

UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF FEMALE STUDENTS' DROPPING OUT OF
SECONDARY SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN RAHIM YAR KHAN
PAKISTAN

By

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Abstract

In Pakistan, the phenomenon of dropout is observed at all educational levels, spread in all areas of the country. The rate of dropout however is the highest for secondary education (grade 9 & 10) in both urban and rural areas. At this level, girls have a higher probability of dropping out before completing matriculation than their male counterparts. This research aims to explore the reasons behind their dropping out of secondary school in the city of Rahim Yar Khan from the perspectives of teachers, parents, and the dropouts themselves. Data was collected and analyzed on the reasons of dropouts from 10 (5 rural & 5 urban) from the government secondary schools in Rahim Yar Khan, a small town in Southern Punjab. The dropouts for the academic years 2017-18 and 2018-19 were considered. To gather data, face-to-face in-depth interviews were carried out. The sample comprised of 160 participants: 10 heads of schools, 50 teachers, 50 school dropouts, and 50 mothers of the dropouts. The study's findings reveal various factors contributing to dropout, including “pull-out”, “push-out”, and “policy-related elements”. Factors pulling students away from education include an unsupportive home learning atmosphere, disengagement from parents and students, failure during ninth grade, financial hardships, domestic chores, local employment conditions, and customs like early marriages and dowries. On the other hand, elements pushing them out involve school geographical locations, subpar learning resources and amenities, ineffective teaching methods, reliance on memorization, and educator-related harassment. Policy-related aspects consist of automated promotion strategies, inconsistent testing criteria at multiple stages, and burdening educators with responsibilities unrelated to instruction. This extensive study, which takes into account views from various stakeholders regarding student dropout, offers valuable insights for shaping public policies and launching effective interventions. This research proposes that in order to achieve the targets of Education for All (EFA) and to reduce the number of “out-of-school children” (OOSC), policies for dropout prevention are required

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Abbreviations

AEPM – Academy of Educational Planning and Management

ASER – Annual Status of Education Report

BISP – Benazir Income Support Programme

CCT – Conditional Cash Transfers

HAAS – Heads of Schools Average Agreement Score

NIPS – National Institute of Population Studies

OOSC – Out of School Children

PBM – Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal

PBS – Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

PEC – Punjab Education Commission

PERSP – Pakistan Education Sector Reforms Programme

PSLM – Pakistan Social & Living Standard Measurement Survey

SED – School Education Department

TAAS – Teachers Average Agreement Score

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nation United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Significance of education

Education is defined as the “provision of learning opportunities in a purposeful and organized manner through various means including, but not limited to, schools and other educational institutions” (Inter Agency Commission, 1990, p. ix). Education provides learning opportunities through both formal and informal channels where schools operate as primary source of formal education worldwide. This study will explore the issue of female students who drop out in their secondary classes (grade 9 and 10) or do not move from middle to secondary classes in the public schools of Rahim Yar Khan. For this research, dropout refers to the students who enroll themselves in a school but leave it without completing the compulsory education (Schargel and Smink, 2014).

Education is seen as a pathway to social, political, and economic development of a county (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). Not only does it perpetuate technological progress, it also promotes scientific knowledge, thereby increasing labor productivity. It is important to note that the education of both men and women play an equal role in economic growth and social development. (Tembon & Fort, 2008). In developing countries, more emphasis is given on educating boys. However, benefits of educating girls are multi-dimensional: it leads to decreased child mortality; improved health conditions of the family; women empowerment; and promotes economic growth. Educated females are more empowered to oppose exploitation and mistreatment (Tembon & Fort, 2008). According to Alman & Gracia, giving at least a basic education to women can be almost threefold more impactful than boosting income by 10% (1993). Additionally, female education narrows the gender disparity by furnishing job prospects and financial self-sufficiency (Tembon

& Fort, 2008, p. 88). Nevertheless, for these socioeconomic advantages to materialize, equitable, high-quality educational access for every child is essential (Mughal, 2018).

The 1989 UN Children's Rights Convention stipulates that anyone younger than 18 is a "child" and should have educational access (Mughal, 2018). Article 28 of this international agreement obliges member nations to offer free, obligatory primary education to all, and to enact efficient strategies to counteract academic attrition (Mughal, 2018). High dropout numbers are particularly troubling in economically disadvantaged areas (Mughal, 2018). The withdrawal of girls from education is a worldwide dilemma with severe repercussions for countries, communities, and households (Komba, 2015). The problem is acutely felt in the developing world, especially in rural zones, threatening the realization of universal education goals (Ngodu, 2009).

1.2 Background of the study

As per the constitutional obligation of Pakistan, the state must provide “free and compulsory education for children aged five to sixteen” (GoP, 2012). Pakistan struggles with being ranked second highest globally for the number of primary-aged children who aren't participating in education, trailing only behind Nigeria (UIS, 2014). The problem of students leaving public schools, particularly in rural areas, is a notable issue. The entry age for schooling in Pakistan is five years. As per a 2013 report by the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), if we take a cohort starting from class 1 enrolment at the age 5, 63 percent move to the primary classes. A small percentage of 40 students from the same cohort progress from primary to elementary classes (classes 6-8) while just 27 percent get to the secondary classes.(AEPAM, 2013). Collectively, almost 73 percent of children between the ages 5-16 (grade 1 to 10) drop out without completing secondary school. Such a low completion rate implies that merely 33.2% of the cohort attain secondary education. (UNDP, 2014).

ASER data from 2017 reveals In rural Pakistan, about 19.3% of kids between 6-10 years aren't attending school. Of this group, 12.9% haven't started school at all, while 6.4% have left. Dropouts are prevalent across all ages, but they peak during secondary education, especially in grades 9 and 10. In these grades, approximately 15.6% of children aged 14 to 16 depart from school. (ASER-Pakistan, 2017).

This purpose of this research aims to delve into the factors contributing to discontinuation of formal education provided by public secondary schools. The primary focus is on the issue of dropout for girls at the secondary school level (grade 9 & 10) in both rural and urban schools of Rahim Yar Khan. The thesis posits that Government-level policies must prioritize addressing dropout concerns to realize the Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan. This objective can only be met when all children continue school until they complete good quality education in the primary and secondary grades.

1.3 OOSC and Dropout

The category of OOSC is divided into two subgroups: those who have 'dropped out' and those who have 'never enrolled'. The term 'out of school' possesses a broad scope and its interpretation varies across different nations. According to the UIS, OOSC encompass those who discontinue their education at a certain time or those who have never been enrolled in any educational institution (UIS, 2013). The term “school dropout” represents the students who leave the school prior to completion of a certain education level, or when they leave and do not return for a given academic year (SAHE, 2021). In the context of this study, dropouts refer to girls who successfully finished classes 1 till 8 in a public educational institution and moved on to secondary schooling. Yet, they ceased their education at some point during their 9th or 10th grade, without switching schools or returning. They might also have taken either the yearly or extra exams conducted by

the secondary education board but failed to secure a passing score, thus not obtaining a secondary education diploma.

1.4 The Problem of Out-of-School Children in Pakistan

Secondary data from ASER in 2019 is employed to contextualize the issue of school dropout, forming the basis for conducting primary research. The following table presents the nationwide estimation of children who are out-of-school, categorized by level of age and education.

Table 1- National Estimate of OOSC by Level

Stage	Population (5-16 years)	Enrolment	OOSC*	
			Number	%
Primary (5-9)	21,887,353	15,808,459	6,078,894	28%
Middle (10-12)	12,336,385	5,854,226	6,482,159	53%
High (13-14)	8,179,188	3,206,745	4,972,443	61%
Higher Secondary (15-16)	8,385,880	1,895,807	6,490,074	77%
Total	50,788,806	26,765,237	24,023, 569	47%

Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2014-15, p. 49

Table 1 illustrates a greater prevalence of children not attending school between the ages of 13 and 16. The table underscores that 47 percent of kids between the ages 10 and 12 are in elementary classes, indicating a high percentage of 53 that are still not part of the educational system. Despite substantial global advancements in enhancing primary school enrolment over the last ten years, a worrisome 28 percent of children of primary school age in Pakistan are yet to enter school.

Table 2 - Percentage of School Enrolment and OOSC in Urban Pakistan

% Children in different types of schools					% Out-of-school		Total
Age group	Govt.	Non-state providers			Never enrolled	Drop-out	
		Pvt.	Madrasah	NFE/Others			
6 - 10	39.4	53.1	0.9	0.6	3.7	2.2	100
11 - 13	42.3	51.1	0.8	0.5	2.2	3.1	100
14 - 16	38.0	52.6	1.8	0.6	3.0	4.0	100
6 - 16	39.9	52.8	1.1	0.6	3.1	2.5	100
Total	94.4				5.6		100
By Type	42.2	55.9	1.2	0.7			
How to read: 94.0% (39.4+53.1+0.9+0.6) children of age group 6-10 are enrolled							

Source: ASER, 2019

The challenge of OOSC persists in urban areas of Pakistan across all age brackets. Approximately 5.6 percent of children aged 6-16 are not enrolled in schools within urban regions, with both girls and boys accounting for 3 percent each. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the dropout rate among secondary students (aged 14-16) is notably highest at 7 percent when compared to other age groups within urban localities.

Table 3 - Percentage of School enrolments and Out-Of-School Children in Rural Pakistan

Age group	% Children in different types of schools				% Out-of-school		Total
	Govt.	Non-state providers			Never enrolled	Drop-out	
		Pvt.	Madrasah	NFE/Others			
6 - 10	65.8	17.7	1.9	0.5	11.7	2.4	100
11 - 13	65.3	16.9	1.5	0.4	6.8	9.0	100
14 - 16	56.4	15.6	1.2	0.2	9.4	17.3	100
6 - 16	64.0	17.1	1.7	0.4	10.2	6.5	100
Total		83.3			16.7		100
By Type	76.9	20.6	2.1	0.5			
How to read: 40.3% (20.1+17.7+2.0+0.5) children of age group 6-10 are enrolled							

Source: ASER, 2019

The data shows that in rural regions, 76.9% of kids earn their secondary diplomas from public institutions, a figure substantially greater than the 42.2% seen in urban locations (ASER-Pakistan, 2019). The statistics also uncover a troubling trend: 16.7% of children between the ages of 6 and 16 in rural areas are not attending school, compared to a lesser rate of 5.6% in urban areas. In rural parts of Pakistan, the issue of children not in school is even more acute, with 9% being female and 7% being male. Much like in cities, dropout rates rise when students reach secondary education in rural Pakistan. The data specifically indicates that 17.3% of students in rural areas between the ages of 14 and 16 discontinue their schooling.

1.5 The Issue of OOSC in Punjab

According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Punjab stands as Pakistan's most densely populated province, with a population of 110,012, (2017). The literacy level stands at 62% and 54% of the population has completed primary schooling, Table 1-4 offers insights into the distribution of school enrollment between governmental and non-governmental educational institutions, coupled with the prevalence of out-of-school children across distinct age brackets.

While the overall dropout rate stands at 4.9%, the rate for age group 14-16 is the highest with 14.7%.

Table 4: Percentage of School Enrolment and OOSC in Rural Punjab

% Children in different types of schools					% Out-of-school		Total
Age group	Govt.	Non-state providers			Never enrolled	Drop-out	
		Pvt.	Madrasah	NFE/Others			
6 - 10	65.6	27.7	0.5	0.8	3.9	1.5	100
11 - 13	69.7	20.8	0.9	0.6	3.6	4.5	100
14 - 16	61.5	16.2	0.7	0.4	6.4	14.7	100
6 - 16	65.7	23.7	0.6	0.7	4.4	4.9	100
Total	90.7				9.3		100
By Type	72.4	26.1	0.7	0.7			
How to read: 94.6% (65.6+27.7+0.5+0.8) children of age group 6-10 are enrolled							

Source: ASER, 2019

1.6 Policy interventions:

The government of Punjab has taken several measures to ensure enrollment and retention. Some of the interventions that are applicable to our research location are shared below.

1.6.1 Conditional Cash Transfers

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs, like the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and Child Support Programme (CSP), are meant for providing financial assistance to underprivileged households. BISP, initiated in 2008, strives to eradicate severe financial hardship, uplift women, and ensure access to basic education for all by offering monthly cash assistance of

Rs. 1500 to qualifying households Child support program is offered by Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) in a few districts, granting cash subsidies of Rs.300 to Rs.600 to families with attending school children. Studies have shown positive effects of CCT programs on girls' enrollment in schools. Similar CCT programs in other countries have demonstrated enhanced school enrollment and retention. For instance, Mo et al. (2013) found that CCT reduced dropout rates in a county in Northwest China, particularly benefiting girls and junior students. However, some studies like Janvry et al. (2006) noted that CCT programs might not entirely prevent child labor in response to income shocks.

The Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme (PESRP) and Punjab Educational Endowment Fund (PEEF) are initiatives of the Government of Punjab aimed at improving the educational ecosystem. Launched in 2003, PESRP, introduced various policy measures for educational development, including free textbooks, scholarships for girls in specific districts, school upgrades, and teacher recruitment. PEEF, established in 2009, offers scholarships to talented, but economically disadvantaged students in southern Punjab. However, the educational outcomes resulting from financial incentives warrant further investigation.

In conclusion, CCT programs in Pakistan like BISP and CSP aim to increase enrollment and attendance rates, particularly for girls. The PESRP and PEEF initiatives introduced by the Government of Punjab seek to enhance educational quality, access, and governance in the province. While these programs have shown potential to improve enrollment and attendance, the broader impact on learning outcomes remains an area requiring more research.

1.6.2 Khadim-E-Punjab Zewar-e-Taleem Programme

Mian Shabaz Sharif, the then CM of Punjab, initiated the Khadim-E-Punjab Zewar-e-Taleem Programme, operating in 16 underdeveloped districts including Bhakkar, Kasur, Okara, and others. This project aims to enhance female enrollment in grades 6-10, providing a stipend of Rs.1000 (\$10) per month to girls meeting the requirement of at least 80 percent school attendance. Its goal is to improve and sustain public school enrollment for girls in targeted districts, resulting in approximately 80,000 girls joining the program during its initial phase. Research by Chaudhury and Parajuli (2010) demonstrated that a stipend program led to a 9 percent increase in enrollment and 10-13 percent higher school attendance among girls aged 10-14 in government-funded middle schools. A study Alam et. Al., (2011) evaluated the impact of the stipend program introduced by the Punjab government. Their study revealed a 9 percent rise in female enrollment in elementary classes, improved likelihood of completing secondary school, reduced work involvement, and delayed marriages among the beneficiaries. However, the problem of OOSC children persists across various age groups in urban Pakistan. In urban areas, children between the ages 6 and 16 are not in school, with equal representation of 3 percent for both girls and boys. Interestingly, this parity in out-of-school rates suggests a diminishing gender bias at the secondary level within urban settings. Notably, the rate of dropout is highest among students of class 9 and 10, reaching 7.8 percent, surpassing other age groups in urban locales.

1.6.3 Free Textbooks

Since 2004, the Punjab government has been supplying free textbooks to students enrolled in both public and public-private partnership schools, encompassing those from nursery to class 10 (PESRP, 2015). Irrespective of their economic status, this policy ensures that all students have access to cost-free textbooks. This initiative aims to enhance educational accessibility and alleviate

financial burdens on families, particularly benefiting economically disadvantaged students who are exempt from purchasing textbooks for their schooling.

This study aims to delve into the causes of dropping out from Government schools in class. It will specifically explore the problem of for the girls at these educational levels in the rural and urban localities of Rahim Yar Khan. The thesis argues that the Government-level policies should put a stronger emphasis on tackling the dropout issue to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This can only be accomplished if all children, irrespective of their gender, are retained in school till the completion of secondary schooling.

The thesis is structured in a way that the next chapter presents a review of the existing body of literature on understanding the process of dropout of female students in grade 9 and 10. The literature review is followed by research methodology in chapter 3. The theoretical framework, data collection methodology and the research questionnaire design are also elaborated in this chapter. The findings of the research and the analysis are presented in chapter 4. The conclusion and policy recommendations, based on the results and discussions, are presented in chapter 5. Finally, the research limitations are presented in chapter 6.

Chapter 2- REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter examines research that has investigated the dropout phenomenon from the viewpoint of teachers, head teachers, dropped out children, and their parents, either directly or indirectly. The literature review attempts to provide holistic insight into the reasons of dropout before completing secondary education with a focus on female students. In order to do so, studies relating to Pakistan and countries that pose similar conditions and have the same limitations have been reviewed. This enables a complete understanding of environmental, social, and policy-driven factors that may influence a girl's family or a girl herself to leave school and not complete secondary education.

2.1 Factors Influencing Dropout

Various reasons cause female students to leave school before completing their secondary education. Most research into this trend focuses either on primary education or combines data from both genders. Additionally, much of this investigation is centered in northern Punjab.

Studies into school dropouts have pinpointed both internal and external reasons explaining this behavior (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996). Internal reasons, or those linked to the school environment, encompass issues like strict school policies, high-stakes testing, crowded institutions, limited extracurricular opportunities, and stringent disciplinary actions. External factors, on the other hand, stem from the student's personal life and background, such as socioeconomic status, family influences, gender prejudices, and family setup (Rumberger, 2015). Hunt's analysis in 2008 describes these reasons as demand (external) and supply (internal) factors.

