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Gender Differences In School Dropout Due To Insecurity And Harassment In And On The Way To School In Sindh

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Abstract

This research is aimed to explore gender differences in children's school dropout due insecurity and harassment in and on the way to school in Sindh. The research is designed as a quantitative research. A survey of 5641 school dropout children in Sindh is done with the help of a questionnaire developed by the researcher. The results of the research show that more than 10% of the children have reported that insecurity on the way from home to school is a cause of their school dropout. The result of t-test shows that more girls than boys are reporting to have left school due to insecurity or harassment they are facing either in school or on the way to school.

Keywords: Insecurity, Harassment, School, Dropout, Sindh.

تلخیص

اس تحقیقی مقالہ کا مرکز سندھ میں اسکول کے اندر یا اسکول کے راستے میں عدم تحفظ اور حراسانی کے باعث بچوں میں اسکول چھوڑ دینے کےرجحان کا تجزیہ کرنا ہے۔ یہ ایک شماریاتی طرز پرکی گئی تحقیق ہے۔ اس میں سندھ کے اسکول ترک کرنے والے ۵۶۴۱ بچوں کا محقق کے تیار کردہ ایک سوالنامے کی مدد سےسروے کیا گیا ہے۔ تحقیق کے نتائج ظاہر کرتے ہیں کہ صرف دس فیصد تارکینِ مدرسہ اسکول کے اندر یا اسکول کے راستے میں عدم تحفظ اور حراسانی کو ان کے اسکول ترک کرنے کی وجہ کے طور پر قبول کرتے ہیں۔ ٹی۔ ٹیسٹ کے نتائج ظاہر کرتے ہیں کے لڑکوں کی نسبت زیادہ تعداد میں اسکول ترک کرنے والی لڑکیاں اسکول کے اندر یا اسکول کے راستے میں عدم تحفظ اور حراسانی کو ان کے اسکول چھوڑنے کی وجہ کے طور پر بیان کرتی ہیں۔

کلیدی الفاظ: عدم تحفظ ، ہراسانی ، اسکول، ترکِ مدرسہ، سندھ۔

Introduction

Pakistan is a patriarchal society. Where women are considered subordinate to men. The private sphere of home is assigned to them as the center of their activity. This social

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arrangement results in poor achievement in terms of education and workforce participation of women. Pakistani women spending most of their time in the private sphere of home lack social capitals like education, public networks, employment opportunities, and professional skills. When they come out to acquire education and do work in the labor force, they face a lot of difficulties and challenges in managing their presence in the public sphere. One of the barriers is insecurity and harassment they face in the public sphere; especially in streets, educational institutions and at work places. This paper is addressing the problem of insecurity and harassment of students in the context of school education and its negative effects on their education, especially in terms of dropout from school.

Pakistan is committed with Education for All and Sustainable Development Goals binding Pakistani government to provide free and compulsory primary education to all the citizens. The Article 25(A) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is about the state's responsibility for providing free and compulsory education to all its citizens of five to sixteen years of age (The National Assembly of Pakistan, 2012). But still Pakistani women and girls are lagging behind in terms of educational achievement. The results of the census of Pakistan held in the year 2017 show that women's literacy ratio (49.69%) is lower than men's (67.79%) among the10 years and above age population. The literacy rate among rural women is much lower (38.57%) as compared to rural men (61.31%) in the same age group of population. Further, the census results show that more than 43 million of five years and above age women and girls in Pakistan have never attained any education (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017).It is reported that more girls (49%) as compared to boys (40%) of five to sixteen years age are out of school in Pakistan (National Education Management Information System, 2018, pp.23-24).

School dropout is one of the problems resulting in poor educational achievement of the population in Pakistan. It refers to the students once enrolled in school but later left school due to certain reasons except death without finishing their education (Ahmad, 2006). Pakistan social and living standard measurement survey has reported school dropout rate at primary level for cohort age group 15-19 years as 21.8% for girls as compared to 16% for boys at class six. This gender gap also becomes wide in rural areas where the school dropout rate is 29.2% for girls as compared to 17.6%for boys (Government of Pakistan, 2020, p.48). Pakistani girls and women's poor educational standing is due to several socio-cultural, economic and structural factors. Insecurity and harassment of girls and women is one such socio-cultural factor.

