Comparative Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cced20

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To cite this article: Aliya Khalid (2023) Mothers and their daughters' education: a comparison of global and local aspirations, Comparative Education, 59:2, 259-281, DOI: 10.1080/03050068.2023.2186656

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2186656

Published online: 16 Mar 2023.

COMPARATIVE EDUCATION
2023, VOL. 59, NO. 2, 259–281
https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2186656

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Mothers and their daughters' education: a comparison of global and local aspirations

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ABSTRACT

Through a comparative analysis of policy texts from UN organisations and scholarly work since the 1990s this paper examines how mothers are portrayed in simplistic terms, as educated thus beneficial for their daughters' schooling, or deprived of education causing detriment to their daughters' future prospects. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with mothers from rural Pakistan, these global comparisons are brought into conversation with local narratives showing how mothers' aspirations facilitate daughters' educational opportunities. It is argued that mothers' subjectivities have a potential to inform global policy discourses for investigating the aspirational and transformational potential of mothers in contexts of material and social constraint. The paper proposes an informed approach to educational research and policy making which seeks to understand the processes surrounding mothers' support for their daughters' education.

KEYWORDS

Gender and education; mothers' aspirations; global and local educational policies; social transformations; intergenerational educational mobility; Pakistan

Introduction

This paper examines how the relationship between mothers and their daughters' education has been viewed since the 1990s in a number of key global policy texts and the scholarly literature which has underpinned these formulations. Since the 1990s gender has been a focus for global and local education policy reform, identifying mothers' role in supporting their daughters' schooling as a key to successful implementation. The nature of this mother-daughter support network for education has evolved from a formulation based on human capital investment in the 1990s to a theme of social and emotional support in 2022. In comparing aspects of the global policy discourse with issues raised in semi-structured interviews conducted in 2017 with mothers from rural neighbourhoods in Pakistan, living in conditions associated with economic and social insecurity, the discussion highlights what is omitted from accounts formulated 'from above' a level often associated with the global' (Vidovich* 2004, 341).

An exploration of the situated experiences of a group of mothers in Pakistan, who give voice to their aspirations for themselves and their daughters, requires a deep understanding

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of who Pakistani mothers are with respect to their histories and activism, acknowledging diversity and nuance. I have tried to approach the task drawing on levels of reflexivity and some experientially based knowledge of the terrain. I see myself as a Pakistani mother, acknowledging my privilege, which places me outside direct exposure to the structures of disadvantage in the lives of the women interviewed in 2017. I draw some comfort, in navigating this gap, from the fact that I have aged through times when Pakistani women mobilised in feminist solidarity, whether it was to protest the regressive gendered laws in the 1980s, or the new wave of feminism in Pakistan since 2018 demonstrated in women's marches against gendered oppression. I have witnessed both direct action and how women have engaged in feminist struggle through other forms of resistance including writing and theatre. I have been inspired by efforts that Pakistani activists and lawyers have made in bringing about some remarkable legal reforms concerning women's rights. Human rights lawyers, Asma Jehangir and Hina Jilani, have pushed back on patriarchal systems of power, helping to form my perspective. Renowned feminist poets, including Fehmida Riaz, Kishwar Naheed, Parveen Shakir, through their work responding to events at specific moments have acquainted me with a wider range of historic insights on women's activism than was available in my own circle (Rana and Shahed 2020; Naheed and Ahmed 2018; Kiran 2015). The most recent wave of feminism in Pakistan in 2022–2023, calling out the silence towards gender-based violence, is another landmark that continues to shape my ideas about the gendered struggles of Pakistani women.

The history of feminist dissent in Pakistan is rich and complex. When, in the 1980s the dictatorship of the time, attempting to garner populist support from extremist groups, used an Islamization process to introduce gender regressive policies, women were active in pushing back (Chaudhry 2009). Since then, women have used media such as theatre (Mazhar 2009; Anjum Bhatti 2017) and poetry (Riaz 2021) to express opposition to repressive legislation. The power of feminist thought in Pakistan, endorsed by Islamic feminist frameworks (Al-Sharmani 2014), came as a reaction to oppressive regimes, but many local extremist versions of religious thought hindered broad feminist agendas in Pakistan and continue to do so today. As a scholar I protest the conditions of inequality and injustice and know I must take heed not to lose sight of the subjectivity of Pakistani women, particularly those living in underrepresented neighbourhoods. In this article I illuminate the ways in which women and communities function, bound in interdependent relationships, striving towards what they value, comparing this with some of the ways they appear in the discourses of powerful global organisations.

The paper thus presents an analysis that compares features of the global/broad and the local/specific. The discussion of policy discourses associated with the global sets the scene for a comparison with the localised experiences of mothers in rural neighbourhoods in Pakistan to consider what is omitted from global policy discourses and scholarly work, and what can be included to make up for these omissions. The first part of the paper reviews global policy discourses drawing on an analysis of key documents from the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (1995– 2022). The methods for the investigation centred on a word search in the 34 selected documents for 'mothers', 'family', 'girls' education' and 'parents'. The text generated from these searches were read together to understand the narratives that were being created in the policy texts. Similarities and differences between the three UN organisations were considered and themes identified in the way the relationship of the education of mothers and daughters was conceptualised and

portrayed. The second part of the paper analyses research based discussions by the Brookings Institute and the World Bank between 1993 and 2014 focussing on the ways the relationship of mothers' and daughters' education was investigated. The third part compares these distillations of a global perspective with considerations about the local, by presenting data collected from qualitative interviews conducted in Pakistan with 12 families in 2017, highlighting narratives through which mothers describe their relationship with their daughters' education and some of the ways they relate their aspirations and dreams for their future. The conclusion focuses on how the insights generated from the interviews can help inform policy and practice.

