

Child's Growth and School Dropout in Sindh

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Abstract

This research paper aims to explore child's growth (in terms of chronological, physical, and social interpretation of puberty and adulthood) as reported causes of school dropout in Sindh. The major focus of the paper is to find gender differences in school dropout due to growth related concerns. The concept of child's growth has been operationalized to include growing chronological age, physical or bodily growth, and social interpretation of reaching puberty as a symbol of gaining adulthood. The research was done through a survey of school dropout children in Sindh. The school going age children who have left school were randomly selected in each district. The data was collected with the help of a questionnaire comprising 3 items scale developed to ascertain the potential of child's growth as a cause of school dropout. The results of the study show that a relatively smaller number of children in Sindh leave school due to any aspect of their personal growth (i.e. only 5.2% due to grownup age, 9.7% due to physical growth, and 9.2% due to puberty). More girls are found leaving school due to growth related concerns as compared to boys. More girls are found to leave school due to physical growth (i.e. 19.6%) and puberty (i.e. 20.6%) in Sindh. The data analysis has confirmed a statistically significant difference between two genders in their school dropout due to growth related issues.

Keywords: Physical growth, age of child, puberty, school dropout, Sindh, Pakistan

Introduction

Education and gender equality are the two main indicators of socio-economic development of any country. Pakistan is striving hard to attain free and compulsory education for all its citizens and to remove all gender based discriminations in all aspects of social life. But still the achievement level on both grounds is not very promising. On the one hand, the dream of achieving education for all Pakistani citizens is still not realized. There are several issues and challenges persisting in the way to achieving this goal. The literacy rate among population remained low (i.e. 62.3%) (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2019, 41). A large number of children remained out of school (UNICEF 2014). Enrolment rates were increasing rapidly in last decades and showing a narrowing down



of gender gap in enrolment rate (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2019, 46) but they were nullified by the simultaneous high rates of dropout from school.

Gender discrimination is persisting in all aspects of social life in Pakistan. Women and girls are far behind Pakistani men in all walks of life. They are more illiterate, less educated, with restricted mobility to public sphere, and with less access to the resources required for the development of their human capital. Women and girls are traditionally assigned to spend their most of life time in the private sphere of home. They are less preferred in decisions regarding educational attainment in relation to their male siblings. With less education and skills required for professional life, they are less represented in paid labour force. Rather, majority of them is traditionally assigned with stereotyped gender roles of performing unpaid work within household and family business. Those who fortunately reached in the paid labour market to compete with men are faced with glass ceilings in their way to climb on top ranks in professional hierarchies.

School dropout is a problem that affects educational attainment of both genders, in general, and of girl child, in particular. More girls than boys get dropped out of schools in Pakistan. There are several factors that differently result in the school dropout of girls and boys. In accordance with the social background of Pakistani society and the gendered order of patriarchal system, this research paper focuses on the gendered pattern of one of the barriers differently effecting the educational attainment among men and women in Pakistan. Personal growth of a child, mostly considered as biological phenomenon, equally benefiting or curtailing the access to education by male and female child without any social implications of gender difference. But in reality the phenomenon of personal growth also has been effecting more dropout among girls than boys. This paper particularly focuses on the personal growth of a child in a comprehensive way by focusing on growth in its chronological, biological and social connotations and their different potential for negatively effecting educational attainment of girls and boys in Sindh.

Review of Literature:

In general meaning, the term school dropout refers to a child who left school. More specific definitions of the term provided in literature explain it in detail. The term is defined as a student initially attending some educational institution but leaves it, due to any reason except death, without completing the educational cycle she/he got enrolled for and without making a transfer to any other institution for its completion (Ahmad 2006, 2008; Habib 2011). It is further elaborated as a child from primary, elementary or secondary school who was once enrolled in school but later left the school (Ahmed 2006). It is also referred as an early departure of student from school without completing course and acquiring certificate (Gul, Gulshan, & Ali 2013). School dropout is a persisting problem in Pakistan. It nullifies all the efforts done to bring ever higher number of children to school for achieving universal compulsory education for all

citizens. Because the large number of children once brought to school later on leave and result in educational wastage.

