Men's Perception of Women's Role and Girls' Education among Pashtun Tribes of Pakistan: A Qualitative Delphi Study

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Abstract

This paper examines how Pashtun men perceive women's role and girls' education. A modified two-round Delphi exercise was followed by in-depth qualitative interviews with Pashtun men of diverse backgrounds, including representatives of religious and political groups. The interviews demonstrated that the sociocultural status of women, and consequently their access to education, remains deeply tied to *Pashtunwali* (tribal code) and rigid religious interpretations. Though at times contradictory, the ideas and stereotypes arising from religion, culture, and politics were found to meaningfully shape men's attitudes about women's participation in community and education. However, the study found that, compared to rural and tribal areas, these traditions and restrictions are not as rigidly practiced in the urban and plains areas. Understanding men's views is a starting point. The next step is to engage men in the collective struggle for gender justice.

Introduction

Worldwide, 65 million girls never start school; 100 million do not complete primary education; more than 542 million women are illiterate (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005, p. 1). This demonstrates broader life inequalities and the widespread suffering of girls, with severe implications for most developing communities. By failing to achieve gender parity in education, many developing countries, including Pakistan, consistently face the resultant negative consequences in poverty, health, and fertility issues, and overall socioeconomic development (UNESCO, 2000; UNDP, 2011). In 2000, the World Education Forum in Dakar noted this alarming situation and declared that a major concern is "eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality" (World Education Forum, 2000, p.16). Within the development community there is general agreement that women's education plays a critically important role in socioeconomic development, though the precise method or scope by which it does so is debated (Balatchandirane, 2003; Schultz, 1993; Sen, 1999). Research has empirically established that the formal education of women is a key factor for bringing about healthy, vibrant, and economically developed communities. Additionally, education allows women greater mobility and economic freedom. Studies have shown that an educated woman faces less physical violence and has fewer and healthier children (Azhar, 2009; Alkire, 2010; Latif,

2010).

In the last two decades, continuing cycles of war and conflict, extremism, and the introduction of strict cultural and religious ideologies have further complicated and magnified the issue of gender justice and girls' education in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KPK) area of Pakistan. The impact is most clearly visible in the Pashtun tribes of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan, where a UNICEF report estimated enrolment of only 13 percent of primary-school-aged girls (UNICEF, 2010).

While there has been a great deal of research on gender and development and women empowerment issues in general (Zulfacar, 2006; Mann, 2005; Moghadam, 1992; Chavis, 2001; Akbar, 1983; Agarwal, 1998; Khattak, 2004; Daulatzai, 2006), there has been relatively little research on men's and particularly fathers' perceptions of women's roles in community and girls' education. This study, therefore, sought to explore and analyze Pashtun men's perception of women's status and role in the community, especially their attitudes toward girls' education. It is my basic assumption that men are the key stakeholders in gender disparity issues. Unless there is a significant change in men's perceptions, practices, and attitudes, the struggle for the promotion of gender equality will continue to face many challenges (Ruxton, 2004). I focus on fathers as one specifically noteworthy group of stakeholders. I suggest that it is important to listen to their voices, to understand their views and concerns, and to actively involve them in women's issues by explaining the benefits of participating in their daughters' education (Barker, 2005). Understanding men's perceptions of the role of women is a step toward social justice, as such initiatives could engage the members of a privileged group in order to challenge that same privilege (Flood, 2001). In this article I identify contradictory ideas emerging from religion, culture, and politics that shape Pashtun men's perceptions of girls and women.

Background

The total population of Pashtuns is estimated to be between 40 and 45 million, but an accurate count remains elusive due to the nomadic nature of many tribes and the tradition of secluding women (Khan, 1991; Ahmed, 2004). Most Pashtun tribes are settled in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (previously known as North West Frontier Province or NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as well as in the adjacent southern regions of Afghanistan. Many of the social configurations and strong cultural traditions defining the identity of the Pashtun population are shared on both sides of the Durand line, a porous frontier inhabited by 22 million people (Hassan, 2007). Besides speaking the Pashto language, a Pashtun must also "do Pakhto," i.e., live up to a set of honour-based practices known as *Pashtunwali* (Barth, 1975, p. 105). Their identity is dependent on strict adherence to the cultural norms and notions of honour and tribal affiliations. Pashtuns are forced to revert to "ideal-type behaviour" (Pashtunwali) in order to be recognized as full members of society (Ahmed, 1980).

