

## **Voices of Parents about their Out of School Children with Disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

In Pakistan, about six million children are out of school at primary level. 30 percent of them are with disabilities. Such a huge number of children create a gigantic challenge for the government to meet the target of 100% school enrollment. A closer look at the levers of exclusion indicates that there are economic, cultural and structural barriers to keep children out of school. Unless these barriers are addressed, the dream of every child to be in school cannot come true. Any educational plan that discount children with disabilities will doom to fail. This study investigates the perceptions of parents about the value of education. The purpose of the study was to collect feedback from the prime stakeholders in their own context. 433 parents of children with disabilities were selected from two districts of Punjab to document their voices about the educational exclusion. Data was collected through the interview cum questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that the majority of the parents were positive towards education of their children. Lack of school readiness, distance from special schools and poverty were reported as major barriers to education. It was argued that inclusive education is the only way forward.

**Keywords:** educational exclusion, children with disabilities, inclusive education

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## Introduction

Pakistan stands at the second last in the list of countries with the maximum number of out of school children (Singal, 2016). With six million out of school children the country is under tremendous pressure to take every possible measure that can bring these children in schools. It is alarming that 30% of these children suffer from one or more disabilities. Referring to school enrollment the situation of children with disabilities is more alarming and challenging for policy-makers and stakeholders. Children with disabilities are particularly prone to be discriminated against by individuals and institutions (ASER, 2015). It is mandatory for the state to protect the rights of citizens without any discrimination (UNICEF, 2014, UNESCO, 2010).

Children with disabilities have 5.5 times higher chance to be out of school than their counter parts (children with no disabilities). Out of the 72 million out of school children across the globe, 24 million are children with disabilities with the numbers increasing. The statistics are alarming. It clearly indicates that education of disabled children is not a priority and may remain badly ignored. Various studies on out of school children with disabilities indicate that no more than 4% of children with disabilities attend schools (government & private) in Pakistan (Hameed 2005). Although, there have been worldwide movements to bring all children in regular schools that are easily accessible for them. As a result of international commitments all UN member states are responding in a positive way, but with varying pace and interpretation. The United Nations has introduced several instruments to protect the rights of individuals. The journey started with a declaration of human rights in late 40s. The whole series of efforts regarding protection of the rights of children with disabilities is presented in the following timeline:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (1966).

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).

International Convention on the Eliminations of All forms of racial Discrimination (1965).

Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (1979).

Convention against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984).

Convention on the Rights of the child (1998).

Dakar Framework for Education (2000)

United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of SDG.

Goal 4 (2015)

The preamble of Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), notes:

“Despite of these various instruments and undertakings, persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in their participation as equal members of the society and violations of their human rights in all parts of the world (p.2)”.

The vulnerability of this marginalized group reduces the chances for access to primary services specifically education. Regular schools do not provide access to all children. They also face challenges of prejudice, social isolation and discrimination and eventually remain deprived of full social and economic participation (Sharma & Das, 2015). The national census 1998 figured out that about 2.54 percent (3,286,630) of the population is with some kind of disability. However, various international studies report that the prevalence of disability in the country is around 10 percent (Barbotte et al. 2001). According to Durkin, et al. (1994). The prevalence can increase up to 14.7% in the country. These studies indicate that prevalence of childhood disability reported in Census 1998 highly underestimates the prevalence of disability in Pakistan. The discrepancy between the prevalence statistics may be due to lack of reliable data on disabilities, the absence of clear definition, lack of standardized instruments and adequate skills to identify the full range of disabilities.

The situation clearly points out to the fact that a general understanding of the existing primary school system can easily accommodate all out of school children, does not stand true (Ahmed & Yousaf, 2011). Various studies indicate that the existing primary school is not a viable choice for the education of out of school children with disabilities (Miles, 1985, Hameed and Manzoor 2014, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to unfurl the causes of educational exclusion (Singal, 2009). The voices of parents whose children with disabilities are out of school constitute the important source to unfold the levers of exclusion. Parents are considered to be the main stakeholders and the primary source of information as they are real benefactor for the education of their children with disabilities. Unfortunately, no such voices of parents in the country have been reported and found in existing literature. Therefore, the study is an effort that

focuses on the analysis of parents' voices about the educational exclusion of their out of school children with disabilities.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study intended to:

- i. Find out the distribution patterns of the identified out of school children with special needs.
- ii. Identify the reasons for being out of school.
- iii. Document the perceptions of parents about the value of education for their out of school children with disabilities.
- iv. Recommend strategies to improve accessibility for schools.

## **Methods and procedures**

The design of the study was descriptive. A questionnaire was designed to collect data from the parents having out of school children with disabilities.

