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Gender and Regional Differences in Dropout Due to Distance of School in Sindh

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Abstract

This research paper explores gender and regional differences in school dropout due to distance of school in Sindh province. The research is done through a survey of school dropout children in six divisions of Sindh. A sample of 5650 dropout children was selected to collect data with the help of a questionnaire. The results of the study show that there is no significant gender difference in children's dropout due to distance of school. But more rural children in Sindh drop out of school due to far away distance of school as compared to their urban counterparts.

Keywords: Distance, School dropout, Region, Sindh, Pakistan.

Introduction

Pakistan is predominantly a rural and patriarchal society characterized with poor infrastructure, communication and transportation facilities available to majority of citizens living in rural and disadvantaged areas of the country. This situation curtails rural populations' access to scarcely available social and economic resources. The education sector is an example showing these problems of availability and access in rural areas.

Despite constitutional commitments for universal primary education in the country, the overall educational standing of the country is not satisfactory due to long standing low literacy and enrollment rates with a large number of children still left out of school. The situation is more vulnerable in case of rural areas of Pakistan, in general, and Sindh, in particular.

The availability and distance of educational facility determines the educational fate of children living in any geographical area. The phenomenon can be studied through difficulty in access to and low enrollment and completion rates in educational institutions in rural areas.

There is shortage of educational institutions in the country. The shortage of schools leads to establishment of these institutions at distance to cover large of majority of rural population. This long distance of school from home creates problems of children's access to and enrolment in school (Bhatti & Awan 2019; Rizwan, Taniguchi, & Hiraoka 2022).

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Those already enrolled tend to get dropout of school due to long distance (Juneja 2001). Yousuf, Rafique, Mahmood and Butt (2020) in their qualitative study to bring voices of dropouts done in two districts of Punjab show that distance from home to school is a main theme in description of the school dropout experiences by school dropout children and their parents.

More children get dropped out of school when the long distance to school coupled with poor transportation facilities. It makes children's commute to school difficult and long time required for it (Rizwan Taniguchi, & Hiraoka 2022).

Qamar, Farooq, and Saifi (2019, p.21) in their research on female dropout at primary school level in Bhawalpur district found that 61% of the teachers agreed that school's location at a faraway place from home is a cause of school dropout in the district. Almost 63% of teachers and heads considered that the lack of transport facilities to reach school is a cause of school dropout.

The problem exists at primary level, but it becomes sever at elementary, secondary and high schools level (as they are less in number) (Bhatti & Awan 2019; Gul, Hayat, & Ahmad 2021). Satti and Jamali (2021, p.397-398) argue that the distance of middle school and secondary school have more strong positive relationship with school dropout than the distance of primary school.

Children from rural areas, and other disadvantaged areas are more vulnerable to school dropout due to distance of school from home. Several studies done in rural areas of different districts of Pakistan found that rural children leave school due to long distance of school (Hussain, Zulfiqar & Ullah 2020; Sawada & Lokshin 2001).

Naz, Ejaz, and Khan (2019, p.81-85) in research on rural areas of Islamabad also found that 13.6% of the respondents have reported the distance of school as a reason of school dropout of children. Their research found that provision of the school at a reasonable distance is one of the two most significant factors effecting school dropout. It has the potential to reduce dropout to 139%.

Besides rural areas, tribal areas are also facing problems of dropout due to distance of school. Khan, Hussain, Suleman, Mehmood and Nawab (2017, p.22) in their study done with teachers of male elementary schools in four southern districts (including Hangu, Lakki Marwat, Tank and Bannu) of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa found that long distance of school is a significant factor causing school dropout.

The patriarchal organization of society makes girls**,** especially rural and tribal ones, educational attainment more effected by longer distance and commuting time to reach school (Mughal, Aldridge & Monaghan 2019). Chitrali, Anwar & Nabahat (2014, p.85-86) have identified that female students' constrained

or limited mobility as a barrier to their education. It is not possible for young girls to move unaccompanied, to cover the long distance to reach school.

