

# Exploring the Barriers to Girls' Education from Primary to Secondary Level in District Lasbela, Balochistan: A Case Study of Tehsil Uthal

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## KEYWORDS

Barriers  
District Lasbela  
Girls' Education  
Balochistan  
Tehsil Uthal

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores barriers to girls' education from primary to secondary school levels in District Lasbela - Balochistan, with a focus on Tehsil Uthal. It also examines the attitude of the people of Tehsil Uthal towards girls' education and offers recommendations to the government of Balochistan to increase girls' educational opportunities in Tehsil Uthal. A mixed research method is used by combining both the qualitative and the quantitative data to reach to the depth of each barrier. Primary data is collected in two rounds of interviews. In the first round, 150 respondents were selected randomly, who were sent a close-ended questionnaire for filling, while in the second round, 20 individuals were selected for in-depth interviews using open-ended questionnaires. The findings reveal poverty, lack of awareness, accessibility concerns (such as lack of schools, lack of transportation facilities, and long distances between schools and villages), gender discrimination and early marriages as the primary barriers to girls' education in Tehsil Uthal. The paper concludes that girls' educational chances can be enhanced by addressing these barriers through more public awareness campaigns, improved school accessibility, incentivizing girls' education through scholarships, and through social change initiatives that challenge gender stereotyping and early marriages.

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## Introduction

Lasbela was a princely state under the state of Kalat and became part of Pakistan on March 17, 1948 after signing an agreement by the then ruler of Lasbela with the Pakistani state officials. After the dissolution of one unit scheme, Lasbela was merged into Kalat division as a separate District (Khan, 2014). Very recently, Lasbela is divided into two District; District Hub and District Lasbela. The District Lasbela consists of four Tehsil s and one sub-Tehsil: 1) Bela 2) Uthal 3) Lakra 4) Kanraj and a sub-Tehsil Lyari.

Tehsil Uthal has a total population of 88,933, covering a land area of 1,756 square

kilometres (Bureau of Statistics, Census, 2023). The Tehsil is divided into the Municipal Committee (MC) Uthal, Union Council (UC) Khenwari, and Union Council (UC) Wayara. There are 66 different Goths (villages) in the UC Khenwari and UC Wayara, excluding the Uthal City and its surroundings Goths.

Economically, Lasbela is important because it sits on a major trade route between Makran and Sindh and is close to Karachi, Pakistan's largest city. The District is rich in agriculture, fishing, and industry, producing most of Balochistan's revenue and industrial

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goods. Before its bifurcation into two District, Lasbela served as the primary industrial zone of Balochistan. It now hosts more than 300 industrial units, of which 202 are currently operational, contributing about 70% of the province's revenue and 90% of its industrial output (Khan, 2022 & Zaheer, 2013).

However, despite this wealth, Lasbela has very low literacy rates, ranking 21st out of 36 District in Balochistan, with only 36% of people able to read and write (Lasbela District Education Plan, 2016-17 to 2021-22: 13). The gap between male and female is large; 49% of male are literate, while only 13% - 20% of female can read and write (Lasbela District Education plan, 2021-22 Muhammad et al., 2022: 130).<sup>1</sup> At national level, Lasbela ranks low in primary education. There is a big difference between boys and girls schooling. 71% of girls aged 6-15 dropping out and 68% not attending school at all (Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education, 2021:7).

While on the other hand, the world adult literacy rate is increasing with time. The world adult literacy rate by gender in the year 2022 is 90.31% for male and 83.78% for female (<https://www.statista.com/>). In Pakistan literacy rate in 2020-21 is 62% whereas male is 73.4% and female is 51.9%. Balochistan's literacy is 54.5% whereas male is 50.50% and female is 32.80% (Labour Force Survey, 2020-21).

Many factors, including social-cultural, religious, economic, infrastructural, and institutional etc., kept girls away from schooling in most of the rural and peripheral areas in Pakistan like District Lasbela and Tehsil Uthal. So, it is not plausible to cover all of them in a single paper in detail. Therefore, this paper focuses on the most

significant ones identified through the empirical data collected during the fieldwork.

It may be noted that during consulting the existing literature, we observed that except certain reports, there is lack of a systematic study on District Lasbela and Tehsil Uthal's education. So, this research paper will be the first of its kind that addresses the major barriers to girls' education, and examining the attitude of the residents of Tehsil Uthal towards girls' education.

### **Objectives of the study**

To investigate the major barriers to girls' education from primary to secondary levels in District Lasbela, Balochistan, Pakistan, with a special focus on Tehsil Uthal.

To figure out families' attitudes towards the education of girls in District Lasbela, Balochistan, Pakistan, with particular reference to Tehsil Uthal.

To suggest ways how to reduce those barriers that are facing by the girls in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal.

### **Research Questions**

What are the major barriers to girls' education from primary to secondary level in District Lasbela, Balochistan, Pakistan, with reference to Tehsil Uthal?

What is/are the attitudes of the families towards girls' education in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal?

What measures need to be taken to reduce the barriers that are facing by girls in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal?

