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FEMALE EDUCATION: The Facilitating and Hindering Factors Regarding Female Education in Gilgit-Baltistan Context of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study conducted in one of the villages of Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of female students and their parents regarding female education. A qualitative case study method was employed to investigate the subject matter. The participants were selected on the basis of pre-determined criteria. The findings of the study showed that female education in the context is influenced by various factors including societal norms, parents perceptions and teachers attitude. It was depicted that female students have adapted such critical circumstances and are motivated to acquire their education. Since the role of society is directly associated with the attitude of female education, and their success depends upon active involvement of whole society, therefore the study recommends that this aspect must be given more attention to further strengthen the female education in our society. This ultimately can improve societal performance through increasing female education rate in the context.

Keywords: Gender Inequalities, Institutional Structure; Gender Barriers

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Women play very vital role in development of any societies. The pace of development is highly dependent on joint efforts by men and women in different fields of development. One of the important developmental fields is education, where women folk can participate and utilize their energies to bring prosperity within societies. The importance of education, mainly women education nowadays can be well understood by the remarks given by woman who fled from Darfur to Chad (2004) saying that they had left behind all of their possessions. The shared that the only thing that they have brought in is what has been in their heads, what they have been taught, that is their education. They told that all the luxuries have been gone but education is the only thing that cannot be taken from them.

Education plays a pivotal role in developing human capital among diverse societies. It can be the beginning, not only of individual knowledge, information and awareness, but also a holistic strategy for development and change. It is very much connected to form social relationships on the basis of equality with others and to achieve the important social good of self-respect. It is important to mobilize (through access towards jobs and the political process), to health and life (through the connection to bodily integrity) and to maintain other significant communications to sustain a developmental world and promoting the concept of global village.

Though the Education has become a universal human right all around the globe but this right has not been not been practiced in its real meanings in many parts of the world. Similar situation has been prevailing in the given research context, the northern part of Pakistan. This territory, being the remotest parts of Pakistan (one of the developing countries) heavily governs on patriarchal values in structuring a society. It represents different cultural practices for men and women. A man is always considered as the

legitimate authority to avail all the facilities and opportunities for development purposes than women. Here home has been defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space where she performs her reproductive role as a mother and wife. In comparison, a man dominates the world outside the home and performs his productive role as a breadwinner. Men and women are conceptually segregated into two distinct worlds. The household resources are allocated in the favor of sons (male members of the family) due to their productive role. Education for boys is prioritized vis-a-vis girls, because it is perceived that boys must be equipped with educational skills to compete for resources in public arena, while girls have to specialize in domestic skills to be good mothers and wives, hence, education is not that important for girls. This gender division of labor has been internalized by the society, and girls/women do not have many choices for themselves that could change these patriarchal realities of their lives. Society does not allow women to develop their human capabilities by precluding them from acquiring education. Chaudhry (2007) research study has endorsed the fact that lack of emphasis on the importance of women's education is one of the cardinal features of gender inequality in Pakistan which has shown a direct impact on economic growth in Pakistan.

Various studies have endorsed such disparities, practiced in Pakistani context. According to UNDP report (2010), Pakistan ranked 120 in 146 countries in terms of Gender-related Development Index (GDI), and in terms of Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM) ranking, it ranked 92 in 94 countries. Besides patriarchal values there are other factors which limit women access to various walks of life. Some of them are destruction of schools and killings which harmed women's education in Pakistan. For instance, 14-year-old education activist and blogger Malala Yousufzai was shot in the head and neck by some of militant insurgents after she blogged about the destruction of schools and closing of all-girls schools.

INTRODUCTION

Various statistics show that education in Pakistan can be characterized by extensive gender inequalities. Women have to face socio-cultural hurdles to acquire education. International community has developed a consensus through the Millennium Development Goals to eliminate gender inequality from education. The proponents of gender equality argue that it is not only humane and ethical thing to provide everyone easy access to education without any gender bias, but it is also essential for development and progress of a society that both men and women are educated. They also point towards empirical studies that have confirmed that gender inequality in education has significant impact on rural poverty in Pakistan, and female literacy is important for poverty alleviation. For example in the year 2006, the literacy rate in urban areas was recorded 58.3% while in rural areas it was 28.3%, and only 12% among rural women.

To overcome such situations, various Feminists like Martha Nussbaum have argued that there is an immediate need to increase the public expenditures on female education in order to achieve gender equality at all levels.

Comparison of data for men and women reveals significant disparities in educational attainment. By 1992, among people older than fifteen years of age, 22 percent of women were literate, compared with 49 percent of men. The comparatively slow rate of improvement for women is reflected in the fact that between 1980 and 1989, among women aged fifteen to twenty-four, 25 percent were literate.

