

The Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on  
Women's Access to Higher Education in Pakistan

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Dania Malik

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## ***Abstract***

Educated women have an important role in the socio-economic development of a country. However, in Pakistan women have low participation in socio-economic development of a country because of low literacy rate. Tertiary enrollment rate of girls is low in Pakistan as they face obstacles that limit their access to higher education. The aim of the study is to explore the socio-cultural barriers women face in Pakistan and the influence on tertiary enrollment rate. The study employs a qualitative approach involving the collection of primary data in order to examine the girl's perceptions of and experiences with the socio-cultural factors that influenced their admission into higher education institutes in Pakistan. For qualitative research interviews were conducted to examine the socio cultural obstacles girls' face in getting admission into higher education in Pakistan. Semi structured interviews were collected from seventeen (17) respondents that includes experts, parents, drop outs, university and college going girls. Interviews were comprehended by means of thematic coding analysis. Results showed that stereotypes, patriarchal and conservative society, early marriages, lack of facilities for girls, parents' attitude, harassment etc. exist in society that limit women's access to higher education. Findings revealed that women's tertiary enrollment rate in Pakistan is increasing due to increasing job opportunities, awareness. Some women use coping strategies to minimize or tackle the barriers that hinder their access to higher education.

## Chapter: 1 Introduction and literature review

### ***1.1 The role of HE attainment in economic and social development***

Higher education is a pre-requisite for economic, social and cultural development of a society. It is not only beneficial for the society but for individuals as well. Higher education benefits the whole society including individuals, industries and economy of a country (Gracia, 2009). Evidence suggests that higher education has a positive impact on development and social change of a country (Rathgeber, 1995). It aids in fostering insight regarding the societal norms; equips young women with traits such as 'self-reliance', makes their overall quality of life better, eliminates various sorts of discrimination (based on social class, gender, religion, beliefs etc.) and uplifts vital factors such as democratic governance (McClelland & Evans, 1992). According to literature, infant mortality is said to have an indirect relationship with each year of a mother's schooling. To be precise, each year that the mother attends school it decreases the infant mortality chances by 5%-10% (Sathar, Haq, & Lloyd, 2000). Because she knows better about the vaccination, medicines and diet than an uneducated mother. So, it improves the quality of life (Ghazala Noureen, 2011). Higher education aims individual to acquire skills and knowledge and introduce competitive labor force in the market. (Goel, 2004) mentioned the linked between tertiary education and the knowledge economy as creating a win-win scenario, in which the demand for high-skilled work is satisfied by the university graduates. (Ringrose, 2007) argued that higher education meet the demands of labor market for relevant skills and ensure good labor market outcomes which results in the economic development of the nation. It not only develops an economy through skilled labor force but also tends to make a society and quality of life better (Jacobs, 1996).

## **1.2 The role of Higher education in women's empowerment and gender equality:**

One does not need to be part of any 'privileged' group in order to get education. Being a human is enough of a reason to be provided with quality education, as education is a 'Fundamental Human Right' (as advocated by 'International Human Right' institutions). Some of the examples include the 'Universal Declaration on Human Rights' in 1948, 'The International Covenant of Economic, Cultural and Social Rights' declared in 1966, along with the 'Africa Charter on Peoples' and Humans' Rights' that was proposed in 198. All of which support the upholding of the stature of Education as a 'Fundamental Human Right' (Heyzer, 2005).

Education is essential for women's empowerment. It empowers women socially, politically, economically and psychologically (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005). Education is most essential to empower women in all spheres of life (Balooch & Ur-Rehman, 2013). According to (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005); (Shaukat & Pell, 2016) increasing access to education for women play a vital role in gender equality. Literature illustrates that gender equality can be achieved through giving women education as it enables girls to participate in social, economic and political life and is a base for development of a democratic and inclusive society (Radford, 2000). (Mahbub-ul-Haq, 2002) quotes examples of some countries and draws a link between the literacy rate and gender equality in those countries. He states that women's literacy rate reflects gender equality. For example, female literacy rate is under 40% in South Asian countries, in several cases it's under 20%, and gender inequality in these countries are very high. Moreover, educated women will occupy at top positions in decision-making organs. This helps in women inclusive policies which eliminated inequality based on gender (Lyon, 1999).

(Haq, 2002) reported that World Bank recommends developing country to increase investment in women higher education as it tends to alleviate poverty and promote development. Investing in women's education yields high social rate of returns. Examples from the past showed that educated women play a significant role in the development of a society (Khan, 2007). Qualified women, who have acquired higher education, not only become strong and reliable leaders of the society, but also emerge as efficient role models for young girls (Rehman & Qadeer, 2011). Literature claims a link between female participation in labor and economic development. (Kabeer, 2005) pointed that higher percentage of female labor reflects high GDP. (Heyzer, 2005) has a similar view and states that countries that have high rate of females in labor market has high GDP. Female education does not only make the 'literacy charts' of the country go higher, but it also fuels the economic growth and productivity of a nation (Sathar, Haq, & Lloyd, 2000).

### ***1.3 Labor force participation issue***

When it comes to women's political empowerment, Pakistan holds the 93<sup>rd</sup> rank, among a ranking of 153 nations. According to the GGGR (Globe Gender Gap Report), 12 percent of women in Pakistan are serving at ministerial positions, and a mere 20.2 percent women are appointed as legislators in Pakistan (World Economic Forum, 2020). ILO data indicates that Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for men is 82.5% which is more than three times higher than women's rate that is 24.8% ( International Labour Organization , 2020). This is one of the reason for low economic activity and under development of Pakistan. Since 2006 the Global Gender Gap Index has been measuring the extent of gender-based gaps among four key dimensions that are: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. According to Global Gender Gap Index reports, Pakistan lies on 56<sup>th</sup> position of 58 countries in gender equality. This reflects that gender disparity exists in Pakistan (World

Economic Forum, 2020). Only one-quarter of women participate in the labor force (i.e. working or looking to work) compared with 85% of men (148th). When it comes to leadership roles and senior positions, a mere five percent of them are held by women across Pakistan. Women account for just eighteen percent of share in Pakistan's labor income. Studies have effectively shown that while most (if not all) countries have been successful in bridging the educational gender gap, the women-to-men literacy ratio is still crippled in Pakistan. Women literacy rate is a mere 20 percent, which is lesser than half in comparison with men's literacy rate (which is 71 percent). As discussed earlier, the political gender gap which exists in Pakistan is also worth a mention; in the year 2017, not even a single female minister was a part of the twenty-five member cabinet. However, in January 2019, a total of only 3 women, were made to be a part of the same twenty-five member cabinet (Higdon, 2020).

#### ***1.4 Reasons of lack of women's access to Higher Education in Pakistan***

According to Annual Report (2008-09) issued by Higher education Commission of Pakistan; 358,000 girls are out of universities of Pakistan. 43% of girls are deprived from Higher education including distance learning programs of public and private universities (Maqsood, 2012). Lack of access to education results in adult women literacy of 29 % as compared with 57 % literacy of men (Sen, 2001). The lack of women's access to Higher Education in Pakistan is due to following reasons:

#### **1.4.1 Gender disparity in HE access and attainment in Pakistan:**

In developed countries gender equality exists in all walks of life including higher education. Women enjoy equal access to Higher education in developed countries. Women constitute 52% of tertiary enrollment rate where as in developing countries only 27% women are enrolled in higher education (UNESCO, 2010). Gender disparity not only operates at higher education level it starts from higher secondary to university level (Khan, 2007). Developed countries country prioritize higher education. However, there are a few developing countries where access to Higher education is still limited and Pakistan is one of them. Gender inequality in education is pronounced in South Asia and in Pakistan (UNESCO, 2010). In Pakistan Gender inequality exists in all spheres of life (Khan, 2007). Gender is one the factors which limit the access of Higher Education. Tertiary enrollment rate of girls in Pakistan in year 2011-2012 was 22% whereas, 46% % is the tertiary enrollment for men. These figures reflect that gender disparity exists in Education sector as well. Though Pakistan protects the rights of women through legislations. Moreover, constitution of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives equal rights to women in all spheres of life and ensure gender equality (Rehman & Qadeer, 2011).

#### **1.4.2 Socio-cultural factors**

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is Muslim majority, male dominated and conservative society and women face disadvantages because of discrimination that exists within the fabric of society. Women are considered weak, less, dependent on men and their role in society is just a house-maker. This mindset is more prominent in rural areas of Pakistan as compared to urban areas. (Sen, 2001). The reason for low enrollment rate of women in higher education is deep rooted in Pakistan's socio-cultural nature (Shehzad, 2002). (Isani & Virk, 2003) identified one of the main

reason of low women tertiary enrolment rate and lack of access to Higher education. According to them conservative belief prevails in the society of Pakistan that women are submissive and women are from getting education at higher levels. (Balooch & Ur-Rehman, 2013) observed that stereotypes and male dominated patriarchal society tends to negatively impact their access in Higher education.

