



“Shall I Feed My Daughter, or Educate Her?”

Barriers to Girls’ Education in Pakistan

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-6231-36741

Cover design by Rafael Jimenez

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NOVEMBER 2018

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AFGHANISTAN

KHYBER
PAKHTUNKHWA

Peshawar

Islamabad

FATA

Lahore

PUNJAB

Quetta

BALOCHISTAN

IRAN

INDIA

SINDH

Karachi

A chalkboard with Urdu text and a desk with a book and papers. The chalkboard is on the left, and the desk is on the right. The text on the chalkboard is written in Urdu and is somewhat blurry. The desk has a book and some papers on it. The background is a plain wall.

If we don't get education, our nation won't progress.

—Rabiya, 23, single mother of a daughter,
Karachi, July 2017.

SUMMARY

Pakistan was described as “among the world’s worst performing countries in education,” at the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education and Development. The new government, elected in July 2018, stated in their manifesto that nearly 22.5 million children are out of school. Girls are particularly affected. Thirty-two percent of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan, compared to 21 percent of boys. By grade six, 59 percent of girls are out of school, versus 49 percent of boys. Only 13 percent of girls are still in school by ninth grade. Both boys and girls are missing out on education in unacceptable numbers, but girls are worst affected.

Political instability, disproportionate influence on governance by security forces, repression of civil society and the media, violent insurgency, and escalating ethnic and religious tensions all poison Pakistan’s current social landscape. These forces distract from the government’s obligation to deliver essential services like education—and girls lose out the most.

Girls attend lessons at a school on the outskirts of Islamabad. Poor facilities at many schools make it difficult for children to study, with a lack of safe and adequate toilets particularly affecting girls who have commenced menstruation.

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There are high numbers of out-of-school children, and significant gender disparities in education, across the entire country, but some areas are much worse than others. In Balochistan, the province with the lowest percentage of educated women, as of 2014-15, 81 percent of women had not completed primary school, compared to 52 percent of men. Seventy-five percent of women had never attended school at all, compared to 40 percent of men. According to this data, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had higher rates of education but similarly huge gender disparities. Sindh and Punjab had higher rates of education and somewhat lower gender disparities, but the gender disparities were still 14 to 21 percent.

Across all provinces generation after generation of children, especially girls, are locked out of education—and into poverty. In interviews for this report, girls talked again and again about their desire for education, their wish to “be someone,” and how these dreams had been crushed by being unable to study.

Lack of access to education for girls is part of a broader landscape of gender inequality in Pakistan. The country has one of Asia’s highest rates of maternal mortality. Violence against women and girls—including rape, so-called “honor” killings and violence, acid attacks, domestic violence, forced marriage and child marriage—is a serious problem, and government responses are inadequate. Pakistani activists estimate that there are about 1,000 honor killings every year. Twenty-one percent of females marry as children.

Pakistan’s education system has changed significantly in recent years, responding to an abdication by the government of responsibility to provide, through government schools, an adequate standard of education, compulsory and free of charge, to all children. There has been an explosion of new private schools, largely unregulated, of wildly varying quality. A lack of access to government schools for many poor people has created a booming market for low-cost private schools, which in many areas are the only form of education available to poor families. While attempting to fill a critical gap, these schools may be compromised by poorly qualified and badly

Students walk to school in Behar Colony of Karachi. A shortage of government schools, especially for girls, leaves many girls walking long distances to school during which they often face sexual harassment. Shortage of schools or sexual harassment may lead to girls being shut out or dropping out of education entirely.

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(above) Students check the attendance register at Behar Colony Government Secondary School for girls in the Lyari neighborhood of Karachi, Pakistan.

(right) Students at Behar Colony Government Secondary School for girls in the Lyari neighborhood of Karachi, Pakistan. Only 13 percent of girls in Pakistan are still in school by ninth grade. While there is an overall shortage of schools for girls, the shortage becomes worse as girls progress beyond primary school.

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paid teachers, idiosyncratic curricula, and a lack of government quality assurance and oversight.

Secondly, there has been a massive increase in the provision of religious education, ranging from formal madrasas to informal arrangements where children study the Quran in the house of a neighbor. Religious schools are often the only type of education available to poor families. They are not, however, an adequate replacement, as they generally do not teach non-religious subjects.

Pakistan’s highly decentralized structure of government means that many decisions regarding education policy are made at the subnational level. The result is a separate planning process in every province, on a different timeline, with varying approaches, levels of effectiveness and commitment to improving access to education for girls. This leads to major differences from one province to the next, including on such basic issues as whether children are charged fees to attend government schools, and how much teachers are paid.

In every province, however, there is a serious gender disparity, a high percentage of both boys and girls who are out of school, and clear flaws in the government’s approach to education.



Students at Behar Colony Government Secondary School
for girls in the Lyari neighborhood of Karachi, Pakistan.

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(above) Laiba, age eight, with Shazia, the founder of the Lyari School. The Lyari School is a free school in Karachi, Pakistan providing classes for local children who otherwise have no access to education. Activists and community groups have created such informal schools in a number of areas without access to government schools.

(right) Laiba, age eight, a student at the Lyari School. Laiba’s older sister is not able to study at all because she is responsible for housework and caring for her younger siblings.

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Barriers to Girls’ Education Within the School System

Many of the barriers to girls’ education are within the school system itself. The Pakistan government simply has not established an education system adequate to meet the needs of the country’s children, especially girls. While handing off responsibility to private school operators and religious schools might seem like a solution, nothing can absolve the state of its obligation, under international and domestic law, to ensure that all children receive a decent education—something that simply is not happening in Pakistan today. Moreover, despite all the barriers, many people interviewed for this report described a growing demand for girls’ education, including in marginalized communities.

Lack of Investment

The government does not adequately invest in schools. Pakistan spends far less on education than is recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its guidance on education. Many professionals working in the education sector described a situation in which the government seemed disinterested, and government disengagement on education is evident from the national level to the provincial and local levels.

One result is that there are not enough government schools for all children to have access to one. Government schools









(above) The area outside the classroom at the Lyari School, a free non-government school in Karachi, Pakistan serving children who otherwise do not have access to education.

(left) A girl studying at the Lyari school.

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are in such short supply that even in Pakistan's major cities many children cannot reach a school on foot safely and in a reasonable amount of time. The situation is far worse in rural areas, where schools are even more scarce, and it is less likely that private schools will fill the gap. Families that can access a government school often find that it is overcrowded.

An "upward bottleneck" exists as children, especially girls, get older. Secondary schools are in shorter supply than primary schools, and colleges are even more scarce, especially for girls. Schools are more likely to be gender segregated as children get older, and there are fewer schools for girls than for boys. Many girls are pushed out of continuing studies because they finish at one school and cannot access the next grade level.

High Cost of Education

Poor families struggle to meet the costs of sending their children to school. Government schools are generally more affordable than private education, but they sometimes charge tuition, registration or exam fees, and they almost always require that students' families foot the bill for associated costs. These include stationery, copies, uniforms, school bags, and shoes. Text books are sometimes provided for free at government schools, but sometimes families must pay for these as well.

The many poor families who cannot access a government school are left with options outside the government school system. The range of private schools, informal tuition centers, nongovernmental organization (NGO)



(above) Bushra, second from the right, a 10th grader at Behar Colony Government Secondary School for girls, at home with her family. Bushra’s mother, far left, never studied; she married at age 14. Like an increasing number of parents who also did not have the chance to attend school, she sees the value of education, including for girls, and hopes for a better life for her daughters.

(right) Bushra, a 10th grader, sews to help earn money for her school expenses. Her mother is a seamstress. Education costs often increase as children advance in grades, and while many poor families go to great lengths to access education for their children, too many find it impossible given the lack of schools and expense.

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schools, and madrasas creates a complex maze for parents and children to navigate. Many girls experience several—or all—of these forms of study without gaining any educational qualifications.

Poor Quality of Education

Many families expressed frustration about the quality of education available to them. Some said it was so poor that there was no point sending children to school. In government schools, parents and students complained of teachers not showing up, overcrowding, and poor facilities. At private schools, particularly low-cost private schools, concerns related to teachers being badly educated and unqualified, and the instruction being patchy and unregulated. Teachers in both government and private schools pressure parents to pay for out-of-school tutoring, an additional expense. In both government and private schools, use of corporal punishment and abusive behavior by teachers was widely reported.

No Enforcement of Compulsory Education

One reason so many children in Pakistan do not go to school is that there is no enforced government expectation that children should study. Pakistan’s constitution states, “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to







Bushra, a 10th grader in Behar Colony Government Secondary School for girls, at home. While Bushra has access to a quality education at her school, many parents and students raise serious concerns about other government schools where they say teachers often do not show up, classes are often overcrowded, corruption is prevalent and corporal punishment is a problem.

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all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.” However, there is no organized effort by government in any province to ensure that all children study. When children are not sent to school, no government official reaches out to the family to encourage or require that the child study. When a child drops out of school, individual teachers sometimes encourage the child to continue studying, but there is no systematic government effort to enroll or retain children in school. This violates international standards Pakistan has signed up to which re-

quire that education be free and compulsory at least through primary school.

Corruption

Corruption is a major issue in the government school system and exists in several forms. One of the most pervasive is nepotism or bribery in the recruitment of teachers and principals. Some people simply purchase teaching positions, and others obtain their jobs through political connections. When people obtain teaching positions illicitly, they may not be qualified or motivated to teach, and they may not be expected to. Especially in rural areas, some schools sit empty because corruption has redirected the teacher’s salary to someone who does not teach, according to education experts.



Barriers to Girls' Education Outside the School System

Aside from the barriers to education within the school system, girls also face barriers in their homes and in the community. These include poverty, child labor, gender discrimination and harmful social norms, and insecurity and dangers on the way to school.

Poverty

For many parents, the most fundamental barrier to sending their children to school is poverty. Even relatively low associated costs can put education out of reach for poor families, and there are many poor families in Pakistan. In 2016, the government determined that about 60 million Pakistanis—6.8 to 7.6 million families—were living in poverty, about 29.5 percent of the country's population.

Bushra and her younger brother sit on their rooftop doing their homework. Her brother goes to a private school and is taught courses in English while Bushra goes to a government school and learns in Urdu. Bushra's mother said she wishes she could send all her children to private school, but she cannot afford it.

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Many children, including girls, are out of school because they are working. Sometimes they are engaged in paid work, which for girls often consists of home-based industries, such as sewing, embroidery, beading, or assembling items. Other children—almost always girls—are kept home to do housework in the family home or are employed as domestic workers.



Saba is one of the almost 22.5 million children in Pakistan who are out of school, the majority of whom are girls. She sells potatoes on the street outside a private school and longs to attend school herself. Poor families often prioritize boys’ education, as grown sons are expected to support their parents in the future while girls marry and join their in-laws’ household.

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Social Norms

Some families do not believe that girls should be educated or believe girls should not study beyond a certain age. Attitudes regarding girls’ education vary significantly across different communities. In some areas, families violating cultural norms prohibiting girls from studying can face pressure and hostility. When families violate norms against girls’ education, the girls themselves may face harmful consequences. Many people, however, described growing acceptance of the value of girls’ education, even in conservative communities; the government should be encouraging this change.

Girls are often removed from school as they approach puberty, sometimes because families fear them engaging in romantic relationships. Other families fear older girls will face sexual harassment at school and on the way there and back.

Harmful gender norms create economic incentives to prioritize boys’ education. Daughters normally go to live with, and contribute to, their husband’s family, while sons are expected to remain with their parents—so sending sons to school is seen as a better investment in the family’s economic future.

Child marriage is both a consequence and a cause of girls not attending school. In Pakistan, 21 percent of girls marry before age 18, and 3 percent marry before age 15. Girls are sometimes seen as ready for marriage as soon as they reach puberty, and in some communities, child marriage is expected. Some families are driven to marry off their daughters by poverty, and others see child marriage as a way of



preempting any risk of girls engaging in romantic relationships outside marriage. Staying in school helps girls delay marriage, and girls often are forced to leave school as soon as they marry or even become engaged.

Insecurity

Many families and girls cited security as a barrier to girls studying. They described many types of insecurity, including sexual harassment, kidnapping, crime, conflict, and attacks on education. Some families said insecurity in their communities worsened in recent years, meaning younger children have less access to education than older siblings.

Families worry about busy roads; the large distance many girls must travel to school increases risks and fears. Many girls experienced sexual harassment on the way to school, and police demonstrate little willingness to help prevent harassment. Girls sometimes hesitate to complain about ha-

Saba, age 11, who does not attend school, with her mother. Saba's mother cooks potatoes and Saba sells them on the street. Almost 13 percent of Pakistani children aged 10 to 14 years are in paid employment, rising to 33 percent among children ages 15 to 17--and work, also including housework or child care, often keeps girls out of schools.

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arrassment out of fear they will be blamed, or their parents' reaction will be to take them out of school.

Girls and families also fear kidnapping, another fear exacerbated by long journeys to school. This fear is heightened when girls are older and seen as being at greater risk of sexual assault. Attacks on education are disturbingly common in Pakistan. When violence happens in a school or in a neighborhood, it has long term consequences for girls' education. Families across different parts of the country described incidents of violence in their communities that kept girls out of school for many years afterwards.





Armed Conflict and Targeted Attacks on Schools

Many parts of Pakistan face escalating levels of violence related to insurgency, and ethnic and religious conflict. This is having a devastating impact on girls' access to education, and ethnic conflict often spills into schools.

One of the features of conflict in Pakistan has been targeted attacks against students, teachers, and schools. The most devastating attack on education in recent years in Pakistan was the December 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar city, where militants killed 145 people, almost all of them children. This attack was far from isolated, however. Between 2013 and 2017, hundreds of schools were attacked, typically with explosive devices, killing several hundred students and teachers, and damaging and destroying infrastructure. One-third of these attacks specifically targeted girls and women, aiming to interrupt their studies.

Pakistan can, and should, fix its school system. The government should invest more resources in education and use those resources to address gender disparities and to ensure that all children—boys and girls—have access to, and attend, high quality primary and secondary education. The future of the country depends on it.

A mother takes her daughter to school in Islamabad. Government schools generally offer free tuition, but parents and students are still obliged to pay for uniforms, school supplies, and exams fees. These costs put education out of reach for many poor families.

© REUTERS/Sara Farid, February 2014.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

- **Increase expenditure on education in line with UNESCO recommended levels needed to fulfill obligations related to the right to education.**
- **Strengthen oversight of provincial education systems’ progress toward achieving parity between girls and boys and universal primary and secondary education for all children, by requiring provinces provide accurate data on girls’ education, monitoring enrolment and attendance by girls, and setting targets in each province.**
- **Strengthen the federal government’s role in assisting provincial governments in provision of education, with the goal of ending gender disparities in all provinces.**
- **Work with provincial governments to improve the quality of government schools and quality assurance of private schools.**
- **Raise the national minimum age of marriage to 18 with no exceptions and develop and implement a national action plan to end child marriage, with the goal of ending all child marriage by 2030, as per Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3.**
- **Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration, an international political agreement to protect schools, teachers, and students during armed conflict.**

TO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS

- **Direct the provincial education authority to make girls’ education a priority within the education budget, in regard to construction and rehabilitation of schools, training and recruitment of female teachers, and provision of supplies, to address the imbalance between the participation of girls and boys in education.**
- **Strengthen enforcement of anti-child labor laws.**
- **Instruct police officials to work with schools to ensure the safety of students, including monitoring potential threats to students, teachers and schools, and working to prevent harassment of students, especially girls.**
- **Ensure that anyone encountering corruption by government education officials has access to effective and responsive complaint mechanisms.**

TO PROVINCIAL EDUCATION AUTHORITIES

- **Rehabilitate, build, and establish new schools, especially co-ed and girls' schools.**
- **Until government schools are available, provide scholarships to good-quality private schools for girls living far from government schools.**
- **Provide free or affordable transport for students who travel long distances or through difficult environments to get to a government school.**
- **Abolish all tuition, registration, and exam fees at government schools.**
- **Provide poor students with all needed items including school supplies, uniforms, bags, shoes, and textbooks.**
- **Instruct all principals to identify out-of-school children in their catchment areas and work with families to get them into school.**
- **Explore options for increasing attendance by girls from poor families through scholarships, food distribution, or meal programs at girls' schools.**
- **When children quit school or fail to attend, ensure all schools reach out to determine the reasons and re-engage the student in school.**
- **Require each school to develop and implement a security plan with attention to concerns of girls including sexual harassment.**
- **Develop a plan to expand access to middle and high school for girls through the government education system, including establishment of new schools.**
- **Strengthen the system for monitoring and quality assurance of all schools, not only for government schools but also private schools and madrasas.**
- **Prohibit all forms of corporal punishment in schools; take appropriate disciplinary action against any employee violating this rule.**
- **Ensure that all schools have adequate boundary walls, safe and private toilets with hygiene facilities, and access to safe drinking water.**

Methodology

This report is primarily based on research conducted in Pakistan in 2017 and 2018. Human Rights Watch researchers carried out a total of 209 individual and group interviews, mainly in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta.

Most of the interviewees—a total of 119—were girls and young women who either had missed all of their primary and secondary education or had started some education but were unable to continue and dropped out. We also interviewed 60 parents and other family members of children who either had not attended school or had dropped out.

In addition, we interviewed 12 teachers, and four school principals. An additional 18 interviews were with education experts, activists and community workers, or local officials.

Interviews with children and families were usually conducted in their homes, or at the home of a neighbor. Some interviews were conducted in the offices of community-based organizations or at schools. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted privately with only the interviewee, a Human Rights Watch researcher, and, where necessary, an interpreter present. Interviews were conducted in Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Saraiki, Brahui, and, with some experts and educators, in English. In a few cases, interviews were conducted through double translation. Some interviews with experts were conducted by phone or in person outside of Pakistan.

All interviewees were advised of the purpose of the research and how the information would be used. We explained the voluntary nature of the interview and that they could refuse to be interviewed, refuse to answer any question, and terminate the interview at any point. Interviewees did not receive any compensation. The names of children and family members have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The names of other interviewees have sometimes been withheld at their request.

We selected research sites in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta with the goal of getting a sample of different experiences of out-of-school children and their families, including in urban environments. We made an effort to include families who migrated to the city from rural areas, and refugee families. We also conducted interviews in some rural

areas, but the research was primarily in urban areas. Security challenges affected our choice of research sites.

In this report, the terms “child” and “children” are used to refer to anyone under the age of 18, consistent with usage under international law.

At the time of the research for this report, the exchange rate was approximately 105 Pakistani rupees=US\$1. We have used this rate for conversions in the text.

I. Background

Pakistan was described as “among the world’s worst performing countries in education,” at the 2015 Oslo Summit on Education and Development.¹ The new government, elected in July 2018, stated in their manifesto that nearly 22.5 million children are out of school.² Thirty-two percent of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan, versus 21 percent of boys in that age group.³ This represents a total of almost 5 million children of primary school age who are not in school, 62 percent of them girls.⁴

As children reach middle school level—sixth grade, when children would typically be about age 10 or 11—the total number of out of school children increases, and the gender disparity persists. In 2016, 59 percent of middle school girls were out of school versus 49 percent of boys.⁵ According to 2013-2014 data, by ninth grade, only 13 percent of girls are still in school.⁶

Both boys and girls are missing out on education in unacceptable numbers, but girls are worst affected, especially poor girls. Among the poorest students, only 30 percent of boys finish primary school, and only 16 percent of girls.⁷ By lower secondary school, the numbers of the poorest children completing their studies is even more unequal: 18 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls.⁸ Only one percent of the poorest girls finish upper secondary school, compared with 6 percent of the poorest boys.⁹

¹ Rabea Malik and Pauline Rose, “Financing Education in Pakistan: Opportunities for Action,” Oslo Summit on Education for Development, 2015, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/pakista.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 3.

² Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, “The road to Naya Pakistan: PTI Manifesto 2018,” 2018, <http://insaf.pk/public/insafpk/content/manifesto> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 44.

³ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “State of the World’s Children data,” December 2017, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/state-worlds-children-2017-statistical-tables/> (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁴ According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as of 2016 4,901,479 children were out of school. 3,040,280 of these were girls, and 1,861,199 were boys. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “Pakistan,” <http://uis.unesco.org/country/PK> (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Baela Raza Jamil, “Pakistan: all girls and boys in school for 12 years – a critical pathway to progress,” post to “World Education Blog,” (blog), Global Education Monitoring Report, 15 February 2016, <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2016/02/15/pakistan-all-girls-and-boys-in-school-for-12-years-a-critical-pathway-to-progress/> (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁷ UNESCO, “Accountability in education: Meeting Our Commitments. Global Education Monitoring Report,” 2017/18, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259338e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 362.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, p. 363.

