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Gender Roles and Their Influence on Women's Educational Aspirations after Marriage

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the psychological, emotional and socio-economic implications on married women putting curbs on post-marriage higher education of women in Loralai, Balochistan. The study provides information on the effect of societal attitudes and gender roles on the education of female students, and investigate how these attitudes stop women from pursuing education to enable them build their self-esteem, mental health, social status and economic independence. The study used purposive sampling method, with 12 married women respondents selected for in depth interview. The selected women had already been denied opportunities to continue their education after marriage. Psychological outcomes of the findings range from frustration and loss of identity to feelings of inadequacy; socio-economic implications go from economic dependency and creativity suppression to reduced socio-economic status. Moreover, the study reflects societal attitudes and practices in Loralai, where women are confined to domestic role and expected to have domestic responsibilities before their educational desire. The study intends to identify ways to support women towards attaining their educational goals with a particular emphasis on the significance of spousal support in the motivation towards education, advancing societal change, and the need for policy reforms to enable women to balance both family and education. These findings shed light on the challenges married women in Loralai encounter and underscore the importance of creating an enabling environment to facilitate their educational pursuits.

Keywords: Higher Education. Marriage, Gender Roll, Women, Loralai, Balochistan

INTRODUCTION

Across the world, the trajectory of women's pursuit of higher education post-marriage remains influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors that create a multifaceted scenario. A study found that only 28.2% of married women in Bangladesh pursued their education after marriage, with barriers attributed to low literacy rates and patriarchal norms that limit educational ambitions (Chan et al., 2022; Howlader et al., 2023). Although higher education is increasingly considered essential for empowerment, In India, women's experience shows that family responsibilities and social expectations generally limit women's access to higher education (Dutta, 2016). In contrast, in much of the industrialized worlds, a significant reduction in the gender gap in higher education has led, in many cases, to women outpacing men in terms of

college attendance (Nozaki et al., 2009). Such trend is part of a global shift towards improving women's access to education, a crucial aspect of their autonomy in the public sphere (Kelly & Slaughter, 1991).

Higher education is one of the important areas in which post-marriage women in our part of the world (i.e. Pakistan) have to overcome so many socio-cultural obstacles. A common problem, early marriages get higher preference than the educationally affluent, as it shows deep-rooted patriarchal norms (Jan & Azeem, 2024; Khan et al., 2021; Panezai et al., 2024), considering education futile and less important for females than males. Married women face various issues, such as the non-cooperation of husbands and in-laws, which are further complicated by the norms that restrict women to household duties (Munir et al., 2022; Tahira et al., 2023). Similarly, some barriers like financial barrier, time management problem, health problem, etc. discourage the married couple from pursuing their academic career (Tahira et al., 2023). In addition, the systemic harassment women face leads to cultural stigmatization of education, creating a hostile environment where women's access to education is further limited and calling for immediate action to eradicate educational discrimination against women (Jan & Azeem, 2024; Khan et al., 2021).

There are several psychological barriers for females pursuing education after marriage due to the influence of sociocultural norms and family dynamics. As a result of this, traditional values place more emphasis on marriage than on education, with expected lack of support from husbands and in-laws when it comes to pursuing education, that most frequently hampers women's education in Pakistan (Munir et al., 2022; Rana et al., 2024). Moreover, anxiety around intimate partner violence and stigma also exert a psychological toll, preventing women from pursuing higher education (Chan et al., 2022; Munir et al., 2022). The persistence of patriarchal systems creates an environment in which women are forced to limit their own educational desires, frequently quashing their ambitions as a result of perceived familial and social pressure (Chan et al., 2022; Siddiqui & Shaikh, 2020). Moreover, the cultural envy and emphasis on men's education make women feel inadequate and fearful, which negatively impacts their mental health and limits their educational attainment to some extent (Panezai et al., 2024). Overcoming these challenges requires some form of comprehensive, national strategies to engage men and women alike in ensuring educational equity.

