



Influence of Culture and Religion on Higher Education of Women in Lakki Marwat; A Post Colonial Feminist Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the structural, cultural, and religious issues, which affect women who want to access higher education in Lakki Marwat, a rural area in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Patriarchal traditions and socio-cultural requirements prevent access to education, especially in rural Pakistan, restricting educational access past secondary school (Ullah et al., 2021). Such obstacles consist of gendered mobility and the socio-religious views of the proper female roles (Ullah et al., 2021). The use of a postcolonial feminist approach based on the concepts of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on the representation and subalternity generates the foregrounds of the research on the problem of educational marginalization as a product of intersecting inequalities of gender, culture, and religion(Philopedia, 2025) Also compared in the study are the real-life limitations and the idealized freedom of the female character in The Sultana dream by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a canonical feminist utopian literature, which envisions the liberation of women regarding patriarchal domination. Using the information provided by the questionnaires of a nearby middle level college, this study shows that the attitudes of the communities, cultural ethics, and religion-guided interpretations are all collaborators in limiting women to high learning paths. The results are meant to provide culture-specific interventions to increase involvement of women in higher education in such rural settings

Keywords: Culture, Religion, Higher Education, Postcolonial feminism.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly accepted that access to higher education is a major driver of women empowerment, socioeconomic development, and gender equality in various countries across the world (Bibi et al., 2024). In Pakistan, although there are policies across the nation which encourage universal education, women access to higher education is still lopsided and restricted by an amalgamation of structural, cultural and religious restrictions, particularly in the rural and tribal areas like Lakki Marwat. Based on the latest education statistics, the general literacy level of Pakistan shows a deep gender imbalance: it is higher among males compared to females, and the literacy level among females in rural areas is significantly lower than in urban areas (Ullah et al., 2021) Elsewhere, especially in KP, literacy levels are much higher among men than amongst women, which is a manifestation of regional inequalities that play a major role in ensuring the lack of access to education among women past the second school tier. (GSR - Global Sociological Review, 2024) **Socio-Cultural Constraints**

In most rural areas of Pakistan, the society is influenced by socio-cultural norms that continue to influence the expectations of the community regarding the gender roles. Conventional

values tend to promote the role of women in the household context- of taking care and maintaining the home instead of academic or career achievement, thus, deterring women to become more educated(*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024) Cultural values in honor, modesty (haya), and gender segregation are additionally used to restrict women movement and their access to public educational spaces in the Pashtun-dominant areas, such as Canada. (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024).

Further literature points to the effect that deeply ingrained cultural and family pressures in rural KP societies limit the educational achievements of girls, with early marriage, gendered division of labor, and limited agency to make decisions in the family portraying as major limitations. (*GENDER DISPARITY in EDUCATION in KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: A CASE STUDY of DISTRICT BUNER*, 2024) Economic priorities are usually the support of such norms, as families expect education of girls to have less value because of the expected domestic responsibilities. (*GENDER DISPARITY in EDUCATION in KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: A CASE STUDY of DISTRICT BUNER*, 2024)

Religious Interpretation and Education

In Pakistan, culture is intertwined with religious beliefs in the opportunities to access education among women. Although Islam as a faith does not necessarily conflict with the education of women, the localized interpretations and social conditions tend to make female education to be in opposition to the desired gender roles, especially in the rural setting. Such interpretations can emphasize the importance of modesty and limit inter-gender contacts, as families employ to explain why women are not allowed to attend co-ed schools or go a long distance to get higher education. (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024)

Lakki Marwat and Rural KP Regional Realities

Lakki Marwat, as well as most of the rural districts of KP, contains particular problems, which worsen these barriers. The lack of infrastructure, long distances to educational centers, unsafe conditions in traveling by girls, and the lack of transport services are mentioned in the baseline educational tests as the real barriers to the female schooling. Girls Education Challenge These structural constraints add to cultural restrictions and strengthen gendered educational exclusion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- Contribution to gender knowledge and Education in Pakistan**

It is important to understand the cultural and religious constraints on women accessing higher education since gender disparities in literacy and enrollment are still deeply rooted in rural Pakistan. The research conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other rural areas has indicated that social-cultural, patriarchal beliefs and inadequate infrastructure have always hampered the advancement of girls to tertiary level of education. KPbased research shows that cultural roles based on gender roles are major barriers to female access to tertiary education and movement. (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024)

This study addresses a contextual research gap by providing empirical evidence, specific to Lakki Marwat district, which has not been subject to comprehensive scrutiny by any scholar, and this provides an understanding of how issues are manifested at the national level.

- GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATION PLANNING AND POLICY**

Increased literacy and education among females is associated with increased developmental objectives, including higher economic levels of engagement, better health, and lower poverty levels. The studies indicate that education boosts the women decision and economic inclusion and empowered women in rural Pakistan, and still, structural and cultural obstacles exist. (Mubarak & Jahanzeb Waseh, 2025)

The suggestions of this research can also enlighten education policymakers, provincial planners, and nongovernmental organizations to develop gender-sensitive educational policies, eliminate infrastructure inequities (e.g. transport, the recruitment of female teachers), and introduce community engagement programs so as to decrease cultural resistance.

- **Emphasizes the importance of Culture and religion in Determining access to education**

Although the Islamic religion promotes the acquisition of knowledge to all, localized formulations of the religious rules tend to promote a situation where women limitation in the public roles including education is limited. This is evident in rural sociological studies of Sindh and KP which indicate that religious and cultural beliefs are coupled in gendered expectations regarding the place of women in the family and that such expectations tend to determine decisions taken by the family in relation to schooling. (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024) The cultural and religious impact of this research contributes to the treatment of educational results through the overlaps of social organization, which is not religion in itself but by social organization, making a subtle perspective that should be comprehended by policymakers and educators

- **Assists Theoretical Progression via Postcolonial Feminism**

Using the postcolonial feminist theoretical lens offered by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this study approaches the marginalization of the voices of marginalized women in educational discourse and policy in a very critical manner. Spivak's attention to subalternity aids in bringing out how gendered cultural norms of postcolonial societies (such as rural Pakistan) serve the disenfranchisement of women into equal access to knowledge and mobility, hence strengthening unequal power structures.

- **Promotes community awareness and social changes in the society**

The case study of rural Pakistan shows through empirical evidence that cultural influences on educational patterns of girls are highly influenced by both parental attitudes and beliefs and those of the community (Khan et al., 2020). By singling them out in the case of Lakki Marwat, the study could be used to justify community awareness efforts in addition to parental education efforts that would help overturn the attitude towards the importance of higher education among women.

- **Role in SDGs**

Goal 4 (quality education) and Goal 5 (gender equality) focus on education, which is the key element of Sustainable Development. Emphasizing the obstacles faced by women in higher learning in rural area is a direct contribution to the world logistics of studying and enhancing equitable access to education. Knowing the localized obstacles in Lakki Marwat would enable tailoring of programming that would assist in ensuring that Pakistan is on its way to achieving these international objectives

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Pakistan, though there are still national and international efforts to enhance gender equality in education, women in the rural areas still have to struggle with insurmountable challenges of accessing higher education. The general female literacy of Pakistan is much lower than male literacy, especially in rural and conservative areas national statistics indicate male literacy at around 73 percent versus female literacy at around 52 percent and rural female literacy can be as low as 40 percent. Such inequalities are exacerbated within such provinces as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) where the established socio-cultural patterns and the patriarchal prescriptions allow women to have limited educational access beyond secondary

school-level, further limiting their ability to enter universities (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024). According to the studies conducted in a similar rural setting, these socio-cultural pressures including the necessity to marry very young and the importance of household duties and honor deprive women of their educational opportunities, including higher education access (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024). There is also a complicated interaction of religious interpretations with the local cultural practices. Although Islamic doctrines do not necessarily prohibit the education of women, the localized misinterpretations and conservative interpretations are often referenced in empirical research as the reasons that are utilized to limit the accessibility of women to higher educational settings, especially those that are mixed-gender or need traveling to other areas (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024). In Lakki Marwat also with socio-cultural aspects in character with other neighbouring districts like Mardan, the phenomenon has not been studied in detail, and there is little localized empirical data, although a good deal of qualitative evidence of gendered educational barriers exists elsewhere in the province. This study thus aims to fill the gap by providing an organized study of the interaction between structural barriers (e.g., a lack of transport and institutions) and cultural and religion-based norms to influence women access to higher education in the given context. The postcolonial feminist theory informs the study to preempt the voices of Western women who have historically been peripheral to the practice of educational research and to critically question the ways in which power relations, gender hierarchies and cultural discourses create and replicate educational inequities. (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- a. To define and elaborate socio-cultural factors that determine women access to high education in Lakki Marwat.
- b. To determine the interaction between religious beliefs and localized conceptualizations of religion on attitudes and practices of women higher education in Lakki Marwat.
- c. To examine structural and institutional obstacles such as infrastructure, mobility, and safety in the study area that impacted women higher education.
- d. To examine parental and household attitudes toward women higher education, and how these attitudes influence women educational choices and opportunities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a. How do socio-cultural factors affect the accessibility of women to higher education in Lakki Marwat?
- b. What is the influence of religious beliefs and localistic interpretation of religion in Lakki Marwat on the attitude towards higher education of women?
- c. What are structural and institutional constraints (e.g. mobility, safety, and infrastructure) to female higher education in Lakki Marwat?
- d. Are household attitudes and parental perceptions mutually reinforcing to limit educational mobility and institutional participation of women in Lakki Marwat?

