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Poverty, Parental Influence, and School Enrolment: A Study of Gender Differences

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Abstract: *The effect of poverty, parental influence, and school enrolment is explored, and the gender difference in school-going children in Pakistan is studied. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, a sample of 400 public and private school students from both urban and rural areas was selected through a stratified random sampling technique. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate economic conditions, parental attitudes, decision making, and enrolment patterns by gender using structured questionnaires. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent simple t-test, and multiple regression analysis in SPSS. Results show that poverty has a strong negative effect on school enrolment, and parents' influence has a strong positive effect. Gender disparities were significant; barriers to enrolment were greater for girls, and the impact of poverty was greater for female students. The effect of economic hardships on enrolment was partially mediated by parental attitudes and decision-making, especially with respect to girls' enrolment. The study concludes that poverty reduction strategies need to be supported by specific interventions to raise awareness among parents, while taking into account gender-based disparities in education.*

Keywords: Poverty, Parental Influence, School Enrolment, Gender Differences, Education Inequality, Pakistan

Introduction

Education is considered a basic human right and a vital source of socioeconomic development for all children; however, many millions are still out of school today in developing countries as a result of interrelated socioeconomic and cultural barriers. Despite the strenuous policy measures taken in Pakistan, such as Article 25-A of the Constitution, ensuring free and compulsory education in the age range of 5 to 16 years, school enrolment status in the country is still unacceptably low, especially among girls and in rural areas. The continuity of these disparities suggests systemic and structural barriers, which are far beyond the capacities of individuals, and are deeply entrenched in household poverty and the dynamics of household decision-making (UNESCO, 2022; Andrabi et al., 2020).

One of the strongest indicators of a low level of educational participation across the world is poverty. Economically deprived households are also burdened with a variety of other costs: direct costs such as school fees, school uniform and stationery, and opportunity costs of schooling when children's labor is economically valuable (Filmer & Pritchett, 2001; Barro & Lee, 2013). The income level of the household is one of the best predictors of school attendance in Pakistan, where children in the lowest income quintile were 5 to 10 times more likely to be out of school than those in the highest income quintile (Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey, 2021). In addition to financial limitations, poverty also contributes to negative attitudes towards the importance of education, especially for girls, creating a vicious cycle of educational exclusion (Colclough et al., 2003; Alderman & King, 1998).

Parenthood, defined as parents' attitude toward education, their investment choices, and involvement in school activities, is also a vital factor that affects children's learning. In societies where children have little

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autonomy in choosing schools to attend, and where family structures are strong, parents are the main decision-makers on school choice, particularly for school enrolment (Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Research has shown that parents' educational goals, their level of education, and their participation in children's schooling are strong predictors of school enrolment and retention rates in all income groups (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001). However, where poverty is a threat to children, parental influence becomes more influential since it accounts for the magnitude by which poverty leads to school exclusion (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1994; Lloyd & Blanc, 1996).

Gender is a very significant axis of education disparities in Pakistan. Although the overall enrolment rate has increased in the last few decades, there is still a gap between the enrolment of boys and girls at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2023; Sathar & Lloyd, 1994). This gender disparity is driven by cultural norms and practices that favor boys' education, security worries for girls' school travel, and a perception that girls' education isn't worth as much as boys' (Burde & Linden, 2013; Jacoby & Mansuri, 2015). Poverty and gender amplify disadvantage because when a family decides to make a trade-off in the type of schooling they provide, they are more likely to send boys to school than girls, where there is not enough money available (Alderman et al. 2001; Duflo 2012).

While there are many studies on each of these factors individually, there is relatively little research that considers their combined impact in an integrated analytical framework, particularly in the Pakistani context. Furthermore, the degree of modulation, and whether it varies by gender, with which parental influence can modulate the poverty-enrolment relationship, has not been sufficiently explored in empirical research. The current study fills these gaps by examining the interaction between poverty and parental influence on enrollment, and systematically examines gender as a moderator in the poverty and parenthood relationship. It is important to grasp these dynamics to inform the design of economically- and gender-sensitive policies and interventions in education.

