



Gallup Pakistan History Project's Weekend Read 35: Public Opinion on Women and Education in Pakistan: Some Trends from Gallup Pakistan History Project Polls Data by Abdullah Waqar Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

*Abstract: The conclusions and interpretations presented in this article are predicated on the **empirical findings of three surveys carried out by Gallup Pakistan**. The first of these surveys was conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 1980 with the objective of empirically determining the opinions of Pakistanis regarding the level of education boys and girls should be given in Pakistan. A nationally representative sample was asked the following question: 'How far do you think boys and girls should be provided education and beyond whereas only 21% of the respondents felt that girls should also be given higher education and beyond. In another survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 2010, a similar question was asked of the Pakistani public. 'How much education should be given to children?' In response, 73% of respondents said that boys should be educated till the post-graduate level whereas 43% of the respondents said that girls should be educated up till the post-graduate level. In another survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan In 2015, a representative sample was asked the extent of their agreement or disagreement to the following statement: "University education is more important for boys than girls." In response, 30% strongly agreed with the statement, 26% agreed with it, 26% disagreed with it and 17% strongly disagreed with the statement. All surveys were carried out among a representative sample of adult men and women from rural and urban areas of Pakistan at an error margin of 2-3% at the 95 percent confidence interval.*

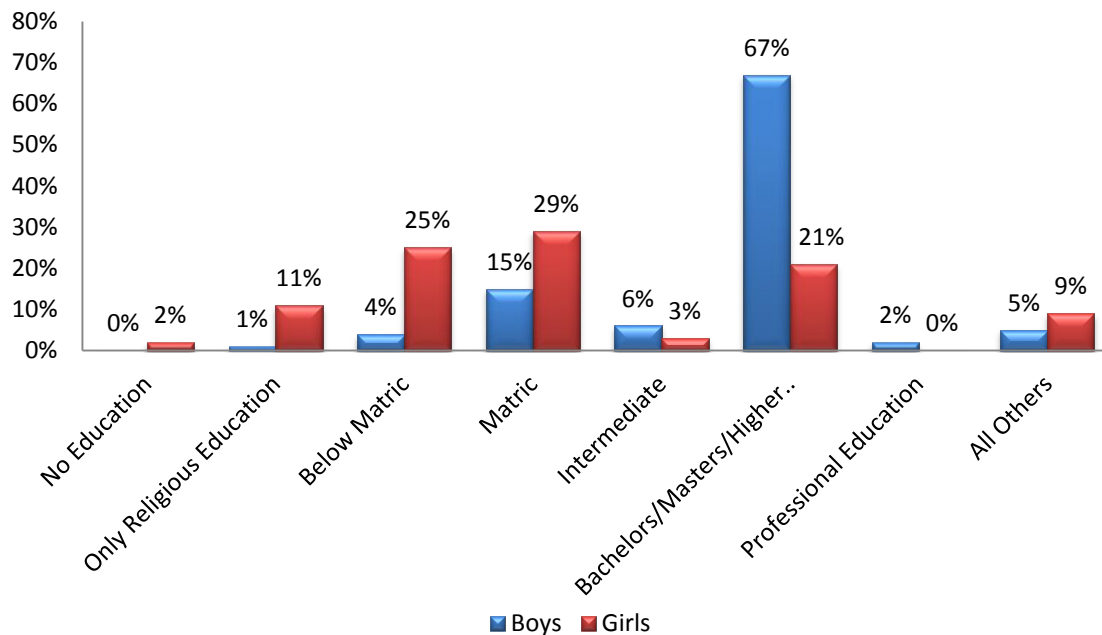
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Education has a fundamental role to play in the development of human society. Education not only aids in an individual's personal growth and development, it also serves as a catalyst for societal change and development. The right to education is a fundamental right of every citizen of the world, as has been stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Pakistan's constitution also grants this right to its every citizen. However, as is often the case, the complete implementation of these rights is easier said than done. With regards to education, Pakistan too suffers from a persisting inability to provide all of its citizens with this basic human right. More problematic for Pakistan is the existence of glaring gender discrepancies within the education sector. Women, in comparison to men, are not treated on an equal footing and suffer from a distinct lack of opportunities for educational attainment in Pakistan. Although, an awful lot of rhetoric is thrown about in the corridors of power in Pakistan with regards to providing women with equal opportunities for education; however, on the ground, there is much that is still left to be desired when it comes to women and education in Pakistan.

