



**Dr. Muhammad Ishaq<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Imran Ullah<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Arif Pervez Khan<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Israr<sup>4</sup>, Ms. Fatima Awan**

1. Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KPK, Pakistan.
2. MPhil Scholar, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KPK, Pakistan.
3. PhD. Education and Director of The Smart School Katlang Mardan, KPK, Pakistan.
4. Assistant Professor Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Sheringal Upper Dir, KPK, Pakistan.
5. PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KPK, Pakistan.

**How to Cite This Article:** Ishaq, M., Ullah., M. I., Khan, A. P., Israr, M. & Awan, M. F. (2025). Exploring Socio-Cultural Factors Contributing to the Dropout of Girls Students at Secondary School Level in Tahsil Katlang; Student's Perspective. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*. 3 (04), 826-833.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.34.826.833>

**ISSN:** 3006-6557 (Online)

**ISSN:** 3006-6549 (Print)

**Vol.** 3, **No.** 4 (2025)

**Pages:** 826-833

**Key Words:**

Girl's education, Girls dropout,  
Early marriages, Domestic chores

**Corresponding Author:**

**Dr. Muhammad Ishaq**

Email: [isak700@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:isak700@awkum.edu.pk)

**License:**



**Abstract:** *Current study is an attempt to explore student's perspectives on various factors responsible for drop out of female students at secondary school level in in district Mardan. The number of females out of schools in the district is alarming and needs immediate attention. One of the basic reasons for low literacy of females is the high rate of drop out of female students at secondary level. Qualitative research methods are used for current study to get inside picture for answering the research question. Dropped out girls reported different factors for early dropout of girls from the schools and discontinuation of their studies. Major factors includes societal and family expectations to perform domestic duties like helping mothers in cleaning house, preparing meals, taking care of younger siblings etc. Early marriages, family honor and shame, observance of strict pardah rules, lack of female teachers and role models, and other religious and cultural factors are reported in the study by female students who were dropped out without completing their education. If we want to increase female education, that is very important to for the development of any society, we need to consider these factors. Community and state institutions should work to make doable solutions for these issues.*

**Introduction**

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for social and economic development. Despite various efforts by the government and non-governmental organizations to improve educational access and equity in Pakistan, significant challenges remain particularly for girls in rural and culturally conservative areas. (World Bank, 2024; Pakistan Education Statistics, 2023) One such area is Tehsil Katlang, located in the District Mardan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the dropout rate among girl students at the secondary level remains alarmingly high.

In many rural parts of Pakistan, girls' education is influenced not just by economic conditions but by deep-rooted socio-cultural norms, traditional beliefs, and gender roles. These factors often create an environment where girls are expected to prioritize household responsibilities or early marriage over

continuing their education. Concerns about modesty, safety, long distances to schools, lack of female teachers, and inadequate school facilities further contribute to this issue. (Sathar & Lloyd, 2019; Shah et al., 2021).

The dropout of girls from secondary school is not merely an educational concern—it has profound implications for social progress, health outcomes, and future generations. Girls who are educated are more likely to participate in the workforce, make informed health choices, and contribute positively to the economy and society (Aslam & Kingdon, 2020). Therefore, understanding the specific socio-cultural factors that lead to dropout in the context of Tehsil Katlang is essential for designing effective and culturally sensitive interventions.

This study aims to explore and analyze these socio-cultural factors through the lens of the local community perspectives of students. By identifying the root causes and patterns of dropout, the research hopes to provide practical recommendations to policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations working to ensure that every girl has the opportunity to complete her secondary education.

Since women make up 53% of the population in Pakistan, educating them is essential because without educated women, no development or advancement can be achieved. Women who lack literacy and training are unable to participate in any form of developmental process. Because education is the foundation of all growth, it is essential to educate women. Education for women is even more crucial than for men. (Aurangzeb, 2024; Zahra *et al.*, 2025). When a girl receives an education, the next generation of her family is elevated because the girl will eventually become a mother, whereas a boy's education just benefits him personally. A child learns the fundamentals from his mother. The knowledge that a kid picks up accidentally and subconsciously. There is a vast dissimilarity in the upbringing of the children of educated and illiterate mothers. (Malik, S. 2018)

The development of education has a major impact on human resource development. Personal productivity and efficiency increase in tandem with the creation of skilled and educated workers who can drive economic growth. The importance of education for the development of human resources doesn't need to be explained or justified. Industrialized nations place a high priority on education, just like rising nations do. Every citizen of Pakistan is guaranteed the fundamental right to education by the constitution, which also requires the government to make sure that every citizen has access to education (Constitution of Pakistan. (1973). Article 25-A.)