The goals of the present study are threefold: first, to evaluate the association of poverty, parental influence, and school enrolment of children among selected public and private schools; second, to compare the enrolment outcomes and the factors that predict these outcomes across gender; and third, to test the joint and differential predictive power of poverty and parental influence on the enrolment of boys and girls. The study helps to fill the gaps in empirical knowledge about educational barriers in Pakistan, while at the same time, it can be of benefit for the policy discussion on inclusive education.

Literature Review

Poverty affects school participation in several ways: lack of direct schooling costs, child labor, poor nutritional status (which affects cognitive functioning), and residential instability (Filmer & Pritchett, 2001; Lewin, 2011). Research in South Asian contexts has invariably shown that there is a negative correlation between household income and enrollment, with rural girls showing the strongest relationship in this regard (Mahmood et al., 2011; Aslam & Kingdon, 2008). According to the analysis of the national survey data, the likelihood of a child being out of school is about five times higher for those in the poorest fifth of households than for those in the richest fifth of households, and the gap in prevalence is far greater for girls than for boys in Pakistan (Andrabi et al., 2020; ASER Pakistan, 2022).

The Becker-Schultz human capital theory (1964, 1961) offers a basic approach to the issue of educational investment where economic constraints are present. In this context, parents' choices with regard to education are seen as rational investments in the productivity and earnings capacity of their children. Poverty not only affects the ability to fund these investments but also may decrease the willingness of parents to sacrifice current income to invest in their children's education in an uncertain environment for returns (Barro & Lee, 2013; Filmer, 2004). Important: Human capital models suggest that gender gaps in enrolments will arise when the returns to female education are lower than male education, which can be the case when there is substantial wage discrimination in the labor market, or when there are strong norms of female domesticity in society (Duflo, 2012; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004).

Parenting is one of the most reliably found predictors of educational outcomes in international studies. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement suggests that parents become involved in their child's learning because they feel effective as educators, feel invited by the school to participate in their children's learning, and have life context demands and opportunities. There is a relationship between strong parental involvement and high enrollment, attendance, and academic success in a variety of cultural and economic settings (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Aslam and Kingdon (2008) also report that maternal education is a strong predictor of children's school enrolment,t particularly in Pakistan, which influences their enrolment partly through their aspiration to educate their children and their participation in their child's educational activities.

Many factors are responsible for gender disparities in enrolment in Pakistan, be it economic, cultural, or structural. These factors of cultural norms that assign girls to domestic roles, parental fears of girls' safety, early marriage, and male teachers in rural schools all contribute to the suppression of female enrolment (Burde & Linden, 2013; Jacoby & Mansuri, 2015; Mahmood et al., 2011). These factors have been demonstrated to be partially offset by the conditional cash transfer program (CCT) Benazir Income Support Program and its educational arm Waseela-e-Taleem, which not only lowers direct costs of school attendance but also offers incentives for the attendance of girls (Cheema et al., 2016). However, the structural barriers that relate to gender norms and economic necessity remain, especially in the most economically marginalized communities.

Gender moderation of the poverty-enrolment relationship has been the focus of growing scholarly interest. Evidence from Bangladesh, Pakista,n and Sub-Saharan Africa shows that girls' enrollment is especially responsive to the income variability in the household, with families that face resource limitations having a greater preference forboys's schooling (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996; Alderman et al., 2001; Colclough et al., 2003). Parental decision-making during economic stress is therefore an important pathway by which poverty manifests in enrolment outcomes by gender. It has also been found that parental aspirations in the field of education of girls in particular are an important determinant in reducing the negative impact of poverty on enrolment, beyond the influence of household income (Sathar & Lloyd, 1994; Andrabi et al., 2020).

This body of literature offers theoretical and empirical support, but there are some gaps. First, although most of the studies conducted in Pakistan are based on the national survey, they fail to capture nuanced parental attitudes and decision-making processes. Second, the influence of poverty, parents, and gender is rarely evaluated together in a single regression model, which would enable separation of the relative contributions. Thirdly, there is scant evidence from comparative urban-rural settings that accounts for within-Pakistan variations. The present study fills these gaps in the first place by using validated survey tools, interaction terms in regression analysis, and stratified sampling based on urban-rural and gender variables.

