

ENHANCING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE GIRLS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the significant obstacles Afghan female refugee students face in accessing higher education in Quetta, Pakistan. There is a huge gap between local female citizen's enrolment and refugee girls in tertiary-level education. Therefore, this study aims to address the barriers that hinder refugee student's access to higher education as well as provide suggestions for the reduction of these problems. The study is a mix of both qualitative and quantitative in nature and is based on primary data. The researcher conducted this study in the main three universities of Quetta including Baluchistan, women's (SBK), and BUIITEMS University. Qualitative research was carried out with five female refugee students enrolled in targeted universities. The survey was taken from forty FSC and enrolled female refugees and those who were recently applying for higher education in targeted universities. The findings shed light on several key challenges faced by these females during enrollment and in institutions during study along with suggestions for enhancing access to higher education. The most challenging barriers for these females are the unavailability of institutional required documents, financial constraints, and lack of appropriate educational facilities. Additionally, gender discrimination remains prevalent in Afghan refugee communities. However, UNHCR is the only organization working for the well-being of refugees through scholarships and financial support. There is also a need for Pakistan's government to contribute to such coping strategies.

Keywords: Female Refugee Students, Higher Education, Obstacles, Enhancing, Access

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of forcefully displaced people has increased worldwide due to global refugee crises. Millions of people were helpless to leave their homes because of conflict and environmental disasters. Due to the conflict in Afghanistan, a large population of Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan for their survival in the 1970s. They adjusted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and FATA regions of Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017). Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for nearly four decades. It has hosted 1.44 million registered refugees and 1.43 million having proof of registration card (POR) and approximately one million are unregistered (Ayub & Attullah, 2022). Refugee Children are considered most affected during this instability and migration of Afghan refugees to different countries (UNHCR, 2023).

Although they are the future human capital, they face challenges to get education in the countries where they have migrated. Refugee girls, particularly, face more problems of exclusion from education due to additional barriers such as cultural norms. Language barriers make it difficult for them to understand the language of the host country. Many Afghan refugees take the help of locals to learn the local language (Humayun et al., 2023). Due to the language differences, it is a very tough task for them to get education in the host country. Female refugee students are more at risk as compared to boys as they face earlier marriage, exploitation, and abuse in almost every society.

During the Soviet war, the refugee women were most vulnerable because they had lost their husbands to the jihad. These young widow mothers with their children have been left to feed for themselves (Schultz, 1994). The UNHCR organization is working on the provision of education to every Afghan refugee child. However, some significant problems remain in the way refugee children get education. It includes lack of qualified teachers in schools of refugee camps. As these teachers are hired by organizations, they cannot afford qualified teachers. Lack of resources and inadequate classroom problems exist in refugee camp schools.

Moreover, parents, who themselves could not get formal education, do not give importance to their girls' education. They prefer earlier marriages of their daughters and keep them at home rather than providing them with education. And, those who are willing, cannot afford the cost of education. One of the girl's schools closed in Saranan Refugee Camp in Balochistan due to the unsupportive attitude of the community (Mandokhail, 2022). To solve these problems, a multifaceted approach may be required that could find out how the cultural as well as language barriers could be tackled. This approach can also provide facilities and support refugee girls, and their families in an educational perspective. In that context, it is essential to identify the challenges and suggest solutions. This research has been conducted to specifically address the barriers that hinder in higher education for Afghan refugee girls in Quetta Urban, Pakistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Refugees are those who have been forced to leave their country due to war and violence and the fear of persecution for reasons of religion, nationality, race, and membership in a particular social group (Hebrank, 2014). 52% of refugees come from Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. The "1951 Refugee Convention" helps refugees by providing protection and welfare rights in host countries (UNHCR, 2021). Pakistan was the favorite immigration place for Afghan refugees due to the ethnic and religious proximity of Pakistan to Afghans and its caring refugee policies (Siddikoglu & Sagiroglu, 2023). Pakistan is one of the top 10 countries in the world hosting refugees and the second largest in South Asia (IOM World Migration Report, 2021). Millions of Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan after the soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (IRIN News, 2005). In 2005, a census was conducted by UNHCR on Afghan refugees in Pakistan. According to this census, 58% of refugees lived in communities and 42% lived in camps (Redden, 2023). Afghan refugees have a sense of insecurity it is due to legal issues.

