



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A Qualitative Analysis of the Relationship between Girls' Education and Early, Child and Forced Marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

March 2022



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Qamar Naseem

Program Manager
Blue Veins

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MESSAGE BY KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA MINISTER FOR LABOR, CULTURE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS



The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 has put girls' education and gender equality as a strategic priority in the international agenda. Governments around the world have been working tirelessly to advance global initiatives aimed at cutting poverty, lowering child and maternal death rates, combating child labour, child, early, forced marriages, controlling GBV, and getting children into school. The widespread and deeply entrenched practice of child marriage and lower level of schooling for girls undermines the achievement of the SDGs and perpetuates the challenges they seek to address.

The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recognizes the economic impacts and costs of child marriage, and how the practice relates to girls' educational attainment. Child marriage is not only a social issue with potentially dramatic consequences for child brides and their children but it is also an economic issue that affects the ability of the country to grow and reduce poverty. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is committed to the economic, political, and social empowerment of women and girls, especially those living in marginalized settings. In furthering our commitment, we are in the process to bring provincial legislation raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 and curbing the issue so that girls' enrollment and retention in secondary education can be strengthened.

This study focuses on exploring the relationship between child marriages and girls' education. We hope this research will provide valuable evidence-based data and recommendations and will serve as an important guiding document for all the policy stakeholders to reform policy-making and address the cross-cutting issues related to girls' education and child marriages.

Shaukat Ali Yousafzai

Minister for labor, culture, human rights, and parliamentary affairs

Lead Technical Committee on Girls Education and Child Marriages, WPC

MESSAGE BY CHAIRPERSON WOMEN PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS



Improving girls' education is a priority of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government. Unfortunately, the cultural, economic, and social conditions that have historically contributed to child marriages, early childbearing and low educational attainment for girls remained strong. More needs to be done to accelerate progress and the Women Parliamentary Caucus of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly is very much committed beyond the party lines to prioritize girls and women empowerment and protection of rights on the legislative agenda. To inspire greater investments in adolescent girls, this research paper analyses the relationship between girls' education and child marriages in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The research emanates potential recommendations and required actions.

Education has the potential to play a pivotal role in enabling countries to break out of the early marriage trap. Of course, education policies operating in isolation cannot break down the structures that perpetuate child marriage but they can make a difference, especially when linked to policies in other areas.

We hope that this study will play a critical part in combating the injustice - and indifference - that perpetuates child marriage and girls' dropout. The scale of the challenge is immense. So, too, are our responsibilities. We, parliamentarians, are ready to take on these responsibilities for a better and secure future for our children in the province.

Dr. Sumera Shams,
Chairperson Women Parliamentary Caucus WPC,
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

MESSAGE BY ACTING CHIEF KPCPWC



Child marriage and girls' lack of access to quality education are both rooted under gender inequality and the stereotypical division of gender roles. Child marriage and lower educational attainment creates ripples into the next generation by diminishing the educational prospects for children of child brides. In other words, child marriage may play an important role in perpetuating poverty and reducing their family's economic potential.

Increasing girls' education is recognized as the most effective strategy for delaying child marriage— a practice that greatly diminishes the agency, choice, and capacity of girls to achieve their life goals, and has further repercussions for their children, families, and communities. Investing in girls' education can have a tremendous impact on reducing child marriage and therefore reducing poverty for families, communities, and the country. We need to address the gendered factors that stand in the way of a girl's education and discourage early marriage through legislative reforms if we are to make education a reality for millions of girls province-wide.

This research paper is an important evidence-based piece exploring how child marriages and girls' education are interlinked issues to girl child development and offers a strong evidence base to inform decision-makers, legislators, and other stakeholders about the norms and perceptions related to child marriage and girl education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

Muhammad Ijaz Khan,

Acting Chief,

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission

MESSAGE BY CHAIRPERSON, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Pakistan recognizes education as a fundamental human right and is a signatory to the major conventions for the protection of the rights of children (girls and boys) and women. The enabling legislation, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017 provides for 12 years of continuous education for both girls and boys.

Human Rights Institutions (HRIs) have a bridging role between provincial, national and international human rights systems. HRIs have a great potential to encourage their respective provinces and state parties to meet their provincial, national and international commitments. Mobilized and well informed Human Rights Institutions can be effective partners in mobilizing the government will and supporting initiatives for improving gender parity in education. They can conduct gender audits, review budgetary and resource allocation, monitor spending, analyze policies and provide recommendations for improvements. I hope that this research will help in establishing the link between child marriages and their negative impacts on girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and will contribute to policy reform and remove barriers that girls face in getting primary and secondary education. When girls overcome barriers and will be empowered, they can lead, influence and inspire the world for a better life for all"

Dr. Riffat Sardar

Chairperson,
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women

MESSAGE BY PRESIDENT BLUE VEINS



Child marriage has long been a barrier to girls' education. Early marriage puts a stop to a girl's education, as societal pressure does not allow her to attend school once married.

In addition, her life suddenly shifts from playing and studying to married life responsibilities. The research conducted by Blue Veins has shown a straight connection between early marriages and low levels of education. According to UNICEF, 21% of Pakistani girls marry before the age of 18 and 3% marry before age 15.

We need comprehensive legislation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that protects underage girls from getting married. In addition, we need to implement and uphold existing laws. For example, Pakistan has article 25-A (Right to Education Act) in the constitution, The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017 gives right to education to all the girls between ages five to 16.

Many child brides hope that marriage will provide the opportunity to go to school, however, they typically end up falling pregnant soon after or being kept at home to carry out household chores.

Girls are the first to drop out of school, the first to be failed by the system; they face the perils of early marriage and early pregnancy. Yet educating girls has the most transformational impact. Educated mothers will educate their sons and daughters, and new pathways will be opened up for women in economic independence and leadership.

Shaheen Quresh,
President
Blue Veins

ACRONYMS

BV	Blue Veins
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DV	Domestic Violence
GBV	Gender Based Violence
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OOSC	Out-Of-School Children
PHDS	Pakistan Health and Demographic Survey
UN	United Nations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The relationship between girls' education and early, child and forced marriages is very strong but mostly under-researched and less concentrated. Early and child marriages are associated with girls' access to and retention in education levels and have negative effects on individual and collective development goals and targets. However, the available data, literature review, and research studies reveal gaps in the empirical evidence on the relationship between child marriage and the dropout of girls from school. This study focuses on producing evidence-based data and analysis of the relationship between child marriages and girls' access to and dropping out of secondary education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to the media reports and available data, Pakistan has the world's second-highest number of out-of-school children (OOSC) with approximately 22.8 million in the age bracket of 5 to 16 years old. Almost 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls are enrolled at the primary level and the numbers drop to 3.6 and 2.8 million, respectively, at the lower secondary level. In the five to nine age bracket, five million children are not enrolled in schools and after primary school-age, the number of OOSC double. (Farhan, 2021)

Similarly, the recent survey conducted by the Benazir Income Support Programme that thirty-nine percent of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's out of 11.7 million children in the 5-16 age bracket are out-of-school. There are 4.7 million children out-of-school and the document shows that the number of out-of-school girls in the province is 2.9 million, which amounts to 53 percent of the total 5.4 million girl population of the same age group. (Ashfaq, 2021)

Early, child and forced marriages have been explored as one of the social barriers to girls' secondary school dropout by many government and non-government reports, media articles, data analysis, and research documents. According to Pakistan Health and Demographic Survey 2017-2018, among the household population of Pakistan, 50% of women have no education compared with 34% of men. Only 9% of the women have secondary and 10% have a higher level of education. During the survey, 22.3% of females in urban areas cited early age marriage as one of the key reasons for discontinuation of their education.

To understand more clearly the relationships between child marriages and girls' education and explore the effects of child marriage on girls' access to and retention in secondary level of education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this study has been carried out. The study sought to explore the extent to which child and early marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa influence the dropout and access to education for girls, and assess the associated underlying factors, including poverty, cultural and gender norms, and perceived returns to girls' schooling (including both learning outcomes and employment opportunities), and other challenges about marriages and schooling.

The study collected data from 380 samples of parents, girls and women, boys and men, community elders, religious leaders, Members of Provincial Assembly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including ruling and opposition parties, representatives of Provincial Human Rights Institutions, representatives of key government departments, CSOs and education rights advocates, media, and academia, consisting of 50, 100, 100, 25, 25, 15, 10, 20, 15, 5 and 15 sample size respectively. The study adopted a qualitative approach to achieve the desired objectives of the research and involved mixed-data collection methods including observations, review of relevant publications, research studies, case studies, resource material, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and one-on-one conversations.

The research identified multi-level challenges associated with girls' education and found child marriages and associated socio-economic vulnerabilities as one of the key contributing factors in secondary school dropout. The analysis of data indicates that girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in rural settings, is considered as societal level challenge, where the culture of marriage and local stereotypical gender norms highly affects girls' enrollment, retention, and dropout of education. There is a stronger role of social, cultural, and religious norms in marriage-related practices and girls' education, which further exacerbates the existing disparities in access to education and plays an influential role in dropout. This research emphasizes on the urgent and dire need to address the invisible underlying factors related to both girls' education and the practice of child marriages and the targeted interventions including policies, aiming to improve girls' secondary education and must also address broader socio-economic differentials in access to school, as well as cultural, religious and social barriers to delaying marriage and extending girls' schooling.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Girls' secondary education and child marriage are interrelated outcomes that have an enormous impact on adolescent girls, curtailing full realization of their rights, limiting their livelihood options, and harming their health and wellbeing as well as that of their children. There are also broader social implications related to economic development and gender equality. Education is a fundamental human right for all children, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and is seen as an enabling right essential for the fulfilment of other rights and for empowering impact of education on societies and individuals. (Kazutaka Sekine, 2017)

Access to education is a key element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is considered a driver for the achievements of all 17 SDGs. The specific objectives of SDG-4 include providing more opportunities for technical and vocational training to youth and adults; ending inequality in educational opportunities; providing the right education for children with disabilities, indigenous people, and victims of conflict; improving school facilities for everyone; increasing the number of trained and qualified teachers and promoting education for sustainable development.

Around the world, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67 million of upper-secondary school age. In countries affected by conflict, girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school than girls living in non-affected countries.

Girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality. It contributes to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals – including boys and men – the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Despite evidence demonstrating how central girls' education is to development, gender disparities in education persist. (UNICEF, 2020)

Internationally four in ten girls complete their lower secondary education, while in low-income countries, the ratio is three in ten. The financial and human losses grow much with time, such as, the World Bank report shows girls who couldn't complete their secondary education lose \$15-30 trillion in their lifetime earnings. It implies that secondary education doubles a woman's income from a woman with no education (Wodon, 2018). An additional school year contributes a 10-20% increase in a woman's earnings (World Bank, 2002). Among 132 million out-of-school girls worldwide, 34.3 million are in primary school, 30 million girls at lower secondary, and 67.4 million girls are in upper secondary school level of which 32.9 million students are in Southern Asia (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018).

Secondary education has great significance, as it bridges basic primary education and higher education. The efforts geared towards improvement in enrollment at the primary level compels for expansion in opportunities for secondary (middle, secondary, and higher secondary levels) education to benefit from investment in primary education. The importance of the secondary level has been multiplied many folds by two major legislations which have implicit bearings on this stage of education.

According to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17 launched by the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), a subsidiary of

the federal education ministry released in July 2018, about 22.84 million children are still out of school in Pakistan which in fact, 44 percent of boys and 56 percent of girls in Pakistan who do not go to school. It makes up 34% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while 57% in the newly merged tribal district. From primary to higher secondary level, 49 percent of the population of girls were out of school compared to 40 percent of the population of boys.

A recent government survey conducted by the Benazir Income Support Programme that thirty-nine percent of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's, 11.7 million children in the 5-16 age bracket are out of school. There are 4.7 million children out of school and the document shows that the number of out-of-school girls in the province is 2.9 million, which amounts to 53 percent of the total 5.4 million girl population of the same age group. (Ashfaq, 2021)

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Girls often have higher dropout rates than boys for many reasons. Different reports by government and non-government institutions report multiple levels of challenges that inhibit girls' access to education and especially the secondary level of education. The reported challenges include but are not limited to household responsibilities; child labour; higher opportunity cost to the family; long distances to schools from girls' homes; early, child marriage and/or pregnancy; the threat of sexual harassment and violence in school, and en route to school; lack of girl-friendly facilities (washrooms, water, electrify, and other basic facilities), a particularly serious problem during menstruation; gender-discriminatory teaching and learning methods; parents and communities who are not aware of the value of education for girls.

Child marriage has long been a barrier to girls' secondary education. Girls often get married because of pressure from parents and relatives, poverty, and lack of alternatives. Early and child marriage puts a stop to a girl's education, as societal pressure doesn't allow her to attend school once married. In addition, her life suddenly shifts from playing and studying to married life with domestic responsibilities. National and international research

has shown a straight connection between early marriages, access to education, and low levels of education. According to UNICEF, 21% of Pakistani girls marry before the age of 18 and 3% marry before age 15.

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, among the household population of Pakistan, 50% of women have no education compared with 34% of men. Only 9% of the women have secondary and 10% have a higher level of education. The 2017-18 PDHS reports early marriages as one of the key reasons of dropping out of school for de facto household members aged 5-24. The most common reasons cited for women are getting married with a ratio of 22.3 of females in urban areas and thinking further education was not necessary (18% each) followed by not being interested in education (17%), costing too much (13%), and school being too far (9%). (Studies, 2018)

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, economic, social, and cultural factors, in complex interaction, play their part in determining access to and success in education, both for boys and girls. However, the impact of these factors is greater on girls than on boys in most contexts. Girls' Secondary education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a bigger challenge as girls are often disadvantaged because of well-founded concerns about their physical security. The missing facilities in schools also militate against girls' attendance.

Girls who are married face unavoidable challenges and hurdles in access to education and other economic opportunities they want to avail themselves for. In the patriarchal norms and cultural practices of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, girls are considered solely responsible for household chores and extending the family. Girls' access to education and right to marriage is deeply rooted under gender inequality and the associated socio-economic vulnerabilities. While child marriage is described as one of the reasons behind girls drop out of education, likewise keeping girls' in school is recommended as one of the best ways of delaying marriage.

To put Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into the context, studies on child marriages and its linkage with girls' education, in general, are limited. There is a lack of empirical research that has focused on the association between child marriage and educational outcomes for girls, particularly secondary level education. As a part of the efforts towards promoting policy and structural reforms to improve girls' access to education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and discouraging the harmful societal norms affecting girls' education, Blue Veins, and Pakistan Education Champion Network conducted this study

with the overall aim to explore how the practice of early and child marriages impacts girls access to education and their retention.

The study sought to explore the extent to which child & early marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa influence the dropout and access to education for girls, and assess the associated underlying factors, including poverty, cultural and gender norms, and perceived returns to girls' schooling (including both learning outcomes and employment opportunities), and other challenges about marriages and schooling.

1.2 **ABOUT THE STUDY**

The current study examines the link between girls' education and child marriage, including the important social and structural barriers that prevent girls' school completion and the protective role of education on girls' voice and agency. The study focused on exploring the trends, factors, and influencers from the social to structural level of child marriages and girls dropping out of schools and how the norms and practices around girls' marriage affect their right to education.

policies and interventions to both promote secondary education attainment and delay marriage.

The study also sought to promote understanding and knowledge about the linkages between child marriages and girls' education. For this purpose, research also targeted relevant key government and non-government stakeholders as respondents and experts from different fields to emanate recommendations and perspectives to inform the design and implementation of more effective

We anticipate that the research will significantly serve as a practical tool and important advocacy document for a diverse range of audiences, including government officials and bureaucrats, other institutional actors involved in policymaking, legislation, and implementation, non-government organizations (NGOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs), academia, media, Human Rights institutions and others. As it summarizes the collaborative conclusions and identifies priorities to address the issue of harmful practices including child marriages to further girls' access to education and maximize the positive impact of efforts government and non-government have been taking to address gender parity in the education system.

1.2.1 **OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

The study aimed at assessing the influence of child marriages on girls' access to education, the determinants of early marriage among secondary school girls, and its effect especially on their health and education. The study explored to what extent child marriages contribute to dropout and negatively

affect the education-related outcomes and targets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The specific objectives of the study include:

- To explore the challenges of girls' schooling as

well as the trend of early and child marriage in the study targeted area and then examine to what extent early marriage affects girls' access to and success in secondary level of education.

- To assess and examine the overall effects of child marriages on the health, education, and psychosocial well-being of the girl-child, and its

1.2.2 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

To achieve the above-desired objectives of the research, both secondary and primary qualitative methods of data collection were employed. Secondary sources of the study were based on a review of related studies and document analyses while the primary data was gathered through preliminary involving key informants and in-depth personal interviews, participant observation, extended case studies, recording life histories of selected subjects, and focus group discussions and desk reviews.

The study collected data from 380 samples of parents, girls and women, boys and men, community elders, religious leaders, Members of Provincial Assembly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including ruling and opposition parties, representatives of Provincial Human Rights Institutions, representatives of key government departments, CSOs and education rights advocates, media, and academia, consisting of 50, 100, 100, 25, 25, 15, 10, 20, 15, 5 and 15 sample size respectively. The respondents of the study also included women and girls who had to discontinue their education due to their marriage at an early age and domestic responsibilities after marriage.

The in-depth interviews aimed to understand participants' perceptions and views on early marriage and girls' education in their relevant local context. Questions related to education-assessed participants' attitudes towards education, their perceptions of the benefits and disadvantages of education, gender norms related to girls' education,

implication on socio-economic development of the society.

- To emanate and produce evidence-based locally appropriate strategies and practical recommendations for challenging the negative aspects of early marriage and promoting girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

girls' right to marriage, factors, benefits, and challenges of child marriages, and effects of child marriages and post-marriage responsibilities on educational attainment. Sample questions included open-ended questions to get clear and comprehensive responses from the respondent of the study against the set objectives.

Sampling:

A qualitative study needs a direct and open-ended approach to collect inclusive and comprehensive sampling. The study applied purposive sampling, which included community and policy actors of different age groups from District Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan, Kohat, and Karak of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To gather the inputs of women and girls, married and unmarried females as well as mothers and fathers of married and unmarried females were also interviewed. The researcher identified the respondents with the help of local community actors, elders, local administrative authorities, CSOs, and through the informed consent of those who were interested to participate in the study.

The interview method is a suitable recognized method for such research due to the diversity of respondents. Therefore, a semi-structured interview and focus group discussions methodology was adopted. Interviews were conducted with Members of Provincial Assembly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, representatives of Provincial Human Rights Institutions, representatives of key government departments, CSOs and education rights advocates,

media, and academia. To improve the reliability of results and reduce the variability of responses, open-ended interviews were conducted. Similarly, to gather a broader perspective, ten Focus Group Discussions, each comprising 6–8 people of the

same gender, were conducted with young women, girls, parents, and community elders.

Below is the sample composition and details of the focused group discussions held for the study:

Table 1.

Respondents	Gender	Number & details
Members of Provincial Assembly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including ruling and opposition party	08 Male 07 Female	15 Including representatives from Women Parliamentary Caucus
Representatives Provincial Human Rights Institutions	05 Males 05 Females	10 2 from each department representing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on Status of Women • Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission • Directorate General of Human Rights • Regional Office Peshawar, Ministry of Human Rights • National Commission for Human Rights
Representatives key government department	11 Male 9 Female	20 Representatives from the following departments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 from Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department KP and District Offices of Social Welfare department • 1 from Ombudsperson Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace • 6 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elementary and Secondary Education Department • 2 from Health Department KP • 2 from Planning and Development Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa • 3 from Local Govt, Election and Rural Development Department
Representatives Civil Society Organizations & Education Rights Activists	08 Males 07 Females	15 Representatives local, provincial and national organizations
Media	02 Male 03 Female	05 Print, electronic, and social media representatives
Academia	06 Male 09 Female	15 Teachers and professors from different public and private educational institutions

Respondents	Gender	Number & details
Religious Leaders	18 Male 07 Female	25 5 from each targeted district of the study belonging to multi-faiths and religion
Community elders	25 Males	25 5 from each targeted district of the study
Men & Boys	100 Males	100 20 from each targeted district which also included secondary schools-going boys, fathers, and married men
Women & Girls	100 Females	100 20 form each targeted district which also included secondary schools-going girls, girls who got married at a younger age and dropped out of their schools, married women, and mothers
Parents	25 Males 25 Females	50 10 fathers and mothers from each targeted district
Total		380

Table 2.

Number	District
3	Peshawar
2	Mardan
2	Charsadda
1	Karak
2	Kohat

Questionnaire:

For data collection through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and over a variety of qualitative questions, a pre-designed open-ended questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire was developed based on a review of different reports and research to analyze and document gender patterns and trends related to girls' education and child marriages.