The statistics presented in national and international data sets and reports show the severity of this problem at global and local level. As per UNESCO estimates, there is 18.31% dropout rate at primary level in the year 2017, globally. The estimates further show the severity of this problem in poor countries; as the school dropout rates at primary school level in low income countries and least developed countries all around the globe are much higher; as 48.6% and 46%, respectively (UNESCO 2020). The dropout rates at primary level are higher in regions like Sub Saharan Africa (45.05%), Western Asia (22.26%), Arab States (18.35%), Latin America and the Caribbean (13.68%) and South Asia (12.38%) (UNESCO 2020). Although, South Asian region has an overall 12.38% school dropout rate at primary schools but several countries within the region are showing very contrasting dropout rates. Sri Lanka has successfully achieved universal primary education with the lowest dropout rate of 1.55% at primary level in the year 2016. But still other countries of the region are showing higher school dropout rates; like Nepal (26.45%), Pakistan (29.59%), India (12.26% in 2016 that fall to 8.76% in 2017), and Bhutan (11.28%) (UNESCO 2020).

Pakistan with 29.59% dropout rate is reported as having highest school dropout rate at primary school level in the region. The dropout rate at secondary school level in Pakistan is reported as 14.39% (UNESCO 2020). The report on Pakistan education statistics has highlighted 65% survival rate at the primary level of education in Pakistan (National Education Management Information System 2018, 27). It shows an overall 35% dropout rate at primary level in the country. Pakistan social and living standard measurement survey 2018-19 has reported that among 10-18 years old citizens the school dropout rate was 8% in 2013-14 (Government of Pakistan 2020, 16). It is also reported in another report that 33% of all children in Pakistan at primary level get dropped out of school before completing their fifth grade (AEPAM 2015). ACER (2012) report has identified that the large proportion (i.e.75%) of the students who got enrolled in class one leave school before reaching class 10.

The provincial positions about the school dropout rates within Pakistan are not much different to the national statistics presented above. Government of Punjab (2018, 23) has reported 72% survival rate from class one to class 5 during the education cycle of 2013 to 2017. It shows 28% of school dropout among this cohort of children. Government of Balochistan (2018, 59) has reported survival rate as low as 41% at primary level. It indicated that more than 59% of the children get dropped out of schools in Balochistan province without completing their primary education. Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2018, 20) is also reporting higher dropout rates; such as 26% at *Kachi* class and 10.99% at *Pakki* class. The province of Sindh has reported to have 34% of completion rate at primary level (Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS) 2018, 188). It seems that the situation of school dropout is alarming in Balochistan and Sindh.

Gender difference in educational indicators are continuously persisting in Pakistan. Pakistani women, especially rural women and girls, are the most disadvantaged group in this respect. The literacy rate for rural women is as low as only 36% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2019, 41). Girl children's enrolment at middle schools (from 6 to 8 class) remained half than boys throughout last decade (e.g. 2,239,686 boys as compared to 1,774,512 girls in 2017-18) (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2019, 47).

The pattern of gender gap is quite visible in available data regarding school dropout in Pakistan. It is reported that among 33% of all the children in Pakistan at primary level dropping out of school before completing fifth grade include 33% boys and 34% girls (AEPAM 2015). The Pakistan social and living standard measurement survey 2013-14 has shown that the school dropout prior to completion of primary level of education is 9% among girls as compared to 8% among boys. This gender gap enlarges in rural areas where girls' school dropout rate is 12% in comparison to only 8% among boys (Government of Pakistan 2015, 46). Sindh has reported a completion rate of 39% among boys and 24% among girls (Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS) 2018, 188). It shows a higher rate of school dropout among girls in the province of Sindh.