They face problems in accessing services like education. They are not enrolled in local educational institutions due to a lack of personal registration. Therefore, they have been provided schools in their camps, but these schools lack formal education and poor literacy skills. Moreover, Pakistanis compel Afghan refugees to avoid education by stigmatizing their behavior (Jahangir & Khan, 2021). Pakistan has developed several policies for Afghan refugees, but they do not have a specific law to secure the social, political, and economic rights of Afghan refugees in the country (Masudi & Mustafa, 2022). The management of refugee crises depends on the capacity of the state. States can control the conditions that regulate the future of refugees, regional, inter-governmental, and international refugee regimes. Developing policy for refugees requires institutional, policy, and governing capacities. Institutional capacity means administrative ability, policy refers to long-term productive policies for the refugee crisis, and governing denotes to integration of complex relationships between domestic and international aims (Siddikoglu & Sagiroglu, 2023).

2.1 Importance of Education for Afghan Refugee Students

Educational rights are one part of human rights. Every individual has the right to access the highest education possible. According to the World Conference on Human Rights 1993, education develops harmonious

relationships among people, and raises mutual understanding, tolerance, and peace (Amanda & Kadir, 2023). From the soviet invasion to the US war, the Afghan refugees faced human security problems, especially lack of education. It is estimated that around 80% of school-aged children face lack of education in Pakistan (Jahangir & Khan, 2021). Refugee students' enrollment is below as compared to other local children. This is because of legal restrictions on enrollment, language barriers, and discrimination in school settings. Teachers play a great role in providing quality education to refugees. A more trained teacher can better teach and manage existing resources. It is identified that lack of financial and material resources, language policies, and lack of access to teachers' training are the barriers to refugee education in Kenya. Along with the provision of school-based teacher training, teachers must be included in the identification of problems and policy discussion of refugee students (Mendenhall et al., 2015). At the national level, education facilitates a productive future for refugees. Refugee students are marginalized in national schools because their national identity and language are given importance. Even if they gets quality education, skills, knowledge, and capacity still they face a lack of opportunities (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). According to UNHCR, higher education is important because it provides social, economic, and gender equality along with empowerment of refugee communities (UNHCR- Higher Education and Skills, 2023). Access to primary and secondary education for refugees also depends on the regulation of host countries. It has been examined that refugee students can access formal education in Uganda, but they are unable to get formal education in Bangladesh, this is due to regulatory differences in these two host countries. This means refugee education is not mentioned in the refugee laws and policies of Bangladesh (Dupuy et al., 2021). Some higher education institutions have been promoting online education for refugees due to barriers like entry qualification, financial, and geographical barriers. Kiron's Education offer is one of the institutions example that offers digital education (Halkic & Arnold, 2019).

3. RESEARCH GAP

There is a noticeable absence of research on higher education of female refugees in Quetta, Balochistan. This study aims to address this gap by conducting the study in Quetta, focusing on addressing the challenges of Afghan refugee girls in accessing higher education.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that limit the enrolment of Afghan refugee girls in higher education in Pakistan?
2. What are the most effective barriers that the Afghan refugee girls face?
3. What measures may be taken to overcome these barriers to enhance their enrollment in higher education?

5. METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodology states the selected methods fit to achieve the objectives of the research and research questions. This chapter focuses on the research method used, sampling size, sampling technique, universe, unit of analysis, and data analysis.

5.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative research design. Survey and semi-structured interviews were used for conducting this research. The research aimed to explore as well as explain the barriers faced by female Afghan refugee students to enroll in higher education.

5.1.1 Tools for Data Collection

In this study, researchers used surveys and interviews in data data-collecting procedure. The researcher used a structured questionnaire for conducting the study.

Another tool used by researchers for data collection was the interview. The researcher used semi-structured interviews for this study. These interviews identified the Afghan refugee girls' experiences and opinions about the gender gap in accessing higher education and the obstacles they faced during enrollment.

5.1.2 Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic and statistical analysis for this study. Different themes were generated from the data set to address the objectives of the research. Four themes were drawn based on data i.e., sources of motivation, challenges in higher education, survival strategies, and suggestions for enhancing higher education for female refugee students. Further sub-themes were formed to claim the main themes. Through SPSS software, the quantitative data is analyzed.

6. FINDINGS /RESULTS

In this section, the findings of the survey and interviews are discussed by answering the research questions of the study.

6.1 Quantitative Findings

This portion addresses the first two questions of the study

6.1.1 General Questions

Table 6.1.1.1. How important is pursuing higher education for your personal development and future opportunities?

	N	%
Not important	0	0%
Slightly important	0	0%
Moderately important	2	5.0%
very important	9	22.5%
extremely important	29	72.5%

5.0% of respondents considered higher education moderately important for their personal growth and future opportunities. For 22.5% of female refugee students' higher education was very important. However, a great majority, consisting of 72.5% of the respondents, believed that higher education was extremely important for their both personal development and future opportunities. The above data shows that the majority of refugee females have importance for higher education.

Table 6.1.1.2. How often do you have access to a computer or the internet for educational purposes?

