

Patriarchal Bargains and Intergenerational Negotiations: An Exploration of Family Decision-Making for Girls' Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study focuses on the effect of economic constraints and patriarchal norms on the educational choices of rural girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Using the theoretical framework of patriarchal relations developed by Deniz Kandiyoti, we examined the strategies employed by mothers, grandmothers, and young women against the backdrop of low educational levels and rigid gender relations. The study involved in-depth interviews and field-based observations with 40 participants, including fathers, mothers, grandparents, and young women. Thematic assessments were incorporated into the data validation protocols. Empirical data reveal that poverty, family pressures, and gender-constructed traditions impede women's educational opportunities. The findings indicate that because of poverty, family, and gender stereotypes, there is low access to education among women. However, with the support of social and economic approaches, high-school girls will be able to challenge patriarchal practices. Therefore, empowering women and girls in families will eventually transform the customary traditions that forbid both education and educational opportunities for the next generations.

Keywords: patriarchal bargain; girls' education; gender inequality; family decision-making; female agency; qualitative research



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Introduction

Education is an essential factor in both social progress and economic success (Halişçelik and Soytaş 2019; Helbling, Tomasik, and Moser 2019). According to Klugman et al. (2014) and Odondi (2024), the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child share the inclusive notion that the right to equitable access to quality education is an integral part of the worldwide aspiration for education for all. Helbling, Tomasik, and Moser (2019) determined that, despite increasing enrolment all over the world, there are still significant educational gaps between female and male learners. Pursuing a gendered approach, Ilie, Rose, and Vignoles (2021) highlight the primary role that poverty and instability, in addition to patriarchal structures, play in women's upbringing. In such an environment, they have to contend with poverty, poor social practices, child marriage and forced early marriages, and schools that are unsafe and do not allow for a conducive learning environment (Mistry et al. 2012; Ninsiima et al. 2018).

The primary challenge in South Asia is ensuring that women, particularly Pakistani rural girls, receive an education. According to Lloyd et al. (2005), the constitutional promises covered in Article 25-A, along with the policies and programmes implemented by the state, have not been successful in effectively addressing deeply rooted patterns of gender inequality in the field of education. The working environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is problematic due to the prevailing patriarchal relations of power, the lingering cultural influence of Pashtunwali tribal practices, and general economic unrest in the region. Despite existing inequalities, women can overcome material barriers related to academic activity (Khan et al. 2025). According to Khan et al. (2024), it is an unquestionable reality that cultural or social norms are paramount among the people, and such norms create a link between female morals, gender roles, and the respectability and responsibility of the family.

A consistent theme across the tapestries is the institutional and ideological constraints that severely restrict women's educational access in the region. Scholars have identified a lack of education as the principal factor perpetuating this systemic issue (Zada, Shah, and Bibi 2023). This educational deficit stems from the collapse of infrastructure and a critical shortage of female instructors in the region. Compounding these barriers are prevailing socioeconomic perceptions that position men as the primary economic foundation of the family, whereas girls are often viewed as financial burdens rather than potential contributors (Aslam 2009). Despite this perception, both the girls and their mothers demonstrate resilience and ingenuity in overcoming various challenges. Recent literature has introduced the concept of female agency to better understand the micro-resistance strategies, tactical negotiations, and informal learning opportunities that women create within a patriarchal context (Ismail, Weihong, and Arif 2025). This approach is a relatively recent development in this field.

The literature generally tends to gloss over the shortfalls in knowledge. The viewpoints of all key players in the social mesh need to be assimilated to understand this complex

gender interaction system (Francis and Paechter 2015; Sabbe and Aeltermann 2007). The discourse on education in KP literature has predominantly concentrated on girls and women, neglecting the critical role of fathers as decision-makers within the home. This omission highlights a significant weakness, as the reasons behind the desires and concerns of these male gatekeepers were not examined. It is essential to address this gap during the policy formulation process, as failing to consider this factor may jeopardise the effectiveness of decision-making in education. This study overcomes these deficiencies by placing greater emphasis on the family. Kandiyoti (1988) refers to a negotiating and accommodation model with a multilevel structure as patriarchal bargaining theory. This theoretical framework has had a considerable impact on the educational experiences of females living in rural Pakistan.