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN**

There exists a considerable amount of literature that puts particular emphasis on societal cultural customs as fundamental obstacles that do not allow women to access higher education in Pakistan. These ideals are reflected in patriarchal ideas where women are given

all domestic chores and are confined outside the home, particularly in rural settings. Khan, Sheharyar Khan, and Khan (2020) blame the gender gap in higher education on the deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and attitudes that parents have that make them underrate the importance of attending higher education, especially at higher levels of education (Khan et al., 2020).

Developing on this, a recent study by Malik and Ahmad (2025) determines the existing obstacles to tertiary enrolment of women in the country to be societal stereotyping, conservative cultural norms, early marriages and adverse attitudes toward parents. (Malik & Ahmad, 2025. On top of these attitudes, they are compounded by the lack of social structures that can support them. According to Aftab, Hadayat Ali, and Bashir (2023), the absence of girls' schools, poor educational infrastructure, and inadequate female teachers is a major obstacle to women taking higher education in tribal regions, which supports the convergence of structural and cultural elements. (Aftab, Ali & Bashir, 2023)

- **INTERPLAY OF CULTURAL AND GENDER NORM**

Women seeking higher education are usually compounded by gender concerns like early marriage, home life, and lack of mobility among other things. The article by Siddique, Safdar, and Parveen (2024) in Punjab demonstrates that early marriages, transportation issues, and social-cultural demands severely limit women to finishing tertiary education, which shows the potential depth of gender expectations in the lives of each individual regarding education. (Siddique et al., 2024)

Jehan, Khan, and Sadiqa (2021) report that in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa context, the socio-economic and cultural bounds share some similarities. Their study in rural KP reveals that poor infrastructure, transport, and cultural constraint are some of the reasons why dropout rates are high, and women are less progressive in their education. (JEHAN et al., 2020)

- **Institutional and Structural Limits.**

Structural constraints i.e. the distance to institutions, inability to travel and lack of female faculty are highlighted in many studies as major issues that affect the higher education attainment by women. Qualitative research in Mardan points out that already limited access to nearby universities and social limitations on women travelling made females particularly discouraged by the barriers increased due to the cultural discouragement of female students travelling alone. (GSR - *Global Sociological Review*, 2024) Likewise, studies in merged districts of the former FATA (e.g. Bajaur) indicate that lack of infrastructure, insufficiency of female teaching personnel and weak policy execution obstructs women access and retention to education which supports conclusion of structural obstacles. (Khan & Khan, 2023)

- **Religious Interpretation and Educational Access**

On one hand, Islam as a religion promotes both genders to acquire education, local applications and conservative readings tend to overlap with the cultural values of limiting educational access to women. Cultural postulates in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa related to haya (decorum) are occasionally abused to curb women education, especially in both-sex learning situations or cases where women are supposed to travel to different places. (GSR - *Global Sociological Review*, 2024)

Though the number of empirical studies that particularly concentrate upon religious influences are limited, evidence about educational barriers in Pakistan, more broadly, observes that religious conservatism and subtle localized definitions of how gender roles should be can exacerbate socio-cultural opposition to educating women. (Bibi et al., 2024)

- **Socio-Economic Influences**

Cultural and structural barriers are usually overlapped with economic disadvantage such as poverty and financial constraints to keep women out of higher education. Research has indicated that both rural and urban settings in Pakistan have economic restrictions that interplay with the socio-cultural norms to curtail tertiary level participation among the female students. Siddique et al. (2024) associate financial problems with transportation and accommodation problems at a disproportionate problem to women. (Siddique et al., 2024) Additionally, the difference in the educational opportunity among genders tends to rely on the general socio-economic differences. In the study done by Buner on mixed-method research, the economic and cultural forces have been shown to act collaboratively to influence the level of access and retention of girls in schools based on the absence of economic opportunities, inadequate school infrastructure, and cultural gender expectations, as they interrelate. (*GENDER DISPARITY in EDUCATION in KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: A CASE STUDY of DISTRICT BUNER*, 2024)

- **Empowerment and Higher Education.**

Although barriers have been well documented, there are other studies that have identified the value of education in empowerment of women. Evidence of the improvements in rural women brought by education is displayed by Mubarak and Waseh (2025), who reveal that education improves women in rural areas in terms of economic involvement, power to make decisions, and role in the community, although all the benefits are not fully observed because of socio-cultural and economic factors(Mubarak & Jahanzeb Waseh, 2025).

This supports the case that structural and cultural barriers are imperative to deal with not just to have access to education but to enhance enhanced outcomes of empowerment.

