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Women Empowerment, and Access to Education in Pakistan: Barriers within Home

Abstract

Education is a powerful social instrument and a pivotal factor that has tremendous potential to change the life patterns of humans in all segments irrespective of any gender discrimination. Unfortunately, gender discrimination is still a prevalent norm in most societies. In Pakistan, the situation is deteriorating day by day specifically in rural areas and has reached the nadir. Since the inception of Pakistan, exploitation in all facets is the fate of Pakistani women. By and large, the fundamental rights of females, which are granted by the constitution of Pakistan, are denied. Even in 20th-century females are treated as second sex and deprived educationally, socially, economically, and politically. Owing to the patriarchal culture which breeds orthodox mentality and resists strongly against any positive social change which fosters women's empowerment in the section of education particularly. In Pakistan, there have had numerous barricades in the way of educational empowerment of women. This paper is based on the social learning theory of Albert Bandura which discusses that social behaviors are more dominant. In that context, this study argues that women's education in Pakistan faced prominent challenges within the home (such as fear of harassment, fear of notoriety, child labour, approach to early marriage, misogynistic mindset, prefer to son's education, etc.) apart from outside home. This paper highlights endogenous and exogenous factors which are acting as acute obstacles in way of women's educational empowerment. This paper discusses the way forward drawn from the theoretical framework based on the results which are related to socio-economic and cultural factors that can assist to improve the opportunities and eradicate the barriers in women education.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Education, Transformation, Challenges, Pakistan.

Women empowerment and Education

International Convention in all forms of Discrimination Against Women (ICDAW) in 1993 mentioned that education is an important means to empower women.¹ In Pakistan according to constitutional and legal provisions² women enjoyed a unique status of equal rights but they come a long way to achieve it on practical grounds. Education is a fundamental right in Pakistan for every child boy or girl. Education plays an important role in the transformation of women's lives it would not be wrong if it mentioned 'Education is empowerment'. In Pakistan, female literacy rate is worse than men. Lack of access to education is considered a broader landscape to gender inequality which leads to anti-women practices, violence, honor killings, and other violations of women's rights. The low level of literacy rate in Pakistan has several other negative impacts on women's lives which include the socio-economic and cultural development of society. In Pakistan its the need of the hour to be focused on women education and empowering them particularly in marginalized areas which are continuously neglected. Where education is perceived as a prominent indicator to elevate the status of women and social change and empowering them in all facets of life but the situation of women literacy is very doomy in Pakistan.

Enrollment- Region, Sector and Gender-wise for the year 2017-18

¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, New York, 18 December 1979, Articles 10, 11 and 13, respectively, affirm women's rights to non-discrimination in education, employment and economic and social activities. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

² The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law, Article 25-A, Chapter No 1: Fundamental Rights, 1973 Constitution of Pakistan

Province/ Region	Public			Private			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
ICT	274,467	282,493	556,960	20,580	13,089	33,669	295,047	295,582	590,629
Punjab	189,821	187,218	377,039	85,705	52,411	138,116	275,526	239,629	515,155
Sindh	107,571	66,878	174,449	58,850	30,322	89,172	166,421	97,200	263,621
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	71,418	26,201	97,619	35,574	10,082	45,656	106,992	36,283	143,275
Balochistan	21,873	9,460	31,333	484	108	592	22,357	9,568	31,925
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	11,368	13,392	24,760	1,021	1,357	2,378	12,389	14,749	27,138
Gilgit Baltistan	2,160	2,184	4,344	0	0	0	2,160	2,184	4,344
Pakistan	678,678	587,826	1,266,504	202,214	107,369	309,583	880,892	695,195	1,576,087

