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Exploring the Socio-Cultural Barriers that Hinder Female's Access to Higher Education in Rural Areas of Quetta and Examining Female Perspectives on the Effectiveness of These Barriers

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### Abstract

The study primarily aims to identify and analyze socio-cultural obstacles that prevent women from pursuing higher education in rural Quetta. It focuses on examining how women perceive the effectiveness of these barriers. This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the experiences of ten young female participants encountering socio-cultural obstacles that hindered their pursuit of higher education. The researchers conducted in-person interviews with participants using a semi-structured questionnaire, allowing for a full analysis of their experiences. The socio-cultural impediments examined include patriarchal culture, early marriages, priority for sons' education, co-education and male teachers, and social bias towards females. The findings indicate that although these obstacles exist, many young females do not view them as effective in discouraging their pursuit of higher education. This study highlights women's unfavorable situation in rural areas of Quetta, highlighting the need for more effective strategies to encourage women to pursue higher education.

**Keywords:** Female Higher Education, Female's Low Literacy, Female Perspective, Rural Area, Socio-Cultural Barriers

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### Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Methodology](#)
- [Patriarchy](#)
- [Gender Discrimination](#)
- [Cost and Benefit Ratio](#)
- [Social Bias Towards Females](#)
- [Coeducation and Male Teachers](#)
- [Preference for Early Marriages](#)
- [Female's Perspectives on the Effectiveness of These Barriers](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

### Abstract

The study primarily aims to identify and analyze socio-cultural obstacles that prevent women from pursuing higher education in rural Quetta. It focuses on examining how women perceive the effectiveness of these barriers. This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the experiences of ten young female participants encountering socio-cultural obstacles that hindered their pursuit of higher education. The researchers conducted in-person interviews with participants using a semi-structured questionnaire, allowing for a full analysis of their experiences. The socio-cultural impediments examined include patriarchal culture, early marriages, priority for sons' education, co-education and male teachers, and social bias towards females. The findings indicate that although these obstacles exist, many young females do not view them as effective in discouraging their pursuit of higher education. This study highlights women's unfavorable situation in rural areas of Quetta, highlighting the need for more effective strategies to encourage women to pursue higher education.

**Keywords:** [Female Higher Education](#), [Female's Low Literacy](#), [Female Perspective](#), [Rural Area](#), [Socio-Cultural Barriers](#)

### Introduction

Education is a powerful tool for progress and change, a basic right for everyone, regardless of their gender. The United Nations (UN) stresses the significance of education for everyone, especially for females worldwide (UN, 1948). Education isn't

just about women's status; it's crucial for a country's development. A good education system can help females, gain the skills they need to be independent, responsible, and valuable members of society. It can also decrease poverty, enrich health, promote equality between genders, and boost



socio-economic growth (Tagar et al., 2019) it also helps in polishing the upcoming generations. However, Pakistan faces big challenges when it comes to education. A report from the World Economic Forum in 2017 ranked Pakistan at 139 out of 149 countries for educational achievement, showing a serious issue with education, especially for girls (WEF, 2017). This problem is even worse in rural areas, where women struggle more to get an education compared to men (Khalid, 1996). Education in Balochistan is in a dire state, with only a 46% literacy rate overall and significant gender disparities (PSLM, 2019-2020) much lower than in other provinces. In Balochistan, only 44% of individuals have ever attended school, with a significant gender gap of 58% for males and 26% for females (PSLM, 2019-2020). Across the nation, Balochistan has one of the lowest rates of female literacy, with about 78% of girls not going to school (UNICEF, 2016). In backward areas of Quetta, things aren't much better for women aiming for higher education. Traditional beliefs rooted in patriarchy dictate gender roles and expectations, holding women back from pursuing education and careers (Khan et al., 2021). Gender discrimination further exacerbates the situation, with girls facing unequal access to education compared to boys. Early marriages, a common practice in many rural areas, often interrupt girls' educational aspirations, forcing them into domestic roles at a young age. Social biases against women's education perpetuate the notion that females should prioritize household duties over schooling, stifling their personal growth and hindering regional development (Uddin I et al., 2021)

Cultural variables influence the educational opportunities for females because they believe that females must eventually get married and that it is preferable to educate males rather than females, and people hold a negative attitude toward female education. Parents are worried about dowries for their daughters' marriages, rather than their education. Furthermore, concerns about female exposure, act as significant barriers to female education (Bol Elijah Bul, 2019).

