

## **Higher Education for Women in Peshawar: Barriers and Issues**

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### **Abstract:**

*Higher education for women is one of the major issues in Pakistan especially in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Most of the girls quit their education at higher secondary or intermediate level, which is a negative sign both for productivity and financial system of our society. Higher education not only increases critical and rational thinking, general knowledge, ways of living, financial status of a family but also common sense. The need of higher education is more for women as they are responsible for the bringing-up of a family; unfortunately, the ratio of the higher education among women in Peshawar is decreasing, which is the point of discussion in this study. This research made an attempt to consider the possible reasons behind the issues related to the women's higher education in Peshawar. Data was collected through Questionnaire and further analyzed by employing ANOVA. The results revealed that there are different social and cultural issues due to which higher education of women in Peshawar is not promoted; however, the increase in the enrolment of the female students has witnessed an increase. Government may make extra efforts to promote the education of women as it directly affects families in particular and societies in general.*

### **Key Words**

*Women education, Higher education, Barriers, Issues*

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### **Introduction:**

Education is one of the basic and essential rights of an individual and there is no discrimination based on gender, race, language or religion. The right to educate is common in all the religions and culture. Unfortunately,

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Asian countries have got the educational discrimination on the basis of the gender, financial status, marital status and some other concepts; especially Pakistan has got multiple societies where the girls' education is discriminated from the boys' education.<sup>1</sup>

Higher education is need of the hour and without having involved in it; one cannot contribute in the field of research and the development of a society. In the preceding argument equality in education is highlighted and women are no exception. Higher Education Commission and Government of Pakistan also strive hard to promote female education in the entire country; however various barriers and issues still need to be addressed; particularly in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The present study focuses on the condition and/or status of the higher education among women in Peshawar. It further analyzes barriers and the reasons for the identification of anticipated factors that are the main causes in the way of women's higher education in Peshawar.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Aims and Objectives:**

The main aim of this study is to identify the barriers and problems that the women in Peshawar have to face in their higher education. The objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the problems related to the higher education of girls in Peshawar
2. To determine the factors that obstruct the education of women in the society.
3. To increase awareness about the importance of the women education in Peshawar

#### **Research Question:**

1. What types of barriers, issues, and restrictions in the women's higher education are present in the society of Peshawar?

#### **Problem Statement:**

The ratio of women's higher education as compared to men is very low in Peshawar and the girls are usually not motivated to pursue their higher studies due to numerous reasons. Although the Government of Pakistan is taking several steps regarding the women's educational rights and various NGOs are also supporting their education; still these efforts are not extracting the expected results. Women empowerment is very important and education plays an effective role in empowering the women; it also allows the women to know about their rights, to aware themselves about different issues, and to make the decisions that are beneficial for them. Therefore, there is a need to identify different issues and barriers related to women education in Peshawar and recommend possible solutions for such problems.

#### **Justification of the Study**

The higher education is a must for women as it helps them to have sound knowledge about the prospective fields and increases their general skills and

abilities besides developing critical and rational thinking. Educated women lead successful life as they have the capacity and ability to bringing-up their children in an educated milieu and manner and they can also help their families even in times of financial crisis. This study allows identifying different barriers, and issues of women education in Peshawar and is also helpful for the different institutions to consider the barriers, and issues, highlighted in the study, and take proper and effective steps on immediate basis that are needed. Empowering women education is the basic need and Islam also promotes education for both women and men. Women education is helpful to build healthier societies as women play an important role in educating their children. Hence, this study focuses on the status of higher education of women in Peshawar and also explores the barriers and issues pertaining to its promotion and present remedial measures.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Current Situation of the Higher Education of Women in Peshawar**

Higher education condition among the women of Peshawar is not appreciable. Although the government is taking measures for the enhancement of the higher education trend for the women and girls of Peshawar but family issues, financial conditions and the security conditions do not allow the women to seek higher education for the sake of their future and also for their future generations.<sup>3</sup> Education influences the character, mind or the physical capability of a person and therefore education can be considered as the process that provides the collective knowledge and the skills from one generation to other. Educated people have an access to the best practices as they have the knowledge and awareness related to different issues and the problems.<sup>4</sup> When the society of Pakistan is considered then it is seen that the females are not usually provided with the equal status as the men and especially in the context of the Pashtoon society more power is delegated to the male as compared to the females. In the educational perspective also this is the problem that males are given the preference over the females.<sup>5</sup>

