

# **Fathers as Agents of Change: Navigating Patriarchy and Female University Education in a Shifting Landscape**

## **Abstract**

This study explores the nuanced roles of fathers in promoting or constraining their daughters' pursuit of university education within the deeply rooted patriarchal context of rural Punjab, Pakistan. Adopting an interpretive phenomenological approach, the study conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 fathers who have facilitated their daughters' higher education, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse socio-economic representation. The findings reveal a multidimensional negotiation of patriarchal norms, where fathers simultaneously challenge, transition, and recreate traditional gender structures through their educational decisions. Three major themes emerged: (1) challenging patriarchy through educational empowerment and advocacy for gender equality; (2) a transitional patriarchy driven by pragmatic economic considerations and shifting social aspirations; and (3) the recreation of patriarchy through the strategic modification of gender roles and controlled empowerment. These findings underscore the complex interplay between local cultural values and evolving social ideals. This study provides critical insights for policymakers, suggesting that interventions must move beyond "empowerment" rhetoric to address the specific socio-economic anxieties fathers face. Furthermore, educators are encouraged to implement community-based dialogues that engage fathers not as obstacles, but as key stakeholders in sustaining long-term female educational attainment in conservative settings.

## **Keywords**

Female Higher Education, Patriarchy, Interpretive Research, Gender Equality, Social Change

## **Introduction**

The narrative surrounding gender and education is perpetually evolving, especially within the patriarchal sociocultural paradigms that often dictate societal roles and norms. In Punjab, Pakistan, this interplay manifests in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, particularly when examining the role of fathers in female education. This study aims to explore this complex relationship.

Historically, the gendered division of labor and patriarchy has placed women in a subordinate position in many South Asian societies, including Pakistan (Connell, 1987). As a site of empowerment and opportunity, education has often been less accessible to women, influenced by hegemonic masculinity and the reinforcement of gender roles (Kimmel, 2008). However, recent trends in Punjab suggest a notable increase in women's enrollment in higher education (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2019), potentially reflecting broader transformations in gender norms and family expectations.

What makes this phenomenon especially compelling is the increasingly supportive role fathers from middle-class backgrounds play in facilitating their daughters' university education. Focusing on the middle class is particularly vital because this socioeconomic stratum operates at the frontline of social transformation—balancing modern professional aspirations, economic necessity, and class reproduction against persistent patriarchal expectations. This emergence of middle-class fathers as facilitators of female education rather than rigid traditional gatekeepers prompts a fundamental inquiry: Are these fathers actively subverting patriarchal norms, or is this behavior a refined mechanism of transition and adaptation within the patriarchal system itself?

The paradox of patriarchy acting simultaneously as a barrier and a bridge to female education in Punjab requires an analytical approach that transcends conventional, binary frameworks. To achieve this, this study integrates gender performativity theory (Butler, 1990) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021). Butler's framework is particularly suited to unpack how fatherhood and patriarchal authority are not static constructs, but dynamic identities constantly reproduced, negotiated, or subtly contested through daily practices—such as supporting a daughter's university attendance. Simultaneously, Crenshaw's intersectionality is essential for capturing how gender intersects with socioeconomic class, regional norms, and family honour to shape the boundaries of educational access. Together, these frameworks enable a critical examination of whether fathers' shifting attitudes reflect a genuine disruption of traditional norms or a strategic performance that adapts and preserves underlying power structures.

In synthesizing these intricate elements, this study moves beyond broad theoretical contributions to offer actionable entry points for gender and educational policy in Punjab. Rather than relying on generic awareness campaigns that treat patriarchal households as homogeneous barriers, the findings demonstrate that policy must directly address the structural anxieties—specifically around

safe transit, institutional security, and family reputation (*izzat*)—that frequently cause fathers to condition or restrict their daughters’ educational access. Concretely, higher education policymakers can utilize these insights to establish secure regional transport networks and monitored campus housing, thereby dismantling the logistical pretexts often used to justify paternal surveillance. Furthermore, because fathers’ support frequently constitutes “controlled empowerment” that halts at graduation, the findings urge education authorities and labor ministries to institutionalize transition-to-work programs and culturally sensitive employment pathways (such as formal remote or localized professional placements). By targeting both structural campus safety and post-graduate workforce integration, educational interventions can effectively ensure that paternal investment translates into genuine, lasting socioeconomic autonomy rather than a renegotiated form of domestic patriarchal control.

