

Attitudes of Illiterate Rural Parents towards Female Higher Education: Uncovering Disparities and Patterns

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Abstract

For the sake of society and the economy, investing in female education is worthwhile and highly needed. In Pakistan, the area of Punjab is highly literate, but the situation of female higher education is not encouraging, especially in rural areas. Thus, the study examined the attitude of rural, uneducated parents about female higher education. The study was delimited to the Sahiwal division. From the Sahiwal Division, one tehsil from each district was randomly selected. From each tehsil, 150 rural illiterate parents were conveniently selected. Thus, the sample size was 450 (150 from each district) illiterate parents. The researcher used a valid structured questionnaire with a reliability of 0.74. The data underwent analysis through the utilization of SPSS version 26. The findings indicated that illiterate rural parents supported their daughters' higher education.

Keywords: *Illiterate, Rural Parents, Parents' Attitude, Female Higher Education*

1. Introduction

A person's sense of self and mental capabilities are improved by education. The higher education system produces a tranquil and laid-back mindset. Education develops mental capacities and sharpens peoples' brains to adjust to the modern world's ever-changing conditions. (Mingat, 2007). The entitlement to education constitutes an inherent right for every individual. It is acknowledged not only by Islam but also by almost all other religions. Both the Quran and the Holy Prophet's sayings (PBUH) emphasize getting an education. As the Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, searching for knowledge is mandatory for all Muslim men and women. Moreover, the Quran says that educated and uneducated are not equal (az-Zumar 39:9). Briefly described, education is the divine command for every human being. The state of female education in Pakistan is not encouraging and always remains under criticism (Islam, 2016).

Keeping in mind the current state of education, the researchers have decided to explore the attitude of illiterate parents toward female education. According to Awan and Malik (2014), education is essentially required for people to have better lives. Education is the process of grooming children. It is a process of directing, educating, and guiding. A phrase derived from education, schooling refers to passing down and revitalizing cultural traditions. Social, cultural, and religious legacy transmission occurs continuously throughout education. It is a process through which people in a

society pick up new skills and ideals to pass on to the next generations (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019).

It is a dire need of the time that women have to pursue higher education in Pakistan as they comprise more than 50% of the total population. No society can progress without involving such a huge population in the social sector. It is empirically observed that developed countries have higher female enrolment in higher education. Higher education motivates women to serve and contribute to the country's economy. The under-developing countries in all public sector institutions proved that the major reason for this low literacy is the unfavourable attitude of parents regarding female higher education. In rural areas of developing nations, uneducated rural people have a negative attitude towards higher education for women and see it as a waste of resources and money. They consider that the woman must get married and move into her husband's house after all. They believe that educated women are rebellious and that a greater level of education will set them apart from societal standards. To better serve their husband and family, they train them in domestic skills (Rizwan, Khan & Saboor, 2011).

In Pakistan's rural areas, more resources and materials are allocated for education and skill-building are preferred for men as compared to women. The quantity of material exchange based on gender has the most possible reasons. Males are provided material resources for their creative roles in their subsequent lives for the family. The family tries to provide the male members with superior educations and abilities because they are more likely to compete for resourcing issues since they are financially dependent on males. They were just born to be a mother, a wife, a sister, and a daughter. Moreover, gender prejudices deny the parents' fair distribution of the assets (Hoodbhoy, 2006).

Nonetheless, females are taught familial skills, such as being excellent moms, domestic chorus, etc. Pakistan is one of the most populous nations. Despite fewer opportunities and many forms of nepotism, Pakistani women are remarkably contributing to the nation's progress. While women put forth a lot of effort, they are undervalued in our culture (Azmat, Mustafa, Hameed, Ali, Ahmed & Bilgrami, 2012).

In Pakistan, just 36% of women are literate, compared to 78% in Sri Lanka and 38% in India. The fact that just 2.5% of Pakistani women engage in higher education is problematic. The Pakistani government should adopt educational policies that will benefit women by directing them within specialized, vocational, and technical instruction. Attendance at school among the world's poorest women is below fifty percent. Unless the government takes action to afford these children and young individuals the necessary education, including a chance for those who discontinued their studies, they will not attain parity in employment or life opportunities. Two out of three of the 774 million illiterate people on the planet are women (Thresia, 2018).