Literature review

The prevailing literature on barriers to girls' education is widespread and have multiple research findings. Many of the researchers produced complex and interwoven results. Therefore, we feel it

<sup>1</sup> It may be noted that there is a lack of reliable data and therefore different sources quote different

percentages of the female education in District Lasbela.

appropriate to appraise the existing literature theme wise under different headings.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is a major obstacle to education in Pakistan, particularly for girls. Many families cannot afford to send their daughters to school and instead rely on them for domestic work. For instance, Khan et al (2011), in their paper examine the dropout rate of girls at primary level around Pakistan's rural areas. The major reason they find out is poverty followed by gender discrimination. The participants selected for this study explained that poverty is a major barrier for them to send girls to school. Likewise, Jamal (2016) also identifies poverty as one of the major barriers to girls' education in the former Federally Tribal Administered Areas (FATA). Similarly, Kakar et al. (2016) noticed that there is a strong correlation between poverty and low literacy rates among women in Balochistan, particularly in District Pishin where the patriarchal cultural norms limit females' educational opportunities. Kakar et al (2016) study is about District Pishin and its three union councils but their study is useful in many aspects because Pishin too is a peripheral District like Lasbela and the cultural set up of Pishin is not that much different from District Lasbela. In both Districts men is the dominated character that determine women's future.

Furthermore, Martínez's (2018) report title, "[s]hall I feed my daughter, or educate her?" indicates that poverty is one of the main barriers to girls' education globally. Bangura and Mambo's (2023) study found African families often prioritize boy's education. It is because they think that boy will be the breadwinner in future. However, they argued that a girl child can become more supportive and active for the socioeconomic progress of the entire family but owing to

poverty parents often give more preference to boys' education.

Hence, poverty is one of the outstanding issues facing by the parents and families while allowing their children to get them enrolled in schools. According to one estimate some twenty-eight million children are not enrolled in schools during the year 2023 (The News, 2023). The countrywide enrolment rate of children shows that parents are struggling to feed their kids and provide them with the necessities of life such as food and shelter.

### **Lack of Awareness**

Education is the source of empowerment, and societal growth. It equips individuals with expertise and skills necessary for life. An educated person can play a positive role for the advancement of the society and the universe (Grant, 2017). Therefore, awareness about the importance of education among people is crucial, especially among parents.

Nonetheless, if the parents themselves are not aware of the importance of education, how come they would send their children to school? This issue exists in various parts of the world, especially in third-world countries where the parents themselves are not educated, thus not sending their daughters to school. For instance, Roby et al. (2009), in their study, which is about Mozambique, concluded that there are various hurdles that hinder girls from going to school, but the major issue is the lack of awareness among caregivers and parents. Similarly, Suleman et al (2015), pointed out that parental education plays an important role in girls' education. They opine that, in countryside's areas, most of the people are uneducated and thus are unaware about the significance of education for their girls. They identify that those parents who are educated allow their daughters to go to schools (see also Humala and Eshya, 2000 - cited in

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Sultana & Haque, 2018 for the same argument).

Furthermore, Rashid et al. (2015), in their research report, which is about Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, identified that out of 397 parents, 61% were unaware of the difficulties faced by the girls in school. This shows that the parents are less concerned of their girls' education due to lack of awareness of the benefits of education. Moreover, Hussain et al. (2020) conducted comparative research with a variety of perspective on rural areas adjacent to District Multan and Khanewal in the province of Punjab, in which they discovered that awareness is one of the major obstacles to girls' education in rural areas. They also revealed that socio-cultural norms and political variables poses less hurdles to girls' education.<sup>2</sup>

The heading "lack of awareness among parents" itself holds important merit in many societies around the globe, especially in rural areas where the people are conservative and culturally bound to keep girls at home and utilize their services for household activities instead of allowing them for education. The lack of awareness about the benefits and importance of education for girls usually found in societies that are deeply knocked into cultural norms, religious and traditional beliefs system including gender biases where they prioritize boys over girls in every field of life including education. To address this issue, a rigorous campaign is crucial to be launched by the government to raise the level of awareness among parents regarding the importance of girls' education.

### **Gender Discrimination**

In this section, what we mean by gender discrimination is educational discrimination based on gender, as many individuals,

particularly parents in rural and impoverished areas, often discriminate against girls in education and place a greater emphasis on boys' education. The issue of gender inequality in education is prevalent in developing countries, where cultural norms and traditions often prioritize male education over female education.

Like other parts of peripheral Pakistan, the culture of Balochistan is also discriminatory and prohibits females from obtaining an education. According to Kakar et al. (2016: 165), the majority of females are discriminated and not permitted to attend school. It is therefore, Balochistan has a literacy rate of 37 percent, which is significantly lower than the rest of the three provinces of Pakistan and the national average of 53 percent. They opine that besides gender discrimination, other factors such as cultural barriers and a lack of resources, also contribute to the low level of female literacy in Balochistan.