Education, as a fundamental human right, serves as a critical foundation for societal progress, economic mobility, and individual agency. However, despite being Pakistan’s most populous province, Punjab continues to exhibit significant educational disparities along gender lines, characterized by pronounced urban-rural divides, substantial female drop-out rates post-primary school, and low tertiary enrollment (ASER Pakistan, 2021). Historically governed by rigid patriarchal norms and patrilineal structures (Azam Roomi & Harrison, 2010), the province is nonetheless witnessing a demonstrable empirical shift: recent sociological studies document a rising trend of fathers actively investing in and advocating for their daughters’ higher education, driven by middle-class aspirational mobility, escalating economic pressures, and changing marriage market dynamics (Aslam & Kingdon, 2008). This study interrogates these evolving and multifaceted dynamics, specifically analyzing how Punjabi fathers navigate the boundaries between female empowerment and traditional familial authority.

Historically, the Punjab region has been governed by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that systematically constrain women’s educational access, personal agency, and socioeconomic mobility (Farooq, 2020). Although official provincial records and recent data from the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM 2019–20 / 2021) indicate an upward trajectory in female enrollment—particularly among middle-class cohorts entering higher education—substantial gender disparities in educational attainment persist (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), 2021).

This enduring educational gap is driven not merely by supply-side infrastructure limitations, but by structural and sociocultural barriers. In particular, conservative gender roles prioritize male educational investments, while mobility restrictions, concerns over personal safety in transit, early marriage practices, and unequal domestic burdens continue to impede female retention and completion rates (Jabeen et al., 2024). Consequently, while aggregate enrollment figures reflect notable progress, qualitative and regional inequities remain a critical concern across the province.

The evolving societal dynamics have brought about a notable shift in the paternal role, particularly in fostering their daughters' empowerment through educational pursuits. This transformation holds the potential to address the persistent gender disparity that exists within our social fabric. In contemporary society, we observe a notable shift in the role of fathers as gatekeepers of patriarchal ideals. Traditionally, fathers were seen as the primary enforcers of societal norms that limited women's educational opportunities and encouraged them to conform to prescribed gender roles. However, in recent times, we have witnessed a noteworthy transformation in paternal attitudes as fathers increasingly advocate for and actively support their daughters' pursuit of higher education. This shift reflects broader societal changes and challenges the previously entrenched patriarchal structures that constrained women's educational aspirations. The comprehensive comprehension of fathers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors bears significant implications for the advancement of gender equality, the promotion of social development, and the facilitation of economic progress. Addressing gender inequities in education is rooted in pursuing gender equality, a fundamental objective of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The incorporation of fathers into this discourse expands the scope of gender analysis beyond the confines of exclusively women-centered frameworks, as elucidated by Sen (2001). The World Bank (2018) asserts that empowering women through education yields significant benefits in terms of health outcomes, child well-being, and the overall development of communities.

Research consistently demonstrates a robust positive correlation between female education rates and broader economic growth. When women are afforded equitable access to education, nations experience enhanced productivity, improved human capital development, and greater innovation across sectors. By narrowing the gender gap in schooling, societies are better positioned to transition toward knowledge-based economies, thereby facilitating sustainable development. Beyond general economic metrics, female education is a primary driver of increased labor force

participation. Educational attainment provides women with the requisite skills and credentials to enter the formal job market, moving beyond subsistence or informal labor. This increased workforce engagement not only boosts individual household incomes but also alleviates poverty and contributes significantly to national GDP, underscoring that female education is an essential catalyst for economic modernization. The realization of this economic potential, however, is heavily influenced by sociocultural dynamics within the family unit. As Klasen (2000) highlights, the active involvement and support of fathers are critical determinants in this process. When fathers act as facilitators of their daughters' education—rather than barriers—they effectively unlock dormant economic potential, fostering environments where women can thrive professionally. Consequently, initiatives aimed at improving female educational outcomes must look beyond schools to include family-level advocacy that engages male guardians as key partners in development.

### **Study Context**

As Pakistan's most populous province, Punjab represents over half the national population and generates the primary share of the country's GDP, making it the central engine of national policy reform and socio-economic transformation (Government of Punjab, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Crucially, the province is characterized by sharp intra-regional disparities: while northern and central urban hubs (such as Lahore and Rawalpindi) exhibit rapid infrastructural modernization and rising female literacy, southern and rural agrarian districts remain governed by deeply conservative kinship structures, strict practices of female seclusion (*purdah*), and male-dominated decision-making (Mumtaz et al., 2013). This stark socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity makes Punjab an ideal empirical setting to investigate how macro-level educational expansion intersects with micro-level patriarchal traditions.

