



Socio-economic barriers to children's education in Afghanistan:

A case study of Kabul city

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ABSTRACT

Having been a war zone for the last four decades, Afghanistan is one of the developing countries where affordable access to quality education is still a dream for many of its people. According to the 2017 UNICEF Annual Report, over 40% (3.7 million) of school-age children were out of school in Afghanistan. In order to better design projects and programs that are working towards reducing this number, it is necessary first to understand the root causes of the issue. The objective of this research is to assess and analyze some of the various social and economic barriers that keep children out of school in Kabul City and hence, offer additional key information and recommendations for limiting this critical issue. Primary data of 300 children were collected through a survey conducted randomly in Kabul City. The target population of this survey were working children (between the ages of 5 and 18) and parents from households of different ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. Poverty and cultural limitations were found to be the most common factors preventing Afghan children from going to school. Other factors like access, physical disability, guardian's type and education level, lack of infrastructure, child labor, and gender discrimination may also contribute to this issue. Results of the analysis suggest that government agencies can play a significant role in facilitating affordable access to quality education for all children by extending coverage of public schools, offering reasonable financial grants for poor families in order to avoid the need for child labor, and bringing necessary legal reforms in the traditional norms to discourage child marriage and gender discrimination.

Keywords

- Barriers to education
- Out of school
- Child labor
- Gender discrimination
- Traditional norms
- Life in a war zone
- Poverty

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1. Introduction

Education is a basic human need and right that equips human beings with the knowledge and skills to understand their rights and duties towards their family and society. It is necessary to ensure significant improvements in the economic growth, living standards, and the sustainability of a community. Education is important for children as they will lead in the future. It develops confidence in children and makes them capable to fight against injustice, corruption, violence, and other unethical activities. Schooling at an early age encourages children to acquire higher education and build a better future. Access to quality education has a direct influence on developing human capital and thus improving the productivity of a country. On the other hand, a lack of education can have serious consequences for the health and living standards of children and adults. Not only does it impact the individual and their family, but it also has a disastrous effect on their communities and countries. Most criminal activities are found to happen more frequently in the non-educated environments. In order to pave their way to success, prosperity, higher economy, and better living standards, governments in the deprived and developing countries must ensure quality education accessible for and attainable by all its people.

Like other developing countries, Afghanistan needs to invest in improving access to education for its people. Unfortunately, progress in children's education in Afghanis-

tan has been very disappointing. According to a significant report, approximately 3.7 million children, i.e. around 43% of the primary-age population, in Afghanistan were out of school in 2017 [1]. The report examines household surveys performed by National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) (2007-2008, 2011-2012), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) (2013-2014), Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (2010, 2015), and Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (AMICS) (2011-2012). Similarly, the analysis for primary education ranked Afghanistan, in 2018, at the 7th lowest place among all countries of the world [2].

There are certain economic and social factors which affect children school enrollment. Among all these potential barriers, poverty has the largest impact on children education in Afghanistan. Families with low income less likely send their children to school due to certain educational expenses. Although public schools provide free education in Afghanistan, additional costs for uniforms, transportation, food and stationery, affect the budget of poor families and put them in a situation to choose which of their children should attend school [1]. The same study says that "Economic disadvantages are often identified as primary reasons for dropping out of school" [1]. The World Bank's report [3] "Education Attainment in Afghanistan" also analyzed different factors associated with the schooling of boys and girls, both in urban and rural areas of



Afghanistan. This analysis is based on the data from the NRVA Survey of 2007/2008, which collected households' information on demography, expenses, education, child health, employment, community-based infrastructure and certain cultural practices. The study showed that demand-side factors appeared to be more important in children's enrollment in Afghanistan [3]. Economic backwardness was found to be the most significant cause impacting the probability of children enrollment. Poverty, combined with the child labor opportunities, affected the opportunity cost of sending children to school [3]. An academic research on "The effects of family income on children's education: An empirical analysis of CHNS data" [4] demonstrated that family income had a considerable role in children's education and a good income could facilitate better education opportunities for children, particularly in case of rural families. A briefing paper by Pamela Hunte [5] explored the basic demand-side factors associated with decision making about children's school enrollment in Afghanistan. The study noticed that many poor families place their expectations on education to get rid of poverty and therefore they prefer to send their children (mostly boys) to school, rather than sending them to work and earn. Such families hardly get succeeded in educating some of their children (preferably boys) because poverty is a bottleneck for them, and it doesn't let them educate all their children [5]. The household size, in addition to poverty, is also a significant element in decision making for acquiring children's education. Children in larger families were found to have a lower probability of school enrollment [3].

