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Gendered Patterns of School Dropout Due to Child's Unpaid Work in Family in Sindh

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Abstract

Children's involvement in work has the potential to affect their school attendance across the globe. The present research is particularly focusing on differences in male and female children's school dropout due to involvement in unpaid family work in Sindh, Pakistan. This is a cross-sectional research done with a one-time collection of data from 5641 school dropout children in Sindh during the year 2018-19. The statistical analysis of quantitative data is done by applying the Independent Samples t-test. The survey of school dropout children in Sindh is done with the help of a closed-ended questionnaire. The data was collected to assess school dropout children's responses to their involvement in unpaid work in the family as a cause of their dropout from school. The study found that 15.9% of students agreed to have left school due to domestic chores. Almost the same proportion (15%) left due to younger siblings' related childcare responsibilities, and 20.9% left the school due to working in the family field or with domestic cattle. The t-test results show a significant difference in male and female children leaving school due to unpaid work in the family. It is inferred that more girls leave school due to their involvement in unpaid work in the family as compared to boys in Sindh. The results of the study will inform effective educational policy development in Sindh.

Keywords: Domestic Chores, Child Care, Unpaid Family Work, School Dropout, Sindh.

تلخیص

بچوں کی کام میں شمولیت انکی اسکول حاضری کو متاثر کرتی ہے۔اس تحقیق کا مخصوص مرکز سندھ کے بچوں اور بچیوں میں بلا اجرت گھریلو کام کے باعث اسکول ترک کرنے کی شرع میں فرق ہے۔ یہ ایک محدود دورانیہ کی مقداری معطیات کے تجزیے پر مبنی تحقیق ہے جس میں سال 19-2018 میں 5641 اسکول ترک کرنے والے بچوں سے مطعیات جمع کیے گئے ہیں۔ حاصل شدہ مطعیات کے شماریاتی تجزیے کے لیے انڈیپینڈنٹ سامپل ٹی ٹیسٹ کا استعمال کیا گیا ہے۔ اس میں سوالنامے کی مدد سے سندھ کے تارکین مدرسہ بچوں کا سروے کیا گیا ہے۔ بچوں میں بلا اجرت گھریلو کام میں شمولیت کے باعث اسکول ترک کرنے سے متعلق معطیات کو جمع کیا گیا ہے۔ اس تحقیق کے نتائج سے واضح ہوتا ہے

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کہ سندھ کے تقریباً 16 فیصد تارکین مدرسہ طلبہ نے گھریلو کام کاج کی ذمہ داریوں کے باعث اسکول چھوڑنے پر اتفاق کیا۔ جبکہ 15 فیصد طلبہ نے گھر میں دوسرے بچوں کی دیکھ بھال کے باعث اسکول ترک کیا۔ اور تقریباً 21 فیصد بچوں نے گھر کے کھیتوں میں یا گھریلو جانوروں کے کام سے متعلق ذمہ داریوں کے باعث اسکول ترک کیا ہے۔ ٹی ٹیسٹ کے نتائج سے واضح ہوتا ہے کے لڑکوں اور لڑکیوں کے بلا اجرت انجام دیئے جانے والے گھریلو کام کاج کی ذمہ داریوں کے باعث اسکول ترک کرنے کی شرح میں فرق پایا گیا ہے۔ سندھ میں لڑکوں کی نسبت زیادہ تعداد میں لڑکیاں بلا اجرت گھریلو ذمہ داریوں کے باعث اسکول ترک کرتی ہیں۔ تحقیق کے نتائج سندھ میں بہتر تعلیمی پالیسی بنانے کے لیے معلومات فراہم کریں گے۔

کلیدی الفاظ: گھریلو کام کاج، بچوں کی دیکھ بھال، بلا اجرت گھریلو کام، ترک مدرسہ، سندھ۔

Introduction

All societies have some basic social institutions; such as family, religion, politics, work, recreation, and education (Stolley, 2005). These social institutions make society work properly and remain in order. They are interlinked with each other. The malfunctioning of one institution affects the functioning of all other social institutions. Consequently, it affects the functioning and order of the whole society and the social and economic development of the people living in that society (Stolley, 2005).