The discrepancy between rural and urban areas is even more marked. In 1981 only 7 percent of women in rural areas were literate, compared with 35 percent in urban areas. Among men, these rates were 27 and 57 percent, respectively. Pakistan's low female literacy rates are particularly confounding because these rates are analogous to those of

some of the poorest countries in the world. The recently developed national education policy of Pakistan 2009 depicts out that females and pupils in rural areas face systematic disadvantage at all levels of education. Females are particularly under-represented in rural areas (36% versus 43% for urban areas), a feature that also holds for secondary education (35% for rural and 48% in urban areas).

The need to address the concerns of women in international development has been well publicized since the United Nation's Women's Year (1975) and the following Decade for Women (1976-85). It was shown that women and children are the most vulnerable to the adverse consequence of diversion of resources from health and education and withdrawal of subsidies from food, medical care and education. In poorer areas, this leads to underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, disease, and is associated with high birth rates.

In Pakistan, the Economy is one of the leading factor which effects directly on resource availability in general and on education in particular. At the global level, Pakistan is categorized among the low-income economies of the world with one of the highest rates of population growth and high fertility (NIFC, 1998). When Pakistan came into existence in 1947, its population was 32.5 million. Today, the population is greater than 134 million (UN ESCAP, 1998). This makes Pakistan the ninth most populous country in the world with a growth rate estimated around 2.9 percent per annum.

Pressure caused by high population growth rates affects the quality of life, as measured by social and economic indicators such as the number of people adequately fed and their health, housing conditions, and mainly the literacy/educational attainment.

It is reported that "Pakistan appears locked into a stagnating economic regime, where growth and exports rely on low paid and unpaid female labor; and where women's household subsistence production underpins the low wages paid in the productive economy" (Elson & Evers, 1997).

Gender barriers place restrictions on women's access to social infrastructure, such as credit and labor markets, federal, provincial and local decision-making bodies, and represents constraints to balance and sustainable economic growth.

Conditions for women are very poor: a newspaper survey done in Pakistan revealed that 99 per cent of housewives and 77 per cent of workingwomen were beaten by their husbands. They listed the following types of violence committed against women: murder in land disputes, being blinded by husbands frustrated on some issue, being kicked to death, burnt in anger, abducted, sold, sexually harassed, and raped (AWRAN, 1985).

Gilgit-Baltistan, the most marginalized and remotest areas of Pakistan also portrays similar situation prevailed in other rural parts of Pakistan. Being a far-flung remotest rural territory, this region has been suffering for availability of resources, especially the educational opportunities. Though this region was formally aligned with Pakistan in 1947 but due to various calamities in the country it has always faced severe conditions regarding availability of resources to improve economy and ultimately acquiring education. This territory comprised of ten districts but all districts represent different pictures regarding education facilities, particularly for female education. Some of the districts even have no schools which could facilitate female education. Hence, the inhabitants mainly rely on agriculture to improve their economic growth and poverty reduction and pay less attention towards education.

There are certain other obligations which limit female education in Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. Culturally, all the districts represent different practices which serve as encouraging or hindering factors. These cultural and social practices have deep rooted

impacts in schools as well and certain practices remain a source to increase students' dropouts.

Besides various challenges, the historical perspectives regarding education in Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly female education remained one of the most crucial challenges. In this connection, various aforementioned studies depicted that the women education in Pakistan, particularly in Gilgit-Baltistan face many challenges to foster women education. Secondly, to study the hindering factors towards access to female education are exceptional. Thus, there is scarcity of literature to address this most important issue. Therefore, and in the light of existing literature which shows a grim picture about Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan, this research study is undertaken to expose out those factors which impede girls' education in this remotest and marginalized region of Pakistan. Therefore the study aims at achieving the given objectives pertaining to female education in the context as:

- ✓ To identify the cultural practices which hinder women's education in Gilgit-Baltistan context of Pakistan?
- ✓ To find out the perceptions of girls regarding their education.
- ✓ To find out the perceptions the parents possess towards their girls' education
- ✓ To provide a platform to conduct similar kind of research studies to generate indigenized knowledge and wisdom.

Hence the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of female students and their parents regarding their educational experiences in one of the villages of Gilgit-Baltistan. To explore about their perceptions, the study focused on the following main and subsidiary questions to guide the study:

Main Question

- ✓ How do female students and parents perceive female education in a village setting in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan?
- ✓ **Subsidiary Questions**
- ✓ How do female students opt for their studies?
- ✓ What challenges female students face while acquiring their education?
- ✓ What are the perceptions of parents regarding their female children?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The contemporary studies depict various aspects regarding the facilitative and hindering perspectives regarding female education. In this connection, the studies carried out by Hafeez (2007) about mother and father perception on girls' education in six districts of the Punjab province reported that both fathers and mothers give importance to general education, while a large number of parents gave much more importance to professional education for boys than girls. Furthermore female education in mathematics and science in Africa (FEMSA, 1997), is another project conducted for exploring parents, males, females and teachers attitudes towards girls' particularly in science, mathematics and their access to education particularly in science, mathematics and technology subjects in the four African countries (Cemeroon, Ghana, Tanzania, & Uganda). Similarly, Manimekhani (2002) who attempted to compare the relative role of working women vis-à-vis housewives in household decision making found that education and employment opportunities to women enhance the status of women in household through greater privilege in decision making for women. This would increase general social status of women and bring about gender equality.

