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Female Education in Pakistan

Every week, millions of children in the United States wake up and go to school for the day, however many girls in Pakistan are not so fortunate. For years, many Pakistani girls have not received schooling, resulting in a largely uneducated female population. There is a significant disparity between girls and boys attending school. According to UNICEF, in 2016 (2018), the gender parity index in Pakistan was 0.86, meaning that for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, there were 86 girls enrolled. This creates a population that is skewed towards males being more educated and thus having more power over women.

There are many reasons for this large gap, and for the number of girls out of school. As explained by Jamal (2015), gender discrimination, religious beliefs, and access to safe and quality schools all contribute to the low number of females that receive education, troubles that boys rarely face. According to Article 28 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments must recognize the right of the child to education. This article states that state parties must make primary education available to every child, encourage higher education, and take measures to ensure that these goals are met. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Pakistan has a responsibility to educate all children, regardless of sex. Through the creation of government-sponsored schools for girls and the support from outside organizations, as well as reinventing the female's societal role through the adjustment of religious and cultural values, Pakistani girls can receive the education they deserve.

The disparity between boys' and girls' enrollment in school only increases as the grade levels do. As noted by UNICEF, the gender parity in primary school is .86 but reduces to .83 in secondary school. This means that as girls make the transition to secondary school, there is an increased likelihood that they will not continue their education. Additionally, there exists a sex gap of .82 between literacy rates in Pakistan. (UNICEF, 2018). This data supports the notion that girls and boys are educated differently and unequally in Pakistan.

Gender discrimination has been prevalent in Pakistan for many years and contributes to the lack of female education. Across all education levels and socio-economic statuses, sons are preferred over daughters, however this is even more common in less educated families (Atif et al., 2016). Males are preferred due to their ability to bring a dowry to their family. Men also provide income to their families, as they stay with the family after marriage. For this same reason, parents rely on males to care for them as they age (Qadir, Khan, Medhin, & Prince, 2011). Conversely, daughters are viewed as an additional burden to parents. Parents of daughters must find husbands for them, as well as pay both the dowry cost and the cost of the wedding, which can amount to decades' worth of income (Atif et al., 2016). Additionally, girls leave the family once they get married, which means that they will not be around to take care of their parents at the end of their lives.

This preference for males influences the way that both sexes are educated. Many families anticipate futures for their sons in which they will be working at a well-paying job to support themselves and their family. To ensure this future, parents are more likely to send their sons to school so they can receive an education in order to help them get a good job when they are older (Ali et al., 2011). However, parents are less concerned about the future for their daughters. Once daughters get married and leave the family, they almost always become full-time housewives and

mothers. Because of this predetermined future, parents are less likely to enroll their daughters in school and will instead take advantage of the years before marriage for the daughter to do manual labor (Qadir et al., 2011).

This male preference is also represented in the societal views of women of Pakistan, which tend to view males as above women, thus giving males more privilege in society. Women are believed to belong only in the house, and many Pakistani societies believe that a woman should be accompanied by a male relative any time she wishes to leave the home. These views also extend to education, with many societies not promoting the education of girls. (Ahmad & Gates, 2016). Men are also believed to be more responsible and knowledgeable, thus fathers are primarily the ones making decisions about their daughter's education. Many fathers fail to educate their daughters because they still subscribe to male-dominant views due to the patriarchal nature of Pakistan. (Ahmad & Gates, 2016).

Many Pakistani people also believe that females should not go to school due to religious values. Pakistan is a primarily Muslim country, and many cite the Qur'an, and the religious principles it encompasses, as prohibiting girls from receiving an education. However, these claims may not actually be substantiated by the Qur'an. According to Abukari (2014), the Qur'an has generally been interpreted by males, as they were the ones in power, and thus trusted with discerning the meaning of such sacred documents as the Qur'an. As a result, interpretations between the 5th and 15th centuries developed theologically-backed standards about women that were reflective of the time's male perspective on women, rather than the perspective that was actually stated in the Qur'an (Abukari, 2014).

Due to Islam's institutional status in Pakistan, these standards developed into a generalized belief system about women that has remained largely unchallenged to this day.

Therefore, it is likely that these interpretations that have worn away women's rights that were originally outlined. Additionally, with many females lacking the education necessary to provide them with basic reading skills, they are unable to read the Qur'an for themselves to discover their rights and are thus deprived of the ability to liberate themselves. Essentially, women are not able to receive an education due to possibly outdated and unfounded beliefs about women and their educational rights; however, in order to change these beliefs, they must receive education, which they are barred from doing due to these same patriarchal beliefs (Abukari, 2014).