(Maqsood, 2012) reported that according to USAID survey, women are harassed and threatened in public transport on their way to job or colleges. According to survey results, 12% of the respondents stopped going to school or colleges because they were frightened from the harassment they have experienced. So, the culture of harassing women in Pakistan hinders their access to education.

According to a survey collected by (UNESCO, 2010) , 68% of girls participated in the survey reported that they had a desire to enroll in universities but could not able to fulfill their dreams because of early marriages. Families did not allow them to go to universities because they wanted their daughter to be married in early age between 16 years-21 years. The prevalent idea in Pakistan which states that in order to make a woman's wellbeing, respect and safety intact, one must subject them to early marriage is one of the core reasons why Pakistan tops the charts when it comes to early marriages of women across the nation. Parents are only considered responsible if they make timely arrangements to get their daughters married at an early age. If they do not make these arrangements, they are regarded in the society as irresponsible. This trend is less common in urban areas or cities. This culture is common in rural areas of country, majority of areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, backward areas of Sindh province, and mostly areas in Baluchistan. Poverty is also one of the most significant reasons why women are subjected to early marriages in Pakistan. Early marriage does not only make their futures brighter, according to their families, but they also lift

off financial burdens of these young girls off of their parents. These early marriages, typically happening with school-aged young girls, are one of the most notable barriers in promotion of equal gender rights and acquisition of higher education across the country (Morley, 2007).

### **1.4.3 Lack of facilities for women in universities and cost of Higher Education**

In Pakistan, a significant number of higher education institutes are co-education and established by private or military sector. This limits the access of women in universities as most girls are from conservative and traditional families. Due to strict, religious or tribal family background they are prohibited to go to universities with boys. This is main obstacle in girl's access to higher education (Khan, 2007). Lack of university transportation, on campus hostels, proper and separate washrooms for women, all-girls-campus, and evening timings of classes make it difficult for women to enroll in universities (Cammish, 1997).

There are gender issues in co-educational institutions in Muslim majority countries, given the traditional cultural perception of the women in society (Balooch & Ur-Rehman, 2013). Many countries have encouraged the establishment of all women's colleges and universities in an effort to empower women by introducing contemporary girls courses (Isani & Virk, 2003). According to (Maqsood, 2012) girls from rural areas are more disadvantaged than urban areas because rural areas of Pakistan do not have universities. (Balooch & Ur-Rehman, 2013) girls from rural areas have to travel in public transport to acquire higher education and in most cases they have to reside in hostels. This hinders the access of women in higher education because conservative families do not send their daughter in hostels.

The high costs of higher education is another reason for low rate of women's participation in tertiary education. Although different Higher Educational Institutions vary from each other in

terms of the fees they charge per semester, but according to statistics, they can charge as high as ‘four lakh and eighty thousand’ rupees (which is 3,106 US-Dollars) each semester. Semester fees at public institutions might be relatively less, averaging from sixty thousand rupees to ninety thousand rupees (which is \$390-\$585) (Hunter, 2020). Families prefer son’s education over daughters so if they cannot afford the education they will prefer to educate their sons only.

However, it is observed that despite the socio-cultural obstacle, women are getting higher education. (Choudhry, Mutalib, & Ismail, 2019). According to (Government of Pakistan, 2013), from year 2011-12 women in higher education has increased to approximately 31%. The figure mentioned is above the requirement of a less developed nations. According to (Choudhry, Mutalib, & Ismail, 2019) mostly developing countries are below this figure. Pakistan is above the average level of female participation rate among developing countries. There has been some improvement in Pakistan.

### ***1.5 Impact of socio-cultural factors on girl’s education in different countries:***

#### **1.5.1 In African countries:**

Garowe town in Puntland is still lagging behind as far as girls’ participation in secondary and higher education is concerned. Parent’s attitude on girl child education, religious beliefs, gender preferences and female role influence on girls’ participation in education (Hellen, 2017). The gap is significant in countries such as in Angola 20% women are enrolled in secondary and tertiary education, 20% in Eritrea, and 23% in Ethiopia and Malawi, only 5% in Somalia and 35% in Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition, drop-out rates of girls in the region remain unacceptably high throughout secondary education. In 2011, boys in Somalia had higher completion rates than girls 27.3 percent for girls as compared to 44.9 percent for boys, in Malawi completion rates for girls

are 13.8 percent where as 22.3% completion rate was reported for boys. The reason for low enrollment of girls in secondary and higher education are embedded in the social and cultural values. Girls have to work and earn money to pay fees for their brothers. Girl child is exposed to or engages in at home which consumes her time instead of concentrating in her studies. Early marriages is another reason for low participation of women in secondary and higher education. Girls who are below 18 years of age are married and they cannot continue their studies after marriage. (Delprato, 2015) argues that in Ghana low enrollment rate of girls are due to early marriages, religious practices, household chores, boy child preference. They prefer girls to work and earn so that parents can pay for their son's tuition fee.

### **1.5.2 In South Asian countries:**

(UNICEF, 2019) reported that early marriages of children is a common phenomenon across the whole South Asia, which has been critiqued worldwide by activists and NGOs. This process of getting a girl married at a very young age puts a stop to their process of education, with their husbands eventually becoming the prime focus of their lives. If we take a look at Nepal's statistics, over 40% girls are married by the average age of 15 years (Cammish, 1997). Although the practice of giving/taking dowry is frowned upon, and even illegal in most countries across South Asia, but it is still widely practiced by the inmates of the respective nations. If a girl is young, less dowry is demanded from her parents, which serves as a reason why parents are tempted to marry off their daughters at an early age.

Once a girl gets older in terms of age, the problem of maintaining bodily integrity, and avoiding any incidence of sexual harassment becomes crucial and even oppressive for her. 'Eve-teasing' is a common term, usually used to refer to sexual harassment among many South Asian countries,

such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc. where this act is also widely reported. Many girls are deprived of education when they reach puberty because of the sole reason that there is a risk for them being subjected to rape, assault, abduction or even murder when they are on their way to, or back, from their schools. Girls who reside in areas that are far-away from their educational institutions are at a greater risk for experiencing all these incidents. This is also one of the major contributing factors why some parents send their daughters willingly to poor-quality educational institutions, while their brothers are allowed to go to far-off located educational institutions which have better quality education. Madhya Pradesh, India has been among one of the pioneer states of a South Asian country to take the initiative of para-teacher or helpers picking girls up from their homes each morning, and then dropping them off to their homes after school, to ensure increase among student enrollment and retention rates. Their 'Educational Guarantee Scheme' also promotes safety and enrollment rates of young girls by constructing schools within a one-kilometer radius of their houses (Cammish, 1997).

In India menstruation is regarded as a taboo, and in some cases, even a 'polluting factor' which makes the woman and her surroundings impure. This makes them acquire feeble knowledge regarding the process of menstruation in general. In India, there are some areas where they still think that girl is impure when she gets her menstruation. So, she is isolated from family members and has to live in a separate room. She is not allowed to meet or go out during her menstruation cycle. This taboo has seriously affected girl's education in India. Every 2 out of 10 girls drop out of the schools due to periods (Anand, 2015). Long-term commitment, and multi-dimensional techniques are some of the elements needed to change the women's perception of their bodies being regarded as 'polluting agents'. These perceptions are deep-rooted within their cultures, as the men, caste, religion and family members support this very notion.

## **1.6 Research Gap**

Several important observations are evident from the analysis of the studies conducted prior to this research. These annotations are not conclusive, but can help determine the course for future research. There are certain gaps in the research related to impact of socio-cultural factors on Pakistani women's access to higher education. These gaps include the inadequate research on impact of socio-cultural hindrance on women's participation rate in higher education, the factors, trends, or policy interventions that allowed an increasing % of enrollment rate of women in universities and coping strategies if any they have used to overcome the barriers. Over half of the studies such as (Jamal, 2016), (Choudhry, Mutalib, & Ismail, 2019) have been conducted in the past have focused solely on examining the impact of socio-cultural obstacles on women's access to primary or secondary education level. While such research is without a doubt significant, it is imperative that additional studies be conducted in order to analyze the social and cultural factors that limit girls' access in getting admission in HEIs and during higher education. Some policy interventions have been implemented in Pakistan in past to increase the enrollment rate of women in higher education. Such policy interventions include establishment of all-girls-colleges, facility of proper sanitation/washrooms, university buses to pick and drop students, morning shift classes and hiring of more female teachers and staffs (Jamal, 2016). Specifically, there is a need for research that assesses the impact of policy interventions that increased the enrollment rate of women at Higher Education level despite social and cultural limitations in Pakistan. When it comes to access to education and women most research has focused on assessing the gender discrimination prevailing in the society.