Education is one of these essential social institutions. United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights has declared education as a human right of every person. It is not only a human right and need of citizens in any particular society. Its quality and extent of provision to all citizens equally are necessary for the proper development of human capital of people. All the contemporary societies are paying attention to and striving to provide compulsory universal education to its all citizens. To achieve this aim, like all other States throughout the globe, Pakistan is taking necessary measures to remove all gender, religion, caste, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic conditions-based barriers, and discrimination in access to education for all of its citizens (National Assembly of Pakistan, 1973).

Besides, the universal efforts to achieve education for all citizens, globally, the elimination of gender discrimination and empowerment of women have become parallel agendas followed by almost all states throughout the globe. Despite these efforts, due to social and cultural barriers, still common women and girls in almost all societies in the world are far behind in achieving their rights and necessary resources like education to

develop their human capital equally as men in these corresponding societies (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Pakistan is also not an exception in this regard. Pakistan is determined to achieve equality for its all citizen in terms of their social and legal status. Pakistan is striving to protect women's rights for gender equality and equal educational provision for all citizens (National Assembly of Pakistan, 1973). Pakistan, since its independence in 1947, has experienced various regimes implementing different ever better policies and programs to achieve the aim of universal primary education and to remove gender-based differences in access and attainment of education for all its citizens (Ahsan, 2003).

Pakistan has made commitments in its constitutional provisions to achieve Education for All and equality of all citizens without any discrimination. Articles 25 to 27 of the constitution of Pakistan ensure gender equality in different aspects of life in the country. Article 25A has made the state bound to provide free compulsory education to all young citizens of 5 to 16 years of age. Despite these clear and commanding constitutional commitments, Pakistan is far behind in achieving equality among genders in different aspects of public and private life (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Education is also one aspect where not only the goal of compulsory education for all is far behind being achieved, but gender equality among school-going boys and girls is not yet achieved (ASER, 2012; Bajwa, 2011).

Overall state of education in Pakistan is not good (National Education Management Information System, 2017; 2018). The education sector is facing several challenges. The education sector is struggling with problems like lack of budgetary allocations, lack of political will, poor policies, insufficient infrastructure, shortage of technically trained human resources, improper syllabus and textbooks, etc. The communities, parents, and individual children are not able to access education due to their poor social and economic conditions, culture and tradition-related barriers, gender stereotypes, non-availability of proper educational facilities and teachers, different gender-based preferences within the family, etc. All these barriers lead to difficulties in achieving the set targets of national and international commitments (e.g. Education for All, Millennium Development Goals, and Sustainable Development Goals and corresponding national action plans developed for education and gender equality) in the country.

High rates of school dropout of children, especially of girls, is one long-persisting problem that curtails the achievement of universal compulsory education and gender equality in educational outcomes of its citizens in Pakistan. Despite the increased enrolment especially of girls in schools, a large number of students (more girls than boys) once enrolled dropped out due to various reasons without completing the educational cycle. There are many factors that individually and collectively force a child to leave school early without completing education (Shahidul & Karim, 2015; Shah, Haider &

Taj, 2019; Zarif, 2012; Zarif, Haider, Ahmed & Bano, 2014). These factors also affect the dropout of girls and boys differently. Involvement in unpaid domestic chores, care work, and contributing family work done in the field or family business affects girls and women more than boys or men. World Economic Forum's (2022, p. 7) analysis of data from 33 countries in the year 2019 has shown the gender gap in care work; women spent 55% proportion of total work in care work in comparison to men who only performed 19% of their total work in unpaid care work.