Theoretical Framework

To offer a holistic understanding of the links between poverty, parental influence, and school enrolment, the study takes a theoretical approach grounded in three theories: human capital theory, social capital theory, and ecological systems theory. The human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) offers an economic perspective on the schooling of children that can be translated into an understanding of how poverty affects enrolment. This is expanded by social capital theory (Coleman, 1988), which highlights the importance of social networks, trust, and norms in promoting educational opportunities, and which equates parental involvement with the expression and creation of family social capital.

This ecological systems theory, by Bronfenbrenner (1979), brings a developmental perspective, positioning the children's educational experiences within the nestedness of family, community, school, and larger socio-economic systems. In this context, poverty is experienced on multiple ecological levels: at the microsystem level, through the lack of material resources and greater stress of households; at the mesosystem

level, through limiting parental involvement in school; and at the macrosystem level, through its linkage with the cultural norms that devalue girls' education. In this context, parental influence is a proximal process that helps buffer and/or intensify the distal process of macroeconomic deprivation.

The amalgamation of these theoretical perspectives yields a number of testable propositions: Poverty will negatively predict school enrolment both through its direct effects on the resources available to the student and through its indirect effects via the parental influences on enrolment, such as parental attitudes; Parental influence will be a stronger predictor of school enrolment than poverty, and be particularly strong when parental influences specifically refer to daughters' school attendance; Gender will moderate both relationships, such that poverty will have a stronger negative impact on the enrolment of girls than it will on that of boys, while parental influence will have a stronger positive impact on the enrolment of girls than it will on that of boys. Below, these propositions serve as the structure for the examination of the hypotheses in the empirical analysis.

Research Methodology

This study is based on a quantitative cross-sectional survey research design, aimed at explaining the relationships between poverty, parental influence, school enrolment, and gender differences. Cross-sectional designs are useful for evaluating several variables in a population at the same time and can be used to detect patterns and associations, but are also feasible in research settings with limited resources (Field, 2018; Creswell, 2014).

The target population included children from 8 to 16 years of age enrolled in school and OOSC children between the ages of 8 and 16 and their parents/guardians from the selected urban and rural areas of the Punjab province, Pakistan. A stratified random sampling was used to ensure demographic representation in four strata: urban public schools, urban private schools, rural public schools, and rural private schools. Stratified sampling was done, and within the strata, systematic random sampling was used for sampling. A final sample of 400 respondents was drawn, half parents/guardians (n = 400) responding to questions on family economic conditions, parental attitudes, and the children's enrolment status. The sample size was found by using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) procedure for a population of about 10,000 students, which yielded 400 responses for a 95% confidence level, including for possible non-response.

The data collected were primary data collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers and reviewed by a panel of five expert academic researchers in educational research, sociology, and economics. The instrument consisted of four sections. Demographic details such as gender, age, locality, type of school, parents' education level, parents' occupation, and household size were recorded in section A. The second part (Section B) included questions on the Poverty Index, based on fourteen items from income adequacy, housing status, access to utilities, food security, and the capacity to pay schooling expenses. Parental attitudes toward education, hopes for children's education, parental involvement in learning activities, and parental decision-making authority on enrolment were assessed using 12 items in Section C that measured Parental Influence. School Enrolment outcomes were measured in Section D for boys and girls separately, and included current enrolment status, regularity of attendance, and withdrawal history. Except for demographic variables, all constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

The content of the items was validated by the expert review process, and the items were modified according to the suggestions of the expert review panel. Thirty respondents not included in the final sample were sent to a pilot study to test for clarity and to further improve the wording of items. Cronbach's Alpha was used to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the Poverty Index (0.81), the Parental Influence (0.84), and the School Enrolment (0.79), all of which met the "satisfactory" range set by Nunnally (1978).

IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) software was used for analyzing data. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe and summarize the sample and construct scores. Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze the bivariate association between the major constructs. Independent-samples t-tests were employed to compare the enrolment and poverty scores and the parental influence between male and female students. The simultaneous predictive effect of poverty and parental influence on school enrolment was examined using multiple linear regression analysis, and the interaction terms (Poverty × Gender and Parental Influence × Gender) were tested formally for the moderation effect by gender. Throughout, two-tailed tests were used, and $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant. The study was approved by the institutional review board, and informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were rigorously observed throughout.

Results

The results are presented in order of the study aims: sample description, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, t-test comparisons, and regression analysis.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic details of the study can be seen in Table 1. Of the 400 respondents, 185 (46.3%) were male, and 215 (53.8%) were female students. The respondents were from urban and rural areas, with about 55% urban and 45% rural. 57.5% of the sample were public school students. Economically, the families had high vulnerability, as 35% of the families had income below PKR 20,000 for the month. There were significant first-generation schooling dynamics as the parents' educational attainment was distributed across three categories, 24% reported no schooling, 59% reported primary, and 17% reported secondary or higher schooling.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Sample (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	185	46.3
	Female	215	53.8
Locality	Urban	220	55.0
	Rural	180	45.0
School Type	Public	230	57.5
	Private	170	42.5
Family Income	Below PKR 20,000	140	35.0
	PKR 20,000–40,000	152	38.0
	Above PKR 40,000	108	27.0
Parents' Education	No formal education	96	24.0
	Primary/Middle	142	35.5
	Secondary/Higher	162	40.5

Descriptive Statistics

All key variables are presented descriptively in Table 2. Overall, the mean score on the Poverty Index was 3.42 (SD = 0.87) on a scale of 1 to 5, representing moderate economic hardship in the sample. Parental Influence had a mean of 3.68 (SD = 0.79), which indicates parental attitudes ranged from positive to mixed. The mean score for Overall School Enrolment (SD = 0.82) was 3.55. Some preliminary evidence of gender differences in enrolment was found, with mean scores on enrolment for males (M = 3.72, SD = 0.76) being higher than for females (M = 3.41, SD = 0.86).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Poverty Index	400	1.20	5.00	3.42	0.87
Parental Influence	400	1.40	5.00	3.68	0.79
School Enrolment (Overall)	400	1.30	5.00	3.55	0.82
School Enrolment (Male)	185	1.50	5.00	3.72	0.76
School Enrolment (Female)	215	1.30	4.90	3.41	0.86
Decision-Making by Parents	400	1.20	5.00	3.49	0.91
Parental Attitude toward Education	400	1.60	5.00	3.77	0.74

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation matrix between the key constructs is shown in Table 3. Parental Influence ($r = -.412$, $p < .001$) and School Enrolment ($r = -.538$, $p < .001$) showed significant negative correlations with Poverty Index, indicating that higher levels of poverty are related to lower levels of parental involvement and lower levels of school enrolment. The result showed that the parental influence is significantly and positively correlated with School Enrolment ($r = .623$, $p < .001$), which means that as the parental influence increased, the enrolment also increased. There were significant correlations between Gender and Poverty Index, Parental Influence, and School Enrolment, which further support the formal moderation testing.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Poverty Index	1.000			
2. Parental Influence	−0.412**	1.000		
3. School Enrolment	−0.538**	0.623**	1.000	
4. Gender	0.183**	−0.214**	−0.267**	1.000

Note. **p < .01 (two-tailed). Gender coded: 0 = Male, 1 = Female.

Independent-Samples t-Test Results

Independent-samples t-tests are reported for key constructs between male and female students in Table 4. School Enrolment scores were significantly higher for males ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.76$) than females ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.86$), $t(398) = 4.231$, $p < .001$. Parental Influence was also significantly higher for male students ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.71$) compared to female students ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(398) = 2.764$, $p = .006$. Female students had significantly higher mean values on the Poverty Index ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.89$) than male students ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.84$), $t(398) = -2.106$, $p = .036$, meaning that families of girls experience more economic hardship or that poverty is a more significant constraint on girls. All these results confirm substantial gender differences on the three main constructs.