There are several universities for higher education and these universities are solely for the women of the Peshawar so that the women could be encouraged to be enrolled for higher education i.e. higher than the intermediate education. The top ranking public sector universities of the Peshawar include the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University for Women, University of Peshawar and Islamia College University. These universities are providing the best teaching material and method with skilled and experienced professors imparting the excellent knowledge to the students. But unfortunately still the enrolment of the girls of the Peshawar is not up to the expectation as compared to the boys, see table 1. According to the population of Peshawar, only 30-40% of the girls get enrolled in the bachelor's programs among which almost 8% of the girls quit the studies in the mid of their studies and fail to get the bachelor's degrees.

The statistics of Peshawar University on their website for 2013 are:-

Faculties / College	Bachelor		Master		MS/M.Phil.		Ph.D.	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Arts and Humanities	35	42	213	148	22	19	10	4
Islamic and Oriental Studies	0	0	144	225	28	5	104	49
Life & Environmental Sciences	838	353	651	782	270	148	112	36
Management & Info: Science	425	738	637	307	1	2	1	17
Numerical & Physical Science	897	93	506	205	118	32	34	4
Faculty of Social Sciences	966	597	748	543	44	24	17	8
Jinnah College for Women	0	392	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3161	2215	2899	2210	483	230	278	118
Sub Total	5376		5109		713		396	

Percentage of Women            41%            43%            32%            30%

**Table 1: Percentage of women enrolled in Peshawar University in 2014**

Source: Peshawar University Statistics: (Arab, et. al. 2013)

### **Barriers in the Higher Education of Women of Peshawar**

There are several visible or invisible barriers in the path of getting higher education by the women of Peshawar. These barriers may be internal or external and they can serve as the obstacle either directly or indirectly.

#### **Internal Barriers:**

Internal barriers are those which are the obstacles that are related to the individual's personal life and his family. Sometimes these internal barriers become unavoidable and the result is in the sacrifice of the women from her higher education. They are direct barriers that are clearly visible by the individual and she can realize the actual barrier which has been found in her internal matters. The internal barriers include poverty, family mind set and the religious beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Poverty:**

Poverty in Peshawar is a main problem and most of the families cannot afford the burden of their children. According to a survey report of UNESCO, 17.6% of the Peshawari children are working and earning for their families although these working children are mostly the boys, but the girls also have to take step to earn some money for their family instead of getting higher education.<sup>7</sup> The net annual income of the 49% of the families of Peshawar is less than their annual expenses and they have to fit their expenses in the same range of their income. So the

easiest way to save the income is to sacrifice the higher education of their daughters.

It is obvious but necessary to observe that poverty has blocked many ways to development in the area, including education.<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that a clear contradiction was observed effective in case of female children as the male children are somehow getting the education but the girls are forced to sacrifice their education.<sup>9</sup>

### **Family Mind Set:**

The education trend in the family of an individual has the largest role in the higher education of the women. The parents have a great influence on the children and the children address the importance of education only when their parents do the same.<sup>6</sup>

According to a study, the stereotyping between the girls and boys is clearly visible in the Peshawar and most of the parents were found to be against the higher education of the daughters. Almost 70% of the parents mentioned Purdah (veil) as the biggest constraint in the way of female education and they consider that the hijab of their daughters will be disturbed if they will take the education in universities. 42% of the parents have the traditional thoughts and criteria that the girls are like the guests in their parents' homes so there is no need to invest on their education as ultimately they cannot participate in the financial activities of the family. About 77% of the mothers of Peshawar are illiterate so they are not aware of the importance of female education. Instead they think that their daughters have to do the same house hold chores and their daughters will also lead a happy life as these mothers have spent.<sup>1</sup>

### **Religious Beliefs:**

The religious beliefs are the most important factor for the women education. Islam has laid the foundation of equality regarding the education but at the same time, Islam has mentioned the superiority of the men upon women. Also the religion has ensured that the girls should not go outside home without any need and if she went outside then, she should cover her face by the veil that is called hijab.<sup>3</sup>