Research Questions

The proposed research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the consequences of the patriarchal process and economic restrictions for the decision-making context of girls' education in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. How do girls and their female caregivers navigate this environment and what strategies (bargains) do they use to get a chance to be educated?
3. What are the attitudes, arguments, and worries of parents regarding their daughters' education?

Theoretical Background

This research is based on the patriarchal bargain concept proposed by Kandiyoti (1988). Through this theory, we examine two ways in which women in patriarchal societies, especially girls in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, negotiate their entry into these decisions.

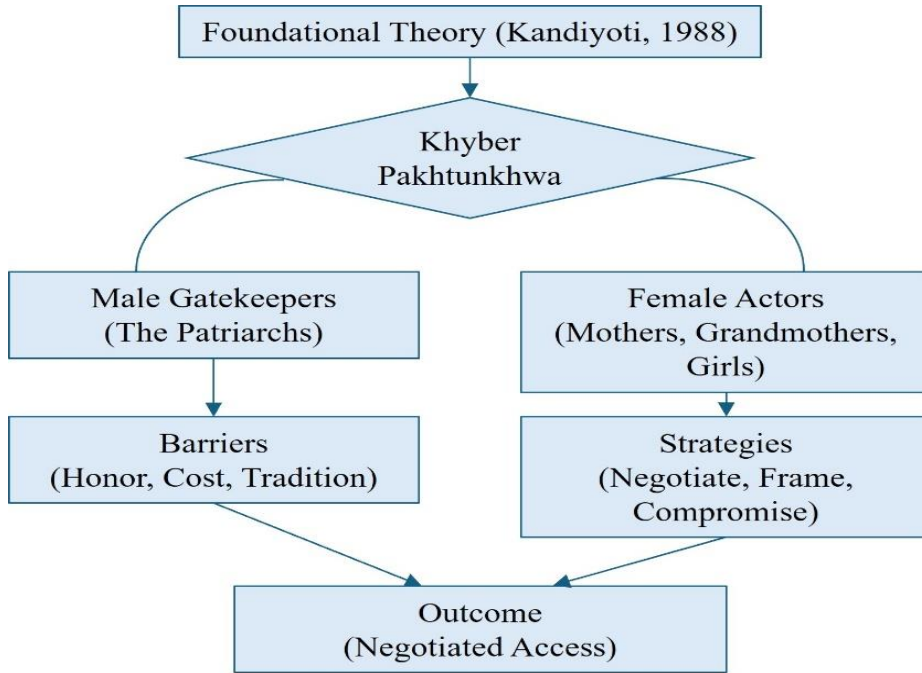


Figure 1: Outline of Kandiyoti’s theory (1988) as applied in this study

Figure 1 above is a visual representation of the foundational theory from renowned scholar Deniz Kandiyoti’s 1988 work, which introduced the concept of the “patriarchal bargain”. Kandiyoti’s theory (1988) discusses the view of patriarchy as a repressive institution that is uniform for all women (Onur 2024). This study indicates that patriarchy is a system of negotiation in which both boys and girls negotiate their interests in terms of gender to attain positive outcomes, which in turn forces them to conform to the norms. The involvement of mothers and grandparents in schools is one way to ensure that daughters receive an education. Such interactions are called patriarchal bargaining (Agha 2021). Patriarchy is a complicated dialectical game of agency and servitude. The choices these women make in their lives reflect the epistemology of dance.

Kandiyoti (1988) presented the concept of the patriarchal bargain, offering a profound understanding of gender dynamics. The results in this study are interpreted in terms of the concept of the patriarchal bargain and the model introduced by Kandiyoti (1988), which focuses on various dimensions of gender relations in patriarchal societies. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a patriarchal society, and this affects the development of the males as well as the education of the rural female population (Yousafzai et al. 2025). These effects are due to a focus on the education and economic improvement of boys. Women have historically been considered incompetent and unable to play an important role in society, which has led them to remain at home and care for their family members (Çoban 2022). We interpret the patriarchal bargain not as a problem of oppression but as a

negotiation among people. Aubel (2024) and Jacobs and Andrews (2021) observe that women, particularly grandmothers and mothers, employ various methods to ensure their daughters continue accessing educational opportunities despite patriarchal organisations and limitations. By representing the idea that education can enhance religious commitment and emphasising the family and homemaking benefits of an educated female, they can promote the importance of education through the application of patriarchal ideals embedded in society (Khan et al. 2025). Therefore, there is a likelihood of women managing the restraints of patriarchy and even recording some incremental yet significant improvements in the educational opportunities of their daughters if they strategically frame the discourse of education (Khalid 2023).