The insecure environment on the way to school also adds to this problem for female students. Zareen (2020) found that insecurity on the long distance to school is a significant factor negatively effecting academic performance among female students in Lahore.

The long distance of school coupled with this insecure environment increase parents anxiety and reduce girls' chances of getting education after they reach puberty. Long distance of school leads students and their parents to decide to leave school in rural Morocco when they consider the security of their girls on the way (Derdar 2014).

Although it is evident that rural areas are more affected by long distance of school, urban areas are not free of this problem. Satti and Jamali (2021, p.397-398) analyzing the PSLM 2014-15 data found that distance of school matters most for urban female children. Almost 78% of the urban female and 65.9% of rural female reported too far flung location of school as reason for their not attending school as compared to only 21.8% urban and 34% rural males. They suggested that lowering the distance from school can help in reducing the school dropout of children.

Yousaf's (2019) research based on views of parents of school dropout children from nine districts of Punjab also found distance of school from home as a problem related to school dropout of children. They contend that majority of the parents reported school being located within one km distance, only few have the school 2 to 3 kilometers away. Therefore, although the distance of school is a problem but it does not affect majority of the children in Punjab. Therefore, it is also important to know the extent of the problem for effecting dropout among children.

Scope of Research

The scope of research is to explore school dropout due to distance of school in Sindh province. The geographical scope is limited to the province of Sindh. The target population is limited to school dropout children. The time frame of this cross sectional research is the year from 2018 to 2019.

Rationale of Research

This research paper aims to explore the extent of the problem of dropout due to distance of school in Sindh province. It focuses the problem from Sindh's school dropout children's perspective, as rarely done in previous studies, to identify

any existing gender and regional (rural/ urban) differences in dropout due to distance of school.

Research Problem/Research Question

The problem addressed in this research is to what extent the distance of school differently effects school dropout among male and female children in rural and urban Sindh.

Objectives of Research

1. To explore gender difference in dropout from school due to distance of school in Sindh.

2. To explore regional (Rural/Urban) difference in dropout from school due to distance of school in Sindh.

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is that the distance of the educational facility (i.e. school) may cause different patterns of school dropout among children on the basis of their gender and regional locations in Sindh. These gender and region wise patterns of the schools dropout in Sindh need to be studied.

Significance of Research

The gender and regional difference in school dropout due to distant location of school have rarely been studied in Sindh. The main significance of this research lies in the fact that it provided empirical data on this problem from all over the Sindh province.

Limitation of Research

This research specifically focuses on school dropout children in Sindh province and does not provide evidence of school dropout due to distance of school in other provinces of the country.

Literature Review

1. The problem of dropout due to distance of school

Lack of budgetary allocation, shortage of schools, and poor planning are some of the continuing barriers in the way of universalization of education in Pakistan. The provision of school for easy access of every child, within in the

limited budgetary allocations for education sector, especially in dominantly rural and dispersed population settlements of the country, is a challenge.

The availability of less number of schools, especially when located at a distance, curtails children's, especially rural children's', access to school directly and their school enrolment and completion, indirectly (Rizwan, Taniguchi & Hiraoka 2022, p.2). Juneja (2001) argues that if schools are located at a long distance from home than students tend to get more dropout due to reasons like sexual harassment and fatigue of travel.

Researches have shown an uneven pattern of schools' location and difficulties in students' accessibility to schools with long travel time and higher costs. The travel distance may reach to 5 km for secondary school students. It is argued that spatial reorganization and restructuring of schools will enhance children's access to schools in Abbattoabad (Tanveer, Balz, Sumari, Shan, & Tanweer 2020).

The location of school usually determines for a student the distance to cover, commenting time, transport requirements, financial expenses, safety on the way, and the time students spend and their academic performance at school. Rizwan et al. (2022, p.2) argued that 'long distance to school from home and poor transportation facilities making commute to school difficult are considered it a main cause of dropout at primary school level in Pakistan'.