There are several causes of school dropout. Different scholars have identified various reasons of school dropout among children. Malik and his colleagues have identified teacher's absence and lack of skill, parents' poor educational status, and poor quality education in schools as major causes of school dropout (Malik et al. 2013, 13). Hussain and his fellows (2010) have identified crowded classes, weakness of teachers' training, their behaviour, teaching method, evaluation process, curriculum, and education system as causes of school dropout. Malik (2002) listed parents' carelessness, educational expenditure, child's mental weakness and no interest in education, and no apparent immediate advantage of education among other reasons of school dropout. Zarif (2012, 145) has brought to light the lack of school facilities, non-provision of books and other educational material, irrelevant curriculum, poverty, absence of teacher and social discrimination as causes of school dropout in district Kahsmore, Sindh.

Among many factors of school dropout, the grown up age of children at the time of their first enrolment in school has also been considered as a factor resulting in school dropout of children in Pakistan (Pradhan, Jamali, Bhamani, Ali & Karmaliani 2018, 52; UNICEF 2014, ix). UKAID's report has identified that getting enrolled late in an age more than officially specified for first enrolment increases the risk of getting dropped out soon (UKAID n.d.). Amadi and fellows (2013, 125) have also linked this concept of overage children and their risk to school dropout with frequent failure and class repetition. The class repetition may cause the problem of being over age among those children who initially enrolled in school at appropriate age but got delayed in reaching to higher grades due to repeated failure and grade repetition. UKAID (n.d.) report links this over age status with the pressure of leaving school for boys to get engaged in earning activities and for girls to be subjected to restricted mobility. The report highlights that when an overage child gets enrolled, he or she has left very few years for schooling

before contributing to household economy, in case of boys, and before reaching to puberty, in case of girls (UKAID n.d).

The social interpretations of biological development of puberty has implications on girls' education. As soon as a girl reaches puberty, the chances for her to quit school increase due to family's concern about her safety and reputation (Lewin, 2011). This problem also becomes sever with the long distance to schools, especially in rural areas. Imtiaz (n.d.) has pointed out that majority of population living in rural areas have to travel on average 10 to 15 Km to reach school and this is the reason that parents cannot afford for their mobility and decided for their children to get dropped out of school (McCutcheon 2007).

Child's physical or bodily growth related to being overaged or achieving puberty are also important in resulting school dropout, especially among girls. Farooq (2013, 59) has reported that teachers in their sample for study of school dropout have reported the physical characteristics of a child as one of the cause of school dropout at primary schools in Pakistan. This problem results in having children of different age groups and capacities get together to study in same classroom without teachers being trained for adopting proper method to cope with this problem.

The above literature review shows that children's grownup chronological age, their physical characteristic and bodily growth, and the social interpretations attached with puberty to restrict girl child's mobility result in their school dropout. These three aspects can be covered as three dimension of child's personal growth. The accumulative effect of these three aspects of child's personal growth has never been studied in detail to identify gendered patterns of school dropout due to child's growth. The gender segregated empirical data is also lacking in this regard. Therefore, this research study is aiming to fill this research gap by focusing on child's personal growth with its three dimensions as a reported cause of school dropout in Sindh. The results of the study will contribute to identification of gendered patterns of school dropout due to physical growth. It will also provide empirical data in this regard.

Objective

- (1) To explore child's growth as a reported cause of school dropout in Sindh.
- (2) To identify gender differences in school dropout of children in Sindh due to their grownup chronological age, physical growth, and social interpretation of puberty as symbol of achieving adulthood.

Hypothesis

H₁: More girl school dropped out children reported to have left school without completing education due to their personal growth as compared to boy school dropped out children in Sindh.

Research Methodology

This research paper is part of a broader research done to explore causes of school dropout in Sindh. It particularly focuses on personal growth of a child as a factor effecting school dropout in Sindh. The concept of child's growth has been operationalized by deconstructing it in three aspects of a child's growth for the collection of more accurate empirical data in this regard. The three aspects comprising the concept of growth are child's grownup chronological age, grownup physical or bodily appearance, and social interpretation of the biological attainment of puberty as a symbol of attaining adulthood. These three aspects of growth addressed also provided the basis for three items of the measurement tool developed and used for data collection in this research.