35 years ago, Gallup Pakistan, then in its infancy, conducted a survey from a nationally representative sample of the Pakistani population. The question that was put forward in the survey was a basic one and focused on gauging public opinion on the broader aspect of education. To be more specific, the survey aimed to empirically determine the extent of importance that Pakistanis attached to the provision of different levels of education for the Country's youth, both male and female, via asking the following question. **'How far do you think boys and girls should be provided education?'** Back in 1980, the results of this survey presented a rather insightful picture into the level of importance that an average Pakistani gave to the provision of different types and levels of education, both secular and otherwise, particularly in a gendered context. The results are elucidated in a table to render effective comparison between the two genders.

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Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

The column that needs to be viewed under a magnifying glass is the one that has been titled 'Bachelors/Masters/Higher'. This column shows the percentage of Pakistanis who were of the view that boys and girls in Pakistan should be educated up to this level. The dichotomy between the percentage that feels boys should be provided higher education (67%) and the proportion that believes girls should be educated up to this level (21%) is immense. On one hand, the Pakistani public of the time overwhelmingly felt that males should definitely have at least a Bachelor's degree, whereas on the other hand, that same public was loath to accept that women in Pakistan should also have the same level of education. Sadly, the level of education that the highest proportion of Pakistanis (29%) felt women should be educated till was matriculation, which is the United Kingdom's equivalent of Ordinary Level and United States' equivalent of 10th grade in high school. At the risk of sounding obtuse, this statistic simply means that most Pakistanis were content to just educate their women till the 10th grade, a qualification that was going to get them jobs placed on the lowest rung of the economic ladder, provided that they were able to land a job in the first place with this qualification.

These worrying statistics necessitate the need for a plausible explanation. To understand the reasons behind this public opinion on educating women, the Pakistani society itself needs to be viewed under

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the microscope. The reason for doing so lies in the need to understand the historical evolution of the Pakistani society and the position that women have in that society. This requires for a discussion of the gender roles that have been widely ascribed on Pakistani women, the factors that feed into the formation of these gender roles and the subsequent impact of these social constructs on the education of females in Pakistan.

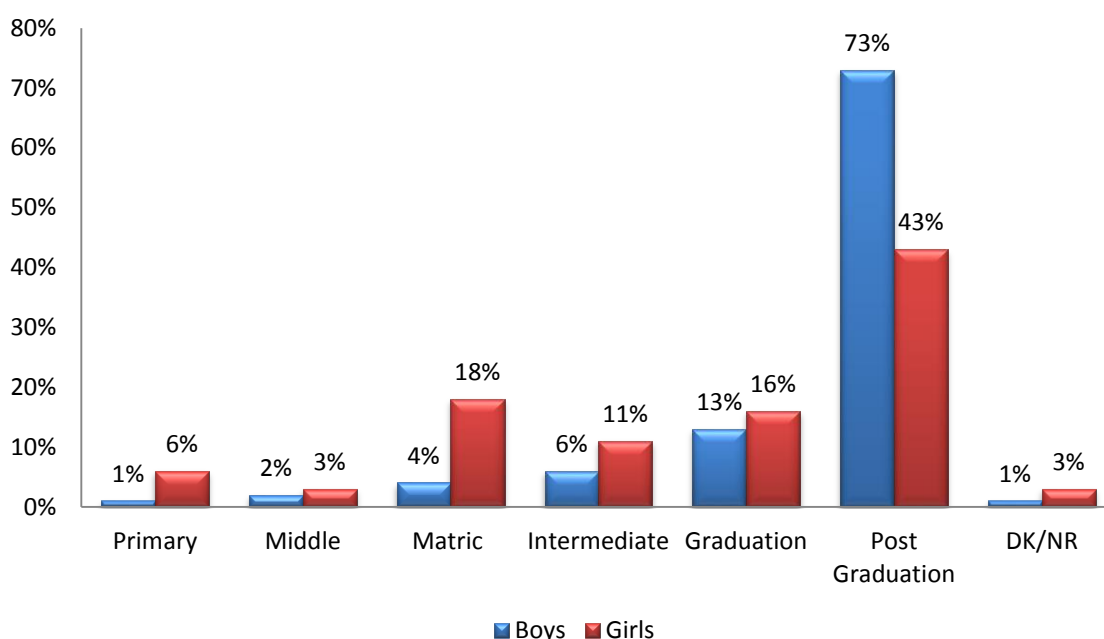
An impediment that seems to have been consistently opposing the education of women in Pakistan, whether primary, secondary or tertiary education, can be found, first and foremost, in the traditions and values that shape the broader Pakistani society and the position that they generally grant women in the social hierarchy. The gender roles that have been ascribed on Pakistani women by the society primarily tend to focus a woman's life around the household, first her parents', then her own. The unspoken and often unchallenged assumption on which a significant portion of Pakistani society functions is that the main aim of a Pakistani woman is to grow up to find a suitable husband, get married, and then devote the remaining years of her life to the rearing of her children as well as ensuring the sanctity of her household. Education, at times, is utilized as a tool by families to better a girl's marriage prospects instead of treating education as a fundamental right that will aid a woman in her personal growth and development. Furthermore, a man is considered the sole breadwinner for the family and the unchallenged head of the household. In light of these societal understandings of the roles of men and women, it starts to become clear as to why there is a greater preference of educating males over females in the Pakistani society, particularly higher education since a higher degree of education would lead to better job prospects for males. Thus, in light of these expectations as well as the patriarchal nature of the Pakistani society, a woman's individual aspirations become secondary. Therefore, education, particularly higher education, is seen in some circles as a contributory factor in a woman forsaking her primary responsibility towards her family and pursuing interests that are not in line with what the society has prescribed for her. It is not that hard to still find families today, within Pakistan's elite as well as the poor, who view the concept of a working woman with disdain, seeing it solely as the domain of men. Unfortunately, what people fail to realize is the fact that an educated mother will be able to raise her kids much better than an illiterate mother. A woman can be considered as the building block of a society by virtue of being a mother. Thus, an educated mother will be able to contribute all the more effectively towards the growth and development of not just her household but the society at large.