While existing scholarship extensively documents structural and financial barriers to female schooling in South Asia (Aslam & Kingdon, 2008), the socio-psychological and intra-household dynamics governing male decision-makers remain critically underexplored. Specifically, the literature has treated patriarchy as a monolithic barrier, overlooking the nuanced, evolving role of the father as the primary cultural and economic gatekeeper of his daughter's life choices in Pakistan (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015). Although aggregate data show increased paternal investment in daughters' schooling, existing research fails to explain why and how fathers negotiate this

support within a normative framework that still prioritizes male heirs and patrilocal marriage arrangements.

This empirical reality presents a compelling sociological paradox: Does paternal support for female higher education represent a genuine ideological departure from traditional patriarchy, or is it merely an instrumental, pragmatic adaptation to economic pressures and shifting marriage-market expectations? Specifically, this qualitative study investigates three central questions:

1. What internal motivations (e.g., personal convictions, religious interpretations) and external incentives (e.g., economic returns, enhanced marriageability) drive Punjabi fathers to invest in their daughters' post-secondary education?
2. How do fathers actively negotiate and mitigate resistance from extended kin and community networks when transgressing traditional gender norms?
3. To what extent does paternal advocacy grant young women long-term autonomy and career freedom, as opposed to functioning as a subtle, benevolent re-articulation of male guardianship (*qawwam*)?

By examining the lived experiences and relational dynamics of father–daughter dyads, this study unpacks how paternal attitudes toward female schooling are negotiated across varying socio-economic strata. Rather than treating fathers as passive conformists to cultural hegemony, this research conceptualizes them as active agents whose educational backing can catalyze female empowerment or, conversely, establish conditional boundaries around daughters' public participation. The findings provide actionable insights for educational policymakers and development practitioners seeking to design gender-transformative interventions that meaningfully engage male heads of household in Pakistan and comparable patriarchal contexts across South Asia.

## **Literature Review**

Patriarchal structures govern intra-household educational decision-making not merely as abstract cultural norms, but through concrete institutional mechanisms of resource allocation, spatial regulation, and marriage-market calculations (Hossain, 2026). Within families, educational investments are routinely prioritized for sons, who are perceived as permanent economic assets and long-term caretakers, whereas expenditures on daughters are frequently disincentivized by

patrilocal norms under which future returns transfer to the in-laws' household (Aslam & Kingdon, 2008). Furthermore, male guardians operate as spatial gatekeepers, often curtailing girls' schooling at puberty to preserve family honor (*izzat*) and mitigate safety risks associated with daily mobility (Mumtaz et al., 2014). Even when post-secondary schooling is permitted, it is frequently mediated by domestic labor burdens or instrumentalized to enhance marriageability rather than foster professional autonomy (Kabeer, 2012). Against this restrictive backdrop, however, there is growing scholarly interest in how paternal authority is being subtly renegotiated, particularly as some fathers leverage their traditional decision-making power to actively sponsor, finance, and legitimize their daughters' educational advancement.

South Asian patriarchy influences fathers' educational decisions through interconnected cultural, social, and economic expectations. In patrilineal and often patrilocal family systems, sons are commonly viewed as future providers and caregivers for parents, whereas daughters are expected to marry and join another household. Consequently, fathers may prioritize sons' education when household resources are limited and may evaluate investments in daughters' education in relation to family honor, safety, marriage prospects, and anticipated economic returns. Concerns about female mobility, contact with unrelated men, and community judgment can also influence decisions about the type, location, and duration of girls' schooling, particularly at the secondary and higher-education levels (Osella & Osella, 2000). Nevertheless, changing labor-market conditions, rising educational aspirations, urbanization, and growing recognition of women's contribution to household welfare have gradually encouraged some fathers to support their daughters' continued education. This support may therefore reflect an adaptation of patriarchal practices rather than their complete disappearance, as fathers may endorse higher education while continuing to regulate daughters' mobility, subject choices, employment, and family responsibilities (Sathar & Lloyd, 1994).

Examining father-daughter schooling relationships, particularly within South Asia, remains an area of limited scholarly inquiry. It is imperative to acknowledge the significant role fathers play in their daughters' educational development (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996). According to (Desai & Andrist, 2010) research, it observed that fathers middle-class fathers exhibit a heightened awareness of discrimination and actively engage in empowering their daughters through education. The subject matter pertains to the intricate interplay between one's economic standing and the

prevailing patriarchal norms within a given society. Further research is needed to this complex dynamic.