Security is the basic human right for all human citizens in any state. Iqbal, Afzal & Inayat (2012,p.20) have narrated Dr. Mehboob ul Haq's simple explanation of the complex idea of human security as including security of people (not solely of territory), of individuals (not just of nation) through development of areas (not through arms). It means the

security of all the people in all places including homes, streets and in the whole society (Iqbal et al., 2012, p.20). But Pakistani women and children are facing lack of security in various forms that affect their life options. Their educational attainment is also contingent on the security in and on the way to the school.

This insecurity or harassment has been studied by several scholars with several names such as harassment, sexual harassment, street harassment, and child sexual abuse in schools. These different terms are used when the insecurity or harassment has been studied in different places (such as workplaces, streets, schools, universities, etc.) and among different victims (such as women workers, students in universities, colleges or schools, or children in institutions of early childhood education) (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan [HECP], n.d.; Hill & Kearl, 2011; Kamal, Hussain & Khalil, 2003; Musharaf et al., 2015). Hill & Kearl(2011) studied students' sexual harassment in high and middle schools of United States identifying its negative effects on students' school performance. Sexual harassment of the female students and workers is also common in Pakistani society. Kamal and his fellows (2003) studied the phenomenon in the context of young women's experiences in the workplaces in Pakistan. Musharaf et al. (2015) explored the dynamics of harassment of young medical students in Pakistani Medical colleges. The Higher Education Commission has developed a policy to deal with the issue of harassment in universities and institutions of higher learning (HECP, n.d.).

Social Policy and Development Centre (2014) has studied the occurrence of sexual harassment in public transports, where young female students travel to go to school and face harassment on their way. Akram and his fellows (2020) have identified the widespread street harassment among female college students in district Kalat. They reported that 42.4% female students reported to experience harassment occasionally and 25.2% reported to experience it frequently. Female students face harassment on their way to college (44.5%), during extracurricular activities (26.9%) and when going out with friends (26.1%). The forms of street harassment reported by students are catcalling, stalking, wolf-whistling, winging, touching or pinching and asking for (phone) numbers (Akram et al., 2020, pp.50-51). The street harassment girl students' face on the way to educational institutes does not only cause depression, anxiety and stress among them but also makes their access to and continuity of education difficult (Suleman et al., 2015, p. 103).

Students, especially female students do not face insecurity and harassment only on their way to school or college, but they experience harassment and abuse within school premises in Pakistan. Khwaja, Khoja & Motwani (2015) have found that 33.7% of school students were physically and 57% verbally abused in schools of three major cities of Pakistan namely Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta during the last twelve months. Ali (2018) has also identified the widespread child sexual abuse in their early years of education. He

reported several incidences of abuse done to students in schools and hostels in different cities of Pakistan (Ali, 2018,pp.121-122). Recently, Pakistani media has reported and discussed the growing trend of incidents of harassment of female students in educational institutions (Chughtai, 2018; Falak, 2020; Jalil, 2020; Khilji, 2021).

This insecurity and harassment is negatively affecting students' educational performance, continuity and achievement. In this context of recently growing concern about insecurity and harassment negatively affecting students' education in Pakistani society, this paper focuses on gender differences in school dropout children's reports of getting dropped out of school due to insecurity and harassment they face in and on the way to school in Sindh province. The findings of this research may help the policy makers and legislatures to better understand the negative effects of insecurity and harassment on girl child's education.

Review of Literature

Chitrali, Anwar & Nabahat (2014, p.85) have identified the cultural impediments to girls' education, especially severely constrained mobility of girls than boys in Pakistani society. Boys are usually moving unaccompanied. But it is not possible for young girls to move unaccompanied (Chitrali et al., 2014, pp. 85-86). Sathar, Lloyd, Mete & Haque (2003) have explained that this restriction for boys' and girls' mobility has different reasons and justification by parents. Parents consider places unsafe for boys only due to their personal safety and physical harm. But for girls the safety and security is more connected with the family reputation and honor.