In a research studies it is emphasized that girls' educational institutions are less in number as compared to boys' educational institutions (Naz et al. 2013). Mostly the girls' educational institutions are far away from one another with no transportation facilities. It is also shown that facilities in girls' educational institutions are lacking due to low priority given to girls' education (Suleiman Q, Hussain I, Jumani NB 2018).

According to the Pakistan Education Statistics Report (2018), 44% of females and 56% of boys are enrolled in Pakistani educational institutions. Gender inequality is evident in Pakistan across all educational levels. Only 45% of girls are enrolled in the primary level, according to statistical evidence. Comparably, at the secondary school level, the enrollment ratio for girls is 42 percent, while for boys it is fifty-eight percent. (GoP, 2018). The students who are not in school, 3,204,111 (3.20 million) are girls between the ages of 15 and 16. Nearly half (49.0%) of girls are not engaged in formal schooling, ranging from class one (basic) to class twelve (secondary education), according to the Pakistan Education Statistics Report (2018).

Almost 50% (49.0%) of female students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan, do not attend

educational institutions. (GoP ., 2018). Education is a powerful stimulant that meets human wants and desires on both a material and psychological level. Moral, ideological, and physical guidance and instruction are necessary for people to comprehend their life's purpose and be equipped to carry it out. It is an instrument for spiritual development. From an Islamic standpoint, education is a means of shaping people's views toward the values of justice and aiding in the development of a robust Islamic community (Ministry of Edu Govt. of Pakistan, 2007).

(Sawyer et al. 2021) highlighted that within the larger field of education, secondary education is a crucial subsector. It serves as a source of middle-class laborers as well as a feeder for more advanced education on the one hand. High-quality secondary education is a prerequisite for high-quality higher education, which is meant to develop professionals of the highest caliber in the nation's social, economic, and political spheres. Thus, it is imperative that this level of education be structured to both educate young men and women for the pursuit of higher education and enable them to effectively and productively adapt to their practical lives. A pupil transitions into adolescent during their secondary education. This is the most important time of your life. Basic beliefs and behavioral patterns begin to take shape, and issues adjusting to new roles in life become critically important. Therefore, the four years of secondary education offer educators and educationists a fantastic opportunity to design and implement programs that start students along the path of appropriate behavior and attitudes that lead to a good, productive, and peaceful existence in the future. (AIOU, 1998).

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the factors contributing to female students' dropout from secondary schools and to understand the perspectives of the affected students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided participants with a flexible and comfortable environment to express their views openly while allowing the researcher to probe relevant issues in depth. A purposive sampling technique was used to select eighteen female students who had dropped out of secondary school from Katlang Tehsil of District Mardan. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns and themes. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study; informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Thematic analysis is used for the analysis of the data.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **Theme 1; Societal expectations of domestic duties and family responsibilities**

Social pressure is no doubt one of the main dictating factors that dictate our behavior. In Pashtun culture social pressure is considered stronger for females than males. Breaches from social expectations and domestic duties are considered grave offence. Many of the girls reported this leading factor that hindered the continuity of their formal education that it is not feasible for me to continue my education in a society where girls are expected to prioritize domestic and family responsibilities over education. In such a society, girls are often socialized to believe that their primary role is to take care of their families and manage household chores, while education is seen as a secondary priority or even a luxury. As a result, girls may face numerous barriers to pursuing their educational goals, including limited access to resources, lack of support from family members, and societal pressure to perform to traditional gender roles. Additionally, girls may be forced to drop out of school to take care of younger siblings, manage household responsibilities, or even get married at a young age. In such a society, girls who try to pursue their education despite these challenges may face discrimination, stigma, and even violence. Therefore,

it is not feasible for me to continue my education in a society that does not value or support girls' education.