The Pashtun way: Pashtunwali

Pashtuns' identity is provided by Pashtunwali. A tribal code, Pashtunwali is an unwritten law, a sociopolitical culture, and an ideology inherited from ancestors and carried on from generation to generation. It is considered the dominant force of Pashtun

culture. Rahman (1995) describes Pashtunwali as "a conservative, naturally democratic, centuries-old but still a young phenomenon in the Pashtun culture and socioeconomic structure. Pashtun society, by the virtue of Pashtunwali, went straight to the feudal social structure without ever experiencing an era of slavery" (p. 160). This tribal code demands honour, hospitality, and generosity for anyone who asks for pardon or protection, and an absolute obligation to take revenge for any type of oppression. Anthropologists have described Pashtunwali as an "ideal-type code" based on such principles as *badal* (revenge), *melmastia* (hospitality), *nanawatee* (refuge), *tor* (female honour), and *tarburwali* (agnatic rivalry) (Ahmed, 1980; Grima, 1998; Lindholm, 1982; Singer, 1982). Similarly, Barth (1981) identifies three major institutions dominating the Pashtunwali codes: *Melmastia,* hospitality and the honourable uses of materials and goods; *Jirga,* councils and the honourable pursuit of public affairs; *Purdah,* seclusion of women and the honourable organization of domestic life. Versions of the code are practised in other nomadic societies such as Bedouins (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2004) and neighbouring Baluch tribes (Mann, 2005).

Status of women

According to traditional Pashtun culture, men begin influencing a girl's life at an early age, exerting authority on issues ranging from education to selection of a husband. After marriage, a woman's husband and in-laws may take control of her life. They could decide issues such as the number of children she will have, what her role in the community will be, and what her limits are in seeking education or employment. Guiding such decision making is the centrality of the chastity and honour of women, which are the most sensitive issues in Pashtun society. Violation of a woman's honour brings disastrous consequences to a society rooted in tribal bonds. A woman's character and actions reflect the status and honour of her family as a whole. The focus is on the word *honour,* for which there are several correlative words in Pashto—*ghairat, nang,* and *namos*—which convey different aspects of social norms and the tribal code. These tribal values make up "a complex identity based on economic moral and social independence." (Mann, 2005, p.3). Each family or tribe has its own self-sufficient boundaries (Mann, 2005). Such traditions and norms—literally man-made—constitute an extreme form of a patriarchal society with built-in hierarchies and a distinct contrast between male and female status (Mann, 2005; Moghadam 1992; Kandiyoti 1988; Tapper 1991). Mann (2005) argues that male honour is proactive and expressed through aggressive and violent behaviour, whereas honour for females "is necessarily passive, submissive, and centered around avoidance of shame" (p. 3). A Pashtun woman is expected to live according to prevailing social norms, cultural values, and the tribal code.

Woman as mother

On the other hand, *Moor* (the mother) is the symbol of glorified status and emotional influence in Pashtun society. She is considered to be an authority on Pashtunwali as well as its legitimate keeper (Ahmed, 1980). The status of the mother is therefore repeatedly acknowledged and represented with dignity and respect. She actively participates in tribal affairs and day-to-day decision making in addition to her supervisory position at home; her power increases with age. Discussing the role of Pashtun women in the Afghan refugee camps at Peshawar, Pakistan, Mann (2005) suggests,

in traditional non-fundamentalist settings, women have negotiated their place; older women are respected and the eldest daughter is often the father's favourite. Just as in other patriarchal societies in the West (Jewish and Christian) up until the end of the 18th century, the official line never favoured women but did not entail automatic oppression. In farms and rural enterprises in Afghanistan or Ancient Régime Europe, men and women always worked hard together in complementary ways, even if the woman's contribution was never recognized as such. Yet Pashtun women, despite their ritual seclusion were not always passive. (p. 3)

Acquiring prestige and influence within the extended family rests on the degree to which a woman produces heirs for the family; namely, sons. Despite such pressures, mothers are always remembered and quoted in most Pashto songs and proverbs with great respect and honour: "Heaven lies at the feet of the mother" is a common Pashto quotation of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahmed, 1980). However, despite such a strong role and the social importance attached to motherhood, the life of a Pashtun woman is full of hardships, unconditional obedience to cultural norms.