This patriarchal social structure is more prominent in Pakistan's rural areas as they are organized on the basis of communities instead of individual households. Therefore, the societal pressure of a community is ever present within the dynamics of each household, subjugating and confining the role of a woman

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within the society. Furthermore, Pakistan's rural areas are more conservative in their organization and religious outlook. The local interpretation of Islam, which is the dominant religion of the Country, has also played its part in cultivating and maintaining this social hierarchy.

However, before going any further, it is important to look at the present day situation and see if public opinion has changed with regards to the question of how much education should be given to children. The survey that works closest in providing a comparative picture to the survey stated above was carried out by Gallup Pakistan in 2010. In this survey, a representative sample of Pakistanis was asked the following specific question: **'To which level do you think boys and girls should be educated to?'** Although the education level categories listed for this survey differ in wording from the categories given in the 1982 survey, they can nevertheless be compared. The results are presented below in a table.



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

As can be seen rather vividly from the table above, there has been a marked change in public opinion on this question over the course of three decades. In 2010, the category titled 'post-graduation', which is broadly classified as the highest attainable level of education, was the category that was selected by the

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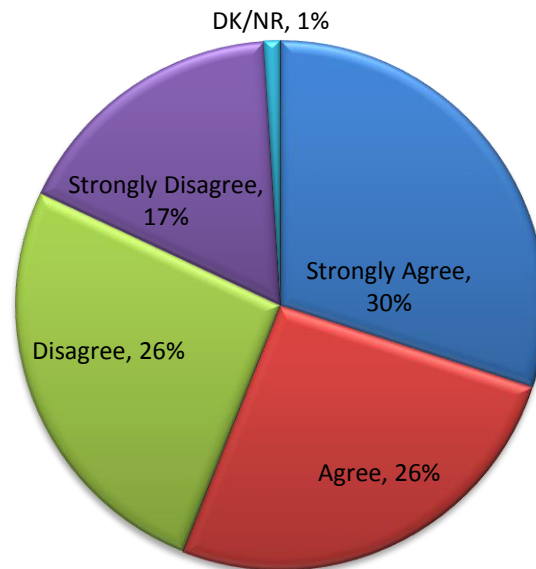
majority of respondents as the level of education that they felt should be given to their children, in both genders. Therefore, this represents a marked improvement from 1980 when the highest proportion of respondents felt that females should only be educated till 'Matric'. In 2010, 18% of the respondents said that girls should be educated only till 'matric', whereas a resounding 43% of the public felt that girls should be educated till the post graduate level. Contrastingly, in 1980, 29% of the respondents said that girls should be educated till 'matric', whereas only 21% of the public felt that girls should be given a higher education, which also included the category of 'graduation' in it. Therefore, if we look at it in that respect, in 2010, a combined proportion of 59% of the public felt that women should be given a higher education (including 'Graduation' and 'post-graduation' categories).