Zareen (2020) has studied the role of an insecure environment on the way from home to educational institution on education of 14-16 year old female secondary school students in Lahore Pakistan. She found that the insecure environment on the way is a significant negative predictor of academic performance among female students. The study proves that 'in insecure societal circumstances; for instance, roadside harassment and unusual activities, etc. for school going female students is a negative predictor of academic performance' (Zareen, 2020). Tusinska (2020, p.239) also counted restricted mobility of girls as a cause of their poor educational standing. As girls become adults (by reaching their first menstruation) parents start fearing from the distance of school due to potential threats of harassment on the way.

Awan & Malik (2020, p. 325) identified insecurity as a major barrier in the way of girls' education in Pakistan because parents do not send girls to school due to fear of harassment. They do not take risks and feel safe by keeping girls at home and curtailing their education outside home. Suleman et al. (2015, p.100) found that 83.4% of head teachers, 84.2% of teachers and 83.2% of students agree that long distance of the school

affects girls' secondary education. They found that 73.4% of head teachers, 75% of teachers, and 75.7% students agree that parents do not allow daughters to go to school in case of long distance (Suleman et al., 2015, p. 103). They have found that 96.5%of the teachers and students agree that lack of proper security arrangements is a factor affecting girls' education in District Karak Pakistan (Suleman et al., 2015, p.106).

Sexual harassment of women is one of the several forms of violence Pakistani women face frequently in different contexts ranging from home to the school and workplace. It is defined as 'unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008, p. 3). Kelly & Regan (2006, p.5) also explained it as 'unwanted sexual attention, requests for sexual favors or unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior of sexual nature'. Hill and Kearl (2011,p. 6) have explained that the term 'sexual harassment' originally was coined for explaining the behavior in the workplace, but it 'also refers to unwanted sexual conduct at school'. This may include verbal or written comments, making gestures, displaying pictures or images, physical coercion, or any combination of these. They further explained that sexual harassment interferes with students' education and educational opportunities.

Harassment of women and girls is commonly occurring in all contexts from home to the educational institutions and workplaces in Pakistani society. Kamal and her fellows (2002) have studied harassment of girls and women in workplaces highlighting its negative social psychological and economic effect on victim women. Similarly, Musharaf and her fellows (2015) have explored the dynamics of harassment among medical students. Khwaja, Khoja & Motwani (2015) studied abuse of school students in Pakistan. Rahim and his fellows (2021) explored the child sexual abuse suggesting that it is a pervasive problem in Pakistani schools.

Besides the workplace and educational institutions, Social Policy and Development Center (2014) showed that this problem exists in society on every street and in public transport of metropolitan city, Karachi. Social Policy and Development Center (2014,p. 27) in their report on harassment of women in public transport found that 49% students experienced harassment sometimes, in addition to 20%studentswho reported it many times and 13%studentswhoexperienced it at least once. Warda Musharraf and her fellows (2015, pp. 8-12) reported that 20.7% of students in medical colleges experienced sexual harassment in colleges. They reported that 32.4% of female students as compared to 6.9% of male students have reported to experience sexual harassment in medical colleges. It shows that more female students than male students experience harassment in educational institutions. These statistics aptly show that students face harassment on their way to school and in school as well. They experience insecurity on streets and in public transports on their way to school and college.

Although, Pakistan government has already passed laws to curb sexual harassment. Pakistan Penal Code section 509 declares sexual harassment as a crime. The Criminal Law (amendment) Act 2010 and The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 are also addressing sexual harassment. The section 377 of the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act 2016 has declared the sexual abuse of persons less than 18 years of age as crime. But these laws do not make the situation any better. The situation is becoming critical as the incidences of harassment and abuse are reported from all sorts of educational institutions; including the premier educational institutions to the shabby buildings of schools in poor localities, from private schools to government schools and religious *madarsas*, from primary schools to the university level (Falak, 2020; Khilji, 2021).

This phenomenon is not limited to Pakistan. Research has shown that the problem of students' harassment exists in all societies around the world. Almost 80% of school students in America were reported to have experienced sexual harassment at least once in their school life (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1993). Young, Grey and Boyd (2008) also reported that 40% to 50% of students experience some sort of sexual harassment during a single school year in America. Similarly, Hill & Kearl (2011,pp. 10-11) reported that sexual harassment is widespread among middle school and high school students in America; as 48% of the middle and high school students during the year 2010-11 have experienced sexual harassment at school. Among them, girls (56%) are more likely to experience sexual harassment at school than boys (40%). This gender gap enlarges in higher age groups and higher classes; as in 12th grade 62% of girls than 39% of boys experienced sexual harassment in America (Hill & Kearl, 2011, p.13).

