

Naima Saleem

Barriers to Girls Education in Rural Pakistan

Master's thesis in Mphil in Childhood Studies

Supervisor: Ida Marie Lyså

June 2020

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the known factor of gender discrimination along with other barriers that create hindrance in acquiring education for rural girls of Pakistan. This study highlights the prevalent familial, cultural, and societal perceptions regarding the education of teenage girls, narrated by the young girls themselves, their mothers, and few grandmothers.

This study is interesting because it has included the voice of females. As a patriarchal society, a rural female commonly does not get a chance to express her thoughts and feelings openly, thus they are left in shadow. This research has given voice to them by explicitly focusing adolescent girls in rural areas, who are rarely included in research. The young girls not only opened up about the difficulties they face for acquiring education, but also the crucial role their gender plays in the construction of their childhood period and in their everyday lives.

Qualitative research methodology in the form of interviews and observation was used for the collection of data. The participants were randomly selected from two rural areas of Pakistan. The findings from the interviews were presented and analyzed using theoretical approaches from Childhood Studies; social constructionist and actor-oriented approach. The concept of gender has also been used for examining the cultural practices and values.

The findings suggest that a number of factors are not only involved in creating difficulties in seeking education but also are responsible for the way girlhood is constructed in rural areas. *Purdah (veiling)*, *izzat (honor or respectability)* and poverty were prominent reasons behind gender discrimination. Gender discrimination was found to be deeply rooted in rural society in all aspects of life. Before addressing the issue of gender disparity in education, on a global level, there is need to understand its local dimensions first.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Almighty ALLAH for bestowing his endless blessings and giving me enough knowledge, strength, and ability to complete this research.

I extend my immense gratitude to my supervisor Ida Marie Lyså. I want to thank her for her guidance and constructive feedback, for being flexible and supportive throughout the process. Without her assistance and continuous encouragement, this thesis would not have been the same. It was such an honour to work under your supervision, Thank You!

I would like to thank all the staff in the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB), especially the administrative coordinator, Kari Vikhammermo, for all her assistance throughout the master's programme.

Secondly, I am deeply grateful to all the participants who welcomed me whole heartedly especially young girls who trusted me by sharing their personal feelings, thoughts, and life experiences. Without their contribution this research would not have been possible, Thank you!

I would like to extend my thanks to all those people who facilitated me during the fieldwork, and my personal acquaintances in the research area.

I would like to pass my heartfelt thanks to my husband, Noman for always being extremely supportive and having faith in me and my daughter, Nabira, for staying patient throughout the challenging research process, I Love you!

A special thanks to my sister Muniba, for proofreading the whole thesis and my friend Ezza for boosting my morale throughout the two years of the Masters.

Lastly, I want to convey my special thanks to my parents, family, and friends in Pakistan for their prayers and continuous encouragement. Thank you for always believing in me!

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List of Abbreviations

UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
NSD	Norwegian Centre of Research Data
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
MOE	Ministry of Education
GOP	Government of Pakistan

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Malala- Personal Motivation

*One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.
(Malala Yousafzai-UN youth assembly,2013)*

Malala Yousafzai is the renowned Pakistani education activist, who raised her voice against the problem that she saw in her society. Taliban took control of the area where she was residing in 2007-08 and they put a ban on girls' education. Taliban call themselves as Islamic militant group and they were not in the favour of western style education, and sending specially girls to school, so they closed every school. Malala, at that time, decided to take stance against Taliban and raise her voice for education. Unfortunately, at the age of 14, on October 9th, 2012, Taliban tried shutting down her voice by shooting her in the head. She miraculously survived and continued her struggle. She was awarded with a Nobel Prize for her fearless and brave efforts and hard work for the rights of Pakistani girls. She is a global icon and is seen as a social change agent who is putting her efforts to campaign for girls' schooling. She also wrote a book titled 'I Am Malala' and inspired numerous children across the world. Recently, her organization Malala Fund in association with The Big Heart Foundation from Sharjah donated 700,000 dollars to construct the girl's school in her hometown, in the valley of Swat. Malala is a motivational figure for every girl who finds it difficult to get education. Malala's struggle and her exceptional efforts for the right of education inspired me to get into the field, observe intimately and find out the common barriers girls are facing in acquiring education. The fieldwork was not conducted in the same area from where Malala belonged, but the research was carried out with younger girls like her, facing similar obstacles as she faced in her everyday life.

In Pakistan, mostly in rural and suburban areas, females, in comparison to their male counterparts, are placed at the bottom of an educational system, as people traditionally believe that women belong to their homes while men are the breadwinners for their family (Noureen, 2011, pp. 8-9). I also went into the field with the view that girls are being strictly held back at the home, prohibited by their parents who are 'depriving' them of their right to education while the boys are sent happily to the schools. Moreover, I thought the rate of enrollment for boys is higher not only in schools but also in colleges. My anticipation took a turn when I went into the field. Gender disparity does exist in different sectors including education, however, when the interviews were conducted, I noticed that both girls and boys are missing out on an education, albeit poor girls were terribly affected. Most of the girls who were interviewed showed the desire to complete their education or at least get some education. They wanted to become doctors and teachers and get some respect, but their dreams were crushed by being not able to study. Drawing on various empirical research studies, Afzal and colleagues found that preference is given to males over females and the issue of gender disparity is overlooked in Muslim countries also at the level of school due to specific religious, societal and conceptual aspirations (Aslam 2008; Baluch and Shahid 2008; Chauhdary and Rehman, 2009; Rahji, 2005, referred to in (Afzal, Butt, Akbar, & Roshi, 2013). I also observed during my studies that in comparison to the young girls, the boys are given the privilege of continuation of schooling by poor parents, but they neither show interest in the studies nor go to their schools regularly. Also, various other reasons are linked due to which girls are out of school, including cultural

values, socioeconomic status, poor facilities provided by government and other factors that will be mentioned and discussed in the later chapters.

1.2. Educational Indicators in Pakistan

Pakistani society is composed of complex dynamics due to the presence of diverse cultures and traditions across the country. Generally, the political, economic, social and morals norms of the society are rooted in Islamic ideology which also defines the life patterns of people. Islam encourages education for both men and women, but the freedom to exercise this privilege is mainly limited to male segments of the society and females often face discrimination when they try to acquire education (Ahmad, Said, Hussain, & Khan, 2014). Bakhsh (2017) writes that Pakistan has been ranked as the second worst country in the world due to high prevalence of gender disparities in various fields. At the Oslo Summit on Education and Development, that took place in 2015, Pakistan was depicted as “among the world’s worst performing countries in education” (R. Malik & Rose, 2015, p. 3).

The government of Pakistan elected in the year 2018, mentioned in their manifesto that the number of children out of school was 22.5 million (HRW, 2018). About 32% of the girls, who are of the age of primary school, are out of school compared to 21% of the boys of the same age group (UNICEF, 2017). When the children reach the middle school, in sixth grade, the number of children who are out of the school multiplies and gender disparity continues. According to UNESCO, in 2016, about 59% of the middle school girls were not going to the school as compared to 49% boys. The data from 2013-14 shows that, by 9th grade only 13% of the girls are left in school (Jamil, 2016). A UNESCO (2017-18) report depicts the number of underprivileged and poor students, amongst which only 16% of the girls finish primary school and 13% boys. There is an even higher difference in the number of children belonging to poor families finishing their lower secondary school: about 18% of the boys and only five percent girls (UNESCO, 2017-18, p. 362). The upper secondary school is completed by just one percent girls versus six percent boys (UNESCO, 2017-18, p. 363). A significant number of children are out of school across the country with considerable gender disparities in education, but in some parts of the country these disparities are noticeably higher. As Rabia, Tanveer, Gillani, Naeem, and Akbar (2019) state, gender discrimination is more prevalent in families with a poor educational background and these families think that educating their daughters will not bring any earnings. On the flip side Rabia et al. (2019) suggest that if a girl is provided a chance to get the education, it can be beneficial for the whole generation because as an educated mother, she can raise her children in a better way and might also earn for her family if necessary.

1.3. Children’s Right to Education and the UNCRC

Education is one of the basic tools for empowering human beings with the help of learning, training, and improving their skills, personality, and abilities. With the help of education people become aware of their rights, gain self-esteem, and develop confidence (Afzal et al., 2013). Over the span of 50 years or so, international organizations and governments have been making attempts to bring improvement and advancement in educational development. However, developing countries are facing challenges in implementing and accomplishing such efforts. The United Nations, UNICEF, UNESCO, the International Labour Office, and the World Bank have made efforts for promotion of education as a basic right and growth engine. The assurance of international community about universal

education was initially laid down in Human Rights Declaration (1984), and then later restated in 1989 in the form of Convention on the Rights of the Child. Then again in the World Summit for Children (1990) this declaration was reaffirmed by the world leaders (Mishra, 2005). The issues of gender disparity were highlighted in United Nations Millennium Summit (2000) and were addressed in two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Through the process of globalization, the idea of education being provided to every child, became prominent in all the cultures of world, and is also reflected in United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 28 of the UNCRC states that children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are, regardless of race, gender, or disability. Children and young people have the right to primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, the fundamental right recognized in the UNCRC (1989) stressing that the child has a right to education and the state's duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory, in article 28, is not practically implemented in several countries who ratified it, for example Pakistan.

1.4. Gender Disparity: A Huge obstacle

Gender disparity is a common problem in many countries including Pakistan, where in many areas people think that women are inferior to men and she is controlled by male family members (Rabia et al., 2019). Gender disparity generally refers to inequality, or gap between males and females specified by differential preferences, in any field of life. Gender disparity in the context of education represents the gap between enrolled male and female students in educational institutes (Afzal et al., 2013). Both men and women suffer from the issue of gender inequality, but females are the ones that who stay underprivileged in accessing their rights. The most vulnerable group are young teenage rural girls who are unable to complete their primary education due to some serious barriers. The boys in most of the cases can go to the school or college located outside the village but the girls are not allowed to go outside the village for schooling. Hence their education is limited to the village level (I. A. Shah & Baporikar, 2013). After becoming an independent country Pakistan still lacks cohesion and even distribution, and the development of education in Pakistan has never been properly addressed (Kazmi, 2005).

According to Purewal and Hashmi (2015) the status of Pakistan, in the context of gender disparity in education, shows both aspects of infrastructural failures to provide satisfactory education to girls as well as biased societal behaviour that puts less weight on schooling of girls as compared to boys' schooling. The approach towards girls' schooling is directly associated with restrictive cultural norms that discourage gender-equitable education. In Pakistan, the issue of gender discrimination commonly exists in every sphere of life particularly in the field of education. Several studies claim that the reasons are very complex behind educational disparity, but some key areas are highlighted like poverty, the inferior status of women in society, and sociocultural problems that are combined with limited access to schools, security, transportation, and lack of female teachers (H. S. Khalid & Mukhtar, 2002). Generation after generation, young rural girls, either leave themselves or are forced to drop out of the school. It was crucial to gather the information by going into the field and analysing that why Pakistan is still suffering from the crisis in the sector of girls' education.

1.5. Overview of the Empirical Work

Initially an ethnographic approach has been utilized in this project that included the method of interview conducted in two small areas from the countryside of two provinces of Pakistan. These sites were chosen because the sample was conveniently accessible through personal networks. Moreover, the idea was to explore the topic and talk with young girls from two different areas with diverse experiences. The first site was located in the province of Punjab and the second one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). In both areas I had acquaintances that helped me in making contact with people and approaching them. Additionally, I am familiar with the language of both regions, so there was no communication barrier during field work. Being native Pakistani, I was welcomed by local people and did not encounter any serious problems.

The participants included were young rural girls and their mothers. The daughters were mostly teenage girls. Fathers were not part of the interviews, as it is customary to avoid talking openly to unknown females especially about their personal issues. It took around three to four weeks to interview 9 families. In order to collect data, intergenerational mother/daughter, grandmother/granddaughter interviews were conducted. When mothers were not able to speak to me, the grandmothers took part in the interview along with their granddaughters. Initially, the interviews were planned to be conducted individually in isolation, but due to certain issues like unavailability of space, the participants usually gathered in the same room to answer my questions. These interviews, however, influenced the responses of participants. Interviews were designed to be semi-structured. Along with the interviews, participants especially the girls were requested to recall the events, factors, and reasons due to which they were either stopped from attending the school or never allowed to go to school. They were also encouraged to share their feelings and everyday life experiences they encounter in connection with their drop out. In this project the method of interview was the best way to get the data from participants. I interviewed people in rural areas, who were mostly illiterate and did not know how to read and write, hence asking verbal questions in the form of interview was most relevant for my research participants. Along with techniques of interview and recalling, participants and their surroundings were also observed.

This research has four key aims: to explore and investigate the reasons behind educational disparities; to understand how these disparities are effecting the lives of young rural girls; to find out mother's (in some cases grandmother's) perspective on not sending their daughters to school; to inquire young girls about the barriers they face on an individual level and within the local context, due to which they drop out of school.

1.6. Research Questions

The objective of this research is to address the issue of gender disparity in education for young girls in rural Pakistan, with the help of answering the following questions:

- What are the barriers to girls' education in rural Pakistan?
- What are the reasons Pakistani parents do not send their daughters to school?

- From the girl's perspective, what are the reasons they are not going to school and how is it affecting their lives?
- How does gender discrimination shape a rural girl's life?

1.7. Childhood Studies

In the era of 20th century, childhood is considered different from that of adulthood. Childhood Studies have comparatively short history, however in the recent years it has developed as an area of academic and policy interest. Within the arena of social sciences, childhood in the past was previously dealt with either socialization theories or through developmental psychology and both of these fields presented children as a natural rather than a social phenomenon (Jenks, 2004). Childhood Studies, on the other hand, views children and their childhood as a social construct. The history of childhood research is denoted not by the lack of interest in children, but rather 'by their silence' (Prout & James, 2015). Contemporary rights and welfare thinking holds the idea of prioritizing childhood as a carefree, safe, secure, and pleasant phase of human life (Boyden, 1997). The existing global discourses are linked to the concept of children as future citizens and workers and children as *becomings* rather than *beings* (Jens Qvortrup, 2009). This notion is followed by an increasing academization of the curriculum and content of their education. Some people also argued that children have specific interests, different from adults, that need to be protected (Burr, 2003). UNCRC, rights-based framework, approved and ratified by many countries, also strengthens this argument, and aimed to protect and care for childhood and that all children have rights separate from adults. Children are differentiated from adults by several biological and psychological qualities that are universally accepted (Boyden, 1997). Universal childhood in the present era can be observed as an element of globalization processes, spreading standards of what it means to be a child. Generally, childhood is associated with formal education and play. Schools and other child education institutes are considered as 'proper' sites to develop, learn and grow. However, some issues need to be addressed like how the global rights and visions of education are applied and then practiced within educational institutions and local communities, and how are these varying practices promote the anticipated ideas of increased knowledge and quality of life (Kjørholt, 2013). In this research project, theoretical perspectives mainly rooted in Childhood Studies will be used as a backdrop that will help in studying the experiences girls are having as a result of not attending school.

Constructionist perspective within Childhood Studies argues against naturalising views of children and childhoods. "The idea of childhood is not a natural but a social construct" (Jenks, 1982, p. 29) and childhood is always associated with specific cultural settings. This idea refers to the notion that childhood is not a natural process rather it is society which decides when a child is a child and when a child becomes an adult. Childhood varies from culture to culture depending upon the context. Childhood Studies aim at interpreting a child according to his or her situational context. Using social constructionist approach, I will discuss the ways in which Pakistani rural society conceptualizes childhood as well as girlhood and how it impacts girls' life. Another perspective within Childhood Studies, known as actor-oriented approach stresses children as 'social actors' having agency which means to have the ability to construct and influence not only their own lives but also of those around them and the society (Prout & James, 1990). Discussing the typologies of agency, like thick and thin agency, Abebe (2019) exemplifies how various context shapes child's agency. He writes that 'thick agency' helps girls and boys to opt for the settings that will eventually affect their present and future lives and 'thin agency' represents children's

everyday decisions and actions. Referring to such type of agencies I will build my argument upon how the young rural girls who are out of school, are exercising their agency in everyday life and how they are experiencing it in some areas of their life and not others. Through the notion of relational and interdependent agency, young girls' agency will be highlighted that rely thoroughly upon their familial and other relationships. The concept of gender will shed light upon the gender roles and designated boundaries for young girls by their family, culture, and society.

1.8. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is categorized in seven different chapters. Chapter 1 opens up with an overall introduction to importance of education and Childhood Studies, some background information related to gender disparity in education within Pakistan and current educational statistics, children's right to education, overview of empirical work, aim and research questions. Chapter 2 gives the profile of the country and the areas where this study was conducted. It will also give information about the country's school system and the political and religious stance on women's education. It will also briefly touch upon childhood and gender in Pakistan. Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology of this study, the significance of qualitative research in Childhood Studies and the researcher's role. The description of the research site will be given along with the account of data collection techniques and presentation of participants. Ethical considerations, limitations and challenges faced during fieldwork will also be addressed. Chapter 4 will focus on the theoretical framework and concepts significant for the analysis of this research. Afterwards there will be an analysis divided in two chapters. Chapter 5 will analyze the types of barriers in girls' education and how society is playing its role in construction of a childhood by making a contrast to the global narrative about equality in education. Chapter 6 will analyze the importance of gender in acquiring education and what role gender plays in setting boundaries for a girl during her childhood. Chapter 7 will present the summary of the findings and the policy recommendations.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1. Introduction

This chapter illustrates the country's profile and the information of the field sites including demographical and geographical information, along with the statistics linked to education of children in Pakistan. Main types of school systems and educational levels within Pakistan are also mentioned briefly. As this research specifically focuses the disparities in education, therefore an overview has been given about the right to education for girls within Islam which is the religion followed by majority of Pakistani population and how much importance is given to this matter by the government of Pakistan. This chapter also touches upon the way the category of childhood is perceived within Pakistani society.

2.2. Country Profile and Field areas

Pakistan was founded in 1947 as an independent Islamic republic. It is situated on the southern edge of south Asia, sharing her border with the neighbours Afghanistan, China, India, and Iran. The country is divided into four provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Urdu is the national language, but at official level both Urdu and English are used. Along with these two languages several other regional languages are also spoken throughout the country due to diversity in ethnic culture. Islam is the state religion of the country, practiced by 96.4% of the population (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). The total population of Pakistan is about 207.78 million, out of which 64% of the people live in rural areas (National Institute of Population Studies, 2018). The results by Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) in 2013-14, concluded that 37.5% of the population (19.3% male and 18.2% female) were between the age 5-19 years, which shows a large percentage of Pakistan's population comprise of children, teenagers and youth.

Pakistan is basically an agricultural country which is growing economically at present, slowly changing from agriculture-based to industrial-based economy and services sectors in the GDP (M. S. Farooq, 2018). A major portion of the country's budget is spent to deal with the challenges of national security and interest payments on its loans. As a result, a very smaller amount is left to be invested on the development of infrastructure in order to increase economic growth and assist social sectors to fulfil basic necessities of the people like education, health, social services etc (M. S. Farooq, 2018). The backbone of the country's economy is agriculture, held mostly by the rural population. The people in rural areas possess strong interdependent extended family system and traditional rural society (A. H. Qamar, 2012). Pakistan is considered to be a patriarchal society where gender holds a significant position and gender disparity is part of the culture. The genders of male and female as well as the social spheres are unambiguously classified. Hence individuals are motivated and positively or negatively reinforced to act in gendered specific ways (A. H. Qamar, 2012). Due to several sociocultural issues and current economic conditions, gender inequality in different sectors of Pakistan is perceived as quite high (I. A. Shah & Baporikar, 2013). This discriminatory behaviour has also affected the idea of *Education for All*. According to A. Qamar and Hasnain (2019) during the last few years despite constant progress, the educational statistics of Pakistan are depressingly low. Currently about one-third of primary-school-age children are out of school; 42% of the population (age 10+) is uneducated. The discrepancies shown by education indicators are of wide range that vary in provinces or areas, locality (urban vs. rural) and gender. At the national level about

two-third of women aged 15+ are unable to read and write, and 35% of girls stay out of school. The Gender Parity Index is 0.82 for involvement in primary education and the number of children who are out of school is approximately over 6.7 million most of them, around 62%, are girls (A. Qamar & Hasnain, 2019).

The fieldwork for my research project was conducted in two rural areas of Pakistan from two provinces, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Below is an overview given about the situation of education in both the provinces.

2.2.1. Punjab

Punjab is the largest, the most populous and developed province of Pakistan. It has the majority of the country's agricultural land with almost 56% of the total population, among whom 3.8 million people over the age of 15 are illiterate (Rehman, Jingdong, & Hussain, 2015). The population in Punjab was estimated to be 10.20 million in 2014 (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2013-14). The literacy rate of Punjab in 1972 was 20.07% and has risen to 61% after many years till 2014 (Rehman et al., 2015). Some changes were made but they were mostly in primary schools and much work is required to bring further improvements.

2.2.2. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), formerly known as North-West Frontier Province, is the smallest province in terms of area. The province' population was estimated to be 25.30 million in 2014 (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2013-14). Approximately 39% of the people are living below the poverty line and poor people are mostly settled in rural areas. The literacy rate of KPK from the year 1972 to 2014, has reported an increase from 15.50% to 53%, thus making the overall literacy rate of the province to be 50% (Rehman et al., 2015). In KPK the percentage of girls out of school is higher compared to other provinces, because of the presence of regional gender disparities in tribal areas and in these underdeveloped tribal areas girls are more likely to encounter cultural obstructions and inadequate treatment in the matter of their schooling (Luqman, Shahbaz, Ali, & Siddiqui, 2015). The ratio of Madrassa education is also higher in this province.

2.3. School System in Pakistan

According to M. A. Ashraf and Ismat (2016) in Pakistan the education system is generally split into five different levels: primary school (grades 1 to 5), middle school (grades 6 to 8), high school (grades 9 and 10, that lead to secondary school certificate [SSC]), intermediate level (grades 11 and 12, leading to a higher secondary school certificate [HSSC]), and various university programs (leading to undergraduate and graduate degrees). Since Pakistan became an independent country, in 1947, it has adhered to the 80-year-old traditional colonial education system. This system, in many people's view, is not coping with the emerging needs of Pakistan. According to M. A. Khan (2018), generally the three main types of education systems in Pakistan are the national education system for the middle and lower-middle classes; the elite private Cambridge system for the upper class; and Deeni Madrassa¹ for poor families. As my field work was conducted within the rural areas that included participants with low socio-economic status, many of them

¹ Religious school

attended public schools or Deeni Madrassa. I will explain these two types of school system here.