SYNTHESIS OF KEY THEMES:

Various literature brings to a consensus some recurring findings that are directly associated with the focus of this study

- In Pakistan, the participation of women in higher education is always hindered by socio-cultural norms, patriarchal expectations as well as their gender stereotypes. (Khan et al., 2020)
- Crossings between culture and religion can have the effect of producing locally specific interpretative systems to rationalise restricting the educational mobility of women. (*GSR - Global Sociological Review*, 2024)
- Cultural limits are increased through structural barriers into distance, non-female teachers, and insufficient infrastructure that exacerbate the issues and reinforce gender educational inequality (Khan & Khan, 2023)
- Economic barriers are interplayed with structural and socio-cultural barriers, which widen access and retention among women. (Siddique et al., 2024)
- Education may be a source of empowerment, although it must be countered by reducing inequality in policy, community interaction, and structure. (Mubarak & Jahanzeb Waseh, 2025)
- The combination of these themes makes it worthwhile to the contextual and theoretical backgrounding of your research on Lakkhi Marwat an under-investigated region of the Pakistani literature to determine the effectiveness of culture and religion in determining the path of education of women. (Mubarak & Jahanzeb Waseh, 2025)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is informed by the postcolonial theory of feminism with reference to the work of Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak and a feminist utopian story The Sultana's Dream by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. These theoretical prisms suit well as they preempt the way systems of power and culture and institutional framework influence the capacity of the marginalised women to engage in knowledge production and higher education.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Postcolonial Feminism

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a postcolonial theory scholar and feminist whose writings explore how the Western paradigm of knowledge and high culture has subjected voices of former colonized states to marginalization. According to Spivak, dominant discourses tend to marginalize or silence certain groups of people especially Global South women in such a manner that ensures inequality persists and they remain unable to achieve true representation or agency. (Philopedia, 2025)

In her powerful essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak finds fault with the belief that subaltern populations are easily represented in either academic or political discourses. She points out the ways in which the subaltern subjects have been historically marginalized by the colonial and patriarchal structures beyond the possibilities of meaningful representation and voice. Spivak further elaborates that when western feminists or colonial powers attempt to speak on behalf of oppressed women, they risk perpetuating the work of epistemic violence of enforcing an outsourced reading as opposed to empowering the voices of women to express themselves. (Philopedia, 2025)

In this study, the subaltern is the key concept. This work by Spivak creates the impression that women in the rural environment could be systematically restricted by a host of overlapping structures of power such as gender norms, cultural anticipations and religious interpretations. Such power structures have an effect on how women perceive, negotiate and even accept the boundaries to the ambition to study. Using the model developed by Spivak, the study is bound to uncover the ways in which cultural and religious discourses in Lakki Marwat can affect not only the access to higher education, but also the terms within which women can express their wishes regarding education access

Another concept mentioned by Spivak is strategic essentialism, which relates to the ways of how marginalized groups could temporarily adopt a collective identity to be used politically without making the collective identity true to itself. This concept is used to guide the discussion on the possibility and means through which the common experiences women can have with educational obstacles can be transformed into shared demands of change. (Kilburn, 2018)

The Sultana's Dream by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

The Sultana's Dream is a feminist utopian novel that was initially written in 1905 by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. It envisions Ladyland that is a place where female gender dominates all institutions, men are confined in safe places thus literally reversing the traditional gender roles and norms. The story is written in a dream speculative framework to attack the gender inequality and to present a vision of the world in which women will take the lead in science, rule and learning.

According to the scholars, The Sultana's Dream is important because it illustrates the concept of gender equality, empowerment and technological advancement. Not only do Ladyland women ensure that they are in the positions of leadership, but they also use scientific knowledge to serve as social welfare. This vision of the utopian world highlights the potentiality of different social orders in which the role of women and their education would be normalized instead of being that of limitation. (Prof, 2023)

To conduct this study The Sultana's Dream will act as a conceptual difference between the subjective reality of women in Lakki Marwat. Although the novel shows a world where women have no cultural and religious restrictions of knowledge telling them what is possible, the empirical inquiry studies the implementation of cultural and religious restraints. With this opposition one is allowed to question the accepted beliefs concerning gender roles in a critical way and take into account the structural challenges that could potentially allow women to participate in education.

Theory with the Research Design

A framework of understanding the interplay of culture, religion and education is offered by the postcolonial feminist theory. Combining the criticism of the representation by Spivak with the utopia of the image in The Sultana Dream, this study puts women in Lakki Marwat not merely as the object subjected to the forces of the culture but as a subject whose views, dreams and obstacles are defined by the overlapping historical and social forces.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design was a cross-sectional survey that employs a descriptive approach of the research by exploring the impact of cultural, religious, structural and familial determinants on access to higher education among women in Lakki Marwat. The reason why a cross-sectional survey was suitable was that it enables the acquisition of uniform data at one instance over a specified group of female students and community participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). To ensure the survey reflected both quantitative and qualitative trends, closed-ended quantitative and open-ended qualitative prompts were used concurrently to ensure the survey represented both.