The questionnaire covered the following key areas to gather desired data for analysis:

- Participants' attitudes towards girls' education, their perceptions of the benefits and

disadvantages of education, gender norms related to girls' education, and educational attainment

- Community beliefs and trends around the child, early and forced marriages, insight into obstacles and resilience related to the relationship between girls' education and early marriages, consequences of early marriages, and girls dropping out of schools
- Recommendations for policy and community level changes, challenging the negative aspects of early marriage, and promoting girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

1.2.3 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A major inadequacy of the study is that it's limited to only 5 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the lack of official data on child marriages at the district level. Very limited data is available to determine the ratio of child marriages at the district level, its respective factors in local contexts, and the linkages between the practice and girls' education. Therefore, the results may not be easily generalized. Due to the limited availability of data on how much child marriages results in girls dropping out or how many girls after dropping out get married at early age and understanding among stakeholders regarding

interlinkages between early marriages and girls' education, this study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of figures or percentage, nor has that been its purpose. It rather attempts to further debate and discussions among the community, policymakers, legislators, and enforcement agencies on their respective roles in promoting girls' education as a strategy to delay early marriages and push the enactment and effective implementation of legislation around child marriages to increase retention in girls' schools.

1.2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical Considerations are specified as one of the most important parts of the research. The research assured consideration of ethical issues throughout the assignment period. To ensure compliance with ethical standards, the risks, and benefits of the research were taken into consideration at all stages of the project.

The research was designed and conducted as per recognized best practices and ethical standards. The

study applied a process to minimize risks to respondents and maximize the potential benefits of participation. To ensure the safety and confidentiality of data and participants of the research, the following ethical principles or guidelines were considered and ensured during the research:

- The majority of the respondents of the research were above the age of 18. Moreover, for below age

- 18 respondents, the parents/guardian took informed consent.
- All research respondents were assured not to be subjected to force in any way to respond to the questions.
- Respect for the dignity of research participants was prioritized.
- Full consent of the respondents was obtained through the consent forms before the research.
- The protection of the privacy of research respondents was ensured.
- An adequate level of confidentiality of the research data was established. Names and information given by the respondents were not shared among them.
- All the participants were provided clear information about the objectives, purpose, and methodology of the research before the interview to avoid any kind of uncertainty.
- The anonymity of individuals and organizations participating in the research was ensured.

Respondents participated based on informed consent. The researcher sought consent by providing sufficient information and assurances about taking part to allow individuals to understand the implications of participation and to reach a fully informed, considered, and freely given decision about whether or not to do so, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Access to education, especially for girls, is still lacking in parts of the world. Despite its prominent role within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals, we are far from reaching “Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The recently published SDG progress report of the United Nations Secretary-General flags that 262 million children and youth between the ages of 6 to 17 were out of school in 2017, while two-thirds of the 750 million illiterate adults are women (UN ECOSOC 2019). Furthermore, there is great structural inequality behind these figures.

Higher rates of illiteracy and poor educational infrastructure are more frequent in remote, rural areas than in urban settlements, while educational levels are higher for men than women and wealthier households. (Katja Voigt, 2020)

Over the past two decades, uneven progress has been made toward gender equality in global education goals. The most recent UNESCO data show that of 161 countries, 60 per cent have achieved gender parity in enrollment at the primary school level, compared to only 38 per cent of countries at the secondary level. Major gender imbalances persist, especially in low-income countries, just 20 per cent of which have reached gender parity at the primary level, and only 10 per cent at the secondary level.¹ this is a major global challenge. (McCleary-Sills, 2015)

Child marriage deeply affects child brides, their children, their families, and even countries. Ending it is a target under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, child marriage will cost

developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030, according to a new report by the World Bank Group and the International Center for Research on Women. (Bank, 2017)

Educating adolescent girls has been a critical factor in increasing the age of marriage in several developing countries, including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand. In India and Pakistan, increased school enrollment has likewise been associated with a decline in marriage among girls younger than 14. (Women, 2006)

The relationship between child marriage and education is two-way. Child marriage is one of the leading reasons for school dropout in low-income countries. At the same time, girls who are out of school are exposed to increased risk factors for child marriage. With many girls living in insecure environments, parents often feel that marrying their daughters will protect them from harm or the stigma associated with having a relationship or becoming pregnant outside of marriage.

The briefing highlights the impact that universal education could have, as well as the huge amount of progress still needed to end child marriages and ensure all girls can complete high school. In addition, it calls on world leaders to prioritize girls' access to health and protection programs to help end child marriage. (Children, 2018)

Recent evidence argues that early marriage can be associated with adverse consequences not only for teenage girls but also for the children they bear. High rates of unintended pregnancy, abortion, pre-term labour, delivery of low birth weight babies, and fetal and maternal mortality are observed among

teenage girls and are strongly correlated with early marriage. Moreover, the girls who are married in teenage are also affected psychologically and they are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders.

WHO reports that 29 per cent of all ever partnered teenage girls experience intimate partner violence. The harmful impacts of domestic violence on the health and wellbeing of women and their children are well documented. Thus, teenage girls are one of the most vulnerable and neglected individuals in the world, and investing in them is important for ensuring their health, creating prosperity, and fulfilling human rights. Addressing the needs of adolescents, particularly teenage girls is necessary not only for their profit but also to attain global goals such as reducing maternal mortality and HIV infection. (Simin Montazeri, 2016)

According to the research conducted by ODI in 2015, After they marry, girls find very limited possibilities for an independent life. Many young married girls reported that they were unable to continue their education without the support of their husbands, which they received relatively rarely. Community consensus regarding what makes a 'good wife' explains much about why this is so; a good wife is defined almost exclusively in terms of the work she does for her husband, children, and home. Furthermore, while there was general agreement that domestic abuse had decreased, domestic abuse thrives in relationships where the wife has no access to an independent income and becomes socially isolated due to economic reliance on her partner. (Nicola Jones, 2014)

A study done by Action Aid (2012) on child marriage and education reflects that the detrimental impact of child marriage on girls' education and development is exacerbated by the fact that girls are often legally permitted to marry at a younger age than boys". (Aid, 2021)

Number of researches found that girls living in poor households are twice as likely to marry before the age of 18 compared with girls in wealthier

households, as are rural girls compared with those from urban areas. This is consistent with other studies finding that the girls most likely to marry early are those with the least education and lowest economic status (Raj 2010). Child marriages of girls overall will lead to work as a barrier to empowering girls and continuing formal education. Fariaa (Ijeoma et al. 2013) showed that significant gender inequality lies in this social structure where girls are not getting the right to education which is very important for their life skills and power of negotiation. (Ijeoma, 2013)

Another study done by (UNICEF 2013) reflects that almost 90 per cent of women with no more than a primary education experience at least one of the listed constraints (child marriage, violence, lack of control over household resources) compared with 65 per cent of women with at least secondary education. Nearly 20 per cent of women with only a primary education experience all three deprivations, compared to five per cent with secondary schooling and higher. We also see that almost one in five rural women with a primary education experience all three deprivations compared with 1 in 50 urban women with higher education.

A series of negative findings around marriage: being married—either monogamous or polygamous marriage—reduces sexual autonomy, and being married before age 18 further reduces sexual autonomy. Women married early are also more likely to have their movement restricted by their husbands. These analysis also confirmed that education plays a positive role and the possibility of threshold effects. Having primary or secondary education does not reduce the probability of mobility restrictions, but women with higher education are less likely to be restricted. Education is also associated with a higher probability that women can make decisions about large purchases, though the effect is less marked. (McCleary-Sills, Child Marriage: A Critical Barrier to Girls' Schooling and Gender Equality in Education, 2015)

Millions of girls around the world are barred from entering and completing their education due to

social norms about gender roles that limit women and girls' agency—the choices they are allowed to make about their own lives. Analysis of Gallup World Poll data across 11 countries in Europe and Central Asia shows that on average one-quarter of men and an equal share of women believe that it is morally wrong for a woman to delay getting married to further her education or to start a career. According to (Gennari et al. 2015) these norms vary across regions and countries, but in the context of education, adverse norms can include attitudes and practices that devalue girls' education and advancement, early childbearing, and early marriage. ([Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?, 2015](#))

According to the Costing Study on Child Marriage in Pakistan by UN Women: A Country-Level Report 2020-2021 Child brides—in comparison to Punjab, the incidence of child marriage in KP is 11 per cent greater and the costs of child marriage on education are relatively higher as well. Estimating the costing exercise conducted on data collected through the Flash Survey shows that, during 2019-2020, given the 32 per cent incidence of child marriage in KP, almost 47,000 girls were unable to complete secondary education because of child marriage. This means that the cost of child marriage on secondary education of girls is that women's secondary education completion rate could have increased by 25 per cent had these girls not been married earlier. ([Dr. Faisal Bari, 2020](#))

These statistics on child marriage are not only alarming but also suggest that the practice continues unabated. This is especially concerning because many such marriages often go unreported or unregistered, especially in rural areas. Therefore, the exact scope of the problem might still be unknown, suggesting that child marriage might be a hidden and unaddressed problem.

Several reasons, most of which are steeped in the family institution, culture, and the toxic combination between poverty and gender discrimination, have facilitated the continual exploitation of the girl child. Some scholars have noted that poor parents are

often compelled to marry off their daughters when faced with austerity, thus reducing their expenses as they will have one less person to feed, clothe and educate. In some communities, the onset of menarche is considered the threshold for adulthood and a sign of marriage readiness. ([Bengesai, 2021](#))

Historically, there have been four approaches to girls' education related to the goal of ending child marriage. Two of these approaches originated in development thinking and two relate to human rights. The development approaches have stressed the many benefits of education and have noted that ending child marriage is an important positive subsequent effect—essentially, that is, an externality of development programs.

From the human rights perspective, child marriage must be addressed directly (not as an externality) through the education system and the education system must empower girls to transcend institutionalized discrimination and gender-based violence in the social structure. Traditionally, these different orientations led to different approaches to addressing the problem of child marriage. ([Walker, 2016](#))

One of the most effective ways to push back on child marriage is to push forward is access to safe, quality education for girls. Around the world, almost one in four girls ages 15 to 19 is neither employed nor in school, compared to only one in 10 boys. Girls face increased challenges in completing their education, like a greater proportion of domestic work including collecting water or caring for younger siblings, and harmful gender norms that may cause a family to prioritize the education of sons over daughters.

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (2017), 12 years of education for every girl would reduce child marriage globally by 64%. World Vision's 2019 child marriage report found that each year of secondary school reduces a girl's likelihood of marrying before 18 by five percentage points or more.