These teachings of the religion have encouraged the male heads of the families to have the feeling of the superiority and they start to think that the girls are the weakest creature, so they do not put sufficient efforts for the education. The superiority complex in men has made the society crueller that the women are not allowed to go anywhere alone in the society rather than to go to the universities.<sup>10</sup>

### **External Barriers:**

The external barriers are those obstacles that come along the female education way from outside the individual's life and family. These barriers are mostly indirect and invisible. These barriers include the cultural barriers, lack of infrastructure of the women education and the security issues.<sup>11</sup>

**Cultural Barriers:**

it is one of the most deplorable factors in the female education issue in Peshawar. The society of Peshawar is not supportive and cooperative for a woman when she steps out for education. The most common obstacles laid by the society include the stigmatizing the girl having higher education, the misinterpretation about the character of the girl, the restrictions of the other girls in keeping friendship with the educated girls, eve teasing of the boys etc.<sup>4</sup> These attitudes of the people from the society introduce the frustration and disappointment in the women so they feel it better to leave their studies and sacrifice education for the sake of their reputation in the society.<sup>9</sup>

There are a number of reasons behind the non-cooperative behavior of the society. The conservative people of our society have misinterpreted the values of Islam and have set the predefined by default rules by themselves which they think are the important in everyone's life.

- Opposition with reference to religion that Islam has not allowed to go outside home, so if a girl is stepping out from the home for the purpose of the education, then she is considered to be sinful and thus may have the bad character.
- The girls don't have to earn for the family and they don't participate in the financial activity generally. So if a girl is getting education then it is assumed that she will be doing job in future for sure, which is not her responsibility.
- Restrictions in the marriage proposals are commonly observed and the families hesitate in arranging the marriage of their boys with an educated girl as they think that the educated girls are very bold, sharp and cunning that they will not respect the husband, family and the family values.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, the majority of females are illiterate in our society and this low literacy level was one of the major causes for their low socioeconomic status in the society. There was a distinct gap in socioeconomic status of males and females where the females were at disfavor. The "Karl Marx's- The Deficient Feminine Nature Theory" which served as theoretical framework of research, was also tested for its validity through findings of the research study. It has been proved as a correct explanation of community's discriminatory attitude towards females and their education, in the context of Peshawar community.<sup>1</sup>

The feminist theory focuses on the gender equality and that both women and men should be provided with the equal rights but as the time has passed it is seen to be focusing on the rights of the women and the dominance of women. This is because women are usually deprived of the different rights they have due to which they are forced to live a life that is miserable.<sup>7</sup> Women can claim that they are equal to men and the inequality of the gender leads to the different issues that makes it an issue and gender equality can be only provided by bringing the changes in the work, family, education; in all fields of life.<sup>12</sup> Liberal philosophy focuses in the equality of gender by bringing the legal and the political changes.

The main emphasis is on the ability of the women that they can attain the equal status as the men.<sup>13</sup>

**Lack of Physical Impediments:**

There are several physical impediments which hamper the education of women in the Peshawar. The studies reveal that the lack of female institutions and the universities has the major impact on the female literacy rate. About 23% of the women and families have reported that the decreased number of the female universities and colleges are the main reason of the female education drop-out and 56% of the students reported that the lack of available books, material and stationary and high fees are the major reason of their quitting the education. The transport facility is also necessary for the girls as 78% of the girls of Peshawar reported in the study that the inappropriate transport facility and the condition of the public vans is not favorable for the innocent girls and the female students. So they require the proper transport facility so that they may not hesitate or be nervous while leaving the home alone.<sup>2</sup>