Sociocultural obstacles prevent women from pursuing higher education. Results indicate that, compared to women residing in urban centers, women from rural areas experience more obstacles when pursuing higher education. The main causes

of lower enrollment of girls in higher education include early marriages, traditional attitudes, and a lack of facilities (Malik, 2021). Furthermore, Socio-cultural barriers are the main factor affecting female education. Early marriages and male preference in the home are sociocultural obstacles that may deter girls from continuing their education. Daughters are more likely to receive assistance from parents who have greater educational attainment (Ouma, 2013).

Women's access to education becomes heavily influenced by patriarchal control, worsening gender-based disparities in educational opportunities. Under this rigid framework, less attention and emphasis are placed on the education of females compared to males. Consequently, daughters in rural areas are deprived of equitable access to valuable skills and knowledge, impeding their socioeconomic advancement. Furthermore, this patriarchal ideology encourages gender inequality, further limiting educational opportunities for women (Sultana, A. M. 2010). According to a study (Sarkar, 2022) male family members had complete influence over their daughters' education because they had to decide whether to send a girl to school or not. Our society's patriarchal mindset has an impact on women's educational opportunities.

Socio-cultural issues, including gender discrimination and conservative attitudes toward female education, are pervasive challenges faced by females seeking education, where females are not only underprivileged from their rights but also because they must do the daily domestic tasks. Furthermore, lack of opportunity and cultural norms restrict girls' access to education. There is a lack of access to education for females since government investment in education is quite low. Cultural norms restrict girls' access to education and government spending on education remains insufficient (Jackson, 2011; Sattar et al., 2012).

In Pakistan, where sociocultural barriers stand in the way of women's education, Early marriages are a major impediment as parents prioritize marriage over education for their daughters (Noureen & Awan, 2011). A study by (Maqsood et al., 2012) highlights challenges faced by girls in accessing higher education, including gender role expectations, male favoritism, safety concerns, and societal pressure regarding marriage. These barriers

reflect the influence of gender discrimination and patriarchal norms on girls' admission to higher educational institutions. Moreover, socio-cultural taboos, early marriages, and household burdens perpetuate educational barriers for females, violating their human rights and limiting their access to proper professions (Iqbal et al., 2013).

The societal approach and cultural norms are the dominant problems regarding girls' education (Tareen, H and Muhammad, 2021). Society plays a major role in hindering female education. Education in any country is gradually enhanced depending on the support offered to women's education. The environment for female education is not entirely encouraging because females are discriminated against as compared to males (Alam, S. 2017).

Sociocultural factors negatively influence girls' education in Pakistan, and this is intensified in Balochistan. In the traditional culture of Quetta, girls are married at a young age, and for that reason, girls must leave their education and get married. Several studies portray that married women in rural Balochistan are bound to household work and fulfill the obligations of the extended family of their husbands and that is the reason that females are not allowed to continue with their education in higher institutions since society will not accept educated girls, because they may bring knowledge and challenge the cultural norms of the society (Kakar et al., 2017).

## Methodology

The study uses a qualitative research method due to the unique social-cultural and geographical characteristics of the rural Quetta. This approach has been adopted to understand sociocultural barriers that hinder women from attaining tertiary education in this area. Face-to-face questionnaires were administered to participants in the form of semi-structured interviews. This form of data collection allowed for the collection of opinions, beliefs, emotions, and feelings from the participants regarding the study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Demographic information and findings on respondents' experiences of socio-cultural barriers towards higher education were obtained through the questionnaire. The study was conducted with young females of 18 to 23 years old who had completed their college education but faced challenges to pursue further higher education. Ten purposively selected volunteers were recruited from the rural areas of Quetta and efforts were made to look for participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Interview data collected were analyzed thematically to provide a qualitative analysis of the study. Codes were initially created, and themes were determined by analyzing patterns in the data (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The analytic method was directed by Braun & Clarke's (2013) approach, which included familiarizing oneself with the data, creating codes, identifying themes, examining and defining them, and writing them up.