In a different perspective, Becker (1994) weighs the schooling costs against the anticipated educational returns. Through Becker's human capital theory (1994), it's inferred that decisions about schooling revolve around its expenses and the predicted advantages. Students gauge the opportunity cost, which is the potential income sacrificed to attend school, against the possible increased lifetime earnings post-education. If the perceived schooling costs outweigh the benefits, students might opt out. This implies that prevailing local job market scenarios can sway the costs and potential benefits. Youth might get drawn to immediate job opportunities, overlooking the long-term benefits of education (Oreopoulos, 2007).

Watt and Roessingh (1994) argue that students showing declining academic results and dwindling interest are at a higher risk of quitting. In a comprehensive study spanning 25 years, Rumberger and Lim (2008) evaluated 302 studies on the dropout trend in the US. Their analysis showed that a mix of individual traits such as academic achievement, attitude, and socioeconomic conditions, along with external factors like family situations, resources, school demographics, and rules, have a profound influence on the decision to leave school. This vast body of research confirms that a blend of personal student characteristics, external and internal dynamics, and weighing education costs against its rewards play pivotal roles in a student's schooling trajectory.

2.2 Pull-out Factors

2.2.1 Marriage and age

A common theme observed across various countries is the significance of age, particularly during adolescence, which is deemed a critical period for girls. Secondary education often commences during puberty, and any delay in enrollment beyond the recommended age can impact the successful completion of lower secondary education. In general, the likelihood of children leaving school increases with age, with a more pronounced effect seen among girls compared to boys. International literature, spanning both developed and developing nations, highlights that each additional year of secondary education correlates with a six-percentage-point decrease, on average, in the risk of early marriage and childbirth before the age of 18 (Wodon, 2018). A report by Human Rights Watch on barriers to secondary education in Tanzania underscores early marriage as a key hindrance to girls' pursuit of further education. Similarly, studies in West Bengal identify marriage as one of the factors discouraging girls' education, as it is often considered an inadequate investment yielding no significant long-term benefits for their families (Chowdhury, 1994; also Sengupta & Guha, 2002).

In certain cases, education is withheld from girls due to concerns that it may promote "non-conformist" behavior, making it harder to find suitable marriage prospects. In rural Kenya, nearly half of girls are married by age 19, with a legal marriage age of 16. Early marriage also emerges as a significant contributor to girls discontinuing their education in Bangladesh and Nepal. In Pakistan, early marriage remains a challenge, particularly as girls can legally marry at the age of 16 in most provinces (GEM, 2020). While parental aspirations for their daughters' education are evident in both urban and rural areas, differences in perceptions have been documented, emphasizing the importance of secondary or higher education for girls (Lloyd et al., 2007).

2.2.2 Distance and Issue of Access

A recurring factor observed across various regions is the impact of proximity to schools. The Tanzanian report identifies distance as a significant deterrent for both boys and girls, given the physical strain of walking for one to two hours, often due to lack of available transportation. Lateness can also result in disciplinary measures from teachers, including physical punishment. In an effort to address this, the government requires private transport providers to offer discounted rates to students; however, interviews reveal instances of abuse by bus drivers and passengers (3).

In the Pakistani context, the distance to schools seems to particularly affect girls' enrollment, with a study indicating that a mere increase of half a kilometer in distance can lead to a 20 percent decrease in girls' enrollment. According to the report by ASER in 2018, approximately 17% of households in Punjab, 12% in KP, 13% in Sindh, and 18% in Balochistan cited distance as the primary reason for not sending their girls (aged 6–15 years) to school. In Cambodia, the considerable distance to lower and higher secondary schools poses a challenge, with travel becoming a significant barrier (Johnson-Welch, 2010). The lack of available transportation forces girls to undertake longer, potentially unsafe walks, carrying the risk of danger or misinterpretation (ibid)

2.2.3 Household Responsibilities and the Opportunity Cost of Schooling

The opportunity cost of schooling refers to the income that a child could have earned if they had engaged in paid labor instead of attending school.

Studies indicate that the lost chance to work, either in a family-run business or in general employment, plays a role in why kids leave school. This impact is especially strong in countryside settings, where young people frequently quit their education to assist with agricultural tasks or

housework. Household workload and child labor, in any form, are significant factors contributing to school dropout rates. In Pakistan, where a majority of the population resides in rural areas, agriculture is the main source of income, and children commonly assist their parents on farms or with household chores. Child labor is closely linked to household poverty, and studies in Pakistan have demonstrated its detrimental effects on education. Poverty increases the likelihood of children engaging in paid work, particularly for boys, while cultural practices and lower perceived returns of education for girls also contribute to their involvement in labor. The reduction of poverty and improvement in the perceived value of education are crucial for reducing child labor and promoting schooling. Other studies have found that child labor negatively impacts academic performance, particularly under poor working conditions and long hours. However, the relationship between work and school attendance can vary depending on contextual factors, such as the availability of employment opportunities and the economic conditions of the students' families. The combination of employment and schooling may be more feasible in urban areas with flexible job opportunities compared to rural areas where travel and limited job markets make balancing work and education more challenging. While quantitative studies have examined the impact of household chores and child labor on education, there is a need for qualitative research to explore the perspectives of students who choose work over education.

2.2.4 Poverty

The 2000 PIHS reveals that a significant number of children from low-income families engage in economic endeavors to supplement their household earnings, often leading to girls, who should be attending school, being directed to agricultural tasks. The connection between family wealth and children's education is further substantiated by an examination of Sub-Saharan Africa. Data collected across multiple countries indicates that "...access to schools, especially at the

secondary level, exhibits considerable inequality, with household income and affluence emerging as the most influential determinants of advancement to secondary and higher education levels, showcasing progress in mitigating gender disparities, yet considerable challenges persist, particularly in certain nations" (Lewin, 2009). Additionally, the amplified cost of education at the lower secondary level necessitates consideration.

One of the chief factors contributing to the low enrollment of girls in Kenyan secondary education is the sustained prevalence of high poverty levels, particularly within urban slums and rural regions. The financial burden of children's education proves prohibitive for most families, compounded by the opportunity cost of sending children to school. Furthermore, entrenched socio-cultural norms founded on patriarchal structures lead families to prioritize boys' education when confronted with financial limitations (UNESCO Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education - One Year On, 2011–12).

Global findings find resonance in the Pakistani context, with studies scrutinizing the determinants of enrollment revealing a significant and statistically meaningful correlation between household income and girls' enrollment (Sathar and Lloyd, 1994). Considering expenses directly tied to schooling, families hindered by low economic status and elevated poverty rates grapple with the challenge of meeting daily educational costs (Lloyd et al., 2007). An indirect cost of girls' enrollment in lower secondary schools also surfaces, as parents forego income derived from child labor and essential contributions to household economic endeavors and domestic responsibilities, should their daughters pursue lower secondary education (ibid).

A study by Aslam and Kingdon (2008), using individual-level data from HIES, delves into biases influencing children's schooling, encompassing (1) decisions about enrolling/maintaining boys and girls in school, and (2) choices regarding education-related expenses, given the

enrollment of both genders. The findings underscore the notable involvement of male household members in decisions related to enrollment and funding of education. The PSLM Survey (2018–19) similarly delves into household-level schooling financial factors, capturing responses from out-of-school boys and girls. The survey highlights that nearly 15% of parents struggled to meet primary education-related expenditures for both genders. This discovery emerged as the second most commonly cited reason for primary-level school dropout (PSLM, 2018–19).

2.2.5 Socio-cultural Factors

In many traditional rural communities, gender prejudice greatly influences educational choices. In places like Pakistan, a common trend is parents showing preference towards their sons rather than their daughters when it comes to education (Sawada, 1997). This bias is often due to perceptions of limited career prospects for women and societal norms linking a woman's future to her eventual spouse (Sathar & Lloyd, 1994). A similar mindset was observed in the Greater Banjul region of Gambia, where Cole and Bojang (2002) discovered that many parents saw a higher economic advantage in educating their sons than their daughters. This led them to more often send boys to school. Research in Nairobi, Kenya, by Abuya et al. (2012) revealed analogous results, with young girls mentioning their education was sacrificed for their brothers by their mothers. In male-dominated rural cultures, the arrival of a female child can sometimes be less celebrated, heightening the risk of them dropping out of primary school, especially if the new sibling is also a female (Lloyd, Mete, & Grant, 2009). As a result, in societies with strong male influence where interactions between opposite genders are limited, female education tends to face systemic biases (Colclough et al., 2000)

2.2.6 Parental Socio-economic status

Several studies have shown a direct relationship between a family's socioeconomic position (SES) and the likelihood of students quitting school. The impact of factors like household income and poverty levels on a student's educational journey has been consistently highlighted in previous research (references). Families with adequate financial means often manage the expenses related to education and usually don't necessitate their children to handle domestic work. This combination of resources and reduced chores means that children from well-off backgrounds tend to persist with their studies. Conversely, economically constrained families might lean on their offspring for household tasks and manual jobs. Such children deeply engrossed in domestic responsibilities or jobs have a higher propensity to leave school.

Research by Huisman and Smits (2009) evaluated primary school attendance across thirty emerging nations, scrutinizing both family and regional dynamics. Their results indicate that aspects like family makeup, nearby educational facilities, parents' education, a father's job status, and household prosperity play crucial roles in educational choices. In a related study, Moyi (2010) analyzed household facets affecting late school admissions in Malawi. This study inferred that children from well-off households had a greater chance of joining and persisting in formal schooling. Additionally, Yi et al. (2012) reviewed 46 middle schools in Northern and Northwestern China, and their findings suggest that students from less affluent backgrounds had a greater tendency to leave school early.

Another common finding across various studies is the challenge of accessing distant schools, which often leads to student withdrawal, particularly among female students (citations). Due to cultural and financial barriers, many female students in Pakistan face difficulties when schools are located a significant distance away. It's worth noting, however, that Holmes (2003) pointed out that distance primarily affects older students rather than those in primary school in

rural Pakistani areas. This might be linked to older female students' reluctance to travel long distances owing to safety and societal challenges predominant in far-flung regions. Additionally, research in Ethiopia and Guinea by Colclough et al. (2000) unveiled parents' apprehensions about sending their daughters to distant schools due to potential dangers and harassment fears. Therefore, the inability to cover transport costs, alongside other indirect educational expenses, increases the chances of students leaving their studies early.

2.2.7 Parental Interest in Education of their Children and parental educational level

The involvement of parents in their child's education is pivotal, and their disinterest can often result in the child leaving school prematurely (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). Research indicates that the likelihood of students discontinuing their education is higher when parents don't actively engage in their academic journey (Jeynes, 2007). Thus, to prevent students from leaving school, it's imperative for parents to be actively involved (Tsujita, 2013). Several elements contribute to parents being disengaged from their child's educational path. The financial burden of education or parents having jobs that keep them away from home, restricting their ability to oversee their child's academic activities, are prevalent issues (Yi et al., 2012). Additionally, ineffective communication between schools and parents, where schools fail to inform parents about their child's progress, can contribute to the problem. Furthermore, school cultures that discourage parental engagement or prevent parents from challenging teachers' performance and participating in school management can hinder parental involvement (Pakistan National Educational Policy, 2009; Joshi, 2014). Socioeconomic disparities between teachers and economically disadvantaged parents can also limit parental participation in public schools (Joshi, 2014).

The educational background of parents strongly influences the potential of children discontinuing their education. While there's ongoing debate over whether the educational level of

the mother or the father is more impactful, some assert that educated mothers, especially in rural regions, play a vital role in decreasing dropout rates, especially for daughters (Lloyd et al., 2009). Educated mothers tend to invest more time in their children's academic pursuits and foster a supportive educational environment (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2012). Conversely, other research points to the significance of the educational backgrounds of both parents in shaping a child's academic journey, though with a father's education being more influential regarding school attendance (Sawada & Lokshin, 2001; Siddiqui, 2017). Parents with higher education often value its impact more (Holmes, 2003). The exact influence of mothers and fathers in dropout prevention can differ based on regional and cultural nuances (Hu, 2012; Bilquees & Saqib, 2004; Kane, 2004; Yi et al., 2012). Moreover, in Pakistan, when females have a stronger voice in household decisions, the likelihood of children, especially daughters, attending school increases (Hou, 2011).

2.2.8 Parental Illness or Death

The loss of parents also contributes to school attrition, and youngsters who have lost their parents face heightened challenges, particularly when they originate from disadvantaged households. This circumstance results in a dual absence of both parental care and monetary backing, significantly impacting their educational journey. Ananga (2011) highlighted parental demise as a factor prompting school discontinuation in rural Ghana, classifying it as an 'event dropout' situation.

2.3 Push-out Factors

2.3.1 Quality of Education

Factors related to resources and availability heavily influence children leaving school early. The lack of essential infrastructure, including proper sanitation, secure boundaries, potable water,

classroom space, seating, and teaching aids, hampers the educational process. The absence of clean menstrual facilities can result in girls frequently missing classes. Furthermore, the unavailability of school-based extracurricular opportunities correlates with higher dropout rates. Studies from the USA have shown that engagement in these activities decreases the chances of students leaving school prematurely. Rural regions often grapple with a deficit of teachers and frequent teacher absences, undermining educational quality and pushing students out of the system. Principal reports from rural Punjab highlighted the negative effects of not having specialized subject teachers on students' academic achievements, causing some to leave school. In both rural Pakistan and Ethiopia, the scarcity of female educators has been linked to increased dropout rates among girls. Frequent teacher absences have been noted as a challenge in rural Pakistan. Intriguingly, teacher education levels were seen to correlate with absence rates, as highly-educated teachers were often more absent. Such neglect and lack of responsibility in underprivileged rural areas harm the overall educational standards and processes.

2.3.2 School Policies and Practices

Certain school regulations and methods may inadvertently lead to student disengagement. Elements such as practices favoring a specific gender, use of physical discipline, mistreatment or harassment by educators, strained relationships between students and teachers, the language of teaching, curriculum choice, and attendance rules can be problematic. Research has suggested that physical discipline combined with an abrasive teaching approach can deter students, elevating the chances of them leaving school (Kane, 2004 reference). Similarly, uninspiring classes, indifferent educators, a curriculum that doesn't resonate, limited after-school activities, stringent attire regulations, and policies around suspension can also make students consider leaving. Packed classrooms and curriculums taught mainly in English are particular issues observed in countryside

areas. On top of that, an insufficient backing from teachers, the way schools are structured, the size of educational institutions, its ambience, and sociocultural aspects might result in weak performance, especially in fields like math and science among underserved students. Discriminatory attitudes based on race or ethnicity, either from the institution or fellow students, can adversely affect students from minority backgrounds.

2.3.3 Poor Academic progress

There are times when students become disconnected from their lessons, both within school walls and outside of them. This detachment can lead to underwhelming grades, and eventually, these students might opt to leave school prematurely, often termed as "school dropout." One of the major causes of this phenomenon is the absence of personal and scholastic encouragement. The theory on academic dropout mediation postulates that struggling in earlier educational phases can be a sign of potential discontinuation during high school. In the rural parts of Punjab, Pakistan, a leading factor for leaving public high schools is a blend of unsatisfactory academic history and not passing the 9th grade. In the U.S., elements like academic scores, past scholastic records, and being held back in the initial stages play a role in high school discontinuation rates. Being held back a grade or repeating grades often correlates with hindered scholastic advancements.

2.4 Teachers' Perspective on Dropping out

Studies in this field indicate that teachers and head teachers often attribute student dropout to factors outside of teaching practices and school culture, such as parental involvement and social factors. While teachers often did not acknowledge their contribution to the dropout dilemma, a research by Seidu and Adzahlie-Mensa noted that, alongside various concerns including absenteeism, delayed attendance, disciplinary measures involving physical punishment,

inefficient use of class time in idle conversations, and subpar teaching methodologies, collectively played a role in the issue of attrition within three rural schools in Ghana. However, some teachers acknowledge that issues like corporal punishment, poor teaching practices, and wasted teaching hours contribute to dropout rates. Teacher quality and the bonds they form with students are key factors in keeping kids in school. Teachers point out multiple reasons why students might quit, including lack of money, health issues, clashes in values between home and school, wanting to earn cash, costly tuition, child work, early weddings, and parents not being engaged in their kids' education. Cultural practices, such as early marriages, can also force girls to leave school. The perspectives of school dropouts themselves provide valuable insights into the phenomenon, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.5 Perspectives of the Dropped-Out Girls

Leaving school early impacts not just the economic prospects but also harms the emotional health and self-worth of students (Kaplan, 1983). Research conducted in Uganda with early school leavers revealed that they perceived dropping out as a traumatic experience that undermined their self-worth (Tukundane et al., 2014). However, existing literature often overlooks the students' perspectives, particularly in poor and developing countries. Empirical studies conducted in various countries attempted to capture the viewpoints of school dropouts, highlighting both push and pull factors contributing to their decision to leave school. The influence of pull factors, such as family problems, financial constraints, peer pressure, and personal responsibilities, appeared to be stronger than push factors (Doll et al., 2013).