Political instability, disproportionate influence on governance by security forces, repression of civil society and the media, violent insurgency, and escalating ethnic and religious tensions all poison Pakistan’s current social landscape. These forces distract from the government’s obligation to deliver essential services like education—and girls lose out the most.¹⁰

There are high numbers of out-of-school children, and significant gender disparities in education, across the entire country, but some areas are much worse than others. As of 2014-2015, which is the most recent published data, the percentage of people who had ever attended school was:

Balochistan:	25 percent of women, 60 percent of men
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:	36 percent of women, 74 percent of men
Sindh:	50 percent of women, 71 percent of men
Punjab:	56 percent of women, 74 percent of men

Similar gender and regional disparities existed among those who completed primary school:

Balochistan:	19 percent of women, 48 percent of men
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:	28 percent of women, 59 percent of men
Sindh:	43 percent of women; 62 percent of men
Punjab:	47 percent of women; 61 percent of men ¹¹

Across all provinces, generation after generation of children, especially girls, are locked out of education—and into poverty. In interviews for this report, girls talked again and

¹⁰ Several education experts interviewed for this report also expressed concern that the curricula used in government schools reflect some of the tensions in broader society. The curricula vary at the provincial level. UNESCO International Bureau of Education, “Pakistan: Curriculum Design and Development,” undated, www.ibe.unesco.org/curriculum/Asia%20Networkpdf/ndreppk.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018). Echoing concerns consistently expressed by experts, one interviewee described the curriculum in her province as “indoctrination,” saying it taught no critical thinking, and was riddled with religious bias and harmful stereotypical representations of other provinces and ethnic groups, and contained messages encouraging extremism and even violence. “Radicalization doesn’t result from no education—it results from the wrong education,” she said. Human Rights Watch telephone interview with education expert (name withheld), September 15, 2018. UNESCO has raised similar concerns. UNESCO, “Accountability in education: Meeting Our Commitments. Global Education Monitoring Report,” 2017/18, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259338e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), pp. 220-221.

¹¹ Government of Pakistan Statistics Division, “Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2014-15,” March 2016, http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//pslm/publications/PSLM_2014-15_National-Provincial-District_report.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018), pp. 17-24.

again about their desire for education, their wish to “be someone,” and the ways in which these dreams had been crushed by being unable to study.

Lack of access to education for girls is part of a broader landscape of gender inequality in Pakistan. The country has one of Asia’s highest rates of maternal mortality.¹² Violence against women and girls—including rape, so-called “honor” killings and violence, acid attacks, domestic violence, forced marriage and child marriage—is a serious problem, and government responses are inadequate.¹³ Pakistani activists estimate that there are about 1,000 honor killings every year.

One particularly concerning theme in some interviews for this report was numerous families in which children were less educated than their parents, or younger siblings were less educated than older siblings. Some families were unrooted by poverty or insecurity in ways that blocked children from studying. Some encountered financial difficulties that made it impossible for children to reach the educational level their parents had achieved. In some communities, schools had closed, or the route to school had become more unsafe. In a few families, views hostile to girls’ education had hardened over time.¹⁴

Pakistan’s education system has changed significantly in recent years, responding to an abdication by the government of responsibility to provide, through government schools, an adequate standard of education, compulsory and free of charge, to all children. There has been an explosion of new private schools, largely unregulated, of wildly varying quality. The number of private schools increased by 69 percent during the period from 1999-2000 to 2007-2008 alone, a period during which the number of government schools increased

¹² “Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births),” World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT> (accessed September 12, 2018).

¹³ In October 2016, following public protests after Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani model, was killed by her brother, parliament passed an anti-honor killing law. The new law included harsher punishments and partially closed a loophole allowing legal heirs to pardon perpetrators who are usually also a relative. After the law was passed, however, high numbers of so-called “honor killings” continue, raising questions about the willingness of law enforcement officials to investigate and prosecute these cases, and to protect women and girls at risk. Saroop Ijaz, “‘Honor’ killings continue in Pakistan despite new law,” commentary, Human Rights Watch Dispatch, September 25, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/25/honor-killings-continue-pakistan-despite-new-law>.

¹⁴ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Basila, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

by only 8 percent.¹⁵ This increased the private schools' share of total student enrollment to 34 percent.¹⁶ The All Pakistan Private Schools Federation has 197,000 member schools.¹⁷

There has also been a massive increase in the number of programs offering religious education, ranging from formal madrasas to informal arrangements where children study the Quran in the house of a neighbor. Because many religious schools are informal, it is difficult to estimate how many exist, but commentators agree that the number has risen sharply over recent decades.¹⁸

A variety of nonprofit schools also exist in Pakistan, though there are far too few to meet the needs of the many families struggling to access education. They range from tiny informal arrangements, such as individuals tutoring a few children in their home for free, to “informal schools” some of which are funded by international donors, to organizations like the Citizens Foundation which boasts over 200,000 students.¹⁹ The Citizens Foundation charges low fees—175 rupees per month (US\$1.67).²⁰

Some nonprofit private schools are only for girls.²¹ Others are based in particularly marginalized communities including, for example, schools located in areas with many Afghan immigrants or in fishing communities.²²

The lines between nonprofit schools and private tuition can be blurred, with some informal schools representing a mix of philanthropy and business, with some teachers charging students who can pay and letting the poorest children attend for free.²³ Tuition teachers sometimes aim to transition their students into a government school but face the same

¹⁵ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, “Private Sector Education in Pakistan: Mapping and Musing,” 2010, saps.org/upload/report_publications/docs/1401025704.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “All Pakistan Private Schools’ Federation,” <http://www.pakistanprivateschools.com/> (accessed September 12, 2018).

¹⁸ E.g. Sabrina Tavernise, “Pakistan’s Religious School Fill Void, but Fuel Militancy,” *New York Times*, May 3, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/04/world/asia/04schools.html> (accessed September 12, 2018).

¹⁹ “About Us,” Citizens’ Foundation, undated, <http://www.tcf.org.pk/#about> (accessed September 12, 2018).

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with nongovernmental organization (NGO) worker (name withheld), Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²² Human Rights Watch interview with Fakhunda, Peshawar, August 6, 2017. Sometimes discrimination is built in to the provision of education; for example, one mother told Human Rights Watch about a school in Peshawar for Afghans which provides primary and secondary education for boys, but only primary education for girls.

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Sana, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

barriers—usually distance and cost—that kept the students out of school in the first place.²⁴

In addition to schools run as charities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also sometimes help other schools, for example by providing books to schools in poor areas.²⁵ The demand for assistance is far greater than the supply. Many families said they had sought assistance from charities to educate their children but were unable to find help.²⁶

Research on educational outcomes for different types of educational institutions suggests that when you control for the differences in intake characteristics of students between government and private schools, their outcomes are in terms of testing achievement are similar.²⁷ On the other hand, outcomes for children who studied only at madrasas were considerably worse.²⁸

Pakistan’s highly decentralized structure of government means that decisions regarding education policy are mostly made at the subnational level, consisting of four provinces (Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh), the capital area containing Islamabad, and the federally-administered tribal areas near the Afghanistan border, and the administrative entities of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Every province has a separate planning process, on a different timeline, with varying approaches and levels of effectiveness and commitment to improving access to education for girls.²⁹ The result is

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mariam and Tehreem, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with government primary school teacher (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Fazeelah, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²⁷ Nadia Siddiqui and Stephen Gorard, “Comparing government and private schools in Pakistan: The way forward for universal education,” *International Journal of Educational Research*, 82 (2017), pp. 159-169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.01.007> (accessed September 12, 2018).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See, e.g.: Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh, “Sindh Education Sector Plan, 2014-2018,” 2014, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/education-sector-plan-2014-2018-sindh-province-pakistan> (accessed September 12, 2018); School Education Department, Government of Punjab, “Punjab School Education Sector Plan 2013-2017,” June 2013, http://aserpakistan.org/document/learning_resources/2014/Sector_Plans/Punjab%20Sector%20Plan%202013-2017.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018); Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, “Education Sector Plan 2010-2015,” April 2012, http://www.aserpakistan.org/document/learning_resources/2014/Sector_Plans/KP%20Sector%20Plan%202010-2015.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018); Policy Planning and Implementation Unit (PPIU), Education Department, Government of Balochistan, “Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2013-2018,” 2014, http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/pakistan_balochistan_education_sector_plan.pdf (accessed September 12, 2018).

that education policies and practices vary significantly from one part of the country to the next, including on such basic issues as whether children are charged fees to attend government schools, and how much teachers are paid.

Despite all the barriers, many people interviewed for this report described a growing demand for girls' education, including in marginalized communities. Aziza, 45, lives in a fishing community on the fringes of Karachi. She never studied; all her five children attended at least a few years of school, though none went beyond primary education. "Now it reflects well on the parent when a child is able to do well for themselves," Aziza said. "Back then in this area we had no experience of educated people, but now we do. So, everyone is interested now in getting an education."³⁰

Some experts pointed to growing acceptance that girls should study. A school headmaster cited four reasons for this: 1) a desire by boys and men to marry educated brides; 2) growing availability of education as a result of the spread of private schools; 3) efforts by the government to push people away from studying in madrasas and toward mainstream education; and 4) a growing belief by families that educated women better contribute to their families, even if their role is only inside the home.³¹

Alima is sending her 20-year-old daughter to college, where she is in 11th grade, even though the family struggles to survive on the money Alima earns as a seamstress and her husband as a fruit seller.³² Alima's two older children, both sons, left school in ninth and 10th grades to work as weavers to help meet the family's rent. "Because she's the last child we put in all this effort for her," Alima said. "If it was up to me, I would put the same kind of focus on all my children, but because of our financial situation I couldn't. Now, because there are four people in the family earning, we can.... I hope she can study to the point where she doesn't have to live like me."³³

"A lot of work is behind this awareness," an NGO worker in a poor area of Karachi said, describing what she said was swiftly growing demand for education in the area. She attributed the change to the work of NGOs and others in creating schools in the area. "The

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Aziza, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

³² In Pakistan, 11th and 12th grade are taught in what are called "intermediate colleges," often referred to as just college.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Alima, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

literacy rate here is quite high compared to some other areas,” she said. “There are a lot of schools here and people are generally aware regarding the importance of education.”³⁴

“Some people say girls should take care of homes, they shouldn’t study,” said a school headmaster in Punjab. “Since they are children, they are preparing to be housewives. But very few people think like this now.”³⁵

“I’ve never even seen the face of a school,” said Razia, 37, a mother of four. “I really wanted to study, but my father wouldn’t let me.... In our family it is a tradition that girls don’t study.” Razia struggled to teach herself to read, and she says girls’ education is more accepted now, including in her own family. “The girls in my family are all studying now,” she said. “Things have changed because education changes you.... Before people weren’t educated and now they are and that’s made them accept girls.”³⁶

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with worker from a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Razia, Karachi, July 29, 2017.

II. Barriers to Girls' Education within the School System

[E]very mother wants their child to be educated but there is not a state system to deliver the services.

—Head of a community-based organization, Karachi, July 2017

While girls face barriers to education outside the school system, many of the most serious barriers to girls' education are within the school system. The government's education system suffers from a chronic lack of investment. This means that many children are too far from the nearest school to travel there safely in a reasonable amount of time, if they do not have access to transportation, a problem that becomes more acute as children reach higher grades and schools are in ever-shorter supply. Compulsory education exists on paper but there is no functioning mechanism to require that children go to school. Corruption and nepotism affect who gains employment in the school system, and rural areas are particularly underserved. The Pakistan government has not established an education system adequate to meet the needs of the country's children.

Lack of Investment

The government does not adequately invest in schools. A 2015 paper commissioned by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals education targets, which include universal completion of primary and secondary school, Pakistan would need to at least double the percentage of GDP going to education.³⁷

According to UNESCO guidance to governments, in order for the government to fulfill its obligations on education, it should spend at least 15 to 20 percent of the total national budget, and 4 to 6 percent of GDP, on education.³⁸ Pakistan is one of about 33 countries which meets neither of these benchmarks, and the percentage increase in expenditure on

³⁷ Annababette Wils, "Reaching education targets in low and lower-middle income countries: Costs and finance gaps to 2030, Paper commissioned for the "EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015, Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges," 2015, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002325/232560e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 12.

³⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) et al., "Education 2030: Framework for Action," December 2015, art. 105. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018).

education has sometimes lagged behind the rate of economic growth, reducing the percentage of GDP spent on education.³⁹

As of 2016, 12.6 percent of Pakistan's total expenditure went to education, and as of 2017, 2.758 percent of Pakistan's GDP was spent on education—both figures well below recommended benchmarks.⁴⁰ This low investment continues in spite of a government commitment in 2009 to spend 7 percent of GDP on education, and makes Pakistan the only country in Asia to spend more on its military than on education.⁴¹

In its 2017-2025 National Education Policy, the government is blunt about its own neglect of the education system, writing:

Pakistan's education sector has persistently suffered from under-investment by the state, irrespective of the governments in power. Years of lack of attention to the education sector in the form of inadequate financing, poor governance as well as lack of capacity, has translated into insufficient number of schools, low enrolment, poor facilities in schools, high dropout rate, shortage and incompetent teachers, etc. All of this has led to poor quality of education for those who are fortunate enough to get enrolled and no education for the rest.⁴²

This diagnosis is refreshingly honest. But there are few signs that it is triggering solutions. Professionals working in the education sector described a situation in which the government seemed disinterested, sometimes pointing out that policymakers send their

³⁹ UNESCO, "Accountability in education: Meeting Our Commitments. Global Education Monitoring Report," 2017/18, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259338e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 265; UNESCO, "Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges," <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 243.

⁴⁰ "Expenditure on education as a % of total expenditure: Pakistan," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS?locations=PK> (accessed September 12, 2018); "Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP): Pakistan," World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=PK> (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁴¹ Andreas Benz, "The Crisis of School Education in Pakistan: Of Government's Failure and New Hopes in the Growing Private Education Sector," *Internationales Asienforum*, 43 (2012), No. 3-4, <http://crossasia-journals.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/iaf/article/viewFile/186/181> (accessed September 12, 2018), pp. 225-226.

⁴² Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan, "National Education Policy 2017," 2017, <http://www.moent.gov.pk/userfiles1/file/National%20Educaiton%20Policy%202017.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 160.

children to high quality and expensive private schools, and lack any personal investment in the quality of government education.⁴³ “The state has never taken education seriously—proper resources have never been allocated in any state,” the head of an NGO in Punjab told Human Rights Watch. “The problem is the priorities of government—education is not a priority and they don’t allocate the budget.”⁴⁴

Several experts pointed to the government failing to spend even the inadequate amount allocated to education, including funding from the government budget and from international donors, saying underspending occurs consistently and across regions.⁴⁵ “Money is going to waste. There’s no system. You need a system of checks and balances and monitoring and political will. You have to have the will,” an expert in Sindh said.⁴⁶

Lack of Enforcement of Compulsory Education

If parents won’t allow their girls to go to school, what can the government do?

—Zarafshan, 18, forced out of school by her uncle at age 12, Karachi, July 30, 2017

Pakistan’s constitution states, “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.”⁴⁷ Under Pakistan’s decentralized system of service delivery, responsibility rests with provincial governments to pass and enforce laws making education compulsory. In reality, however, there is no organized effort by government to ensure that all children study.

When children are not enrolled in school, no government official reaches out to the family to encourage or require that the child study. When a child drops out of a government school, individual teachers may encourage the child to continue studying, but there is no systematic government effort to enroll or retain children in school. This is incompatible

⁴³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with education expert (name withheld), September 15, 2018.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with head of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with education expert (name withheld), September 15, 2018; Human Rights Watch interview with education expert (name withheld), UK, September 8, 2018.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

⁴⁷ Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, http://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1431341153_169.pdf (accessed September 13, 2018), article 25A.

with the constitution and international standards Pakistan has signed up to which require that education be free and compulsory at least through primary school.

Some children try to enforce their right to education through their parents. “My younger daughters go up to their father and say, ‘Put us in school or the government will throw you in jail,’” Zunaisha, 35, said, laughing. “But their father says he can’t afford it.” Zunaisha’s oldest daughter, Hafsa, 16, interjected: “He won’t *allow* it.” Hafsa was forced to leave school after a year, something she deeply regrets, saying she now has no dreams. “You can only have interests and hobbies if you have an education.” She tried to convince her parents to let her four younger sisters, ages seven to 15, study, but without success. “It’s my father and brothers who don’t let me go to school,” she said. “I think it should be mandatory for girls to study until the 10th grade. Then if they want to, they can study further.”⁴⁸

Outreach by the government to encourage families to access education—and explain that education is compulsory—could make an immediate difference. Safina, 40, never went to school. She is a mother of 10 children, ages six to 22. One of her children is studying, but she said her other children refused to go and said they were not interested. “The government should have meetings with the parents and explain that kids should go to school,” she said. She suggested the government should send people house to house to talk about education. “Nobody came,” she said. “I wish the same things everyone wishes—that my kids go on to study.”⁴⁹

In the absence of compulsory education, children sometimes decide themselves whether to study. “My father tried to make me go [to school]—he had no good job but still he wanted his kids to go,” said Kaarima, 19. Her father washes cars for a living. She left school at age 10, after fourth grade, because, she said, she was “not interested.” Some of Kaarima’s siblings study, and some do not.⁵⁰ Kaarima’s mother, Sahar, said she and her husband tried to make Kaarima continue studying but she refused. Sahar believes the government should force children to go to school. “It’s good if the government takes this initiative because kids have their own will.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Hafsa and Zunaisha, Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Safina, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Kaarima, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Sahar, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

Some families are not aware that government schools, with free tuition, are available. Saira, 30, has three sons and one daughter, ages six to 12. Her husband is physically abusive and did not allow Saira to leave the house, but he was away from the home after he found work as a cleaner in a school. “He didn’t want to pay for education, but once he started working, I could sneak out and ask at the church for friends to help our kids go to school,” Saira said. “We didn’t know school was free back then—that’s why the kids didn’t go earlier.” A priest explained that government schools were free, and her husband agreed to enroll the three older children. “When they got admission I cried so much, because I was so happy. When I saw other children in uniform I always wondered, ‘When are my kids going to study?’” Saira never attended school.⁵²

Not only are children not required to study, in numerous cases parents and children described situations where teachers urged children to drop out. Palwashay, 16, was in fifth grade and age 14 or 15, when her teacher at government school said she was too old for her grade and should leave. She had low marks and had failed the exam to progress to sixth grade. Her family hopes now to send her to private school.⁵³

Shortage of Government Schools

They should open a government school for all of us.

—Ghazal, 16, speaking in a group of 11 out-of-school girls in a poor area of Karachi, July 30, 2017

There simply are not enough government schools for all children to have access to one. Even in Pakistan’s major cities many children cannot reach a government school on foot in a reasonable amount of time and a safe manner. When families can access a government school, they often find that it is overcrowded.

“The government needs to spend more money and open more schools,” said the head of an NGO working with out of school children. He described an area where his NGO worked: “In two union councils, there was one [government] school. An area that size needs five to ten schools.”⁵⁴

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Saira, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Palwashay, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with head of an NGO (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

In Peshawar, a local government official said the closest government school was a 40-minute walk away. Because of this, she said, most children start school late, at ages eight to 12, because parents wait for them to be old enough to walk to school on their own.⁵⁵ Some parents struggle to pay for a nearby private school for the first year or two of education while they wait for children to become old enough to travel alone to more distant—and more affordable—government schools.⁵⁶

Pakistan has many more boys' school than girls' schools, despite the greater safety concerns and restrictions on freedom of movement many girls face.⁵⁷ On a national level, in 2016 the government reported equal numbers of middle schools for boys and girls, but major disparities in the number of girls' primary schools (66,000 girls' schools out of 165,900 total) and secondary schools (13,400 girls' schools out of 32,100 total).⁵⁸ The disparities become even greater at the level of professional colleges and universities.⁵⁹

In some provinces and local areas, disparities can be higher. For example, in Balochistan there are more than twice as many schools for boys as for girls.⁶⁰ A similar disparity exists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: "If you have ten schools for boys, you have five for girls," an education expert from the province explained.⁶¹ Another expert described an area with 14 high schools for boys and only one for girls.⁶²

Aisha, around age 30, lives with her husband and their six children in an area of Peshawar where the nearest government school for boys, offering nursery school through 10th grade, is less than a five-minute walk away. The nearest government school for girls is a 30-minute walk and goes only through fifth grade. Aisha's daughter quit school at age nine because of her parents' concerns about her safety walking to school.⁶³

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with local counselor (name withheld), Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

⁵⁶ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Mumtaz, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

⁵⁷ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with teacher at a government school (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

⁵⁸ Government of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Social indicators of Pakistan 2016," [http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//SOCIAL%20INDICATORS%202016%20%20\(FINAL\)%20%20COLOUR%201.pdf](http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//SOCIAL%20INDICATORS%202016%20%20(FINAL)%20%20COLOUR%201.pdf) (accessed September 12, 2018), pp. 56-57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶⁰ 9,399 boys' schools, versus 3,880 for girls. "Detail of Government Schools in Balochistan," Government of Balochistan, <http://emis.gob.pk/Uploads/DETAIL%20OF%20GOVERNMENT%20SCHOOLS%20IN%20BALOCHISTAN.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with education expert (name withheld), September 15, 2018.