One group that advocates against female education is the Taliban, a terrorist group that has been active since 1994. The Taliban ideology combines sharia law with radical interpretations of the Qur'an and forbids female education and employment on the basis of Islam (Fazl-E-Haider, 2013). In 2008, the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley of Pakistan and implemented bans on female education with very strict and harsh punishments. In 2012, Malala Yousafzai, a 14-year-old Swat Valley resident who was still attending school, spoke out against the Taliban and advocated for female education. In October of that year, Taliban forces in the Swat Valley shot Yousafzai in the head on her way home from school (Malala Fund, 2018). The Taliban was quick to announce to the world that it had attacked Yousafzai and seized it as an opportunity to show other activists the price of disobedience (Fazl-E-Haider, 2013). Even today, the Taliban is one of the most prevalent radical Islamic groups and continues to advocate for the elimination of female education, despite international pushback (Mir, 2018). The continued presence and influence of the Taliban remains a barrier to female education.

It can be argued that the Qur'an actually does advocate for women's rights. Chapter 51 verses 56-58 of the Qur'an read "I have created jinns and men, that they may serve Me. No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. For Allah is He who

gives (all) sustenance” (Abukari, 2014, p. 12). Based on this, it is implied that the purpose of humankind is to worship God only. If the purpose of existence is to worship God, then it is reasonable to think that in order to know how to worship God, his people must be educated. So, if women were created by God, then the purpose of their existence is to worship God, and they must also have the right to receive an education in order to properly do so (Abukari, 2014).

Knowledge and Islam are very closely intertwined. According to Abukari (2014), the second most used word in the Qur’an is knowledge, with the first being the name of God. Additionally, words that originate from the Arabic word “ilm” (knowledge) appear 865 times throughout the Qur’an. In the Qur’an, the prophet Muhammad is also reported to have said that “the acquisition of knowledge is the duty of every Muslim man and Muslim woman” (Abukari, 2014). This further emphasizes that the Qur’an supports female education. Davids (2015) additionally affirms the Qur’an’s support for female education. According to Davids, many women who chose to actively and persistently pursue education were those whose fathers were well known for their knowledge of the Qur’an (primarily religious leaders) and were supportive of their daughters’ education. This support from religious leaders suggests that the Qur’an does support female education, because surely if the Qur’an did not advocate for it, religious leaders would not condone or encourage females in their family to pursue education (Davids, 2015).

In addition to religious and societal hurdles to education, girls face additional difficulty in finding and accessing quality schooling. This problem is especially common in rural areas, where there are fewer schools, and where the distance in between schools is farther (Callum, Sathar, & Haque, 2012). Additionally, many schools are segregated based on sex due to the need for separate bathroom facilities for girls. At boys’ schools, there is often no formal bathroom, as boys can go to the bathroom outside. To some extent, girls can also do this, but once girls begin

their menstrual period, there is a need for special bathroom facilities for females to attend to their period, which they may not be willing or able to attend to in public (Nawaz, Khalid, & Serani, 2017). The need for these additional facilities makes girls' schools more expensive. In 2002, almost one in four rural Pakistani communities had no girls' school within the community or within two kilometers of the community (Callum et al., 2012). The likelihood that a girl will enroll in school triples when there is a local school. In 2013, over half of rural Pakistani girls had not completed primary education, compared to 25 percent of urban girls. The gap between rural and urban school completion is much closer in boys, with around 20 percent of urban boys and around 30 percent of rural boys failing to complete primary education (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, 2013).

However, in 2002, 47 percent of girls still did not attend school in rural areas that had a local primary school (Callum et al, 2012). One major hindrance to a Pakistani girl receiving an education is her mobility. Mobility is a girl's ability to move freely outside her home without restriction (Callum et al., 2012). There are three general types of mobility: unrestricted mobility, restricted mobility, and very restricted/no mobility. For the purposes of this study, unrestricted mobility was defined in terms of being allowed to go alone to school. Restricted mobility was the ability to go to school if accompanied by an escort (usually an older male). Very restricted/no mobility was then defined as only being permitted to attend school very infrequently, or not at all. If there was a school within the community or within two kilometers, approximately one-third of girls could attend without being accompanied, as compared to 98 percent of boys. An additional 58 percent of girls could attend if escorted, and 8 percent of girls were not allowed to attend school at all. The numbers are even lower when there was no school within proximity. When there is no local school, only 21 percent of girls could attend school unaccompanied and

64 percent could attend with an escort. This leaves 15 percent of girls whose parents allowed them to attend infrequently or not at all (Callum et al., 2012).