The study was designed as cross-sectional research with quantitative data collection and its statistical analysis. The data was collected through a survey. School dropped out children from all over the Sindh province were the population for this research. The respondents were selected from different districts of Sindh through random sampling. A total of 5641 cases were included in this research. The sample includes 4032 boys and 1609 girls who already have left schools in different districts of Sindh.

The data was collected with the help of a closed ended questionnaire. The data utilized in this research paper was collected with the help of a three items scale developed to assess the potential of child's personal growth in causing school dropout in Sindh as per the reports of school dropout children. As stated above, the three items of the scale addressed the three aspect described above to operationalize the concept of child's growth as a reported cause of children's school dropout in Sindh. The three item scale was loading as one factor with high factor loadings (i.e. for Item 1=0.912, Item 2=0.907, and Item 3=0.9796) and without any cross loading in the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the complete tool utilized in broader research on causes of school dropout. It shows the convergent validity of the tool used. The reliability of the tool was assessed by calculating Cronbach Alpha (i.e. 0.860).

The data collected was statistically analysed to identify gender related patterns and test above stated hypothesis. The results of cross tabulation was presented to show gender segregated data on each (i.e. chronological, biological, and social) aspects of child's growth as reported cause of school dropout. The gender difference, as emerging from the gender segregated data presented through cross tabulation, was also confirmed by applying Independent sample t-test. The t-test results are presented below to show the gender based difference of mean scores of male and female students as acquired on the three items scale of child's growth as a reported cause of school dropout.

Data analysis and presentation

This research explores the school dropout among male and female students due to their growth related issues. The three aspects of child's growth namely chronological growth (being over aged), biological or physical growth (i.e. grown up body appearance) and social aspect of growth (related to puberty as considered a symbol of achieving

adulthood) are explored and analysed. The results of data analysis are presented below. Firstly, gender segregated data on three aspects of growth was presented in the form of cross tabulation to show the gender based potential of the each aspect to cause different effect on school dropout among boys and girls in Sindh. Finally, the data analysis is presented in the form of t-test results to confirm the statistical significance of the difference in reports of school dropout due to child's growth between the two genders.

Leaving school due to being grown up in age in relation to other classmates

The difference in age of the child in relation to other children attending the same class has effect on school dropout. It is found in data analysis that only a minority of the children has agreed to their grown up age as being cause of their school dropout. The data analysis presented in Table 1 shows that only 5.2% of the respondents have reported their grown up age as a reason for their leaving school early without completing education cycle. The result indicates that majority of the students get enrolled in schools at the appropriate age of first admission in school and they keep progressing to upper grades in accordance of their proper age. But still there are some students in the system who either get enrolled in school late in their age or they may get older due to frequently repeating grades because of class failure. The problem of school dropout due to grown up age persists in Sindh but the magnitude of problem, as shown by the reports of being one of the reason affecting school attendance of a smaller proportion of children, is lesser.

Table 1: Difference of age with other classmates as a cause of school dropout (%)

	Gender		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Strongly Disagree	54.7	53.5	54.4
Disagree	37.8	34.6	36.9
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	3.0	4.7	3.5
Agree	2.2	4.1	2.7
Strongly Agree	2.3	3.0	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data of this research.

The data analysis presented in Table 1 also informs about the gender aspect of children's leaving school due to grownup age in Sindh. More girls are reporting to leave school due to this reason. The number of boys leaving school due to their grownup age is less in relation to girls. The data shows that 7.1% of female school dropped out children in Sindh have reported to have left school due to their grown up age in relation to other students in the class they were attending. It is presented that only 4.5% of the male school dropped out children have reported the same as a reason for their school dropout.

The data presented above informs that more girls in the province are facing barriers in reaching school at the proper age specified for admission in school. They are

reaching and enrolling school later in their age and then having difficulty in managing their presence in the classroom with majority of relatively younger children. This may result in their school dropout and they are reporting to have left school due to this age difference more frequently than boys.

It further shows that boys in the province either reach school at the proper age of admission, do not repeat their grades frequently or they do better manage with their grownup age in a class with majority of the younger children studying there.

