

ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL
Available Online: https://assajournal.com
Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026.Page#.6422-6429
Print ISSN: 3006-2497 Online ISSN: 3006-2500
Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems

Factors Contributing to Girls Dropout from Government Primary Schools in Tehsil Kot Addu, District Muzaffargarh, Pakistan: A Cross-Sectional Study of Parents' and Education Officials' Perspectives

Ahmad Nadeem Khalid
Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan
**Corresponding author: ahmadnadeemkhalid@gmail.com*

Abstract

Background: Persistent gender disparities in primary school completion continue to undermine progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Pakistan, where national estimates indicate that only 22% of girls complete primary schooling compared with 47% of boys, and more than 3.2 million girls remain out of school nationally. Rural districts of southern Punjab report disproportionately high female attrition, yet micro-level, multi-informant evidence from these settings remains scarce. Objective: This study examined the socioeconomic, familial, and institutional factors associated with girls' dropout from government primary schools in Tehsil Kot Addu, District Muzaffargarh, Punjab, and assessed parent and education-official perceptions of School Management Committee (SMC) performance. Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted using simple random sampling to recruit 200 respondents (100 parents, predominantly mothers, and 100 education officials comprising teachers, Assistant Education Officers, and Education District Officers). Data were collected via a pre-tested, structured interview schedule and analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and the chi-square test of association ($\alpha = 0.05$). Results: Education officials identified household poverty (37%) and parental illiteracy (30%) as the leading determinants of girls' dropout, followed by institutional weaknesses (10%) and social taboos (5%). Among parents, 83% endorsed (strongly agreed/agreed) that parental education level influences enrollment, 75% linked non-functional "ghost" schools to reduced enrollment, and 39% expressed dissatisfaction with SMC performance. A significant association was found between perceived dropout determinants and beliefs regarding parental education ($\chi^2 = 59.90$, $df = 16$, $p < 0.001$). Conclusion: Girls' primary school dropout in rural Punjab reflects an interaction of household poverty, parental illiteracy, and weak school-level governance. Findings support integrated poverty-alleviation, parental-literacy, and SMC-strengthening interventions to improve female primary retention.

Keywords: Student Dropouts; Educational Status; Poverty; Rural Population; Parents; Pakistan

1. Introduction

Universal access to quality primary education remains a foundational target of the global development agenda, embedded first in the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently reaffirmed under Sustainable Development Goal 4. Gender parity in schooling is central to this agenda,

yet girls in low- and middle-income countries continue to face disproportionate barriers to enrollment and retention. In Pakistan, the scale of this disparity is substantial: national estimates indicate that only 22% of girls complete primary education compared with 47% of boys, and UNESCO figures place the number of out-of-school children above five million, of whom more than 3.2 million are girls. Pakistan's public investment in education, at approximately 2.4% of GDP, remains among the lowest in the region, constraining the infrastructural and human-resource capacity of the government school system.

Within this national context, rural districts of southern Punjab present acute manifestations of the problem. Tehsil Kot Addu, the largest tehsil of District Muzaffargarh with 27 union councils, is characterized by dispersed rural settlement patterns that require many students, particularly girls, to travel considerable distances to reach functioning schools. Prior scholarship has attributed female educational attrition to an interacting set of structural and normative factors, including household poverty and income insecurity in rural Pakistan (Irfan & Amjad, 1984; Checchi, 2003), the influence of parental education and household structure on children's schooling (Glick & Sahn, 2000), rigid cultural norms and patriarchal restrictions on female mobility (Qureshi, 2004), and deficiencies in school infrastructure, teacher availability, and local governance (Noorani, 2009; Rahman, 2005). These accounts are broadly consistent with human capital and social exclusion frameworks, which posit that educational attainment is jointly shaped by household resource constraints and by the responsiveness of institutions serving marginalized populations.

Existing empirical work on girls' dropout in Pakistan, however, has tended either toward national-level aggregate analysis (Farooq, 2013) or toward single-district studies conducted in other regions such as Sargodha (Malik, 2002), leaving the specific dynamics of Tehsil Kot Addu underexamined. Moreover, few studies triangulate the perspectives of parents with those of front-line education officials, or apply inferential statistical testing to move beyond purely descriptive tabulation of survey responses. This dual-informant, hypothesis-testing approach constitutes the principal contribution of the present study relative to prior district-level research in Punjab.

Accordingly, this study was designed to (i) identify the socioeconomic and institutional factors perceived to drive girls' dropout from government primary schools in Tehsil Kot Addu; (ii) examine the perceived role of the District Education Department in mitigating dropout; and (iii) evaluate parent and official perceptions of School Management Committee effectiveness. Corresponding to these objectives, the study tested the null hypothesis that no association exists between perceived structural determinants of girls' dropout (e.g., poverty, parental illiteracy, institutional weaknesses) and respondent beliefs regarding the contribution of parental education level to school leaving, against the alternative hypothesis that such an association exists.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Design and Setting

A cross-sectional, descriptive-analytical survey design was employed to examine factors associated with girls' primary school dropout in Tehsil Kot Addu, District Muzaffargarh, Punjab, Pakistan. Tehsil Kot Addu was purposively selected as the study setting because it is the largest tehsil in the district, encompasses a predominantly rural catchment of 27 union councils, and is characterized by long average

travel distances between residences and functioning government schools — a factor repeatedly implicated in female attrition in the literature.