Saleem (2020), whose thesis examines gender inequality in rural Pakistan, asserts that Pakistani society frequently pushes women to the bottom of the educational food chain due to deeply ingrained beliefs that women are inferior to men and ought to be kept at home by themselves while men ought to be the main breadwinners and should be permitted to go out and pursue education (see also Suleman et al., 2015). Similarly, Pasha (2023) finds out that males are given preference over females, and the subject of gender inequality is ignored in many Muslim nations, let alone Pakistan, where men are given preference over women due to particular religious and cultural requirements. Likewise, Rashid et al. (2015) asked a question from their selected

to schools, they cannot send their girls to school (see Bibi and Ahmad, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, there are certain studies that claim that people and parents are aware of the importance of girls' education but due to other reasons, such as poverty, frequent migration, and school accessibility

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sample of 497 respondents, out of which 387 were parents: “[i]n case if you have a son and a daughter and you have to choose only one child to school, which one would you select?” Absolute majority chooses son. They argue that it is a societal tendency where parents consider girls of inferior gender and boys of superior or preferred gender in the field of education. It is because people think that boys are the future breadwinners for their families.

Rabia et al (2019: 378) findings also show that most individuals believe that parents place more emphasis on boys than on girls, and that there is prejudice in the sphere of education (see also Bukhari et al, 2019 & Rana et al 2022). Similarly, according to Anwar et al. (2022), everyone, whether men or women, should have access to education however, females still do not have easy access to education in Balochistan. They claimed that male dominance is profoundly deep-seated and that families display a gender discrimination in education. Furthermore, the Sindh Technical Report (2022), titled 'Issues of Girls' Education in Sindh,' also identifies seven barriers to girls' education, among which gender discrimination stands out as an appealing one, in addition to other barriers.

Thus, the prevailing literature shows that gender discrimination exists in Pakistan all around, but when it comes to rural and peripheral areas of Pakistan, such as District Lasbela - Tehsil Uthal, the situation gets worse as compared to urban centres (see introductory section).

**Accessibility Barriers (lack of schools, lack of transportation, and long distances of schools)**

It may be noted at the very outset that under this heading we combined three interwoven and interlinked barriers under one heading. For instance, if one talks about the long distances between schools and residential

areas, it is directly related to the notion that there is a lack of schools and, therefore, transportation would be required for a girl to reach school. This interconnectedness highlights the importance of addressing all three issues simultaneously under one heading.

Pakistan is a developing country and is trying its best to control the literacy rate and improve education for all citizens. However, it still lags behind in improving girls' education, especially in rural areas of Pakistan. However, keeping in view Pakistan's population and the resources it has, it is not possible to establish schools all around Pakistan at the doorsteps of the dwellers. So, in most rural areas, there are primary, middle and high schools, but due to the long terrain and scattered population it is not possible for many parents to send their children to school.

According to Suleman et al. (2015), besides other factors, long distances to school have a negative impact on girls' education in rural areas of Pakistan. It is because there are fewer schools [at the secondary and middle levels, if not primary]. Parents frequently restrict their daughters' not to attend schools owing to long distance, which raises concerns about their daughters' safety and the possibility of sexual assault on the way to school. Similarly, Hameed's (2019) MPhil thesis titled “Challenges of Girls' Education: Evidence from a Local Government Area of District Kech, Balochistan” suggests that long distance to schools is one of the factors, besides others, that causes girls to be confined to their homes by their parents for the protection of the girls and family honour. In addition to this, same opinion is advocated by Sultana and Haque (2018). Though, their study is a comparative one in which they compared the causes of low enrolment in Bangladesh and Pakistan at the secondary school level. They state that “[i]n Pakistan,

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secondary schools are very limited. In the rural areas schools' distance creates various problems like child abuse, sexual violence, security, and transport cost" due to which parents, especially economically poor parents, remain reluctant to allow their daughters to attend school.

Furthermore, in her research on women's voices in a male-dominated rural society, Naima Saleem (2020), besides poverty, underlines that girls' education is hindered by the lack of schools in villages and the distances between homes and schools, which are 5 to 10 km on foot, making it difficult for girls to attend primary and middle schools. She also identifies that most of the villages have only one primary or middle school, which means that many girls are unable to continue their education beyond primary level.

Likewise, Ullah (2022), in his study, examines the fundamental belief regarding girls' schooling ahead of the primary level in the recently amalgamated District of Bajaur-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to him, majority of the people of the District Bajaur are in favour of post-primary education for boys and girls alike, but besides poverty, lack of schools in the surrounding areas, and scarce transportation prevent girls from chasing education.

Furthermore, many researchers believe that the long distance between schools and girls' homes, among other factors, is a major barrier to girls schooling. For instance, Gill (2024) states that in the peripheral areas around Pakistan, due to parental worries, some girl's students miss school since it is difficult for them to walk from their homes to the closest schools that are miles away (see also Khan et al., 2022 for the same argument).

In brief, it is noted that different areas have different kinds of issues and vis-à-vis girls' education. However, majority of the

researchers are agreed that lack of schools, transportation facilities, and the long distances between schools and girls' residences provide significant impediments to girls' education in rural areas of Pakistan.