	N	%
Daily	19	47.5%

Weekly	3	7.5%
Monthly	3	7.5%
Rarely	5	12.5%
Never	10	25.0%

The purpose of designing this question was to know whether the lack of access to the internet or computer hindered refugee females from pursuing higher education. 25.0% of respondents did not have access to a computer or internet for their educational purposes. 12.5% rarely had access to computer and internet. While a minimum, consisting of 7.5% used computers and the internet for study purposes. The majority of respondents almost 7.5% were daily involved in the usage of the internet and computers for their educational purposes whether making assignments or studying online.

Table 6.1.1.3. Have you encountered challenges accessing necessary educational resources due to a lack of technology or internet?

	N	%
Yes	22	55.0%
No	17	42.5%

The above table shows that 42.0% of both secondary and enrolled in higher education female refugee students did not face any problem in accessing educational resources due to lack of technology and internet. 55.0%, of respondents had encountered challenges accessing educational resources just due to lack of technology or the internet. It means that technology is necessary for accessing education.

Table 6.1.1.4 How did you become aware of available higher educational opportunities for Afghan refugee students?

	N	%
through family/ friends	23	57.5%
through educational institutions	8	20.0%
through community organizations	2	5.0%
through online resources	5	12.5%
Others	2	5.0%

Family plays a great role in the provision of education to the children. As it is shown by this table that 57.5% of respondents, more than half, had awareness about available higher education for Afghan refugee students through family or friends. 20.0% of respondents were informed by the educational institutions about the availability of higher education for them. Only 12.5% of students became aware of higher education through online sources. Community had become the source of information about higher education just for 5.0% of respondents.

Table 6.1.1.5 Which type of support or resources would be most effective in reducing the challenges faced by Afghan refugee students in accessing higher education? (Select all that apply)

	N	%
Scholarships	25	62.5%
Safe transportation	0	0%
accessible educational facilities	3	7.5%
Gender awareness campaigns	0	0%
Mentorship programs	0	0%
all of the above	12	30.0%

7.5% of respondents considered that the challenges in accessing higher education could be reduced through accessible educational facilities in institutions. There were also other ways of reducing problems in higher education like scholarships for Afghan refugee students. 62.5% of Afghan refugee students preferred scholarships to reduce the obstacles in higher education because mostly financial constraints were the dominant problem for them. The remaining 30.0% of students believed that both scholarships and accessible educational facilities were necessary and most effective to reduce the problems in accessing higher education.

6.1.2 Most Effecting Barriers in Accessing Higher Education.

Table 6.1.2.1 Challenges in Accessing Higher Education

Statements	Not faced		Slightly faced		Neutral		Moderately faced		Extremely faced	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Facing difficulties in obtaining an equivalence certificate-affecting enrollment in higher education.	9	22.5%	6	15.0%	0	0%	3	7.5%	22	55.0%
Lack of confidence during the transition from small camps to universities.	15	37.5%	6	15.0%	10	25.0%	6	15.0%	3	7.5%

Hindered admission due to insufficient documents like proof of registration (POR).	10	25.0%	9	22.5%	1	2.5%	2	5.0%	17	42.5%
Premature discontinuation of education due to early marriage.	26	65.0%	1	2.5%	5	12.5%	4	10.0%	4	10.0%
Limited degree opportunities in your current situation.	3	7.5%	6	15.0%	5	12.5%	9	22.5%	17	42.5%
Limited representation of refugee girls' education in media and society.	7	17.5%	4	10.0%	7	17.5%	7	17.5%	15	37.5%
Language barriers affecting integration into the education system.	9	22.5%	4	10.0%	10	25.0%	8	20.0%	9	22.5%
Negative community attitude towards education for refugee girls.	11	27.5%	6	15.0%	9	22.5%	5	12.5%	9	22.5%
Lack of career counseling during secondary education affects your path.	5	12.5%	4	10.0%	5	12.5%	8	20.0%	18	45.0%
Unavailability of convenient transportation to distant educational institutions.	4	10.0%	4	10.0%	6	15.0%	9	22.5%	17	42.5%
Possibilities of migration affecting the pursuit of higher education.	6	15.0%	4	10.0%	4	10.0%	5	12.5%	21	52.5%
Financial constraints.	3	7.5%	0	0%	5	12.5%	7	17.5%	25	62.5%
Lack of appropriate educational facilities.	3	7.5%	2	5.0%	7	17.5%	6	15.0%	22	55.0%
Limited availability of scholarships or financial aid.	2	5.0%	3	7.5%	6	15.0%	6	15.0%	22	55.0%
Social and cultural norms restrict education for girls.	13	32.5%	6	15.0%	4	10.0%	5	12.5%	12	30.0%
Safety and security concerns	7	17.5%	2	5.0%	7	17.5%	6	15.0%	18	45.0%
Gender stereotyping impacts career choices.	12	30.0%	4	10.0%	5	12.5%	7	17.5%	12	30.0%
Political instability or conflict in the region.	7	17.5%	6	15.0%	9	22.5%	2	5.0%	16	40.0%