Underwhelming scholastic results emerged as a primary cause for departing school prematurely. Aspects like uninspiring lessons, frequent absences, influence from peers, inadequate

backing from educators and relatives, educational challenges, and a lack of rapport with instructors were linked to academic difficulties (Banerjee, 2016).

Furthermore, students' perspectives highlighted school-related factors that pushed them to drop out, including boredom, a negative classroom environment, bullying, poor student-teacher relationships, and organizational and policy issues within schools (Banerjee, 2016).

It is worth noting that some studies presented a different perspective, suggesting that for certain families with a history of poor educational performance and behavioral issues, dropping out may be seen as a relief rather than a problem (Okey & Cusick, 1995). Overall, the perspectives of school dropouts shed light on the various factors influencing their decision to leave school, including personal, family, and school-related factors.

2.6 Perspectives of the Parents of Dropped-out Girls

School employees and teachers frequently blame low parent participation and a lack of dedication to their kids' learning for educational gaps, according to a 2002 study by Boyle and colleagues. However, this view isn't always correct. In the same study, Boyle and his team discovered that even if they didn't have much education themselves, parents with low incomes saw education as a way out of being poor. These parents were also capable of judging the educational quality offered by nearby schools. Bridgeland (2010) also emphasized that parents, regardless of their income, race, ethnicity, or the school their child attends, recognize the importance of education. Some studies have explored parents' perspectives on the relationship between schools and families, as well as the significance of teacher-student relationships (Connor, 2001; Krane & Klevan, 2018). Krane and Klevan (2018) conducted focus group interviews with 14 parents in Norway to examine their experiences with teacher-student relationships and parental involvement

in an upper secondary school. These studies highlighted the positive impact of strong teacher-student relationships on students' performance. In rural China, Liu (2004) interviewed 30 families of dropout students to understand their reasons for leaving school. The parents and dropouts cited various factors such as exhaustion from schooling, financial constraints, limited job prospects, dissatisfaction with school life, and parental influence as reasons for dropping out (Liu, 2004). However, there is a lack of documentation regarding parents' perspectives on their children dropping out, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan.

2.7 Dropout as a Process

After a careful analysis of school dropouts, it is evident that those dropping out at a secondary level have been disengaged since their early school years (Alexander, 1997; Barclay and Doll, 2001). The studies suggested that children who are engaged at an early stage are less likely to drop out of school and factors such as attendance, behavioral problems in primary and secondary schools, the teacher-student relationship, and academic prowess determine the likelihood of a student dropping out at the secondary level. It has also been noted that students are likely to excel and achieve more if they have a comfortable relationship with their instructors (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). However, there is more to the equation as research clearly states that it is essential for students to foster a connection with school (Finn, 1993). Students who feel like they belong with their peers and have a connection with others are relatively happier (Steinberg, 1996). Accordingly, student engagement comprises of how much the student participates in activities, the extent to which he/she identifies with their school, social interaction, and their performance in academics (Finn, 1993). There are studies that also suggest that low student attendance or student discipline issues may also be reasons that students quit school and don't continue with their education, particularly at the secondary school stage (Bachman et al, 1971).

Rumberger (2011) concludes that behavioral issues related to attendance, discipline, and participation in school activities are massive predictors of girls dropping out of school. Rumberger is of the view that students should be cognitively engaged by investing in their learning and motivating them to succeed. Previous studies by Alexander (1997) and Barclay (2001) agree with Rumberger (2011) by stating that negative emotional engagement such as not wanting to be in school, bad relationship with instructors and peers, and hampered learning can also immensely affect the dropout rate. Therefore, the notion that dropping out may be a decision on the students' part because of little to no engagement in school, or a bad academic performance, and/or no connection with peers, is supported by these studies. According to Nkinvangi (1980), girls are more likely to drop out than boys if they belong to families in the lower socio-economic strata. For example, in some societies, girls are not given the same opportunities as boys because they are considered to be homemakers and are destined to get married and move away. Therefore, parents who cannot afford education for both girls and boys tend to prefer to give boys an education. Wanjiru (2007) from Mombasa, Kenya conducted a study related to factors that cause students to quit school in public secondary schools and unsurprisingly found that 52.4% of the people who participated in his research preferred and valued giving a boy education over a girl. The reason for this is that girls are to leave their homes when they get married and their education is of no benefit to their family or their blood relatives but is rather an asset for their in-laws (UNESCO, 2002). Similarly, the World Bank (1996) found that in countries such as Africa and its counterparts, certain socio-cultural activities hamper a school's proper functioning. Kapakasa (1992) has also found evidence in support of The World Bank's empirical findings determining how much girls are likely to participate, excel, and persevere in school. It was seen that initiation ceremonies were a popular factor affecting the school dropout rate as parents were more enthusiastic about financing

initiation ceremonies rather than a proper education. Therefore, it was evident that families value initiation ceremonies for females more than their formal schooling.

2.8 Research Gap

There is a dearth of research on the school dropout issue in Pakistan that combines the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders, specifically with emphasis on the secondary level. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the topic and fill in the gap in order to attempt to find solutions to the problem. The literature review above makes it clear that prior research was conducted by recruiting and interviewing students of various age groups and grades who had dropped out. While this may provide a general framework of the situation and provide a basic understanding, comprehending and understanding the circumstances in different age groups and for certain grades is difficult. Liu (2004) has taken the complete 9-year compulsory education cycle into consideration while exploring different human factors that affect the dropping out rate. Ananga (2011) took a sample of eighteen children between the ages of 7 and 17 to understand why students fled basic education in schools in Ghana. However, A 7-year old child has very different reasons to quit school compared to a 17-year old teenager. Therefore, measures to prevent students from dropping out of school are definitely different when speaking of different age groups and levels of education. As mentioned above, students dropping out from primary levels have different concerns or motivations for doing so than those quitting at secondary level. Accordingly, it is imperative to address the problem with proper consideration given to age groups and levels so that appropriate policies and practices can be put in place. Additionally, a lot of the existing literature is based on quantitative calculations and longitudinal research, creating a gap for the qualitative aspects of the issue to be explored and explained. Developing countries lack literature with detailed analyses of the individual cases of children who have dropped out, their families, and their

instructors (including head teachers). Therefore, this study will be exploring and filling the gaps left by the existing literature and research and will address the problem thoroughly. In less wealthy and developing nations, there's a clear lack of in-depth personal accounts from kids who've left school, as well as their parents, educators, and principals. This research aims to fill those noticeable voids in the current scholarly works

2.9 Research objectives and significance of the study

The main objective of this research is to study the issue of dropout among secondary school female students (grade 9 & 10) in the public schools of Rahim Yar Khan in both urban and rural areas. The research intends to investigate the reasons and the motivations behind dropping out even when public education is free and compulsory. Another objective is to study the differences and similarities in the drop out pattern of rural and urban schools in Rahim Yar Khan. This study also intends to study the difference in perception of parents, teachers, heads of school, and dropped-out girls with respect to drop out.

Leaving school prematurely results in the squandering of state investments aimed at nurturing human potential. Countries with lesser economic development, such as Pakistan, seldom offer alternative educational or training pathways for those who exit school early. As a result, individuals who don't finish secondary education face future socioeconomic challenges. Given that a large portion of Pakistan's population comprises children and youth, completing mandatory education is crucial for personal growth and national socioeconomic progression. If girls don't finalize their secondary education, their future economic prospects diminish, making the state's educational investments ineffective (Sabates et al., 2011). Premature school departures can negatively impact children and their communities (Maton & Moore, 2010). This issue particularly impacts females, limiting their job and further learning opportunities (Ekstrom et al., 1986), often

leading them to early motherhood (Mahler, 1999) with accompanying mental and financial stresses (H. B. Kaplan, 1983).

Pakistan's educational investment in females lags behind other South Asian nations. The insufficient emphasis on human capital could significantly hamper economic progression (Sawada, 1997). Beyond economic advantages, finishing school yields various societal and individual benefits for agricultural communities. In Pakistan's rural landscapes, families with stable income sources are less likely to see their children abandon schooling (Sawada, 1997). Boosted productivity for farmers can translate to higher earnings, enabling impoverished families to maintain their children's education. Some universally acknowledged advantages of education encompass improved health, nutrition, reduced fertility, and lowered child mortality rates (Sawada & Lokshin, 2001). In Pakistan, constrained adult incomes and educational accomplishments further strain their ability to support their children's education (Alderman et al., 2003). A significant repercussion of female school dropout is the impending scarcity of women educators. Research indicates that an absence of female educators correlates with diminished girl enrollments in Pakistan (Alderman et al., 1996). This issue is particularly evident in regions like Baluchistan, one of Pakistan's sparsely populated provinces. The ramifications of leaving school during secondary education are extensive, impacting both national economic progression and individual and community welfare.

2.10 Research Questions

According to research, poverty and the economic state of the country are strongly linked to education (Joshi 2010, p.546). One option to increase countries' literacy rate is through the elimination of the dropout phenomenon (Mehrah 1995, p.5). Not only economic growth occurs

when literacy rate increases and education level gets higher, but social development is also observed in the specific country in the form of reduction of birth rates, lower infant mortality, more equal income distribution and increase in life expectancy (Joshi 2010, p.548).

The review of literature indicates that high dropout rate in general is a grave concern for any government (Danovska, 2018). Pakistan has a retention rate (grade 1- 10) of 34 percent for females. To formulate effective policies, it is important to understand the dropout phenomenon from a holistic viewpoint. Looking at the perspectives of parents, teachers, and the girl dropout themselves will help understand the problem from multiple lenses.

This research will explore answers to the following:

1. What socioeconomic and cultural factors influence the girls/their families' decision to drop out?
2. What are some policy-related factors that influence the girls/their families' decision to drop out of school?
3. What are the school-related factors that influence the girls/their families' decision to drop out of school?
4. What are the differences/similarities in perceptions of parents, teachers, and the students with respect to the factors that influence the decision to drop out?
5. What are the differences/similarities in the reasons of dropout in rural and urban schools?

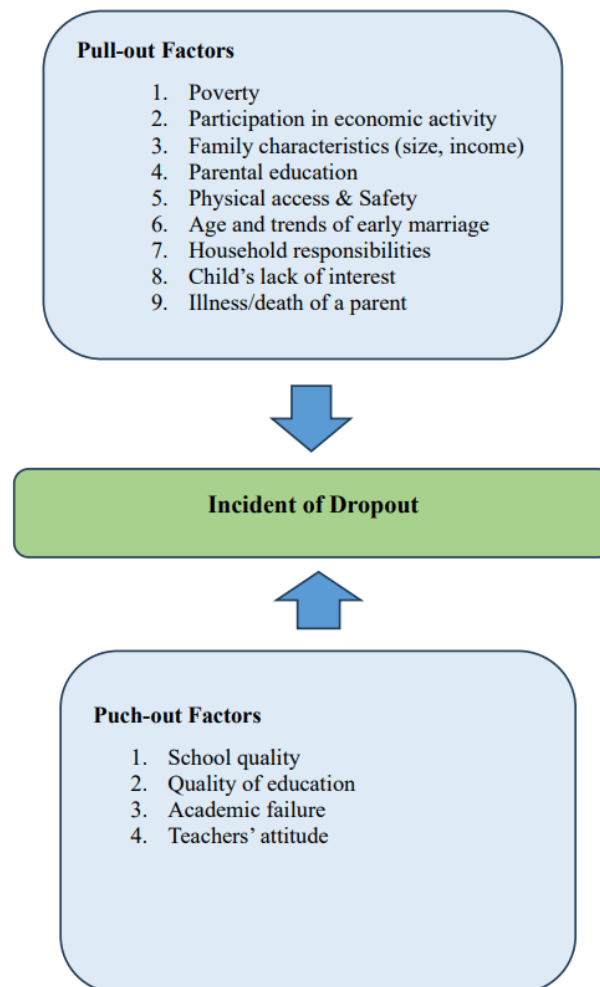
2.11 Significance of the study

This study aims to delve into the factors leading to girls' dropping out of formal education provided by rural and urban public schools. It will specifically examine the issue of dropouts in the secondary level (grades 9 and 10) in Rahim Yar Khan. The government must design policies to

control the dropout rate. It is imperative that every child in the country not only gets access to quality education but also remains in school till completion. Therefore, to understand the dropout problem in detail, it is advisable to look at it through the eyes of educators, parents, and the girls who've left, especially when thinking about how services are provided. To really address an issue like school dropout, a ground-level policy strategy that starts at the base of society is essential

2.12 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Pull Out and Push Out Factors



Many academic studies describe quitting school as a long process, not a quick choice (Finn, 1989; Hunt, 2008; Rumberger, 1987). Rumberger talks about how leaving school reflects a student slowly pulling away from learning, often due to money troubles or social issues. Hunt says that leaving school is more than just a single moment; it's a complicated path shaped by various pushing and pulling forces. Sometimes these forces become so strong that they mess up a student's ongoing education. Finn also thinks quitting school is a slow process of disconnecting over a long stretch of time, not a snap decision. This study supports the idea that leaving school is a lengthy path, aligning with what Hunt and Finn have said.

The study posits that the decision to halt one's education isn't spurred by a single incident. Instead, it's a decision that grows over time, influenced by a combination of factors, not just one. The study's theoretical foundation is firmly grounded in the push-out and pull-out models related to dropout challenges. The literature analysis illuminates how personal and family characteristics, together with persistent economic strains, push high school students out. Additionally, the lack of educational tools, less than ideal teaching conditions, and certain disadvantageous school rules and methods serve as catalysts that push students out. Hence, this research leans on the push-out and pull-out models to delve deep into the dropout patterns, aiming to discern the varied reasons that influence such decisions both within and outside the school environment.

Chapter 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research methods that are used in this study. The research design and the framework for analysis are presented first. This study aims to explore the phenomenon of school dropout among secondary classes female students in the rural and urban locales of Rahim Yar Khan. Using an interpretive approach, the research seeks to understand the subjective meanings and motivations behind students' decisions to drop out, as well as how teachers, heads of schools, dropped-out girls, and parents perceive this issue.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Qualitative Approach

The underlying research is primary in nature, and in order to answer the research questions, the researcher has employed a qualitative approach. The data was collected through face-to face interviews. The closed-ended questions helped with the analysis in identifying the factors that influence the drop out behavior from multiple perspectives. Through descriptive analysis of the results, we can also draw comparisons between rural and urban schools in terms of their drop out factors. The research also focuses on the lived experiences of students, teachers, school heads, and parents. The qualitative approach is chosen due to its interpretivist and constructivist beliefs, acknowledging the subjective nature of individuals and their interpretations. By using in-depth investigations and listening directly to the participants, the research aims to contribute valuable insights for policy and practice in Pakistan.

3.1.2 Case Study Design

In this study that employs qualitative methods, a case study structure has been adopted. This involves the utilization of an exploratory approach within the qualitative analysis framework. The objective of this design is to create instances through a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings and their synthesis. A deductive methodology has been employed. The primary goal of this research is not to facilitate the generalization or extrapolation of its findings. Instead, its objective is to cultivate a deeper and more holistic comprehension of the dropout phenomenon within local contexts. Furthermore, it captures and presents insights from various stakeholders including school heads, parents, students, and teachers.