## Chapter.2 Research Design

### 2.1 Data Collection

#### 2.1.1 Qualitative approach

The method used to collect data for this research was qualitative approach which includes primary data. Qualitative approach were chosen over quantitative approach to study this phenomena as qualitative methods are intended to achieve depth of understanding while quantitative methods are intended to achieve breadth of understanding (Palinkas, 2015). Similarly, this study explored the types and influence of socio and cultural factors that limits the access of women to higher education institutes in Pakistan and not how much women's access is affected by socio-cultural obstacles. For qualitative research interviews were conducted to examine the girl's perceptions of and experiences with the socio-cultural factors that influenced their admission into higher education in Pakistan. The data was collected by using the technique of semi-structured interviewing. Interviews are an important instrument for generating data in qualitative research (Kabir, 2016). Semi-structured interviews were conducted keeping in mind the fact that as a rule of thumb, a case number of ~30 is often mentioned and suitable for collecting primary data. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because it allowed to collect more data on the themes that were identified by using previous theories and literature. Furthermore, study identified research gap in the literature and aimed to explore new themes as well. Hence, semi-structured interviews were conducted as it generated new themes. (Adams, 2015) semi-structure interviews are effective instrument to collect qualitative and open ended data. The study aimed to explore the participants' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, experiences and semi-structured interviews are best to use in this case.

(Vaughn, 2018) argues that purpose of semi structured interviews are to gather information from the informants who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs related to the topic of interest. Despite limited time, the interviews allowed the collection of a wide range of responses; that were considered sufficient to determine conclusions for the study. The number of responses were not enough to reach the saturation but similar trend was observed in all the responses. The study adopted qualitative methods which place primary emphasis on saturation i.e., “obtaining a comprehensive understanding by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is acquired” (Ilker Etikan, 2016). However, due to limited amount of timeframe it was not possible to reach theoretical saturation which is one of the limitations of this study.

### **2.1.2 Data Collection Instrument**

The semi-structured interviews were collected from five experts working in academia, policy institutes/think tanks, education department, and higher education institutes in Pakistan. Keeping in mind the complex socio- cultural phenomena of the study it was important to conduct interviews from parents, girls enrolled in A-levels or higher secondary level, universities and dropped out from the Higher education institutes in Pakistan residing in rural and urban areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab province for the purpose of a fruitful analysis and conclusion. The respondents belong to rural and urban areas of different districts of Pakistan. All the questions asked were open-ended and in-depth. The interview questions designed were different for each category of interviewees (experts, parents, girls dropped out from universities, enrolled in Higher education institutes and higher secondary education). The purpose of conducting interviews from women who were who dropped out from universities, enrolled in HEIs, higher secondary level and parents were to analyze the relationship of our variables within the population chosen. Interviews were collected to explore their opinions and life experiences on the socio and cultural factors that

they are facing during higher education. The interview questions for women and their parents contained all related questions of social and cultural problems women are or were facing in accessing and pursuing higher education. Whereas, interviews from the experts on the other hand paved way for a deeper understanding of impact of socio-cultural factors on women's access to Higher education and effectiveness of policies and interventions in combating this issue.

*Table 1: Overview of interviewees' background characteristics.*

<b>Respondents:</b>	<b>Number of responses(n):</b>	<b>Area (Rural or Urban):</b>	<b>Income level (Low and middle income):</b>
Parents	2	Rural	Low income
Women dropped out from universities	2	Rural Urban	Low income Middle income
Girls enrolled in higher secondary level( A levels or Fsc)	3	Rural Urban Rural	Low income Middle income Low income
Women enrolled in higher education institutes	5	Rural Urban Urban Rural Urban	Low income Low income Middle income Middle income Middle income
Experts working in academia, policy institutes, think tanks, education departments and higher education institutes.	5	-	-

## **2.2 Sampling:**

The respondents including women enrolled in higher secondary level and higher education, dropped out from universities and parents were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The study aimed to purposively pick women who belongs to low or middle income household. The income bracket of the girls interviewed was known to me prior to research as they were part

of my extended social network. Using purposive sample causes selection bias to occur (Baltar, 2012). However, selection bias is not a relevant category in qualitative interviews, because it is not the intention of this study to draw inferences from an interview sample to a population as in surveys. The rural and urban areas were selected through purposive sampling (non-probability). In order to make use of resources that are limited, purposeful selection of qualitative inquiry samples is done in order to yield cases that are 'rich in information' (Suri, 2011). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. Furthermore, the urban and rural areas selected can be categorized under purposive sampling as it was selected based on the characteristics of the population residing in those areas and the goals of the study. Considering the convenience, rural and urban areas were selected from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab province. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab province have rural and urban areas. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is considered a smaller, less developed, less advanced and relatively poor province of Pakistan. Whereas, Punjab is rich, larger area, modern and developed province of Pakistan. Punjab has wide range of higher education institutes ranging from public, private and military administered universities. Whereas, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has public, private and military administered universities but there are few HEIs in this province as compared to Punjab.

Due to the complex socio- cultural phenomena of the study it was important to conduct interviews from parents, girls enrolled in A-levels or higher secondary level, universities and dropped out from the higher education institutes in Pakistan for the purpose of a fruitful analysis and conclusion. Women were sampled in three different situations that is at higher secondary level, higher education level and dropped out form HEIs. It was important to include girls enrolled in higher secondary education in the study to see what factors they will consider while enrolling in

the universities and what are the barriers they face and how it influence their decision of continuing higher education and choice of university. Women enrolled in universities were included in sample because it is important for the study to analyze their experiences, personal stories and perception about the socio-cultural barrier they face in their daily life and how it influences their access to higher education. Girls who dropped out from the universities were sampled to know the reasons for their drop out and what barriers they had faced during higher education.

On the other hand, experts were selected using snowballing sampling technique. Snowball or chain referral sampling was opted because samples with the target characteristics were not easily accessible due to closure of offices, universities, policy research institutes etc. as strict covid-19 lockdown was imposed in Pakistan. Therefore, respondents referred the next expert with the target characteristics. Two experts out of the total experts reached out for the interviews did not respond and zero declined.

### ***2.3 Data Collection Methodology***

The procedure adopted for data collection was simple and cheap. It started with anticipating all issues that may arise during the data collection such as strict COVID-19 lockdown after third wave of corona in Pakistan, political strikes, or road blockages due to security threats. Therefore, in order to conduct interviews from respondents different online mediums were used: Zoom video call, WhatsApp audio call and emails. Face to face interview approach was not adopted by the study due to covid-19 lockdown, travel restrictions and travel costs. Online interviews were best suited and had considerable advantages under this scenario. Online interviews saved time, bridged the travel distance and time zones between the area of research and researcher. Interviews from experts were conducted online via Zoom video call. Whereas, interviews from parents and students

were conducted by WhatsApp audio call. The medium of communication was kept flexible according to preference of respondents. Therefore, a flexible schedule was prepared for the collection of data online; in accordance with the schedule, convenience and availability of all the respondents. Moreover, the interviewees were given the opportunity to decline or skip the question. The questions were arranged in a meaningful order and format, using straight forward and appropriate language.

The interview questions were pre-tested/approved by the thesis supervisor to guarantee that it would not offend any group or ethnicity and to ensure that interview questions will yield the insights needed. I took feedback from my thesis supervisor to approve the interview protocol to make sure that questions are aligned with the themes. I revised the Interview protocol after few initial pilot interviews. After conducting the pilot interviews, I realized that when participants especially university going girls were asked about the lack of facilities and its impact on their access to higher education they misunderstood the question because of the lack of clarity. Most of the respondents mentioned the lack of labs, computer etc. Therefore, question was revised to make it clearer and sub-questions were added to elaborate the main question. Sub parts were added in the question to yield the insights needed as lack of facilities in this scope is limited to lack of transport, hostels, all girls' campuses etc. The disclaimer was clearly stated that the purpose of the research was academic and ensured that it will not use against or in favor of any agenda. Identities of interview were kept anonymous keeping in mind the ethical consideration and a code was assigned to each interviewee. Interviews were not recorded on Zoom and WhatsApp upon the request of interviews. Notes of responses were documented in writing during the interviews.