Difficulty in balancing education and family responsibilities.	7	17.5%	7	17.5%	6	15.0%	4	10.0%	16	40.0%
Challenges in obtaining official recognition of previous education.	8	20.0%	9	22.5%	6	15.0%	6	15.05	11	27.5%

22.5% of respondents had not faced equivalence certificate challenges during enrollment in higher education. The same (22.5%) is the percentage of those respondents who had slightly faced difficulties in obtaining equivalence certificates during enrollment in higher education. while 55.0%, of the majority of respondents' enrollment in higher education had been affected due to difficulty obtaining an equivalence certificate. The majority of female refugee students had done their primary and secondary education in refugee camps so 37.5% did not face a lack of confidence as a barrier in their enrollment. 30.0% of respondents agreed with the idea that they slightly faced a lack of confidence during the transition from small camps to universities. 25.0% of students remained neutral on this idea. A minimum of 7.5% of respondents faced an extreme lack of confidence during the transition to the University of Quetta. Pakistan's government provided POR cards to the Afghan refugees as a national identity. As local students give National identity card numbers in any kind of document, the Afghan refugee students use proof of registration card numbers for the same purpose. The expiry date of this card is only three years then they must re-activate it. 42.5% of respondents were extremely hindered in admission due to a lack of POR cards. 27.5% of respondents slightly faced problems in the admission process of higher education due to the unavailability of POR cards. They did have this card but was expired. It took time for re-activation.

The small sample size of 2.5% remained neutral on the idea of hindered admission in higher education due to insufficient documents that as POR cards. 25.0% of respondents did not face hindrance in enrollment due to lack of POR card. The above table shows that only 10% of female refugees had extremely faced discontinuation of higher education due to earlier marriage. 12.5% were those respondents who just slightly faced earlier marriage as a barrier to their continuation of higher education. A huge sample size of 65.0% did not agree that earlier marriage was a cause of discontinuation of education because they did not face this challenge. However, 12.5% remained neutral on the idea of earlier marriage as a barrier to pursuing further education. 7.5% of respondents who chose "Not faced" indicate that they had not encountered limited opportunities in their current educations. 37.0% of respondents had suggested the middle level of experience regarding limited degree opportunities. 12.5% of respondents believed that they neither faced nor did not face this issue. 42.5% of respondents agreed that limited degree opportunities, extremely faced, is a significant challenge for their higher education.

22.5% of respondents perceived no evidence of limited representation of refugee girls' education in media and society; they had not faced this barrier. The percentage of moderately faced respondents is 27.5%, these students had observed some instances of limited representation of female girl's education in media but might not consider it as a significant issue for their access to higher education. 17.5% of female refugees had neither strong agreement nor disagreement with the idea of limited representation of education for girls, they remained neutral. 37.5% of respondents chose "extremely faced", a presence that there was a lack of girls' education representation in society and media. 22.5% of respondents recorded the language barrier affecting their integration into the higher education system. They had extremely faced language barriers in institutions. However, 25.0% remained neutral

on whether the language barrier affected their assimilation in the education system; neither suggesting that they faced nor otherwise. A high number of them, including 30.0% have moderately faced a language barrier in their study. 22.5% believed language was not a substantial barrier to access to higher education. 22.5% believed the community had a negative attitude towards girls' education. They perceived a negative community attitude as a barrier to their education. However, 27.5% slightly agreed with this idea and had observed some instances of community negative attitudes toward girls' education. Some of the respondents, 22.5%, remained neutral. 27.5% of the respondents chose not to be faced, which indicated they had not encountered the negative attitude of the community toward their education. The respondents of 12.5% had not faced any trouble in their career path due to lack of career counseling, which suggested that they had clear goals and aims independent of formal career counseling. Individuals of 30.0% "slightly faced" indicated that had experienced minor challenges due to the absence of career counseling. 12.5% of female refugee students remained neutral and neither faced or otherwise in their career path. While most of the respondents including 45.0% had extremely faced a lack of career counseling during secondary education. The absence of formal guidance might had resulted in delays in pursuing higher education.