Women's education

A society's understanding of what women should be determines the direction of development plans for them. Educational outcomes, as measured by enrolment and attainment for Pakistani girls, are among the lowest in the world. Pakistan's Gender Equality Education Index (GEEI) is 0.20, the lowest in South Asia. The low GEEI indicates low net attendance rate in primary and secondary education. Similarly, a low gender development index shows "women's inferior conditions of health, education and income compared with men" (UNICEF, 2009, p. 90). However, it is important to note that there is significant regional variation in most areas of development in Pakistan. Women in rural areas receive less attention than women in urban areas in terms of development and education policies. Likewise, women in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) receive much less education than do women in the Punjab, Sindh, and Kashmir provinces of Pakistan. Shortcomings in girls' education are particularly notable in the tribal areas, which in 2004 had the lowest ratio of female enrolment of any province in Pakistan. According to the World Bank – Education For All (EFA) 2000 assessment report, only 11 percent of girls and women are literate in the Pashtun-dominated tribal areas (UNESCO, 2000).

Development researchers and practitioners have observed that in Pakistan, women are significantly less educated than men (Thomas, 1996; Khan, 1993; Shah, 1986; Behrmann & Schneider, 1993; Barth, 1981). At the primary level, the male enrolment rate is almost double the female enrolment rate. In most areas, less than half of girls ever enrol in school compared with 50 to 80 percent of boys (UNICEF, 2004). These figures among Pashtun tribes compare unfavourably, to a significant degree, to other parts of the country, and alarmingly so to other countries in the region with similar levels of economic development.

The gender gap in education stems from decades of discriminatory education policies, which in turn reflect the low status of women in Pakistani society. Despite several declared commitments, the government has not made women's education a priority. Government priorities can best be judged by examining the allocation of

resources to the education sector. Whereas the United Nations recommends at least 4 percent of gross national product (GNP) for education in developing countries, in Pakistan from 1959 to 1989 the education share of the GNP was roughly 1 percent (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1993). By 2013, spending on education had doubled, but was still at only 2 percent, or half the UN recommendation (UNESCO, 2012).

Besides the lack of government money, many funds earmarked for education have been squandered due to widespread corruption. In 2003, the Pakistan Participatory Assessment (PPA) surveyed fifty-one districts of Pakistan and identified many "ghost" or non-functional girls' schools—present only on paper. The Pakistan National Educational Survey confirmed that 7.7 percent of 164,579 public-sector schools are "nonfunctional," a euphemism for ghost schools. The figure signals the high level of corruption and mismanagement in the government's education sector ('Ghost' Schools Galore, 2006).

Change in men's perception

As Cornwall (2003) points out, instead of the ''add women and stir'' approach to addressing gender, what is needed is a combination of policies and implementation strategies that seriously consider the power effects of difference, combining advocacy with a willingness to give open spaces to those who are least heard, thereby enabling people to recognize and use their abilities, insights, and freedom. There are historical precedents of men's active participation and support for women's development and gender equality (Metcalf, 2002). Esplen (2006) points out that small numbers of men and boys in developing countries are changing their attitudes and behaviour toward women; they reject fixed gender division and are open to "gender equitable" alternatives. They openly speak out against all kinds of gender-based discrimination. However, the challenge is to develop programs that channel these positive attitudes into behaviours that advance the goal of gender equality. Esplen (2006) suggests:

> Initiatives need to engage men as allies, using positive and relevant messages, which also address their specific concerns. By highlighting the costs of gender inequality, as well as the benefits of gender equality—both for men as individuals, and as members of families and communities—programmes can support men to reflect on, and ultimately resist, harmful constructions of masculinity. (p. 4)

In Pakistan, there are many international and local forums advocating for women's rights and gender equality, but most of these organizations are run by women of the elite class with voices that are limited in circulation to the privileged segments of society. In rural Pashtun areas, where the majority of women are living under strict tribal codes, men's perception and participation in women's development and education issues is critically important. In these rural communities strong adherence to the cultural norms and well-established patriarchal system may offer women few opportunities for development until men become a strong ally for the cause of gender justice (Forbes, 1996).