With the changing times, the number of degrees issued has significantly grown due to increased female enrollment in higher education institutions. The number of degrees issued is projected to rise between 2003-04 and 2015-16 (Khan, Mustafa & Nawaz, 2021).

Pakistan, being a traditional nation, grapples with various impediments to education, resulting in a low literacy rate and limited enrollment of females in higher education. Despite constituting 54% of the population, women face challenges in accessing education, whether formal, informal, or non-formal. Understanding an individual's behaviour and skills remains crucial across all forms of education. This is especially true for them whether or not the guardian is educated. Particularly, the women, who make up around 54% of the population in Pakistan, are passionate about educating their kids. Unfortunately, they do not enjoy the same chances as those who identify more strongly with the culture's male gender (Haider, 2008).

When crossing provincial boundaries to attend higher education institutions, transportation is one of the biggest obstacles for female students. It is advised that means of transportation be made available to females, especially those living in remote regions, so they can attend colleges and universities (Aslam, 2004).

It is acknowledged that a merit-based, open civil society is a prerequisite for higher education. Education improves people's awareness of their responsibilities and rights in society. It encouraged the development of morality and disproved prejudice towards others in the same social group. As a result, caste, gender, and religious and philosophical differences were misunderstood throughout society (Kramer & Kramarae, 2000). According to Khalid and Mukhtar (2002), rural parents' concerns about their daughters' safety are a major factor in the low percentage of female students enrolling in colleges and universities. By sending them to higher education facilities, they cannot take a risk with their reputation.

Rural, uneducated parents do not favour the higher education of females because they feel that women are only suitable for domestic work (Maqsood, 2012). Similarly, Tampio (2017) found that parents demonstrated a higher inclination to prepare their daughters for early marriages and orchestrate their dowries rather than invest in their education. The study also underscored the prioritization of men's education, driven by the belief among parents that allocating more resources to their sons' education yields greater benefits; those kids could support the family with more money. Most higher education institutions are located in cities or metropolitan regions, so it is difficult for women from rural areas to pursue higher education, and rural parents are often unwilling to send them alone to cities. They believe that women's safety should come first. Women have a lot of trouble travelling without any nearby educational facilities. Being alone when travelling poses a serious risk to one's safety (Sathar & Lloyd, 2000).

The distances between these institutions and the lack of adequate transportation for female students in rural areas strongly influence the fact that there are fewer women in higher education. Sexual assault and harassment could stem from it (Sathar & Lloyd, 2000). According to research, higher education institutions would see an increase in female enrollment and literacy rates if they offered rural students transportation for pick-up and drop-off. Various social and cultural factors still influence rural parents' attitudes toward sending their daughters to college in Pakistan despite a large increase in rural women enrolling in higher education. This enrollment boost, seen in Pakistan's rural areas, ensures the growth of the people and the nation. The increasing prevalence of female education in Pakistan benefits society, considering that women constitute more than half of the population and play a significant role in contributing to the country's economy (Maqsood, 2012).

2. Literature Review

Studies have shown that once the ban has been imposed on one girl, it might be challenging for other girls in the same family or area to get it lifted. Yet, because of the institutions' distance from homes and commuting difficulties, there are becoming more female higher education institutions (Maqsood, 2012). Rural Pakistani women spend much of their lives at home since it is often believed that mastering domestic skills is much more important than schooling. Females in rural areas with illiterate parents are made to learn household duties (Pirzada, Muhammad, & Mahmood, 2022). Parents strive to polish their children's domestic skills. Some parents in remote areas only provide their daughters with a rudimentary education because they cannot afford the additional costs. Education and professional experience are associated with the male family member. The woman in her husband's home will use these domestic talents to help him and his family.