Table 2: Respondent's Code

Interviewee:	Code for their identity :
Parents	P1, P2
Women dropped out from universities	DP1, DP2
Girls enrolled in higher secondary level( A levels or FSC)	HS1,HS2,HS3
Women enrolled in higher education institutes	HE1, HE2, HE3,HE4, HE5,HE6
Experts	E1,E2,E3,E4,E5

Doxastic style of interview was adopted in the study as doxastic interviews help in collecting data about the topic of interest through the experiences, attitudes, and views of interviewees (Bernero-Rodoreda, 2018). I collected information about the *experiences* of women [e.g., what happened to them on campus, or on the way to campus...], *attitudes* of women [how they feel about going to university / dropping out...], *attitudes* of parents [e.g., how they felt about their daughters going to university], and to understand from the experts *how public policy works*.

Pakistan is selected as a research area because I was aware of the research problem as I spent my whole life there. I have met girls in the past who shared their experiences with me and I have seen women around me facing the socio-cultural obstacles that hinder their access to education. I being a Pakistani woman feel lucky and consider myself one of the few blessed girls who graduated without facing any socio-cultural obstacles. Furthermore, I am the first woman in my family who came abroad for higher studies. I was aware of the higher education system, socio, cultural and economic system of Pakistan. Therefore, it was relatively easy to collect data, approach people for interviews as I had social network circle in Pakistan. Prior to conducting literature review and

collecting data I was aware of the issue in detail. Prior to research I believed that socio cultural barriers exist in Pakistan and it has negative impact on women’s access to higher education so it has influenced the research design, the research process, and interpretation of research findings as my stance was not neutral. Due to my positionality I did not have a null hypothesis or neutral stance in the research.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

After collecting qualitative data, I comprehended it by means of thematic coding analysis. The process of analyzing responses started with coding the notes I took during and after the interview. The thematic coding was opted as it facilitates coding because “one already knows what one is looking for (St.Pierre, 2014). The analysis is abductive as some categories were derived from existing research, while the others were selected based on the interviews. Hybrid method of deductive and inductive approaches were used to analyze the data. In the first stage of the analysis, the data was coded roughly along major categories derived from prior to data collection given in Table#3. The inductive approach is used to derive categories as they are derived from prior studies and with the help of literature review. The themes derived from literature review were: parent’s attitude, early marriages, cost of higher education, patriarchy and conservative beliefs, harassment and lack of facilities. The deductive approach was also used to derive new categories after interviews on the basis of responses. The categories are further developed and differentiated based on the data. Finally, codes were interpreted and linked with literature and responses collected.

*Table 3 : Major categories derived from exiting literature*

<b>Total Themes:</b>
1. Stereotypes, Patriarchal and conservative society

2. Harassment
3. Early marriages
4. Parents' attitude towards girls' education
5. Cost of Higher Education
6. Lack of facilities

*Table 4: Themes and sub categories derived after collecting data*

<b>Total Themes:</b>	<b>Sub categories:</b>
1. Lack of facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Inflexible schedule and evening classes</li> <li>b) Lack of transport services</li> <li>c) Lack of onsite accommodation</li> <li>d) Few all-girls campus</li> <li>e) Lack of facilities for married women</li> <li>f) Less universities in villages and rural areas</li> </ul>
2. Parent's attitude towards girls' education	-
3. Early Marriages	-
4. Patriarchy, stereotypes and conservative mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Feudal system</li> <li>b) Women specific subjects/fields</li> </ul>
5. Issue of harassment	-

6. Cost of Higher Education	-
7. Coping strategies, policies and interventions	-
8. Reasons for change in Trend	-

## Chapter: 3 Results and analysis of findings

### 3.1 Lack of facilities

#### 3.1.1 In-flexible schedule or evening classes

According to most respondents lack of facilities negatively impact women's access and retention to higher education. Lack of on campus accommodation, university pick and drop services, evening classes and co-education universities are most highlighted issues pointed by respondents that has a significant impact on tertiary enrollment rate of women.

In response to questions related to parent's attitude and impact of inflexible timetable schedule on the women's higher education most respondents reflected that it creates hurdles in their road to completion of education. According to one of the participants enrolled in HEI, evening classes in Pakistani society which is a conservative society limits their choice of university. HE3 reflected:

*“While taking admission into higher education my parents took into account the factor of evening classes. I wanted to do Pharmacy and there were only two campuses in my city that offers Pharmacy; Comsats Institute of Science and Technology and Women*

*Medical College. Comsats institute of Science and Technology has better quality of education and ranking than Women Medical College. I wanted to take admission into Comsats University. However, it was co-ed and it has evening classes. Whereas, Women Medical College has morning classes from 9am-3pm. In my family girls are not allowed to stay out of home after Maghreb Time (after sunset). Social mobility of girls is restricted after evening time.”*

Evening classes in Pakistan are common at higher education level. Classes usually commence at 8am to 2pm till higher secondary education. Evening classes are very common in universities. So, participants enrolled in higher education and parents expressed their concern towards evening classes. Parents are not comfortable in sending their daughters to evening classes. They are reluctant because it is considered unsafe for girls to be out after Maghreb. Moreover, society labels them as ‘characterless, open minded, or modern’. P2 said: *“Currently my daughter is in college and her classes starts at 8am and ends at 2pm so I am not worried about her school timings. However, her tuition classes occurs in the evening between 5pm to 7pm. I pick and drop her daily from her tuition classes because it is not safe for her to travel alone in the evening.”*[P2]

In response to similar question P1 responded: *“I don’t allow my daughter to go out alone in the evening for any purpose. My daughter is in Medical College and during her third year she has to be in hospital till night. I use to send my son to pick her because people talk bad about girl’s character if they see young girl travelling alone at night and it is not safe for them as well.”* On the other hand, expert (E1) reflected that evening classes do not affect women’s access to higher education. According to this interviewee, it has insignificant impact on women’s dropout rate if any. *“Mostly students have pick and drop services so evening classes doesn’t affect student’s access.”*[E1]

Parents and students believe that evening classes is an important issue and it negatively influences women. Whereas, most experts believe that evening classes does not affect students as they have pick and drop services. In literature inflexible schedule in universities were identified as one of the barriers for women's enrollment in higher education institutes. (Stromquist, 1989) listed the lack of facilities that affects the enrollment rate of girls and he pointed inflexible seclude of classes as one of the factors. Women are not safe to travel alone at night in South Asian countries (Choudhry, Mutalib, & Ismail, 2019). According to (Asian Development Bank, 2015) it is recommended to women in Pakistan to not consider the option of using public transport at night.

A gap in literature was identified as previous studies did not explore the negative impact of inflexible schedule on women's access to higher education. Findings from the interviews showed that evening classes that are very common in Pakistan pose hurdles in the women's tertiary education. It limits women's choices of higher education institutes and further restrict their social mobility. They have societal and family pressure to enroll in those universities that offer morning classes rather than quality and better ranking of institute.

### **3.1.2 Lack of on-site accommodation**

When participants were asked to describe a typical day on their way to university from home they highlighted the issue of shortage of space in on-site hostels or lack of on campus accommodation facility. HE2 described her typical day while traveling to university and pointed the issues she faced due to shortage of space in university's hostel.

*“I got admission in the university which is away from my hometown. I had to reside in the hostel but due to lack of space in on-campus accommodation, I had to reside in the private hostels nearby my university for one year. I did not get accommodation inside the campus for one year as a result of which my father pressurized me to re-consider the*

*decision. In the start he was reluctant to send me to a private hostel. I have faced difficulty to commute from hostel to university daily. It was a hassle for me as it was time consuming as well.”*

Similar experience was reported by another respondent [HE2]. She has to walk for 10-13 mins daily from private hostel to campus. A question was asked from the experts to mention some facilities that are important to increase the women’s access to Higher education. In response to this question. E4 responded:

*“On campus accommodation is one of the most important facilities and factors that parents consider while admitting their daughters to universities. If I have to send my daughter in university I will check whether they have on site accommodation or not and whether it is safe or not.”*

Educational institutions lack hostel facilities (Junaidi, 2013). Majority of the respondents pointed that private hostels are unsafe, costly and are not up to the mark. (Iftikhar, 2020 ) claimed that hostel availability is regarded as an important factor that can promote education of young women of Pakistan. According to literature lack of hostel facility translates into poor concentration on academic activities by the young girls. (Sheheryar Ahmad, 2018) pointed that in rural areas across the country, lesser hostel accommodations are present, which affects young women and their educational journeys in a negative manner as hostel accommodation is crucial for their safety, wellbeing and smooth education journey. Analysis of responses from parents showed that they are very reluctant to send daughters to school if there is no facility for the accommodation and security is inadequate, (Balooch & Ur-Rehman, 2013) also highlighted this point. According to his paper parents’ concerns about their daughters’ safety are put to rest if secure hostel accommodations are present. Parents across the globe have the same concerns, regarding the vulnerability of their

daughters, but these concerns are markedly high, according to literature, among Hindu and Muslim parents in the sub-continent. (Cammish, 1997) recommended that in order to increase the enrollment rate of women more residential accommodation should be provided.