## **Population**

The total population comprised on parents of all out of school children with disabilities between ages 5–19 years in two Districts Kasur and Sheikhpura.

## **Sample**

Multi stage sampling procedure was used to select sample. Firstly, conveniently accessible one rural and one urban union council from each tehsil of both districts (Kasur & Sheikhpura) were selected. Secondly, 433 parents were selected by using purposive sampling technique from each union council. The criteria for purposive sample was; parents who have children with disabilities between ages 5-17 years, parents are permanent residents of the area and were willing to participate in this study. The selected age bracket is considered as school going age. In total there were 16 union councils (eight urban and eight rural), eight tehsils (three from district Kasur and three from district Sheikhpura) from which 433 parents were selected. Distribution of sample is presented in figure 1. Due to non-availability of statistics, invisibility of out of school children and limited

resources for locating the families to collect data, all categories of disabilities were included in the study.

**STEP 1: Union Councils were selected by using convenient sampling**

DISTRICT SHEIKHUPURA				DISTRICT KASUR			
Sheikhupura	Sharqpur	Muridke	Ferozwala	Kasur City	KotR.Kishan	Chunian	Pattoki
1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC	1 Urban UC
1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC	1 Rural UC



**STEP 2: Parents were selected by using purposive sampling**

Parents 59	Parents 33	Parents 60	Parents 47	Parents 61	Parents 60	Parents 52	Parents 61
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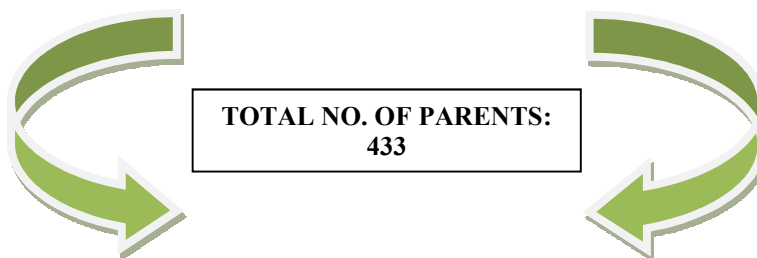


Figure 1: Distribution of sample selection.

**Instrument**

A questionnaire was developed to examine the responses of parents of out of school children with disabilities. Language of questionnaires was Urdu with simple vocabulary that could be easily understandable. Parnet’s questionnaire consisted on 19 items along with demographic sheet to identify distribution pattern of children with disabilities. Pilot study was conducted to calculate Cronbach Alpha reliability of instrument which turned out to be 0.89. The instrument was also presented to a panel of

seven field experts for the validation. The questions were developed according to the following hypothetical framework:

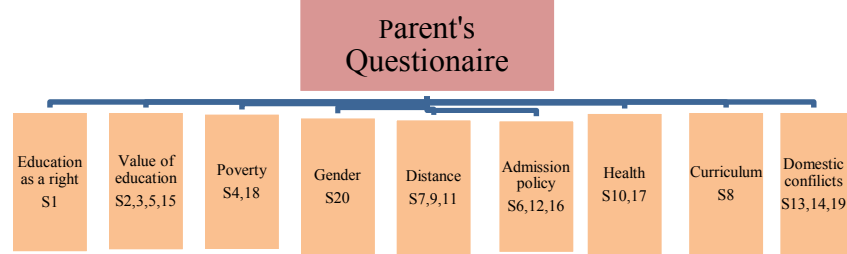


Figure .2: Hypothetical framework for the parent's questionnaire

## Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through questionnaires from parents. A team of research assistants were hired and trained to collect data from scattered sample. The selected research assistants were natives of the assigned areas, fluent in local language and willing to follow the given instructions accurately. A procedure for close monitoring of data collection was prepared and used by the researcher.

## Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used for applying descriptive and inferential statistics. Results of the study highlighted the causes of educational exclusion of children with disabilities reported by their parents.

## Results and Discussions

Distribution of the sample characteristics are presented in figure 3 and 4. The analysis represents the population.