3.2 Research Location – Rahim Yar Khan

Figure 2 - Map of Punjab-Pakistan



Figure 3 – Government Schools by Level in Punjab Province

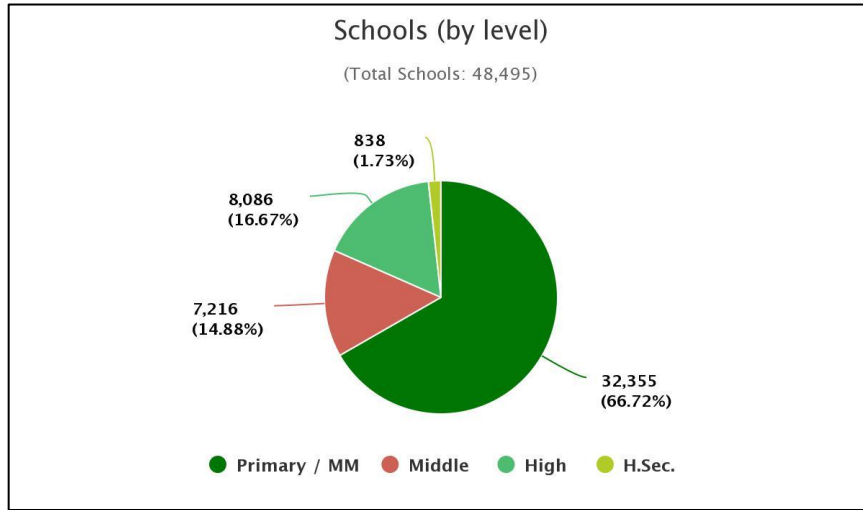


Figure 4 - Government Schools by level in Rahim Yar Khan District

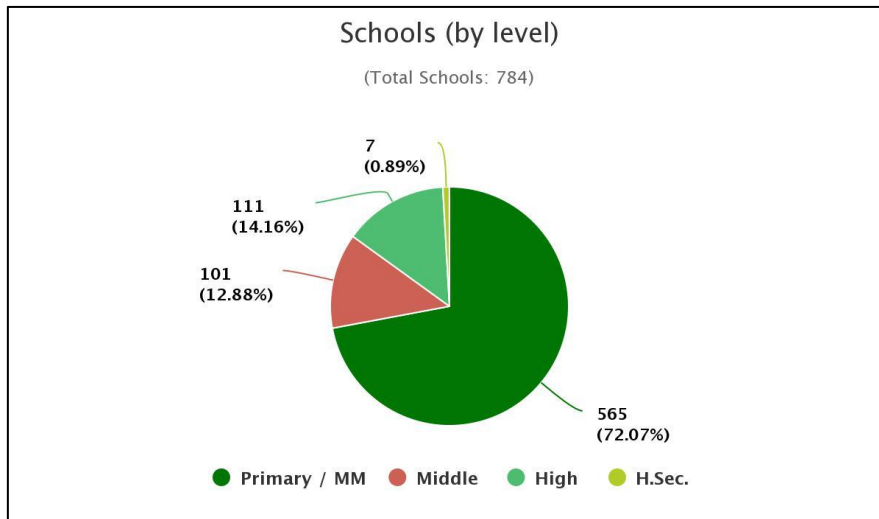


Table 5 - School enrollment and OOSC in Rahim Yar Khan (Rural)

Age group	% Children in different types of schools				% Out-of-school		Total
	Govt.	Non-state providers			Never enrolled	Drop-out	
		Pvt.	Madrasah	NFE/Others			
6 - 10	82.4	12.8	0.2	0.6	1.7	2.3	100
11 - 13	75.4	10.6	0.9	1.6	1.6	10.0	100
14 - 16	46.6	14.1	0.0	1.2	9.8	28.2	100
6 - 16	76.7	12.4	0.4	0.9	2.6	7.0	100
Total	90.4				9.6		100
By Type	84.8	13.8	0.4	1.0			
How to read:96.0%(82.4+12.8+0.2+0.6)children of age group 6-10 are enrolled							

(Source, ASER 2019)

Table 6 - School enrollment and OOSC in Rahim Yar Khan (Urban)

Age group	% Children in different types of schools				% Out-of-school		Total
	Govt.	Non-state providers			Never enrolled	Drop-out	
		Pvt.	Madrasah	NFE/Others			
6 - 10	34.3	62.4	0.8	0.7	1.0	0.8	100
11 - 13	32.7	56.1	1.0	1.0	2.0	7.1	100
14 - 16	30.4	55.9	1.2	1.2	0.6	10.6	100
6 - 16	33.9	61.0	0.9	1.0	1.0	2.2	100
Total	96.8				3.2		100
By Type	35.0	63.0	0.9	1.1			
How to read:98.2%(34.3+62.4+0.8+0.7)children of age group 6-10 are enrolled							

(Source, ASER 2019)

3.3. Population, Sampling Frame, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

3.3.1 Population

The research population comprises 33 Government girls' high schools in Rahim Yar Khan Tehsil. Higher secondary schools (with grades 11 and 12) were not considered.

3.3.2 Sample Frame and Size

5 schools in the urban area and 5 in the rural area were selected based on their dropout rates. The dropout data was for a specific period, from 2017-18 and 2018-19. However, there were a few schools reluctant to be involved in such a study. Schools that were not open to engaging had to be dropped. The final sample was based on ease of access since it required teachers connecting the researcher with dropped-out students and their families. The children who dropped out in the years 2017-18 and 2018-19 and did not return to school or failed to pass their secondary school examinations were included in the study.

Within each school, 5 dropped out students, 5 parents, 5 teachers, and 1 Head of the school, were interviewed. This made our total sample of 160 individuals. Dropped out students and parents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. It was not possible to randomly select respondents who would be willing to be interviewed. It was necessary that one respondent suggest a possible interviewee and act as a point of contact, who would in turn recommend and connect the researcher to another drop out / parent. Moreover, teachers and headmistresses helped with providing contact details of their dropped-out students and their parents.

3.4 Interview Design

The tools used to gather data were face-to-face interviews. The interview questions were both open-ended and closed-ended. The first part of the interview guide had demographics where respondents were asked their gender, age, education, income. For dropped-out girls and their parents, the second part of the interview questions included a set of statements. They were required to answer in Yes or No. Yes implied that the factor mentioned in the question had an influence on their decision to drop out of school. The last part of the interview had a few open-ended questions. For the teachers and the heads of the schools, the first part of the interview gathered some demographics; in the second part, they were given a set of statements and they were required to

rate them on a Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree; the last part of the interview had a few open-ended questions. The responses were then analyzed through descriptive analysis (for closed-ended questions) and thematic analysis (for open-ended questions). The interview questions were designed by combining and modifying questions from two earlier studies: Mughal, 2017; and AWAZ, 2014. Using different questionnaires for the parents, teachers, and the students helped understand the research questions from multiple viewpoints.

Apart from the survey questionnaires, following data sources were used:

- a. Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU)
- b. Punjab Examination Commission
- c. Pakistan Education Statistics 2017-2018; 2018-2019
- d. School Census by School Education Department SED

3.5 Fieldwork and Data Collection

Fieldwork began in March 2021 but it was put on halt multiple times due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was challenging to get hold of dropped out students and their parents.

3.5.1 Accessing Dropped Out Children and their Parents

Heads of schools and teachers played a crucial role in reaching out to dropout girls and their parents, as they were familiar with them and their families due to residing in the same areas. Additionally, efforts were made to locate dropouts and their parents. To ensure the relevance of participants to the research questions, purposive sampling was employed to select dropout girls, teachers, and parents. Initially, participants were chosen based on school dropout statistics, and initial contact was established through local school staff. As the study progressed, the snowball sampling technique was utilized to identify additional dropout cases.

3.5.2 Participants

Primary data were collected through in-depth individual interviews with 160 participants comprising 10 heads of school, 50 teachers, 50 school dropouts, and 50 parents of school dropouts.

The table below shows details of the participants.

Table 7 - List of Participants in the Study

Participants	Total Number of Participants	Interview type	Interview Location
Parents	50	Face-to-face	Multiple places
Dropped out students	50	Face-to-face	Multiple places
Teachers	50	Face-to-face	School
Head of School	10	Face-to-face	School
Total	160		

Chapter 4 - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the findings of our comprehensive investigation into the factors contributing to dropout rates among adolescent girls in both rural and urban settings within Rahim Yar Khan. The study focused on girls in classes 9 and 10, delving into the complexities of their

decisions to discontinue education through the lens of pull-out and push-out factors. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, data collection encompassed direct interactions with dropout girls and their mothers, as well as perspectives from educators, including teachers and school heads.

The initial phase involved semi-structured interviews with dropout girls and their mothers. The interviews were designed to elicit responses on a binary scale (0 or 1), allowing us to quantify the prevalence of specific factors contributing to dropout. This enabled a direct comparison between the perceptions of the mothers and the dropouts themselves, revealing any disparities in their viewpoints. Simultaneously, we administered questionnaires to teachers and school heads, aiming to gauge their perspectives on the factors influencing dropout rates. Utilizing a Likert scale, these stakeholders were requested to rate their level of agreement with statements pertaining to potential reasons for dropout. The Likert scale was transformed into a numerical scale (ranging from 1 to 5), facilitating the aggregation of responses for subsequent analysis. The teachers' average agreement score (TAAS) and Heads of Schools Average Agreement Score (HAAS) is shown in the analysis under each factor.

Our analysis identified two overarching themes: pull-out and push-out factors. We categorized the factors under these themes based on the responses obtained from both dropout girls and their mothers.

Table 8 - List of Pull Out and Push Out Factors

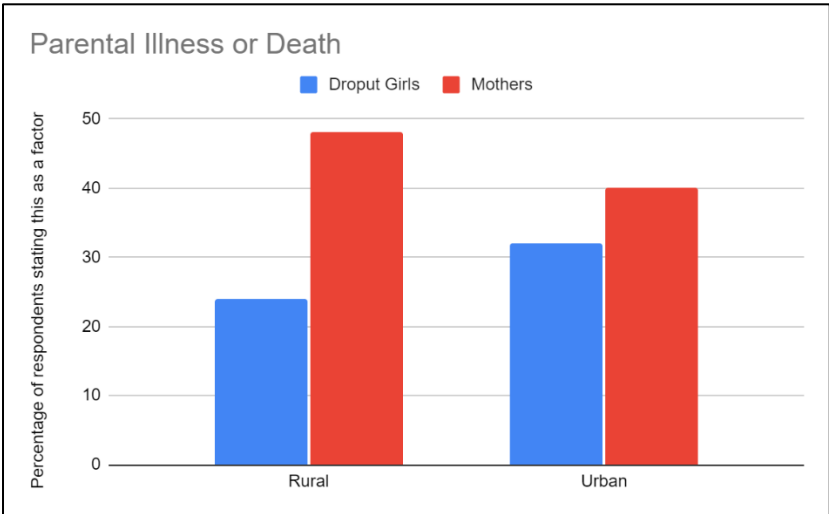
Pull-out Factors	Push-out Factors
Parent's illness or death	Distance and Safety related concerns
Need to contribute to household income	Lack of basic facilities

Cost of schooling	Bullying from teachers
Pressures of domestic responsibilities	Poor-quality teaching
Early marriages	
Parent's lack of interest	
Poor performance in grade 9	

4.1 Pull-out Factors as Identified by the Dropout Girls, Mothers, Teachers, and Heads of Schools (Rural and Urban).

4.1.1 Illness or Death of a Parent

Figure 5 – Summary of Parental Illness or Death as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Parental Illness or Death	Rural	24	48	3	2
	Urban	32	40	3	3

24% of the girls and 48% of the mothers in the rural category shared that their decision to drop out was influenced by either a death of family member or parent’s illness. Previous studies

have shown that parental death or illness can lead to financial constraints for families, affecting female students' school attendance. The present research findings align with these studies. In countries like Pakistan with poor social security systems, the impact of parental illness or death is particularly severe. Rehana, a class 9 dropout, explained how her father's illness and subsequent inability to work led to financial difficulties, forcing her to drop out of school. She was not only expected to take care of her sick father, but also help her mother with domestic chores and looking after the guests who would often come to visit her father. Rehana's older brother was encouraged to continue his education so he could apply for a learning program at one of the nearby vocational training institutes.

The emotional impact on children and families is significant, and the immediate consequence is a disruption in school attendance. The loss of family income due to parental illness or death not only limits educational opportunities for these girls, but also often necessitates their withdrawal from secondary school to contribute to the household income through work. It is evident that sudden income shocks have a more profound effect on secondary school children compared to their younger siblings in primary classes.

A girl who left GGHS Chak no. 140/p shared her story, revealing a compelling tale. She had four older brothers, all employed in Khanpur city. Her academic journey hit a pause midway through grade 9 due to her father's passing. In response, her family reached a decision: she should work and save money for her future dowry, as her father was no longer there to shoulder this responsibility. This scenario underscores the influence of cultural pressures, specifically related to marriage and dowry customs. The circumstances surrounding her father's demise compelled her family to reevaluate priorities. The notion of arranging her dowry and financing her wedding

emerged as immediate concerns, emphasizing how cultural norms can steer significant life choices, even altering educational paths.

The disparity between the responses of rural girls (24%) and mothers (48%) regarding parental illness or the death of a parent in the rural as the reason for dropout could be attributed to several underlying factors. Girls might provide more nuanced and personal reasons when discussing their own dropout, considering emotional and psychological factors that parents might not be fully aware of. Parents, on the other hand, might focus more on immediate and practical implications, such as financial challenges resulting from a parent's illness or death. Moreover, Girls might avoid attributing their dropout to a parent's illness or death out of fear of being perceived as using it as an excuse.

The difference in agreement levels between teachers (3) and heads of schools (2) suggests a variation in their perceptions or viewpoints regarding the issue being evaluated. This suggests that a significant portion of teachers somewhat agree or are neutral about the factors that contribute to girls' dropout rates. It's possible that teachers may have diverse opinions or may not feel strongly about the specific statements or factors presented in the questionnaire. A Likert score of 2 indicates a lower level of agreement among the heads of schools. This suggests that a significant proportion of heads of schools lean towards disagreement or are neutral regarding the factor of parent's illness or death.

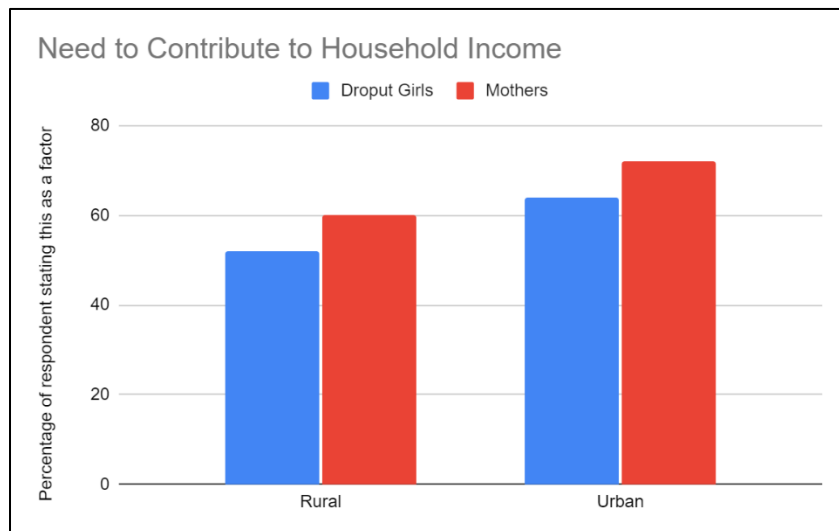
In urban areas, an even higher proportion of dropout girls (32%) attributed their decision to the illness or death of a family member. Notably, 40% of urban mothers also acknowledged this factor. This data suggests that the impact of family-related challenges on dropout rates extends beyond rural contexts, affecting girls in urban environments as well.

The disparities observed between rural and urban areas could stem from differences in healthcare access, support systems, and economic conditions. The higher figures for illness or death of an immediate family member as a dropout factor among rural girls in Rahim Yar Khan can be attributed to a combination of factors. Disparities in healthcare access, economic pressures stemming from the cost of healthcare and sudden medical expenses might lead to financial strain for rural families.

The agreement score of 3/5 among teachers and heads of schools indicates a moderate level of consensus regarding the significance of the factor "illness or death of an immediate family member" as a contributor to dropout rates in the urban areas of Rahim Yar Khan. This level of agreement suggests that while there is a notable recognition among educators and school administrators about the impact of family health challenges on girls' education, there might still exist varying viewpoints or nuances in their interpretations.

4.1.2 Need to Contribute to Household Income

Figure 6 - Summary of Need to Contribute to Household Income as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Need to contribute to household income	Rural	52	60	4	3
	Urban	64	72	3	3

In the rural settings, more than 50% of the dropouts explained that they dropped out of school because it was necessary for them to contribute to their family's income in order to survive. For example, Maimoona, a class 10 dropout working as a seamstress, shared her story of financial hardship and the need to support her family. Similarly, Zahoora, another dropout, explained how household poverty led both her and her younger sister to leave school and earn for their families.

Rural households in Rahim Yar Khan often struggle with economic precarity and poverty. As a result, families may face difficulties in making ends meet, leading to a greater reliance on every available income source. In such circumstances, the idea of a girl's potential contribution to household income may become a compelling reason for her to leave school. Traditional gender roles prevalent in rural areas often dictate that girls are expected to assume responsibilities related to caregiving and income generation. Girls may be seen as more suitable for certain types of work or domestic responsibilities, leading to their withdrawal from school to fulfill these roles. The difference in answers between mothers and their daughters regarding the reasons for dropping out of school can be attributed to a variety of factors, each influenced by their unique perspectives, experiences, and societal dynamics. Moreover, mothers may provide socially acceptable reasons for dropping out during interviews or surveys to avoid judgment or criticism. This could lead to them attributing reasons to factors such as family needs, while the daughters might provide more personal and nuanced insights when they feel safe and comfortable to do so. Mothers may not fully comprehend the extent of their daughters' struggles or aspirations, while daughters might not fully understand the economic or familial constraints that lead their mothers to make certain decisions

During the fieldwork, the researcher observed child labor to be prevalent in these areas, with young girls working as domestic helpers, cleaning staff, and baby-sitters in the nearby cities. These findings align with previous empirical studies that highlight how household poverty serves as a significant factor in causing disadvantaged students to drop out of school (Abuya et al., 2013; Al-Hroub, 2014; Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Bridgeland, 2010; Chugh, 2011).

Similarly, in urban areas, 36% of the dropout girls cited the need to contribute to household income as a reason for their dropout. This finding suggests that economic considerations remain relevant even in urban settings, where economic conditions might differ from their rural counterparts. Moreover, 32% of mothers in urban contexts acknowledged the influence of household income needs on their daughters' educational decisions.