Methodology

A modified two-round Delphi method was used to determine group consensus concerning perception and role of women. The Delphi method is a systematic and interactive forecasting, problem-solving, and decision-making method based on

independent inputs from a panel of experts in the field. A panel of twenty Pashtun men with diverse but relevant experience was recruited through purposive sampling from the following groups: tribal councils of elders (Jirga), religious leaders (Imams), rural community leaders, politicians from Pashtun constituencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the Ministry of Education, Pashtun men with low incomes, fathers of daughters, scholars in the field, and government officials of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan. Coverage ranged from major cities to small rural communities, from the mountainous and tribal terrain of KPK province to Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering Afghanistan. Common barriers of access, cultural legitimacy, and language were significantly reduced because I was born and raised in a Pashtun tribe of northwest Pakistan.

Data collection and analysis

In Round 1, I conducted semi-structured telephone interviews. Interview questions were open-ended, non-leading, and broad in context "so as to widely cast the research net" (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007, p. 10). The interviews were recorded, translated into English from Pashtu, and transcribed. Then I conducted a qualitative analysis to identify relationships, themes, categories, and areas where there was a difference of opinion among participants. I summarized these in the form of a 2,000-word report. The report was distributed to the participants, who were given at least two weeks to reflect on the analysis.

The defining characteristic of Round 2 of the Delphi exercise was to confirm the degree of consensus that emerged from the Round 1 data. Participants were encouraged to carefully evaluate the summary report of Round 1—which included, of course, responses of all participants—and, if necessary, reconsider their previous responses in the context of the group response (Bradshaw, 2008). This was a critical stage of the Delphi process because participants could reflect on their previous responses and either refine them or identify areas of agreement and disagreement (Powell, 2003; Bradshaw, 2008).

Compared to Round 1, interviews in Round 2 were more structured. They concentrated on key themes and issues involving perception of girls' education. Specific questions were developed from the Round 1 data; these questions probed agreed-upon areas and those needing further clarity. During this process the range of the answers decreased as the panel converged toward consensus on major issues. Nevertheless, special attention was paid to areas of disagreement and to changes of opinion from Round 1. Dissenting participants were asked for the rationale and context of their point of view, and their responses were included in the subsequent analysis. Much can be learned from such disagreements, negative cases, or "alternative thinking" in a Delphi study (Bradshaw, 2008). In the present study, these alternative-thinking areas were particularly highlighted and their attendant context noted.

On-site in-depth interviews

Following the Delphi exercise, in-depth, face-to-face interviews with four Pashtun men were conducted in Peshawar, Pakistan (a major city of KPK bordering Afghanistan). The purpose of the interviews was to refine the findings of the Delphi study and to improve the credibility and applicability of the outcomes by "triangulation" (Bradshaw,

2008; Van Zolingen & Klaassen, 2003; Boote, Barber, & Cooper, 2005; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975; Van Dijk, 1990).

Findings

The following themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the data:

Men's perceptions of women's status and girls' education in the context of Pashtunwali

As discussed above, *Pashtunwali* is Pashtuns' code of living" (*Usman*). Pashtuns consider codes of Pashtunwali as a critically important aspect of their social structure. An NGO leader on the panel (Waseem) commented that women's place is "either *kor* (home) or *gor* (grave)." However, participants also concurred that this trend is rapidly changing, particularly in the plains and urban areas of the province.