If these weren't enough reason to take a closer look at education, research also shows that education for girls helps reduce violence and poverty and contributes to better health for a girl and her future children. When girls are educated through secondary school, they are empowered to make more decisions for themselves, they have more economic opportunities, and they're better informed about how to care for their health and the health of their families. This makes sense, but why is there such a strong link between girls' education and child marriage. ([Why More Schools: Less Child Marriages, 2020](#))

CHAPTER 3.

AVAILABLE POLICIES, LAWS, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The 18th Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan was passed in 2010 and among the changes, it introduced was the devolution of many powers and responsibilities from the center to the provinces including the area of education and child rights. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been making several legislative and policy reforms around the devolved functions and matters with a special focus on education. The Provincial government has taken concrete steps to set education as a strategic priority for sustainable development in the province.

Child marriage is also considered one of the provincial subjects and therefore, at the provincial level, government and non-government stakeholders have been putting their best efforts either to introduce a new law to ban child marriages in the province or amend the existing Child Marriage Restraint Act. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Act 1929 and there is a need to make changes and enact provincial legislation to curb the issue of child marriages. Following are the key laws, policies, government commitments, and measures available in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa around girls' education and child marriages:

3.1

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AROUND EDUCATION

Constitution of Pakistan 1973:

Pakistan has formalized its commitment to improving education sector outcomes through several actions in the recent past, including the insertion of Article 25-A in its Constitution which guarantees free and compulsory basic education for all children 5-16 years of age. After the 18th Amendment, the Government of Pakistan included the Right to Education (RTE) in its constitution through Article 25A, whereby it states that ***“The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as determined by law”***.

National Education Policy 2017-2025 and Vision 2025:

Pakistan has also developed National Education Policy 2017-2025 intending to achieve gender parity and equality in education and empower women and girls within the shortest possible time. The policy defines Secondary Education (VI-XII) as one of the most important stages of the education system and consists of three phases: Middle (V-VIII), High (IX-X), and Higher Secondary (XI-XII). Secondary Education is important for several reasons: such as it is continuity from the primary to a higher level of education; preparation for the world of work; adoption of the profession and most importantly the conceptual clearance of basic life skills.

The policy sets different targets of development for primary, secondary, and higher education. The targets for the development of secondary education (Chapter seven) include the up-gradation of 50% of primary schools to the middle; 40% of middle schools to secondary; and 20% of existing secondary schools to higher secondary level. Besides, increase the gross participation rate at the middle education level to 85% and secondary up to 70%.

Pakistan Vision 2025

The Government of Pakistan introduced Vision 2025 intending to become a competitive, caring, and collaborative society by the year 2025. Pakistan's Vision 2025 gives a visible direction to the people of Pakistan as they are struggling to achieve developed nation status. After the introduction of Vision 2025,

all private and public societies, in their planning and development are being directed to line up their goals and objectives with those of the Vision to attain the desired outcome.

Meeting the basic needs of this growing population, including in particular their access to essential services—health, education, energy, water, and sanitation, is one of the key priority areas of Vision 2024. It focuses on increasing Primary school enrollment and completion rate to 100% & literacy rate to 90% by 2025 and improving the Primary and Secondary Gender Parity Index to 1 and increasing the female workforce participation rate from 24% to 45% by 2025.

3.2 FRAMEWORK AROUND CHILD MARRIAGES

Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929

The Law governing child marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 which stipulates the minimum lawful age of marriage for boys as 18 years and girls 16 years. The law states that a male person above the age of 18 contracting a child marriage shall be liable to imprisonment up to a maximum period of one month and or a fine up to Rs. 1000. The law provides punishment for the male parents or guardians of the child.

Furthermore, whoever performs, conducts, or directs a child marriage can also be punished with simple

imprisonment extending up to one month or a fine extending up to Rs.1000 or both unless he proves that he had reason to believe that the marriage was not a child marriage.

It is pertinent to mention that a draft Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Bill 2022 is long-awaited pending in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. The Bill introduces the requirements of presenting ID cards of bride and groom at the time of Nikkah. Furthermore, the Bill raises penalties to be borne by offenders under the Bill, including those who convene or solemnize child marriage.

3.3 INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS TO ENDING CHILD MARRIAGES AND PROMOTING GIRL'S EDUCATION

International Conventions :

The right to education has been recognized in several international and regional legal instruments: treaties (conventions, covenants, charters) and also in soft law, such as general comments,

recommendations, declarations, and frameworks for action. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to education has been reaffirmed in numerous treaties at the international and regional levels which include:

- International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Pakistan is a signatory of all the above-mentioned treaties and is also a part of several international initiatives on right to education and has been taking initiatives to localize its international commitments to achieve the goal of gender parity in education.

Pakistan and Universal Periodic Review

In 2017, Pakistan had its 3rd periodic review in Human Right Council. Pakistan accepted the majority of the recommendations made by other countries about improving the education system in the country and noted several recommendations to end child marriages.

Following are some key recommendations concerning education:

- Continue the current efforts to ensure that all children, without discrimination, enjoy the right to education.
- Increase government spending on education to provide compulsory public and private education.
- Ensure better and greater access for women and girls to education to empower them.
- Step up efforts to ensure the access of all children to quality education, regardless of social status, gender, or ethnicity.
- Step up efforts to ensure the provision of free and quality primary and secondary education.
- Strengthen efforts to ensure the access of children to compulsory education.

- Undertake more efforts to ensure equal access to elementary and secondary education for both genders.
- Take measures to further promote the right to education, including by ensuring that school facilities and well-trained teachers are adequately present throughout the country.
- Continue its efforts to increase enrolment rates at all levels of education, in particular, continue to improve equal access to education for all children, regardless of gender, income level, or background.

Following are some key recommendations concerning ending child marriages:

- Take effective measures to ensure the full implementation of the laws against “honour” crimes and rape and raise the legal age of marriage to 18 years in all provinces.
- Work on raising the legal marriage age to 18 years.
- Enact and enforce legislation that facilitates women's social, political, and economic empowerment, including concerning child marriage and forced conversion.
- Amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act to include an equal minimum age of marriage of 18 years for all individuals.
- Set the legal minimum age to marry at 18 years for males and females in all provinces, and ensure that the law is effectively enforced

Pakistan and SDGs:

Pakistan adopted Sustainable Development Goals 2030 as its National Development Framework in February 2016 with the purpose to evolve national prioritized goals and determining relative priorities. Pakistan has prioritized the following national targets in its framework concerning education, gender equality, and empowerment of women and girls by reducing all forms of discrimination and violence:

- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.
- By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.
- By 2030, End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- By 2030, Eliminate all harmful practices, such as childhood, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation
- By 2030, Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.
- By 2030, Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

CHAPTER 4.

UNDERSTANDING CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE STATE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

4.1

WHAT IS CHILD MARRIAGE IN PAKISTAN?

To understand child marriages, the question that first needs to be understood is, who is a child? Under Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier".

In Pakistan, there is no uniform definition of children but most of the local laws, including the provincial laws, concerning a person, define a child as a person below the age of 18 years. Under the Majority Act of 1875, "every person domiciled in Pakistan is deemed to have attained his majority when he shall complete his age of 18 years and not before".

For child marriage in Pakistan, under The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, a marriage is a child marriage if the male is under eighteen years of age and/or the female is under sixteen. Sindh is the only Pakistani province that has raised the minimum age of girls to 18 for child marriages after the 18th amendment.

The situation of child marriage:

According to the study "Child Marriage in Pakistan: A Taboo" conducted in 2007 by UNFPA and Rahnuma, early marriages are far more prevalent in Pakistan's rural areas than in the urban areas. Alongside rural/urban differences in early marriage trends, there are also significant variations in early marriage

statistics between and across Pakistan's four provinces. In the available statistics, Sindh shows the highest percentage of early marriages in rural areas, with 72 per cent of females and 26 per cent of males in the selected sample, married before 20. Sindh also has a high percentage of females in urban areas married by 20, reaching 36 percent.

The recent data released by Pakistan Demographic Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18 reveals that 18% of women in Pakistan aged 20-24 reported being married before the age of 18 as compared to 4.7 per cent of men in the same age bracket. The data reflects it is overwhelmingly girls who become victims of child marriage in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the data shows that child marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) stand at 28% and 35% in Newly Merged Districts (NMDs), PDHS 2017-2018 informs that in KP 5.5% of girls are married before 15 compared to 7.5% in NMDs. The seven NMDs were included in data collection for the PDHS for the first time in 2017-18.

Responses from research respondents also reflected that the community in Pakistan also lacks knowledge about the legal age of marriage and minimum age. Only 47% of the research respondents were aware of the legal age of marriage in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other provinces of Pakistan while the majority of them had no idea and were of the view that there is

no minimum age of marriage in Pakistan, those respondents who were aware of the legal age of marriage in Pakistan mostly consists of government departments and CSOs.

Marriages in Pashtun Society:

Marriage, in Pakhtun culture called Wadda in Pashtu, is mostly arranged by parents' society, and the boy and the girl themselves play little or no role in negotiations. Marriage by choice is rarely an option both for males and females in the Pakhtuns society.

Child marriage is widely practiced in districts where research was carried out. The most common marriages are those that take place between girls' age group (from age 12 or 14) and boys/men (16 to 40). The following types of marriage take place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

The traditional marriage: This type of marriage follows accepted social practices involving consent from families. Ideally, the decision to marry is made freely and not as a result of coercion or as a means of addressing other issues, according to the respondents, many marriages involve two children –as opposed to a child and an adult.

Exchange marriage (Badal/watta satta): Exchange marriage, or Badal, is an agreement between two families on “exchanging” daughters or other female family members through marriage. The daughter (the agreements may involve several women from each family) of one of the parties is married into the other party's family, and vice versa. Poverty and insolvency are frequently the causes of exchange marriages because these agreements reduce or eliminate the costs associated with weddings. According to the key informants often in the practice of exchange marriage one of the girls is a minor.

Walwar: Walwar means the bride price and bride price for the young girl are higher than the older women. It sometimes contributes to child marriages. In some areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Walwar is the right of the father to receive for his daughter's marriage or the right of the brother to receive for his sister's marriage. As per the custom of walwar, after

the proposal is accepted by the family of the girl, the father of the groom with other relatives goes to the girl's house and discusses the amount of walwar. The portion of it is to be paid in cash and in-kind, and the presents, which the father will, at the wedding, give to his daughter. If the girl dies before the Nikah, half the walwar paid is refunded.