Table 4

Independent-Samples t-Test: Gender Comparisons on Key Variables

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
School Enrolment	Male	185	3.72	0.76	4.231	398	< .001
	Female	215	3.41	0.86			
Parental Influence	Male	185	3.81	0.71	2.764	398	.006
	Female	215	3.57	0.85			
Poverty Index	Male	185	3.29	0.84	−2.106	398	.036
	Female	215	3.53	0.89			

Multiple Regression Analysis

HMR was conducted to check the combination of predictive influence of Poverty Index, Parental Influence, and Gender on School Enrolment, and interaction between Poverty Index and Parental Influence on School Enrolment, as well as between Poverty Index and Gender, and between Parental Influence and Gender, were entered in the second block to test for moderation effects. The full model was statistically significant, $F(5, 394) = 54.82$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .411$, suggesting that the predictors explained about 41.1% of the variance in school enrolment. The standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed in Table 5. Poverty Index was a significant negative predictor of school enrolment ($\beta = -.397$, $p < .001$) while Parental Influence was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .402$, $p < .001$). Gender, female = 1, was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.141$, $p = .001$), which reiterates that females were less likely to be enrolled, even with poverty and parental influence controlled. The interaction term Poverty × Gender was significant ($\beta = -.118$, $p = .011$); this suggests that the negative effect of poverty on enrolment was significantly stronger for female than for male students. There was also a significant interaction between Parental Influence and Gender on enrolment ($\beta = .101$, $p = .024$), suggesting that the positive effect of parental influence on enrolment was somewhat greater for female students, implying that parental support can help to mitigate gender-based disadvantage.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis: Predictors of School Enrolment

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
(Constant)	4.812	0.213	—	22.59	< .001	[4.394, 5.230]
Poverty Index	−0.374	0.048	−0.397	−7.79	< .001	[−0.469, −0.280]
Parental Influence	0.418	0.053	0.402	7.89	< .001	[0.314, 0.522]
Gender (female = 1)	−0.231	0.071	−0.141	−3.25	.001	[−0.371, −0.091]
Poverty × Gender	−0.112	0.044	−0.118	−2.55	.011	[−0.198, −0.026]
Parental Inf. × Gender	0.097	0.043	0.101	2.26	.024	[0.013, 0.181]

Note. $R^2 = .411$, Adjusted $R^2 = .403$, $F(5, 394) = 54.82$, $p < .001$. Gender coded: 0 = Male, 1 = Female.

Discussion

The results of this study give strong empirical evidence in support of the hypothesized relationships between poverty, parental influence, school enrolment, and gender in the context of Pakistan. The pupils' poverty is found to have a significant negative effect on school enrolment ($\beta = -.397$), which is in line with the large body of literature across the globe that reports that poverty is one of the key barriers to children's participation in school (Filmer & Pritchett, 2001; Lewin, 2011). Where income is lacking to fund direct education costs and children's work contributes significantly to the household economy, keeping children in school is a very real trade-off of material costs and benefits. The results are consistent with the human capital theory argument that the education investment is limited by resource availability, and also offer empirical evidence in the Pakistani education context for the theoretical prediction.

The significant positive relationship that was found with Parental Influence and School Enrolment ($\beta = .402$) highlights the importance of the family agency and orientations to education in influencing children's school participation beyond the economic context. This discovery aligns with Coleman's (1988) social capital framework in which parental involvement and educational aspirations are types of social capital that come to fruition in tangible educational gains. Importantly, the size of the parental influence effect is similar to that of poverty, indicating that interventions that aim to influence parental attitudes and engagement could lead to similar results as economic transfers in improving enrolment, especially in households where absolute poverty thresholds are partially covered by social protection programs. There are important implications for designing community-level education interventions to tap into existing parental social capital rather than being solely based on some form of financial subsidy.