Pointing towards access for female education, Devaki jain (1979) pointed out that even if house hold work is not recognized as work at least data should be made available in order to see whether women's domestic work prevent them from acquiring education, job and higher status. It is very often the case that women do not undertake paid work or attempt to market their service mainly due to the pressure of household duties. Therefore, the women are not able to offer their service outside the market. The less opportunities to women education is considered directly related with socio-economic conditions. As Kravdal (2000) studies found that the higher-order birth rates were relatively low in regions where many women were literate. Farhad and Bacchus (1999) share many constraints regarding access to female education. One of them is parents' fear of girls' independent access to the outer world in case girls go to school, because women's conduct is associated with family honour. Similarly, a gendered division of labour is stated by them as another factor that hinders girls' education. In conformity to the societal norms, young girls start their care giving role.

In the context of the international commitments; universal primary education (UPE), EFA, and MDGs, our country has launched different projects, for example ESR 2001-2005, and NEPA, 2001-2015, with little visible improvement in girls' education.

These projects remained insufficient to meet the required targets as the current scenario of girls' education requires paying prompt attention to this and many other questions about targets in achieving UPE and girls' education. Furthermore, a majority of parents show concern about household responsibility which effects the contribution of women' education. A significant number of parents also feel that household responsibilities are more important than women education. Parents consider security as the prime need for girls to opt education. Some of the other factors are lack of physical facilities like classroom, water, latrine, electricity, and boundary walls which are also associated with security for female folks. More importantly, the lack of quality of education is also regarded as a major concern that keeps girls away from educational institutions.

Another traditional factor, for example, societal and family pressure on the mobility of women strongly influences the family decision of women sending for higher education. Similarly, the custom of early marriage also effect women education. Apart from it, the presence of educational institutions in another caste or kinship residential area is also a reason for stopping from attending university. Feudalism and class system in some of the regions is also linked with girls' access towards educational institutions.

Though female education is possess deep rooted meanings for developing the nations as rightly uttered that educate a man and you educate an individual, educate an individual, educate a women and you educate a nation. But despite all the efforts women still lag behind in literacy. The situation is a result of certain factors which are common to all of us in negative attitude of parents to the education of girls, inhabiting culture values and practices, religious values, poverty and early marriage, among others. Though religious practices also impact on female education but such experiences are indirectly observed. According to religious and legal factors had only indirectly effects on higher education of women. Religion is not reckoned to be a direct factor of any significant to the issue of female education opportunity. However, it is invoke by some of those who wish to constrain such opportunity, so that it operates implicitly through perceived norms. It would be helpful if religious leaders were to espouse the cause of girls' education. Women play an important educational role in the community, because they are responsible for educating their children, they also exercise an influence over the rest of the community in order to guarantee their integrity and development.

It has been also claimed that the within group inequalities and between group inequalities arise due to similar factors. However, the central reason for wage inequality,

namely Technology, works through separate channels for within and between group dynamics.

Also, there are differential returns to race and gender but these are mainly analyzed by making across group comparisons, and not necessarily paying enough attention to what might generate variations for the members of the same category. The gender gap in education for China has declined over time; however the schooling continued to be more unequal among females.

All these studies tell that socio-economic groups such as gender or race are very broad and usually are divided along income, regional and family background lines. Thus, it is Necessary to investigate the within group differentials.

On the basis of parents' view about educating a child the study reported that due to the changing socio-economic conditions, there were possibilities of increasing with drawal of children from schools. The study also identified that the preference of parents of giving priority to boys, education also effects women education. According to women have to purchase foods that are less processed; they also spend more time trying to find cheap foods and gathering fuel wood and water. Since a considerable proportion of the fuel and water procurement is done women this division of labour affects women's participation in higher education.

According to that the religious scholar, politicians, and feudal lords tend to use Islam for their own purpose to impose restrictions, power, and operation, in most cases on people in the rural areas. There are many factors of low enrolment of woman in the universities. Culture barriers, custom, religious scholars, traditions and politicians have great influence in Gilgit town. Women and girls are the victims of this form of patriarchy.

The study conducted by pointed out that Pakistan is a country where women are considered to be dishonor not for only family but society, many of them are bound between the four walls of the house, some more interesting cases I have come across with are, many of the women are allowed to get education but unfortunately after completion of their education they are not allowed to work in offices, which is loss of the talent, loss of the resources and a disastrous factor to the society, who otherwise could play an important role for the socio-economic development of the society, such women must be encouraged to be independent economically, so that they can work side by side with the men to improve the standard of living of the families, which would obviously affect the national prosperity, since approximately half of the population consists of women, but unfortunately Pakistan is such a suffocated country where women do not have freedom of speech.