Compensation (Swara): Swara is the blood marriage, which takes place between two families to end a family feud. In such cases, marriage is an agreement concluded as a consequence of a family, a clan, or a tribe acknowledging the responsibility to compensate the victim of a crime. It involves giving a young girl(s) to the victim's family/group. The marriage is agreed upon to solve/end conflicts that may involve or have developed into, a blood feud. Often, local Jirgas or Shuras decide that a conflict must or can be solved by intermarriage. The girl, who is sometimes not more than four or five years, is handed over to the enemy family against whom the menfolk of the girl's family have committed some crime. The innocent girl pays the price for the criminal act of the men in her family, who thus escape punishment. Though Swara is a crime under “Anti Women Customary Practices Act 2011” but is still practiced in rural areas and often minor girls are given in Swara marriages.

Ghag: Child marriage in Pashtun culture also takes place in form of Ghag. Ghag is a custom or tradition which translates as 'avaaz lagana'in Urdu or 'to make something known'. A man announces his intention to marry a particular girl. It's an act whereby a person forcibly proposes a girl to whom he wants to marry. The announcement can be done in many ways but it is mostly in violent means. Often a messenger is sent to the house of the bride to inform her family that the man in question has decided to marry her. Sometimes the announcement is more dramatic and exaggerated. There have been instances where the groom-to-be has fired gunshots from the stoop of the local mosque while shouting the name of his chosen bride.

Regardless of how Ghag is announced, the impact on the girl, her family, and her future is destructive.

That's because ghag is sometimes used to exact Badal (revenge) on the girl's family by claiming, without consent, their most prized possession. Legally the practice of ghag is banned in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa under “The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elimination of custom of Ghag act 2013”.

4.2 STATE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

According to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17 launched by the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), a subsidiary of the federal education ministry released in July 2018 about 22.84 million children are still out of school in Pakistan which in fact, 44 per cent of boys and 56 per cent of girls in Pakistan who do not go to school. It makes up 34% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while 57% in the newly merged tribal district. From primary to higher secondary level, 49pc of the population of girls were out of school compared to 40pc of the population of boys.

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018, among the household

population of Pakistan 50% of women have no education compared with 34% of men. Only 9% of the women have secondary and 10% have a higher level of education. The 2017-18 PDHS asked the reason for dropping out of school for de facto households members aged 5-24. The most common reasons cited for women are getting married with a ratio of 22.3 of females' in urban areas and thinking further education was not necessary (18% each) followed by not being interested in education (17%), costing too much (13%), and school being too far (9%). Below are some key highlights of progress and initiatives made by the KP government in the last 5 years on education including girls' education and overall progress and allocation.

4.3 STATE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

The recent survey, the National Socio-Economic Registry census, carried out by the Benazir Income Support Program with the help of elementary and secondary school teachers, reveals that the children, in the 5-16 age bracket, not attending school in the province has raised to 4.7 million. The number of such children in settled districts has gone up from 2.1 million in 2018 to 3.7 million in 2021 despite the Rs632.2 billion in elementary and secondary education expenditure during the period.

According to the survey, the children in the 5-16 age bracket in the province total 11.7 million, including 1.8 million in tribal districts. The figures highlighted a greyer picture of the situation in the newly merged districts as 74.4 per cent of girls and 38.5 per cent of boys in that age group are not attending school according to the survey.

The survey further reveals that the number of out-of-school girls in the province is 2.9 million, which amounts to 53 per cent of the total 5.4 million girl population of the same age group. In settled districts, the percentage of such girls and boys was 47 and 27.2, respectively. The survey also revealed that 65.2 per cent of the people declared poverty as the reason for not sending their children to school, while 15.2 attributed it to low standards of education. It also showed that 12.1 per cent of the out-of-school children were engaged in child labour, 3.8 were unwilling to study, and 3.7 were out of school due to health issues.

4.4

RESOURCES AND FINANCING FOR EDUCATION IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for Education 2030: the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, adopted in 2015 by 160 countries encourages countries to set nationally appropriate spending targets for education. It refers to allocating at least 4% to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) to education; and/or allocating at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education. While according to the media articles and financial reports by state and non-state actors' Pakistan's public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is estimated at 2.4 per cent in the fiscal year 2018-19 and 2.5 per cent in 2017-2018, which is the lowest in the region¹.

Pakistan is one of about 33 countries that meet neither of these benchmarks, and the percentage increase in expenditure on education has sometimes lagged behind the rate of economic growth, reducing the percentage of GDP spent on education².

As of 2016, 12.6 per cent of Pakistan's total expenditure went to education, and as of 2017, 2.758 per cent of Pakistan's GDP was spent on education—both figures well below recommended benchmarks. This low investment continues despite a government commitment in 2009 to spend 7 per cent of GDP on education and makes Pakistan the only country in Asia to spend more on its military than on education³.

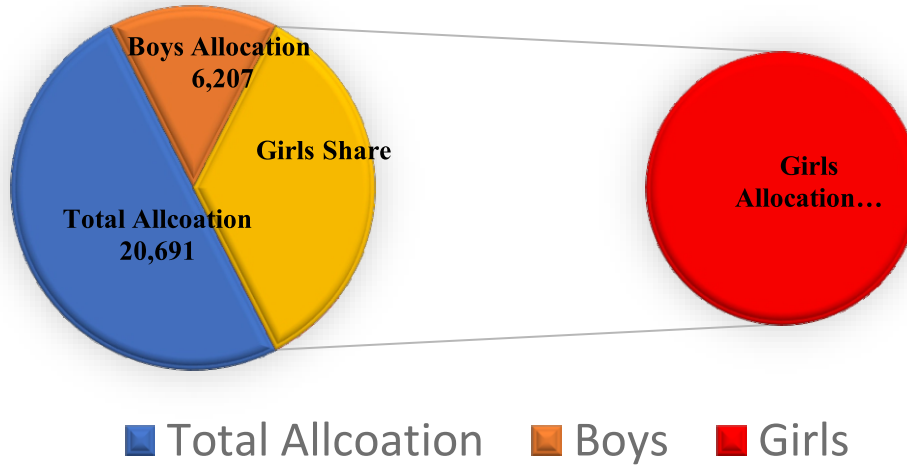
With the benchmark of UNICEF to allocate 20% of the total budget for education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the only Province in Pakistan that spends more than 20% of its total fiscal budget on education. In 2021, the KP government successfully increased (24%) of the education budget and allocated 205 billion total budget for education which includes 175 billion for settled areas and 30 billion for newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

With the purpose to improve the state of girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the KP government in compliance with The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Blueprint (2018-2023) and equity policy, allocates 70% of its development budget for girls' education in 2017.

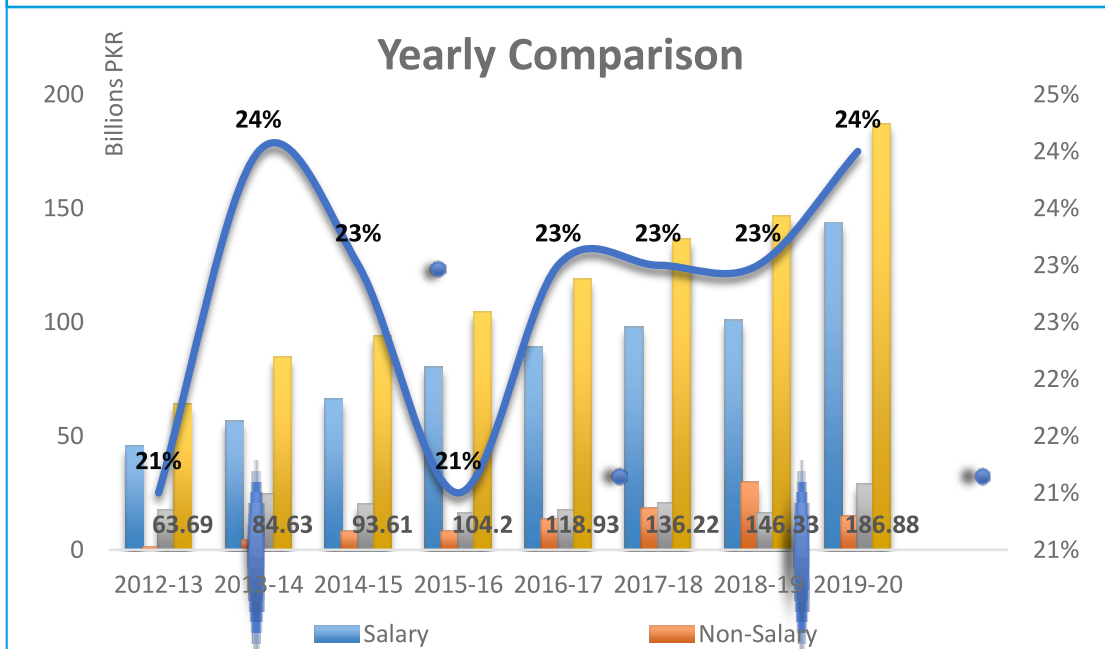
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In Million

Girls Allocation Share as per (30:70) ratio



The Education Budget Allocations Snapshot by KP Government (from 2012-2020)⁴



4. <https://www.pyca.org.pk/Bringing-All-The-Girls-To-School-Updated.pdf>

		Rs in Billion (per year)																							
		Year-1	Year-2	Year-3	Year-4	Year-5	Year-6	Year-7	Year-8	Year-9	Year-10	Grand Total													
Province	KP (FATA include)																								
Level	Primary	23.05	25.36	27.89	30.68	33.75	37.13	40.84	44.93	49.42	54.36	58.31	64.14	70.55	77.61	85.37	93.90	103.30	113.62	126.21	138.83	152.71	167.98	181.99	
Level	Secondary	48.19	53.01	58.31	64.14	70.55	77.61	85.37	93.90	103.30	113.62	126.21	138.83	152.71	167.98	181.99	200.00	218.18	236.56	255.14	273.91	292.88	312.05	331.42	351.00
Level	Total	71.24	78.37	86.20	94.82	104.30	114.74	126.21	138.83	152.71	167.98	181.99	198.28	211.10	225.22	240.74	257.73	276.48	296.18	317.36	339.74	363.59	388.83	415.00	442.99
OOS Girls		506,897	530,000	553,103	576,206	600,000	623,500	646,700	670,000	693,500	717,000	740,500	764,000	787,500	811,000	834,500	858,000	881,500	905,000	928,500	952,000	975,500	999,000	1,022,500	1,046,000
Rs/ month		3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790	3,790

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa must invest Rs. 1,135.41 billion over the next 10 years to ensure education for every OOS girl⁵

4.5 GLOBAL BEST APPROACHES TO IMPROVE GIRLS' EDUCATION

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016 numerous interventions and approaches to tackling girls' education have emerged. Some draw on human rights frameworks, others on economic models; some seek to harness the potential of civil society organizations, others work with government institutions; some mainstream gender into education sector-wide approaches; others focus on challenging discrimination against women and girls.