According to Ghosh (2022), the main idea of the thesis provided by Kandiyoti (1988) is that male practices have to be perpetuated from one generation to another. This article discusses how crucial mothers are to changing beliefs and aspirations towards education across generations. Recognising their own illiteracy has led to an understanding of the significant roles that the majority of grandmothers fulfil within their communities. Despite this, these women play an important role in educating their grandchildren by providing money for formal education and assisting them in obtaining it. Based on this analysis, men have changed their values and perceptions. This is a significant generational change, as Patnaik (2021) indicates, evidenced by the evolution and adjustment of the male system to enable women to work in the traditional model. Such a contract will not cause changes in the education system, but it will be possible to make strategic adjustments that will gradually increase its results. The reconsideration of patriarchy shows that these patterns are not unchangeable, because women can adjust and modify them over time (Swargiary 2024).

Engaging other people, including fathers and grandfathers, is essential in influencing attitudes towards the education of females in a patriarchal environment (Hasan et al. 2025). Their arguments and decision-making are based on several cultural, social, and economic determinants; hence, they should not be omitted in the discourse on family education (Khan et al. 2024). Liu (2025) and Shah, Sabir, and Zaka (2025) also point out that fathers realise the potential benefits of higher education for their daughters, such as the opportunity to obtain dowries and an upgrade in family status, as well as the potential costs, including the threat to male social conventions. Kandiyoti (1988) believes that these male gatekeepers operate under strict restrictions imposed by society and communal values that influence their decisions. This division has created a complicated interaction marked by male leaders who support and maintain patriarchal values (Waheed 2025). Furthermore, negotiations complicate the decision-making process regarding education because of constraints imposed by male gatekeepers (Mustaniemi-Laakso, Katsui, and Heikkilä 2023). Patriarchal agreement situations reveal a shift in negotiation processes that affect women's pursuit of higher education. Typically, male figures dominate decision-making, sidelining women's autonomy and voices (Agha 2021; Haque 2025).

The concept introduced by Kandiyoti (1988) concerns the position that women and girls play in a male-dominated society. It emphasises their negotiating skills rather than unco-operative counterattacks. According to Haque (2025), this strategy allows students to enjoy the benefits of education while remaining within the comfort of the conventional education system. According to the study results, women face many barriers when trying to obtain formal education; however, they choose to learn independently and with the help of communities. Mothers utilise the social and financial resources available to them to provide their daughters with an education. According to Khan et al. (2025), patriarchal systems stimulate the creation of different strategies to promote school attendance. Some mothers may convince their husbands to support their daughters' education by emphasising the importance of their daughters' roles as wives and mothers. They are the products of a culture realignment approach (Akuffo 2024; Khalid 2023), which has been successful in schools. The gap in educational attainment is associated with different rates of access, and patriarchal values may change (Dahal, Topping, and Levy 2023). Patriarchal bargaining determines educational achievement because students with similar social statuses may have unequal access to learning opportunities (Nambiar, Benny, and Sankar 2022).

Kandiyoti (1988) believes that the adaptation of traditional values in respect to new cultural environments changes the level of control of the patriarchal system over families. Some families are governed by conservative thinking, which assumes the need to educate male family members (Rossi 2024). The control of patriarchal norms in education leads to dissimilar results, creating the likelihood of renegotiation and new alterations to the existing agreement in the future.

Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal contract hypothesis can be used to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between women's education and its various dimensions in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We can apply this framework to study how patriarchal beliefs and norms prescribe and restrain the development of educational policy. Often, a society wants girls and women to remain within the bounds of society. With workplace empowerment, female decision-making, and generational differences, there is still much potential to enhance education among Pakistan's rural communities, thereby increasing access to education. In turn, this will improve the prevalent gender bias and inequality within society and the family. Negotiations, subtle pressures, and compliance with patriarchal norms can be sources of change.