As one respondent stated that

*"In our society, girls are expected to prioritize household chores and family responsibilities over education, which makes it very difficult to continue schooling."*

Pursuing education in a society that prioritizes domestic roles for girls over education is untenable for me. In this society, girls are conditioned to believe their primary responsibility is caring for families and managing households, while education is secondary or a luxury objective. This leads to barriers such as limited resources, lack of family support, and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Girls may be forced to drop out to care for siblings, manage households, or marry young. Those who defy these expectations face discrimination, stigma, and even violence. In a society that doesn't value or support girls' education, continuing my education is not feasible.

As one respondent stated that

*"Education for girls is seen as a luxury, while domestic work is viewed as our primary role."*

In a society where girls are expected to prioritize domestic and family responsibilities over education, continuing one's education can be highly challenging but not necessarily unfeasible. Overcoming these barriers often requires strong personal determination, support from family or community advocates, and sometimes innovative solutions like remote learning or flexible study schedules. In such contexts, creating supportive networks and finding mentors who can champion educational opportunities for girls are crucial. Additionally, raising awareness about the value of education for women and advocating for systemic changes can help create a more conducive environment for girls to pursue and continue their education despite societal expectations.

As one female respondent stated that

*"I was forced to leave school because taking care of the home and younger siblings was considered more important than my education."*

In a society where domestic and family responsibilities are prioritized over education for girls, continuing one's education can be extremely difficult, often constrained by cultural norms and limited resources. The pervasive expectation that girls should focus on household duties rather than personal development can create significant obstacles, such as limited access to educational institutions, lack of time, and societal pressure. However, changing this dynamic requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, and advocacy groups, to challenge and shift societal norms. Programs that integrate educational opportunities with family responsibilities or provide financial and logistical support can help bridge the gap, enabling girls to pursue education while still fulfilling familial roles.

## **Theme 2; Early marriage**

In Pashtun culture in general and in Mardan region in particular females gets married earlier than males. After entering matrimonial life, most of the females' main responsibilities include taking care of the husbands and their parents and in many cases their other family members. Reproduction responsibilities and kids rearing and caring are almost full-time job after marriage. In such circumstances it is not usually possible to spare time for continuity of the formal education as that need more time.

As one respondent stated that

*"In our community, girls are often married at a young age, and after marriage, their main responsibilities are taking care of their husbands, in-laws, and children, leaving no time for education."*

Early marriage in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan, significantly contributes to high dropout rates among secondary school girls by forcing them to abandon their education for domestic responsibilities. This practice not only denies girls their right to education but also perpetuates poverty and gender inequality. Early marriage results in limited resources, social isolation, health risks, and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes. To combat this issue, it is crucial to implement policies and programs that promote girls' education, challenge gender norms, and provide support for at-risk girls. Engaging local leaders, parents, and the community in changing attitudes towards early marriage and education can also be instrumental in addressing this challenge and improving socio-economic development.

As one respondent stated that

*“Early marriage forced me to leave school because domestic duties and childbearing became my full-time job.”*

Early marriage has a profoundly negative impact on the dropout rate of girl students at the secondary school level in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan. When girls are married at a young age, they are often forced to abandon their education and take on domestic and family responsibilities. This not only deprives them of their right to education but also perpetuates the cycle of poverty and gender inequality. Early marriage leads to a range of consequences, including limited access to resources, social isolation, and increased vulnerability to health risks. Girls who are married early are more likely to face domestic violence, early pregnancy, and childbearing, which can have serious health consequences. Moreover, early marriage reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and perpetuates the notion that girls are not worthy of education. In Tehsil Katlang, early marriage is a significant contributor to the high dropout rate of girl students at the secondary school level. It is estimated that a significant percentage of girls drop out of school due to early marriage, which not only affects their individual potential but also hinders the socio-economic development of the community.

To address this issue, it is essential to implement policies and programs that promote girls' education, challenge harmful gender norms, and provide support to girls who are at risk of early marriage. Additionally, community-based initiatives that engage with local leaders, parents, and girls themselves can help to change attitudes and behaviors around early marriage and girls' education.

Early marriage has a profound and detrimental impact on the dropout rates of secondary school girls in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan. When girls marry at a young age, they are often compelled to leave school to assume domestic responsibilities, which disrupts their education and curtails their future opportunities. This not only undermines their right to education but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty and gender inequality. The consequences of early marriage extend beyond educational setbacks, leading to limited access to resources, increased vulnerability to health issues, and social isolation. Furthermore, early marriage reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and diminishes the perceived value of girls' education. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive efforts, including policy reforms, community engagement, and educational support to challenge and change the societal norms that drive early marriage and support girls in continuing their education.