As women make up more than half of Pakistan's population and the nation is undeveloped, it is obvious that without their contribution to the economy, progress cannot be realized. We must educate our girls in rural regions to make Pakistan a developed nation. Pakistan consists of five provinces, and each one has a unique scenario. More than in other provinces, the proportion of women enrolling in higher education is low in rural regions. Urban women have the same amenities as urban men. Rural women are, however, constrained from pursuing higher education by several social and cultural factors, such as worries about their safety, the size of their families, gender inequality, and poverty.

The current investigation centers on the perspectives of rural, illiterate parents regarding the higher education of their daughters. The findings of this study can serve as valuable guidance for stakeholders and policymakers in devising strategies to address the obstacles women encounter in higher education institutions. The research underscores the significant influence of sociocultural norms on national development. To enhance female empowerment, the study places considerable emphasis on the pivotal role of female education and advocates for a reassessment of the sociocultural trajectory of the country. The study investigated how rural parents felt about sending their daughters to college in the Punjab area.

Everyone in society must receive an education. According to the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), "It is compulsory for every man and woman to pursue knowledge." Every male and female should receive an education in this sense, but the situation for female education in Pakistan, especially in rural regions, is not promising. As a result, Punjab has seen an upsurge in secondary enrollment during the past several years. Nowadays, women have far more access to higher education.

Nevertheless, rural areas continue to have a negative reputation. The proportion of women enrolling in higher education is quite low in rural areas due to several factors, such as family size, economy, the status of women in society, and cultural beliefs. More attention must be paid to learning how rural parents feel about female higher education in light of this unfavourable aspect of society. The researcher tried to determine what uneducated parents thought about women attending college.

The advancement of a nation requires the education of women. Nonetheless, Pakistan has relatively low female literacy levels and higher education enrolment. Due to historical and cultural restrictions, among other things, the government, various organizations, and NGOs are investing a sizable amount of money in the education of females. Still, the statistics on this issue are not encouraging in comparison to the efforts and budget made. Several obstacles have an impact on this phenomenon. The old-fashioned traditions and conventions that prevent women from pursuing higher education in rural regions hurt society and hinder national progress. Those with higher education become more skilled members of society who contribute to a nation's progress. Pakistan is a growing nation; thus, producing more skilled workers is crucial. At the national level, there aren't enough statistics available. Since women comprise an estimated 50 percent of Pakistan's population, educating women alongside men is essential for the nation's growth. In metropolitan regions, the number of women enrolled in higher education is rising, while parents in rural areas are the least expected to send their daughters to college. This study investigated the factors influencing illiterate rural parents' attitudes regarding female higher education.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to investigate the attitudes of illiterate rural parents in the Punjab province regarding higher education for their female children, with the following specific objectives:

1. To assess illiterate rural parents' attitudes towards their daughters' higher education in the Punjab province.
2. To evaluate illiterate rural fathers' attitudes towards their daughters' higher education in the Punjab province.
3. To scrutinize illiterate rural mothers' attitudes towards their daughters' higher education in the Punjab province.

4. Research Questions

The research question is based on the aim of the study, and it is as follows.

1. What are illiterate rural parents' attitudes towards their daughters' higher education in the Punjab province?
2. How do illiterate rural fathers perceive the higher education of their daughters in the Punjab province?
3. What are illiterate rural mothers' attitudes regarding their daughters' higher education in the Punjab province?

5. Research Methodology

To better understand the rural parents' views on their female higher education, uneducated rural parents of the Punjab province were polled for this study. A field survey was used to acquire primary data (Akram, Butt, & Muhammad, 2022). This survey investigation was correlational as a result. The participants in the current study were illiterate parents in the Punjab province. The multistage sampling approach was used to obtain the necessary sample. At the first stage, the Sahiwal division of the Punjab was chosen randomly from among all ten divisions. For the second stage, three Tehsils, Sahiwal, Pakpattan, and Renala, were chosen randomly from among the districts in the Sahiwal division. The parents, 150 in number, were conveniently approached from each of the three randomly chosen tehsils to gather information. To gather data, 450 illiterate parents were contacted, and 410 indicated a desire to participate in the procedure. Hence, the illiterate parents' response rate was 89%.