National educational system. At public (government) and non-elite private schools, the medium of instruction is Urdu and national curriculum of Pakistan is followed by their students. Public (government) schools in Pakistan are the major providers of free education but the system of these school is not completely developed (M. A. Khan, 2018). The teaching standard and education is not up to the level in government schools due to outdated books and syllabus, lack of training programmes for teachers, congested classrooms, inadequate resources, dishonesty in utilizing the limited school funds and ineffective monitoring system (M. A. Khan, 2018). Over the past few years, the gap in the quality of education formed by the low-quality public schools is filled by non-elite private schools. Non-elite private schools on the other hand claim to provide quality education in English language and mostly children belonging to middle and lower middle-class families attend these schools (Coleman, 2010). About 31% students in Pakistan go to these non-elite private school for completion of their higher secondary education, however there is shortage of trained and qualified teachers (M. A. Khan, 2018). Nevertheless compared to public schools, the non-elite private schools are equipped with better furniture, use up to date curriculum and prepare their students well for board examination so that they can get decent grades (A. Malik, Sarwar, & Khan, 2010)

Deeni Madrassa (Religious School). Besides public and private schools, another type of schooling is offered in 'Deeni Madrassa' (Religious School), giving free to expensive religious education with free food and accommodation. In Pakistan, Madrassas are the second-largest education providers and serve frequently the poor families of rural areas (M. A. Khan, 2018). Deeni madrassas follow the orthodox *Dars-i-Nizami*² curriculum, which provides the base for the syllabus and imparts religious education through rote learning, thus it lacks critical thinking (M. A. Khan, 2018). The Madrassas are mostly run by local communities and are funded through charity and donations.

Elite private schools have high fees, offer the Cambridge education system and International Baccalaureate curriculum for their students, and cater first-class education facilities that consists of learning resources and highly equipped classrooms (M. A. Khan, 2018). The teachers are also well-educated and are given better pay compared to the teachers of any other type of school. According to the International Crisis Group (2014) elite private schools only use English for teaching purpose, follow a separate curriculum and their fee structure is unaffordable to most of the families. The participants of this research mostly attended government or public schools because they were easily accessible and affordable. Some of the participants after dropping out of school also joined Madrassa for short period of time.

2.4. Political Stance on Education

The article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan declares that "the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law." The 18th amendment made in 2010 in the constitution of Pakistan declared education as a fundamental right of every child from age 5 to 16 but a

² The Dars-i-Nizami curriculum is a system of traditional Islamic education which originated in the 19th century for religious education.

major number of children are out of school at present, especially girls. Half of Pakistan's population consists of females and it's essential to make education accessible to them for country's economic growth and other developments (Social Policy and Development Centre, 2003). At the level of policy making, the government of Pakistan is trying to put their efforts to bring improvements in the sector of education but, "Still almost 44 million Pakistani population in working age (i.e. 15 plus) have not had the opportunity to learn how to read and write, about two third (28 million) of whom are women" (Ministry of Labour and Manpower Government of Pakistan, 2009, p.18). Though at various international forums Pakistan has pledged to make education equally accessible to both males and females (UNESCO, 2010) like in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), World Declaration on Education For All (2000), Dakar Framework for Action and The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to Shaikh, Khushik, and Nizamani (2019) at macro-level, some considerable attempts have been made by the Government of Pakistan to deal with the matter of girls' education. All of the education related strategies, policies and reforms gave some value to improve female education with the aim of eradicating gender disparity. Nevertheless, formulating the policies for developing a successful education system is not the only criteria. In fact, effective education system demands appropriate policy implementation that additionally rest on adequate funding, honesty of staff, and political stability but sadly Pakistan has to go a long way in making additional improvement in these areas. Moreover, the Government of Pakistan has admitted its failure in improving the educational status for the female population, particularly those in rural areas (MOE, 2009). Yet the government has continued to concentrate only on giving facilities instead of dealing with the social and cultural barriers. In Hasnain's (2010, p. 140) point of view, the local governments get compelled by provincial governments and give precedence to establish physical infrastructure like highways and roads, water, sanitation electricity in rural areas etc at the cost of education and health. His study indicates that in Pakistan voters associate this spending of money by political agents on public infrastructure for advancement in their areas and inclined towards such projects more than education and health development programs. In the rural and less developed areas particularly, public demand for education has been low as a result the local bodies have allocated less monetary funds and resources for provision of education.

S. Ashraf (2019) imparts that the state shows its dedication to the aim of universal primary education by publicly spending on basic education and currently, among other Asian countries, Pakistan holds the last position in public financing of education. The country in 2018 was positioned 150th among 188 countries and is classified in medium human development on the human development index (HDI). In these South Asian countries, Afghanistan is even lying above Pakistan in allocation of their GDP on education and only Bhutan is the country with less gross primary enrolment percentage compared to Pakistan (UNHDR, 2016; UNHDR, 2018). In the report submitted by Pakistan to UNCRC (2016), it has been admitted that at present Pakistan is facing diverse educational challenges and majority of these challenges are mainly due to inadequate spending on education by succeeding governments of the country. According to the Ministry of Finance's (2014 – 2015) economic survey, Pakistan spent only 2.14% of its GDP on education. It has also been mentioned in the report that accessing education differs significantly by location, gender, and money. The children who are out of school comprise of mostly girls particularly those belonging to poor families compared to the wealthy families (Ailaan, 2014). In Pakistan, between the time period of 2006 and 2012, very small developments were made

in both lowering the number of the poorest children who never attended the school and decreasing the gender inequality of 18 percentage points between them (UNESCO, 2015).

2.5. Education for the Woman in Islam

Family acts as a significant unit of Islamic social structure reinforcing the legal and social systems of Islam. In many Muslim societies, where male dominance prevails, however the family system is manipulated in order to keep women under control in the name of Islam (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). Islam, on the other hand, teaches love, justice and equality and the Qur'an puts emphasis upon equal rights of women like right to education, earning and property as well as status (the Qur'an, 4:7, 4:32, 4:124). According to Islam it is an obligation for every Muslim, both men and women, to pursue and acquire knowledge, as knowledge is thought as a part of 'belief' (faith). Both men and women are encouraged on equal basis, by The Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad, to put their efforts in acquiring knowledge (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). The first verses of the Qur'an commence with the word *Read*:

Read. Read in the name of thy Lord who created; [He] created the human being from blood clot. Read in the name of thy Lord who taught by the pen: [He] taught the human being what he did not know. (96: 1-5)

In Qur'an it is also mentioned "Are those who have knowledge equal to those who do not have knowledge? (39:9)". One interpretation of these verses demonstrates that Allah commands the obligation of acquiring knowledge to human beings irrespective of their sex, age, or race (S. T. Khan, 2016). The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him) has also stressed the importance of acquiring knowledge on numerous occasions. For instance, the Prophet said, "seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim..." (Saheeh al-Jaami', 3914, in Khan, 2016, p. 340). There is also a Hadith³ frequently cited in Islamic discourses, instructs to "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" (Multaqa Ahl al Hadeeth, in Khan, 2016, p. 340). This means either of the sexes, male or female can acquire education without any age limit. In the Mosque of Madinah, the Prophet used to educate both men and women and once women complained about the teaching time that did not suit their schedule, because of the type of their work at home, the Prophet changed the timings immediately so women could join and take part in teaching or learning (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). The Prophet's concern regarding female education was evident by the fact that he himself taught women along with the men and his wife Aisha was also a great scholar and who used to teach people in Masjid-e-Nabvi. Islam has given women an equal right to get education and acquire knowledge despite in many Muslim societies, including Pakistan, females approach to education is distinctly less than males (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). Islam never restricted a certain group for pursuing education rather it was the first religion that granted females with their basic rights like right to have opinion in choosing partner for marriage, right to have share in property and right to education.

In some Muslim cultures and societies educated women are perceived as a threat to the cultural values that are acknowledged as well as to the family, an important institution which constructs the core of the Islamic social system (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). Some people are also scared that if girls are allowed to go out of their house, they would disobey the teachings of Islam. In several rural areas of Pakistan females cannot leave home

³ The sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

without permission due to cultural norms and if they are permitted to go out, they must be accompanied by a male family member (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). Shaukat (2009) agreed that extreme disparity exists in some rural parts of Pakistan as the ratio of girls' enrolment in schools is intensely low as compared to the boys. Gender inequality occurs due to different overlapping factors including cultural, religious, structural, social, and economic that effect the girls' engagement in studies and dropout from the school (Adhikari, 2013). Males are regarded as the decision makers and sole earners of the family while females are required to stay within the boundaries of her home (Nasrullah & Bhatti, 2012).

There was a prevailing view, since many years, that traditionally women are not allowed to do religious interpretations while men can only contribute to the interpretations and discourse formations (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). This perception resulted in marginalisation of females, using religion to diminish women's power, and limiting girl's access to education by means of segregating, *pardah*⁴, *izzat*⁵ and Islamic moral principles (S. Shah & Shah, 2012). Due to their deep roots in the culture and society, these practices persistently work as barriers to females' education in diverse ways.

2.6. Childhood and Gender in Pakistani Society

A. H. Qamar (2015) indicates that in a traditional society like Pakistan gender is defined distinctly, and the biological development of children locate them as girls and boys, explicitly separating them as two dissimilar social groups. As the children biologically grow, usually when they show puberty signs, the cultural and social gap between these two groups becomes evident. The restrictions put by the religion and cultural norms on intermingling of gender are also carefully practiced. Therefore, these biological changes not only set the criterion for determining the physical ability of a child for carrying out various activities but also determine gender roles and structured boundaries. While carrying out gendered specific household tasks children learn how to "do" gender and discover how to merge "their ascribed gender identity into their prescribed gender roles" (A. H. Qamar, 2015, p. 102).

The perceptions regarding children are highly gendered in a Pakistani society where traditional roles of males and females, whichever age group they belong to, are seen as a major obligation (A. Farooq, 2020). From the early years of their life males are taught to be responsible for the work outside the house and females for the domestic chores, hence boys learn to stay independent while girls are taught to be dependent on their counterpart. The factors like age and social position, conservative thinking of the society about gender roles has an effect on female's autonomy, thus reduces her ability to think and act independently (A. Farooq, 2020). Young people's decisions and actions are influenced by

⁴ *Purdah* is generally defined as a veil or covering face or body. It is regarded as a religious and social institution of female seclusion. In fact, the concept of *purdah* can also be expressed as going beyond or moving within a boundary. *Purdah* may include concealment of the body, partially or fully, for both men and women as defined through various religious interpretations, cultural practices, moral reasoning, and individual choices (Mughal, 2019, p. 86).

⁵ *Izzat* means honour or respect. A girl or a woman is considered as a symbol of *izzat* for her father, brother, husband or for the family.

societal and familial demands and strong kinship. Caste or *zat*⁶, divided into *biradari*⁷ (literal meaning 'brotherhood'), is a permanent element of Pakistani rural society, therefore it plays a crucial role in defining the everyday life of young people, both males and females. Societal and familial pressures do not allow young individuals to take their decisions themselves while the caste act as a constraining factor in forming new relationships (Farooq, 2020). *Biradari* and caste system are quite strong especially in the province of Punjab. Every *biradari* has its own standard rules and regulations related to the choice of profession, marriages, and other social spheres which act as guiding principle in everyday life (Chaudhry, Ahmed, Khan, & Hussain, 2014). The basic function of caste cannot be overlooked in both traditional rural settings and in urban areas of Pakistan where the people are very much certain about the caste they belong to. The caste serves many purposes like in marital bonds, resolution of inter-caste disputes, creating a bond of social connections in order to extend social contacts (Chaudhry et al., 2014). The caste and *biradari* are significant particularly for a woman because it establishes gendered hierarchies between men and women and between women. These systems help women to sketch boundaries between family and strangers, especially with men (Ahmed, 2019). Thus, in Pakistan the division of family system and the gender identities, created by the society, are often significant in determining gender roles and shaping the children and young people's life.

2.7. Summary

This chapter opened with the demographical information of the country and the two provinces Punjab and KPK, where the fieldwork was conducted. I also drew the attention of the reader towards the indicators of education in Pakistan that were depressingly low. At the national level about two-third of women cannot read and write, and 35% of girls stay out of school. The literacy rate in Punjab was estimated to be higher than Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The different school systems and levels of education in Pakistan were also explained. Afterwards the political and governmental approach concerning the matter of disparity in education was discussed. Islamic perspective about girls being equally rightful to acquire education was depicted. In the end general description of how childhood is viewed in Pakistan was briefly highlighted.

⁶ *Zat* is the word used locally for the caste. Caste system refers to a social setup in which classes are determined by inheritance and is assigned at the time of birth.

⁷ A collection of occupational and/or ancestral groups within a caste is called *biradri*. This depicts that within a single caste, there are further divisions based upon birth, occupational natures and various beliefs. (Nahyan, Hussain, & ul Ghafoor 2019, p. 92)

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1. Introduction

The chapter will begin by highlighting the status of children in research. I will briefly reflect on the researcher's role in research and knowledge. Next, I will give a general description of the two field locations where the study was conducted and the procedure of participant selection. Afterwards I will bring to light the benefits of qualitative research. The research methods used are interview and observation and the procedure followed during the fieldwork for data collection will be discussed in detail. Further I will also describe my role as a researcher in the field, and the difference of power between myself and participants. The chapter will then underline the way ethical considerations like informed consent, privacy and confidentiality were taken care of. The chapter will end with limitations to the study and challenges faced during fieldwork.

3.2. Research with Children

Within social sciences, the way human beings are seen, either as an 'object in' or 'subject of' their lives, defines the overall research methodology which in turn decides the techniques to apply in the research process (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). Traditionally, children's lives and their childhood have been researched through the ideas and understandings of their adult caretakers, who spoke on children's behalf. As a result, a child was positioned as an object excluding him/her from the research process. Childhood Studies challenged this notion by regarding children as having unique characteristics that researcher should consider while creating research design and methodology (Christensen & James, 2008). Within Childhood Studies, the idea that children and young individuals are 'human becomings', has changed to the notion of regarding them as having a lot of potential and being experts of their own lives (Jens Qvortrup, 2009). Children are now viewed as thinkers, doers, and social actors where by listening carefully to them and paying attention the way they communicate will help researchers to learn about how to do research *with* children instead of doing research *on* them (Christensen & James, 2008).

Recognizing children as social agents and active participants within research has changed their position in various discourses. Within Childhood Studies, there is a tendency of researching children in two different ways: either by considering them same or completely different from adults which will influence the choice of methods (Samantha Punch, 2002). In addition, a third way was presented by (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998), suggesting that children could be perceived to be like adults but possessing different competencies. This latter perception encourages researchers to use innovative methods based upon children's skills (Punch, 2002). The recognition that children have awareness and knowledge of their social worlds has led to new methods in child research (Christensen and James 2008). The two basic ideas within sociology of Childhood, where children are viewed as social agents shaping (and being shaped by) their lives and those around them (James & Prout, 1997) and childhood being a social construct (Jenks, 2004) helps in understanding the position of a child which is not a universal experience and that childhood varies across cultures. These concepts will be taken into account when selecting a suitable methodology to be used in this research project. This research included adolescent girls as participants who rarely get a chance to get included in a research. Therefore, this research has given these girls the status of active research subjects by giving voice to them and to their experiences and perspectives.

3.3. Researcher: A traveller or a miner?

In order to obtain a thorough understanding of parents and their daughters' view regarding education related disparities in Pakistan, I constructed a research plan that could explore the causes and reasons behind why parents did not send their daughters to school and as a result the consequences these girls face from dropping out of school. Getting the proper insights into this matter was only possible by getting the information from individuals who have undergone such situations. In order to explore this topic, I mainly conducted qualitative interviews with my participants for the purpose of data collection. Regarding interviews, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) use two metaphors *traveller* and *miner* that might encourage the researcher to make reflections on the type of knowledge conception, he or she brings to an interview analysis. The metaphors of traveller and miner refers to the notion of interviewing, as a process of knowledge construction or collection, respectively. Within the miner metaphor "knowledge is known as a buried metal and the interviewer is the miner who unearths the valuable metal", where some miners pursue for objective data to be measured while others search for "nuggets of essential meaning" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48). In the contrary traveller metaphor, the interviewer is referred to as "a traveller on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48). The interviewer-traveller wanders around and upon encountering the people he asks them questions and encourages them to share their own stories of their lived worlds. The possible meanings in the original stories are separated and unfolded with the help of traveller's interpretations of the story. Hence, his or her journey may not only make him acquire new knowledge but might change him or her as well. As a researcher I conceive myself as a traveller who went into the field to meet people and inspire them to share the personal stories and experiences of their life. My journey as a traveller initiated the process of reflection. I made repeated reflections throughout my research process about my relationship with the participants and the way I engaged with them which in turn influenced the data I collected. My reflections also led me to new ways of understanding not only myself but also the values, norms and traditions practiced in my country that I previously took for granted (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, my role as an interviewer-traveller influenced the data and its collection process. These metaphors of traveller and miner not only make us realize how qualitative interview is used by researcher in different ways but also the significance of difference in framing our interpretations of interviewing and knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Alongside interviews, the method of observation was used in order to get familiar with the participants, their social relationships and learn about their lifestyle at home, schools, and the circumstances they were living in. Also, observation helped to familiarize myself with the type and nature of relationship participants were having with their family members.

3.4. Research Location

I carried out my field work in two small villages located near the city of Taxila (Punjab) and Mansehra (KPK), respectively. These two villages were chosen because I had personal acquaintances there that helped me in finding the research participants.

3.4.1. Description of Taxila City

Taxila is a historical ancient city situated near Rawalpindi District in Punjab, Pakistan. It is located about 22 miles (35 km) north-west of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, alongside the historic Grand Trunk Road, near the significant Sikh pilgrimage centre of Hasan Abdal, and

the Mughal-era Wah Gardens (Britannica, 2018). The total population of Taxila city is 677,951 (2017 census). Taxila was previously known as Takshashila. The recorded history of this city starts from 6th century BC. Within the city Punjabi culture dominates where people understand English and Urdu language but mostly speak Punjabi language. Taxila is also known for its handicraft and stonework. In the past it was also known as centre of learning within subcontinent. At present there are two universities in this city and students come from other places to get degrees from these universities. There are also other local school systems, but they are located in the city while rural areas have a smaller number of schools. Mostly within rural areas one or two government schools are present and sometimes people open private schools at their homes where younger children come to study. A small rural area was selected from Taxila and most of the fieldwork was conducted here.

3.4.2. Description of Mansehra City

Mansehra is located towards the east of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The city is situated at the southern end of the Pakhli Plain on the Bhut Stream (Britannica, 2013). It is a market town encircled by the hills that are pine-covered. Its population is estimated to be 1,017,643 (2017 census). The people here speak Hindko, Pashto, Gojri and Urdu is understood throughout the city. The overall literacy level of Mansehra is lower compared to the national literacy rate and the people in the rural areas of this city are facing poverty and food insecurities which is quite noticeable compared to other provinces (Luqman et al., 2015). There is only one university in this city therefore students travel to other cities in order to get higher education and also the literacy rate of females is low compared to males (ibid). I conducted a few interviews in a smaller village in Mansehra.

3.4.3. Selection of Participants

As this research is conducted in the research field of Childhood Studies, choosing children as participants is a crucial aspect. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the "scientific instrument", which implies that most technique of data collection for a qualitative researcher is through "looking and listening" (Changezi, 2009, p. 22). For this research two rural areas were selected. The people residing especially in the rural areas of Pakistan mostly live the life of poverty and are not highly educated. Although these rural people are financially poor and hardly make both ends meet, they still prefer to send their sons to school. The daughters on the other hand are kept back at home because of limited financial resources. My focus in this research project is gender disparity, particularly related to education. Prior to my fieldwork, I was already familiar with the high prevalence of gender disparity within rural areas. The people sometimes send their daughters to school up to certain age but after that they are asked to stay at home and their brothers continue to study. That is the reason I opted for the rural population and particularly females as the focal point of this study. Also, because the voice of young rural females is rarely included in the area of research. Therefore, purposive sampling technique was used where sampling is done "on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions" (A Bryman, 2004, p. 334). There were total of ten families who participated in this research. Eight out of ten interviews were conducted with mothers and their daughters and two interviews included grandmothers and granddaughters. While selecting participants, the definition of a child was considered from UNCRC (1989) which states that a child is a person under the age of 18 years. Based on this I collected my sample, which included the participants from the age of 13 to 18.

Although these young girls were falling into the legal category of child but contextually it was not the case. Their chronological age was not the determining factor for their childhood rather many other factors were involved which I will discuss in the later chapters. These young girls were my focus of attention, but I also included their mothers or grandmothers aged above 40. I wanted to hear from this vulnerable group of young girls, whose voices are neither heard nor considered generally, in order to comprehend the way, they experience their lives. In addition, some of the participants who migrated from the other regions of Pakistan talked about the norms of their castes and how this impacted on the young girl's everyday lives. The castes mentioned specifically were *Pathans*⁸ and *Kohistani*⁹ and their traditions and values were stricter than that of the other participants. My sample furthermore comprised of two categories of girls; those who never went to school and those who dropped out of school. The adults, mothers/grandmothers, were also part of this study in order to gain better understanding about their cultural beliefs, common practices, and also socioeconomic condition. I was not able to include their fathers in this research as the common rural area culture does not encourage male figures to talk to an outsider openly about their personal/family issues.

3.5. Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative methods are useful for studying the groups that are omitted and silenced, making their voices to be heard publicly (S. Ashraf, 2019). This project is mainly concerned with exploring the barriers and the causes behind gender inequality in education. It will also explore the importance of gender in the life of young rural girls and the role it plays in determining their everyday life. Within Childhood Studies the qualitative, ethnographic approach plays a vital role in acknowledging children and adolescents as worth studying in their own right (James, 2011) Qualitative research methodology was used in this project which involved a smaller number of participants and using in-depth research questions, for example by asking open ended questions (Silverman, 2006). Initially, both face-to-face interview and diary writing method were selected for the research. In diary writing method participants write about their daily life activities and experiences for number of days and this method is quite valuable for getting information linked to easily forgettable real-life events (Lämsä, Rönkä, Poikonen, & Malinen, 2012) and on-going experiences. The tool of diary writing relies on the important factor of children's literacy (Samantha Punch, 2002). When I went into the field and interviewed the participants, I came to know that although they went to the school for couple of years, they are unable to write properly. Few girls knew how to write and so they wanted to stick to the interview method. Without pushing them further, eventually the diary writing method was dropped. Using the method of face-to-face interviews was most suitable in this project for getting in-depth information. Observation technique was also used alongside the interviews in order to

⁸ The Pathans (also known as Pashtun or Pakhtoon) are an ethnic group based in Pakistan and Afghanistan and are the largest Muslim tribal society in the world. There are at least 30 major tribes, and countless sub-tribes and clans. They are known for their strict patriarchal and male-dominated dynamics where women are given little or no representation in the decision-making process.

⁹Kohistan, a Persian word meaning "land of mountains" is an administrative district in the province of Khyber –Pakhtunkhwa. Kohistani people practice patriarchy, where women are considered part of a man's property, having no rights of their own.
<https://historypak.com/kohistan/>

learn about the relationships, home environment, living conditions, the schools these girls went to.