Global policy discourses and UN organisations

Since 1990 key policy texts produced by powerful UN organisations – the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO -have identified women's education as a means to develop economies and eradicate poverty. Even post 2000s when the common vocabulary globally was turning from GDP preference to wellbeing and happiness indicators (Kim 2022), little has been written examining international organisations' focus on 'performance based' and quantitative indicators and its 'counterproductive' effects on social justice (Vaughan and Longlands 2022, 1). Issues arise as social processes of support cannot be valued in terms of 'performance' but very little has been written to examine these global formulations. All three organisations signed up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000–2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015–2030), both of which featured women's education as a key component of their vision. In the conception of both the MDGs (Goals, 2 and 3) and the SDGs (Goals, 4 and 5) education and gender are presented as separate goals (Taylor and Mahon 2019). The MDGs had separate goals for addressing child mortality (Goal 4) and maternal health (Goal, 5). The SDGs focus on quality education and women's empowerment highlighting economic opportunities, political participation, and decisions on health (Wulff 2020; Eden and Wagstaff 2021). In these global frameworks women appear as independent rights bearers and in their relational role as mothers, for example SDG 5.4.1 which recognises 'and value [s] unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family' (United Nations 2021, 1). Some of these threads appear in the key policy texts of the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO.

Table 1 presents the conceptualisations of the relationship between mothers and their children's education emerging across the policy documents of the three organisations. Across the three organisations, and a thirty year stretch of policy making, several common themes emerge. These cohere around the idea that mothers, whether in terms of their education, empowerment, or possession of assets, are key to any improvement in the general well-being of their children and, particularly, their daughters. A linear connection is made but the focus changes over time. An initial idea is that investments made to increase mothers' economic and educational resources will translate into an improvement in their children's, specifically their daughters' educational and health prospects. This changes to a looser notion of the ways in which mothers can support emotional and social wellbeing associated with a delay in marriage or improved learning outcomes.

Table 1. Thematic comparisons of global policy documents: World Bank UNICEF and UNESCO (1995–2022).

	Educated mothers and educational benefits for children	Educated mothers and children's health	Employed mothers and children's wellbeing and education	Socioemotionally sensitised mothers and their support for children	Literate mothers and their daughters' education	Absent mothers and negative consequences for children
World Bank	**World Development Report 1995** Educated mothers devote more resources to children's wellbeing and prioritise their education (26) **The World Development Report 2018** 'Better-educated mothers raise healthier and more educated children' (41) **World Development Report 2019** Children whose mothers have even a single year of education spend an extra hour a day studying at home' (51)	**World Development Report 2000** Mothers' education and postive impact on child nutrition (77) Mothers' education positively related with child cognitive development (119)"	**World Development Report 2020** 'Young women in villages exposed to the Global Value Chain-dominated garment sector delay marriage and childbirth, and young girls gain an additional 1.5 years of schooling' (68) **World Development Report 2013** 'Jobs for women can change the way households spend money and invest in the education and health of children' (2).	**World Development Report 2015** "mothers who provide more attenion to children have better learning experiences (103) Socio-emotional contributions of mothers missing from some contexts-lower economic context countries (14)	**World Dvelopment Report 2010** Mothers' literacy to help children with school work (26)	
UNESCO	**Global Education Monitoring Report 2020** Early childhood education participation of children is significantly lower for those with less educated mothers (44)	**Global Monitoring Report 2010** Less educated women are at higher risk for losing infants (53)		**Global Education Monitoring Report 2022** Incarcerated mothers who live and interact with their children during early stages have a positive impact on their wellbeing (154)	**Global Monitoring Report 2005** 'mothers' literacy skills are often associated with their school-age children's participation in education (130)'	**Global Education Monitoring Report 2019** The language of 'absent' mothers and its adverse impact on children's grades (20)
UNICEF		**Annual Report 2015** High mortality rates of children whose mothers lack education (21)	**Annual Report 2000** 6 out of 10 school going age children's mothers are unemployed (9)	**Annual Report 2020** Psychosocial interventions for parenting-example of mother not yelling at her children after being exposed to the UNESCO's psychosocial support interventions for parents in Ecuador (29)		

Across the organisations' policy texts, mothers are constructed as a group to be empowered economically, supported to have good health or literacy, in order to bring about positive consequences for their children.

In policy documents from the World Bank, a key theme is women's participation (or lack of) in the labour market. Women's employment in the formal sector is shown to have a positive impact on their children's, especially girls' education (World Bank 2013, 2020; UNICEF 2000). The World Bank's 2020 World Development Report shows that when women engage in global value chains, early marriages are reduced and approximately 1.5 years of schooling is increased for girls (World Bank 2020, 68). A related connection is made with mothers' capacity to devote more resources to their children's education. For example, the World Bank 1995 report states that mothers who are educated tend to devote more resources on their children's wellbeing and education. An assumption for mothers would be that an overall expenditure increase on children's education would be achieved if mothers had more access to resources through direct or indirect involvement in the labour market. UNICEF's 2000 report warns that 6 out of 10 children have mothers who are unemployed decreasing their educational possibilities (9). World Development Report (2013) makes the observation that when mothers are employed the household spending for education is increased (World Bank 2013, 2). However, mother's employment did not emerge as a theme in UNESCO documents.

The themes in the reports summarised in Table 1 show that complex relationships between mothers' work and daughters' education are presented in a very simplistic manner. The implication is that increasing employment opportunities for women will achieve better learning and wellbeing outcomes for children. For example, World Bank's 2020 and 2013 reports argue that when women are engaged in industries and 'Global Value Chains' daughters' gain additional years of education (World Bank 2020, 68) and women's employment improves household expenditures on education (World Bank 2013, 2). But this portrayal lacks a 'transformative approach' and does not acknowledge the social realities of women participating in the labour market, exploitative relationships and unsafe working conditions, which may not allow such ambitions to be achieved (Kaltenborn, Krajewski, and Kuhn 2020, 108).

There is a recognition, across all three agencies' reports, that when mothers are involved in the education of their children or present, the learning and wellbeing outcomes increase for their children (see mentions in World Bank 1995, 2019; UNESCO 2020; UNICEF 2015). The World Development Reports note that involved mothers improve children's learning experiences (The World Bank 2015, 103) and cognitive development (World Bank 2000, 119). The World Bank highlights that a large proportion of children in poorer households have learning difficulties, although socioemotional education for mothers can ameliorate this (The World Bank 2015, 103 & 14). Socioemotional aspects are picked up by UNICEF in their 2020 report. Psychosocial interventions were cited as a means to improve mothers' interactions with children. The UNICEF 2020 report states how psychosocial support was provided to communities in eastern Ukraine, reaching approximately 20,000 children and young people (UNICEF 2020, 15). In Ecuador 'Based on this work and with the aim of creating a methodology for psychosocial interventions in parenting, seven parenting guides were created, reaching more than 600,000 unique users through Facebook and Instagram' (UNICEF 2020, 29). In Ecuador an example is shared where after receiving an intervention a mother notes, 'Before I yelled at them all day

long, and now I am starting to talk to them. The mother I was before no longer exists (UNESCO 2020, 29).' Mothers, who experience oppressive conditions impact their children's wellbeing, but this relationship can be positive. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report in 2022 states that incarcerated in jail mothers have an opportunity to be involved in their children's development and wellbeing by virtue of being close (UNESCO 2022, 154).