Pashtuns are very sensitive to women's image and identity. Sometimes they will not take their wife to the hospital because other men may be able to see her (Waseem). Gull stated that Pashtuns do not like to say the names of their women in public. Even if they have to say their names in government offices or hospitals for identification purposes, they will first look around to make sure no other Pashtun man is within hearing range before they whisper their wife or daughter's name to the officer. One participant shared an interesting example:

> I will give you an example of a friend of mine. He has done his MSc. He is the director of an NGO. He has served people greatly through his NGO but even if today you ask his little son what is the name of his mother, he will shout from the corner of the room and stop his son from mentioning his mom's name. (Gull)

In most rural areas the Pashtunwali code of *"either kor or gor"* is still in practice, but this is not the case in urban Pashtun areas. Participants shared the belief that perceptions of women's role in the community and understandings of gender discrimination, particularly girls' education, are changing. One participant observed significant shifts in the household status of girls and boys:

> However change is taking place right now. For the parents both the boy and the girl are their children. They are their own flesh. Both are sweet. In situations, when guest comes then the best is given to the male guest and the female will eat whatever is left. You see that trend of male preference is also changing now as far as my personal observation goes. Good food is shared by both male and female children. They eat whatever is cooked. It is the same in my house. These days children will often eat eggs for breakfast. There are eggs for both the girl and the boy. Some place where there is still any discrimination that is also going to end *Inshallah* [by the will of God]. (Pirzadah)

Discussing attitudes about girls' education, one participant shared his recent encounter with his older brother who was living with his family in an urban setting but was reluctant to send his daughters to school:

> Well, initially, my eldest brother was not ready to send his daughters to school. I told him, "Look, brother! If you are not sending your girls to

school, then you might as well get them married in the village." I know
many people whose girls grew up in cities with all the facilities that cities
offer like electricity, markets, hospitals, etc., but because they [girls] were
not educated they were married off to people in villages back in the land
[rural areas]. And at the same time, I have seen girls who grew up in
villages without roads, water, electricity, and all that a city offers, but
because they acquired education, they are now living city lives. So you see
people are deaf and blind. Some of them might have closed their eyes but
they are not actually blind. (Gull)

It is very difficult for girls who are born and raised in the cities to adjust to remote rural
areas. Hence, most Pashtun parents are now sending their daughters to school so they can
find a good match for their girls within urban communities.

Men's perceptions of girls' education in the context of religion

A majority of participants agreed that due to continued wars and conflict in the
region, an extremist and violent version of Islam was introduced and has flourished
among Pashtuns. In this form of Islam, women's status, roles, and responsibilities are
defined and restricted according to radically conservative religious interpretation. The
public education system is mistrusted. It is considered an organ of imperial forces that
tries to misguide local women and induce Western values and models in their
communities. In some rural areas, there were incidents where Imams even issued
religious verdict to restrict girls' education (Usman).

One participant who belongs to the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan commented
on the impact of wars and widespread extremism. According to him, the Taliban version
of Islam is widely accepted in the region and the interpretation proclaimed by this version
includes restraints on girls' education.

The tensions about extremism and security issues were highlighted by many
respondents with great concern and distress. Thirteen of sixteen agreed that the
emergence of the extremist version of Islam during the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1990s
has significantly changed Pashtuns' perception of women's roles and responsibilities.
One participant (Karim), who was once captured by the Taliban for ransom and lived
with them for more than five weeks, reported that the Mullah (religious leader) has a
strong influence in rural tribal areas. He suggested that they misinterpret some verses of
the holy Quran and articulate its meanings for their stance against women's equality and
girls' education. Unfortunately, common Pashtun men have no option but to follow them.
However, some participants argued that the core reason for the restraints placed on
women is not religious interpretation but continued war and conflict.

When I inquired about the Taliban and the ban on women's education declared by
a few famous Imams, a participant argued that religious institutions are penetrated by
some ignorant people in the garb of scholars and "all the violence that flowed into
Pakistan from Afghanistan was actually a seditious trend, a great trail. All our great
scholars called it a *FITNA* (conflict, chaos)." (Molana). There was consensus that
"authentic" Islamic teachings have a much more moderate view of women's position in
the community. Some prominent religious scholars emphasized that Islam encourages
girls' education and quoted text from the Quran and teachings and practice of the Prophet

Mohammad that make it mandatory for Muslims to educate their daughters. One Imam (Meraj) stated that,

> prophet's wife, Aisha, learned and spread teachings of Islam outside home. Education is equally mandatory for both men and women in Islam. Islam is not against female education. Instead Islam exhorts us to give education to women. And this was the reason the wives of the Prophet had reached the highest stages of knowledge. Now when there is no female education or it is weak here [among Pashtuns], the reason is not that Islam and the scholars are against this. If this education is within the boundaries of religious order, such as women's dignity, privacy and chastity not being endangered, we should all accept female education as publicly and openly as we accept it for boys. Islam insists on education for women.