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3.6. Entering the Field

The interviews were planned to be semi-structured for this project. Before going to Pakistan for the fieldwork, I prepared the interview guide separately for the mothers and their daughters so that the whole process of interview brings meaningful data. When I entered the field, I met 10 families, who agreed to participate in my study and engage in interviews. I used my private sources and contacts in order to find relevant people for the research. Many of the young girls among these families were eager to talk about their experiences that depicted how their voices are not commonly heard and considered. Most interviews were conducted in a small village in Taxila, Punjab, which is my hometown and I smoothly gained an access to the participants. That does not mean I gained permission to enter every person's home. There were few families who were not willing to take part in this study, because of their personal reasons, therefore they refused right away. I respected their decision and privacy by not requesting them again for participation. In ethnographic research, field entry is significant as one of the aims of this method is forming the affiliation and an insider's perspective (William A Corsaro & Molinari, 2008). This aim depends on dealing with guardians along with developing trust, getting to know about interpersonal relations and daily routines in the setting. Likewise, after gaining access to those families who were willing to take part, I went to their homes and presented my topic of research. I explained to each family about the method of interview, the questions I prepared for them and asked for their consent and told them about the recording device to be used during interviews. The day before each interview was conducted, I asked my participants to suggest a time slot so that their daily routine activities were not disturbed.

I also asked for the consent of mothers about their daughters giving interview. By showing such consideration families welcomed me more warmly. I informed them about the different sets of questions for the girls and the mothers and asked for a separate room or space in order to conduct the interviews. I also wanted the responses of my participants to not get biased in the presence of some other family member. Many agreed to this, but some families did not because they had small homes, not enough rooms or sometimes simply because the mother did not want to leave her daughter alone to answer. For instance, there was a case where a joint family was living, and they did not have enough space in their home, all the women and children gathered in the same room and there was a lot of noise, so I offered them to go to my place for the interview and they happily agreed. The remaining interviews were conducted at my participants' place.

3.7. Data Collection Techniques

In this research, the data was collected by using qualitative methods. I selected two qualitative methods; semi-structured interviews and field observation to collect data from my participants. For studying children and young people, qualitative research methodology is quite suitable because like adults, children's viewpoints matter a lot and provide meaningful data (A. W. Mughal, 2018). The contextual framework of research requires children's voice to be heard, referring to "the process of allowing children to articulate their views on matters that concern them" (James & James, 2012, p. 24). In contemporary childhood research researchers commonly implement those methods that are child-focused, and directly talk with the children and youth for the purpose of learning about their viewpoints and perspectives (James & James, 2012). When the researchers directly put the quotations of children in text, the reader should keep in mind that these quotes are precisely chosen for illustrating a particular argument or theme. Hence the representation of childhood, through specific quotes, is often mediated (James & James, 2012). During my analysis I will directly quote young girls and their mothers in two different chapters, showing two perspectives of different generations.

3.7.1. Interviews

The qualitative interviews act as a tool to understand the world from the participant's perspective, to uncover the meaning of their experiences and to reveal their lived world before explaining it scientifically (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Through such interviews we come to know how people describe their actions and experiences. The practicality of interview method in the discipline of social sciences has been widely acknowledged, which means that the method of interview has normally assumed to be an essential element in research design, as the qualitative researchers are likely to present comprehensive descriptions of participants and events in their natural settings (Weiss, 1994). Kvale (1996) also highlights that usually these events cannot be observed directly, rather having a conversation with participants is more effective in gaining comprehensive answers and exploring more knowledge. The interview guide I planned had open-ended questions that helped me in making further inquiries from my participants based on their responses. Such an interview guide permits the researcher to involve the interviewees within broad discussion after asking the introductory questions (Alan Bryman, 2016). The type of interview I used in my research is semi-structured interview, that is quite flexible as compared to structured interview because "it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Alshenqeti, 2014, p. 40). Researchers suggest using a basic checklist which

I prepared in the form of an interview guide, which “allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study” (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 40). A research interview is centred upon everyday conversation that has a structure and purpose and it helps the researcher to gain first-hand knowledge about subject’s feelings, values, experiences etc.

The whole project was notified and approved by Norwegian Centre of Research Data (NSD)¹⁰ before going into the field. The research aims to investigate the experiences of young rural girls and explore the challenges they face as a result of not going to school or getting dropped out of school. For this purpose, participants were not asked for their common perceptions, but rather their individual experiences. In order to get a clear depiction, the interviews should, as Kvale (1996) highlights, “neither be strictly structured with standardized questions or entirely nondirective but focused on certain themes” (1996, p. 34). As my interviews were semi-structured, I made sure to stick to the questions and wherever it was necessary I posed some new relevant questions and asked for more details from the interviewees. It was important to include parents in this research, as Tingstad (2007) states the interview of parents give contextual information, for example, related to “... habits, the family and the child, routines and practices, norms, and regulations” (2007, p. 133). So, in this research participation of mothers helped me to get additional information related to their daughters, culture, family norms and so forth.

Alshenqeeti (2014), while critically evaluating the method of interview, states that although interview is an inexpensive method that helps the researcher to discover relevant details that are not possible using other techniques, this method also depends upon the will of interviewees and how much data they want to reveal about any situation, event or themselves. He further states that while interviews produce large amount of data, they can be very time-consuming because the researcher needs to go physically in the field, spend time to gather data and also for transcribing and analysing that data.

3.7.2. Observation

Observation is also a type of qualitative method that was used alongside with interviews in this research. Observation is a primary source for providing data and it involves accounting for fieldwork events, behaviours, discussions, activities, interpersonal communications, or any other aspect of visible human experience (Changezi, 2009). This method can be used for shorter or longer intervals and helps researcher to experience and comprehend the behaviour of participants. During fieldwork, this method of unstructured observation was used while I was present in my participants’ home. I kept on observing, for instance, the type of house they live in, their lifestyle, any obvious factors that create hindrance for girls for not going to schools, any house chores performed by girls etc that might be connected to my topic of research. I also observed how some of the girls and their mothers got emotional when telling about their poor financial condition and others factors due to which they dropped out of school. As A Bryman (2004), indicates that in an unstructured observation there is not any requirement of planned observation for recording participant’s behaviour rather the objective is to note every possible detail regarding the behaviour of participants. The observations that I found important and relevant were jot down. For instance, when I went into the homes of my participants, I observed the joint family system where many people were living under one roof. If a joint

¹⁰ Reference number: 646936

family lived together, they had 2 or 3 rooms with one kitchen and one toilet and if there was a nuclear family, they had smaller homes with one or two rooms, a toilet, and a kitchen. Sometimes I noticed piles of baggage and stuff neatly stacked at the corner of room due to unavailability of space. The homes of participants were usually made of concrete, but some were living in mud houses and in huts. They were living a simple rural life. In terms of appearance the young girls presented themselves modest, wore simple dresses with a head scarf. They talked unpretentiously; some girls were shying away on some questions while others gave elaborated responses. Among these young participants a few of them were very shy to speak so that the interview lasted 10-15min, but several others took 30-35min for interview conversation and gave a detailed response.

3.8. Researcher's Role: An Insider, Outsider, or Both?

Within the qualitative research, the researcher holds a crucial position where her role is interpreted depending upon whether he is perceived as an insider or outsider. The data a researcher is able to collect from her participants may vary according to which position she seems to have i.e. either an insider or an outsider. When doing research with children, the researcher needs to remain reflexive throughout the process. Reflexivity is the ability of a researcher to critically reflect upon her role, assumptions, the choice, and the application of the methods (Samantha Punch, 2002). During my research when I kept on reflecting upon my role, I was inclined towards being more insider than an outsider. Nevertheless, I was accepted by research participants as both an insider and an outsider. Belonging to a comparatively privileged family and visiting from a foreign country gave the impact of being an outsider. Although I lived in the same village, my participants had several different castes, sociocultural backgrounds that I was unfamiliar with, which made me an outsider to them. On the other hand, having the familiarity with the country's common rural norms and being in the local apparel made me feel an insider for young girls and the culture. An insider is the one who possibly has similar reference points as the participants of the study (Changezi, 2009, p. 20) which allows the researcher to ask questions from his participants in such a way that is easy for them to understand. Being an insider has an advantage to read "between the lines" and comprehend the participants' response in a better way within a specific context it is being given (ibid). Being an insider gives the researcher benefit, but conversely it also has the risk of making participants feel that they know what the researcher "wants" to hear, and this could possibly affect their response (ibid). When the participants think that the researcher is an insider, they automatically perceive that he has a better understanding of their situation and they think of not elaborating their answers. As a result, the data produced might lack important or minute details. When I went into the field to interview the participants, several times they responded to my questions with the statement "...You know the reason" or "you know how it goes" etc. Such responses could have easily altered the production of primary and 'authentic' data. However, I kept on reminding the participants to explain things. Although I belong to the same area and the same culture, I have never experienced how it feels like not going to school. Therefore, instead of assuming and making my own interpretations I asked the participants to elaborate on their responses. As an insider I faced this challenge, that my participants might have skipped some important points useful for my research, but I also got the benefit of being familiar with the culture and language of my participants that helped them communicate with me comfortably that they wouldn't have done with "an outsider".

3.8.1. Asymmetrical power

It has remained an argument that the researcher will always remain in power and in control of the research procedure which cannot be avoided by adult researcher because she cannot pretend about having no power over child participants and the research process (Abebe, 2009). Imbalances in power are significant to all relationships, but they are amplified in the relation of adult-child, because research plans cannot remove the situation of adult power that children face on daily basis in their homes, school and communities (Abebe, 2009; Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Irwin, 2006; Kjørholt, 2004; Samantha Punch, 2002). I faced this sort of situation during my fieldwork, where girls were already living under the dominance of their male family members. Although they saw me as an insider, they also considered me as some adult 'elite' who came from abroad in order to talk to them on the matter of education and gender discrimination. Due to this reason they might have developed an idea that I am 'an outsider' too. Abebe (2009) says that dealing with these unequal power relations is vital for ethical research, therefore I also adopted the role of 'friendly adult', in order to create minimal power imbalance by spending time and showing respect towards them (Abebe, 2009; Mandell, 1991). Whenever I interviewed a single participant, I made sure to listen to their feelings and experiences with details without interrupting but rather showing my interest. As a result, they exhibited comfort and trust in elaborating on their personal experiences and situations they have been through. In addition, I think apparently I did not look 'more adult type', as the age difference was not much, I wore the same simple clothes as those young girls wear and I talked in the same language they did (Urdu, Punjabi) which helped me in adapting the role of 'friendly adult' and creating a relaxed atmosphere. Instead of calling me by my names the young girls used the word *baji* (an Urdu language word that refers to an elder sister) during our communication. They called me *baji* not only because it is a common way of addressing an elder girl but also it is a general practice of showing respect by not calling person by her name.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Doing an ethical research with humans requires a lot to take care of, especially when the children or young individuals are involved in research. Morrow and Richards (1996) describes ethics in research as applying moral norms in a way to avoid hurting or wronging others, to encourage the good, to give respect and be impartial. Hence the researcher should neither try to use any techniques that provide physical or mental harm to the children nor should they feel excluded from sharing their experiences and views in research. Their opinions should be given respect. Initially I planned to include children from 8 to 18 years, but then making younger children part of the research and asking them about their painful experiences from the past might make them think that they are being forced to explain. This might result in re-establish uncomfortable feelings (Boyden & Ennew, 1997) that can raise ethical issues. In order to follow ethical standards, I avoided including participants under the age of 12 for this research. Moreover, interviewing younger children and trying to make them understand the question and other related concepts was hard in the limited time period. The children and the researcher, in order to have a significant conversation, must understand the terminologies and concepts used by both sides (Fraser, 2008). For this purpose, teenage rural girls were opted as participants.

Generally, it is preferable if the researcher does not bring children to his home because that effects the already present asymmetrical power position between the adult researcher

and the children. In this study all the interviews were conducted at participant's home but as mentioned previously due to unavailability of space one family was brought to the researcher's place because that was the only option in order to make interaction with them. The empirical data gathered from this particular interview might have been influenced due to the change of settings. The participants seemed more confident at their homes but at researcher's place they seemed a bit shy while responding. I also observed that they were answering the interview questions hurriedly and in brief a manner. I got the impression that the participants did not want to share all the details because they were constantly interrupting each other and their grandmother. This situation made me reflect that in the future I should interview my remaining participants at their homes where they feel more comfortable and at an ease, while responding.

3.9.1. Informed Consent

The aim of the research should be elaborated to the participants by the researcher before conducting an ethical research. The researcher should seek for the permission of participants with the help of informed consent. As mentioned above the whole project was notified and approved by Norwegian Centre of Research Data (NSD) before going into the field. Therefore, separate sets of forms were first created which were approved by the NSD (please see Appendices). In this research, the sample I selected was unaware about reading and writing. Therefore, it was not practical to give them any information in written form or undertake any written agreement. Hence, I prepared an oral consent where participants were given all the required information like background and purpose of the study and then were asked to orally give an agreement. Along with the mothers, young girls were also given the authority to give consent. Although these girls were under 18 and fell into the category of children, it is indicated that children gain a valuable experience when they are given the power to make decision to participate in the research or not that in turn gives them control over their individuality, autonomy and privacy (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 95). Participants were informed about the nature of the research and their consent was taken before conducting the interviews. They were also told that they have the right of withdrawing or ending the interview at any time and could refuse to respond to any question they did not like answering. All the respondents included in the research participated willingly. The participants were informed about the recording device that would be used to record interviews, so permission was taken before starting the interviews.

3.9.2. Privacy and Confidentiality

Respecting the privacy of participants and maintain their confidentiality are crucial ethical concerns that a researcher should take care of. When the research is conducted in participants' home, privacy becomes a vague concept specially when the available space in the homes is being collectively shared with the other family members (G. Valentine, 1999). During my fieldwork it was difficult to find private space for interviews, sometimes because of the local conception about childhood, which view children's position as inferior within households and sometimes because of difficulty in finding suitable place (Abebe, 2009). I encountered some cases where I found difficulty in maintaining privacy and confidentiality, because the families had small homes and little space was shared by many people. At times, during my interviews with girls when they were sharing their feelings or past experiences, small children and adults kept on coming and going, which made my participants hesitate to share their experiences. I tried making that situation comfortable

by asking more general questions and when we were left alone then I preferred asking their personal experiences. In order to maintain my participants' anonymity and confidentiality, their names were not used while reporting them so that the participants remain unknown and unidentified. Ethics guidelines recommend that in order to protect anonymity and confidentiality of participants, their names and location are disguised in research (Morrow, 2008). During analysis, the names of interviewees were replaced with pseudonyms to conceal their identity. I asked my participants to choose their own pseudonyms, and also explained them the reason behind not choosing and including their real names (Morrow, 2008).

I guaranteed my participants confidentiality and asked them whether they want their interviews to be recorded in written form (i.e. taking notes during the interview), on recording device or not at all. Most of the participants agreed that I can record our conversation on sound recorder and these recordings were put in my computer in a password encrypted file so that no one has access to them. One participant specifically said that if this interview would not go on radio or television then it is okay to record it. I ensured her that this is not for public use and will only be used for my research work and deleted afterwards.

3.10. Transcription and Analysis

Transcription is the process of converting an oral conversation into a written text. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe transcribing as "a translation from one narrative mode-oral discourse-into another narrative mode-written discourse" (2009, p. 178). Out of ten interviews that I recorded, four or five are completely transcribed and from the remaining interviews some of the passages are quoted and transcribed. During transcription of sensitive topics ethical issue can arise if the confidentiality of the interviewees is not protected (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Therefore, interviews were not only kept in encrypted folder but were erased from the storage as soon as transcription was done. I excluded the names of participants and the occupations of their families in order to maintain anonymity. The interviews were translated from Urdu and Punjabi to English and the complete transcription was done by me. During the process of transcription, I was able to reflect on my role as a researcher and where I could have performed better. For instance, the interviews conducted in the beginning could have been less formal by talking to my participants for longer periods of time and more casually. Since it was the very first time for me to conduct face-to-face interviews, I was a little nervous too. Then in the following interviews I quickly learnt from my mistakes and tried being more confident and less formal. Hence my participants felt comfortable talking to me and gave detailed response especially young girls who happily shared their personal feelings and experiences.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews refers to the continuation of the conversation that began during the interview, revealing its horizon of probable meanings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In this research, two main themes will be constructed in order to analyse in two different sections. One chapter will try to examine the life of young girls from their mothers' perspective, describing the way their childhood is constructed and the importance of education in their lives. The second chapter will purely be based upon the life experiences of young girls and the boundaries they must comply with being a 'female'. The presence and experience of agency in the life of young rural girls will also be explored.

3.11. Limitation: Gendered Specific Research

One of the limitations regarding my study was the exclusion of male figure that is the father. When I went to interview my participants, I anticipated that the male figures would not participate. This is due to the cultural and religious boundaries between men and women. Moreover, fathers or any adult male figure do not like to give their opinions or talk to an outsider openly about their personal/family issues. Consequently, the data collected from the interviews might become gender specific that means demonstrating only female opinions. This might have an impact on the research analysis and its result. When I went into the field and asked from the mothers for their husband's opinion, I did not get any positive response. Initially three mothers came up with an excuse, therefore I further limited my research work around female participants. That is why only young girls and their mothers were part of this study.

Though, I was aware of the fact that several research settings are adult spaces where children have less control (Samantha Punch, 2002) and their responses could get biased in the presence of dominant adults. Before conducting interviews, I humbly requested to get a separate space, if possible, for both the mother and the daughter. In few cases when the interviews were being conducted, mothers or some other elder family member kept on coming and sitting in the same room even if I were in the middle of conversation with the girls. Keeping in mind the norms, I thought that if I asked the people to give us 'privacy', then it will become both 'a-cultural' and an 'awkward' manner of dealing with the situation, especially the when the members of the family are sharing a very small space (Abebe, 2009, p. 457). I observed that in the presence of an adult, the responses of my participants were being influenced because they responded by either hiding the facts or not expressing their feelings explicitly. I also observed the change in the body language of my participants, and they acted more shyly in the presence of other family member. Otherwise when I was alone with the girls their facial expressions and gestures exhibited that they are happily and openly sharing their experiences.

Thirdly the rural area in Taxila, where I conducted most of the interviews, was the one where I lived. I had few presumptions regarding the problems due to which girls do not go to school. I tried picking up 'perfect strangers' as my subject of study, who never met me, and we are unfamiliar to one another in order to maintain distance between us (McCracken, 1988). As having no 'critical distance' from the participants of the study can mislead from observing and collecting important data (McCracken, 1988, p. 22) and this happened specifically in two cases because sometimes the conversation became more informal and I was not able to ask directly from my participants to stay near the topic. This behaviour might have affected their responses. Upon reflecting on initial interviews, I was able to get the idea that in the next interviews I need to maintain the formal behaviour as a researcher, to get adequate responses.

3.12. Challenges Faced During Fieldwork

Finding bigger or smaller problems during the whole process of research specially in the field is normal for every researcher. During my fieldwork, some problems that I faced will be outlined here. I visited Pakistan during summer. When I went into the field, it was the month of Ramadhan (fasting month for Muslims), when people were fasting. I approached one of the families and asked for the interview. They agreed but during the interview I felt that they were talking with difficulty due to empty stomach and dizziness. Also, there was

no electricity and sitting in that room without a fan in the scorching heat and talking about such sensitive topic was not only difficult for me but for my participants too. So, in order to get data with some details I requested my participants if there was possibility to resume our interviews after the fasting period ended and they happily agreed. Although I thought of spending 4 to 5 weeks in the field but after Ramadhan, I was left with 3 weeks only. This was one of the challenges I encountered of completing my interviews within the time period of 3 weeks. Not every family I chose was able to give an interview. I went to a family where a mother and her daughters were sitting inside the room. I explained them the aim of my research and that I wanted to use a recording device, but she did not allow me. The mother asked me to come another day because she was afraid of her brother-in-law who was strolling outside the room, we were sitting in. According to her, if her brother-in-law heard us talking about education it could create problems for her and her daughters. He will use abusive language once I am gone. I got fearful seeing that man and listening to that woman's problem, so I thought of neither creating any trouble for her nor for me, so I left. These were just a few challenges encountered during fieldwork.

3.13. Summary

In this chapter I have explained the significance of children's voice in relation to the construction of research methodologies within Childhood Studies. I also briefly reflected upon being a traveller who produced data while having encounter with research participants. After entering into the field, the most important method of interview used for gathering data was described along with the technique of observation. I made reflections on my role being an insider and outsider for the interviewees and the setting and the power difference between me and the research participants. The ethical issues of privacy and confidentiality were also stated and the way they were taken care of. I also discussed about my research being gender specific and other limitations to it. In the end I mentioned some challenges I faced during my fieldwork.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter the relevant theoretical perspectives and concepts will be presented which will form the basis for analysing the research problem and the collected data. I will start the chapter by introducing briefly how Childhood Studies as a separate field emerged many years ago. Then I will talk about the approaches to be used in my analysis chapters later. First, I will describe the perspective of social constructionism where I will discuss about childhood not being universal. Rather it depends upon one's cultural, societal, and familial norms. That is why the phenomenon of childhood varies across time and space and I have chosen social constructionism to theorize childhood in rural Pakistan. Then I will discuss the actor-oriented approach where agency will be explained. The contextual situation of this research is complicated; therefore, the meaning of agency is not as simple. Lastly the concept of gender will be presented with reference to social constructionism. Perceiving children as social actors and childhood as a social construct puts emphasis upon the agency that children possess. Gender is an important entity within Pakistani culture leading the society to decide how to construct the childhood of a girl and boy. Due to explicit gender boundaries, particularly in rural areas, gender roles are defined. Therefore, in order to find what kind of agency girls experience and how their constructed childhoods affect them and their lives, these concepts will be used.

4.2. Emergence of Childhood Studies

Childhood Studies is considered a contemporary research field which has granted children and childhood a unique place in the present era. Until 16th century the idea of childhood as a separate phase of life did not emerge. Aries (1962) critically proposed the concept of childhood by stating that in the medieval ages the concept of childhood did not exist. He proposed such an idea after analysing medieval paintings where children were portrayed as miniature adults. In the 17th century the perceptions regarding childhood as a separate entity from adulthood started establishing, which gained much popularity in 19th and 20th century. Although Aries interpretations were criticized by some researchers (e.g. Corsaro, 2011 and Gittens, 2004), yet his work served as critical basis for understanding the ideas about childhood in the past. The ideas and notions of developmental psychology, anthropology and sociology had many similarities when conceptualizing children and observing them as incomplete beings, dependent upon society for representing the future of the social world (Lee, 2001). The children were studied and observed thoroughly in the late 19th century, but not for the sake of getting a glimpse in a child's daily life or identifying what it was like to be a child, rather the scientists perceived children essentially as individuals who were fascinating for revealing information about the foundations of humankind (James, 2009). Children were recognized as 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings' (Qvortrup, 1994) and they were traditionally seen as passive and dependent upon adults (Prout & James, 2015). When the paradigm shift and transformation in views about childhood and children occurred around 1970s and 1980s (referred to as a 'break with tradition', James, 2009, p. 37), the exclusive focus was on children *becoming* adults, hence overlooking children's importance as *beings* (James, 2009). After thoroughly studying children's activities and contributions to their own lives and to the social world around them, Childhood Studies leaned towards the *being* child of the present over the *becoming* child of the future (James, 2009).