2.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised two strata: (i) parents — predominantly mothers — of primary-school-age girls, including both currently enrolled and previously dropped-out students; and (ii) education officials, including primary school teachers, Assistant Education Officers (AEOs), and Education District Officers (EDOs) serving in the tehsil. A total sample of 200 respondents was recruited (n = 100 per stratum) using simple random sampling, whereby each unit within the accessible sampling frame had an equal probability of selection. A formal a priori power calculation was not reported in the underlying study and is acknowledged as a methodological limitation (Section 4.3).

2.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured interview schedule administered face-to-face, a method selected in view of the high prevalence of illiteracy among parent respondents. The instrument was developed from the reviewed literature and refined through pre-testing on a trial sample, which led to the removal of double-barreled and redundant items and to a reduction in overall instrument length.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Field data were collected directly from government primary schools and their surrounding communities within Tehsil Kot Addu. Interviews were conducted in person by the research team; fieldwork proceeded with generally cooperative respondent engagement.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Formal written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the School Education Department prior to fieldwork. An official authorization letter issued by the affiliating university was shared with the Department and subsequently circulated to the sampled government primary schools, granting access for interviews with teachers and other education officials. Parents of participating students were informed of the study's purpose in advance, and verbal informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to interview administration. Respondent confidentiality was maintained throughout data collection, entry, and reporting.

2.6 Statistical Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) characterized respondent demographics and item-level responses. The chi-square (χ^2) test of association was applied to evaluate the relationship between perceived determinants of girls' dropout and respondent beliefs regarding the contribution of parental education level to dropout, with statistical significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

3. Results

Demographic characteristics of the two respondent strata are summarized in Table 1. Parent respondents were 86.0% female and 14.0% male, with 52.0% residing in rural areas; the largest single age band (34.0%) fell within 20–25 years. Education officials were 100% female respondents in this sample, with 44.0% reporting rural-area service context.

Characteristic	Category	Parents (n = 100)	Officials (n = 100)
Sex	Female	86.0%	100%
	Male	14.0%	—
Residence	Rural	52.0%	44.0%
	Urban	48.0%	56.0%
Family structure	Joint	62.0%	21.0%
	Nuclear	32.0%	75.0%
	Extended	6.0%	4.0%
Age (dominant band)	20–25 y / 40+ y	34.0% (20–25y)	51.0% (40+y)

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Parent and Education-Official Respondents (N = 200)*

When asked to identify the main factors responsible for girls' dropout from school, education officials most frequently cited household poverty (37.0%) and parental illiteracy (30.0%), followed by institutional/school-level weaknesses (10.0%) and social taboos or cultural prohibitions (5.0%); an additional 18.0% cited other compounding factors, including distance from school, security concerns, and religious considerations (Table 2).

Perceived Determinant of Girls' Dropout	n	%
Household poverty	37	37.0
Parental illiteracy	30	30.0
Institutional/school-level weaknesses	10	10.0
Social taboos / cultural prohibitions	5	5.0
Other (distance, security, religious concerns)	18	18.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Table 2. *Perceived Determinants of Girls' Primary School Dropout — Education Officials (n = 100)*

Parent respondents' item-level perceptions of household and institutional barriers are presented in Table 3. A substantial majority (83.0% combined strongly agree/agree) endorsed the view that improving parental education would increase enrollment, and 75.0% associated non-functional ("ghost") schools with reduced enrollment. Sixty-five percent (strongly agree/agree combined) reported that distance between home and school reduced enrollment. Regarding governance, only 35.0% of parent

respondents expressed satisfaction with School Management Committee (SMC) performance, while 39.0% reported dissatisfaction and 26.0% were unaware of SMC functions (Table 3).

Household/Institutional Item (Parent Respondents)	SA	A	D/SD	N
Parental education improves enrollment	49%	34%	13%	4%
Long distance to school reduces enrollment	31%	34%	18%	17%
Non-functional ("ghost") schools reduce enrollment	42%	33%	15%	10%
Teaching-profession reform is needed	51%	36%	4%	9%
Satisfied with SMC performance (Yes/No/Don't know)	35%	39%	26%	—

Table 3. *Household- and Institution-Level Perceptions Associated with Dropout — Parent Respondents (n = 100)*

Note. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D/SD = Disagree/Strongly Disagree; N = Neutral. SMC item used a Yes/No/Don't-know response format rather than a Likert scale.

A chi-square test of association was conducted between the item on main factors responsible for girls' dropout and the item on whether low parental education level was believed to cause dropout. The association was statistically significant, $\chi^2(16, N = 100) = 59.90$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that perceived structural determinants of dropout were not independent of respondents' beliefs about the role of parental education (Table 4). This finding supports rejection of the null hypothesis of no association between the two constructs.