**Table 1**

*Themes and subcategories generated after data collection*

Total Themes	Subcategories
1. Patriarchy	-
2. Preference was given to the son's Education	Gender discrimination Cost and benefit ratio
3. Co-education and male teachers	-
4. Social bias toward female	-
5. Preference for Early Marriages	-

## Results and Analysis of Findings:

### Patriarchy

Pakistan constitutes a male-dominated and patriarchal culture, especially in rural areas where patriarchy prevails, and only male family members

have the authority to make decisions. Patriarchy is considered one of the major variables impacting female tertiary education. Most respondents stated that the conservative outlook of males affects their educational pursuits. A respondent reported:

"My brothers never liked me pursuing my dreams. After my father's worsening health, they stopped me from being university admission. They believe that educated and career-orientated females are not respected by society, as they don't have any sense of running a household, and their character is questioned"

### **Preference was given to the Son's Education:**

#### **Gender Discrimination**

In our society, women experience gender discrimination in every aspect of their life. Where women are given less educational options and men are thought to be superior to them. Male education has priority over female education in male-dominated cultures because men regulate the decisions.

The division of tasks and responsibilities between men and women appears to be profoundly embedded in the culture. The obvious division of labor which states that women will never be equal to men in terms of opportunities and educational attainment, may perpetuate gender inequality. It confines women's educational opportunities as Females are undervalued in households, and their hard work and studies are never acknowledged.

A respondent narrated, "I am never supported by my father in my studies, he is always cautious and interested in my brothers' academic performances but not mine because my father thinks that females can never become equivalent to boys no matter how much educated they get. Fathers are more concerned about their son, their education, job, and future, as their perception regarding females being the breadwinner is quite negative."

Males are regarded as superior to females, leading to fewer opportunities for females in the educational field. Male education is preferred over female education because men are more independent and have better access to public areas, but women are often constrained to private spaces such as their homes and communities, whilst men have greater access to public places.

Respondent responded "The cultural problem is that people think females are supposed to be a sign of pride and dignity of the family and higher

education of females is not perceived as a good act. They think females are the creatures who must live within the boundary of four walls".

#### **Cost and Benefit Ratio**

In rural Quetta, parents think that investing in a girl's education will benefit her future in-laws more than their own family. This perspective prevents parents from making their daughters' education a priority.

A respondent stated, "In my area, many females aspire to pursue higher education, but they face significant barriers. Parents often remind them that their eventual marriage will lead them away from their household, where their income will benefit their future in-laws instead of themselves. This discouragement adds to the challenge of accessing education, as it's perceived as less valuable than preparing for marriage."

Moreover, parents encourage males' education since they think sons are supposed to care for their elderly parents. This perspective led parents to consider investing in their son's education as a type of retirement planning.

#### **Social Bias Towards Females**

Rural society displays a biased mindset about women's education. Most respondents claimed that their parents' opinions toward their educational goals are shaped by society. The conservative view of society prevents many parents from advocating for their daughters' higher education, therefore they opt to stick to social norms instead of taking a stand for them.

Respondent stated "My parents were supportive, but my extended family tried to influence them. They told my parents to start looking for my marriage proposal instead of sending me for higher education because families face many problems in getting a suitable proposal for their more educated daughters".

Respondents showed concern about social bias towards them and believed that their educational achievement is dependent on society's positive attitude.

Respondent stated "The most significant and major problem in our society is the mindset of our people. They need to know that education does not make a woman or a female bold. It needs to be

highlighted that our culture does not stop us from studying whereas our people think so. Our people have changed the culture according to their mindset rather than mending their ways”.

### **Coeducation and Male Teachers**

Co-education is more generally accepted and done in urban areas, indicating a more progressive mindset. Rural communities, on the other hand, seem to have more traditional beliefs and are less accommodating towards co-education and male teachers. These societal taboos and misconceptions may discourage parents from enrolling their daughters in co-educational schools. These taboos and attitudes may be rooted in fears about modesty, safety, or traditional gender roles.