Generally, the *being* child is perceived as a social actor in his or her own right, actively constructing his or her own childhood, and who has understandings and experiences about being a child; the *becoming* child is viewed as an 'adult in the making', who lacks universal characteristics of the adult that they will become (Uprichard, 2008, p. 304). Instead of discussing *being* and *becoming* as two separate discourses, Uprichard (2008) argues that 'being and becoming' should be used together in complementary ways. A child should be recognized as both 'being and becoming,' while childhood must be seen in a temporal context. She further states that considering the child as both 'being and becoming' increases the agency that child has in the world. Referring to her empirical study, Uprichard (2008) makes an argument that children actively constructed themselves as both 'beings and becomings'; therefore, conceptualizing children as 'being and becomings' is not only constructive in terms of explicitly addressing the ageing process within childhood itself, it also reflects the ways that children themselves see themselves and their changing world within which they are necessarily situated (2008, p. 310). Consequently, children's agency helps them to construct their everyday lives and the world around them both in their present and future lives (Uprichard, 2008, p. 311). Furthermore, Hanson (2017) has recently pointed out the absence of the 'been' child and expressed the need of including the *past* into the equation i.e. been, being, becoming. He suggested that in order to understand children and childhood researchers should give due consideration not only 'to how present and future are balanced but also to more explicitly embrace children's and childhood's past' (Hanson, 2017, p. 281). In his opinion the *triolectical* conceptualization made of 'been', 'being' and 'becoming' proposes a more productive lens for exploring children and childhood, as this conceptualization comprise of more complicated relationships between children's past, present and future.

UNCRC emerging in 1989 supported the idea of the changing image of the child by granting them separate rights from adults. UNCRC was a huge milestone proving grounds for discussions and research into children's lives. The twentieth century is regarded as the *century of the child* (James & Prout, 1997) where children are valued and respected by giving them special status in the society, policy, and legal framework. Within research, they are not considered passive or incompetent anymore because they are now being recognized by giving them more direct voice and participation in data production (ibid). Today about forty years have passed since the emergence of the research field of Childhood Studies, that came out of a heavy criticism of child development and family studies' paradigms and during this process some other branches and research areas made connections with the sociology of childhood – from geography to education to law – forming an academic field of interest often labelled 'Childhood Studies' (Tisdall & Punch, 2012), hence turning into a multidisciplinary research area. Childhood Studies started seeing children as actors, human beings, thinkers, and doers. Consequently, researchers started to focus on doing research *with* children instead of *on* them. In their book *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, Prout and James (1990), point out that the history of childhood within social sciences has been identified not by having less interest in children but rather by the silence of children. They supported the idea of Hardman (1973) that the emerging paradigm tries to give a voice to children by studying them in their own right. Hence six key features of the new paradigm of social studies of childhood were identified by Prout and James (1990):

1. Childhood is understood as a social construction. The socially constructed childhood is distinct from biological immaturity.

2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. Varieties of childhoods exist rather than a single or universal childhood.
3. Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right.
4. Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live.
5. Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood because it allows children to have more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data.
6. Proclaiming a new paradigm of childhood sociology is to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society.

(1990, pp. 8-9)

Childhood Studies is perceived as a wide multidisciplinary field, where children and childhood are theoretically focused and analysed (Smith & Greene, 2014). It comprises of many theoretical concepts but Alanen summarized these into three main approaches/perspectives that describe the ways to do research with children in Childhood Studies: actor-oriented approach, structural perspective, and constructionist perspective. The actor-oriented approach stresses upon valuing children as competent, active beings (Prout & James, 1990) and using the method of ethnography for understanding children's experiences in daily life circumstances. The structural perspective views childhood as a social category and a phenomenon in a society (Qvortrup, 1994). The constructionist approach argues that childhood is not a natural phenomenon but a social construct that is created by the children and for the children (Prout & James, 2015). In this research, the two main ideas of Childhood Studies; children being social actors and agents and not just passive recipients and childhood being a social construct that varies across time and space, will be my main focus. In the following section I will present the theoretical ideas and concepts related to these two perspectives and the concept of gender will also be highlighted which holds a crucial position in this research.

4.3. Childhood as Socially Constructed

Even though there was criticism on his idea that the status of childhood in its own right did not exist in the European middle ages and children during that time were not separate from adults, Aries (1962) is still considered the pioneer for studying childhood as a social construction. He was among the first historians who pointed out that childhood is a social construction which changes immensely over the period of time. The approach of social constructionism is related to the perceptions about children and not facts about them, therefore several social constructionists refuse the presence of universal facts related to children (Montgomery, 2003). Social constructionists essentially explore how categories are constructed, how bodies of knowledge are developed and how childhood as well as adulthood are viewed and comprehended in a given society (ibid).

Among the six key features mentioned above, the very first feature is significant in forming the basis of social constructionist approach and is elaborated as:

Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.

(Prout & James, 1990, p. 7)

As the ideas related to children are reliant upon their social, cultural, and historical context so they vary. Therefore, social constructionism permits the analysis of the ideology behind practices, debating that before passing any judgement these practices should be studied in reference to their context. Jenks (1982) supports, while theorizing, that childhood is neither a natural occurrence nor understood as such because childhood is always associated with a particular cultural setting. He believes that socially transforming from a child to adult does not mean just growing physically or getting recognition by adults. Although physical characteristics make distinctions between a child and an adult, they do not form logical foundation for the relationship between them. Childhood is basically considered a social construct that vary from culture to culture, time to time and society to society. In fact, it varies profoundly within the history of a single culture and is merged within the social structure, thus shaped, and revealed by some typical ways of conduct (Jenks, 1982, 2004).

Montgomery (2003) point out that the methods and policies which form the basis for the social construction of childhood, not only influence the ways of dealing with a child but also gives an idea of what a child should be. Within anthropology and sociology, it has long been understood that every culture has a different way of raising a child and each culture has its own meaning of childhood. However, the modern world is going through the phase of globalization, defined by sociologist Anthony Giddens as 'the increasing interdependence of world society' (Giddens 1997, p. 64 in Montgomery, 2003), where power shifts are occurring between cultures and governments and international corporations. In the light of social constructionism, there is diversity in the childhoods that are socially and culturally constructed because children's lives vary depending upon 'culture, class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, religion and birth order', hence making simplistic distinctions can be challenging between the Majority and Minority World childhood (Samantha Punch, 2003, p. 278). "The child being immature is a biological fact but the ways of understanding and comprehending this immaturity are a fact of culture" (Prout & James, 2015, p. 6) and these facts may keep on changing over the course of time. Thus, keeping this in mind we can say that childhood is both constructed and reconstructed both for children and by children (Prout & James, 2015). As the childhood varies from culture to culture depending upon the context, in the similar manner the child of global North cannot represent the child of global South or an urban childhood cannot signify a rural childhood. Childhood Studies aims at interpreting a child according to his or her situational context. Thus, emphasizing children as social actors who are *beings* in their own right and bringing change in theorizing children from being passive human-becoming to active human beings (James, 2007). When a child is perceived as complete human being, it does not refer to the child as identical to an adult rather he should possess same values as that of adults (Nilsen, 1990).

As James (2007) mentions that children are not natural beings and childhood is socially constructed depending on the context. This whole argument will be used in the analysis

chapter by aiming at the context-specific description of childhood. The ways in which rural society conceptualizes childhood as well as girlhood impacts the young rural girls' life. This concept will illustrate and demonstrate how the constructed life of a rural child is separate from a global child perspective. Various physical, cultural, and familial reasons will be exemplified on the basis of this notion.

4.4. Actor oriented approach: Agency and its Types

Within Childhood Studies, the actor-oriented approach argues that children should be perceived and valued as complete human beings who actively construct their own lives, influence the lives of those around them and the society of which they are part of (James & Prout, 1997). Thus, children are regarded as worthy of studying in their own right, focusing their perspectives and views which are distinct from adults (ibid).

The actor-oriented approach is one of the major approaches within social studies of childhood, where children are recognized as social *actors* or *agents*, whenever we indicate the agential power of individuals. Some define agency as "the capacity of individuals to act independently" (James & James, 2012, p. 3), some say agency is individual's own "capacities, competencies and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds" (Robson, Bell, & Klocker, 2007, p. 135), others define it as "children's ability to construct and determine their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8). While an important division is made by Mayall (2003) between actor and agency; an actor is the one who does something whereas the agent is someone who does something in relation with other people and, in doing so, makes things happen. According to Abebe (2019) this distinction suggested that being an actor is about performing or accomplishing whereas being an agent is about relationality that includes intergenerational relations and when we theorize children as agents, this given viewpoint refers to perceiving them as thinkers and doers. Moreover Lyså (2018, p. 45) elaborates that agency, other than being an issue of change or resistance, can also be a topic of adaptation, compliance, understanding your position or acting in a 'socially responsible' way. For instance, children may undertake their subordinate position in society but in doing so they do not act as passive objects rather they become 'strategic agents' by making 'active decisions' for getting the desired benefit (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013, p. 484). Thus, children can be defined as agents who act purposively, which means neither are they directed to do a specific action, nor they act only without producing an effect in their surroundings (K. Valentine, 2011).

Abebe (2019), while referring to the definition of 'agency' presented above by Robson et al. (2007), explains that children's agency lies in their actions/practices while they use their agency to accomplish the expectations as well as the individual and/or collective choices, which in turn has an effect on their immediate and future lives. This implies that agency keeps on changing, depending upon the context. It also suggests that there are continuous negotiations of agency between children, families and communities while dealing with personal and mutual interest. Consequently, the way children experience agency changes relying upon the people they are with, their actions and their location (Robson et al., 2007). Similarly, children are said to be potentially competent but in some context their agency becomes limited, negative or problematic (Tisdall & Punch, 2012) while in some areas of life children may experience agency but in other areas they don't (Robson et al., 2007). Based on the idea that children's agency is not individual, or it depends on the people they are with, I will highlight Relational and interdependent agency.

4.4.1. Relational agency/ Interdependent agency

Within sociology, idea of agency has been conceptualized by Burkitt (2016) as relational rather than an individual phenomenon. He elaborates on agency by stating that it is related with the people, who create specific effects in the world and on one another with the help of their relational connections and mutual actions. Consequently, individuals are considered to be interactants rather than singular agents or actors. Instead of mentioning structure, he states about “webs or networks of relations and interdependencies, both interpersonal and impersonal, in which interactants and their joint actions are embedded” (Burkitt, 2016, p. 323). When agency is defined in a wider sense, it is recognized as producing effect on the world and others and appears among people in their relational context, but it cannot be theorized as an absolute power, rather it should be understood as a matter of degree (Burkitt, 2016). The agents act in the ways they do because their acts are extremely meaningful to them:

“we are not engaged in different forms of relations and interactions purely to reproduce or elaborate structures on the basis of our own interests, but because the meaningfulness of the particular activities we engage in with others is deeply fulfilling to us”

(Burkitt, 2016, p. 331).

In such an understanding, agency cannot be understood as individual’s capacity to act independently (Lyså, 2018). Hence children are dependent and independent at the same time and their agency should be researched according to their contextual location (Abebe, 2019).

Within Childhood Studies the relational agency is highlighted by Abebe (2019), as ‘interdependent agency’ where childhood and other generations like youth, adults, elders co-determine each other. The relationship among them cannot *only* be contradictory but also productive. This interdependent agency affects the way the relationship between adults and children are developed in everyday life. For instance, in many countries of Majority World, there is an intergenerational contract, based on the idea of care and responsibility between generations; where parents take care of their children and children in return are supposed to take care of their parents when they get old (Punch, 2015). Through *negotiated interdependencies* the relationships between parents and children and among siblings are negotiated and renegotiated over the time span depending upon context, which illustrate the significance of social relationships in young children’s life (ibid). Punch (2015) concludes that relationships can play a vital role by encouraging young people to avail the opportunities and also at times may restrict their livelihood chances. Such interdependent relationships keep on evolving. In case of working children, they not only support their family by earning but also give their parents some space to do certain activities, while they take care of house chores. This shows how agency keeps on changing depending upon daily life situations, where a child’s agency remains an essential component, influenced by the familial ideas of care, obligations, and reciprocity (Abebe, 2019). Yet there is possibility of empowering children as relational beings, by allowing them and their adults to acknowledge their individual roles in a way that reveal their everyday life (Abebe, 2019). According to children’s competencies and their gender, they perform some particular activities and roles and with the passage of time these roles merge with their characters. In Majority world children either boy or a girl are given value

for actively contributing to the household tasks, rather than being passively dependent (Powell, Taylor, & Smith, 2008). They are not asked ideologically to stay away from doing work and contributing financially, compared to Minority world where children's agency in creating and cooperating economically is denied (Powell et al., 2008).

Thick and thin agency are the terms used by Klocker (2007) in order to describe 'constrained or expanded capacities to exercise agency' in various situations (p. 85). By referring to thick or thin agency the effect of context on a child's agency can be theorized. Thick agency means having the opportunity to act or make decision when children are surrounded by many options or variety of choices. Conversely thin agency is the capacity to take decisions and perform everyday actions within highly restrictive environment, providing limited choices to the children. Over the passage of time and space and across different relationships, the agency of an individual is likely to become 'thickened' or 'thinned'. Various relationships, contexts and structures can function as thickeners or thinners of a person's agency either by limiting or increasing available options.

The concept of agency will exclusively provide basis for examining the way a young rural girl is exercising her agency within the boundaries of her home and in her life. This concept will clarify about the activeness of a female gender in negotiations taking place in daily life circumstances in various relationships. The young rural girls dropping out of school due to familial pressure cannot be categorized as solely passive or vulnerable victims rather their agency exists which I will try to explore by giving voice to them.

4.5. Gender

Gender is defined by Coltrane (1998, p. 7) as "what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific time and place". The time and space indicate societal context where gender is classified according to the cultural values followed at specific time and setting. Gender is defined by James and James (2012) as "the social and cultural construction of sexual difference" (p. 59). When a child is born the sex is biologically distinguished and the child is attributed as a male or a female, but the way in which maleness and femaleness are perceived and experienced, construct 'gender' in society (ibid). Sex is perceived as an attributed status because an individual is born with it, whereas gender is an accomplished status because it should be learned. Rogers (2003) highlights the differentiation that theorist and researchers make between these two categories; sex refers to the features that appear from biological variations while gender represent the degree or ways that masculinity and femininity are influenced by history, society, culture, economy, politics and psychology. There has also been an argument since long about the impact of nature and nurture; some argue that girls and boys are distinguished on the basis of biological factors occurring naturally, some are of the view that nurture is responsible for gender differences while the third group thinks that the interaction between nature and nurture plays a role in child development (Rogers, 2003). Another claim is that gender and sex are outcomes of human meaning-making where only gender produces sex and not vice versa (ibid). No matter what the reasons are behind the gender differences, either biological or social or mixture of both, they remain major distinguishing factors in daily life of children.

4.5.1. In the Light of Social Constructionism

As mentioned above, social constructionist approach argues that gender is neither the product of biology not simply of socialization but is constructed by human-meaning making. This means that the way people conceptualize and give meaning to gender makes the sexual distinctions between male and female powerful (Rogers, 2003). In every culture and society, gender strongly determines how the children will be recognized and treated by the community members, the way children observe themselves and interact with others, what children are allowed to do and what not, the opportunity and resources they have etc (ibid). Children whether male or female are unique physically, socially and in terms of their need and responsibilities. The children are valued and regarded in a different way when differentiated by social and physical characteristics and gender is one of them that shows persistent and prominent differences during childhood (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Biologically girls are considered to be stronger than boys because after birth their survival chances are higher, but various societies strongly prefer boys which then affect the wellbeing of boys and girls differently (ibid). It is claimed that universally females hold an inferior status as compared to males without any biological cause, but the reason behind this inferiority could be found within the philosophies and symbols of a particular culture (Montgomery, 2008). I will also try to find out through this research how being a female gives a rural girl inferior status, where she must show obedience towards her father, brother, or husband. A rural girl is also expected to follow the traditional roles constructed for her. The society and most importantly the family and parents play a significant part in constructing gender roles. As gender roles become part of the culture, they turn into gender stereotypes, which describe the way of living of a specific society (Saeed & Zainab, 2017). The particular characteristics linked with the masculine and feminine roles in the society are known as gender role stereotypes (Stets & Burke, 1996). After getting born a child identify himself/herself as a male or female by existing cultural patterns that recognize one's gender and also initiates child's active role as a male or female. Culture is also a complicated, dense, and multidimensional expression with numerous definitions based upon broader meanings applied to various societies with certain contextual notions limited to specific categories. Nevertheless, the main objective of all definitions is to emphasize upon some aspects of human behaviour in everyday life (A. H. Qamar, 2012).

Gender holds a crucial position within social surroundings, where it classifies the individuals of the society as male or female, instantaneously establishing the gendered socialization (A. H. Qamar, 2012). Sex in biological terms is easy to understand comparative to gender which has a social dimension. Gender is understood in terms of its social meaning, where it holds a complicated position due to wide range of social structure across cultures (A. H. Qamar, 2012). The culture and society remain dominant in raising children and explaining childhood with regards to social perspective (Prout & James, 1990), thus forms the core of social construction of childhood. As (A. H. Qamar, 2012) points out that the culture and religion together form the traditional rural society which puts its influence on a child's life since birth. Within the informal setting, gender specific roles are learned by children when they are growing up through a continuous interaction with elders, parents, and fellows. This informal education leads to the transmission of culture from one generation to another while forming and constructing a crucial component that is gender. According to (A. H. Qamar, 2012) a *successful* socialization takes place when culture-oriented gender identity is accomplished by a child and is capable of performing his or her gender role in the society. He further mentions that gender is portrayed and depicted in distinctive ways in our lives like in monetary or social activities,

daily life interactions, use of language (verbal labelling), carrying out traditions and customs etc. Many societies provide space to identify gender and then nurture males and females through informal education.

Gender inequality. The noticeable or hidden disparity between people on the basis of gender refers to gender inequality. Sex is constructed biologically through chromosomes and genes and gender is constructed socially through social interactions. The way a gender is constructed contributes to the creation of discriminatory behaviour which is exhibited in several aspects of life. That means when the males and females are divided into two different groups, they experience differential treatment which lead to gender inequality. In many societies, females face the discriminatory behaviour but very less literature is available describing the fundamental reasons behind gender gap. Nevertheless, many studies point out that man's physical strength and dominance in his behaviour leads to discrimination towards females (I. A. Shah & Baporikar, 2013). In many Muslim communities like Pakistan gender relations are dependent upon two ideas: females being subordinate to males, and that the honour of a male lives in actions of females of his family. Thereby women, in conventional Muslim society, face restricted mobility and limited boundaries for performing activities because they have the obligation to maintain family honour (I. A. Shah & Baporikar, 2013). Through this research I also seek to uncover the underlying justifications for gender discrimination particularly in the field of education.

4.6. Summary

This thesis is being written from the perspective of Childhood studies therefore, two main concepts from Childhood Studies have been included. The two approaches social constructionism and actor-oriented approach along with the interdependent agency, thick and thin agency have been explained in this chapter that will provide basis for the analysis chapters. Another important concept of gender has also been discussed, as gender hold a crucial position in regards with the context of this research. The concept of social constructionism will mostly be used in chapter 1 of analysis, where it will explore how different barriers in schooling are constructing childhood of a rural girl. The actor-oriented approach will examine the degree and type of agency in a young girl's life. Agency becomes a complex topic when applied within a specific context and this I will exemplify in the final analysis chapter. Side by side the concept of gender will be used in both the chapters because it holds an important position in the lives of young rural girls due to which they face discriminatory behaviour. I will further elaborate on it in the analysis chapter.

Chapter 5: Barriers to Girls' Education

5.1. Introduction

There are several obstacles a Pakistani rural girl faces during her schooling or due to which she drops out of school. For a young rural girl, these obstacles do not create hindrances alone, rather every type of barrier is interrelated and interconnected leading to strong gender inequality within the field of education. This study will explore what those multiple factors causing discrimination are, and how they are interrelated with one another. For instance, during my fieldwork I observed that poverty is the root cause in creating barrier to girl's education, but I also found out that cultural and familial norms are important barriers. Therefore, in this chapter first I will explain three main barriers that my participants encountered: structural, familial, and cultural barriers. These barriers not only overlap one another but are closely intertwined. This chapter will mostly discuss the opinions and viewpoints and of mothers, who will talk about their daughters' drop out. Afterwards I will analyse and discuss the barriers mentioned by the mothers in light of social constructionism. These barriers will indicate the way the childhood period of a girl is constructed, and the types of expectations linked to an *ideal* girlhood in this context.

5.2. Practical Barriers

Practical barriers stand as the primary reasons why rural girls are not able to complete their education. Firstly, the schools built within rural areas are less in number. Generally, for the children of one village only one or two schools are available, and they are usually not fully equipped with required facilities. For instance, my research participants in Punjab mentioned that their rural population is approximately of four thousand people where children and young people make half of the population. Both the schools in the village have approximately around 70 students in preschool level, 190 in primary level, and 50 in middle level. I got the opportunity to visit the two schools in the village of Punjab and found some details regarding those schools and cross-checked them with what my participants told. I observed that there are two schools in that rural area. One school was up to 5th grade and was co-education, but the other school had girls and boys up til 5th grade and from 6th to 8th grade there were only girls. The boys for continuing their school after 5th grade was supposed to join the school outside the village while girls had an option of attending school up til 8th grade. The distance between the two schools in village was 5 to 10 min by foot. The basic necessities were present like furniture and blackboard, but they were of poor quality. There were just two to three toilets in each school and were not clean enough. The participants also told me that there was no fence before around one of the schools but now it has been built. Along with that the facility of water was unavailable in one school, so these girls were asked by their teachers to fetch water from the nearby canal which I also observed at one occasion. I saw them fetching water from the canal and bringing it to school for their teachers and younger students. Classrooms were also of limited number and there were no laboratories. There was no backup for the electricity, because when electricity was gone the students had to sit in the classrooms without lights and fans and study. These conditions are very common in the schools located in rural areas which are usually attended by the children belonging to the poor families. The participants told me that they pay only 60 rupees (approximately 0.38 USD) school fee every month which is not expensive. When I went to their homes, I saw the conditions

they were living in like the small houses, only one or two persons earning and very less income upon which number of family members were relying. The observation method assisted me in viewing some visible and invisible barriers that did not let Pakistani girls go to schools.

The children particularly girls when reach up to middle level of schooling their number drops drastically. One of the evident reasons is that the school is until middle level (8th grade) and after that girls have to travel outside the village for attending school. Behind their drop out lies numerous reasons as well as barriers. Mothers were asked during the interviews about their concern towards the availability of limited facilities at school, and two of them stated like this:

There was shortage of facilities some years ago. There was neither water nor toilets in the schools. The students used to go out of the school for toilet. But now in the recent years the situation has changed...

There are very few teachers in the school. Furniture was also not available initially and children used to sit on floor and study but now they have chairs and tables.