Akhter (2013) identified the role of eve teasing (i.e. teasing/harassment of young girls by young males on streets and public places) in school dropout or poor educational and job prospects for girls in Bangladesh. She identified that eve teasing has negative impacts on victims; like compelling them to dropout from the school, reduce mobility and psychological problems (Akhter, 2013, p.7). Nahar and her colleagues (2013, p.82) found that girl students do not enjoy the erotic comments about their appearance or the physical touch by unknown boys while they pass on the ways in public places. It gives them a constant feeling of insecurity. Further, they fear reporting it to anyone because of the fear of being blamed for provoking it.

Mwakipesile (2015, p.43) in his study in Tanzania found that 42.5% of girl students agree that they are harassed by boys. He considered that these factors affect girls' performance in school. The long distance of school creates anxiety among parents about sexual safeguard of their daughters in their way to and from school'. Derdar (2014, p.93) also identified that long distance of school compels students and parents to decide to leave school in rural Morocco. This long distance from school becomes more problematic when parents think about the security of their girls on the way to school. He found that

parents make their girls leave school early because they fear that somebody will sexually harass their girls on the way to school. Girl students also reported to have left school because they are harassed on the way to and from school (Derdar, 2014, p.93). Parents are also found to make their girl children withdraw from education due to pervert conduct of young teachers (Derdar, 2014, p.94).

The insecurity and harassment students face on the way to school and inside school negatively affects their social, psychological and educational development. Sexual harassment predicts low self-esteem and creates feelings of tension, anger, and anxiety among victims. It interferes in students' performance and results in absenteeism. Anila Kamal and her colleagues (2002) also identified negative psychological, physical and emotional effects on victims. Juvonen et al. (2000) in their research study have shown that self-perception of victimization due to peer harassment among students affects psychological maladjustment among school students through affecting loneliness and self-worth issues among them. In turn this problematic psychological adjustment affects students' school outcomes, absenteeism, and their social adjustment.

Hill & Kearl (2011,p. 23) also found emotional and psychological impacts of sexual harassment on students that effects their education. They reported that students either did not want to go to school, felt sick, found it hard to study, stayed at home, got in trouble at school, or switched schools (Hill & Kearl, 2011, p. 23). Mahmood (2012, p.7) identified that the fear of sexual harassment can be reduced with the presence of more number of female teachers in school. But the irony is that most of the Pakistani schools in rural areas have one teacher that is more often male one. It makes families stop sending their girls to school (Mahmood, 2012, p. 7).

The above reviewed literature has shown the prevalence of harassment and insecurity among school students in and on the way to school. It also highlights the negative effects of insecurity and harassment on victim students' educational prospects in Pakistani society. In this context, this research paper addresses the difference of male and female students' school dropout due to insecurity and harassment they face inand on the way to school.

Objective

To explore gender differences in school dropout due to insecurity and harassment on the way to and in school in Sindh.

Hypothesis

H_1. More female school dropout children report insecurity and harassment on the way to and in school as a cause of their school dropout in Sindh.

Research Methodology

This study is based on quantitative research. A survey of school dropout children is done with the help of a questionnaire. The questionnaire included a three items scale used to assess insecurity and harassment as a cause of children's dropout from school. The answer categories of the items were designed as five point Likert scale. The respondents of the research study were school dropout children randomly selected from six divisions of Sindh province. Total 5641 male and female school dropout children were recruited as research participants. The data collected was coded and entered in the computer. The collected data was statistically analyzed to test the above mentioned hypothesis. The t-test was applied to identify the difference between male and female students' reports of the insecurity and harassment in and on the way to school as being the cause of their dropout from school.

Data Presentation and Analysis

School Dropout Due to Insecurity in School

Majority of the respondents disagreed(i.e. 52.8% strongly disagreed and another 36% disagreed) that they left school due to insecurity in school. Still some of them agreed (i.e. 3.5% agree and another 2.3% strongly agree) that they left school due to insecurity in school. More girls agreed (i.e. 4.9% agree and 2.9% strongly agree) than boys (i.e.2.9% agree and 2.1% strongly agree) to have left school due to insecurity in school.