Cultural norms are central to educational outcomes because they shape how families interpret the value, purpose, and acceptability of girls' education and influence decisions about household resource allocation, mobility, school choice, and educational continuity. In Pakistan, gender norms may lead families to prioritize sons' schooling, restrict daughters' travel to educational institutions, or view higher education as acceptable only when it does not conflict with expectations concerning modesty, marriage, and domestic responsibilities. Educational policies that do not account for these family-level processes may schooling without addressing the social conditions that determine whether girls can access, remain in, and benefit from education (LeVine, 2004; Ali, 2009). Although previous scholarship has examined gender inequality and educational policy in Pakistan, comparatively limited attention has been given to how fathers interpret and negotiate these norms when making decisions about their daughters' higher education, particularly in Punjab. This study advances existing knowledge by moving beyond aggregate indicators of enrollment and policy-level analysis to examine the mechanisms through which paternal attitudes, economic considerations, concerns about family reputation, and expectations regarding gender roles shape educational support. By focusing on fathers' accounts and the father–daughter relationship, the study also identifies the conditions under which paternal support may expand girls' educational opportunities or reproduce patriarchal control. In doing so, it contributes a context-specific understanding of the changing but persistent relationship between patriarchy, family decision-making, and female education in Punjab, with implications for culturally responsive educational policy and community-based interventions (Malik, 2007; Government of Pakistan, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The intersection of sociological and gender theories offers a comprehensive analytical framework for comprehending the complex and evolving role of fathers in female education. The present section explores prominent theoretical frameworks that shed light upon the fundamental dynamics, cultural norms, and patriarchal structures that shape the educational opportunities available to women in Punjab, Pakistan. Classical Patriarchy Theory (Friedan, 2010; Millett, 2016) emphasizes the institutionalized male dominance over women in societal structures. This theory provides a

useful lens for understanding the patriarchal control and restrictions women face in education in Punjab. However, this theory has been critiqued for its overly deterministic portrayal of gender relations, overlooking variations and nuances within different cultures (Walby, 1990).

Feminist theories provide diverse perspectives of the centuries-old patriarchal structures. Out of various feminist perspectives, liberal feminism (Friedan, 2010; Wollstonecraft, 1792) emphasizes equality and rights. This perspective highlights the need for policies promoting equal educational opportunities for women, while recognizing fathers as potential agents of change, yet it has been critiqued for not fully addressing structural inequalities and being mainly concerned with legal reforms (Eisenstein, 1981). The most relevant theory to unpack the phenomenon under study is intersectional feminism (Crenshaw & Vistnes, 1989). Intersectionality provides a valuable analytical lens to examine how gender, culture, and education intersect and interact (R. P. Crenshaw & Vistnes, 1989). Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity allows researchers to examine how gender roles are constructed and performed, including in educational contexts (Butler, 1990).

The reviewed theories offer complementary perspectives on the role of fathers in female education in Punjab. Patriarchy theory accounts for the structural barriers, feminist theories provide insights into gender equality struggles, and sociological theories elucidate socialization processes and interpersonal dynamics. Combining these frameworks provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon

## **Methodology**

Rooted in an interpretive paradigm, this study adopts a relativistic ontology that recognizes multiple, context-dependent realities shaped by Punjabi sociocultural dynamics, rejecting a singular objective truth (Lincoln et al., 2011). Epistemologically, it employs a constructivist stance, viewing knowledge as co-created through interactive engagement with paternal participants within their patriarchal milieu (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Methodologically, a hermeneutic approach is utilized to iteratively connect individual lived narratives to broader cultural structures through the hermeneutic circle. Finally, guided by a value-laden axiology, the inquiry integrates researcher reflexivity to critically account for positionality, values, and interpretive biases throughout the research process (Morrow, 2005).

## **Participants and Procedures**

The ethical approach in this study involves respecting participants' diverse perspectives of the fathers and approaching the subject matter with sensitivity. Acknowledging the cultural complexity of patriarchy in Punjab, the research upholds principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and respect.

The study employs a qualitative research design to examine the complex role of fathers in female education in Punjab, following the interpretative tradition that seeks to understand the human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The sample comprised 30 fathers from various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, both urban and rural, in Punjab who have sent their daughters to university. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure a diverse representation of fathers across different strata of society (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample size was determined according to theoretical and data saturation principles. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the fathers using a semi-structured format. The interviews were conducted using a standardized interview protocol, designed to explore fathers' perspectives regarding various subjects, including education, gender roles, individual agency, and societal transformation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

## **Data Analysis**

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to analyze the interview transcripts, to identify recurring patterns and themes inherent in the collected data. The initial phase of the research process involved conducting initial coding, as outlined by Saldana (2016), to identify and categorize meaningful patterns from data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). This process involved grouping similar codes, which were subsequently refined and organized into larger groups, drawing upon the foundation established by the initial codes.