- **POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

The target population consisted of:

- The female students at government college in Lakki Marwat.
- College students: their family members.
- other adults in the Lakki Marwat community

Overall, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. The respondents were chosen due to their influence and/or direct interest in the matters of the female involvement in the education of Lakki Marwat. The student questionnaire was given to a sample of 30 female students, and this gave the adequate diversity with regards to age, educational background or experience, motivations and barriers to higher education

- **RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The shaped questionnaire that was created by the researcher was used to collect data. The research questions and objectives formed the basis of the instrument and were in line with the literature about cultural and religious barriers to women education.

The questionnaire contained the following parts:

- **Demographics and Educational Background.**

Collected age, academic program at the moment, completed secondary school, enrollment in madrassa / religious schools and plans to attend the university.

- **Aspirations and barriers**

There were closed-ended questions concerning intentions to go to university, motivation to obtain higher education or not, application experiences, and the open-ended follow-ups to clarify those answers

- **Perceptions at the Family and Community**

There were parent/guardian levels of education, support to daughters in university, worries on mobility of girls and level of education, and attitudes regarding religious versus modern education. **Attitude Statements (Likert Scale)**

Assessed the agreement of respondents with the statements like, women should also have equal right to university education as compared to men, co-education is not appropriate to our culture, religion and religion allows women to pursue modern education.

- **Knowledge Items and Religion.**

Evaluated beliefs regarding whether religion allows women to have higher education, whether women should receive education on religious/moral education and the kinds of knowledge that women should be allowed to hold.

- **Assistance to Female-Only Institutions**

Asked to find out the respondents would respond to the idea of having a female-only university near their area.

The questionnaire was distributed through the use of Google Forms and paper-based administration on college campus, so as to ensure that the participants could access the questionnaire.

- **liabilityValidity and Re**

The content validity was achieved through a correspondence of the items to the theoretical framework (postcolonial feminist theory) and topics of the literature review on culture, religion and educational inequality. The draft instrument was reviewed by educational experts to give conceptual and cultural relevance. To make sure that the question was clear, a pilot test was carried out using 10 respondents who did not enter the main sample. Feedback was used when making minor adjustments to phrasing. In the case of Likert-scale items, the analysis phase involved the evaluation of the internal consistency of the items based on the value of Cronbach alpha in order to determine the reliability.

- questionnaire was **h**etesting **t**-Data Collection Procedure Development and Pre .drafted and tested by a small group of students and people of the community College administration and community leaders were asked to grant the :Permission .research permission

Dissemination: The completed questionnaire was distributed over a three-week period. The paper copies were distributed within the college during the class breaks. Those who wanted to use online response were asked to use Google Forms and to whom a link was provided in student WhatsApp groups and community social networks.

Consent and Confidentiality: the participants were advised that their participation would be voluntary and that the responses will be anonymous and confidential. No punishment was observed on non-participation or item skipping.

Collection and Data storage: Hard copy; the hard copy responses were stored in safe files by shortening them in locked file.

Electronic Response: The electronic responses were downloaded and stored in the password locked devices.

- **Data Analysis Techniques**

The analysis of data was performed with the use of the quantitative descriptive and qualitative analysis, which were thematic.

Quantitative Analysis Quantitative responses were coded and sent into descriptive statistical tables to calculus: Denominations (age, program, madrassa attendance) frequencies, and percentage. Attitude, aspiration, and barrier distribution. Trends in Likert-scale concurrence and dissent. An appropriate crosstabulation was employed in those situations where it was

needed to determine the relationships between variables (e.g., attendance at madrassa and attitudes about university education). Tables and charts were built to visually represent the trends in such variables as plans to pursue university, motivations and obstacles, community attitudes and religious beliefs.

Qualitative Analysis The thematic content analysis was utilized to analyze open-ended responses. The responses were read one by one, to determine the recurring ideas and concepts. Development of themes was done inductively and was subsequently categorized under broader themes that were related to the research questions including: Financial constraints Family rejection or acceptance. Transportation and security problems. Unavailability of local institutions. Gender expectations and culture. These qualitative thematic codes were cross-examined with the quantitative results in order to add more meaning.

- **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical standards were also well adhered to Voluntary participation: The participants were told that they can skip any question and pull out at any time with no repercussions.

Confidentiality: No information on personal data (names, contact details) was taken. The responses were only reported in aggregate form.

