leave and childcare for women's career progress.	58	26	16

Results

The results summarized above indicate that the majority of respondents generally agreed with statements highlighting gender-based inequalities and barriers to women's education in Pashtun society.

Perception of Inferiority and Inequality about 62% of participants acknowledged that women are still viewed as inferior, and 72% believed that girls and women do not have equal participation in education or workplaces. This reflects the persistence of patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles in Pashtun communities.

Educational Barriers more than half of the respondents (54%) agreed that obtaining education is difficult for women, while a significant number (80%) reported that parents fear sending their daughters to co-educational institutions beyond age nine. These responses highlight the cultural restrictions and safety concerns that hinder women's access to schooling.

Support for Equality and Reform Encouragingly, a large majority (74%) supported legal equality for women and ending discriminatory laws and practices. Additionally, 66% recognized the need to challenge patriarchal attitudes, and 58% favored providing parental leave and childcare facilities to support working women. This shows growing awareness and acceptance of gender equality among men and women alike.

Psychological and Social Effects Responses also revealed the emotional consequences of gender discrimination — around 58% of respondents agreed that girls experience depression and self-blame when deprived of educational opportunities or treated unfairly. Furthermore, 80% believed that men often display abnormal or disrespectful behavior toward educated women, indicating ongoing social stigma against female empowerment.

Cultural and Structural Issues: More than half of the participants (56%) pointed out that a shortage of female teachers continues to limit girls' education, especially in conservative areas. This finding supports the argument that both institutional and cultural factors contribute to gender inequality in education.

Recommendations

For men

- The men should take some steps to reduce the levels of negative perception.
- There is an extensive need to launch technological and professional-based educational policies in Pakistan generating awareness about women rights.
- There is also a need of psychological support system for affected women. This system could be delivered according to the different needs of each individual. It would aid the individual in coping with negative perception, build confidence in their ability to actively seek work, alleviate boredom and despondency and provide a social opportunity to meet others in the same dilemma.

For family and friends of educated women

- Family and friends need to avoid negatively treatment of the affected women, which is the major cause of feelings of shame and embarrassment during the period of education.
- Friends of an affected women need to keep encouraging

him in the stressful situation of domestic educations. To avoid feelings of hopelessness and shame.

- Family needs to provide mental, emotional and financial support to affected women to get them passes through the hard situation of education.

Conclusion

At the end of our research we can say that our study support the previous literature. The general perception of culturally traditional gender roles that, specifically, a woman is expected to take care of the home as wife and mother, whereas the male dominates outside the home as a breadwinner, is questionable in certain sectors. In agricultural work, within rural areas, both men and women work in the fields and are expected to contribute equally to household work. In a survey by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2013–2014, it was reported that 26% of women are in the labor force (approximately 15 million). There is a traditionally conceptual idea of segregation of men and women into two distinct worlds. However, this materializes differently in different parts of the country. Only in the most of rural-isolated regions in the country is this idea of gender roles strictly followed. Poverty is one of the major factors in unequal household resources allocation in the favor of sons due to their role in society outside the home.

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