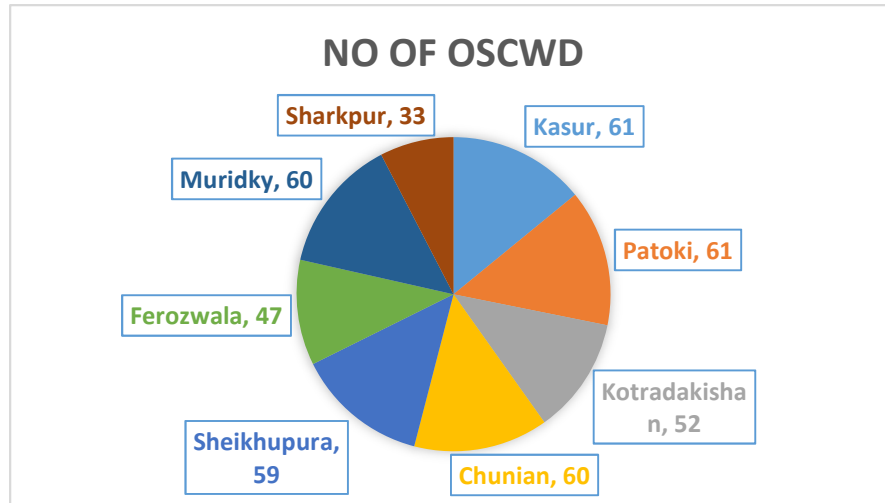


Figure 3: Distribution of Sample

The distribution in figure 3 shows that there were total 433 parents having out of school children selected from four tehsils of each district. There were 61 parents from tehsil kasur, 61 from Patoki, 60 from Chunian, 52 from Kotradakishan, 59 from Sheikhupura, 47 from Ferozwala, 60 from Muridkey, and 33 from Sharkpur Sharif.

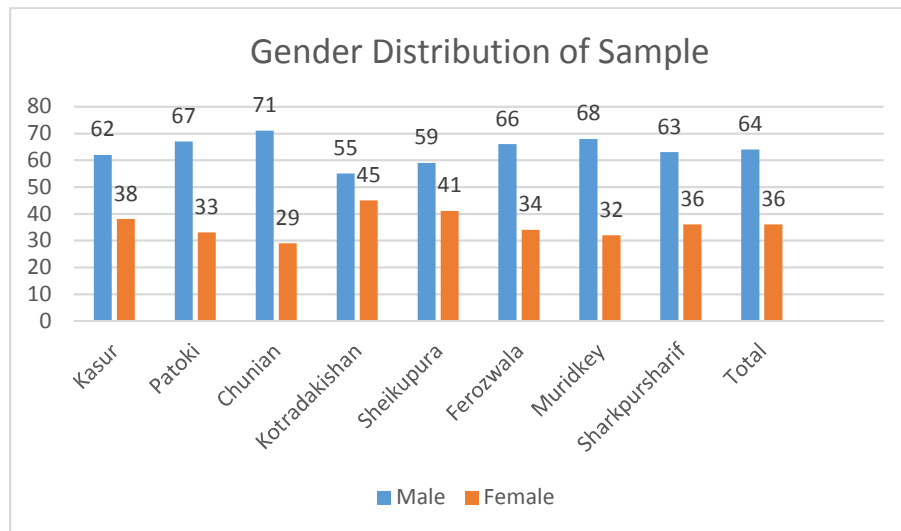


Figure 4: Distribution of sample by gender

Results in figure 4 indicated that the majority of parents had male children with disabilities in all tehsils. Overall male children were 64% and female children were 36%. The results are similar to National Census report 1998 that also indicated the high prevalence of male children with disabilities than female.

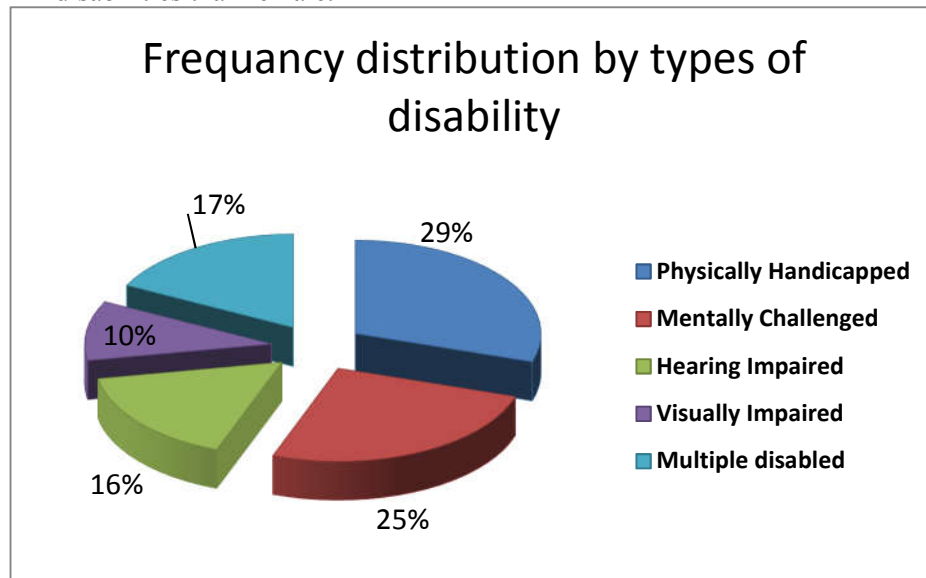


Figure 5: Frequency distribution by disability

Results shown in Figure 5 indicated that majority of the children were with physical and intellectual disabilities (Physically impaired = 29%, Mentally Challenged = 25%). Children with visual impairments were found less in all i.e.10%. Hence it can argue that children with physical and mental impairments were dominating the whole group. The results shown in the figure were not similar to the results of National Census Report 1998 which did not indicate high prevalence of mentally challenged in country.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics of the sample by age.*