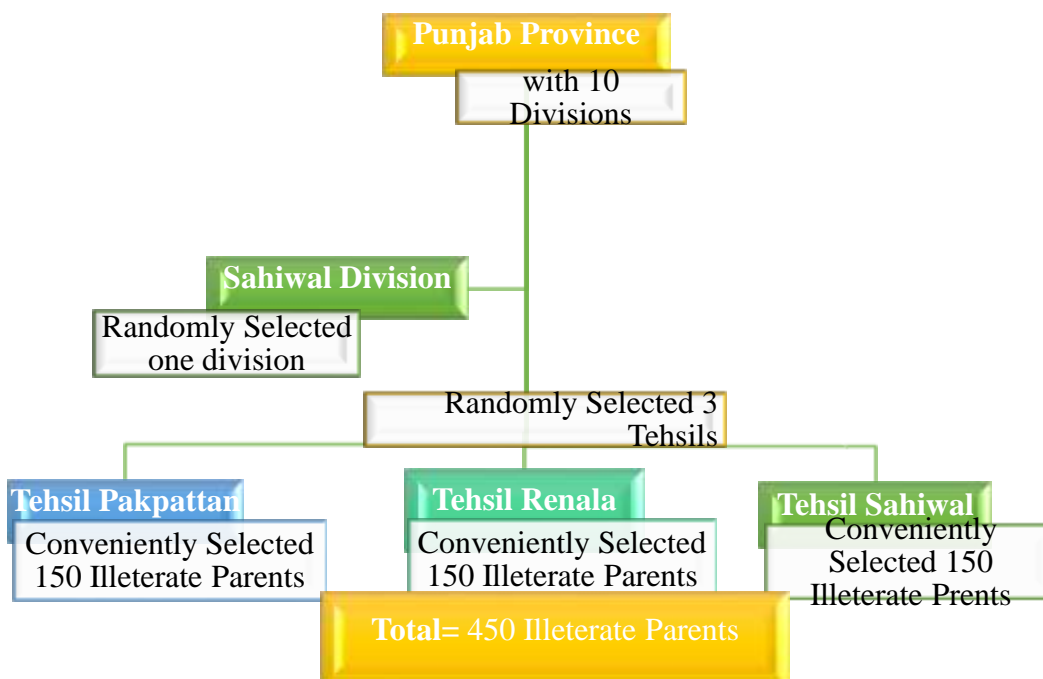


Figure 1: Population and Sampling

In this study, the researcher utilized a three-point Likert scale to assess the attitudes of illiterate rural parents. The agreed, neutral, and disagreed three-level Likert scale was self-developed to look for the worthwhile attitude of the chosen sample. The questionnaire has 24 items over five criteria. The researchers and the other subject-matter experts were consulted while choosing the elements and items from the literature review. The questionnaire's components included the economy, family size, religious beliefs, conventional wisdom, and the role of women in socialization.

This study used pilot testing to ascertain the questionnaire's reliability and validity. Expert comments were used to assess the questionnaire's validity. Using the SPSS, the questionnaire's reliability was determined. The scale's Cronbach alpha value is (0.71), demonstrating the validity of the survey. The pilot testing was performed using information from 40 respondents. Uncertain statements were taken out of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire has 24 statements and five factors.

6. Data Analysis

In this study, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20 was used to evaluate the collected data. Following is the further details about data analysis.

7. Findings

The following are the findings of the study.

Table 1*Attitudes of Illiterate Rural Parents Toward Higher Education for Their Female Children*

N	Mean	SD	t	Df	p
410	2.70	.21	-2.50	98	0.018

Concerning Table 1, a significant difference in rural, illiterate parents' attitudes regarding their daughters' higher education was discovered ($p=0.018<05$). Thus, it was established that the rural illiterate parents supported their daughters' higher education.

Table 2*Attitudes of Illiterate Rural Fathers Toward Higher Education for Their Female Children*

G	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	p
Male	205	2.60	.321	-2.420	98	0.018

In Table 2, it was discovered that there was a significant difference in how illiterate rural female parents felt about their daughters pursuing higher education ($p=0.0180<05$). So, it was established that the rural illiterate male parents supported the higher education of their female offspring.