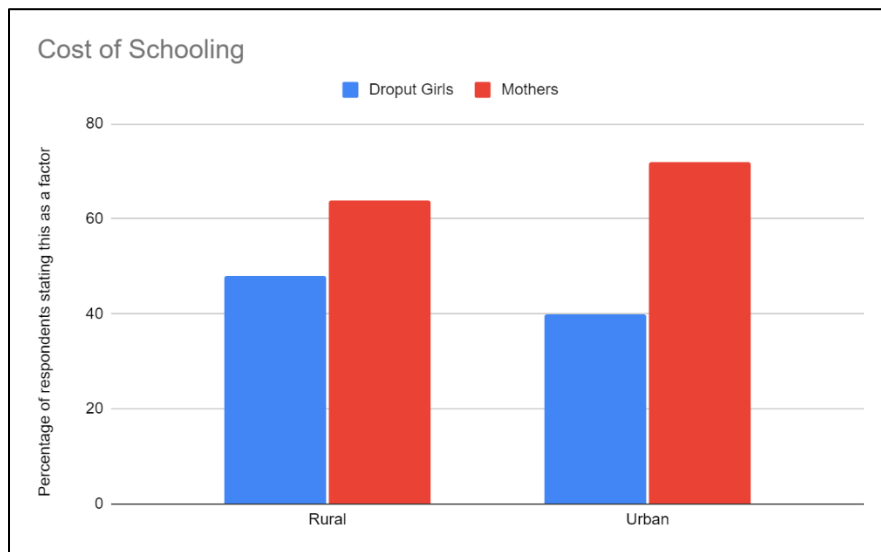
The agreement score of 3/5 among teachers and school heads in urban areas underscores the acknowledgment of the role of contributing to household income as a dropout factor. This moderate level of agreement indicates that educators and school administrators in urban settings within Rahim Yar Khan recognize the impact of economic pressures on girls' educational participation. The observed variations between rural and urban areas reflect the nuanced ways in which economic factors intersect with educational decisions. In Rahim Yar Khan, where economic conditions can vary significantly between different locales, the need to contribute to household income emerges as a consistent and influential factor driving dropout rates.

To address this challenge, comprehensive strategies are essential. These might include creating pathways for girls to balance education and income-generating activities, providing vocational training that aligns with local economic needs, and engaging with families and communities to highlight the long-term benefits of education in improving economic opportunities.

Teachers and Heads of Schools in both rural and urban schools showed a strong agreement towards the need to contribute to the household income as a dominant factor for girls dropping out. An average Likert score of 4 for both teachers and heads of schools in the rural schools and 3 for urban indicates a notable level of agreement among these stakeholders regarding the issue or statement being evaluated. The fact that both teachers and heads of schools have, on average, given a score of 4 reflects a shared perception and understanding of the factors contributing to girls' dropout rates. This alignment is crucial for identifying key challenges and potential solutions, as it suggests that multiple stakeholders acknowledge the same underlying issues.

4.1.3 Cost of Schooling

Figure 7 - Summary of Cost of Schooling as a Factor of Dropout



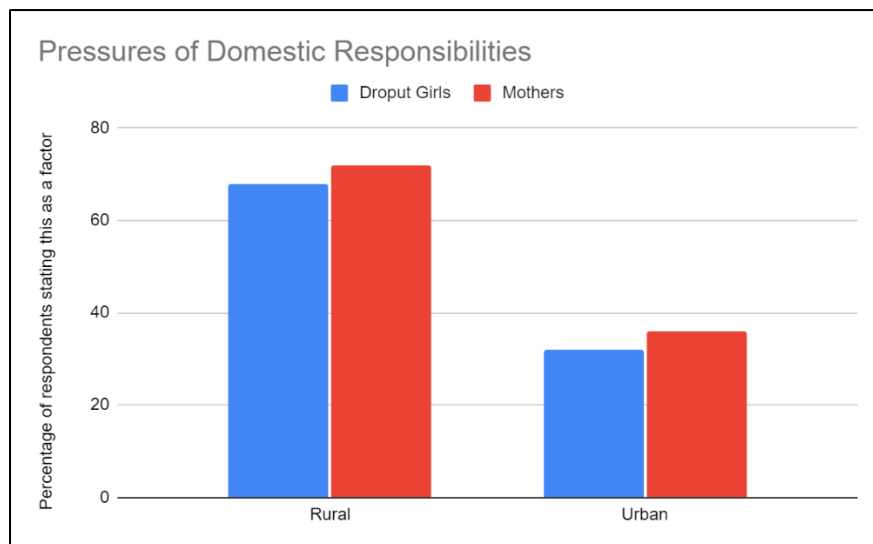
Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Cost of schooling	Rural	48	64	4	4
	Urban	40	72	4	3

The cost of schooling can still be a significant issue for families. This cost encompasses various expenses that are indirectly associated with education. These include:

- Uniforms: Mothers and dropout girls reported that cost of uniform was sometimes difficult to bear. The shoes weren't always cheap and they would tear off with frequent use.
- Books and Supplies: Mothers and dropout girls reported that at secondary level, they often needed extra resource material such as guides to help understand the concepts better.
- Transportation: Mothers in the urban areas cited this as a major chunk of their schooling expense. At secondary level when schools were at a distant, it was not always possible to have a male member walk the girl to the school. In Rahim Yar Khan, the means of public transport are usually rickshaws that come off an expensive option.

4.1.4 Pressure of Domestic Responsibilities

Figure 8 - Summary of Pressure of Domestic Responsibilities as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Pressures of domestic responsibilities	Rural	68	72	5	4
	Urban	32	36	4	4

The data reveals that a considerable proportion, specifically 68% of the dropout girls, attributed their decision to the "pressures of domestic responsibilities." This factor is particularly noteworthy as it highlights the complex interplay between societal expectations, gender roles, and educational opportunities. Interestingly, a substantial majority of mothers, accounting for 72%, also acknowledged domestic responsibilities as a contributing factor to their daughters' dropout. This alignment between the perspectives of dropout girls and their mothers underscores the shared recognition of the challenges posed by domestic responsibilities. Such a high level of agreement between these two groups emphasizes the need to understand the nuanced ways in which domestic roles and expectations impact girls' educational trajectories.

There is a notable agreement level of 4 among teachers and an equivalent agreement level among heads of schools. This convergence of perspectives within the educational community signifies a clear acknowledgment of the weight of domestic responsibilities in influencing girls' decisions to discontinue their education. The prevalence of domestic responsibilities as a cited reason for dropout highlights the need to address deeply rooted societal norms and expectations that often lead to the disproportionate burden of household duties falling on young girls.

In Rahim Yar Khan, teachers highlighted that the main livelihoods revolve around cattle rearing, agriculture, and milk trade. Yet, financial hardships force many children to forgo consistent school attendance because of home-bound duties. A narrative shared by Tehmina, a high school educator, revolved around Aasiya, a grade 9 pupil. After her school hours, Aasiya aids her mother with farm tasks and tends to their animals. Many educators recounted analogous tales,

suggesting that many high schoolers, like Aasiya, experience this daily grind. Additionally, educators noted that several young girls in higher grades engage in household activities and assist their families with chores, including cattle care, meal preparation, laundry, and looking after younger family members. Such observations echo findings from literature reviews indicating that engaging in household tasks and supporting parents in agricultural activities is a typical part of many students' lives. Prior research confirms that excessive home-based labor, especially for female students, often results in them leaving school early (Abuya et al., 2012). Interestingly, in urban areas, while a lower proportion of mothers (20%) acknowledged domestic responsibilities as a contributing factor, a considerable 32% of dropout girls in urban contexts cited these pressures. This discrepancy suggests that while urban mothers might perceive fewer domestic pressures as a reason for dropout, the lived experiences of dropout girls reveal a different narrative, possibly influenced by evolving urban dynamics.

The agreement score of 3 among teachers and school heads in urban areas underscores a notable level of recognition regarding the pressures of domestic responsibilities as a factor impacting dropout rates. This acknowledgment by educators and school administrators in urban Rahim Yar Khan adds weight to the significance of this factor and its implications for girls' educational participation.

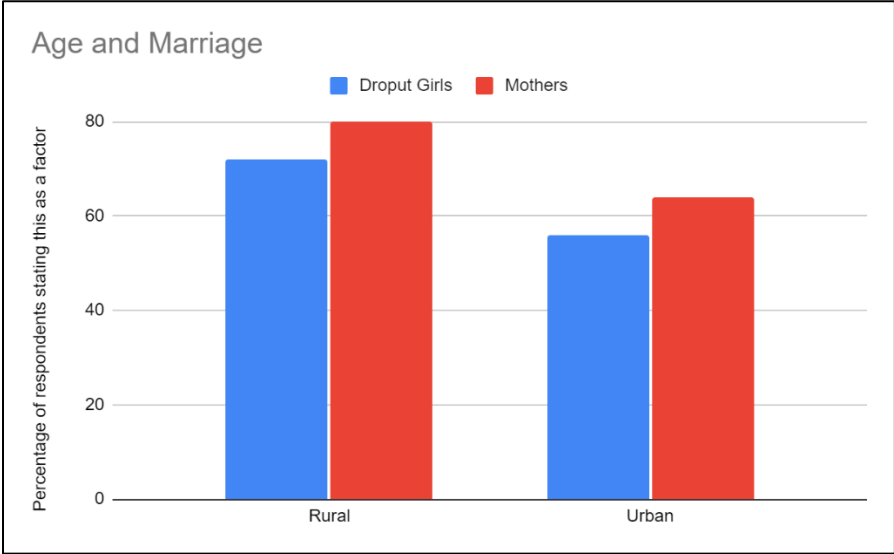
The findings collectively emphasize the urgent need to address the challenges posed by domestic responsibilities. Tailored interventions could encompass initiatives that foster awareness about gender equity, promote family support for girls' education, and establish mechanisms to help girls manage their educational aspirations alongside household duties.

Furthermore, this data underscores the importance of challenging traditional gender norms and creating an environment where girls are empowered to pursue education while fulfilling

domestic responsibilities. Engaging with parents, communities, and educational stakeholders to collectively redefine roles and expectations can create an enabling environment that supports girls' educational advancement.

4.1.5 Age and Marriage

Figure 9 - Summary of Age and Marriage as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Age and Marriage	Rural	72	80	5	4
	Urban	56	64	4	4

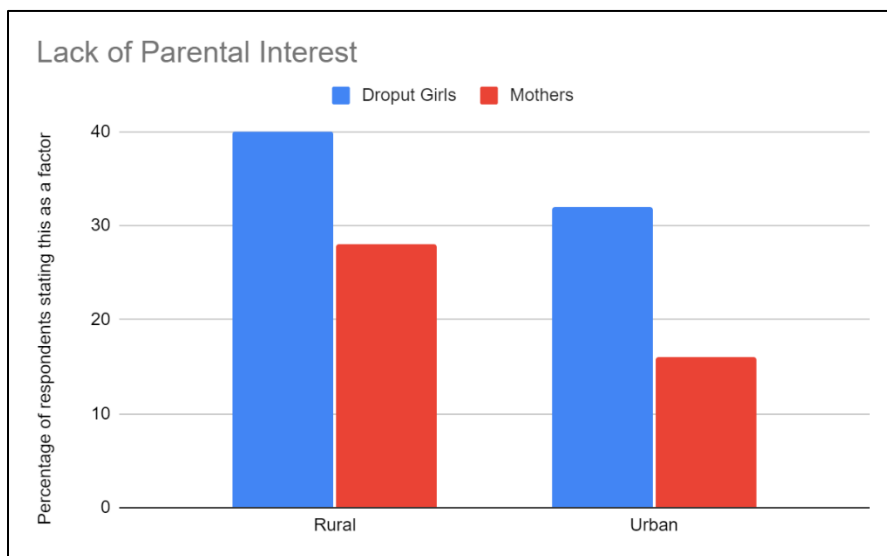
A substantial percentage, specifically 72% of the dropout girls in the rural category, identified "trends of early marriage" as a contributing factor to their decision to discontinue their education. This factor unveils a deeply rooted societal challenge that intersects with education, gender norms, and social expectations. Equally noteworthy is the perspective of rural mothers, with 80% of them acknowledging trends of early marriage as a reason for their daughters' dropout. This parallel acknowledgment by mothers further emphasizes the pervasive influence of early marriage as a driver of educational discontinuation.

The strong agreement level of 5 and 4 among teachers and heads of schools, respectively, underscores the shared understanding within the educational community regarding the impact of early marriage trends on girls' dropout. This consensus in viewpoints emphasizes the critical role that educators play in recognizing and addressing this issue. The female teachers also noted that once girls get married during secondary school, they never return to school. Various studies have consistently identified the trend of early marriage as a reason for school dropout (Abuya et al., 2013; Al-Hroub, 2014; Bridgeland, 2010; Munsaka, 2011). Additionally, most parents arrange early marriages for their daughters due to religious beliefs, considering it necessary for girls to marry once they reach puberty.

The disparity between the rural and the urban figures isn't stark. This is due to the fact that even in urban areas, families from lower income groups prefer to get their girls married at an early age.

4.1.6 Lack of Parental Interest

Figure 10 - Summary of Parental Lack of Interest as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Parent's lack of interest	Rural	40	28	5	5
	Urban	32	16	4	4

In the rural category of schools, the data underscores that a notable proportion, specifically 40 % of the dropout girls, attributed their decision to the "lack of parental interest." This factor serves as a critical indicator of the crucial role parental involvement plays in shaping girls' educational trajectories. Interestingly, a contrasting perspective emerges from mothers, with only 28% acknowledging lack of parental interest as a contributing factor to their daughters' dropout. This divergence between the perceptions of dropout girls and their mothers prompts us to delve deeper into the intricate dynamics of parental engagement and its perceived influence on educational decisions. Dropout girls might attribute their decision to dropout to a perceived lack of parental interest, while mothers might have their own perspective on the reasons behind the decision. Mothers might focus on other factors they consider more significant, such as economic constraints or cultural norms.

The significant difference between urban mothers' reported lack of interest (32) and urban dropout girls' perception of parental lack of interest (16) as a contributing factor highlights a noteworthy dissonance in viewpoints. This discrepancy suggests a potential gap in communication and understanding between mothers and their daughters regarding the importance of education. The data indicates that a relatively lower number of urban mothers (16) acknowledged lack of interest as a factor for dropout, possibly indicating a lack of awareness or underestimation of the impact of parental involvement on educational decisions.

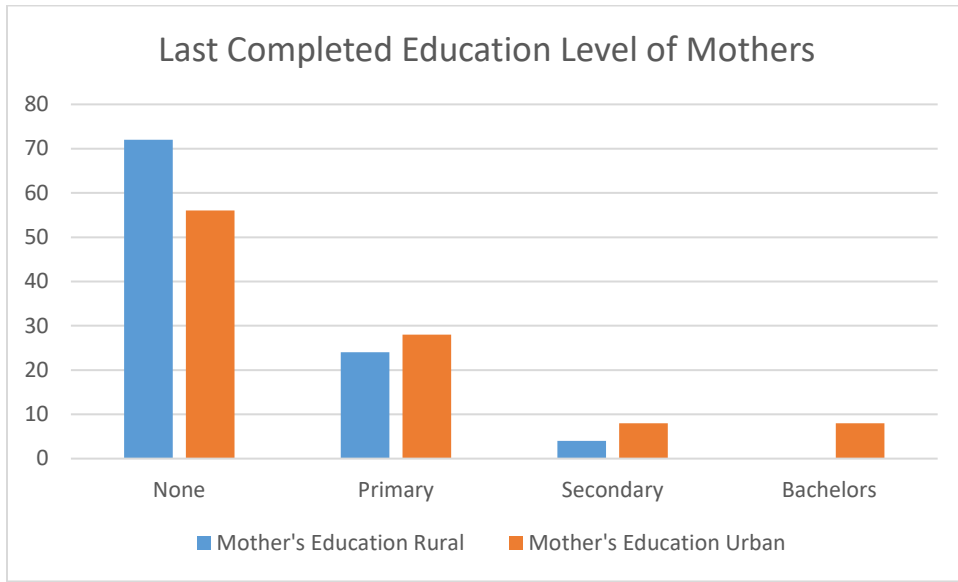
The consistent agreement level of 4 among both teachers and heads of schools in the rural and urban schools signifies a shared understanding of the impact of lack of parental interest on

girls' dropout. This convergence in viewpoints within the educational community highlights the significance of this factor and underscores its relevance as a determinant of girls' educational outcomes. . Lack of parental interest further encourages habitual absenteeism and eventually leads to dropout. This study supports these findings, with teachers and school heads in Rahim Yar Khan affirming that a lack of parental interest is a cause of dropout in public secondary schools. This suggests that parents who lack interest may not see the future benefits of schooling for their children. When teachers contacted such parents to discuss their daughter's progress or absenteeism, they showed little or no interest.