Many factors effect girl's education in Gilgit context. Most of the parents consider the return from education in term of monitory benefits. Girls are supposed as guests who would sooner or later be married off considering boys as the heir and breadwinners for the family. State that the huge dropout rates however indicate that girls are more often than boys are needed for other activities such as looking siblings; doing domestic work and helping with farm work such factors affect their studies.

By way of introducing gender issues in education in Gilgit-Baltistan, we begin with general observations on the condition of women education in Pakistan. An assessment by Bari (2000) provides a harsh account of the position that the social and cultural context of Pakistani society is mainly patriarchal. Men and women are conceptually divided into two separate worlds. Home is defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space, while a man dominates the world outside the home... Therefore women's mobility

is strictly restricted and controlled through the system of purdah, sex segregation, and violence against them, this type of factors and perception effect women education.

A recent report by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) (2003: 37) Farming is the largest source of income for the vast majority of people in the Gilgit.

In most cases, with both men and women working long hours in their fields, older children, mostly girls, have to take care of younger siblings as well as handle other household chores. Generally, these older girls are not able to attend school or enjoy an uninterrupted education. This factor also contributes to the effect girl's education.

According to, daughters are considered to be 'guests' in their parents' homes, because eventually they will move to their husbands' homes. As can be expected, this sense that girls are only 'temporary sojourners' often negatively influences parents' attitudes towards their daughters' education. And the socially constructed disadvantages are reinforced by the geo-physical conditions of Gilgit-Baltistan, which are major hindrances to females in regard to access to education, particularly higher education, and also restrict their general movements, as most of the population lives in small hamlets and villages that are scattered all over a vast, mountainous area. In spite of what has been said, the situation in Gilgit-Baltistan is not universally depressing.

Though female education possesses deep rooted meanings for developing the nations as rightly uttered that educate a man and you educate an individual, educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a nation. But despite all the efforts women still lag behind in literacy. The situation is a result of certain factors which are common to all of us in negative attitude of parents to the education of girls, inhabiting culture values and practices, religious values, poverty and early marriage, among others.

Besides other factor, there are certain religious practices impacting on female education too but such experiences are indirectly observed. According to religious and legal factors had only indirectly effects on higher education of women. Religion is not reckoned to be a direct factor of any significant to the issue of female education opportunity. However, it is invoke by some of those who wish to constrain such opportunity, so that it operates implicitly through perceived norms. It would be helpful if religious leaders were to espouse the cause of girls' education.

Similarly, Manimekhani (2002) who attempted to compare the relative role of working women vis-à-vis housewives in household decision making found that education and employment opportunities to women enhance the status of women in household through greater privilege in decision making for women. This would increase general social status of women and bring about gender equality. Pointing towards access for female education, Devakijain (1979) pointed out that even if house hold work is not recognized as work at least data should be made available in order to see whether women's domestic work prevent them from acquiring education, job and higher status. It is very often the case that women do not undertake paid work or attempt to market their service mainly due to the pressure of household duties. Therefore, the women are not able to offer their service outside the market. The less opportunities to woman education are considered directly related with socio-economic conditions. As Kravdal (2000) studies found that the higher-order birth rates were relatively low in regions where many women were literate. It has been also claimed that the within group inequalities and between group inequalities arise due to similar factors.

However, the central reason for wage inequality, namely Technology, works through separate channels for within and between group dynamics .Also, there are differential returns to race and gender but these are mainly analyzed by making across group

comparisons, and not necessarily paying enough attention to what might generate variations for the members of the same category. The gender gap in education for China has declined over time; however the schooling continued to be more unequal among females. All these studies tell that socio-economic groups such as gender or race are very broad and usually are divided along income, regional and family background lines. Thus, it is Necessary to investigate the within group differentials. On the basis of parents' view about educating a child the study reported that due to the changing socio-economic conditions, there were possibilities of increasing withdrawal of children from schools. The study also identified that the preference of parents of giving priority to boys, education also effects women education. It is a fact that women play an important educational role in the community, because they are responsible for educating their children, they also exercise an influence over the rest of the community in order to guarantee their integrity and development.

The studies by Bunwaree (1999) depicted out another dimension which hamper women education. He found that women have to purchase foods that are less processed; they also spend more time trying to find cheap foods and gathering fuel wood and water. Since a considerable proportion of the fuel and water procurement is done women this division of labor affects women's participation in higher education.

There have been extensive studies on differential education opportunities among genders. King and Hill examined the barriers to women's education in developing countries, and conclude that despite the decrease in the gender gap, girls still receive less education than boys. One of the main factors behind this is the institutional structure where there are biases against girls' school choice, and another one is the cultural impediments and different standards applied to genders.