Evidence, used by all three organisations, claim that investing in mothers' literacy and education yields health and education related advantages for children and daughters (World Bank 1995, 2000, 2019; UNESCO 2010, 2020; UNICEF 2015). The educated mother, presented in these reports, is literate and has received formal education at least to the end of primary school. By virtue of these characteristics, she is able to support her children in multiple ways, making informed decisions about their health and education, improving their outcomes. The 2010 World Development Report (World Bank 2010, 26) notes literate mothers are capable of supporting their children with schoolwork. UNESCO's 2005 Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2005, 130) shows that children's school participation is associated with mothers' literacy's skills.

Mothers' education is connected with children's health and nutrition by the World Bank (World Bank 2000, 77 & 119) and a lack of mother's education is linked with increased child mortality rates by UNESCO and UNICEF (UNESCO 2010, 53; UNICEF 2015, 21). With only a 'single year of education' mothers can provide increased support with schoolwork for children (World Bank 2019, 51). UNESCO notes 'the participation by girls in school reflects in part the educational level of the mother' (UNESCO 2010, 105). A later report states that 'ECCE (early childhood care and education) participation is significantly lower among children who have immigrant or less educated mothers (UNESCO, 2020, 44)'.

In recent years mothers' social and psychosocial contributions to their daughters' and children's learning are noted. UNESCO's 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report notes the case of 'absent' mothers that have left behind their children after migrating for work with adverse effects on children's grades (UNESCO, 2019, 20). UNICEF's 2020 report states that psychosocial interventions for parenting were provided during the pandemic (5). In UNICEF's Strategic plan's vocabulary (UNICEF 2022) there is an emphasis on the structural barriers such as, 'extreme poverty, geography, conflict, discrimination, exclusion' (15) and harmful 'social norms, cultural practices, humanitarian crises and other harmful actions undermine children's safety and well-being in every country' (13).

Increasingly, within these discussions relating to the 'global family' (UNICEF 2020, 2), 'international community' (The World Bank 2022, 223) and 'removal of structural barriers' (UNICEF 2022, p. 17), mothers and their work in families emerge as a central response to the pandemic. We see a focus on understanding how women/mothers as held back economically by childcare (UNESCO 2022, 136; The World Bank 2022, 223) and an increased focus on 'family friendly policies' (UNICEF 2020, p. 41) and the importance of 'family and friends', for instance in terms of borrowing in times of need (The World Bank 2022, 56 & 74). There is a lack of attention to how mothers facilitate education for their children regardless of economic and social precarity at a time when they were the primary care and education providers. This has strong implications for how we view recovery in the future, what analytical frame is used and who is considered as providers for an equitable recovery and whose efforts are omitted. Without a recognition of these relations which

include mothers among others, socially workable policies are unlikely to achieve success. The challenge of situated voices often left unheard is one that has been raised by many scholars. For example, Moletsane's (2022) study on issues of gendered violence in a university campus of South Africa draws attention to photovoice as a means used by the participants to communicate critical perspectives about their circumstances. For Moletsane it is essential that subdued voices are vocalised and heard. Similarly, it is essential that in the global policy and academic narratives the omitted perspectives of mothers are also recognised.

Another issue with the documents reviewed from these three organisations is that in making the case for links between mothers and daughters' education with regard to employment, literacy and increased attainment, the discussion provides no information on *how* supporting mothers' education can lead to educational equity and improving girls' education and the onus is placed primarily/wholly on women. Causal links are asserted, but the associated processes are not discussed. Exploring the intricate structures of social support to children and their mothers requires documenting the social relations, adaptations and aspirations of support systems developed by mothers. The focus in policy texts on learning outcomes or mothers' employment does not open up these issues for consideration.

The policy texts of the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (1995–2022) show various tropes which link women's employment, literacy or completion of primary education, the construction of the relationship with their children's wellbeing and especially their daughters' education. Research produced by academics, working in close alliance with these UN organisations, has been particularly influential in developing this association. In the next section I trace the connections between the positions distilled through the reports of the three agencies and the work of researchers working at two influential Washington based institutions – the Brookings Institute and the World Bank's research department.

Scholarly perspectives on mothers and girls' education

Some of the most influential scholarly work that provided academic evidence for the discourse on mothers as a useful investment to support their daughters' education came from World Bank researchers, Anne Hill and Elizabeth King (King and Hill 1993; Hill and King 1995). Their 1993 book, published by the World Bank, argues, 'Rising levels of education improve women's productivity in the home which in turn can increase family health, child survival, and investment in children's human capital (King and Hill 1993, 22)'. The discussion constructs a binary between mothers, who are successful/educated/literate, and mothers, who are unsuccessful/ uneducated/illiterate. An educated/literate mother, the analysis suggests, would automatically translate into success for her children's health and education. No questions were asked in this analysis as to how mothers express and enact personal motivations for their daughters' health and education, and what restrictions they encountered to the exercise of their rights. An image was deployed of mothers, who were either good for themselves, their daughters and others when educated, or the opposite. These connections are evident in excerpts from King and Hill's 1993 work.

King and Hill (1993) stress 'recent research and concrete calculations show that educating females yields far-reaching benefits for girls and women themselves, their families, and the society in which they live (v)'. Table 2 distils key elements of this argument. The multidimensionality of poverty is presented simplistically in a story communicating clear policy messages. The story of the unsuccessful/uneducated/illiterate mother is a story of disadvantage. The role of the mother is minimised, and the discussion is taken over by patriarchy. The male earner makes impossible and tragic choices which ultimately result in the death of the daughter. What does this story tell us? It tells us that if a mother has never entered school, she is invisible and of negligible consequence. In the reports analysed in the section above, it can be seen that often mothers are presented as investments for future generations. This analysis draws on the ideas distilled by King and Hill. The clear suggestion is that if a mother has education, wellbeing and learning outcomes for their daughters will automatically follow.