Respondent expressed “Growing up in a conservative family, we were never allowed to talk to the opposite gender, except if they were from our own family. This became a great problem for me, as the institutes we have here are either co-education or have male teachers, and my family was against this because they thought of the possibility, of me interacting with males, which is not agreeable”.

### **Preference for Early Marriages**

Early marriage is a source of concern in Quetta's rural areas. Females are married at a young age to help them settle into their lives and protect their future. Families look for financially secure partners for their girls to ensure their well-being. They choose a decent partner for their daughter with the expectation that the husband will give financial assistance and protection to his wife. But amid all of this, many dreams are shattered as parents prioritize their daughter's marriage over their education.

A respondent stated "The younger me could have never imagined, that one day I will end up as a housewife like every other female. I had some dreams and ambitions too, but I never got a chance, neither was my opinion considered. Moreover, it's not just me who faced all these problems, every other female in our area, who once dreamt of doing something big in their lives, is now busy taking care of their houses, their in-laws, or their kids."

### **Female's Perspectives on the Effectiveness of These Barriers**

Most respondents, when asked if these obstacles were successful, said that they didn't consider them. Society and their parents are the only ones who think women are inferior to males. Everyone believes in themselves and is confident that if given the opportunity, they will be able to overcome all these obstacles. All they need is a chance from their family and society to show everyone else that women are not inferior to men.

According to another participant "These barriers are not effective at all, in fact these are pointless, and if I get a chance right now. I will surely complete my education, and set my future so that I don't depend on my father or my brothers any more, moreover, many females are living in hostels, so can I, I am not scared of traveling alone in a van and bus, I just need permission from my family, if they are willing to send me to university then I can manage everything”.

The respondents were quite confident in themselves and other girls in their area, as females believed that if given the opportunity, they could achieve great things.

A participant responded “The females of our area are very hardworking and intelligent so they can achieve a lot and make a change if they are allowed to get higher education but there are a lot of females who are not allowed to go and pursue their dreams. Moreover, there is a higher rate of female population in this area, let's suppose we have 20 houses in this area, and if only one female from each house goes out and gets higher education it will make a great change in the society.”

Female respondents voiced concern about how these limitations would affect their access to higher education, believing that enrolment rates in rural areas would remain stable and never increase. After all, these restrictions drastically hinder women's access to higher education.

A respondent stated “These barriers are keeping too much pressure on females to carry on with education and it is creating a negative impact on our future generations as well. These barriers are the cause of the low rate of literacy in our region”.

According to another respondent “Degrading female education has become a norm now, it is not easy to gain education in this environment, and these barriers are affecting us in their manner”.

## **Discussion**

This study reveals that socio-cultural barriers exist and impede female access to university education in Quetta's rural regions. The results indicate that girls in the rural regions of Quetta are disadvantaged in the educational system in comparison to males. This is attributed to social culture, beliefs, and norms that limit women to their homes more so women than male children. The research reveals that most women in the rural regions of Quetta are denied their basic right to be educated.

The results of this study align with previous research (Maqsood et al., 2012) which states that the society of Pakistan is male-dominated and therefore restricts women from accessing higher education. According to the findings of the study gender stereotypes and traditional values are barriers, and women are rarely involved in decisions regarding education. The fathers, brothers, or uncles from the father's side of the family make choices regarding whether females in the family can seek higher education or not. This kind of male control shows deep-rooted gender dynamics where traditional norms and family expectations often restrict women's choices and opportunities.

The responses from females, as noted by (Sattar et al., 2012), can also help in understanding the existing gender relations and the social culture that prevails concerning education in rural regions. A belief that seems to be deeply rooted in many traditional societies, as observed by (Sattar et al., 2012) is the preference for educating sons over daughters. Another one of the stated rationales for investing in the education of sons is the belief that they are better equipped to become providers and heads of families. Thus, they may spend more on their sons' education as they consider it to be the key to ensuring family stability and wealth in the future (Sattar et al., 2012). The effects of this gender bias in education are numerous. Not only hinders personal and professional advancement for individuals but also reinforces systemic inequality and social injustice. Due to a lack of access to

education girls and women have lower chances of employment, social mobility, and empowering themselves.