It is important to mention that there were several occasions when some participants were slightly reluctant to respond to my questions about women's issues, probably due to security concerns. Nevertheless, I found a strong consensus in rejecting the view that religion itself directly prohibits girls' education. Participants did, however, identify potential factors that indirectly create gender disparity and obstacles to girls' education. These include certain religious restrictions on women (such as *purdah*), the socially regulated role of women in the community, and the importance of female chastity and behaviour to family honour.

Men's perceptions of the importance of girls' education for the well-being of the community

There was consensus that an educated mother is a blessing for the family, particularly the children. She would raise her children with better training and care and thereby contribute to the welfare of the family. When asked their thoughts on educated mothers, one participant said,

> [an educated girl] can teach her children the Glorious Quran and she can also help them with their [school] homework. She can also guide them well about issues in life. Those women who are not educated do not care much about such things. When she is educated she will tell her children, "Bring your books," and then she will listen to her kids read. She will teach them something good. (Meraj)

Another participant (Usman) described the importance of girls' education in the context of moral and spiritual benefits to the community:

> I will say here that the purpose of education is not just being able to know what is A, B or C, or being able to get a job. The purpose of education is instilling positive values within oneself and being able to distinguish between good and evil. Besides, an educated housewife can give good training to her children like a teacher in the school. Well, the child of the woman gets to have a teacher from her lap. So that when he/she goes to school, that child has already had a good dose of ethical, physical, moral, and spiritual education.

Another common perception about the importance of girls' education concerned health. Girls' education would assist in bringing female doctors to the community. There

was agreement that Pashtun communities badly need women in the health professions
generally; the shortage of female doctors is especially severe. One participant explained:

> One thing that often happens in our villages is that people will hesitate to
> bring female patients to male doctors. If there are female doctors then
> there will be no problem because then both will be women. (Ali)

Another participant, while discussing the desperate lack of female doctors in the rural
areas, shared his story:

> I had a friend who was a religious studies teacher. His wife became very
> sick, but he didn't want a male doctor [the only one available in the area]
> to perform a checkup for her. In spite of so many requests from friends
> and colleagues, he didn't take her to the clinic and her condition
> deteriorated. (Alamdin)

These examples demonstrate recognition of how the education of women can
positively influence the religious, moral, and physical well-being of the family and
community. However, there are concerns that an educated girl may challenge local
traditions and create conflict within the family. A community leader on the panel
(Alamdin) mentioned an interesting encounter with one of his friends who is married to
an educated woman:

> I will give you an example. I met with a person the other day whose wife
> is educated, he had a fight with his wife and as a result he was cursing all
> those men who want to get married to educated girls. The wife demanded
> something from him. If a wife is educated, she will definitely ask
> questions and would also have some demands from her husband to fulfil.
> She would do active discussions. Traditionally Pashtuns don't appreciate a
> wife who is asking too many questions and objecting to her husband's
> actions.

Nonetheless, there was agreement among participants that the criterion and
perception of a "good wife" is significantly changing in both urban and rural areas. Now,
even in rural areas, most educated boys prefer to have an educated wife. If needed, one
participant clarified, the wife may share financial responsibility with her husband (Ali). A
participant living in the city suburbs and working in a school argued that

> due to increased population and reduced agrarian land in our region—the
> trend of only men working outside home cannot feed the family and other
> living expenses—an educated woman may help during financial
> constraints. (Alamdin)

Looking at this trend, most parents now desire to send their daughters to school so they
will be able to find better marriage proposals. For boys, marrying an educated girl is
"becoming a competition in the community" (Pirzadah). Three participants did not agree
with the argument of educating girls so they can financially contribute at home. They
suggested that parents are sending their daughters to school but they are still not ready to
let them seek employment. One participant who disputed the need for women's help in
financial affairs explained,