**Early Marriage System**

According to UNICEF (2023) child marriage is a formal or informal union in which one or both partners are younger than 18 years of age. Approximately 640 million women and girls were married off as children worldwide; South Asia, which includes countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, accounted for 45% of these marriages. Pakistan has the third-highest rate of child marriages in this region (UNICEF, 2023). Child marriages violate human rights, depriving girls of education and stopping their mental, physical, and social growth (McCleary et al., 2015).

There are different factors that compel families to marry off their girls in early age. For instance, McCleary et al (2015) and Suyanto (2023) are of the opinion that cultural norms, societal expectations and poverty often pushes families to marry off daughters early. Suyanto (2023) believes that education is frequently compromised, and females who marry early have few opportunities for financial independence and personal development. Likewise, Bayisenge (2010) highlighted that early marriage hinders girls' education, as societal and parental biases often prioritize marriage over schooling, leading many married girls to drop out.

In South Asian countries like Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan the early marriage system is a prominent hurdle to girls' education, particularly after completing primary schooling. For instance, Sekine & Hodgkin (2017) identify early marriages as a primary driver that compel girls to quit schools. In Bangladesh, research reveals that early marriages of girls decreases the chances

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of secondary school by 4–6 % annually (Field & Ambrus, 2008).

According to UN Women Report (2020-21) child brides often leave school, lack decision-making power in their marital homes, and have limited chances for personal growth. Early pregnancies further exacerbate their physical and mental health issues, affecting both their wellbeing and that of their children.

Briefly speaking, child marriage not only transgresses fundamental rights but also feeds the cycles of gender inequity, poverty, and illiteracy. Early marriage and the loss of girls' educational and developmental possibilities are clearly related, according to the research. A holistic strategy is needed to address this problem, one that includes upholding the law, questioning cultural norms, and enhancing vulnerable families' access to financial and educational resources. In order to empower females and promote healthier, more just societies, child marriage must be stopped.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a mixed research methodology, incorporating both descriptive and explanatory strategies. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to girls' education in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal. The selection of this methodology was driven by the need for in-depth explanation, description, and analysis of the identified challenges.

### **Sampling Techniques and Size**

Two sampling methods were utilized: purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling ensured participants met specific criteria relevant to the study, while convenience sampling allowed easy access to participants given the researcher's health and logistical constraints. A total of 150 respondents participated in the first round of data collection via Google Forms. These

respondents included schoolteachers, parents, education department employees, university teachers, and students residing in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal. In the second round, 20 interviewees, selected from the initial pool, participated in open-ended interviews to explore key barriers in greater detail.

### **Data Collection**

The study collected both primary and secondary data. The primary data included responses to structured and unstructured questionnaires in the two rounds of interviews. The first round involved a close-ended Google Forms survey shared through WhatsApp, focusing on 15 predefined barriers to girls' education. The second round comprised qualitative interviews, utilizing three different open-ended questionnaires tailored to specific respondent groups (parents, students, and education professionals). Secondary data was gathered from books, research articles, reports, and other credible sources.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

Quantitative data from the first round was organized using Microsoft Word and visually represented through graphs and pie charts. Qualitative data from the second round was analysed thematically and included as quotes where relevant in the thesis. This comprehensive methodology ensured the collection of reliable data and an in-depth understanding of the barriers affecting girls' education in the study area.

### **Discussion and Analyses**

#### **Poverty**

In response to the question regarding poverty as a barrier to girls' education in District Lasbela, particularly Tehsil Uthal, survey data highlights that 42.2% of respondents believe poverty is a significant obstacle, while 37.5% agree that it hinders girls' education in the region. These figures suggest that poverty is a critical issue affecting access

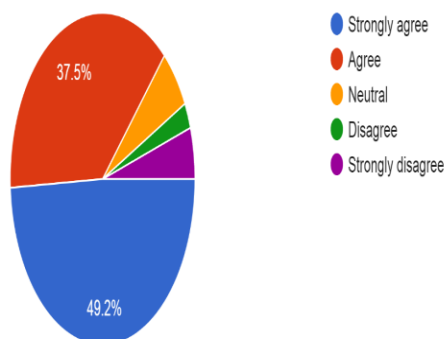
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to education, especially for girls in Uthal (see the pie chart below).

It is said that poverty is one of major the barriers to girls' education in District Lasbela in general and Tehsil Uthal, in particularly

120 responses



This issue (poverty) aligns with findings in the broader literature, where poverty is consistently identified as a major barrier to education, not just in Lasbela but across many regions of Pakistan (see Khan et al., 2011, Jamal, 2016, Kakar et al. 2016, and Martínez, 2018).

During a field visit to a primary school in Chib Mandrah, situated about 10 km from Uthal city, it was observed that many students lacked basic necessities, such as shoes, which reflects the severe poverty in the area. Parents also expressed their struggles with sending their children to school due to financial constraints. One father, whose family resides in a remote village, argued that establishing boarding schools for girls could alleviate the burden on poor families, allowing them to provide free education, lodging, and food for their daughters. Another parent, a woman in her late 60s, shared her own challenges, noting that even though her sons received some schooling, they could not afford further education due to financial difficulties. This issue is compounded by the limited

availability of schools for girls, as highlighted by the government's education data (BEMIS, 2023), which reveals a stark disparity in the number of schools for boys versus girls in Tehsil Uthal.