Methods and Procedures

Research Philosophy and Methodological Approach

This study uses a hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm to explore the complex socio-familial variables that affect the educational possibilities of girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This paradigm is a philosophical approach to human experience, focusing on its methodology to explain or provide a platform for the continuation, reconstruction, and reconfiguration of patriarchal structures in everyday interactions (Gadamer 2004). The methodology is devoted to the interpretive reconstruction of meaning, aiming to describe the interplay of cultural inclinations, economic requirements, and individual subjectivity concerning educational preferences. From this philosophical standpoint, the researcher plays a role in establishing knowledge because human experience is highly contextual. The research process flows logically through several key stages:

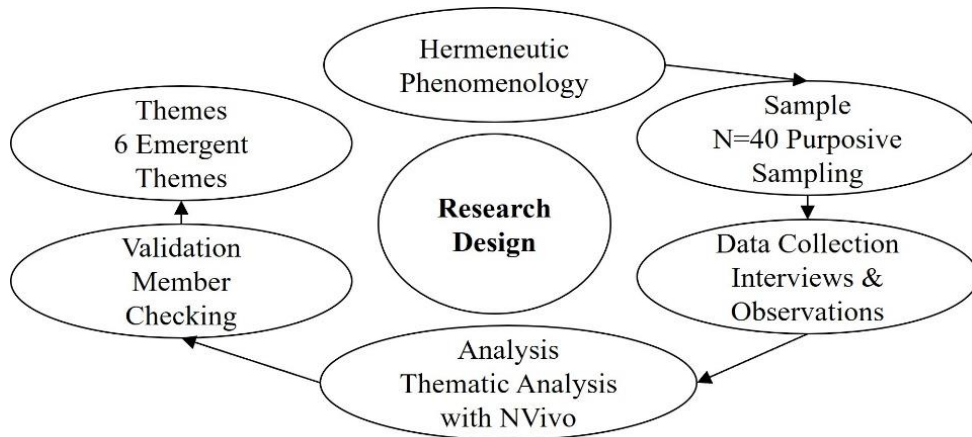


Figure 2: The research framework

Figure 2 above presents a research framework. At the core is hermeneutic phenomenology, which is the overarching philosophical and methodological approach aiming to interpret and understand the essence of lived experiences.

Research Context and Geographical Parameters

This study, conducted in Mardan, outlines the complexity of social and educational phenomena prevailing in the Pashtun region, where traditional patriarchal family and tribal education systems interact with a developing national education system. Urbanisation, rural traditionalism, and the rural environment blend in this area, with urban growth around Peshawar serving as a prime example. Mardan is one of the areas where the fusion between old values and modern education is evident. The present study adopts a multi-site field-based research and applies stratified sampling in various academic settings (rural, semi-urban, and suburban) in Mardan.

Table 1: Geographical and administrative representation of the participants

Tehsil	Union Councils
Tehsil Mardan	Chamtar, Baghdada, Mayar
Tehsil Takht Bhai	Parkho, Lund Khwar, Jalala
Tehsil Katlang	Qasmi, Kati Garhi, Kohi Bermol

This study discusses three administrative units (tehsils): Mardan, Katlang, and Takht Bhai. Three union councils were selected for geographical representation in each tehsil. In this regard, the union councils of Chamtar, Baghdada, and Mayar were chosen from the Tehsil Mardan. The union councils of Parkho, Lund Khwar, and Jalala were selected from the Tehsil Takht Bhai. The union councils of Qasmi, Kati Garhi, and Kohi Bermol were chosen from Tehsil Katlang.

Participant Selection and Sampling Strategy

The study selected purposive samples to ensure the researcher had representative and diverse samples that would cover different perspectives on the decision-making process of rural families on education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The theory behind the sampling is the patriarchal bargaining theory, which focuses on the input of male and female relatives in negotiating and making decisions regarding the education of girls in a male-dominated society. The main goal is to involve people with varying levels of influence in such decisions, as this complex process dictates the performance of the girls in rural areas.