Several studies, published between1995 and 2012, drawing on data from many countries in the Global South, expanded this analysis and focused on the various attributes of parents, most notably mothers identifying a statistical association with daughters' educational and health outcomes. Some examples of this work, influenced by King and Hill's analysis, are listed in Table 3. These studies all confirm the future benefits to be derived from mothers' investment in their daughters' schooling.

After 2012, the discourse of the 'learning crisis' emerged in UN organisations (Clarke 2022; Sriprakash, Tikly, and Walker 2019). Focus shifted from an earlier generalised future educational benefit, associated with girls' education, as in the work of King and Hill (1995) to a specific and immediate focus on 'what works' to enhance learning outcomes. Sperling and Winthrop's (2015) influential literature review for the Washington based Brookings Institute was entitled: '*What works in girls' education: Evidence for the world's best investment*'. The book sought to trace the wins and losses associated with girls' education. This is portrayed as an investment: 'when girls are educated, they become educated mothers who are far more likely to encourage both their daughters and sons to go to school and to become more dedicated students. And this is perhaps the greatest return from girls' education (Sperling and Winthrop 2015, 13)'. Some

Table 2. The failure success binary of mothers Hill and King (1993).

Moral of the story: Failure	Moral of the stiry: Success
A poor family has six children. The mother never attended school, was married at age 15, and remains illiterate. Her husband earns most of the family's meagre income and decides how it is spent. Since his own economic security depends on his son's ability to support him in his old age, he insists that the boys go to school, while the girls remain at home to do chores. When his daughter becomes ill, he feels that he cannot afford to make the two-day trip with her to the medical clinic in the city. The daughter dies' (1993, *p*.iv)	A poor family has three children. The mother went to school for five years and is able to read and do arithmetic well enough to teach school in the village. As her last birth was extremely difficult, she and her husband adopted family planning. She now has more time and resources to spend on her family. Hoping for a better future for her children, she insists that they all go to school and practice their reading each night. When one of her daughters gets sick and does not seem to be getting better, she takes her to the medical clinic. The doctor gives the mother some ampicillin tablets and instructs her to give them to any of the children who fall ill. The daughter's strep infection is cured, as is the infection of the son, who is running a high fever by the time the mother returns home' (1993, *p*. iv)

*Table headings added.

Table 3. Scholarly work linking mothers' and parents' relationship with their children's health and schooling.

Author	Year	Evidence base	Context	Approaches
Sathar and Lloyd	1994	Statistical analysis of household level survey	Pakistan	Impact of parental decisions on children's schooling
Jejeebhoy	1995	Literature review	Global South ('developing countries)'	Role of families in human capital investment
Strauss and Thomas	1995	Statistical modelling	Multiple contexts	Role of families in human resource investments
Dreze and Kingdon	1999	Statistical analysis of household survey data	Rural India	Lack of parental; and child motivation for school participation
Chowdhuri and Nath	2002	Statistical analysis of survey data	Bangladesh	Greater likelihood of mothers with education to send their daughters to school
Sabates et al	2011	Statistical analysis of DHA dataset	Sub Saharan Africa	Strong association between mothers' education and their daughters schooling
Aslam and Kingdon	2011	Statistical analysis of household level dataset	Pakistan	Intrahousehold expenditure on the education of sons and daughters
Blick and Sahn	2012	Statistical analysis of DHA dataset	Tanzania	Intergenerational benefits of mothers' education

themes related with education such as investment, evidence and community development are evident in a word cloud presentation of Sperling and Winthrop's (2015) book (Figure 1).

The book refers to mothers 143 times (weighted average of total text 0.3%) and to parents 64 times (weighted average 0.13%). Within these mentions some themes are visible in the ways that mothers' and parents' educational relationships are conceptualised. Some of these themes are illustrated in Table 4 which presents selected quotations from the book.

Mothers are, as in the reports of the global agencies, mostly depicted as a potential investment in order to achieve better health and educational benefits for children (Sperling and Winthrop 2015, Theme A: pp. 29, 32, 38 & 59; Theme B: 13, 40, 42 & 43) and personal autonomy and decision-making power (Sperling and Winthrop 2015, Theme C: 52). Parents are presented as passive in terms of educational progress and often depicted as responsible for conservative decisions for their daughters' education due to poverty related issues (Sperling and Winthrop 2015, Theme D: pp. 7, 12, 49 & 106). Here mothers as a distinct group become invisible. What is notable in the text is the simplistic way in which education is conceptualised for girls who are assumed to become mothers and will pass on all of these disadvantages to their children. Susmita Mitra states in her review of the book that both the authors make a strong case for the benefits to girls':

> In developed countries positive returns from investing in girls' education might be limited to only income and economic growth, however when it comes to developing nations, evidence shows that high returns are spread over various crucial areas – including improving children's and women's survival rates and health, reducing population growth, protecting children's right and delaying child marriage, empowering women in the home and in the workplace,

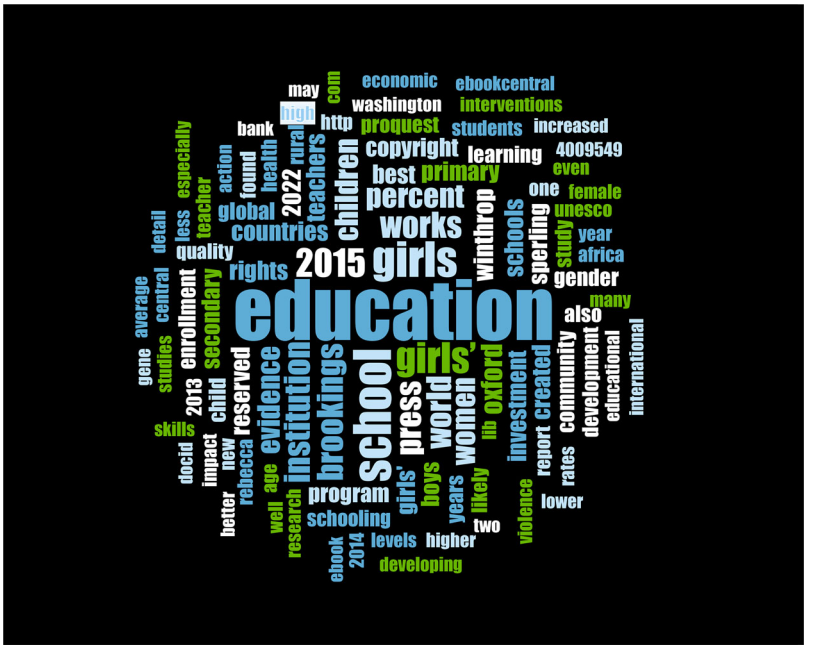

Figure 1. Winthrop and Sperling, 2016-word cloud. Notes: The word cloud was created by uploading the PDF version of the book on to NVIVO and using its word cloud function.