The sample size of 10.0% suggested that they did not face a lack of convenient transportation to distant educational institutions. These individuals might have easy access to reliable transportation or might live close to educational institutions. Some individuals 32.5% slightly faced the absence of convenient transportation; suggesting that this challenge might not significantly hinder their ability to attend educational institutions. On the other hand, 15.0% had chosen to be neutral, the individuals in this category might not be affected by inconvenient transportation, or they might have other means of transportation to the institutions. However, the majority of respondents, 42.5%, had extremely faced unavailability of convenient transportation. This barrier might have affected their punctuality and limited their educational choices or academic performance. 15.0% of the respondents selected the "not faced" option for the statement that the possibility of migration interrupting their higher education. This suggested that they had permanent settlement in the host country that allowed them to pursue higher education. 10.0% had remained neutral on the idea of whether the possibility of migration affected the pursuit of higher education. Maybe they had no chance of migration or managing study at any location. Nevertheless, 32.5% of individuals had experienced some impact of migration due to the possibility of migration. The chances of migration might slightly influence their education but did not consider it as a major barrier for education. Conversely, 52.5% of respondents had seen the possibility of migration to another country as a negatively affecting factor for their education.

The minimum number of individuals, 7.5%, had not faced financial constraints in pursuing higher education. It seemed they were financially stable. 12.5% of respondents selected the neutral option; it can be that their financial situation was neither particularly favorable nor challenging for their current education. However, 17.5% were those who had moderately faced financial constraints, but not severely affecting factors in their education. 62.5%, that was the majority of respondents, extremely faced financial constraints leading to a high level of difficulty in pursuing higher education. 7.5% of female refugee students who did not face inappropriate educational facilities in institutions were satisfied with the sufficient and appropriate resources available in universities. 20.0% of respondents slightly faced challenges related to educational facilities that was not as significant to hinder the learning process. Some respondents, 17.5%, might believe that there was neither a substantial lack nor an abundance of educational facilities in the institutions. In contrast, 55.0% of individuals

faced an extreme lack of appropriate educational facilities, due to which facing challenges in accessing quality education. As mentioned above most of the respondents had encountered financial constraints in accessing education, so they depended on financial aid or scholarships. Nevertheless, 55.0% of refugee students faced extremely limited availability of scholarships in institutions. They faced a lack of financial support from universities for education. 22.5% slightly faced a deficiency of scholarships but believed there were still opportunities for financial assistance. While only 5.0% had not faced this barrier, might be able to take their educational expenditures without the help of any support program. Every society has its own social and cultural norms that shape societal functions. As 30.0% of refugee girls had shared that, they had faced extreme restrictions on girl's education. Cultural norms might have enforced strict gender roles, where girls had limited access to higher education. 27.5% of respondents slightly encountered cultural norms' restrictions on girls' education. It seemed those social norms had set some boundaries on girls' education such as limited career choices or accessing higher education in same-gendered institutions, but these restrictions did not inhibit their overall education. Respondents of lying in the neutral option, 10.0% neither faced nor did not face social and cultural norms and restrictions on girl's education. While 32.5% of students did not face a significant restriction on girl's education. In their communities, Gender equality in education was promoted and girls had equal access to educational opportunities.

17.5% of the respondents did not face safety and security concerns in accessing education. The educational infrastructure was relatively secure. 20.0% chose the slightly faced option, suggesting that in certain areas, there were issues of bullying, unsafe transportation, or safety hazards but these did not pose barriers to accessing education. 10.0% were those who remained neutral that safety concerns might or might not be faced. But the majority, 45.0% believed safety and security were extreme issues that impeded access to education. Extreme cases might include girl harassment, violence, stigmatization, and conflict. 30.0% of the respondents did not face gender stereotyping in career choices, they might have equal chances to select career choices of their interest, regardless of gender. 27.5% slightly encountered gender stereotyping in their career choices. However, 12.5% remained neutral on whether gender stereotyping impacted their career choices. The sample size of 30.0% extremely faced gender stereotyping, which might be their societal norms limiting individual career choices based on their gender. Political instability could be a barrier to the education of students. The majority of respondents 40.0% had extremely faced challenges in education due to ongoing political instability and conflict. 20.0% had slight disruption in accessing education, which might be an interruption in the daily schedule. Moreover, 22.5% remained neutral on the idea of political instability as a barrier in their current education.

There were also those students of 17.5% who had not encountered political unrest during their pursuit of higher education. 17.5% of the respondents did not face difficulties in balancing education and family responsibilities without compromise. However, 27.5% of female refugees slightly faced difficulty in managing education along with family responsibilities and might face minor disruptions. 15.0% remained neutral indicating that they either did not face difficulties or could easily balance education and family responsibilities. Most of the respondents 40.0% encountered extreme challenges in balancing education due to family responsibilities. 20.0% of the respondents have not faced challenges in obtaining official recognition of previous education due to the smooth process. 38.0% have encountered some difficulties in obtaining official recognition of secondary education, but the process was manageable. Moreover, 15.0% remained neutral which indicated that they neither faced difficulty nor eased in obtaining official recognition of previous education. Nevertheless, 27.5% have faced

extreme difficulty in obtaining official recognition of secondary education which might include additional documentation requirements and delays in the process.