Thus, in lieu of these relatively recent findings of 2010, one can safely assert that there has been a marked improvement in public opinion on the question of providing the highest possible degree of education to women. These results are reflective of an evolution of the Pakistani society over the course of three decades with regards to the importance of education for women. Thus, with a passage of time, the Pakistani public has experienced a positive growth in its attitudes towards educating women. Increasing modernization as well as a growth in Pakistan's urban population has also played its part in changing people's attitudes and behavior. Now, a dominant proportion of the public feels that women should also be educated till the highest possible degree. This thinking bodes well for the women of Pakistan as well as for the future of the country. For not only is the right to an education a fundamental right for women, it is also a necessary factor in Pakistan's socio-economic development. Education is the best way to empower women and subsequently enable them to challenge the societal norms of Pakistan and change them for the better by bridging gender disparity within the country. Furthermore, women with higher education qualifications will add to Pakistan's skilled labor force, thus bringing about an improvement in the Country's economy.

However, the fact that in the survey of 2010, a resounding 73% of the same respondents felt that men should be educated till the post-graduate level, compared to 43% who felt the same for women, still hints at the stubbornness of some of Pakistan's societal prejudices. Even today, this thinking still persists that it is a man's duty to earn bread for his family, while a woman's job is to mind the house in his absence. Furthermore, the continuing influence of an orthodox and narrow interpretation of Islam in Pakistan's social sphere has also contributed to a continuation of these prejudices. Hence, the Pakistani public attaches far greater importance to education for men than it does to education for women. To this end, Gallup Pakistan conducted a nationwide survey in 2015 in which a representative sample of the Pakistani public was asked to lend their degree of agreement or disagreement to the following

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statement; **‘University education is more important for boys than girls.’** The empirical results of this survey are presented in a pie chart.