Finally, a comprehensive analysis examined the relationships among various themes to gain insights into their relevance to the primary research goals (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The findings were analyzed through the lens of postcolonial feminism, conflict theory, and Giddens' structuration theory. These theoretical frameworks, as expounded by Giddens (1984), Mohanty (1988), and Marx and Engels (1848), respectively, provided the conceptual tools necessary to examine the data critically.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics.

| No. | Age<br>In<br>years | Education<br>Level | Occupation           | Spouse's<br>Education | Spouse's<br>Occupation | No. of<br>Children | No. of<br>Daughters<br>in<br>University | Socio-<br>economic<br>Status | Residence |
|-----|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| 1   | 52                 | Graduate           | Engineer             | Graduate              | Housemaker             | 3                  | 1                                       | Upper-middle                 | Urban     |
| 2   | 45                 | Graduate           | Business Owner       | Intermediate          | Housemaker             | 2                  | 2                                       | Upper                        | Urban     |
| 3   | 48                 | Matric             | Farmer               | Less than Matric      | Housemaker             | 4                  | 1                                       | Lower-middle                 | Rural     |
| 4   | 50                 | Ph.D.              | University Professor | Bachelor's Degree     | Housemaker             | 3                  | 1                                       | Upper                        | Urban     |
| 5   | 54                 | Diploma            | Technician           | Matric                | Housemaker             | 5                  | 2                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 6   | 40                 | Graduate           | IT Professional      | Matric                | Housemaker             | 2                  | 1                                       | Upper-middle                 | Urban     |
| 7   | 51                 | Graduate           | Small Business Owner | Less than Matric      | Housemaker             | 4                  | 2                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 8   | 58                 | Master's           | Teacher              | graduate              | Teacher                | 3                  | 1                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 9   | 61                 | Matric             | Farmer               | Less than Matric      | Housemaker             | 5                  | 1                                       | Upper-Middle                 | Rural     |
| 10  | 53                 | Matric             | Policeman            | Primary               | Housemaker             | 2                  | 1                                       | Middle                       | Urban     |
| 11  | 49                 | BA                 | Small Business       | Intermediate          | Teacher                | 2                  | 1                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 12  | 54                 | Primary            | Farmer               | Illiterate            | Housemaker             | 4                  | 2                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 13  | 47                 | Matric             | Own Business         | Less than Matric      | Housemaker             | 2                  | 1                                       | Lower Middle                 | Rural     |
| 14  | 58                 | Matric             | Own Business         | Intermediate          | Housemaker             | 3                  | 1                                       | Upper Middle                 | Urban     |
| 15  | 49                 | Masters            | Banker               | Graduate              | Housemaker             | 2                  | 2                                       | Upper Middle                 | Urban     |
| 16  | 55                 | Graduate           | Farmer               | Matric                | Housemaker             | 3                  | 2                                       | Upper                        | Rural     |
| 17  | 45                 | Middle             | Guard                | Illiterate            | Housemaker/<br>Tailor  | 2                  | 1                                       | Lower                        | Rural     |
| 18  | 47                 | Primary            | Gardner              | Illiterate            | Housemaker             | 2                  | 1                                       | Lower                        | Rural     |
| 19  | 53                 | Graduate           | Clerk                | Intermediate          | Teacher                | 2                  | 1                                       | Lower Middle                 | Urban     |
| 20  | 57                 | Middle             | Peon                 | Primary               | Sweeper                | 3                  | 1                                       | Lower                        | Urban     |
| 21  | 60                 | Matric             | Driver               | Middle                | Housemaker             | 2                  | 1                                       | Lower                        | Rural     |
| 22  | 46                 | Graduate           | Salesman             | Intermediate          | Nurse                  | 2                  | 1                                       | Middle                       | Urban     |
| 23  | 54                 | Graduate           | Doctor               | Master                | Professor              | 2                  | 2                                       | Upper                        | Urban     |
| 24  | 50                 | Primary            | Farmer               | Illiterate            | Housemaker             | 3                  | 1                                       | Lower Middle                 | Rural     |
| 25  | 46                 | Intermediate       | Event Manager        | Matric                | Beautician             | 4                  | 2                                       | Middle                       | Urban     |
| 26  | 52                 | Matric             | Medical Technician   | Graduate              | Teacher                | 3                  | 2                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 27  | 51                 | Post-Graduate      | Doctor               | Master                | Professor              | 1                  | 1                                       | Upper-Middle                 | Urban     |
| 28  | 53                 | Graduate           | Shopkeeper           | Matric                | Housemaker             | 4                  | 2                                       | Middle                       | Rural     |
| 29  | 50                 | Post-Graduate      | Agriculture          | Master                | Housemaker             | 1                  | 1                                       | Upper                        | Rural     |
| 30  | 49                 | Graduate           | Office Clerk         | Intermediate          | Teacher                | 2                  | 1                                       | Lower-Middle                 | Rural     |

The complex interplay of demographic and socioeconomic factors reveals a gradual shift in traditional patriarchal norms within Punjab, Pakistan. Through the analysis of 30 fathers from diverse backgrounds, this study illustrates the influences that enable these fathers to prioritize their daughters' university education.