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with education expert, UK, 2018.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Aisha, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

Many neighborhoods are education deserts for poor families. “I could send them if there was a government school,” said Akifah, 28, a mother of three children, ages ten, eight, and seven. The family had moved from a village near Multan to Karachi three years earlier, looking for work, and had no choice but to settle in an area where there are only private schools the family cannot afford, but no government schools within reach.⁶⁴

The distance to school often increases as children get older, especially for girls. Schools are more likely to be gender segregated as children get older, and there are fewer schools for girls than for boys. If a primary school is nearby, secondary school is often further, and high school further yet, due to smaller numbers of girls’ schools at the higher levels. The government has acknowledged this gap. For example, the Balochistan provincial education plan identifies it as a barrier for girls, saying, “School availability is further limited by ‘upward bottlenecks’ created by the drastic reduction of the number of schools at the middle and secondary levels, leading to the exclusion of many children, especially girls.”⁶⁵

This gap makes the transition from fifth to sixth grade impossible for many girls. Beenish, 14, left school after fifth grade, because the closest secondary school was a 10 to 15-minute drive. “Both of my parents want me to study,” she said, explaining they would allow her to continue if there was a school nearby. But, she said, she is not allowed to walk through the bazaar, which is on the route to the government secondary school, because her family sees it as unsafe, and the family cannot afford to pay for her transportation. She longs to return to school: “I wake up, I pray, I read the Quran, and I do housework—that’s my day,” she said. “My request to the government is to upgrade the primary school to the secondary level so I can continue my studies.”⁶⁶

Girls face another difficult transition when they complete 10th grade. In Pakistan, 10th grade ends with an examination called a secondary school certificate, or SSC. After passing the SSC, students who wish to continue studying go on to a different school, often referred to as an intermediate college, where 11th and 12th grades are taught. Government colleges are in short supply.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Akifah, Karachi, July 28, 2017.

⁶⁵ Education Department, Government of Balochistan, “Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2013-2018,” 2014), p. 53.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Beenish, Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

Ghazal, 16, lives in a poor area of Karachi. There are two government schools within walking distance of her home, and she completed 10th grade. But to continue she would need to go to a college, and the nearest government college is a half hour drive away, an insurmountable barrier to her poor family. “We don’t have money for more,” she said flatly.⁶⁷

Government colleges, where children study beyond 10th grade, are few and far between, which creates not only barriers in terms of distance, but also fierce competition for admission. “It is competitive to get into government colleges,” the principal of a private school explained. “If children have poor marks, they go to a private college.”⁶⁸

“My hope is that they make government colleges in this area—that is our main issue,” said Asima, 16. “There is one lakh of population here [100,000 people] and no institution for higher learning nearby. The government should take this into account and open an institute here.” She said government schools in their neighborhood go only to eighth grade. She studied to eighth grade at government school, then attended private school for grades nine and ten, but now faces dropping out because her family will only permit her to continue if she can find a job at a college and pay the fees herself. The closest government college is four or five kilometers away, and the family cannot afford for her to travel there by rickshaw.⁶⁹

Urban Versus Rural Differences

The situation is often far harder for families living in rural areas. In villages and the countryside, the distance to a government school can be far greater, and private schools are less likely to be available as they often struggle to earn a profit outside of cities and thus are less likely to fill in gaps created by lack of government schools. Some interviewees said there was no school—government or private—in their village of origin.⁷⁰

In rural areas, like cities, government schools are increasingly scarce as children move from primary to secondary to high school. “In every village, there is a government school,

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Ghazal, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with principal of a private school (name withheld), Lahore, July 19, 2017.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Asima and her parents, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

⁷⁰ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Bina, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

but no college, no higher school,” the headmaster of a private school in a small town in Punjab told Human Rights Watch. “There’s nothing past 10th grade. It’s 13 or 14 kilometers to a college [for children in villages].”⁷¹

Asifa, 20, delayed attending school until she was nine or ten years old, because it was a 45-minute walk from her village. “My parents said, ‘If you are interested enough you can walk there.’ Whoever wanted to went,” she said. “I found it too far. The path is lonely and isolated and there have been cases of two or three kidnappings in that area.... But then I realized I needed to study so I convinced my parents and I got friends to go so we walked to school together.” The school only went through eighth grade, so after that her only option was to go live with her sister in a town where grade nine and ten is available.⁷²

Mina, 22, wanted to be a doctor, but in her village the only way to attend ninth grade is to travel to a college in a town a 45-minute drive away. “I left school because the science teacher wasn’t available until late and I couldn’t come home so late,” she said, explaining the class ended at 6 or 7 p.m. “I asked them to move the time, but the teacher said no.”⁷³

Corruption

Corruption is pervasive in Pakistan, which is ranked 117 out of 180 countries on the 2017 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.⁷⁴ Corruption is a major issue in the government school system.

One of the most pervasive forms is bribery or nepotism in recruitment. Some people simply purchase teaching positions. The director of a community-based organization said that the bribe paid to secure a government teaching position varies but averages around 200,000 rupees (US\$1,905). “For the last five years, everyone has to pay. It’s worth it just for the salary—it’s an investment. This has an impact on the quality of the teaching—there’s no teaching. Even the building is being used by the landlord in that area in some places for his own purposes. He’s a powerful man—no one dares challenge him.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Asifa, Punjab, July 19, 2017.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mina, Punjab, July 19, 2017.

⁷⁴ Transparency International, “Corruption Perception Index 2017,” https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017 (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

Others obtain jobs through political connections. “I did a BA in arts and have a certificate in teaching—and then an MP from this area helped me,” said a government school headmaster, explaining how he obtained his position. “[Government recruitment] is done on a political basis. Maybe 10 percent is on merit.”⁷⁶

An education expert explained that politicians put people loyal to them into positions in the education system not only for bribes, but also for political influence, as teachers can play a role in elections. “They mobilize people, they help fix elections,” he said. “Teachers are influential people.”⁷⁷

When people purchase a teaching position, they do not necessarily teach. “Everywhere you’ll find a government school—the building is there, the teacher is on the payroll, but there is no teacher and no students,” the director of a community-based organization said. “I personally know many teachers who have other jobs. They are earning 60,000 rupees a month [\$571]. They have to give some to the district education officer—it varies, sometimes 10 percent. This is a pattern.” He said there is nothing communities can do: “Teachers are political appointments. They have paid money to get these appointments. There is no pressure because these people cannot be pressured.”⁷⁸ UNESCO in 2017 cited findings regarding diverted funds, over 2,000 fake teacher identity cards, and 349 “ghost” schools.⁷⁹

The impact of corruption is particularly devastating in rural areas. “There is pressure on principals in cities to enforce some things,” a staff member at a private school said. “But in the villages sometimes the principals don’t even show up.”⁸⁰

“At least in Karachi the government [education] system is functional,” the director of a community-based organization said. In rural areas, particularly in Sindh and Balochistan, he said there was no pressure on government officials to deliver education effectively,

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of a government primary school (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with education expert, UK, 2018.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

⁷⁹ UNESCO, “Accountability in education: Meeting Our Commitments. Global Education Monitoring Report,” 2017/18, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259338e.pdf> (accessed September 12, 2018), p. 269.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with private school staff member (name withheld), Lahore, July 19, 2017.

describing local government agencies as “non-functional.” “[A] school is there, but no teachers and no students,” he said.⁸¹

There is also corruption within schools. “There was a girl in the class who was really dull, but she paid 3,000 rupees [\$29] and came first,” said Beena, 40. “My niece cried a lot and said, ‘Why couldn’t you pay so I could come first?’” The girl’s mother added: “The teacher asked for money, but I couldn’t give it, and then [my daughter] passed matric, but with a D.”⁸² Beena added: “My friend’s son did well—he studied for his matric. His teacher said, ‘If you do something for me—if you pay us 3,000 rupees—we’ll pass you.’ He said, ‘If I’m doing well, why should I pay?’ Then he failed on three out of four papers at his intermediate course in 12th grade and he got discouraged and left.”⁸³

Corruption is an issue in both government and private schools, and some parents said that demands for bribes are more of a problem in private schools, perhaps because of the low salaries.⁸⁴

High Cost of Education

The government doesn’t help the poor. We can’t educate our children, and we can’t feed ourselves.

—Rukhsana, 30, mother of three, with a husband rarely able to work due to illness, Karachi, July 2017

For most of Pakistan’s families, education costs money.

The decision whether to charge fees at government schools is taken at the subnational level, resulting in a patchwork of different practices. In Sindh, most interviewees reported that government schools did not charge fees. In Punjab, interviewees consistently said they paid fees at government schools, most frequently 10 rupees (\$0.09) per month for pre-school classes, and 20 rupees for children in primary school.⁸⁵ In Balochistan, a government teacher said her school charged an annual admission fee of up to about 30

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Beena and Alima, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Fazila, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

rupees (\$0.29) and local businesses sometimes assisted children whose families struggled to meet the costs.⁸⁶ Children must also pay for exam fees, which can be about 20 rupees at primary level at 30 rupees at secondary level (\$0.19 and \$0.29).⁸⁷

Government schools are also not automatically less expensive than private schools when you take into account associated costs, which may include registration, exams, books, uniforms, and transport. Private schools often have fewer associated costs, for example for books and uniforms, and may offer discounts on fees. Private schools may also be closer, eliminating or reducing transportation costs.

Costs, even if small, put education out of reach for poor families, and there are many poor families in Pakistan. In 2016, the government set a new “poverty level,” an indicator designating adults subsisting on under 3,030 rupees per month (\$29) as living in poverty. Using this benchmark, the government in 2016 determined that about 60 million Pakistanis—6.8 to 7.6 million families—were living in poverty, about 29.5 percent of the country’s population.⁸⁸

Children often switch between government and private school for financial reasons. “My children were in private school initially,” said Pariza, 44, mother of eight. “But the switched to government school because we didn’t have the money for private school.”⁸⁹

Associated Costs of Government Schooling

Parents said sending a child to government school, even at the primary level, cost as much as 5,000 rupees per year in associated costs (\$0.48).⁹⁰ “The school may be free, but there are always demands for money for something or the other,” said Zarifah, a mother of five. “Copies, stationery, every day there is a new expense. A school bag alone costs 500 rupees [\$4.76].... Every day, every day, it’s something.” Zarifah’s oldest daughter studied to second grade but the family took her out of school because of the expense. Zarifah says she would like to send all her children to school, “but our resources are limited.” She adds:

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with government middle school teacher (name withheld), Balochistan, January 2018.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Mubarak Zeb Khan, “New poverty line makes a third of Pakistanis poor,” *Dawn*, April 8, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1250694> (accessed September 12, 2018).

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Pariza, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

⁹⁰ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Benazir, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

“I cannot send just one child to school as this would be unfair to the other children. They will feel hurt at being left out.” Zarifah’s oldest daughter now studies the Quran with a neighbor; the other children are not in education.⁹¹

Government schools often provide some, but not all, of the textbooks children need and families must also pay for school supplies. “Some books are provided, and some we buy,” said Aqiba, 18, discussing her family’s struggles to keep Aqiba’s two younger siblings in government school. “They keep adding new books every 15 or 30 days that we have to buy. For example, they added a coloring book recently. We spend 3,000 rupees [\$29] per month for books.”⁹² Several families estimated that it cost 500-600 rupees per year (\$5-6) per child in school supplies for them to send their children to government primary school.⁹³ Others said the cost was much more, as they had to buy replacements and new notebooks throughout the year.⁹⁴

Uniforms can cost over 1,000 rupees (\$9.52).⁹⁵ Children who cannot afford uniforms may be excluded from school. For girls, parents must also buy a *dupatta* [scarf] which one mother said cost another 750 rupees (\$7).⁹⁶ Students may need several uniforms per school year, and may need uniforms for different seasons.⁹⁷ A few government schools give free uniforms to selected students, but such assistance is rare.⁹⁸ Shoes cost about 500 rupees (\$4.76) new, or perhaps half that if you can find them used.⁹⁹

Paveena, 13, said only one girl in her extended family ever went to school. “My six-year-old cousin really cried for it, so her older brother put her in [school],” Paveena said. “But she only went for a month. She would leave the house at 7 a.m., reach the school at 10 a.m. [But] she was going in her home clothes, instead of the uniform, so the teacher took her

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Zarifah, Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Aqiba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Azwa, Ayesha, and Sidra, Karachi, July 31, 2017, Fazila, Lahore, July 18, 2017, and Bisharah, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqiba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Pariza, Lahore, July 17, 2017, Fazila, Lahore, July 19, 2017, and Aqiba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Bisharah, Lahore, July 18, 2017, and Aqiba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

⁹⁷ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Benazir, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqiba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

out.” Paveena said the uniform cost 1,000 rupees (\$9.52) and the family could not afford it. “We really want to go to school, but we don’t have the means.”¹⁰⁰

Muskaan lives in a neighborhood of Lahore where she says the nearest government middle school for girls is a 15 to 20-minute trip by rickshaw. To make the trip every day would cost 3,500 rupees (\$33) per month.¹⁰¹

Ann finished eighth grade at a school near her home but would have to travel by rickshaw to reach a school teaching ninth grade. A rickshaw would cost 40 rupees each way (\$0.38). Her mother is a tailor, her father a construction worker, and she has three brothers. “I assessed my situation myself and saw the issues with transportation and expense for transportation,” she said. “So, I decided not to pursue it. Then I did housework instead.”¹⁰²

Higher grades are more expensive than lower grades, even in government colleges, in terms of both tuition and associated costs. “For science classes for the matric [10th grade exam] you have to buy special things, like test tubes for 500 rupees [\$4.76] each,” said Alima, whose daughter is in 11th grade. “You need frogs. We can find them for free but at this time of year you can’t find them. They sell them for 200 rupees [\$1.90].... I had to look for a frog for two days on the ground, but I couldn’t find one. I went to a fish seller and he said he would get me one for 100 rupees [\$0.95]. My daughter needed it for the science practicum class.” Alima’s daughter also had to contribute 500 rupees (\$4.76) toward a science set used by the class.¹⁰³

Madrasa and Informal Tuition as Alternatives to School

Tutoring is sometimes seen as a more affordable option for parents who cannot afford the cost of school.¹⁰⁴ Madrasas are also frequently used as an alternative for girls not able to attend school.¹⁰⁵ Some children attend madrasa in addition to regular school.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Paveena, Quetta, January 17, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Muskaan, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with Ann, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Alima, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Nazneen, Karachi, July 29, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Eva, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

Madrastas and tutoring are often closer and cheaper than school. Shumila, 12, said she and her sisters could only attend madrasa because there was no government school for girls (the closest was a 25-minute walk away) in their neighborhood in Quetta. There was a private school a 10-minute walk away that they could not afford, and six or seven madrasas, including one a two-minute walk from their home which was free.¹⁰⁶

Low cost tutoring is often available. Some madrasas charge fees, but many are free. Both tutoring and madrasas are generally free of associated costs that come with government and private schools. They are also typically easier for children to join, often accepting children on a rolling basis without administrative requirements such as identification and birth certificates.

The lines between a madrasa education and informal tutoring can be blurred. Asadah, 12, is the oldest of six children in her family. She left school after second grade, because the family could no longer afford the expense, and she was needed to help with chores at home. She has managed to go back to studying by attending Quran lessons at a neighbor's house every morning; her family pays the neighbor 100 rupees per day (\$0.95). She is the only child in the family in any type of education. "I then come home and teach my siblings," she says.¹⁰⁷

While madrasas and tutoring can provide some education for children who otherwise would go without, they are not an adequate substitute for school. They do not generally teach a full curriculum, and typically lack a path for transitioning students to the formal education system or helping them obtain formal educational qualifications. Students at madrasas often learn only religious subjects. Children attending informal tuition learn whatever the teacher chooses to teach, in whatever time the child shows up.

Najiba, 12, was unable to go to school because there is no government school in her area and her family cannot afford private school. She went to madrasa instead, six days a week for three hours a day, but studied only the Quran, which she said she has now finished.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Shumila, Quetta, January 17, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Asadah, Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Najiba, Quetta, January 17, 2018.

Sahar, 34, sends three of her children to madrasa, two in lieu of regular school and one in addition to regular school; the family receives a discount at the madrasa because they are poor, so they pay 600 rupees (\$6) per month for all three children.¹⁰⁹

Busrah, 17, lives in a poor fishing community in Karachi. She attended a private school that cost 600 rupees (\$6) a month through fifth grade. When her family could no longer pay, she moved to a government school for grade six. “I didn’t complete sixth grade,” she said. “I just didn’t think the place was right. At private school the teacher used to focus on the students but at government school they didn’t.” After leaving the government school, Busrah joined a madrasa, but left after a year. “They had this whole concept of purdah, but I can’t do this because I have to fetch water, so that didn’t work out,” she said, explaining that the madrasa required girls to cover their whole body, including wearing gloves and socks, anytime they were outside their home. “It’s very hot.”¹¹⁰

Quality of Education

There are not enough good quality schools [in this area]. Parents get disheartened and take kids out.

—Career counselor at a youth center in a poor area of Karachi, July 2017

Poor families, unable to afford elite private schools, are left with the options of government schools or low-cost private schools. Parents in this situation often expressed concerns about the quality of education. Some felt that the quality was so poor that there was no point sending children to school at all.

The government itself acknowledges concerns about poor quality government schools. For example, the Balochistan government writes: “The quality of education also remains poor and the exponential growth of private schools in the province indicates the low levels of confidence in public sector schooling.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Sahar, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Busrah, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹¹¹ Education Department, Government of Balochistan, “Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2013-2018,” 2014, p. 10.

Quality concerns differ in government versus private schools. In government schools, parents and students complained of teachers not showing up, overcrowding, and poor facilities. At private schools, particularly low-cost private schools, concerns more often related to teachers being poorly educated and under qualified. In both government and private schools, use of corporal punishment and abusive behavior by teachers was widely reported.

Quality Concerns in Government Schools

Families had a range of complaints about government schools, including absent and abusive teachers, violent forms of punishment, overcrowding and insecurity in the schools, poor facilities including lack of toilets and water, and frustrations with the curriculum.

Teacher Absences and Qualifications

Many families complained of teachers being absent from school. “Sometimes students go to school and there’s no teacher, so they miss out on their studies,” said Tehreem, 21, who attended government school before becoming a teacher. “This happens here. I am speaking from experience. Throughout the year they wouldn’t teach us, and then for the last three months there would be all this pressure before exams. In a week, they would come once or twice. Mostly this is the case in primary schools—this a crucial development time for children, but the teacher is not there.” Of her current unpaid work in a free tuition center, she said, “We feel happy doing this, and we want these children to get a better education than what we got in government schools.”¹¹²

Atifa, 16, and her sister, Hakimah, 17, live in Karachi. They both left school after fifth grade. “A lot of times the teacher showed up late or he would not show up at all. We would just go and sit and then come home,” Hakimah said, about their primary school. Their younger sister, Zafra, 12, left school after grade two or three. “I had the same issues—teachers wouldn’t show up. I left because of that—I didn’t feel I was learning.”