> and improving even climate change adaptation (Sperling and Winthrop 2015 in Mitra 2019, 556).

These benefits are not just for girls, but for the mothers they will and will not become.

Ideas about parents and mothers merge with the ideas of family and community. Sperling and Winthrop argue that information asymmetries affect girls' education in a way that parents with little education do not understand the broad advantages related with girls' education. The issue with presenting parents in this light is that of erasing the specificity of social contexts and situations to an extent that these assumptions erase the subjectivities of parents in relation with their daughters' education. In particular mothers are depicted as a force unmatched in Sperling and Winthrop's (2015) work stating:

> we know that when girls are educated, they become educated mothers who are far more likely to encourage both their daughters and sons to go to school and to become more dedicated students. And this is perhaps the greatest return from girls' education: the belief that when a single girl who would have been denied an education receives a high-quality education, it starts a positive cycle of education and empowerment from mother to daughter, generation after generation. Perhaps no specific study of the hundreds cited in this book can ever precisely calculate the generational impact of the positive ripple created by a single girl overcoming barrier after barrier to get a high-quality education – and yet, even in a book on evidence, this inter-generational impact we take on faith is one more reason that there is no greater investment in the world than educating girls (Sperling and Winthrop 2015, 13).

Strong associations are made between women's/mothers' education and its impact on not only the increased likelihood of their children's school attendance but also on the

Table 4. Themes around mothers and parents in Sperling and Winthrop 2015.

Theme A Educated mothers and children's health	Theme B Educated mothers and educational benefits for children	Theme C Educated mothers and impact on personal agency and decision-making	Theme D Passive mothers/parents making also making unfavourable decisions for daughters
• Children's lives are saved when mothers have a better education (29) • Mothers' education reduces malnutrition and stunting (38) • Mothers' schooling decreases chances of their children's survival (32) • 'More educated mothers are able to protect their children's welfare through a higher quality of care and their greater ability to mitigate adverse shocks, such as food price changes, that might reduce food intake' (59)	• Mothers' education increases children's schooling (40 & 42) • 'When girls are educated, they become educated mothers who are far more likely to encourage both their daughters and sons to go to school and to become more dedicated students (13). • 'Multiple studies have found that a mother's level of education has a strong positive effect on her daughters' enrollment – more than on son's and significantly more than the effect of fathers' education on daughters' (43).	• 'Education plays a major role for women and girls: 'Around the world, we see that better educated women are often better able to make and implement decisions and choices, even where gender norms are restrictive (Klugman et al. 2014 in Sperling and Winthrop 2015, 52)'.	• 'Around the world, parents of large and poor families, when forced to pay a fee for each child, will often choose to educate only their boys (7).' • 'Many poor parents who choose not to send their girls to school simply do not believe that education can provide an alternative economic path for their daughters (12).' • 'With parents unable to afford to pay fees for all their children, many poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized families were forced to choose which of their children to enroll. More often than not, a preference for boys meant that millions of girls were kept out of school (106)'. • 'Findings from various country studies show that girls who are doing poorly in school, not learning well, and falling behind are sometimes being pulled out of school by their parents in order to marry (49).

generations to come. The importance of this role is highlighted emphasising girls' education as 'no greater investment in the world' (13). Educated Mothers reduce malnutrition and stunting (38) and improve children's schooling (42)

In contrasting the very precise role assigned to mothers in King and Hill's work, and the more diffuse intergenerational role in Sperling and Winthrop a number of questions arise. These centre on why is it that mothers do or do not take certain decisions about girls' education, what alternatives they consider and how choices are impacted by the involvement of others. This knowledge is essential to understand the social contexts and enablers so that the potential efforts to drive access and quality education for girls has greater impact. The following section draws on a small-scale study in a local setting to consider what has been missed from the accounts emerging from policy texts and the research linked to global policy.

Focusing on the local and the specific

In contrast to the ways in which mothers are presented in the global policy texts and the research work summarised in the earlier discussion, the empirical study reveals that there is considerable nuance and complexity in the way mothers talk about their relationship with their daughters' education. Data collected from a small qualitative study conducted in 2017 in Pakistan[1] provides a fine-grained perspective on the relationship of mothers with their daughters' education. 12 mothers from a rural community I call Virasatpur in Punjab Pakistan were interviewed after a 2-stage recruitment process including surveys and house visits. The interview schedules drew on theoretical concepts of aspirations and agency from the capability approach (Conradie and Robeyns 2013). Of particular importance to the study were aspirations for 'alternative futures' and how mothers could make these possible for their daughters through piecemeal actions and constant reflections (DeJaeghere 2018, 99). DeJaeghere (2019) in her 5-year study with Tanzanian and Ugandan youth shows that often the processes of education can create the possibilities for those who participate of imagining alternative futures. She argues that 'Out-of-school youth are often characterised as … idle … essentially excluded from being citizens of their societies' (p, 99), without much reflection on how processes of growth emerge in these contexts in the shape of imagining futures outside of these conditions of deprivation. Similar perceptions about mothers who lacked education were evident in King and Hill's 1995 account. This conclusion was challenged by Conradie and Robeyns (2013) in their action research with women, with minimal education, in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. Conradie and Robeyns (2013) argue that when aspirations are treated as an important part of awareness-raising initiatives (process of voicing, examining and then realising their aspirations), reflection and deliberation practices are revealed. They argue that deliberations on women's aspirations demonstrate an agency-unlocking role. The study I conducted in rural Pakistan set out to explore mothers' deliberations that could lead to agency-unlocking considerations of a goal of education for their daughters.