Table 3*Attitudes of Illiterate Rural Mothers Toward Higher Education for Their Female Children*

G	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	p
Female	205	2.73	.24387	-2.53	97	0.017

In Table 3, it was discovered that there was a significant difference in how illiterate rural female parents felt about their daughters pursuing higher education ($p=0.0170<05$). Therefore, it was established that the rural illiterate female parents supported their daughters' higher education.

Table 4*Comparative Analysis of Male and Female Attitudes Toward Higher Education for Females Based on Economic Considerations*

G	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	205	2.46	.308	-2.255	98	.027

Female	205	2.58	.244
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Table 4 showed a significant difference between how Punjabi rural parents who lack literacy felt about their daughters pursuing higher education. ($p=0.0270>05$). Additionally, it demonstrated how rural parents' economic circumstances influenced their attitudes toward higher education for women.

Table 5

Comparative Examination of Male and Female Attitudes Toward Higher Education for Females Considering Family Size

G	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	205	2.059	.53031	-5.10	98	0.000
Female	205	2.59	.309			

Table 5 showed a significant difference in rural Punjabi illiterate parents' attitudes regarding their daughters' higher education ($p=0.0000<05$). It was thus determined that family size impacted rural, uneducated parents' attitudes toward female higher education.

Table 6

Assessing Male and Female Perspectives on Higher Education for Females in Light of Religious Beliefs

G	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	205	2.16	.382	-2.93	98	0.005
Female	205	2.57	.909			

Table 6 shows a significant difference in how Punjabi rural parents without access to a formal education felt about their daughters pursuing higher education ($p=0.0050<05$). Thus, it was established that the religious beliefs of illiterate rural parents impact their attitudes toward higher education for women.

Table 7

Comparative Study of Male and Female Views on Higher Education for Females Considering the Role of Females in Socialization

G	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	205	2.60	.321	-2.43	98	0.018
Female	205	2.73	.235			

Table 7 shows a significant difference in how Punjabi rural parents without access to a formal education felt about their daughters pursuing higher education ($p=0.0180<05$). Therefore, it was established that the socialization of girls had an impact on illiterate rural parents' attitudes toward women's higher education.

Table 8

Analysis of Male and Female Perspectives on Higher Education for Females Based on Traditional Ideologies

G	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	205	2.197	.423	-3.03	98	0.004
Female	205	2.441	.384			

According to Table 8, illiterate rural parents' attitudes toward females' higher education in the rural districts of Punjab differed significantly ($p=0.0040<0.05$). Additionally, the conventional viewpoints of uneducated rural parents impacted their attitudes toward higher education for women.

Table 9

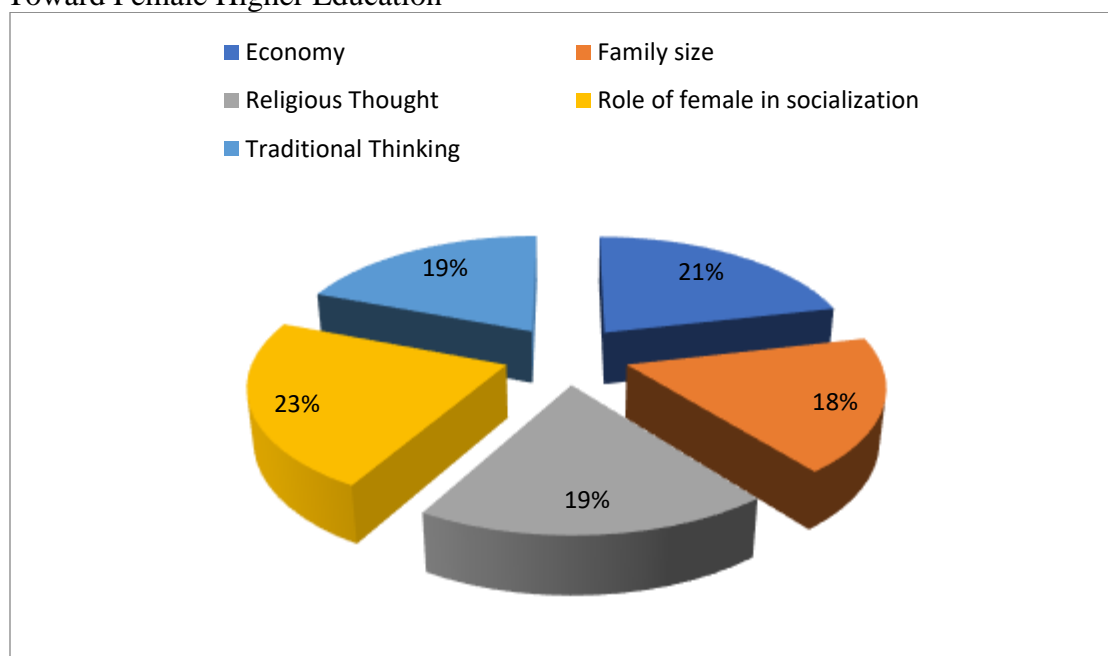
Comparative Assessment of the Overall Mean of Female and Male Attitudes Toward Higher Education for Females Considering Traditional Values