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2019, pp. 73-74) highlights that more than 15% of the women in the informal employment sector are contributing family workers. It is almost double that of men; as only 8.1% of men working in the informal sector are working as contributing family workers. These statistics show that women and girls are more involved in unpaid work within the family such as domestic chores (including cleaning, cooking, washing, fetching water, etc.), child care and care of the sick, working in the family field or business all around the globe, in general, and in Pakistan, in particular. This unpaid work conditions their life options such as school enrolment, attendance, punctuality, and ultimate level of educational achievement.

Reducing the rate of school dropout is essential for achieving the educational objectives of the country. It is only possible if the causes of and factors affecting school dropout among children in Pakistani society are fully understood. School dropout is a complex phenomenon. It results from a large number of factors (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Covering all the causes of school dropout in one single research is not possible. Therefore, this research is particularly focusing on the child's involvement in unpaid work in the family as a potential cause of school dropout.

Child's involvement in paid and unpaid labour within and outside the home is one important factor that leads to the respective child's dropping out of school (Dida, Obae & Mungai, 2014; Ersado, 2005; Guarcello, Lyon & Rosati, 2015; Nyatuka, 2012; Singh & Mukherjee, 2018). Mostly boys leave school because of their involvement in paid child labour outside the home. While girls leave school due to the load of unpaid work of domestic chores and child care within the family. As the focus of the existing literature has mainly remained on the effects of child's involvement in paid work, there is not much empirical evidence available to understand the difference in the effect of unpaid work in families on school dropout of girls and boys in Pakistani context (Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Gul, Gulshan & Ali, 2013; Guarcello, Lyon, & Rosati, 2015). Therefore, this research specifically focuses on the gender differences in male and female children leaving school due to their involvement in unpaid work in their family in Sindh province.

Review of Literature

Pakistan's constitution defines the equality of all citizens in Article 25A. In Article 25(1) all citizens are declared equal before the law having the right to equal legal protections.

Any discrimination due to sex of the citizens is prohibited in Article 25(2). Article 25(3) allows states to take measures to promote gender equality for citizens. Article 25(A) has been inserted to protect equal educational rights for all citizens. The education for 5 to 16-year-old children has been declared as free and compulsory.

Contrary to constitutional commitments, educational statistics show a wider gender gap in terms of educational indicators. The literacy rate among women is lower at the national and regional levels. As per the statistics provided by the Pakistan Living Standard Measurement Survey (Government of Pakistan, 2020, p. 19), the literacy rate is only 49% among women as compared to 71% among men in Pakistan in the year 2018-19. The rate is further lower among women in the lowest income quintile (i.e. 23%) as compared to the women in the highest income quintile (i.e. 75%) (Government of Pakistan, 2020, p. 19).

It is reported that more girls (i.e. 29%) as compared to boys (i.e.17%) are out of school at the primary level in Pakistan (Government of Balochistan, 2018, p. 56). Further, in the age group prescribed by the constitution for the provision of free compulsory primary education (i.e. 5 to 16 years), more girls (i.e. 49%) as compared to boys (i.e. 40%) are out of school (National Education Management Information System, 2018, pp. 23-24). The highest rate of out-of-school children is in Balochistan (i.e. 54% among primary school-aged children and 70% among primary and secondary school-aged children) (National Education Management Information System, 2018, p. 25). To show the gender gap, Balochistan has been reported to have 65% of girls (as compared to 44% of boys) out of school in the province (Government of Balochistan, 2018, p. 56). Sindh has the second highest rate for out-of-school children (i.e. 41.56%). The National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) (2019, p. 16) has reported a higher net school attendance rate among boys than girls.

Among out-of-school children, the category of school-dropped-out children is a critical indicator of educational wastage. The survival rate at class five in Pakistan is reported as 66% in the year 2015-16 (which means only 66 out of 100 children in that cohort could reach class five) (National Education Management Information System, 2017, p. 26). The government of Pakistan (2020) has reported that Pakistan has 6.57% of out-of-school children as school dropouts. Punjab comprises the highest proportion of (i.e. more than 7%) out-of-school children as those children who dropped out of school. Balochistan has been reported to have 4.7% of the out-of-school children as school dropouts. Sindh has more than 6 percent of out-of-school children as school dropouts (Government of Pakistan, 2020, pp. 18-19).