While many approaches adhere to one or perhaps two types of intervention, many, especially more recently, tackle girls' education using a combined and integrated approach. Combined approaches often yield the strongest and most sustainable success by complementing activities in the education sector with inputs to tackle challenges in livelihoods, health, employment, and more.

Approach 1: Improving educational institutions for girls

The quality of education significantly affects girls' enrolment, participation, retention, and completion of basic schooling. Girls and their parents often identify poor infrastructure, including inadequate toilet and classroom facilities, and insufficient teachers and teaching, including absent teachers and poor attitudes, behaviour, and pedagogy, as key factors that push them out of school. The language of instruction and school curriculum can also have serious effects on girls' attendance and retention.

Many education sector programs have intended to tackle these problems, through school construction and rehabilitation, in-service and pre-service teacher training on child-friendly pedagogy and alternative discipline, school managers' capacity development, and curriculum review processes.

Approach 2: Alleviating economic barriers to girls' enrolment and retention

5. <https://www.pyca.org.pk/Bringing-All-The-Girls-To-School-Updated.pdf>

Removing or reducing the costs of education for parents and families, living in poverty has been shown to have significant effects on girls' enrolment, retention, and completion of basic schooling. Costs can be both 'direct' through school fees and levies and 'indirect' through children's need for school materials including books, pencils and uniforms, and food. Although primary education is supposed to be, free in many countries, indirect costs may be prohibitive for poor parents. In addition, secondary schooling is often not free of charge. At this level, registration, examination, and ongoing direct costs alone may render secondary schooling unaffordable.

A range of social protection interventions to mitigate the costs of education have been tried and tested across disadvantaged, poor communities. Interventions include conditional grant schemes such as school feeding; stipends; conditional cash transfers; and targeted subsidies such as scholarships or incentives in-kind. Studies have shown that implemented properly; some of these interventions can prove highly effective for increasing attendance and progression rates among disadvantaged groups, including girls. Some schemes for example conditional cash transfers also may help to combat other socio-economic demand-side barriers to girls' education, including domestic work and child labour.

Approach 3: Challenging socio-cultural constraints to girls' schooling

Challenging discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes that curtail girls' education is of critical importance in raising girls' educational attainment. Some interventions that challenge gendered inequalities in education take an explicitly multi-sectoral approach, coordinating efforts to break down socio-cultural barriers to girls' education, such as early marriage and female genital cutting, across education, health, social justice, and other sectors. Showing that girls have value in addition to marriage and childbearing and that they can play an important and active role in the community, through, for example, girls' football clubs or community theatre, can have a significant positive impact on girls' lives and their futures.

CHAPTER 5.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Early and child marriages have been associated with girls' access and completion to education but very few research and qualitative analysis have been conducted to explore this linkage and the impacts associated. This research explored the strong linkage between the practice of child marriages and girls' right to education and identified girls' education as a key means to reducing girls' vulnerability to the child, early, and forced marriages. For this study, data was collected from five districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa following the qualitative approach. The following are the key findings of the research:

Early marriage as a hurdle to education:

The research explored the community's perspective on early and child marriages and their association with girls' right to education and there were mixed opinions. Many of the respondents shared their perspectives on how negatively early marriage affects girls' access to education and their agency.

The research findings revealed that early and child marriage and the narrow classification of adolescent girls' potential based on their marriage seriously impact girls' prospects of accessing their right to education in a meaningful way. Girls who are married off during their school-going age, are less likely to complete their secondary and high education due to their social and domestic responsibilities.

Parents and girls respondents of the research shared that marriage brings domestic responsibilities and life suddenly shifts from playing and studying to married life responsibilities. The social pressures associated with post-marriage responsibilities make it difficult for girls to continue their regular education and result in absenteeism and dropout.

Some of the respondents view that early age

marriage in addition to the host of structural, social, and financial barriers further increases girls' vulnerability and prevents girls' enrollment and completion of both primary and secondary schools. Stereotypical social norms about gender roles especially concerning marriage responsibilities limit women and girls' agency—concerning the choices they are allowed to make about their own lives.

The respondents highlighted lack of education both as a risk factor and an outcome of child marriage. Every year of early marriage significantly reduces the probability of girls completing secondary school. The responses of the research respondents highlight that women and girls experience multiple deprivations of agency as a result of early age marriage, including limited control over household resources, less participation in decision making, and attitudes that expose women and girls to increased risk of different forms of violence.

Early childbearing, lack of education, and impacts on girls' agency:

Girls' educational attainment, child marriage, and early childbearing are closely linked. Early childbearing is strongly associated with decreased education. Marriage at an early age increases the chances and risk of unplanned and more pregnancies. Expectations of birth at a teenager often lead to termination of formal education which is further linked to several social, structural, infrastructural, and financial issues. Along with the social pressures, ground realities around the education facilities further exacerbate adolescent mothers' vulnerability to education attainments such as lack of sensitive infrastructure, absence of mother and daycare centers, and financial challenges.

The respondents were of the view that low

educational attainment, child marriage, and early childbearing affect girls' life trajectories in many other ways. Girls marrying or dropping out of school early are more likely to experience poor health, have more children over their lifetime, and earn less in adulthood.

The research reflects that ending child marriage and early childbearing would improve girls' educational attainment. The research indicates that conversely, improving girls' educational attainment would help reduce child marriage and early childbearing. The higher the level of a woman's educational attainment, the fewer children she is likely to bear.

Socio-economic challenges:

The research findings reflect that education has the potential to act as an antidote to child marriage. Girls who are enrolled in the education system, especially in secondary education are more likely to marry later. The research respondents highlighted economic pressures as one of the practical reasons for girls to drop out as well as for child marriages in the community. The factor of poverty is merged as a widespread cause of the prevalence of child marriages. According to the respondents, poverty and financial constraints expand the effects of cultural practices. Among families with economic issues, marrying daughters at a young age is often seen as part of a wider economic coping strategy.

One of the respondents reflected that girls are not commonly considered as financial contributors in the families as breadwinners and therefore are confined to their homes and at large considered a financial burden and letting them for education is considered just an option. Securing their marriage relieves families of the financial pressures of supporting their daughters.

The research findings also reflected that poverty is one of the most common, widespread, and significant factors driving child marriage and girls' dropping out of education, especially in rural communities where sometimes parents and families find child marriage as an impending opportunity than education for girls.

The research data indicates that for families where feeding and providing clothes to children is difficult due to the economic crisis, in such cases, girls' education is unaffordable for families. Therefore, marrying a daughter early becomes a good option for such parents. Also in such socio-economic challenges, girl children see marriage as a chance to escape challenging economic and material conditions and as a solution to their very basic needs.

Community perspective on marriage and education:

Establishing the link between school dropouts for girls and child marriages was a debatable phenomenon among the respondents of the research, even civil society experts debate the direction of causality. Do children drop out of school because of early marriage? Alternatively, do they marry early because they have dropped out of school?

Marriage is considered a well-regarded social and religious practice in the community. Conventionally, this practice has been treated with great respect, and the ceremony of marriage is practiced according to certain accepted processes, including the giving of signs of commitment, negotiations, and ceremonial feasts that involve not only the individuals getting married but also their families and communities.

The respondents in the selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reflected that there is a common perspective among the community that girls, who get married, are no longer in need of education. There is a common perception that once a girl is married, she has crossed the threshold into adulthood, and then she must be ready to shoulder domestic and marriage life-responsibility. The perception is also surrounded by the belief that married girl's secure stable life and they do not need to get an education and participate in the economic sphere.

The value attributed to girls' education is equally important. Many of the respondents reflected that people's perception of girls' access to and completion of all grades of education is also related to the expectation that once they are married they

won't be able to pursue their careers. Girls do not have much chance to connect and practice what they learn at school especially in their married lives and this perception always hindrance girls' access to education.

The research respondents suggest that to transform the attitude toward the importance of girl's education among the community, a rights-based approach to education planning and delivery is crucial - that is, translating 'human rights into educational strategy and practice, and moving beyond equal access to education and equality in education, to education for equality. There is a need to change the perception that girls do not need to attain education following their marriage, or that they can only take their education to their marital home.

School Dropouts and Child Marriages:

Research shows that girls' education is strongly associated with delayed marriage. Girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children when compared to girls who have little or no education. (UNICEF, [Child marriages, 2007](#)) The causality of this relationship is debated, although more recent research suggests that being out of school puts girls at risk of marriage rather than marriage being a reason for girls being pulled out of school (Lloyd 2006).

The current study also highlighted child marriages as a consequence of girls dropping out of school. School dropout and child marriage are interrelated outcomes that have an enormous impact on adolescent girls.

Gender inequality in education is both a cause and a symptom of child marriage. While gender gaps have been narrowing at the primary school level and gender parity in education is a top priority for the Elementary and Secondary Education Department in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the difference is huge.

According to the survey, which was carried out as part of the BISP's National Socio-Economic Registry census with the help of elementary and secondary

school teachers, the children not attending school in the province total 4.7 million. The number of out-of-school girls in the province is 2.9 million, which amounts to 53 per cent of the total 5.4 million girl population of the same age group. These girls face elevated risks of early marriage at the adolescent age tipping point for early marriage.

The numbers from BISP's National Socio-Economic Registry census provide an insight into the interface between education and early marriage. While this research is cautious in concluding the cause and effect the unequal distribution of opportunity to enter school and progress through the education system means that over 2.9 million young girls are put in a situation where child marriage becomes more likely. While it is difficult to isolate the early marriage effect from the wider social, cultural, and economic forces that act to disadvantage young girls, there is compelling evidence that it contributes to gender disparity. Some of that evidence comes from data on the education status of teenage girls who are married.

Different reports and the respondents of the research quoted various socio-economic, cultural structural, and policy-level factors of girls dropping out which at first put girls at the risk of early marriages.

One of the research respondents shared that infrastructural and structural challenges to educational institutions are one of the big issues for girls. In the majority of areas, girls' schools are not available and if schools are available, they miss basic facilities. Especially underdeveloped and gender-blind infrastructure is one of the leading causes of the inability of women and girls to access education. And these challenges have an impact on whether girls are forced to drop out and marry early. The research indicates that the number of years a girl stays in school depends on a range of complex social, economic, and educational factors.