### **3.1.3 Lack of transportation**

When participants were asked to describe a typical day on their way to university from home they highlighted the issue of lack of campus pick and drop services and unsafe public transportation.

*“During my stay in private hostel which was nearby to campus but in the summers I had to walk from the hostel to the university. There was no proper public transportation in that area. Metro was under construction for that area. Taxi, uber careem were too expensive to afford daily. It was time consuming and so hard to walk during summers when temperature was above 35 degree. During evening classes it was unsafe to take a walk alone from campus to the hostel. Campus is huge and there are no security guards and cameras. Many buildings were under construction due to which workers were always there on the campus. I used to be scared while walking alone because some incidents of harassment was reported by girls.” [HE3]*

Some universities provide private transport to their students that helps women to commute. According to another participant: *“I lived in Wazirabad, approximately an hour and half away from the University. I would wake up early and reach the bus stop at 7:15 AM. The University of Gujrat provided their own private transport, outside of Gujrat, to surrounding cities where students came from. The buses were always crowded and we hardly ever got a seat because they were so jam-packed. The bus drivers drove like their fathers’ owned the road, and although the distance from my home to University would have taken a normal person on a car an hour and*

*a half to reach, it only took the University bus an hour at maximum. So, standing in the bus while it nearly sky-rocketed was quite irritating yet adventurous.” (D1)*

Participants linked lack of university transportation to harassment issue when they were asked to walk through their experience of lack of facilities in higher education and how it affected their studies on a daily basis. In response to a question about the facilities that are important to increase the women’s access to higher education, E2 reflected that school and college going girls usually have pick and drop services. Universities in Pakistan do not have pick and drop services due to which girls suffer a lot. Students from middle or high income families can afford private transport to travel to education institutes but poor students cannot afford private transport. They have to use public transportation and it is not safe for girls if they are not traveling with male member of the family. It can be used in the daytime but girls and parents are reluctant to use public transportation at night. P2 highlighted the issue of transportation and linked it with lack of institutes within their city. P2 shared that his daughter did not study after higher secondary level because there was no university within the city. The closest university is approximately two hour drive and it is unsafe to travel in the public buses daily and ***“I cannot afford the cost of private transportation. The government should take this into account and open an institute here.”*** Similar response was shared by another participant, she said: ***“in my home city that is Sialkot there was no university that offered industrial designing. There was a university at two hour away from Sialkot but the quality and ranking was not up to the mark. My parents were reluctant to send me far away from home for the university”.*** (HE2)

On the other hand when an E5 was asked about the lack of transport and universities’ pick and drop facilities, he responded:

*“Transportation does not affect the women’s access to education as most of the girls have pick and drop facilities arranged by their parents. So, it is not a problem. However, in regions like interior Sindh or regions with conservative mindset it is a problem. In those regions parents do not send their daughters to universities even if the campus is near to their homes because of socio cultural factors.”*

Analysis of these responses reflect that the vulnerability of women is accelerated/exaggerated by various infrastructural and physical barriers. Findings show that women cannot enroll in universities as they do not have access to safe and secure means of transport. There is no reliable and safe public transport and there are no dedicated school buses. Lack of transport facilities is linked to the issue of harassment issue. Due to absence of university pick and drop services women are forced to use public transport or walk alone to the campus. Analysis of the responses show that majority of harassment issues occur when girls travel alone in the public transport or on their way to campus. Respondents reflected that lack of higher education institutes in their areas causes the issue of transportation. Hence, these issues are interlinked with each other. It is recommended by (Asian Development Bank, 2015) that promoting the number of female schools, colleges, mobility, and infrastructural facilities will lead to an effective increase in women’s education. (Bari, 2015 ) argues that without addressing the transport issue, we will never be able to get our children, especially girls, to school. The costs of mobility are ‘too high’, and often ‘unaffordable’ for most women. This factor serves to continue deprive young girls of their basic right to get education.

### 3.1.4 Facilities for married students

This new subcategory is emerged from the responses of the interviewees. Experts were asked to share the feedbacks that they have received from the students about the lack of facilities for girls on campuses. In response to this question an expert shared he has received many feedbacks and complaints regarding the lack of daycare facilities on campus for students. In Pakistan day care facilities are not very common and there is not trend to provide these services for students. Only faculty has day care facility. He suggested that students should also get day care for babies because many mothers who have new born or toddlers drop out from the universities because they do not have anyone to take care or baby sit their babies. He further said: ***“Students filled the feedback for and suggested that it would be so helpful for them if campus has day care centers”***. (E4)

A question was asked from a girl who had to drop out from the final year after marriage about the lack of facilities that she encountered during her studies before dropping out from higher education and how had it affected her studies

***“A lack of facility that I faced was teachers and faculty those did not understand the problems of the students. They have forced me to believe that the mentors of today’s newest generation are so caught up in their melodramatic lives that they begin to impose their own problems on students so much failing to understand the dilemmas of students thus failing to accommodate them in ways that they can save their students’ futures. It’s affected me because teachers and mentors, whom are in the same problems as married female students, trying to complete their studies become the same antagonists for their students. An easier way to put it is I could not freeze my semester half-way through the semester because it is a regulation of the University unless I intend to forge or “show” a domestic issue, even if it is not there.”***

### **3.2 Early marriages:**

According to some of the respondents early marriages are of the main reason for dropout rate. While other believes that it has less impact on dropout rate of girls but family pressure of marriage does not let girls to enroll in higher education institutes. Reason of drop out was asked from a participant who dropped out from the final year of her bachelors and she shared that due to marriage she had to drop out from her studies, she said:

*“I dropped out in March 2018 because I got married in January the same year. I had only three semesters left and I believed I could complete my studies alongside my marriage. I was an outstanding student with a CGPA of above 3.5 but I was also expected to be an exceptional daughter-in-law. Society won.”(d1)*

When she was asked about the family pressure she had experienced to drop out from the studies to get married she responded that:

*“I got married early because my mother had all daughters and she remains ill. She did not force me to marry thinking it would affect my studies, however coping with the pressure of studies, undermining teachers, discouraging friends and family and especially making your place in your new home is very difficult. No one directly forced me to drop out, but it was my own decision because you can’t wear two hats at the same time.”*

E1 reflected that in Pakistan participation rate of female education particularly at the graduate level is low. Poverty, the custom of early marriages, heavy domestic work and cultural norms against female education are the main causes of females’ dropout at the graduate level of education.

Participants were asked about the family pressure they experience to drop out from the studies to get married. In response to this question, HE5 responded:

***“I want do PhD and masters after bachelors. Right now there’s no pressure from the family for marriage. But they want me to get married after bachelors. My parents are not supportive about MS and Phd as they think it will be late for marriage. I have seen this trend in my family as well. I will try to convince them to allow me to do MS and PHD but chances of getting higher education is low. I am uncertain that whether I could be able to achieve my dream of getting higher education or not.” I have many friends who got married after 10<sup>th</sup> grade or FSC.”***

According to HE3 opinion parents supports girls’ education till the age of 23 and 25 maximum but after that age parents want their daughters to get married and then it does not matter whether they have completed bachelors or masters (S. M. Shahidul, 2015) contended that girls' dropout rate is high since parents believe girls' teaching has no benefit when they go to their family after marriage. The women have to manage their families and look after their children. Another participant reflected: ***‘I want to go abroad for higher studies after undergrad but I know my family will not support my decision because according to them it is an ideal age for girls to get married and after marriage it is obvious that I cannot complete my studies let alone go abroad for higher studies.’ (HE5)***

HE1 shared the same information. In order to know the severity of this issue another similar question was asked from the participants. They were asked to whether they know anyone in their circle that has dropped out from the university due to pressure of early marriage. Majority of the interviewees listed a long list of girls who could not continue their studies due to parents’ pressure to get married. According to HE4:

*“Yes, my cousin got married during her undergrad and she had to drop out from the university. I know another girl who was my class fellow she could not enroll in university after higher secondary education because she got married. But they did not try to convince their parents nor show resistance.”*