6.1.3 Aspirations and Believes

Table 6.1.3.1 Aspirations

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Obtaining higher education in the host country enhances job prospects.	10	25.0%	2	5.0%	3	7.5%	2	5.0%	22	55.0%
Higher education empowers you to contribute positively to the host country's workforce.	9	22.5%	3	7.5%	7	17.5%	2	5.0%	18	45.0%
The host country's market aligns with your field of study.	10	25.0%	4	10.0%	7	17.5%	7	17.5%	11	27.5%
You believe higher education will open doors to fulfilling career paths.	10	25.0%	4	10.0%	6	15.0%	4	10.0%	15	37.5%
Immigration to a Western country is a key motivation for you to excel in higher education.	7	17.5%	6	15.0%	5	12.5%	2	5.0%	19	47.5%

30.0% of the respondents strongly agreed with the idea that obtaining higher education could enhance job opportunities in the host country. However, 7.5% remained neutral neither they agreed nor disagreed with the idea that higher education could increase job prospects for female refugees. A great majority, consisting of 60.0% of the sample size, disagreed that getting higher education in a host country did not enhance job prospects. 29.5% of the respondents believed that by getting higher education they could be empowered and contribute to the host country's market force. Only 17.5 % of them had no suggestion on this idea. Another 50.0% of respondents strongly disagreed; and expressed a strong acknowledgment that higher education could not empower them to participate in the workforce market of the host country. 35.0% of respondents agreed and believed that the host country's market was well suited to their field of study. In addition, opportunities for their field of study exist in the host country's market. 45.0% disagreed, who perceived a misalignment between their field of study and the host country's market. Neutral responses were 17.5% might not feel strongly that the host country's market either aligned or did not align with their field of study. 35.0% of the respondents agreed and suggested that higher education was a key factor in unlocking opportunities for fulfilling career paths.

Against it, 7.5% were those who disagreed, and held the view that higher education did not necessarily guarantee fulfilling career paths. 25% remained neutral which might imply a lack of uncertainty regarding the role of higher education in shaping career paths. The last portion of the table showed that 32.5% of the respondents agreed with the idea that immigration to Western countries was the motivation for excelling in higher education. They might leave the host country in the future therefore not applying for higher education. Nevertheless, 52.5% were those respondents who disagreed with the view of immigration as the primary motivation for exiling higher

education; they might have other reasons for leaving higher education. Again 12.5% remained neutral on whether the motivation for the migration barriers could be exiling higher education in the host country.

6.2 Qualitative Analysis

6.2.1 Themes

6.2.1.1. Family Relation (Family education, Mother, father)

An individual is born and socialized in his/her family. During this journey of life, a strong relationship builds with family members (mother and father). Family relations have a great influence on an individual's behavior and attitude. They are the first motive of their children toward any social activity. For example, the father plays a crucial role in providing education, a positive environment, and facilities to his daughter. As a female refugee student said, "My father is my motivation, having supported me in pursuing higher education".

If we look at family relations, a mother has a multifaceted role. She provides emotional support, and curiosity and actively participates in her daughter's academic journey. In this patriarchal society, every mother aims to make her daughter independent by providing education. A female refugee student said, "My father is illiterate, but my mother is educated. She is my source of motivation. She has supported me in pursuing higher education with the goal of securing a bright future".

6.2.1.2. Personal Motivation

Personal goals and values are stronger sources of motivations than interpersonal sources. The individual desire for autonomy and competence motivates her to achieve a position or role in society. When a person has a clear vision and intent, the societal obstacles do not matter to her. A female refugee interviewee sounds similar in our analysis by saying,

I come from a family with limited educational background; my parents can only write their names. Through observing my family, I have recognized the significance of education. Observing gender inequality, especially as a girl, has powered my determination. I have decided to pursue further education not only to uplift my family but also to challenge and overcome gender disparities in my community. I aspire to build a secure future for myself, believing that every household benefits from an educated mother.

6.2.1.3. Support Programs

Several organizations/programs work to support students who face financial barriers in education. UNHCR is one of those organizations which are working for refugee students in Pakistan. It provides primary and secondary education to Afghan refugees through schools, satellite classes, home-based girls' schools, and earlier childhood education centers in refugee camps in Pakistan. It provides scholarships for higher education Afghan refugee students. It addresses the needs and challenges of female refugee students and provides them with financial aid in higher education. DAFI scholarships funded by the government of Germany are administered by UNHCR and granted to female refugee students enrolled in higher education.