4.1.7 Parental Education

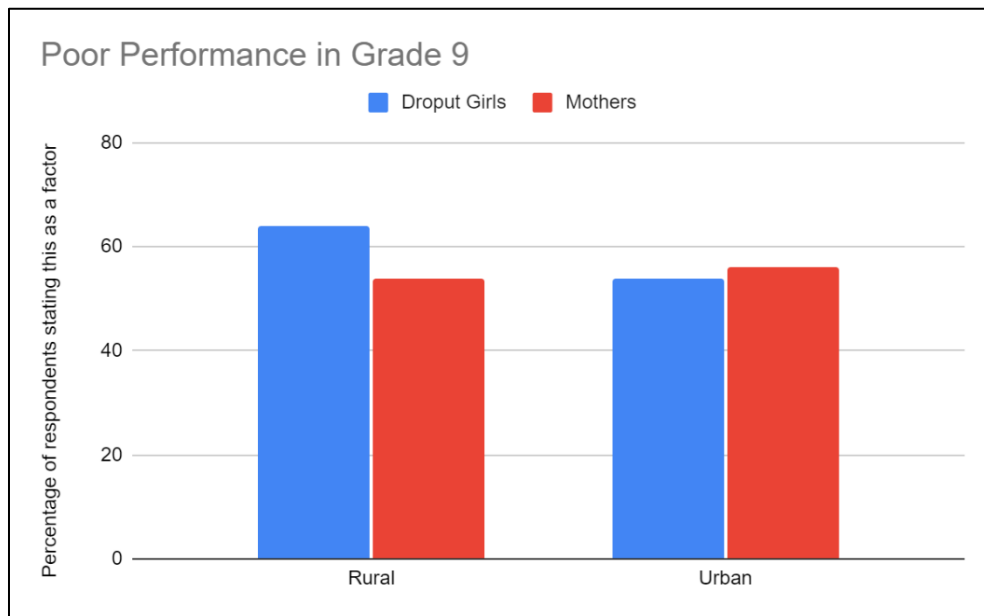
A significant majority of mothers in the rural category, constituting more than 70%, had not completed primary. Comparatively low, but the figures were still on the higher side for the urban category where more than 55% of the interviewed mothers of the dropout girls didn't complete primary education. This corroborates with the existing literature showing a strong relationship between mother's education and likelihood of their daughter completing secondary school (SAHE, 2001). Mothers with higher education levels are more likely to understand the importance of education and its long-term benefits. They tend to prioritize their daughters' education and provide the necessary support, both emotionally and financially, to ensure continued enrollment (SAHE, 2001). Moreover, mothers with higher education levels are more likely to be aware of available educational opportunities, scholarships, and support programs. They can guide their daughters towards accessing these resources, facilitating their educational journey.

Figure 11- Summary of Last Completed Education Level of Interviewed Mothers



4.1.8 Poor Performance in Grade 9

Figure 12 - Summary of Poor Performance in Grade 9 as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Poor performance in grade 9	Rural	64	54	4	3
	Urban	54	56	4	4

64% of the girls and 54% of the mothers in the rural category stated poor performance in class 9 as one of the contributing factors. When asked about the reasons for their poor academic performance, some attributed it to their lack of effort during primary and elementary school, while others blamed inadequate teaching by their teachers. Interestingly, none of them mentioned making any efforts to overcome their academic difficulties and accepted their poor educational background as an inherent trait.

Multiple elements can lead to a child's waning interest in early education. Factors encompassing subpar teaching techniques, inadequate school amenities, a shortage of extracurricular engagement, crowded classrooms, a scarcity of educators, curricula that don't align with local cultures, and unsupportive public policies can disrupt a student's focus. Research from Machingambi in Zimbabwe's Masvingo district underscores issues like monotonous classes, uninvested educators, weak student-educator bonds, non-relevant study content, and a dearth of extracurricular options as triggers for declining interest and eventual withdrawal from school. Notably, not passing class 9 became a significant hurdle to advancing in secondary education. Students who didn't pass this class weren't permitted to retake it. Instead, they advanced to class 10, juggling previously failed subjects with new ones. This mix of inadequate academic foundations and the task of managing subjects from two classes frequently culminated in students leaving school. Struggles with course content, financial constraints for examination fees, and the stress of combined exams plagued those who didn't pass both classes 9 and 10, leading many to quit.

These insights hint that allowing academically struggling students to remain in their current grade rather than pushing them to the subsequent one could address their educational challenges. For some participants, secondary classes were tough. Advancing to class 10 after not mastering

class 9 subjects further hindered their success, often ending in them leaving school. Studies by Jimerson (2001) and Ahmed & Mihiretie (2015) have highlighted the potential downsides of practices where students move to the next grade irrespective of their scores, which can harm academic results and escalate dropout numbers. In line with this, the study at hand suggests that letting those who didn't pass class 9 stay and repeat it might bolster their chances of completing secondary schooling.

Poor academic performance and subsequent failure in class 9 were identified as major factors leading to school dropout, according to all the schools. In Pakistan, class 9 and 10 exams are conducted separately by authorized secondary boards, and many students leave school after failing in class 9. This was true for the dropouts in the urban areas as well where 44% of the mothers and dropouts shared that this indeed was one of the influencing factors. This finding aligns with previous research that typically assesses academic achievement using quantitative longitudinal data analysis (e.g., Hardre and Reeve 2003; Parr and Bonitz 2015; Watt and Roessingh 1994). Notably, in our interview-based study, mothers in our sample expressed different views regarding the reasons for their children's academic struggles. Some mothers attributed their daughters' poor performance to their inherent academic weaknesses. They believed it was futile to continue sending them to school as they were unlikely to pass secondary school exams. These mothers perceived their daughters to lack the cognitive abilities necessary for academic success. Conversely, other mothers blamed the teachers for their daughters' academic struggles, asserting that inadequate teaching in the classroom hindered students' progress. They argued that when teachers did not effectively teach their pupils, it resulted in students falling behind in their studies.

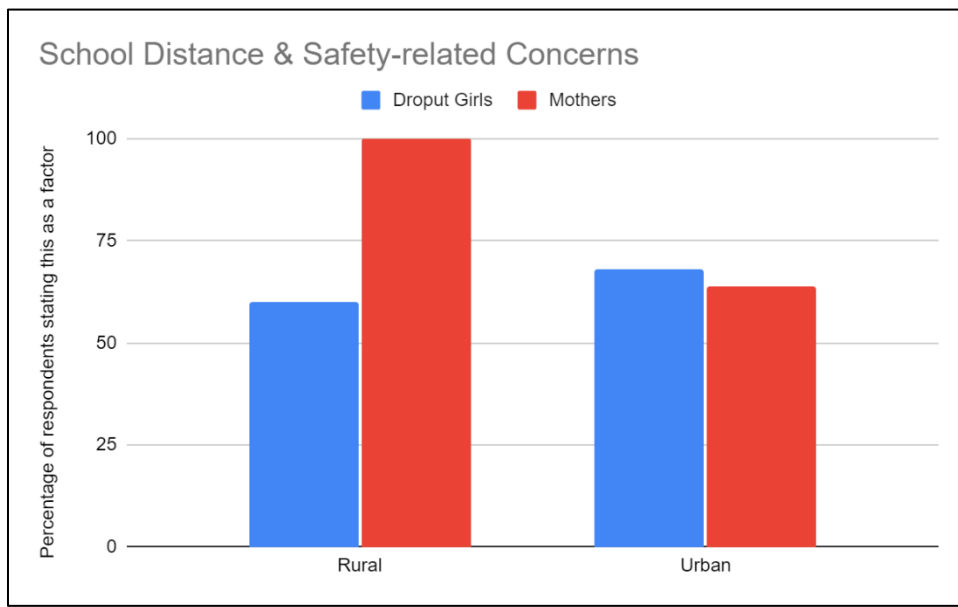
There was an agreement level of 4 and 3 for the teachers and the heads in the rural category while an agreement level of 4 for both in the urban category. The teachers, however, mentioned

that the quality of students that they get in class 9 is subpar. According to them, there is only so much that they can do to help these girls appear for the class 9 board exams. The teachers further shared that it was unfair to expect class 9 teachers to get good results when the girls don't have a strong base. One of the teachers specifically said that we get 'kachra' in class 9 and then we are pressurized by the heads and local councilors to generate 100% results and maintain a high attendance. which is simply not possible.

4.2 Push-out Factors as Identified by the Dropout Girls, Mothers, Teacher, and Heads of Schools (Rural and Urban)

4.2.1 School Distance & Safety-related Concerns

Figure 13 - Summary of School Distance & Safety-related Concerns as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Distance and Safety-related concerns	Rural	60	100	5	4
	Urban	68	64	4	4

The factor of "School distance and safety-related" as a reason for dropping out presents varying perceptions and dynamics between rural and urban contexts in Rahim Yar Khan. In rural areas, 100% of mothers and 60% of dropout students attribute the decision to the distance of the school. This is indicative of a substantial recognition among mothers that the geographical proximity of the school plays a role in their daughters' decisions to discontinue education. A high agreement scores of 4/5 among both rural teachers and heads of school reinforce this perception, underscoring a shared acknowledgment of the impact of school distance on dropout rates.

In urban areas, the dynamic shifts, with 64% of urban mothers and a higher percentage of urban dropout students (68%) identifying school distance as a factor. The increased percentage among urban dropouts might reflect a stronger resonance with this concern, possibly due to factors such as the urban environment, transportation challenges, or a higher concentration of educational institutions. The elevated agreement scores of 4/5 among both urban teachers and heads of school further validate the significant influence of school distance in the urban context.

These results underscore the concrete influence of school distance as a contributing factor to dropout rates, particularly evident in rural settings where extended travel distances could impact decisions to discontinue education. Urban areas, on the other hand, demonstrate relatively elevated agreement scores, emphasizing a heightened awareness among teachers and school administrators regarding the role of school proximity in dropout rates. Extensive research has consistently highlighted the notable implications of lengthy commutes to school on dropout rates within rural communities (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009).

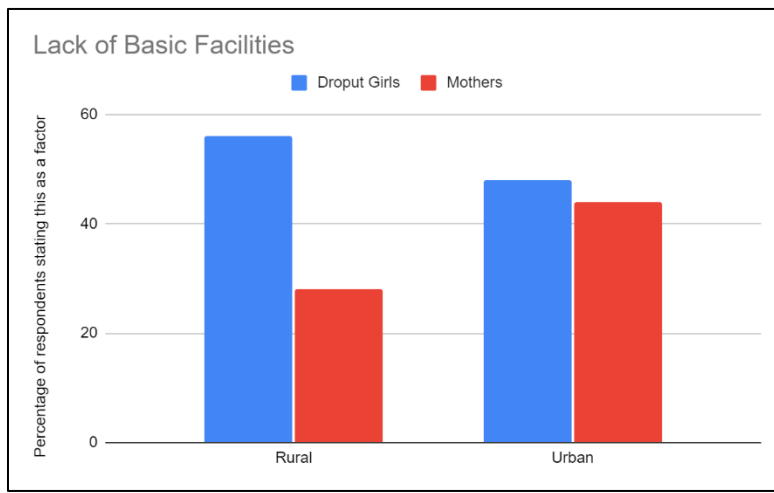
Secondary schools are typically situated in more populated villages or towns, rendering them inaccessible and financially burdensome for numerous students residing in remote and dispersed areas. In this study, female educators and school administrators further corroborated this

observation, highlighting that apart from financial constraints, cultural norms, and safety apprehensions deter girls from walking extended distances to school without male companionship. It is customary for a male family member to accompany a girl to ensure her safety, given concerns about potential harassment and attempted assaults, as also reported by headmistresses. These combined factors contribute to parents' hesitance in allowing their daughters to travel significant distances on foot, leading to a number of girls discontinuing their education.

The data emphasizes the critical role that safety-related factors play in shaping dropout decisions. In both rural and urban settings, there is a notable awareness of safety concerns among mothers and dropout girls. The higher percentages in urban areas might reflect increased exposure to potential risks, given the density and dynamics of urban environments. The agreement levels among teachers and heads of school underscore their understanding of the impact of safety-related concerns on dropout rates, further validating the importance of addressing this factor.

4.2.2 Lack of Basic Facilities:

Figure 14 - Summary of Lack of Basic Facilities as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
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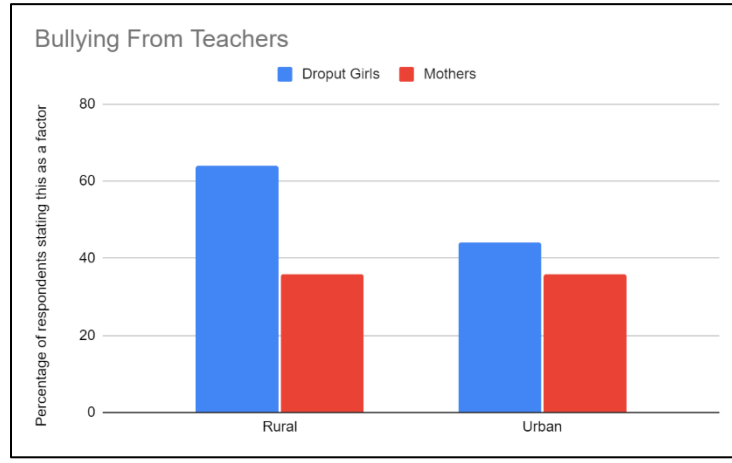
Lack of basic facilities	Rural	56	28	2	2
	Urban	48	44	3	2

The principals of the schools consistently pointed out various reasons for students leaving school, including not having enough teachers, classes being too full, not enough classrooms, and the school buildings not being good enough. The headmistresses said some classrooms had as many as 65 students, and one school had only five teachers for 400 secondary students. Because there weren't enough rooms, some students had to sit outside on the ground, even when the weather was bad. Not having enough facilities like a science lab was also mentioned by Noureen, a female head teacher. Teachers also said they had to teach 65-70 students in each class, which made it hard to check homework, take attendance, and teach everything in the short 45-minute class. This made the education not very good, and the students didn't do well in exams, so some of them left school. Another problem was not having enough science and English teachers. The teachers who were good at these subjects preferred to teach in towns or give private lessons to richer families. So, teachers who weren't qualified to teach these subjects had to teach them, and they couldn't help the students learn properly.

Some girls who left school said they missed classes because there were no clean bathrooms with water. This was a bigger problem when they had their monthly period, and it made them miss more school. When they missed school, their teachers were strict with them, especially in rural schools. The Parents of the girls who left school thought not having clean bathrooms and water was a big problem. But the teachers thought differently. They believed if students really wanted to learn and cared about their future, these things shouldn't matter. They said they taught in similar conditions, and it didn't stop them.

4.2.3 Bullying from Teachers

Figure 15 - Summary of Bullying from Teachers as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Bullying From Teachers	Rural	64	36	NA	NA
	Urban	44	36	NA	NA

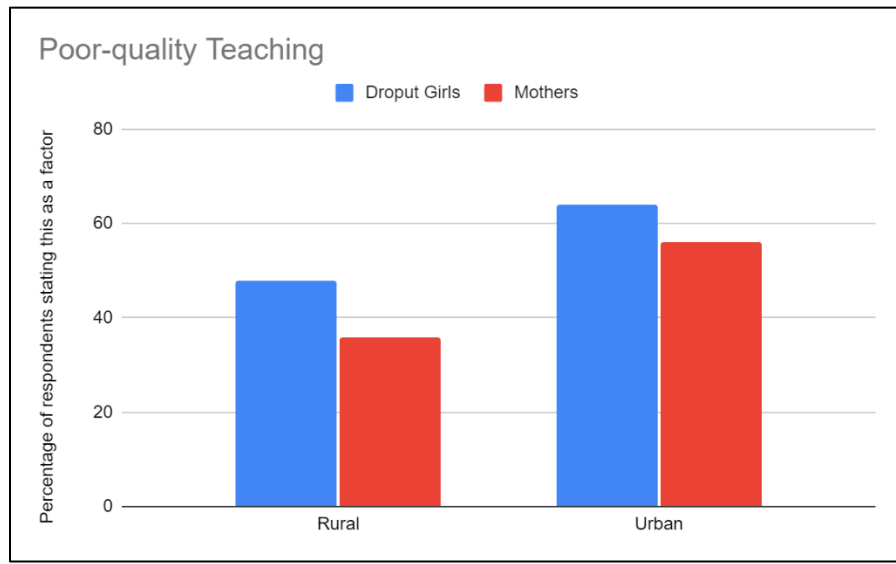
36% of the mothers and 64% of the dropouts in the rural category reported bullying and harassment from the teachers to be an influencing factor. The figures were slightly different with 36% for mothers and 44% for the dropouts. Teachers would taunt and mock students who struggled with memorizing lessons or exhibited limited progress in exams. An example was provided by a class 9 dropout who recounted her personal encounter with an English teacher. The teacher would ridicule her and employ derogatory terms like "bewakoof" (stupid) openly in front of the entire class. Similar instances of verbal mistreatment by teachers leading to disheartened students and subsequent dropout cases have been documented in rural areas of China and Punjab.

Moreover, the dropout girls affirmed that instead of offering assistance or investing additional effort in teaching, some teachers contributed to making them feel inadequate for

completing their secondary education. These teachers would convince parents that their children lacked the capacity to pass secondary school exams, ultimately encouraging parents to withdraw their children from school and have them work instead. The persistent bullying by class teachers also influenced some fellow classmates to abandon their studies. Comparable findings have emerged in other research, indicating that teachers' low expectations, unsupportive attitudes from school counselors, and feelings of isolation and bias within school environments have all contributed to elevated dropout rates across various regions.