The demographic characteristics of participants in the study are illustrated in Table 5. Most of the families interviewed were manual labourers. Brick kilns and orange farming were the main income-generating opportunities for people. Many children in the village were helping to earn a livelihood for their families. Daughters substituted for mothers in the home, as mothers spent time working in the fields, orange orchards, kilns or

collecting fodder to feed the cattle. Sons worked as manual labourers at the kilns or in the fields. I noticed that in many households all the family members were working to fulfil the basic needs of the family. Men were mostly manual labourers; in only three of the households where interviews were conducted were male members engaged in white collar jobs (teaching, clerical work, and retail). Eight mothers were based at home, three were working in the fields or kilns, and one, was assisting her husband in his shop. Two families lived in temporary constructions on land owned by the large landholders, for whom they worked. Their work conditions were very poor. Four families had unstable incomes derived from casual labour. Four families owned land but were engaged in temporary jobs which required them constantly to look for work from large landholders. Three families had relatively stable incomes, as shop keepers or in clerical jobs. They owned the land they lived on. Three families own small holdings of agricultural land in the village but were not as financially and politically influential as the ruling elite groups in the neighbourhood.

In contrast to the policy linked reports of global organisations and the selected scholarly work, discussed above, which establish a direct association between mothers and their daughters' education, the study set out to explore the perspectives of mothers on their daughters' schooling, considering the process of education rather than a focus on pre-specified outcomes. In the analysis the contexts and conditions of mothers were considered together with mothers' own aspirations, psychological resources, and motivations with regard to their daughters' schooling.

Reflecting on the data there were two ways of making sense of the socio economic and educational landscape. From one perspective this was a context of opportunity constraint with the people living in Virasatpur deprived of agency, living in a society that does not provide equal opportunities for everyone. Thinking in such a way has implications for policy making. Within this framing the conditions and contexts become important, whereas the subjectivity of the mothers disappears into the background. Some questions could be asked about what the structures of constraint are, and how they limit the potential of women.

From another perspective, the economic and educational background of Virasatpur could be interpreted as one where mothers were adapting to dynamic forces

Table 5. Demographic characteristics of participants interviewed, Virasatpur, 2017.

Total Families 12	7 No school
	5 been to school, lowest completed 2 years highest 10
Mothers' education	38
Mothers' average age	2 worked in the brick kilns
	5 homemakers, also engaged in farming
	5 breadbakers, seamistress and shop minders
Mothers' professions	Manual labour/clerical jobs
Fathers' professions	1 lone family
	2 extended
	8 nuclear families
Family Type	5
Average family size (children)	32 sons
	26 daughters
Number of sons and daughters in the sample	5 never enrolled
	5 dropped out
	4 currently enrolled
Status of school attendance of daughters (available data)	

at play on a global and local level. These perspectives only present a limited view of a context rich with complexity and potential. Closely examining socially rooted knowledges allows for capability reducing as well as expansion mechanisms to reveal themselves. The economic and educational profiles provide a macro analysis of what was and remains historically and presently in terms of economic activity and educational policy mobilisation. It is also important to note that economic and educational processes are intertwined with each other, affecting and being affected by the social context of the region. I discuss this interconnectivity in the following sections.

The economic profile of the country is reliant on the agricultural sector contributing 5% to the overall economy. In the 1960s a new genetically modified High Responsive Seed (HRS) for wheat and rice was introduced in Pakistan (Hayat 2007). This grain yielded dwarf crops that produced more yield and were suitable for tropical regions. These HRS were introduced in Pakistan and India. This brought about what is called the 'green revolution' in these countries. The yield of wheat and rice more than double producing a sizable surplus (Beck 1995; Byerlee and Siddiq 1994). This resulted in increased economic activity with new players entering the market. According to some authors, medium and large farm holders were able to negotiate better prices and there was a noticeable increase in the market activity (Mohammad 1985).

Alongside the improving agricultural economy a social process was set in motion that deepened existing class hierarchies and created new ones. The opportunities that were created at the time only served the farm holders that had the resources to purchase the new high yield seed, fertilisers, and pesticides (Niazi 2004). This brought in extreme disparities and widened the pre-existing income and wealth inequalities, splintering the social class system further, making the rich richer and the poor poorer (Alavi 1972; Ahmad, Shah, and Zahid 2004).

The people of Virasatpur have experienced the changing dynamics of the Green Revolution and expanding educational provision. The economic stratification resulting from the Green Revolution impacted other sectors as a whole including socially reduced access to education for the landless or small-scale farmers. Presently, ownership of land in many rural neighbourhoods whose economy is agriculture based shows the social distance between the large-scale farmer and the landless peasant.

The education landscape reflected some of these economic changes. These changes were impacted by the country's response to global policy making organisations. In 2010 responding to the Education for All agenda, Pakistan passed the 18th Amendment to the constitution. As part of this amendment two insertions related to educational access and opportunities were made in April of the year 2010. One is Article 25 A, which ensures free and compulsory education for children aged 5–16 funded by the state. The second, included a devolution plan for the education sector which transferred powers from the central to the provincial and local governing bodies (Aziz et al. 2014). The implementation of related policies has however been a slow often unsuccessful process due to multiple issues including the absence of required economic resources (Cheema and Naseer 2013). In 2010 a systems level reform called the Punjab Schools Reform Roadmap (PSRR) was launched to address educational challenges of the time including scale, educational provision, and political will (Chaudhry and Tajwar 2020). As a consequence, the ruling governments in Punjab introduced incentives, such as free uniforms

and books, however these provisions often did not reach remote rural areas (Ashraf and Hafiza 2016).

According to the interviewees, seven years after these reforms were introduced, very few government policies were being implemented in the area, and most were not available to the financially weakest families. One mother, Neelum, explained, 'You can't even get zakat [state moderated system of charity dissemination], if you don't have somebody's reference under your belt'. Commenting on policies for educational support, Neelum noted, 'In Sargodha city government schools are giving … stipends as well as school uniforms and books. Here, they [the government] are not giving anything'. No other government policies relating to education available in Virasatpur were mentioned. Some respondents reported that they were noticing a change in the wider educational landscape, 'Sometimes teaching is not good, but now schools have been upgraded. New teachers have joined, and teaching is also getting better. Maybe the situation will change soon (Safia)'. There was awareness about policies in general. Neelum said, 'Women here get Benazir Income Support [a social support programme of cash transfers named after a former prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto], but I can't get that because it is only given to widows '.