Researches show that the problem becomes more sever at the secondary, elementary and high school levels as there are fewer of these schools as compared to primary school, especially in rural areas of Pakistan. Bhatti and Awan (2019) in their research on determinants of enrollment at elementary schools in Bhawalrpur district found that fee and school distance are the major factors negatively related to school enrollment. They argue that as the distance of school from home increases, the enrollment in school decreases.

2. Educators' perception on dropout due to distance of primary school

Several researches in the context of Pakistan touched the topic of school dropout due to long distance of school at primary school level from the perspective of teachers and educational managers. Jafar, Yasin, Aslam, Ullah, Nasir, Ijaz, Iqbal and Khaliq (2021, p.61) in their research on Vehari tehsil found that 62% of the teachers considered long distance between school and home as a determining factor for primary school dropout. Gul, Hayat and Ahmad (2021) found that 83.3% of head teachers of primary schools in Swabi tehsil agreed that distance from school to home has the higher potential to influence children's school dropout.

Atta, Iqbal and Joya's (2020, p.46) research found that 51% of the teachers in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa perceive that students leave school because of long distance between home and school at primary schools level. Urban female teachers most strongly considered this a reason of school dropout as compared to rural females, and urban and rural males.

Shah, Haider and Taj (2019, p.50) in their research covering 12 districts of Pakistan found that 70% of the educational managers, 67% of the teachers and majority of the parents have identified the long distance of school as an important factor effecting school dropout at primary level. They argue that, at primary level, students are so tender in their age that they cannot travel too far to reach school. Therefore, it is argued that having school near to home (within 1 kilometer) has a positive effect on primary school attendance (Sathar & Llyod 1994).

3. Dropout due to distance of school in rural and underprivileged areas

The long distance of school is a major problem in rural areas. Scholars identify that poor children (such as from rural areas) and especially girls are effected most due to increase in commuting time and cost (Mughal, Aldridge & Monaghan 2019). Hussain, Zulfiqar, and Ullah's (2020, p.583) research in rural areas of Multan and Khanewal districts found distance of school as a barrier to female education in rural areas of Pakistan.

With the increase in distance to school the possibilities of girls' enrollment and completion decrease (Chaudhury, Christiaensen, & Asadullah 2006). The chances of rural girls' entry in school increase by 18% and their school dropout decreases by 16% in Pakistan if the school is located within the village (Sawada & Lokshin 2001).

Pervez, Kamal, Ullah, Khan and Khan's (2017, p.4) research done with female students of secondary schools in Waziritan found that 76% of the respondents agree that lack of transport facilities have impact on females secondary education in the area. Jahan, Khan, and Sadiqa's (2021, pp.52-54) research on tehsil Balamot in district Dir showed that female students of middle and high schools consider that unavailability of proper transportation and the fear of sexual harassment are constraints for female higher education in that area.

Similarly, Zada, Sarir, and Jawad (2021, p.153) found that almost 77% of the respondent family heads in Bajour district of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa considered distance from school as the most important reason of female student's dropout at secondary school level. As in Pakhtoon society schools are located at distance from home, the girls are not allowed to leave home due to customs like *Purdah* and *Haya*. Most of the male respondents from district Charsada in KP affirmed that distance of school is a contributing factor to female illiteracy (Khan 2016, pp.1016-17).

The longer distance and travel time also become barriers for rural girls to continue their education at high schools (Rizwan, Taniguchi & Hiraoka 2022, p.3). They usually complete education at primary level and get dropout rather than taking admission and continuing their education at a far flung located high school.

4. Gender and dropout due to distance of school

The long distance of school effects schooling of both the genders. Zeb, Gul, Mingyan, and Ullah (2021, pp.257-258) found that 6% and 12.5% of the households in Peshawar district considered long distance of school as a cause of school dropout among boys and girls, respectively.

Research has identified that long distance of school from home is a critical factor determining female adolescent's educational prospects in Afghanistan (Noori 2017). It is linked with parent's concern for their girls' safety and cultural norms and beliefs about girls' too long distance travel as dishonor and shame for family (Noori 2017).