4.2.4 Poor Quality Teaching

Figure 16 - Summary of Poor-quality Teaching as a Factor of Dropout



Factor	Category	Dropout Girls	Mothers	TAAS (out of 5)	HAAS (out of 5)
Poor-quality teaching	Rural	48	36	NA	NA
	Urban	64	56	NA	NA

The dropout girls who attributed their poor educational background to teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the proficiency of their English and science teachers. For instance, Sakina, a

class 9 dropout, described how her English teacher struggled to teach without relying on a translation book, making it seem like she was reading news rather than instructing the class. Similarly, Rakshanda, another class 9 dropout, mentioned that their science teacher couldn't explain certain scientific terms, resulting in rote memorization rather than comprehension. These girls, along with others, shared similar experiences of inadequate teaching during their primary and elementary education. Mughal and Aldridge (2017) supported these observations by reporting a shortage of subject specialists in secondary schools in rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan. Qualified teachers preferred working in urban areas due to better facilities, leading to a lack of competent teachers in rural schools.

The research underscores the detrimental effects of subpar instruction during initial education levels on advanced schooling outcomes. However, as UNICEF (2000) points out, it's not solely about teaching caliber. The broader educational quality during foundational years is pivotal in determining whether students progress and finish secondary education. UNICEF identifies an array of indicators critical to effective learning. These include optimal health and nutrition, formative experiences that nurture psychological and social development, consistent school attendance, and backing from families. A prime learning setting would also incorporate sufficient educational amenities, manageable class numbers, secure and harmonious atmospheres (particularly vital for female students), the demeanor of educators, productive discipline strategies, and an inclusive ethos. When it comes to the content, it should be centered on students and free from biases. As for instructional methods, they should prioritize ongoing teacher training, faith in every student's capabilities, positive operational conditions, supportive administrative leadership, and apt language lessons for students.

4.3 Stakeholder-specific Analysis (Rural)

Based on the findings highlighted in the previous section, we have picked the top 5 contributors for each stakeholder in both rural and urban categories.

Table 9 - Top Factors for Dropout Girls and their Mothers– Rural

Rural			
Mothers		Dropout Girls	
Factors	%age Stated Yes	Factors	%age Stated Yes
Distance and Safety-related Concerns	100	Age & Marriage	72
Age & Marriage	80	Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities	68
Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities	72	Poor Performance in Grade 9	64
Cost of Schooling	64	Bullying from teachers	64
Need to Contribute to Household Income	60	Distance and Safety-related Concerns	60

In the rural category, the most common factors identified by the dropout girls and their mothers were Age & Marriage, Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities, and Distance & Safety-related Concerns.

4.3.1 Age & Marriage

In the context of Rahim Yar Khan's rural landscape, the factor of Age & Marriage assumes particular significance due to deeply embedded cultural norms and practices. Within this framework, early marriages are prevalent, often driven by social and economic considerations. This practice can lead to the premature termination of girls' education, as marriage is frequently perceived as a transition point that necessitates a shift in priorities from education to familial responsibilities. As a result, dropout girls and their mothers cited Age & Marriage as a substantial factor contributing to discontinuation of education.

4.3.2 Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities

The theme of Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities resonates closely with the social fabric of Rahim Yar Khan. Traditional gender roles and expectations within rural communities often dictate that girls assume caregiving roles within their households. This includes responsibilities such as household chores, childcare, and elder care. The burden of these roles can intensify as girls transition into adolescence, leading to a confluence of duties that competes with their commitment to education. The perceived necessity of prioritizing domestic obligations over schooling becomes a compelling factor influencing dropout decisions among rural girls. The mothers' and daughters' acknowledgment of these responsibilities in the context of their experiences underscores the entanglement of societal norms in shaping educational trajectories.

4.3.4 Distance & Safety-related Concerns

The factor of Distance & Safety-related Concerns unveils the multifaceted challenges that rural girls encounter in accessing education. Rahim Yar Khan's rural expanse often necessitates long journeys to reach educational institutions. The prevailing infrastructure and transportation limitations amplify these challenges. Additionally, concerns related to personal safety while commuting or being present in public spaces pose tangible barriers. These concerns intersect with broader issues of gender-based violence and societal restrictions, constraining girls' mobility and inhibiting their participation in formal education. Another reason for this being dominant factor could be the fact that there are fewer secondary schools in the area. Not all families have a male family member to manage the pick & drop for their daughters/sisters. The dropout girls interviewed for the study mentioned that their male family members live in the nearby urban

centers and visit home one every few weeks or sometimes even months. This further exacerbates the safety concerns for them.

4.4. Stakeholder-specific Analysis (Urban)

Table 10 - Top Factors for Dropout Girls and their Mothers– Urban

Urban			
Mothers		Dropout Girls	
Factors	%age Stated Yes	Factors	%age Stated Yes
Need to Contribute to Household Income	64	Need to Contribute to Household Income	72
Age & Marriage	56	Cost of Schooling	72
Poor Performance in Grade 9	54	Age & Marriage	64
Distance and Safety-related Concerns	68	Distance and Safety related concerns	64
Poor-quality teaching	64	Poor-quality Teaching	56

In the urban areas of Rahim Yar Khan, a distinct set of factors emerges as common themes contributing to dropout rates among adolescent girls.

4.4.1 Age & Marriage

Despite the urban setting, the factor of Age and Marriage remains a significant contributor to dropout rates. The cultural and societal norms prevalent in Rahim Yar Khan transcend urban and rural boundaries. Over the past two decades, efforts have been undertaken through legislative measures to establish a minimum age requirement aimed at discouraging early marriages. Despite these initiatives, the persistence of this practice is discernible to a certain extent. Notably, in Pakistan, prevailing regulations permit girls to enter into matrimony at the age of 16, a provision applicable in the majority of provinces (GEM, 2020). It is pertinent to recognize that secondary school girls typically fall within the age bracket of 14 to 16. This temporal overlap highlights the intricate link between the age and marriage factor, where girls on the cusp of adolescence and early

adulthood encounter decisions regarding education and marital commitments. Moreover, adolescent girls and their mothers might consider early marriage to access improved living conditions or secure financial support, thus prioritizing marital obligations over continued education.

4.4.2 Distance & Safety-related Concerns

The prominence of Distance and Safety-related Concerns in urban dropout narratives highlights the unique urban challenges that Rahim Yar Khan presents. While urban areas generally offer greater infrastructure and accessibility compared to rural regions, the city's layout and transportation systems still present hurdles for females to travel alone. Factors such as inadequate public transportation, and concerns about personal safety in public spaces can disproportionately affect girls' ability to attend school consistently. The dropout girls shared a few instances of being cat-called several times while walking to their schools, which was always an unpleasant experience.

4.4.3 Poor Quality Teaching

In urban settings like Rahim Yar Khan, where formal educational opportunities are more readily available, the issue of Poor Quality Teaching assumes significance. It does not necessarily reflect the quality of education in urban settings is better than in rural, but it signifies that the parents and the dropout girls were able to identify this as one of the factors. Some of the dropout girls reported that their school didn't have a science teacher so another teacher, who had no experience of teaching or even studying science was given this subject to teach. As a result teachers struggle and rely heavily on guides and rote learning.

4.4.4 Need to Contribute to Household Income

The Need to Contribute to Household Income becomes a compelling factor for dropout girls and their mothers. There are more opportunities for employment or income generation in the urban areas of Rahim Yar Khan, and adolescent girls perceive that leaving school to work might alleviate financial pressures on their families. The decision to contribute to the household income might be driven by a sense of responsibility and urgency, especially in cases where families face economic vulnerabilities. The girls who dropped out reported that they felt they were old enough to financially support their families. One of the girls mentioned that she had seen her elder sister suffer at the hands of her husband and in-laws who refused to provide her any financial support. She wanted to be financially independent before getting married.

4.5 Rural vs. Urban Comparison

Table 11 - Factors of Drop Out as Identified by the Mothers (Rural & Urban)

Mothers			
Rural		Urban	
Factors	%age Stated Yes	Factors	%age Stated Yes
Distance and Safety-related Concerns	100	Need to Contribute to Household Income	64
Age & Marriage	80	Age & Marriage	56
Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities	72	Poor Performance in Grade 9	54
Cost of Schooling	64	Distance and Safety-related Concerns	68
Need to Contribute to Household Income	60	Poor-quality Teaching	64

In both rural and urban areas, mothers showed concern for the safety of their daughters for all the reasons discussed in the earlier part of the essay. It implies that while the concern of safety might be greater in the rural areas, it is still a very important factor for girl in the urban centers. This has to do with the socio-cultural environment of Rahim Yar Khan where one would find a

very small percentage of females in public spaces. Another common theme that emerged was the socio-cultural norm of early marriages for females.

Table 12 - Factors of Drop Out as Identified by the Dropout Girls (Rural & Urban)

Dropout Girls			
Rural		Urban	
Factors	%age Stated Yes	Factors	%age Stated Yes
Age & Marriage	72	Need to Contribute to Household Income	72
Pressures of Domestic Responsibilities	68	Cost of Schooling	72
Poor Performance in Grade 9	64	Age & Marriage	64
Bullying from Teachers	64	Distance and Safety related concerns	64
Distance and Safety-related Concerns	60	Poor-quality Teaching	56

For rural dropout girls, Age & Marriage stood out to be the most common factor, while for the urban girl dropouts it was the need to contribute to household income. Interestingly, while one can assume that the poverty ratio would be higher in the rural areas, we see the need to financially support highlighted by our urban respondents. It can be attributed to the fact that there are more job opportunities for females in the urban areas where they are found to work at local businesses such as salons, child-care, and stitching, as opposed to rural areas where job opportunities for females are limited to working in the fields. Exposing young girls to work in fields poses a threat to their security, as identified by several mothers in our sample.

4.6 Feedback of Teachers and Heads of Schools

Separate interviews were carried out with the teachers and the heads of the schools to gauge their perspective. The structured questions measured their perception against the pull-out and push-out factors, the responses to which have been discussed already. The subsequent segment of the

interview encompassed open-ended inquiries, designed to ascertain if there existed additional insights derived from their respective roles.

4.6.1 Assigning Unrelated Responsibilities to Teachers

According to the insights shared by the teachers, non-teaching duties contribute to the problem of dropout. Teachers are obliged to visit homes to encourage school attendance, reducing their teaching time. Government departments monitor school progress and withhold promotions and salary increments if enrollment targets are not met. Additionally, teachers engage in external tasks like board exams, elections, and censuses, diverting attention from in-school students. These non-teaching obligations hinder effective teaching, negatively affecting student performance and dropout rates.

4.6.2 Practice of Rote Learning and Varied Examination Patterns

When discussing their academic journey, girls who had left school early indicated a heavy reliance on simple memorization, both in classroom settings and examinations. They would often commit to memory content from subjects like science without truly comprehending the material. One former student from grade 10 described how they would recite lessons verbatim while teachers cross-checked their recitations with textbooks for precision. Educators appeared to favor students who exhibited sharp memorization capabilities, while not providing the same acknowledgment to those who couldn't deliver entire lessons from memory. Another grade 10 student mentioned that during exams, a student's memory was the key to success. Consequently, from the accounts of these girls, it appeared that their academic journey was dominated by a culture of rote learning, lacking deeper comprehension or analytical thought.

Principal figures from schools voiced concerns about examination procedures across various educational stages. The Punjab Examination Commission (PEC) administers tests for class 5 and class 8, while regional boards oversee the testing for secondary and higher education. Notably, educators and school leaders observed that the PEC's approach leaned heavily towards multiple-choice questions. This method enabled students to advance to subsequent grades even if their scores were below average or if they performed poorly in several subjects. This style of testing impedes the development of reading and writing skills, crucial for more advanced academic pursuits. Certain educators, taking advantage of this test format, might not invest adequate effort in instructing their students. The underlying goal of such a policy seems to be aimed at keeping as many students in the school system by minimizing the failure rate, a practice some educators described as the "easy advancement approach". This phenomenon was reportedly more common in countryside educational establishments than in city-based ones. In more urban environments, it was noted that students often sought assistance from private tutors to navigate the evolving academic landscape.

4.6.3 Automated Progression Policy

The state has initiated an automatic progression system within schools, aiming to enhance student retention and deter academic withdrawals. This system is adopted by the PEC for evaluations in class 5 till 8. However, a contrasting approach is seen in secondary education boards, which employ a subjective evaluation style paired with rigorous passing standards. To progress in the secondary phase, learners are required to secure at least 33% in every subject. Given this stipulation, students who haven't honed advanced writing competencies during earlier academic phases often struggle to fulfill secondary exam prerequisites. This divergence between the lax

promotional strategy in initial stages and the stringent secondary assessment pattern inadvertently sets up many students for academic challenges, leading to an eventual dropout.

This situation raised alarms for teaching staff and school administrators alike. A notable segment of educators conveyed that incoming grade 9 pupils frequently displayed an academic proficiency below what's expected at that stage. The prevailing sentiment among educators was the urgency to pinpoint and support academically lagging students well before they reach the ninth grade, ensuring they're equipped to tackle board exams. This viewpoint was held by over half of the educational professionals, spanning both city and countryside establishments. However, students who had left school prematurely, along with their guardians, presented a differing narrative. They argued that secondary education teachers often lacked the necessary training for effective board exam preparation. Parents voiced their grievances, pointing out the inconsistency in attributing students' success to educators during primary levels, but shifting blame onto students when they underperformed later on. They believe educators ought to be accountable in both scenarios.

Chapter 5 – CONCLUSION, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Based on projections from the National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS, 2015), Pakistan is home to roughly 51.53 million children aged 5-16. From this number, only about 28.84 million are enrolled in either public or private educational institutions. This leaves a staggering 22.8 million children aged 5-16 not attending school. Breaking it down further, of these out-of-school children, 5.5 million are aged 5-9, 5.4 million are aged 10-12, and 9.8 million are aged 13-14. In Pakistan, children typically begin school at the age of 5. As per Pakistan's Education Statistics, from the initial enrolment at age 5 in Class 1, about 83% manage to advance through primary education (grades 1-5). However, this number drops significantly with only 46% making it through grades 6-8, and a mere 37% advancing to the secondary level (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2017-2018). As a result of these diminishing progression rates, just 34.2% of Pakistan's populace attains an education up to the secondary level (UNDP, 2014).

Children and young people make up a large component of Pakistani society. Getting a formal education or at least completing compulsory years of schooling can considerably increase individual living standards, health, and improve lifestyles. If secondary schools are not attended by students and they do not complete their secondary education, they are likely to suffer from having fewer and low-quality economic opportunities in the future. Accordingly, the investment made by the government to provide a free basic education to these students would be of no benefit (Sabates et. al., 2011). Therefore, quitting school and not completing secondary education is likely to have adverse effects on local communities and the living standards of the young population residing there (Maton & Moore, 2010).

5.1 Conclusion

The thesis investigated the causes of secondary school dropout amongst females in urban and rural locales of Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan, by gathering insights from Teachers, Heads of Schools, dropped out girls, and the mothers of dropped-out females. The research employed the framework of pull and push factors to study external, financial, and social pressures that hinder educational goals, as well as internal factors within schools that fail to meet students' learning needs. Using an interpretivist approach, the research aimed to comprehend the subjective meanings individuals attribute to their behavior and the world around them. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with 160 participants.

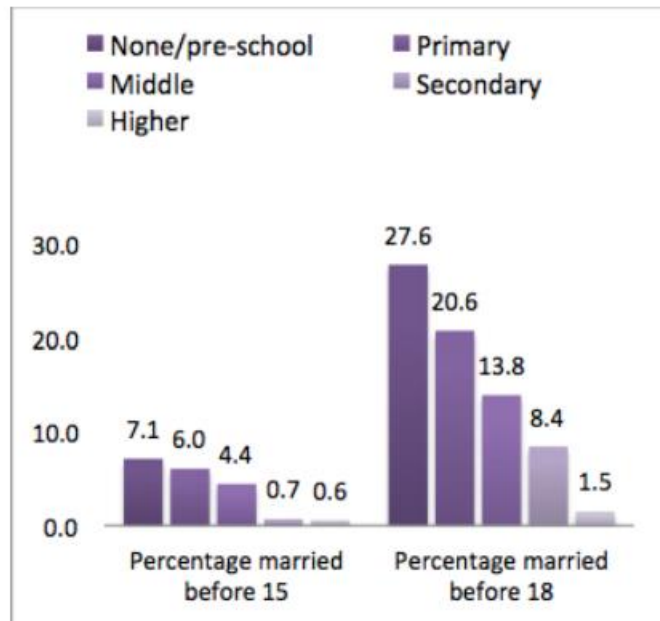
The common themes that emerge across parents, and dropout girls in both rural and urban categories include **Age & Marriage**, and **Distance & Safety-related concerns**, and **Contribution to Household Income**. These themes are deeply intertwined with the socio-cultural landscape of Rahim Yar Khan, where certain socio-economic indicators underscore the challenges faced by girls in continuing their education. Notably, the female literacy rate in the region stands at 39%, while their male counterparts exhibit a higher literacy rate of 60%. This disparity in literacy rates reflects the prevailing gendered norms and the implications they have on education access and attainment.