The respondents mentioned that gender segregation and Honor preservation are well-established cultural beliefs, for which females are discouraged from attending co-education institutions. This phenomenon thus directs attention to other cultural practices that perpetuate conventional gender roles and marginalize women in decision-making processes regarding education. The rejection of choosing co-education not only limits the educational opportunities of female students but also enhances the gender gap in higher education attainment. This supports the finding of (Maqsood et al., 2012) who found that the significant hurdle faced by females in pursuing higher education is co-education from the perspectives of Honor and gender Relations. Impeding women from co-educational institutions is the perception of traditional rural communities that co-education is a potential threat to female modesty and Honor.

This paper, based on the societal perspective of female higher education as discussed by (Alam, S., 2017; Tareen & Mohammadi, 2021) shows that women face many challenges when pursuing higher education. Both findings further clarify that society plays a huge role in shaping the educational opportunities for women. The role of society in determining female educational opportunities is another focal point stated in both studies. The negative attitudes towards female higher education are an obstacle to their access to resources and opportunities. This societal bias not only limits a person's potential but also plays a part in the gender inequalities we see nowadays in educational achievements and employment opportunities among females.

Early marriage is becoming a common culture that significantly affects female education in rural areas of Quetta. (Kakar et al., 2017) explored the role that early marriage plays in denying women higher education in rural Balochistan. Once women are married, they are often pressured into household chores and responsibilities, pushing their educational needs behind those of the family. This cultural belief not only hinders them from achieving education but also reinforces traditional gender roles that domesticate women more than

men. Moreover, (Kakar et al., 2017) state that educated women in rural Balochistan are hardly accepted for marriage. This societal preference for less educated brides also limits females' chances of attaining higher education since early marriage becomes a priority for families rather than seeking education for their daughters.

The findings of (Kakar et al., 2017) are supported by literature, including the work of (Noureen & Awan 2011) which underscores the deep-rooted concept of early marriages in many traditional societies. This practice extends gender unevenness by affecting females' educational journeys and reinforcing societal norms that prioritize marriage and domestic life over academic pursuits.

The conclusions drawn from this study indicate that socio-cultural factors are the main causes of low enrollment rates of women into programs of higher learning because many women in rural areas are denied the opportunity to attend university. Despite these barriers, a vast majority of female participants do not account for their lack of education by these impediments. However, they blame these hurdles on society and family norms that consider them the inferior gender. The findings show that female respondents see themselves as resilient and strong individuals capable of overcoming socio-cultural hurdles. These young women have a strong commitment and confidence in themselves. There seems to be a disparity between these young females' perspectives and the cultural standards and expectations that are placed on them.

Despite the perception held by society that they are weak or need protection, female respondents believe they are strong and competent.

In addition, the female participants indicate a strong aspiration to be the primary earners and make financial contributions to their households. This challenges conventional gender norms as the women do not perceive these obstacles as effective.

### **Conclusion**

The current study investigates the numerous socio-cultural hurdles that restrict female access to university education and the impact of these restrictions on their educational pursuits, as well as an analysis of their effectiveness in rural regions of Quetta. The obstacles encountered by the female participants are interrelated and interact with one another. The study suggests that these constraints are not individual occurrences, but rather components of a complex web of difficulties that affect female's willingness to attain higher education. Traditional norms and cultural expectancies have a considerable impact on the educational opportunities available to women. The study suggests comparing barriers faced by females at different educational levels and settings, identifying common and unique challenges, exploring success stories to inform overcoming barriers, and conducting quantitative research to study female higher education barriers more broadly. Cultural and social customs vary by community and cause these obstacles. To bridge the gap, female higher education should be promoted while respecting traditional values. Females in rural regions of Quetta are enthusiastic about university education, highlighting the need to eliminate these barriers and pass laws that offer equal educational opportunities.

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