A retired District Education Officer pointed out the historical neglect of girls' education in the region, citing political and administrative factors that have hindered progress. The lack of educational infrastructure in remote areas, combined with poverty, continues to limit girls' educational opportunities. Teachers also highlighted the need for financial incentives, such as scholarships and free meals, to encourage parents to send their daughters to school.

To address the issue of poverty, the government and NGOs must provide targeted interventions, such as scholarships, free education, and the establishment of more schools for girls, to improve educational access and outcomes in the region.

### Lack of Awareness

In rural areas like Tehsil Uthal, the lack of parental awareness is a significant barrier to girls' education. Many parents in these regions have never had the opportunity to attend school, which results in a limited understanding of the value of education for their children. This lack of awareness about the benefits of education is highlighted by 50% of respondents in the first round of surveys, with 25% strongly agreeing that it is a key issue. According to interviews, many locals are unaware of how education can improve their lives (see the pie chart below).

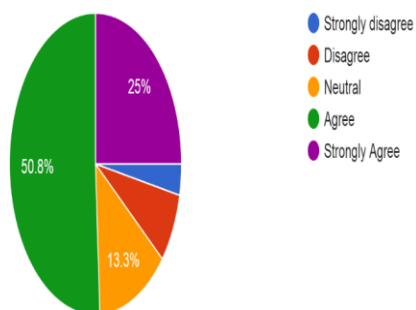


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Literature on barriers to girls' education reveals that in rural Pakistan, the lack of awareness on the part of parents is one of the fundamental factors that is applicable to District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal?

120 responses



As noted in previous research, such as Muhammad et al. (2022), the literacy rate in District Lasbela is alarmingly low, with male literacy at 42% and female literacy at just 13%. A student from Lasbela University who lives in Tehsil Uthal shared that while her family is educated, many people in her community do not send their daughters to school because they believe education is unnecessary for girls. This view is supported by a retired Education Officer, Noreen Ahmed, who pointed out that the lack of parental education is a major factor in the region's low educational participation (Noreen Ahmed, personal communication, August 16, 2024).

Furthermore, some teachers and local educators confirm that many parents, particularly those living in remote Goths, do not prioritize their daughters' education due to financial constraints and a lack of understanding of its importance. They often view education as a luxury, particularly when basic needs like food are a struggle. According to Muhammad Dawood, a local teacher, parents who are educated tend to send their daughters to school, but those without education do not see its value

(Muhammad Dawood, personal communication, September 5, 2024).

Parents' awareness of the significance of girls' education is often shaped by their own educational experiences. For instance, a 60-year-old father in Tehsil Uthal shared that he only realized the importance of education after an experience with healthcare for her wife first pregnancy. Despite such individual cases, the overall lack of awareness remains a widespread issue.

To address this, awareness campaigns are crucial. Research, including that by Zubair et al. (2023), emphasizes the need to educate parents about the long-term benefits of their daughters' education. Such campaigns could significantly reduce the barriers posed by a lack of awareness and help improve girls' enrolment in schools.

### **Accessibility Barriers (lack of schools, lack of transportation, and long distances of schools)**

Balochistan is the largest province in terms of land area, covering 44% of Pakistan's total territory, but it has the smallest population, making up only 6.2% (12.34 million) of the national population (Population Census of Pakistan, 2017). Due to its vast expanse and dispersed population, the government faces challenges in developing infrastructure, such as constructing link roads and schools, particularly in rural regions.

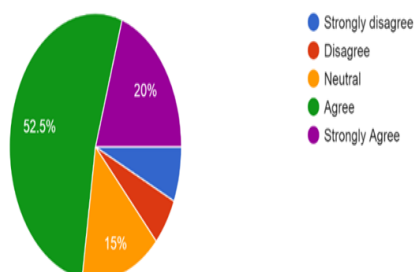
In Tehsil Uthal, respondents, in the first round, were asked whether the long distances to schools affect girls' education. According to the pie chart, 20% strongly agreed, and 52.5% agreed, with only 15% providing neutral responses (see the pie chart below).

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It is said that the primary and middle schools in tehsil Uthal are far away from many of the household. Therefore, long distance of schools affect girls' education in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal.

120 responses



During fieldwork, it became evident that rural areas, especially Goths like Chib Mandrah and Awra, lack middle schools. For instance, Chib Mandrah, 8 km from Uthal city, only has a primary school, while Awra, located 14 km away, has a primary school where one teacher handles all classes. In Tehsil Uthal, there are only three middle schools for girls out of 62 Goth/villages, excluding Uthal city.

Amir Bakhsh, a resident of Awra, shared his experience of shifting to Uthal city for better educational opportunities for his children, as many Goth residents cannot afford transportation or lack middle schools (Amir Bakhsh, personal communication, September 26, 2024). Similarly, Muhammad Hanif, a schoolteacher, noted that many parents cannot afford to send their children, especially girls, to middle school due to both the distance and financial constraints (personal communication, Muhammad Hanif, September 18, 2024).