Different cultural impacts and negative social pressure of the community are also key reasons to stop children, particularly girls, from going to school. Girls in all ages are less likely to attend school as compared to boys of the same age group [1]. The probability of enrollment for boys was almost 40 percent higher than that of girls [6]. Poverty, religious beliefs, traditional and ethnic customs, security concerns, geographical problems, lack of quality facilities, and corruption in the public sector were identified as the root causes of gender inequality in terms of girls education in Afghanistan [7]. Similarly, UNESCO [8] specified school-based violence, gender-based harassment, physical contact by boys and teachers, and other threats to girls' physical safety as the key factors that restricted girls' mobility and their access to education. Child marriage or early marriage is considered the second most reported reason of leaving school by girls [1]. Girls in the rural areas are usually expected to perform household tasks rather than to go to school [8]. In addition, the fear of social impact badly affects the education of girls, particularly their enrollment in high school when they are teenage with the beginning of puberty [5].

The marginal impact of regional and linguistic variables is also of large significance. "Girls and boys in the south, west, and southwest regions are less likely to participate in primary education than children in Afghanistan's central region" [3]. The trend of children's enrollment was

found minor in Pashto speakers as compared to Dari speakers [5].

Studies have also shown that proper guardianship and parental education have significant impact on the probability of children's school enrollment. According to the World Bank analysis [3], the parents' education was important for their children's enrollment, but mother's education had more impact, specifically on girls' enrollment. Similarly, a child's financial needs increase if he or she has no parental protection. "Without the care of guardians, children are more likely to discontinue education" [1]. These children usually give priority to leading and feeding themselves, their siblings and the whole family. More than two million Afghan children, mostly boys, of the age between 6 to 14 years were engaged in child labor [1].

In addition to the mentioned demand-side factors, there are some supply-side factors which also contribute in limiting children's access to quality education in Afghanistan. These factors include financial constraints in public sector, lack of infrastructure, security concerns, quality and quantity of teachers, Curriculum issues, and lack of facilities for disabled and overage children. An article on the political economy analysis of education in Afghanistan [9] argued that Afghanistan's education system was badly affected by failing security conditions, weak governance and extensive corruption. Lack of proper education infrastructure is another important factor and almost 30 percent of the unenrollment cases were caused due to unavailability of schools [6]. Other findings showed that political conflict and war had a negative impact on children's lives and had reduced opportunities for children's education in Afghanistan [10]. Similarly, education facilities were almost inaccessible in the areas where internally displaced people or returnees from other countries (like Pakistan and Iran) were settled [1]. Some teachers criticized the curriculum length and declared it an extra burden for students because of too many subjects [1]. Same study [1] recommended to depoliticize the curriculum in order to enable teachers to provide education in insecure areas.

2. Purpose of this study

This research aims to understand, compare, and analyze different factors preventing children in Afghanistan from going to school. This study conducts a comparative analysis of various social and economic barriers to children's education in Kabul City. Poverty or low income is the central focus to discover how household income is a driving factor for stopping children from enrolling in school.

3. Methodology

The research studied the behavior of children and their parents against different aspects that impact children's education in Kabul City. It is a descriptive, observational data-collection study. The Chi-Square Test of Independence method was used to analyze the relationship between different variables. In this method, the distribution of categorical variables is checked in order to see whether

they are different from each other. In this research, the alpha level is chosen as 10% or 0.1, so any resultant p-value equal to or less than 0.1 would determine that the null hypothesis is rejected, and the variables are significantly in relationship.

The formula for the Chi-Square statistics used in the Chi-Square test is given as:

$$\chi_c^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \quad (1)$$

Where, " χ^2 " is the symbol of Chi-Square statistics, the subscript "c" is the degree of freedom, "O" is the observed value, "E" is the expected value, and "i" denotes the position of value in the contingency table.

To collect the primary data, a research survey was conducted in different locations of Kabul City where children and families of different ethnic backgrounds were approached. The accessible literature and published papers were reviewed to analyze secondary data.

The questionnaire approach has been used as a research instrument for collecting the primary information. Two different surveys were prepared for parents and working children, written both in English and local languages (Pashto and Dari). Questionnaire samples are attached in Appendix A of this document.

The parent's survey includes questions about household size, parents' education level, children's gender and education status, source of income, ethnic background, and average income level. The target participants were (i) both genders, (ii) willing to share their educational and economic status, (iii) belonged to different ethnic and regional backgrounds, (iv) having different professional backgrounds, (v) comfortable to share educational information of their family members, and (vi) willing to be asked questions. The questionnaire also incorporates parents' remarks about different barriers to their children's education and their view about other potential barriers. Finally, they are asked to share their recommendations for the government and for private schools in order to improve children's enrollment in school.