Source: Higher Education Commission

Research Method

The data were collected by both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study was conducted in the capital cities of Pakistan and its rural surroundings. Quantitative data was collected through the structured interview schedule from 200 women and qualitative data were collected through an interview guide from 50 women. A semi-structured interview technique was used to collect data from the participants for this study. Interviews were conducted with young girls and women who missed school due to male decision influence or dropped out at the primary level. This barrier to the education of girls did let them know about their fundamental rights. The major was covered during the semi-structured interviews such as: the interview questions were initiated from socio-demographic features with female respondents and family background. Furthermore, the questions were shifted to the specific context of the study such as: support from home to send school, the decision of girls schooling, the influence of males in sending girls to school, preference sons over girls, early marriages of girls, experience during the education process, intrinsic and extrinsic challenges in their educational career, awareness about their fundamental rights. The interviewer tried to maintain the order of questions same for all interviewees. The questions were asked bilingual and held at the convenient place of the participants because the place of women choice was considered the most convenient to interview rural and urban areas because there was no interference and pressure of family members and respondents were free to answer the question. The quantitative approach of the study also includes national quantitative data year-wise assessment. The documents related to literacy showing the relevant data from the sources: Program Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU); National Educational Assessment System (NEAS); National Education Management Information System (NEMIS); Provincial Education Management Information System (PEMIS); Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM); Provincial Educational Assessment System (PEAS); National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and Education Management Information System (EMIS) were considered for this study

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data and result of the current study shows that the education level of the women in Punjab is very low. Education plays a key role in the development and empowerment of gender. According to the results of the present study, a majority 34.3% of the total respondents has intermediate level education and doing private jobs, while 23% have graduate level education and doing jobs in the public and private sector, only 7.3% of the respondents have a master degree and are getting well paid in the public and private sector. 43.8% of respondents are still unemployed while they have a metric level education or illiterate and only 8% of respondents were aware of gender inequality and women were not empowered to make decisions regarding their daughters' education due to males supremacy at home. The statistics of the results show that the empowerment of women and social transformation correlates with the level of education but girls are facing challenges within the home due to poor support from their head of the family. The data indicate that 65.6% of the respondents have an education level less

than intermediate and they have less knowledge about their rights and cannot raise a voice against the decisions of male family members otherwise they will get the threat of divorce. Although on the other track 34.4% of respondents having education level higher than graduation have also less knowledge about their fundamental rights and situation is not very different from uneducated females. 16.5% of respondents with rural backgrounds suffer more inequality than urban dwellers. 83.5% of women with urban backgrounds have 34.3% education levels higher than intermediate and they know a little about gender inequality and effort to raise voice for their daughter's education. 62.8% of respondents have to some extent knowledge about inequality with the urban and rural background while only 14.8% respondents have to great extent knowledge about gender inequality and took a stand for their daughters and sent them to school of 65.5% of respondents having education level less than intermediate, only 8.5% know about women empowerment. Form 65.8% respondent with an education level less than intermediate, only 18% know about the fundamental rights, women empowerment and pro-women legislation while other 82% of the respondents do not know about it, and they never learned it from any source like Media, NGOs and other sources as well. All the respondents were never taught at school and home as well about gender inequality, fundamental rights, and women empowerment. This trend represents society as a male dominant society and there are multiple hurdles in the education of women. Finally from the statistics, this conclusion can be drawn that the level of education increased the level of knowledge about fundamental rights, social transformation and, women empowerment increased.

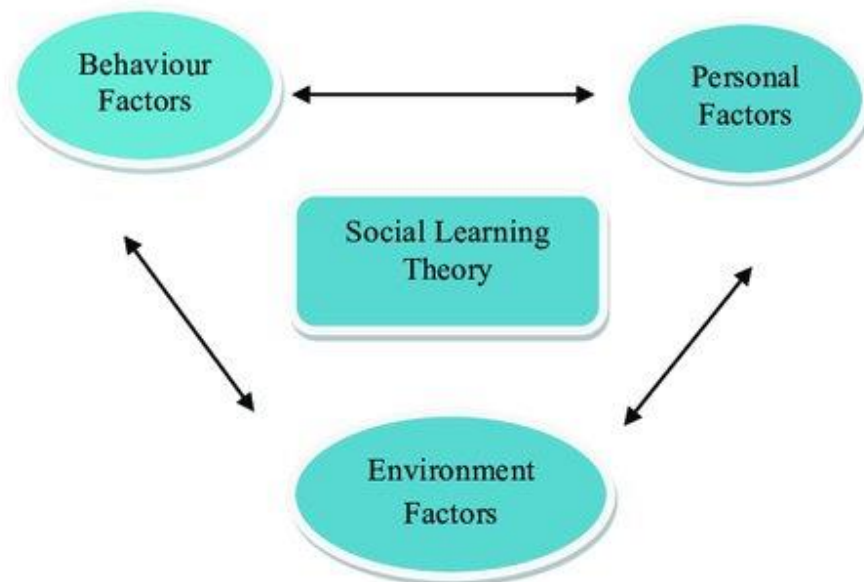
Barriers Within Home:

Individual attitudes are affected by biological factors such as age, personality impact, training and education, the potential of accepting gender inequality. In the social pattern of Punjab, females faced so many challenges from womb to tomb. Patriarchy culture always suppresses the fundamental rights of females in the name of honour. Four walls of the home are considered more respectable for the females rather than the education. As the results of this stereotype practice female's literacy rate is very poor. Simultaneously, women not only remained illiterate but also if her educational caliber is lesser to her husband then she is more vulnerable to be a victim of discrimination, domestic violence as compared to those women whose academic status is high from their husband.³

The literature review shows that there are some inherited characteristics of aggressive attitudes in a male's personality which force them to adopt an aggressive and harsh attitudes towards women. Bandura's theory of social

³ Parveen Azam Ali and Maria Irma Bustamante Gavino, "Violence against Women in Pakistan: A Framework for Analysis," review Article, *J Pak Med Assoc* 58, no. 4 (April 2008): 200 **198-203** <http://www.jpma.org.pk/PdfDownload/1372.pdf>

earning⁴ depicts the fact that one can “effectively learn and grasp by observing and focusing others.”⁵



Source: Social Learning Theory, Bandura, 1977.

Bandura's theory of social learning is a reiteration of gender roles and behaviors. In Pakistan, these traditional gender roles preserve female subordination and maintain the male dominance. These behaviors also maintained the son's preference and discrimination against women in all facets of life. In particular, girls' education where changes the life patterns of society their high literacy rate is also negatively associated with low gender gaps and gender equality.

So the implication of Bandura's theory in the social milieu of Pakistan, children considered their parents as their ideals and usually following the trends and behaviors of siblings, parents, and relatives. So, gender discrimination in society, patriarchy and giving more importance to sons is the result of adaptive behaviors from parents and surroundings. "If a father beats her daughter, his son would also torture her daughter." This practice is quite ubiquitous in Pakistan and is considered a prominent determinant of gender discrimination.⁶

Apart from all, socio cultural barriers combined with the economic factors which lead towards the girls from education deprivation. This orthodox approach prominent the incentives to prioritize boys' education. This practice assumes that investment in girl's education is useless because they will get marry and contribute to their husband's family, on the other hand, sons are supposed to live with their parents and investment in their education is better from a futuristic point of view. One of respondent mentioned that

'Parents preference is sons education because in futre they contribute in household economy and parents are supposed to lived with parents. Girls education is not encouraging in our society as girls are suppose to took the household responsbilities.'

The dominance of misogynistic culture further intensifies the issue. Many parents believe not to send girls to schools as they are at the mercy of panchayats, jirgas, or 'peace advisory groups'. As consequence child marriage is prevalent. In Pakistan, "21 percent of girls marry before age 18, and 3 percent marry before age 15. Girls are

⁴ Social learning theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the importance of observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Social learning theory considers how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behavior. Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), Annals of child development. Vol. 6. Six theories of child development (pp. 1-60). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/Bandura1989ACD.pdf>

⁵ Albert Bandura, *Social learning theory: Prentice-Hall series in social learning theory*, (Prentice Hall, the University of Michigan, 1977),ch.31.