Most of the mothers and their daughters upon asking said that the basic facilities are available in their school, but the main issue is about school having limited grades. They are either up to 5th grade or 8th grade. The schools that are far away or outside the village are up to grade 10th. In both the villages, where fieldwork was conducted, the problem of schools having grades less than 10 was common. Sumaira and Salma's mother during the interview showed the desire of sending her daughters to school no matter the cost but there was this obstacle:

The school in our village is not up to 10th grade. If any school near our home was up to 10th grade, then I would have sent my daughters. Even if they faced any problems while going to the school they were near their home. It is difficult to send them outside the village to some other place because there are many problems then.

Bushra migrated with her mother from another rural area a year ago. Her mother explained that a few years back there was only one school in the old village, which had the co-education system:

There was only one school which was coeducation. People felt embarrassed when they saw girls and boys studying together. So, some parents took their daughters out of that school. The school was opened in someone's home, after some time a school was build and children were moved there. We also had a problem with coeducation, so our girls also dropped out of that school.

None of the other mother mentioned that they had problem with coeducation until 5th grade but Bushra's mother felt humiliated because no one in her village viewed coeducation positively. She sent her children to the school outside the village. As the school was far away, soon her daughters dropped out of it. In her view shortage of schools in rural areas brings various other issues for young girls due to which they drop out:

There was no school near our home, neither for boys nor for girls. They used to walk long distances. It was really far. Although a school has been built in the recent years but now my two daughters are married and the third one has also grown up. She is not of school going age.

Besides the smaller number of schools, the availability and affordability of transportation is another challenge, which the poor parents are generally not able to overcome. The people living in rural areas have large families and live a life in poverty. When they have to send all of their children to school that indicate more cost for food, uniform, books, and transport. Therefore, parents choose their sons to go outside the village and continue their studies and girls drop out of school. The girls then are not able to continue studying after primary school. Usually parents cannot send their daughters on foot to the school outside the village because the schools are very few and far away, there are problems like safety and harassment issues for girls which is not the case for boys. Hence some private transportation should be arranged for the girls to go outside the rural areas for continuation of their studies. This, in most of the cases, is not possible because parents simply cannot afford the cost of private transportation. A mother of 8 children explained:

I sent my children to the school. The two daughters went to the nearby government school, one left the school after completing 8th grade and the other one dropped out after 7th grade. The school is only up to 8th grade. After that children have to go outside the village. I could not afford sending my daughters after 8th grade because the schools were far from our house, more money was required for school and travel expenses and no one was ready to take responsibility for picking and dropping the girls...

The mother of Amina and Fatima shared similar views:

Girls usually leave the school after 5th grade because in the village there are two schools, one is till 5th and the other is till 8th grade. It is difficult for parents to send their daughters to some other area for schooling. Firstly, they do not want their daughters to travel alone and secondly there is expense of travelling, along with the school fee and other expenses every month. My youngest daughter went to the Madrassa¹¹ with her cousin and some other girls to read Quran and get religious education. Although the fee was a bit high, we still asked her to go and study. But after 6 months she left Madrassa because all the girls that were going with her were not capable of paying the travel expenses.

Bushra's mother told that Bushra used to walk to the school for more than an hour and dropped out of school in 3rd grade. Although they forced their sons to continue studying, they dropped out soon after the death of their father. Among other issues, poverty and transportation caused problems for her daughters:

...The other reason was that school was at a distant place and my husband did not have enough money for travelling purposes. We were financially not stable and also the rented car drivers are not trustworthy

¹¹ Religious school (mentioned in chapter 2)

and reliable. The facility of local bus was available but for that the children were supposed to walk out of the village. Although Bushra decided herself but we as her parents also told her that the school is too far, and we do not want bastard people cross your way and its risky to send young girls. So, all my three daughters dropped out of school at the same time.

Like Bushra's mother, every single mother was insecure about the shortage of physical infrastructure that was creating barrier in their daughters' access to education. The government schools, in almost all the cases, were few and far between due to which girls were supposed to travel long distances. The families felt that travelling long distances is not worth it because being a female it was not safe for their young daughters. Either travelling was on foot or with pick and drop service, the parents were not in favor of sending their daughters to a school outside the village. The schools were mostly up to 5th and 8th grades; hence parents tried sending their daughters up to these grades but afterwards due to lack of infrastructural as well as other barriers eventually the girls dropped out.

5.3. Familial Barriers

In rural areas of Pakistan, a key barrier to girls' education is poverty. Due to poor socioeconomic conditions, parents (my research participants) showed a discriminating attitude towards their daughters' schooling. Sons were permitted to continue their studies and daughters, after passing some grades at school, ultimately drop out of it. The girls either stayed at home and looked after their siblings and house chores or went to Madrassa, for seeking religious knowledge. If they possess cattle at homes, then they also go out, fetch water, and collect fodder for them. Amina and Fatima's mother admitted that she does not have any intention of showing discrimination between sons and daughters but due to poverty, they were not able to afford the school fee and travel expenses. Hence girls were asked to stay back at home and provide a helping hand in house chores:

From the start we sent all sons and daughters to schools. There was no restriction, neither from me nor from their father. If we had money, we would have sent them to private schools, where the education is of high standard. But my husband is jobless, and we hardly make both ends meet. Now my youngest son is asking us to buy him a bicycle so that he can go to school. But if we admit him to the school, we think of the extra expenses that will come with studies. Nowadays studies bring a lot of additional expenditures that we poor people cannot afford.

Many people living in rural areas face poverty throughout their lives. The head of the family i.e. father usually has low salary upon which many people depend. Through this low income only few basic needs of daily life are fulfilled. When it comes to the matter of giving education or food to their children, parents then prefer food, as it is the most essential need for them. The expenses on education and travelling are cut down when girls drop out of school. The boys continue their studies because parents expect them to support the family in the future. The sons of my participants were not able to fulfil their parents' expectations because they were not as interested in studies as daughters were. The participants were of the view that in comparison to the boys, girls pay more attention towards their studies. The mothers while talking showed disappointment in their sons and confessed that although as compared to the daughters the sons are given an opportunity

to go to school and make their future bright, but they do not avail it. They waste their time by roaming here and there with their 'loafer friends' and not taking studies seriously, though the schools and facilities are available, but it depends upon their willingness:

There are many schools but if children are lucky enough and realize the importance of going to the school then they can get the education.

During interviews, I observed some mothers getting emotional and holding back their tears while they expressed their dissatisfaction with their sons for not attending school. A mother showed her unhappiness in these words:

Nowadays sons do not give any benefit to their parents. If my sons go to school and get some education, it will be beneficial for themselves. They will be able to get some job and earn money for themselves. We will not get any benefit from them. We are very disappointed and annoyed with our sons, they neither go to school nor try to find any job. They are easily getting free food from their home that is why they do not act as responsible sons. Once they stop getting food from home, they will try to find some work and earn money.

She also described the situation within her home due to which her daughters Amina and Fatima were not able to complete their education:

Of course, we would have sent our daughters to school if there was proper system within our home. We do not have enough money. The income that we get is hardly enough for food and basic expenses. If we did not have these cattle, then we would have not been able to get food. We must take care of our cattle; our hands are tied, otherwise our daughters would have attended school further.

Bushra's mother was also not happy about her sons. Firstly, because they did not acquire any education and wasted their time. Secondly, they were not earning money and were totally dependent upon their widow mother:

I wanted both my sons and daughters to study well but due to poverty and some other reasons girls dropped out of school. After my husband's death, I forced my sons a lot to continue their studies, but they did not listen to me. My unmarried daughter and I work as a maid in other people's homes and earn money. My boys do nothing.

As mentioned above in many regions of Pakistan, girls get dropped out of school because their parents are poor and cannot afford transport for them. Transport is necessary not only due to travelling purpose but for the safety of girls. When the school is a bit far from the home or is outside the village then the security of a girl becomes the main concern. It has also been stated that lack of security for girls and poverty are two main reasons for high dropout rates of girls in Pakistan (Khan, Azhar and Shah, 2011) and these reasons indicate which school parents will choose for their sons and daughter. In the village of Punjab, where this fieldwork was conducted, the people did not show any fear of facing threats from extremists' groups or schools being bombed. Such incidents mostly occur in the war areas of Pakistan, where Taliban forcefully try to shut down girls' schools by

destroying them. This village is not amongst sensitive areas of Pakistan rather it is a calm peaceful village therefore participants were not concerned about extremism factor. As long as girls were attending the school within that particular rural area, parents considered it safe, but they were afraid of girls getting harassed by opposite gender if they went outside their village alone. The mother of Amina and Fatima showed her concern in these words:

The school that is near our house, there was no concern there. But sending daughter to the school that is far from our home, outside the village, it was not possible. The girls cannot be sent to the school alone, it is not safe for them. There was no one to pick and drop them at school.

But Sumaira and Salma's mother highlighted the fact that even if her daughters were attending school and Madrassa within the same village they were living in, she sometimes feared her daughters getting harassed:

Yes, sometimes I was afraid. In the morning there was no issue as many people were coming and going but, in the afternoon, there were less people on the way to home. At times boys kept on standing in the streets. Even though my daughters observe purdah, I was scared of boys teasing my girls and this could cause serious problems.

Within Pakistani rural community the concept of female seclusion, *purdah*, holds a crucial position. *Purdah* generally refers to cover face and body with a veil. According to several religious explanations, ethical reasoning and cultural practices, the concept of *purdah* signifies covering body, fully or partially, both by males and females (M. A. Mughal, 2019). *Purdah* is commonly interpreted as a religious and social tradition of female seclusion. Another interpretation of the concept of *purdah* is expressed as going beyond or moving within a boundary (M. A. Mughal, 2019). The boundaries of *purdah* range from physical movement to social distance to intellectual limits between individuals and groups by creating separate worlds for maintaining modesty and morality. I concluded from the response of participants that the rural society generally takes the meaning of *purdah* connected to the gender of females. Generally, the society highly expects only a female to observe *purdah* and show modest behavior. For some interviewees *purdah* in general terms meant covering the face but for others it was also staying within the boundaries of their homes. The meaning of *purdah* and its implication depends on the way family interprets it. A grandmother explained that the males in her family are very strict about *purdah*. They do not like it if some unknown man puts his gaze upon their young girls. They usually stay within the boundaries of their home but if they have to go outside then the girls in their family and caste¹² are asked to cover them properly with *head scarf* and *abaya*¹³ or *chaddar*¹⁴:

¹² Caste system refers to a social setup in which classes are determined by inheritance and is assigned at the time of birth. (explained in chapter 2)

¹³ Abaya is a long piece of clothing worn by females that reaches to the ground, covering the whole body except the head, feet, and hands.

¹⁴ Chaddar is a traditional garment worn by Muslim women, consisting of a long, usually dark coloured cloth or veil that envelops the body from head to foot and covers all or part of the face.

The school that is nearby, we do not have any concern there but yes, we are afraid of young boys if we have to send the girls at a distant place. If boys stand on the way to school, they will tease the girls. The girls are also asked to do purdah (cover their face and body properly), so that no unknown male is able to see them or their face. Our men are very protective about their females.

Sobia, a young girl of 16 years, explained, with teary eyes, the reason behind her drop out. While she was telling the reason, her mother interrupted her by saying that no one forced her to leave the school. Her mother kept on saying that her brother just thought that 5 grades are enough for her that is why he did not want her to go school anymore. Her mother told that due to poverty Sobia could not continue studies. Sobia, on the other hand, told the reason in a different way:

I dropped out of school because my brother was strict. Whenever I went to the school, I kept on thinking about him. I was so scared of him that I also left the Madrassa. My brother did not like when we go out of our home. We did not have the facility of drinking water at school, so we had to bring water, from a small canal nearby, especially for small kids to drink. One day when I was in 7th grade, my brother saw us fetching water. He got angry at me and said, "we don't send you to school for fetching water". Whenever I came back to home from school my brother starts to fight with me which led me to take the decision of dropping out of school.

Many participants during the interview revealed the fact that their fathers seldom asked them to stay at home. In most of the cases, the brothers took the decision of either not sending their sisters to school or ordering them to drop out of school. If the sisters did not listen to their brothers, then they asked the mothers to intervene and make their sisters understand. According to my participants boys feel being insulted if their *orders* are not acted upon. That is why sometimes there are heated conversations among siblings, where boys forcefully try to implement their choice for their sisters. The mothers in order to settle down the matter ask her daughters to accept whatever her brother is saying because he can never be wrong. This idea showed that how a rural society in Pakistan is male dominated, where their decisions are obediently followed by female members of the family. Hence it can be said that familial barriers like following norms of *purdah* and safety and protection of young girls are more important to rural people than their right to education. These familial barriers are associated with religious and cultural understanding and expectations about appropriate behaviour for both genders.

5.4. Cultural Barriers

Traditional rural societies, like Pakistan, get strengthened with an intricate fusion of cultural and religious traditions that offer essentials for construction of childhood (A. H. Qamar, 2012). These essentials get fulfilled by providing informal education to children where gender specific roles are particularly focused (A. H. Qamar, 2012). Since religious practices and deep cultural norms are related, they have an effect on each other. For instance, culture impacts the way society comprehends the religion, and on the other hand, religion effects the construction of cultural practices and values (S. T. Khan, 2016). As a result, various interpretations and implementations of Islam emerge. Muslim

countries, in general, have a patriarchal system in which the birth of a girl is seldomly appreciated because of additional liability and the daughters are reluctantly sent to schools (S. T. Khan, 2016). However, many mothers disagreed with the statement that their sons will benefit them in the future and daughters' will not. They wanted education for both the sons and daughters so that they could live decent lives. They did not think of daughters as an extra burden. Like poverty, at times there were other external factors like cultural practices that created hindrance in education for the girls. One of the major factors that prevails within Pakistani society is that of respectability and *honour (izzat)*. A girl or a woman is considered as a symbol of *izzat* for her father, brother, husband or for the family. In a Muslim culture, when males believe that their females are their honour, it implies they will protect them at all cost (S. T. Khan, 2016). Particularly the married girls are protected from evil sight of men. That is why observing *purdah* is not only religious act but in order to protect girls from *evil* world and maintain the *honour (izzat)* of the family, they are asked to cover themselves properly.

The interviewees revealed that girls in rural areas mostly observe *purdah* and cover themselves properly. Even if girls are covering themselves sometimes people become so much protective of their daughters or sisters that they do not send them to school or ask them to drop out. The parents are afraid of something bad happening to the girls. The fear of society, caste and family push them to take this step of not educating the girls. This indicates that while people try to protect their girls, they end up exhibiting discriminatory behaviour towards their education. Instead of strictly teaching boys to give respect to young females and never harass them, girls are asked to make sacrifice. In order to protect their own and their family's honour they leave their schools and stay at homes. This is because people generally think that boy's nature of harassing would not change, therefore girls have to protect their *izzat* themselves by staying within the boundaries of their homes. When a mother was asked about the problems her daughters faced when they attended school, she started smiling first and hesitantly told me that you already know what the problems are. But then she described:

We are poor people and all that a poor person has is 'honor' (izzat), if it is gone then we are left with nothing. These girls are our honor. The boys will verbally tease (harass) the girls on the way and then girls cannot go easily to the school. Also, the people in family or village taunt us if they hear that such a thing has happened. I also asked the girls to drop out of Madrassa because boys kept on standing on the sides of streets and irritated the girls verbally. I complained to those boys' families, but they simply said boys will stand there because that is the pathway. When I got this sort of response, I decided not to send my daughters to Madrassa too.

She further elaborated that she wanted her daughters to continue their studies but there was a lot of family pressure. She did not want to listen to anybody's belief but then due to constant pressure from the maternal grandmother, who thinks in an old-fashioned way, girls dropped out of school. The grandmother gave an opinion when the girls were around the age of 15-16, not to send them to school because she believed the girls were grownup. She got upset with their family when her suggestion was not taken up seriously. This situation illustrates that a household within a rural area of Pakistan is not able to take its decisions discretely, rather these decisions are influenced by the extended family

members, the society, or the caste. According to Gul and Noor's mother people value *their honor* more than the education:

Sometimes parents want their daughters to go to school but the other family members criticize them. The parents are not able to tolerate such insult, so they ask the girls to drop out of the school. The parents then say that we do not want our daughter's education, we want respect.

As mentioned above that females are regarded to possess the honour of the family and it is, she who has to protect that honour (I. A. Shah & Baporikar, 2013) by acting according to the moral standards based on local perspectives. The matter of family's reputation and parents' respect in the community and society is not only sensitive but also at risk in case appropriate behaviour is not shown by children, particularly girls. Therefore, during this research parents shared the fact that they prefer having respect, within their community and neighborhood, because it was more valuable to them than daughter's education.

The matter of girls' education is also connected to Islam in a way that people justify by saying that our religion demands a female to stay within the boundaries of their home, therefore she should not go to school. When a girl goes to school she steps out of her home's boundary, seek education and at times encounter unknown men, which is not acceptable to some people. On the other hand, the education of females was encouraged by Prophet Muhammad and there are many Hadith (teachings of the Prophet Mohammad) on it:

Whoever has three (or two or one) girls or sisters and treats them well and does not prefer male children over them and educates them in the best manner, Allah [God] will make them a shield against hell and will put them in heaven. (Abu Davud in Jamal, 2016, p. 10)

Islam on the other hand puts no restriction on girls' education which is quite evident in education ratio in the most conservative Islamic countries. In Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates ratio of gender gap is almost zero at primary and secondary levels (Jamal, 2016). The general perception in some caste is that a girl should read Quran and *duas*¹⁵ and that would be enough for her. Even if a girl is educated at college level, there is no professional future for her, as she must stay at home after marriage. Noor told about the situation education in Pathans:

In our biradari (division of caste) girls are not commonly sent to school whereas boys are allowed to go anywhere. The girls are asked to do house chores, read Quran at home, and learn household skills. The people in our caste do not let girls adopt any profession. Even if a girl gets the higher education, she is not allowed to do job.

Zarqa's grandmother, who was also Pathan, but belonged to different *biradri* also shared the common approach towards girls' education within her family:

¹⁵ In the terminology of Islam, *dua* literally means invocation considered as an act of supplication. The term is derived from an Arabic word meaning to 'call out' or to 'summon', and Muslims regard this as a profound act of worship

The people in our family think that if a girl gets educated, she becomes clever, she desires for more like wanting to marry the person they like or buying the stuff of their own choice. The people think that the female is supposed to stay within the boundaries of her home and do house chores. She should not step outside the house. If some girl is so interested to get the education and her family has money and can afford it then a tutor is appointed at home. But she too can study up to 4th or 5th grade...

In Pakistan the boys are usually trained to stay dominant, therefore after growing up they prefer their females to be submissive and dependent upon them. As my participants mentioned that some people, especially males, have negative thinking about girls' education. They believe that going to school and acquiring education will pollute a girl's mind and she will not stay under their control. Their main concern is that she will marry the boy of her choice, which happens only when she runs away with him and it is totally unacceptable to them. In some specific castes, people decide to engage their children within their family, with the person of their choice and marry off girls whenever they want. A girl in such families cannot share her preference because she is already engaged (to marry) in her childhood and it becomes a matter of family ties which can get broken if engagement is called off. This happens in some particular castes (like Kohistani and Pathan) but when people from other families hear such incidents, they become terrified, thus do not allow their girls to go to school. Sumaira, who was fed up with the way her extended family thinks about education explained:

My uncle and grandmother were upset with my parents. They argued with my parents that why are you sending the young girls to school, they are grown up now. In their opinion we should be married now. When my uncle hears the incidents about girls running away with boys, he gets disturbed. He is afraid that these incidents will make us corrupt and pollute our minds and we will do the same bad things. That is why he is not in favor of job or education. Because of him many times there were disputes and fights in our home.

On the other side it is a fact that in some cases girls ran away with the boys to marry them. They do so because they are faced with a lot of restrictions. According to my participants when a girl is born, after three to four years she is engaged to someone who is a lot older than her. Firstly, she is not allowed to get education. Secondly, she is married off as soon as she hits puberty or around 16-17 years. They are never asked about their choice due to which they take this extreme step of running away with boy of their choice. Ayesha's mother explained her situation where she said that her daughter and stepdaughter are not able to go to the school because her son ran off with some girl and now, they have developed enmity. It is dangerous for her daughters to go out to the school because their enemies want to kidnap their girls:

We have migrated from the North part of Pakistan. My stepson illegally ran away with some girl. That girl's family became our enemies. They wanted to kill or kidnap one of us. After that, my other sons restricted their sisters from going to school.

She further elaborated on common trend within *Kohistani* caste, that she belonged to:

As we belong to Kohistani caste, this is common that Kohistani people are really strict. Spending money on daughters is not considered profitable. Kohistani people get upset when a girl is born and become happy and celebrate the birth of a boy. The girls are usually asked to stay at home and get religious education. The schools are also far, people are illiterate and ignorant in our native village. Mostly brothers restrict their sisters from going to school. Those who have money send their girls to school at a distant place, but we cannot, as we are poor. Even if the girls go to school and receive education, they are not allowed to do jobs. There are many such cases in our family too.

In her opinion if girls are able to get the education by going to school then its fruitful not only for themselves but for their family too because the daughters will pray for parents after getting married. Ayesha's mother told that her daughter could have gone to school if she had enough money. Her son who used to restrict her from going to school, himself ran away with some girl. Also, her 14-15 years old daughter, who was engaged at an early age will get married within 3 to 4 years. Her daughter on the other hand wanted to continue her studies and did not want to get married this soon. Within some castes, a usual culture of marrying girls off as soon as she hits puberty is another contributing barrier due to which girls cannot opt for education in the school. Instead parents encourage their daughters to learn household tasks and teach them Quran in Arabic (S. T. Khan, 2016). Specifically, in rural patriarchal society of Pakistan, where gender identity and social spheres are clearly marked, females are encouraged to stick to predefined roles (A. H. Qamar, 2012). Here, along with family traditions, the perception of people about the identity of a specific gender matters a lot. Many people perceive that a male has to work outside and provide for the family whereas female has to stay at home, look after kids and house chores. At times people relate it to the Islam but the Quran and prophet's teaching never stops a woman from getting education (mentioned in chapter 2). It is the mentality of people and their own way of interpreting Islam which makes it difficult for a girl to easily complete her education. Two sisters, Gul, and Noor, during interview, told that one of them never went to a school and the other just went for 3-4 months. Both of them were supposed to help their mother at home and look after their siblings, due to which they did not get the chance to attend school. They also shared the fact that even if the circumstances were favorable their brother would not have allowed them to go to school because the trend of educating females in their family does not exist:

I never went to school. I asked my mother several times that why did not you send me to school and she told me that it was due to some responsibilities at home. I sometimes get angry and upset with my mother, but she tells me that she had no other option at that time.

I went to school for 3-4 months but then my youngest brother was born. My mother was not well, so I stayed at home, looked after her and did the house chores. I was interested in studies so during my teenage years I went to school, but the administration refused to give me an admission. They told me that now I have crossed that age limit required for admission. Now I have grown up and I will look like an adult studying in school....

