

## Following Them in the Footprints: The Effect of Parental Illiteracy on the Drop-Out of Their Children

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**Abstract:** This study examined the effect of parental illiteracy on the continuation of their male children's education. This study adopted a case study approach, thus only one village (Shikraybaba) of District Mardan was taken as case study. However, the unique characteristics of this study was the bi-strata treatment, i.e., the inclusion of both parental and grand-parental strata in an attempt to know the effect of parental illiteracy on the continuation of their children's (in our case, their sons') education at primary level. Simple random sampling method was used to take the sample for the study and thus 20 out of about 200 houses/families were taken as the sample. It was supposed that the parental trend of having not gone to school would sift through down to the parental level and would result in their being the same. Also the same was supposed about the children-level illiteracy (standing at 96% percent). The astonishing fact is that none of the grandfathers of the selected families were found educated or literate.

**Key words:** Illiteracy • Parental • House/Family • Grand Parental • Strata Head of Families (HoFs)

### INTRODUCTION

Illiteracy has been found as one of the factors which pave the way to primary level drop-out in male students. Pakistan has been there amongst countries which have a greater ratio of male illiteracy. Our over-all picture regarding illiteracy is awesome. According to past research, some of districts of Pakistan have as abysmal illiteracy rate as 80% of the total population [1].

This means that as much as 5 of every 6 children are illiterate in these districts which mean that more than 80 percent of parents will be illiterate. The phenomenon is further aggravated by another statistical fact that illiteracy has been especially high amongst the female population of rural areas. Rural women's unjustifiable rate of illiteracy can be held one of the most serious factors of their sons' drop-out from primary schools. An illiterate girl or woman means an illiterate sister or mother which is equally dangerous for smooth on goings of educational and academic progress of male population both in shape of brothers and also in form of sons. Female population in status of sister or mother contributes a lot to the educational prosperity of any given community. In Pukhtoon areas especially, the house-hold environment is greatly influenced by literate women. They are more cooperative and necessarily useful for the educational

achievement and facilitation of the male children. Pakistan with the prospective status of the 4<sup>th</sup> largest nation of the world by 2050 [2] cannot survive without eliminating parental illiteracy. Every effort goes futile as far as father does not know what really can accelerate academic progress of their children. Parents and especially father have the decision making power in the domestic atmosphere of a typical Pukhtoon rural home and what he says cannot, under any circumstances, be modified or challenged by someone else. Therefore the future generation of rural Pukhtoon fathers in specific and parental strata of the Pakistani society in general needs to get out of the realm of illiteracy and therefore indifference to education of children. Otherwise, illiteracy on behalf of parents and especially fathers will keep the whirlpool and vicious circle of dropping out of children from basically needed primary education. And this ignorance of parents will leave us of no use as fathers to give our children a chance to compete with our rivals on the front of educational achievement and progress. One of the issues coming out of the illiteracy and therefore unrealistic attitude of such parents to the real objectives of children's education is there approach to education as only a tool to get good government jobs. This is why they will be seen quoting examples of people who even though have completed higher education, seem

roaming here and there without any government job. This approach to the education of children would otherwise have been null and void in their eyes had they been able to know for themselves the various other explicit and implicit benefits of education in the life of an individual. But even if we assume that education should give the individual good lucrative jobs and especially government jobs, then the problem can only be traced back to the poor quality of education imparted and acquired. The poor and lamentable quality of education in the public primary schools of rural areas is a thing of serious and special concern. Therefore, quality of education should be enhanced in all public schools in general and in the rural public primary schools in specific, in order to lure more parental attention towards and voluntarism for their children's education in a country where about "71% of primary education schools are located in rural areas" [3].

Parents and more specifically the poor and ignorant parents are unable to see any substantial changes in the life and behavior of their educated children. This might cause them to opt in favor of or at least not against drop-out. Most of them seem to be in favor of complete staying-away of their children from the hustle and bustle of educational life and academic engagements. The poor quality of our primary education as imparted in the public schools is a dire menace which is one of the largely responsible factors of absenteeism of children to as grave an intensity as "30%" in some instances as per UNESCO's report in 2007 (p.2). Out of absenteeism may come the evil of drop-out in many instances? [4].

Parents' illiteracy also affects children's competency. The children of poor parents are more often less competent than those of the literate and educated parents. There has been enough evidence to the fact that parents are more conscious of their children's low level of competency overlooking the fact that this in reality finds its roots in their very illiteracy and ignorance. No uneducated father can plan, program and execute his children's educational life and future success. He might be misled by what others are doing for their sons because requirement of every child is different from every other. Thus poor competency of children is majorly related to parents' illiteracy [5]. Illiterate parents even feel shy or at least seem ignorant of the importance of showing up in the annual parents days held at schools. It is almost the single biggest event and opportunity in which and when they can discuss their sons' academic performance with their teachers [6]. Illiterate parents are also responsible for poor health care of their children. Health care problems result in regular absence of students from schools.