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Pearson χ^2	59.90	—
Degrees of freedom (df)	16	—
p-value	< 0.001	Significant

Table 4. *Chi-Square Test of Association Between Perceived Dropout Factors and Beliefs Regarding Parental Education*

4. Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of Findings

The findings indicate that girls' dropout from government primary schools in Tehsil Kot Addu is perceived by both parents and education officials as arising from an interacting set of economic, familial, and institutional factors, rather than from any single determinant. The prominence of poverty (37.0%) and parental illiteracy (30.0%) as leading determinants aligns with the broader South Asian literature

linking household resource constraints and parental education levels to reduced investment in daughters' schooling (Checchi, 2003; Glick & Sahn, 2000). The statistically significant association between perceived dropout determinants and beliefs about parental education ($\chi^2 = 59.90$, $p < 0.001$) lends empirical support to intergenerational-transmission accounts of educational disadvantage, whereby parents with limited schooling are less able or inclined to sustain their daughters' enrollment.

The high proportion of parents citing non-functional "ghost" schools (75.0% combined agreement) and expressing dissatisfaction with SMC performance (39.0%) points to a governance dimension that is comparatively underemphasized in earlier dropout literature focused primarily on household-level determinants. This suggests that supply-side institutional failures — irregular teacher attendance, inactive community oversight bodies, and infrastructural neglect — compound demand-side household constraints, consistent with Noorani's (2009) characterization of multi-layered barriers within Pakistan's education sector.

4.2 Theoretical and Policy Implications

These findings are consistent with a human-capital framework in which household underinvestment in female schooling reflects both resource poverty and low perceived returns to girls' education, compounded by a social-exclusion dynamic in which weak local institutions fail to counterbalance household-level disadvantage. From a policy standpoint, the results suggest that interventions targeting a single determinant — for example, fee waivers alone — are unlikely to substantially improve retention unless accompanied by parallel investment in functional school infrastructure, regular teacher deployment, and revitalized School Management Committees capable of exercising meaningful community oversight.

4.3 Limitations

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding the relationships identified; the significant chi-square association establishes statistical dependence but not directionality. Second, the sample size (N = 200) was determined pragmatically based on resource and time constraints typical of thesis-level fieldwork, rather than through a documented a priori power calculation. Third, findings are confined to a single tehsil, limiting generalizability to other districts of Punjab or Pakistan. Fourth, reliance on self-reported perceptions — particularly among education officials reporting on the performance of their own sector — may introduce social desirability bias. Fifth, only one inferential statistical test was conducted; the broader item set was analyzed descriptively, constraining the extent to which multivariate confounding (e.g., the joint influence of income, distance, and parental literacy) could be assessed.

4.4 Recommendations

For policy, the findings support (i) targeted cash-transfer or stipend programs to offset the opportunity cost of girls' schooling among low-income households; (ii) adult and parental literacy programs integrated with school enrollment drives; (iii) audits and remediation of non-functional "ghost" schools; and (iv) capacity-building and accountability mechanisms for School Management Committees. For future research, longitudinal and mixed-methods designs incorporating multivariate regression modeling are recommended to disentangle the relative contribution of poverty, parental literacy,

distance, and institutional quality to dropout risk, alongside expansion of the sampling frame to permit cross-district comparison.

5. Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Formal written permission for this study was obtained from the School Education Department. An official authorization letter issued by the affiliating university was shared with the Department and circulated to all sampled government primary schools, permitting interviews with teachers and education officials. Parents of participating students were informed of the study in advance, and verbal informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable — the manuscript contains no individual person's identifiable data, images, or case details.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing Interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. This manuscript is derived from the author's M.Phil (Sociology) thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan (Session 2011–13).

Author Contributions

Ahmad Nadeem Khalid was responsible for study conception and design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Ayaz Muhammad Rana, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the supervision and guidance of Prof. Dr. Ayaz Muhammad Rana, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, throughout this study.

References

Checchi, D. (2003). Inequality in incomes and access to education: A cross-country analysis (1960–1995). Labour, 17(2), 153–201.

Farooq, M. (2013). An inclusive schooling model for the prevention of dropout in primary schools in Pakistan. Bulletin of Education and Research, 35(1), 47–74.

Glick, P., & Sahn, D. E. (2000). Schooling of girls and boys in a West African country: The effects of parental education, income, and household structure. Economics of Education Review, 19(1), 63–87.

Irfan, M., & Amjad, R. (1984). Poverty in rural Pakistan. In A. R. Khan & E. Lee (Eds.), Poverty in rural Asia. ILO/ARTEP.

Malik, Z. M. (2002). Causes of drop out in primary schools of Sargodha Tehsil during the years 1996–1997 and 1997–1998. Pakistan Journal of Applied Sciences, 2(6), 646–648.

Noorani, S. (2009). Barriers to girls' education, strategies and interventions. UNICEF.

Qureshi, S. (2004). Pakistan: Education and gender policy for girls' education — A lifetime to development [International Policy Fellowship 2003–2004]. Center for Policy Studies.

Rahman, T. (2005). Passport to privilege: The English medium schools in Pakistan. Peace and Democracy in South Asia, 1(1).