The second survey was organized for children, including any working children. This questionnaire consists of questions about child's usual demographic characteristic, education status, reasons for working or staying away from schooling, gender and education information of his/her siblings and other children in his/her home, number of family members, family's ethnic background, parents' or guardian's education level, family's average income and his/her contribution to this income. The target participants were: (i) 5-18 years old, (ii) both genders, (iii) comfortable to be asked, (iv) both working and non-working children, (v) belonged to different ethnic backgrounds, and (vi) willing to share their family information as per

questionnaire requirement. Respondents were also asked about their choice to quit working if given the chance of acquiring free schooling.

For the purpose of collecting primary information through questionnaires, the stratified sampling model was chosen. The population was divided into 4 strata based on geographical factors, i.e., north, east, south, and west zones of Kabul city. Then, within each stratum, the survey respondents were selected randomly. Both questionnaires resulted in acquiring information about a sample of 300 children between the ages of 5-18 years.

In both surveys, both the economic and social information about the out-of-school children and their families were collected. The economic information would help determine the average monthly income required for a family to let their children attend school. Similarly, questions about ethnic background and home province would inform us on the impact of different cultures on children's education and would help to predict barriers to children's education in different provinces and regions other than Kabul.

4. Analysis and discussion

The questionnaire gathered information from a sample of 300 children, including 177 boys and 123 girls, with different frequencies of either going to school or not as shown in Table 4.1. Using the Chi-Square test, gender and school enrollment preference are likely to be related in the population, $\chi^2 (1, N=300) = 6.84, p < 0.05$. Given the fact that 22% of boys (39/177) and 35.8% of girls (44/123) are not attending school which indicates that girls are most likely out of school in this population.

Table 1: Gender distribution.

Children Gender	Going to School	Not Going school	Total
Girls	79	44	123
Boys	138	39	177
Total	217	83	300

The population of both genders of the school age children (5 – 18 years) has been analyzed based on different categories like age group, ethnic and regional background, guardians' characteristics, and the income and size of their households. The Chi-Square analysis technique has been used to understand how significant these variables are in terms of children's school enrollment. Each variable has also been tested distinctly against the enrollment of male and female children.

4.1. Age group

Children were sub analyzed into four age groups as shown in Table 4.2. The population of children, either in or out of school, were observed to be statistically relevant to the mentioned age groups, $\chi^2 (3, N=300) = 6.53, p < 0.1$. Male

and female children enrollment were also tested separately, and it was found that girls' enrollment is statistically not relevant to their ages, $\chi^2 (3, N=123) = 2.54, p > 0.1$ while the frequency of being in school or out of school for boys was found statistically significant and in relation with the given age groups, $\chi^2 (3, N=177) = 8.80, p < 0.1$.

Table 2: Gender distribution.

Age Group	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not going to School	Girls Not going to School	Total
5-8	30	22	5	17	74
9-12	51	30	10	11	102
13-15	38	16	11	9	74
16-18	19	11	13	7	50
Total	138	79	39	44	300

Children aged 16-18 years old are most likely out of school with a highest ratio of 40% (20/50) of the population of this age group (Figure 1). Based on the respondents' feedback, the reasons for this ratio are opportunity cost and cultural limitations in boys and girls respectively. Most of these boys do not attend school as they need to work for their families while girls of this age group are supposed to stay at home due to certain social norms. Girls of all age groups, except 16-18 years, are more likely out of school as compared to boys of the same age groups. The difference of enrollment rate of girls versus boys is highest in the early school age group (5-8 years) where the rate of not attending school is 43.6% and 14.3% in girls and boys respectively. Overall, children aged 9 to 12 years old are most likely attending school as their rate of enrollment is almost 80%. The enrollment rate is found lowest (60%) in the children who are above 15 years old.

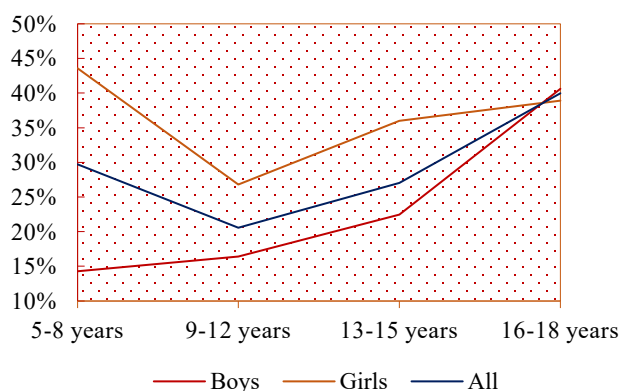


Figure 1. Age-based percentage of children not attending school.