Age and education level appear to influence the fathers' decision-making processes significantly. Older fathers with higher education tend to be more open to supporting their daughters' higher education. This aligns with the understanding that education often promotes more egalitarian views (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Furthermore, exposure to formal education may foster a deeper understanding of gender equity and the potential benefits of female education for both the individual and society (Sen, 2001).

Fathers' occupations and socioeconomic statuses also influence fathers' support for higher education. Fathers employed in professional occupations or owning businesses are more likely to encourage their daughters to pursue higher education, because they recognize the long-term economic benefits and societal changes (Becker, 2009). On the other hand, those in lower socioeconomic strata may view education as an empowering tool that can potentially improve household socioeconomic conditions from economic constraints (Sen, 2001).

The education level of spouses, typically lower in this population, does not appear to deter fathers from sending their daughters to universities. This may signify a transition from traditional patriarchal attitudes, where women's education was not prioritized, to a more progressive mindset that values education irrespective of gender (Kabeer, 2005). The urban or rural residence further also influences these patterns to this dynamic. Fathers in urban settings tend to have more progressive views, possibly influenced by exposure to diverse perspectives and global trends (Levine, 2003). Conversely, despite facing traditional cultural barriers, fathers in rural areas are also choosing to educate their daughters, symbolizing a significant shift in patriarchal norms.

The impact of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics on the choice of sending daughters to universities in Punjab is a multidimensional phenomenon beyond mere statistics. It signifies a transition in patriarchy where fathers, regardless of their background, identify and challenge oppressive norms. The empowerment of daughters through education emerges as a rebellion against patriarchal constraints and a conscious choice rooted in understanding the economic, social, and personal benefits of female education. This study underscores the need to explore further the underlying motivations and the potential role that policy interventions can play in supporting this paradigm shift.

## Findings and Discussion

### Themes and Sub-themes

Table 2 outlines the main themes and sub-themes from in-depth interviews with fathers who sent their daughters to universities, thus challenging barriers of patriarchy while potentially creating a new form of patriarchy.

**Table 2.** Showing the themes and sub-themes of the study.

| Main Theme                               | Sub Theme                  | Description                                                                                | Supportive Quotes                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Challenging Patriarchy</i>            | a. Educational Empowerment | Fathers recognizing education as a tool for empowerment                                    | "I want my daughter to stand on her own feet; education is the key to her independence."                                                           |
|                                          | b. Gender Equality         | Belief in equal opportunities for daughters                                                | "My daughter has the same right to education as my son."                                                                                           |
| <i>Transition in Patriarchy</i>          | a. Economic Consideration  | Viewing daughters' education as an economic investment                                     | Putting money into her schooling is like putting money into our family's future.                                                                   |
|                                          | b. Social Change           | Perception of education as a catalyst for social change and a break from traditional roles | "Education is changing the way our society sees women," She still needs to take care of her family, but I encourage her to continue her education. |
| <i>Creating a New Form of Patriarchy</i> | a. Modified Gender Roles   | Emergence of a modified understanding of gender roles within the family                    | I told her, "I want you to go to college, but you have to choose a field that is suitable for women."                                              |
|                                          | b. Controlled Empowerment  | Encouraging education within certain boundaries or expectations                            | Putting money into her schooling is like putting money into our family's future.                                                                   |

### Theme 1: Challenging Patriarchy

#### Subtheme 1a: Educational Empowerment

The notion of educational empowerment elucidates the pivotal role that education assumes in emancipating women from the societal constraints that have historically been imposed upon them, it is crucial to recognize that Fathers perceived higher education as a pathway to independence, economic security, and social mobility. Instead, it serves as a pathway toward an individual's self-actualization and attainment of independence. One of the participants involved in the study expressed their perspective as follows: *"I want the same opportunities for my daughter that everyone else does. She should be allowed the privilege of an education to reach her full potential. She is a potential leader, not just a housewife."* - Participant 3