Lack of understanding of human development:

The majority of the research respondents had little understanding of how early marriage hinders the

overall development of adolescent girls and boys. The study and responses indicate that education is more valued in terms of financial development for economic growth, which is seen as the real measure of development.

Education is a fundamental source of wider human development, and early marriage seriously hampers the girls' educational and social development. Marriage at an early age has serious health and social implications for children. Ultimately, early marriage has implications for the well-being of families and society as a whole. Hence, where girls are uneducated and ill-prepared for their roles as mothers and contributors to society, there are costs to be borne at every level, from the individual to the household to the nation as a whole.

However, the research findings indicate that girls who are married early are often denied access to secondary education or pulled out of school, diminishing the opportunity to acquire critical life skills, which will enable them to escape poverty-related conditions. The research highlights that for several poor families, the potential rewards of educating daughters are too off and therefore their education is not recognized as an investment. The findings indicate that families perceive that a girl's education will only benefit her husband's household, and not her parents and is neither important if a girl does not need to do a job. Prevailing gender norms on the roles of girls focus mainly on marriage, and as such, it becomes acceptable to remove girls from school for marriage. In some cases, girls are not even allowed to go to school at all, because education is perceived as unnecessary for becoming wives and mothers.

Stereotypical gender norms:

Discriminatory norms and stereotypes that affect learning and education outcomes are common and the research findings strongly reflect that existing social norms against the education of girls were heavily noted by communities. These norms are further reinforced by traditional gender norms and stereotypes related to girls' education in the community, such as beliefs that girls cannot learn as

effectively as boys, girls even if get higher education cannot be able to pursue their careers, and that educated girls who delay marriage for education are more likely to be defiant to parents and resistant to the marriage.

Further, many of the research respondents indicated fear that girls who continued education and delayed marriage were more likely to date or engage in a premarital relationship, which would bring dishonour to the family and community. Such norms affect girls' treatment and support in education but also their value in marriage, with many indicating that educated and older girls are less likely to be selected for marriage or may have fewer options for a good match.

The findings of the current study indicate that stereotypical gender norms devalue girls' education and educated girls themselves, and reinforce girls' values based on their marriageability, thus creating context less support for girls' completion of secondary education. These persistent harmful norms impede gender development, including inadequate progress in women's education levels, employment, and career advancement.

One of the respondents also shared that the stereotypical norms not only affect the girl's access to education but further lead to what kind of education girls can get. For example, there is a pervasive stereotype that girls are less well suited to study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and other professional courses; therefore, they are less competent in these subjects than boys. Such kind of attitude discourages girls' interest in education and career-building. With greater emphasis on the domestic role of women, girls are less likely to be encouraged for high studies and career development and are forced to get married as early as possible.

The challenge of legal marriage:

According to UNICEF, Pakistan has the sixth-highest number of absolute child brides in the world (1.9 million). Child marriage prevalence rates in Pakistan remain alarmingly high; more than 21 percent of

girls in Pakistan are married before 18 and 3 per cent before they are 15 years old. Across provinces, prevalence is reported to be highest in Sindh (33%), followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (29%), Baluchistan (22%), and Punjab (20%).

Pakistan's Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 sets the legal age of marriage for boys to 18 and 16 for girls, which is still enforced in Pakistan except for the province of Sindh which after the 18th amendment through its provincial legislation raised the legal age of marriage to 18 for both girls and boys. After years of silence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the issue of setting a minimum age for marriage is at the center of pro-women legislation. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is committed to acting and protecting the rights of children to a childhood. That means challenging social and cultural practices that are hostile to equal citizenship for girls – and it means doing more to keep girls in school and out of the marriage before they are 18.

The respondents of the research highlighted the issue of the legal age of marriage as a key issue in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan to girls' retention in secondary education. The unavailability of law on standardization of minimum age of marriage is resulting in a greater likelihood that girls in Pakistan would either be never enrolled or drop out of education, especially at the middle and the secondary level. The study determined that legally restricting marriages below the age of 18 would increase average female secondary schooling.

Glorification of marriage:

70 % of the research respondents including young girls and teachers shared that marriage retains a special place in the cultural and legal landscape, and married girls are glorified and celebrated, and socially rewarded simply because they are married. One of the young girls' respondents of the research shared how the glorification of marriage, gossip among peers about married couples, and the associated factors make a young girl fantasize about post-marriage life. The imposition of marriage begins at a generally young age. Like the children, both girls, and boys, would put on play weddings in

their backyard or would get mock married to their cousins. The respondents highlighted that very early; the mindset about marriage life gets embedded into our culture. In addition, from childhood, the notion that girls are meant to be wives translates into the lives of teenagers, and education becomes a choice for many of them. There is a general belief among girls, that marrying is an internal and external signifier that immediately enhances their social status in their home and society. These notions and glorifications negatively affect the attainment of education for teenagers, especially girls where the associated socio-economic challenges further create obstacles to access to education.

The research further explored that media also plays a big role in reinforcing the fantasized notions related to marriage. The majority of the entertainment media, film industry, dramas, and stories revolve around the glorification of marriage, which promotes a stereotypical narrative about the superiority of people who get married. This has created social pressure on families and girls regarding the issue of marriage.

Trends in rural and urban areas:

The available data analysis and review indicates that while the trends around marriages are changing countrywide, they are playing out somewhat differently across urban, suburban, and rural area. The respondents in the selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reflected that, as elsewhere, rates of child and early marriage are higher in rural than urban areas. According to the respondents, girls in some rural areas are more than twice as likely to marry as their counterparts living in large towns and cities.

In rural communities and areas, where there are lesser opportunities for women to work, parents see no point in educating girls whose ultimate purpose is to get married and bear children. The infrastructural challenges to education further add issues to girls' access to education. Unavailability and long distance from schools especially girls' schools were highlighted as one of the key issues in rural areas. One of the respondents shared that long-distance is

a major factor that limits girls' education, especially in rural areas, while families especially mothers recognized the long distance between schools and home as a hurdle that hinders their daughter's secondary education.

In rural areas, there are already a limited number of schools and are far from residential areas, generally, there is one school in a radius of 10-15 villages and sometimes more. Research respondents including parents, teachers, and students in rural schools stated that the lack of basic facilities, good teachers, and a safe academic environment in schools hinders parents to send their daughters to long distanced schools and leaves them with the only option to get their daughters married at an early age and also increases the chances of domestic violence at later stages because then girls have lack of alternatives.

The respondents suggested that government must work on structural reforms in the education area with a special focus on rural areas, and should work to provide access to a range of programs, information and services, and, opportunities for leisure and recreation, skill development, and employment to promote girls' education and discourage child marriages.

CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the progressive actions, child marriages have been proved to be a global challenge to girls' education and the current study further emphasizes the interlinkage between the two. The findings of current research and available literature show that girls' education is strongly associated with delayed marriage. In general, girls and more so adolescent girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa face huge challenges to remain in school. The transition from primary to secondary education is the key to gaining the knowledge and skills needed to live a meaningful life. On the other hand, the socio-economic, political, and structural barriers singularly or jointly restrain the opportunity for girls to get and complete an education.

Girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry as children when compared to girls who have little or no education (UNICEF 2007). Schooling is protective against marriage for at least two reasons. Normatively, simply being in school helps a girl to be seen as a child, and thus not marriageable. Other than home, schools can be seen as a “safe space” for girls. <https://www.healthynetwork.org/hnn-content/uploads/Solutions-to-End-Child-Marriage1.pdf>

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are 4.7 million out-of-school children, out of which 2.9 million are girls, which amounts to 53 per cent of the total 5.4 million-girl population of the same age group. The survey carried out by Benazir Income Support Programme in 2021, also revealed that 65.2 per cent of the people declared poverty as the reason for not sending their children to school, while 15.2 attributed it to low standards of education.

This is a reflection of the persistent socio-economic barriers that prevent many girls around Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from attending and completing

school, including child marriage. The current research also strongly reflects that families make decisions about their daughters' marriages at an early age within the context of social norms, financial constraints, and economic opportunities. Addressing the structural level obstacles with systematically targeted strategies is the key to ending child marriage and achieving gender equality in education.

There is a wide-ranging, intertwined set of complex issues involving multiple stakeholders at different levels influencing girls' secondary education and child marriages. While investments to end child marriage, and promote education for girls should not be based solely on economic considerations, social and cultural issues should also be considered. The available reports by government and non-government departments show that the barriers to girls' education and factors of early and child marriages are very complicated and there are multiple facets to each issue, which require policy solutions to improve the status of girls' education and end child marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The lasting change can be achieved through positive engagement of influential community members, including religious leaders, community elders, and policy stakeholders at the policy level as well as accelerating legal reforms. Programs and strategies that increase girls' access to education—through financial incentives to attend school, expanding economic opportunities, and more gender-equitable schools, have been shown to result in delaying marriage beyond 18 years of age.

The interconnected nature of these issues demands that we push forward integrated policy solutions to mitigate the impediments to girls' education and improve the situation on the ground around child marriages. In some places the development policies

seem to be effective, however, the scale and the scope of the challenge require a much broader and integrated approach.

The study suggests the following policy recommendations for the improvement of girls' education at the secondary level and addressing the issue of child marriages:

- Review/amend National family and marriage laws and policies, which discriminate against girls to enhance their independence. Accelerate the enactment of Provincial legislation on raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both girls and boys.
- Targeted awareness-raising and sensitization programs should be carried out to create legal awareness about the current national and provincial laws-policies regarding early marriage and girls' formal education.
- Develop locally binding rules and regulations for available legislation against the practice of early marriage and promote girls' formal education to strengthen their implementation.
- Develop Rules for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017 to strengthen its implementation.
- Advocacy and awareness campaigns at grass root level to convince the local communities of the values of girls' education and postponing their marriages based on positive role models and evidence-based advocacy work.
- Attitudinal and behavioural transformation among the communities through engaging the local social structures and "gate-keepers" like religious leaders, community elders, local government bodies, and structures.
- An integrated and collaborative effort must be promoted by the government, the local community, academia, and civil society organizations concerned with tackling major

barriers to girls' enrollment and retention in the education system.

