

FACTORS AFFECTING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN KHYBER PAKTUNKHWA

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ABSTRACT

The research study aimed to look at the situation of gender discrimination in higher education prevailing in the province of KPK. Out of a total of 16 public universities, 4 were selected through simple random sampling technique. The population of the study comprised of all the students, their parents, faculty members of all the public universities in KPK. Equal representation of both sexes was ensured while selecting 360 respondents, 120 each from all the categories (60 males and 60 females). Simple random sampling technique was used as the data producing sample. The situation was looked at from four angles; home-related factors, socio-cultural factors, religious factors and economic factors. Analysis of the data found similar views of both sexes about home related and socio-cultural factors to be the two decisive elements in rendering out discriminatory attitude towards the females in providing them higher education. The respondents expressed their lack of knowledge of Islamic teachings related to education of females. Economic factors and financial matters were not considered as much important factor as the respondents belonging to economically well off families claimed to have experienced inequality due to home-related and socio-cultural factors prevailing in the areas.

Keywords: *Gender discrimination, Higher education, Diverse factors, KP*

INTRODUCTION

Prejudice and discrimination exercised on the basis of gender and denying equal chances of progress, development and decision making to one of the sexes is referred to as gender discrimination. This discriminatory attitude affects both men and females alike; however, it is a general perception that the social system of gender power, discrimination and unequal treatment places females at much lesser leveled social positions as compared to males. Gender inequality and male dominance shows its ugly face at every stage of a woman's life; from infancy to girlhood, adolescence, puberty, child bearing age and eventually old age Lorber (1997). Thus primarily, females, considered to be "the weaker sex", are subjected to this attitude on a much higher ratio in almost all the societies irrespective of the race, cast or creed. Researches have shown, however, that this inequity may be present with much more intensity in some cultures than the others (Elson, 1993). Females are denied inheritance rights, access to education, and basic health facilities, have been subjected to domestic violence, and have even faced unequal treatment at work place in terms of work hours, wages and fringe benefits (Lorber, 1997).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Countless researches have been done by sociologists and educationists to pin point the reasons that give rise to such intense levels of discriminatory attitude towards the females in the field of higher education. One such research done in India has shown that at the grass root level, within the household, strong maternal-son preference is a pit hole in which equal educational opportunities, basic secondary or tertiary, into which all the female children of the household are dumped without any remorse (Sunita, 2012). In West Africa, poverty and lack of sufficient resources are the main contributors leading to gender inequality in access to education at almost all the levels. While getting higher education, females are more affected by poverty at home as compared to males (Okoiije, 2002). Thus when the parents have to make a choice most of them choose to provide higher education to the male children instead of females (Oxaal, 1999). In a similar study done by Kotwal & Gupta (2006), the researchers have clearly indicated that in poor family's female children are expected to look after household chores so that the mothers work outside the house to share the financial responsibilities with the males (Kotwal, 2006).

Early marriages are also the reason behind limited female higher education (Ara, 2012). Research by Myers and Rowan (2011) point out chronic poverty as main factor which leading to early marriages of females. According to the authors, marriage often seems like the best way out for the parents in order to safeguard their daughters' future on one hand and lighten their financial burden on the other (Myers and Rowan, 2011). Erulkar, (2004), blames the social-cultural setup that encourages early female marriages. Referring to the example of Amhara region of Ethiopia, the writer asserts that thirty percent of the females were denied higher education due to the fact that they were married off at a very young age (Erulkar, 2004). Social norms and taboos in most of the societies, where the behaviors of the citizens are motivated by a desire to conform to the shared social expectations of a collective group don't approve of females getting education alongside males in the universities (Heise, 2013). Thus cultural attitudes strengthen the norm that girls do not need further education after primary school" (UNESCO, 2009).

A very negligible number of research studies have targeted the topic of religion and female education and even the results of these studies point out mainly to the difficulties involved. However, they note the importance of key individuals, the religious leaders and community members. In Islamic societies, the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings has resulted in giving the impression that Islam doesn't approve of female education. The main factor behind this intentional misinterpretation is the male chauvinistic attitude of

the religious leaders. Looked from a brighter perspective, religious affiliation can be the main simulant in changing the mind set and developing positive and gender friendly norms on the basis of Islamic teachings. Numerous studies have pinpointed the important role the religious leaders of the communities can play by developing supportive networks within faith communities for female higher education (Walton, 2013; Zents, 2005).