G	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	205	2.30	.250	-6.14	98	0.000
Female	205	2.58	.2170			

Table 9 shows a significant difference in how Punjabi rural parents without access to a formal education felt about their daughters pursuing higher education ($p=0.000<0.05$). The genuine image of the responders is depicted in the following graph.

Figure 01

Percentage Distribution of Various Factors Influencing the Attitudes of Rural Illiterate Parents Toward Female Higher Education



The above figure is about percentage distribution of various factors influencing the attitudes of rural illiterate parents toward female higher education.

8. Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the study are as follows:

1. The research revealed that the attitudes of rural illiterate parents towards the higher education of females were notably shaped by various social and economic factors, encompassing economic status, family size, religious beliefs, traditional perspectives, and the perceived role of females in socialization.
2. The findings demonstrated that lower family sizes and greater economic status increase the enrollment of rural girls in higher education. Higher-class, illiterate rural parents thought

that their female children's education would provide them access to better employment, pay, and living conditions.

3. There were still a lot of traditional and religious beliefs prevalent in rural regions, which had an impact on how illiterate parents felt about their daughters pursuing higher education. The barriers to females obtaining higher education were antiquated conventions and practices such as female veils, female isolation from males, early marriage and only obligation to take care of the family, and the futility of investment. These were the key elements influencing rural illiterate parents' attitudes towards their daughters' higher education, and these elements restrict their daughters' education.
4. This study found that illiterate rural parents were worried about the safety of their female children. Parents from rural areas who were illiterate wanted to send their daughters to colleges, but they were dissatisfied with the transportation options. Due to increased risk and expense, as well as the fact that pick-up and delivery services by higher institutions were not available in remote rural areas, they could not send them alone on local transportation.
5. The attitude of respondents in this study was significantly more favourable towards women pursuing higher education; however, numerous social and economic challenges constrain the enrollment of women in higher education. Reducing these issues through increased literacy and higher education awareness was crucial for the nation's progress. There should be media initiatives to persuade illiterate rural parents to support their daughters' higher education. Most rural households were made up of men, and they chose to invest in their higher education since they viewed men as the family's primary source of income and expected women to look after their parents, homes, and children. They thought that, unlike their uneducated mothers and grandparents, a well-educated woman could never be an expert at managing their households. But to ensure the nation's swift growth, it is necessary to alter this mindset.
6. It was found in this study that the size of the family affected the attitudes of rural, uneducated parents. The education of their female children was more of a concern to rural parents with smaller families. Most rural regions were below the poverty line, and due to the large family sizes, people there chose to take care of their own needs and prioritize marriage to lessen the financial load. The research's goal was accomplished.

9. Discussion

Following is a debate based on the current study.

In the Punjab area, uneducated rural parents had a favourable outlook on women's higher education. Parents understood the long-term importance of education for the growth of any community and nation. It is the sole means of accelerating progress in today's quickly expanding world. Parents have to educate their children, particularly their female offspring, since a nation cannot grow without women's education. Illiterate rural parents' perspectives on women's higher education have changed. But in remote rural regions, social and economic barriers made it impossible for rural, illiterate parents to send their daughters to colleges or universities. This study explored social and economic aspects that affected rural, uneducated parents' attitudes toward female higher education.