After completing fifth grade, Atifa and Hakimah tried to register for secondary school. “We’ve been trying to get admission there for a while,” Hakimah said, of the government secondary school nearest their home, a 15-minute walk away. “But we would go, and they

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Mariam and Tehreem, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

would say, ‘The headmistress is not here—come another day.’ We went three or four times and then gave up.... Then finally we tried the private school, but we found it cost too much money for us—700 or 800 rupees per student per month [\$7-8].”¹¹³

Many interviewees pointed to teacher absences as one of the key factors in their preference for private schools. “In private schools they have to always show up,” said Layla, 50, a grandmother, after explaining that teachers are often absent at the nearby government school.¹¹⁴

Although teachers in government schools typically earn more than private school teachers, some experts cited poor salaries as a reason for teacher absenteeism in government schools, along with the corruption issues discussed above. “The issues are teacher salaries—they are paid badly and there is no job security because now the government is giving short term contracts,” a labor rights expert in Punjab said. “If teachers are paid well in government schools, the quality will improve.” He said teacher salaries start at 15,000 rupees (\$143) per month—the equivalent of the national minimum wage.¹¹⁵ Government teachers interviewed for this report reported earning monthly salaries ranging from the 8,000 rupees (\$76) paid to a primary school teacher in Karachi to a high school teacher in Peshawar who said she earned 78,000 rupees (\$743) per month.¹¹⁶

The director of a community-based organization said that the Sindh government had discussed creating a biometric system using fingerprints to track teacher attendance, but it was never implemented. “There was no interest from the high level. There is no shortage of money in the education system in Sindh, but it is not being used properly.”¹¹⁷ In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a teacher said that a biometric system for monitoring teacher attendance had been implemented and had significantly improved teacher attendance.¹¹⁸

Experts and families also had concerns about teachers’ qualifications and motivation. “There are a lot of challenges,” the principal of a government school in Karachi said.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Atifa, Hakimah, and Zafra, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Layla, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with head of an NGO (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with government primary school teacher (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017, and government high school teacher (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with government high school teacher (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

“Illiterate teachers with only a matric are being appointed as teachers. They don’t know how to learn and teach. We face this a lot.” He said that on paper the government requires primary school teachers to have completed a one-year post-matric training course, but in recent years people without this qualification were being appointed. “The main problem was politicians,” he said. “Politicians appoint their family and party workers as teachers.... The politician thinks about his voter and his own benefit. He has to reward the people who support him.”¹¹⁹

“Teachers in government school just eat sweets while the children play outside—they don’t focus on the kids,” said Maryan, 36, explaining why she and her husband sent their children to private school. When Maryan’s husband lost his job as an electrician in Saudi Arabia, they could no longer afford the cost of private school, and the children stopped studying.¹²⁰

Overcrowding

Government schools often suffer from unmanageable class sizes. Class sizes in government schools are meant to be limited—in some areas, for example, to 35 students.¹²¹ But children and experts said classes are often much larger—50 to 80 students, and sometimes more.¹²² “In government schools, there are very few teachers,” a worker at a youth center in Karachi said. “There will be one teacher who is supposed to be teaching two sections. One section is supposed to be 35 kids but usually it is more—45, 50—so you have one teacher for 90 to 100 kids.”¹²³

A teacher in Peshawar said she struggled to teach high school subjects to classes of sometimes over 60 students.¹²⁴ Another government teacher, in Peshawar, said she had 120 students: “too many.” She also complained of a grueling schedule: “One teacher can’t teach eight classes in a row,” she said.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with government school principal (name withheld), Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Maryan, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with the head of a youth center (name withheld), Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹²² E.g. Human Rights Watch interviews with private school teacher, Lahore, July 19, 2017, and headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with staff of a youth center (names withheld), Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with government high school teacher (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with government school teacher (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

Overcrowding drives children out of government schools. “At the government college and government school it’s so crowded it’s chaotic and you can’t focus mentally,” said Marzia, who helps run an informal school in her family’s home in Karachi.¹²⁶

Maryam has worked at a private school for nine years. She attended government school for her own education, and said that overcrowding has grown worse:

This is recent. In the past, before 2000, government schools were seen as very good, but the reputation of government schools has gone down because there are so many students in one class. How can teachers focus on this many kids?... I went to government school and was really happy. My sister is 14 years younger. She found it a different place, not good. When I was learning ... if I had a question I could ask as many times as I want. Now, if you learn, fine. If you don’t, the teacher won’t explain again.¹²⁷

Overcrowding can lead to government schools turning children away. A headmaster of a private school in Punjab said the government school in his area refuses to enroll new students. If they didn’t, he said, “I wouldn’t have to run a private school.”¹²⁸

Because of overcrowding, many schools have several shifts a day. This shortens the school day, typically to only four hours, making it impossible to cover a full curriculum.¹²⁹

Water, Sanitation, and Facilities

If there are teachers, there are no classrooms. If there are classrooms, there are no teachers.

—Government teacher in Peshawar, August 2017

Government schools are often in poor physical condition, unable to offer a safe learning environment. “The education policy is not implemented,” the head of an NGO working with

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Marzia, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Maryam, Lahore, July 19, 2017.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

¹²⁹ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Anusha and Zafira, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

out of school children said. He described specific rules about the number of rooms and chairs schools should have but said these are not followed. “The laws and policies are there, but they are not implemented because there are no resources,” he added. “We are not in a position to upgrade our education system.”¹³⁰

“There is not enough money for buildings, toilets, washrooms, furniture,” the headmaster of a government primary school in Karachi, who has worked in the government education system for 25 years, said. “Every government school faces these problems.”

He had recently been assigned to a different school where the situation was worse than at his previous school. “There are no windows or doors—just a ceiling and walls. No chairs—we are trying to arrange chairs. Kids sit on the floor. There is no water at the school—kids go home to have water. There are no washrooms or toilets—they go back home [if they need the toilet].... Naturally it does affect our ability to teach.”¹³¹

An education expert pointed out that poor infrastructure, particularly lack of toilets, creates greater difficulties for girls than for boys. “Schools in rural areas are not built for girls’ needs,” he said. “There is no toilet, no water, no boundary walls, no security.”¹³²

Thirty-seven percent of schools do not have basic sanitation or toilet facilities.¹³³ Girls who have started menstruation are particularly affected by poor toilet facilities. Without private gender-segregated toilets with running water, they face difficulties managing menstrual hygiene at school and are likely to stay home during menstruation, leading to gaps in their attendance that undermine academic achievement, and increase the risk of them dropping out of school entirely.¹³⁴

“There is an issue with drinking water in the school,” said Zafira, 15, a ninth-grade student in government school. “Generally, in this area there are water shortages, so sometimes for

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with director of an NGO (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster at government primary school (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with education expert (name withheld), UK, 2017.

¹³³ UNESCO, “Accountability in education: Meeting Our Commitment. Global Education Monitoring Report,” 2017/18, p. 356.

¹³⁴ E.g. Caitlin Gruer, “Menstruation matters: That’s the bottom line,” Global Partnership for Education, March 9, 2017, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/menstruation-matters-thats-bottom-line> (accessed September 13, 2018).

a week there is no drinking water at school.” Zafira said students bring their own water or go without.¹³⁵

Poor facilities also affect school staff. Shazia, 24, is a private school teacher. “I have friends who are government teachers,” she said. “They said I should work for the government.” Shazia decided not to apply. “There are none of the facilities that I get here—electricity, a generator, furniture. The salaries are high, but the infrastructure is very bad,” she said. “In so many schools there are no toilets and no clean water. These are the reasons that I didn’t want to work there, and my in-laws didn’t want me to work there.”¹³⁶

Quality Concerns in Private Schools

Experts and educators raised concerns about the quality of education in some low-cost private schools. One expert said, “My real concern is low-cost private schools.... Kids spend six or ten years in these schools and learn nothing.”¹³⁷

Teacher Qualifications, Training, and Salaries

Private schools often maximize profits by paying teachers as little as possible, which results in them hiring teachers with few qualifications.

“In private schools, teachers get very low salaries,” the head of a community-based organization told Human Rights Watch, adding that in the area where his organization works private school teachers earn 1,500 to 3,000 rupees a month (\$18-29). “Minimum wage [for government teachers] is 15,000 [\$143] so they are getting one tenth or one fifth as much.” He said that the private school teachers are usually required only to have completed 10th grade, and most are women.¹³⁸

A government teacher in Balochistan contrasted her terms of employment—18,000 rupees per month salary (\$171) with an annual raise, pension, health benefits, annual and parental leave, and annual training—with that of private school teachers she knew, who

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Anusha and Zafira, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Shazia, Lahore, July 19, 2017.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with education expert (name withheld), UK, 2017.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

she said earned 4,000 to 5,000 rupees per month (\$38-48) with no benefits.¹³⁹ A government headmaster said that while physical conditions are generally better in private schools, he wouldn't work in one due to low salaries and lack of benefits.¹⁴⁰

Experts said conditions of employment are similar for teachers in NGO schools: "You have one teacher with 20 students in one room. The teacher earns 5,000 rupees [\$48] a month.... [I]nformal school teachers should have proper training and higher salaries."¹⁴¹

Lack of Government Regulation of Private Education

Private schools are obliged to register with and obtain a certification from the relevant government authority. But oversight, both through and after the registration process, is sparse. "They are registered with government but not standardized," the head of an NGO said.¹⁴² An education expert pointed to the role of some government officials as owners of companies operating private schools as a barrier to monitoring, citing examples where these politicians had intervened to block government from more closely regulating private schools in ways that might reduce profits.¹⁴³

Government officials inspect private schools periodically, but inspections are often cursory. The headmaster of a private school in Punjab said the government inspects his school, "But they are not effective. They come, but they are not doing a good job."¹⁴⁴

"Once or twice a year they come, unannounced," another private school principal said. "They come for a half hour. They want tea and to be entertained. You have to please them or they will say that your school is not good. Once I made the inspector wait and he got mad and left and said, 'I will write a bad report.' My colleague went to his house and gave him 25,000 rupees [\$238] and we got a good report."¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with government primary school teacher (name withheld), Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of government primary school (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker (name withheld), Lahore, July 21, 2017.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with head of an NGO (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with education expert (name withheld), UK, September 15, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with a private school principal (name and location withheld), July 2017.

Private schools are free to choose their own curriculum, though some use the government curriculum. “We set the curriculum—no one tells us what to teach,” a headmaster of a private school explained.¹⁴⁶ “There is no monitoring of the curriculum,” the head of an NGO said.¹⁴⁷ As they prepare students for government exams after sixth grade, some private schools become more likely to use the government curriculum.¹⁴⁸

Because private schools are so unregulated, they can vary dramatically in terms of not only teaching quality but also the adequacy and safety of the facilities, with some low-cost private schools in very poor facilities.

There also exists an entire world of private tutoring, often providing additional help for children in school, but sometimes the last resort for children unable to access schools. Tutoring often consists simply of a teacher—usually a woman or girl—setting up classes in her home. While some tutors are motivated by philanthropy, other are businesses, and such tuition is often entirely unregulated. Private tuition does not provide children with a path for transitioning into a school or obtaining educational qualifications. Parents who are uneducated likely have difficulty assessing the quality of private tuition and are vulnerable to exaggerated claims by tutors.

Because there is such unmet demand for education, and the sector is so unregulated, establishing a school has become a business option for educated girls and women. Gulrukh, who left school after eighth grade, started her own tutoring business. “I take 50 rupees [\$0.48] per month per child and five or six children come to me,” she said. She helps those in school with their homework and teaches the Urdu alphabet to those not in school.¹⁴⁹

Basma, 12, left government school after class two or three because of abusive behavior by teachers and violence among pupils. She moved to a private school but left after class five when the family could no longer afford the fees. At the time of the interview she was attending private tuition, paying 500 rupees (\$4.76) per month for classes from 8 to 11 a.m.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with head of an NGO (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with principal of a private school (name withheld), Lahore, July 19, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Gulrukh, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

every day. Basma’s mother supports the family as a tailor; she wants Basma to become a doctor.¹⁵⁰

Rukhsana, 30, and her 17-year-old daughter, neither of whom ever studied, are employed together in a private home as domestic workers. They moved to Karachi from a village in Punjab seeking work. In their village, the local school charged 1,000 rupees a month (\$9.52), which the family could not afford, so none of Rukhsana’s three children studied. In Karachi, Rukhsana was approached by a woman providing private tuition. “This lady is in the area—she said send your kids and I’ll teach them,” Rukhsana said. She decided to send her 7-year-old son—the first time one of her children has studied—but struggles to pay fees of 500 rupees (\$4.76) per month. She worries about the quality of the instruction and is frustrated that the teacher sometimes cancels classes.¹⁵¹

Corporal Punishment and Other Abusive Behavior by Teachers

Use of corporal punishment and other types of abusive behavior by teachers is widespread. It seems to be a greater problem in government school but also occurs in private schools. “Once they hit me so hard the stick broke,” said Hakimah, 17, about her government primary school. “They also force us into the chicken position.” Her sister Atifa described the “chicken position”, which she had also experienced: “You have to put your arms under your knees while sitting, and then put your hands on your cheeks. You sit like this for a long time—like a half hour.” Hakimah added, “We were hit three or four times a week—if we would get to school a little late they would hit us for that.”¹⁵²

Corporal punishment drives many children out of school. Somia, 12, was 11 years old and in class three in a government school when she quit. “My father told me to leave, because the teacher used to hit me a lot, with a steel rod on my hands.” She said that she was hit every day, whenever she made a mistake on her lesson. “In first grade, I had a different teacher who wasn’t angry, but in second grade the teacher was very angry and started hitting me,” Somia said. “Everyone got hit. She has a temper. She was hitting every kid every day.... The principal didn’t know she was hitting—no one told him. If anyone said

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Basma and Najma, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rukhsana, Karachi, July 29, 2017.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Atifa, Hakimah, and Zafra, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

anything, they would have been beaten by the teacher.” Somia now studies in a madrasa but is frustrated that her dreams of becoming a doctor ended when she left school.¹⁵³

Although private school teachers are under pressure not to drive students away, due the financial interests of their employers, private schools also use corporal punishment. “It was a very good school, but they used to hit us,” said Aliya, age 10 or 12, describing the private school she attended up to second grade. “They made us go in the chicken position.... The teacher used to pull our hair. She used to hit me every day.”¹⁵⁴

“The teacher used to beat us up, hit us with a stick,” said Shaheen, 16. She went to both government and private schools, and was beaten in both. She said she was beaten when there were fights between students and when the principal told her to cut her hair and she resisted. She saw other students beaten after missing class, so when her family went away to a festival and she missed school she was afraid to go back and quit.¹⁵⁵

Students also reported abuse in schools run by NGOs. Atifa, 17, said that her 9-year-old brother dropped out of a school funded by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) because he was being hit by the teacher. “He wants to go but every time he goes back to this class he gets hit again,” she said.¹⁵⁶

Some teachers forced children to do chores for them. “I didn’t like school because the teacher would make me do chores outside, like go get her fruit,” said Noor, 15, describing her government village school. “We would come in the morning and she would send us off to do some chores. Even in school holidays she would make us do work.... We would go to her house—she lived far away. We would go and do the shopping for her and then go to school.” Noor said the teacher slapped her once when she tried to refuse to do chores.¹⁵⁷

Asifa, 20, said at age 13 and 14 she was forced to clean the house of her teacher at a village government school, and students were also forced to do agricultural work in a teacher’s fields. “There was no one to complain to,” she said. “As a child you can’t

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Somia, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Aliya, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaheen, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Atifa, Hakimah, and Zafra, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Noor, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

understand. The teacher would threaten that, ‘If you go home and complain to someone I’ll remove you from school.... Village people think there’s no point in sending a child to government school—when you see examples like this, parents aren’t going to send kids.’¹⁵⁸

Basma, 12, left government school because of fighting in her school. “The teachers would not stop fights. They were always on the phone,” she said. During inspections of the school, Basma said the teachers would behave well. But after inspectors left, “the teachers would go back to being themselves. There was no discipline. They were even rude to parents.”¹⁵⁹ Her mother added: “[T]hey are like this with all the children. Teachers insult children. They say things like, ‘Don’t sit with this child—he is dumb.’”¹⁶⁰

Students struggling academically are sometimes targeted for abuse. “Teachers used to create hurdles for some students, if they didn’t like some, regardless of whether the student was good or not,” said Tamana, 15, who dropped out at age 13: “My teacher would call my mother, saying I shouldn’t be in school.... So then my mother took me out. She said I wasn’t doing well in my studies, but I got 90 out of 100.” Tamana said the teacher singled out her and a friend of hers who also dropped out as a result. Tamana’s mother complained to the school principal, but the principal sided with the teacher. She thought perhaps she was targeted because she is short. “The teacher kept saying I should be in a lower section [because I’m small].”¹⁶¹

Children are sometimes afraid to complain of abuse because it may lead to their parents removing them from school. “My mother said if she [the teacher] is hitting you, just leave,” said Aliya, age 10 or 12.¹⁶²

Noor, 15, said her teacher slapped her after she tried to refuse to do chores such as food shopping for the teacher’s family. “But I told my parents I was slapped for not doing my

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Asifa, Punjab, July 19, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Basma, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Najma, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamana, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Aliya, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

work,” Noor said. “I lied because if I told them the truth [that I was spending part of the school day doing chores for my teacher] they wouldn’t send me to school anymore.”¹⁶³

Administrative Barriers at Government School

Families sometimes face administrative barriers to registering children in school, including requirements for birth certificates, national identification cards, age restrictions, and demands for certificates from previous schools. These barriers can be difficult to overcome, particularly for families that are poor, that move frequently from one location to another, or where parents are not literate. Requirements to register in school can vary from one place to another and be applied with varying levels of strictness.

Children are sometimes required to provide birth certificates to register for school. Malaika, 45, registered her older children in government school without birth certificates, but when she went to register her youngest son the school had a new requirement for a birth certificate, which she did not have. Instead she sent him to an NGO school funded by UNICEF, which did not require a birth certificate.¹⁶⁴

Farzana, age 25 to 30, mother of six, moved from a village to Karachi two months earlier. She is determined that her children, who were in school in the village, study again, but has been told she cannot register them in government school in Karachi without birth certificates, so she is waiting for their father to get birth certificates from the village.¹⁶⁵

Other schools require that children provide national identification cards. Salma, 12, never went to school because her father doesn’t have a national ID card (known as a CNIC) and that means she can’t get one—and identification is necessary to register in school.¹⁶⁶

Some groups face barriers to obtaining identification. “We don’t have CNICs in this area,” said Samra, 11, explaining why she has not studied.¹⁶⁷ The neighborhood consists largely

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Noor, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Malaika, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Farzana, Karachi, July 29, 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Salma, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ A CNIC is a “Computerized National Identification Card,” a card issued by the Pakistan government to adult Pakistan citizens, which citizens living in the country are required to register for. A CNIC is required for many actions such as voting, obtaining a passport or driver’s license, or booking a plane ticket. It is also often required from a parent wishing to register their child in government school, although this rule seems to be not always present, and not always enforced. It is less likely

of people who migrated from Bangladesh during the war between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1971, and many are unable to obtain identification cards due to difficulties proving that they are citizens of Pakistan. This means their children are barred from government school, and prevents individuals from working in the fishing industry, a common occupation in the area. The fear of problems with law enforcement further restricts their movement, making education even more inaccessible. “Sometimes rangers just pick up people from this neighborhood for identification, for random checks,” said Samra’s mother.¹⁶⁸

Gulrukh, 20, studied through eighth grade, but was unable to continue. “To give exams for ninth and 10th grade, you need a B form,” she said. “I can’t get it because my mother doesn’t have a CNIC.” Gulrukh said her mother migrated to Pakistan from Bangladesh in 1971 and, because she applied several times for a CNIC at different offices, she has been blacklisted from obtaining a card. Her father also came from Bangladesh, but earlier, and his parents were able to get him an ID card before the war.¹⁶⁹

Some schools place age restrictions on who can study, which create barriers for girls who started school late or had disrupted schooling, putting them in a class behind where they should normally be for their age. Many children, especially girls, start school late, and need to be able to access education behind the regular schedule. “Fifteen and sixteen-year-old girls want admission for sixth grade,” a teacher in Peshawar said.¹⁷⁰

“When I wanted to get admission, I tried to go to fifth grade, but I was 14,” said Khadijah, 14. “They said, ‘If you are 13 you can go, but you are too old.’ What does it have to do with age? It should have to do with ability.”¹⁷¹

“If you are over 16, you need special permission to sit for the ninth and 10th grade exams,” the head of a youth center told Human Rights Watch.¹⁷²

to be an issue outside of the government school system. Some parents may have lost CNICs, never obtained them in the first place, or faced barriers obtaining them because of issues like difficulties proving citizenship.

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Samra and her mother, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Gulrukh, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with government school teacher (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Khadijah, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with the head of a youth center (name withheld), Karachi, July 30, 2017.

Many poor families interviewed for this report move frequently, seeking work or struggling with insecure housing. Administrative barriers can contribute to children in these families falling out of school. Sara, 16, had completed fifth grade when her family moved from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Karachi. The family stayed temporarily in an area with a school nearby, and Sara attempted to enroll, but was turned away, first because she did not have a certificate from her previous school, and then because exams were taking place. She was told to come back later, but before she was supposed to return, the family moved again. “When we moved to another area, there was no government school nearby, and my father couldn’t afford private school,” Sara said. The nearby private school costs 350 rupees (\$3) per month. Sara’s father is a security guard at a garment factory.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ayesha, Parveen, and Sara, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

III. Barriers to Girls' Education Outside the School System

Poverty, housework, purdah.