The statistics reinforce these observations: out of 12 middle schools in Tehsil Uthal, 9 are for boys, and only 3 are for girls. Moreover, data from Balochistan Education Statistics (2022-23) show a significant dropout rate from primary to secondary education among girls, indicating that long distances and the lack of sufficient

schools are primary barriers (see the table below for numbers of girls' schools in Tehsil Uthal).

Table: List of Govt. Schools in Tehsil Uthal, 2023 Union Council Wise

Union Council	Primary		Middle		High		Higher Secondary	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Uthal City	5	5						
Wayara	5							
Khenwari	1							
Non-educational	0							
Non-functional	0							
Total	01	5						1
Total (B+G=T)	01	+25=12	+3=11	+0=3	+1=2			

Source: The Balochistan Education Management Information System (BEMIS, 2023).

The situation is worsened by the lack of schools in Goths and the distance between them and the available schools. A respondent in Wayara, Zainab Khatun, explained that her daughters do not attend school due to the absence of middle schools and the unaffordable transportation costs (Zainab Khatun, personal communication, September 26, 2024). Similarly, Muhammad Bakhsh from Khenwari shared that financial constraint prevented him from sending his daughters to school beyond the primary level (personal communication, Muhammad Bakhsh, September, 12, 2024).

These findings align with the literature, which highlights long distances and the lack of schools as significant barriers to girls' education in rural Pakistan. Studies

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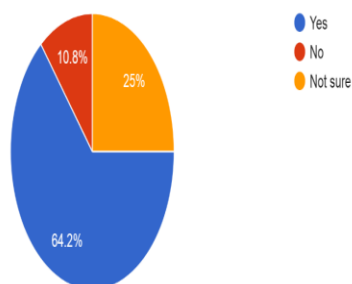
by Solangi and Khan (2022), Hameed (2019), and others confirm that such challenges are compounded by poverty, making it difficult for families to send their daughters to school. These obstacles are particularly evident in Tehsil Uthal, where long distances, lack of schools, and financial limitations severely hinder girls' access to education.

### Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination against females is a widespread issue, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries. Pakistan, ranked 135th out of 146 countries in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index, faces a significant educational gender gap. According to the National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan (2023), 22.8 million children (ages 5-16) are out of school, with 53% of females aged 15-64 having never attended school, compared to 33% of males.

In Balochistan, the situation is even more alarming. South Asia Press (2024) reported that 70% of school-age children are out of school, with 78% of girls and 63% of boys missing out on education. In rural Balochistan, female literacy is below 2% (South Asia Press, 2024). To gauge the views of respondents from District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal, a question was asked in interviews: "Is gender discrimination present in girls' education?" The responses from 120 participants showed that 64.2% believed gender discrimination exists, while only 10.8% disagreed, and 25% remained neutral (see the pie chart below).

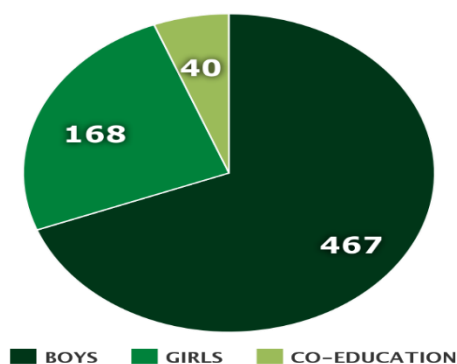
Is gender discrimination existing in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal regarding girls' schooling?  
120 responses



In the second round of interviews, many respondents highlighted that parents often prioritize boys' education over girls. A parent stated, "girls are expected to marry after puberty, so education is unnecessary. Boys are the ones who will provide for the family." Similarly, a female student at Lasbela University shared that she faced discrimination both at home and school, where boys are given more importance. A male student from the Faculty of Education echoed this, explaining that people in rural areas view girls as home-bound and prefer boys' education, though some families support girls' education if schools are available.

Statistics from the Balochistan Education Information System highlight the gender disparity in education, with fewer schools for girls and higher dropout rates for them. A teacher from Lasbela pointed out that after primary school, many girls do not continue due to a lack of middle and high schools, with families prioritizing boys' education due to cultural beliefs.

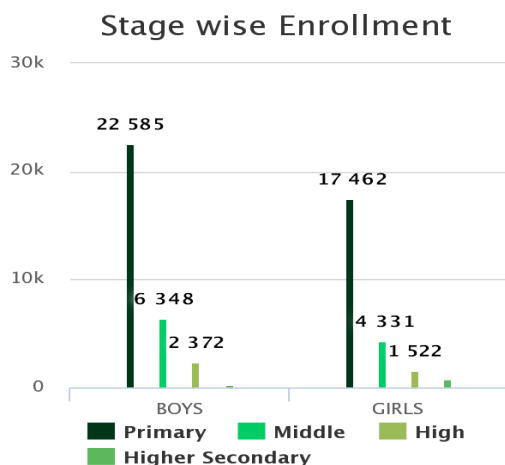
Total Number of Schools 675



Source: Education Management System Balochistan

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Further, an ex-education officer mentioned that societal discrimination is ingrained, even within families, where girls are expected to serve the household while boys are sent to school (An Ex-Education Officer, personal communication, October 3, 2024). This discrimination is supported by societal norms that favor boys' education, as reflected in research by Khan et al. (2011) and Saleem (2020), which identifies gender bias as a key barrier to girls' education.