Many mothers showed an awareness of changes which offered enlarged opportunities and were keen to engage with schools, if they believed that their children were being treated unfairly. Neelum, who despite having never studied at school, was aware of the rights of her children. She said, 'I keep an eye on the children and the teachers. Once a teacher beat up my children and I went to the school to see them. I told them that, if they don't want to educate the poor, I will go to the higher authorities and tell them what they are doing here. I was very angry. I told them that they don't have an issue teaching the girls from better (rich) families but treating our children like this. The teacher stopped punishing our children then'.

The mothers, even the poorest, expressed a capability to aspire. Their aspirations for their daughters' education were full of hopes, dreams and adaptations which would sometimes be strategic and designed to achieve future goals**.** Parental aspirations have been key in promoting greater educational achievements for their children in Pakistan and elsewhere (Ashraf 2016; Gutman and Akerman 2008). The mothers shared different kinds of aspirations ranging from those appearing to acquiesce in reproducing patriarchal norms and those looking forward to better life and choice for their daughters, that many had been unable to take advantage of for themselves (Khalid 2019, 2022; Khalid and Rose 2022).

In contrast to the themes in the policy and research literature, which stress the outcomes from education, the interview data highlights a concern with processes. The mothers interviewed reveal a concern to play designated gender roles associated with care activities to deal with a changing world, expand the capacity for 'choice', and express a desire for a better life. Thus they considered 'success' for their daughters after achieving education meant that their daughters would find a better marriage partner and have a comfortable future. Daughters needed to be equipped with the necessary skills/education to survive in a changing world. 'Equipping' referred to being literate and numerate, being knowledgeable and wise, being respected and successful. Valuing choice did not mean they expected their daughters would have multiple options to choose from. In fact, for them education meant that their daughters would

have the choice of not submitting to gendered, oppressive roles. This freedom was understood in many ways – having improved earning potential, not being financially dependent on others and, having the choice of not complying with societal expectations and gendered norms.

Some of these findings align with studies from similar settings including India (Sharma and Wotipka 2018; Hussain 2020) that reveal mothers' ability to imagine futures for their daughters that are different from the ones they themselves experience. For example, Hussain in her study with Muslim parents pursuing their daughters' education in Assam India argues that parents use gendered forms of symbolism to 'culturally authorize their daughters as legitimate actors in (and through) the field of education' (Hussain 2020, 3). The data from Virasatpur show that mothers have nuanced aspirations. A mother may anticipate that with an education her daughter will gain the ability to play a gendered role in the society, whilst also desiring that education will eventually help her daughter may have the option to choose between alternatives. Figure 2 illustrates graphically how seemingly gendered aspirations when interpreted holistically, demonstrate transformative potentialities.

Sometimes the same people would simultaneously have gendered as well as transformational aspirations. Two interviewees, Fizza and Kulsoom, were able to articulate the benefits that they anticipated from education and the complex strategies they used to provide support to their daughters. Fizza devised multiple plans for her daughter's education and Kulsoom was doing so through her ability to gather support by creating ties with her in-laws. 'I tell them to study because only then they can become 'someone'

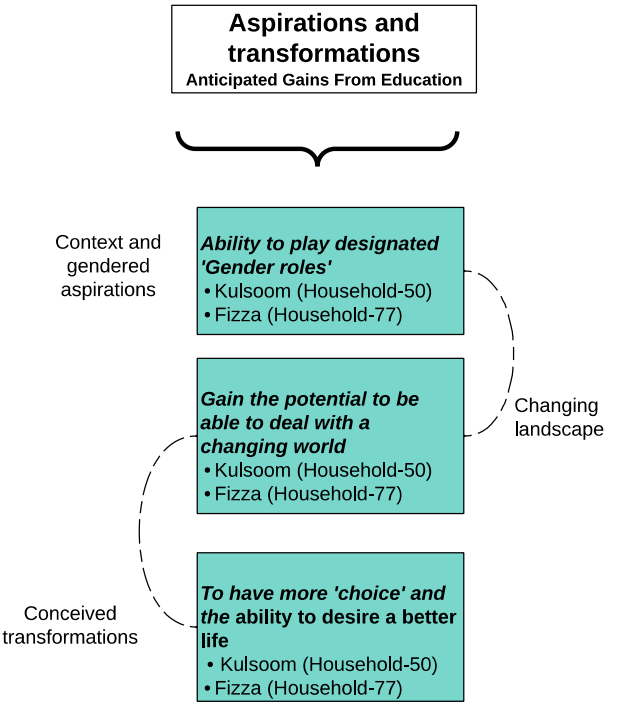

Figure 2. Holistic interpretation of aspirations and transformative potentiatlities.

… I tell them, if you study you will have the 'choice' to live a better life … it is our success as parents as well'.

Mothers seem to be preparing their daughters for gendered roles, but there is an accompanying expectation for education to bring 'independence' for their daughters. This is not unique to these mothers from rural villages of Pakistan. Sharma and Wotipka's (2018) study in India on mothers' aspirations finds that some viewed education as a 'means for independence'.. Kulsoom in Virasatpur says,

> See, good families seek educated girls for their sons. So, a girl's prospects become better if she is educated. Look, you are educated so your match is an educated man. Similarly, everybody feels that way. My sons will also seek educated girls as wives. The irony is that here even if the boy's family isn't educated, they will still prefer an educated girl. Because educated girls are more sensible and wiser (Shaoor-honda).

Fizza seeks a similar possibility and understands that 'education gives more, it gives people a sense of how to conduct oneself socially (uthnay-baithnay-ka-tareeqa-ajata-hai)' and it also allows one to grow and adapt to a changing world. It is important to not lose sight of the complexity of such views. While admitting her belief that education prepares girls to be more sociable and sought after she also understands that without it her children will never be respected:

> I keep telling my children this world now is not for the illiterate (ay-zamana-anparhiyan-da-nahi) … will never have any respect. Without education you have no social standing. People do not want to communicate with you.

There is a belief that their daughters' education would unlock doors to a new world and to make the best of this new world they will need to be independent. Fizza argues,

> If the girls are highly educated, they can find good jobs. They will never have to look to others for help. They will be independent. They can support themselves financially and not have to rely on others.

The data also reveal insights into how mothers' actions, not just aspirations, can be understood. Two mothers from Virasatpur, Maria and Ghazala, explained how aspirations and actions are situated in a broader frame of opportunity structures. Maria comes from an extremely under-resourced household. She dropped out before completing primary school. Without deeper investigation into Maria's situation her profile appears to fit the deficit discourse, but the data illuminate her efforts to provide education to her children.