- Mass media awareness campaigns and strengthening the use of the existing media to raise awareness against the practices of early, childhood and forced marriages as a factor in girls' education through communication channels, in particular using the community radio, which is relatively accessible to the rural communities, TV programs, transit media, print, and electronic media.
- Stereotypes related to gender roles disadvantage girls and women in many ways. Multi-pronged strategies are required to challenge the ideological and social system, which results in the traditional gender division of labour and gender-specific roles and behaviours that restricts girls and women in the domestic sphere with household chores and reproductive burdens.
- Carry out education programs and activities with the younger generation about gender issues with specific reference to harmful traditional practices, including an early, child, and forced marriage. This could be possible by incorporating these issues into related subjects such as social studies and/or civic education or through the integration of life skills-based education in the curriculum.
- Increasing expenditure on education in line with UNESCO recommended levels: e 20 % of the total budget to be allocated for education is needed to fulfil obligations related to the right to education and promote girls' education.
- Overall, budget allocation both developmental and recurring may be increased for secondary education with a special focus on girls' education.
- Girls' education including primary, secondary, and higher education should be a priority of government (federal and provincial) in the budget, regarding the provision of basic facilities including construction and rehabilitation of

schools, training, and recruitment of an adequate number of female teachers, and provision of missing facilities, to address the imbalance between the participation of girls and boys in education at all levels.

- Develop a comprehensive plan of action to end child marriages and formulate approaches that reflect the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Stakeholders must develop and implement programs that address the underlying causes of child marriage and create alternative life options for girls at risk and adolescent mothers.
- Improving the economic conditions of rural communities and poor families by designing income-generating schemes following the objective reality of the area and supporting parents who fail to send their daughters to school due to poverty.
- Expand non-formal education at the community level and provide life skills training to girls on nutrition, health, finance, legal awareness, communication, negotiation, decision-making, rights and responsibilities of married life, and other relevant topics for girls' completing primary education or dropped-out from primary schools, to increase their opportunities for employment outside the domestic sphere.
- Concrete initiatives should be taken to ensure a conducive environment at schools by the provisions of facilities, electricity, potable water, sanitation, girls-friendly toilets, boundary walls, and other basic infrastructures, especially in the rural area to attract female teachers and students of rural villages to education.
- Address the fiscal pressures and constraints on families, which push them to marry daughters at an early age, through social protection and cash transfers that are conditional on girls being kept in school. Cash provision, scholarships, fee subsidies, uniforms, and supplies as incentives for girls to enroll and remain in school should be

made.

- More schools especially for girls must be established in rural areas to address the challenge of travelling such a long distance and transport which would encourage parents to send their daughters to the local school or to allow them to continue their formal schooling since it minimizes parents' worries about their daughters' safety.
- Reform education with provisions of all basic facilities and needed school supplies to all students, including notebooks, pens, pencils, and a book bag, providing uniforms at no or very low cost to students so that every student can have an access to quality education without any financial hurdle.
- Programs that aim to tackle poverty, access to quality education, sexual and reproductive health issues, social protection, gender equality, and health need to be more cognizant of their potential to reduce rates of child marriage and to provide better protection to girls, brides and adolescent mothers.
- Mentoring and peer group training to youth leaders, adults, teachers, etc. to provide ongoing information and support to girls for knowledge and information sharing about child marriage, schooling, rights, reproductive health, and other topics.
- Safe spaces or forums, clubs, and meetings should be established at the community level that allows girls to meet, gather, connect and socialize outside the home and empower girls with skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and peer networking to advocate for girls' rights and gender equality.
- Group and community education sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage. Targeted engagements with parents, community, and religious leaders to gain support and mobilization to change social norms and

forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who are willing and ready to change the custom of early marriage.

- Government must eliminate inconsistencies between domestic laws that deal with the minimum age for the end of compulsory education and the minimum age for marriage. Effective implementation should be ensured to the minimum age legislation, which provides a legal guarantee of minimum age for both compulsory education and marriage.
- Design gender-responsive education systems and sector plans that address the rights of girls at risk of child marriage and married girls, promoting the active participation of girls in the design of education plans and programs. These plans must acknowledge the two-way link between child marriage and girls' education.
- Ensure girls at risk of child marriage and married girls can enjoy continued and safe access to quality education in crises, including humanitarian crises.
- Adopt mechanisms to monitor prolonged absenteeism and dropouts; determine the reasons for non-attendance and seek to re-engage such students.
- Ensure that all children have access to learning during humanitarian crises –when schools are closed, investing in inclusive gender-responsive distance education methods and maintaining regular communication between teachers, learners, and families to keep learners motivated and prevent girls from dropping out the risk of early marriages.
- Reviewing customary and civil law in the light of internationally agreed human rights in addition to standards of marriage. Reviewing existing laws and strengthening legal and policy frameworks.
- Religious, traditional, and community leaders

should be mobilized and engaged to play their role in promoting girls' education and discouraging child marriages at the community level. They have the power and influence to help unlock challenges and remove barriers to girls and women's education by bringing every other key decision-maker on board.

- Adopt mechanisms to ensure all schools regularly monitor students who are out of school for prolonged periods or drop out of school altogether and reach out to determine the reasons for non-attendance and seek to re-engage the student in school.
- Targeting boys and men to be a part of discussions about cultural and societal practices which hinder girls' participation in education.
- There should be mechanisms that permit and encourages young married student/girl to continue their studies, even including during pregnancy and if they have children, and schools should where possible provide childcare assistance.
- Ensure an equitable approach to resource allocation towards girls' education. Allocate more financial and other resources towards girls' education to ensure gender parity in the education system and improve access to quality education for girls.
- Motivational or inspirational stories of young educated girls who are contributing to different sectors in Pakistan should be highlighted among communities, and it can be of great benefit to enhance hope, and encouragement and to improve positive perceptions about educating girl children at the grass-root level and delaying early marriages.
- To motivate the community toward girls' education and delay marriages at an early age, girls must be empowered economically in more direct ways. More employment opportunities must be created for girls. Micro-credit and micro-

enterprise schemes should be directed toward young girls. Vocational pieces of training and capacity building must be provided to them, endowing them with those skills that are marketable in the context of their economy.

- All relevant stakeholders who have the mandate and interest to end child marriages a provide response services must recognize the agency of boys and girls in child marriages. All programming on the issue should incorporate the children's rights, the principle of inclusion, and participation, ensuring that children's perspectives, opinions, and recommendations are heard while ensuring the principle of safeguarding.
- Local government representatives are very well placed to prevent and respond to child marriages in their communities at the grassroots level. They have a unique position to shape, advance, and implement public agendas. Village Chairmen, Councilors, and especially youth counselors can be an effective voice for the rights of girl children to mobilize political will and commitment to ending child marriage and promote girls' education.

ANNEXURE A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Open-ended questions for semi-structured interviews for “A Qualitative Analysis of the Relationship between Girls' Education and Early, Child and Forced Marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa”

1. Do you think that child, early and forced marriages and girls' education are interlinked issues?
2. What is your understanding of the issue of early, forced, and child marriages?
3. What are your thoughts about the impacts and connection of early, child, and forced marriages and girls' access to education?
4. What are the parental issues and challenges for not sending their daughters to school? What are the obstacles to girls' enrolment and retention in schooling?
5. What is your perspective about girls' education, and the role of education in their empowerment?
6. What do you think are the community views, perspectives, and attitudes towards education attainment by girls and their marriage at an early age?
7. What are your views about stereotypes which play role in determining the preferences and choices of girls by either their parents, or themselves?
8. Why is child marriage happening in your community? Are the reasons for child marriage the same for boys and girls?
9. What types of families and communities practice child marriages and why? What factors make girls more vulnerable to child marriages?
10. What do you think are the incentives for the parents to marry off their daughters at an early age and drop them out of formal education?
11. How do socio-economic vulnerabilities affect girls' access to education and play role in their early and child marriages? What do you think are the associated factors?
12. What are your views about existing child marriages and education-related laws, policies, and measures in Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? In addition, any comments for improvement?
13. How can the underlining reasons for child marriage and girls dropping out of school because of early marriages be combated?
14. What do you think and suggest about the minimum age for marriage in the province? Do you think it can make any difference in enrollment and retention in schools for girls?
15. What do you suggest about community and policy level required actions to promote girls' access to education and discourage early, child, and forced marriages?
16. What do you suggest for the government institutions to do for increased enrollment and retention of girls in schools to delay child, early, and forced marriages?

ANNEXURE B

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH RESPONDENTS

“A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GIRLS' EDUCATION AND EARLY, CHILD AND FORCED MARRIAGES IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA”

Who is conducting the research?

My name is -----and I am inviting you to take part in my research “A Qualitative Analysis of the Relationship between Girls' Education and Early, Child and Forced Marriages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa” conducted by Blue Veins with the support of PECN. I am working as a consultant for this research.

The study aimed at assessing the influence of child marriages on girls' access to education, the determinants of early marriage among secondary school girls, and its effect especially on their health and education. The study through qualitative methodology will explore the perspectives and attitudes towards child marriages and their contribution to the dropout and negative impacts on the education-related outcomes and targets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Why am I doing this research?

I want to achieve the following objective through this research: The specific objectives of the study include:

- To explore the challenges of girls' schooling as well as the trend of early and child marriage in the study targeted area and then examine to what extent early marriage affects girls' access to and success in secondary level of education.
- To assess and examine the overall effects of child marriages on the education and psychosocial well-being of the girl-child, and its implication for the socio-economic development of the girls and

overall society.

- To emanate and produce evidence-based locally appropriate strategies and practical recommendations for challenging the negative aspects of early marriage and promoting girls' education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

What will happen if you choose to take part?

I will be pleased if you agree to take part in being an important stakeholder and I will share with you more details about my research and answer any questions you may have.

Will anyone know you have been involved?

All data will be treated confidentially and will be completely anonymized. I will not use your name and remove any personal details from my research to ensure you cannot be identified.

Could there be problems for you if you take part?

You are very unlikely to face any problems when taking part but if there are any questions you feel uncomfortable answering; you have the right to stop the interview at any time. You also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will write up the results of the research to Blue Veins who will further publish and share the finding of the results with a wider audience. I will make sure anonymity is given. All data will be securely stored with me and I will not disclose any information even among the other respondent of the research.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you would like to be involved, please sign this information sheet and return it to me at

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at

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ABOUT BLUE VEINS

Blue Veins is a non-governmental women-led organization based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, working for the empowerment of women and other socially isolated groups. Blue Veins works to empower communities towards improving their status which is essential for them in realizing their full potential for social, political, and economic development and for promoting gender diversity and inclusivity.

Blue Veins is working in Pakistan since 1999 and has over one decade of experience in project implementation, management, research & policy development, stakeholder engagement & lobbying, awareness campaign, networking & partnership, community outreach and has implemented over 250 projects funded by international and national funding agencies. Blue Veins is an award-winning organization committed to building, strengthening, and galvanizing women & transgender person's collective power for a just and sustainable world – for all.



For more information about Blue Veins please visit
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