4.2. Ethnic background

Children of different ethnicity are found to have different trends towards enrollment in school. Table 4 shows that there is a strong statistical relationship between ethnicity and children education, $\chi^2 (5, N=300) = 25.92, p < 0.05$. Similarly, when the enrollment of only female children was analyzed, it was found statistically significant and in

relationship with their ethnic or linguistic background, $\chi^2 (5, N=123) = 21.68, p < 0.05$. In contrast, school enrollment of male children in Kabul was found to be statistically insignificant and irrelevant with their ethnic or linguistic background, with a confidence level of 88%, i.e., $\chi^2 (5, N=177) = 8.66, p > 0.1$. Which means that ethnic background does not play a significant role in keeping boys in or out of school the way it does for girls.

Table 3: Ethnicity and children enrollment.

Ethnic Background	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not going to School	Girls Not going to School	Total
Hazara	13	10	8	14	45
Pashai	6	8	2	0	16
Pashtun	73	31	23	23	150
Sadat Arab	4	0	2	2	8
Tajik	41	28	4	5	78
Uzbek	1	2	0	0	3
Total	138	79	39	44	300

Children of Sadat Arab, Pashtun, and Hazara tribes are found to have higher ratio of out-of-school children as compared with those of Pashai, Tajik, and Uzbek children (Figure 2). The common issues among these children were poverty and traditional norms for boys and girls, respectively. Overall, the ratio of boys attending school (78% i.e. 138/177) was better than that of girls (64% i.e. 79/123) in this population.

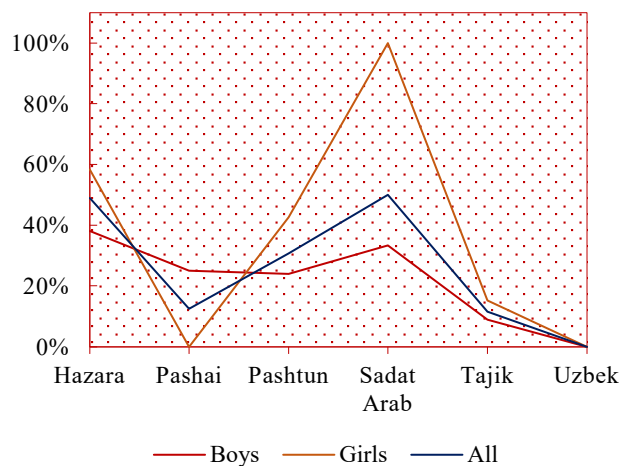


Figure 2. Ethnicity-based percentage of children not attending school.

4.3. Guardian characteristics

Guardian is the head of a household who plays the leading role in driving the financial and social decisions of a family. Having been a war zone for the last four decades, Afghanistan has become the home for many orphans who have been grown up under the guardianship of either a mother or someone other than their own parents. Considering this tragedy, the type of guardian was included in the questionnaire. The term "other" was used for anyone,

other than parents, who was playing the role of guardian to the surveyed child.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 show the impact of guardians/parents on children’s schooling. As can be seen by the frequencies in Table 4.4, guardian type has significant relationship with children’s enrollment, $\chi^2 (2, N=300) = 20.06, p < 0.05$. If the population of only female children is considered, their school enrollment is found insignificant with the type of guardian they have, $\chi^2 (2, N=123) = 2.94, p > 0.1$. In other words, guardian type has no significant impact on the schooling of female children. On the other hand, if the guardian type is statistically tested against boys’ enrollment, they are found significantly relevant with a confidence level of more than 99%, $\chi^2 (2, N=177) = 2.94, p < 0.01$. It indicates that the type of guardian has a strong impact on the school enrollment of male children.

Table 4: Guardian type and children education.

Guardian Type	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not Going to School	Girls Not Going to School	Total
Father	112	60	20	27	219
Mother	14	15	17	13	59
Other	12	4	2	4	22
Total	138	79	39	44	300

Children under the guardianship of their own parents, especially the father, are most likely going to school (Figure 3). In case of father being the guardian, children have the highest school enrollment rate of above 78%. The lowest rate of enrollment observed is 49% when mother plays the role of guardian to children. The proportion of out-of-school boys is highest (54.8% i.e. 17/31) when they have mother as guardian, but the ratio is far better in boys having a guardian other than mother. While in case of girls, they are mostly out of school if they do have neither a father nor a mother as their guardian.