⁶ Sania Muneer, "Pro-women laws in Pakistan: challenges towards implementation", *Pakistan Vision*, VOL.8 NO.2, December 2017.

sometimes seen as ready for marriage as soon as they reach puberty, and in some communities, child marriage is expected. Some families are driven to marry off their daughters by poverty, and others see child marriage as a way of preempting any risk of girls engaging in romantic relationships outside marriage. Staying in school helps girls delay marriage, and girls often are forced to leave school as soon as they marry or even become engaged.”⁷

In the context of Bandura’s theory gender roles in Pakistan are the result of social behaviours and learning attitudes. This leads to confined female roles to their homes or extended families and remained out from main decision making that’s why “more than 50% of the women lack basic education and approximately 30% do earn some income.”⁸

Endogenous variables also include the social and religious misconceptions about women which are in practice to reinforce their suppression. Such as “girls are supposed to take household responsibilities” or “women cannot refuse the will of her husband”. These misconceptions teach by mothers to their daughters. These attitudes are existing from generations in society and gender roles are still discriminated. In few cases, grandparents promoted their children’s (girls) education only for the good marriage proposals or prospects but still, son’s education is more preferable. One of respondent mentioned that

Barriers Outside Home:

The two fundamental challenges behind the women's disempowerment, legal illiteracy, and social inertia are; the dearth of education among women and; not reporting the incidents of violence and brutality to law-implementing agencies (i.e. police).⁹ “Political instability, disproportionate influence on governance by security forces, repression of civil society and the media, violent insurgency, and escalating ethnic and religious tensions all poison Pakistan’s current social landscape. These forces distract from the government’s obligation to deliver essential services like education—and girls lose out the most.”¹⁰

There are two types of approaches in Pakistan regarding girl’s education; one who doesn’t want to send their girls to schools due to poverty, social norms, child labour, gender discrimination and insecurity. The second approach to send girls for education but not in favour to let them do jobs or to contribute to society.

Lack of access to education for girl and legal illiteracy to fundamental rights largely adds to the continued existence of parallel justice system in Pakistan, which proceed to “sanction acts of violence against women” or “hand down severe punishments (such as honour killings) for women who allegedly transgress societal norms.”¹¹ The continued existence of these tribunals—despite their sanction in the constitution—is proof that enactment without extensive access to education is insufficient to counteract brutality against women.¹²

In recent years, the provision of religious education increased massively (formal madrasas to informal arrangements such as children’s study the Quran in the neighborhood) where only poor families preferred to send their children’s. These spaces of religious education are not generally offered non-religious subjects to children’s which is not considered as adequate replacement and hurdle to legal literacy and social transformation.

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/11/12/shall-i-feed-my-daughter-or-educate-her/barriers-girls-education-pakistan>

⁸ National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) [Pakistan] and Macro International Inc. Islamabad, Pakistan: National Institute of Population Studies and Macro International Inc; 2008. Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006–07.

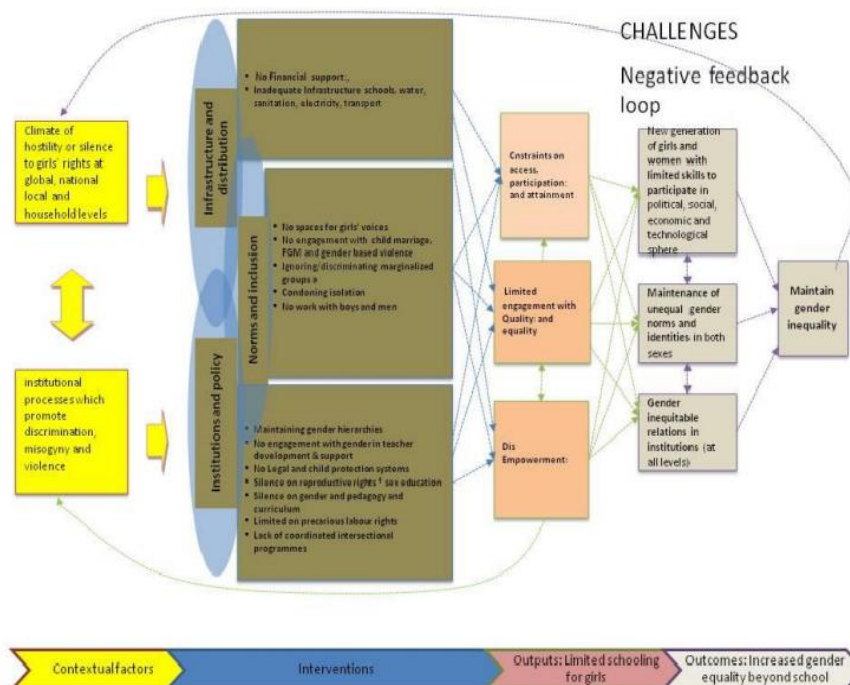
⁹ Naima Tabassum, Huma Tabassum and Tabassum Afzal, “Social Practices Fostering Crime Against Women and the Law in Pakistan,” *International Research Journal of Arts & Humanities (IRJAH)* 41, no.41 (NA, 2013):324, Accessed November 16, 2016, <file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/1432-3094-1-SM.pdf>, 305-328.