6.2.2. Challenges in Higher Education

6.2.2.1 Enrollment Process

The primary obstacle in the enrollment process for female refugee students is the unavailability of institutions' required documents. As non-local residents of Pakistan, these individuals are required to provide certain documents during the enrollment process. These required documents include proof of registration card (POR), equivalence certificate, Shadat Nama, and passport/visa. The process of obtaining an equivalence certificate involves several steps. Firstly, one must obtain a letter from the Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to verify the Shadat Nama in Kabul. Following this, the Shadat Nama needs to be stamped by the

same ministry. The second step involves acquiring a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Afghan Consulate General in Pakistan. With these documents, individuals can proceed to the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) in Islamabad to receive the equivalence certificate after verification of all documents. This process takes a minimum of one to two years. A female refugee student talked about the faced challenges during enrollment by stating that,

I have invested two years in convincing my family for my admission to higher education. Moreover, it took an additional two years to make my equivalence certificate. Then financial instability hindered my ability to pursue my education. For a yearlong, I have waited for the announcement of the DAFI scholarship. Despite these difficulties, I did not lose hope and my persistence paid off when I was selected for the DAFI scholarship.

Previously, the Shadat Nama could be formed and stamped through any representative of female refugee students. Now there has been a change, it is that the student herself or the individual in her family history must personally visit foreign office for Shadat Nama. This policy makes it even more difficult for refugee girls to get higher education. A female refugee student said in this context that,

The main challenge I have faced during enrollment is the lack of required documents. The institution required national documents such as passport/visa. However, I was born and raised in Pakistan, so it is impossible for me to provide an Afghan passport. Before we could send anyone for Shadat Nama but now the student or her family members can only bring this certificate. Being a girl, I cannot go to Kabul because it is very risky to go to Afghanistan just for a stamp.

Some of them received secondary education in Pakistani colleges but are required to wait for one to two years for their Detailed Marks Certificates (DMCs). This implies that they do not gain any benefits from studying in Pakistani colleges. A participant held that, “My two years were wasted to get DMC even though I have got secondary education in Pakistani local college, Girls can’t college Quetta”.

6.2.2.2 Social Exclusion (Stereotype, Ethnicity, Otherness, Stigmatization (Namakharam)

Social exclusion is a social process of alienation of groups or individuals from social relations or institutions. This social exclusion can be connected to Peron’s social class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and appearance. This social phenomenon is mostly exercised in every society. Refugees are one of them. Female refugee students not only encounter challenges during the enrollment process but also continue to face hurdles after being enrolled in institutions. They become hunted for social exclusion in institutions due to their nationality, ethnicity, and gender. Stereotype is attaching a word or meaning to a specific community, group or individual. Female refugee students are stereotyped by the term Afghan or Mohair. Their class fellows consider them inferior and do not cooperate with them just due to their non-national status. They are stigmatized by Namakharam. For instance, a participant shared that,

It was difficult for me to attempt papers due to the language barrier. My classmates often disappoint me by making fun of me and mentioning me as a "Mohajir." They teased me by questioning why we did not return to my country. They used harsh words like “Namakharam” against me.

Despite that female refugee students facing hurdle in study due to language or financial barriers, teachers are not cooperative with them. Even teachers do not behave the same way with these students as they do with local students. A student participant held that,

The university system was entirely unfamiliar to me. Teachers are uncooperative; they make no effort to comprehend our challenges and adapt their teaching methods to our understanding. The behavior of the teachers towards me differs from their treatment of other local students. When I attempt to communicate my issues, their response is simply to suggest leaving your studies if faced with such obstacles.

6.2.2.3 Mismanagement of Class and Session Time

The support programs or organizations held sessions for refugee students in higher institutions. The purpose of these sessions is to identify obstacles or problems of enrolled refugee students. However, female refugee students consider these continuous sessions as an obstacle to their studies. As a student said, “to get financial support or scholarships, attendance in the conducted session of support programs is necessary. However, it is a challenging task for me to balance my classes, maintain attendance percentage and participation in these sessions”.

6.2.2.4 Language Barrier

Language barrier is a common issue that is faced mostly by female refugee students. Their native language is either Pashto, Dari or Persian and they receive primary education and sometimes secondary education in their native language. When they are enrolled in higher education institutions in Pakistan where education is provided in English and Urdu language, it becomes very challenging for them. As a respondent noted that, “It was very difficult to understand the language and teaching method of teachers. I had to take quizzes, make assignments, and give presentations, which were very new for me. I was afraid of dropping out due to the language barrier”.

6.2.2.5 Survival Strategies: Hiding their identity

It is nature of human to employ survival strategies in order to overcome environmental and social problems to ensure their well-being. Female refugee students have experienced social exclusion in institutions due to their nationality. Therefore, they hide their identity. A participant noted that, “My Teachers and classmates behave normally with me because I have kept my nationality hidden.”