Yassin's (2020, p.38) research in Oromia Zone in Ethiopia found elementary school in the region are located at closer distance, but the secondary schools are at relatively more distant places. This curtails the chance of girl students for acquiring secondary education. Girls usually get dropout after passing class eight as they cannot travel to far away secondary schools by covering a distance such as thirty seven kilometer from their villages.

Similarly, Suleman and his fellows' (2015, p.100) research in Pakistan observed that majority of head teachers (83.4%), teachers (84.2%) and students (83.2%) in Karrak District affirm that long distance of school is negatively effecting girls' secondary level schooling.

5. Other problems entailing distance of school

Not only the distance of school is a problem but it also gives rise to several other problems creating hurdles in children's educational attainment. The available literature shows that the long distance of the school has the potential to further cause mobility, safety and harassment related problems occurred on the way to school for secondary and high school students. Parents become concerned about safety of their daughters if they need to walk or commute to a school at a distance.

Lewins (2011) argued that the reason for parents' becoming uncomfortable in letting their daughters commuting to a school located at a distance is latter's security and reputation. The insecurity, entailing the long travel distance to school, becomes major hurdle in the way to female education in Pakistan (Awan & Malik, 2020, p.325).

Parents' and communities' concerns about children's commuting to a school located at a long distance result in restrictions to free and unaccompanied mobility. As, the distance of school increased, parents avoid the risk of harassment and take a safe option of keeping their girls at home without sending them to school (Awan & Malik, 2020, p.325). Tusinska (2020, p.239) identify this restriction on free mobility of children, especially girls, as a factor resulting in their poor educational achievement. As girls reach puberty, their parents start fearing from the long distance to school.

Suleman et al. (2015, p.103) found that majority of the head teachers (73.4%), teachers (75%), and students (75.7%)) in Karak district considered that parents do not give permission to their daughters to attend school if the school is located at a long distance. Further, they also found that majority (96.5%) of the teachers and students considered that poor security arrangements is leading to poor girls' education in District Karak Pakistan (Suleman et al., 2015, p.106).

Bibi and Ahmad (2019) in their research on Swat district found that 3.6% of the respondent children have reported the far away location of school as a reason of leaving school. Further, 6.3% respondent considered the problem of transport availability to access school as causing school dropout.

6. Dropout due to distance of school in Sindh

Several researchers also highlight the problem of school dropout due to distance of school in different district level studies in Sindh province. Nayyar, Talpur and Jariko's (2018) research on Matiari and Badin districts found that children on average walk for 4.93 km to reach a primary school. They found that the distance of school from home is positively related to school dropout.

Nayyar, Jariko, and Mughal's (2017, p.263) research on Badin district found that community members and teachers are of the view that female students face violence, kidnapping or harassment on their long way to school. Therefore, they are not allowed to leave home. These factors hinder female students' way to go to school and leads their dropout from primary schools.

Aga, Rind and Issani (2021, p.52) in a study in rural areas of Khairpur district found that school proximity and girls education are interlinked with each other. Almost 43% of the respondents affirmed that girls' dropout incidences increase if the secondary school is located far away.

The review of literature shows that a provincial level study of school dropout due to long distance of school done from the perspective of school dropout children to identify the gender and regional (rural and urban) differences is still needed in Sindh.

Research Methodology

This research study was designed as a quantitative cross-sectional research. A survey of 5650 randomly selected school dropout children (including 4669 rural and 981 urban and 4031 boys and 1619 girls) was done in six divisions of Sindh province with the help of a closed ended structured questionnaire. A three item scale was used to measure children's perceptions about faraway distance of the school as being the cause of their dropout from school. The collected data was statistically analyzed using computer software SPSS. Item wise Cross-tabulation is presented below to show gender and regional percentages of responses for each answer categories. The Independent samples t-test was applied to statistically test above stated hypotheses for identification of gender and regional patterns of school dropout due to distance of school among children in Sindh.