Leaving school due to being grown up physically:

The research data presented in Table 2 below shows the statistics regarding physical growth of the child's body as a reported cause of school dropout. It is showing dropped out children's responses about their grownup physical build or body consequently leading to leaving school. It is observed that only 9.7% children reported to have left school due to the grown up physical structure of body. Majority of the students do not report this reason as one of the cause of their leaving school early.

It shows that physical growth and appearance of the child is only a concern of less than one tenth of the school dropout children and their families when taking a decision of leaving school early.

Table 2: Grown up in physical appearance as a cause of school dropout (%)

	Gender		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Strongly Disagree	53.0	46.1	51.0
Disagree	38.1	28.0	35.2
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	3.2	6.2	4.1
Agree	3.6	9.2	5.2
Strongly Agree	2.2	10.4	4.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data of this research.

The gender segregated statistics provided in above table reflect that there is difference in the percentage of boys and girls in their reports of their physical or bodily grownup appearance as one reason of their school dropout in Sindh. The data shows that 19.6% of the girl dropped out children have reported their physically grown up appearance of the body as one of the cause of their school dropout. While, a relatively smaller number of boy school dropped out children have reported to leave school due to their physically grown up bodily structure. The data shows that only 5.8% of the boy respondents have reported this as the reason of their school dropout in Sindh province.

The data presented above shows that the number of girl school dropped out children reporting their grownup physical appearance as cause of their school dropout is

four times higher than the number of boy school dropped out children reporting their school dropout due to the same reason. It clearly shows that almost one fifth of all the girl respondents have left school due to the concerns about their physically grown up body. The findings are in accordance with the social acceptance to girl child's restricted mobility, as they grow up, to the limits of the four walls of the house in the patriarchal and male dominated traditional society of Pakistan.

Leaving school due to reaching adulthood by achieving puberty:

The research data depicts a more or less same picture for the puberty related concern behind the school dropout as that of the physical growth of children. It is found that only 9.2% of the children who had already left school have reported their achievement of gaining adulthood in the result of achieving puberty as one of the reason behind their school dropout in Sindh. It means this is the reason of leaving school among only one tenth of the children who got dropped out of school.

Table 3: Becoming adult by reaching puberty as a cause of school dropout (%)

	Gender		Total
	Boys	Girls	
Strongly Disagree	53.6	44.7	51.1
Disagree	38.7	29.1	36.0
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	3.0	3.5	3.7
Agree	2.7	8.6	4.4
Strongly Agree	2.0	12.0	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data of this research.

A critical point related to young girls' life cycle in patriarchal societies is the achievement of puberty. As with their reaching to this biological point in bodily growth they are considered as grownup and adults. In traditional sense it is interpreted as the end to their teenage and adolescence. Now they are considered reaching the womanhood; thus resulting in all the social terms of their life patterns direly changing. They may face the restriction on their mobility outside home. It hampers their educational attainment and access to other resources in the public sphere outside home.

In accordance with this social setup, the data of this research study also indicates similar gendered patterns of this reason being the source of school dropout among boys and girls. More girls than boys among school dropped out children have reported to leave school due achieving adulthood in terms of reaching puberty. On the one hand, a relatively higher percentage (i.e. 20.6%) of school dropped outs girls in Sindh have reported to leave school due to this concern. On the other hand, a smaller proportion (i.e. 4.7%) of the boys who had left school have reported this as a reason of their school

dropout. It simply refers to the pattern of girl children facing more social restrictions and limitations in their access to socio-economic resources after achieving puberty than boys in Sindh. Accordingly, the same gender gap is visible in not only the educational outcomes but on all indicators of social and economic development in Pakistan.

Growth of child and different effect on school dropout of boys and girls in Sindh:

Although, the gendered pattern of school dropout due to personal growth of children is visible from the above presented gender segregated data analysis. It is necessary to test and confirm the statistical significance of the gendered pattern regarding this aspect of school dropout in Sindh. Therefore, the mean scores were calculated regarding school dropped out children's responses on the scale for assessing their reports of growth of child as a cause of school dropout. The data presented in Table 4 shows a relatively higher mean score acquired on the scale by girl school dropped out respondents than their boy counterparts in Sindh. The mean score acquired by girls is $M=1.9745$ with standard deviation as $df=1.05774$. The boy respondents have scored a relatively lower mean score of $M=1.6139$ with standard deviation as $df=0.77701$.