### **Subtheme 1b: Gender Equality**

Gender equality signifies a shift from the deeply rooted patriarchal behaviors that exist in society. It suggests that fathers increasingly recognized that their daughters are entitled to the same educational rights and opportunities as their sons, which is indicative of a shift toward a more egalitarian and just society. The following is what one of the fathers who took part in the study had to say:

"It's not a matter of being a boy or a girl; it's a matter of human rights. Equal educational and developmental opportunities for my children, son and daughters, are a basic human right. We need to change along with the times". - Participant 7

Examining these themes reveals a complex interplay between the forces of tradition and modernity, thereby emphasizing a transformational shift in societal norms. The increasing willingness of fathers to support their daughters' educational endeavors and professional aspirations is emblematic of a broader societal shift toward gender equality and the gradual dismantling of entrenched patriarchal structures.

The acceptance of education as a means of empowerment and the adoption of gender equality are indicators of a dynamic sociocultural environment. Not only does the aforementioned phenomenon represent an individual achievement for the fathers and daughters involved, but it also has far-reaching implications for the larger social fabric, as it has the potential to fundamentally alter the prevalent gender dynamics in the given geographical area.

### **Theme 2. Transition in Patriarchy**

According to conflict theory, societal inequalities and power imbalances result from competition for limited resources, causing social conflict and tension. Similarly, social change resonates with symbolic interactionism's emphasis on meaning-making processes. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the role of symbols, language, and social interactions in shaping individuals' worldview and subsequent actions. In this context, social change is viewed as the consequence of a society's collective reinterpretation and renegotiation of shared meanings and symbols. In conclusion, the economic rationale is consistent with conflict theory's emphasis on material interests, emphasizing the significance of resource competition in shaping societal dynamics. On the other hand, the concept of social change resonates with symbolic interactionism's emphasis on

meaning-making processes, highlighting the role of symbols and social interactions in propelling transformative societal shifts. Collectively, these subthemes provide a holistic perspective on how patriarchy is transforming in light of emergent challenges and opportunities.

According to the conflict theory's theoretical framework, social interactions and relationships are profoundly influenced by a society's underlying economic structures and material interests. In the given thematic framework, it is clear that fathers view education not only as a theoretical concept, but also as a strategic allocation of resources aimed at ensuring a prosperous future for their daughters. This viewpoint exemplifies a comprehensive understanding of the complex mechanisms by which economic factors can propel societal transformations. Throughout the duration of the study, a participant communicated:

### **Subtheme 2a: Economic Consideration**

The theme of "Transition in Patriarchy" provides a focal point for analyzing a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. This observation emphasizes the dynamic nature of patriarchal norms, which are neither fixed nor uniform but malleable and susceptible to change. Various factors, such as economic conditions and social dynamics, reshape these norms, leading to their evolution over time.

For me, this is about more than just fairness for my kid; it's about protecting her future. Investing in her education is, in my opinion, a smart way to ensure her future financial security. We are abandoning our old norms. Participant-5

### **Subtheme 2b: Social Change**

The focal point of this particular subtheme is the recognition of education as the driving force behind broader social change. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for examining how meanings and practices change as a consequence of interactive processes. This phenomenon incorporates a profound transformation that reconfigures societal conventions and principles. In accordance with the verbal expression of a father figure, the following statement was made: *“A change in our community is symbolized by my daughter's education, which is why I consider it more than just a personal achievement. That women are just as capable and deserving of opportunity as men is what we are proving”*. - Participant 8

### **Theme 3. Creating a New Form of Patriarchy**

#### **Sub theme 3a: Modified Gender Roles**

In the patriarchal context of Punjab, Pakistan, education for daughters is considered a double-edged sword. While many fathers supported their daughters' higher education, they also express concern about preserving traditional gender norms. *"I want my daughter to be educated, but she must also know her responsibilities at home. Her education shouldn't take her away from her cultural values."*-Participant-1

This quote resonates with postcolonial feminism's understanding of the persistence of gender roles within contemporary educational context. The father's support for education is coupled with expectations of domestic roles, reflecting the complex interplay between universal feminist ideals and localized cultural norms (Mohanty, 1988).

#### **Sub themes 3b: Controlled Empowerment**

Controlled empowerment was a recurrent theme in interviews, reflecting the nuanced ways in which fathers promote education while also maintaining traditional gender norms. *"Education is important, and I want my daughter to be strong and independent. But there are limits; she should know where to draw the line."* Participant 2

This quote underscores the tension between promoting empowerment and controlling the extent of that empowerment. This finding is consistent with Giddens' Structuration Theory, we can understand how these fathers' beliefs enable and constrain women's education simultaneously. This controlled empowerment illustrates how social practices are embedded within the existing social structures, both enabling and restricting actions according to underlying rules and resources (Giddens, 1984).