Sr. No	Description	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Mini value	Max. value
1	Child age	11.27	11.00	8	4.28	5	17
2	Fathers age	41.37	40.00	40	8.87	25	68
3	Mothers age	36.27	35.00	35	8.06	20	66



Results indicated in table 1 shows the mean age of out of school children was 11.27. The maximum age was 17 years and minimum was 5 years. This age bracket is fit for school going children. Results also indicated that average father's age was 41.37 and mother's age was 36.27. These results were also similar to National population parameters.

Table 2

*Financial status of the family.*

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	182	42
Fair	148	34.2
Good	54	12.5
Rich	5	1.2
No response	44	10.2
Total	433	100

The analysis in table 2 indicated that majority of children with disabilities (42 %) belonged to families with poor financial status. Whereas 34.2% families have average financial status and only 12.5% had good financial status. Only 1.2% families appeared to be rich. In other words, results indicated that majority of the identified out of school children belonged to poor families.

Table 3

*Parents Questionnaire statements*

Sr. No	Statements	Yes	No
1	Education is right of every child.	430(99.3%)	3(.7%)
2	Child with disability has equal rights for education.	426(98.4%)	5(1.2%)
3	Education is the only source for rehabilitation of child with disability.	359(82.9%)	69(15.9%)
4	Family income is sufficient to meet the educational burden of child with disability.	154(35.6%)	277(64%)
5	It is always beneficial to spend money on education of child with disability	311(71.8%)	119(27.5%)
6	Child can get admission in the nearby primary school.	130(30%)	297(68.6%)
7	Primary school is far away from home	109(25.2%)	320(73.9%)
8	Ordinary school has sufficient resource to educate the child with disability.	67(15.5%)	359(82.9%)
9	There is special school in the vicinity	228(52.7%)	202(46.7%)
10	The child is physically fit to attend the school.	221(51%)	205(47.3%)
11	We can provide transport facility for pick and drop of child to school.	97(22.4%)	321(74.1%)
12	Physical features of child with disability like use of glasses, sticks, hearing aids; prosthetics etc. is barrier to get admission in school	174(40.2%)	233(53.8%)
13	Family permits child with disability to attend school.	285(65.8%)	145(33.5%)
14	Parental conflicts hinder to get admission	66(15.2%)	364(84.1%)
15	People make fun of child out side home.	190(43.9%)	235(54.3%)
16	Documents for admission can be provided if needed.	191(44.1%)	228(52.7%)
17	Ordinary school meets the individual needs of child.	98(22.6%)	310(71.6%)
18	Child is earning hand for home	57(18.2%)	369(85.2%)
19	Child does not attend school being engaged in housekeeping.	47(10.9%)	380(87.8%)

Table 3 showed that a large majority of parents 99.3% of the parents were agreed that education is a right of every child. Similarly, majority of the parents 98.4% were agreed that education is also the right of child with disability. 82.9% parents were on the view that education is the only

source for rehabilitation of child with disability. However, 64% parents reported that their family income is not enough for the educational burden of their child with disability. 68.6% parents were of the view that child with disability cannot get admission in the nearby primary school as 82.9% parents reported that nearby ordinary school had no sufficient resources to educate the child with disability.

About half of the parents 51% were of the view that their child is fit to get education in ordinary school because 53.8% parents reported that even physical features of child with disability like use of glasses, sticks, hearing aids; prosthetics etc. is barrier to get admission in school. Majority of the parents 84.1% reported that parental conflicts are not the reason behind being out of school. Similarly, majority of the parents 87.8% did not keep their children out of school because of taking help from them in housekeeping.

The reasons for being out of school were ranked ordered on the basis of parent's responses.