This study aimed to look at gender discrimination faced by the females at higher education in KPK, the north-western province of Pakistan. The researcher aimed to find out the causes of and the factors that contribute to gender inequality in higher education in the province. This gender based study looked at the present scenario from the perspective of female access to higher education institutions in a province enwrapped by centuries old male dominated socio-cultural norms. Similarly, rectification measures have been suggested to cushion the effects on the existing situation as well as provide cures to lessen the discrimination gap in future.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focused on getting comprehensive and exhaustive information from the stakeholders about the factors affecting gender discrimination in higher education from all over the KP. The population of this research study comprised all the currently enrolled Students, their parents and faculty members of all the public Universities in KP. The researcher delimited the research only to education offered in the general Universities in KPK.

The data of this research study was collected through multi stage sampling:

In the first stage, out of a total of 16 HEC recognized general Public Universities in KPK, a sample of 4 public universities were selected through simple random sampling technique. b) After the 4 universities had been sampled out, the researcher obtained the enrollment records of all the departments of these 4 universities and randomly selected 30 students (15 male and 15 female) from each university. Thus 120 students were selected as data producing sample. c) In the next stage, the researcher sampled out another set of 30 students each from these 4 universities through simple random sampling technique and the parents of these students were used as data producing sample. Thus a sample of 120 parents was used to collect the required information.

Similarly, 120 faculty members were selected through the simple random sampling technique by taking a sample of 30 members from each sampled university. However, in order to ensure equal representation of both the genders, the researcher selected 15 faculty members each from both sexes. Thus a total of 120 faculty members, 60 males

and 60 females, were selected. In totality, 360 respondents were used as a quantitative data producing sample for the research study.

The researcher intended to obtain quantitative data in order to know the extent of gender discrimination at Higher Education Institutes. As no standardized questionnaire was available that could provide the required information for the research study, the researcher developed a questionnaire. The validity and reliability of the research instrument was ensured through triangulation and pilot testing. Out of a total of 360 questionnaires administered, 232 were received back, (97 from students, 74 from faculty members, 61 from parents). Apart from the descriptive analysis of the data, inferential analysis was used by the researcher to know about the difference of opinion and association among the variables. For this reason, the researcher applied T-test on the collected data to investigate gender based significant difference of opinion of the stakeholder about four test variables.

The study was based upon the following presumptions:

- There lies no significant gender based difference in the perception of the stakeholders about the home related factors effecting the gender discrimination in higher education.
- There lies no significant gender difference in the perception of the stake holders about the socio-cultural factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.
- There lies no significant gender based difference in the views of the stakeholders about the religious factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.
- There lies no significant gender based difference in the views of the stakeholders about the economic factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This was a gender based study and the researcher aimed to get the views of male and female respondents hailing from various categories. There were four main test variables in the research study; home related factors, socio-cultural factors, religious factors and economic factors. During the descriptive analysis, the researcher used average of averages to analyze the data from these groups. Descriptive analysis of the data reveals that out of a total of 232 respondents 151 were males and 81 were females. Out of a total of 232, 97 were students, 74 were faculty members, and 61 were parents. On the whole, 60% of the respondents agreed that Home related factors were the main reason for gender discrimination in Higher education. Gender wise, 65% males and 69 % females agreed to the role of home related factors in this respect. 69% of the respondents agreed that socio-economic factors play a decisive role in gender discrimination in higher education.

Gender wise, 61% males and 65% females agreed to the significant role of socio-cultural factors in discriminatory attitude rendered out to females in the field of higher education. A surprisingly large number of the respondents didn't know about the role of the religious factors in gender discrimination out of these majority (40%) were the students. However, 70% of the faculty members agreed to the fact out of which 37% were females. The views of the stakeholders about role of economic factors were very interesting as majority of them expressed their lack of knowledge about it. The percentage of agreement was very low as only 40% of the total respondents agreed to the fact that economic factors play any role in gender discrimination.