Taken together, these themes and subthemes, the study reveals the intricate landscape of patriarchy within Punjab. It illustrates how fathers, in supporting their daughters' education, are neither completely dismantling patriarchal norms nor strictly adhering to them. Rather, they are negotiating a delicate balance, creating a new form of patriarchy that accommodates both modern educational aspirations and traditional gender roles.

The analysis of these themes through various sociological and gender theories reveals a multi-layered and complex transition in patriarchy within Punjab, Pakistan. The role of fathers in promoting female education is marked by both significant strides towards equality and empowerment and lingering elements of control and traditionalism. The interplay between global feminist ideals, local cultural norms, economic considerations, and social interactions creates a complex pattern of social change, highlighting the intricate nature of social transformation.

### **Limitations and Suggestion for Future Research**

This study has several limitations. Although it includes 30 fathers from diverse backgrounds, its geographical focus is limited to Punjab, Pakistan; therefore, the findings may not reflect the cultural and social variations found in other regions of the country. Moreover, the qualitative design involves interpretive judgment, which may introduce subjectivity, particularly when examining complex issues such as patriarchy. The participants' responses may also have been influenced by social desirability bias, societal expectations, prevailing cultural norms, or the presence and positionality of the researcher. In addition, the study focuses exclusively on fathers' perspectives. The experiences of daughters, mothers, and other family members are not included, although their viewpoints could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of family decision-making regarding female education.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the geographical scope to include different regions of Pakistan and, where appropriate, conducting comparative studies with countries that share similar sociocultural contexts. Including the perspectives of daughters, mothers, and other family members would offer a more comprehensive account of educational decision-making within patriarchal households. Longitudinal research could further examine how fathers' attitudes and daughters' educational experiences change over time, thereby providing deeper insight into the evolving nature of patriarchal relations. Finally, quantitative studies could complement qualitative findings by measuring the prevalence of particular attitudes, beliefs, and forms of paternal support among a larger population of fathers.

## **Implications**

The government and nongovernmental organizations should develop context-sensitive educational campaigns that engage fathers and emphasize the importance of girls' and women's education while encouraging critical reflection on restrictive patriarchal norms. Such policies should recognize the complex relationship between education, empowerment, and established cultural expectations; therefore, interventions must be locally informed rather than based on uniform or externally imposed models. Involving respected community leaders, religious scholars, teachers, and other local influencers in the design and promotion of educational initiatives may increase community acceptance and facilitate implementation at the grassroots level. Policymakers should also consider providing targeted financial assistance—such as scholarships, conditional cash transfers, transport subsidies, or educational grants—to families who support their daughters' continued education. These measures could reduce the economic barriers identified in this study and encourage greater household investment in girls' educational advancement.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the nature and extent of Punjabi fathers' support for their daughters' pursuit of higher education, with particular attention to the factors that shape their attitudes and practices within a patriarchal social context. The findings indicate that paternal support is a complex and conditional process rather than a straightforward rejection of patriarchal norms. Fathers may support their daughters' education because they recognize its economic, social, and personal benefits; however, this support is often negotiated alongside concerns about family reputation, gender roles, marriage expectations, and daughters' domestic responsibilities.

These findings suggest that the increasing acceptance of female higher education does not necessarily represent a complete transformation of gender relations within Punjabi families. Although education may expand daughters' opportunities, enhance their confidence, and improve their prospects for economic participation, it may also coexist with continued expectations that they fulfill conventional domestic roles. Paternal support can therefore promote educational advancement while remaining embedded within existing forms of authority and gender control. This tension demonstrates that patriarchy in Punjab is not static; rather, it is being gradually

adapted and renegotiated in response to changing economic conditions, social expectations, and perceptions of the value of women's education.

The findings and community practice. for educational policy and community practice. Efforts to promote female higher education should address not only access and enrollment but also the social and household conditions that influence women's ability to continue and benefit from education. Policies and programs should engage fathers and other family members, challenge restrictive gender expectations, and provide culturally sensitive support for girls' educational and career aspirations. Community-based initiatives, financial assistance, safe transportation, and awareness campaigns may help reduce the practical and cultural barriers that limit women's educational opportunities.

Overall, this study demonstrates that fathers' involvement is an important but ambivalent dimension of female education in Punjab. Their support can facilitate daughters' access to higher education, yet its transformative potential depends on whether it enables genuine autonomy or remains conditional upon conformity to traditional expectations. By highlighting these complexities, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender, education, family authority, and social change in contemporary Punjab.

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