Another responded said: *“my neighbor dropped out from the university. She completed two years of her BS degree. Another friend aged year 22/23 years old at that time dropped out from final year of BS Business Management. Her parents forced her to marry a guy who was living abroad. They told her that she can continue her education after marriage. However, after marriage her husband and in laws were not supportive.”* (HE2) shared her own experience as well and narrated:

*“When I failed a course during my first year of bachelors my parents started pressuring me to come back and get married. They told me that I cannot complete this degree. So, as a fear of going back and getting married I studied day and night and improved my GPA.”*

In order to find the impact of marriages on women’s access to higher education and dropout rate a question was asked from experts to explore their insight. E2 shared her view and said: *“Early marriages does not have a significant impact on dropout rates because once parents send their daughters for higher education then there are less chances of dropping out. They do not let their daughters to enroll in the first place.”*

E1 further compared this trend in rural and urban areas and reflected that this issue is prominent in rural areas. The respondent reflected that approximately 30% of the girls’ higher education is affected by marriages. Research studies found that if the process of early marriage is delayed, it

can foster positive results. If this process is delayed for a year then it is associated with an increase of ½ a year of education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The same delay in early marriage (for one year) may also be associated with 1/3<sup>rd</sup> year of education in South West Asia, along with a lesser probability (by 5.5 percent) of dropping out of secondary school in East and South West Asia (Delprato, 2015). Analysis of responses show that early marriages affect girl's access to higher education. According to (Saima Mughal, 2020) early marriage has negative effect on the girls' education as Getting married at a young age serves as a major distraction for the future of young girls – socially, educationally, and economically. This issue is lower in urban areas as compared to rural areas. The pressure of marriage gets high with the age of a girl and in this way it affects their access to higher education more than other levels of education. According to the findings the ratio of dropout rate due to marriage is decreasing. Analysis of the findings and existing literature shows that the ratio of dropout rate due to early marriages is high in rural areas whereas, in urban areas the percentage of girls who drop out or could not continue her higher education due to marriage is lower. In urban areas girls show resistance, they are bold and confident to take their decisions. According to another expert (E2) dropout rate due to marriages are decreasing. When asked about the reason of decreasing ratio he responded that now girls are able to continue their studies after marriage because husbands are progressive and supportive. He further reflected that another reason for lower percentage of drop out is more awareness and increased job opportunities for girls.

### **3.3 Sexual Harassment and assault**

Interviewees linked lack of pick and drop and unsafe transport to harassment issues. They reflected that lack of transport facility is one of the reasons for harassment women face on campus and during their travel to university.

*‘Rape cases on campus was reported due to lack of transportation provided by college. Girls use to take lift inside the campus as it is huge campus. A rape case was reported because girl asked a stranger inside the campus to drop her off near her department’.*

[HS3]

When asked about how the sexual harassment and assault case was dealt she told that proper action was taken by the administration. Investigation committee was formed to investigate the matter and university management introduced shuttle services inside the campus, helpline and security guards/cameras were installed. In response to the question asked about the harassment during travel to the university, D1 replied: *“Facing sexual harassment is probably the most terrifying thing in the world, especially for a female in the society we live in. Another thing is always anticipating every male around us to be the harasser. On my way to University, there was never a day that I did not think I might get sexually harassed today. Although it is a skeleton in the cupboard that remains untouched, harassment is very common in educational systems around our country.”* Another respondent reflected that people really don’t like to talk about it, but they know it’s there. HE4 said: *“I also believe harassment is there because females have become too bold and males are finding educated females as a threat to their expertise in many fields. It immensely affects female education because it can lead to mental health issues, it is a skeleton in the cupboard and the importance of speaking up about it if it is happening to you is not emphasized, hence it can devastate anyone trying to focus on their studies.”* D2 added: *“Luckily, I haven’t faced an issue like it but have heard many cases of it.”*

Respondents were asked to share any harassment case reported on their campus and how it was dealt. According to majority of the respondents, harassment case in their universities were dealt efficiently and immediate action were taken against harasser. HE1 stated:

*“University of Gujrat had approximately 21,000 student body. There must have been countless issues of harassment, mostly unreported. One I can recall that was reported was actually a male teacher harassing a female student by forcing her into sexual relations if she wanted to pass his class. She reported him and he did get suspended but another case I recall was another male teacher forcing a male student to marry his sister if he wanted to pass the class, this issue wasn’t dealt with because the professor was a favorite colleague among the University officials.”*

According to some respondents harassment cases on campus and lack of facilities are interlinked. HS1 reflected that her campus is on large are and some areas does not have light, cameras, security guards and usually harassment or rape cases are reported in those areas. According to (Muasya, 2014) the incidences reporting cases of sexual harassment, sexual favors, and intimidation of women has instilled a fear among women interfering with their ability to trust supplementary sources of earning, library, and even catering facilities.(Human Rights Watch, 2018), argues these factors within the education system resists girls from attending school. Responses reveal that women face harassment during their travel to university and in some cases on the campus. Interviewees believed that in most cases universities took strict actions against the perpetrators of harassment and took steps to increase safety of students on campus. According to the findings facilities such as proper security and safe transport can reduce the cases of harassment.

### **3.4 Patriarchy, Stereotypes and conservative mindset:**

(Jamal, 2016) believes that Pakistan has a patriarchal and male dominated society. Stereotypes and conservative values and beliefs exist that act as barrier to women’s access to higher education. Majority of the interviewees reflected that conservative mindset of society and stereotypes affect

the parents' attitude. These mindsets shape the views of parents as some parents reflected that they do not allow their daughters to go abroad for higher education or does not let them study after BS because of society's pressure and conservative culture. According to a participant: ***“My parents were supportive but my extended family tried to influence them. They told my parents to not send me in hostel or away from home because it is unsafe and I will get rebellious.”(HE2)***

The age set for girls to get married and parents' pressure also come from the society and conservative values. Some interviewees connected the issue of early marriages and parents' preference of sons over daughter's education to patriarchal society and conservative culture. An interviewee said: ***“Sons are preferred over daughter for higher education because of patriarchal and conservative society of Pakistan. Parents spend more money on son's education because society believes that girls have to get married and there is no point of giving them education.”(HS5)***

Majority of the participants believes that women are not allowed to work because of this issue. They further pointed that low socio mobility of women in Pakistan is due to conservative culture. According to expert (E2): ***“Such views overrule the religious customs. These mindsets overrules over Islamic values because in Islam women have given equal rights.”*** E2 further added that such beliefs and values are prominent in villages or rural areas. However, an expert (E5) had opposite view. E5 told that ***“I do not believe that Pakistan is a patriarchal country, it is just a narrative.”*** E5 further added that increase in socio mobility and higher enrollment rate of women in Pakistan is very noticeable and men should be given a credit for it. Males should be celebrated because they played positive role in this change. He further said:

*“There are some stereotypes that benefits girls and can be termed as positive stereotypes. For example people now believes that if girl is educated she will get good rishta (marriage proposal).”*

### **3.4.1 Feudal system:**

A new sub category was emerged as result of responses. Feudal system is categorized as sub category of patriarchal, stereotypes and conservative mindset because it creates and supports patriarchy and holds conservative beliefs and values. Some respondents identified feudal system as one the main reasons for low enrollment rate of women. Feudal system is very prominent in Southern Punjab and some parts of Sindh. Feudal system exists in Pakistani society which is one of the reasons for low literacy rate in these areas. Feudals are against education let alone women’s education. E3 highlighted this issue and said: *“Feudal system in some parts of Sindh and Punjab is responsible for low enrolment rate in those areas.”* Research studies also reflected on this issue. (Latif, 2009) argues that a dynamic of control and power is prevalent among cultures that promote or practice patriarchy and feudalism, which in turn serves as a depriving factor for acquisition of rights (including educational rights) by the citizens abiding within such cultures. Analysis of literature and responses reveals that they are against education because of personal motives and benefits. Feudals want that people who are working for them remains uneducated as they know that if educated and literate people will stop working for them and will raise their voices against oppression and slavery. In past educated citizens tried to oppose their system. Furthermore, (Roof, 2015) noted that ghost schools where teachers never show up in classes reflect the domination of the feudal elites to retain a servile illiterate population.