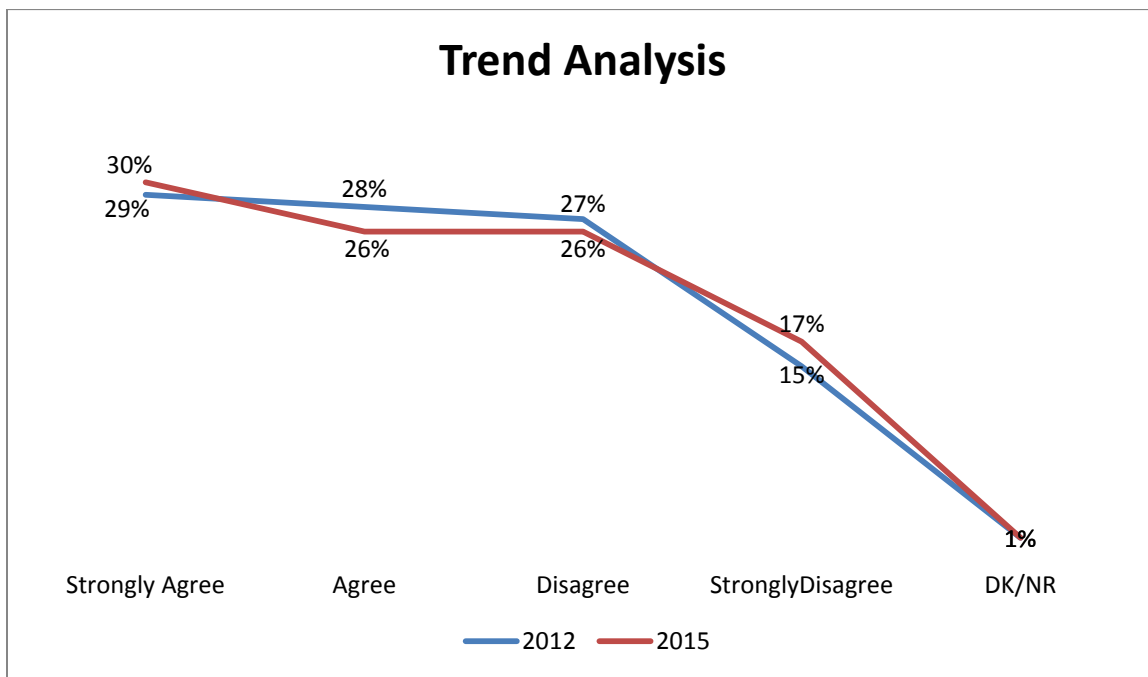


Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

As can be seen in the pie chart, 30% of the public ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement that University education is more important for boys as compared to girls. Additionally, 26% of the respondents were also in ‘agreement’ with this statement. On the other hand, 17% of Pakistanis ‘strongly disagreed’ with the statement that University education is more important for men instead of women. Furthermore, 26% of the respondents also ‘disagreed’ with the statement, albeit not strongly. Therefore, it has been empirically determined that even in the present day and age, the proportion of Pakistanis who are of the belief that University education is more important for boys as compared to girls (56%) still outnumber the percentage of the public which feels otherwise (43%). Although it can reasonably be claimed that the situation has improved markedly in comparison to 1980, however, there is no hiding from the fact that there is a greater percentage of Pakistanis that still feels Higher Education is more important for men than it is for women. Furthermore, Gallup Pakistan has also empirically ascertained the persistence of this trend among the Pakistani public over a period of three years, since this survey

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was also conducted in Pakistan back in August 2012 and yielded similar results. In 2012, 29% of the public ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement that university education was more important for boys whereas 28% of the public ‘agreed’ with this statement. In comparison, 15% of Pakistanis ‘strongly disagreed’ with the claim that university education is more important for men than it is for women and an additional 27% ‘disagreed’ with this statement. Taken together, one finds that three years prior to the present year, the proportion of Pakistanis who felt university education to be more important for men as compared to women (57%) still outnumbered the proportion of the Pakistani public that disagreed with this statement (42%). A comparison of trend lines of the empirical results of this survey for the years of 2012 and 2015 is provided below to further elucidate the consistency of public opinion in Pakistan on the issue of providing higher education to women in the Country.



Source: Gallup Pakistan National Survey (covering 4 provinces and Urban/Rural areas)

At this point, it becomes important to examine other factors that have resulted in this recurring gender disparity in education. An important issue that is wedded to the aforementioned social factors is that of poverty. Over the years, Pakistan’s economic fortunes have taken a turn for the worse, fuelled primarily as a result of the Country’s worsening law and order situation as well as the persistent problems of mismanagement and corruption within the state apparatus. Rising poverty has therefore resulted in

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more children being forced to work in order to sustain their families, thus depriving them of some of their most fundamental rights. Although this phenomenon of child labor has not been restricted to a particular gender, it has still caused a number of females to forego education, albeit mostly at the primary and the secondary level.

Also of importance to this issue is the case of a weak state and government apparatus that has been unable to address some glaring problems and shortcomings in Pakistan's education system. The lack of a political will and misplaced priorities at the national level have also played their part in maintaining this gap in education between the two genders. The Pakistani state, for years, has neglected the education sector. Even though it is the duty of the government to provide education to all, many of the public schools and colleges are in a truly dire condition. Lack of funds and facilities, teacher absenteeism, misuse of public land designated for schools and colleges are just some of the problems that exist that need to be addressed on an urgent basis. Furthermore, in order to increase female enrollment within these schools and colleges, cash transfer and stipend programs for school girls have to be initiated, particularly in rural areas, so that families are encouraged to send their daughters to school. Quality higher education institutes in the country are only restricted to a few major urban centers of Pakistan. If the government is genuinely concerned to assist in a greater percentage of women attaining higher education, then it has to sincerely devote more funds and resources for the setting up of more centers of higher learning as well as ensure equal admission of both genders into these institutions.

Conclusion

The importance of education for women cannot be understated. Not only is the attainment of education their fundamental right, it is also the means by which women can unlock their potential and contribute significantly towards the socio-economic development of a country. All over the world, women are increasingly becoming active and valued members of the labor force as well as public affairs. Although Pakistan's position in this respect has improved significantly since 1980, there are still some shortcomings that need to be addressed. If Pakistan wishes to propel itself to a higher tier of growth and progress, then it has to empower its women and ensure the safeguarding of their rights. However, in order for this gender gap to subside, there needs to be a concerted effort towards social change from within as well as an effective and cohesive national policy to rectify the numerous problems that exist within the education sector.

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