¹⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/11/12/shall-i-feed-my-daughter-or-educate-her/barriers-girls-education-pakistan>

¹¹ In 2006, the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences affirmed that this standard of due diligence is a universal one, as well as a rule of customary international law. Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, *The Due Diligence Standard as a Tool for the Elimination of Violence Against Women*. see also Rebecca H. Rittenhouse, “The Due Diligence Obligation,” 4.

¹² Rebecca H. Rittenhouse, “The Due Diligence Obligation,” 12.

Challenges and opportunities for empowering girls through education, negative feedback loop



Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/pieces/STUD/2015/510022/IPOL_STU\(2015\)510022_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/pieces/STUD/2015/510022/IPOL_STU(2015)510022_EN.pdf)

Pakistan is facing a hurdle to ensure girls education, prominently disadvantaged, attend, stay and learn in school. On the other hand enrollment and retention rates are improving, while progress is not so fast. According to a UNICEF report¹³, “an estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 are out-of-school”. UNESCO revealed an education report, “Pakistan is among three countries in the region where women are twice as likely to be illiterate than men.”¹⁴ According to the Aurat Foundation report, “statistics show that while urban women have made gains, girls and women in rural areas are at a systematic disadvantage”.¹⁵ Concern Worldwide US, Inc. announced that “It has been accounted for that, “Pakistan has one of the highest gender disparities in education figures in the world”¹⁶.” Corruption is considered the bane and exogenous variable in the promotion of education which needs to be addressed on priority bases.

Education copiously: A way forward

In Pakistan where women are confined to domestic spaces can bring social change through education. Education for girls is limited within four walls and religious education, it should encourage secular education for sustainable progress in society. Equal opportunities to females can alter the fate of society and empowering them. In this regard role of government and civil societies is important in reforming education policies. It’s mentioned in the 18th

¹³ Pakistan has the world’s second-highest number of out-of-school children (OOSC) with an estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 not attending school, representing 44 per cent of the total population in this age group. In the 5-9 age group, 5 million children are not enrolled in schools and after primary-school age, the number of OOSC doubles, with 11.4 million adolescents between the ages of 10-14 not receiving formal education. Disparities based on gender, socio-economic status, and geography are significant; in Sindh, 52 percent of the poorest children (58 percent girls) are out of school, and in Balochistan, 78 percent of girls are out of school. Nearly 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls are enrolled at the primary level and this drops to 3.6 million boys and 2.8 million girls at the lower secondary level. UNICEF Pakistan-Education, <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>