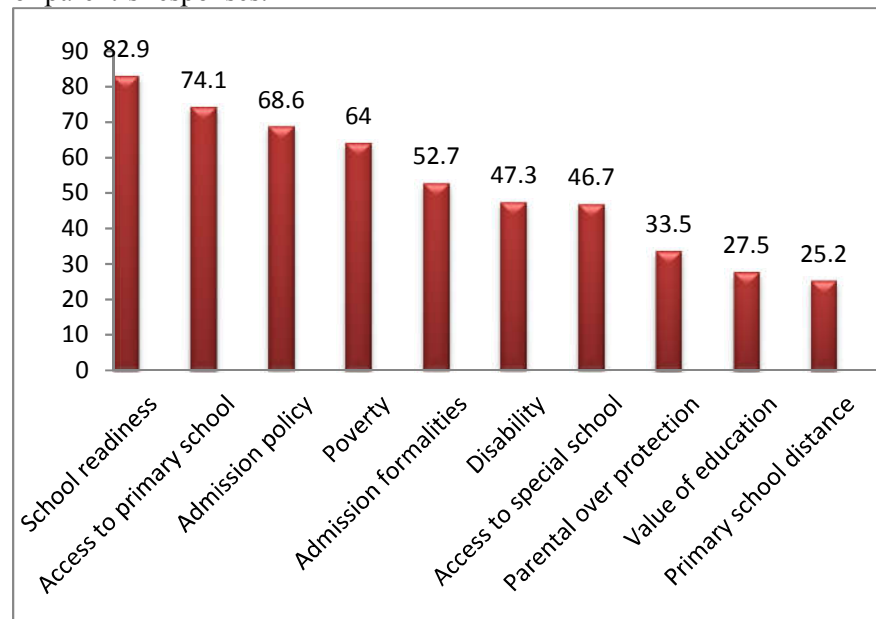


Figure 6: Rank orders of reasons for being out of school

Figure 6 shows the rank order as following:

1. Ordinary school is not capable to accommodate the diversified needs of children with disabilities because of limited resources.

2. Parents cannot cover distance and provide transport facility for pick and drop to their children at schools.
3. Ordinary nearby primary schools refuse to admit children with disabilities.
4. Family income is not enough according to the educational burden of children with disabilities.
5. Documentation for admission is difficult to provide schools.
6. Child is not physically fit to attend school.
7. There is no special school in the vicinity.
8. Family does not permit child with disability to attend school.
9. Spending money on the education for these children is not beneficial.
10. Primary school is far away.

The findings of the study were derived from the survey of reasons reported by parents. The reported causes can be complemented by Filmer (2005) and UNICEF (2014). The reasons for being out of school as reported by out of school children and their parents such as poverty (UNESCO, 2000; Singal, 2009; Hameed, 2006), gender (UNICEF ROSA, 2014), admission policy of ordinary school (Singal, 2009; Hameed, 2006; barton 2008;), distance (Singal, 2009; Filmer, 2005; Hameed & Manzoor 2005; UNESCO 2014), physical health (UNICEF 2014, UNESCO 2014; UNESCO, 2009; Miles, 1985), child earning (Gitter & Barham, 2007; Hossain & Zeitlyn, 2010), school fear (Miles, 1985; UNESCO, 2005; UNESCO, 2010), inappropriate curricula (Hameed, 2005; UNESCO 2010) physical characteristics of students i.e. wearing glasses, use of hearing aid and wheel chair etc (Fear, 2004; UNESCO, 2013) were in accordance with other mentioned studies.

## Conclusions

1. The distribution of the prevalence of disabilities deviates from the pattern of census 1998. The children with mental retardation and physical disabilities are out of proportion.
2. Parents of these children were well aware of the rights of their children and value of education.
3. Surprisingly enough, major barrier reported by parents was not financial constraints however, school readiness was emerged as major cause. According to them, children cannot attend school because nearest primary school is unable to cater the special needs of their children. Distance from home school was reported as another major cause for not being in school.

4. The role of general education is important in this regard. The idea of inclusive education seems to be realistic approach for the enrollment of maximum number of out of school children in schools.

## **Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations have emerged:

1. Inclusive education as proposed in new Education Policy should be implemented.
2. National Bureau of Statistics may collect baseline data about out of school children in all urban and remote areas so that realistic planning can be undertaken.
3. Department of Education may improve the existing primary schools to accommodate all children with disabilities. These regular schools should be made disabled friendly by flexible admission policy, refining physical infrastructure, parallel curriculum and differentiated instructional pedagogies.
4. Department of Special Education needs to expand the services available in all special schools. These services include increase of teaching staff, construction of own buildings, transportation and outreach programs. These schools should play the role of resource hub for ordinary primary schools.
5. Government may provide financial support for those families who are facing the burden of disability through voucher schemes or similar instruments.
6. Government agencies may sponsor large scale studies improve the generalizability of the results of this study.

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