This affects their academic performance in two ways;

- By lapse of quite a few lessons taught during his sickness and illness days.
- By mentally making him weak and exhausted that goes against better classroom achievement.

Both of the above mentioned affects of poor health of students can result in their poor or no achievement which makes it a futile business in the eyes of illiterate parents to bear the trouble of taking out their children from the economic or domestic activities which would otherwise have been their major contribution in the household economy or general routine. With respect to fewer or no higher-education precedents in the family, illiteracy of parents is the instrumental force and exemplary situation. Children and students are generally inspired by family and friends precedents and examples. If a child finds no immediate example of higher education, his primary school education will seldom be thought possible to be completed or at least to provide sustainable foundation for higher studies. Thus there should be role-models for students with respect to any particular objective. Family and friends precedents encourages towards acquisition of knowledge and its successful completion [7].

In research studies teachers have voiced great concern over illiterate parents' indifference to get themselves benefited of the education of their children [7]. This not only means that they are unaware of ways and means to better education planning of their children but also their inefficiency in dealing with their children's education-related issues systematically and with cool and calm attitude. Illiterate parents are emotionally very easily inflammable. They most often possess extreme social, political and religious emotionality. This over emotionality and extremism is an index of their superficial understanding of situation which otherwise demand deeper knowledge and longer observational stamina.

The illiterate think about pros and cons of an action after its execution and therefore they are more often confused as to how something should be done. Parental decision to cause their children's drop-out or leave the continuation of their children's education at the disposal of their young-minded off-spring, is based on the unrealistic attitude of such parents towards not only educational but also social development of their children. Such view is held and expressed in the National Education Policy [8].

The illiteracy of parents and guardians can be otherwise utilized in favor of continuation of their children

and wards education. This end can be achieved by making it more abhorrent in their eyes to be an uneducated father or mother. They can be made aware, in various ways, of the problems that others as illiterate and ignorant parents are facing. They can be briefed about how better they could organize the local and domestic environment socially, culturally, politically and economically. They can be made conscious about how come their illiteracy affect their young ones' lives and attitude. The common solution to all this situation of illiteracy prevailing on parental level in the rural areas is a comprehensive adult education program. Help can be taken from example of measures undertaken by Literacy and Mass Education Commission (LAMEC).

An easily understandable approach can be seen in shape of 'each one teach one' program as introduced by General Zia Ul Haq in his era, irrespective of how much successful it was in his time [9]. Regarding the illiteracy of parents and its impact on smooth flow of activities of primary school boys, our findings are almost identical but a bit local in nature and outlook.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Participants:** Subjects of the research included 20 families selected from a total of about 200 families/houses in the village taken as the population of the research in a cluster sampling way.

The researchers knew all the families in person. For further clarification regarding any grey areas as far as the subjects educational status was concerned, they were contacted in person. It was taken care of that their status would be confirmed by looking at any sort of document (School Leaving Certificate etc) in case they should come up with positive response to their being educated. That being impossible, their verbal testimony was counter-verified by contacting their then class fellows and/or teacher and it is to be noted here that the senior most primary school teacher of the village is still alive and his kind assistance with detailed discussion in this respect is greatly acknowledged hereby.

**Delimitation of the Study:** An observation table was designed in order to record the relevant responses/information. The study was not only delimited to parental level of education and drop-out of children but some other relevant aspects like socio-economic status etc. were also taken into consideration and in this paper only parental literacy was studied with respect to children's (delimited to male children only).

**Procedure:** At an initial meeting with all heads of the families (HoFs) and their sons, the participants gave informed consent. Each consent form contained and assigned identification number in which the participants were requested for the information. The date and time for meeting them was fixed at their disposal. Separate meeting with each and every participant was fixed as far as their time-scheduling was concerned. Two days after the initial meeting, participants were informed of the researcher's meeting with them at 10:00 am and it was done on the phone in the morning. The researcher met with the participants at their guest houses or nearby hujra (the Pukhtoon community center).

Two of the twenty HoFs couldn't spare time as they had immediate urgent tasks, while nine of the participants felt that they could better be available for more time some other time/day. The two HoFs, therefore, on contact by mobile, consented to be available at different times next day and the same was the case with most of the other nine participants, while two of them were away for some days to attend a funeral of their relative in the nearby district. They were met after three days and thus the data was collected from all the participants.