Even if a girl is allowed to attend school, there is no guarantee that she will continue her education. Mobility was shown to have an impact on the enrollment and dropout rate of girls in rural areas. Of the girls whose parents allowed them very limited mobility, very few of them actually arrived at and attended school. These girls were also much more likely to drop out. Fifty percent of 9-14-year-olds that attended school infrequently had already dropped out, and all girls aged 13-14 that attended infrequently had dropped out (Callum et al., 2012). This is most likely due to the infrequent amount of times that the girls actually went to school, which made it very difficult for them to learn and retain information and reap real benefits of their education. Girls that required an escort to go to school also displayed an increased risk of dropping out. Twenty-four percent of girls that needed an escort had dropped out, as compared to 18 percent of those that could attend school alone (Ismail, 2014). Simply put, higher mobility leads to better retention in school.

Solutions do exist for increasing female mobility. Some (primarily urban) communities offer bus transport systems that girls can utilize to get to school, but these systems are not always safe and can be hubs for both physical and sexual abuse; physical abuse usually being perpetrated by those who do not want girls to attend school, and sexual abuse being committed by those that see educational bus transport systems as a location with many young girls that cannot easily escape. Some transport systems require a female to be accompanied by a male relative to combat this problem, but a male relative may not always be available to escort the girl. If a girl is not able to safely get to school each day, she is likely to drop out in order to keep herself from being harmed (Ismail, 2014).

It is obvious that the lack of female education in Pakistan has adverse effects on the girls of the country. Girls who are not able to receive an education due to societal beliefs about what jobs they should have feel devalued, and like they do not get to determine their own future (Oppenheim & Stanbach, 2014). Additionally, if religious values continue to be used as the basis for keeping girls out of school, they feel as though their religion is against them (Abukari, 2014). This has already become an issue in Pakistan, as feminist critics of the Qur'an have denounced its holy status because its interpretation does not support the education of girls (Davids, 2015).

A lack of female education also impacts Pakistan as a whole. Females make up 50 percent of the population in Pakistan, yet there are a great number of them who are not educated and are not working. As 50 percent of the population, females theoretically comprise 50 percent of the potential workforce and economic contributions available to Pakistan (Shaikh, Taherani, Shah, & Baghal, 2015). Because girls are either not receiving education at all or not receiving the same level of education that boys are receiving, they are unable to provide these contributions to their country. This just worsens the already weak economy of Pakistan (Shaikh et al., 2015). If girls in Pakistan were able to receive education, they would be able to feel more empowered and turn that empowerment into real change for their country.

Educating girls has positive impacts. UNICEF states that educating girls has a “multiplier effect” (UNICEF, 2018): educated girls are more likely to marry later in life and have fewer and healthier children, who will, in turn, have a greater chance of survival and attending school themselves. The failure to educate girls in this generation is the failure to educate children for many generations to come (UNICEF, 2018). One fundamental way to increase the number of girls that go to school is to change societal views about females and female education. According to Jamal (2015), females have the ability to empower themselves by challenging the

interpretations of the Qur'an that restrict them from education and by promoting gender equality. Another method that focuses on first educating wealthy girls is also suggested by Ullah (2016). If wealthy girls are able to attend school, they will be able to get higher paying jobs and provide for their families just as their husbands do, thus leveling the playing field. When the rich make these strides, societal viewpoints change, and schools will become more accessible to everyone (Ullah, 2016).

However, the most effective change will likely come from those in power: the men. Jamal (2015) details many different methods for involving men in promoting female education developed and recommended by the men themselves. Community elders and religious leaders are the most influential community members, and thus wield the most power to change views about female education. Most "authentic and educated" community elders and religious leaders are not against female education, but they were not very willing to voice their beliefs about the topic due to the societal views about it (Jamal, 2015, p.279). Engaging these leaders and convincing them to share their opinions with other men would be monumentally important in changing the way that society views education (Jamal, 2015).

Another possible way that societal views about girls' education can be changed is through the engagement of men's institutions. A central way to incite change is to engage men in power in Pakistan (Ullah, 2016). In rural Pakistan, there are two central institutions that could be effective to initiate conversations about female education: the men's village gathering place, or Hujira; and the council of elders, or Jirga. Because Hujira is a common spot for men of the villages to gather and talk, this would be a prime location to introduce the idea of expanding female education to others of the village. One study participant who was a member of a Jirga stated that most direct and effective way to advocate for female education was to talk to Jirga

members about female education. If Jirga members are convinced that female education is an important issue and should be supported, they are more likely to use their influence to compel others in the community to educate their females (Jamal, 2015).