Table 2: Demographic profile of interview participants ($n=40$)

Participant Category	Number (n)	Age Range (Years)	Gender	Family Role	Purpose of Inclusion
Girls	15	13–18	Female	Daughters	Directly affected by education decisions. Provided perspective on personal experiences, aspirations, and resistance strategies.
Mothers	12	35–45	Female	Primary caregivers	Key negotiators and advocates for daughters' education. Employed tactical bargaining within patriarchal constraints.
Fathers	8	40–55	Male	Primary decision-makers	Provided insight into attitudes, economic concerns, and the weight of cultural norms (honour, tradition) on decision-making.
Grandmothers	3	60–70	Female	Elder generation	Represented intergenerational attitudes and regrets. Often supported granddaughters' education based on their own missed opportunities.
Grandfathers	2	65–75	Male	Elder patriarchs	Embodied traditional, conservative views on gender roles and the irrelevance of female education.
Total	40				

The sample size used in this research was 40 participants, selected to reflect the various positions and experiences they possess in their decision-making regarding the education of girls. This case study directly analysed a sample of 15 young females aged 13 to 18 years. The girls were chosen since they were consulted on the education policy, which influenced their right to education. The sample respondents included 12 mothers. Although they live in a patriarchal society, women do all they can to educate their daughters, and they employ negotiation tactics to offer education to their children. Eight fathers and two grandfathers were selected because they are considered the primary decision-makers of families (in gender roles). Thus, attitudes towards the advantageousness, economic cost, and social pressures of girls' education can be

invaluable in learning more about the overall processes of the impact of patriarchy on education. The three grandmothers symbolise intergenerational attitudes towards educational decision-making. Information about the respondents highlighted the influence of the older generation's experiences on their granddaughters' educational choices and emphasised the role of mothers as role models in shaping their daughters' decisions. Theoretical saturation is a key factor in qualitative research. In this study, a sample size of 40 was considered adequate to meet the needs of the research process. Collecting additional samples was considered unnecessary to cover emerging information and problems. The recruitment process proceeded until the saturation was achieved to ensure that an inclusive sample population was used and that the research problems were well addressed.

Data Collection Protocols and Procedures

We used a qualitative design in our research, combining phenomenological interviews and systematic observations, focusing on field-based research to gain an understanding of the decision-making process on education in a household. The model assists in establishing family dynamics concerning education. The choice of these phenomenological interviews presupposed a feminine perspective (girls, mothers, and grandmothers), allowing participants to describe their educational opportunities, the impact of their emotions, and how they solved their problems. These negotiations brought forth the themes of hope, regret, resistance, and acceptance of educational opportunities. The other interviews were centred on males (fathers and grandfathers), their preference for academics, their perceptions of risks and benefits, the quality of family life, and the need to fend off attacks on the community. The growing capacity for learning and the ability to maintain culture and familial health reflect their perspective. The interviews had three main features: building trust, offering assistance with intricate narratives, and adding an emotional twist without violating ethical regulations. The report on the family environment in which learning conversations take place is based on the results of systematic observations and interviews. The content defines the organisation of space and rituals in the family, focusing on nonverbal communication and interpersonal relationships.

Thematic Analysis

The current research work followed the paradigm of thematic analysis, considering the articles developed by Naeem et al. (2023) and Deterding and Waters (2021) for an analysis of socio-cultural, economic, and family-related determinants leading to the educational choice of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rural girls in Pakistan. The process of analysis started with transcription and translation of the interview data; to get a sense of the authenticity of the voices of the interviewees, reverse translation methods were used between Pashto and English. This level of socialisation has the potential to help the researcher gain insightful knowledge about the life experiences of the participants. We opened and coded the data, and it gave us some of the major themes, which included patriarchal norms, economic constraints, and the role of girls. By using induction, the

data revealed patterns not anticipated to be found in the available categories, such as slight resistance, and the hopes and regrets of different generations. This article is a theoretical treatment of the reactions in different socio-economic contexts, discussing the conflict between the traditions of the patriarchy and the chances for girls of getting an education, particularly in rural and suburban regions. Qualitative data were automatically formatted and coded by NVivo software to conduct systematic analysis of subjects such as dowry and family honour. To guarantee the accuracy of the transcription, a member-checking method was used in which the members of the group were able to read and give their views on the results, which increased the credibility of the results. We make use of the patriarchal bargain introduced by Kandiyoti (1988) in explaining the negotiations that occur in families in terms of educational aspirations and limitations. We focus on the interactions of the girls of this area with the patrilineal system, family practices, and economic conditions in the context of pursuing school education.