Hypothesis No. 1

There lies no significant gender based difference in the perception of the stakeholders about the home related factors effecting the gender discrimination in higher education.

Table T-test Showing gender based difference in the perception of the stakeholders about the home related factors effecting the gender discrimination in higher education

Group	n	Mean	S.D	t-tab	t-calculated
Male	151	3.961	.5677	1.645	-.843
Female	81	4.025	.52765		

To ascertain whether there lies any gender based differences in the views of the stakeholders about the home related factors affecting gender discrimination in higher education, the researcher applied t-test to analyzed the given data. The means scores of males were found to be 3.9614 as compared to 4.0257 of females. The S.D.s was calculated as .5677 and .5276. T- Calculated was -.843 which was less than t. tabulated. Hence it was affirmed that similar views of males and females exists about the home related factors affecting gender discrimination.

Hypothesis No. 2

There lies no significant gender difference in the perception of the stake holders about the socio-cultural factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

Table T-test showing gender difference in the perception of the stake holders about the socio-cultural factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

Group	n	Mean	S.D	t-tab	t-calculated
Male	151	3.695	.65398	1.47	-.405
Female	81	4.053	.61904		

To ascertain whether there lies any gender based differences in the views of the stakeholders about the socio-cultural factors affecting gender discrimination in higher education, the researcher applied t-test to analyze the given data. The means scores of males were found to be 3.695 as compared to 4.053 of females. The S.D.s were calculated as .65398 and .61904. T- calculated was found to be -.843 which was less than t. tabulated. Hence it was affirmed that similar views of males and females exists about the socio-cultural affecting gender discrimination.

Hypothesis No. 3

There lies no significant gender based difference in the views of the stakeholders about the religious factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

Table T-test showing gender based difference in the views of the stakeholders about the religious factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

Group	n	Mean	S.D	t-tab	t-calculated
Male	151	4.024	.6950	1.47	-2.169
Female	81	4.216	.52800		

To ascertain whether there lies any gender based differences in the views of the stakeholders about the religious factors affecting gender discrimination in higher education, the researcher applied t-test to analyze the given data. The means scores of males were found to be 4.0243 as compared to 4.2160 of females. The S.D.s were calculated as .6950 and .52800. T calculated was found to be -2.169 which was less than t. tabulated. Hence it was affirmed that similar views of males and females exists about the religious factors affecting gender discrimination.

Hypothesis No. 4

There lies no significant gender based difference in the views of the stakeholders about the economic factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

Table showing gender based difference in the views of the stakeholders about the economic factors effecting the gender discrimination in education.

Group	n	Mean	S.D	t-tab	t-calculated
Male	151	3.634	.7415	1.47	-2.524
Female	81	3.884	.6605		

To ascertain whether there lies any gender based differences in the views of the stakeholders about the religious factors affecting gender discrimination in higher education, the researcher applied t-test to analyze the given data. The means scores of

males were found to be 3.6349 as compared to 3.8844 of females. The S.D.s were calculated as .7415 and .6605. T calculated was found to be -2.524 which was less than t. tabulated. Hence it was affirmed that similar views of males and females exists about the economic factors affecting gender discrimination.

DISCUSSION

Countless researches have been done to know about the reasons behind the gender discrimination in higher education. The results of these researches can be generalized up to some extent but not all the societies have similar norms, traditions, religious beliefs and economic setup. Which leads us to believe that apart from certain similar facts, there exists uniqueness of the situation with in each area. Pakistan, being a developing country with age old socio-cultural roots, rigid religious beliefs and a somewhat unstable economic background, creates an atmosphere that is quite different and exclusive which can hardly be found anywhere else in the world. KPK, the north-western province of Pakistan boasts off to be the home of the conventional Pashtuns. Being a typical male dominated society, various hurdles exist in the way of providing equal and gender friendly environment to the females. Various factors like early marriages, checks on female social mobility, lesser employment opportunities for females, misinterpretation of the teachings of Islam and male domination within the house hold make it very difficult for the females to break away from these bonds.