**Analysis/Results:** The analysis of status of school education of parents of all the seventy sons of the HoFs is hereby given. This observation was focused at assessment of the educational position of the seventy sons of the twenty selected families' heads. Only 3 sons' fathers were educated out of seventy. The result percentage for those sons who had received school education and as indicated by the response term "yes" is 4.2%. The observation result indicates that as much as 67 out of 70 sons of the HoFs did not have parents who were educated in the school. Outcome of this category's analysis proves that as much as 95.7% of the sons selected for observation had illiterate parents. The trend towards receiving of school education had commenced by then. The commencement of the trend and their inclinations are visible in the growing percentage of the educated parents.

Here is the most important and significant categories of this researcher's observation the analysis of which tells very clearly and tersely about the primary education of not only the heads of the families (HoFs) but as well of their children (Sons and N-70). First, the researchers analyzed the educational position of primary level of the Heads of the selected twenty families which is;

- That only two of the Heads of the Families had been able to successfully complete their primary level of education.

- The percentage of this category's outcomes is 10%.
- The outcome of this observation concludes that none of the twenty HoFs had dropped out of primary education, surprisingly amounting to 00% outcome.
- The fact confirmed by the analysis of dropout issue from the population's parental level (note the second generation after grandfathers) tells the truth that *when it is the entrance into education from a background which is totally illiterate in earlier times, the possibility of dropout is the least if not at all.*
- It showed that 18 out of 20 HoFs were illiterate.
- From this category we could be able to know the rate of illiteracy prevailing at our parental level, a generation before us. It is evident that when 18 out of 20 heads of the families were ignorant and illiterate and had got no primary education at all, the resultant percentage would be 90%. Thus 90 people of every hundred who belong to the level and stage of our parents' age are illiterate in our rural area of district Mardan.

The researchers also analyzed status of primary school education of all the seventy sons of the HoFs. It is very much important with regard to an understanding of dropout rate in typical rural areas of District Mardan. Our observation, here, was focused at assessment of the status of completion of primary education of the total of seventy sons of the twenty selected families' heads. A total of 25 sons' primary education was found to be completed 'successfully.

The result percentage for those sons who had successfully completed primary education from among the seventy observed sons is 35.71%. Those who completed their education at primary level were indicated by the response term of Yes. The observation results indicate that exactly 13 (thirteen) students of primary level belonging to the cohort of children of the HoFs did not carry on their education progress successfully. They due to one or another reason, which can be understood from the observational outcomes of the above-given four categories of parental level, dropped out of primary education.

Outcome of this category's analysis proves that dropout rate in the rural areas of district Mardan, according to the data analysis of this research observation, is 18.57%. The outcomes of this category of our observation also throw light on the amount of those sons who did not get any primary education at all. There have been found as much as 29 sons of the HoFs to have never been able to get primary school education.

Percentage of those who did not get any primary and therefore no, education at all is tantamount to 41.4%. Those who, among the seventy sons selected for our observation regarding dropout at primary level, are still going to primary school were noted as 3 out of 70. From the outcomes of this category's observational and then statistical analysis it is known that 4.2 percent of the children of the HoFs are those who come under the response term of "Studying" or more simply <sup>2</sup>"Student".

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<sup>1</sup>(Note: By successful completion the researchers never mean that the said observed person stopped his education after completion of primary education. Rather when we talk of primary education to have been successfully completed, we mean to say the person was fortunate enough to reach near or complete his high school education as well).

<sup>2</sup>This note is with reference to a question we had posed before us under explanation of analysis of observation of this same category about HoFs. We had asked if our hypothesis, that when education becomes more commonly practiced phenomenon of social life, the rate of dropout also increases, is true or not. Perhaps it will be difficult to give a thoroughly accurate answer to this question but we can attempt it in the light of the latest statistical analysis. We can say that it is true to say that when education was rare dropout was almost negligible as we see in the example of the outcomes of the category of primary education position of HoFs. But overtime when education attracts the common masses in great numbers i.e., the enrolment becomes higher; the phenomenon of dropout becomes more common.

There are various reasons to it inclusive of;

There become many family and friends precedents available nearby the student of the time when education is very common. This attracts students of weak parental supervision and guidance. Due to increase in number of educated people, jobs relevant to educated masses become rare hence students can see no real output of completion of education. Due to increased number of students, it becomes difficult for the government to provide excellent teaching facilities on one hand; while on the other hand, it becomes difficult for the teachers to maintain an appreciable equilibrium between best teaching techniques and increased number of students. By the above discussion and the result of the analysis of the category of primary education related to sons, it becomes evident that generalization of education initially gives birth to more chances and tendencies of dropout.