There is also discrimination and segregation in the labor market, which pushes women to select certain professions and get training for them. The World Bank data show that there has been a significant improvement for the girls' enrolment in schools. For example, the secondary school enrolment rate among girls in low income countries was around 26% in 1990 and rose to 41% in 2001. The school enrolment rate for boys in the same set of countries has gone up from 42% in 1990 to 51% in 2001.

This indicates a convergence but there is still a 10% gap between the genders. Despite the low investment in girls' education, the returns to schooling for women are found to be quite high. In some cases, the returns to secondary schooling for girls are estimated to be higher than it is for boys.

As understood from these studies, several factors can influence boys' and girls' education options in a dissimilar manner leading to not only disparities across genders but also among the females themselves. Therefore, analyzing the education opportunities for girls is a prominent exercise, especially for developing countries where schooling for this group offers potential contribution to economic growth and individual well-being.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As the purpose of this study was to explore the perception of selected female students and few parents regarding their girls', therefore to study about their perceptions, case study method seemed more applicable to get the required data. The study particularly used this method as it allows using different tools such as interviews, observations, document analysis etc. Determining the importance of such method Creswell (1998) demonstrates that, "Case study provides the researcher with an opportunity to involve multiple sources of information which are rich in context" (p.61). Therefore, these

multiple tools under case study method helped me in triangulation of the data which ultimately enhanced the validity of my research findings.

Research Participants and Context

The study was carried out in one of the remote villages of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. This study involved two female students who were studying at higher grades and two of the parents (one who is optimistic towards female education and the other who is reluctant to send their female child to acquire education). While selecting research participants, the proposition by Merriam (1998) was considered that while sampling one should keep in mind the purpose of the study, the context of the respondents and their experiences relevant to the purpose of study. As the purpose of this study was based on studying the perceptions of female students and parents, therefore a purposive sampling was carried out as it allows choosing a case; it illustrates some feature of process in which the researcher is interested (Silverman, 2000). Precisely, the following criteria were observed while selecting research participants:

- ✓ Female students must be studying in university level education;
- ✓ The parents who are motivated to educate their female children;
- ✓ The parents who are reluctant to send their female children to get education
- ✓ They show willingness and volunteer to participate in the study and are interested in sharing their perceptions.

In addition, the study applied interviews as major tool for data collection, as "an interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insight on how subjects interpret some piece of work" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.96). Using interview method, the participants are asked open ended questions and ask for elaboration and clarification. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), "by probing an interviewee's responses, we are likely to add to the richness of the data, and end up with better understanding of the phenomenon we are studying" (p.95).

After each interview session, the data was reviewed which helped for making clarifications regarding questions asked and to prepare further probing questions on a need basis. To get participants' responses, a loosely structured interview guide was used to facilitate the conversation. Additionally, maintaining a methodological journal remained an ongoing activity throughout the whole data collection process. This journal was used to write down the experiences during the discussion and interviews and noting down observations. For further clarifications, the reflections were written during visits to participants while data collection process.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Glesne (1998) stresses that data analysis should be done simultaneously with data collection process which enables the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds. In line with these thoughts, data analysis in during the research study continued throughout the data collection process. Additionally, during collection of data, this process was accomplished in an organized way. For instance, the data was read several times and summaries were made. Then, the key ideas were sought and grouped them in similar categories. Furthermore, these categories were analyzed to identify key themes. The recurring themes were interpreted into research findings. While reviewing the whole data, five major themes emerged in nearly every interview. They are described under following paragraphs.

Perception of Female Students and Parents' Attitude

All the four participants in the study perceive education as a major tool in their career. They are highly motivated in acquiring education and consider education as one of the leading factors to build the human character.

The interviews with all the participants depicted out that they have a sound understanding regarding female education and its role in developing their families and their personal value in society.

As all the female students belonged to a specific Muslim community which is directly supported by their spiritual leader, therefore they give higher regards to their spiritual leader who pays higher attention and guidance towards acquiring female education. Supporting to such guidance, one of the participants uttered:

In my opinion I have to follow the guidance of our spiritual leader who advices us get education at any age level. Our leader emphasized that if a man has two children, a boy and a girl and if the parents cannot afford for both, they must prefer girl over boy. As if the female are educated, the whole family is benefited by her education. Therefore being a follower, I must understand the role of education in my life. (Interview: June 15, 2013)

Similar expressions were also shared by other participants. They were of the view that besides helping their mother at home and whenever they find any free time, they prefer to study books instead of watching television or being relaxed. One of the participants expressed:

I am the eldest daughter at my home. Though my mother is doing all the domestic work, i.e. cooking, sweeping and washing cloths etc. but I have to support my mother when she becomes too busy. I help my mother especially in cooking and pressing cloths of my younger brothers and sisters. Sometimes I become overburdened with home tasks; still I try my best to avail some time to study books and my course. And when I did not get any time at day time, I prefer to stay late night where I study one to two hours daily. This really helps me out and I become able to overcome my study difficulties. (Interview: June 17, 2013).