In most of the cases, girls are asked to leave the school because parents did not see them having a profession in the future, hence there was no point of giving them more and more education. The girls would simply get married, have kids, and stay at husband's home. Therefore, the parents try to push their sons to keep getting education, so that they could adopt a suitable profession and earn decent wages. Some mothers also acknowledged the fact that as parents they did not put a lot of efforts in their daughters' education. However, they forced their sons in order to get education which would consequently help them get a respectable job. The sons, on the other hand, never took it seriously and they also dropped out of school. Hence the rural girls who want to pursue for more education stay at home due to physical, familial and cultural barriers that contribute in establishing discriminatory behavior towards their schooling and their gender. While boys who are preferred on the basis of their gender, upon getting repeated chance for education never fully avail it.

5.5. Seclusion and Respectability

This research focuses on the difficulties a rural girl face in getting education and how these barriers as well as family and society are constructing the childhood period of a typical Pakistani rural girl. This section will demonstrate the global narrative, based on UNCRC, about a proper childhood and social construction of girlhood in rural Pakistan. I will mention how these local constructions (presented above) illustrate different views and ideas about what a proper childhood is or should be, for these rural girls. These constructions of girlhood illustrate that the image of girl, if viewed from local perspective, varies a lot from the ideal notion of UNCRC.

During my fieldwork, I observed that most of the mothers indicated that their sons stopped their sisters from going to school. There were several different reasons, but the male figure was common and prominent in taking decisions for the girls, in each case. In majority cases elder brothers asked their sisters to stay at home. The reason behind this scenario is the existence of strong gender categorization since childhood especially in rural community where boys are given preference over girls in every aspect and their decisions are valued by parents. The father, brother or husband are considered to have the right to take decision for their daughter, sister, or wife respectively and females are expected to obey them hence indicating strong patriarchy (A. H. Qamar, 2012). The barriers above reveal that in local context, as soon as a girl reaches 5th or 8th grade, she is seen as a grown-up girl who now requires more protection outside the home. At this stage fathers or brothers think it is better for the girl to stay at home, participate in house chores and remain protected. On the other hand, boys are allowed to continue their studies because they have to support their family in the future. The boys do not require protections rather they are the protectors. Saeed and Zainab (2017) explained that within a Pakistani society, from childhood boys learn to rule a woman and consider it their right. As result of this gender stereotyping parents see their daughters as emotional and dependent whereas the sons as strong and independent. When these girls and boys become adults, the gender stereotypes within their conscious and unconscious makes the men to exercise their power, show unequal behaviour towards woman and the women unconsciously accepts this unfair treatment, for instance, toward their right of education, health and employment. Such inadequate behaviour towards women is also because commonly they are believed to be significant for the purpose of reproduction and house chores while men are thought to be the protectors of family honour and interest. During the interview, many girls shared the fact that their brothers stopped them from attending school because they

linked the mobility of girls might be cause risk to their honour or *izzat*. To protect an honour or *izzat* of a girl, fathers fulfil it as their duty while for brothers it is not mere responsibility, they also feel pride in protecting their sisters' honour. As mentioned above, a female is a symbol of *izzat* for her father, brother and husband, the men in Muslim culture will protect females at all cost (S. T. Khan, 2016) hence protecting their *izzat*.

Another crucial aspect is the observance of *purdah* which is also linked to *izzat* in some ways. The participants shared the fact that in order to protect their *izzat*, the girls are asked to go outside their homes by covering themselves properly. In this way they would not face any harassment, no unrelated men would put his gaze on these girls and in this way, girls will be able to maintain their family's *izzat* and also protect themselves. The social practice of seclusion (*purdah*) and traditional gender roles of a female are pervasive in a Pakistani society and becomes more visible when a girl reaches the age of adolescence or puberty. As a result, girls are enforced to show modesty by wearing a veil or scarf, dropping out of school, and engaging in such a socialization process that take them away from public domain and direct them towards the responsibilities of home. Thus, reducing their chances to continue getting their education (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015, p. 981). The perspective and concern of *respectability* within Pakistani culture view girls as carrying the weight of respect or *izzat*. This means girls not only bear but also maintain the responsibility of *izzat* by following the restrictions put on their mobility and staying confined to the social rules in terms of roles, actions, appearance, and relationships (ibid). In this context socio-cultural values of rural society in Pakistan have been recognized as having adverse impact on girls' education whereby matter of respectability is the focal point while deciding either to send or not send girls to school. It is a common thought that the potential risks to the *izzat* can be decreased when girls avoid walking to school as a result they will also not interact with unknown men and by staying at home would remain unacquainted with the notions not in line with the expected traditional gender roles. UNCRC may be perceived as a threatening power to the existing cultural and familial concepts in rural Pakistan because it supports the idea of children's freedom and their rights and voice to be heard (Burr, 2003). As discussed, the girls cannot raise their voice, for instance when it comes to the matter of *izzat* because respectability of parents is above all than any other matter. Applying UNCRC principles to such society becomes demanding because children in traditional communities have almost no rights for expressing their opinions in familial, social, and educational decisions etc (Burr, 2003). These rural girls will not be encouraged, if they try to go against familial and cultural practices.

Childhood is considered to be a social construct that vary from culture to culture, time to time and society to society. In fact, it varies profoundly within the history of a single culture and is merged within the social structure, thus shaped, and revealed by some typical ways of conduct (Jenks, 1982, 2004). I realized during my fieldwork that young girls and their mothers are not aware of the fact that education is the fundamental right of these girls, provided nationally and internationally. The girls had the right of getting education in any circumstances but even if they knew it, they would not be able to exercise it. As childhood is continuously linked to a particular cultural setting that is why it is not understood as a natural construct (Jenks, 1982). In Jenks view socially transforming from a child to adult does not refer to just physical growth or gaining appreciation from adults. Although physical features make clear distinctions between an adult and a child, not every culture is based upon such distinction criteria. In the rural Pakistan, the girls are considered to be grown-ups as soon as they show the signs of puberty. The interviewees revealed that extra care is shown towards them when they step out of their house. Even

though they are under the 18 years of an age and still in their period of childhood, they are not considered a child anymore. The girls enter into the adulthood phase soon before they turn 18. They are supposed to act like an adult female by staying at home, observing purdah, and not socializing with men outside their home. In order to protect *izzat* these male figures limit their girl's mobility to the boundaries of home, only because a trivial issue can lead to devastating bloodshed (S. T. Khan, 2016). Thus, an ideal girlhood establishes when a girl completely surrenders in front of societal and cultural norms predefined for her. As long as a girl stays family-oriented and traditionally bound, her ignorance, illiteracy and poverty does not matter to the society. This local perspective of an ideal girlhood is opposite to the western concept where females are independent, educated, modern, and have right to make decision for themselves (Berents, 2016). This global idea does not fit with the local religious standards where maintaining honour is more important than giving the right of education to girls.

The barriers faced by rural girls indicate how the important period of their life that is childhood is constructed by the society. Although the rights have been provided separately to the children in the world by UNCRC, within a Pakistani society it is challenging to apply these rights. The demanding societal and cultural norms and expectations do not harmonize with the ideology of UNCRC. The convention was drafted by majority of countries of Global North, hence asserting their specific agenda on the countries of Global South. Though, Samantha Punch (2003) explains, the Majority World consist of children living a financially poor life and many of them work in order to earn money for basic necessities of life. The globalized model of childhood, built on western ideals of Minority World children, expect children to play, study and not work which is not applicable on all of the Majority World children, hence the childhood in Global South is perceived as deviant. The countries who ratified UNCRC are obliged to implement its rights, but this implication depends on the legal system of a country and the practicalities of implementing a policy (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Pakistan being a signatory of UNCRC (mentioned in Chapter 1), approves that 'every child has a right to education' (Article 28). Hence the country has made this right the part of legal framework. Unfortunately, it is not strictly implemented throughout the country, particularly in rural areas where if the parents are illiterate, they would not concentrate to educate their children. The daughters in rural areas suffer more because of a societal belief that a girl will become a housewife and giving her education will be worthless, thus the cycle of family illiteracy continues (S. M. Khalid & Khan, 2006). In accordance with socially constructed gender roles, girls are usually expected to become wives and mothers, they don't have to do a job and are not supposed to provide for their parents or in-laws therefore it has no value in investing girls' education (Ansell, 2016). Same is the trend of rural Pakistani families who do not expect their girls to adopt a professional life therefore prioritize the education of sons over daughters. Girls are trained in doing house chores so that they could easily get adjusted in their homes after marriage.

As previously identified that the important cause found was poverty that created a lot of other problems and barriers for girls due to which they dropped out and faced discrimination. The families being poor were not able to afford the school related expenses specially the arrangement of private transport. When transport was not available girl could not continue education because the parents feared their daughters could face harassment and security issues. If the daughters face harassment it becomes problematic in maintaining the matter of *izzat*. The respect or *izzat* is the notable and sensitive affair for a family upon which no one compromise then, therefore girls drop out of school while boys continue to attend school even out of village. Many members of one family also depend

on limited income. In such condition where parents hardly feed and provide clothes to their children, education becomes a minimal priority, particularly for girls as they are likely to marry early, thus will not contribute income to the household (Jamal, 2016). Therefore, the available money is spent on boys by sending them to schools so that they could get a decent job in the future and support their family. Whereas girls were kept at home in order to help their mothers in feeding cattle and in household work etc. The childhood period of girls was mostly spent within the boundaries of their homes doing cooking, cleaning, looking after siblings or going to Madrassa. The concept of play or leisure activities is not evident in daily life of these girls.

5.6. The Corrupting Force of Education

As the beliefs, notions and values related to childhood are becoming globalized, therefore every country, except US, has signed and ratified UNCRC. By signing UNCRC these countries agreed with the convention that a child is a person below the age of 18 years. But this statement is not applicable to every society and culture because neither do children suddenly attain the status of adults at 18 years in every society nor are, they dealt with as children till that age (ibid). Nevertheless, the paradigm of Childhood Studies and the global vows like UNCRC are noteworthy within current studies. Pakistan is the signatory of UNCRC and other treaties that offer children special protection about their rights and are of considerable importance as they influence the rules and regulations made for children in national plan for education. In Mughal's (2018) point of view most of the countries have accepted education as a fundamental human right, materialized its economic and social gains, signed international pacts, and agreed to give equal and quality education to children and youngsters. However, by becoming the signatory of these treaties does not imply that better circumstances for children and youngsters will be accomplished in low-income countries like Pakistan. In such countries the gap between commitment and the real outcomes made for implementation of primary and secondary education do not complement each other, specifically in rural areas where the population living in poverty have less chances of improving their lives.

Based on global narrative, UNCRC provided extensive rights to every child below 18 years of an age and the article 28 specifically mentioned that primary education should be free and secondary education should be available to every child. Contrary to the global perspective, where providing education is considered essential, many people in my research expressed that rural society thinks that education pollute girls' mind. These people believe that as the girl gets more and more education, she becomes broadminded, takes the decisions of her life, and becomes independent. They are particularly concerned with the fact that she would marry the man of her own choice and will run away with him. Generally, a girl is supposed to marry the person of her parents' choice, whether she is happy or not. If she gets educated the parents are afraid that she would not listen to them. Therefore, as soon as a girl enters her adolescence, she drops out of her school, mostly around primary school age. The parents or brothers do not allow them to get secondary education because they are afraid of losing control over them. On the other hand, the mothers during the interview told that their boys have access to education, without any restrictions, but they still do not show interest in studies. The boys have an open choice from their childhood, in any aspect including education but that freedom of choice particularly for education is taken away from girls since early age.

I noticed from the interviews that parents put more emphasis on modesty of their daughters than their sons and negatively associate the impact of education on the girls. That is why acquiring education is thought of as *potential corrupting force* on the gender equality within family which direct the girls to drive away from traditional gender roles (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015). Although there was no such case within my research interviews where girls could have drifted away from their gender roles, the interviewees made references to these aspects while narrating their life experiences. The reason behind not going to school for some girls was this idea that education will pollute their minds and the girls will act in a way which would be totally unacceptable for the family and community. When Ayesha's mother mentioned that her son ran away with a girl, the family put the restriction on Ayesha's schooling not on her brothers. Before her brother ran away, he expected her sister not to morally get corrupted from education and tried putting restrictions upon her. In Ayesha's case the family's poverty did not create hurdle rather her brother's negative step acted as a barrier for her schooling. This illustrate parents' particular thinking about the gender of females, where they assume that education will negatively affect the actions of girls more than the boys. Due to their doubts, girls are given less chances of acquiring education than boys.

At times parents face a lot of pressure; they do not have enough money, unavailability of schools, harassment issues due to which girls drop out of school and other times they are bound to follow the cultural and familial trends. The girls are not expected to show resistance in front of their father or brothers' decision, especially if it is a matter of *izzat*. If there is a chance that a girl would face any verbal or physical harassment, then it is not tolerable by the family. That means the girls is straight away asked to drop out of school. The father or brothers are not only concerned about the girl's security and protection but also afraid of being criticized by the family or the society. Some girls struggle to get their right to education by arguing with their mothers. Those girls who were really interested in studies tried negotiating with their mothers, but the mother was not the head of the family. The ultimate decision was of the male member of the family, so mothers, being females, were also powerless in such cases. The girls then request their mothers for joining Madrassa located in their village. Mostly they get the permission of attending Madrassa because it is not located far away, no travel expenses and no fear of harassment because mothers accompany their daughters. Also, because Madrassa deliver exclusively religious education therefore parents without any doubt most of the time permit their daughters to join it. Girls are usually able to attend Madrassa for shorter period of time because soon they take over the house chores or are supposed get married.

United Nation Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) stresses upon providing children special protection due to their age and emotional development and emphasizes on application of rights to every child regardless of the state they live in (Montgomery, 2003). Although UNCRC is the widely ratified convention, there exist underlying causes of concern. One of the issues is difficulty of applying general standards on the local context and secondly the existence of cross-cultural differences and various opinions regarding the concept of child (ibid). The definition of child within local context of Pakistan varies from rural to urban areas. I included children as per defined by UNCRC but after interviewing I came to know that girls and boys both have different standards of being labelled as grown-ups. Both the genders are legally children when under the age of 18 even in the constitution of Pakistan but contextually they are not. Article 28 of UNCRC provides the basic right to education but the convention did not take into account the deep cultural and familial norms practiced since many years. A young rural Pakistani girl may try to seek

her rights legitimately, established at international level, but mainly due to patriarchal society her access to the legal system would become impossible. The societal expectation from the female gender to stay subordinate to males and protect the honour of the family puts restrictions on them (I. A. Shah & Baporikar, 2013). On the other hand, UNCRC based on individualistic ideals, provides the rights to the child as an *autonomous individual* and such concept is totally contrary to the situation interviewees explained above. Due to the existence of strong institution of family, a girl in Pakistani rural culture is perceived as part of wider context and not an individual person. Therefore, giving her education is also her family's and extended family's decision. For some families sending girls to school up to a certain grade is enough for them and the other families are satisfied with their decision of not sending girls to school at all. The world sees education as something that develops a child's personality but according to my participants education is considered as a corrupting force that pollutes girls' mind. Due to the fear that after getting education and coming in contact with the outside world, the girls will choose the partner for their life, make choices for themselves and will raise their voice, the daughters are given less opportunity to exercise their right of education either provided by the state of Pakistan or UNCRC. That is why being a child is said to be not a universal phenomenon but a socially construct, influenced by social, cultural, and historical dynamics (Prout & James, 1990; Tisdall & Punch, 2012).

5.7. Summary

In this analysis chapter I have listed down the common factors that not only create barriers but act as root causes behind gender discrimination, particularly in the field of education. This section quotes mothers who have explicitly shared their personal views, including familial and cultural, regarding their daughters' schooling. I have also discussed the way education is perceived by some people as having a negative impact on girls. The priority for many families is to maintain their honour or izzat in the community they live in. I have highlighted that how sending girls to school can risk their izzat due to which boys are preferably sent to school compared to girls. Although UNCRC is accepted internationally but not completely applicable in local situations because this convention does not reflect the realities of young girls' life in particular cultures. Moreover, other than the cultural notions about gender roles, poverty, in most of the cases, was concluded to be the root cause behind gender inequality.

Chapter 6: Gendered Childhood

6.1. Introduction

In the previous analysis chapter, the structural, familial, and cultural factors causing the gender inequality, have been discussed. This analysis chapter will focus on the discrimination that the young participants of this research experienced and felt. The everyday life experiences of the girls which they narrated in the interviews will be shared and analysed here. First, I will highlight the cases of eight different girls coping with unique circumstances in order to show the value of young rural girls. Even being submissive, these adolescent rural girls use their physical potency to actively participate in household work and learn skills. However, they still remain dependent on socially, culturally constructed world and the norms and perspectives of their elders. The two sisters, Sumaira and Salma, really wanted to get education, but they were faced with some familial barriers created by their maternal grandmother. Even if they were not able to complete their schooling, they did find a way to earn a living for their family with their father's support. Another girl Bushra, dropped out of school very early because of several reasons. Her lack of interest in studies and the temptation to get a better married life by having dowry, made her decide to stay at home. She ended up having a future she never imagined. Amina and Fatima, due to extreme poverty dropped out of school. Both sisters had different stance on getting education and its significance in their lives. Belonging to specific castes Ayesha, Gul and Noor were subjected to the norms they had to follow no matter what. Although the caste of Gul and Noor was separate than that of Ayesha, purdah was a mutual aspect in both cases due to which they faced discrimination in their lives. Here I want to emphasise that my young interviews faced several barriers and those barriers were interconnected. Only one factor is not responsible for creating barrier rather various reasons overlap each another and cause gender disparity in education. Even if the two sisters were not going to school, they had different stories to tell. That is why the situation girls are living in and the sentiments they feel illustrates how complicated the whole matter of gender discrimination is.

After presenting the experiences of girls I will discuss the importance and role of gender in their lives and especially in the field of education. When it comes to the matter of continuation of education the genders are looked upon differently. Sons are allowed to go to the schools and get as much education as they want while daughters get dropped out. The girls cannot actively participate in making decisions for themselves but that does not mean they are socially passive. By quoting girls I will illustrate that their families rely on their daughters' valuable support in domestic tasks. In such an interdependent rural society, where western concepts are not certainly applicable, the status of a child as *being* and *becoming* is usually put together (A. H. Qamar, 2015). Furthermore, I will explain the presence of agency in young girls' life and how agency gets influenced in the social structure of rural Pakistan where each member of a family has connection with another for the well-being of whole family.

6.2. Sumaira and Salma

Sumaira told during the interview that she wanted to continue studying after 8th grade. For that she had to travel outside the village to attend the school. Her father and brother told her that whatever education she has was enough. Sumaira's maternal grandmother and uncles were extremely against sending her getting education. Many times, her

grandmother and uncles came to her house and quarreled with her parents for sending their daughters to school. In their opinion Sumaira was grown up and should focus on doing house chores:

I do all the house chores like cleaning, sweeping, cooking, and doing dishes. I also help my younger brothers and sister in doing school homework. If my father needs any help in his work, I also do that. A month ago, I have started teaching in the same school from where I studied. I am also assisting my neighbor aunty in her frozen food business.

She explained that even though she was performing her duties and doing extra tasks, still her grandmother was not happy about her going to school. At last when the grandmother showed a lot of disappointment in front of her parents, then she dropped out of school. Sumaira did not completely devote herself to house chores instead she tried getting back to school after a few months. Upon asking that how she got the permission to do a job when she was not even allowed to complete her schooling, she responded:

I resisted this time and said that I want to do this job. My elder brother is not living with us now, so he does not know, and we are also not talking to our grandmother and uncle this time. My mother sort of advocated for me and said to my father that you did not allow her to continue her studies, now let her go this time. Initially my father argued that people will say bad stuff like they are sending their daughter to earn the money. But my mother convinced him that it is not an insult for us, then he agreed and allowed me.

Her resistance in front of her father illustrates that she did not accept the trend of making girls stay at home. She wanted to change the life for her family by earning some money. Her agency helped her in making a choice to go against the family trends and also to accomplish the expectations she had for herself, which in turn is affecting her immediate life and most probably the future life too (Robson et al., 2007). According to Sumaira, she is not earning a lot, but 'something is better than nothing'. Her mother uses the money for some household expenditure, and she feels happy to contribute a little. She seemed really disappointed while telling about her parents' preference to send boys to school:

I argued with my mom many times that you keep on focusing on boys' education and they do not even study. Instead they get fail in school and tell you proudly, as if it is not a big deal for them and we girls feel shameful if we ever get failed in school. If girls are given this much concentration and opportunity, they would be number one in every walk of life.

She wanted to give courage to the other girls in her family and be a role model for them by completing her school. That did not happen, but she managed to get a job for which she was quite happy. Her elder sister Salma was also not able to complete her education but, in her case, she was not forced to drop out. She left the school in 7th grade due to her domestic circumstances. She expressed unconditional love for her father during the interview. He was a heart and diabetes patient and remained unwell most of the time. Her brothers were neither showing seriousness in studies nor were they contributing

financially, therefore in order to keep the socioeconomic pressure off her father she dropped out. She wanted to play the role of a son for her family, a son who is expected to earn and bring income for the family. As her father was a tailor, he tried making his elder son learn the skills of stitching and sewing, but that process of learning did not go well. Therefore, she thought of learning this skill herself, side by side with her studies. After a lot of practice, when she felt that she could help her father she dropped out of school. While explaining proudly she told that she was not only the best student in her class but also in the whole school. Her aim was to become a pilot or a soldier and serve Pakistan, that is why she was eager to get education. Her father's illness kept her worried all the time and she was not able to focus. Although her father was not in favor of preventing any of his daughter from attending school, he expected his sons to give him a helping hand. His sons did not care enough which led Salma to take this decision. While staying at home, she not only worked but also managed to learn some English:

My younger sister has passed 8th grade, but I am better than her because I loved studying. I was a bit weak in English subject but thank God I have learnt it by sitting at home. I have learnt English by watching television and reading books and magazines. I am trying to learn English because I do not want anyone to say that I am illiterate or ignorant.

In her opinion girls are cleverer than boys and can be more successful only if they are given a chance but in Pakistan the situation is different for those girls having their hands tied:

I think that every girl should get the chance to study because they can accomplish their goals. Girls are the best, even if they belong to a poor family, they should get the opportunity to study. In our society boys are given more attention. However, this trend is changing now. But some girls are forced to leave the school because of poor economic conditions and others are restricted by the conservative thoughts of their family members but what can a girl do. She cannot argue with the elders.

The example of these two sisters illustrates the way a society, parents and family play their part in forming gender roles. In rural Pakistan not only, immediate family but also the extended family and community is involved in constructing roles for girls and boys. Especially in rural community where people live closely to one another, the opinions of neighbors and involvement of extended family members are a big deal for a family. Both the girls told that their grandmother and uncles tried to impose their thoughts and fears by forcing their parents to drop the girls out of school. The girls clearly did not like the way they were discriminated. In their opinion their brothers did not concentrate on their studies, still they were given repeated chances. No immediate or extended family member put restrictions on them because it was thought that boys will get the education and in future have a decent job. On the other hand, it was thought that girls will be staying at home and doing house chores. Therefore, they should be trained and should not be sent to school after 7th or 8th grade. In this scenario the girls were providing a helping hand to their parents by earning, even though they discontinued their studies. Also, their parents did not expect from their daughters to earn for the family, it was their sons' duty. The girls fulfilled the expected gender role as well as additional duties at the cost of dropping out of school. Same was the case for many other interviewees who helped their parents in

earning because their brothers neither studied nor earned a penny. Their lives were mainly constructed around doing house chores and staying at homes.