> you see we are Pashtun and we have seen that there are many people who
> have given their girls' very good education but they are not willing to send
> their girls out for employment. There are people living right in front of us
> who gave their girls great education. Some of their girls have passed

bachelors and some masters too but they don't expect them to earn for the
family. Those men themselves earn the money. They consider it a shame
to send their women out for earning. (Saifullah)

There were examples when an NGO would need female workers and, despite poverty and
financial necessity, male family members would not let the women work outside the
home. One participant who visited a village and needed a few female workers to visit
homes was harshly discouraged by the community, saying,

on a local level we needed women. Some parents brought their own girls
to us and we recruited them. Immediately, many problems arose. Like
people started making disrespectful comments about those girls and made
bad stories about these girls. Some girls had to hide their jobs from their
brothers. They were afraid that their brothers might come and stop them
from working. Some said, "Oh, they are working with strange men." Some
girls worked in secret from their families. Well, there were some who had
the support of their families. (Gull)

While the education of girls was widely supported among participants for its
benefits to family and community, some concerns about employment for educated
women still remain.

Discussion

In this study, Pashtun men's perception of women's role and girls' education was
explored. Questions focused on the responsibilities of women and the value of girls'
education for the well-being of the community. The study confirmed earlier findings
about the status of women in Pashtun society, a severely patriarchal society with well-
established norms asserting gender division between men and women (Mann, 2005;
Kandiyoti, 1988; Tapper, 1991; Moghadam, 1992). The Delphi panel findings are
consistent with previous research (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1993; Mann, 2005; Rugh, 2000;
Jackson, 2011) that sociocultural environment in a patriarchal society regulate strict
gender divisions and hierarchies that often doesn't support women empowerment. The
current study found that the perception of women is constructed in the context of
Pashtunwali (tribal code) and religious interpretation. A woman is considered subordinate
to a man; her place is in the home. However, during the last decade the number of girls
attending school in the urban Pashtun areas of KPK has increased. Despite many
challenges, a substantial number of Pashtun women are taking an active part in many
professional fields, including politics and social development.

Though religion stands out as a crucial component of the Pashtun environment,
the Pashtunwali code exerts equal, if not greater, influence. A religious leader on the
Delphi panel argued that Pashtuns adhere to their culture strictly. If Islamic teachings
conflict with tribal norms, Pashtuns will try to sidestep religious protocol so as not to
compromise deep-rooted values. Molana Meraj, a religious scholar in the Delphi panel,
explained:

You see a Pashtun, no matter how big a scholar or educated person he
might become, will not give inheritance to his daughter. Rather, he would
prefer giving his daughters' share [in land inheritance] to his sons and this
is against the ruling of Islam.

However, participants agreed that, compared to rural tribal areas, Pashtunwali traditions are not as rigidly practised in urban areas of KPK. During my visit to urban Pashtun regions, I met many parents who have moved to urban areas to educate their daughters and to avoid rigid Pashtunwali practices.

Against the backdrop of religious and Pashtunwali pressures, for more than three decades the Pashtun region has experienced a continuous cycle of war and internal conflict, possibly due to its strategic location as the gateway for central Asia. Because the KPK area borders Afghanistan, the people of this region have faced threat and insecurity ever since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. More than 1.5 million Afghans have taken refuge in the province; most still reside there. With the invasion of Afghanistan by NATO forces in 2002, a fresh episode of extremism and militancy began. Perpetual warfare and the resultant instability have had a significant impact on the overall development and socioeconomic condition of the area, including a direct impact on women's issues and girls' education. As discussed in a UNDP (2011) report,

> the combination of large numbers of refugees and the politics of the war has eroded the traditional social order in the province, broken down law and order, crippled the economy, discouraged investment and resulted in large-scale emigration of skilled labour to the rest of Pakistan and the growing economies of the region. Above all, the refugees taxed the social and physical infrastructure of the province. Finally the province has become the battleground of an insurgency since 2007, which has its roots in the war in Afghanistan. (p. 1)

The fighting has brought with it radical and extreme religious views about women's roles and girls' education. The UNDP (2011) study found that militancy has created a fearful environment where diverse or critical views about the existing social order and religious interpretations are forcefully discouraged. Instead, immoderate views are declared and imposed on the public.