Table 4: Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Child's growth	Boys	4032	1.6139	.77701	.01224
	Girls	1609	1.9745	1.05774	.02637

Source: Survey data for this research.

The t-test results presented in Table 5 below show that there is a statistically significant difference between male and female students' mean scores on the scale of 'Child's growth as the cause of school dropout'. The t-test results show $t(2331.960)=217.252$, $p<0.001$. The p value is lower than 0.05. This shows that the difference of scores between two genders is statistically significant.

Table 5: Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Error Differ- ence	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Child's growth	Equal variances assumed	217.252	.000	-14.115	5639	.000	-.36060	.02555	-.41068	-.31051
	Equal variances not assumed			-12.404	2331.960	.000	-.36060	.02907	-.41760	-.30359

Source: Primary data from survey done for this research.

The statistics provided in Table 4 and Table 5 show that there is statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the two genders on the scale of child's growth being the cause of school dropout. The mean scores cited above show that girls are scoring higher than boys. On the basis of above data, it is inferred that school dropped out girls in Sindh more frequently report to have left school due to age and physical growth related concerns than boys in Sindh. Therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) cited above stating that more girl school dropped out children reported to have left school without completing education due to their personal growth as compared to boy school dropped out children in Sindh is accepted. It is inferred that girls are more at risk of leaving school due their physical growth in school going age than boys in Sindh.

Findings and Discussion

This research study was aimed to explore the growth of children, in terms of their grownup age, grownup physical appearance and body, and their being traditionally considered as reaching adulthood by achieving puberty. The three aspects of young children's growth, especially of girls, are focused to ascertain their respective and accumulative effect on the school dropout of children in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. The major findings of the research appear, as discussed below, are found to be in accordance with the social reality prevailing in the tribal and feudal society of Sindh:

- ◆ ***A smaller proportion of children leave school due to their being grown up:*** Majority of the school dropped out children in Sindh did not agree to their age and physical

growth as being the cause of their school dropout. The data presented above shows that almost 91.3% school dropouts in Sindh did not agree to leave school due to their grown up age. Similarly, 86.2% school dropped outs in the province have also disagreed to count their physical/bodily growth as a cause of their leaving school. In accordance with the other two concerns, the large proportion of school dropout children (87.1%) in Sindh did not accept their being considered adult in result of reaching puberty as a factor effecting their school dropout. A smaller proportion of the children are found reporting to have left school due to these three reason; as only 5.2% have reported to leave school due to grownup age, 9.7% due to grownup physical growth, and only 9.2% due to puberty.

- ◆ ***More girls than boys leave school due to being grown up in age and body:*** This research study highlights that there is a gender specific pattern emerging out of data that more girls than boys leave school due to being grown up in terms of age, physical appearance or in biological growth. It is observed that 7.1% girls as compared to 4.5% boys reported to have left school due to being grownup in age. Similarly, 19.6% girls as compared to 5.8% boys reported to have left school due to their grownup physical or bodily appearance. Following the same pattern, 20.6% of the girls in relation to 4.7% of boys reported to have left school due to puberty considered as a sign of their adulthood. The three indicators used to judge the potential of child's personal chronological and biological growth as one factor effecting child's school dropout has depicted a negative effect on girls more than boys.
- ◆ ***Gendered pattern in physical growth resulting in school dropout:*** This research has highlighted the pattern that more girls than boys in Sindh province are being negatively affected in terms of their educational attainment by this accumulative chronological, biological and social interpretation of the concept of being grownup in Pakistani society. The data presented above has shown a clear statistically significant difference among two genders in their mean scores acquired on the scale developed to assess their growth as the cause of their school dropout in Sindh. It is confirmed that among school dropped out respondents of this research, more girls reported to have left school due to chronological, biological and social dynamics of growth as compared to their male counterparts.

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