6.3. Bushra, Amina and Fatima

Only one girl mentioned that she was working outside with her mother as a housekeeper. Bushra said she willingly dropped out of school in 3rd grade along with her sisters. According to her there were several reasons behind her drop out:

My father bought a cow when I was in 3rd grade. I was interested in taking care of that cow. I used to bring fodder, water for my cow and cleaned its dung. The other reason was that school was at a distant place and my father did not have enough money for travelling purpose. We were financially not stable and the rented car drivers are not trustworthy and reliable. Although it was my decision of not going to school, but my parents also told that the school is too far, and they don't want bastard people cross our way. Also, some people within our family and village talk nonsense about young girls who go to school.

The village where she spent her childhood, a trend of looking after cattle was commonly followed some years ago. As the people lived the life of poverty, they were not able to afford the school expenses. Therefore, parents used to buy the cattle and asked their daughters to rear them. Then in the future the cattle were sold, and the money was used to buy dowry for the daughters. Usually one girl had to look after one cow etc. Bushra was not able to get her share because the cattle were sold soon after her father's death. She told about her everyday routine after dropping out of school:

I used to do cleaning and dusting of my home. I walked to a distant place to fetch the water, brought fodder for the cattle. Our home, in my village, was made of mud so I used to paste mud on that. My sisters and I used to do the house chores together but then they went to get education from Madrassa, and I did all the chores with my mother.

Bushra also went to the Madrassa and lived in the girls' boarding but left it after two weeks. She told that there are very few Madrassa that provide boarding for girls, but parents usually are reluctant to send their daughters in boarding of Madrassa. According to her, nowadays parents feel unsafe to leave their daughters alone in boarding because they think that the atmosphere of the boarding and the girls residing there will corrupt and pollute their daughter's mind. She expressed being happier at home, "it was better to do house chores than work at Madrassa" because the staff in there used to make the girls to work a lot and provided substandard food. While narrating about her life, she told regrettably:

I would have been living a comfortable life if I were educated. I might have a job with high rank and would have been sitting in a luxurious office. People might have been showing respect towards us and I might have some value in front of them. But now for these people, we are worthless, and they ask me to do a lot of their household work. When my married sister come to spend her holidays with us then I am at ease

otherwise I have to do work not only in other homes but also of my own home.

Although financial circumstances primarily created hurdles in completing their education, the girls also did not get the decent environment for studying.

Amina went to a government school near her house but could not complete grade 5. Her mother's hand was chopped off from a machine while cutting the fodder for the cattle. Her elder married sisters were in favour of Amina's drop out, so that she could help her mother in house chores. She told about her lack of interest in studies therefore dropping out of school was an easy decision for her. However, she revealed the everyday situation at her school:

Our teachers asked us to sweep up the school, do the dishes and clean the toilets. They sort of warned us that if we will do this stuff then we will be promoted to the next grade otherwise not. Because of doing all this, we were not able to focus on studies. The students also used to go to the school late and kept on having chats inside and outside the classroom. Once my teacher deliberately failed me in exams. I got angry and left the school. Then she came after some days and informed me that I got promoted to the next class but then I told her I cannot come because there was a lot of work to do at home.

At that time, she did not have a choice of continuing her studies because there was a lot to do at home. Her elder married sisters also suggested to their mother to keep Amina at home so that she could lend some help. Moreover, she was not that eager to go to school. After staying at home for some years, now there was a shift in her views:

Now when I compare this present life to the school life, I sometimes think that going to school, sitting comfortably in class and studying was easier than whatever work I am doing right now. Getting education is important.

Using the notion of decision or choice is complicated in the present context. It is about understanding the way these girls try to relate to their own situations. Although agency exist in their lives but the options and possibilities that they can choose between are not easy and simple. Amina's sister Fatima also left the school after completing 5th grade. Her mother even offered to send her outside the village to get more education, but she refused. According to her she was keener to go to Madrassa therefore she did not continue her schooling. She had a clear idea in her mind that "*reading, and learning Quran is the most important thing and if I were able to learn Quran than that would be enough*". She was not able to go to Madrassa immediately because her family had a lot of cattle. She and Amina were supposed to collect fodder and fetch water in the morning and evening and did the cooking and cleaning of the house. Unlike her sister and many other girls, she was satisfied with her everyday routine. Fatima seemed very confident while narrating her everyday life situation. She appeared calm and confident throughout the interview and I did not notice any regret about her past. Rather she was very happily sharing about her routine activities and was excited about going to the nearby Madrassa nowadays and reading the Quran there:

I am happy and used to the work I do at home. Some girls get tired and annoyed of the *work* at home and asked their parents to send them to school or Madrassa, but I am not amongst those girls. I am habitual to the work I do at home because I already knew that nothing would change, even if I get the education because of the poor condition we are living in. If I tried, I still cannot change the condition of my family. My brothers were supposed to do jobs and earn, but they refused to attend school and get education.

The viewpoints of Amina and Fatima regarding the impact of education on their life are almost contrary. Fatima was aware of the circumstances that no matter the situation is schooling would not change their life. The reason is like boys they would never get the permission to have a job because their duties lie within the boundaries of their homes. While for Amina developing interest in education would have been a better option than the tiring household tasks.

6.4. Ayesha, Gul, and Noor

Some people strictly follow the family traditions where females are overly protected from unknown males. If someone lays an eye on a girl, males especially brothers consider it as an insult to them. It is unacceptable for males that some unknown person glances at the girls because then it becomes the matter of perceived 'ownership', pride, and responsibility. That is why girls, even when they are quite young, are asked to properly cover themselves with *chaddar* or *burka*¹⁶ when they go outside or stay at home. Ayesha also faced the similar situation where her brother restricted her from going to school because her school was coeducation, but her father was lenient compared to her brother. According to the participants when their elder brothers grew up, they try to take the matter in their hands about making decisions for their sisters. They want to show their manliness by their aggressive actions; therefore, fathers take a backseat until and unless there is a serious matter. The brothers feel pride in protecting their sisters and also become more and more worried when they learn about the importance of *izzat* connected to their sisters. Ayesha described:

We studied while sitting on the floor. First, we used to sweep the floor, lay the carpet, and then sat. Girls and boys were in the same classroom, girls were seated on one side of the room and boys on the other. My stepbrother had problem with that. He emphasized on not sending me to school because of coeducation but then that incident happened (he ran away with some girl). My father was lenient compared to my brother. He allowed us to go to school because in his opinion we were quite young, and coeducation does not matter.

She told that she was not allowed to play with the boys at school either. One day she was playing with her stepsister and they applied red lipstick. Their brother saw them and beat her stepsister so hard with a stick, that it broke. Such an incident, being beaten up by her brother for applying red lipstick happened just one time because there were males outside the house who could have fixed their eyes on her. Ayesha's sister was in 5th grade but

¹⁶ A burqa is a long garment that covers the whole head and body, including the face, and is worn in public by some

Kohistani people are strict about maintaining purdah. They never played like this ever again. She explained that there is specific mindset behind not giving education to Kohistani girls:

In the community of Kohistani people, the young girls of 14-15 years are married without considering their opinion. That person could be someone quite elder or he can be handicapped. Because of this fear, sometimes girl run away from their home secretly or commit suicide. That is why girls are commonly not given education. Because the people in this community think that when a girl gets education, she becomes an openminded person then she will choose the boy of her choice for marriage. When the girl already knows that her parents will not marry her to person of her choice then she runs away with that boy.

Her everyday life is carried around doing dishes, cooking and other chores, which she learnt from a very early age. Along with that she was learning stitching and sewing. She sometimes wrote poems secretly in her diary, which she was not allowed to do. She was not happy with the restrictions her family imposed on getting education, but she was glad at least someone in her family like her younger brothers were going to school. She was not able to continue her schooling, but her brothers were attending the school which made her happy. In her family no one commonly ask girls about continuation of school or getting the husband of their choice, but boys are given this privilege. Even though she did not experience the childhood as the other kids in the neighbourhood do and felt being discriminated but she shared the pledge she made to herself:

I just want to say that children should be given education. Even if you are illiterate yourself, you should give your children education. I will do two things when I will have children, especially girls, one I will make them study and get education and second, I will marry them with someone of their choice.

Gul and Noor belonged to a Pathan family and faced similar restrictions in their childhood. Since many decades, Pathan parents mostly preferred their sons' schooling because after completing studies they would have been doing a job and bringing money to the family. On the other hand, education for girls was not prioritized because they will not only be getting married but are not allowed to do a job. Gul and Noor told that now many years later the trend is shifting as males are showing interest in sending their girls to school. The girls from their caste are speaking up within their families for their right to education. In the past no female dared to speak in front of male family member but now the young girls are questioning their parents about "letting their sons go to school and their daughters are not even able to read and write, like animals". Gul was an elder sister and had to look after younger siblings since she was 8. Besides taking care of siblings and poor financial conditions due to which she never went to the school there was also a critical reason upon which her future life relied on:

In our caste, parents accept the proposal (for marriage) for their daughter when she is very young. When I was 8 years old, I got engaged. Although I live with my parents right now, my in-laws have asked my family to not allow me to go outside neither for studies nor to anyone's home. My sister and I are engaged now (but yet to marry and move to

in-law's place). We wanted to go to Madrassa, but our in-laws did not give the permission. They said that we are grownups now. They do not want anyone to see us or take our picture secretly. The in-laws impose restrictions upon us and if we disobey them, then after marriage, they will show harsh behavior towards us. They will beat us and will take physical revenge, for not listening orders before marriage. They do not even give us divorce but torture us. That is why I think it is better to stay at home and listen to your in-laws.

She revealed that these practices are common within her caste because *purdah* (veiling) is strictly followed by the female members. The girls in her family are not even allowed to attend Madrassa, only boys have permission to go there. If girls show interest then parents teach them how to read Quran, otherwise they do not. Gul expressed with disappointment that "our elder will force us to do any task, but they never force us to study and get education". Instead of going to school both sisters used to collect the fodder for the cattle, fetch the water and cut and bring the wood back to the home. They also had younger siblings whom they looked after. Gul mentioned that as she never went to school, she was really interested in reading and writing therefore she asked her elder brother to teach her, but he straightaway refused. Her brother insults her even if she picks up the mobile phone or remember anyone's number. Her brother thinks that using mobile phone will *pollute* her mind. He does not want her sisters to become like the girls who run away from home with other boys and destroy the *izzat* of family. Therefore, girls' exposure to the outside world is limited by bounding them to stay at home, not giving permission for attending school and Madrassa. In Gul's case her brother felt insecure about her sisters that is why they were not allowed to use mobile phone.

6.5. Girlhood Boundaries

Within Childhood Studies the age of any type either chronological, biological, or social also helps considerably in conceptualizing children as an active being (A. H. Qamar, 2015). The biological age (that depends on the physical changes in the body) and social age (the culturally constructed norms of appropriate behaviour) are considered vital in constructing rural childhood specifically. In a rural setting as a child biologically grows, he or she tend to actively participate in the adult world (A. H. Qamar, 2015). During the fieldwork, my participants revealed that boys and girls when reach the age around 10 or 12, they are expected to help their fathers in the field or their mothers with the house chores, respectively. In terms of helping their parents in domestic work, both sons and daughters are perceived as 'beings' which means expecting children to actively use their physical strength to contribute to chores. In addition, these young girls by carrying out the household duties and remaining adherent to familial values, implies that in a way they are being encouraged to construct and learn from the experiences of their present life for practicing them in future. Acknowledging these young girls as both 'being and becoming' increases the agency that they have in the world and that they are simultaneously constructing their present and future lives (Uprichard, 2008). Also, the past should be given due consideration just like the present and future lives. The reason is that for obtaining a contextualized understanding of the research themes, every childhood researcher is required to include at least some aspects of children's and childhood's past (Hanson, 2017). That is why in this research the past experiences (been) along with the present lives of the adolescent girls and their thoughts about the potential future (being and becoming) have been taken into account and explored in detail.

Rogers (2003) points out that the gender of a child in every culture and society determines the way he or she would be treated. This treatment also affects the way children observe themselves and how they interact with others. Gender also influences the activities a boy or girl is allowed to participate in and the opportunities and resources they have. I. A. Shah and Baporikar (2013) highlighted different stages of gender discrimination in Pakistan, which many of my participants also went through. The first stage, as I. A. Shah and Baporikar (2013) indicate, starts at birth when most of the families including females themselves wish to have a son. When a son is born, his birth is celebrated while on daughter's birth there is silence, particularly in rural areas. The next stage involves the female child experiencing discrimination in getting good nutrition compared to the male child who not only gets better food but is also treated with more care and value. In the next level of discrimination, the son after getting the education from the village school is allowed to attend the school or college outside the village. On the other hand, parents prefer to limit their daughters' education to village level. There are numerous reasons behind this preference leading to discrimination, several are also described in this thesis. Generally, the young boys are allowed to take part in outdoor activities, visit friends and relatives and go to the shops unaccompanied. Conversely, the girls are not given permission to participate in outdoor activities. Along with that, if they wish to go outside their home, some family member must accompany them. When it comes to the stage of marrying their children off, the parents arrange the marriage for their daughters at an early age whereas the sons can marry when they complete their education or start earning their own money. At this point, a girl faces discriminatory behaviour when she is not asked about her choice. The decision is purely taken by the elders of the family. In case of sons, parents ask them about their choice and then make the decision about the marriage. The discrimination continues after the marriage when a girl moves into her husband's house. She has to develop a good relation not only with her husband but with other family members too, particularly with mother-in-law. It is commonly observed that a satisfactory relationship never develops between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, hence anger and discrimination are initiated among the woman from the woman's side. If a girl is able to overcome one or more discriminatory stages mentioned above, she still needs to ask for permission from her father/husband for a job. Not only job opportunities are fewer for females, but they are also paid far less than males. Women also encounter discriminatory behaviour and inappropriate attitudes not only from men but also from other women. At times, the women at workplace not only create problems for other women but also do not cooperate. My participants, being females, also went through these phases of discrimination based on gender differences. During research I found out diverse reasons behind discriminatory behaviours which played a major role in shaping the everyday life of these girls. Most of the girls in a Pakistani society encounter all or some of these levels of discrimination, which indicates that the gender is a lifelong factor for differential treatment. The response of the girls in the interviews showed how belonging to a specific gender sets limits to their childhood and girlhood boundaries.

6.5.1. A girl cannot argue with the elders

Within Childhood Studies and other contemporary discourses, the agency of children is romanticized, portraying them as competent and independent social actors (Abebe, 2019). Children are active human beings (James, 2007) however there is need to elucidate the context the children live in, for evaluating the degree and type of agency they possess. Although it is argued to understand children according to their contextual background, the society on the other hand plays a crucial role in conceptualizing and influencing the way

childhood is constructed. Through the interviews of young girls, it apparently seemed that they have no active agency, but one cannot deny the presence of concealed agency in their daily lives. The girls understand the expectations while actively negotiating with their parents or elders and make the decisions that will influence their own and their family's present and future lives (Klocker, 2007). These rural girls encounter several acts of discrimination while growing up, where their male counterpart is always given preference on them. The agency sometimes become thin and sometimes thick depending upon the structures, context, and relationships they confront (ibid). As the residents of Pakistan, both boys and girls are equally rightful nationally and internally, to get education and schooling. This right to education for all is *violated* by displaying discriminatory behavior towards the education of girls. The rural girls face every type of obstacle starting from being born as a female to structural, cultural, and familial barriers.

From the feelings and situations of young girls expressed during their interviews, it is quite evident that children in rural Pakistan particularly girls do not have power to directly negotiate in their relationships with adults. They already know that their opinions and feelings do not have significant value, therefore they must accept and act upon whatever their elders tell them to. However, agency in many situations may seem invisible but it should not be ignored or overlooked (Robson et al., 2007). When in a restricted environment young people are able to conform their actions according to the adult expectations, then they show the possession of agency to some extent (ibid). According to my participants they are trained and expected to stay *submissive* to their fathers and brothers and every other adult in the family. Young rural girls usually do not have freedom to make decisions about the matters of their life. When some male or any elder family member asks them to stay at home and not go to school then they must stay obedient. If the agency of these girls is viewed from a macro perspective, it seems they are generally and *apparently* powerless throughout their lives. Firstly, before marriage they rely upon their parents to make decisions for them and after marriage on their husbands. The main elements like age, gender, poverty, and culture sometimes act as thickeners in enhancing their agency but most of the time play part in thinning the agency of young rural girls (Robson et al., 2007). The thinning of agency is not referring to girls as being victims or mere actors who are just performing whatever they are told by elders rather they practice agency, which is relational consisting of intergenerational relations (Abebe, 2019). The relationality here refers to the connection and mutual association the different generations like childhood, youth, adulthood have. Several cultural, religious, and societal norms are rooted within these relations which are required to be conformed to. This means that when girls agree to the decision of their elders about dropping out of school, they are not only recognizing their position as a *female* but also act in a socially acceptable way. They try to act just like their elder sisters or other girls of their family and community who dropped out of school at an early age. As Twum-Danso Imoh (2013) refers to such children as *strategic agents* who make active decisions for getting likely benefits. For example, in the case of Sumaira, she dropped out of school due to immense pressure by family members. She argued with her mother alone but was not able to disagree with other family members, thus dropped out of school. She did not stop there but after few months she started helping her neighbour in her business and also started teaching in the same school which she attended. Initially she was holding a submissive position and it was against the family norms to resist therefore she adapted to the decision made by elders. Active decision making in the past facilitated her in a way that she was the first girl in her family who was allowed to go outside her home and become a teacher. Even though she passed just 8 grades, she took a training course for teachers and in rural areas which is usually

considered enough to teach younger children. Similarly, Gul and Noor were also *restricted* from going to school and Madrassa. It was not only their brothers' order but also their in-laws warned them about the consequences, if they stepped out of their house for getting education. On one side it seems that agency does not exist in the lives of these sisters but by digging a bit more deeply it can be said that agency does exist and that it is thin in nature. Therefore, showing them as passive beings who are not *doers or thinkers* in their daily life matters. Firstly, they were performing domestic tasks since a very young age, thus they can be valued for actively contributing to the tasks, rather than being passively dependent (Powell et al., 2008). Secondly, within confined settings, being young females and bound to follow their ethnic norms they actively conformed to the situation by deciding not to go to school, stay at home and help their mother with house chores. We can say that this agency is quite likely to help them in their future, after marriage, where in-laws of these young girls would not torture or beat them for going to school. The girls in both of the above-mentioned cases are acting purposefully (K. Valentine, 2011) which means that neither they are being forced to take a certain decision nor are they simply following other people's choice. They took the decision of not going to school or dropping out of it, because this choice will probably make them achieve a conscious purpose they had in their minds.

In general, young rural girls in Pakistan possess agency but the degree to which they can exercise their agency varies. The society is male dominated therefore a female's agency apparently seems less operational compared to male counterpart. As the father is the head of a family, earns for them and the sons, on the other hand, have an advantage of being born as a *male*, therefore mothers instruct and train their daughters to obey both their father and brothers. The other factors like familial norms and practices, opinions of extended family members including future-in-laws also manipulate the decisions a family is making, hence leaving girls with very little agency. If poverty prevails in a family, it causes the thinning of agency with the passage of time (in case of Bushra explained above). (Klocker, 2007) states that thick agency helps a person to act or decide when surrounded by variety of choices and agency could get thick or thinned over the period of time. For instance, different relationships and socioeconomic conditions play vital roles in thickening or thinning of a girl's agency. If the financial situation gets stabilized or a rural girl is married in a family with better socioeconomic conditions, then this could thicken her agency. Nevertheless, her agency could only be thickened just to a certain extent. In a Pakistani society, the concept of family and relatives is deeply incorporated in the society and their opinions matter a lot. One of the ways of showing respect towards elders is when children, both boys and girls, follow their orders. Children either belonged to poor or rich families are not usually given any degree of autonomy because they are believed to be minors and dependent upon their parents (Jabeen, 2009). Parents take important decisions for their son and daughter thus expecting children to obey their elders' order especially male adults (ibid). This idea illustrates that in rural Pakistan where relationships matter a lot, agency cannot be understood as individual's capacity to act independently due to young individuals' dependency upon their adults for their needs.

6.5.2. Different aspects of agency

Agency keeps on changing depending upon contextual location and the people they are with, children can be considered dependent and independent at the same time (Abebe, 2019). Through negotiated interdependence the relationships between parents and children and among siblings are negotiated and renegotiated over the time span depending

upon context, illustrating the significance of social relationships in young children's life (Punch, 2015). Using negotiated interdependence an individual can also immediately shift roles between adult and child in the presence of same people, context or according to specific activities or the arena (Samantha Punch, 2003). The participants of this research expressed about being in powerless position when the interdependent negotiations are made by their siblings' in the matter of drop out. Sometimes elder brothers and sisters and other times some outsiders pressurized young girls to stay at home. Like Gul and Noor who were told by their brother about no schooling, he took the place of their father and instructed accordingly. Gul and Noor on one side agreed to their brother's decision because they were younger than him and choose not to resist. On the other side, they also positioned themselves as adults by looking after their siblings and being responsible for household activities. This situation illustrate that the girls face the restriction from doing certain activity (going to school) but this restriction also encourage them to take over the female expected task as soon as possible. Amina and Fatima's married sister while observing their mother's condition suggested that they should stay back at home. Both of them were valued by perceiving them competent enough to help actively in domestic activities. Amina's decision to drop out of school was highly influenced by her older sisters' idea to lend a helping hand to their mother. Her elder sister did not force rather Amina understood the situation of work at her home who was followed by Fatima's drop out because one sister was supposed to work at home while the other one went out for collecting fodder. Thus, a strong sense of family responsibility between siblings keeps them negotiating over the time and at some instances shaped by birth order (Samantha Punch, 2003).