The result is that majority of the females who succeeded in getting secondary education face the ever increasing challenges of fighting for their rights to attain higher education (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2005). The researcher embarked upon this research in order to know the perception of the stakeholders belonging to various parts of the KPK, about the factors behind gender discrimination in higher education in this province. Data analysis revealed a very interesting response of the stake holders about the four main factors under consideration. Home related factors and socio-cultural factors were given most importance by the respondents as 60% of the respondents agreed that these two factors were the main reason for gender discrimination in Higher education. The results showed significant agreement of both males and female respondents about the afore mentioned two factors as being the main reason for the existing gender discrimination in higher education. These results conform to a similar research study done by Erulkar, (2004), that blames the combination of home related factors and socio-cultural setup as mainly responsible for rendering out unequal treatment to the females aspiring for higher education. Female respondents put slightly more weightage to home related factors as compared to other factors.

Among the home related factors; illiteracy and lack of interest of parents, early marriages, and maternal-son preference were found to be the main aspects that directly or otherwise affect gender discrimination in higher education. This result is seconded by the research study based upon the Amhara region of Ethiopia where the researcher asserts that thirty percent of the females were denied higher education due to the fact that they were married off at a very young age (Erulkar, 2004). Thus when looked from the perspective of poor parents, spending money on the girl child who has to be married off to another household, it seems unwise to invest in their higher education. Social norms and customs also push the females towards anything but attaining higher education. A study done in Armenia, GCA (2012) reports that ages old customs and norms expect women to be married off while they are still in their early teens. Any failure of the family to do so results in negatively labeling the young females of the household as spinsters or old maids; thus creating a mindset within the young females to prefer marriage over Higher education.

There was a general agreement of all the stakeholders about maternal-son preference in areas with low female literacy. Less educated mothers or illiterate mothers fail to give due importance to the education of their daughters. The results of the study show that more than 65% of the females and 60% of the male respondents agree to the fact that females are expected to help out in household chore rather than go outside and study. In the poor households, investments are done in the education of male children because the son is supposed to be the future bread earner of the family while daughters are to be married off to other families Yourke (1999) in a research study endorsed the idea that the ambitions and aspirations of the parents is a decisive factor in providing equal higher educational opportunities to the children (Yourke, 1999) (Sunita, 2012).

Excluding a few modern and developed countries of the world, the social structure around the world treat women as housewives and care givers whose role revolves around the household and has got very less to do with out-of-home activities including education. Likewise, in KPK, social norms and cultural taboos don't approve of females getting out of the security of their homes and work therefore their higher education is not considered important enough. Apart from a few urban areas, in most of the KPK, the society puts checks on female mobility even if it is for getting education (World Bank, 2011). The results of the research study show that 83% females and 80% males, agreed to the fact that restrictions on female mobility was one of the main reason in the way of attaining Higher education. A similar research was done in Saudi Arabia which point out to the fact that females in Saudi Arabia are restricted by social norms to have an easy access to transportation and thus have to have a male companion in their daily commute to and from the educational institution. Consequently, even if the facility of hostel and boarding

is available to the female students, it is not considered appropriate to allow the females to live outside their homes (Sabbagh, 1996).

According to Walton (2013), the influence exercised by the religious institutions over the majority of the people should be used positively to create awareness and develop a positive attitude towards female higher education. A surprisingly large number of the respondents didn't express their opinion about the role of the religious factors in gender discrimination. However, it is interesting to point out that respondents belonging to rural areas, both males and females, gave weightage to the pseudo-religious mindset of the people as a hurdle in the way of female higher education. This has to be kept in mind that religious teachings, as misinterpreted by majority of the illiterate people have been wrongly used as an instrument of male dominance and female subjugation by the so-called religious leaders. In Pakistan in general and in KPK in particular, religious beliefs play a very important role in deciding the everyday dealings and decision making process.

The conventional Pakhtuns boast off to be very religious minded. However, lack of proper knowledge of the religious teachings and personal interests of the male-dominated society have put the female on the receiving end. Data analysis showed that majority of the respondents was not aware of the teaching of The Quran and The Holy Prophet (PBUH) about the merits of female education. Whenever the issue of equal female rights for education has arisen, the males have taken refuge behind the self-created and molested teachings of Islam, claiming to refuse the right to knowledge and learning to the females. The religious teachings, as interpreted by majority of the male and female respondents, require limiting the females within the four walls of the house which is, sadly, quite the opposite to what Islamic teachings actually propagate. Islam, a religion thought to be the champion of women rights, has been negatively portrayed. Looking at the teachings of Islam, countless Ahadiths and Quranic verses can be found ordering equal rights and responsibilities of Muslim men and women in attainment and seeking of knowledge and learning (Abbasi, 2009).