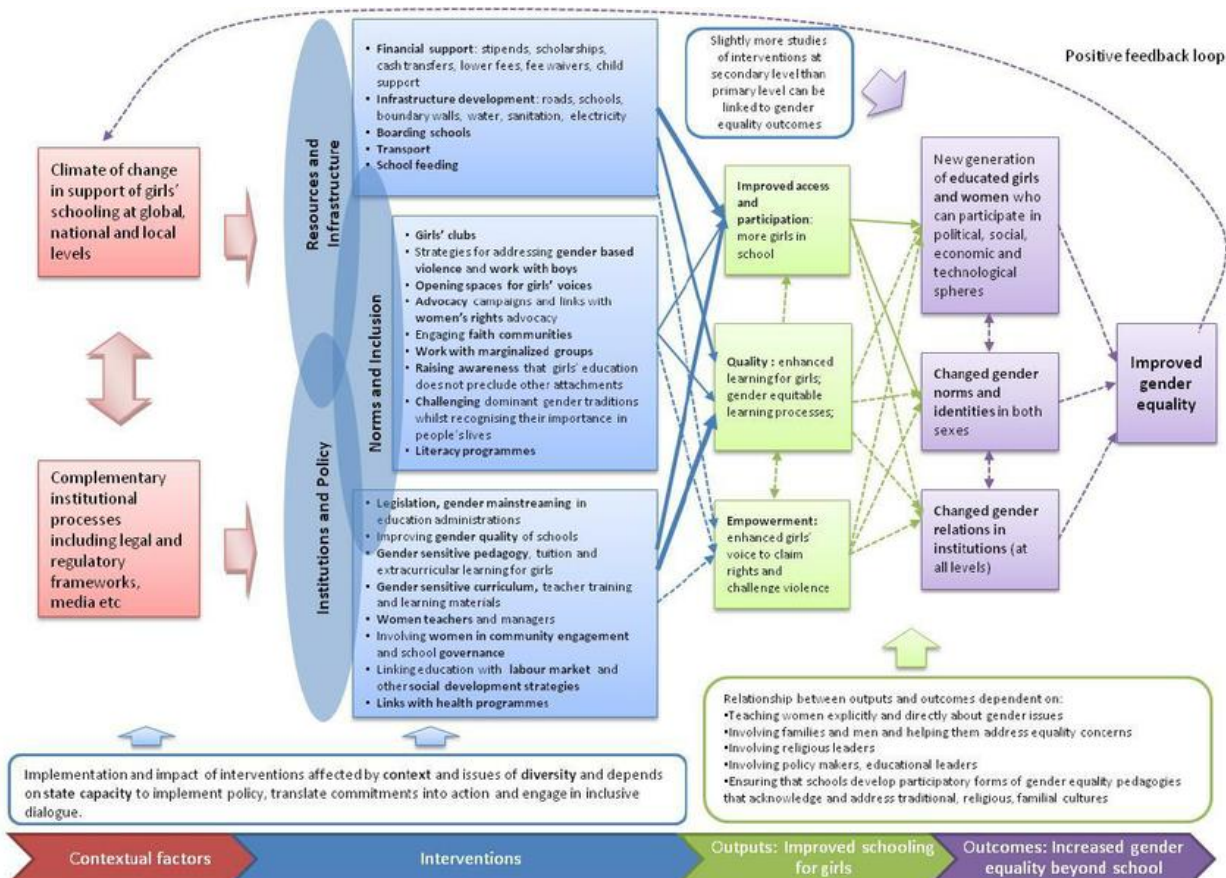
¹⁴ “Pakistan 4th on regional list of adult illiterates,” *Dawn*, January 21, 2018, Accessed November 16, 2019, <http://www.dawn.com/news/896208/pakistan-4th-on-regional-list-of-adult-illiterates>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ Rebecca H. Rittenhouse, “The Due Diligence Obligation,” 17.

amendment of the 1973 constitution that “the right to education was declared a fundamental right for all citizens.”¹⁷ It depicts the relentless struggle to educate every child apart from any discrimination. It also includes the 70 percent of the rural area population who are religiously following the social norms and reluctant to send their girls to school.¹⁸

Figure 2: Challenges and opportunities for empowering girls through education, positive feedback loop.