Research Hypothesis

H_1. Girls more frequently dropout of school due to far away distance of school in Sindh.

H_2. Rural children more frequently dropout of school due to far away distance of school in Sindh.

Analyses and Interpretations

1. Patterns of school dropout due to distance of school in Sindh

The Table 1shows gender and region wise percentages of the responses regarding distance of school related causes of school dropout. Although, majority of children in province did not leave school due to distance of school, still 23.3% of the children in Sindh agree (either agree or strongly agree) that they have left school due to far away location of school. Almost 20% of the children agree (either agree or strongly agree) that they left school because the next level school was far away. Further, total 20.7% of the children agree (either agree or strongly agree) that they left school because of school's location far from community/population.

Table 1: Responses regarding dropout due to distance of school (%)

Causes of school dropout	Response categories	Rural			Urban			Total		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
School being far away from home	SD	36.6	33.2	35.7	58.2	50.0	55.8	40.3	36.3	39.2
	D	33.4	32.6	33.2	26.1	29.9	27.2	32.2	32.1	32.1
	NAND	5.5	7.4	6.1	2.3	3.4	2.7	5.0	6.7	5.5
	A	10.6	9.6	10.3	2.9	7.1	4.2	9.3	9.1	9.3
	SA	13.8	17.2	14.8	10.5	9.5	10.2	13.2	15.8	14.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Faraway next level school	SD	37.9	37.2	37.7	61.1	49.7	57.7	41.9	39.5	41.2
	D	34.4	34.3	34.4	28.7	37.1	31.2	33.5	34.8	33.8
	NAND	5.0	6.5	5.4	3.2	4.8	3.7	4.7	6.2	5.1
	A	10.7	8.8	10.1	3.2	5.1	3.8	9.4	8.1	9.0
	SA	12.0	13.3	12.4	3.8	3.4	3.7	10.6	11.5	10.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Distance of school from community	SD	38.4	38.9	38.6	60.4	51.4	57.7	42.2	41.2	41.9
	D	33.6	30.6	32.8	27.9	34.0	29.8	32.7	31.2	32.2
	NAND	5.1	6.9	5.6	2.9	3.4	3.1	4.7	6.2	5.1
	A	9.7	10.3	9.9	2.6	5.4	3.5	8.5	9.5	8.7
	SA	13.2	13.3	13.2	6.1	5.8	6.0	12.0	11.9	12.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NAND=Neither agree nor disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly agree. Source: Author's field data.

Gender wise segregated data does not show any wide difference in percentage of responses between girls and boys. Table 1 shows that 24.9% girls, compared to 22.5% boys, left school due to far away location of school from home. Further, 19.6% of girls, as compared to 20% of boys agreed to left school due to far away location of next level school. Even 21.4% of girls, as compared to 20.5% of boys, agreed that they left school because the school was located away from the community.

Regional data suggest that there is visible difference in responses of rural and urban children. Table 1 shows that the percentage of rural children is much higher than the urban children who left school due to distance. More than 25% rural children left school because of faraway location of school, 22.5% left school due to far away location of next level school and more than 23% left because of distance

of school from community or population in Sindh. Only 14.4% of the urban children left school due to far away location of school, 7.5% left because of faraway next level of school, and 9.5% due to distance of school from community or population.

2. Gender wise difference in school dropout due to distance of school in Sindh

The mean score of male school dropout children on the scale of school dropout due to distance of school (M=2.1732) is slightly lower than the mean score of their female counter parts (M=2.2440).

Table 2: Gender wise mean scores on dropout due to distance of school

	Gender	***N***	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Distance of School	Male	4031	2.1732	1.21869	.01919
	Female	1619	2.2440	1.22106	.03035

The results of the independent sample t-test shows a non-significant value of F=1.331 with *p* value=.249 indicating that the test result is not significant if equal variance is not assumed. Thus, the test result suggests a statistically significant gender difference in the score of male and female school dropout children in Sindh, only if the equal variances is assumed, on the scale of school dropout due to distance of school, t(5648)= -1.974, p=.048. Keeping in view that a large difference exist in number of respondents in both groups compared, this result may not be considered significant for existence of gender difference in school dropout due distance of school in Sindh.