While the reasons for such obstacles are multifaceted and interconnected, they mainly consist of sociocultural, familial and economic challenges that married individuals in Pakistan face when considering higher education. Sociocultural values and patriarchy dominate the scene with far more early marriages than educational pursuits, massively eradicating the possibility of women entering higher education (Munir et al., 2022; Rana et al., 2024). Similarly traditional roles and lack of support from their husband's and in-law also limit their freedom and mobility, reducing their chances of attending normal educational institutions (Munir et al., 2022; Rana et al., 2024). Limited income is a second main barrier because several households don't see women's education as a worthy investment and avoid spending money on it, with men's education being viewed as more important (Behlol & Irfan, 2016; Tahira et al., 2023).

Furthermore, married students also encountered academic problems like balancing their household responsibilities with their academic workload which breaches them to face stress which serve as an obstruction to the education progress (Behlol & Irfan, 2016; Tahira et al., 2023). Health problems like stress and mental health issues are also one of the biggest reasons that hindered married couples continue their education of married students (Tahira et al., 2023). Moreover, societal attitudes and stereotypes regarding the perceived detrimental effects of women's higher education on their morality and family responsibilities play a role in the opposition to women's educational progress (Behlol & Irfan, 2016). Overcoming these obstacles necessitates broad-based policy changes, cultural transformations, and specific efforts to foster a more accommodating and supportive setting for married people seeking higher education in Pakistan (Rana et al., 2024) (Rana et al., 2024).

In several societies, women approach the institution of marriage with a desire to further their education and attain higher education including in Loralai, Balochistan. However, the attainment of such educational goals often finds itself stiffened amongst many, once married, simply due to societal and familial pressure, especially from one's own spouse. In Loralai, cultural norms that place household duties ahead of educational ambitions further compound these challenges. Consequently, a lot of women are unable to pursue their dreams of higher academics, causing a major hindrance to their self-growth and health. The psychological effects are stark, as many women feel frustrated, suffer low self-esteem, and feel as though they've lost their identities because they cannot follow their academic dreams. This prohibition results in economic dependence, which takes away their artistic and leisure side. Not only do their husbands become their emotional support, but their husbands also become their social surrogate, which often means that as these women become increasingly reliant on their husbands, their social status declines, their autonomy reduces, and their sense of self-worth diminishes. These impediments inhibit their own development both personally and professionally in Loralai, which has limited avenues in terms of education for women. Therefore, in this context, it is important to explore the potential implications of this on a wider scale and recommend measures that will enable women to shatter these glass ceilings.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The current study is based on qualitative research design to find out the psychological, emotional and socio-economic impact of gender roles on married women's educational aspirations in Loralai, Balochistan, Pakistan. The specific aim is to analyze how the societal and marital sanctions limit women's access to higher education after marriage along with the impact on their well-being. The sample consisted of 12 married women who have faced limitations in pursuing higher education after marriage through purposive sampling technique. Participants were recruited on the basis of their capability in providing rich, in-depth contextual perspectives of their lived experiences. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as a data collection technique, thus enabling the respondents to express their views on how their educational goals were impacted by marriage and the societal expectations related with it. Some interviews were conducted with the participant in their own natural habitat, which led to

a feeling of familiarity in the talk, and openness with trust. Thematic analysis of data, through identification of patterns and key themes on psychological impacts, economic dependency, social status and the role of gender norms in educational opportunity. It enables to understand the lived reality of married women of Lorlai as well as the various functioning of the barriers and the strategies that can empower them for higher education. They seek to use those findings to inform future policy and societal change on behalf of a woman's education in the context of marriage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BELIEVES ABOUT MARRIAGE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

In many communities and societies, the societal and cultural status-quo allocate the responsibility of being a wife and mother as the only viable career choice once married, enough to challenge the opportunities for higher education for women after marriage. Women may strive for education, but they are soon met with marriage milestones that threaten to erode the drive to pursue their ideals. The message here is a cultural one that runs deep, that say that marriage and education do not go hand-in-hand, as such many women gave up on their education too soon to get married. Women still form an educated class, there is societal importance pressure and lack of support from family members but they limit their potential. For many, the belief that after marriage especially after child birth education is impossible becomes prima-facie reality. This theme sheds light on the influence of these cultural expectations on married women's educational trajectories, emphasizing the delicate balance between personal development and societal pressures of being a wife.