Cultural sensitivity: Questionnaire was non-judgmental in language. An informal review of ethics of case study participants (faculty and community) was conducted to ascertain cultural presupposition

Summary

The research design of this study was set in a way that quantifiably embraced not only quantifiable relationships, but also highly qualitative contextual descriptions regarding cultural, religious, and structural factors that affect the higher educational desire of women in Lakki Marwat. Through the mixed quantitative and qualitative survey tool that has been adjusted to fit in the local situation, this study will furnish sound background data in response to the research questions and in subsequent interpretive parts of this research.

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the student survey that was conducted to 30 women doing their college in a government college in Lakki Marwat are discussed. Conclusions are organized in line with the main themes of the research, which are the demographic profile, educational intentions, barriers and motivation, family and community attitudes, cultural and religious perception and support to women education.

AGE DISTRIBUTION:

AGE GROUP	PERCENTAGE %
15-18	0.0
19-21	6.9
22-25	48.3
OTHERS	44.8

Majority of the respondents were in the 22-25 age group

CURRENT PROGRAM:

PROGRAM	PERCENTAGE%
ICS	55.2
FSc (PRE MED)	20.7
FSc(PRE ENG)	20.7
FA	0.0

I.COM	0.0
OTHER	0.0

ICs was the major subject among the respondents of the survey

MADRASSAH ATTENDANCE:

Ever Attended Madrassah/Religious School

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
YES	58.6
NO	41.4

Majority of them went to a religious school

EDUCATIONAL INTENTIONS:

Plans to attend a university

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE %
YES	6.9
NO	24.1
UNSURE	69.0

Most of the students were unsure about going to a university

MOTIVATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION:

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE%
CAREER /JOB	62.1
PERSONAL INTEREST	51.7
FAMILY SUPPORT	34.5
MORAL REASONS	13.8
PEER/MEDIA INFLUENCE	10.3

Common motivations for going to a university among female's were career opportunities and personal interest

PERSONAL DESIRES FOR ATTENDING A UNIVERSITY:

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE%
YES	6.9
NO	89.7
UNSURE	3.4

Majority of the students expressed that they personally did not feel like getting higher education.

BARRIERS TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

CONSIDERED APPLYING TO A UNIVERSITY

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE%
YES	48.3
NO	51.7

Less than half respondents considered applying to a university

OBSTACLES FOR THOSE NOT PERSUING HIGHER EDUCATION:

OBSTACLE	PERCENTAGE%
FAMILY ISSUES	34.8
FINANCIAL REASONS	26.1
LACK OF ACCESS	26.1

SOCIAL PRESSURE	21.7
TRANSPORT ISSUE	17.4
GENDER ISSUES	13

Family issue was the biggest issue for girls followed by financial problems

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Analysis of the open-ended questions of the survey revealed multiple themes

- 1 financial issues (e.g., cannot afford fees, very pricy)
- 2 Non-supportive Family
- 3 Transport issues
- 4 Lack of nearby institutes
- 5 Gender discrimination

IMPACT OF WOMEN EDUCATION ON SOCIETY

An overwhelming majority of 89.7% respondents believed that women education has a positive impact in shaping our societies

Open resources emphasized that educated women:

- o Raise Educated Kids
- o They improve the family systems and community outcomes
- o 3 Better understanding of the world

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY FACTORS

PARENTAL EDUCATION LEVEL

Father education

LEVEL	PERCENTAGE%
NONE	34.5
PRIMARY	13.8
MIDDLE	24.1
SECONDARY	6.9
INTERMEDIATE	13.8
OTHER	0.0

Mother education

LEVEL	PERCENTAGE%
NONE	24.1
PRIMARY	17.2
MIDDLE	20.7
SECONDARY	13.8
INTERMEDIATE	0.0
OTHER	24.1

Parental Education varied among the respondents.

SUPPORT FOR DAUGHTERS' HIGHER EDUCATION

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE%
YES	79.32
NO	20.68

Most of the parents were supportive of their daughter's higher education

CONCERNS ABOUT GOING OUTSIDE HOME FOR EDUCATION

CONCERN	PERCENTAGE

SECURITY	58.6
MIXING WITH MALES	48.3
TRANSPORT ISSUE	41.4
FAMILY HONOR	37.9
FINANCES	31.0
RELIGION/MORAL	20.7
OTHER	13.8

Parents were mostly concerned about interaction with males and the safety issues.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER NORMS AND EDUCATION LIKERT SCALE ATTITUDE ITEMS

TABLE SHOWS ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER AND EDUCATION

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Equal access for women	86.2%	10.3%	3.5%	0%
Religious vs university education treated	6.9%	13.8%	34.5%	44.8%
Girls should get religious not university	10.3%	24.1%	24.1%	37.9%
University education harms family honor	6.9%	13.8%	37.9%	41.4%
Women need higher education for society	72.4%	20.7%	6.9%	0%
Co-education inappropriate	27.6 %	37.9%	13.8%	20.7%
Madrasah education sufficient	6.9%	13.8%	17.2%	55.2%