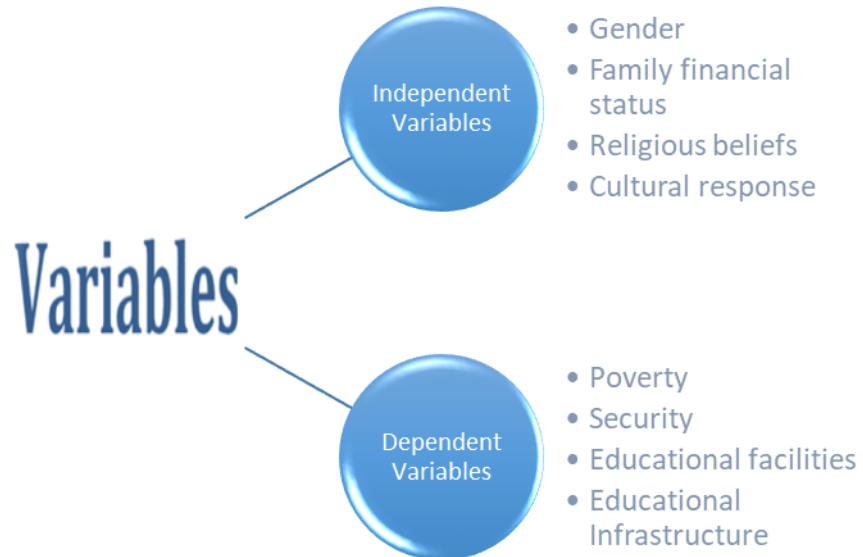
**Lack of Infrastructure:**

The infrastructure for the women education is also the main problem for the women of Peshawar as there is no any proper infrastructure in the educational institutes of Peshawar.<sup>14</sup> About 22% of the female students of Peshawar women universities have mentioned that the availability of books and the professors is very difficult and the teachers, lecturers and professors are rarely available that they cannot discuss any academic problem with them. About 45% of the female students reported that there is a significant lack in the furniture of the university that include the chairs and tables also the lab instruments and equipment are not up to the mark. The students have to face problem when they have to wait in the laboratory for their turn so that they can learn the related topic. The non-availability of the computers and the internet is a major issue for the students that the students have to face a lot of difficulties in the research projects and assignments.<sup>15</sup>

**Security Issues:**

It is a common perception that a woman cannot protect herself in any adverse environment and situation. The protection of woman is only possible when she is assisted by her father, husband, brother or son. In the terror-struck Peshawar, parents were often reluctant to send their kids to school and suddenly city conditions become tense. So the parents take the safe side and don't allow their daughters to take higher education.<sup>9</sup> The terrorist attacks on the educational institutions such as APS attack, the incident in which the terrorists attacked the school a massive loss occurred. On December 16, terrorists attacked on the Army Public School of Peshawar in which more than 140 people were killed, in which 130 children were also included.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, another terrorist attack took place in the year 2016, in which the terrorists attacked Bacha Khan University and killed at least 21 people.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Theoretical Framework***



### **Methodology**

The study adopted survey type research in the universities and colleges of Peshawar. Questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect the data. A sample of total 180 respondents belonging to 3 universities and 7 colleges of Peshawar are used to collect the data. All the respondents are the residents of Peshawar among whom 76% of the respondents are females and 24% are males. This study undertake qualitative tools as the variables could not be rationalized in the numeric form. The data is analyzed by employing ANOVA and the results are expressed in the tabulated form in the later section

### **Results and Analysis**

It is found that the level of women education in the Peshawar Institutes is very low and the percentage of the girls who are taking admissions in higher educational institutes is very dissatisfying. The results are calculated by using the SPSS software so that the data can be analyzed with the statistical tools. The results show that only 6.8% girls of the total female population of Peshawar are enrolled in the higher education institutes (see table 2) which shows the lower degree of the higher education in women of Peshawar.



### Level of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	37	16.7	20.6	20.6
	2	16	7.2	8.9	29.4
	3	6	2.7	3.3	32.8
	4	30	13.5	16.7	49.4
	5	76	34.2	42.2	91.7
	6	15	6.8	8.3	100.0
	Total	180	81.1	100.0	
Missing	System	42	18.9		
	Total	222	100.0		

Table 2: Percentage of girls according to the level of education

### Problems Faced by the Women in Peshawar

The female students are found to be very uncomfortable in their educational institutes due to the higher degree of discrimination and discouragement by the family and society. The average mean and statistics of the problems shows that the number of issues that are faced by the women is very high and most of the issues were related to the family were found to be 41.4% and societal issues found to be 32.4% of all the problems (see table 2) which shows the higher level of discouragement from the families and society of the Peshawar.