Findings

Apart from these issues, there is also the problem of cultural taboos and structural restrictions on educating rural female students in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Poor economic conditions, a lack of infrastructure, and the insufficient involvement of female teachers have aggravated this. In this context, cultural gender roles are mainly geared towards modesty, the honour of the family, and collective responsibility, and hence, the education level of girls is restricted. Fathers and grandfathers, who are responsible for passing on patriarchal traditions, constitute the majority of household decision-makers.

Theme 1: Cultural and Structural Barriers to Girls' Education

There is a significant issue of cultural restrictions and structural barriers to the education of girls from rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This situation has been worsened by economic distress, lack of good infrastructure, and insufficient numbers of female teachers. Cultural gender roles, in this connection, are primarily geared towards modesty, the honour of the family, and collective responsibility, and thus end up restricting girls' education. Fathers and grandfathers are mostly the decision-makers who, in turn, perpetuate the traditions of patriarchy in the household. One of the fathers expressed his worries regarding the influence education has on social standing:

I am not against my daughter receiving an education, but our society has certain expectations. What would people say if she went to school? They will think she has become too independent, which will damage our reputation. (INT021, father, aged 50)

Similarly, a grandfather emphasised the tradition of restricting girls' access to education:

When I was young, we did not send girls to school. This is tradition, and nothing has really changed. Education is not so relevant for girls because their primary responsibility is at home. (INT022, grandfather, aged 70)

These views emphasise the influence that patriarchal institutions, in the sense of Kandiyoti (1988), have on negotiating power, in particular regarding gender expectations and family honour, and they demonstrate that patriarchal norms can put the education of rural girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in danger. The grandfathers' teachings are passed on to the next generation, supporting traditional gender roles that represent the cultural heritage and restricting female access to education. The interviews have shown the destructive effects of patriarchy on girls.

Theme 2: Emotional Resonance: The Hopes and Regrets of a Generation

The emotional reactions of the girls, their mothers, and their grandparents manifested in various forms of optimism, displeasure, and implicit resistance to educational restrictions. Many mothers would like to provide their daughters with a new future, and they would regret losing the opportunity to educate them. One mother explained how she felt about a missed opportunity:

As a child, I wanted to study, but my father stopped me. Now, I hope that my daughter will have opportunities that I have not had. It was not so easy trying to talk to my husband about this. (INT009, mother, aged 39)

Grandmothers shared their great wish that their granddaughters would have the opportunity they missed due to their inability to continue with their studies:

I always wanted to go to school, but my parents did not let me. Now, I hope that my granddaughter will be able to have the education that I did not have. However, the decision or choice always remains with her father. (INT020, grandmother, aged 63)

The interviews highlighted the intergenerational conflict regarding female education by placing it in the context of patriarchy, which supports the patriarchal bargaining of Kandiyoti (1988). Although male decision-makers still dominate educational decision-making, mothers and grandmothers have expressed their aspirations for the academic success of their daughters and granddaughters.

Theme 3: Girl Agents: Subtle Resistance and Negotiation in Education

The mothers and girls demonstrated skills in overcoming learning obstacles and frequently utilise communal resources to improve their learning. Their informal educational pursuits are creative, as they include borrowing books from neighbours and attending informal classes. One girl explained how she tried to carry on learning within relatively weak conditions:

Although I cannot go to school regularly, I still study through the books I find at home. I even read the newspaper my uncle brought. (INT008, girl, aged 16)

Mothers and grandmothers who are economically independent or have social authority usually speak out for their daughters' education. A widowed mother shared the positive methods she used to obtain permission for her daughter to attend school:

I have been working hard trying to raise my children. Now, what I want for my daughter is for her to study. I said to my brother, "My daughter will attend school, and I will somehow deal with the expenses." (INT011, mother, aged 44)

The testimony clearly highlights the importance of economic independence and negotiation in providing educational opportunities. Likewise, a mother who had successfully persuaded her husband to allow their daughter to be educated said:

My husband was initially against it, but I told him of the benefits of education for our daughter, and he eventually agreed. Now she is going to school regularly. (INT015, mother, aged 40)

The interviews also illustrated the beneficial aspect of women and girls preserving their position in the patriarchal system, which is congruent with the theory of patriarchal bargaining as argued by Kandiyoti (1988). Girls are adaptable due to independent learning, while mothers strategically offer learning in a culturally acceptable manner to influence male family members. These campaigns have encouraged women to strive to increase the educational access of girls, which is slowly being redefined within the confining patriarchal restrictions.