### **3.4.2 Women specific fields:**

A new sub category was emerged as a result of the semi-structured interviews. Many respondents highlighted the issue of conservative mindset and stereotypes in Pakistanis society and as a result of these stereotypes and conservative mindset people think that some fields such as engineering, Business Management are for boys. Girls face resistance form society and family when they wish to enroll in male dominated fields (Math, Engineering, and Business etc.). Labelling of fields according to gender is due to stereotypes and conservative mindset that prevails in Pakistani society so it is a sub category of main theme. Interviewees were asked to share any stereotype or patriarchal view or obstacle they faced while applying for university and during higher education and its effect on choice of university or studies. In response to this question, D1 responded:

***“The block where Psychology department was situated also had Business Management department in it. During my time at University, I always wondered why there was female majority in Psychology department while male majority in Business department. The reason is because, in Pakistan, it is believed that some fields are specifically designed for male expertise while others’ for female expertise. In small cities like Gujrat, and towns and cities even smaller those surround Gujrat this is the stereotype. However, it hasn’t affected me or my choices in any way whatsoever.”***

Similarly, expert shared the same opinion. E1 stated that girls tend to opt for the subjects which are label as women specific such as Psychology, Home Economics, and Biosciences etc. Such fields have less job opportunities in Pakistan so practical application of women’s education is reduced. These fields are selected keeping in mind the socio-cultural factors. He further shared that girls opt subjects which are easy to pass, less competitive and hard because they are easy to manage after marriage. In Pakistan, majority of girls are not appreciated to enroll in engineering

field because it requires field work. According to another respondent: *“My parents were comfortable and supportive in my decision of doing industrial designing because it is not a male dominated field. My first priority was engineering and Industrial designing was my second priority whereas, my parents were in favor of industrial designing because engineering is considered as male specific field”-[HE3]*. She linked this issue with patriarchy and stereotypes in Pakistani society. She added: *“However, I am doing industrial designing we have to go to workshops for wood cutting and other such activities. I have noticed than men looked down upon girls working in the workshops. According to them girls cannot excel in this field as they need male assistance for wood cutting because more strength is needed in such activities.”*

This trend is decreasing as number of girls are taking admission in fields which were once considered for men. E5 said: *“During 1980s and 1990s there were some fields such as software engineering etc. in which number of women was very low but now more and more girls are opting for those fields. The trend is changing.”*

(ECU, 2019) found out that the choices regarding ‘subject-majors’ that students mindfully select, are impacted by factors such as educational gender discrimination. Previous studies and findings reflect that gender specific fields limit the choice of women. Women tend to opt fields that are labelled for girls and easy to manage with domestic work and marriage instead of interest and job opportunities. A gap exists in literature regarding the impact of labelling fields according to gender. However, studies prove that this phenomena exists but its impact on women’s access to higher education in Pakistan is unexplored. Therefore, findings of this research is valuable for literature on women’s access to higher education access and future research.

### **3.5 Parent's attitude towards Higher education:**

Mixed responses were received from the interviewees about the parent's attitude towards women's higher education. Majority of the respondents linked the parent's attitude with societal pressure and conservative values of the society. According to them conservative values that exists in the society shape parents' attitude and that is why in rural areas parents are less supportive and prefer sons over daughters in educating them. Interviewees were asked to share the reason behind parents in Pakistan preferring their sons over daughters for higher education. In response to this question D2 responded:

*“My parents didn't have a son, but they gave all their daughters and are still giving them a higher education. I got married and dropped out, but if I was a son, marriage wouldn't have affected my chance to complete my studies. I believe too much is expected from women in our society, a female student having CGPA of above 3.5 compared to a male student having CGPA above 2.5, the male student still has a better chance at attaining higher education than the female just because of his gender. Parents place too much effort in paying for all their children's' educations. Poor them that they waste so much money if the female has only 99% chance of completing her studies if she gets married. The 1% really counts.”*

According to majority of the participants, parents' attitude towards their education is similar to brothers'. *“My parents have always been supportive and have never treated me in a way different than people having a son.”*[HS2]. Another respondent added: *“My parents are supportive but told me that I can study and work until the age of marriage”*-(HE1).Moreover, some

interviewees reflected that society or extended family try to frame parent's attitude by convincing and pressuring them against daughter's education. *"My parents are supportive though the extended family is very conservative. They tried to convince my parents about the field/subjects I wanted to opt for my bachelors"-(HE4)*. However, participants have different view and according to them they had to convince their parents at some point. Some parents were reluctant about sending them away from home while others show concern about the co-ed and field/subjects.

*"My mother was very supportive but I had to convince my father. He was reluctant to enroll me in a university which was far away from home. Whereas, my father is supportive about my brother's education and he has no issues in sending him to a hostel."/[HE3]*

Similar response was shared by another respondent, HE1 said: *"Parent's attitudes is different because of the concept that male is the breadwinner of a family. There is a narrative in our society that goal of a girl's life is to get married. Some parents in rural areas consider girls as burden because in the old age sons support their parents financially."* HE3 reflected that her family will not allow her to go abroad for higher education but her father wants her brother to study abroad. Parents were also interviewed and they shared that they are supportive and treat their daughters and sons equally. Parents reflected that they are in favor of educating their daughters.

*"I do not consider it safe for my son to travel alone at night. He is also not allowed to stay out after Magrib (sunset) and same rule applies for my daughters" (P2)*

Analysis of responses showed that the most parents belonging from different socio-economic classes believed that females can play their part, quite significantly, in uplifting the society and national development, by using higher education acquisition as a tool. However, findings also

reflect that parents take the final decision of daughter's education. (Kahn, 2021) found out that the decisions regarding a young girl's future are taken mostly by her parents. (Hussain, 2003) conducted a study and found out that 61% of parents interviewed were of the opinion that acquisition of education does not make a woman/girl irreligious. 97% respondents agreed that domestic work such as house-hold chores etc. are not liked by women who are educated. However, a majority of participants, about 90 percent, were of the opinion that women who are educated become better wives as compared to those who are uneducated. According to (Hashmi, 2014 ) an objective logic serves as a shaping factor for parental views on their daughters' educational journey. They relate their daughters' education with her modesty, potential benefits that come along with her educational process, and also to major or minor fears that education may lead to normative girls' expectations.

### **3.6 Coping strategies and government interventions:**

In order to find the coping strategies that women have adopted to overcome these barriers and mechanisms implemented in Pakistan certain questions were included in the semi-structured interview. They were asked to share their opinion on any mechanisms implemented in Pakistan that target this issue and its impact. Majority of the participants believe that no policies or interventions are introduced by the government of Pakistan. Some responses reflected that there are few policies but they have not implemented. *“I do not think there is any policies that target this. If there are any, they are not implemented yet. Girls have to use their own strategies and they have to help themselves.” (P1)* Same response was shared by HS2: *“I do not think there is any mechanism implemented by government. Government of Pakistan do not care about literacy rate and this point can be proved from education budget. Education budget is lowest. Government does not spend resources on education. It is not on their priority other issues are*

*important for them.*” They argued that government cannot afford to eliminate such issues because they will lose votes and politicians will face resistance from conservative group of people/extremists and majority of the vote bank consists of these people.

On the other hand, few interviewees believe that government has introduced policies and interventions but policies cannot change the mindset of society. *“Recently government have taken initiatives. Cadet College for girls was built by government. This is a new trend and a large number of girls have joined the cadet college. This means that more women will join army. However, if we compare the ratio of girls to the boys in cadet colleges in Pakistan it is insignificant.”* (E5) They were further asked to suggest effective policies to increase women’s access to universities. Expert (E2) suggested that pro-women policies which focus on awareness is vital to ensure women’s access to education. Also, affirmative policies such as setting fixed quotas for women in universities is pertinent. Such interventions at the university and country-level are essential to increase women’s tertiary enrollment rate by breaking away from patriarchal mindset and stereotypes. According to P1:

*“The role of gender-neutral and pro-women public policies in eradicating gender equality in a society is well established as most developed countries such as the UK were able to reduce gender discrimination through women-friendly public policies. However, it is important to understand that cultural barriers to women’s higher education need to be addressed at a deeper level through awareness and education. Changing the orthodox mindset of people is very important when it comes to ensuring that pro-women policies perform effectively.”*

Majority of the students have used coping strategies to overcome the barriers faced during their education. Responses reveal that good grades, high achievement, determination and parents’ trust

were some of the strategies girls used to convince families to allow them to continue higher studies. *“Getting good grades and improving my GPA were the coping strategies that I have used. Parents support you if grades are good because high GPA shows determination. You have to be careful to never let them down and break their trust. You have to be extra cautious that you do not get caught in any wrongdoings like relationships, smoking, bunking etc”- (HS2).* Some girls were doing part time jobs to pay their educational expenses as a coping strategy. This strategy was common in girls who belong to low income households. HE2 from low income family said: *“I was doing a part time job and paying my own fee and educational expenses.”* Another participant responded: *“I was determined and mother supported me as well” (HE4).* Whereas, few girls did not use any coping strategy to overcome the barriers. *“I did not use any coping strategy as I gave up on my choice of university and enroll in the university according to my parents’ wish. I accepted their decision of enrolling in all-girls University that has morning classes.”(HE3)*

Research gap in the literature was identified related to inadequate research on the factors, trends, or policy interventions that allowed an increasing % of women to access higher education in Pakistan and coping strategies if any women have used to overcome the barriers. However, there is few data on the policies and intervention implemented by Pakistan to increase the access of women in higher education institutes but no research is found on the impact of such policies. Therefore, findings from interviewees are really valuable.