Keeping in view the aforementioned, gender discrimination is a major obstacle to girls' education in Tehsil Uthal. According to the 120 respondents, 64.2% agree that gender discrimination exists in education. The issue is further exacerbated by cultural norms that view boys as the family breadwinners. However, there are families supportive of girls' education, though challenges such as a lack of schools beyond primary level, distance, and security concerns persist.

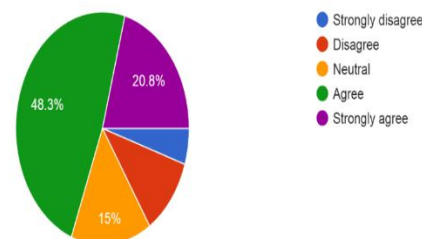
### Early Marriage System

Early marriage, or child marriage, is a significant issue, particularly in underdeveloped and emerging countries like Pakistan. It occurs when individuals under the age of 18 enter into a marriage contract. In Pakistan, early marriage is widespread, often preventing girls from continuing their education beyond primary school. According

to Shabbar and Manzoor (2022), 72% of girls and 25% of boys are affected by early marriage. The incidence is highest in areas like Punjab and Balochistan, with 66% of girls and 22% of boys married early. In former FATA, the percentage is alarming, with 99% of girls married at a young age.

In our study conducted in Tehsil Uthal, District Lasbela, we included a statement in the first round of interviews, asking if early marriage hinders girls' education. Of 120 respondents, 20.8% strongly agreed, 48.3% agreed, and 15% were neutral (See the pie chart below). The remaining responses were insignificant. These results suggest that early marriage is a significant barrier to girls' education in this region, as parents may prioritize marriage over education, viewing girls as future homemakers rather than individuals with educational potential.

The early marriage of girls is a barrier to girls' education in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal.  
120 responses



In the second round of interviews, I asked two boys and two girls about the impact of early marriage on education in their community. All agreed that early marriage was prevalent and detrimental to girls' education. One interviewee noted that many uneducated parents didn't understand the importance of education and believed that girls were meant to marry and manage households. Amar, an ex-student, added that elders in his community believed girls should

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marry after puberty and saw investing in girls' education as unnecessary, fearing societal shame if a girl remained unmarried too long (Amar Khawar, personal communication, October 2, 2024).

Similarly, Hameed Baloch explained that parents often see their daughters as belonging to another family, so they invest in sons' education instead. However, educated and financially stable families are increasingly prioritizing girls' education due to exposure to new ideas via social media and the internet (Hameed Baloch, personal communication, October 9, 2024). Allah Bakhsh, a 65-year-old father, expressed regret for marrying off his daughters early and acknowledged that if given the chance, he would have prioritized their education (Allah Bakhsh, personal communication, October 3, 2024).

Respondents also shared that early marriages often lead to girls quitting school at a young age. One parent noted that societal and religious norms favoured early marriage for girls, leading them to abandon education by the age of 12 or 14. As internet access grows, many parents are beginning to understand the importance of girls' education and the dangers of early marriage.

Education experts in the region also confirmed that early marriage severely limits girls' educational opportunities, health, and future prospects. Many families in rural areas send their children to school late, and due to early physical maturity, girls are often pulled out of school before completing primary education. Financial pressures and cultural norms drive many parents to marry off their daughters early, though some educated families are now sending their girls to higher education.

According to UNICEF (2023), 640 million girls marry before 18, with 45% from South Asia. Researchers like Tembo (2021) and McCleary et al. (2015) suggest that early

marriage is influenced by cultural, religious, and economic factors, all of which prevent girls from pursuing education. However, as in Tehsil Uthal, attitudes are slowly changing, with more families recognizing the value of girls' education. Despite this, social pressures and poverty still drive many to marry off their daughters young, hindering their educational development.

### **Major Findings**

#### **Poverty**

According to the responses gathered in both rounds of interviews, poverty is considered one of the primary barriers limiting girls' education from primary to middle school in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal. In the first round, 80.8% of respondents identified poverty as a significant barrier. Additionally, 49.2% strongly agreed, and 37.5% agreed that poverty is a major obstacle to girls' education. This issue was also consistently mentioned by interviewees in the second round. Poverty emerged as a pervasive challenge for families, influencing their ability to send girls to school. This theme is not only reflected in the responses from the participants but also aligns with the existing literature on education barriers.

#### **Lack of Awareness**

A lack of awareness regarding the importance of girls' education is prevalent in many areas of Pakistan, particularly in rural regions like District Lasbela. According to the survey, 69.2% of respondents in the first round identified a lack of awareness among parents as a major barrier to girls' education. When asked if this issue is applicable to Tehsil Uthal, 50% of the respondents agreed, and 25% strongly agreed. The second round of interviews also confirmed that many parents in this area do not fully understand the significance of educating girls. This lack of awareness is often rooted in traditional beliefs and a focus on domestic responsibilities for girls. In many cases,

parents do not see the long-term benefits of sending girls to school, resulting in fewer girls attending school, especially beyond the primary level. The literature on barriers to girls' education supports this finding, indicating that limited awareness about the benefits of girls' education is a common issue, especially in underdeveloped and rural areas.