—Gulrukh, 20, listing reasons girls in her poor neighborhood in Karachi do not go to school, Karachi, July 2017.

Poverty, child labor, gender discrimination and harmful social norms, and insecurity and dangers on the way to school create barriers to girls' education. Many families are too poor to afford even the costs associated with attending a government school, let alone paying for private education. Poverty drives many families to put their children to work, which often keeps them out of school.

Other girls are kept home to do housework. Restrictions on girls' freedom of movement due to harmful gender norms push many girls out of school, as does child marriage. Families short on resources often decide to educate sons and not daughters.

An insecure environment, where sexual harassment is a regular experience for many girls, fear of kidnapping and other crime is pervasive and well-founded, and conflict and attacks on education pose very real threats, prompts many parents to keep their girls home from school. Fear of violence and harassment may make what would otherwise be feasible walks to school seem too far.

A teacher in a government school in Balochistan summed up these challenges and said: "This happens every year: we have a high number of admissions in the beginning and little by little the girls drop out. By fifth grade, there are only four girls left."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with government primary school teacher (name withheld), Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

Poverty

We're poor people, we don't go to school.

—Neda, 17, Karachi, July 2017

Whatever money we get, we feed ourselves.

—Akifah, 28, mother of three out-of-school children, Karachi, July 2017

For many families, the most fundamental barrier to education is financial. “In this area, about half of girls go to school and about half don't,” said Aqiba, 18, who left school at age 12 in Lahore. “For the ones who don't go, it's always because they can't afford it.”¹⁷⁵

“If there was no poverty, parents would be able to send their daughters to school,” said Mariam, formerly a private school teacher, who now runs a free tuition center in her Karachi home.¹⁷⁶

“I was the sole breadwinner then, because my husband has a heart condition and couldn't work,” said Pariza, 44, a mother of eight, explaining why most of her older children studied to grade 10 or 12, but her youngest daughter had to drop out of 5th grade. “I was the only one earning, so I needed help. I was working in a garment factory, so my daughter had to cook.” The family moved from their village to Lahore—where Pariza had more opportunities to find work—after family in the village tired of helping them financially. In Lahore, however, unlike the village, they had to pay rent, and Pariza had just received an electricity bill for 30,000 rupees (US\$286). “I never went to school—I understand the value of education,” said Pariza. But she felt overwhelmed by financial difficulties. “There is no hope for poor people in Pakistan. I don't see any hope for my situation.”¹⁷⁷

“I wanted my daughters to get educated, but I couldn't because of poverty,” said Halima, 38, mother of five daughters, ages 13 to 19, none of whom studied more than a year or two. Her husband works in a chewing gum factory. “My husband's salary is 12,000 rupees [\$114]

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqiba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mariam and Tehreem, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Pariza, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

a month. At the end of the month, we are always out [of money] and wonder what to do—it is all gone. I want a school for girls who belong to poor families.”¹⁷⁸

Bad luck, failed crops, illness or a death can easily put education out of reach. Muskaan was in seventh grade when her father, a construction worker, fell from a mosque building site and died. Her mother struggles to support her seven daughters and three sons. An uncle helping the family financially refused to pay for the girls to study. “He said, ‘You’re a girl, and girls should just cook.’”¹⁷⁹

“My father passed away and I had to be the breadwinner,” said Talween, 20. She and her two siblings attended a private school where the fees were 1,800-1,900 rupees per month per child (\$17-18). Talween was among the top three students until her father’s death—and the loss of his income as an employee of the government’s water board—forced her out of eighth grade. She trained as a beautician and became the family’s sole wage earner. “As long as my father was there he was taking care of everything, but since he’s been gone I’ve been taking care of everything and running the household,” Talween, whose mother has a disability and cannot work, said. “Parents should have enough so that girls can complete their education.”¹⁸⁰

As children get older, they are sometimes obliged to pay their own school fees if they wish to continue studying. Asima, 16, has an 18-year-old brother who works full-time, pays his own school fees, and is in 12th grade. Asima just completed 10th grade and wants to become a doctor. Her father said, “She can study as much as she wants if she pays herself.” But finding employment can be more difficult for girls than boys, due to harmful gender norms, discrimination, and restrictions on their freedom of movement. Asima’s father said the only job he would allow her to do that would permit her to pay school fees is a position as a receptionist at the school she attends. “I want to study further,” she said. “But because of the financial situation in my house I think I won’t be able to.”¹⁸¹

Lack of future employment opportunities discourages some families from educating girls. “We do want our daughter to get an education,” said Aisha, about her 14-year-old daughter,

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Halima, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Muskaan, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Talween, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Shakila, Asima, and Asima’s father, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

Bushrah. “But even boys don’t get jobs after college, and we’re poor. So, it doesn’t make sense. Boys can’t get jobs, so how will girls?” She said in her neighborhood, there are only two young women who studied as far as 10th grade, and neither have jobs.¹⁸²

Many poor families move between urban and rural areas as a survival strategy. Families living in rural areas sometimes travel to the cities where work may be more plentiful. Families settled in the cities often return to the village where they have roots for weddings, funerals, and other visits. Movement back and forth often disrupts children’s access to education, especially for girls.

“I was late starting school because of all the back and forth,” said Noor, 15, whose family has moved every two or three years between Karachi and their home village her whole life. Noor said the frequent moves happened because the family wanted to live in the village but were repeatedly forced back to the city by lack of work in the village. Her father paints houses; in the city her mother finds work as a maid. Noor began school at ages 3, 10, and 13, but only reached second grade, because of disruption. At the age of 14, when the family moved to Karachi again, she gave up.¹⁸³

Families living between two locations may be able to access schools in one place, but not the other. Sheherbano is 15 and just finishing fifth grade. She was behind in her studies because she left school for several years when her family returned from Karachi to their village. “We went to Punjab for two to three years and I didn’t study at all there,” she said. “We didn’t know much about school there.”¹⁸⁴

Children switching schools are sometimes obliged to repeat grades. Rania, 14, moved between Karachi and her family’s village several times, as her parents sought work in the city but were pulled back to the village by family ties. She completed first grade in Karachi, but when her family returned to the village had to redo first grade. The family moved back to Karachi again one year before Human Rights Watch interviewed Rania. This time Rania did not go back to school because the family viewed the stay as temporary and rent in

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Aisha, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Noor, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Sheherbano, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

Karachi was too high to leave money for education costs. She hopes to attend second grade after the family returns to the village.¹⁸⁵

Child Labor

Many children, girls and boys, are out of school because they are working. Sometimes they are engaged in paid work, which for girls often consists of home-based industries, such as sewing, embroidery, or assembling small items. Other children—almost always girls—are kept home to do housework in the family home.

Some NGOs run specialized schools designed to accommodate children’s work schedules, with books and school supplies provided for free, and incentives such as a free meal for students. “We have given recommendations to the government, we said from 5 to 9 p.m. you should have a shift of school for kids who can’t go earlier. They are done with their work and housework and are relaxed then,” an NGO worker said. She also urged outreach to children and families, bringing the message, “You can work and study at the same time.”¹⁸⁶

Housework in the Family Home

My mother had to go to work and my siblings were young.

-Taslina, 18, explaining why she left school after second grade, Karachi, July 2017

The pressure to take on housework drives many girls out of school, especially when their mother works outside of the home. “I do housework—all the housework,” said Basooma, 16. “I am the only one doing the work in this house.” Her mother is one of her father’s two wives, both of whom are domestic workers in private homes, leaving Basooma responsible for the tasks in the family home. Basooma has three siblings, two brothers and a younger sister. All her siblings studied, but Basooma was told she was needed for housework. “I really want to study,” she said.¹⁸⁷

“When we were young, we went to school, but now because our mother works, we can’t go,” said Azwa, 16, describing her situation and that of her 18-year-old sister. Their mother

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Rania, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker (name withheld), Lahore, July 21, 2017.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Basooma, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

works as a maid. Azwa’s older sister married at age 11, so Azwa, at age ten, left school to take over housework for the family which includes their father and two brothers. “There was no one to take care of the house—I can’t leave the house alone.”¹⁸⁸

Often one girl in the family sees her education sacrificed to housework, while others study. Nadia and her sister Sahar Gul went to a government school together in Karachi and did the family’s housework together after school. When Nadia was 17 and in ninth grade, however, a death in the family prompted a visit to their village. While there, Sahar Gul liked the village school, and their parents agreed for her to stay with extended family and study. Left to do the housework alone back in Karachi, Nadia could no longer manage both that and studying. “My sister missed a lot of days of school to do housework after I stayed in Punjab,” Sahar Gul explained. “So, then the school threw her out.” A year later Sahar Gul was still studying and hoped to become an engineer. Their parents sent Nadia to seamstress training, and she continued to do all the housework.¹⁸⁹

Eldest daughters often bear the brunt of housework.¹⁹⁰ Rabia, 16, lives with her father, three brothers, and two younger sisters—her mother died eleven years ago. Her younger siblings are all studying, and her older brother completed 10th grade, but Rabia quit fourth grade. “I’m the eldest daughter and I have to take care of the home,” she said. “My father’s health is not that great. I have to take care of all the younger siblings and the house.”¹⁹¹

“I give food to my younger siblings—my mother goes to work,” said Aynoor, 13, the oldest of five children. Aynoor’s eight-year-old sister is in school, but Aynoor left school after second grade when the family moved from a village to Karachi and her mother found employment as a domestic worker. “I do these things because I am the oldest sister.”¹⁹²

When older daughters marry, the responsibility for housework often shifts from them to a younger sister, in turn pushing her out of school. “When my sisters were unmarried, I used

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Azwa, Ayesha, and Sidra, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Nadia and Sahar Gul, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Conversely, families sometimes made a special effort to educate the youngest child or children in the family, often aided by earnings of eldest children who were already working. E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Muskaan, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rabia, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

¹⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Aynoor, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

to go to school,” said Parween, 17, whose mother has impaired vision and physical limitations because of diabetes and other illnesses. Parween attended school from age 10 to 13, completing second grade before she was forced to drop out and take on household work after her three older sisters married at ages 17 or 18. “I felt bad [about leaving school],” she added. “My father stopped me from going because there was no one to work at home.” Her older sisters had studied briefly but were also forced to leave school to take on domestic work at home. Parween described her daily routine of cleaning the house, washing clothes, and preparing meals for her parents and her two brothers.¹⁹³

Paid Labor

I used to try to study, but I couldn’t remember anything and the financial situation at home was such that I had to work. And then I would come home so tired I would just eat and go to sleep.

—Aziza, 23, works making spices, Karachi, July 2017

Child labor remains widespread in Pakistan, though exact figures are hard to come by. The International Labour Organization cites estimates that almost 13 percent of children aged 10 to 14 years are in employment, rising to 33 percent among children ages 15 to 17.¹⁹⁴ The US Department of Labor says that in Punjab 12.4 percent of 5 to 14-year-olds are working, and in Sindh that figure is 31.5 percent.¹⁹⁵ An NGO staff member working in poor areas of Lahore estimated that 70 percent of children in those neighborhoods are in paid employment, much of it home-based.¹⁹⁶

Experts pointed to lack of effort by the government to end harmful child labor. “Poverty has gone down slightly, according to figures, but we don’t see change regarding child labor,” a labor rights expert said:

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Parween, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

¹⁹⁴ “The Elimination of Child Labour and Promotion of Decent Work in the Stora Enso Value Chain, with a Focus on Pakistan,” International Labour Organization (ILO), undated but the project duration is 2015-2017, http://www.ilo.org/islamabad/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_427005/lang--en/index.htm (accessed September 13, 2018).

¹⁹⁵ US Department of Labor—Department of International Labor Affairs, “Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports—Pakistan,” 2016, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/pakistan#_ENREF_5 (accessed September 13, 2018).

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker (name withheld), Lahore, July 21, 2017.

The government is not enforcing laws against child labor. For example, the government passed a law banning children under 14 from working at brick kilns, but it has not done anything to raise the parents' income. So, this new law means some kids moved from brick making to other sectors, but they may be less safe now because they are isolated and not with their parents. So, we don't see these measures as helpful. You have to address poverty and really implement labor laws, especially enforcing the minimum wage—and the minimum wage is too low. You need a living wage, and you need to make people follow it.... It's not a priority for government. When steps are taken, it's because of international pressure.¹⁹⁷

Children in families interviewed for this report worked in occupations including home-based industries such as sewing, embroidery, jewelry making, making furniture (string beds), as domestic workers in other families' homes, at brick kilns, and fishing, and working children were rarely in school. "Those children who are out of school, it's because they are involved in some kind of economic activity," the head of a community-based organization. "They are engaged in some work, so they don't have the time [to study]."¹⁹⁸

"In poor households both parents work and there are four or five children," a school headmaster in a poor area of Karachi explained. "Child labor is prevalent throughout Pakistan, but it is more prevalent in places like this." He explained that children typically start work at age eight to ten, helping with their parents' work. "A child that is working with the mother or father, to leave his earning that the family needs—how is this possible? If the government supported the family, then the child could go to school."¹⁹⁹

Home-based industries account for much child labor by girls. This labor is largely invisible and unregulated, as it takes place in private, is often itinerant, and has no fixed hours. Children are particularly likely to work with their parents when the parents are employed in the home, an NGO worker said: "In one house, all the kids and their parents work."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with labor rights expert (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with director of a community-based organization (name withheld), Karachi, July 27, 2017.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of government primary school (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017.

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker (name withheld), Lahore, July 21, 2017.

“More than 75 percent of workers are in the informal economy,” a labor rights expert told Human Rights Watch. “Home-based industry is the biggest sector in Pakistan. The implementation of labor laws is very weak even in factories, and production is moving from bigger factories to smaller factories to home. More and more things are being made at home. The reasons for this include cost saving, but also avoiding labor rights laws. These workers are not covered by Pakistan’s labor laws. And it is mostly girls working at home with their mothers—this is very common.”²⁰¹

In some areas, boys are more vulnerable to missing education due to child labor than girls. For example, in a fishing community, an activist explained that more girls study than boys, because boys often join their fathers on fishing boats from age 12 or 13 or even younger, and long days offshore make it impossible to attend school regularly.²⁰²

Some children manage to combine work and school.²⁰³ But many other are kept or taken out of education so that they can work. Barriers to accessing school, and concerns about the quality of schools, encourage poor parents to opt for children to work instead. “The parents send the kids off to work at young ages because they think what’s the use of studying, because the school is poor quality,” a teacher explained. She went on to talk about the daughters of domestic workers: “Their mothers take them to work with them starting at young ages if there is extra work, such as guests visiting.”²⁰⁴

“The situation in my house was not such that I could study,” said Samika, 13. “My brothers don’t do anything, so I started working at age 10.” Samika learned embroidery from her mother and older sisters. She earns 100 rupees (\$0.95) per piece of embroidery; one piece takes her two days. “I work throughout the day, from morning until 2 p.m., then I do housework until 4, then *zari* [embroidery] again until 8 or 9 p.m. Then I’m tired,” she said. “I try to make my parents understand [that I want to study] but my father says, ‘We’re not in a financial position to send you.’” Samika said the nearest government school charges 250

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with labor rights expert (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

²⁰² Human Rights Watch interviews with local activist (name withheld), Karachi, July 26, 2017, and Busrah, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

²⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker (name withheld), Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mariam and Tehreem, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

rupees (\$2.38) a month and is an hour-long walk away. “I wish to tell the government that however they can do it, please make a school here so that I can go to school.”²⁰⁵

Sometimes all the children in a family work. Azeeba, 11, does embroidery with her three sisters, ages 9, 12, and 15, and her brother, aged 13. The children work 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., earning 400 rupees (\$3.81) each per day. “I give some of the money to my mother and father and for the rent,” Azeeba said. The family’s rent is 5,000 rupees (\$48) a month, and both parents have health problems. Azeeba’s father has intermittent work as a metal polisher, and her mother does not do paid work. Azeeba’s brother and youngest sister both study and work, but the family can’t afford education for the others.²⁰⁶

Efforts to make it easier for children who are working to study are few and poorly funded. Mahvish, 13, and three of her siblings studied for the first time three years earlier, when an NGO opened a school for working children in their area of Lahore providing all supplies for free plus free lunch. The family managed to allow them to stop working and focus on their studies. The NGO had recently run out of money, however, and the school closed. Mahvish was back at work, with her 11-year-old sister and brothers, ages 8 and 15. The children make necklaces, and the family earns 10 rupees (\$0.10) per dozen. Mahvish said she can make six dozen a day, earning 60 rupees (\$0.57). Their mother makes necklaces with them and does embroidery, while their father irons laundry. Although there is a government school nearby, Mahvish says the children cannot study there. “I would have to buy the books myself,” she said. “There’s no money for books.”²⁰⁷

Girls with mothers employed as domestic workers often help. Tamana, 15, an oldest daughter, left school at 13, in ninth grade. “I had to work with my mother,” she said. “I go with her and work in houses cleaning and doing dishes.... My mother keeps telling me to go back to ninth grade, but I say no. My mother is alone, and she needs my help. My father has a problem with his leg and he’s in pain and I don’t want him to work.” Tamana’s younger sister, 13, is studying and hopes to be a doctor.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Samika, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Azeeba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Mahvish, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamana, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

Child Labor in the Brick Industry

A particularly abusive form of child labor in Pakistan is brickmaking. While the government has made some efforts in recent years to prohibit child labor in brick kilns, the extreme poverty of families employed in the industry and lack of enforcement of labor laws continues to put many children at risk.²⁰⁹ Despite laws aimed at ending bonded labor, families signing up to work at a brick kiln—who are often in desperate straits—are regularly given an advance of up to 100,000 to 200,000 rupees (\$952-1,905) which they must repay through their labor. “The family is paid, not the individual,” an NGO worker assisting brick workers explained, saying families are paid weekly, earning seven to eight rupees (\$0.7 to \$0.8) per brick. He estimated that hundreds of thousands of children under the age of fourteen are making bricks in Punjab alone, where much of the industry is based, starting work as early as age four or five.²¹⁰

Children grow up at the kilns, and often continue as adults. “They don’t have anything else—because they don’t have the opportunity to study or to learn new skills, this passes on from generation to generation,” the NGO worker said. “Government schools are very far from the kilns ... and these children of brick workers won’t be accepted there. Teachers will treat them badly.” He said there are government funds to help children from brick kilns study, but estimated this assistance reaches five out of every 100 eligible children.²¹¹

Neither Yasmina, her mother, or her grandmother—who still works at the kiln at age 62, one of four generations of brick workers—nor any of Yasmina’s children ever went to school. Yasmina thinks she is about 32—she knows that she married at 14. She shares a one-room hut owned by the brick company, about 9 by 15 feet, with her husband and their nine children, ages 15, 12, 11, 9, 8, 7, 5, 3, and 2. “There are too many expenses in the school—I can’t make ends meet,” Yasmina said. Her eldest daughters, 15 and 12, are domestic workers, while the younger children stay at the kiln. “They do small work—they get me water, they help clean the bricks,” Yasmina said. “They’re not making bricks—

²⁰⁹ E.g. Iftikhar Khan, “Child labour: Lack of coherent reforms in Pakistan, *News Tribune*, July 1, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1447383/child-labour-lack-coherent-reforms-pakistan/> (accessed September 13, 2018).

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker assisting brick workers (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

they're too small. But they clean the mud away, they pile the finished bricks." Her husband added: "We put the kids to work so it gets done quickly." The family makes about 1,000 bricks a day, earning around 900 rupees (\$8.57), but receive half of that; the owner keeps the rest as rent and to recoup money he advanced them. One of Yasmina's brothers, age 10, was the only child in the family to study, walking two kilometers to government school. But after school fees increased from 40 rupees (\$0.38) to 200-300 rupees (\$1.90-2.86) a month, the family could no longer afford it and he quit.²¹²

Gender Discrimination and Harmful Social Norms

Patriarchy is the main problem.

—NGO gender expert, Lahore, July 2017

Why don't they let us study? They let the boys study, so they should let us study.

—Bina, 15, forced to leave school after fifth grade, Karachi, July 2017

Some families do not believe that girls should study or believe that girls should not continue school beyond a certain age. In data comparing responses across 15 countries to the statement, "A university education is more important for men than for women," Pakistan had the unhappy distinction of being the country in which there was the greatest increase in the number of people agreeing with that statement, in a comparison of data from 2001 and 2012.²¹³

A teacher in Peshawar said after poverty, the most common reason for children dropping out of school was: "religious and cultural issues with sending girls out." She explained: "After eighth grade, a lot of girls get married.... There are some girls who are so good in their studies and have so much potential that I feel very sad when they're taken out."²¹⁴

²¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Yasmina and her family, Punjab, July 20, 2017.