The statistics provided by UNESCO (2020) show that 29.5% of school dropouts at the primary level and 14.39% at the secondary level in Pakistan. The number of students

dropping out without completing class ten is very high (i.e. 75%) (ASER, 2012). It is also reported that only 28% of the girls enrolled in school in 2004-5 could reach class 10 in the year 2013-14. It shows a high rate of girls getting dropped out of school without completing their higher secondary school.

School-going children's engagement in paid or unpaid work affects their education. There is sufficient research done on poverty and paid child labour resulting in consequent drop out of the child from school (Farah & Upadhyay, 2017; Gul, Gulshan & Ali, 2013; Guarcello, Lyon & Rosati, 2015). This research study mainly focuses on a child's unpaid work in the family as a factor affecting his/her education.

Dida, Obae, and Mungai's (2014) research found a relationship between children's involvement in domestic roles and their academic performance. They argue that the more the child is involved in domestic roles, the more their educational performance at school is negatively affected as they come late and try to school and cannot complete their assignments. They contend that girls are more affected by these domestic roles. Not only informal domestic work within the family, but girls' involvement in formal domestic work outside the family to contribute to family income is common in countries like the Philippines, Ghana, and Ecuador and it results in a lack of educational opportunities for them (Amorim, Murray & Bland, 2004).

Nyatuka (2012) has identified a link between children's absenteeism and unpunctuality at school due to their participation in domestic chores with their poor academic achievement in Kenya. They listed washing utensils, preparing meals, fetching water, cleaning the house, and selling milk as the main reasons for their reaching school late. While, housework, caring for young siblings, selling and buying goods in the market, caring for the sick, preparing land, weeding or harvesting crops, and looking after animals are resulting in absenteeism among them.

Woldehanna, Endale, Hamory and Baird's (2021) research in Ethiopia also found a negative relationship between adolescents' educational outcomes and their involvement in paid or unpaid work. They explain that younger children are largely involved in domestic chores which decreases their educational outcomes and caregiving is also significantly associated with absenteeism for young female children. Chinyoka and Naidu's (2014) research identifies several household-specific factors including much of the time they spend doing domestic chores negatively affecting girl children's academic performance in Zimbabwe.

Girl children's involvement in household work and child care is also identified as a point of concern for their education in South Asian countries. Arafat, Ahmed, and Ismail

(2021) highlighted that families engage their girls in household responsibilities and care for siblings which affects school dropout among high school girls in Bangladesh.

Sikdar and Mukherjee's (2012, pp. 28-29) research in the Indian context found that 12% of children of elementary school age (17.8% girls and 5.6% boys) never got enrolled in school because of attending domestic duties. They reported that 9.4% of school dropout females of secondary school age were not able to continue their education due to household duties. Singh and Mukherjee (2017) also found domestic chores as a significant predicting variable for secondary school completion of children. They found that the widest gender gap is found among children who are involved in domestic chores for more than two hours in India.

Abbasi and Saeed (2012, p. 335) highlighted that utilizing female children's help in household work is a common occurrence in Pakistani families due to their submissive socialization. They further identified that women's restricted mobility channeled them to perform more work inside the four walls of the household. While boys are encouraged and motivated to perform works about the sphere outside the home. Shah, Haider, and Taj's (2019) research found that 80% of the educational managers in Pakistan think that a child drops out of school because he/she helps parents with domestic chores.

Gul, Hayat, and Ahmed (2021) also identified in their research that 70% of the teachers have considered domestic chores as a cause of school dropout children in the Swabi district. Shah and Ayaz (2015) also identified that educational managers and primary school teachers in Bannu and Laki Marwat districts considered the heavy load of household work as one of the reasons for the school dropout at primary level schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is reported that 43.2% of all households including 61% of rural households in Pakistan own domestic cattle (NIPS, 2019, p. 21). This requires a lot of unpaid labour to look after these farm animals in the family.