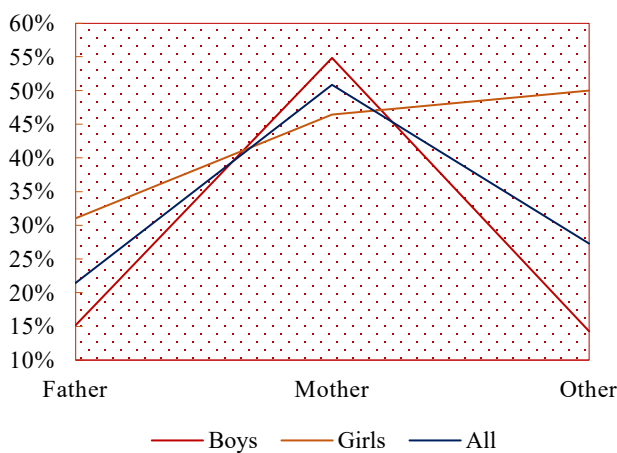


Figure 3. Percentage of children not attending school based on guardian type.

In addition to guardian type, guardian’s education level has also a significant impact on children’s education. Analyzing the data given in Table 4.5 with the Chi-square method, guardian’s education level is found strongly related with their children’s enrollment in school, $\chi^2 (5, N=300) = 21.37, p < 0.01$. In case only girls are considered, their school enrollment is also statistically relevant to their guardian’s education, $\chi^2 (5, N=123) = 9.29, p < 0.1$. Similarly, using Chi-square analysis, guardian’s education level has a strong and significant role in the school enrollment of male children too. The confidence level here is 99%, $\chi^2 (5, N=177) = 18.88, p < 0.01$.

Table 5: Guardian’s education level and its impact on children education.

Guardian Education Level	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not Going to School	Girls Not Going to School	Total
Uneducated	47	23	21	21	112
Pre-primary school	3	1	5	1	10
Primary school	21	9	1	5	36
Middle school	15	12	1	5	33
High school	33	19	9	11	72
College/university graduate	19	15	2	1	37
Total	138	79	39	44	300

As shown in Figure 4, guardian education has a positive impact on children enrollment in schools. Parents or guardians with higher education mostly send their children to school. The rate of school enrollment is highest (92%) in children whose guardian has completed college or university level education. While the ratio of out-of-school children is highest (up to 60%) if their guardian or family leader is either uneducated or have not completed primary school.

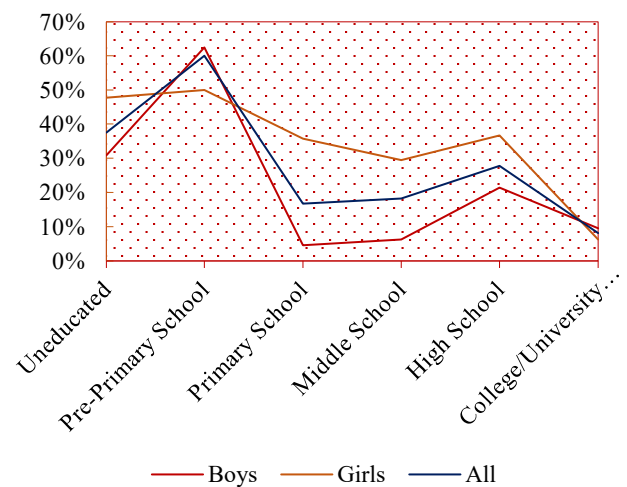


Figure 4. Percentage of children not attending school based on Guardian Education Level

4.4. Household income

In order to understand the economic impact on children education, the information on their household's average monthly income was collected during the survey. For the analysis purpose, the household's average monthly income was categorized in four classes as shown in Table 4.6. To be mentioned that AFN 78 was equivalent to one US Dollar at the time of conducting this survey.

Using Chi-square analysis on the data tabulated in Table 4.6, the frequencies of children going or not going to school have a statistically significant relationship with their family income, $\chi^2 (3, N=300) = 20.17, p < 0.01$. If the same table is analyzed against female children only, it is found that girls' enrollment is also statistically strongly related with their family's income, $\chi^2 (3, N=123) = 24.23, p < 0.01$. On the other hand, if we consider only male children's school enrollment, it is found to be irrelevant to their family's income in this population, $\chi^2 (3, N=177) = 6.00, p > 0.1$.

Table 6: Household Income and its impact on children education.

Household Income (AFN)	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not going to School	Girls Not going to School	Total
Below 15,000	72	32	28	31	163
15,000 - 30,000	29	12	5	12	58
30,000 - 50,000	23	18	2	1	44
Above 50,000	14	17	4	0	35
Total	138	79	39	44	300

As shown in Figure 5, the rate of children not going to school is highest in poor families whose average monthly income is below AFN 15,000 (or USD 200). The rate is higher in girls, i.e. 50% of the girls' population in this category are observed to be out of school. This result confirms the UNESCO report [8], which indicates that parents in poor households prefer investment in their boys' education as they have certain economic, social, and cultural expectations out of this investment. Children of the families with the lowest average monthly income have the lowest enrollment rate of 63.8% while the enrollment rate is highest (93.2%) in children whose household's average monthly income is in between AFN 30,000 and AFN 50,000.