²¹³ UNESCO, "Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges," p. 124.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher at government school (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

“There’s a view that there’s no need to educate girls because they will be married,” an NGO gender expert said. “These views are changing, but it is taking a lot of time. Parents say boys and girls are equal, but in practice they don’t do this.”²¹⁵

Humaira, 17, studied for only one year and her four sisters are similarly uneducated. Humaira said they were prevented from attending school by their grandfather. “He liked to say, ‘Education is not for girls,’” Humaira said. “My father wanted us to go to school, but my grandfather ruled this house, so my father couldn’t ask for us to go.”²¹⁶

Attitudes regarding how desirable or acceptable it is for girls to study, especially as they grow older, vary significantly across different communities in Pakistan, and there is a range of attitudes in every community. In some areas, however, families violating cultural norms prohibiting girls from studying face pressure and hostility. “People talk,” Asiya, a mother of seven daughters explained. “The girls would cry to let them go to school, but their father says he can’t keep arguing with other people.”²¹⁷

Farkhunda, 40, and her husband are Afghan immigrants living in Peshawar. They have six daughters and two sons. “It’s considered disgraceful to send girls to school,” in their community, Farkhunda explained. She said that if the family had the means to pay for education, they would permit their daughters to study until age 10, but no further.²¹⁸

For some families, their willingness to send girls to school, especially as they grow older, hinges at least in part of whether girls study separately from boys and are taught by female teachers. Many schools are segregated by gender, through separate schools, separate shifts, or separate sections of the building. As students get older, schools are more likely to be segregated.²¹⁹

When families violate norms in their community against girls’ education, the girls may face stigma. “When a girl steps out of the house, she doesn’t get proposal,” said Amina, about age 30, explaining that if her daughters attended school and as a result were seen walking

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO gender expert (name withheld), Lahore, July 20, 2017.

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Humaira, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Asiya, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

²¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Farkhunda, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with government school teacher (name withheld), Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

in the neighborhood, it would harm their ability to get married. Amina’s daughter had a job as a domestic worker, but when she began menstruating her father decided that it was no longer permissible for her to do this work.²²⁰

Girls also face restrictions on their freedom of movement that undermine their access to education. “There is less mobility for girls—boys are allowed to go outside,” a gender expert with an NGO working with out of school children said.²²¹

“I don’t have permission from the people in the house—my father,” Sima, 15, said, explaining why she left her studies after passing her grade 10 exams. Her mother explained, “In my in-laws’ household, they say if a girl studies more she gets ruined.” Sima attended school through eighth grade but was barred from continuing by her father. Her mother brought her textbooks for ninth and 10th grade, and she studied on her own, at home, so successfully that she took and passed the 10th grade matric exam. Her father has now put an end to her studies.²²²

Some girls are permitted to study only within strict limits. Batool, 13, was the first girl in her family to study and completed fifth grade. But when it was time for her to sit the exam for sixth grade, the exam center was at a different location than her primary school. “I could not sit my exam because my father did not give me permission to go to the center,” she said, “even though the school had made arrangements to take the girls there.” Batool said that her school headmistress asked to meet her father to try to convince him to let Batool sit the exam, but Batool’s father never went for the meeting.²²³

Girls are often removed from school as they approach or reach puberty. “My father said I was too big and then he asked me to leave,” said Salma, 15, who left school at age 13, during third grade. “People gossip among each other and say, ‘That girl is grown up now.’... My father said no, he said ‘Don’t study—girls aren’t supposed to study.’”²²⁴

²²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Amina and Fatima, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

²²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO gender expert (name withheld), Punjab, July 20, 2017.

²²² Human Rights Watch interview with Sima, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

²²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Batool, Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

²²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Salma, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

Families taking girls out of school sometimes fear that girls will engage in romantic relationships. “Why are you educating your daughters?” Muskaan, who left school after seventh grade said her uncle demanded of her mother. “It corrupts them—they get bad.” Muskaan explained, “In his mindset a girl is going to have affairs if she studies and then will marry whoever she wants.” Muskaan said her uncle fought often with her mother about Muskaan and her sisters going to school. “Do you want your daughters to be westernized?” she said he demanded.²²⁵

Azra, 40, a mother of 11 children, including seven daughters, said girls in her family are not permitted to study beyond fifth grade. “Otherwise they talk to boys,” she said. “Then the sons and fathers argue with you, saying, ‘Look at what your daughter is up to.’... One can’t pick fights all the time—it’s not worth it.”²²⁶

Harmful gender norms create economic reasons for prioritizing boys’ education. Daughters who marry typically go to live with, and contribute to, their husband’s family, while sons are expected to remain with their parents—so sending sons to school is seen as a better investment in the family’s economic future. “If [parents] have land to inherit, it’s for the boy,” an NGO gender expert explained. “Girls don’t support their parents. They cost dowry and go to their in-laws. Parents think a boy should have land.”²²⁷

“He is a son, so he studies, and he can work,” said Zainab, 32, mother of four, explaining why she and her husband prioritized education for their oldest son. “If the daughter doesn’t work it’s not that important. We’re in a strained situation and we have to give priority to our son, so he gets the right kind of job.”²²⁸

Girls are also perceived as unlikely to find work, even if they are educated. “It’s stressful having so many daughters, because they don’t generate income,” said Anisa, who has seven living daughters and one son. “It would have been better to have more sons.”²²⁹

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Muskaan, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

²²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Azra, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

²²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with NGO gender expert (name withheld), Lahore, July 20, 2017.

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Zainab, Karachi, July 29, 2017.

²²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Anisa, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

Some girls go to extraordinary lengths to seek education, over family objection. “My uncle said no, and I hide from him to come here,” said Aliya, who is 10 or 12 years old, who had started attending a free tuition center one or two months earlier, after she quit second grade. “I say I’m going to get something and then I take my notebook and come here. My mother and brother make up stories to send me out of the house. My uncle says: ‘Work at home, wash the clothes.’ He thinks girls shouldn’t study.”²³⁰

Afsha was 16 before she had a chance to study for the first time, when she learned about a free tuition center in a neighbor’s home. Afsha’s father has left the family; her brother stood in the way of her studying. “My brother said don’t go, and he still says don’t go but I come anyway.... In our household, girls don’t go to study. That’s just the way it is.”²³¹

Sometimes views, or decision-makers, about girls’ education change within a family, affecting girls’ ability to study. For example, Mumtaz, 20, told Human Rights Watch that when she was young her uncles, who lived next door, said she shouldn’t study, but her father permitted her to go to school anyway. Now, however, several of her brothers are in their late teens, and they are becoming angry about their sisters studying and putting pressure on their parents to take the girls out of school.²³²

Zarafshan’s older sister was able to study through 10th grade, but by the time Zarafshan was 12, her uncle, who previously worked elsewhere, had opened a cycle shop next to their house. “He sits there, and whenever he sees anyone’s daughter going to school, he gets aggressive,” Zarafshan, 18, said. “My uncle stopped me going to school—he said I should stay home and do housework.... My father has to listen to him because he says, ‘If your daughter goes to school, so many boys will follow her, and people will talk about her and no one will marry her.’”²³³

Restrictions on the movement of women and girls are sometimes so severe that when girls leave school they become essentially homebound. “My eldest sister really wanted to study,

²³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Aliya, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

²³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Afsha, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

²³² Human Rights Watch interview with Mumtaz, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

²³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Zarafshan, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

but she was not allowed to, and now she doesn't even leave the house," Baheerah, age 12, told Human Rights Watch.²³⁴

Instead of studying, Azrah, 12, helped at home, including food shopping in the bazaar, but four months before Human Rights Watch interviewed her, she gave up that task. "Once we get bigger, we don't go to the bazaar without a burqa, so I had to stop going," she said. "Now I just sit at home all day. There's no permission to go out at all now."²³⁵

Some girls and parents called for more female teachers and more girls-only schools as a measure to make it possible for more girls to study. "The government should open all-girls' schools close by with no men, not even male teachers or any staff," said Zaneerah, 16, who left school at age 11 or 12, explaining what would have permitted her to continue studying. "Only the *chowkidar* [guard] outside can be a man."²³⁶

Yasmina, 13, said she left school three or four years earlier, when she was in third grade, after the school closed because there was no female teacher. When the school re-opened after a year, with female teachers, Yasmina's father said she was now too old to study.²³⁷

Negative perceptions about girls' education may even affect where girls' schools are established. Lily, 45, lives in a poor area of Lahore. Her daughter was in her second year of university at the time of the interview. When she was younger she had to travel by rickshaw to a private school every day as there is no government school nearby. "The government promised to make a school here—they even bought a plot of land," Lily said. "But landowners in the area said that schools being set up had a negative foreign influence and would corrupt the girls." Lily said her own in-laws were among those fighting to block to creation of the school. "They didn't allow the school to be made. [The government] made it in a neighboring area instead."²³⁸

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Baheerah, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Azrah, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Zaneerah, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

²³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Yasmina, Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

²³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Lily, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

Child Marriage

The educated daughter of today will become the mother of tomorrow.

—Beena, aunt of a 20-year-old in 11th grade, Karachi, July 2017

Child marriage is both a cause and a consequence of girls not attending school. In Pakistan, 21 percent of girls are married before age 18, and 3 percent marry before age 15.

Early marriage, in particular marrying younger than 18 can cause severe harm. Married children are more likely to leave school, live in poverty, and experience health problems. Girls who marry as children are more likely to experience domestic violence than women who marry later.²³⁹

Girls are sometimes seen as ready for marriage as soon as they mature physically. Ayesha arranged for her daughters to be engaged, at the same time, to two brothers who are their relatives, when the girls were ages 17 and 13. “Sixteen or 15 is a good age to get engaged,” said Ayesha. “This is the age when girls have their periods and are mature.”²⁴⁰

In some communities, child marriage is expected. “When daughters are not married, people start talking about them, so there’s that pressure,” said Saira, 30, who never attended school and married at age 17. Two of her three sisters married even younger.²⁴¹

Aisha plans to get her 12-year-old daughter Bushrah engaged soon. Aisha married as a teen herself; she is about 30 years old and has six children, ages two to 15. Her oldest sons are now in ninth and seventh grade, but Bushrah left third grade when she was nine years old. Aisha told Human Rights Watch that it is normal for girls to marry at about age 15 in the area where the family lives, and that if girls wait later it becomes difficult for them to marry. Early marriage is a reason for parents to prioritize educating sons. “She belongs to

²³⁹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage,” 2002, http://aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/publication/UNFPA_2012_Marrying_too_young.pdf (accessed September 13, 2018).

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ayesha, Parveen, and Sara, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Saira, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

someone else, will live in someone else's house," Aisha said about Bushrah, but sons, "will bring money home."²⁴²

Some parents see child marriage as a chance to lighten their load. "If a girl goes to her own home [with her in-laws] it's good, because then a burden is lifted off the parents," said Faiza, mother of a son, 17, and a daughter, 20. Faiza's daughter began studying at age 13, at a tuition center. After Faiza arranged a marriage for her at age 15 or 16, her in-laws forced her to stop studying.²⁴³

Marjan, who does not know her age, and is a mother of six children, would like her 15-year-old daughter to marry: "One less daughter is one less mouth to feed."²⁴⁴

Child marriage is sometimes seen as preventing girls from engaging in romantic or sexual relationships outside marriage. "If she's good to me I'll get her married after age 20," said Saira, 30, who married at age 17, about her eight-year-old daughter. "But if she rebels and sees men and has flings, I'm going to get her married quickly. In my area there is a government college. If she's good, I'll put her there and she can study higher."²⁴⁵

Girls often have little or no say in the timing of their marriage, or the choice of spouse. Tamima, age 14, has been engaged to a cousin since she was 12; her mother is planning the wedding for when she is 15. When asked her daughter's view about the marriage, Tamima's mother Raheebah replied, "What is she going to say? What does she know?" Tamima began studying at age 13 in a tuition center, but this will end once she marries. "That's our decision what she does now, but after she marries it's her in-laws' decision," explained Raheebah. "If girls work there's no one to take care of the house and the children.... All five fingers are not equal."²⁴⁶

Dinah was engaged at age 15 and married at age 17. She grew up in a compound where seven related families lived. Some girls in the compound studied until age 10 or 12, but the girls in Dinah's family did not study because they were poorer, as their father had

²⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Aisha, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

²⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Faiza, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

²⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Marjan, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

²⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Saira, Karachi, July 26, 2017.

²⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Raheebah and Tamima, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

intermittent work as a day laborer. About her marriage, she said: “We had no part in that decision. My mother and grandmother wanted it. We have no decision power—neither girls nor boys.”²⁴⁷

Staying in school longer can protect girls from marrying young. “They get married after they are done with schooling,” said Sumbul, 25, the aunt of two teenage girls struggling to stay in school. “Someone in school wants to complete their schooling and then marry.”²⁴⁸

Zarmina, 20, married at 16, and has two children. She said she would have married later had she not been forced out of school when her father became blind and could not work. “If you’re studying, you keep going,” she said. “You have to finish your studies and you don’t marry.” Instead, when her father’s disability worsened her mother went to work as a maid, but the family faced pressure to marry their daughters off:

My mother arranged our marriages because people started telling her, ‘You should get them married.’ My parents felt sad that they had to get me married at such a young age, but they had to so people wouldn’t say things. I felt sad, and I felt weird to be married at such a young age. But people in this area gossip and raise suspicions. My father said, ‘I can’t see so I can’t protect you, so I should get my daughters married quickly.’ He didn’t want his daughters to be harassed.²⁴⁹

Some in-laws prefer a young daughter-in-law. “My mother-in-law hurried it up—I was 11 when I married,” said Ayesha, 18, who married a cousin. “I was engaged one week and married the next week.” Ayesha never studied; her younger sister was studying, she was forced to drop out and take over the housework when Ayesha married. Three years later, Ayesha fled back to her parents. “It wasn’t a nice place—there was constant bickering and fighting,” she said. “I liked the boy—he is a hard worker—but the mother-in-law is the one creating problems.” Ayesha longed to study, but her in-laws didn’t allow her to leave the house at all. After leaving her husband, she at last found a way to study, in a madrasa, studying the Quran and Urdu. “I’m not going back [to my husband] ever,” Ayesha said.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dinah, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

²⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Sumbul and Aziza, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Zarmina, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

²⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Azwa, Ayesha, and Sidra, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

After marriage, girls often leave school. Some future in-laws agree to allow girls to continue studying, but such promises are often broken. “I would have kept studying if this engagement hadn’t come,” said Saba, married at 16. She had completed 10th grade when she married. Saba said before she married her in-laws agreed she could continue studying: “They said you can do whatever you want.” But as soon as she married both they and her husband forbid her from attending school.²⁵¹

Kanwal, 24, had just taken her tenth-grade exam and was about 16 years old when her parents married her to her cousin. She agreed to marry because her parents and in-laws promised that she could continue studying. When she received her exam results she found that she had passed everything except math and planned to retake the math exam—but at that point her in-laws said they wouldn’t allow her to study any more. She argued with them, but to no avail. “And then I got pregnant,” said Kanwal, who now has three daughters. She said her husband gambles and rarely works, leaving her financially dependent on her parents. He also began beating her as soon as they married, and one beating was so severe that she was hospitalized for brain damage. “I felt bad—I wanted to study, to write,” Kanwal said. “I would have a job—I would be of use and feel useful. I could work in a bank.... Sometimes I feel women aren’t treated well in this society.”²⁵²

Boys are also sometimes forced into child marriage. Layla, 50, said her oldest son drowned six months after marrying, when he and his wife were in their early 20s. Layla’s second son had died of a fever as a child. Her third son was 15 or 16 years old at the time and had recently left school. The family decided that he should marry his brother’s widow. After marrying, the couple had five daughters, ages three to 14 at the time of the interview, none of whom study because their father is unemployed due to substance abuse. “He said he started doing drugs because he didn’t want to get married,” Layla said.²⁵³

It is common in many communities for there to be a payment from one family to the other at the time of a marriage. Both dowry (payment by the bride’s family to the groom’s family) and bride price (payment by the groom’s family to the bride’s family) are practiced, in different communities.²⁵⁴ These payments can consist of jewelry, clothing, household

²⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Saba, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

²⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Kanwal, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

²⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Layla, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²⁵⁴ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Mumtaz, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

goods, and cars or motorcycles, as well as cash. The cost of a dowry or bride price is often a crippling expense for poor families already struggling to get by.²⁵⁵ The financial pressure of trying to reduce or avoid dowry or needing to receive bride price can induce families to accept a marriage proposal that comes earlier than they would have chosen.

Some mothers who married young fight to delay their daughters' marriages. Zunaisha, 35, a mother of nine, married at age 12. Her older daughters were 16 and 15 years old when Human Rights Watch interviewed Zunaisha and were not engaged or married. Zunaisha hopes to delay their marriages until they are 20. "I want them to enjoy their lives and spend as much time with their parents as they can," she said.²⁵⁶

"I'm going to be very careful in selecting a husband for my daughter," said Shaista, 32, who left school during 8th grade and married at age 14, after her grandparents, who she lived with and cared for became too ill to support her. "For me a mistake was made. I got stuck and I drowned. But I won't let that happen to her." Shaista's daughter has passed her 10th grade exam, but her father has said she may not study further.²⁵⁷

Insecurity on the Way to and in Schools

There's a lot of fear in parents' minds of sending their daughters outside.

—Baheerah, 12, who never attended school, Karachi, July 30, 2017

Many families and girls cited security problems as barriers to girls studying, including sexual harassment, kidnapping, crime, conflict, and attacks on education. Insecurity has a disproportionate impact on girls because girls are often targeted and parents are often less willing to have girls leave the home or make long journeys to school in insecure conditions than boys.²⁵⁸ Widespread impunity for violence against women and girls heightens parents' fears.

²⁵⁵ E.g. Human Rights Watch interview with Rukhsana, Karachi, July 29, 2017.

²⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Zunaisha, Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaista, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

²⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with education expert (name withheld), UK, 2017.

Some parents and children said insecurity in their communities had worsened in recent years, meaning younger children had less access to education than their older siblings. “These are bad times,” said Shaista, 32, mother of four daughters and three sons, ages three to 18, who lives in a poor area of Karachi. “Before, 20 years ago, things were nice, but the environment now is such that I don’t even want to let my small girl out of the house. There is drug addiction and alcoholism and then when your daughter steps out boys will whistle at her. So, to protect your honor you won’t send your daughter out.”²⁵⁹

Families worry about terrorist attacks, but they also worry about busy roads, and the long distance many girls must travel to school can increase risks. Hafsa, 16, thinks she was five or six years old on the day she fell into an open sewage ditch on her way to her school which was an hour-long walk away. That was her last day of school. “After my fall, I just didn’t feel like going back,” she said. “But it wasn’t just that—the distance was just too much. Many years later I regretted leaving, but I was too old to start all over.”²⁶⁰

“We can’t walk alone because of boys selling drugs and big trucks going by,” said Layla, 50, explaining why the school 30 to 40-minute walk away is not accessible to her family.²⁶¹

Conflict and Attacks on Education

Life and death is in God’s hands. Of course, people here feel some fear.

Anyone would be afraid. We can take precautions, but if it’s fate, it’s fate.

—Zulekha, mother of seven, living in an area of Quetta known for insecurity, Quetta, January 2018

Many parts of Pakistan are facing escalating levels of violence related to insurgency, and ethnic and religious conflict. In the areas most affected, this is having a devastating impact of girls’ access to education. Fawzia, 34, in Peshawar, is a mother of four girls and one boy. She said she is afraid for her children when they go to school. “Why would there not be fear?” she said. “Fear is present 24/7. From the time the child steps out of the house till they return home, the fear is persistent.” Fawzia said if she could, she would

²⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaista, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

²⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Hafsa, Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

²⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Layla, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

teach her children at home. She described a bombing in the family's church, and other attacks that followed. "Children died in that blast, and nothing changed."²⁶²

Parveen sends four of her daughters to a madrasa to study, because it is more affordable than schools. She said there were two bomb blasts near the madrasa three or four years earlier, but no one was killed or injured. "We do worry, but we still send them," she said.²⁶³

Insecurity has long-term consequences. "There was a lot of shooting—for a whole week, constant firing," said Fazeelah, 35, explaining why she took her oldest child, a son, out of school, and kept her other six children, including four daughters, home. The worst of the violence took place about 10 years earlier, but after missing school during that period, the children were never able to go to school."²⁶⁴

Layla, 50, said the government school near her home closed permanently after 10 to 12 bodies were found there during ethnic conflict in the neighborhood in 2005. Layla said ethnic tensions have eased, but the area remains insecure, especially for women. "The situation is better, and that ethnic fear is gone, but there is still fear of harassment by boys, and that's worse now," she said. "Before people hid this harassment more—now they do it more openly." She said lingering ethnic tension makes it harder to fight back against harassment. "The school is a mix of Pakhtuns and Muhajirs so we're afraid if anyone says anything to one of the boys another ethnic conflict could start depending on who he is, so it's better just not to send girls—and studies there aren't very good anyway."²⁶⁵

A teacher in Balochistan said that many of her students manage to finish high school, but to continue to university they must travel through areas seen as unsafe for people from their ethnic group, which deters many from continuing.²⁶⁶

Ethnic conflict often spills into schools. Basma, 12, was moved by her parents from government school to private school, even though they struggled to afford private fees, in part because of fighting in the government school between Hindu and Muslim students.

²⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Fawzia, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

²⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Parveen, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

²⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Fazeelah, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Layla, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with government middle school teacher (name withheld), Balochistan, January 2018.

Basma’s foot was fractured during one eruption of violence. “I feel very hurt that they hurt my daughter,” Basma’s mother Najma, said.²⁶⁷

Attacks on Education and Government Responses

The government is nothing. They just fill their own stomachs. There are bomb blasts in schools—children die all the time. If they can’t take care of schools, what can they do?

—Farzana, age 25-30, mother of five daughters and one son, Karachi, July 29, 2017

One aspect of insecurity in Pakistan has been targeted attacks against students, teachers, and schools.²⁶⁸ The most lethal attack on education in recent years in Pakistan was the December 16, 2014, attack by armed militants on the Army Public School in Peshawar city, killing 145 people, almost all of them children.²⁶⁹

This attack was far from isolated, however. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) describes Pakistan as a country heavily affected by attacks on education.²⁷⁰ According to GCPEA, between 2013 and 2017, “armed non-state groups and unknown parties” reportedly attacked hundreds of schools, across every province, typically using explosive devices, killing several hundred students and teachers, and damaging and destroying infrastructure.²⁷¹ One-third of these attacks targeted girls and women and were “aimed at repressing or stopping the learning or teaching of girls and women.”²⁷² In August 2018, alleged militants attacked and burned down at least 12 schools in Diamer district of Gilgit-Baltistan.²⁷³ At least half were girls’ schools.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Basma and Najma, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

²⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Dreams Turned into Nightmares: Attacks on Students, Teachers and Schools in Pakistan*, March 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/03/27/dreams-turned-nightmares/attacks-students-teachers-and-schools-pakistan>.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), “Education Under Attack 2018: Country Profiles: Pakistan,” May 2018, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua2018_pakistan.pdf (accessed September 13, 2018), p. 1.

²⁷¹ GCPEA, “Education Under Attack 2018,” May 2018, <http://eua2018.protectingeducation.org/> (accessed September 13, 2018), p. 33.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁷³ “Pakistan: Surge in Militant Attacks on Schools,” Human Rights Watch news release, August 3, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/03/pakistan-surge-militant-attacks-schools>.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The Army Public School attack had ripple effects as many parents became more concerned about security. Abda, 51, lives with her husband, four of her six children, two daughters-in-law and five grandchildren, in Peshawar. She said that after the Army Public School attack, the children in the family were afraid to go to school and her husband wanted to take all the children out of school for safety reasons, but Abda insisted on keeping them in school.²⁷⁵

Zunaisha, 35, a mother of nine in Peshawar said when she discussed the possibility of several daughters going to school they said they were afraid of bomb blasts. At the time of the interview, all her children were out of education or studying in a madrasa.²⁷⁶

Naira worries about her teenage daughter, a college student in Quetta. Naira described their lives in Quetta as being like a prison, saying targeted attacks against members of the Hazara community are so pervasive that girls from other ethnic groups sometimes beg Hazara girls not travel with them or stand close to them on public transportation.²⁷⁷

An activist in Balochistan said he believed driving Hazara students out of education was an objective for sectarian groups. “They targeted us because we were progressing—in the military, in sports, education,” he said. “We always achieved the highest marks at Balochistan’s various universities. Now there are only a handful of [Hazara] children who go to Balochistan University. This was a concentrated campaign to keep us down.”²⁷⁸

“There should be security for girls, so parents are not afraid of sending girls to school,” said Marzia, who helps run an informal school in her family’s home. “There should be security outside the school. I went to an army school, and I felt safe because no one could go inside without a CNIC [national identification card]. There was a checkpoint. But this doesn’t exist at government schools.”²⁷⁹

After the Army Public School attack, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced a 20-point National Action Plan to address the threat from terrorism, but none of the 20 points

²⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abda and Zarghona, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

²⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Zunaisha, Peshawar, August 8, 2017.

²⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Naira, Quetta, January 2018.

²⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with activist (name withheld), Quetta, January 2018.

²⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Marzia, Karachi, July 30, 2017.

pertained to protection of educational institutions.²⁸⁰ Instead, in most cases, the responsibility for enhancing and maintaining security has been passed to school authorities. This has sometimes led to increased hardship and chaos. Some schools organized traumatic security drills, while others armed teachers and students.²⁸¹

Sexual Harassment

Many girls encountered sexual harassment on the way to school. “In this place, it’s not the type of area [where you can go to school]. It’s not a good area. When you walk out, the boys stare at you and tease you.... I can’t go to school because of the environment outside,” said Azeeba, 11, who studied for the first time when an NGO opened a school near her home. When it closed due to lack of funds two years later, her education was over. She was not allowed to go to the nearby government school as men are gambling in that area. “If someone small goes out, no one looks at them. But if you’re a little grown people stare, and boys tease you,” Azeeba said.²⁸²

Some girls said men and boys harass them outside their school. “Lots of girls from this area go to the government school,” said Paveena, 13. “But men hang around there.... They speak crudely, curse, sometimes they throw stones at you. I took my cousin to school once, and this man started cursing me. This is just how it is in Quetta—it happens to all girls.” Paveena said that dressing modestly, in a *chaddar* [concealing robe and head covering], did nothing to help.²⁸³

“They walk you halfway home,” said Mumtaz, 20, about the boys at a nearby school, complaining that they follow girls and harass them.²⁸⁴

When the distance to school is long, it intensifies fears of sexual harassment. “It takes one hour to walk to the nearest school, and it’s not a nice area,” said Samika, 12. “You know what boys can be like. They bother you. It’s not nice for girls to be walking alone.”²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ National Counter Terrorism Authority Pakistan, “20 Points of The National Actions Plan,” http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/document/papers/National_Action_Plan_20_Points.htm (accessed September 13, 2018).

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, *Dreams Turned into Nightmares: Attacks on Students, Teachers and Schools in Pakistan*, March 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/03/27/dreams-turned-nightmares/attacks-students-teachers-and-schools-pakistan>.

²⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Azeeba, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Paveena, Quetta, January 17, 2018.

²⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mumtaz, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

Sidra was 13 and in fifth grade when her family returned from Karachi to Quetta. In Quetta, Sidra tried to re-enroll in the nearest government girls' school, a long walk from her home. "I went one day with a group of girls," she explained. "The men stare, they say things to you. Sometimes they hurl abusive words at you—bad words." That was two years earlier, and she decided never to go back. "If there's a school made close by, I'll go." She works instead, earning 150 rupees each (\$1.43) for stitching suits of clothing.²⁸⁶

"In private schools we try to stop it," a private school headmaster said, explaining that sexual harassment would hurt his school's business. "I make complaints to the police regarding specific boys. Since then no one bothered my female students in this street. Before boys used to hang out in this street."²⁸⁷

Other said police demonstrate little willingness to intervene to try to end harassment of girls. "In front of our house is a store owner who has a drinking problem and beats his wife and harasses my 13-year-old sister and says he's going to marry her," said Tamana, 15. "The whole village [neighborhood] is very upset about him. We complained to the police, but he paid them off." Tamana, who left school at 13, said that their mother wants her younger sister to leave school because of the harassment by the neighbor.²⁸⁸

Girls face security risks on the way to school, but they also, too often, face insecurity at school. Interviewees described this as primarily a problem at government schools; private schools have a greater incentive to fix any conditions that could lead to them losing students. Insecurity for girls often takes the form of sexual harassment by male students.

"I studied to eighth grade, but then I stopped because my brothers told me to because there were these boys who were very lewd to me," said Rabiya, 23. She left government school at around age 11 and missed several years of school before her mother managed to pay for private school. She still lives near the government school, and says over the intervening years, it became worse. "The girls are afraid," she said. "Girls are on one side of the school and boys on the other, but there is one gate. These boys sit outside and bother them. The boys throw their phone numbers at the girls." Rabiya said another

²⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Samika, Lahore, July 21, 2017.

²⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Sidra, Quetta, January 17, 2018.

²⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with headmaster of private school in a small town (name withheld), Punjab, July 19, 2017.

²⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamana, Lahore, July 17, 2017.

concern was that low walls at the school failed to protect girls from boys in the neighborhood seeking to harass them. She described the private school she later attended as feeling much more secure, with parents required to pick up their children, ID cards required for entering, and separate shifts for boys and girls.²⁸⁹

Parents sometimes have a lower tolerance for harassment than their daughters. Salima, 13, had quit school a few days earlier. “The boys in the school used to bother me—they would throw rulers and pencils at me,” she said. “My mother told me to leave because of the boys bothering me. I want to study but my mother won’t let me.”²⁹⁰

When security measures are in place, they are often ineffective. “The school guard is old and doesn’t have any teeth—what can he do?” said Rabiya, 23, about the government school she left. “He lives at the school, so he is scared for himself.... He won’t say anything to the boys, who are much stronger.”²⁹¹

Others echoed the view that security measures are better at private schools. Fawzia, 34, recently removed her 16-year-old daughter from government school and now plans to send her to private school. “They have cameras and keep a check on all the students who come and enter and leave the premises. They take responsibility for the children.”²⁹²

Pakistan’s ethnic and religious tensions sometimes result in children feeling unsafe at school. Basma, 12, left government school because of fighting between Muslim and Hindu students.²⁹³ Priya, 17, left school after eighth grade, after three years of bullying by other girls. “In the entire school, I was the only Hindu,” she said. “They just wanted me out—like, ‘Why is this Hindu girl here?’ I think [I was bullied] because I was alone.”²⁹⁴

Harmful gender norms about older girls being seen in public can create heightened sensitivity to harassment. Samah, 19, was forced by her four brothers to leave school after

²⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rabiya and Zahida, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Salima, Punjab, July 19, 2017.

²⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rabiya and Zahida, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

²⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Fawzia, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

²⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Basma, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

²⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Priya, Peshawar, August 5, 2017.

class 10, because they wouldn't permit her to travel further to a government college. "None of my brothers are okay with me studying," she said:

Harassment happens—you know what our society is like. What my brothers are saying is you can study privately with a tutor who comes over [to our house], but a girl can't walk alone because things are bad. Men look at you funny, they stare. Sometimes they hoot or whistle. My brothers are afraid men would do something—or just my being seen is a problem. They don't like other men looking at their sister. It does bother me that men are like this, but I would still study [if I could]. I really want to study—I wanted to be a doctor.

Samah said her brothers would only permit her to study if her mother escorted her to and from school, but there is no government college close enough to their home to make that feasible. She has also been unable to find tutors that will come to her home. She is now working as a tailor instead. Even paying for a rickshaw or car with her wages would not allow her to go back to school, she said. "My brothers still have an issue if I'm in a car or a rickshaw.... Even though we wear the veil [niqab—face covering] there is still that insecurity."²⁹⁵

Harmful gender norms mean that when girls are sexually harassed, the consequence is often that their movement is restricted, pushing them out of school. "If a girl is being sexually harassed on the way to school, often she won't tell her parents, because they will take her out of school if they know," a researcher on education said. "Kids, especially girls, are afraid of their parents—afraid that if anything happens to them, even if it's not their fault, then they'll be taken out of school."²⁹⁶

Girls, and their families, are sometimes seen as at fault when they are the target of harassment. "My father doesn't allow us, because we're girls, to go out to school, because boys will harass us, and people will see and will say, 'They were harassed on the street,'" said Humaira, 17, one of five sisters. "It's about our honor—even though we wear abayas [long figure concealing garments] and niqabs. We've been living here for so many years, so

²⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Samah, Lahore, July 18, 2017.

²⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with a researcher on education (name withheld), Lahore, July 19, 2017.

every boy knows what girls live in this house.” Humaira said since she finished studying at madrasa three years earlier, she leaves the house only for specific reasons—such as a doctor’s appointment or a visit to a relative—every month or two.²⁹⁷

Just the fear of harassment sometimes leads to families keeping girls home. Aisha, a mother of one daughter and five sons said that one reason the family removed her daughter from school after third grade was concern about “what people will say if, for example, she’s seen in a ‘non-respectable’ place.” When asked what “non-respectable” places are, she said her husband raised this concern and she does not know as she does not go outside herself. Aisha’s husband Mubashir said he had heard of an incident of a girl being harassed near the local madrasa, and that: “There are private schools here where boys just hang outside and throw their phone numbers at girls.”²⁹⁸

Harassers also sometimes target teachers. A teacher in Balochistan said that when she was posted to a new school at first her husband dropped her off every day on his motorcycle. But he and she encountered harassment from young men from the community who did not like a strange man coming to their area. She began taking shared transport instead, which ended the harassment, but created a financial burden, costing 4,000 rupees a month (\$38) which was over 20 percent of her salary.²⁹⁹

Crime

I used to be interested in studying, but that interest died.

—Mahmuda, 22, left school in fifth grade due to gang violence in her neighborhood, Karachi, July 2017

When violence happens in a school or in a neighborhood, it has long term consequences for girls’ education. Parizad, 12, said one reason she left school in Karachi was because several children at that school, including a girl in her class, were abducted from the school and murdered. Parizad and her brother left school, in part because of fear of being murdered. “We used to feel very scared,” she said.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Humaira, Karachi, July 25, 2017.

²⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Aisha, Bushrah, and Mubashir, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

²⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with government primary school teacher (name withheld), Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Parizad, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

Anisa’s oldest son was killed in a local dispute in the family’s village a year before Human Rights Watch interviewed her. Fearing that their remaining son might also be targeted, the family abruptly left the village. Anisa’s five youngest daughters can no longer study as there is no nearby school in their new neighborhood, and the family feels unsafe there.³⁰¹

Several families in a Karachi neighborhood said the area had experienced such high levels of gang violence several years earlier that many girls’ education was disrupted, and some families had fled the area. “We left school because the environment wasn’t good, the times weren’t good,” said Mahmuda, 22, explaining why she quit school after fifth grade. “It was the time of gang violence, so it was difficult to go back and forth to school.... We used to feel scared.... Now everything is fine and there’s no fear, but that age to study is gone. What would we learn now?... Imagine if it had been fine before—we could have studied and had different jobs.” Mahmuda, her mother, and her younger sister are domestic workers.³⁰²

Rabiya, 23, said a classmate of hers disappeared and her body was found two days later at their government school. “We saw it with our own eyes,” she said. “We saw bruises all over her arms.” Rabiya was around 11 at the time. “My brothers said, ‘These are uncertain times,’ so they took me out,” she said. Over ten years later, the family refuses to send children to that school. In the home where Rabiya and her extended family live, there are ten children. Some study at private school—if their parents can pay the fees; the rest do not study. The oldest child is a 14-year-old girl who left school after fifth grade. Rabiya said the girl has no one to pay fees since her mother died and her father left to work in Malaysia and was never heard from again. “We can’t send her to the government school and we can’t afford the private school. We’re still scared of that government school.”³⁰³

Layla, 50, lives nearby. She described the same murder and said several of her children quit school afterwards, including her oldest living son. “He said he didn’t feel safe,” she said. The family removed their daughter who was studying there: “They said girls in this

³⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Anisa, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

³⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with Taslima, Samina, and Mahmuda, Karachi, July 31, 2017.

³⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Rabiya and Zahida, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

school disappear,” Layla explained. Another son wanted to stay at the school. “We let him study at the government school in spite of the murder because he was a boy.”³⁰⁴

Fear of Kidnapping

Because the area was so desolate, if someone were to kidnap or assault me, no one would be able to find me.

—Zaneerah, 16, describing the walk to the school she dropped out of, Peshawar, August 2017

Families in particular fear kidnapping, especially when girls face long walks to school. It is difficult to know the exact number of kidnappings each year, due to inconsistencies in how figures are collected, but media reports suggest a significant and growing problem, and fuel fears.³⁰⁵

Alishba, 29, a mother of seven, said that she and her husband took their oldest daughters out of school at ages seven and eight because the walk to school took the girls past a field where drug users congregated, and they feared someone would “take them away.” Alishba said if they could have afforded a rickshaw they would have let them continue, but the cost was prohibitive. The girls now study part-time at a madrasa closer to their home.³⁰⁶

This fear is heightened when girls are older and seen as at greater risk of sexual assault. Kamila is a mother of six children, including four adolescent girls. She said that the reason her daughters cannot attend school is because Kamila’s husband, the girls’ father, “is afraid someone will steal them if they step out of the house.”³⁰⁷

The distinction between fear of girls being kidnapped and them engaging in a romantic relationship are sometimes blurred. “They’re pretty, so we’re afraid they will be taken,” said Asiya, a mother of eight, using a term that can mean both kidnapped and wooed, explaining why her older daughters left school, at ages 16 and 12. “If someone dishonors one of my daughters, it’s a matter of dishonor for my remaining daughters as well.” She said one daughter studied until 16 while the other had to leave at 12 because the 12-year-

³⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Layla, Karachi, July 27, 2017.

³⁰⁵ E.g. Asif Chaudry and Fahad Naveed, “Why are so many of our children going missing?” *Dawn*, August 15, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1276916> (accessed September 13, 2018).

³⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Alishba, Peshawar, August 6, 2017.

³⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Kamila, Balochistan, January 18, 2018.

old had physically developed early. Asiya said that her next two daughters, ages 12 and 13, would leave school soon for the same reason.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Asiya and Zaneerah, Peshawar, August 7, 2017.

IV. Pakistan’s Obligations under Domestic and International Law

The right to non-discrimination and equality between men and women are enshrined in numerous human rights treaties and Pakistan domestic law. Non-discrimination is essential for ensuring that all children, including girls, have full access to education.

Right to Education

Education is a basic right enshrined in various international treaties ratified by Pakistan, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).³⁰⁹

The Constitution of Pakistan, when adopted in 1973, contained a section under the non-enforceable “principles of state policy” that provided, “The State shall ... remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within [the] minimum possible period.”³¹⁰

In 2010 the 18th Amendment introduced article 25-A in the section containing judicially enforceable “fundamental rights,” which states that “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.”³¹¹

Article 25-A has been transposed into the local laws of different federal units of Pakistan via the Right to Free and 2012 Compulsory Education Act (for Islamabad), the 2013 Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, the 2014 Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, and the 2014 Balochistan Compulsory Education Act. However,

³⁰⁹ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990., art. 6. Pakistan ratified the CRC in November 1990. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A.Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976. Pakistan ratified the ICESCR in April 2008.

³¹⁰ Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, art. 37(b).

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, art. 25-A.

requisite legislation for KP, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Kashmir has yet to be drafted.

Pakistan became a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which includes an obligation to ensure women equal rights with men, including in the field of education.³¹²

The right to education entails state obligations of both an immediate and progressive kind. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the expert body that interprets the ICESCR and provides guidance to states in their efforts to implement it, governments should take steps towards fulfilling the rights in the ICESCR that are “deliberate, concrete and targeted as clearly as possible towards meeting the obligations.” The committee has also stressed that the ICESCR imposes an obligation to “move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards that goal.”³¹³

Under international human rights law, everyone has a right to free, compulsory, primary education, free from discrimination.³¹⁴ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated that the right to fundamental education extends to all those who have not yet satisfied their “basic learning needs.”³¹⁵

International law also provides that secondary education shall be generally available and accessible to all without discrimination. The right to secondary education includes “the completion of basic education and consolidation of the foundations for life-long learning

³¹² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted December 18, 1979, G.A. res. 34/180, 34 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, entered into force September 3, 1981. Pakistan acceded to CEDAW in March 1996.

³¹³ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 3, The nature of States parties' obligations (Fifth session, 1990), U.N. Doc. E/1991/23, paras. 2 and 9.

³¹⁴ ICESCR, arts. 13 and 2; see also UN Economic and Social Council, Preliminary report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Ms. Katarina Tomasevski, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/33, E/CN.4/1999/49, January 13, 1999, http://repository.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/223172/E_CN.4_1999_49-EN.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y (accessed September 13, 2018).