One limitation of the research study was that the data was collected mostly from the respondents directly or indirectly linked with education; these were mainly financially stable people who were unaware of the financial hurdles faced by the females in their quest for higher education. Lack of knowledge of the respondents towards the economic factors contributing to the gender discrimination can be attributed to the fact that this particular group of people was simply unaware of the financial struggles involved in the process of getting Higher education.

CONCLUSION

Female education affects their overall life. The life of an educated woman is totally different from the uneducated one. Education positively alters the way she looks at the world. Her life changes for the better. It affects her status within the household, her financial independence, and the education of her children. Once the policy making authorities understand the importance of female higher education more effective and long lasting measures should be taken to improve this situation and improve gender equality within the country (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2005). A lot of work has been done in this field aiming to create awareness among the society on the importance of providing equal higher educational opportunities to the females. Countless studies have pointed out that providing higher education to the females of a nation almost always results in positive outcome. These efforts are slowly paying off and it has been observed that females are now getting education at higher education institutes in spite of the socio-cultural barriers and other hurdles. However, this should also be kept in mind that any efforts to improve the situation first of all focus on the urban areas and the rural and far flung areas take more time and deeper efforts to show any signs of improvement in the female higher education improvement.

Over the years, awareness about the equal rights of females in every field of life has gradually been acknowledged and the positive effect, however minute, are becoming visible around the world. The results of this research study point out to the fact that both males and females are quite aware of the nature of discrimination at higher education level being rendered out to the females in KPK. The results of this research study showed that the respondents seemed to be aware of the factors that have given rise to this sort of inequity in provision of higher education and there seemed to be no gender based differences in opinion about it. This gives rise to a very important question in our minds. If the representatives of both the sexes are aware of the extent of discrimination, factors lying behind this sort of discrimination and the impeding effects of this situation on the overall socio-cultural and economic situation of the province what measures can be adopted to rectify existing situation?

The level of awareness of gender equality and its acknowledgement from the locals and the level of efforts done to rectify it depends upon the education level of the common man, the unique socio-cultural, economic, religious and home related factors of each particular area. The situation in the urban areas of Pakistan, even in KPK provides a very promising picture where in some areas of higher education, females have outnumbered the males but as mentioned earlier, this is essentially an urban phenomenon and the rural areas have yet to show improvement in this regard. The limitations imposed by socio-cultural norms on female mobility are also being challenged in urban areas by the growth

of new universities, lessening the travelling and boarding problems for the females. However, this has to be kept in mind that a well thought of and systematic long term process to target gender equality at higher education level needs to be developed which should aim at involving the whole society. Awareness among the locals, community members, and religious leaders needs to be created through media campaigns, and propagation of true Islamic teachings about the merits of female education. Within the educational institutions, the impact of gender differences needs to be cushioned by introducing a gender friendly curriculum, developing gender friendly teaching pedagogies that acknowledge and critically analyze how cultural norms, religious teachings and familial traditions eventually result in encouraging gender discrimination in this field.

It is concluded, in the end, that illiteracy, poverty, unfavorable home environment, rigid socio-cultural norms and pseudo-religious taboos combine to form a vicious circle, inundating all that fall within it and negating all the positive efforts for female Higher education. Countries that neglect female education tend to suffer heavily in the long run and have to pay the price in the form of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment and under development. Pakistan, with more than half of its female population needs to pull itself free of all the negative forces that are sucking it in the black hole of gender discrimination. It needs to put on efforts to remove the hurdles in the way of female higher education by developing a positive mindset and ensuring concrete and fruitful efforts to take along the females, by making them positive contributors to the development of the country. This can only happen if hurdles are removed, ways are paved and opportunities provided for a smooth process to ensure higher education opportunities for the females of the country.

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