In this regard, the participant of the study explained that social and cultural perspectives towards marriage and education posed considerable challenges for women in pursuing further studies after marriage. Several appeared convinced that, even though education was important, it was secondary to marriage, due to ingrained social norms that promote marriage above all else. Participants highlighted that education is something in their communities that should only be done prior to marriage and, once married, it must be put to the side and replaced with domestic duties. Many women thus drop out of school before they achieve their educational aspirations to prepare for marriage.

Moreover, many participants shared that they see no relationship between marriage and education, and that the two can't coexist. This social consideration causes them to leave their studies early; they are encouraged to put family life first. Even those who do continue education after marriage usually face tremendous opposition from older generations, who assert that something like education is impractical after marriage because of the burdens of marital life. This discouragement of those close to respondents reflects a larger societal narrative that education holds no value once a woman is married.

Furthermore, participants added that for those who do continue their education, the fact that they arrive at their first child typically serves as a point of redemption. They told that, regardless of how determined they are at the beginning, ultimately they abandon their ambitions because they find the alternate narrative, that education cannot happen post

marriage, is borne out in their lives. These insights highlight the entrenched societal norms that lead to a self-perpetuating cycle, one where women's educational aspirations are curbed by the expectation to conform to traditional family roles in marriage and motherhood.

Women's Isolation, Resistance, Anxiety and Education after Marriages

Women who want to study after marriage have to be isolated, become resistance and get anxiety. Though resolved against abandoning their educational aspirations, they face many challenges, mostly due to their families, husbands and communities not supporting them. The women are left to navigate their journeys primarily alone, resulting in emotional distress, such as feelings of loneliness and anxiety. However, the prevailing societal norms of married women as caretakers in their families, especially in rigid traditions, bring constraints to their studies.

In this respect, the participants discussed that their biggest challenge is the resistance that comes mostly from members of their own family, especially their husbands, who sometimes do not encourage them to pursue further education. This mindset gives rise to an inability to recognize, or appreciate, a woman's will to reach greater heights through education post-nuptials. Husbands, in particular, often perceive their wife's pursuit of higher education as an illicit threat to a stable family system, further complicating the support women often so desperately need to be able to pursue their education.

Moreover, participants added that they are also balancing educational and domestic tasks with little to no help from those around them. This lack of support causes feeling overwhelmed and completely lost, thus leading to rising anxiety and stress levels. Unlike men, for whom there is usually encouragement and social support in their academic or professional pursuits, these women have to bear the costs themselves. No wonder they are under emotional stress and struggle at home with adjustments and academics as the home and educational institution feel both desperate to have the students do better but giving them a sense of isolation in both worlds.

In the same way, participants explored that the few who are able to obtain education despite of all of these struggles stumbles upon the road. These women struggle with feelings of insecurity and embarrassments, as their best efforts go unappreciated. Their educational journey has no clear terminus, and often is interrupted by family commitments. The uncertainty in whether they might become successful adds even more emotional stress on them.

Furthermore, the participants described that women receive resistance from society and are socially isolated from their study peers as well as are stressed out and anxious. Among those whose families could afford to send them to educational institutions, the desire for education is never the issue – it is how the families support their daughters to pursue them that needs to change and be driven through a cultural change that encourages the women to marry and plot in family and study too.