Research has consistently demonstrated a robust correlation between the educational levels of mothers and the likelihood of their daughters completing their schooling. This connection can be attributed to several interrelated mechanisms. Mothers who have received an education are more likely to serve as positive role models for their daughters. When girls witness their mothers valuing and benefiting from education, they are more inclined to view education as an important and achievable goal. Mothers with education often seek to break the cycle of intergenerational

poverty by investing in their children's education. This determination can lead to a collective effort within families to ensure that daughters remain in school and complete their studies.

Another common theme that stood out was Age & Marriage. According to the Women's Economic & Social Wellbeing Survey in Punjab (2017-2018), 3.8% of the women between the ages 20-24 were married before they were 15 years of age whereas 14.8% were married before they were 18.

Figure 17 - Women aged 20-24 years who were married before they were 15 and 18



(Source, Women's Economic and Social Wellbeing Survey in Punjab, 2017)

The graph above shows that a very small percentage of girls who got married before 15 years of age completed secondary education. This corroborates our research findings that show that one of the most common reasons across our respondents and geographical locations was the issue of early marriages. When girls enter class 9 they are between the ages 14-15, considered ready for marriage.

The need to contribute to household income also emerged as one of the common factors. This is because more women are entering workforce.

Table 13 - Employment Status of Females and Males in Rahim Yar Khan

	Female (%)	Male (%)
Employers	0.1	0.4
Own Account Workers	18.3	40.8
Contributing Family Workers	64.7	12.1
Employees	16.9	46.7

(Source, Pakistan Labour Force Survey, 2020-2021)

The table above shows that in Rahim Yar Khan, approximately 65% of the working women are mostly employed as family workers while a very small percentage of 17% women hold jobs as employees. The need to contribute to family income coupled with the type of jobs available for females can determine the educational path that they choose. If they expect to work as family workers in future, they are less likely to complete their education. .

5.2 Policy Recommendations

5.2.1 Extra Support for Students

It is understood that compromised educational background and poor performance contribute to high dropout in rural settings in the city of Rahim Yar Khan. Financial constraints prevent some girls from accessing private tutoring, as reported by dropouts and their parents. Suggestions were made by teachers, parents, and dropouts themselves to provide extra support within schools to improve academic performance. Private tutoring is prevalent, especially in

classes 9 and 10, with higher rates in private schools compared to government schools. Advertisements for private tutoring were widespread in remote rural areas, reinforcing claims that some teachers prioritize private tutoring over classroom teaching. To tackle these problems, suggested fixes are stopping teachers from offering paid one-on-one lessons, upgrading rural primary schools, getting parents in on running the school, trying new teaching methods, and setting aside money for special classes for struggling high school kids. Other options could be hiring after-school tutors or giving study coupons to students who need extra help. Existing government interventions do not fully address the needs of academically weak students, making additional support classes or tuition vouchers crucial in preventing dropout.

5.2.2 Policy change at the Government Level

Educators, school leaders, and previous dropouts have put forward various strategies to tackle high dropout rates in far-flung rural regions. Among these are the call for a unified testing method across primary to secondary levels, supplying complimentary Urdu textbooks, holding educators accountable for students' underachievement, allowing year 9 retakes, reconsidering the English-centric curriculum, delaying board assessments for two years in classes 9 and 10, re-evaluating automatic promotion practices, facilitating supplementary training for educators, formulating concrete dropout prevention strategies, addressing unofficial registration issues in state schools, and tightening rules surrounding private tuition offered by educators.

Key figures in education have pointed out that primary and mid-level exams, overseen by the Punjab Examination Commission, lean heavily towards multiple-choice assessments. In contrast, secondary level exams demand elaborate written answers. This mismatch can compromise

students' writing prowess, making secondary school transitions challenging. Furthermore, the PEC's leniency, like promoting students who score as low as 20% or even those failing several subjects, contrasts starkly with the intermediate and secondary education boards that mandate at least a 33% score in each subject for progression. This lenient approach at the elementary level means many students advance without being adequately primed for secondary challenges.

The push for a uniform test system and rethinking automatic promotions were highlighted as crucial in combating the dropout issue. A sentiment echoed by parents and some dropouts was that educators might become complacent given the existing automatic progression system and the dominance of multiple-choice testing, potentially leading to a lackluster teaching approach. Observations during the study indicated potential malpractices, like cheating, during multiple-choice evaluations. However, these loopholes become challenging during subjective tests, demanding detailed responses. The over-reliance on memorization, lenient early grade progression criteria, and an inconsistent examination framework exacerbates the dropout issue in isolated rural locales such as Rahim Yar Khan. To better equip students for secondary education challenges and reduce dropouts, there's a call to adopt a consistent examination and progression protocol.

Another significant suggestion was to give students the chance to redo year 9, offering them a better foundation for subsequent levels. Currently, failing students in class 9 can only resit their exams in class 10, making their academic journey more burdensome. Previously, schools had the autonomy to delay students' progression to class 10 until they were adequately prepared. Yet, a change in policy has transferred this responsibility to secondary boards. Many school heads feel this shift inadvertently amplifies dropout rates, advocating for a return to the old system.

5.2.3 Implementation of Dropout Prevention Policy

The government appears to be missing a structured strategy aimed at preventing school dropouts, as evident in the surveyed schools. Records from the past year's school council meetings don't highlight or discuss the dropout dilemma, signaling a gap in policy measures. Educators, together with school leadership, emphasized that the state's emphasis leans towards boosting student enrollments, without a definitive plan for sustaining their stay in school. Both teachers and administrative heads felt restricted by their lack of power and resources when it came to persuading students to return or offering financial assistance to their families. No formal funds were allocated to schools for the express purpose of curbing dropouts. When educators initiated conversations with students who left and their guardians, the predominant obstacle identified was severe economic hardships, leading families to prioritize immediate needs over education. The dual pressure of dwindling resources and expectations of managing low admissions and high dropout figures only magnified the issue. Many educators believed they were primarily appointed to impart knowledge rather than rallying the community, and they often met with pushback from parents weary of constant interventions. While financial support remains a focal point in educator feedback, it's pivotal for the authorities to roll out a robust strategy against school dropouts. This strategy should encompass the multitude of reasons causing dropouts, gather insights from all involved parties, and address the varied factors that either attract or repel students from the education system.

5.2.4 Changes to and Implementation of Age of Marriage Act

It is imperative that government changes the age of marriage for girls in the Punjab Province from 16 to 18 years for girls as has been done in the province of Sindh. Once this change is made enforcement of the law becomes essential.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The research underscores the detrimental effects of subpar instruction during initial education levels on advanced schooling outcomes. However, as UNICEF (2000) points out, it's not solely about teaching caliber. The broader educational quality during foundational years is pivotal in determining whether students progress and finish secondary education. UNICEF identifies an array of indicators critical to effective learning. These include optimal health and nutrition, formative experiences that nurture psychological and social development, consistent school attendance, and backing from families. A prime learning setting would also incorporate sufficient educational amenities, manageable class numbers, secure and harmonious atmospheres (particularly vital for female students), the demeanor of educators, productive discipline strategies, and an inclusive ethos. When it comes to the content, it should be centered on students and free from biases. As for instructional methods, they should prioritize ongoing teacher training, faith in every student's capabilities, positive operational conditions, supportive administrative leadership, and apt language lessons for students.

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Annexures

Annexure A - Questionnaire for the Dropouts

1. Respondent Name	
2. Last completed class	
3. Name of School	
4. Area of residence	
5. Age at the time of dropout	

5. Monthly Household income	Less than Rs.20,000 Rs.20,000 – Rs.39,999 Rs.40,000 – Rs.59,999 Rs.60,000 – Rs.79,999 Rs.80,000 – Rs.99,999
6. Fathers occupation	Self Employed Please specify: Paid employment Please Specify: _____ Stay at home father Unemployed
7. Mothers occupation	Self Employed Please specify: Paid employment Please Specify: _____ Stay at home mother Unemployed
8. No. of siblings: _____	
9. Birth order: _____	
10. How important do you see education for yourself? _____ _____ _____ _____	
11. What are the factors which influence your decision to drop out of school? _____ _____	

	<hr/> <hr/>
12.	At what stage did you realize it was difficult for you to continue schooling? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
13.	Did you discuss your educational difficulties or plan of dropping out of school with peers, parents or schoolteachers? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
14.	What was the reaction of your peers, parents and teachers when you informed them about your decision to drop out? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
15.	What help did you receive from the family, teachers and school councils to encourage you to stay in school or re-enrol?

16. What were your out-of-school activities/responsibilities before you dropped out?

17. What are your current activities/ responsibilities after you dropped out?

18. What factors can help you to re-enrol and complete your secondary school certificate if you wish to do so?

19. Reflecting on your own dropout experience, how can the issue of dropping out can be addressed effectively at?

a. School level:

b. Government level:

c. Personal level:

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Financial constraints significantly influenced my decision to drop out of school in grade 9/10."

- 0
- 1

To what extent do you agree with the statement: "I faced academic challenges in class 9 that contributed to my decision to discontinue my education."

- 0
- 1

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "The high cost of schooling played a role in my decision to drop out of school."

- 0
- 1

To what extent do you agree with the statement: "I experienced difficulties in balancing family responsibilities and school commitments, which led to my decision to drop out."

- 0
- 1

<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement: "I faced bullying or harassment at the hands of teachers in school, which was a factor in my decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1 	
<p>Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I had concerns about my safety while traveling to school because long distance which contributed to my decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1 	
<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Poor quality teaching contributed to my decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1 	
<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Lack of basic facilities such as clean washrooms, drinking water, boundary wall, furniture influenced my decision to drop out of school."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1 	
<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I dropped out of school to get married right away or In near future."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1 	
<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "My parents' lack of interest influenced my decision to drop out of school."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1 	
<p>Name and Signature of Interviewer: _____</p> <p>Date of Interview: _____</p>	

Annexure B - Questionnaire for the Mothers

1. Respondent Name	
2. Relationship to the student	Mother
3. Name of School	

4. Location	
5. Qualification	Less than primary Primary Middle Matriculation Intermediate Bachelors
6. Monthly household income	Less than Rs.20,000 Rs.20,000 – Rs.39,999 Rs.40,000 – Rs.59,999 Rs.60,000 – Rs.79,999 Rs.80,000 – Rs.99,999
7. Occupation	Self Employed Please specify: Paid employment Please Specify: _____ Stay at home mother/father Unemployed
8. How important do you see education for your children _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	
9. What are the factors responsible for girls' dropout/non-completion? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	

10. Did the dropped out child ever discuss with you his/her academic difficulties or plan to quit schooling?

11. What are the particular reasons for your child dropping out of school?

12. Did the school administration inform you that your son/daughter is at-risk of dropping out before he/she actually dropped out?

13. What did you do to encourage your children to stay in school and complete secondary school certificate?

15. As a father/mother/guardian what support do you need to prevent your children from dropping out or getting re-enrolled?

16. Reflecting on your own vast experience being the head of the school, how the issue of dropping out can be addressed effectively at:

- School level:

- Government level:

<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Financial constraints significantly influenced our decision to drop out of school in grade 9/10."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement: "My daughter faced academic challenges in class 9 that contributed to the decision to discontinue my education."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "The high cost of schooling played a role in the decision to drop out of school."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement: "My daughter experienced difficulties in balancing family responsibilities and school commitments, which led to the decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement: "My daughter faced bullying or harassment at the hands of teachers in school, which was a factor in the decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "W had concerns about the safety of our daughter while traveling to school because of long distance which contributed to the decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Poor quality teaching contributed to the decision to drop out."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Lack of basic facilities such as clean washrooms, drinking water, boundary wall, furniture influenced the decision to drop out of school."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "My daughter dropped out of school to get married right away or In near future."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "My husband ir I believr that educating girls to complete secondary isn't needed"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 ▪ 1
<p>Name and Signature of Interviewer: _____</p> <p>Date of Interview: _____</p>

Annexure C - Questionnaire for the Teachers and Heads of the Schools

1. Respondent's Name	
2. Name of the School	
3. Academic Qualification	
4. Location	
5. How important is girls' education? _____ _____	
6. Why do girls tend to drop out from school? _____ _____	
7. Reflecting on your own vast experience being a teacher/head teacher, how the issue of dropping out can be addressed effectively at:	

<p>a. School level</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>b. Government level</p> <hr/> <hr/>

8. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Household poverty and the need to contribute to household income is the major reason for female students dropping out of secondary schools."

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

9. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Female students drop out because they have to attend to domestic chores."

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

10. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Illness in a family is a common reason for drop out."

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

11. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Trend of early marriages is a common reason for drop out."

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

12. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Academic failure in grade 9 is a strong reason for girls to drop out.."

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral

- Agree
- Strongly Agree

13. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Availability of clean drinking water and washrooms is a significant factor contributing to the dropout at these grades"

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

14. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Safety and distance to school is a significant factor contributing to the dropout of girls of this age".

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

15. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "The high cost of school is a significant factor contributing to the dropout of girls of this age".

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

16. What other factors can trigger dropout for the girls at this age and grade?

Name and Signature of Interviewer: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Annexure D - Additional Questionnaire for the Head of School

1. Name of School	
2. Location	
3. School Building	All Pacca Semi-Pacca Katcha
4. Drinking water supply	Yes No Non-functional

5. Toilet Facility	Yes No Non-functional
6. Boundary wall	Yes No Non-functional
7. Electricity	Yes No Non-functional
8. Playground	Yes No Non-functional
9. Functional fans and bulbs	Yes No Non-functional
10. Desk/benches in the classroom	Yes No Non-functional In-sufficient
11. Black/white board	Yes No Non-functional
12. Library	Yes No Non-functional
<p>13. Number of teachers officially assigned to school: _____</p> <p>14. Number of teachers working in school: _____</p> <p>15. Enrollment situation by grades:</p>	

Year	Number of students across different grades									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2017-18										
2018-19										

16. Number of girls dropout in the last two years:

Year	Number of students drop out across different grades									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2017-18										
2018-19										

17. Is there an institutionalized mechanism such as PTA/SMC in the school?	Yes No
18. If yes, how often parent teacher meetings are held?	Monthly Quarterly Bi-Annually Annually

Name and Signature of Interviewer: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Annexure E - Participants Demographics

Urban Schools				Rural Schools				
Dropped-out Girls N=25	Parents N=25	Teachers N=25	Heads of Schools N=10	Metrics	Dropped-out Girls N=25	Parents N=25	Teachers N=25	Heads of Schools N=10
Grade 9: 52% Grade 10: 48%	None: 56% Primary: 28% Secondary: 8% Undergraduate: 8%	Undergraduate: 72% Graduate: 28%	Graduate: 100%	Educational Background	Grade 9: 56% Grade 10: 44%	None: 72% Primary: 24% Secondary: 4% Undergraduate: 0%	Undergraduate: 84% Graduate: 16%	Undergraduate: 80% Graduate: 20%
-	< PKR 25,000: 24% PKR 25,000 – 45,000: 50% > PKR 45,000: 24%	-	-	Household Income	-	< PKR 25,000: 50% PKR 25,000 – 45,000: 36% > PKR 45,000: 14%	-	-
Self Employed: 16% Paid employment:	-	-	-	Mother's occupation	Self Employed: 0% Paid	-	-	-

40% Stay at home: 44% Unemployed: 0%					employment: 34% Stay at home: 60% Unemployed: 6%			
Self Employed: 20% Paid employment: 60% Stay at home: 0% Unemployed: 20%	-	-	-	Father's Occupation	Self Employed: 24% Paid employment: 40% Stay at home: 0% Unemployed: 36%	-	-	-

Annexure F - Details of schools included in the sample:

Sr. No.	School	Category	No. of drop out students in the years 2017-2019		Total strength as of 2021	Qualification of the Head	No. of Teachers (Filled)	No. of SST (Filled)
			Grade 9	Grade 10				
1	GGHS Jinnah Park	Urban	6	13	837	MA	37	2
2	GGHS Model	Urban	29	52	1672	MSc	47	15
3	GGHSS English Mohalla	Urban	7	11	1273	MA	45	9
4	GGHS Nooray Waali	Urban	6	5	1315	Msc	42	7

5	GGHS Taamir-e- Millat	Urban	3	2	1278	MA	38	6
6	GGHS chak no. 51/P	Rural	7	13	322	MA	13	3
7	GGHS chak no. 140/P	Rural	11	16	535	MA	15	2
8	GGHS chak no. 102/P	Rural	20	30	411	MA	13	2
9	GGHS chak no. 247/P	Rural	18	7	283	MA	10	1
10	GGHS chak no. 92/P	Rural	9	24	242	MA	12	1

5 schools in urban areas and 5 in rural were selected. Keeping in view the nature of the research, it was imperative that the selected schools were comfortable with the research being carried out in their school. Cooperation from current students, teachers, and head of school was needed to connect with the dropped-out students and their parents.