Guarcello, Lyon, and Rosati (2015, p. 10) highlight that the work male and female children perform varies according to their traditional social role; resulting in girls being engaged in household chores and boys being involved in earning activities outside the home. According to the Pakistan demographic and health survey 2017-18, 7.3% of females and 6.3% of males among the 5-24 year school dropout population in Pakistan have narrated the reason for their school dropout as they were needed to work household or farm (NIPS, 2019, p. 10).

Shahidul and Karim (2015) also identified that girls are more engaged in household chores and child care in various countries. They look after younger siblings. The chance of childcare responsibility for female students becomes higher if there are fewer than 6-year-old children present in the house (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Girls are said to have

more responsibility for household work than boys; rural girls are more like to do household chores than their urban counterparts (Ersado, 2005).

Zarif's (2012, p. 149) study of school dropouts in Kashmore has identified that 60% of teachers, parents, and community members agree that children drop out of school because they need to remain at home to help parents and family in the household. The same findings are also reported in the context of District Thatta where 60% of the respondents agree that children remain at home to help parents with family work and leave school without completing their education (Zarif et al., 2014, p. 163). Gul, Gulshan, and Ali (2013, p. 122) also confirmed that children leave school due to the responsibilities of work at home. ACTED (2015, p. 11) highlights that parents do not send their children to school and keep girls at home to look after their siblings and take help of elder children in earning activities.

Shahab and Sherani (2015) report from the PSLM survey 2014 that 12% of girls and 9% of boys in Pakistan do not attend school due to their need to work at home. They also report that higher figures are reported for Sindh where girls are required to look after younger siblings and to work in fields. Toor and Parveen (2004, p. 142) relate this to the financial condition of the families, highlighting that poor families keep their girls at home and do not attend school to care for younger siblings and to work in the family business. Khatoon, Khowaja, and Buriro (2017, p. 207) highlighting the problem of affordability of education for poor families explain that 70% of parents agree that their children help them in daily work, while 60% agree that their children are engaged in domestic chores.

Still, the majority of the research studies done in the general context of Pakistan or the particular context of Sindh do not inform with empirical data from the field about the gendered effects of a child's unpaid work in the family on school dropout or out-of-school children (Abbasi & Saeed, 2012; Bajwa, 2011; Habib & Yahya, 2015; Pradhan et al., 2018). This research paper particularly focuses on highlighting the gendered patterns of school dropout among male and female students in Sindh due to their involvement in different categories of unpaid work in families such as domestic chores, child care, and work in family farms or fields.

Objective

1. To explore gender differences in school dropout due to unpaid work in families in Sindh.

Hypothesis

H_1: The mean score acquired by girls for their school dropout due to unpaid family work is higher than the score of boys in Sindh.

Research Methodology

This study was designed as quantitative research to identify gender differences in school dropout children's self-reporting of their school dropout due to unpaid work in the family. The concept of unpaid work in the family was operationalized through three more tangible sub-categories of unpaid work commonly done in families; namely domestic chores (i.e. cooking and cleaning), child care (i.e. child care of younger siblings), and work in agricultural and farming activates (i.e. looking after of domestic cattle and work in the family field).

The survey method was adopted to collect data from school dropout children in Sindh. A sample of 5641 school dropout children from 22 districts of six divisions of the province of Sindh was selected through a multi-stage random sampling technique. The selected sample included 4032 boys and 1609 girls. The data collection tool to be used in the survey was developed by the researcher. The tool was based on a closed-ended questionnaire with items having answer categories developed on 5 5-point Likert scale. The tool was pre-tested and standardized before data collection in the field. Factor analysis of the tool showed that the items were finely loaded as one factor namely "School dropout due to unpaid work in the family", without any cross-loadings, having values of factor loadings as 0.894, 0.914, and 0.751. The reliability of the tool was calculated as Cronbach Alpha 0.893. The data was coded and entered into the computer. The data was statistically analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) by applying an Independent Samples t-test to test the hypothesis stated above.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data was analyzed through cross tabulation to assess the gendered patterns in school dropout of children to involvement in unpaid work in the family and results are presented below.