When Bushra dropped out of school, it was both her own and her parent's decision. She expressed that during childhood she was more interested in taking care of cattle because in the future that cattle would have been sold to give her dowry. In her mind she was aware of the fact that even if she gets education that would not be worth it, hence she complied to the common practices, that young girls follow, in her village. She knew that she would be a housewife eventually doing no professional job, therefore taking care of cattle was better than going to school. Here we can perceive that her role as an agent made her decide to construct her childhood by doing house chores and rearing cattle. She possessed some degree of agency back in her childhood, but it seems to be thin in nature (Klocker, 2007) because her decision of dropping out of school was taken within the limited available options. The poverty she was living in and her parent's concern for the safety would have sooner or later resulted in her drop out of school. As the years passed and situation took a turn after her father's death, the way her childhood was constructed by herself and her elders affected her life (James & Prout, 1997). In the past, it was decided that she would spend her childhood period at home, rearing cattle instead of going to school. Her economic conditions resulted in thinning her agency more and now she has to work as a maid in many houses for livelihood. She expressed her regret for not deciding to get education at the early age. She feels worthless in the eyes of other people. Due to poverty her agency has continued to become thin because in order to earn some money she has to continue working as a maid or house helper. As Mayall (2003) points out, an agent is the one who does something in relation with other people and, in doing so, makes things happen. On the flip side keeping in mind this perspective of agency, it can be said that Bushra is utilizing her agency in her present life. She is not looking towards more privileged people or her brothers to financially help her rather by choosing to independently work as a maid, earn money, and bring it to the home she is helping her family to survive. Through her livelihood she is making difference not only in her but her

family's life too. Consequently, the ability to earn is influencing her life and people around her, making her valuable.

Children are said to be potentially competent, but their agency becomes limited in some situations (Tisdall & Punch, 2012) while in some areas of life children may experience agency but in other areas they do not (Robson et al., 2007). This is because children's agency is not individual, rather it depends on the people they are with therefore referred as relational and interdependent. Salma choose to leave the school herself because she could not see her father working in his illness. She wanted to provide a helping hand to him and support also her family financially. She received encouragement to learn the skill and by staying at home to help her father and also earn. Sumaira, on the other hand, faced restrictions and criticism from her uncle and grandmother when she tried to contribute financially by stepping out of the house for a job. Both sisters tried to help their family but received different types of responses from extended family members. Living in a social world where interdependent relationships play vital role in encouraging young people to avail the opportunities and also at times restrict their livelihood chances (Punch, 2015), thus effecting their agency. Here the interdependent agency of both of the sisters remains an essential component, influenced by the familial ideas of care, obligations, and reciprocity (Abebe, 2019). Children, particularly girls, in rural societies not only contribute financially or physically but also train themselves with basic skills that empowers them to stay active members of the society (Abebe, 2007). If these young rural girls are valued as both 'being and becoming' at the same time, it will increase the agency that they have in the world (Uprichard, 2008).

In a wider context agency is related to the people in a way that people create particular effects on each other and the surrounding world with the help of their relational connections and mutual actions (Burkitt, 2016). This means when individuals interact, they make such actions that are meaningful to them. Most of the rural girls that participated in this research, their decisions of dropping out or not going to school show that they made their choice depending upon the available knowledge they had. Their interaction with their family and society made them realize, consciously and unconsciously, that males are the rulers. While being females they have to serve their own and in-law's families, including parents, brothers, in-laws, husband, and children and also be experts in domestic work (Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2014). The knowledge that they are fed with, leads them to make meaningful decision that will not only affect them but also their future married life whether it is about dropping out of school, doing house chores, looking after siblings or staying submissive to their males. Furthermore, their interviews illustrated the fact that it is not only the primarily brothers or fathers that are involved in the process of considering school dropout. Rather there was an engagement of a large group of people ranging from parents and siblings to in-laws and extended family members who usually influence the whole decision-making process.

6.5.3. Every girl should get the chance to study

A. H. Qamar (2015) states in his paper that the opinions about childhood vary in different cultures and societies where most of the societies clearly mark a distinction between childhood and adulthood. Moreover, several norms, values and anticipations are connected to them During the interviews I posed this question to some of the mothers 'how do you determine that your daughter is now a grown up?', none of them answered with the numbers i.e. age. No mother said that when their daughters turn 18 then they are

considered grown up. I was surprised to learn that most of my participants were unaware of their age. The girls never asked their parents, neither it seemed chronological age was important to them. The numeric age does not define the competency of a child or girl in rural areas because mental, physical, and societal competencies of children develop over the period of time and are distinguished differently in various socio-cultural contexts (A. H. Qamar, 2012). The mothers told that sometimes through physical growth they assume that their daughters now belong to the category of adults and she is not a child anymore. As soon as this assumption takes place, the young girls have to follow the same trends as adult females, like observing purdah, staying at home etc. That is why when most of the girls reaches 5th grade, they enter or are about to enter the phase of puberty. Their parents or brothers become more protective of them and make the decision of taking them out of school, while the boys continue to go to school. When the girls enter the age of puberty that means there are more chances of harassment thus making parents worried about their *izzat* (respect and honour). This along with the other factors lead to the drop out. The mother of Salma and Sumaira told that she wanted her youngest daughter to continue her education:

Now I am thinking of sending my youngest daughter to school after 8th grade and make her study till 11th or 12th grade. She looks quite small and young compared to the elder sisters. Her age is not that much, she is just 14-15 years old and is in 7th grade. Moreover, her brothers are grown up. They will also study further and can take their sister to school and pick her up.

Her statement illustrates the significant role bodily characteristics play when it comes to deciding whether girls could continue going to school or not after a certain grade. The other two daughters were marked as grownups as they reached 7th and 8th grade because their bodies started to show the signs of puberty, hence determined by their social age which is the culturally constructed standards of appropriate behaviour. While the third daughter not only looked like a *child* in 7th grade but also her brothers were responsible enough to take care of their sister while picking and dropping her to school. Therefore, not only her mother seemed aware of the importance of education but her chances of acquiring more education also seemed brighter. Many mothers when asked about the age of their children revealed the fact that they do not know about the age because they do not how to read and write, therefore they cannot tell about the age either. The young girls were also unaware of their age and were just giving a guess. This also shows that how less educated their familial background was and how chronological age of a child is not as important in everyday life. The chronological age is usually not looked upon when determining activities for them. There was less awareness about education some years ago due to which parents did not bother for their daughters' schooling. I asked a grandmother 'How do you recognize a girl that she is a grown up now and she should not go to school anymore, as you have no idea about their age?' she replied 'We don't know about the age because we are illiterate but for example by seeing their height. If a girl long height, then we recognize that now she is a grown up and she should stay at home'. The views of parents and the society heavily rely upon the development of girl's bodily characteristics. When they feel that a girl is becoming physically mature then many decisions including dropping out of school takes place. The young girl is not perceived as child anymore, the family thinks that an outside world is not protective enough for her, hence her family in order to protect her, prefers to make her stay at home. That is when many girls leave the school.

In some context children's agency becomes negative or problematic (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). In various castes, like *Kohistani*, people think that education pollutes a girl's mind. They believe girls agency will ultimately cause problems not only for girls but for the whole family and community. Kohistani people are concerned about their females getting a partner of their own choice and marrying him off. This only happens when she steps out of her house like going for school because otherwise, they are rarely allowed to go out outside their homes. The girls are allowed to attend few grades at school or never allowed to go to school. Ayesha really wanted to attend school but her brother at times used to show anger towards her schooling. He did not want her sisters' mind to become *polluted*, but that same brother ran away with some girl making impossible for Ayesha to go to school or Madrassa. Ayesha, on the other hand, showed optimistic view of sending her children to school and giving them privilege to marry someone they love. She was not willing to set boundaries for her children's agency which she was not able to practice rather she wanted to strengthen it by giving them their rights practically. This also illustrates that how well girls are aware of the fact that education is essential to spend a decent life for both males and females.

One of the main elements behind the dropout of these girls was poverty and it was common factor amongst all the cases. Except few, most of the girls told that dropping out of school was their own decision, they were not forced. They were aware of the circumstances they were living in, their socioeconomic status, the respectability of their parents and their worries about their daughters' *izzat*. Hence when their parents showed the concern, the girls were sensitive enough to take the decision for themselves. Although they had very limited options, where they took the decision of dropout or not going to school, but they utilized the thin agency they had in order to make choice. Recognizing that they have thin agency instead of having no agency at all, acknowledges 'both of their difficult circumstances and their efforts to survive and to build better lives' (Klocker, 2007, p. 92). Before conducting interviews, I also observed that some girls who never went to school were really excited to talk to me about this topic. They elaborated sometimes happily and sometimes with teary eyes the situation and feelings they had gone through. They also expressed their strong will that in future after getting married they will send their children to school because they already knew how important it is to get education for each and every child.

6.6. Summary

As this thesis is written addressing gender discrimination within educational context with focus on girls, therefore in this chapter the general cultural and familial expectations regarding gender roles of females are highlighted. In this section I have depicted the routine life activities of young rural girls, that they described themselves. The girls revealed that being females they are expected not only to master the house chores but also supposed to show submissive behaviour in front of the elders, especially males, in their life, both before marriage and after marriage. I have also described the way girls feel when they are not allowed to go to school, while their brothers are, hence depicting their emotions towards gender discrimination. Actor oriented approach and different types of agency related to interviewee's life situation provided basis for analysis in this section. The living circumstances of these rural girls were complicated therefore the concept of agency was not used in a straightforward manner rather in a complicated way. Side by side the notion of gender also provided basis for exploring the way it effects the agency of a girl in her daily life. The involvement of various factors like poverty, relationships and cultural

and traditional practices were also assessed as they play a huge role in thickening or thinning of the agency.

Chapter 7: Conclusion- Getting Education is Important

Malala Yousafzai is a symbol of peace and courage and represents the struggle of many girls around the world against tyranny and oppression. Malala was full of potential but unfortunately, she belonged to such an area where her potential did not get a chance to flourish. Malala herself was extraordinarily strong, but she had little access to quality education. However, her father's support and her own resilience made it possible for her to fight the unfavorable circumstances. In the same way the girls belonging to the areas where I conducted research have the abilities hidden inside them, but they do not get opportunity to channel out those abilities. I believe that if these girls get a chance like Malala and are supported and encouraged by their fathers and brothers, then by getting education they can positively influence the society in amazing ways meanwhile flourishing in their own personal capacities and capabilities.

7.1. Summary of the Findings

In this chapter I will conclude and summarize the main findings regarding my research question. The final remarks would be followed by recommendations for future policy. This study pursued for research questions that were posed in the introductory section. The aim of my research was to find the barriers behind girls' education in rural Pakistan and to explore the reasons behind them. I also aimed at finding the way these barriers are affecting a rural girl's life especially the factor of gender discrimination. In order to explore the answers to my questions I included the mothers and their young daughters for gaining their perspectives. Based on my objectives I formulated two main findings that were built upon the theories and concepts, explained in the theory chapter. The first set of findings not only stated the concrete but also indeterminate factors behind drop out. Gender discrimination, that is one of the main causes due to which girls remain out of school, has been explored from the viewpoint of mothers and its role in the construction of girlhood. The second set of findings depicted the emotions and experiences of adolescent girls regarding their opportunity to get education. It also highlighted the extent to which they can exercise agency in their daily lives and activities which are highly gender-bound.

My introduction chapter stated that in rural Pakistan, as compared to males, females lie at the bottom of an educational system because of the one main known reason that is women belong to their homes while men to the outer world. I went into the field with the thinking that girls are strictly kept back at home by *depriving* them of their basic right to education. The chapter one of analysis was designed in a way to clarify the general perception of *injustice* a girl face when she wants to go to school. The mothers pointed out several factors including poverty, the cost of their uniforms, the travel expenses, unavailability of transport, shortage of schools, security, and safety of the girls, onset of puberty, cultural preference towards *purdah* and *izzat* and strict familial norms regarding female gender. These reasons were all contributing factors, but poverty and social and familial attitudes were founding basis for gender discrimination thus causing drop out of girls from school. I viewed a rural girl's life from the contextual perspective not from the general globalized understanding. The findings demonstrated that the parents' discriminatory attitude particularly towards the education of their daughters was not on purpose, but they were helpless due to their circumstances. A sensitive aspect of female being a symbol of *izzat* for her male family members, indicated that the men in Muslim culture protect females at all cost (S. T. Khan, 2016) due to which many research participants could not finish their schooling. This discriminatory behaviour, on the other

hand, played important role in constructing the crucial period of girl's life i.e. childhood or more specifically girlhood. The conceptual framework of Childhood Studies and the global vows like UNCRC were noteworthy in studying the lives of rural girls. UNCRC emphasises upon providing the right to education for the betterment of children but my participants revealed that for many families the education was harmful because it effects a girl negatively. That is why gender equality in education does not exist because when girls acquire education it becomes a *potential corrupting force* for them and drive away the girls from traditional gender roles (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015). The families had a fear that their daughters' education will result in contact with the outside world, that will eventually led them make independent decisions like choosing a husband or making independent choices for themselves. That is why the childhood period of a girl is constructed in a way that gives her less opportunity to exercise her right of education either provided by the state of Pakistan or UNCRC. This construction of childhood indicated that it is not a universal phenomenon but a social construct, influenced by social, cultural, and historical dynamics (James and Prout 1990).

The findings in chapter 6 were based upon the mixed feelings of pain, regret, and helplessness expressed by the participants not only because they dropped out before completing their school but also because their gender was female. Being female, the childhood in village was constructed in a very unique way surrounded by many boundaries where education is not the basic requirement of families. The barriers faced by the participants were interconnected and linked to each another. Thus, the interplay of multiple factors was resulting in drop out from school. The young rural girl in her life was perceived to be weak and incompetent, where adults through their authoritative behaviour were protecting her. This apparently depicted that girls do not possess agency in any aspect of life. Through using an actor-oriented approach where children are regarded as agents i.e. competent and beings in their own rights, the life experiences of rural girls were explored, and the existence of the agency was depicted. Different types of agency were utilized in order to understand the presence of agency in the daily life and activities of young girls. The living circumstances of these rural girls seemed complicated therefore the concept of agency was not used in a straightforward manner rather in a complicated way. The girls were part of social, interdependent, and relational world therefore they were understood as being in their own right along with becoming for their future lives. Their narratives about past decisions and experiences were also analysed which showed that their past is alive in their present which will probably influence their future.

As parents, especially male family members, take important decisions of their children's life and expect obedience in return, therefore agency of young girls was not recognized as individual capacity to act (Jabeen, 2009). Rather girls understood the expectations and acted according to their dependency on their family and other relationships. They were dependent and independent at the same time, hence made the decisions in a way that impacted not only their present lives but also future ones (Klocker, 2007). Although Childhood Studies portray children as competent and independent social actors (Abebe, 2019) there was need to interpret the context the young rural girls lived in, for evaluating the degree and type of agency they possess. The findings proved that the societal, religious, and cultural norms played a crucial role in conceptualizing and influencing the way childhood and girlhood was constructed.

It was also concluded that although young girls were social actors, their agency at various levels was restricted. At many instances, their agency seemed invisible, but it could not

be ignored because in a constrained environment when they were able to conform to adult expectations, they possessed agency (Robson et al., 2007). As a researcher realizing the fact that these Pakistani rural girls possessed agency to some extent helped me acknowledge the hardships they were confronting and their struggle of surviving and building better lives. The analysis indicated that childhood varies from culture to culture, where societal and familial norms, anticipations and values make distinction between adulthood and childhood. When a Pakistani rural girl's childhood period is over depends upon the development of her physical characteristics. The onset of puberty usually marks the end of childhood and places her in a category where she is not child anymore. Thus, it is the time when her physical maturity leads her family to decide that she would be more protected while staying at home than going outside for the school. Her physical growth and biological development are indicators that she can now competently participate in domestic work.

As this thesis was written with reference to Childhood Studies the qualitative, ethnographic approach helped me in acknowledging children and adolescents as worth studying in their own right (James, 2011). Qualitative research methodology used in the form of interviews in this project was useful because it involved a smaller number of participants and pursued for in-depth research questions, for example by asking open ended questions (Silverman, 2006). For studying children and young my research methodology was quite suitable because like adults, young people's viewpoints mattered a lot and provide meaningful data. During interviews I maintained the approach of a *traveller* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and in doing so I was able to construct valuable data. As a researcher I perceived myself as an interviewer-traveller who separated the potential meanings of the original stories with the help of interpretations. My interpretations made during analysis were based upon some of the concepts of Childhood Studies. My reflections made me acknowledge the fact that as a traveller I had an impact not only on the collected data and the research process but also upon myself. Thus, this research regarded children as worthy of studying in their own by focusing the young girls' perspectives and views which were distinct from adults (James & Prout, 1997).

7.2. Policy Recommendations and Suggestions

The findings of this research indicate the enthusiasm of young rural girls to get education. Their responses during interviews showed that they were aware about the significance of education that can help not only themselves and their families but also their country. In the light of this research's findings, the following policy recommendations are devised that can help reduce gender inequality in the field of education:

- Free education should be provided until secondary level in government schools. Financial assistance in the form of scholarships should be granted particularly to the rural girls belonging to low-income class, so that they could pursue for education.
- Cheap and secure transport facility should be available so that the families who want to send their girls at distant school for acquiring education could fearlessly travel outside the village.
- The government of Pakistan should give proper attention to the infrastructure and the educational system of rural areas, that are being ignored since long. In villages the government schools should be upgraded til 10th grade (secondary school), so that every girl gets an equal opportunity to attend all the grades of a school.

- With the help of government intervention in the form of campaigns, awareness could be created about the lasting impact of education. Without the involvement and support of families and change in the attitude of society, gender parity in education is not possible.
- The policy makers should take an account of the difficulties faced by the girls at domestic level in order to plan strategies that will increase the enrolment in rural areas.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Letter to NSD

Are you interested in taking part in the research project:

Barriers to girls' education in rural Pakistan

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to find out about inequality that exists between girls' and boys' education in Pakistan and to search the reasons/factors from both parents' and girl's perspective behind this inequality. In this letter you will get the information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

I am a student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and I am here to conduct my research on the topic of gender disparity in education. The goal of this research is to explore the reasons why parents are in favor of sending their sons to school and not their daughters. This project will explore the reasons/factors behind this inequality and will also investigate the challenges a girl faces as a result of not going to school or getting dropped out of school.

This is a two-month fieldwork in which I will conduct interviews and observations with small sample of people to collect data. This data will be used for my master thesis.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Sample consists of the people who live in rural areas. Those families will be asked to participate whose daughters don not attend the school. Sample is selected randomly from two different provinces using private networks and contacts. About 10 to 12 families who are willing to participate are included in this project who will be interviewed.

What does participation involve for you?

If you are willing to take part in this project, this will involve answering some questions about the topic of gender differences on education. The method of interview will be used in order to collect the data. During the interview digital tape recorder will be used to record your answers. If you are not comfortable then instead of recording, I will write your answers on paper. Moreover, if you want, I can read the questions for you or your daughters prior to interview and then you can decide to take part or not.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If people withdraw, information will be removed and not used further. If people participate, all the information will be made anonymous. Also, participants can withdraw their consent at any time without giving a reason. There

will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

The information that I am going to collect from you will be used for my thesis project only. Firstly, your personal information like name, place will not be asked, rather general questions regarding socioeconomic status will be inquired, in this way you will remain anonymous. Secondly the data collected from you in the form of recordings will not be shared with anyone and will be stored in password protected folder, so that no one will have access to it.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end 15th May 2020. The data collected in the form of digital tape will be deleted at the end of the project.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) via Ida Marie Lysa.
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Student (if applicable)

Consent form

Oral Consent

I am a master's student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). I am going to conduct an interview with you and the information obtained from it will be strictly used for my thesis work. No one will have access to it other than me and my supervisor. I will start the interview and switch on the sound recorder and will ask you whether you are interested in this research or not. If you answer with 'yes' then we will proceed if you say 'no' in the beginning or even in the middle of interview we will not continue further. In addition, if you feel uncomfortable at any question, we will skip it.

I have received and understood information about the project [Gender Disparity in Education] and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in an interview

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 2

Interview Guide for Parents

Family Characteristics

1. When did you get married?
2. How many children do you have? Their age? Sons:____, Daughters_____.
3. Do they go to school?
4. How many sons go to school?
5. How many daughters go to school?
6. What kind of school do they attend? Private/Government/Religious school?
7. What is your qualification?
8. What do you do for living? How much is the average income? Is it enough to support the whole family?

Reasons for not sending or dropping daughters out of school

1. Why don't you send your children (specifically daughters) to school?
2. (If they were sent then) Why were they dropped out of school?
3. Is this common in your family that girls are either not sent to the school or beyond certain age they are kept at home? If yes, why is this so?
4. Were there any safety concerns for your daughter attending school?
5. Do you think that spending money on sons and sending them to school will benefit you in future? (and such will not be in daughter's case?)/ Explain how?
6. If you had resources, would you send your daughters to school along with your sons?
7. What are their responsibilities/ or activities they perform instead of going to school?
8. Are you saving money for you daughter's dowry by not sending them to school?

Quality of school

1. Do you think shortage of schools is the reason you don't send your daughters to school?
2. Was there shortage of facilities like a smaller number of teachers, furniture, toilets, water., boundary wall etc. that led you to this decision?
3. How much was the school fee? Were you able to afford it?
4. How were they used to travel to school? Was it too far from home?
5. What is the system of education in her school? Either coeducation or segregated?
6. Was there male staff/teacher at your daughter's school?

7. Did any incident happen due to which your daughter was dropped out of school?

Rounding Up

1. Could you share any happy memory with your daughter?
2. Is there any addition you want to make, or do you want to ask any question from me?

Appendix 3

Interview Guide for Girls

1. What is your age?
2. Till which grade did you attend the school?
3. At what age did you drop out of school?
4. What do you think was the reason that you dropped out of the school? Was this your own decision or your parents?
5. Were there any factors within school that created difficulty in attending school?
6. How was your performance in studies as compared to your other siblings?
7. Did your parents mention and discuss the reason with you for not sending you to school?
8. Instead of going to school what do you do at home?
9. Do you help your mothers in household chores or do you work outside?
10. How do you feel/think when you see your brothers (or other children) going to school and you don't?
11. Do you have any friends who go to school?
12. What kind of hardship you face as a result of not going to school?
13. Do you think going to school and getting education can change your future?
14. Is there anything you want to add?
15. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix 4

Information for NSD advisor

My topic of research is 'Gender Disparity in Education in Pakistan'. The research will be conducted in the rural areas of Pakistan where sample taken will consist of people who are either less educated or illiterate. In order to collect data, interview method will be used. The consent of participants will be taken orally because most of the participants including are not able to read or write. So due to issue of illiteracy of participants, so it's better not to take written consent from them. The following text will be converted into the language that participants speak/understand easily and then it will be presented to them.

Project information (for participants)

The project will be introduced and described to the participants in following words:

I am a master's student in Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and i am here to conduct my research on the topic 'Gender disparity in education' for my thesis. In this project i am going to explore the reasons and factors that restrict girls from going to school or due to which they get dropped out of school. I want to find out both parents and their daughters' perspectives behind this situation.

I will conduct an interview in which questions will be asked from the parents and their daughters separately. If you(parents/daughters) are interested to look at questions first i can read them to you and then afterwards we can start interview if you give me the consent. I will use a tape recorder to record my questions, your answers and your consent.

Oral Consent

I am a master's student in Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). I am going to conduct an interview with you and the information obtained from it will be strictly used for my thesis work. No one will have access to it other than me and my supervisor. I will start the interview and switch on the sound recorder and will ask you whether you are interested in this research or not. If you answer with 'yes' then we will proceed, if you say 'no' in the beginning or even in the middle of interview we will not continue further. In addition, if you feel uncomfortable at any question, we will skip it.



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