Table: 1
School dropout due to insecurity in school (%)

	Gender		Total
	Male	**Female**	
Strongly Disagree	53.0	52.4	52.8
Disagree	37.2	32.9	36.0
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4.8	6.9	5.4
Agree	2.9	4.9	3.5
Strongly Agree	2.1	2.9	2.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data.

School Dropout Due to Insecurity on the Way to School

Majority of the respondents disagreed (i.e.48.8% strongly disagreed and another 34.4% disagreed) that they left school due to insecurity on the way from home to school. Still some of them agreed (i.e. 3.8% agree and another 6.9% strongly agree) that they left

school due to insecurity on the way from home to school. More girls agreed (i.e. 6.3% agree and 7.8% strongly agree) than boys (i.e.2.8% agree and 6.3% strongly agree) to have left school due to insecurity on the way from home to school.

Table: 2
Dropout of school due to insecurity on the way from home to school (%)

	Gender		Total
	Male	**Female**	
Strongly Disagree	49.7	46.8	48.8
Disagree	35.6	31.6	34.4
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	5.7	7.5	6.2
Agree	2.8	6.3	3.8
Strongly Agree	6.3	7.8	6.7
	100.0	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data.

School Dropout Due to Harassment in and on the Way to School

Majority of the respondents disagreed (i.e. 50.2% strongly disagreed and another 37.5% disagreed) that they left school due to harassment in and on the way to school. Still some of them agreed (i.e. 3.3% agree and another 3% strongly agree) that they left school due to harassment in and on the way to school. More girls agreed (i.e. 4% agree and 4.5% strongly agree) as compared to boys (i.e.3% agree and 2.4% strongly agree) to have left school due to harassment in and on the way to school.

Table: 3
Dropped out of school because of insecurity due to harassment (%)

	Gender		Total
	Male	**Female**	
Strongly Disagree	50.6	49.2	50.2
Disagree	38.5	35.2	37.5
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	5.6	7.0	6.0
Agree	3.0	4.0	3.3
Strongly Agree	2.4	4.5	3.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data.

Gender Differences in School Dropout Due to Insecurity and Harassment

The results of the statistical test show that the mean score of the male school dropout children (N=4032) on the scale of insecurity and harassment is *M*=1.7118 with

SD=0.90832andstandard error mean as 0.01430. The mean score of female school dropout children (N=1609) on the same scale of insecurity and harassment is *M*=1.8303 with *SD*=0.94844 and standard error mean as0.02364. The mean score of the female children is slightly higher.

Table: 4
Group statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Insecurity and harassment	**Male**	4032	1.7118	.90832	.01430
	Female	1609	1.8303	.94844	.02364

Source: Survey data.

The results of the independent sample t-test show a statistically significant difference in the scores of male and female school dropout children on the scale of insecurity and harassment as a cause of their school dropout, $t(2848.30)= -4.289$, $p=.000$. The above shown mean scores of the male and female school dropout children confirm the nature of the difference that the female school dropout children are scoring higher on the scale as compared to their male counterparts.

Table: 5
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
Insecurity and harassment	Equal variances assumed	14.897	.000	-4.369	5639	.000	-.11852	.02713	-.17170	-.06534
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.289	2848.303	.000	-.11852	.02763	-.17271	-.06434

Source: Survey Data.

On the basis of the above results, rejecting the null hypothesis, the above cited alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted. The mean score of female school dropout children was found significantly higher on the scale of insecurity and harassment on the way to and in

school as a cause of their school dropout as compared to the score of male school dropout children. It shows that more female school dropout children reported insecurity and harassment on the way to and in school asa cause of their school dropout in Sindh.

Conclusions

This research paper was focused on gender differences in reports of insecurity and harassment in and on the way to school as a cause of school dropout among children in Sindh. The results of the study has shown that more girls than boys have reported to have left school due to insecurity in school, insecurity on the way to school and harassment in and on the way to schools. The results of t-test have confirmed that there is statistically significant gender difference in the mean scores on the scale of insecurity and harassment in and on the way to school as reported cause of children's school dropout in Sindh. The results showed that girl school dropout children than boys have scored a higher mean score on the scale. Thus, this research study found that more girls have reported to have left school due to insecurity and harassment as compared to boys in Sindh.

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