### Problem

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	8	3.6	4.4	4.4
	2	92	41.4	51.1	55.6
	3	72	32.4	40.0	95.6
	4	4	1.8	2.2	97.8
	5	4	1.8	2.2	100.0
	Total	180	81.1	100.0	
Missing	System	42	18.9		
	Total	222	100.0		

Table 3: Percentage of the problems that are faced by the girls for their higher education

Further calculations were made related to the problems of the women education so that the mean variance, standard deviation and mean squares can be calculated for the purpose of detailed elaboration of the problems and issues found from the collected data (see table 4).

#### ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.043	1	.043	.083	.773 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	92.757	178	.521		
Total	92.800	179			

a. Predictors: (Constant), discrimination

b. Dependent Variable: problem

**Table 4: Statistics of the various types of problems and issues faced by the Peshawar female students**

From the findings and results of the study, the major problems and issues can be analyzed which are found to be the lack of awareness, family conservativeness, societal pressure, religious beliefs, poverty and the security issues (See table-4). These are the major problems which the women of Peshawar are facing through ages. There is the greater need to overcome the problems, to improve the weakness of the society and to correct the misconceptions that are found in the society of Peshawar.

#### Discussion:

The results have indicated that the level of the education of women in Peshawar are not satisfied; there are restrictions for the women if they want to continue their education. Most of the women are not allowed to continue their education and there are many factors behind that. For instance, the pressure from the society; as the Pakhtoon society is a male dominating society where females are considered to be involved in the house-hold activities, and in such a society the working ladies and/or women who pursue education are usually not encouraged by the people.<sup>7</sup> Parents are concerned about the security of their children and especially when it is about their daughters as the Pakhtoons are very concerned about their women and their respect. Parents are usually concerned that education might make the girls rebel and they may not follow the customs of the society after getting higher the education as they consider that the education of colleges and universities are generally influenced by the Western society.<sup>5</sup>

Women are often discouraged to attain the education so they are seen to be facing the issues; such as they feel uncomfortable when they hear people talking about their education or people arguing on their education.<sup>4</sup> The security issues are also contributing to the threats and people who already have the concerns

related to the education of women do not want to send their children to schools and colleges due to the threats of the terrorist attacks. Also the peer pressure, the social, and religious values make it difficult for the women to continue their education. Islam has not put any restriction on the education of the women; rather promotes it. Women are required to cover themselves properly according to the religious and cultural values while they are outside their homes. In addition, talking to strangers and/or opposite gender is also not considered upright. Results have shown that most of the women found issues related to their families while attaining the education as compared to the societal barriers and issues; though they have faced the societal issues as well. The main cause of the barriers and issues were due to the lack of the awareness and the misconception. The other factors that included were pressure from the society, and weak financial statutes of the families.

**Conclusion:**

The condition of the higher education among the women of Peshawar is not appreciable and satisfactory. Although the enrolment of the women is increasing showing that people are realizing the importance of female education but the number of such mind-set is still very low and discouraging. The highly educated woman can serve the society in a better way than the illiterate one as she has a sound knowledge and understanding of life values. But the inherent barriers are difficult to overcome and women can only pass those barriers if they have the enthusiasm, zeal, and interest for getting the higher education. *Education for change!*

**Future studies:**

Government needs to take the effective and important steps to overcome the social issues that are making it difficult for the women to attain education. For future studies a large sample should be considered for conducting the survey and interviews should be conducted from the parents and the government officials. For future studies the data should be analyzed quantitatively in tabulated form.

### Recommendations:

The findings and results of this study have revealed the basic problems of the society, which need to be overcome. There is a need of the following steps by the Federal and the provincial government:

- Awareness campaigns about the importance of the women higher education in the society.
- Ensuring the support and cooperation by the society to the women who are interested in getting higher education.
- Provision of the high standard security for the women in the institutions.
- Increase in the educational funds, and scholarships, which not only enhanced the facilities and infrastructure of the institutions but also help in growing the motivation of the female students.

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