When I met Maria and her six children, two from her first husband and four from her second, I discovered that her eldest two daughters had never attended school, whereas her younger four children, including one daughter, were currently attending school. The eldest two daughters had shared Maria's domestic responsibilities since childhood and were never given an opportunity to attend school. She was mindful that her eldest two could not attend school and were depressed. She found a solution by enrolling them in a nearby religious school (madrassah). For her the social aspect of schooling was as valuable as the educational.

Maria also hoped that with education her children would lead a better life. She said: 'They will be able to feed themselves and their children. Their futures will be better than our present'. Even though she had left school when she was in year two, she was

making efforts so that her children could achieve a higher level. These efforts are visible through various strategies she adopted to support her children with schoolwork: persuading her husband to let their children study, assisting them with schoolwork by advising them to approach others for help and keeping them focused on education by motivational tactics.

Ghazala has 8 years of education, comes from a financially secure family and had three children. The eldest daughter was 14 when I met the family. Her husband wanted the daughter to leave school, but she yearned for it 'I really want them to study further, but the school is just up until 10th. Their father does not allow them to leave the village; he says she should stop after 10th'. Ghazala kept trying to persuade her husband, but in vain. The difference between the two mothers is striking. Maria was able to navigate her desire for her daughters' education, whilst Ghazala, who had more education and belonged to a financially more secure family found herself at a loss, with her daughter being forced to drop out of school.

These stories suggest that aspirations, considered alongside actions, provide an insight into mothers' efforts, and indicate that pathways to action can be very different. These instances illuminate how the tropes of successful and unsuccessful mothers in the policy and research literature fail to appreciate the complexity of the social relationships in play. The ability of aspirations to act as positive motivational forces has been documented by others. Conradie's (2013) longitudinal qualitative action research from 2006 t-2010 in South Africa with women living in a low-income neighbourhood, explored whether intentional efforts to realise aspirations increased their capabilities. She found that reflecting on aspirations led to an increased awareness and commitment to life goals. The interview data from Virasatpur shows that, regardless of immediate characteristics – socio – economic context, levels of education, decision making power – mothers engage with their contexts and respond to change. Being uneducated or illiterate does not rob them of their human capacity of 'being' in spaces and aspiring for better 'becomings' regardless of structural constraints. Mothers aspire and hope for better futures for their daughters. Their aspirations are born in conditions of economic and social hardships and reflect their subjectivities as agents engaged with the educational processes surrounding their daughters' lives. Mothers' aspirations may be motivated by anticipated gains for their daughters from education. But the mothers interviewed in Virasatpur also demonstrated a sense of awareness for the dynamism in their context. Sobe and Kowalczyk (2012) suggest the need for a continued critical engagement with context, when considering policy. This applies to understanding the aspirations of mothers, and their complex relationships with their daughters, their views about schooling, and their socio-economic conditions. There is thus a clear contrast, when looking closely at local processes, with some of the simple distinctions and linkages made in scholarship and policy texts.

Conclusion

The paper has shown the differences in the ways in which mothers in one locale in Pakistan articulate aspirations for their daughters' education, and the ways these relationships come to be expressed in policy texts. There is a considerable literature that critiques the

power asymmetries between global policy narratives and their applications to local contexts (eg. Rizvi 2013; Unterhalter and North 2011; Unterhalter et al. 2018), but without a specific focus on the relationship between mothers and their daughters' education. Bartlett and Vavrus (2014) highlight the risks associated with a failure to adequately understand and situate local actions and interpretations in a broader cultural, historical and political investigation highlighting global policy production as a form of 'global localism' (139). Narwana (2015) in her study on the global and local disjuncture regarding community participation in Haryana India argues that global programmes often undermine the social and local processes in which they are being implemented. Detachment from local knowledge can mean policy initiatives lack effectiveness As Vimala Ramachandran and Aarti Saihjee (2002) cite, 'The undeniable fact is that people, be they parents, teachers, children or community members, do not have one homogeneous identity and hence cannot be subsumed in a generic category – the community' (1068). This study has shown how apt these comments are when assessing mothers' engagement with their daughters' education. This also appeals to the need for recognising important voices and perspectives that function at the site of operation of local living and imagining (Moletsane 2022).

The omission of critical analysis of mothers' role in daughters' education in policy texts has had the effect of depoliticising a gendered issue meaning that in depth understanding of these processes has not been adequately explored. The simplification of complex relationships and its counterproductive effect on social justice has been discussed elsewhere (Vaughan and Longlands 2022). Policies are needed that approach the matter of mother daughter relationships which understand mothers' networks as parents, and especially when they become a window between two worlds. They often navigate with their children deeply political and socially divided aspects of the environments in which they live. These experiences are not external to learning for children and need much better understanding.

Approaches to girls' education have changed over the decades but 'educating girls' and 'women empowerment' remain separate issues (for example SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 5: Gender Equality remain two separate goals). 'Contexts' need to be understood as a complex set of economic, locational, social, and family relationships, not economic, social and 'cultural barriers' (King and Hill 1995, 23). Contexts are constantly in flux, especially in a world that is learning to live with COVID and the assaults of climate change. The COVID pandemic has revealed that any conception of the future will need to account for the unanticipated economic and social precarity. In these times, for a truly well-meaning global and local society that aims to support equality in the capabilities of people, being mindful of the dynamism of context, a expanded meaning of 'context' is needed. This process entails a broadened documentation of mothers' and daughters' relationships around education, and the policy that can respond to this.

Note

1. This paper is part of a bigger project in which 30 mothers and their family members from three rural communities in South Punjab were interviewed in 2017 using narrative semi-structured interview technique based on the capability approach.

Reference: Khalid, A., 2019. How do Mothers Perceive their Ability to Influence their Daughters' Education? A qualitative study of mothers' capabilities in three rural communities of Punjab, Pakistan (PhD Thesis). University of Cambridge, U.K.

The data is from pre-COVID times but speaks strongly to the key argument that regardless of the pandemic mothers have always navigated their contexts to aspire for and achieve aims for their daughters sometimes at the expense of their mental health (Qudsia 2022; O'Reilly 2020).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

I am indebted to Gates Cambridge Foundation for funding my PhD research at Cambridge [Grant Number: OPP1144].

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