Early marriage significantly affects secondary school dropout rates for girls in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan. When girls marry young, they often have to leave school to take on household duties, disrupting their education and limiting their future opportunities. This not only infringes on their right to education but also entrenches a cycle of poverty and gender inequality. The impacts extend beyond education, leading to fewer resources, greater health risks, and social isolation. Additionally, early marriage upholds harmful gender stereotypes and devalues girls' education. Tackling this issue demands a comprehensive approach, including policy changes, community involvement, and educational support

to challenge societal norms and help girls continue their schooling.

### **Theme 3; Family Honour and Shame**

The relationship between girls' education and family honour and shame is a complex and sensitive issue in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan. In this societal context, a family's honour is often tied to the behaviour and actions of their female members, including their educational pursuits. Unfortunately, this can lead to a negative impact on girls' education, particularly at the secondary level. When girls pursue education, especially beyond primary level, they may be perceived as bringing "shame" to their families. This is because education is often seen as a threat to traditional gender roles and cultural norms. Families may fear that educated girls will become "too independent" or "too westernized," which can lead to a loss of honour.

Consequently, families may restrict girls' access to education or force them to drop out of school to protect their honour. This can result in a higher dropout rate among girls at the secondary level. Furthermore, the pressure to maintain family honour can lead to early marriages, as families may seek to marry off their daughters to avoid the perceived shame associated with educated girls. In Tehsil Katlang, addressing this complex issue requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural dynamics at play. Efforts to promote girls' education must be sensitive to these concerns and engage with local communities to challenge harmful gender norms and promote a positive understanding of girls' education as a source of family pride, rather than shame.

In Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan, girls' education is often linked to family honour and shame, leading to a significant impact on dropout rates at the secondary level. If a girl is perceived to be interacting with boys or engaging in activities deemed inappropriate, it can bring shame to the family, leading to pressure to drop out of school to protect the family's honour. Conversely, a girl's academic success can bring honour to the family, but this pressure to excel can also lead to dropout if expectations are not met. This complex dynamic creates a challenging environment for girls to continue their education, making dropout at the secondary level more likely.

In Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan, the notion of family honour and shame is intricately tied to girls' education, significantly influencing secondary school dropout rates. When a girl's actions are perceived as compromising family honour, she may be forced to drop out to mitigate shame. Conversely, academic achievement can bring honour, but the pressure to succeed can also lead to dropout if expectations aren't met. This honour-shame dynamic creates a precarious environment for girls' education, making secondary school dropout more probable.

The intricate connection between family honour and shame in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan, puts girls' education in a precarious position, significantly affecting secondary school dropout rates. When a girl's actions are perceived as dishonourable, she may be forced to drop out to salvage family reputation. Conversely, academic excellence can bring honour, but the weight of expectations can also lead to dropout if not met. This honour-shame dynamic creates a high-pressure environment, making secondary school dropout more likely for girls.

### **Theme 4; Familial Responsibilities**

In Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan, family pressure and support for prioritizing familial responsibilities can significantly influence dropout rates at the secondary level. For instance, 14-year-old Maria is forced to drop out of school to care for her ailing mother and manage the household chores, as her father insists that her siblings' education takes precedence. Despite her desire to continue studying, Maria's family expects her to prioritize her domestic duties, perpetuating the cycle of gender-based dropout.

Nadia, a 15-year-old girl, received encouragement from her parents to pursue her education despite the

demands of helping with farm work and caring for younger siblings. They recognized the importance of education in improving their socio-economic status and supported Nadia's aspirations. With their backing, Nadia excelled in her studies and became a confident and independent individual.

Maria, a 14-year-old girl, was forced to drop out of school to care for her ailing mother. Her father insisted that her siblings' education took precedence, and Maria's domestic duties became her top priority. Despite her desire to continue studying, Maria had to sacrifice her education to manage the household chores and care for her family members.