SUPPORTIVE SPOUSES, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND CAREER BUILDING

A few women participants felt lucky that they have husbands who allow them to continue their educations and to achieve their ambitions after marriage. As one participants shared "Being continually reassured by my husband, I feel more calm and confident in pursuing

my studies. His support has been crucial in helping me maintain both my family life and education.” More emotionally, the support from their spouses also translated into real-life improvements in their finances and day-to-day home life. A participant explained, “Because I was supported by my husband, our financial situation improved and home and work became much easier to manage.”

Although some of the women had not received very high levels of formal education, they stressed how the education they did have enabled them to gain employment and feel somewhat more financially secure. As one participant described, “With the education I’ve had access to, employment is a good job away, and I’m fine with my financial situation. I feel like I’m doing something to contribute to my family’s well-being.” This financial security also enabled them to push their kids toward education. One woman told us, “I always tell my children that education is important, because it can open doors for them, just like it opened doors for me. I want them to reach for the stars, never stop learning”.

For many of these women, the fact that they were able to get an education and hold down a job also meant that they could play a more active role in their children’s growth. One women added, “Even though I go for work and educational institution, I make sure I’m there for my children, guiding them, helping with the studies. I also become a friend to them, advising them whenever they have a problem.” They were keenly aware that their education equipped them tangentially with the skills to navigate the more challenging realities of the world beyond the traditional role of housewife. One of the participants explained, “My education has opened my eyes to the challenges that our children are faced with today and I’m able to share with them things that they may not always get from someone who doesn’t have the same experiences.

The women interviewed for this study also recognized three important attributes that helped them succeed. To start, they pointed to the support of their spouses, which they credited with allowing them to achieve their ambitions. As one participant revealed, “I continue to be able to do what I do thanks to my husband’s continued support. Without my husband’s unwavering support, I wouldn’t be where I am today. It is his faith in me that has motivated me to keep going.” In addition, they expressed their resolve to pursue education and obtain jobs, demonstrating their resiliency in addition to their hardships. Another participant disclosed “I’ve worked hard to balance everything, but I’ve made sure that nothing stops me from my goals”. Finally, these women were motivated by a desire to make a meaningful impact in their families, community, and society. One of the participants summed it up when she said, “Regardless of struggle, I know that what I’m doing on this stage today will positively impact not only myself, but my family, the society of which I’m a part. I do not eat fast food, and I want to be an example for my children and for those around me.”

CONCLUSIONS

The result of this study contributes to our understanding of how social and cultural attitudes shape the opportunities of married women to pursue higher education in Loralai, Balochistan. The research find that, typically for cultural reasons, male and female have different

perspectives about marriage and education, which presents women with significant challenges in achieving their educational goals after marriage. Spouses and family members also support these traditional values which constitute a sort of barrier that limits women's educational opportunities, leaves them without any form of psychological comfort and a place to be economically independent with an equal social status. Some women manage to overcome these hurdles, provided their husbands are on board. The findings show that when women receive emotional and practical support from their spouses, they have a greater sense of confidence about continuing their education and having a career. Such support translates to better financial and household management where these women earn both their independence and self-worth. Furthermore, these women help redefine what it means for their children to succeed in school — instilling in them the importance of education and assuming the role of a fierce advocate for their family's ambitions. The study also emphasizes the necessity of a cultural change that accommodates women's educational goals. Even if those who are not quitting their studies are doing so, they face societal discouragement and resistance from family members, both of which will take a heavy emotional and psychological toll. They may reflect that a concerted effort may need to be made to provide a conducive environment for married women to balance family life with their educational and career aspirations. It is believed that with education and supportive peer and community relationships, women can break out of these traditional molds and be a storyteller on the stage of life in meaningful and impactful ways. The study highlights the potential causes for this issue and calls to reframe this issue from other perspectives, such as social change and policy reforms that can target barriers to women pursuing higher education after marriage. Women in the Loralai region and in similar patriarchal communities can be allowed to realize their potential for the benefit of their families and society as a whole through equality in the framework of education and promotion of cultural norms.

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