RELIGION AND KNOWLEDGE PREFERENCES

QUESTION	YES	NO	UNSURE
Does religion allow higher education?	75.9%	13.8%	10%
Should women education be limited to religious studies?	6.9%	89.7%	3.4%

Table: Important types of knowledge for women (multiple responses)

Types of knowledge	Percentage %
Religious	82.8
Skill based	82.8
Moral education	75.9
Modern academic knowledge	72.4

Table: Support for female only university

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE %
YES	89.7
NO	10.3

A majority believes that religion allows women to gain higher education but the limited female only university and the fear of putting the family honor at stake by sending their daughters for co-education are the issues due to which female cannot get proper higher education in rural areas of Pakistan.

Summary

The outcome shows that there is a unique interaction between the positive attitude towards the education of women and the negative social and structural limitations. Although most people concur that women should be educated and given an opportunity to study at college as it impacts a good community, the number of women who become actual planners is low.

Some of the barriers are listed as family restrictions, inaccessibility, financial barriers and cultural traditions regarding the role of men and women. Based on these findings, in the following chapter, the findings will be interpreted regarding the literature and theoretical framework.

DISCUSSION

This research study has found that, there is a multifaceted interaction between the cultural attitudes, religious interpretations, structural-based barriers, and intentions of women towards higher education in Lakki Marwat. Though the majority of respondents had strong positive attitudes toward the education of women and they understood the positive influence it has on the society, the number of those willing to obtain university education was rather small. This disjunctive state between the overall favourable trends around the idea of educating women and the actual educational goals is in line with other exploring works in Pakistan that point out to the occurrence in which the social-cultural norms and family requirements can suppress the furthering of female education. The role of higher education among Pakistani women has also been researched, which has reported that girls seldom get any opportunities after reaching secondary school due to the influence of the patriarchal mindset and the choice of their parents (Khan et al., 2020)

Family restrictions, finances and absence of access to the local institutions were also key barriers in the current study, which were noted to have been barriers in the literature. Research on tribal areas in Pakistan has discovered that the absence of infrastructure, poor educational institutions and social cultural needs are major constraints to accessibility of higher education among women (Aftab et al., 2023). In the same light, studies show out that, due to negative parental perceptions and morally conservative cultural climate, low female tertiary enrolments exist (Malik & Ahmad, 2025). These trends are consistent with the existing data, in which such barriers as financial problems, family limitations and access were commonly mentioned by the respondents. The issues of safety and transportation reflected the conclusions made in the research that put the structural conditions as an important determinant of female access to education in rural settings. The sociocultural studies on women education underline the point continuously that the transportation problems and concerns on the safety are particularly relevant in conservative and rural lands (Hasan et al., 2025).

These critical patterns interact with society to bring about multi edged hiccups among the women who could otherwise access higher education. The attitudes in the present study indicate subtle conceptions in regard to gender roles and education. The normative change towards having an aspiration towards education can be reflected in the high levels of agreement that women should have equal access to university education and the fact that educated women are crucial to the development of societies. Concurrently, large percentages of the people surveyed raised their reservations regarding co-education and supported cultural orthodox notions regarding gender education roles. This opposition justifies the studies concerning the fact that cultural beliefs may contribute to maintaining the importance of education both in theory and a traditional gender role in the real world (Malik & Ahmad, 2025).

Religions were not identified as a major constraining factor; majority of the respondents said that religion allowed women to further their studies and denied the idea that women should only study religion or morality-based studies. Such difference is significant since previous studies indicate that such an attitude towards restrictions is more likely to be embedded in local cultural understanding rather than in the religious doctrine itself (Malik et al., 2025). The

contribution of several forms of knowledge in the current data such as religious, moral, skill-based and modern academic presents the possibility that, there exists a pluralistic interpretation that does not place religion and modern education in extreme contradiction. Through postcolonial feminist prism, the findings may be interpreted in terms of socio-epistemic restrictions of the agency of women outlined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The idea of subalternity by Spivak emphasises the fact that marginalised people, like women in the countryside, are usually well-known in the language, but cannot do something with their dreams since they are controlled by the overlapping power forms (Suryawati et al., 2021). Female students and community members, in this work, express these statements to support the education of women, yet the material and cultural objects of the community they live in, do not allow actualizing those ideas. The continued domination of women in terms of movement and choice of education are good examples of structural silencing that is inflicted by the Spivak on subaltern statuses. The precedence that female-only universities has received is an indication that culturally aware educational paradigm can offer viable ways of increasing accessibility in a religious context. The Sultana dream though projects the existence of a utopian society in which females experience no restrictions in their education and intellectual roles, the decisions of Lakki Marwat points out to a compromised method in which gender-specific institutions could be viewed as valid stepping stones in increasing the involvement of females. The qualitative responses supported the quantitative results by giving a picture of the lived experience by the barriers. Then there was financial constraint, family resistance, scarcity of local establishments and transport problems as some of the themes that became salient. Such qualitative data is connected with the evidence of a wider range of rural Pakistan which states that barriers are multifaceted and that specific interventions should be provided (Malik & Ahmad, 2025)