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

7.1 Family Counselling

Before enrollment, female refugee students face family and community restrictions due to their gender. Community norms are set that the breadwinner of the family is the man so they more focus on the education of males than on the females. Parents believe their sons can fulfill familial expectations and obligations. As a participant emphasized the gendered influence of parents on education, “My parents believe that they cannot reap any benefit from my education because after marriage I move to another home. Therefore, they do not prefer to invest on my education.”

The respondents have suggested that even though it is difficult to encourage families and communities to girls' education, somehow, they can be encouraging through motivational speeches on the importance of women's education, because they may be unaware of it. As a female participant noted their parents could not afford educational expenditures. So, they can be motivated to women education through financial support. All the respondents were DAFI scholars; they said The DAFI scholarship should be extended to at least two siblings, a sister, and a brother, as parents often lean towards utilizing this support for their sons.

7.2 Providing Opportunities for Higher Education (Inclusive Environment, Scholarship Opportunity for females)

In general, refugees lack opportunities for employment and income. Most refugee men depend on the illegal economy, but women cannot do this. Limited access to business opportunity and financial benefits worsens their economic struggle. Despite facing numerous challenges, the refugee females are pursuing higher education

just to get a job opportunity and become independent. Providing support and employment opportunities enables their economic independence and enhances their well-being. Gender equality in resource access and job opportunities can ensure the refugee female to participate in their economic growth as well as contribute for prosperous society (Kakar et al., 2022). As Zarmeena noted that “I recommend providing us with job opportunities. We get higher education for the sake of our jobs. If the organizations specify some jobs just for Afghan refugee girls, so it can be helpful to motivate parents for higher education and can bridge gender gap”.

Educational institutions can create a more inclusive environment for female refugee students in higher education through workshops, training sessions, and internships. There is a need for a psychologist for emotional and psychological support. A refugee female student Iqra mentioned, “Held awareness sessions and training centers that teach us skills of online job like free launching, as we face the deficiency of job opportunities. An inclusive environment of institutions should include carrier counseling as well.”

As local students of Pakistan, the female refugee students are motivated for abroad educational scholarships. Nevertheless, they are unable to apply for such scholarships. They can have financial support and scholarships for higher education but do not have any support for MPhil and PhD programs. Further Saleema added, “This system should include more opportunities and especially scholarships for PhD programs. They help us apply for international study scholarships like U-grade or MS”.

7.3 Providing a Safe and Secure Environment (hostel facilities, Psychological and Emotional Support System)

Refugee females face challenges in the educational aspect of human security. Insecurity can be in the sense of harassment, bullying, violence, conflict, and stigmatization. A psychological and emotional support system is required in higher educational institutions to help them in such traumatic conditions. Most refugees live in camps, which are in sub-urban regions. Daily long-distance travel impedes a barrier to the educational success of these students. Offering hostel facilities can ensure a conducive environment for learning. Moreover, Irum said, “The power of words is stronger than the injury of the sword. We face bullying along with other problems. Therefore, we need both psychological and emotional support. We need the cooperation of the university in the sense of language barrier, career counseling, and hostel facilities”.

8. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the impediments encountered by female refugee students in gaining access to higher education. Moreover, the primary objective of the study was to enhance access to higher education for these refugee girls by overcoming the most effective barriers. The findings of this study show that majority of the respondents considered tertiary level education extremely important for their personal growth and development. The persistent hindrance to their limited enrollment are socioeconomic, cultural, and inadequate infrastructure facilities. The most effective barriers are lack of career counseling during secondary education, unavailability of insufficient documents (equivalence certificate, POR card), lack of appropriate educational facilities, and limited degree opportunities. Further socio-economic barriers included financial constraints, restrictions on female education, language barriers, safety and security concerns, and gender stereotyping impact career choices. Hence, they face family restriction, delays in documentation process and then several issues within institutions during study. These challenges can be overcome by firstly family counselling about importance of female education. Facilitating opportunities and an inclusive educational environment is crucial for enhancing their access to higher education. Despite these challenges, they believe higher education will open doors to fulfilling career paths and can positively contribute to the host country's workforce. One of Practice implications of this study is either

decrease the documentation process or provide them primary and secondary education in local institutions. Make available hostel facilities because within proximity to institutions can positively influence their academic performance. There is need of contribution of universities with these students by providing them scholarships, except DAFL. This paper makes a valuable contribution in addressing the underlying factors contributing to the constrained enrollment of female refugees in higher educational institutions of Quetta, Baluchistan, along with strategies/suggestions to overcome these barriers.

One of limitation of this study is small sample size and it was conducted in one city. In addition, the results are just generalizable for the main three universities of Baluchistan. It is suggested to future researchers to conduct a study in other cities of Pakistan, which should attempt to have a larger sample size.

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