School Dropout Due to Load of Domestic Chores

Table 1 shows that almost 15.9% of school dropout children in Sindh reported leaving school due to household work in families done for helping their mothers in cleaning and cooking etc. The gender gap is visible as more school-dropped-out girls (i.e. 27.6%) than boys (i.e. 11.1%) reported to have left school due to their involvement in domestic chores for helping their mother. Thus, involvement in household chores appeared to be a cause of leaving school among more than a quarter of girl school dropped out children in Sindh.

Table-1
Helping mother in cleaning and cooking, etc. as a cause of school dropout (%)

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Strongly Disagree	46.9	38.3	44.5
Disagree	37.5	30.2	35.4
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4.4	3.9	4.3
Agree	4.5	11.7	6.6
Strongly Agree	6.6	15.9	9.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

School Dropout Due to Load of Child Care

Table 2 shows that almost 15% of school-dropped-out children in Sindh have reported leaving school due to their involvement in childcare activities performed to look after their younger siblings. The gender gap is visible as more girls school dropped out (i.e. 22.1%) than boys (12.2%) are reporting to have left school due to their involvement in childcare activities to look after their younger siblings. Thus, the number of girls leaving school due to childcare activities appears higher than boys in Sindh.

Table-2
Looking after younger siblings as a cause of school dropout (%)

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Strongly Disagree	45.4	38.1	43.3
Disagree	38.1	35.4	37.3
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4.3	4.4	4.3
Agree	5.2	9.9	6.5
Strongly Agree	7.0	12.2	8.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

School Dropout Due to Load of Work in Family Farming and Agriculture

Table 3 shows that 20.9% of the children reported agreeing with their involvement in work with domestic cattle or family fields as one of the reasons for their dropping out of school. There is not much difference in the percentage of boys (20.9%) and girls (20.9%) reporting to have left school due to their involvement in work looking after the domestic cattle and working in the family field. It shows that male and female school-going children are equally involved in unpaid work of looking after domestic cattle and the family field in the province of Sindh.

Table-3
Look after domestic cattle or work in the family field as a cause of school dropout (%)

	Gender		Total
	Male	**Female**	
Strongly Disagree	43.6	38.0	42.0
Disagree	31.2	36.2	32.6
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	4.4	5.0	4.5
Agree	8.1	8.8	8.3
Strongly Agree	12.8	12.1	12.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Gender difference in school dropout due to children's involvement in unpaid family work

Table 4 shows that male school dropped outs (N=4032) in Sindh have scored a lower mean score of *M*=1.9731 (*df*= 1.11104) as compared to the girl school dropped outs (N=1609) who are scoring a higher mean score of *M*=2.2670 (*df*=1.28279) on the scale. It shows that the involvement in unpaid work in the family is affecting school dropout more frequently among girl children in Sindh.

Table-4
Gender-wise numbers, means, and standard deviations

	Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
School dropout due to unpaid work in the family	**Male**	4032	1.9731	1.11104	.01750
	Female	1609	2.2670	1.28279	.03198

The results of the t-test presented in Table 5 as $t(2621.113)=-8.063$, $p<0.00$ show that there is a statistically significant difference in male and female student's means scores on the scale. The mean scores shown above indicate the direction of this statistically significant difference in mean scores of both genders. It is found that female school dropout children in Sindh are scoring higher means on the scale of their involvement in unpaid family work as the cause of their school dropout as compared to their male counterparts.

