

Introduction

Pakistan currently has the largest cohort of young people in its history (50 million aged 10-29), and subsequent cohorts are projected to be even larger. As in most countries, there is the awareness that the development of the current and subsequent young cohorts is profoundly important for the social, political, and economic development the country.

While they are half of the population of adolescents, girls are often denied opportunities for participation in employment and education. This is in part due to a lack of opportunities, but also is largely due to conservative and traditional attitudes of parents and other gatekeepers in the family and community.

How important are parental aspirations and intergenerational effects on the educational and employment outcomes of adolescent girls in Pakistan? This paper investigates the relevance of parental aspirations in influencing the lives of young girls (ages 15-24 years) in Pakistan. It also explores the role of socio-demographic and opportunity related community factors that may or may not influence the lives of young girls in comparison to the aspirations of parents.

Methodology

The study approach makes some assumptions about opportunity structures for both education and employment based on community characteristics. Factors such as availability of schools and type of work being undertaken by boys and men in the family will be used to create an index of the potential for girls to participate in schooling and paid work in their settings. This will then be matched with parental aspirations for their children, and specifically their daughters. To a large extent, the possibilities will shape parental aspirations, but we will examine the independent effects of parental aspirations for girls schooling on actual outcomes. Results will be segregated by gender of parent, region, and socio-economic status. Logistic regressions will be used to determine the influence of the set of factors on education and work of young females in Pakistan.

This paper will use data from the National Survey on Transitions to Adulthood: Education, Work and Marriage Among Adolescent and Youth in Pakistan. This is the largest such survey in Pakistan which focuses on young people. The survey provides rich data on 8076 male and female young people who are 15-24 years old. We have collected information on their important transitions from school, to work, to marriage and childbearing along with detailed household information and information about their own aspirations. Information on their households (6585) and aspirations of a responsible adult, usually parents, was gathered. Community information from the 254 locations where the young people live has also been collected.

We will focus mainly on girls' outcomes but will also compare them with boys with similar parental and community characteristics to highlight the gender discrimination both at home and in society.

Results

Parental literacy makes a profound impact on the chances of going to and continuing in school. The parental educational influence on children's schooling is much more pronounced for girls: only 35 percent of girls with illiterate fathers ever attended school compared to 75 percent of boys. Ninety seven percent of girls with literate mothers are enrolled in school, double the number with illiterate mothers.

At the same time, parents, regardless of their own education have expressed clear aspirations for young people to attain a higher level of schooling than themselves. However, they still discriminate blatantly in favour of sons' education. Nearly half of parents feel that boys should receive more than 12 years schooling, while only one-third feel the same for girls. But aspirations are related to opportunity and urban parents have higher aspiration for boys and girls because of the greater availability of schools there.

Similarly, attitudes and behaviours that children acquire towards work are shaped by parental influence. Surprisingly, we found that most parents want their children, including girls, to work for economic gain. More than 75 percent reported that young girls should work to supplement the family income, and the proportion is higher in rural areas. Of course to a large extent, this is due to family poverty, but we will go further to investigate the types of work (government, teaching, agriculture etc.) that parents are aspiring for when they answer this question.

Initial results from the survey show that, parents have the most influence on the young people's lives and any intervention into the policies and program on youth will be subject to the acceptance of adults of households. Programs in Pakistan need to address the ingrained gender restrictions to work, school attendance, and female mobility. These will require inputs from the media, active women and youth groups, and members of civil society. This also demands interventions which are well planned and sharply targeted but which meet the approval of parents and families as well.