Pointing towards importance of female education one of the parents expressed:

I have never attended any school as in our times no schools exist in my village. Though I was interested to go to any schools and wished to get education. But due to unavailability of female schools in the surroundings I could not do so. I wish if I will get opportunity now a day to attend any schools. I will at least read my son's letter who is serving in Pakistan army. (Interview: June 19, 2013)

Such remarks uttered by the research participants depicted out that they have understood the real meaning of education in their lives. This highly motivated aptitude seems because of the guidance given by their spiritual leader and they seemed to obey the instructions whole heartedly.

Family Aptitude/Regard for Female Education

The parents and all the family members of each research participants was quite remarkable regarding their daughters' education. The whole data revealed that their families regard female education and give preference over gaining education than other important tasks at home. In their priorities, they mark education on the top. Speaking about such aptitude of the parents, one of the research participants shared:

My parents give the top-most priority to education. They always guide me to acquire education. They always pinch me to remain attached with the books. My father and mother are farmers and we have a huge land. All the agricultural activities perform by my parents. They always guide me to study and study. They share their stories and enforce that as they haven't got any education, therefore they do not have any choices other than agricultural work. They say that you are lucky having access towards education therefore try your best to remain intact with the books. (Interview: June 22, 2013)

Similar expressions were also reflected in other participants' views. They were candid in saying that their parents and family members always encourage female education. They remain busy in searching out various means which could support their daughters in marching towards acquiring education. Pointing towards such aptitude one of the participants' shared:

My father and mother are very keen in my education. Whenever I go back to my home after school hours, they ask me what you learnt today. Though they are not highly educated but still they interestingly listen to me. Their attitude is always encouraging as they ask me what type of other supplies you need to do your school tasks. This really boosts my courage and I try to involve myself with the books. (Interview: June 24, 2013)

When one of the parents' participants was asked about their female child, she depicted out:

Though in our surroundings female face difficulty in attending the schools but I boost up confidence of my daughter. She has to walk 15 minutes to reach her school and I always ask her to go with the other team mates.

Me and my husband are happy the way our daughter is securing in her class. Sometimes I pay visit to school and meet with the headteacher to know about my daughter's progress. He shares openly how my daughter performs in her class. I always become happy to hear his remarks, and share with my daughter too and she follows my advice. (Interview: June 22, 2013)

Various interview sessions with the participants pointed out that they do not possess any pressure by their parents and family members. They are highly supported by their families in acquiring their education and are happy with their school lives.

The System and School

The contemporary data revealed that all the female students are studying under a system which has deep rooted educational aptitude towards female education. As their system lies under NGO-based systems therefore it has been applying multiple approaches to enhance female education. Interestingly, the participants are studying in a school which is totally a female school and hence it provides more freedom for girls apply their potential without any difficult hurdles.

Additionally, the school has its own vision and mission statement. Both the statements have given prime importance towards female education. The teachers and other staff members are trained routinely to achieve their vision and mission. During their school time, they design such activities which remain instrumental in developing various skills among female students. Pointing towards such practices, one of the participants shared her views as:

Our teachers are skillful and the same with headteacher. They design beautiful activities; we enjoy working with our teachers. Though my teachers are mostly male but I did not hesitate to share with my teachers. They have given us such encouraging environment

that we always enjoy our school time. Inside classes, they always encourage us to present our learning in front of whole class. This boosts up our confidence. We are lucky that we are having such beautiful teachers. (Interview: June 25, 2013)

Sharing about other experiences, another participant expressed that:

Our Principal is a highly educated person. He is very cooperative and keen to involve us in school activities. During assembly, he speaks less and encourages us to design different activities to present in the assembly. We, as teams design different activities and present in daily-based assembly proceedings. We love this activity and we try our best to bring different innovative practices in assembly time. We recite Holy Quran, present latest news and other information to all our fellows and other students studying in our school. (Interview: June 26, 2013)

Pointing towards the role of the system and schools' aptitude towards female education, one of the parents said:

We are thankful to the AKES system for providing opportunities to improve female education. If this system did not exist, we were unable to send our female children to any schools.

They have opened many schools in surroundings. In my view, their quality of education is nice and we feel happy to send our children to this school. The headteacher and teachers are cooperative too. When we need their assistance, they welcome us. Sometimes they also contact us for school matters. We and our children are happy in this school. (Interview: June 25, 2013)

It was also revealed that the system under which this school is functioning is facilitative to school staff and students. The system organizes various sessions regarding teachers, community members and headteachers professional development. It also launches such informative programmes for the students which remain highly supportive in building their relationships with the school and making decisions about their future. Indicating towards such kind of practices, one of the participants embarked that:

During summer vacations and different intervals our Principal and our organization professionals arrange sessions for us. During these sessions we are informed about the career we need to opt in our future studies. They give us multiple directions. This is so beautiful and now we have gained a track and we are applying our best to follow it. They also provide us counseling and guidance sessions. It helps us to see our strengths and decide about our future. (Interview: June 27, 2013)

The above mentioned various expressions shared by the research participants depicted out that the school has a strong facilitative role in enhancing students' motivation and findings their career. They also are supported by the professionals directly linked in their schools. All these supportive mechanisms really help the students to find their right tracks as career path.