4.5. Household size

The household size of the surveyed population was categorized into three groups based on number of family members (Table 4.7). Based on the Chi-Square statistical analysis of the data given in Table 4.7, children's education is not significantly related to their family size in this population, $\chi^2 (2, N=300) = 2.60, p > 0.1$. Therefore, the impact of family size on children's education shown in Figure 6 could be considered significant for the sample but not for the whole population.

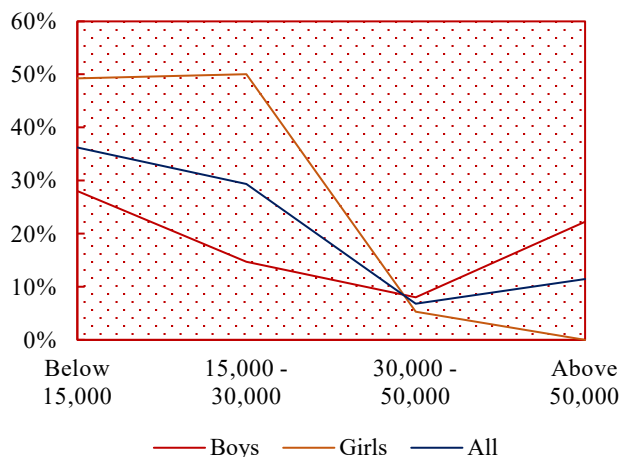


Figure 5. Percentage of children not attending school based on family income.

Similarly, considering the population of only female children, it was found that girls' enrollment in the given population is also insignificant and irrelevant to their family size, $\chi^2 (2, N=123) = 0.79, p > 0.1$. In other words, household size does not play any significant role in the school enrollment of girls. In contrast, while analyzing the school enrollment for only male children, it was found that boys' schooling was statistically significant and in relation with their household size, $\chi^2 (2, N=177) = 5.92, p < 0.1$.

Table 7: Household size and its impact on children education.

Household Size (Number of Family Members)	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not Going to School	Girls Not Going to School	Total
3 - 6	45	25	21	14	105
7 - 10	75	50	15	26	166
Above 10	18	4	3	4	29
Total	138	79	39	44	300

According to Figure 6, girls from bigger families and boys from smaller families are more likely out of school. The rate of girls not going to school is consistently higher than boys in all categories of household size, but it is highest in households with more than 10 family members, i.e. 50% of all girls are not going to school.

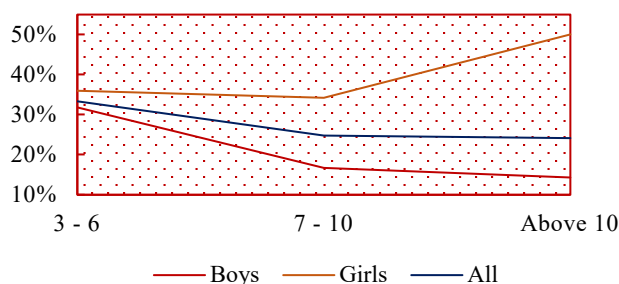


Figure 6. Percentage of children not attending school based on family size.

4.6. Home region

Based on the geographical location of their home provinces, the surveyed children have been categorized into different zones or regions of Afghanistan (Table 4.8). Applying Chi-square analysis method on the cross tabular frequencies given in Table 4.8, children’s school enrollment and home regions were found to be strongly in relation to each other, $\chi^2 (4, N=300) = 16.28, p < 0.01$. Children with Kabul province as their home region are found to be most likely attending school and are leading the table with 81.6% rate of enrollment. . If we consider the enrollment of only girls in Table 4.8, it is also found to have significantly strong relationship with girls’ regional background, $\chi^2 (4, N=123) = 15.52, p < 0.01$. The most deprived girls were from Central Afghanistan whose enrollment rate was only 33.3%, while girls from South Afghanistan had the second lowest rate of attending school (44.7%). Similarly, the school enrollment of only male children was also found in a significant relationship with their regional backgrounds or home provinces, $\chi^2 (4, N=177) = 11.25, p < 0.05$. In this case, the highest rate of school enrollment (83.3%) was found in boys from North Afghanistan, followed by South Afghanistan, Kabul Province, and East Afghanistan with 79.2%, 78.9%, and 76.5% enrollment rates respectively.

Table 8: Regional background and children enrollment.