Theme 4: Consultative Autonomy in Education: Seeking Education within Cultural Boundaries

With some level of freedom, girls tend to undertake vocational training or informal education, which fulfils the expectations of their families. One girl, who did not want to attend a regular school, managed to identify a solution to combine her family duties and her wish to have an education:

I am not allowed to go to school, but I am learning how to sew. I do these activities to help my family, but I also have some time to read. This job is not what I want, but I can do it. (INT012, girl, aged 17)

Another girl recalled her negotiations with her father in pursuit of her dream of becoming a teacher:

I told my father about my dream of becoming a teacher. I told him that if I could receive an education, I could help this family. He finally agreed to let me have a few hours of classes every week. (INT013, girl, aged 17)

The negotiation in the patriarchal context and the adaptation strategies developed by the girls were the focus of the interviews, relating, as proposed by Kandiyoti (1988), to the theory of patriarchal transaction. By engaging in informal learning, one girl was able to navigate the limited educational options available to girls and support her family financially. Another girl, against all traditional norms and practices, extracted limited permission from her father to receive a formal education, which would not only assist the family but also further her social adaptation to patriarchal society. These instances indicate that girls can effectively accomplish educational objectives, although under a few conditions.

Theme 5: Striking a Balance between Tradition and Change in Educational Autonomy: The Role of Family and Culture

Girls' ability to access education is influenced by several factors, including cultural norms, economic status, and family. The decision-making power of male relatives is the most important factor. Nevertheless, mothers and grandmothers can have an extraordinary effect on the decision to pursue education, particularly those with economic or social status. One mother who insisted on sending her daughter to school was able to tell her story:

I convinced my husband that the teacher was a female, and it would not take long. I told him that it would be good for our daughter's future. After some struggle, he consented to let her go. (INT009, mother, aged 37)

The case demonstrates the importance of mothers in gaining access to schooling for their daughters against clear resistance from male relatives. In one of the interviews, it was seen how some mothers, particularly those who are economically and/or socially capable, understand the limits of education set by the norms of the traditional way of life. A mother who carries the burden of the family gave an account of her struggle for her daughter's education, despite the opposition of her male relatives:

I have always done my best to raise my children. Now, I want my daughter to receive an education that I could not receive. I have to be very tough with my brother and tell him that I will ensure she goes to school and cover all the expenses myself. (INT023, mother, aged 41)

The interview also shows that women are part of a patriarchal society and agree with the philosophy established by Kandiyoti (1988). When mothers assume this position, they promote the right of women teachers to receive an education and emphasise the positive impact of this right on their children. Furthermore, they present culturally relevant ideas to help the male population understand the need to educate girls better. These women could change the patriarchal system because they are known as teachers and economic innovators. They showed their persistence and ability to argue in their favour by skilfully manipulating patriarchal rules.

Theme 6: Future Aspirations through Education: Aspiration for Change

Despite social, family, and economic constraints, mothers and grandmothers have expressed a strong desire for educational change, hoping to create opportunities for themselves and their daughters. A grandmother recalled the opportunity she had missed and expressed her hope for her granddaughter's future:

I have never been to school, but I hope my granddaughter can have such an opportunity to go to school. I never had the chance, but perhaps my granddaughter could change some things for herself. (INT022, grandmother, aged 66)

This statement expresses the collective hope of young girls in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for a brighter future, as they believe that education can change their lives. Similarly, in another interview, a mother was brimming with confidence in her daughter's future, despite the difficulties they had to overcome:

Because of family pressure, I never got my studies done, but I wish my daughter might have the opportunity that I did not. Every time I think of her, I try to picture what a great person she is going to be after her graduation. I hope she can achieve the dream in her life despite facing challenges. (INT024, mother, aged 38)

The interviews conducted demonstrate Kandiyoti's (1988) claim that the patriarchal bargain signifies fundamental shifts in a society's desires and expectations over time. Grandparents and mothers lamented being deprived of their educational rights yet were keen to play an active part in the education of their daughters and granddaughters. As is evident, patriarchal laws have been changing as generations passed, demonstrating a wish to break the chains of educational oppression.