### **Accessibility Barriers**

In the first round, 120 respondents identified a lack of schools, poor transportation, and long distances to existing schools as key barriers to girls' education. Interviewees in the second round also emphasized the difficulty of accessing education due to these factors. The lack of middle and high schools in remote villages, coupled with limited and expensive transportation options, restricts girls' ability to pursue education beyond primary school. Many families, as highlighted by interviewees, relocate to urban centres like Uthal for better educational opportunities, but such options are often unavailable to low-income families. These findings are consistent with existing literature, which identifies accessibility issues—such as long travel distances and lack of transportation—as major obstacles to girls' education in rural Pakistan.

### **Gender Discrimination**

Gender discrimination in education remains a significant issue in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. According to the first round of interviews, 62.2% of respondents noted that gender discrimination in education is widespread in Tehsil Uthal, where families prioritize boys' education over girls. Interviewees in the second round similarly pointed out that girls are often seen as less important in terms of education because of traditional gender roles. Boys are expected to remain in the family and contribute economically, while girls are typically married off early and take on domestic duties.

This gender bias is further compounded by factors such as poverty and the lack of middle and high schools for girls, which limit their educational opportunities beyond primary school. The existing literature supports these findings, with studies indicating that cultural and economic factors reinforce gender discrimination, preventing girls from accessing education.

### **Early Marriage**

Early marriage is a widespread practice in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas like Tehsil Uthal, District Lasbela, and it significantly impacts girls' ability to pursue education. In the first round of interviews, 46.7% of respondents identified early marriage as a major barrier to girls' education. Many parents in the area prefer to marry off their daughters at a young age rather than send them to school, viewing marriage as their primary responsibility. Early marriage often leads to girls discontinuing their education after primary school, as they are expected to focus on household responsibilities. The second round of interviews also supported this view, with many interviewees citing poverty and societal pressure as key reasons for early marriage. However, despite these challenges, a shift in attitudes has been observed, especially among educated families, who are beginning to recognize the importance of education for girls and the negative impact of early marriages. The literature also reflects this view, with researchers acknowledging that early marriage is a significant obstacle to girls' education in rural Pakistan, particularly when it is influenced by cultural and economic factors.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research conducted in District Lasbela, Tehsil Uthal, reveals the key barriers limiting girls' access to education from primary to middle school. Through a comprehensive literature review and two rounds of

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interviews, several significant factors were identified, with poverty emerging as the most prominent obstacle. Overall, this research highlights a complex interplay of factors that limit girls' access to education in Tehsil Uthal, District Lasbela wherein, besides poverty, lack of awareness, gender discrimination, accessibility barriers, and early marriages contribute to the challenges faced by girls in this region. While efforts have been made to address some of these issues, such as establishing primary schools in remote areas, significant work remains to overcome these barriers. The findings of this study are a call to action for policymakers, communities, and organizations to address these issues and create a more supportive environment for girls' education in rural Balochistan.

**Recommendations**

*Establishment of Residential Institutions*

There are 6 residential colleges, known as Balochistan Residential Colleges (BRS), and 11 cadet colleges across Balochistan, which offer admission in 7th grade. Out of these 17 colleges, there is only one such college for girls. It suggested and recommended that the Government of Balochistan should establish such colleges for girls in such localities where the poverty is widespread, such as Uthal, and offer free education to girls from class 6th to higher secondary level.

*Up-gradation of the Existing Girls' Primary Schools*

It suggested and recommended that the Government of Balochistan should upgrade the existing primary schools into middle and high that are accessible to most of the Goths in UC Khenwari and UC Wayara. By adopting this approach, the issue of the lack of middle and high schools, the long

distances of schools, and the financial burden on parents on account of transportation can be minimized.

*Monthly Scholarships and other Incentives*

As mentioned earlier, 78.5% people of Tehsil Uthal are poor. Thus, majority of the families do not send their girls to school, especially after primary level. Therefore, it is suggested and recommended that the provincial Government should incentivize the education by offering yearly scholarships and monthly stipends (including free books, school dress, and lunch) to the students. This will encourage families to send their girls to school.

*Awareness Campaign*

As discussed in the preceding parts, here is a lack of awareness among people about the girls' education and its importance. To overcome this barrier, it is suggested and recommended that the Government of Balochistan, with the cooperation of Education Department, NGOs, and Local Government, should start a rigorous awareness campaign at District-level to contact families across the district and convince them of the importance of girls' education.

*Measures against Early Marriages*

It is suggested and recommended that the provincial Government should take steps and legislate on early marriages as per the teaching of Holy Quran and Sunnah, and then such laws should be enforced strictly and take actions against those who breach them. It is also important for the local Government and social workers to conduct awareness sessions, seminars, and visits to inform people about the damaging effects of early marriage on girls' education as well as her general well-being.



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