Home Region (Province based)	Boys Going to School	Girls Going to School	Boys Not Going to School	Girls Not Going to School	Total
Kabul Province	45	35	12	6	98
Central Afghanistan	0	1	3	2	6
North Afghanistan	25	14	5	8	52
East Afghanistan	26	12	8	7	53
South Afghanistan	42	17	11	21	91
Total	138	79	39	44	300

As shown in Figure 7, 83% (5/6) of children of Central Afghanistan are most likely not going to schools. While if we consider only out-of-school girls, their ratio is highest in Central and South Afghanistan, i.e. 66.7% (2/3) and 55.3% (21/38) respectively.

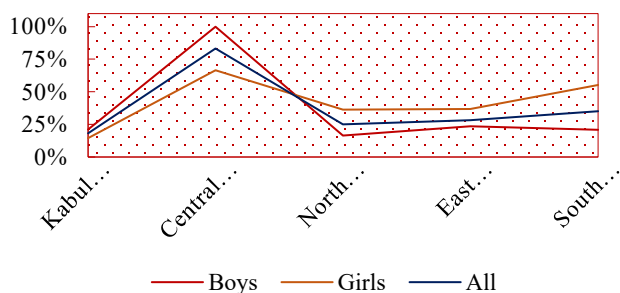


Figure 7. Percentage of children not attending school based on home region.

5. Major obstacles

Based on the feedback of survey respondents, different types of barriers to children’s education are identified as listed in Table 5.1. Analyzing the number of out-of-school children, it has been found that the most dominant factors of keeping children away from school in Kabul city are poverty and cultural limitations. Other factors like access to school, disability, and age limits are found to be less likely affecting children education in Kabul city. The underage barrier category type mentioned in this section specifies a 6 years old girl and two 5 years old boys who have not been enrolled in school as their guardians assumed, they were not old enough to be admitted in school. The ‘school completed’ barrier category type in the following table and figures indicates those 18 years old children who have recently finished their high school. Similarly, the unenrollment reason for two children was not stated by the survey respondents therefore it is termed as ‘unknown’ category type.

Table 9: Barriers to children’s enrollment.

Barrier Type	Unenrolled Boys	Unenrolled Girls	Total unenrolled Children
Poverty	33	23	56
Cultural Restriction	0	18	18
Underage	1	2	3
School Completed	2	0	2
Unknown	1	1	2
Access issue	1	0	1
Disability	1	0	1
Total	39	44	83

Looking at Figure 8, poverty is the most common factor with 67.5% contribution in keeping children away from school in Kabul City. Similarly, cultural limitation is the second most common barrier with 21.7% role in children’s unenrollment.

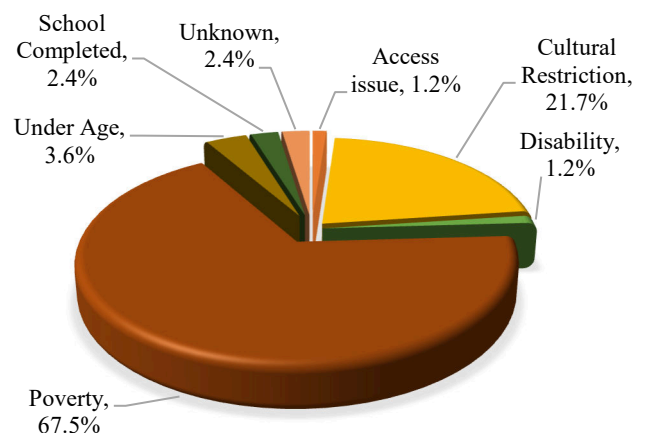


Figure 8. Barriers to children’s school enrollment.

The rate of unenrollment and the impact of various barriers on children’s enrollment is found different in male and female children. 39 out of the total 83 unenrolled children are boys which are not attending school due to certain reasons as highlighted in the following chart (Figure 9). Poverty has almost 85% role in keeping boys out of school which makes it the most common barrier to boys’ school enrollment in Kabul City. While there are no cultural limitations to boys’ education, but physical disability and under-age concerns have 2.6% (each) contribution in keeping male children out of school. Rest of the out-of-school boys have either completed their high school or there is no specific reason given for not attending schools.

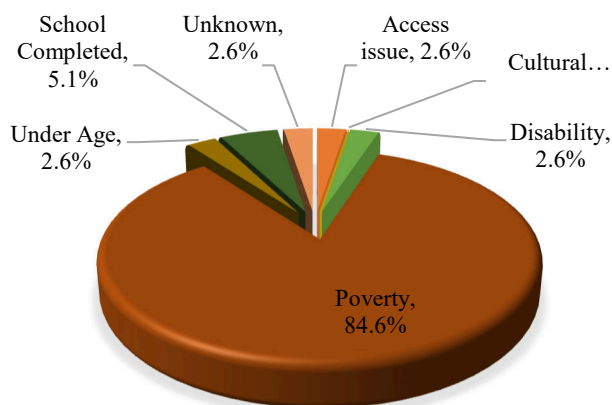


Figure 9. Barriers to boys’ school enrollment.