Even if societal views about female education change, it is more than likely that many Pakistani males will rely solely on the interpretations of the Qur'an that have been around for thousands of years and use them as a basis for not allowing women to go to school. Thus, it is important to reexamine the Qur'an and develop new interpretations. Religious change would likely be a second step in changing opinions about female education. Once societal norms have changed, and religious leaders voice their opinions on why female education is valuable, the opportunity arises to reevaluate the rights for women that are outlined in the Qur'an. Religious scholars such as Abdulai Abukari have published studies detailing different ways that the Qur'an advocates for girls' education, and it is believed that these findings have the potential to influence religious beliefs about female education (Abukari, 2014). If more studies such as these are conducted, the information discovered can begin to change how Islam has traditionally viewed female education, which can eliminate religious grounds for opposing female education.

Once societal and religious views about female education change, the final step would be to construct closer and better schools for girls in Pakistan. Recently, the government of Pakistan has developed a new system of girls' schools called Government Girls Primary (GGP) Schools (Habib, 2013). A typical GGP school employs two primary level teachers and has fewer physical facilities, but has the appropriate facilities needed for females, including female bathrooms, as well as nurses that can assist with female health issues. Community Model (CM) Schools also have been developed and funded by the Pakistani government. A typical CM school has classrooms with chairs, desks, fans for cooling purposes, a playground, a principal's office and

staff break room, toilets, and locations to provide water. Each school also employs five female teachers and a female principal, each with higher qualifications than those working at a GGP school. The government of Pakistan received a loan of \$64.2 million from the Asian Development Bank for the Girls Primary Education Project, to construct 873 CM schools (Habib, 2013). The participation rate for these schools for females is 62 percent, which is a marked improvement over female education rates without this program. They have a low rate of dropouts, better teachers and administration, better academic performance, and better equipment than Government Girls Primary Schools (Habib, 2013)

A logical next step would be to implement Community Model Schools in rural areas as well as urban areas to provide girls living there with close schools that provide them with quality facilities and teaching. This would reduce the rate of girls that have to leave school. Additionally, due to the governmental endorsement of these schools, it is likely that fathers would be more open to giving their daughters more mobility in order to go to these schools. Another course of action could be to fund Government Girls Primary Schools as well (Habib, 2013). Since these schools are not held to the same standard as the CM schools, they are less expensive and may be easier to implement in rural areas, because of the massive area that must be covered. If many less expensive schools can be placed in rural areas, it will allow more girls to be able to attend a school close to them. These schools can also act as stepping stones; if they are successful, perhaps Community Model Schools can begin to be constructed in the rural areas as secondary schools. These schools are already helping to increase the number of girls that can go to school, and if the government of Pakistan develops more of these schools in the country as it plans to, hopefully girls will also have schools to attend that are equal to the boys' schools currently available.

The Malala Fund is also working to provide educational resources to girls in Pakistan. After her Taliban-inflicted brush with death, Malala Yousafzai founded the Malala Fund. The fund raises money to build schools in communities that lack them and continues to advocate for female education. In 2017, Yousafzai announced that in the few years since its inception, the Malala Fund had invested \$6 million in female education in Pakistan (Malala Fund, 2018). The Malala Fund also employs and consults local activists and educators that are ideally positioned to advise on educational issues facing females in their communities. The Malala Fund also provides resources that detail why supporting female education is crucial. This organization has already been key in both creating awareness for female education and making strides to improve it.

Overall, female education in Pakistan is an issue, but it is a solvable problem. Different societal views of females, such as their utility, their future, and their value as compared to males, lead many Pakistani males to believe that females should not receive an education. Additionally, patriarchally skewed interpretations of Islam's sacred text, the Qur'an, state erroneously that women should not receive an education. This provides many citizens of Pakistan with a religious basis for their belief that females should not be educated. Limited access to schools, especially in rural areas, and limited female mobility also contribute to the lack of Pakistani girls receiving a quality education. This problem not only has adverse effects on the girls but on Pakistan as a country. Possible solutions include starting a conversation with influential males about ways to change the current views on female education in hopes of reversing the societal views that treat women as lesser. The Qur'an should also be reinterpreted to discover that women truly were given the right to education and that this is protected in the Islamic faith. This would effectively refute the argument that Islam says that girls should not receive an education. The Pakistani government is attempting to institute new schooling options throughout the country, and the

continuation of these efforts, along with contributions being made by the Malala Fund will make schooling feasible for girls everywhere, including rural areas of the country. If the Pakistani government and citizens combine all of these efforts, then the percentage of girls are able to receive a quality education will soar.

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