The perception of people regarding women's education needs a drastic change. It required a great effort to address the challenges which start from home. Endogenous factors can be addressed through gender equality and equal preferences to girls and sons at home. Media can play an important role change the social and religious misconceptions regarding's gender roles and girl's education. Albeit, it's challenging to restructured social perceptions on new foundations but not impossible.

In the social milieu of Pakistan, women's role and their subordinate position considered to be maintained from generation to generation due to societal and religious misconceptions within the home or in extended families. Even in a focused group discussion for this study women said that “they have accepted this suppression as their fate” one of the respondent mentioned “violence is considered as a part of marriage”.

In this regard, religious clergy's role cannot be neglected to bring change in society because people followed them and their preaching's considered most acceptable. For this, responsibility is on religious clergy to avoid misinterpretation of Islamic conjunctions.

¹⁷ 18th Amendment of 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.

¹⁸ Mekamu Kadir, Emily Schmidt, and Ahmad Waqas, Pakistan's Changing Demography: *Urbanization and Peri-Urban Transformation Over Time*, working paper.039 ,International food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2016, Accessed December 15, 2018, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00M79K.pdf

Apart from these exogenous barricades required revolutionary steps to promote girl's education. Social and state institution cooperation is required to eliminate gender inequalities in all facets to promote gender equality. Government can play an important role by increasing the number of primary schools for girls which is less in numbers.

No doubt laws are considered a panacea of social change in society but legal literacy and awareness is more important which can bring the basic understanding of human rights. The commission's 2018 annual report reveals that "Pakistan moved up 16 places to 125 on the UN Human Development Index (HDI)¹⁹. It shows a lack in performance of education department as compared with other South Asian countries while the expected years of schooling were at only 6.8."²⁰

Pakistan is an Islamic country and traditions and customs are being followed here.²¹ Government must focus on the establishment of new educational institutions for women, particularly in medical science and law. It will bring a positive change among those parents who are against co-education. Additionally, more women doctors and lawyers can work for the women in the health and legal sector and women can easily trust them.

Pakistan's neighboring countries, like China and India, are developed countries. While Pakistan needs to boost its economic growth to sustain the regional status quo.²² Consequently, any force which persists in inequality between men and women is deplorable. This force can impact and impede progress in any sector. So, there must be an equal provision of opportunities for both genders to haul the country out of backwardness and penury. Albeit, the religious scholars provide any solid censure against the syllabus or contents of educational books then the government should design this syllabus with mutual collaboration. Education can be considered as key bedrock which is essential to build a developed society. Education is only the power of knowledge that can raise awareness among men and women to accomplish the pinnacle of glory and to comprehend the importance of women's rights.

Moreover, committees should be established for educating local women at the community or town level. If women cannot get advance or higher education, then at least they should be taught enough to read and write. Else, no positive change can be seen in rural areas of Pakistan where women are unaware of human rights, the UN, and its declaration. For them, the declaration is defined and imposed by local tribal or jarga leaders.

These people cast their votes and assign power to a local tribal leaders. These tribal leaders make and strengthen their ways to the National Assembly where they become a part of the decision-making body of this country. So how can one expect from them to raise voice against women rights and laws violation when they are the actual root cause, promoter and supporter of misogynistic practices?

The curriculum is also a millstone as access to education. Education should contain human rights issues, working bodies, information about legislation so both men and women will be aware of their rights under defined rules and regulations. It is the dearth of education and awareness about human rights legislation which continue to old practices and a parallel judicial system like "sanction acts of violence against women" and "hand down severe punishments for those women who defy these societal norms."²³ Regardless of the sanction in the constitution, the presence and working of these tribunals is corroboration that legislation without pervasive access to education is merely not sufficient to eradicate discrimination against women.

¹⁹ The UN Human Development Index is a comparative index composed from data on life expectancy, education and standard of living. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *State of Human Rights in 2010* (Lahore, Maktaba Jadeed Press, 2010), 254.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

²¹ John L. Esposito, *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*, ed. (New York, University Press, 1998), x.

²² T.V. Paul, *The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 150.

²³ *Ibid.*, 24.