³¹⁵ CESCR, General Comment No. 13, The Right to Education (Art. 13 of the Covenant), U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), para. 23.

and human development.”³¹⁶ It also includes the right to vocational and technical training.³¹⁷

Human Rights Watch believes governments should take immediate measures to ensure that secondary education is available and accessible to all free of charge. They should also encourage and intensify “fundamental education” for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of primary (or basic) education.³¹⁸

In implementing their obligations on education, governments should be guided by four essential criteria: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. Education should be available throughout the country, including by guaranteeing adequate and quality school infrastructure, and accessible to everyone on an equal basis. Moreover, the form and substance of education should be of acceptable quality and meet minimum educational standards, and the education provided should adapt to the needs of students with diverse social and cultural settings.³¹⁹

Governments should ensure that functioning educational institutions and programs are sufficiently available within their jurisdiction. Functioning education institutions should include buildings, sanitation facilities for both sexes, safe drinking water, trained teachers receiving domestically competitive salaries, teaching materials, and, where possible, facilities such as a library, computer facilities and information technology.³²⁰

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, paras. 11–12.

³¹⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted December 10, 1948, G.A. Res. 217A(III), U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948), art. 26; ICESCR, art. 13(2)(b); CRC, art. 28. Technical and vocational education and training refers to all forms and levels of the educational process involving, in addition to general knowledge, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, know-how, attitudes and understanding relating to occupations in the various sectors of economic and social life. Convention on Technical and Vocational Education 1989, adopted November 10, 1989, No. 28352, art. 1(a). For further information, see also Convention on Technical and Vocational Education, November 10, 1989, art. 3. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13059&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed September 13, 2018).

³¹⁸ ICESCR, art. 13(d). According to the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, “sound basic education is fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education and of scientific and technological literacy and capacity and thus to self-reliant development.” Basic education “should be provided to all children, youth and adults ... [and] should be expanded and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities.” World Conference on Education for All, World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001275/127583e.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2018), art. 3(1)-(2).

³¹⁹ CESCR, General Comment No. 13, “The Right to Education (Art. 13), para. 6 (a)–(d).

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

Non-Discrimination in Education

Governments should guarantee equality in access to education as well as education free from discrimination. According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, discrimination constitutes “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference or other differential treatment that is directly or indirectly based on the prohibited grounds of discrimination and which has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise [of rights] on an equal footing.”³²¹

In addition to removing any forms of direct discrimination against students, governments should also ensure indirect discrimination does not occur because of laws, policies, or practices that may have the effect of disproportionately impacting on the right to education of children who require further accommodation, or whose circumstances may not be the same as those of the majority school population.³²²

CEDAW addresses the right to non-discrimination in all spheres. Article 1 of CEDAW defines “discrimination against women” as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women.³²³

Governments also have a positive obligation to remedy abuses that emanate from social and cultural practices. CEDAW requires that states “take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs, and practices which constitute discrimination against women.”³²⁴ It obligates states to “refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation,” and to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise.” CEDAW requires governments:

³²¹ CESCR, “Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights),” General Comment No. 20, E/C.12/GC/20 (2009), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4a60961f2.html> (accessed September 13, 2018), para. 10 (b).

³²² Ibid.

³²³ CEDAW, art. 1.

³²⁴ CEDAW, art. 2.

To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.³²⁵

International human rights law also calls upon governments address the legal and social subordination women and girls face in their families, provisions violated by Pakistan's tolerance of a disproportionate number of girls being excluded from school.

Quality of Education

It is widely acknowledged that any meaningful effort to realize the right to education should make the quality of such education a core priority. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has maintained that beyond their access obligations, governments need to ensure that the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, are “acceptable” to students. The committee stated that acceptability hinges on a range of different factors, including the notion that education should be of “good quality.”³²⁶ The aim is to ensure that “no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life.”³²⁷ According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, an education of good quality “requires a focus on the quality of the learning environment, of teaching and learning processes and materials, and of learning outputs.”³²⁸

The state must provide education “on the basis of equal opportunity,” “without discrimination of any kind irrespective of the child's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.”³²⁹ In addition, the guarantees of equality before the law and the equal protection of law prevent a government from arbitrarily making distinctions among classes of persons in promulgating and enforcing its laws. A state will violate the prohibition on discrimination in education both with direct action, such as introducing or failing to repeal

³²⁵ CEDAW, art. 5(a).

³²⁶ CESCR, General Comment No. 13, “The Right to Education (Art. 13),” para. 6(c).

³²⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “The Aims of Education (article 29),” General Comment No. 1, CRC/GC/2001/1 (2001), http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC1_en.doc (accessed September 13, 2018).

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 22.

³²⁹ CRC, arts. 28(1) and 2(1).

discriminatory laws, as well as when it fails to take measures “which address de facto educational discrimination.”³³⁰ States must ensure that their domestic legal systems provide “appropriate means of redress, or remedies ... to any aggrieved individual or groups,” including judicial remedies.³³¹

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated: “The prohibition against discrimination enshrined in article 2 (2) of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights] is subject to neither progressive realization nor the availability of resources; it applies fully and immediately to all aspects of education and encompasses all internationally prohibited grounds of discrimination.”³³²

Protection from Child Marriage and Child Labor

Child marriage—a major barrier to education for girls in Pakistan—is recognized under international law as a human rights violation. Since the vast majority of those subjected to child marriage are girls, it is considered a form of gender-based discrimination, and it violates other human rights principles. The CRC does not explicitly address child marriage. However, child marriage is viewed as incompatible with a number of the articles in the convention. CEDAW states explicitly that the marriage or betrothal of a child should have no legal effect.³³³

There is an evolving consensus in international law that 18 should be the minimum age for marriage, and Human Rights Watch calls on all governments to set the minimum age for marriage at 18. The committees that interpret the CRC and CEDAW have each recommended that 18 be the minimum age for marriage for boys and girls, regardless of parental consent.³³⁴ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has taken a clear position on

³³⁰ CESCR, General Comment No. 13, “The Right to Education (Art. 13),” para. 59.

³³¹ CESCR, General Comment 9, The Domestic Application of the Covenant, E/C.12/1998/24, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47a7079d6.html> (accessed September 13, 2018), paras. 2, 9. See also, CESCR, General Comment 3, The Nature of States Parties Obligations, E/1991/23, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838e10.html> (accessed September 13, 2018), para. 5.

³³² CESCR, General Comment No. 13, “The Right to Education (Art. 13),” para. 31. See also, CESCR, General Comment 11, Plans of Action for Primary Education, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/4 (May 10, 1999), para. 10; and CESCR, General Comment 3,, para. 2 (stating that the obligation to guarantee the exercise of rights in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights without discrimination is “of immediate effect”).

³³³ CEDAW, art.16 (2).

³³⁴ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 21, Equality in Marriage and Family Relations, (Thirteenth Session, 1994), para. 36; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 4, Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, (Thirty-third session, 2003), para. 20.

18 as the minimum age for marriage, regardless of parental consent, and repeatedly addressed the need for countries to establish a definition of a child in all domestic legislation that is consistent with the provisions of the CRC.³³⁵ These committees have pointed to the importance of delaying marriage to protect young girls from the negative health implications of early marriage such as early pregnancy and childbirth and to ensure that girls complete their education.³³⁶ The CEDAW committee has noted that child marriage and early pregnancy impede girls' rights to education, and are a primary cause of school drop-out for girls.³³⁷

In Pakistan, laws regarding the minimum age of marriage vary from province to province. Some provinces have reformed their legislation to reduce child marriage, but in 2017, the Senate rejected national legislation that would have raised the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18.³³⁸

The CRC also obligates governments to protect children from economic exploitation, and from performing work that is hazardous, interferes with a child's education, or is harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.³³⁹ The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Minimum Age Convention and the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention describe what types of work amount to child labor, depending on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the impact on education, and other factors.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 4, Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of the Convention on the Rights of Child, CRC/GC/2003/4, (2003), <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Health/GC4.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2018), paras. 16, 20, and 35 (g).

³³⁶ CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 21, Equality in Marriage and Family Relations, (Thirteenth Session, 1994), para. 36; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 4, Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child," (Thirty-third session, 2003), para. 20.

³³⁷ See, for example, CEDAW Committee, "Concluding Observations of the Committee to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Uganda," October 22, 2010, para.31, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW-C-UGA-CO-7.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2018).

³³⁸ Saroop Ijaz, "Pakistan Should End Child Marriage," commentary, Human Rights Watch Dispatch, October 12, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/12/pakistan-should-end-child-marriage>.

³³⁹ CRC, art. 32.

³⁴⁰ C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (Entry into force: June 19, 1976), ratified by Pakistan on July 6, 2006 stating a minimum age of 14; C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Entered into force November 19, 2000), ratified by Pakistan on October 11, 2001.

Pakistan's constitution states: "No child below the age of fourteen years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment."³⁴¹

Protection from Violence, including Corporal Punishment and Cruel and Degrading Forms of Punishment

Under international law, governments should take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, and maltreatment.³⁴² The CRC obligates governments to "take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity."³⁴³ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has defined corporal or physical punishment as "any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light."³⁴⁴

The international prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, relates not only to acts that cause physical pain but also to acts that cause mental suffering to the victim.³⁴⁵ Children and pupils in teaching institutions should be protected from corporal punishment, "including excessive chastisement ordered as ... an educative or disciplinary measure."³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, article 11(3).

³⁴² CRC, art. 19(1). See Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children and Save The Children, "Towards non-violent schools: prohibiting all corporal punishment, Global report 2015," May 2015, <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/thematic-publications/schools-report-2015/> (accessed September 13, 2018), pp. 4-5.

³⁴³ CRC, art. 28(2).

³⁴⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 8 (2006): The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts.19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia)," CRC/C/GC/8 (2007), http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGC%2f8&Lang=en (accessed September 13, 2018), para. 11.

³⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Committee, "General Comment No. 20: Article 7 (Prohibition of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment)," A/44/40, (1992), http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCCPR%2fGEC%2f6621&Lang=en (accessed September 13, 2018), para. 5.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 5.

Recommendations

To the Federal Government of Pakistan

- Increase expenditure on and resources available for education to bring the level of education funding up to standards recommended by UNESCO to enable Pakistan to fulfill its obligations on education.
- Monitor expenditure of education funds at the provincial level and ensure full use of funds.
- Strengthen the federal government's role in assisting and advising provincial governments in their provision of education, with the goal of removing disparities between provinces, ensuring universal access to free primary and secondary education across all parts of the country, and removing gender disparities in all provinces.
- Work with provincial governments to improve the quality of government schools and to strengthen quality assurance of private schools.
- Assist provinces to reform the curriculum in all parts of the country based on international best practices and through a consultative process with education experts and national stakeholders.
- Ensure that the curriculum is gender-sensitive and includes comprehensive sexuality education.
- Once high-quality curricula are in place, private schools and madrasas teaching non-religious subjects should be required to use the government curriculum.
- Encourage continued international donor assistance for education from foreign donors, and work with donors to ensure that aid to the education sector goes where it is most needed.
- Support efforts to develop sustainable solutions to increase girls' participation in education, including by developing strategies to develop and expand innovative models such as community-based classes in remote areas, schools targeting disadvantaged populations, and schools designed for children who combine education and work.
- Ensure anti-corruption efforts include a strong focus on fighting corruption within the education sector.
- Strengthen oversight of provincial education systems specifically regarding their progress toward ensuring that all girls complete primary and secondary education, by taking steps to ensure that provinces provide accurate data on girls' education, monitoring enrolment and attendance by girls, and setting specific targets in each

province toward achieving parity between girls and boys and universal primary and secondary education for girls and boys.

- Work with provincial governments to increase enforcement of laws prohibiting child labor.
- Raise the national minimum age of marriage to 18 with no exceptions and develop and implement a national action plan to end child marriage, with the goal of ending all child marriage by 2030, as per Sustainable Development Goal target 5.3.
- Ensure that students deprived of their schools because of hostilities or threats, their schools need to be repaired or reconstructed, or the use of their school for military purposes, are promptly provided access to alternative educational facilities in their vicinity.
- Endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, committing to take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools by armed forces and armed groups, and to use as a minimum standard the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- Develop a comprehensive policy for protecting students, teachers, schools, and universities from attack and military use.
- Address and remedy the disproportionate harm to girls' access to education because of hostilities and military use of schools. The government should adopt measures to assist girls who have been denied or risk losing access to education.
- In any negotiations with insurgent groups, make it a priority to negotiate for access to education for all children, including girls, in insurgent-controlled and contested areas of the country.

To Provincial Governments

- Direct the provincial education authority to make girls' education a priority within the education budget, in regard to construction and rehabilitation of schools, training and recruitment of female teachers, and provision of supplies, to address the imbalance between the participation of girls and boys in education.
- Monitor expenditure of education funds and ensure that all funds are used.
- Strengthen enforcement of anti-child labor laws.
- Instruct police officials at the provincial and district level to ensure that police at the community level work with schools to ensure the safety of students, including monitoring potential threats to schools, students and teachers, and working to prevent harassment and abuse of students, especially girls.
- Work with education authorities to collect reliable data on military use of schools by both government security forces and non-government armed groups. Data

should include the names and locations of the educational institutions being used; the purpose for which they are being used; the duration of the use; the specific security force unit or armed group making use of the school; the enrollment prior to use and attendance during use; impact on students unable to attend school; actions taken by the authorities to end military use of the school; and the damages sustained during the military use of the school. Where relevant data should be disaggregated by gender to capture any disproportionate impact on girls.

To Provincial Education Authorities

Increase the Availability of Government Schools

- Rehabilitate, build, and establish new schools, especially for girls.
- Until government schools are universally available, develop a program for providing scholarships to good-quality private schools for girls living in areas not served by government schools.
- In consultation with school officials, students, communities, and relevant local government officials, provide free or affordable transport for students who would need to travel long distances or through difficult environments to get to a government school.
- Introduce a partial or fully subsidized transport program for students in urban areas to travel to government schools.

Increase Girls' Participation in Education

- Ensure universal access to free primary and secondary education, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 4, including by:
 - Abolishing all tuition, registration and exam fees at government schools;
 - Providing all needed school supplies to all students, including notebooks, pens, pencils, and a book bag;
 - Abolishing uniform requirements, or providing uniforms at no cost to students;
 - Reforming the system for providing textbooks, to ensure that every student receives free use of a full set of textbooks in a timely manner each school year.
- Instruct all principals to work with school staff to do outreach in the catchment area for each school, identifying out-of-school children and working with families to convince them to send their children to school.

- Develop and ensure compliance with guidelines that prohibit schools from excluding students based on their lack of identification or birth certificate.
- Require schools to permit children to enroll at any point in the school year.
- Ensure that every school has an active school management committee, and that the staff of the school are working with the committee to identify and reach out-of-school children in the community.
- Explore options for increasing attendance by girls from poor families through scholarships, food distribution or meal programs at girls' schools.
- Develop and implement a plan to increase access to alternative forms of education for children and adults who have been unable to study during their school-age years.

Improve Retention of Girls in School

- Adopt mechanisms to ensure all schools regularly monitor students who are out of school for prolonged periods of time or drop out of school altogether and reach out to determine the reasons for non-attendance and seek to re-engage the student in school.
- Instruct each principal of a school for girls to work with police in the area to identify locations where girls walking to school face harassment or threats and enlist police and community leaders in preventing such threats to their safety and taking quick action when girls encounter them.
- Take steps to help ensure cases of harassment and threats are reported to appropriate enforcement authorities, including police, and that cases are duly investigated and appropriately prosecuted.
- Require each school to develop a security plan in consultation with students and parents, with each plan for a mixed or girls' school giving special attention to security issues of concern to girls including sexual harassment.
- Develop guidelines for teachers and principals on monitoring the student body for girls at risk of child marriage. When girls are identified as being at risk, school staff should reach out to the family to discourage the marriage and to keep the girl in school.
- When female students marry, school staff should advocate with the girl's family and in-laws to convince them to allow her to continue her studies. Married girls should be both permitted and encouraged to continue their studies, including during pregnancy and if they have children, and schools should where possible provide childcare assistance.

- Develop a plan to expand access to middle and high school for girls through the government education system, including establishment of new schools and colleges and, where possible, adding additional grades to existing schools.

Improve the Quality of Education

- Strengthen the system for monitoring and quality assurance of all schools, not only for government schools but also private schools and madrasas.
- Hire and deploy more qualified teachers as needed.
- Ensure adequate qualification requirements are in place and applied for teachers, and provided domestically competitive salaries, commensurate with their roles, and where necessary provide financial incentives to encourage teachers, especially female teachers, to work in under-served areas of the country.
- Strengthen measures to monitor quality of instruction and teacher attendance.
- Publicly prohibit all school staff from using any form of corporal punishment and take appropriate disciplinary action against any employee violating this rule.
- Include mandatory training on alternative forms of class management and teacher discipline in all teacher trainings. Ensure teachers are adequately trained in positive forms of class management, and ensure teachers are provided with sufficient materials and tools to adequately manage large classrooms.
- Ensure that all newly constructed schools have adequate boundary walls, safe and private toilets with hygiene facilities, and access to safe drinking water. Work promptly to install boundary walls, toilets with hygiene facilities and a safe drinking water source in existing schools that do not have them, with the goal of all schools having these facilities.

Improve Transparency and Accountability

- Strengthen anti-corruption anti-nepotism mechanisms to ensure that anyone who encounters corruption or nepotism by government education officials has access to effective and responsive complaint mechanisms. Strengthen internal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the performance of ministry efforts at the local, district, provincial and national levels, and make findings public.
- Include in all job announcements and recruitment materials statements explaining that it is an offense for anyone to demand a bribe at any stage in the recruitment process for teachers and include information on how applicants can confidentially report any such demands. Appropriately sanction or seek prosecution of any official found to have demanded bribes.

Enforce Compulsory Education

- Develop a phased plan to achieve Sustainable Development Goal target 4.1, by 2030 ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education. Gradually roll out compulsory education across the country, including through public awareness strategies, plans for engaging community leaders, and systems for identifying and engaging out-of-school children and their families.
- Develop, and ensure compliance with, guidelines that require government schools to ensure that all children of compulsory school age enrol and complete at least lower secondary school.

To Non-State Armed Groups in Pakistan

- Respect the right of girls and boys to education in all areas that are contested or under the influence or control of anti-government forces. Issue clear orders to all commanders and fighters forbidding them from attacking or threatening schools, teachers, students, and families of students.
- Immediately cease all attacks against schools that are not lawful military objectives. Take appropriate disciplinary action against individuals who are responsible for unlawful attacks on schools.
- Take appropriate disciplinary action against individuals responsible for attacks or threats against girls' education. Order commanders and fighters not to interfere with the operation of schools.
- Order commanders to avoid use of schools and school property for camps, barracks, deployment, or as depots for weapons, ammunition, and materiel in accordance with the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- Immediately cease the use of inherently indiscriminate weapons such as improvised explosive devices near schools as well as other populated areas.

To International Donors and Agencies Supporting Pakistan

- Urge the government of Pakistan to comply with international and domestic laws and policies supporting girls' right to education, including through implementation of the recommendations above.
- Continue to fund girls' education at current or higher levels until the government can devote sufficient government revenue to education to maintain the current

system and expand it in order to meet the goal of universal access to primary and secondary education.

- Ensure new construction of schools are funded, designed and constructed to include water and sanitation facilities. Provide funding and support to construct water and sanitation facilities in schools previously constructed that do not have adequate water and sanitation facilities.
- Improve coordination among donors at the local level to ensure appropriate distribution across the country of donor-funded education services.
- Work with the Pakistan government to discourage the military use of schools, encourage security forces to vacate occupied schools, and promote security force policies and practices that better protect schools.

Acknowledgments

This report was written by a Human Rights Watch researcher, based on research by that researcher and by an independent consultant. Elin Martinez, children’s rights researcher, contributed additional research.

The report was edited and reviewed by: Liesl Gertholtz, director of women’s rights; Tom Porteous, deputy program director; Saroop Ijaz, Pakistan researcher; Zama Neff, children’s rights director; and Aisling Reidy, senior legal advisor.

Production assistance was provided by Agnieszka Bielecka, associate in the Women’s Rights Division; Fitzroy Hepkins, administrative manager; and Jose Martinez, senior administration coordinator.

Human Rights Watch would like to thank all the experts, activists, teachers, principals, and community leaders who kindly agreed to speak with us. We regret that the environment in Pakistan toward NGOs makes it unwise to thank them here by name. We acknowledge the important work Pakistani organizations are doing to push for, and achieve, education reform and to educate some of the children falling through the cracks in the existing system. Our greatest gratitude is, of course, for the girls and young women and their families who welcomed us into their homes and shared their stories with us.