The current study's findings corrected Danial's (2002) study, which found that the main barriers to female enrolment in higher education in developing nations were social standing, income, wealth, and occupation. Most families in rural regions have very low social standing and monthly incomes. According to the study's findings, most respondents were farmers and labourers who put in much

effort but earned little money. Due to their heavy financial load and limited ability to provide for their family, they could not cover the costs and fees associated with higher education. If certain illiterate parents could provide education to their children, they chose to send their sons to college because they believed that sending their daughters to college would put a financial burden on their parents since they would marry off to another family. Compared to dads, moms from financially secure homes and illiterate rural households were more supportive of female higher education.

Overall, parents were quite supportive of their daughters' higher education. However, because of financial constraints, families with several daughters enrolled fewer of their daughters in higher education despite their continued support for female students. Major barriers to female higher education were large families and traditional family structures. Even uneducated rural parents were willing to reject archaic norms, attitudes, and rituals due to the beneficial transformation that mass media had brought to rural communities. Fewer parents adhered to such customs as forbidding women from leaving the house or believing that a college education would cause them to rebel.

Parents in the countryside who were uneducated knew that a woman with a degree could provide for her family. She might also make a good impact on the economy of her nation. She was able to lessen the financial strain on men after completing higher education. As a result, parents in rural regions were now eager to work after completing their education. According to the survey, several illiterate parents thought women with higher education had fewer skill sets in the home.

On the other hand, they were prepared to send a daughter-in-law with a college degree. It demonstrated how admirable the idea was that an educated woman could successfully raise her offspring. Illiterate rural parents concurred that a college degree made women feel more confident and deal with society. They believed that women with greater education may raise their moral and spiritual standards and effectively carry out their religious obligations.

10. Recommendation

This study revealed that illiterate rural parents supported their daughter's higher education; this marked a success for the government's universal education program. Nonetheless, there is a need to mitigate the social and economic factors that impact the sentiments of illiterate rural parents concerning sending their daughters to college. It will be highly beneficial to increase the enrolment of women in higher education if better employment and decent incomes are provided to them after completing their higher education to improve their financial standing in society. Now that times have changed, rural illiterate parents agree that equal access to education for women and men is essential for advancing the family and society. Some recommendations are given below:

1. Parents must remember that female education is just as vital as male education. If a woman has the opportunity to pursue further education, she can make as much money as a man. Therefore, parents shouldn't base their children's education on their gender.
2. The male family members often decide on marriage, education, and other matters. Giving kids the option to pick their jobs is now crucial, especially regarding their schooling. A rural woman must have complete flexibility to study outside if she expresses an interest in doing so.
3. Parents are aware that education raises one's economic standing and prepares one to be a good citizen.
4. It is also advised that the government and decision-makers employ the media and various efforts to change the mindset of illiterate rural parents towards sending their daughters to college.

11. Implications for Further Research

The following points describe how this research has implications for further study.

1. The study, performed to further the research goals, is unusual in that it examines how Punjabi rural parents who lack literacy feel about their daughters pursuing higher education. The results of this study will aid future research in this area.
2. In this study, the attitudes of illiterate parents are examined, and many elements that influence their attitudes are investigated. The questionnaire is utilized to gather data to ensure that the survey's results and conclusions are accurate. The social and economic hurdles can be reduced, and families with a negative attitude toward women pursuing higher education might be addressed.
3. The next study must include men from rural regions to assess their attitudes towards higher education.
4. Similarly, an online study could assess the sentiments of illiterate rural parents regarding sending their sons to college, allowing for a comparative analysis of findings between the two studies.
5. Furthermore, it is important to note that the current study is confined to examining the attitudes of illiterate parents toward the higher education of females in rural Punjab. Subsequent research endeavours may explore diverse regions across Pakistan, employing varied sample sizes and data collection methodologies for a more comprehensive understanding.

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