Overall, the findings indicate that besides normative support of women higher education in Lakki Marwat, barriers are present structurally and through cultural importance to gender roles, which prevents the actual educational enrolment. The results are part of the new studies on educational inequality in Pakistan since it shows how both attitudes and structural conditions are intertwined to warp women education career paths. To overcome these obstacles, the intervention should not simply focus on attitudinal change, but also should incorporate improvement of infrastructures, family and community involvement, and culturally sensitive educational policies. Future studies including sample sizes that are bigger and more varied can put these trends into context and help formulate policy frameworks that can be used to have more equitable access to higher education.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

This paper discussed how culture and religion affect the female access to higher education in Lakki Marwat using the life stories and views of the female learners and the society as a whole. The findings indicate that there is a complicated pattern of normative encouragement to women education and at the same time there are enormous structural as well as cultural limitations to the actual involvement in higher education. Although most of the respondents considered the influence of educated women to the family and the community to be positive and they affirmed that the religion allowed women to be educated in modern times, only a small percentage showed resilient desire to seek university education. The majority of the respondents are unsure or unintended to go to university, and this means that the positive perceptions are not enough to break the real barriers

Family limitations, economic issues, poor access to higher educational facilities, security and transporting issues were some of the greatest offsets. These obstacles also represent the

general patterns in the literature on rural Pakistan where women have a restricted education trajectory due to patriarchal norms and poor infrastructure (Khan et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2021).

Theoretically, these findings are in line with the localized interpretation of gender roles even with the abstract promotion of gender equality as proposed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The subalternity of Spivak emphasizes the silence of the voice of women who may still become the voice of this conversation but are limited by interconnecting forces in the structure of power enabling women to do whatever they want (Suryawati et al., 2021). In Lakki Marwat, there are good discourse a proposed women education and material and normative barriers that reduce the access of women into higher education. The fact that it is in a contrast to The Sultana Dream by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain highlights the degree to which the gender norm and the institutional restraint form the experience of educational opportunities. Although the utopian dream of the world portrays existence in which the community can have no restrictions on the role of women in intellectual affairs, the realities on the ground are characterized by perennial social and organizational constraints. On the whole, this study can add to the knowledge on the intersection of culture, religion and structure conditions to explain the higher education of women in rural Pakistan. It emphasizes the necessity to get beyond the attitudinal change and focus on the material, social and cultural environments under which educational options and opportunities are subordinated.

Recommendations

The recommendations that can be provided based on the results of this research to enhance access of women in higher education in Lakki Marwat include:

Increase Access to Higher Education in the Locality.

The absence of higher education institutions would be overcome by building local university campuses or satellite programs, which the respondents would repeatedly mention as the barrier to this situation. Accessible institutions will also save on the long-distance study travel time, the safety issues, family opposition and resistance.

Enhance Transportation and Safety facilities

The data contained structural obstacles (unsafe travel and bad transportation). The government and educational authorities ought to liaise in order to offer safe and credible transportation services to the female students and come up with policies that will guarantee safe commuting patterns.

Create Awareness and Family Engagement Programs

Engaging parents, guardians, and community leaders in the programmes would assist in changing the cultural perceptions and adding some resistance based on the traditional gender norms. The actual positive outcome of higher education should be emphasized in awareness programs to explain the benefits of higher education to both individual families and the community at large.

Support Culturally Responsive Educational Models

The high opinion in support of female-only universities makes it possible that gender segregated education could be an efficient transitional model in conservative settings. The policymakers or educational planners should propose or increase the female only colleges and degree programs to suit the cultural tastes and also improve access to the education by women.

Provide Financial Support and Agreements

One of the reasons was financial constraints. An increase in scholarships, waiver of fees and allowances on women with low-income backgrounds would diminish economic constraints and enhance the affordability of higher education.

Promote the Community-Based Support Networks.

The female students can be guided, uplifted and given practical advice through support networks carried out through alumni, civil society organizations and mentorship programs in their educational paths.

Enhance Female-Integrated Curricula and Instruction. Gender sensitivity training should also be applied in teacher training and curriculum development to achieve the creation of inclusive learning conditions conducive to female educational participation and overcome the challenges of stereotyping that might dishearten female participation.

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