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Table. 3: Gender wise difference in dropout due to distance of school

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Distance of school	Equal variances assumed	1.331	.249	-1.974	5648	.048	-.07082	.03588	-.14115	-.00048
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.972	2980.129	.049	-.07082	.03591	-.14123	-.00041

These results suggest that there is no difference in male and female school dropout children's mean scores for school dropout due to distance of school. Therefore, above stated hypothesis H_1 is rejected.

3. Regional difference in school dropout due to distance of school in Sindh

The mean score of the school dropout children from rural areas of Sindh on the scale of School dropout due to distance of school (M=2.2896) is sufficiently higher than the mean score of their urban counter parts (M=1.7356).

Table 4: Regional mean scores on dropout due to distance of school

	Region	***N***	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Distance of School	Rural	4669	2.2896	1.24347	.01820
	Urban	981	1.7356	.97781	.03122

The results of the independent sample t-test show a statistically significant difference in the score of school dropout children from rural and urban areas of Sindh on the scale of school dropout due to distance of school, t(1520.928)= 13.525, p=.000.

Table. 5: Regional difference in dropout due to distance of school

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Distance of school	Equal variances assumed	127.392	.000	13.127	5648	.000	.55400	.04220	.47126	.63673
	Equal variances not assumed			15.331	1717.492	.000	.55400	.03614	.48312	.62487

These results suggest that school dropout children from rural areas more frequently left school due to its distance. Therefore, above stated hypothesis H_2 is accepted.

Discussion

This research was aimed to explore the extent to which the distance of school effects dropout among children of rural and urban areas of Sindh. The problem was explored from the perspective of school dropout children. The analysis of the data in this study shows that almost 23% of school dropout children in Sindh confirm to have left school due to faraway location of their school. Almost 20% the total school dropout participants affirm that they left school due to distant location of next level school. For 21% of school dropout children, the distance of school from community was a reason for leaving school.

These findings confirmed, from the students perspective, the arguments already raised by various scholars, from teachers' and educational managers' perspectives, that distance of school is a determining factor for school dropout at primary level (Atta et al. 2020; Gul et al. 2021; Jafar et al. 2021; Shah et al. 2019). It supports the argument that the location of school near home has the potential to increase school attendance, as argued in the research done by Sathar and Llyod 1994).

The result of this study also confirms the previous researchers' findings that distance of school effects both the genders. Confirming the findings of previous researches (Sawada & Lokshin 2001; Zeb et al. 2021), this study does not show any statistically significant difference in school dropout due to distance of school in

Sindh. Still this research indicates a slightly higher pattern of school dropout due to distance among girl children in rural areas of Sindh as compared to their male and urban counter parts.

The research also found that rural children are more frequently get dropped out of school due to distance of school. This pattern visible in data for rural female children's more frequent dropout from school due to distance is also affirming the findings of several previous researches (Chaudhury 2006; Hussain et al. 2020; Pervez et al. 2017; Rizwan et al. 2022).

Conclusion

This research explored dropout due to distance of school in Sindh province. On the one hand, the distance of school from home and community/population is found to equally effect both male and female children in Sindh. No statistically significant gender difference is found in the mean score of children about leaving school due to long distance of school. On the other hand, Rural children were found leaving school more than urban children due distance of school in the province. The distance of school seems to have more negative effect on rural children's schooling as compared to their urban counterparts.

Recommendations

This study recommends future research on school level (i.e. primary, secondary, elementary and higher secondary schools) wise differences in school dropout due to distance of school. Further, policy makers and implementers should consider restructuring and reorganization school's spatial locations in rural areas to maximize the access of students as also suggested by scholars (Tanveer, Balz, Sumari, Shan & Tanweer 2020). Schools need to be established in central areas and in case of long distance proper transport should be provided (Shah, Haider & Taj 2019).

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