Figure 9 demonstrates the ratios among different types of barriers which keep female children out of school in Kabul City. Like male children, poverty is found as the most common barrier to school enrollment of female children as well. 52.3% of the total out-of-school girls are not attending school due to poor economic condition of their families. Additionally, cultural restrictions, having almost 41% contribution towards girls’ unenrollment, are found to be the second most common factor in limiting female children’s school enrollment. Similarly, 4.5% of the out of school girls are not attending school due to the underage concern, i.e. they are either 6 or below 6 years old, while there is no reason given for 2.3% of the total out of school girls.

During the survey of parents or guardians, it was also tried to obtain their opinions about barriers to children’s education in Afghanistan. According to these respondents, in addition to poverty and other barriers discussed earlier in this section, displacement due to war, lack of access to public schools, underage marriage, child labor, lack of skilled teachers, and lack of a standard curriculum are factors that also keep children away from school in Afghanistan. Most of these respondents have suggested to offer financial grants for poor families and facilitate access to free education for all children in order to increase the rate of children’s school enrollment in Afghanistan.

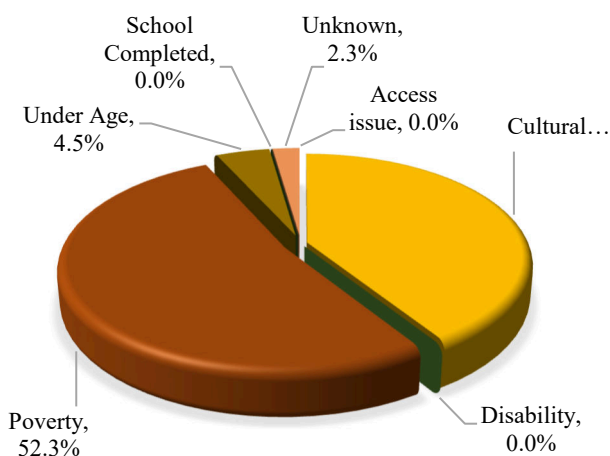


Figure 10. Barriers to girls’ school enrollment.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The survey analysis shows that poverty and traditional limitations are two major obstacles in keeping children away from school. The impact of these issues varied for different groups of children based on their linguistic, geographic, ethnic, family size, and family income background. Poverty was a dominant factor in over-15 year-old boys as most of them were working children as the bread winners for their families. Similarly, girls of the same age group, particularly those of Pashtun ethnicity, were out of school due to certain traditional norms and limitations. Children from families with lower monthly income (< AFN 30,000) and larger household size (7-10 family members) were found less likely to attend school. If given the opportunity, these families usually prefer schooling boys over girls of the same age group. Guardian’s education also impacted children education. Children whose guardian is someone other than a father or whose guardians are uneducated are less likely going to school.

From our results, we propose that government agencies and non-government organizations can play significant role in facilitating access to quality education for children in Afghanistan. Extending the network of public schools can result in improving access to education for children from poor families. Similarly, offering reasonable financial allowances can help reduce and avoid the need for child labor and increase poor children’s school enrollment. Private schools can also reduce the number of out-of-school children by offering free education to children in need.

To mitigate the second largest obstacle to children education, government and other concerned agencies must support public awareness programs and bring necessary legal action to discourage child marriage and gender discrimination. To increase public interest in educating children, the government should also invest in developing teachers’ skills and to ensure a safe and healthy study environment for all children. In addition, the study curriculum should be structured in a way that meets the needs

and demands of children from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

7. Future Implications

This research was conducted with certain geographic, time, and access limitations. Considering the importance of the topic, a period of few months is not enough to collect and analyze the required data of different locations of the country. Similarly, there were issues and obstacles in access to data from relevant organizations. Most of the websites of these organizations, particularly that of Ministry of Education, are not updated in order to obtain the necessary information out of them.

In order to get a more thorough picture on this subject, this research should be extended to further regions, including both urban and rural areas of the country. Despite the few economic and social barriers discussed and evaluated in this paper, there are other potential causes and issues which stop children from going to school. These issues may include warfare, availability of infrastructure, access issues, teachers' capacity issues, internal and external displaced and returnee children, children health issues, children harassment, and availability of female teachers to encourage girls' education. These issues and causes could be studied and analyzed in detail if the research population is protracted to further cities and remote areas of the country.

Similarly, open access to the updated data of the relevant organizations is also necessary to acquire the desired information for performing further research on this subject. Ministry of Education should take essential measures to ensure that all public and private schools keep a proper and updated record of their respective students and publish all the relevant non-confidential information online for public access.

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