Societal Influence

The research participants are deeply concerned with the social and societal practices prevailing around them. They consider the role of society as one of the biggest hurdle in acquiring female education. In their perceptions, a nation's educational progress and development relies on the positive approach of society. If the society encourages female folks for opting education and serving in different fields, the nation can progress. They were of the view that the surrounding where they get education is unluckily in reversed practice. Female are considered somehow different than their male counter parts. They

had to prefer the nearest school to get their education and moving to distant parts, they face many challenges which are reflected through society practices. The participant from higher grade sharing her experiences narrated that:

I am living an area which is little bit far from my school. I have to walk for 20 minutes daily to reach to my school. Sometimes, I have to come cross the main roads. I feel that the people around these roads are not welcoming towards female education. They are not positive towards me. Sometimes I feel embarrassed to see their behavior while they are talking to each other and indirectly they try to say some of the bad names. I feel disheartened with their behavior. To overcome this I usually ask my father to accompany me towards my school. (Interview: June 28, 2013)

Reflecting with her experiences, another participant responded:

In my surrounding majority of the households belonged to illiterate families. They did not have enough knowledge about the role of education, particularly female education. They give priority to household tasks than education. When we go to school they feel that we are not supportive to our parents. Sometimes they also whisper our parents. At that moment I become upset and think about whether I am doing any wrong practice. (Interview: June 28, 2013)

The views of one of the parents' participants were quite similar to the student participant. She uttered:

We are living in an area where people are less educated. They do not prefer their female education. They generally feel that girls do not need to get education. They have to do household tasks. We need to send our sons to schools because they can support our families. Girls have to go to another house and they will not give us anything, just serving another house. (Interview: June 18, 2013)

Various discourses with the research participant presented similar feelings regarding female education. They shared similar kind of challenges happened because of societal practices. But their responses reflected that they are optimistic towards their education and they feel that this situation may be reverted if all the female are encouraged to get their education. They also feel that certain religious practices also hamper their education. There are certain stereotypes attached with female and all these factors remain a source of disappointment for female to acquire their education.

Peers/Colleagues' Role

The data showed that peers and colleagues have strong association with the female students regarding their education. It was noticed that female students not only share their knowledge, they also remain supportive to each other in difficult times. Highlighting such practices, one of the research participants was candid in expressing that:

In my school I have another family which is my fellows' family. I really love to be a part of this family. We work together as sisters, discuss about the topics, share our learning and get help from each other. My team-mates are so supportive, they like to share. We not only share our educational activities, but share our personal problems with close friends. We join our hands if any of our fellow feels under stressed. This is so nice practice and we are lucky to have such beautiful friends in our school. (Interview: June 30, 2013)

Similar perceptions were also narrated by other participant, saying that:

I feel the role of my colleagues' one of most encouraging episode. If my colleagues were not supportive I may have left this school. When I joined this school I was not considered

as a good student. I was facing many problems in understanding any concept. As I was small, I was unable to ask from the teachers for clarity.

I feel ashamed to ask again and again. I used to ask by my peers. They were so kind and supportive. We used our break times to share and hence I improved my understanding and now I am leading the class and remain one of the top position holders in my class. (Interview: June 30, 2013)

The third participant shared another dimension of colleagues' and peers' support. She was of the view that:

I have a circle of nine friends. They all belong to my class. In various subjects we have assigned responsibilities to each other. For example, I am leading the English subject and other friends lead different subjects too. Our task is to go through in-depth study about any theme or topic. All of us do so and we come to school earlier than school timings. We discuss our learning with other friends and hence improve our understanding. We often use our break time and free periods to discuss various contents. This is quite amusing as we become sound in our courses. (Interview: June 30, 2013)

Various dimensions of participants sharing regarding the role of their peers depicted out those students deeply consider the role of their colleagues in their professional journey. Being same age students, they are frank in sharing their educational and personal matters. They see a strong affiliation with their colleagues during difficult times, discuss freely and resolve their academic and personal matters.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The research has gathered many insights by barely scratching the complex topic of female education. Female education in Gilgit is a multifaceted situation with many different areas that merit attention. The societal approach regarding female education may be an especially potent area for further research, as it seems to be a large problem that is mainly underground and secretive. Future research could also compare the different regions in Gilgit or even whole context of Gilgit-Baltistan. Since this research focused mainly on a small town, and in particular, the small village adjacent to Gilgit town, the other voices are not really captured. Therefore further deeper studies in this connection would be interesting to examine what factors cause these differences.