Regarding our observation in this regard two points are of immense importance; Generalization when handled excellently and systematically will later on prove a discouraging factor for the dropout issue. We are only giving our observations about rural areas of District Mardan. It can't be generalized to other rural areas of Pakistan or in some cases other areas of the Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa

Next, category of observation is the second most important one in the whole list of categories that we had selected for observation. And it should also be borne in mind that it is the last most important also with regard to our topic of research study. The researchers were mainly concerned with the study of factors responsible for dropout of male students from the public primary schools of the typical rural areas of Mardan district. Therefore, the outcomes of this second last category of the observation will definitely give some useful details because it has already been started with parental specifications that lead to dropout and continued the effect until we have reached the children of the sons of the HoFs. We have taken our observation from grandfathers to grand grand-sons.

In the analysis to come, our area of interest is to know the educational (especially and exclusively of primary level) position of children of HoFs (referred to in this observational analysis as Sons) and their children (that we shall denote by the term grandsons of the HoFs). We shall see if the response to their educational status of primary level is “Yes” denoting the positive response, “Some” denoting partially positive and partially negative response of our observational outcomes and finally “No” which shall negate any presence of primary education to have been received by the children so far.

First of all we shall analyze the educational position of the children of the Heads of the total of twenty selected families for observation as shown in the following graphic table. Please note that in this case the children are no different persons but the same Sons as referred to in all previous and subsequent occurrences.

The observation shows that nine Heads of the Families have been able to arrange for the primary education of their children and that the children have either complete their education of primary level or are still studying. The percentage of this category’s outcomes is 45%. It is quite heartening that the percentage of children of HoFs who have are being / have been provided with primary education is the highest so far regarding a stratum of our society provided with opportunity of primary education.

We are here concerned with the analysis of frequency of the response term “Some” regarding provision of primary education to the children (sons) of the HoFs. The outcome of this observation concludes

that 9 of the twenty HoFs’ children have been getting primary education in partial distribution. There are still who do not have been able to receive primary education. The simple outcome of this category’s response analysis shows that some children of 9 of the 20 HoFs’ children have got primary educational facilities and some haven’t.

The percentage of this category outcome is very surprisingly and interestingly the same as of those who’s all children have got primary education. The previous response terms percentage of occurrences was 45% and of this category also the occurrences’ percentage is exactly the same 45%. The result of response term No’s occurrences shows that only 2 out of 20 HoFs’ children are not provided with primary education neither to their full nor partial number. They are astonishingly completely devoid of heed, attention and sense of responsibility towards primary education of their children (sons). The response term for such outcome of observation of this category is denoted by the term “No”. The result percentage for frequency of response term “No” has been calculated as 10%.

Furthermore, we shall see the analysis of status of primary education of children of all the seventy sons of the HoFs. Please look at this graphic presentation. It is very much important to know this position as it will be an index of educational outcome of effects of the preceding 8 categories’ outcomes.

This observation that we are eventually going to discuss is focused at assessment of the status of children’s primary education of the total of seventy sons of the twenty selected families’ heads under our observation. A total of 41 sons’ children were found out of the application of the outcome responses of this category (in order to know domain of application and for detail of definition of the response term “N/A” please read it under. The result percentage for the outcome of the response “N/A” is 58.57%. This is an ample proof of the fact that a great number of children do not at all come under the application of the response term “N/A” during our observational analysis of this category.

The observation results indicate that 16 sons’ children are not provided with required facilities of financial and moral sort to get primary school education. This is known by the frequency of occurrences of the response term “No”. Outcomes of this category’s analysis

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<sup>3</sup>By a No response there should also be considered possibilities of two kinds;

- That the person under observation might not be able to come under the application of this category’s observational rules and regulations.
- That the person (the child, son) might anytime start education because he is still of the age of primary education.

prove that children of 22.8% sons have not got/started primary school education. This does not include children who are not of the school going age because we have included such and related exceptions under the analytical results for the response term “N/A”.

Our observation has found that 1 Son (of the HoFs) had children among whom some were being/had been educated at the primary level while others not. The “some” response percentage is 1.4%. According to our observation, there are 22 such sons out of the total 70 whose children have been/are being educated at the primary level.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Different research studies have been conducted on the topic under study but this study followed a different approach in that the researchers toiled hard to access all those persons of the target population who have been dropped out of the school due to one or other reason. Another unique and quite alarming finding of this study is that all the dropped out persons regretted their decisions of leaving due to their immature and of course premature decision about their future.

This study has pin pointed all those factors which compelled the students to quit the school before completing their primary education. Although government is taking pain to eradicate all the hurdles but still it's a long way to achieve the universal literacy rate.

Government should constitute different monitoring bodies in order to monitor all the activities taking place at primary level. Government should assign special task at village and community level to report all such cases which compels the member of the community to take out their children from schools.

It is strongly recommended that PTA should be held responsible if it fails in reporting such cases to the educational authorities.

Government should also give financial support to those deserving students who leave their school just to work on order to have both their ends meet.

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