Discussion

The study explores the implications of patriarchal judgements on the education of rural women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as cultural and institutional restrictions and family structure. The study emphasises the prevalence of patriarchal values in the decision-making process. Fathers and grandfathers may make decisions with references to cultural concepts of family honour and the roles of men (Christianson, Teiler, and Eriksson 2021). Education affects the family image and, more specifically, the autonomy of girls on an individual level, making this dilemma more difficult to negotiate (Hasan et al. 2025; Khan et al. 2025). The results contribute to reinforcing the previously existing statistics that demonstrate patriarchal values in South Asian countries (Aslam 2009), where there is a complicated interplay between social practices and girls' education.

However, the research found favourable strategies that can be followed by mothers, grandmothers, and girls to overcome the problems, highlighting the important role of mothers in securing the right of the girl child to an education (Aubel 2024; Khalid 2023). The inference obtained after conducting this study is that, although women have limited

influence in the family, they access education by finding creative ways to resist. The outcome aligns with past research about the agency of women in patriarchal settings (Aikman and Rao 2012; Khan et al. 2021). What generations view as the development of variations within the patriarchal order are different outcomes of the attempts made by women of the past generation to ensure a better life for their offspring, despite all the challenges they encounter. Such growth is particularly remarkable among low-income families, as education is considered the most powerful tool to provide previously unattainable opportunities (Cooper and Pugh 2020). The concept refers to intergenerational contact, where parents have made efforts to raise their children, demonstrating the elasticity of patriarchy as described by Kandiyoti (1988). Some daughters may experience frustration due to emotional dynamics, largely stemming from a lack of awareness of their educational opportunities. However, knowledge is a transformative process, characterised by intense emotions and palpable intentions to assist future generations. Previously, researchers have focused less on the emotional aspects of the decision space and more on the economic or structural aspects (Khan et al. 2025; Khan and Sharif 2025; Pham 2007).

Research Limitations and Policy Implications

This article investigated the impact of patriarchal values on educational decision-making in some parts of Pakistan. The limitations associated with this study are the geographic focus and the subjectivity of the qualitative interview process. This suggests that future studies should adopt a holistic hybrid solution approach to understanding education choices in different social and cultural contexts. Although the patriarchal bargaining model functions to facilitate the analysis of culture, economy, and education relations, certain areas of participation are not similarly addressed as a function of class, “race”, and urban-rural relations. Based on this study, it is essential to develop inclusive education policies that reflect the problems of women and point to the critical position of mothers and grandparents in the process of education decision-making. The study’s implications suggest preparing women and involving community leaders in rural education activities to overcome patriarchal dispositions towards girls’ enrolment in education. Furthermore, nonformal education programmes need to be promoted in areas where formal education is not well developed. The study’s findings indicate low levels of opposition and negotiation despite the existence of patriarchal constraints within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Still, women and girls have perceived this as sufficient in empowering them.

Conclusion

The argument has been enriched with the patriarchal bargain theory of Deniz Kandiyoti, who describes the influence of men on the education of women in rural areas, such as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan. This research report has indicated gender norms and limited financial resources as being the main constraints to female education. In this qualitative research, the researchers analyse how females, their mothers, and their grandmothers negotiate male power in decision-making to defend their right to

education. Some of the most common factors that influence girls' access to education are a change in financial conditions, the absence of opportunities for study, and social beliefs that encourage the position of women in a family. However, there is a section of less rigid people who are primarily women, particularly mothers, who can contribute much to improving the education of their children. This article shows that the conservative attitude towards education has become more progressive, suggesting that inclusive strategies have become more significant in identifying the role of mothers and grandparents in promoting access to education. Non-formal schools are critical for increasing awareness in communities where girls cannot access formal education. Despite the challenges girls encounter in the educational landscape, families can take various steps to enhance girls' educational opportunities.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Data Availability

The study data are not available because they may compromise participants' confidentiality.

Ethics Statement

Interviewed participants provided written informed consent with their signatures.

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