Research specifically looking at the role of various stakeholders in encouraging female education would be beneficial. Looking solely at different approaches that NGOs and other community-based sponsored schools could be very helpful to uncover what problems the female students face and based on the findings the future challenges may be addressed.

While it is difficult to make any sweeping generalizations about the findings of these three case studies, it is possible to make various connections between the research and the field. One general impression formed from the three female students is that all three appeared to be very composed, self-assured, and confident. They answered the questions articulately and with ease. They presented an image of competence and self-assurance both in their conduct and in the content of their answers.

A further observation drawn from the data is that all three women have an encouraging attitude from their parents and family members and hence they are motivated to continue their education despite several societal challenges in their ways. My experiences also endorse that many women have gone through such bitter experiences in our localities. Similar situation was also the case for all three of the research participants I interviewed.

There seemed to have been certain key persons in their lives who made the suggestion at the right time in their career that gently nudged them in the direction of educational institutions.

However, all the participants uttered that they were notably "tested" in the initial stages of their studies. While this "trial" period may occur for any first year student, male or female, the consensus amongst the three participants was that they felt they were challenged somewhat more because they were female. This certainly supports the research that women sometimes lack legitimate authority and often women feel they have to work harder to be considered as equal to their male counterparts. It would appear then, that female students face two main hurdles in securing and maintaining an educational approach. First, as research points out, there are various barriers women must overcome and secondly, an initial "testing" period where the female students must "prove" themselves worthy. Once these two hurdles are overcome, it would appear that the female students have a better chance to succeed in their educational journey.

The literature suggests more and more women are obtaining certification and pursuing higher education, and there is an influx of women taking graduate level work at the masters' and doctoral level (Shakeshaft, 1987).

The research I conducted seemed to verify that women are becoming more highly motivated as all the three female students I interviewed had their own plans to acquire higher education. It appears those females are putting themselves in better positions to obtain significant positions by undertaking higher studies.

Current literature points to a female's domestic and family responsibilities as being another possible barrier to women pursuing careers in educational setting. My research does seem to support the literature. I found that all of the three research participants expressed the same feelings that apart from their school tasks, they have to perform another domestic tasks and family responsibilities. To fill those responsibilities they have to pay extra attention towards their routine activities and performing other domestic tasks.

A significant factor was that the parents are paying greater roles in provision of study time for these female students as they bear the workload more than what they were expected to do so.

One of the participants concurred that the dual responsibilities women faced were very challenging, not only in terms of workload, but also in terms of the perceived scrutiny of her female skills often perceived by community members. Since research does support the notion that women are still bearing the brunt of the domestic responsibilities and are the primary care-givers, it is clear that these dual responsibilities of career and home may be a deterrent to many women striving for acquiring education.

In attempting to ascertain whether societal obligations and practices is an issue or not for women in educational setting, it was quite difficult to draw any sort of broad conclusions from my research sample. However, it appeared that although being unmarried was not an issue for the particular participants I interviewed, they did have the perception that being unmarried could potentially be difficult for aspiring female students but the stereotyping aptitude regarding female folk may cause certain difficulties for them. We can draw that the society's lack of comfort with issues of sexuality and some of the unspoken beliefs about men and women working together may have affected the perceptions. These factors could certainly inhibit or interfere with some women advancing up the educational ladder.

The powerful influence of gender socialization has been thoroughly documented.

Mahoney (1993) cites Witaker and Lane in saying women are limited by social expectations, parental guidance and self-aspiration. Men are more often socialized to persevere and seek professional success while women are socialized to nurture and support others as they assume the traditional role of mother and caretaker of the home. It is difficult to say how much influence gender socialization has had on these three female research participants. However, it is apparent that for two of the three women, negative socialization did not appear to have hindered their ambition very much.

The literature often points out that women tend to lead in more collaborative, democratic ways. Such perception are also confirmed through my research as all three female students indicated during the interview process that connecting with staff, collaborating for staff input, and working as a team were important to them.

There were strong indications that these female students prefer non-confrontational, democratic ways of working with their peers, teachers and their communities.

From the information the three female participants provided about their typical day, it became apparent that they worked very hard at this stage of educational life. They have been spending a great deal of extra time not only in their course studies, but in extracurricular responsibilities as well.

I concluded that these female students are extremely dedicated and hard-working individuals. They face the challenge of their studies in ways that ensure they are successful for their communities and derive satisfaction for themselves.

So, based upon the commitment expressed by the three research participants, it is recommended that women who are immersed with lot of responsibilities must opt for distance learning educational opportunities.

In developing countries, like Pakistan, there are various distance learning programmes being offered at state level and there is an easy access towards such programmes.

If the women are being informed and provided with the opportunities, they not only can improve their educational status, but also render their services in improving the status of their families and overall societies. .

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