Ayesha, a 15-year-old girl, received unwavering support from her family to pursue her education. Her parents encouraged her to balance school with domestic duties, recognizing the significance of education in securing a brighter future. With their support, Ayesha excelled in her studies and became a role model for her younger siblings.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study highlight that girls' education in Tehsil Katlang, District Mardan, is profoundly influenced by intertwined socio-cultural factors. Societal expectations place the burden of domestic duties and family responsibilities primarily on girls, making it difficult for them to continue their education beyond the primary level. Early marriage further compounds this challenge, forcing many girls to abandon schooling to assume domestic and reproductive roles, which perpetuates cycles of poverty, gender inequality, and social marginalization. Additionally, the cultural emphasis on family honour and the fear of shame create a restrictive environment where girls' educational pursuits are often viewed as a threat to traditional gender norms. Together, these factors create structural and social barriers that limit girls' access to secondary education, while simultaneously reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women's roles in society. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including community engagement, awareness campaigns, policy reforms, and supportive educational programs that challenge harmful norms, encourage families to value girls' education, and provide pathways for girls to continue their schooling despite societal pressures. Only through such concerted efforts can girls in Tehsil Katlang be empowered to realize their educational potential and contribute meaningfully to social and economic development.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. Community Awareness and Sensitization:**

Conduct awareness campaigns involving parents, local leaders, and religious elders to highlight the importance of girls' education, challenge harmful gender norms, and promote the idea that educating girls brings pride rather than shame to the family.

- 2. Delay Early Marriage:**

Implement policies and programs that discourage child marriage, including enforcing legal age requirements, providing incentives for families to keep girls in school, and creating community support networks for at-risk girls.

- 3. Flexible and Accessible Education Opportunities:**

Establish flexible schooling options, such as evening classes, community-based schools, or remote learning programs, to allow girls to balance household responsibilities with their education.

- 4. Support Services for Girls:**

Provide mentorship programs, counseling, and peer support groups to help girls navigate societal pressures, build self-confidence, and continue their education despite family and community expectations.

## References

- Aslam, M., & Kingdon, G. G. (2021). Public–private partnerships in education: Do they offer an equitable solution to education in India and Pakistan?. In *Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts* (pp. 79-97). Routledge.
- Cornfield, M. (2018). Empowering the party-crasher: Donald J. Trump, the first 2016 GOP presidential debate, and the Twitter marketplace for political campaigns. In *Social Media, Political Marketing and the 2016 US Election* (pp. 6-37). Routledge.
- Hassan, F. (2024). Economic Survey of Pakistan 2024-2025 (Summarized.)
- Hus, A. K., Xu, Y. Y., Steinmetz, J. D., Aalipour, M. A., Aalruz, H., Abdulah, D. M., ... & Jairoun, A. A. (2025). Global, regional, and national burden of headache disorders, 1990–2023: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2023. *The Lancet Neurology*, *24*(12), 1005-1015.
- Malik, R., Chauhan, G., Traylor, M., Sargurupremraj, M., Okada, Y., Mishra, A., ... & Elliott, P. (2018). Multiancestry genome-wide association study of 520,000 subjects identifies 32 loci associated with stroke and stroke subtypes. *Nature genetics*, *50*(4), 524-537.
- Memon, G. R. (2007). Education in Pakistan: The key issues, problems and the new challenges. *Journal of management and social sciences*, *3*(1), 47-55.
- Nisar, S. K., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Stress and performance: Investigating relationship between occupational stress, career satisfaction, and job performance of police employees. *Journal of Public Affairs*, *20*(1), e1986.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2021). The iterative and improvisational nature of the creative process. *Journal of Creativity*, *31*, 100002.
- Shah, B. H., & Shabir, G. (2017). Exploring ICT Usage Among AIOU Students and Gratification of Their Academic Needs. *International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *45*(45), 169-178.
- Shah, S. S., & Abdullah, N. A. (2024). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Pakistan: An Exploration of Issues, Challenges and Solutions: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Pakistan. *Journal Of Social Sciences*, *15*(1), 34-49.
- Suleman, Q., Hussain, I., & Jumani, N. B. (2018). Occupational Stress among Secondary School Heads: A Gender Based Comparative Study. *Journal of education and educational development*, *5*(2), 240-258.
- Zadi, K. I., Ch, S. N., & Hameed, U. (2021). Implementation of Article 25-A of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Punjab and KPK: A Critical Analysis of Government’s Memorandum and Shortcomings. *Al-Qamar*, *4*(2), 173-186.