Table-5
Gender-wise difference in school dropout due to child's unpaid work in the family

		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
School dropout due to unpaid work in the Family	Equal variances assumed	116.605	.000	-8.573	5639	.000	-.29391	.03428	-.36111	-.22670
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.063	2621.113	.000	-.29391	.03645	-.36539	-.22243

Therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) states that the mean score of girls for their school dropout due to unpaid family work is higher than the score of boys in Sindh. It shows that more female school dropouts report having left school without completing their education due to their involvement in unpaid family work.

Discussion

Contrary to Pakistan's constitutional commitment to providing free compulsory primary education to all citizens of 5 to 16 years of age (National Assembly of Pakistan, 1973), the results of this study found evidence that still, 15% to 21% of the children in Sindh left school, leaving aside all other reasons, only due to their involvement in unpaid work within the family. It affirms repeated claims about the poor state of education (National Education Management Information System, 2017; 2018) and the high rate of school dropout in the country (ASER 2012; UNESCO, 2020).

Providing empirical evidence in the particular context of Sindh, this study shows the validity of the previous research findings from across the world that children's involvement in paid and unpaid work has the potential to affect their education (Amorim, Murray & Bland, 2004; Arafat, Ahmed & Ismail, 2021; Chinyoka & Naidu, 2014; Dida, Obae & Mungai, 2014; Gul, Gulshan & Ali, 2013; Sikdar & Mukherjee, 2012; Woldehanna, Endale, Hamory & Baird, 2021).

The findings of the study also confirm wide gender gaps in all walks of life, particularly education (ASER, 2012; Bajwa, 2011; Government of Pakistan, 2020; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019) and care work (World Economic Forum, 2022), as previously identified by different research studies. Affirming the findings of NIPS (2019), the results of the study show tangible evidence of the existing gender gap in school attendance due to domestic work; as more girls are found leaving school due to their involvement in unpaid

work in the family as compared to boys in Sindh (See table 4 and 5). It is by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics' (2019) found that almost double the number of women, than men, working in the informal sector are involved in family work. The pattern of gender difference for school dropouts due to work in the family as found above is also similar to the one reported in the PSLM survey 2014 for school dropouts due to work at home (Shahab & Sherani, 2015). Sounding similar to Shahab and Sherani's (2015) report that Sindh has reported the highest number of girls to be required for child care at home, the results of this study clearly show that a higher number of the girls (i.e. 22%) is found to have left school due to their involvement in child care in Sindh.

Conclusions

This research assessed the gender differences in children's school dropout due to unpaid work in the family. First, as unpaid work in the family was defined into three conceptual categories of child care, domestic chores, and family farming and fieldwork, the results showed that 15%, 15.9%, and 20.9% of school dropout children in Sindh reported having left school due to these categories of work, respectively. Second, as the main aim of the research was to identify the gender pattern of school dropout due to unpaid family work, it was found that girls are found more frequently leaving school due to a load of domestic chores (27.6%) and child care (22.1%). While boys and girls equally (i.e. 20.9%) leave school due to work in family agriculture and farming. The gendered patterns identified show that the highest proportion of girls left school due to a load of domestic chores (i.e. 27.6%) and the highest proportion of boys left school due to their engagement in family farming and agriculture (i.e. 20.9%). Further, the mean score of girls (M=2.2670) is higher than that of boys (M=1.9731) showing that overall more girls than boys are forced to leave school due to unpaid work in the family. The t-test result also confirmed the statistical significance of the difference in girls' and boys students' school dropout due to their involvement in unpaid work in the family as $t(2621.113)=-8.063$, $p<0.00$. The empirical evidence provided by the study may help an effective educational policy development in Sindh to narrow down the gender gap in school attendance, curb the higher rates of school dropout, and to overall improve the state of education in Sindh, in particular, and in Pakistan, in general.

Recommendations

Further research is needed to study the social, economic, and institutional causes of children's engagement in unpaid work in families to the extent that it creates barriers to their educational attainment.

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