### **3.7 Cost of Higher Education:**

In order to find how cost of higher education affects women certain questions were asked from the participants to analyze whether it has same impact on both the genders. Some respondents argued that most girls in Pakistan do not pursue higher education due to a lack of financial resources and

they suggested that increasing the number of scholarships will definitely help in improving the dropout rate. Mixed responses were received when students were asked to share whether cost of higher education in Pakistan has affected their access or drop out from the university. D1 responded: ***“Cost of higher education is not high in Pakistan. The private sector has made it high showing the people glamor and luxuries which are not required for a student who wants to earn degree and expertise. I was enrolled in a government University, which was highly accessible to students on merit.”*** Whereas, a different view as shared by another student, she said: ***“I have heard my father saying that he will send my brother to the best university (it is a private university with high fee). Whereas, high fee was hindrance for me though I had very good grades.”*** (HE5)

According to interviewee (E2), cost of higher education has similar impacts on both girls and boys but some families favor sons over daughters. Public universities with low fee is accessible to students from low income families. E2 concluded that cost of higher education is hindrance for women’s access to higher education. Parent (P2) believes that there are two main obstacles for girls to attain education, one is high fee and low financial resources and second obstacle is socio and cultural barriers. Mixed responses were received from the respondents. Some believes that cost of higher education has equal impact on both boys and girls whereas according to others girls are more vulnerable due to parent’s preference. Moreover, majority of the interviewees view cost of higher education as main hindrance for women’s access to higher education while few thinks there are public universities which are affordable to low income students. (Ghazala Noureen, 2011), states that the although different higher educational institutions vary from each other in terms of the fees they charge per semester, but according to statistics, they can charge as high as ‘four lakh and eighty thousand’ rupees (which is 3,106 US-Dollars) each semester. Semester fees

at public institutions might be relatively less, averaging from sixty thousand rupees to ninety thousand rupees (which is USD\$390-\$585). Families prefer son's education over daughters so if they cannot afford the education they will prefer to educate their sons only (Malik, 2011).

### **3.8 Reason for changing trend in women's enrollment rate:**

Prior studies highlighted the change in trend of tertiary enrollment rate of women. Evidence shows that percentage of tertiary enrollment rate increased in few years. Based on literature review this theme was identified. Moreover, one of the primary research questions and aim was to identify the factors, trends, or policy interventions that allowed an increasing % of women to access HE in Pakistan. Therefore, interviewees were asked questions about the recent trend of women's tertiary enrollment rate in Pakistan. In response to this question E1 replied: *“According to National Education Policy 2017, the female's enrollment ratio has increased from 36.8% to 47.2% by 2014, but the dream of gender equality is impossible to achieve in near future. The gender disparity in higher education is an outcome of various socio-economic and cultural factors.”*

According to another respondent:

*“Various socio-economic and cultural factors are responsible for low female's enrollment in higher education such as sexual harassment, religious misconception, gender discrimination and early marriages. Also, safety issues, lack of schools and cultural factors hinder female's access to tertiary education”- (E4).* Participants were also asked to share the reason of these trends. Majority of the respondents identified more job opportunities and awareness as main reasons for the increase of women's access to Higher Education. *“Society has taken big shift as things are changing at ground level. It cannot be understood through statistics because the change is new. The shift is due to more job opportunities” (E2).* Another interviewee shared the

similar view and said: ***“Increase in job opportunities have increased the trend of women’s education. Increase in inflation also made them realized that single man cannot sustain the living. To maintain living standards women also has to work”***- (P2). Interviewees identified construction of motorways and universities in small towns as the main reason. ***“All-girls University is established in Sialkot and many girls took admission in that university”*** (P1). Furthermore according to some participants, development specifically in villages are promoting girls education as it is increasing more awareness. ***“These days villages also have internet and they have similar patterns to urban areas.”*** (HS2)

Some respondents shared that the current government is progressive and it is taking many new initiatives for girls’ education. Reflecting on this view, HE1 said, ***“Before 2000s government of Pakistan was conservative.”*** Many interviewees highlighted the importance of awareness and realization among Pakistani society. They pointed increase awareness among people about the importance of women’s education. (Gillian Clarke and Ingrid Lunt, 2014) found that an increasing number of women are either obtaining certifications, or acquiring higher education. There is also an increase in the number of women pursuing doctoral and masters’ degrees for their personal and professional development. Studies have reported an increase in women’s motivation to obtain higher education (Sumara Mehmood, 2018). Studies have also reported, that a steady influx in educational opportunities within the last few years, have contributed to shape local opinions and perceptions about women’s social and gender roles in a more positive manner (Katja Voigt, 2020). Findings from the interviews and prior studies reveal that in Pakistan women’s access to higher education and tertiary enrollment rate is increasing. The figure is still low than other developing countries but positive change has observed in the past few years ( International Labour Organization , 2020).

## **Chapter: 4 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The main findings of the study show that socio-cultural barriers exist in Pakistan that limit the access of women to higher education. Findings of the study reveal that there are no proper policies and interventions implemented by government to solve these issues. However, recently the trend of women's tertiary enrollment rate is increasing due to awareness, job opportunities and coping strategies used by girls. Findings reflect that in rural areas barriers are more dominant than urban areas therefore, girls residing in rural areas have to face more resistance to enroll in higher education institutes than in urban areas. The study highlights the new issue of lack of facilities for married women who are students. Literature has not explored this topic because married students were not included in the surveys and questionnaires. Previous studies that explored the issue of women's access to higher education were not inclusive. Therefore, findings of this study would help future researchers in literature review for further research. Analysis of responses call for need of future research in the area of specific facilities for married women to increase the access of higher

education. It draws the attention of researchers to focus on more inclusive sample while conducting research on this topic. Considering the results of the research, I have derived a few recommendations that can be employed by the government, policy makers and researchers to solve the issue of low tertiary enrollment rate and inclusive research to include married students and girls who dropped out from HEIs.

The research also derived new themes from the interviews such as feudal system, women specific fields and its influence on women's tertiary enrollment rate that were not studied previously. Therefore, the study contributes in the existing literature and provide an insight into the public policy as it will be useful for the policy makers to know about the severity and importance of the issue. Previous studies collected data from students only whereas, this study collected data from parents, drop outs, experts as well. Based on the interviews I found that lack of facilities, early marriages, conservative beliefs are major factors behind low tertiary enrollment rate. It is recommended for policy makers to introduce flexible schedule and morning timings in the universities so women can enroll in HEIs without facing resistance from society and family as findings show that parents are reluctant to send their daughters to in the evening. Moreover, keeping in mind the responses shared by dropouts it is suggested that HEIs should have a daycare facilities for married students. Therefore, there is a dire need to implement policies specific to the needs of married girls. Government and policy makers should take combine initiatives to introduce projects like pink buses (public buses for girls), universities private buses and pick and drop services to ensure safe transport for girls so they can travel easily to and from universities. Pakistan lacks on site hostels for girls. Parents consider private universities unsafe for their daughters which limits the options of universities for girls. Therefore, in order to increase the women's access to Higher education it is recommended to build more and more onsite hostels for girls. It is difficult

for some universities to have onsite accommodation facilities in that case it is recommended to manage private hostels by universities administration. HEIs should managed the private hostels. It is recommended that government should take initiatives for safe and secure student dorms for girls. HEIs should have a strict anti-harassment and sexual assault policies. Committee compromising of different members should be formed under this policy that would be responsible for investigating the cases of harassment and sexual assault. Findings reveal that most of the cases happen due to lack of security and safety on campuses. To tackle this issue it is important to take steps to install security cameras, lights in dark places and security guards. Counselling and therapist sessions should be given to students who suffer through mental trauma after harassment. It will reduce the dropout rates of girls who had to leave higher education after harassment and sexual assault. Lastly, the study showed that tertiary enrollment rate of girls is increasing in Pakistan and according to experts it is due to more job opportunities for women. Therefore, it suggested that women in Pakistan should be given equal job opportunities so that they can make use of their degrees because practical application of women's education is very low in Pakistan. Percentage of women who used to work after completing high education is low and more job opportunities and awareness will increase the importance of women's higher education and thus participation in socio-economic development of the country.

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