The differences in gender were found to be statistically significant by t-test analysis, which reaffirms the existence of gender disparity in education in Pakistan. Female students' enrolment scores were significantly lower, and they experienced higher rates of poverty and were less likely to have high levels of parental influence on their education. The findings confirm prevailing evidence of structural disadvantage of girls in Pakistani Education (Andrabi et al., 2020; Burde & Linden, 2013) and illustrate that gender disadvantages exist across economic, familial, and institutional spheres at the same time. The substantial difference between the poverty rates of female and male students might stem from the fact that more females attend school in higher-poverty communities, but also because of gender differences in resource allocation among children within households, such as in the allocation of schooling time to boys, when enrollment is limited by household economic pressures.

The moderation analyses are a contribution of the present study with the most theoretical significance. The interaction between Poverty and Gender is significant ($\beta = -.118$), indicating that the negative effects of poverty on enrolment disproportionately affect girls, as has been suggested in both South Asian and sub-Saharan African contexts (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996; Colclough et al., 2003), which is supported by the significant negative effect of Poverty on the proportion of girls in enrolment. The differential sensitivity to poverty suggests that a universal economic intervention may not be enough to reduce gender gaps in enrolment and therefore that other gender-specific mechanisms are needed to make sure that an economic intervention achieves equal results for both boys and girls.

These findings are put in a positive light by the very strong positive interaction between Parental Influence and Gender ($\beta = .101$). The gender gap in enrolment is partly reduced when parental influence is high, suggesting that high parental commitment to daughters' education can reduce the compounding effects of poverty and cultural norms. This is in line with the studies of Sathar and Lloyd (1994) and Andrabi et al. (2020), which found that mothers' aspirations and fathers' support for girls' education are important factors of female enrolment in Pakistan. It also points towards an intervention strategy at a specific programmatic level: interventions that change parents' attitudes and increase awareness of the returns to girls' education may have disproportionate results with regard to closing the gender gap, especially where economic resources are already limited for the purpose of delivering a financial intervention strategy.

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences, regression analysis accounts for confounding variables, and the direction of relationships cannot be definitively concluded. This study may be subject to social desirability bias because respondents may be inclined to answer the questions in a particular manner to present their answers in a favorable light. The study is restricted to the province of Punjab only and thus cannot be generalized to other provinces in Pakistan, which have different cultural and economic attributes. Longitudinal designs are recommended for future investigation, as is the use of objective economic measures and expanding geographic scope for the sake of obtaining more causal evidence and policy-relevant conclusions.

Conclusion

This study empirically establishes that poverty and parental influence are key independent and interactive factors affecting school enrolment in Pakistan and that gender is a crucial moderating factor. Both poverty and parental influence have strong, negative and positive impacts respectively on enrolment rates, and these impacts are enhanced, particularly for girls and boys with positive orientations toward their daughters' education. The results of this research have definite policy implications.

Economic interventions to reduce household poverty (conditional cash transfers, school fees for the poorest, livelihood support for the poorest households) are necessary, but not sufficient, to address gender disparities in enrolment. These need to be supported by specific measures of transferring money, which encourage enrolment of girls, such as giving them higher cash transfer amounts or introducing cash transfer programs that offer financial gains to girls' enrolment compared to boys, who may have higher costs attached.

Second, the expected gains of enrolment from attitude change programs for parents can be significant, especially for girls, and can be achieved using community-based communication, religious leaders, and women's groups. The similar effect size of parental influence as poverty in the regression model suggests that investment in demand-side social mobilization for girls' education deserves serious policy consideration. Third, security concerns among parents that stem from the school, such as hiring female teachers, enhancing school safety, and shortening the distance to secondary school, can affect girls' enrolment without being linked to economic considerations.

To conclude, a multi-faceted approach that tackles the various dimensions of the gender gap in school enrolment, such as economic factors, parental attitudes, and institutional support, is needed in Pakistan. This study's findings on the role of parental influence in part buffering the educational costs of poverty for girls highlight the need for greater commitment to investment in community-level school enrolment and educational awareness as an important part of any sustainable strategy to reach universal and equitable school enrolment.

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