Religious extremism

Religion was a dominant theme discussed by all participants in both rounds of Delphi interviews. A few participants mentioned colonial influences and the reaction of religious leaders against the Western educational system. Others mentioned a clash of moderate and extreme interpretations of the Quran and Islamic scripture around women's issues. These findings are consistent with other studies (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1993; Kabeer, 2001; Hoodfar, 2007) where religion, especially a few particular religious interpretations, were considered to have a significant influence on gender roles and girls' education. However, many—including some of the men interviewed here—argue that there is no evidence of direct restrictions on girls' education in either the Quran or the Sunnah (teachings of Prophet Mohammad). Instead, these sources clearly encourage education for both boys and girls. These men suggested that certain religious groups have interpreted religious texts for their own political agendas, because in a conservative culture such as the Pashtuns', few would question a religious verdict (Rugh, 2000). This study also found strong evidence of support for girls' education in the participants' interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah.

The participants here agreed that most Ulema (religious scholars), particularly in urban Pashtun regions, are sending their daughters to public schools. The trend is less

consistent in the rural and tribal belt of the Pashtun areas. The present study found that it is not religion in general that creates resistance to educating girls. Rather, the resistance is due to in part to a particular interpretation of religion (itself infused with Pashtunwali values) and in part to the recent radicalization of the society. During the Cold War era, several radical Arab groups settled in Pashtun areas bordering Afghanistan, to support them in war against Soviet Union. The Arabic language, being the language of the Quran, gave Arab nationals more authenticity with respect to Islamic jurisdiction, interpretation of the scripture, and views on religious issues. This was a major shift for Pashtun communities because—notwithstanding a patriarchal society—Pashtun women supported one another culturally and economically through informal household, neighbourhood, and community networks (Ismael, Ismael, & Langille, 2011; Tarzi & Lamb, 2011). For instance, Pashtun women traditionally would collect wood for cooking and take some role in farming, using such activities as opportunities for socializing with other women. Women Eid Fairs, for instance, were women-only gatherings where hundreds of women and girls from nearby villages gathered for play and social activities. Rigid interpretations of scripture, first by the Mujahideen and then by the Taliban, particularly within the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, put a ban on all such activities of women outside the home. Thereby women's roles were abruptly redefined.

Peace—A prerequisite for a productive dialogue
As discussed above, militancy and religious extremism have produced an environment of fear and insecurity in the whole area, with the result that people are reluctant to openly share views on sensitive issues. As emphasized by a community leader in the tribal region, "We are living in a war-like situation, now they [militants] blew up so many schools. Forget female education, now we don't even have schools for boys" (Kabir). Continued war and conflict worsen the already entrenched gender inequalities of peacetime society. However, "A just peace involves the reworking of the status quo" (Manchanda, 2001, p. 28). The research process undertaken here makes it clear that security is the key to sustaining productive dialogue about gender issues. When people no longer need to be concerned about their safety, and a relationship of trust is established, they are willing to share their thoughts even on sensitive issues such as schooling for girls.

Conclusion
As shown here, the perception of women in the Pashtun tribes is constructed in the context of Pashtunwali (tribal code) and religious interpretation. This is especially true in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. In the Pashtun plains region, where it is relatively peaceful and where the state has more authority, rigid gender roles are giving way to the recognition that women play a critical role in socioeconomic and political life. This study suggests the need for a systemic, inclusive approach to gender-related discrimination. Understanding men's perceptions and involving them in gender-related initiatives does not, however, mean ignoring women's agency. Rather, it is a recognition that achieving social justice requires active participation of the whole community—both men and women.
Understanding men's perception would be helpful in other development initiatives in patriarchal societies, in areas such as human rights, domestic violence, and

family planning programs. I believe that men possess many interests and motivations—concern for children, moral and religious values, socioeconomic realities, and ethical and political commitments—that outstrip the maintenance of their privileged social position (Flood, 2001). These broader interests can unite men in the struggle for gender justice. While there will always be risks involved in taking on such sensitive projects regarding women's development in patriarchal societies engaged in wars and internal conflicts, it is to be hoped that these risks and challenges will never generate compromise in the efforts of both men and women to achieve gender justice.

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